

Spiritual Letters of Fr Barre

Letter 1

To a Religious (cloistered)

How does one accept physical or spiritual trials in a spirit of faith?

- . accept them as offered to us by God for our purification and spiritual healing,
- . receive them without being preoccupied as to when they will end,
- . believe that they have no other purpose than to lead the soul to a higher level of sanctity,
- . continue being faithful to all one's spiritual exercises,
- . observe silence and be obedient in community life,
- . if one has been unfaithful, repent at once and turn back to God,
- . follow the advice of a spiritual director without becoming attached to him or her as a person.

This is the price one pays for inner freedom.

O Father ! O Lord ! O Love ! (a)

I thank Divine Providence for favouring you with the various physical and spiritual sufferings which you have told me about in detail in your letter. It is good that God is helping you become aware in a concrete way of the great poverty and disorder that exists in your life, both body and soul. You need all those sufferings and even more to keep you from being proud and over eager in your desires. When you arrive at being truly humble and dead to yourself (b), be sure to praise God for your excessive suffering instead of complaining about it. Take great care then to observe the following guidelines:

Firstly: in reference to the troubles and rebellion which you spoke to me about, you must endure them in the same manner as an unfortunate sick person patiently puts up with bouts of persistent temperature caused by serious infection.

Your frail nature is not without its "temperatures", but let it be, it helps to heal the mind and purge you of those bad "infections" that cling so much to our wretched human nature that they even seem to be part and parcel of it. Thus, from your inmost depths, you must abandon yourself to God, who has put fire in that furnace of apparent anger, lust, rage, hatred of God and aversion to things eternal and salutary, not in order to mislead you but to purify you and destroy all that is contrary to His designs. So resign yourself in the same manner as the unfortunate sick person suffering from the violent feverish tremors that intensify their attacks.

Secondly: to accept that double affliction (c) without dwelling on it, and still less wishing to escape it, without being concerned as to how long it will last or where it will end; close your eyes firmly so as to avoid seeing that side of things. It is God who governs, who acts and who plans for the future and not those whose role it is to obey, endure and follow.

Thirdly: to believe, to truly believe with conviction and confidence that all that happens within you is not only for your salvation but to enable you to reach perfection and free you from the

unfortunate state of being a slave to yourself. You must believe that these experiences of being forsaken by God are indeed experiences of abandonment and not condemnation; on the contrary, they are a sign of approval and a test (d). They are the beneficial actions of a doctor and kind surgeon who wish to remove what is causing trouble in your body in order to cure you effectually and permanently. Even if your difficulty should continue for a long time or even get worse and you feel and experience in yourself that you are being condemned (e), you must believe and be convinced that your salvation is being secured by this means. Take care not to fail in this point, try to renounce your own point of view, your feelings and your experiences and try to believe what I have told you.

Fourthly: to perform all your spiritual exercises; those that are part of the rule as well as those that are private devotions, community exercises as well as individual ones, even if you have to force yourself to do so, because of distaste, lack of devotion or an aversion to things holy or eternal. Let your prayer be nothing else but one of continual resignation in regard to your present state. The same applies to preparation for Communion and thanksgiving; do not concern yourself so much with the performance of acts of virtue, either interior or exterior, but rather aim at modifying them (f), being content to endure and to suffer silently without trying to escape from this state; be ready to accept all these resistances from God's point of view; say your office as well as you can (g).

Fifthly: to obey faithfully in all that concerns your social and community life, do all that you have been directed to do, at least externally; speak as little as possible and very softly when you do; accept without retort or justification all the complaints and reprimands that are addressed to you.

Sixthly: if you fail in a small or big way in regard to some of these rules, come back immediately and place yourself in the Master's hands, promptly and obediently, to be chastened for your infidelity and accept that your sufferings be redoubled as a punishment for your faults. Try to do all this simply in a spirit of obedience or resignation; sometimes you will be able to do this and at other times the results of your efforts will be so weak that you think nothing is happening.

Seventhly: refrain from thinking about me; apart from following these instructions, do not allow yourself to think deliberately of the one through whom God gives them to you. Neither do I for my part wish to hear from you orally or by letter. Let me know when you are making your retreat; if I come I will try to help you, in the meantime be patient. You were wrong to show such over-eagerness, and still more such emotion and longing. You say others do the same, that is still worse (h), you are implying that you are not the only guilty one. Ah! to be a child of God you need to be much more charitable, gentle and restrained.

Do you wish to please God? Do you wish to become truly religious? Do you wish to become kind, to cease to be self-willed, proud or impatient? Do you wish to become free and to escape from the wretched slavery of the worst of masters, yourself? Do you wish to stop being foolish and to start being prudent? Follow these guidelines or at least try to do so. May the Lord Jesus, of whom I have been thinking while writing to you, bless you and also the one who is unworthy to be giving you this advice. Yours...

Notes:

- a) translation of the Latin: O Pater, O Domine, O Amor, refers to the Trinity.
- b) dead to oneself and to all that would prevent one from belonging to God and to His working in the person.
- c) the double affliction: the evil tendencies of our nature and the desire to do better which, sadly, often distorts us.
- d) a test with the aim of strengthening a person to make decisions and choices.
- e) Fr. Barre often uses this paradox: even if interiorly you feel yourself to be condemned, remember that you are being saved through this very experience.
- f) this is an invitation to avoid seeking being virtuous for the sake of it.
- g) c.f. MAP 3
- h) this paragraph seems to allude to an attitude of fulfilment seeking on the part of the directee vis-a-vis the spiritual director.

Letter 2

To a young lady (a)

By a series of contrasting ideas Fr. Barre explains that spiritual accompaniment must help both the director and the one directed to become more aware of their nothingness before God and to live confidently in abandonment.

O Jesus! O Love!

I am writing to you because you wish it, and I shall tell you clearly that I have accepted to be your director only through letting go of myself and my judgement (b), because if I had used my judgement properly I would never have accepted. I am but a poor wretch and you likewise are so full of imperfections and poverty that neither I nor you deserve to have any satisfaction in what we undertake, while being powerless in the land of the dead and the dying (c). So while accepting to be your director, it is not my intention to derive any satisfaction from this task, or to give you any, because I would be preventing you from losing all (d). I do not know for how long I will be your spiritual director, but I am undertaking it so that you may experience the lack of guidance and so that left to yourself you may experience your nothingness, your inadequacy and your unworthiness.

My dear lady, you must die and be abandoned by everyone (e); in confiding in me you are giving me the right to prevent you from being helped or to absent myself when I wish, in order to leave you with yourself and to yourself, that self with its sinfulness and deception which cuts you off from God and which prevents you from being aware of or understanding what God wants of you. I may be harsh and severe in what I am saying and may even appear to be unreasonable. However I sense and I know you are aware that I must treat you like this. One cannot be demanding enough with you so that you may be forced to turn away from yourself and respond to God and the gifts He has given you. However, whether you obey God or resist Him, there is no alternative; the longer you wait the worse it will be.

So you see you have approached a "destroyer" rather than a director (f); a torturer and a tyrant (g) instead of a brother; a poor wretch who must suffer because of having to cause you suffering. The way to deal with that situation is to avoid being possessive of me and to give up thinking that you have someone to lead you to God.

What a wonderful guide God is, and how necessary it is to encounter opposition and contradiction in order to arrive at union; to encounter trials in order to arrive at order and peace. Similarly, what darkness and horror must be experienced in order to reach the centre of all light and splendour, the centre of all honour and pleasure. And yet, this is the only way.

My dear lady, I forbid you, as far as possible, to do any writing, socialising or to get involved in conversations, unless you feel obliged to do so in conscience. Do not write or speak about anything.

Even if an angel were to come to tell you some heavenly truths, let everything pass by and slip away without recalling anything. Let us disregard everything while we are alive: graces, lights, sanctity, ecstasy (h), humiliation, desolation: everything.

May my poor N..... be reduced to nothing; may she look on all her insights and resolutions as false and worthless. In a word, it is enough for N.... to have thought, spoken, acted to say that it was all worthless. Don't be afraid of being misled through following this path, but rather fear not to have had enough; in fact you will never have enough because you will never fully leave yourself behind. Thus you will always ensure and regard yourself to be in the midst of complete uncertainty and in the utmost darkness (i).

If you can, send me those people who oppose your entry into religious life and who look on you as a poor wretch, wicked and accursed; I shall caress and embrace them while waiting for you to have the courage to wish them well and to be humbled before the grace which God gives you (j). Thus you are being treated as you deserve, but only partly, because if you had been treated with absolute justice, you would not have any life in you, neither natural life nor the life which comes from God's grace(k). Finally, it is not possible to give too much advice or put too much pressure on someone who is not yet empty of self. Get into this state profitably or rather allow yourself be put there so that you may be as God wishes you to be. Pray to God for a poor worthless one, so that what I wish for you, which is total self-emptying, may be realised in me. Yours ...

Notes:

- a) This young lady belongs to the nobility. As the end of the letter shows, she was considering the monastic life. According to L3, which is a reply to this letter, the young lady is Genevieve. The letter and the reply indicate that she is already deeply attached to Christ. Fr. Barre was very gentle with beginners, but very demanding with the more advanced. (MD 30 - 35)
- b) From the beginning of his letter, Fr. Barre's focus is humility, both for himself and his directee. He does not give the latter any guarantee that he will keep her on as a directee. He has just accepted to become her director and wants to help her avoid any form of self-complacency.
- c) An image of the pattern of life on earth.
- d) This is very demanding language because Fr. Barre wishes to show his directee that she must be ready to accept to lose all if she wishes to be helped to find God.
- e) c.f. ML 9.
- f) c.f. MD 3. The spiritual director should "destroy" all that would lead a person away from God.
- g) c.f. MD 53.
- h) moments of deep union with God.
- i) In seeking endless assurances, you will always be uncertain and in darkness.
- j) This young lady is being encouraged by Fr. Barre to consider as a grace the opposition she is encountering with regard to her vocation to the monastic life and to wish well and love those who are creating obstacles.
- k) It is solely by the grace of God that you are given life. If justice were done, you would be nothing by yourself.

Letter 3

The Young Lady's reply to the preceding Letter

My dear Reverend Father,

Replying to the first point in your letter, I want you to know that it is my utmost desire to enter into my nothingness, my helplessness and my unworthiness. Any other opinion of myself would be false. If you can help me to pursue this line, then it is God who will have chosen you to help me. But, O God, what a grace, given to the least among the saints on earth.

The second point in your letter is still more in keeping with my deepest wish. Yes, it is necessary to die and be abandoned by everyone, I would welcome this; all people must act as executioners towards me. This has been part of my experience for some time, but with "executioners" who have been hidden and masked. You do not say enough when you tell me to accept and to allow myself be reduced to nothing; this has to happen in spite of myself, while my whole being fights against it. That is what is hard. Because, when one wants something, no matter how difficult it may be, one is content when it happens. But, O God, you are right, it is necessary to treat me the way you are doing. What is surprising is that it has no other effect than to strengthen my interior life in the face of whatever you may say which is disagreeable or unpleasant. This seems so little in comparison to what one feels (a). Hell, the wheels and the gallows (b) appear as trifles to me; the best gifts and the greatest graces seem insignificant by comparison. I know the one to whom I am speaking when I speak to you and I know intuitively that you have experienced what I am talking about. All possessions, graces, evils, are of no consequence to me. God is, and this unknown God is the only one who is; we will never have a good understanding of what this means. And yet, our happiness lies in penetrating that Being (c) whose mysterious depth we shall never fathom.

I do not expect to arrive at this self-emptying through desiring it. I wish you would destroy all that leads me away from God. This would be great, holy and divine direction. Destroyer, that was the role of the Father in relation to the Son (d). How wonderful you are, Reverend Father, you choose well. Allow me then to address you in this way; your humility will sustain you. Do your work then, great destroyer, a work which will take root by virtue of being destroyed.

Perhaps, when the Church does its work through you, all hell and all creatures will be satisfied, because they will have nothing more to do after you. For a long time I have been running after prelates (e) and their favours for that. Nobody understood me, although all of them thought they did. Do not be afraid to cause me suffering; there must be strange havoc in order to arrive at union, yes, "destruction" is the only way. If I had found a destroyer, I would have taken the first step long ago. I haven't done so yet but I know it must be done.

Very willingly, I will neither write nor say anything. It is not me, but an inner power in me which has composed whatever I have written, as is the case at the moment. For many years, in the depths of my

being, I have not wished for a taste of all paradise or of all the universe, finding that all is nothing when I think of Him who is known only to Himself. Once again I know to whom I am speaking; how this nothing that I am consoles me. How happy this miserable Genevieve will be when she is reduced to nothing. It is like this: all that happens within me and in the entire universe, great and luminous, appears small and obscure to me and is for me an illusion. My dear "destroyer", do you believe that's how it is? Yes, I know you do.

Oh, how right you are! There is nothing misleading about this road, even though it is not one that is sought. Pray to Jesus that I may enter this state immediately, totally and forever (f), since it is the beatitude of the saints. While lovingly accepting those people who are against my entering religious life, deplore the sins they commit in saying what is not true. Seemingly there is a very holy man who claims to know from God that I should not enter, which is not true. This frightens me; I beg you to pray for them and for me.

You are right in saying that I must let myself sink deeper into my nothingness. To be truthful, if I were able I would have done so a long time ago. But what am I saying? If I had been faithful, I would already be there. It is my fault then, weep for me because of it and note that I am in a more wretched state than you could have thought; not in the way those people are who would prevent me from entering religious life - it is through the grace of God that I am not like that. My wretched state is due to my infidelity to the great graces offered me. I beg you, dear "destroyer", to tell me what I must do in entering and in living religious life (g).

I am, Reverend Father, your humble servant in the Lord.

Notes:

- a) To those who really seek God, all the rest seems "little", "trivial", "nothing", including the best gifts and the severest trials, both material and spiritual.
- b) Instruments of torture used in those times.
- c) Jn 17: 3.
- d) This idea is expressed in the theological context of the 17th century. In order to reveal the love of His Father, Jesus accepted to die. In allowing Himself be "destroyed" by death for the love of the Father, Jesus "destroyed" or overcame death.
- e) A bishop or other church dignitary of equal or higher rank
- f) c.f. L 32.
- g) Monastic religious life

Letter 4

To a Religious (cloistered) (a)

Is it the human being that seeks God? Or rather is it God who seeks and urges the person to give himself/herself to Him? Having enumerated the stages of this never-ending search for God, Fr. Barre insists on the necessity of not letting anything distract us from it. He encourages contemplation, that is, living respectfully and lovingly in the presence of God.

O Jesus! O Love!

It was not God's will that I should visit you or be of service in your area, as you and I had hoped would happen. But in all that happens may that great and adorable Master be praised. He is already over-generous in allowing me to write even a few words about Him and in allowing you to receive them with love, as coming from His hand.

And so, Reverend Mother, you are seeking God? Who would not seek Him, apart from those who have never heard of Him or who do not yet know Him? And yet the world is full and will always be full of such people. "He came to his own and his own people did not accept him" (b). You are fortunate not to be among these senseless, blind people. God is granting you an exceptional grace, Reverend Mother, which He hopes will be fulfilled in you and which will happen if you co-operate faithfully. It is he who grants you the privilege of searching for him. He makes as many attempts to seek you, find you and unite you to himself, as you do yourself to seek and find him.

It is this mutual love, of God for you and you for God, that gives rise to those holy feelings and emotions which you experience (c). Reflect with wonder on this condescension of God and strive to respond to it, unceasingly and unfalteringly. And when you have done this, be honest enough to admit that He was the one to make the greater advance and in so doing urged you more insistently to give yourself to Him. Thus, you will be both faithful and grateful.

Take note of the excellent order to be followed:

1. We must seek God.
2. We find him, but from afar, and only get a glimpse of Him.
3. We draw near to Him.
4. We gaze at him with wonder, then contemplate him with humility and finally with love and trust.
5. We speak to him.
6. We listen to Him.
7. We embrace him.
8. We hold on to him.
9. We let ourselves be absorbed in his love.
10. We rest in him.

11. We lose ourselves in him and finally are transformed into him.

But, Reverend Mother, to whom is all this granted? My answer is brief: to those who want that only . To whom does he impart these marvellous graces? To those who seek God alone, who have the courage to spurn vanities (d) and perseveringly continue to do so. These exceptional and outstanding favours are of infinitely more value than all the vanities; but they are given only at a price and not for less. Give then what is asked of you and these favours, including Paradise, will be yours. Your Paradise will be such that it could be called the Highest Heaven, given excessively to noble and generous souls.

Note that the first thing to do is to seek Him, the other graces will follow; in such a way, however, that when you get there it will be necessary to begin again, in order to make a better discovery and draw closer. The reason is that God is infinite, in regard to our potential for union with Him as in all other things. We never find Him so fully that there is no further need to seek Him. What is amazing is that we take the second search for Him more seriously than the first and the third more than the second. We become so intent on each quest that, when we consider what remains to be done, we think we have not yet sought him, found him or united ourselves with him. And yet we never tire of this game of divine love. The more we possess him the more ardent, eager and capable we are of receiving more.

What must we do to seek him? To really seek him, we must seek him only; nothing should discourage us or put us off. We must ardently long for God, meditate, read, cry out, keep silent, be indifferent to the way people behave towards us - whether good or bad. We must withdraw, forget ourselves, rise above everything and keep a low profile; we must keep going, even if we seem to be going backwards instead of forwards. We must suffer without saying a word and persevere in our searching without ever finding. We must run after God, while he flees from us faster than we can pursue. We must rise again after a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand falls without losing heart or being discouraged by our faults and infidelities, starting anew each time and never giving up.

Whoever undertakes to seek him in this way will find him, draw near to him, savour him, cling to him.....

Our reading must include whatever treats of God's greatness and perfection, his holy presence, his love, his humility and contempt of all illusory greatness. We should read attentively, regularly, constantly, often re-reading whatever would have struck us the most.

We need to meditate in order to assimilate and deepen what we have learned through reading or sharing with others, like so many lights dissipating the darkness that obscures the minds of so many people.

We must bemoan the fact that we are so far from our goal and consequently that we are so full of sinfulness, ignorance and imperfection, for the nearer or the further we are from our goal, which is

God, so much the less or the more, are we limited, ignorant, weak, faint-hearted and pitiful. We must cry out, pray properly, and even if it seems that God is not listening, we must not give up, but plead inwardly, call on God to hear us, raise our eyes, stretch out our hands, lift our hearts towards heaven in order to urge him to come to us. The longer he delays, the more divinely rich will his coming be.

In this game, whoever loses wins and often the one who gains loses. This should be well noted so that we will not be taken by surprise or give up such a noble and worthwhile pursuit. Reflect and dwell on the other above mentioned means in the same way.

To all this we must add a more direct and efficacious means of seeking and finding God and that is contemplation. Contemplation is a respectful and loving attention to his adorable presence as well as his infinite and majestic greatness, through which he sees and penetrates untiringly, with infinite care, all that we are, all that we think and do in the most secret recesses of our being. But God's way of seeing is both active and effective for it creates, sustains, guides and orders all things to his purposes. However, his special attention is directed towards those who search for him in truth, in a way that is fatherly, appealing, uplifting and conducive to union with him. Your approach to him must be animated by a lively faith, which will lead to certainty, conviction and a continually habitual assurance regarding these truths. In fact you will be surer of them than of the things you see with your own eyes and touch with your own hands and thus you will be perceptively seized by God. You should not let a day pass without devoting time to this contemplation (e). Do not be surprised by the difficulties and distractions that come your way at first, in the initial stages of your total conversion to God.

Notes

- a) Later on, Fr. Barre addresses her as "Reverend Mother"; she is undoubtedly the prioress of a monastery.
- b) Jn 1: 11
- c) This refers to the spiritual experience of a relationship with God.
- d) Ecclesiastes 1: 2....
- e) c.f. Letter 55: "...without casting a glance of love and confidence...."

Letter 5

To a dedicated young woman(a)

Fr. Barre suggests seven ways of acting that should lead to perfect abandonment. He wants us to imagine that it is God Himself who is putting these before us:

- . freedom and detachment from all things,
- . commitment or attachment to God alone,
- . acceptance of all bodily and spiritual afflictions,
- . kindness, respect and gentleness towards all,
- . love of sinners and prayer for their conversion,
- . continuous awareness of the presence of God,
- . deep consciousness of one's own unworthiness.

O Jesus! O Love!

Imagine that God is talking to you and that he addresses the following words to you:

My dearly beloved, I am asking seven exercises of you, take care to carry them out and fulfil them faithfully.

1. Let go of or be detached from all material and created things, so that you may neither love them nor think of them nor be attached to them in any way; total solitude and complete self-emptying, especially of all thoughts and assiduous attention to yourself.

2. Commitment or attachment to God alone, changeless and only centre of your being, of all your affections, thoughts, work and rest. Say within yourself: "My God and my All, in you I sleep and rest secure" (b). Even better than that, do not think so much of giving yourself to Me, or of drawing Me to yourself; think rather of Me, as if not daring to touch Me or come near Me, because of My infinite purity and holiness and your own extreme unworthiness and impurity. Often say:

"Holy, holy, holy, You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord, You alone are Most High, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father ".

3. A longing, a total giving and oblation of yourself, even though deprived of my presence and forsaken by all my people. Be ready for all affliction, all contempt, all abandonment, all sorts of insults and persecutions, both inwardly and outwardly, believing yourself to be the greatest sinner of all.

4. Kindness, respect, gentleness, inner and outer compassion towards all kinds of people, receiving them and considering them as my children (c), while regarding yourself as a pitiful slave who deserves to be excluded forever from my Paradise.

5. Love and inner zeal for those that you know or suspect to be in a state of mortal sin, so that

through your own inner pleading, however poor it may be, you may procure the grace of conversion for them, devoting your whole life to this exercise of charity.

6. Perfect modesty and good behaviour, inwardly and outwardly as if continually present to Me, so as never to deny my adorable and majestic presence.

7. Total contempt for yourself, your life and all your actions, thoughts and affections; reproaching yourself in everything and everywhere, as one who is unworthy of pleasing Me, but deserving only of being condemned and abandoned.

Notes

a) Somebody who has a strong faith.

b) Ps 4: 9

c) Human beings: children of God, c.f. PM 4,5, and L 14.

Paragraphs 4 & 5 emphasise the apostolic dimension which should spring from detachment from self and attachment to God.

Letter 6

To a religious (cloistered)

Fr. Barre invites this religious to become "a copy of Jesus Christ" in the midst of the trials she is experiencing. He recommends the following five attitudes as fundamental in this regard:

- . peace and tranquility in the certitude of God's tender love.
- . patience when experiencing spiritual purification.
- . union with the paschal mystery of Jesus.
- . co-operation in suffering for the salvation of loved ones.
- . relaxation and rest.

O Jesus! O Love!

Since you asked me to do so, I will outline briefly for you, five considerations embodying the principal points in the conversation that God has been pleased to grant both of us, regarding your present situation which in His Providence, He is allowing you to experience.

The first is a faithful, filial and, hopefully, continual harmony between your painful and disturbing situation and the transcendent will of God. Since this is the integral and all-embracing principle of all that is created, it also applies to you in your present circumstances (a). Then it is God, the supreme source of all, the most adorable goodness of the Father, who most certainly creates you and who instills this disposition in you. Thus, your nature and temperament have been formed towards this end. Contrary to all opinion and apparent human reason, it is in response to His will that you have lovingly accepted your profession. Let there be peace and tranquility then in the depths of your soul amid these difficulties, pressures and inner trials. Such is the will of God since it is He who allows you to experience them and it is His glory that must show forth in you through these painful experiences. Say often: "Our Father in Heaven, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven". Believe this and adhere to it lovingly, if you wish to live a life of faith and love; in other words, if you wish to be totally His to whom alone you must belong.

The second point is that this internal and external disposition serves to set you free from all that could cut you off from God, in which you have been conceived, born and brought up like other mortals. God's desire is to unite Himself to you without being impeded by anything, but He can do that only with someone who is pure and deserving of Him. That is why He wants to destroy what is inordinate or disruptive in you (b). He permits these deep and constant inner sufferings so as to draw out, as it were, from the marrow of your bones all that is impure, namely, the poison of self-love of which we have a greater supply than our veins have of blood. You can be sure that no other sufferings would procure more effective results than the ones which grip your heart, overpower you and prevent you from thinking clearly. So have patience and be at peace in the depths of your heart since you are being formed in the way of purity and perfection.

The third point is that you will thus be associated and united in a special way with Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to use the term that God puts on your lips: you will become "Christified". You have been buried alive with him (c) while still suffering inwardly, as He was from the time of His conception until His death on the cross, so that for all eternity you might enjoy freedom and repose with Him, in proportion to your sufferings.

The fourth point is the bond that God has formed between you and your friend. It shows that your suffering is intended to lead to her salvation. God wishes to show her favour since he allows her other self, that is you, to experience these afflictions and sufferings; you, whom He has consecrated and dedicated to His service so that you may cooperate in the salvation of this person whose deplorable state distresses you (d).

The fifth and last point touches on the appropriate relaxation that you could and even must take to sustain you to some degree in the many trials that come your way and to prevent you from being overpowered by them.

I pray God that all that has been written may be for His glory, your perfection and the salvation of the person who is so dear to your heart. This is the wish of someone who dares to call himself in Jesus,
Yours ...

Notes

- a) God permits these trials; they could be a means of salvation for whoever undergoes them.
- b) MAP 50
- c) Col 2: 11 - 12; Eph 4: 22 - 24; PM 7.
- d) In the communion of saints, the person who faces trials in a spirit of faith co-operates in the salvation of a friend or loved one.

Letter 7

To a Religious (cloistered)

There are two essentials for any advance in the spiritual life:

- . We should abandon ourselves totally and humbly to the will of God, no matter what difficulties we encounter.
- . We should be faithful to our times of prayer and to the obligations of monastic life, and in time, in spite of the human failings that remain with us, we can hope to arrive at holiness. (a)

O Jesus! O Love!

In response to your letter, and having called on the Father of light for help, I would recommend that what the person in question should do mainly is to concentrate irrevocably on two practices and never give up.

The first is complete, entire and unreserved resignation in regard to all that may be difficult and contradictory, either interiorly or exteriorly. Let her accept all from the bountiful and fatherly hand of God in atonement for her infidelities and in order to wipe out this unfortunate characteristic, self-love, which is more part of us than the marrow of our bones. A person can be deceived and led astray by self-love, attributing all that is good to oneself, whether it be apparent or real, as if to the ultimate centre and to God. Let her not be surprised then by the way her passions, desires and whole self are aroused against all that relates to God and his service, or by her dim understanding, her fears and discouragements. These are like the naughty children of a disordered and rebellious nature. On leaving them and rejecting them, she will gradually move from perversity to integrity; from being mundane and marred as she is, she will become other-worldly and spiritual; from being inward looking and thinking only of the human dimension, she will become all pure and God-centred.

You must therefore believe all this, then endure patiently and await God's mercy even though it may seem that it is never going to come. You must keep going, continuing against all hope or likelihood. Whoever has not experienced these disorders does not know the meaning of an interior struggle which occurs and lasts a long time, within us and against us, and against the powers of evil which often join forces with the accursed ego, thus intensifying the conflict, the pain and the danger. Such a person does not yet know and has not even caught a glimpse of that inner depth of humility, which is the only holy and hallowed basis of all true virtue. Moreover, all this is in accordance with the will of God who acts justly and therefore shows a much greater mercy, which is all the more precious in that it is concealed, profound and hidden as if it were not there. Let us abandon ourselves to faith and believe fully in these truths, so as to be wholly resigned and so that it will be easier for us to accept our sufferings and hence render them more meritorious.

The second point is never to forego anything but to give of one's best regarding: all the spiritual

exercises, silence, retreat, vocal and mental prayer, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, acts of charity towards others, fidelity to the rule concerning, modesty, gentleness, recalling the presence of God, detachment from all creatures and all particular friendships, so as to preserve oneself for God and give oneself entirely to Him. If, in order to be faithful to the above exercises, we seem to be lacking fervour, compassion, attention or other graces, we must not be worried but try to carry them out in the least mediocre way and, with a quiet and humble patience, make up for all the faults committed, whether through infidelity or weakness. We must never give up the resolution to do better always. If we suffer from discouragement or interior trials, we must go against ourselves in a gentle and discreet way, so as to be able to hold on and continue. If we fall, we must rise again, for the hundredth time as for the first time. "Anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved." (b)

All this accumulation of pain, anxiety, depression, weakness and even infidelity is not outside God's heavenly plan. The resulting suffering and distress are intended to purify us from our wretched ego and, through thousands of experiences, convince us and enable us to put our finger on how much wretchedness and unworthiness there is within us. This perceptible and experiential knowledge, which is all the more salutary because it is painful and of long duration, leads us to a true interior life, that is a depth of silence, an attraction for and a deepening of the supernatural and divine truths, of humility, meekness, a pleasant and resplendent peace and tranquility, and finally a hidden, intimate and pure union with the Holy of holies. All these great and wonderful graces follow closely on the suffering and death that accompanies the two above-mentioned points or maxims and principles, which might seem unbelievable to those who have a general and ordinary piety. Sometimes even that seems like a dream or a fable to people who are a prey to these afflictions (c). This is what faith and blind obedience are all about. Let such people act with fidelity, patience and perseverance and they will understand clearly the truth of what I am saying.

This good person is given to too much worrying because she believes she has been wrong in setting out to seek perfection as she did. Tell her not to worry, let her know once and for all that while she is on earth there will always be some degree of deception and error in her efforts to arrive at perfection. Her present state is no exception, neither is the one which we desire for her, even though it will gradually lessen. No matter what practice we take up or what stage we may have attained, there is always some self-deception, because we are always weak and mistaken due to our disordered nature, which will only disappear at the gates of heaven. You can see from this the extent to which humility and fidelity go hand in hand. If this religious is so upset that she is unable to comply with what we tell her or with what we could say to her, there is no need to worry about her. Let us have a little patience and we will see that God, in his goodness, will make all things work for his glory, for the growth of the person and for our consolation. We must have faith in and accept the words of Our Lord: "they will bear the fruit of their perseverance" (d), and those of the apostle: "perseverance must complete its work..." (e), and finally those of Our Lord: "if the grain of wheat does not die...but if it dies..." (f).

All that has been said above presupposes that the person in question is in good health. Since I have just heard that she has become ill, she must be content to resign herself interiorly and, patiently and obediently, make use of all the remedies prescribed for her. If she can believe that God loves her very specially, this should be a consolation for her in her spiritual and bodily ailments; even then she will only be believing a little of the truth, since God loves her much more than she can believe or imagine. I beg the help of the prayers of this dear person, so that my words and my life may be conformed to the desires of Him in whom I remain, although unworthy. Yours ...

Notes

- a) This letter, like several others, is addressed to a religious concerning another religious whom she is directing.
- b) Mt 10: 22 – 24
- c) MAP 204
- d) Lk 8: 15
- e) James 1: 4
- f) Jn 12: 25.

Letter 8

To a Religious (cloistered) (a)

When in the midst of spiritual trials, it is not advisable to try to escape the darkness: We must

- . give ourselves totally to God again,
- . be faithful to prayer,
- . live in humility
- . be silent about ourselves.

This is the way God, through his Spirit, leads us along the road of true faith.

O Jesus! O Love!

May God who is All absorb the one who is nothing; may the creator "destroy" his created one in order to make place for himself. If you understand and grasp well the secret of this blessing that I, though unworthy, desire for you on God's behalf, you will no longer question the pain, obscurity and numbness which God, in His providence, allows you to experience. You will be glad to accept it all, without any more reasoning, not wishing to alter the way in which God is guiding you, or to divert the impenetrable course of his grace. It is not necessary for me to give you the reasons for this because, whether I give you the true and precise reasons or not, there is no point in giving them to you as they would be more confusing than enlightening and would distract rather than direct and guide you. If I were to share them with you in detail, God would need to change your disposition, as it would be better for you to be without clarity and light so that the practice of blind obedience (b), self-surrender, letting go of your thoughts and of your salvation (c), could penetrate the deep and intimate recesses of your soul.

When you have disclosed the pattern of your entire life in order to give a clear picture of your present state, since it is on this that you seek the guidance and direction which you must follow now, then you will be happy to hear such words as the following: remain patient and faithful, nothing more; live with the uncertainty of not knowing whether the state you are in is good or bad. Be satisfied, even if you do not know whether you are slipping back or advancing in perfection or where it is all leading you and such like. Wait in peace. If you were to be treated otherwise, or if you wanted it otherwise yourself, it would be to prevent the action of God's grace in your soul.

And so, beloved child, God has put you in a dark dungeon. From a human point of view, you would willingly ask me to open a window and give you a little light. Most of the time until now, God has been guiding you in the light, sometimes bright and sometimes less so, always holding you by the hand. But now that he has led you into a region of darkness, he seems to have withdrawn his hand and left you to yourself, that is, to a poor worthless, wretched, blind and hardened sinner (d). Do not say a word, have patience, do the least possible harm; if you fall, if you stumble at each step, have patience, try to do the best you can, calmly and humbly. Be at peace at all times, whatever happens.

Is it a punishment? Is it the way God is leading you? What does it matter! This is the way it is. Be obedient and die to yourself in all things. May the poor wretched one disappear and be destroyed, body and soul; you are not allowed any enlightenment (e). However, I am not prohibited from indicating what you have to do, since you have asked me to do so in the name of God, and it is in his name that I seek to respond to you.

1. You must aim at dying to all your opinions and fears, so as to lose yourself blindly in Divine Providence, without feeling anything at all, not even having a sense that you are in the hands of Providence; rather, you may feel and be led more to believe that the contrary is true. As long as you are a sinner, that is, as long as you are on earth, never give up the effort to abandon yourself and give yourself over entirely to God.
2. Be faithful to all your spiritual exercises and regular observances in so far as your health and obedience permit.
3. Regard yourself not only as the servant and the least one but as the slave of the monastery, in comparison to the others who are there. Consider yourself as worthless, wretched and ungrateful, deserving to be abandoned by God for time and eternity because of your infidelities. But all this is something to be realised in your own heart, between God and yourself, simply, quietly and unemotionally, without ever saying anything about it to others.
4. Do not dwell too much on what you have experienced (f), or what you may experience in the future; that would ruin everything and lead to suspicion and illusion; you must regard yourself as tainted and defiled (g). But do not let this worry you. Remain calm and peaceful in the depths of your heart as if everything were going fine for you. However, you should mistrust all that is going on within you and refrain from lingering on it, as if it were worthless, harmful and false (g).
5. Be very faithful to all your spiritual exercises, even though you may feel you are making no progress or doing anything worthwhile. To try to carry them out is already considerable, even too much for you, in your weakness and nothingness. Follow the attraction given to you, if you still feel drawn to it. The simple, silent offering of your inner self, in the form of Acts, before the adorable majesty of God, should suffice. Do not worry if all your other devotions are not as you would like them to be or if you are empty and without feeling. The more you have taken away from you the better you will be. You have only got to focus on being, entering into your nothingness. But you cannot lead yourself there, it is God who must do that. It is His Spirit alone that can guide you safely and firmly; you are better off not knowing this if you are to avoid going astray (h). Be at peace. Do not be afraid. God's ways can be strange and surprising..."how incomprehensible are His ways" (i). You need a tremendous amount of humility, simplicity, obedience and fidelity in order to set out on these ways, persevere and arrive at the goal, which is none other than God. In whom I dare to say, Yours.....

Notes

- a) Letters 8 & 9 are addressed to the same religious; a well known directee, whom Fr. Barre addresses as "very dear child".
- b) Obedience lived in total confidence, even if one does not understand God's ways. N. Barre wishes to guide his directee towards this total giving of herself to God, through whatever difficulties she may be undergoing.
- c) Not relying in any way on oneself, one can live in abandonment and leave the care of the present and of eternity to God. This is a profound attitude of detachment and disinterestedness with regard to oneself.
- d) All these terms are meant to express the desolation one experiences on becoming aware of one's weakness and sin.
- e) N. Barre does not wish to give security in "explaining" or in throwing light on the cause of the spiritual trials experienced.
- f) Without doubt, N. Barre is alluding to the mystical experiences in the life of his correspondent.
- g) c.f. Note 3 in MD.
- h) The paradox of faith which is of another order than that of knowing.
- i) Rom 11: 33.

Letter 9

To the same person

It can be a good thing when doubts and darkness alternate in one's spiritual life. The surest way of remaining close to the Lord, to carry out His will and give Him free reign, is to persevere, empty oneself totally, abandon oneself unreservedly to God and keep oneself humble and tranquil in all situations.

O Jesus! O Love!

May God reduce to nothing and disperse all that can come between you and Him so that you may know Him alone and receive nothing except what comes from Him. Dear child of God, this is the principle on which to base all you have experienced up to now and all that will happen for the rest of your life. For that reason, should you find yourself troubled and upset about your inner life, accept this difficulty and uncertainty in peace and silence, while taking all reasonable measures to clarify your doubts. The suffering which you are experiencing and which is for your good is permitted by Him who is your ALL, your one and only Jesus. Doubt and fear are to be your foundation and support so that you may be compelled to throw yourself entirely into His adorable plan, be lost in it and totally absorbed by it.

Whatever good there may be in you, unworthy and wretched as you are (a), whatever gift of prayer you may receive, it is good that all these be put to the test and challenged. Be prepared then to accept light and darkness equally from the hand of God, as part of His plan and on whom we rely completely for everything. I am happy that you have endured and experienced uncertainty until now, in this spirit. I had even thought of not referring to your difficulty when writing, or of giving you any guidance on it. For others, that could be harmful, but for you it would be only an occasion of dying to self and of greater detachment from self, from a human way of thinking and from self-love. Be humble then, dear child of God, in the face of these struggles and perplexities. Be aware of your great unworthiness, wretchedness and extreme poverty when such trials come your way.

You are a child of death and darkness so it makes no difference if darkness and the shadows of death surround you and you do not feel able to drive them away. However, be very faithful to what you perceive to be really your duty. As for everything else, be patient and plead with the Lord in secret about your darkness and doubt. Abandon yourself totally to His justice and to His will, which outwardly appears to be demanding, but deep down it is truly compassionate and generous.

To come to the point about your doubt, I would say that based on the maxim I have just touched on and on the knowledge that I have of you, you can be at peace. Follow your inner promptings in all simplicity. Do not be worried if you cannot enter into the mysteries of Christ or follow the exercises of a normal and active life (b). God alone can suffice; all else is but a means, a direction or a path. God,

in His divinity, is our goal, the centre and object of all our motivations.

We should devote our energies only to whatever will lead us to this goal and centre. If God, in His mercy, gets us there and keeps us there, for a longer or shorter time, we have only to allow ourselves to be led by Him and to relax; we can rest in the centre and enjoy the goal whereas we can become disturbed and ruffled on the way. Besides, your heart and mind are too limited to hold all the infinite and supernatural truths simultaneously. It is the privilege of the blessed to have such an infinite range and capacity. It is quite enough for a little brain and heart like yours to receive these truths one by one as has been the case for you. After all, God is the sovereign Master. It is for Him, as He pleases, to fill the minds and hearts He has created for His pleasure and dwelling place. He finds it good to dwell there in the way you are experiencing now. So, do not worry, but believe that it is indeed He, and neither your imagination nor the evil spirit, who is responsible for the way you feel now. But be aware too that you have many hidden faults and infidelities which your limited perception cannot notice or observe. Therefore you must be peaceful, faithful and very humble.

Peaceful: in agreeing with what I tell you and believing that it is God who wishes to draw close to you now;

Faithful: in allowing yourself to be guided by His Spirit, like a feather being tossed about by the wind (c);

Humble: in being open to his inspirations and obedient to what draws you to Him, always taking as your guide the great and unique mistress and mother which is humility of heart.

In regard to what you suggested to me in an earlier letter concerning daily communion and penances, I think it would be good for you to receive communion every day (with the consent of your Abbess), except for one day each week, as thought fit by her or by you (d). You should do this only on condition that you are entirely faithful, interiorly and exteriorly; that you consider yourself subservient to all, not even deserving to be a door-mat in the house (e); that you do this with sincerity of heart and mind and without any pretence before God and his people; that you speak to others only when it is necessary, and then very humbly and respectfully.

Finally, you must be so humble, unassuming, empty of self and reduced to nothing that nobody will know that you are in the house (f) so that the Lord will find himself more in his own abode than in yours, because our King is so great a lord that he prefers to dwell where he is at home. He would be received very poorly and unworthily elsewhere and would only pay a call. Your constant efforts to grow in humility and self-emptying will lead to death to self and then it will be Jesus Christ reigning alone who welcomes himself and sets up his dwelling. You have a glimpse of this truth now but when you will have reached complete self-effacement, you will have a better understanding of it. It is only humble children and faithful slaves (g) who understand this language and these truths.

As for penances and austerities, be satisfied with keeping all the observances and obligations of your

rule faithfully; do not give in to self-indulgence and the desires of your disordered nature; be faithful to all I have told you in this letter and in the preceding one. You will find enough penance and austerity in all of that. Put your mind to serving God in spirit and in truth (h) and be kind enough to pray for me sometimes that God will not exclude me from his paradise. Yours ...

Notes

- a) Fr. Barre is writing to a cloistered religious who lives a deep spiritual life. He is urging her to allow herself be guided totally by God. In repeating the words: "unworthy" and "wretched" throughout the letter, he is endeavouring to keep her very humble and convinced of her unworthiness when compared to God's gifts.
- b) She is being told not to worry about her difficulties in prayer or in the observance of the rule.
- c) c.f. SC 37; L 13.
- d) c.f. RR 9; At that time in history, Fr. Barre was one of those who encouraged frequent communion.
- e) This image is used as an invitation to accept to serve and to be humble, remaining unnoticed.
- f) "house" could mean the monastery but more likely it refers to the person empty of self who has become God's dwelling place i.e. leaving all the space for God, c.f. Jn 15.
- g) "slaves" as in Rom 6: 16 – 18.
- h) Jn 4: 23 - 24.

Letter 10

To a cloistered Religious

This letter offers reassurance to a cloistered religious who is worried and troubled by various temptations.

- . She should receive Communion often and be faithful to prayer and the observance of her rule of life;
- . She should not doubt God's mercy or her eternal salvation.

As a spouse of Jesus who is sharing in his sufferings, she will also share in his glory.

O Jesus! O Love!

May God continue to grant you the graces he is giving you and you will undoubtedly reach the fulness of all graces which is Paradise.

Your letter refers to four important points:

1. Communion
2. The assurance and certitude of your salvation
3. Prayer
4. Religious life.

Through the mercy of God, I can offer you some good advice on these points which may be useful to you. In accepting this advice, I ask you to remember my unworthiness. Believe me then and all will be well. You have turned to me as to someone who can satisfy you, enlighten you and relieve you of your doubts. I ask you to accept what I am going to say and then follow it out in practice (a).

1. As far as receiving Communion is concerned, you should do so often in spite of your feelings about it (b).
2. If you die in the state of grace, in which state you already are through God's mercy even though you do not realise it, you will be Jesus' faithful companion and spouse, participating in his glory.
- 3 & 4. Your prayer life is going well and you are called to a truly religious life.

Following what you shared with me in your letter, these four explanations should be sufficient for you. But to convince you further, I shall enlarge a little on each of these points and particularly on the first.

1. (i) You must not torment yourself or be anxious, thinking that it is a precept of canon law to receive Communion once a month. It is a rule rather than a precept of obligation so you are not bound under pain of sin.
(ii) Although there is no obligation under pain of sin, you must make the resolution to receive Communion frequently. It pleases God and Jesus to dwell within you and that you prepare an abode for him in spite of all the difficulties and obstacles that arise. You should not have refrained from receiving Communion in the midst of your trials and sufferings, instead you should have gone to Communion and brought them to him. Follow the advice you have been given and go to Communion

even though you find it hard to come to terms with the decision. Accept your trials wholeheartedly in union with those of Jesus Christ. Give him the satisfaction of uniting you once more to the cross which he loved and still loves so much. Unite yourself both to the cross and to Jesus; espouse one and the other, that is, go to Communion in spite of yourself and in spite of your sufferings. Take hold of Jesus and be happy that you have him whole and entire, because normally we only have him in part. We have Jesus entirely when we have him with his cross to which he wishes to be attached in this world. Receive Communion even when accompanied by feelings of distress, repugnance, hopelessness, anxiety and anguish, because you must receive the cross when receiving Jesus (c).

(iii) Since you have great difficulty in receiving Communion, then you must consume the cross, the nails, the thorns, the gall and the vinegar at the same time that you consume Jesus, which goes completely against human nature. Another reason is that God wishes you to die to yourself. He wants to create in you a capital of pure love so that you can live on the interest (d). In order to bring this about, he sends you this insurmountable difficulty, so that through trials and sufferings, as through muslin, you may be purified and tested, in such a way that you will lose the most imperfect and worldly part of yourself. Finally, Jesus wants to teach you to know Him and to know yourself. He is majesty and you are lowliness; He is holiness and justice and you are impurity and injustice; He is power and wisdom and you are weakness and foolishness; He is All and you are nothing; He is the Holy One and you are a sinner; He is to be adored and you are to be looked down upon (e).

You know all that quite well but not well enough. If you were convinced of it, you would see that this God, this Saviour wants to unite you to Himself; that is, weakness to Omnipotence, the sinner to the Holy One. Be convinced of this truth, believe in it and do not resist any longer. Go to Communion despite yourself.

You receive a great grace when you want to belong to Jesus as God wishes and to live in accordance with His will, being unable to decide to leave him, even if a whole empire were offered to you or if he should wish to condemn you (f). This grace comes from your lack of grace; this wealth from your poverty; this happiness from your wretchedness (e).

This brings me to the next point regarding your salvation.

2. You ask me for my opinion on predestination (f) and if you will be saved. I see you as one of the blessed, only you must persevere. It makes no difference to me whether you believe me or not; even if you were to go on as you have up to now, you would be saved. But if you do what I say and continue to be aware of the feelings of sinfulness and lowliness to which you have referred, you will draw closer to the Lord despite yourself and will be even more assured of your salvation. I realise that you hold a different opinion on this, but that does not worry me, since the way in which you see things enables you to mortify yourself, die to yourself and grow in pure love.

3. Regarding the third point which has to do with prayer, I beg you to give yourself to it as regularly as possible. In order to be faithful to the way along which the Lord is leading you (h) and to minimise any difficulties you may have, remember that spiritual reading leads to prayer and if you are faithful to it,

you will arrive at contemplation and intimate contact with God. Therefore, cultivate this practice of reading, put yourself in God's presence, remember that it is neither a human person nor an angel that is speaking to you, but Jesus; the same Jesus whom you fear so much in the sacrament of the Eucharist, who allows you to suffer and who even finds delight in your sufferings (i).

You know the proverb: "the pleasures of the prince only benefit those who provide them" (j). Your sufferings are similar, they cause much pain but give pleasure to Jesus. This is enough for you, since the created one exists only to give joy to God. Whilst on earth and mortal, this will be at his or her expense and cost. Be happy then that Jesus rejoices at your expense.

4. I fully approve of the zeal which God has given you to be faithful in keeping your rule, to devote yourself to solitude and silence, to avoid particular friendships, not to grumble about privations, to make use of all the means available to you to pray to God and to love your neighbour, so that in everything and everywhere, exteriorly and interiorly, you may be divested of everything, expended and reduced to nothing and thus belong to Jesus.

O Lord, O Love, give this grace to your dear child and to him who is unworthy to call himself. Yours ...

Notes

a) What Fr. Barre says about humility is not meant to undermine the confidence of the person he is writing to. In MD 46, we find reference to the obedience due to one's spiritual director. In MD 24 & 25, there is reference to the gentleness and compassion expected of the director.

b) On the subject of frequent Communion in a Jansenistic age, see SR 2, CE, RA 9, SA 1 & 2. In the following letter, Fr. Barre encourages this same Sister to overcome her fears so as to receive Communion at least every fortnight.

c) Because of Jansenism, people were full of fear before the majesty of God and also fearful of sacrilege. This explains the "distress", "repugnance", "hopelessness", "anxiety", "anguish", etc.

d) This is an image of money invested which then earns enough interest on which to live.

e) Antitheses and paradoxes are a familiar method with Fr. Barre. By these means he introduces his directees to the depths of the mystical life, to which Jesus Christ invites all believers. This method finds an echo in St. Paul:

"it is when I am weak that I am strong". Fr. Barre's concern for the progress of his directees is seen in his use of terms: "asceticism", "impurity", "sinfulness", "repugnance"..... c.f. MD 33.

f) c.f. Rom 8: 31 – 39.

g) Predestination was a burning question in the 17th. Century. In response to this, Fr. Barre invites his directee to come closer to the Lord in whom is salvation and the source of pure love.

h) c.f. MD 39, 40, 41.

i) This sentence and the following two paragraphs were perhaps acceptable with what was happening at the king's court. They are rather difficult to understand in today's context.

j) This proverb tells us that those who carry out some work for the prince's pleasure, e.g. some artistic work, also benefit from the glory it gives rise to, in spite of how difficult the work might have been for them.

Letter 11

To the same person

The religious who confided in Fr. Barre seems to be going through a difficult time, a real spiritual hell. This is in fact a very special grace from God to lead her to a deeper and more intimate union with Him.

O Jesus! O Love!

May you be captivated by Jesus in such a strong and powerful way that you will generously accept thorns, even the shedding of your blood (a), so as to belong entirely to Him.

The purpose of this letter is not so much to instruct you and to comfort you, as to instil in you a strong supernatural courage. It is not I who will do this but Jesus; my words are only a reminder to help you respond to the great grace He wishes to give you.

Rouse yourself then, re-awaken the strength and heavenly grace, the spiritual fire, that God has hidden in your heart. It is there even though you may not feel it; I would not say it if I did not perceive it in you. Remember that you agreed to follow my instructions (b). I would not say anything to you if I did not expect firm and total submission from you.

With the help of this hidden grace, be prepared to conquer yourself, namely, the wretched egoistic self, which is a mixture of disordered nature, self-love, temptations from the evil one and sinfulness. This is my understanding of "yourself". This is what you carry about, what you are in your own eyes. Remember that Jesus Christ is hidden and enshrined in this unfortunate sheath, this loathsome vessel, which is both sinful and detestable(c).

Jesus must dwell within you and lead you to the Jesus who lives outside of you, in the Blessed Sacrament, his throne of mercy and inestimable graciousness. May blood and water pour out from this sinful being that comes between the two and prevents Jesus from fully establishing his dwelling and his home within you. The more it costs your disordered nature, the more firmly will Jesus be rooted in you. For Him this will mean happiness and glory but for you it will be distress and shame.

Child of God, you who are both poor and rich at the same time, count your blessings by your misfortunes; your progress in the spiritual life by your sufferings, trials and weakness (d). The adorable and supremely wise king of your heart could create a level path for you to reach him, but he does not want it that way: "my grace is sufficient for you, my strength is revealed in weakness" (e). My grace, he says, is enough for you; virtue is made perfect in the midst of the greatest difficulties and obstacles.

My dear, I take pleasure in conquering the evil one in you and through you. Have courage then, even though you may feel timid and cowardly. Isn't the love you owe me strong enough to make you go through fire? (f). I don't want you if you are so fragile? I want to be your "blood spouse" (g) so that you may be a source of edification (h) and worthy of me, and not a foster-spouse full of self-love. If you do not wish to obey me, I shall leave you and find a hundred more suitable to me.

Let me have the joy of seeing you go through death and hell to come to me and find life, to have your God and your king, your only one and your all, in order to be united to him. You are ignorant (i) and stupid if you do not value me enough to pay this paltry price to possess me. The extent to which we will be united in heart and held together in spiritual embrace (j) will be in proportion to this fidelity and will be close, firm and unchanging. I brought you into the world, I have called you to the monastic life, I surrounded you with graces so that you should reach this state and I could make my home in you (k) at this price and on these conditions.

The grace you are complaining about is very special and I rarely give it to my spouses, who sometimes grumble in a loving way that I do not give them the opportunity of showing their love and drawing close to me through similar difficulties. Listen carefully to these truths, let them be imprinted on your heart and remember that I am going to be more mindful than ever of your struggles, your painful and distressing efforts to draw near to me. I shall be happy to take up my abode where I am so as to make it more accessible for you. Be generous in all that you do and remember that I have given you grace in abundance. I have infused you with my spirit, so that you would be able to do my will.

Well then, my disconsolate one, do you understand these words? Do you believe what is being said to you? Do you obey Jesus who makes these desires known to you and infuses them so powerfully in the depths of your heart? How worldly and materialistic you are if you do not understand? Will you have difficulty deciding to go to Communion at least every two weeks or would you prefer to stay with the difficulty? Will you begin all over again every two weeks? What are you in the world for except to serve as a stage and a performance for Jesus? (l). In whom I do not deserve to be called, Yours.....

Notes

- a) Fr. Barre is comparing the trials of the spiritual life to martyrdom or to the following of Christ in His passion.
- b) In trying to be faithful instruments of the Holy Spirit, the great spiritual directors often asked their directees for total trust and submission, especially at a time of crisis, trial or doubt.
- c) The religious to whom Fr. Barre is writing is probably experiencing the anxiety that so many people of the time experienced with regard to salvation and sin; anxieties which, as we see later, keep them from receiving Communion. He does not try to convince her that her sinfulness is less serious than she believes, as this would probably only reassure her momentarily. He invites her to centre her life on Christ, so that the awareness of her nothingness may allow Christ's life to be manifested more abundantly in her. c.f. 2Cor 4: 7.
- d) Fr. Barre invites her to recall the marvels of God as they appeared in the form of trials and to let God's gifts be seen through her weakness.
- e) 2 Cor 12: 9
- f) Sg 8: 6
- g) Ex 4: 25
- h) Building others up, or furthering their growth through what is shown forth in your own life.
- i) not being sufficiently formed in the knowledge of God.
- j) Sg 1: 1
- k) Jn 14: 23.
- l) This is meant to encourage people not to be looking at themselves, but rather to be aware that Jesus is continually looking at them.

Letter 12

To a person of high social standing (a)

Fr. Barre explains to this person that God allows her to experience trials so that she may advance in the spiritual life. He suggests to her a very beautiful prayer of abandonment. In this spirit of confidence, she will serve God patiently, faithfully and humbly. Thus, she will live out her vocation and attain perfect charity.

O Jesus! O Love!

May your heart be a throne for Jesus to carry out His will fully. As I read your letter, I noticed you were concerned about four things, which I shall now seek to address. My role is to help a person re-focus on God (b), to reconcile one with the other, in so far as it is possible in this world. I would like to put your mind at ease regarding your preoccupations and your relationship with God so that you will only have to read, pray to God for an increase of His grace and co-operate actively with the help of this grace in the carrying out of His will.

The four concerns that I have noted are:

- (i) exterior desolation,
- (ii) abandonment, such as interior abandonment (c),
- (iii) your sinfulness and repeated infidelities,
- (iv) your religious vocation of which you feel unworthy.

I am going to say a word on each, more for your sanctification than for your consolation.

(i) You are feeling badly because you have no opportunity for conversations which you consider desirable and necessary for your spiritual progress and then there is the great solitude which you have to endure. You say you find it very hard to cope with conversations which are not directed towards your spiritual progress. You find that this disturbs you, goes against your will and upsets your inner peace. Since there is no one with whom you can share all this, your suffering increases. In addition, your human nature is constantly struggling against this state of affairs and is suffering also. You try to overcome this but, seeing no way out, your misery increases and drives you to desperation. This is part of the suffering that God allows you to experience, dear child of God. To soothe the impetuous torrent that reduces you to sighs and tears, listen attentively to the words that God speaks in the depths of your heart:

" My child, this is my will for you (d). Nothing happens to you, either from within or without, that is not for your good and that I have not willed. Surrender yourself then, and do not hold out against your own sanctification and my desire for you. This is borne out clearly by the faith and love which I have given you: in accordance with my eternal plans, to glorify and sanctify you in my holy name; everything that happens now and in the future will be in accordance with my will and as I think best. The more submissive, unselfish and obedient you are, the greater the value to you and the more

peaceful you will feel. Be assured then that there will be no dichotomy between my will and what is of benefit to you while on earth. I refer to the great, unique and supreme benefit, which is to be united to me for all eternity, in my blessedness and glory. While you are on earth, this will consist in following the narrowest and most effective path, where I shall always lead you. This path is often assailed by the disordered nature within you which seeks to lead to your downfall, while appearing to satisfy you - at the expense of your sanctification."

What is asked of you is resignation (e), total conformity and complete abandonment to the desires of your ALL, your king and your spouse Jesus. In order to do this well, your adorable Saviour asks you not to desire or wish for anything that does not conform to His sovereign will, which alone is just, wise, gracious and all-embracing. It watches over you continually and never misses out on what concerns you, big or small, temporal or spiritual, desiring only what is for your greater good. If you are wise and have a little faith and love, you will respond to this Saviour, saying in your heart:

" Lord, I want nothing more, I desire nothing more, only to be ready to desire what you desire and as you desire it.

It is enough for me that you hold me in your presence,
that you take care of everything,
that you watch over all my concerns,
all that happens to me and that nothing escapes your adorable guidance of my life.

O Jesus! O Love! You are my God and my All, centre and unfathomable depth of goodness and greatness! May Jesus live and His will be done!

There is nothing left for me to desire.

Choose, Lord, what you want of me. Order all things, plan and arrange all things in the way that pleases you, and I will try to make my desires and actions yours, to follow you in everything and everywhere, without reserve or limit.

Finally, Lord, I want to belong totally to you, no more measuring or portioning out,
neither in life nor in death, in sorrow or in joy, on earth or in heaven.

My beloved is all mine and I am his forever.

O Jesus! O Love! "

I have carried on in this vein, believing that this is what you would have wanted.

Dear child of God, you will realise that our trials and difficulties spring from an unmortified and uncontrolled will because of our worldly desires and attachments. We want to satisfy all our desires and, when thwarted, our emotions take over, causing us to lose control and resist God's will, and we are in trouble. The result is suffering, discontent, inner affliction, all of which make us unbearable to ourselves. So surrender your own will entirely and forever and let go serenely to the will of God with a lively faith and great love. This will liberate you from all resistance to God and from all anxiety.

(ii) You are also concerned about feelings of inner desolation. You have the impression that God does

not care for you and leaves you with your anxiety, without pouring into the depths of your heart the fortifying and soothing balm of his grace. To be thus deprived of His support and consolation, together with the concerns outlined in (i) above, completes your uneasiness and is the devil's cunning trick to get you to slacken in God's service. He gets you to think that you are doing nothing worthwhile. He tries to discourage you and to put you off everything, plunging you into a despondent and lethargic sadness - the worst enemy of all that is good and virtuous.

This is a sample of the second concern you raised. You need to arm yourself against this enemy of your progress. It is not difficult if you use the remedy referred to above in (i), it is very effective. Here again it is a question of being resigned (e) to God's plans. We need this resignation and should practice it as described above. But it should be practised with a pure and naked faith which can and should sustain us in spite of all possible indifference and lack of feeling in God's service. Pure and naked faith does not have to be accompanied by affective and perceptible grace. The more God seems to abandon and exclude us or not to be even interested in us, the more our faith grows stronger, enabling us to rely on God fully and firmly, and to overcome discouragement, depression and faint-heartedness. In faith we persevere with all our exercises, fully determined to pursue our goal. Even if we appear to make no progress or do anything worthwhile and if this were to go on throughout our lives, we remain determined to persevere in our efforts, never giving in. This expression of faith, generosity, fidelity, trust and reliance on God is as hidden and precious as it is solid and unshakeable. That, dear child of God, is true virtue; an adult way of serving God and not a child's way. That is what it means to be faithful to God and keep faith in Him, to be demanding with oneself and the whole world. It is thus that we grow in solid virtue; there is no other way to become perfect in virtue. From all this you will understand why God allows those who are really trying hard to break away from all secular attachments, to experience difficulties and deeply felt powerlessness. Read and re-read all this attentively, so as to understand these truths clearly, capture their spirit and thus stand firm in the midst of your weaknesses, through which you will reach God.

I have spent so much time on the first two points that there is none left to deal with the remaining two. It is not in fact necessary after all I have said to you already. In spite of the difficulties, you may experience from one or other of them (f), you must exercise the resignation and great fidelity we talked about. Be patient then amid your difficulties; even if they start all faithful. Always pick yourself up again and never give up. Go on practising humility and pleading before God and your sins will lead you to the perfect love of God which you desire so much.

Do not worry about your religious vocation; let go of your anxiety about it. You will certainly be a religious in heart and soul if you believe the advice I am giving you and persevere in living your life accordingly. This advice will always be applicable. Read it carefully, reflect on it and it will lead you and accompany you as you enter Paradise, where you will be crowned by your one and only spouse, Jesus. Amen.

Notes

- a) A person of high social rank. The letter shows that this person, a woman, is thinking of a religious vocation.
- b) MD 30, 31
- c) "Abandonment" here means God's apparent withdrawal, a feeling of being abandoned by Him.
- d) This "will" is for the person's good and happiness.
- e) Resignation implies a serene acceptance of God's will in faith and love.
- f) "one or other" refers to the concerns mentioned at the beginning of the letter: the sense of infidelity which the directee is experiencing, as well as the feeling of being unworthy of a religious vocation.

Letter 13

To a religious (a)

God must become ALL for those whom He draws to Himself. He is the creator, the way, the support, the centre, the source of action and of happiness. Under the action of the Holy Spirit, this conviction leads to adoration, abandonment, joy...and ultimately to pure love. We find these ideas expressed in the four verses of the Spiritual Canticle with which this letter ends.

O Jesus! O Love!

Father and dear child of God, may the most adorable ALL be your beginning, your foundation and your support; may He surround you, be your bond and your way; may He be the sole purpose, centre and glory of your life (b).

So Father, this is what I desire for you with all my heart. It represents all that we ought to wish for in life; this is the principal, or rather the sole aim, of all that we do. We must devote ourselves entirely to developing this spirit inwardly and in our prayer if we wish to draw close to Jesus and be truly united to Him. Let us examine the three strands of this wonderful sublime cord which binds and attaches us to the supreme God and creator of all - "a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (c). Then, in order to sanctify our entire life, including our inner life, to the extent that God gives us the grace to do so, we shall move on to touch on three or four points which you may need to work on.

We are on this earth so that God may be our ALL. This begins, develops and is accomplished in the course of time. It can only take place if God is given the opportunity of reigning fully and supremely within us (d). But it must be a kingdom of love, where we surrender ourselves willingly and lovingly to Him (e). Nothing can offset this dependence on God, neither a sinner, nor the evil one nor the antiChrist (f). If we do not allow God to be our Master in this way, we separate the divinity from the title Creator, an insult which would be unacceptable to God, or he would not be God. "I shall not yield my glory to another" (g). God's glory is to be God, to be ALL. "I am He who is" (h).

In order to foster the reign of God in us and over us, our whole being must be united with Him:

- . as our sole beginning and creator;
- . as the prime mover and centre of all things;
- . as our centre, goal, place of rest and supreme happiness.

May God be the focus of our lives "planted in love and built on love" (i). These three points must be taken together as one.

We are united with God as our sole beginning. He has created us and supports us continually above the abyss of our nothingness, towards which we tend to revert. We need to become more aware of our dependence, through the exercise of a faith which is active, genuine, sensitive and related to our experience, by constantly and faithfully reflecting on it, a thousand, ten thousand and a hundred

thousand times.

We must also remember to consider the visible and invisible universe, in its entirety as well as its individual parts, seeing it in its everlasting dependence on God who created and supports it. Let us then turn our mind to reflect on God's greatness, "creator of heaven and earth, visible and invisible"; not alone He who "made" but He who "is making" and creating all things. We move from wonder to adoration, contemplating God's infinite majesty on the one hand and our own immeasurable weakness on the other. From adoration we move to silence, entering into a profound attitude of respect, inwardly and outwardly. Silence leads us to a sense of God's mystery, an intimate awareness of God's concern for us, "I shall not take my eyes off you" (j); a sense of God deigning to look on me in a loving way, knowing He could not do otherwise lest He destroy his creation. Take care to apply all this to your life.

These inner movements will increase much more when we reflect that it is God who enlightens us. These amazing truths are imprinted deep in our hearts and minds by His divine finger. All these movements become transformed into love, joy, pulsations of pure love, immense goodwill and mutual friendship between God and ourselves. We know that all this happens so that we may be happy, honoured and satiated, like him, in him and with him and consequently with what most merits our affection, our esteem and our love; so that we may be overwhelmed with joy and glory in the bosom of God himself. O Love! O Joy! O Comfort! O Jesus! O Love!

You can see that I have now come to the other glorious climax where all the movements I have referred to may be found. It is sufficient for me to bring it to your attention, the Holy Spirit will do the rest (k). Abandon yourself to faith, and God will instruct you and give you a much deeper knowledge of all this than I could ever do by what I write under his inspiration. Nevertheless, the two virtues most closely linked in this relationship with God, our supreme, ultimate and eternal goal, which will be ours in heaven, are hope and love. What then will you say after such manifestations of love? Having shown you so much favour, Jesus asks: "will you love me?" (l); love in exchange for love, total love for total love, pure love for pure love. Take courage then, child of God, accept to die that you may live, come out of yourself and enter into God. Imagine your great Master addressing the following words to you: " Let go of what you are - your insignificance, limitations, nothingness, wretchedness. Give up this disordered state, these limitations which are so mixed with imperfections, evil and sinfulness, in order to share my treasures and abide with me. May your whole life be a continual exodus from your Egypt, from your sufferings and darkness. Enter then into the desert to which I am calling you (m), into the solitude of mind, thoughts, affections and inclinations, so that we can commune with one another, one to one. If anyone asks you what you have come here for, you will say: 'I have come to offer sacrifice to the Lord' (n). Say to yourself that you have not come, but that you have been brought and that it is I who have placed you here. You will remain here as long as I want you to. Whatever you do or suffer will be in accordance with my will. And so you will reach the third point on the journey, which is dependence on me as the one who motivates you in everything. You will be happy to place yourself

in my hands, abandon yourself to my guidance, act only through me, in confidence, love, obedience, abandonment, setting aside all anxiety and impetuosity regarding your life, work, death, perfection, in time and in eternity. I shall give you a taste of what it is like to have me as your prime motivator and driving force (o) and thus you will belong to me.

Close your eyes, throw yourself into my arms and act only through me. Let your one concern be to obey me and follow me in everything and everywhere. My dear child, let yourself be taken and numbered among the blessed of whom it can be said and sung with love: (p)

God reigns forever in them,
His Spirit is free to do as He wishes in them,
He possesses them, motivates them,
as He would His faithful slaves.
No feather drifting in the wind moves so freely through the air;
God's power is at work in those who offer no resistance,
And who are drawn to Him alone.

God lifts them up and casts them down,
Tosses them about in a thousand different ways,
Going from power to weakness; love enables them to endure all.
In everything they find peace, deep meaning and pleasure.
Their only wish is that God be the one to govern,
His plan will always find fulfilment in them.

All that happens seems good to them,
Whether it be to themselves or to others.
Love has no other judge.
In the light of their unbounded ardour,
Their only experience is to listen, be enlightened and obey
The laws which they lovingly embrace.
Nor has it been revealed that they follow other laws than His.

When He has given some sign
Or the slightest revelation of His will,
He is served as a sovereign Master.

His greatness is sufficient;
His simplest wish is the guiding light his lovers follow.
They look for no other support, know no repose,
Save only when they rest in Him.

Notes

- a) This Letter, addressed to a religious priest, contains numerous biblical quotations in Latin, which indicates that he was familiar with the Bible. He also appears to be a friend as well as a directee, with whom Fr. Barre shares his own spiritual experience.
- b) Acts 17:28
- c) Ecclesiastes 4: 12
- d) MD 13
- e) As a result of being attracted by Him.
- f) All creation is in a state of dependence on God; it could not exist otherwise. But this necessary dependence can be transformed into a love relationship.
- g) Is 42: 8
- h) Ex 3: 14
- i) Eph 3: 17
- j) Ps 31: 8
- k) Jn 16: 13; 1Jn2: 27
- l) Adaptation of Jn 21: 15
- m) This passage and the lines that follow recall the exodus from Egypt and the journey through the desert, Ex 13:17..
- n) Heb 13: 15; 1 Kgs 16:2
- o) Total dependence on God's action is being emphasised.
- p) The following verses are extracts from the Spiritual Canticle of Fr. Barre, 37, 38, 39, 40, with some modifications.

Letter 14

To a gentleman (a)

In this very long letter, Fr. Barre encourages a man to continue his search for God, by being freely faithful to his time of prayer and inwardly detached from worldly and even spiritual things, in order to seek God alone.

Entering into this intimate relationship with God entails:

- . humbly recognising one's pitiable state
- . considering oneself as a slave in God's house
- . little by little being elevated by Him to the role of servant
- . eventually becoming a child of God.

This filial relationship with God calls for total abandonment of self to God the Father which involves:

- . great confidence
- . forgetfulness of self and of one's interests
- . acceptance of his fatherly will.

Fr. Barre ends the letter with further development of these different points.

O Jesus! O Love!

May God's name be forever blessed for the very special graces he has given his servant. I fully approve of the excellent plans and resolutions you have made which obviously have sprung up in your heart through the action of the Holy Spirit. The first of these is your resolve to examine your conscience twice daily in addition to the usual nightly exercise. The second is to disregard all that goes on in the world, as if you no longer belonged to it, desiring only to please God and do his will regardless of the cost. Your conviction is that if you are damned (b), it is what you deserve and if you are saved, it is by divine mercy . I therefore consent to and approve of these holy resolutions.

Regarding the first resolution: examination of conscience, I approve of this on condition it is done in a spirit of love and union with God and in complete freedom. It must not be an anxious analysis but a reflection made very freely and lovingly, so that, experiencing the freedom of the children of God in mind and heart, you may freely and more easily enjoy God's holy presence and become deeply immersed in his sovereign goodness. This is how I see your twofold examen.

Regarding the second resolution: abandonment to God, I also approve of this, not because you had never made this resolution, but because it is a reality for you and because God has bestowed so many graces on you that you can consider yourself as no longer belonging to the visible, unhappy, deceitful and transitory world. Rather, often consider yourself unworthy of the world which is invisible (c), happy, real and unchanging, peopled by God's children of earth. Convinced as you are of the emptiness of this demoralised world, you should not identify with it since it is not God's wish for you.

Moreover, your extreme unworthiness obliges you in all humility to distance yourself from that invisible, true, happy, unchanging world of the saints, the just and the innocent.

So, acknowledge the grace you have received from God. He wants you for himself more than anything else, not only more than temporal things but more than all created things. He wants you solely and completely for himself. In short, God wants you for himself on his terms, not on yours. Nevertheless, he will lead you, in accordance with either his justice or his compassion, without your being able to turn one way or the other. Otherwise, you would cease to belong totally to God or to be guided by his will; you would cease to be God's creature, since God would no longer have the freedom to use his power as creator.

Those are some of the marvels that are included in the graces you are receiving (d), and that I must point out to you. You know you must strive towards the goal to which you are called. Since, in your dependence and submission, you have come to me for direction, God, acknowledging these attitudes will give me the light I need to help you. I appeal to you over and over again in the words of Our Lord: "Friend, go up higher" (e). It is Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, who is using me the most unworthy interpreter of his will, to convey to you the four or five stages he wishes you to pass through in order to reach total union with him and be completely immersed in him.

Five stages on the road towards abandonment.

1. The first stage through which you, dear child of God, have already passed is the basis and foundation stone of all the others. Although it appears to be more of a loss than a gain, it is in fact of more importance than you think. This stage is the unfathomable depth into which God has allowed you to fall through your sufferings, sins, infidelities and every other form of sinfulness, but from which you have been rescued by his grace. Grace it was that made you cry loud and long from these depths, without knowing what the result of your pleading would be; "Out of the depths, I have cried to you O Lord, Lord hear my voice. Let my ears be attentive.." (f). You expressed this cry in a way that was known only to yourself, with unspeakable pleading (g), in silence, in distress, in utter powerlessness, overwhelming afflictions leading to the depths of despair and the hopelessness of the damned.

2. The second stage is where God receives you as a slave in his household. God communicates with you and helps you become more familiar with his divinity, at a distance however, and more in the form of silence and suffering than in loving conversation. Still, you were a member of the royal household; although as a paltry slave, you had not the right to look up at your Prince and Master much less to speak to him (at least not directly or on your own behalf); so great is the distance between the adorable Master and the lowliest of his slaves.

3. The third stage brings you to the role of servant, by which you have come closer to the Master and are bold enough to look him in the face; you often hear him speak and at times even converse with him. You have tried to carry out His will as generously and faithfully as possible, abandoning yourself to whatever discipline he may in his wisdom and goodness adopt towards you, while saying with

David: "O Lord, I am your servant, the son of your handmaid, the Church (h). At this point, sustained by grace, you have been endowed by God with extraordinary zeal and intense love for his spouse, the Church. This has given rise to an unswerving attachment that links you more firmly to the Church than to your own life. You regard this Spouse of Jesus as the sole anchor of your hope and the cornerstone of your salvation, with special respect for the vicar of Jesus Christ, knowing that the Pope upholds the interests of the Church in all matters. "O Lord, I am your servant, the son of your handmaid", a poor wretched sinner. These words are addressed to you and not to others who would be unable to understand them. "It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted" (i). You hear the words: "friend, go up higher" (e); you are already very high up, too high for you, but not yet as high as your Master Jesus desires for you.

4. You must therefore go to the fourth stage, which is that of the child of God, an intimate friend of God. "He gave them power to become children of God, those who are born, not of the flesh, but of God...I no longer call you servants, I call you friends" (j). Go up higher, take on boldly the status of child and friend of God. You are given this wonderful honour because you remain deeply conscious of the fact that you are a pitiable sinner, a lowly slave and a faithful and generous servant; all of which you show forth in all things, in all that you say and do, in your joys and sorrows. May you always preserve these qualities, unless Jesus your Master takes them from you, which he would have the absolute authority and power to do, as will happen when he takes you up to heaven. In heaven there is no place for self-love, human weakness, vain complacency, presumption, laziness or abuse of God's grace.

I hope you understand well the meaning of each word I am using; you have to climb high enough to leave nothing below. On the other hand, if the grace and enlightenment you receive are to be effective for your present needs, they must make up for what has been deficient in the past. We see the same thing happening every day in the growth and development of our bodies (k), which grow up tall, while at the same time the lower parts grow in proportion and become firm and strong. This is even more noticeable in the plants and trees; if this did not happen there would be no real growth. Let us open our eyes and reflect on our humble and lowly state when compared to the rest of our growth and development, as with the roots of trees in the depths of the earth. Nature begins, continues and attains its growth of trees and plants in the roots planted deep in the earth. Let us learn from this comparison how to recognise truth and discover the original because we only see the copy. For nature is only the image, the letter, the copy and the reflection (l). Grace is the hidden meaning, the pattern and what is true and genuine; "grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ" (m).

5. The fifth stage includes the five dispositions that are necessary for it.

The unfortunate sinner, the pitiable slave, the lowly servant now reaches a higher level. May you be given the status, honour and manner of life that befits a child of God, through the action of the Spirit in instilling the following spiritual dispositions in the depths of your heart. These dispositions are essential or integral to spiritual childhood.

- (i) Abandonment and entire surrender of self and all your concerns to God as to your Father.
- (ii) Disregarding whatever would prevent you from reaching out to God;
- (iii) Reaching out lovingly, simply, serenely, continually and directly to the Father; an essential practice for anyone in the happy state of being a child of God. This arises from the fourth disposition:
- (iv) The firm inner conviction of the infinite, pure and gracious love which the Father has for his child; a truth which you will never fully comprehend, assimilate or appreciate. Nevertheless, it is the wonderfully fruitful source of attraction towards a lofty, strong and perfect love. Notice that the radiant beauty and nobility of spiritual and holy childhood arises from two expressions of reciprocal love, that of the Father for the child and of the child for the Father. This is principally what the eternal uncreated Son of God came on earth to establish and is the splendid fruit of the holy and adorable childhood which he recommends so much at this time (n).
- (v) This mutual love bears fruit in the faithful and loving accomplishment of all that the Father asks us to accept and to do or not to do. This response presupposes the practice of every virtue, inwardly and outwardly, in all situations where the Father's wisdom makes his will known to his child. Thereafter, his child's thoughts, affections, words and actions are borne along by the loving, gentle and irresistible force of love, "whither the eagerness of love carries them", as St. Augustine says; that is, into the arms and heart of the Father. This is where the child of God will find rest, happiness and deep joy. Anywhere else would be foreign and enemy territory, an unknown region and an exile.

"They who dwell in the shelter of the Most High" (o); "they" means all those, without exception, who want to benefit from the great love that God, as Father, bears them "dwell in the shelter."; the more literal translation from the Hebrew means " 'secret place' of the Most High ". They must make their dwelling, their home, in the heart and bosom of the Father; remain there and dwell there always. All this is contained in the Hebrew expression. Each word of this magnificent psalm could be explained in the same way, portraying filial confidence in God.

Here we touch on the true happiness which begins in this life but is only fully realised in the next.
"Safe in your presence you hide them, far from human plotting" (p).

All these mystical and sanctifying movements originate, as you will see, from two expressions of love. The first, from which the second originates, is God's love as Father for his child; a Father who is an all-powerful God, infinitely great and wise.

The second is created love, infused and divinely poured into the heart of this child, enabling the child to turn to God, reach out to Him and render the child worthy of Him, capable of conversing intimately with Him and of sharing the human and spiritual favours He bestows. Henceforth, His desire is to treat His child in this way. All the infidelities of the poor unfortunate sinner are obliterated and destroyed in this divine fire, consumed and consummated by the flame coming from the paternal heart and by its excessive goodness.

It would be good to reflect on each aspect of this love relationship; it would provide nourishment for

your mind and make this holy exercise a little easier for you. I will say something about abandonment, even though the Holy Spirit could do so much more than I could ever think of or express.

Total abandonment requires three qualities, if it is to be commendable to God; these three qualities are: trust, surrender and resignation.

1. Trust, an assurance based on God's excessive love and support, whereby you can presume that you are destined to die in friendship with God. "We rely on you totally", says Judith (q). Furthermore, you are now in a state of grace, believing that God loves you too much to allow you to be lost. "No one who is a child of God sins" (r), says John the Evangelist, that chosen child and one of the greatest princes among the children of God, who wrote with so much eloquence and feeling about that divine relationship, which springs from the adorable truth: "the Word was made flesh" (s).

Remember these words also: "The just will neither fall nor be struck down, since the Lord supports them by the hand" (t); "No disaster can overtake you, no plague come near your tent...though a thousand fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, you yourself will remain unscathed...since they cling to me I rescue them, I raise them high, since they acknowledge my name" (u). This name is none other than that of the Almighty Father. It is only those children blessed by God who recognise Him fully. This confidence in God's saving power wins them marvellous blessings. Besides, I must assure you that the longer you remain on earth, the greater will be your eternal happiness and glory, provided you continue to grow in intimate union with your Father.

Do your best to develop this threefold trust in God in all that pertains to the spiritual life which is the essential and only thing that counts, while God, in turn, gives you the grace of perseverance in your good works, your frequent communions, your examinations of conscience; in short, in the various little ways you mentioned in which you serve His adorable Majesty. Be assured that I understand it well enough to be in a position to say what I am saying to you and to encourage you to believe and accept it. If you do this you will have the great consolation of seeing how God's pure and deep love will take root and grow in you.

Let trust regarding things spiritual be combined with abandonment regarding things temporal, relying on your heavenly Father's care and finding your rest in Him. Pay reasonable attention to the upkeep of your family and leave the rest to God. He is the only Master and sovereign judge in the order of nature and grace, in heaven and on earth. Rely on God then and trust in Him for both spiritual and temporal needs.

2. Surrender: Trust and the support one finds in God leads on to surrender, which is none other than a letting-go of self in order to flow into God, to fall into the bosom of his adorable providence. You will then no longer live in and by yourself; no longer rely on your own self-sufficiency, whatever it may be, distrusting yourself and your capabilities. This must extend to the temporal as well as the spiritual, to nature and grace. This surrender, which is true abandonment and total letting-go of one's whole self to God is basic to the trust we have been talking about. To abandon oneself in this way is to enter into one's nothingness, morally and mystically; and thus to return to God and flow into Him, the true source; returning to the creative essence to be re-created in a purely divine way (v).

Having been grafted (w) on to the stem, trunk and root, we can no longer produce anything but divine fruit. Henceforth, all our actions, feelings, sufferings and intentions will be divine. It will no longer be as in the past, when we acted as if we were gods of ourselves and of all that was associated with us; we no longer see ourselves as the first beginning and ultimate goal of all that we do. We recognise and acknowledge a Beginning prior to ourselves, from whom we continue receiving our being, power and potential for action (x). We realise that this first Beginning is also our ultimate goal, the central point where all our existence, strength and actions converge. It is only then that grace and nature, having a beginning prior to ourselves and flowing from a higher source, only pass through us, converging and culminating at a deeper and more sublime centre than we could ever become.

This is what Our Lord meant by the words: "Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (y). Similarly with the words: "How can a person grown old be born again? Surely it is not possible to re-enter one's mother's womb?" (z). Through this surrender, self-emptying, fervour, oblation, we re-enter our mother's womb, which is God's creative essence, divinity, all-powerful and gracious will, infinite, unremitting, maternal and paternal providence.

The precious state reached here is more passive than active; first passive and then active. We no longer live as if we were in full control or motivated by self-love. Totally detached from self, we now live out of pure love, guided by the Holy Spirit who has taken the place of our own finite and insignificant self. Such people are the true children of God, the true brothers or sisters of Jesus Christ, since in His humanity He experienced this state fully and totally, in order to share it with all those prepared to follow Him in obedience, dependence, poverty, temptation (a1), suffering etc... "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God, made in the image and likeness of His Son" (b1). These alone are free, all others are slaves. There is only a very limited number of such blessed souls on earth; they are the illustrious heritage of the Church. How wonderful is the outcome of surrender!

3. Resignation: This third quality of abandonment is none other than a serene, loving and filial acceptance of all that God desires, welling up from the depths of a heart totally seized by God and His love. It means saying 'yes' to the totality of the will of Him who is unique among fathers and mothers; "from whom every fatherhood, in heaven or on earth, takes its name" (c1); "You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven" (d1). This virtue of resignation and acquiescence leads us to accept the will of the Father, made known to us through the commandments, obligations or other demands, even if they are very hard or take us by surprise. We recognise the Father reaching out to us lovingly rather than desiring to chastise us. Indeed, the main characteristic in all of this is love, so much so that there is no other principle, motive or aim. Moreover, if we were to examine the depth and desires of the two hearts, that of the Father and of the child, we would see only kindness, wisdom, friendship and caring, because the two have become one. "Father, I pray that they may all be one, as you are in me and I in you, so..." (e1). The trust you have been telling me about and towards which you feel drawn, demands familiarity with God; a special gift reserved only for members of God's household. It is one of the principal means, if not the only one, of reaching intimate union with God.

Five conditions for arriving at familiarity with God:

- (i) Indifference to all that is not God, that is, total detachment from all that is created, so that our spiritual powers may be able to receive the uncreated Being and be sensitive to His action.
- (ii) A genuine and undisguised feeling of our unworthiness, of which we are very aware due to our frequent relapses into sin and the innumerable frailties with which we are surrounded.
- (iii) A real relationship with God in prayer. This comes about through a living faith which enables us to contemplate the Divinity as if we were seeing Him with our own eyes and gives us the courage to speak to Him, respectfully, freely and lovingly, as an intimate friend would with another (f1).
- (iv) To do nothing, undertake nothing, plan nothing, even in the secret of our hearts, without referring to God, in whose presence we remain continually. Otherwise our great friendship with Him would break down. So, continue to live in His presence as far as possible.
- (v) Freely, respectfully and lovingly to ask God to bestow His graces on our neighbour. We must make use of the favours He grants us and the benefits stored up for us, in order to do good to others and above all to promote His glory. "God made everything for its own purpose" (g1). Much more glory will surely be given to God when we reach out to others in this way rather than focussing on ourselves only.

Our friendship with God will be all the more real and profound, the more detached we are from ourselves and our personal interests (h1).

Notes

- a) The context indicates that this is a nobleman and the father of a family.
- b) Damnation was a controversial Jansenistic issue. Fr. Barre refers to this again later on in the letter.
- c) Fr. Barre is explaining the experience of "being in the world but not of it", and at the same time the "already there" and what "is not yet" in regard to life in God.
- d) Fr. Barre, being a wise director, outlines this man's spiritual life for him, in terms of gifts or graces he has received. As the letter goes on, we see that he seeks to interpret his directee's itinerary and throw light on the various stages he has been through or called to go through.
- e) Lk 14: 10
- f) Ps 130
- g) Rom 8: 26
- h) Ps 116: 16
- i) Mt 19: 11
- j) Jn 1: 12 - 13; Jn 15: 15.
- k) We find many images and parables in Fr. Barre's writings. Here, using the image of the body, which doesn't grow upwards without strengthening its base, and the plant which grows in proportion to its roots, he expresses one of the essential themes of his spirituality: we cannot go towards God without, at the same time, sinking into our own nothingness and becoming more aware of our weakness.
- l) Fr. Barre refers to the Greek philosopher, Plato, for whom what is created and perceptible is a reflection of the spiritual. It is also, in a way, the language of the gospel parables.
- m) Jn 1: 17
- n) This refers to the seasons of Advent and Christmas. This letter is therefore relatively dated.
- o) Ps 91
- p) Ps 31: 21
- q) Judith 8: 15
- r) 1Jn 3: 9
- s) Jn 1: 14
- t) Ps 37: 24
- u) Ps 91

v) This refers to the conversation with Nicodemus in Jn 3. This text seems to have played a prime role in Fr. Barre's inspiration as a founder. We find it again in S.R. 1, which describes the origin of the Institute.

w) Jn 15

x) Acts 17: 28

y) Jn 12: 24

z) Jn 3: 4

a1) Temptation, as a test and a means of always being conscious of one's poverty, is seen here as a way of going to Christ and of resembling Him.

b1) Rom 8: 14; Rom 8: 21.

c1) Eph 3: 14.

d1) Mt 23: 9.

e1) Jn 17: 20 - 21.

f1) Ex 33: 11.

g1) Prov 16: 4.

h1) The letter ends with an apostolic invitation, as in much of what Fr. Barre has written, be it to the laity in general or to the Sisters of the Infant Jesus.

Letter 15

To a cloistered Religious

Fr. Barre, writing to a nun who is in utter desolation, encourages her to accept in silence the absence she feels of all human or divine help. God's plan for her is to eradicate all her imperfections and make His dwelling place in her.

O Jesus! O Love!

Your unhappy state reflects God's great mercy towards you, if you use it well. You are deploring and over-reacting to it, whereas the triple desolation which I notice in you is an Ark of the Covenant (a) that Jesus is setting up within you in which to enclose the unction of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Believe me, I can assure you that through the hardness of heart regarding all that is divine and heavenly, the painful situations (b), bitterness and coldness you are experiencing, God is setting up a completely new Tabernacle within you, while destroying the old one which He does not like. The latter would be good enough for a village girl (c), but it is not worthy of a Lady-of-honour of the Court, as he wants you to be. Know that the longer you experience this desolation, the more worthy of its guest and His Majesty will be the dwelling and the Tabernacle of God.

Have courage then, in your extreme discouragement, do not wish for or desire anything less than God and Jesus. I am not talking about possessing God and Jesus in their greatness, goodness, power, attractiveness or even in their Essence. You would be too rich were you to enjoy all that. It is only a question of the word God and the word Jesus; these sacred words made up of three or five letters. You must be prepared to let everything else go from within and without. If you feel tempted again to believe that you have not been saved, let it pass, do not resist, allow yourself be reduced to extreme poverty, having nothing but these two names: God and Jesus; without feeling taste, fruit or progress in virtue.

From then onwards, all your treasure will consist of the following: (i) poverty; (ii) intense internal and external suffering; (iii) separation from God (d); (iv) the word God; (v) the word Jesus. Then feeling poor and abandoned, burdened with yourself, like an unfortunate person surrounded by hardship and cut off from God, you will forget yourself and your painful situation as much as possible in order in all humility to reflect on the words: God and Jesus.

Look at them, touch them, utter them (e), let them become God for you. May you value nothing else, desire nothing else, on earth or in heaven. Believe yourself to be very fortunate and treated far beyond your merits.

Well, Sister, do you feel yourself to be in that state? You still have a long way to go. Why then are you complaining and grieving so much? Calm yourself, look within yourself, do not struggle against that beautiful, though painful, moulding of the heart (f). Do not run from this triple desolation which implies:

1. being deprived of help and consolation with regard to earthly and temporal things, which you must not reach out for or be attached to lest you lose contact with divine life;
2. feeling totally isolated and cut off from relationship with God, experiencing no inner consolation (g);
3. not receiving any support or consolation from God or those who represent Him and whose ministry is to support and help the needy children of God.

If you were to add to this triple desolation, the reactions of an uncontrolled and unmortified nature, the attacks and temptations of the devil, the external persecution from people, the sufferings of a painful and persistent illness, followed by constant infidelity and endless sin; all this would constitute hell on earth for the duration of time. Nevertheless, you must live through it and continue to serve God through it. The unfortunate person who may experience all these at the same time must be resigned and accepting of them so that there would be as little offence as possible to the divine Majesty. But you still have a long way to go. Try to refrain from complaining and avail of the great graces God is giving you. Acknowledge your faults, be resigned and grateful to God, do not make unnecessary demands on yourself, remain indifferent, keep silent; be at peace, faithful and patient; endure, persevere and wait.

These are all mysterious words; they represent many different practices and inner dispositions, which will only gradually be opened up for you (i).

Acknowledge your fault, strike your breast, because you have been complaining about the way God is leading you and resisting His desires and plans for you. You must give up this kind of behaviour and accept what He wants for you; letting go of everything, without thinking or discriminating. Stifle the feelings and murmurings of self-love. Make sure you thank God for all the graces He has given you and which He is still giving you; thus He will be moved to help you still more and to give you His choicest graces. Thank Him for allowing you, who are poor and worthless, to enjoy His most intimate and compassionate love; because in the realm of divine truth and light, that is the way of describing the bitterness, rejection, powerlessness, painful loneliness, which have shocked you and will continue to shock you; since you are not strong enough to bear them with good grace and accept them for what they are - singular and extraordinary favours from God. Following on these inner movements and spiritual acts, enter into those which will help you to follow the path that God has mapped out for you.

Be silent, no more complaining, let gratitude and surrender become part of your life. Keep silence, which outwardly is superficial but inwardly is much deeper, in order to accomplish the following worthily in the eyes of God: to endure and bear God's sanctifying anger towards you so as to reduce to nothing your sinful self; He will then be able to set up his own dwelling within you, supernaturally and spiritually. If you do not understand me now, have a little patience; you will reach a clearer understanding through the sufferings and trials that God is allowing you to experience. "Difficulties sharpen the intellect" (j).

Notes

- a) Dt 10: 15
- b) God often makes demands on us through painful situations or difficulties in the area of faith.
- c) Fr. Barre is using an image to illustrate a point. It does not refer to the nun's social status. She is being invited to let God build within her a dwelling worthy of him; like a king who would build a palace to which she would be invited.
- d) This cloistered religious is fearful that she may face damnation. This is more likely to be linked with the Jansenistic views of the time, which were commonly used by preachers and writers. Fr. Barre, being an experienced director, did not try to reason with the person he was directing in order to persuade her to the contrary, which usually has no effect. He encourages her to turn away from herself and give her mind to God and Jesus, without putting any strain on herself.
- e) This is a reference to the Ignatian use of Application of the Senses while meditating.
- f) God often uses suffering to bring about transformation in a person.
- g) Letter 44
- h) FM 13
- i) The director's role is to make known the ways of grace, as in MD 19, 24, etc. The remainder of the letter illustrates this.
- j) Is 28: 19

Letter 16

To one of his friends (a)

Experiences of doubt and of our faith being tested, as well as feelings of the absence of God, are all means of purification and can lead to a deeper and more authentic relationship with Jesus.

O Jesus! O Love!

This troubled person must be prepared to give her attention to what appears to have lost meaning for her: Jesus, faith and common sense; without mixing them up with things of the earth i.e. with what is emotional and tangible (b), but quite the opposite.

Her common sense, or ability to reason, functions as if (c) totally influenced by her emotions and the reactions of her proud and impulsive nature (d).

Her faith is in complete darkness as if, choked by apathy, indifference, distaste and infidelities that lead her away from God. Consequently, she is without feelings of enthusiasm or devotion, without enlightenment or any semblance of truth. O pure and naked faith ! O spiritual and transparent faith ! how hard you are on self-love, self-indulgence and pleasure seeking (e). How dull and unbearable you are in the sight of this princess, who has such a spontaneous imagination! (f).

Finally, there is Jesus, but Jesus veiled under a black mourning crepe (g), hidden in profound obscurity, Jesus as if He did not exist, as if He did not see you (h), as if He had disappeared because of the infidelity, indifference, apathy, evil aversion; all of which must be hiding, protecting and shielding the real person of Jesus in the intimate depths of the soul, as happens with the species of bread and wine in the adorable Eucharist. Where the senses, intellect, common sense and human experience are concerned, Jesus is not to be seen, there is nothing of the brilliance of his glory (i). Who could say that He is there? Neither sight, nor touch, nor imagination, nor understanding could identify him. It is only divine sight and understanding, capable of penetrating the real truth, that can see Him. The gift of faith, which has been infused into our souls, is a little ray, enabling us to share in this.

Jesus wishes to be alone with this troubled person. He does not want any intermediary or that she should experience any eagerness, affection or enlightenment. These would stand between Him and her and be a source of division, impeding total union and immediate and loving contact with Jesus. The poorer and more devoid of all created help she is, the more she is enriched and filled with the Creator Himself. God allows her to experience these deprivations, in order to discipline her self-love and infidelities, but it is a discipline of love, which leads to stronger, deeper, more intense and more lasting love (j). It does not matter what He uproots provided He does not desert her; it only means that all will be well and even better.

However, it is difficult to bring comfort to this troubled person, even though she is on the road to

perfection without knowing it, because she is feeling and experiencing the contrary (k). These are painful feelings, experiences and possibilities which, fundamentally, do not prevent her having, preserving and developing the presence of Jesus in a wonderful way. The troubled person I am talking about will not be aware of this. She is being asked to believe what she hears, what she is told and what is written to her from a distance. Let her live by it, avoiding anything to the contrary where possible; because the very thought of doing good is both too much and too little for her at present.

May her life and death reflect her sole desire and effort to live a good life, without appearing to make any progress; may she not fear to die in this way, as it will unknowingly lead her to paradise (k), into the bosom of Jesus. When she sees Jesus, she will understand all, and even before that if she believes what we are telling her. She must not be complaining so much and trying so hard to find solutions for her doubts and remedies for her sufferings. In making plans and seeking enlightenment, she is only altering and spoiling her opportunities. This letter and the preceding one (l) should help her regarding what is past and what is to come. May she be at peace so that Jesus may be able to do what He wants in her. In her charity, let her recommend to her adorable ALL, he who is unworthy of referring to himself as "in the Lord", by her or by you. Yours.....

Notes

- a) This letter is addressed to a spiritual director regarding one of his directees, who is a woman.
- b) This refers to trials experienced by this woman in her spiritual life; "no devotion, enlightenment or enthusiasm". She must not seek emotional consolations, since they are not in themselves a sign of a deep spiritual life. They can even be a purely human pursuit "of things of the earth", which can divert one from seeking God in a true spirit of faith.
- c) The use of "as if" so many times shows how difficult it is to find words to express spiritual realities.
- d) The emotions are never fully controlled or geared towards what is good.
- e) Jn 1: 13; Gal 5: 19....
- f) At the time "imagination" was described as a person's inner ability to describe things, enabling that person to have access to true representations of reality, but it can also lead to mistaken and illusory fantasies. It is in this sense that she is at times a "princess" and at times governed by her instincts.
- g) Crepe material was worn as a sign of mourning i.e. Jesus appears to be dead.
- h) The "you" here gives the impression that the writer is alluding to his personal experience or that of his friend to whom he is writing.
- i) RR 9
- j) Sg 1:1; apart from painful purifications, God's tenderness is also experienced, c.f. SC.
- k) One is not aware of the progress one is making; it is the "unknowing" of the mystical life. L 50.
- l) We do not have any trace of the "preceding letter".

Letter 17

To a Religious Priest (a)

This priest is going through a period of spiritual aridity, doubt, temptation and loneliness. Fr. Barre helps him to see how this can lead to his sanctification. He encourages him to go through it all humbly, and to continue relying on God in the midst of his anguish.

O Jesus! O Love!

My reverend and very dear Father,

It is clear to me that God wants to take possession of you entirely and forever since He has filled your heart with such lofty dispositions. Whether I listen to you or not, write to you or not, in spite of the pressing reasons you put before me in order to receive an answer, you continue to be happy and impartial; never losing your salutary attitude but rather, growing in it and developing it. You still effectively feel your extreme unworthiness; an unworthiness you consider so great that you would regard it unjust to receive any consolation, inwardly or outwardly. "Come near, Master Etienne, so that I may express how I feel about you." The fact that you find yourself unable to complain about anything or anyone, is not something which comes from you, Etienne, but purely from God. It surpasses both natural and common supernatural powers which would surely be inadequate at such a time.

Reverend and very dear Father, you see clearly that you need to retain this attitude so that it becomes habitual, giving completion to your state of perfection (b) and forming the basis and foundation for all the graces you may receive during your lifetime.

In order to bring this about, God works in you in three ways:

1. He is very strict and rigorous in not wanting you to experience any temporal or lasting consolation; this would be forbidden and dangerous fruit for Etienne. It is not for a sinner or a slave, assigned by God to bear the pain of exile and the rigour of chains, to aspire to the happiness of the sinless and the free (c). Thus He leads you along the path of humility and mortification, purifying you magnificently in the process and detaching you completely from the attractions of created and earthly things. So there is no consolation for you there!

2. Having taken this rigorous stance of preventing you from experiencing any temporal comfort, he wishes, nevertheless, not to fill the void with any spiritual, supernatural or inner consolation. Having added pain to pain, he leaves you in a state of inner hunger and dryness that makes you cry out for mercy and makes you wonder if you are not being reproached by God and being given a foretaste of your eternal damnation. What a terrible state to be in: continually pleading and seeking to be heard by God and dissolving into tears; at the same time, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, understanding nothing; as if all that is celestial, supernatural, spiritual and omnipotent had become an

empty dream. What is still harder is the evident lack of courage and strength to pray, plead and call upon God; remaining dry as a stone, hard as marble and as indifferent as an atheist with regard to what is truly supernatural.

Having treated you so strictly in depriving you of all consolation and spiritual joy; having been so hard on this poor, distressed, unfortunate, yet precious Etienne (d), God still allows you to be tested to the extreme by the powers of darkness (e). It is as if the evil spirits have been empowered by God (f) to exercise their role as executioners and executors of God's supreme and sovereign justice and so you are beset by ruthless temptations, which you experience against the understanding, causing loss of faith and plunging you into utter disbelief; against the will, removing all confidence in God and depriving you of the little love and charity you already have for Him, for yourself and for your own salvation;. against the memory, wiping out the remembrance of God's mercy, His infinite greatness and all the joys and attractions which used to give delight to your heart. The evil spirits snatch away all experience of God and all lofty thoughts, making you view these merely as fantasies of a hollow and limited brain and leading you sometimes to mistake dreams for realities and to believe as true all that you like to imagine about yourself.

My poor Etienne, don't you think that all of this is but the odious invention of the Evil One to disturb and unsettle you? But is it not also the admirable invention of heaven to make you strong in virtue and to awaken in you a humility which, formed and rooted in you in the very depths of hell (g), will render you unshakeable all through your life. Thus, totally affirmed, you will no longer allow self-love and complacency to reap the fruit of the most beautiful work of grace. The latter, however, can happen imperceptibly when a sinful and conceited self (h) is not uprooted, or when one believes oneself to be truly virtuous and praiseworthy, when in reality one is full of arrogance and self and devoid of truth, virtue and God.

Only the humble, who accomplishes God's work to the full, will be exempt from the declaration: "...all our upright deeds have been like filthy rags..."(i), or "...with justice he will judge your good deeds..." (j), which will be heard on the day when God's sovereign, uncreated and true justice will judge justly all human and created judgement.

This second way in which God works in you brings with it three kinds of pain and suffering: (i) you will feel as if no mercy is being shown to you from above; (ii) you will experience callousness and coldness in your heart; (iii) you will find yourself struggling with a perverse, proud and resentful nature arising from the attacks of evil spirits. These evil spirits conspire with your sinful nature in order to make you give up your true and generous desire to serve God, belong entirely to Him and free yourself forever from the seductions and charms of vanity and lies (k). In addition there are the harmful assaults of lust as well as greed for wealth, knowledge and ambition.

The unbearable anxieties arising from a troubled and scrupulous conscience deprive us of whatever peace and rest we could have. It is on this basis that God becomes our avenger (l). He allows us to experience a hell here on earth in order to save us from the eternal one.

3. We now come to the third way in which God desires to work in you. Let us visualise the three kinds of very hard stones and pebbles with which God wishes to crush Etienne, kill him and reduce him to powder. In addition to all that has been said, you are in a situation that merits great sympathy, in which you have to endure:

- the lack of all human help, which could, and even should, come to you from those who appear to be part of God's household (m), who have heard of, and have had some experience of His designs, ways and guidance, who claim to be attached to Him and to draw and unite others to Him;
- being seriously ill and having no recourse to a doctor;
- being on a precipice or sinking in a bog, with no one to hold out a helping hand or throw a rope for rescue;
- being starved for ten consecutive months, crying out for a piece of bread and receiving none from anybody;
- imploring humbly that someone would light a small candle to lead you up the hills and down the slopes, around the twists and turns, to places you have never been...only to remain in the darkness of a terrible night, likely to fall as often as you take a step (n).

What is still more painful about this state of affliction is to seek enlightenment from blind people, relying on them and placing yourself in their hands, only to receive false lights which, like will o' the wisps, lead you to more dangerous precipices than those you wanted to avoid: "If the blind lead the blind, both fall over the precipice" (o).

Notes

- a) The text of this letter, which is written to a friend, called Etienne, is incomplete. Etienne is a professor of theology, as L 18 indicates. That is why Fr. Barre calls him "master". This is one of the few letters that has the name of the addressee. Research indicates that it refers to Fr. Etienne Molien, a very kindly Minim who died at Rouen in 1671, while trying to save one of the Minim students from drowning. The fact that Fr. Molien had died 26 years prior to the publication of the letters explains why Fr. Raffron did not omit the name of the addressee.
- b) The sense of one's nothingness must be applied to all aspects of life in order to bring it to completion.
- c) Contrasting words are used to illustrate the point e.g. "sinner" or the one condemned, with "sinless" or the innocent one; "slave" and "free" i.e. child of God as in Gal 4: 7.
- d) Fr. Barre points out that the truth is not to be found in apparent desolation and that Etienne is precious in the eyes of God.
- e) Job 1: 7 – 12
- f) These ideas are also found in the book of Job, where God allows the devil, or gives him power, to assail a person.
- g) The trials experienced, inwardly and outwardly, can constitute "hell" for the person and lead to a deep sense of humility, which also results from the person's struggle against the attacks of the evil one.

h) We must try to get rid of the idea that we are total masters of ourselves, making us believe that what is right and good in us is due to power within ourselves.

i) Is 64: 5

j) Ps 73: 3

k) Whatever falsifies reality, deceiving and misleading people.

l) The avenging justice of God is a theme found frequently in the old testament and was also much talked about during the 17th century. The idea being that God would punish in proportion to the sin committed and that there is no forgiveness without a price paid to God in exchange.

m) Rom 6: 20

n) MD 10

o) Mt 15: 14

Letter 18

To the same Religious

Fr. Barre writes to his friend to help him become more aware of the graces he has received. He encourages him, in spite of his difficulties, to persevere in prayer, accept the trials, contradictions and solitude through which God brings about His kingdom in us.

O Jesus! O Love!

I can never receive a letter from you, even if it is only a few words, without feeling overcome with joy and thanksgiving to God for the favours and singular mercy that he deigns to give this precious one, my dear and venerable Etienne, towards whom I have poured forth my pitiable heart and feeble supernatural love, as if part of myself. I would say that it is because of a holy self-love that I am rejoicing at the graces you have been given (a).

I have noticed four: two of them natural and two supernatural.

The first of these natural gifts is the integrity, clarity and soundness of your mind and judgement. This would be an assured source of your downfall if God had not taken possession of it in order to supernaturalise it by immersing it in that grace of Jesus, which is humility, poverty, dependence and self-emptying. Yes, my dear Etienne would be lost without that grace. What you call your past and present infidelities are only the result of this natural grace. Strange as it may seem, if God had not allowed you to be unfaithful, fickle, lax in your resolutions and unappreciative of what comes from God, you would only harm yourself because you would be proud, presumptuous and self-opinionated about your fidelity. God allows you to slip into faults, only little ones it is true, so that through this humiliation you may become more virtuous than you have been. God will allow you to fall into little infidelities again so that you may become more aware of your need for his help and his grace and thus become more humble and dependent on Him. Meanwhile you must do your best to overcome and reduce the number of your faults and your failure to respond to the grace of Jesus - your unique ALL.

The second natural gift can, with God's help, become a stepping stone to the supernatural ones. I am referring to the profession to which you are called notwithstanding your wisdom and judgement. Teaching theology in particular does in fact oblige you to rely on what is outside of yourself and to live according to the eternal truths through the experience of solitude, faithful use of your time and continual submission to God (b).

The first supernatural gift is the importance you attach to talks and discussions on what pertains to the spiritual and eternal. Therefore you experience real regret when you cannot find something similar in the groups in which you find yourself.

The second supernatural gift is revealed in the unutterable longings (c) constantly stirred up in you by the Holy Spirit, at all times and in all places, so as to enable you to forget yourself, to destroy the self which belonged to sin (d) and that was a slave to sin (e), stripping off your old behaviour and your old self (f).

From all I have said, dear Etienne, it is not difficult to find some solution for what is troubling you:

(i) regarding prayer, you must never omit it, even for a single day, no matter how rushed you may be. Without prayer everything will go awry. However mediocre it may be, it uplifts us, sustains us and in some hidden, imperceptible way it procures us blessings we would never otherwise experience. So, be very faithful to prayer, giving more time to it on Sundays, feast-days and holidays. Don't be afraid that your studies will suffer in consequence; on the contrary, they will improve, intensify and deepen. As you are aware and as you will get to appreciate more, the books which we use in prayer are a higher and more spiritual form of learning and affect us very differently from the dead writings of the great secular scholars (g).

(ii) regarding the difficulties and minor obstacles you encounter, always examine yourself and consider yourself to be more sinful than what you observe others to be; God has not given them as many graces as he has given you and therefore he will not ask as much from them as from you. Consider also, Etienne, that after a while, instead of being the statue that is being carved and fashioned in the workshop of the Master, you will become, because of your infidelity, pride and resistance, a hammer and chisel, which you will use at your own expense to form and shape other statues (h).

We must both be careful not to consider ourselves superior to the children of the House (i), but rather as pitiable strangers whom the Master can throw out of His House any day, and never let us in again. Let us be so humble that we will always be ready to be trodden underfoot by everyone, without ever asking why. We cannot expect anything else because of our extreme unworthiness. Therefore, let us never be so presumptuous or insolent as to judge or condemn anyone (j). This is the secret of the Gospel, the narrow and only door to the Court (k), through which one enters, advances and perseveres in true dignity, in the footsteps of the only Sovereign, Jesus.

Think well about it and, even more so, let it become part of your life. Remember that whatever you do, for many years, you will only be a novice in this superhuman art, of which Jesus alone is worthy. So, my dear friend, let us set our eyes on this goal and never give up. Let us let go of all that we have and are, in order to possess this treasure and gospel pearl: "On finding a pearl of great price, the merchant goes and sells everything he owns and buys it" (l). This is the only way to find the kingdom of God which is within us.

I have nothing more to add. Yours joyfully.....

Notes

a) This letter begins with gratitude and an expression of great affection between Fr. Barre and his friend. He is a spiritual son who is dear to him and whom he esteems very much; use of words; "precious", "venerable". Note also the contrast between the "venerable Etienne" and the "pitiable director".

b) The profession of a theology professor can facilitate the reception of grace; it forms a "link" between natural dispositions and God's grace and challenges one to be dependent on and docile to God's gifts.

c) Rom 8: 26

d) Rom 6: 6

e) Rom 7: 14

f) Col 3: 9

g) Using books as an image, Fr. Barre is referring to contact with God in prayer.

h) If the contradictions and difficulties in our relationships with others are accepted in forgiveness and love, they will form us into images of God (as statues in God's workshop). Our own pride, limitations and faults, which are so hard for others to bear, are also a means of forming them in this image, even though at cost to ourselves.

i) Mt 15: 21 – 27

j) Mt 7: 1 – 5

k) Mt 7: 13

l) Mt 13: 46; RR 1.

Letter 19

To a Religious (cloistered)

This letter is addressed to a woman religious who is very preoccupied about herself. She is being encouraged to seek Jesus more earnestly and to love God and others in total disinterestedness.

O Jesus! O Love!

It seems that after communication with me (a), whether I see you or not and even if I dismiss you, you still continue to seek me out. You should be the same with Jesus, but more earnestly seeking Him, even when He appears to be distancing Himself from you.

Do not be depending on the support and pleasure that human beings desire, so that God's life may flow into you more deeply and truly and be with you forever. Normally, people expect to get what they asked for having appealed, pleaded and made sacrifices for it. On the contrary, you can expect refusal, rejection (b) and reproach.

People like to be listened to when they speak, to be loved when they love and to be thanked when they give. You, if you wish to be wise, must desire the opposite in regard to Jesus and, because of Him, in regard to others. You should regret any experience of the contrary, that is, when your love and attention are reciprocated (c). You know that I would have difficulty being hard on you in this way (d).

You must try to get over the difficulties you have with your superior. You are so naive that you imagine that what you do not feel, does not exist. Then, let your life with God also be simple and unsophisticated. I am sure this is not too demanding for you, to whom I wish to be in the spirit of Jesus, Yours.....

Notes

- a) This refers to the bond created through spiritual direction.
- b) The rejection of all that is of no value
- c) Lk 6: 22 - 26, 32.....;
- d) MD 31.

Letter 20

To a troubled person

Fr. Barre is no stranger to humour! By taking comparisons from the world of finance, he shows his correspondent the mistake she is making in looking for human support. He strongly urges her to give herself entirely to God.

Jesus!

Since you are not willing to accept the human help you have asked me for, it looks as if you want to work on silver while I am doing all I can to help you work on gold (a). Those to whom I give spiritual direction earn a little money when I pamper them; when I speak to them and take an interest in them, they earn silver; when I reproach them and ill-treat them (b), they earn gold, that is, when I give the impression of neither seeing nor hearing them, nor wishing to speak to them, nor even condescending to admonish them, but of treating them as strangers and people in whom I have no interest.

This is how I wish to treat my former daughter and servant of God, who should have been married a long time ago and given hundreds of children to Jesus (c), but there she is behaving foolishly like a little girl and child. She has three cents (d) to give to Jesus and for fear of going bankrupt, she wants me to contribute 2.9 cents (e). Is this not something to be ashamed of? You should hide yourself, O faithless and idolatrous one! (f).

Pay less attention to seeking human support, you will then become more aware of the love of Jesus and be captivated by it.

Farewell, I do not wish to see you again as you are at the moment. Change, and then I will say wholeheartedly that I am, Yours.....

Notes

a) Undoubtedly, the person to whom Fr. Barre is writing is already giving a very generous response, which he recognises as "silver", but he wishes her to give more and to learn to do without his help in order to work in "gold".

b) In MD, Fr. Barre explains that it is good to be demanding of people who are already advanced in the spiritual life.

c) cf PM. This could refer to a young woman who should make a commitment to the service of others, perhaps as a teacher or a catechist. The reference to marriage is ambiguous. It could be taken literally or as imagery.

d) The currency referred to would be worth about one twentieth of a pound and would correspond to its weight in silver.

e) Fr. Barre encourages his correspondent to take responsibility for her own progress.

f) This is an example of the "reproaches" or demands which Fr. Barre refers to above and reflects the reproaches uttered by Jesus, as in Mk 9: 19 and Lk 8: 38.....

Letter 21

To a Religious (cloistered) (a)

Despite all the trials she has to endure, Fr. Barre points out how rich she is with all the power and greatness of God's name. He encourages her to give her heart over to Him completely.

Jesus!

Nobody can cause you more suffering than what I desire for you in the sense in which you are writing to me. Far from complaining of being abandoned, you should rather be overwhelmed that you can still have God's holy name in your heart and on your lips (b). That name alone is sufficient to nourish, sustain and fortify a hundred thousand worlds of just and wise people. Continue then to retain a sense of wonder and pay heed to your inclinations, tongue, pen, imagination, emotions, thoughts and desires so as to keep your heart entirely free for God alone. Refrain from any soul-searching so that you may advance with great simplicity along the way of perfection. Farewell!

Notes

a) This is a very short note rather than a letter. The ending is different from Fr. Barre's usual style.

b) L15; Acts 2: 21; Rom 10: 13.

Letter 22

To a person of great piety

Fr. Barre summarises the spiritual life as follows:

- . detachment and freedom with regard to all of creation;
- . humility;
- . patience and peace in the midst of trials.

Thereby one can arrive at intimate and constant union with God.

One must pay continual attention to the following: lowliness, patience, renunciation and union, while being peaceful and gentle with oneself.

1. Renunciation: this means a deliberate decision to separate (a) oneself honestly from all creatures in order to be attached to the Creator, the only true Lord of our hearts. Therefore, since our hearts belong to him alone, we must not cut ourselves off from his total grip on us, because otherwise he would be extremely cold and dangerously indifferent to us. We must approach people only to the extent that God permits; we must therefore be glad when they leave us because they only drain our hearts and hold us captive. We must enjoy the freedom that comes from God and not imprison ourselves by attachment to what is perishable; this is the way that leads to deep peace. This separation must apply to what is internal as well as to what is external, i.e. let us efface from memory all ungodlike images which keep us in perpetual night and are an obstacle between us and true light, which the soul perceives when it is looking only at the Sun of Justice (b).

2. Lowliness: this is none other than the exercise of true humility which helps us to remain among the least of all God's people, leading us into our nothingness in order to give glory to God and enter into a state of true adoration before the majesty of God. The exercise of humility also helps to empty us of all pride and anger, of all bitterness and indignation, of all ambition and emotional disorders. The humble soul alone possesses all these blessings, not to mention the other great graces experienced by such a soul.

Humility leads us to abhor all praise and flattery. It strengthens us in times of contradiction and humiliation, which God could allow or which could arise through our own fault. It keeps our sins ever before our eyes; it gathers them all and, as it were, charges us with them as if they had only just been committed and never wiped out. It conceals God's pardon in order to keep us in our lowliness and make us more receptive of God's greatest graces. O admirable virtue! inconceivable grace! whose practice is unknown, sacred and so neglected. Let us allow ourselves to be uplifted by this treasury of heaven and of God's gifts (c).

3. Patience: signifies an inner spirit which is both humble and hidden. It is the result of a special grace which enables us, without any bitterness or grumbling, to submit peacefully and quietly to whatever

misfortune or suffering we may encounter in our lives. This submission disposes us to accept all from the loving hand of our adorable Master who was willing to receive his crown only from the cross. He recognises as his spouses and his children only those who are lovingly attached to the cross.

4. Union: is the fruit of the practice of the above three virtues and reflects an unwavering and intimate relationship of the heart with God. Arriving at this quality of relationship presupposes, turning our attention away from what God has created, letting go of the world, having a humble and contrite heart; being aware of our extreme unworthiness (d) and being full of respect and awe before the majesty of God; a suffering heart, already half broken by sorrow (d), affliction and numerous contradictions, which it has finally accepted, surrendering itself to the will of God.

Having worked on these three areas (e), we must take a closer look at "union" and we will see that it consists in the merging of four excellent virtues:

(i) attention to the presence of God;

(ii) a reverential awe which draws us closer to the majesty of God. This keeps us truly humble, both inwardly and outwardly. Thus we are considered worthy of appearing before the adorable majesty; this humility is accompanied by complete submission which enables us to enter into and remain in an attitude of adoration and service towards God.

(iii) filial confidence, which is the surrendering of one's whole self to God, our only Father, totally forgetting all that we are and placing all our concerns in his hands. We know that He will look after everything and that whatever concerns our salvation will be taken care of by his divine providence, to his glory and ours. There are very few religious people who abandon themselves to God in this way, really giving themselves up to him alone without relying on themselves or on anybody else.

(iv) charity or love of God, which so invades those in whom it reigns supreme, that they totally forget themselves and their concerns and are wafted into God forever without any effort on their part. It is only of God and his interests that they think and speak; it is God alone as well as all his concerns that they breathe, love, see and revere. They experience great joy in all that he is and does and are equally distressed by all that displeases him. Finally, this love takes possession of and transforms each person's mind and heart in such a wonderful way that one would think it is no longer the same mind and heart but that of God Himself (f). Such is the eminence, excellence and greatness of this union! Herein lies the height of perfection, the divine transformation of all!

Since this love is all-consuming, supernatural and never satisfied, it has three very great and remarkable effects:

Firstly, the cultivation of great respect and affection for all that reflects the image of God. We recognise this image of God in our neighbour, on whom God's favour rests, for whom he created this world and the world to come, for whom he became flesh and died. These considerations lead us to

have a great love for our neighbour and a great zeal for his or her salvation and sanctification (g). Secondly, everything is referred to God; neither doing, nor enduring, nor undertaking anything, neither living nor dying except for God. In a word, whatever one does is an expression and a living out of one's love for God.

Thirdly, there is always a readiness to begin again, never having done enough, or having it done well enough. (h).

Notes

a) In the original text, the word "divorce" is used, which indicates a total cutting off. Fr. Barre advises the person well advanced in the spiritual life to give up even the legitimate pleasures of the world in order to seek God.

b) "Sun of Justice" is a scriptural title given to Jesus. cf. Mt 13: 43; 17:2; Rev 10: 1.

c) Humility is the key to this treasury, it opens up all God's riches to whoever has it.

d) Ps 51.

e) The three areas are: forgetting about those whom God has created, letting go of the world, a humble and contrite heart.

f) Gal 2: 20 and 1Cor 13 describe the love which is in question here.

g) MAP 203.

h) This letter has no ending. Maybe it was omitted for reasons of confidentiality or maybe it did not have any bearing on the theme of the published letters.

Letter 23

Guidelines to help overcome pride (a)

Using a series of comparisons with various animals, Fr. Barre presents, in a light-hearted way, some steps to be taken to promote growth in humility.

Jesus!

In order to control your disordered nature which is still enslaving you and stifling whatever divine grace is inspiring within you and to eradicate the pride and arrogance that goes with it, you would do well to heed the following advice:

1. In a spirit of humility, compare yourself to a horse that is fed only so that it may work. Consider yourself before God and people in this humbled state in order to destroy your proud and arrogant nature. You must work at this spirit of lowliness and try to keep it alive in you, as well as the spirit of true and blind obedience (b).
2. Compare yourself to a donkey, a lazy and slow animal, fed on thistles, never spared any blows, yet never protesting or making noise. Accept then to be humbled in this way and to experience shame, suffering and patience throughout your life.
3. Compare yourself to a sheep ready to be shorn, to have its throat slit and to be skinned, without ever making a sound and offering no resistance. This spirit requires great gentleness and meekness.
4. Try to become as dumb and as silent as a carp (c), both inwardly and outwardly. This spirit of inner and outer silence will enable you to be open to divine grace and to come before the sovereign majesty with deep feelings of love and adoration.
5. Let it be your aim to become as small as a mouse, remaining hidden in the depths of your nothingness of sin and alienation (d), so as not to be pounced upon and devoured any longer by the devil or by pride, as God desires for you.

If you can identify with all of the above, then, relying on God's true compassion rather than on yourself, you can confidently aspire to a sixth level, which is to be like an angel and a saint in heaven. Thus you will live in the presence of God's majestic greatness and splendour, in loving, profound, silent, constant and unremitting adoration, as far as you possibly can, at least during the scheduled times of each day.

Notes

a) This letter, addressed to a directee, has obviously been shortened by Fr. Raffron, so as to give only what would be of interest to the reader. Fr. Barre's letter has obviously been adapted to the level of his directee by the use of very simple language, images and comparisons with animals. "Whoever wants to act as an angel resembles an animal", wrote Pascal (1623 - 1662). Paradoxically, Fr. Barre invites his directee to imitate the humility symbolised in the behaviour of five animals in order to attain "angelic" holiness, which is God's gift. MD 54; MAP 159 – 161.

b) The horse allows itself to be led; it changes direction and speed at the least order of its coachman. It wears blinkers which prevent it from looking sideways and letting itself be distracted on the way.

c) freshwater fish

d) God has made us for himself alone. Left to ourselves, we are nothing. Sin enters into this nothingness and cuts us off from God. Being alienated from God is the worst evil that could befall us.

Letter 24

Means of preserving peace in the midst of great trials (a)

The means given by Fr. Barre are:

- . patience and hope
- . the certitude of God's love
- . abandonment to God's will
- . fidelity to prayer.

You will come to realise that the peace which is so desirable and about which I have already spoken only comes about through struggle and opposition, both inwardly and outwardly. The more these difficulties increase, the more frequent and persistent they become, the more we shall grow in this heavenly and blessed peace, which is the dwelling place of God, the nuptial bed of the Bride and Bridegroom (b), the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit.

In order to continue progressing in this direction and become supernaturally enriched, you must practice patience, hope, resignation, fidelity and thanksgiving. Therefore be ready to accept patiently all the obstacles, sufferings and inner trials which appear to weigh on you so much.

From the generous hand of God, you can expect a hidden flow of graces and blessings. He will pour them into the depths of your soul and uproot all that is in any way disorderly in you. Thus you will be penetrated by the purity and holiness of the Spirit of Jesus until such time as all that is impure and unseemly is eradicated from you.

So, dear child of God, have no fear of all these difficulties, terrible temptations and anxiety about your sinfulness. These are only trials and reasons for hope and joy for the spiritual and enlightened (c); they are not reasons for discouragement, as you think. They motivate us to express our thanks and gratitude to Jesus for looking after our conversion and sanctification so effectively.

Be at peace and continue in full confidence in the midst of these shadows of sin and death (d). These are not offences but trials and crosses that are pleasing to him and make you worthy of him. Be totally resigned and abandon yourself to God's will; do not make any choice of state by yourself alone but let your main focus be the will of Jesus. Never omit any of your religious exercises and above all be faithful to Holy Communion, which you will receive every Sunday and also twice a week with the consent of your director. Pass on to him this advice I have given you, humbly ask him, from me, to grant you this grace and he will surely do so.

I recommend myself to your prayers, and I am, Yours.....

Notes

- a) This letter has been shortened. We do not know who the "dear child of God" is who is addressed, or whether the person in question is a man or a woman. This person already has a spiritual director as indicated by the last paragraph.
- b) This is an indirect reference to the Song of Songs.
- c) People who take their spiritual life seriously and who desire to live according to the Spirit. St. Paul distinguishes between the "spiritual person" and the "natural person". 1Cor 2: 14; 1Cor 15: 44. The Holy Spirit alone can transform our trials and make them channels of grace for us.
- d) Ps 22: 4.

LETTER 25 (a)

The proposal of a daily time-table for prayer is a subject often taken up by Fr. Barre. His proposal is very precise here and consists of a reflection for every hour, followed by a practical application of it.

This spiritual clock or diary aims to help a person grow in holiness and union with God at each hour of the day through the practice of adoration, inwardly and outwardly. Several different spiritual practices are suggested for each hour.

4 a.m. Reflect on the existence and unity of God.

Practice: recollection, that is every thought and act absorbed in and united to God as the sole and undivided centre of all our activity.

5 a.m. The Holy Trinity

Practice: silence, wonder (b), admiration.

6 a.m. God's majesty

Practice: self-emptying, a holy surrendering (c) of ourselves and all our faculties (d), as if unable to live apart from God.

7 a.m. God's goodness

Practice: love, zeal, affection, as if one's heart were totally absorbed in God (e).

8 a.m. God's almighty power and providence

Practice: trust, abandonment, surrender, a holy immersion of oneself in God (f).

9 a.m. God's justice

Practice: a holy and awesome fear and trepidation, bewilderment, over-awed silence, apprehension, fear and unease before the impenetrable, unavoidable, uncompromising, eternal and unrelenting judgement of God on every person and on each one's deeds and omissions (g).

10 a.m. God's wisdom

Practice: total self-effacement which is reflected in one's outward behaviour, on becoming aware of the intimate presence of divine wisdom.

11 a.m. God's holiness

Practice: deep sorrow and shame in the awareness of one's countless sins, transgressions and offences which are so far removed from the holiness of God. All heaven bows down in awe and veneration in such a way that all its citizens no longer appear to exist (h).

12 noon: God's beauty and infinite fullness

Practice: joy, peace, excitement, rapture, union filled complete happiness and peace; never being able to grow tired of this attribute of God, never tiring of believing in it, thinking of it, seeing and enjoying it. O happiness! O delight! O God! O Love!

Each hour of the afternoon will be given to adoration of Our Lord Jesus Christ, especially the attitudes (i) and mysteries (j) expressed by his life.

1 p.m. The conception or Incarnation of Jesus Christ

Practice: offer and dedicate to Him, the humility, self-emptying and love of his lowliness.

2 p.m. His holy Infancy

Practice: simplicity, innocence, obedience.

3 p.m. His hidden life

Practice: inner solitude, quiet and silence so as to listen to God in one's heart and in the depths of one's being.

4 p.m. His relationships and meekness

Practice: gentleness, a humble and caring attention to the needs and sufferings of others. Let nothing deter you, a soothing presence, lead everyone to God by example and deeds rather than by words.

5 p.m. The Institution of the Blessed Sacrament and the adorable presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

Practice: faith and respect as if one felt oneself in the company of Jesus, the Word made flesh. We are his servants and he is our Prince, our Sovereign, our King, What faith, veneration and profound respect such feelings should evoke in us!

6 p.m. The Passion, Suffering and Death of Jesus

Practice: acceptance of internal and external suffering, with a fervent thirst for more in order to resemble our one loving and crucified Jesus more closely.

7 p.m. His Resurrection and presence at God's right hand, whence he rules the whole world, especially his Church and above all those specially consecrated to Him.

Practice: total submission to God in all things and total union with the Blessed, by means of a lively faith and a firm trust that we shall one day be united with so many just and holy people, despite our sinfulness.

8 p.m. His coming on the last day of judgement

Practice: being ready to question ourselves strongly on all of our life as well as our best efforts; believing ourselves to be worthy of condemnation and punishment.

Let us bury ourselves in spirit in God's deepest dungeon and most confined prison (k) and remain buried there until death. Be willing to suffer in this way throughout our life. being very aware of God's judgement and thus be born to new life, while others enter the darkness of death (l).

During the whole night. contemplate Jesus Christ glorified, seated at God's right hand and governing the whole Church, with attention to every detail.

Notes

- a) It is not clear whether this is really a letter or part of a letter. Many images are used to try to explain mystical realities.
- b) An emotional response to an overwhelming fact.
- c) Accepting to let go control of one's life in order to be led by God.
- c) Intelligence, will and feeling
- e) Seized' by God and "melting with love" for him, the person becomes totally absorbed into him.
- f) This image describes the depth of abandonment desired.
- g) These represent the attitudes of the sinner before the grandeur of God as well as the sinner's unworthiness. These expressions were commonly used at the time. They contrast with those used to describe love - the latter being much more numerous in the spiritual clock.
- h) Rev 4: 10 ; 7: 9.
- i) The inner attitudes such as: prayer and union with His Father.
- j) The whole of the life of Jesus from birth to death.
- k) The trials. feelings of unworthiness and being deserving of punishment. This is the path which leads to a new birth for us. This is God's free gift, rather than the fruit of our efforts and good deeds.
- l) Ignorance of God's ways leads to death for those who rely only on themselves.

Letter 26

Basically, this letter is a theological discourse on the different ways in which God is present in creation. The style, vocabulary and many quotations given in Latin in the original may indicate that it was addressed to someone who had studied theology. Fr. Barre refers very clearly to the Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas and describes the presence of God through various stages, beginning with the inanimate. God who is present to the inanimate, is still more present to the human being created in His image. Human beings have the added ability of responding to the desire which God has of sharing His life with them.

There are ten ways in which God is present: three refer to ways in which He is present to all His creatures, animate and inanimate; the remaining seven refer to ways in which creatures are present to God. It does not mean that God is not also present to them, but that they cooperate with Him, whose presence permeates all created beings and who is present to all because He fills all. "Do I not fill heaven and earth" Jer 23:24.

In part 1 of the Summa, St. Thomas describes the three ways in which God is present when he says He is everywhere by his essence, by his power and by his presence. To make this more intelligible, the great Doctor goes on to describe how a king is present in his kingdom (a).

- (i) He is present through his essence, seated on his throne, since he is there in person. He is present in the court by the fact of being in attendance, since he sees all the people of whom his court is composed as well as all that is going on there. He is present in the rest of his kingdom through his power because, even though he is not personally present in every town and village, all are subject to his ruling.
- (ii) According to St. Thomas, God is present in a similar way through His essence because He is an infinite Being and is infinite in His substance and consequently is diffused everywhere and in everything (b). Amazed at this marvel and convinced of its truth, the prophet-king (c) proclaimed it with as much respect as admiration: "If I climb the heavens, you are there. If I lie in the grave, you are there. If I take the wings of the dawn and dwell at the sea's furthest end, even there your hand would lead me.." (d).
- (iii) He is everywhere by his power, because everything is subject to his laws and under his control; nobody can exist or act without his consent. He is everywhere by his presence because he sees and knows all.

God is universally present in these three ways, but He is present to those who are spiritually minded in seven other different and special ways. These ways of being present are 1) objective, 2) affective, 3) effective, 4) negative, 5) infused, 6) passive, 7) expressive.

Before going on to explain each of these and so that you may be more familiar with all the different kinds of presences, I want you to notice, with St. Thomas, that apart from the general ways in which God is present to all his creatures, He is present in a special way in our Temples which have been

consecrated to Him. We find this truth expressed in Genesis where Jacob, having built and consecrated an altar to God, said: "This is the House of God and the gate of heaven" (e). He is present in a special way in the empyrean heavens (f), the abode of the Blessed. He is present in a special way to the Sovereign Pontiffs and the Councils so that they may lead the Church well. He is also specially present in the lives of the just and those who love him. Jesus Christ teaches us this truth in St. John's Gospel: "Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love that person, to whom we shall come and in whom we shall make a home" (g). He is also particularly present in the Blessed; according to St. Thomas (a), he descends into their souls, that is, he penetrates them. The Fathers of the Church say that God is present to the damned as their judge and to the Blessed as their reward, their delight and their happiness. With the same Angelic Doctor, we also notice that God is present in all these different ways as the one who is at work. It is because of the different ways in which God is at work that we make a distinction between his ways of being present. Let us now return to the seven such ways referred to above.

1. God's **objective** presence: this consists in seeing God in all creatures made to his image. "Though we cannot see him....we can discover him through his works" (h). The understanding will recognise God in all created things when it beholds them as originating in God. Any person who beholds something created or any perfection will immediately recognise the existence of God, since without him that person, in whom God dwells, would be nothing. This presence is illuminative and stems from the understanding.

2. **Affective** presence: this consists in the union of God with the soul through love. The soul is filled with tenderness for the beloved because he is good, beautiful, lovable and has all imaginable riches and treasures. This presence is associated with the will.

3. **Effective** presence: it is this which brings about the action and the effects in response to the above two presences. It is called a presence of God because God, who dwells in the soul through love and grace, is the source and prime mover of all our good actions. It is this presence of God which instigates good deeds.

4. **Negative** presence: God unites the soul to Himself in a simple and intimate union. He wishes to possess the whole person - being and faculties. Thus the subordinate part of the soul associated with actions, seeing itself cut off, has a feeling of bitterness which can only be described by the one who has experienced it (i). On the other hand, the predominant part of the soul, feeling obliged to take another route, no longer guided by the understanding with its reasoning powers, or by the will which is attached to those loved, giving all its attention to God without any human consolation, experiences a kind of suffering which plunges it into the abyss. This could also be called the purgative way because God empties the soul of all that is created by means of bodily and spiritual illnesses, in order to fill it with Himself.

5. **Infused** presence: this arises from the negative presence and consists of an outpouring from God of inexplicable delights, sweetness and tenderness. The extent to which one experiences this presence depends on the extent to which one has suffered. However, God, in his mercy, often allows one to have this experience without any prior suffering.

6. **Passive** presence: this consists of a union with God which totally absorbs the soul. Having been led through the preceding degrees, the soul reaches total detachment with regard to self and others. It no longer wishes or desires anything, and if it does, the desire comes from God.

7. **Expressive** presence: here there is a desire to express what is being experienced, either in writing or in words.

Notes

a) In the theological Summa: question 9-2: Art 2; question 9-8: Art 2, 3.

b) The presence of God in the whole of creation is expressed several times in the Old and New Testaments. Note that God's presence is not confused with creation as that would be pantheism.

c) David.

d) Ps 139: 8 – 9.

e) Gen 28: 17.

f) That which relates to the highest heaven, the abode of God.

g) Jn 14: 23.

h) Rom 1: 20.

i) This privation explains how this presence of God is referred to as negative.

Letter 27

To a missionary

In this rather friendly letter, Fr. Barre encourages a man in his missionary vocation. He advises him to take time for whatever rest and relaxation would enhance his spiritual life. He advocates an apostolic life of contemplation and action, that is, carrying out the work confided to him by God, in union with Him and strengthened by prayer.

O Jesus! O Love!

I felt both privileged and pleased to receive your letter, which at the same time was a humbling experience for me. It brought me a lot of joy because, on the occasion of your worthwhile visit, God gifted me with a great affection for you on account of the very singular graces He has been pleased to bestow upon you. I felt humbled by the deference and confidence you manifest towards one so unworthy and incompetent. I have spent a long time thinking about your request because, being conscious of my inability, I feared that instead of taking this special grace which you have got and helping you bring it to full fruition, I could impede it and frustrate God's designs through my imprudence and blindness. This would have been no small matter of reproach for me. Following this hesitation about what I should do, I have accepted to do what I feel incapable of, trusting in God to come to my rescue, since He has bestowed so many favours on you. I hope He will use me as His instrument in the fulfilment of His purposes, in spite of my unworthiness. May God direct everything and keep me from saying anything contrary to His intentions, the promotion of His greater glory or the salvation of souls.

First of all, let us consider your call: to leave your country (a) and all things in order to work in the most neglected dioceses and other parts of France with the aim of founding missions and forming missionaries. Considering the way in which God has blessed your work up to the present, you need have no doubt about following this lofty inspiration. This is what God has in mind for you and to which He is calling you. It is the way and the road you must follow in order to reach the land of eternal bliss, which is Paradise and the heart of God. Therefore, pursue this task in a spirit of obedience and self-abandonment.

Secondly with regard to the rule of life that you asked me about, since you are already following it and Fr. N.....approves, I see no reason why you cannot continue it. Nevertheless, such unremitting work with so little rest calls for moderation. I think you should take a break, which would not only be of physical benefit to you but it would also be of help to you spiritually. You would do well then from time to time, and indeed fairly often, to take some days off, or even weeks, to recover your strength of soul and body. During these times, you could devote more time to prayer and contemplation of the eternal truths, while avoiding any form of strain. Be content to simply empty your mind of all other preoccupations as well as whatever has to do with your work. You can then gently turn towards Him

who is your beginning, your central, main and total goal, since it is for Him alone you are undertaking your work. "In peace, I lie down and at once fall asleep" (b). All our activities must lead towards rest in Him and particularly towards a rest from which the soul draws new strength and greater energy to start work again with a renewed sense of purpose which will bear more fruit.

The more united we are to God, the greater will be our spiritual strength and influence, of which He alone is the source and ocean. This will lead you to a remedy for the problem which you mentioned in your letter, namely, that frequently, and nearly always, you lose the sense of God's presence when burdened with work and other preoccupations. As a result of losing sight of God, you say you grow dissipated and hence your life becomes governed by your lower nature and passions, with consequent manifestations of anger and indignation. The latter are of course the fruits of an irritable and impatient nature rather than emotions guided by reason. Sometimes, it is a good thing that the latter would be aroused out of zeal and a just and prudent anger in order to inspire fear in the sinner.

In withdrawing from this intensive work and taking the breaks which I advised, you will be able to bring more order into your life and you will sanctify yourself in working for the salvation of others. The latter will go hand in hand with your own personal sanctification and follow from it.

In this way, you will become more like the angels, who lose none of their sanctity or their wonderful freedom in the great tasks they carry out in obedience to God. Moreover, you will enter into the state of perfection in all its dimensions. As you know, this is best described as the mixed life, in a two-fold spirit: "Let me inherit a double share of your spirit" (c). It is a holy and spiritual blending of the active and contemplative life, in such a way that the contemplative dimension extends itself and discreetly penetrates the active dimension, elevating and exalting it.

The rest and relaxation which I recommend to you will lead to a deep humility, which in turn will enable you, in spirit and in truth (d), to enter into the excellent and admirable spirit of adoration which the Eternal Father desires so much and which is so little cultivated by Christians and people in general. Alternately, this state of adoration of God's Majesty radiating and reigning universally over our whole being and in the depths of our hearts, reveals two abysses: our own nothingness and God's greatness. It will plunge us deeper and deeper into humility, that sea abounding in all virtues and the inexhaustible source of God's graces and of His most intimate inspiration and communication.

You know that one of the many good effects of humility is the great peace it imparts to our whole being including our emotions. In this way, it restores us to our true selves and we enter into the true wisdom which is the most active, and at the same time the most tranquil thing in the world. It is changeless change and active rest. It is in motion and at rest at the same time. The movement is all the more admirable for being so calm (e). This is an excellent disposition of soul because it brings us nearer to God, the supreme and principal focus of our esteem; God, who is wisdom itself and of whom it is written: "Wisdom is quicker to move than any motion" (f). Without moving Himself, God sets everything in motion. He is infinitely active while remaining infinitely serene. In this eternal and

limitless rest, He never ceases to generate within Himself the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit, and outside of Himself, He creates and continually preserves this whole vast universe. This is perfection and a reflection of true wisdom. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (g). May God give us the grace to attain the same degree of perfection.

Do not worry if you lose the sense of God's presence in the midst of your work. It is often necessary to give your time and attention to the needs of your neighbour, without diverting your thoughts to God. After all, it is God's work you are engaged in and even if you do not feel His presence, He is often there, truly present. There is a way in which God is very present in the midst of activities most prone to distract us from Him. You can grow in awareness of this presence if you try a process of withdrawal, that is, to free your mind from all created things and forget them. This process will enable you to have control of your thoughts and emotions; you will then be more easily and totally reclothed and filled with God and His glory, during times of meditation, Mass and while praying the Office.

The reasons you give me for not joining a large missionary society are so convincing and obvious as to leave no doubt. I respectfully greet your associates (h) and I have the honour to remain all my life, unworthy though I be, Yours.....

Notes

- a) The country in question here is probably the region in France where this person lives. The "missionaries" travelled over various regions preaching a renewal of Christian life. The "missions" consisted of special times devoted to preaching and lasting a few months. This letter is addressed either to a lay person or a diocesan priest.
- b) Ps 4: 8; Ps 3: 5; SR 3:12.
- c) 2Kgs 2: 9.
- d) Jn 4: 23.
- e) Fr. Barre frequently uses paradoxes to convey a message; cf. SC.
- f) Wis 7: 24.
- g) Mt 5: 48.
- h) The person to whom the letter is written is obviously involved in his missionary work with some group with whom Fr.Barre seems to be familiar. He does not give any reasons why he does not wish to join one of the bigger societies founded specifically for missionary work e.g Vincentians, Eudists, etc founded during this time.

Letter 28

To a spiritual director

This letter is made up of two parts:

- 1) Living out his mission in the footsteps of Jesus, the spiritual director, who is a priest, contributes to the development of the one with whom he is journeying amid the difficulties and resistances as well as the awareness of his own limitations.
- 2) Fr. Barre gives advice to the director regarding the person being directed. The directee should be helped to accept spiritual difficulties in a spirit of abandonment in order to enter more fully into the life of God. The director, who is experiencing difficulties similar to those of the directee, is encouraged to place them all in God's hands with greater confidence.

O Jesus! O Love!

I found your letter so full of wisdom, devotion humility and supplication that I cannot refrain from replying. First of all, I want to say to you that just as Jesus suffered greatly and died to rescue and save the Church, similarly those who share his priesthood in spirit and in truth, will suffer much and lose their lives in serving or at least helping the Church (a).

Do not be surprised then by the suffering and difficulties that arise between you and the person whom God has confided to your guidance. This is quite normal and God's blessing is on you both. The loving care with which you seek to guide this person along the way of perfection, despite the reluctance and human irritation that you feel, is a clear enough sign that what is taking place between the two of you is in the realm of the mystery of God and a kind of sacrament. "This mystery has great significance, but I am applying it to Christ and the Church" (b). What happens between you, as a minister of the Church, and the person whom you are guiding, reflects what takes place between Jesus Christ and all those whom He has come to save. Hence, like Jesus, the first priest, who suffered so much in so many ways for the salvation of others, it is also opportune for the sake of the salvation of one soul, that you should expect much suffering, opposition, affliction, distress and death to self, in order to become more like Jesus Christ, whose image you desire to become, in working for the good of His Church.

Another difficult area in the direction of others is the deceit and cunning of the evil one, which exists to whatever extent there is self-centredness and self-love. Experience has shown that no one is totally free of being deluded except those who experience the fulness of light, in so far as that is possible in this world. How many such people exist in the world? I do not know the answer to this question but you must not think that you are one of them. It would be no small miracle for you to arrive at this before the end of your life.

Having said all of this, I want you to see, if amid the graces given to you by God, there may not be

some infidelity on your part that has slipped in. The fact that you may not be aware of it, is not any indication that it does not exist. "My conscience is clear, but that does not prove that I am really innocent", says St. Paul (c). In order to bring all our infidelities to light, a thorough process of discernment is necessary, which in turn requires a total and complete detachment. This type of detachment can only exist and is only to be found where there is complete self-emptying and total death to one's pitiable self. Since, wherever there is infidelity, self-love, self-centredness, complacency, there also one finds delusion, deceit and the wiles of the evil one, appearing as an angel of light.

But, I hear it said, that since this is what happens when guiding others, it would be better not to take it on, so as to avoid the risk of delusion, since such a situation is inevitable and obvious. In response to that I would say that one has to be careful, but even should we wish to give up this work, we could not, because this guidance of others is closely linked to what God desires. Therefore, it is necessary to continue with it, respect it, develop it and work at continuing in it as far as that is possible for us. But since it is a God given gift to us, and we are already in such great need, we must cultivate it reverently, humbly and faithfully, constantly having the utmost mistrust in ourselves and in what we do, while at the same time doing the best we can.

Apart from this, it seems that in the case of the particular person confided to you for direction, that God in his justice directs his anger towards her and regards her as his enemy (d), either because of her infidelities, past or present pride and disobedience or because of God's hidden plan for her (e). She must therefore carry in herself (at least at the level of feeling and experience) an indelible sense of being condemned and cut off from God forever. She will always need to be helped. She must not give in to these feelings but must be faithful to all the exercises of devotion and of virtue appropriate to those who seriously wish to pursue the way of perfection (f).

What then will happen if she develops the practice of fidelity and humility as well as distrust and rejection of self and her spiritual state? This will be very advantageous for her. On the other hand, if she is unfaithful and not willing to submit to God's will for her, she will find herself far from attaining her desires and expectations.

Why then, people say, cannot such a person be given a clearer explanation of her situation rather than keeping things hidden? The reason is that firstly she must experience the total lack of support and the deep feeling of being totally cut off from God, to such an extent that she believes them to be real and operative. Secondly, in order to arrive at this total dying to self and to her whole being and thus sharing in the divinity of Christ (g), as if transformed in God, she must experience the loss of light, as if surrounded by darkness, obeying like an animal or a blind person. This attitude is particularly necessary for the person in question who tries so much to understand what is going on (h), spending a lot of time reflecting on her experience. Moreover, the thought of rejection, hell and being cut off from God counteracts strongly all our own efforts at understanding.

But why must the director also be in darkness?

Firstly, because having had the experience oneself, one will have more insight and be better able to give guidance to others. Thus it would be good for you as director to experience this same sense of emptiness and nothingness throughout your whole being, mind and judgement, as has been described for the directee above.

Secondly, because you must work generously for this person's good and salvation, without having the consolation of knowing if all is going well for her or if she will be saved.

Finally, what more could one wish for in such a situation of uncertainty and darkness, where all efforts to seek more help from enlightened people only lead to resistance and contrary advice, where one approves what another disapproves. Therefore, in the case in question, it is fitting that the director should also experience the same struggle and difficulties as the directee, so as to be able to evaluate the kind of direction being given i.e. with what humility, trust in God, discretion, concern, fidelity and to what extent one turns to God and begs His help. It is also necessary to consider the suffering and spiritual distress experienced by the directee. There is nothing worse than to have to act in darkness, uncertainty and blindness, putting a person at risk, in the most important of all areas. My dear friend, this is real martyrdom, but at the same time a great blessing, if you follow carefully the advice I have just given you and which I recommend to you very specially. With the limited enlightenment given me by God, this is all I have to say to you in response to your questions. I leave it to those whom God has more enlightened to judge the value of what I have said. It is in God's name I respectfully remain,
N..... Yours...

Notes

a) MD 37; MAP 159.

b) Eph 5: 32.

c) 1 Cor 4: 4.

d) MD 32, 33; MAP 134.

e) The person is seeking consolation and enlightenment by recalling the past, whereas God wishes her to live in total abandonment, accepting to be purified by the darkness. cf. MAP 204 (v).

f) She must persevere in the way of holiness in all the events of her life. c.f. MAP 34.

g) MAP 33; RR 9; SC.

h) She tries to analyse and understand the meaning of the trials she is experiencing, instead of accepting to place herself entirely in God's hands, without any further seeking to understand.

Letter 29

To a religious

The religious to whom Fr. Barre is writing is undergoing a spiritual crisis of torment, doubts and scruples. Kindness and firmness are obvious in Fr. Barre's reply as he encourages him to trust in God's mercy. Without denying his weakness, he invites him to use it as a means of drawing closer to God.

God !

What can I say to you or do for you during this time of terrible suffering and distress, which God, in His infinite goodness, seems pleased to allow you experience? Let God in His infinite and loving providence take care of your salvation. Do not spend too much time thinking about your unhappy state, your unfaithfulness, the ways in which you block God's action and the number of times you fall. That only leads to depression. If you can let go of your eagerness to spend time thinking about your own misfortunes, you will learn to forget yourself and your self-love all the more. This is what God desires to eradicate in allowing you to experience these weaknesses. You will then feel more united to God and be more in possession of His deep and gentle peace in your heart.

And so, my poor unfortunate child, put aside all that is most dear to you, including all your thoughts about your life of faith and of grace. My dear loveable and pitiable one, on God's behalf, I want you to forget all this. I have been asking you to do this for such a long time; why don't you take my advice? Why do you not agree to accept what would be for your good?

You hear me say that you should believe you have done nothing worthwhile in life and that, in both life and death, you must expect to be stripped of all grace and virtue, even departing for the next life in this way. I know that you find these words very difficult to take, that you are appalled by them and that they cause you continual suffering. Believe me that I am doing this on purpose in order to help you grow in mortification and self-emptying; not you, but your disordered nature, your fear and excessive self-love. You need to be obedient and patient. What have you to fear, since I have reassured you that by following the way which God has willed for you and which cannot be changed. You will reach God with great joy along those very paths which appear to you to be leading you away in the opposite direction from your goal.

If all were to be told, my dear friend in Jesus, it is not true that you are being deprived of all grace and virtue. This harsh and unbearable conviction is very deeply ingrained in you and it is a hard and painful experience for you. It is through God's great mercy and goodness that you have been given this experience, even though you may think otherwise. This is what has to happen so that you may die to yourself and, in the inner struggles and difficulties, become more like your divine model and leader, Jesus. In that way you will be found worthy of Him and worthy to be intimately united with Him

in eternity.

For your consolation, remember then that what is going on for you is not what you think, but something far beyond what you could have imagined. Even though you do not know what is really happening, you can be at peace. Obey and believe in spite of the so-called proofs that you have or what your experience may be. If you cannot yet believe or obey, be patient.

Remain at peace then, Father, in the midst or at the height of your struggles, believing that God truly loves you. Since God's love is all-powerful, you know that you are greatly blessed by Him and that this is how you will die, in spite of your weaknesses and infidelities. If you can really put all your trust in Him, you will come to realise that you will be saved by his great mercy before being condemned for your unfaithfulness. God in his goodness will triumph over you for his glory and yours. I urge you to enter into this disposition in so far as you can. I am addressing this to you and not to anyone else.

Just believe me and you will find that what I say is true. Do not dwell on all those doubts that thwart your faith and hope. Write the following words in large capitals: "I believe in God", and if, in extreme infidelity and despair, you have deliberately torn up or burned this sign of your faith and hope, this does not mean you have yielded fully to infidelity or despair. Even when you have torn up these words, it would not necessarily be an indication of sin. If you reflect on these words and speak them sincerely, you will find that they contain, not only faith, but hope and love as well.

Do your best to carry out all that your Rule prescribes, in so far as you can and in so far as your weak health permits, without being scrupulous or headstrong about it.

Do not get involved in anyone else's salvation (a). You have quite enough to do to look after your own salvation; you will be working on it following the advice I am giving you in this letter as well as in previous ones. Do not worry about the malicious gossip you may hear. Do not reproach anyone, since you have not got enough peace of conscience or adequate wisdom and prudence to do so satisfactorily. So consider yourself exempt from such a duty. Be straightforward in your relations with people, refrain from judging, criticising or reproaching anyone. Even if you think you have judged someone, don't worry about it in the way you do, as your sensitive conscience would find faults where there are none.

Do not be afraid to say Mass without going to confession when you have passed such judgements. I know the kind of conscience you have and how God protects you.

Do not go to confession more than once a week and if you go beyond eight days, do not be worried. A quarter of an hour's examination of conscience, including sorrow for sin and purpose of amendment, is already too much for you.

My beloved Father, you must die totally to yourself, not only during your life time but also in your dying; you will thus shorten your time in purgatory.

The advice that I give you is for your whole life, up to and including your last moments. Keep silence as far as your health permits. Make your meditation and spiritual reading as well as you can; do not be surprised by your failures. Keep saying in the depths of your heart, silently rather than aloud, your "Blessed be God..." (b), and believe that I am, Yours.....

Notes

a) This paragraph reflects great wisdom. Anyone who is anxious or scrupulous lacks the necessary discernment to guide others in the spiritual life.

b) The canticle of Zechariah, Lk 1: 68...

Letter 30

To a young priest (a)

Fr. Barre encourages him in his desire to seek God alone and to give himself totally to Him and to His work. He outlines a way of life for him and advises him to seek guidance from a competent spiritual director.

God !

Do you remember the resolution you so solemnly made and so frequently repeated to desire God alone and find your happiness only in Him? Truly anyone who is not satisfied with God is very foolish and very unwise. Therefore, since you have chosen Him as your ALL, do not draw back, but remain firm forever in the choice you have made. Always take time to renew this resolution before you meditate, say Mass, examine your conscience or review your spiritual life. Always be deeply aware that no matter what you do is never done well enough or with sufficient zeal. The resolution to belong totally to God is wonderful; it is a lofty and precious desire to be so totally and truly absorbed in God and resolute about it. It is the beautiful door and the pearl of great price, spoken of in the Gospel: "Anyone who hates his or her life in this world, will keep it for eternal life" (b); "When he finds a pearl of great value, he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it" (c). To have this is to have everything; to have everything without it is to have nothing, "there is just one thing needed" (d). Rebuke yourself frequently and reprimand yourself saying: "F..., you have not yet given yourself to God, when are you going to do it? You have been pretending to do it rather than really doing so. It is intolerable to go on living without giving yourself over to God fully." One of the saints said that whoever does not love God loses purpose in life.

Often keep before your mind:

Nothing but God,
All for God,
God alone,
My God, only you!

Be faithful to spiritual reading everyday. Let your conversation be mainly about study or spiritual things. I do not wish to exclude leisure and genuine relaxation. Never go to class or take up your writing without raising your mind and heart to the Master of all knowledge, truth and enlightenment, the Holy Spirit.

Resolve to make at least a half an hour's meditation each day, either all at one time or at two different stages, usually taking as your subject, the wonderful and all-loving presence of God who desires to enter into your nothingness. Think of this adorable creator who preserves and governs heaven and earth. Do not let an hour go by without some form of loving communion with God. Never let a day pass without making some spiritual reading, resolving to belong entirely to God and examining your

conscience. Seek to experience His presence in all your spiritual practices.

It would be very helpful for you to have a competent and definite person who could guide you along these lines and it would be a very effective means of keeping alive and increasing your union with God. I do not have anyone in mind, but whoever it is, must be willing and able to do it properly. Keep looking for such a person, from a human and spiritual point of view, earnestly asking God's help.

While waiting to find somebody, continue to keep the same confessor.

Choose prayerful and humble people, as their example will encourage you in your search for God.

Don't hesitate to make demands on yourself for a while (e). Eight to ten months of steadfast and sustained fidelity will suffice to liberate you and enable you to form a supernatural habit. Then heaven will be happy to be responsible for you, as it were, and to look after your interests at its own expense (f). You will be very happy when that happens.

Above all, do not be discouraged, however weak you may feel about following the way that leads to heaven and to true virtue. However faltering your steps may be, if you persevere in making great efforts (e), you cannot fail to be abundantly blessed, even if you feel and think the contrary, since you will not see any apparent progress for some time. Even if all your efforts appear to be in vain, you will find, in the end, that what was apparently useless has been to your advantage.

Therefore, I anticipate total obedience to all that I have indicated. Say the "Come Holy Spirit" once for this intention, and remember that I am, Your.....

Notes

a) This young priest is a student. We do not know his name, except that his Christian name begins with F.

b) Jn 12: 25.

c) Mt 13: 46; RR 1.

d) Lk 10: 42.

e) To make efforts to transcend oneself, go beyond oneself, cf. Mt 11: 12; Lk 16: 16.

f) Fr. Barre assures his correspondent that sincere, sustained and steadfast effort to live in God will lead him after 8 or 10 months to inner freedom and to be recompensed by God's gifts. He will receive the gift of union with God, even if he does not see any apparent progress in his spiritual journey.

Letter 31

To a religious

The human person is a capacity for God - destined to be an abode for God. But He may not be welcomed in this abode. This is when the disordered nature takes over and the human person is cut off from Him who alone can fill this capacity. Following this introduction, Fr. Barre explains to this religious how his weakness can be transformed into humility, a grace which will lead him to God.

God !

You have already become aware of your wretched state but you have not yet seen what is at the base of all these disorders. There is a spirit at work within you, rooted there like a second self, which is made up of: conceit, possessiveness, pride, independence, presumption and rigidity. It tries to take control of you and make life difficult for you, as you realise. This perverse spirit induces you to follow your natural inclinations and opposes all that is spiritual and supernatural in you and tries to destroy it totally.

In order to understand this, you must remember that the inner core of the human person is nothing more than a capacity to fill and a power to become (a). The same can be said of the faculties. This capacity is made for and directed entirely to God and His perfections (b) as its only real and genuine plenitude, with the help of God's grace. However, it is within our power to cut off this plenitude and prevent God from filling us with Himself, in whom alone we can find fulfilment. We then become filled with another plenitude, which is that of iniquity, misfortune, sin and disorder, instead of justice, blessings, holiness and wisdom (c). This is what you have to put up with. This is the basic sinfulness in a person, the wretched self that has usurped God's place. God wants to eradicate the roots of this sinfulness and take up His abode in its place. Considering what has to be done to accomplish this and the extent of it, you will see what an enormous task it is. Thirty, forty or fifty years of work, struggle and suffering would be well spent in accomplishing it.

I hope you will be thoroughly convinced of this principle in mind and heart, then you will not be surprised if your progress is slow in a task which is difficult and which takes time. One never comes totally to the end of it. There still remains a hidden and inexhaustible source of all kinds of sin that we would be certain to fall into if we were to slacken our prudent and unwavering earnestness (d). We must keep this up until the moment of death, even if, having worked hard at our spiritual life, we have experienced and savoured the depth and joy of the highest form of spirituality and felt the impact of the Holy Spirit's outpouring of love.

Now then, my dear friend in the Lord, how long are you going to continue making resolutions without carrying them out? How often will you begin something without getting anywhere? How many insignificant intentions that produce no results? God allows all these situations to happen for you

because of your innate pride and arrogance which must be uprooted. If you did not experience repeated infidelities and weakness, you would never get rid of the awful conceit which would destroy the depths of your soul and overshadow God, who does not tolerate or seek any desires to be greater or superior to Him.

Nevertheless, make every effort to carry out faithfully all that you have resolved to do with the help of God's grace. Should you fall again after that and should your falls continue to increase and multiply, do not be discouraged and do not give up. From the moment you persevere in wanting to do what is right, you will be sure to grow in humility in proportion to the humiliations which cause you very deep suffering. If we are to become really humble, it is not enough to experience humiliations from people and from the evil one, we must also experience them from God and from ourselves, to the point of not being able to take any more, that is, until we reach a state of utter weakness and hopelessness about ourselves.

My dear Father, have courage, you will understand this more and more as you advance and gain more experience. You will always be among the wretched, whom all heaven will rise up against and reproach, if you do not faithfully accept what God is calling you to experience.

Make sure you give one and a half to two hours to meditation every day. Whatever way it turns out, it will always uplift you and sanctify you, without your knowing or feeling it. Therefore, be faithful to this exercise, even if it does not lead you to be as faithful and as generous as you would wish. If I had more time, I would explain this better. Please forgive my inability, I who am unworthy to be...Your.....

Notes

- a) The seed and the promise planted in each human person will gradually come to fruition i.e. a capacity to be filled and a power to become in God's image and likeness.
- b) God is every human person's goal. "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." St. Augustine.
- c) Using the analogy of "capacity", those who refuse to allow themselves be filled with God, will be filled with all that is not of God.
- d) This is a reference to spiritual struggle; Mt 11: 12; Lk 16: 16

Letter 32

To a religious

Fr. Barre encourages this priest who has already had many years experience of the monastic life:

- . to live in a spirit of humility which will enable him to become aware of and develop his lowliness,
- . to keep a spirit of silence and live in the presence of God, while leading a simple and humble life-style,
- . to recall the graces received during the first years of his religious life, so as to renew his fervour.

O Jesus! O Love!

There are three important points in your letter (a), which I would like to discuss with you, with the help of God's grace.

Firstly, I notice you are troubled (b) and regretting from the depths of your heart that you have lost, and in particular failed to benefit from, the hidden manna, the tasty and delicious meat (c), the heavenly favours which neither you nor I deserve to receive. These feelings come from God and are worth reflecting on by the humble. They can help us become more deeply convinced of our extreme unworthiness, a conviction we should never lose sight of and which should become deeper with the years. We are wasting both our time and our lives if we are not making progress in humility and reaching down to its admirable depths, fully aware, at all times and in all places, of our own nothingness before God. This depth of humility resonates very forcefully and powerfully with the deep abyss of God, in the greatness, independence, majesty and goodness of His whole being and all His perfections (d). Thus He unites us to Himself in an extraordinary way, inconceivable for anyone who has not experienced it.

So count your days, your steps, your deeds, your virtues, your success only in proportion to the progress you make along this road, which is so advanced and God-like that it is almost unknown to people. Be ready to go right down to the depths of hell to find for yourself a dwelling place of humiliation, failure, nothingness, lowliness, shame and embarrassment (e); of silence within and without; far removed from all greatness, pleasure and all created things.

When, with the help of God's grace through your suffering and fidelity, you find this dwelling place, don't ever seek to leave it. To pay for your lodging faithfully, work every day with all your strength of mind and body, otherwise you will be evicted and your place given to someone who is prepared to pay more than you. This is not a language understood by everybody; it is to you it is addressed and only you are expected to respond wholeheartedly and sincerely so as to acquire this amazing and awe-inspiring virtue (f), which frightens cowardly and lukewarm Christians.

Do whatever you can to live in the adorable presence of God, who never ceases to surround and

penetrate all that is deepest and most intimate in us. It is also important to remember obedience, fidelity to the rule, silence, mortification of the senses, gentleness and above all recollection and awareness of the presence of God (g). You have quite a programme marked out for you there in very few words. Work hard without expecting help from anyone. Do not be afraid to go forward alone, your progress will be all the more graced and spiritual (h), which is the gift God has given you and which brings me to the second point I want to talk about.

Secondly, you refer to a resolution to seek more solitude, live a more recollected life, thus withdrawing from the bustle and fuss that are inevitable in all human interaction in every community. According to St. Bonaventure: "The religious who does not erect a second monastery within the monastery itself, will never be perfect". This second monastery is built within the heart of the religious, where a hidden cell is set up and where one can retire with one's spiritual insights, desires and virtues in order to develop them and even with one's weaknesses, infidelities, attachments and disorders in order to put them right. Those who wish to enhance this cell must return to it often and seek God who resides there more than anywhere else in the world, except in the sacrament of the Eucharist. He pours out His graces and His penetrating, uplifting and enlightening inspirations from this cell. The result is that little by little, their inner conversation with God grows and intensifies and they come to enjoy God and converse intimately with Jesus Christ, their God and King, their one and only possession, as well as with the Blessed Virgin, their mother, sovereign lady and mistress and with all the angels and saints.

It takes long and persevering efforts to arrive at the experience I have been describing, but those who seriously desire to order their lives each day along the lines I have indicated when referring to the second point in your letter, will not fail to arrive at it. All this inner communication with God, with the angels and saints takes place in silence and in secret. No outsider hears what is going on in this sacred monastery, this holy cell, except those to whom we are accountable for what may be more concealed within, in order to receive the necessary guidance and direction needed for the spiritual life (i).

You must take great care not to become too remarkable in your behaviour or to cut yourself off, as if this way of life were exclusive to yourself. In order to really work on this life of intimate union with God, you must be more humble, unassuming, obedient, discreet in your speech, submissive and obliging, without being a burden to anyone, apart from yourself, because of the multitude of faults you notice in yourself, believing them to be there and to remain there always.

Thirdly, I notice your desire to recapture the insights and feelings of devotion which you formerly enjoyed so abundantly. Try to gather the crumbs of those bygone feasts and to go over in your mind those sublime truths, which raise us above what is of the earth and help us get beyond what is overly natural and sensual (j). With this in mind, do not neglect the spiritual reading that would be necessary. It is with this intention in mind that I have spoken to you at such length in this letter in response to your request. I hope you will be able to benefit from it and that it will help you to respond to God's

invitation to commit yourself to Him, to give yourself fully and unreservedly to Him forever; in whom I remain unworthy,, Yours...

Notes

- a) This letter, written in response to a religious, appears to be incomplete.
- b) Fr. Barre expresses this idea very frequently. The French word "confusion" is used 48 times. It signifies feelings of being troubled or distressed on becoming aware of one's faults, imperfections or weakness.
- c) The "manna" and the "meat" evoke the food given by God to his people in the desert (Exodus). The imagery used here recalls God's grace. Fr. Barre refers to graces which both he and this religious received in the past.
- d) There are many references in this letter to the abyss of humility and the abyss of greatness. This expresses very forcefully a central aspect of Fr. Barre's spirituality i.e. it is through the experience of lowliness and nothingness that the human person can enter into the immensity of God's life.
- e) This collection of terms expresses how a person feels as a sinner before the holiness of God.
- f) This refers to the virtue of humility which is the opposite of our natural tendency to pride, independence and control. It is a virtue which is often misunderstood. It causes fear in some and is rejected by others. True humility is nothing more than a recognition of one's total dependence on God, freely and lovingly accepted.
- g) These ideas are often used by Fr. Barre, cf, ML 9, and refer to a constant awareness of the presence of God.
- h) The religious has told Fr. Barre of his desire to live the solitude of the monastic life more deeply. He encourages him along these lines but invites him to approach it in a very simple way so as to avoid attracting attention to himself.
- i) In using "we", Fr. Barre appears to indicate that this is also his own personal experience.
- j) 1Cor 15: 14.

Letter 33

To a sick person (a)

There are two parts to this letter:

. In the first part, Fr. Barre is giving a message to a woman for another who is sick. He is inviting this woman to remind the other of the eternal glory which is to be her destiny and gives her some signs of this. Also he wishes her to be reminded that union with Our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest blessing she could have and he indicates some means to help her towards this end.

. In the second part, he addresses the sick person herself. He shows her how much peace and happiness she will receive through humility, hope, faith in God's mercy and through sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

O Jesus! O Love!

May the peace of the Lord fill your heart. I am confiding my thoughts and words to you so that you can communicate them to M. Tell her and help her to recall two great truths on which she can reflect and which will be a source of consolation and encouragement for her. These truths embrace all that one might wish for of what is best and most beneficial in the world.

The first is that she was created for eternal glory, destined to enjoy incomprehensible happiness, the infinite riches of God Himself (b). There are considerable and convincing proofs of this blessed predestination (c). I shall give a general outline here of the ways in which this destiny is made manifest:

- i) in an abiding disposition to really love God with all one's heart, inwardly longing that one could serve him better;
- ii) in continuing with the same dispositions to the end of one's life;
- iii) in maintaining these dispositions in times of illness, difficulties and anxiety;
- iv) in making every effort to abandon oneself totally to God's will, whether it be to suffer or even to die, should it be God's will to call the person to himself;
- v) in trying to stand firm and endure all with great confidence in God's mercy and goodness, in spite of being reproached by one's conscience for former sins and infidelities, remembering that God is a Father rather than a judge. While there will be fear and apprehension, let it be God-like and full of love, such that it will diminish or remove those other extreme fears of seeing a terrible judge at the hour of death (d).

The second is that the most beneficial state for us, the one most pleasing to God and from which we will derive the most consolation is partnership with Our Lord Jesus Christ. This will become a reality to the extent that we conform to His will. In order that this conformity become greater and more complete, we must:

- i) accept patiently any upsets or spiritual and bodily suffering, since Our Lord carried his cross with

constancy in the secret anguish of his heart, having been eternally sacrificed to the majesty of God for our salvation: "My spirit fails me; my heart is full of fear. I am about to fall; my pain is ever before me" (e);

ii) persevere in our efforts to be patient and resigned in the trials which the divine mercy may be pleased to send us;

iii) accept to be crucified as long as it pleases Him, committing our life and death entirely to Him, so that He may leave us here or call us as he chooses in accordance with His adorable and divine providence.

iv) spurn all worldly pleasures and advantages, believing these to be the portion of those deserving of reproach or whom God considers to be unable to or unworthy of serving Him generously or of receiving the adorable seal of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our King and God.

M..., I now wish to invite you (f) to gaze upon this portrait and mirror of all perfection and holiness, Jesus Christ (g), in whom you will have a big share for the rest of your days. Therefore, be consoled and trust yourself to God, have no fear and never give up.

Take comfort from the fact that God wishes to include you among His greatest friends and to count you among the number of His chosen ones. He desires to unite you with Himself, to wash away all your imperfections, to purify your past life, to choose you to share in His sufferings, anguish, sorrows and His cross.

Entrust yourself to Him, rely on Him and on His supernatural grace and mercy. It is He who will be suffering in you from this on. He will bear all your infirmities. Be bold enough to have this trust and it will be done to you according to your faith. He will answer for you before His Father and will make a point of being with you to strengthen you, to enable you to gain merit and bear his yoke and burdens (h).

Do not be surprised if, after so many desires and resolutions to do what is right and change your life completely, you still find yourself full of faults and sins and are tempted to become depressed and slack in God's service. Do not let this twofold suffering surprise you: being aware of your continual faults and the depression which tends to overwhelm you. Be content to practice humility and accept the disturbance you feel in yourself before God each time you fail, continuing on your way as before. In this way, your confidence, humility, patience and love of God will continue to grow.

And so, persevere in what you have begun. No matter how inadequate your service of God appears to be, it cannot but be pleasing to Him if accompanied by humility, patience and perseverance. Be ready to suffer bravely to the end. May the main thrust of your prayer and devotion be patience in suffering, united with an awareness of God. Think often of the presence of God. Consider the eternal happiness which is awaiting you through the merits of Him who loved you so dearly, that He would willingly have remained nailed to the cross until the end of time had His Father so required it. It is in

His name and in His Spirit that I wish to remain all my life, Yours.....

Notes

- a) Fr. Barre is writing this letter to a sick person, through the intermediary of another, who is being asked to communicate the message to her.
- b) Rom 11: 33.
- c) Rom 8: 29; 11: 2; 1Pet 1: 2.
- d) There are many contrasts in this paragraph: confidence in God's goodness and awareness of one's sins; looking on God as Father rather than as judge; a loving fear that replaces the fear of a judge.
- e) Ps 143: 4; Ps 38: 18.
- f) Fr. Barre is now addressing the sick person directly.
- g) This is a reference to the litanies inspired by Wis 7: 26.
- h) Mt 11: 29.

Letter 34

To a Religious (a)

Suffering accepted in faith forms us in the image of Christ, enabling us to share in His Passion and in the joy of His Resurrection.

O Jesus! O Love!

May what is deepest and most central to us always reflect God's will and desires.

Your welcome letter, dated the 5th, reached me at 8 p.m. on the 13th (b). I do not know what caused this long delay in the news of our dear relative's serious condition (c).

I am praying hard to God, and have asked others to do so also, that He may support her through the pain and distress He is allowing her to experience through a hidden act of His love for her. May she realise, that in dealing with her in this way, He wishes to bring her vocation to full completion. He wants to draw close to her in order to form her in His image and likeness (d), in a more perfect way than was possible during the whole of her life, no matter how faithful she may have been. To live and work for God, in accordance with the mind of God, serving Him as He desires to be served, is to be deserving of heaven. Let her keep in mind her King, her only, unique and supreme monarch, Jesus, as well as her mother and patron saint - Teresa of Jesus. The latter merited this beautiful name because of her ardent and extraordinary love for her Saviour's Cross and sufferings: "whether to suffer or to die". She used to say to the Lord that whether she suffered or died, she only wanted what He wanted. "Suffering is enough for me, but how and how much is up to you to decide as you see fit, my only Lord, my All and my King Jesus. I submit and abandon myself to you totally" (e).

As long as she is in this state of being motivated by grace rather than by her lower nature, let this sick person engrave in her heart and in her inmost being, the following convictions:

- i) that all of this comes uniquely and directly from Jesus, her All and her only One;
- ii) that He allows this to happen so that she may reflect the beauty of God and become more worthy of Him, through the total expiation of her sins, including the lukewarmness and cowardice which creep into anyone's life, irrespective of being a religious or consecrated to God's service or being generously blessed with His choicest, greatest and most abundant graces (f);
- iii) that the greater her suffering and the harder it becomes to bear the pain inflicted on her body (g), the greater the evidence of her destiny (h); it becomes like a living word (i), a divine inscription in the Book of Life and in the list of the Elect;
- iv) that the Lord has never been so close to her as now; the most beautiful moment of her life, which should be recorded for eternity, will be the endurance of great suffering;
- v) that her body, which has been given to her for suffering, will receive all the more honour and glory for all eternity, for having been an arena of suffering and thus resembling more closely the sacred body of Jesus (j);

vi) that God holds her in one hand while He strikes her with the other; or rather, that He shapes, moulds and fashions her after His own heart (k), so that she may become a true image and portrait (d) of Himself and thus become the object of His eternal delight.

Thus, being in the hands of God, she can look forward to never being separated from Him, believing that she will never leave His hands except to be pressed against His heart and kissed with His mouth (l). Let us pray then for this child of suffering and of Jesus, so that we may contribute something to the accomplishment of the divine will of our sovereign Master in the life of this sick person.

It is in this spirit that I dare say on yours and on her behalf,.....Yours....

Notes

a) The contents of this letter seem to indicate that Fr. Barre is writing to his own sister, Louise. Born in 1627, she became a Minim religious at Abbeville in 1658. She had written to her brother to give him news of their relative who was seriously ill. c.f. Note c.

b) The distance between Abbeville and Paris, where Fr. Barre was at the time, is 131kms and there were three postal deliveries per week between the two towns. Hence the surprise at the delay in getting news. This letter was probably written in January or February 1678, if it preceded the death of their relative by a few days or weeks.

c) Research into Fr. Barre's genealogy shows that Elizabeth Trudaine is probably the person in question here. She entered Carmel in Amiens in 1639 and was one of the foundresses of Carmel in Abbeville, where she was from 1636 - 1654. She was also the mistress of novices. On her return to Amiens, she continued as novice mistress.

The archives of the monastery in Amiens show that she had poor health. It is written that her final illness was one of continual fever and pneumonia. She died on the 7th Feb. 1678.

The memory she has left is of someone who "was very devoted to the Divine Office....gave a special place to the garden of Olives in her prayer" and was a source of edification for others "by her example and exceptional virtue"

d) PM 6; MAP 208; L22; L 26. There are two references in this particular letter to the image of God.

e) "whether to suffer or to die" is a quote from Teresa, the remainder is a paraphrase of Teresa's thoughts.

f) Elizabeth Trudaine was known as Sr. Elizabeth of Jesus and Mary. Her necrology describes her as "a Sister who, in spite of poor health, was very exact in the observance of our holy rule for more than twenty years" i.e. during the time she lived in Carmel in Amiens.

g) This refers to the medical practice at the time, which often included bleeding as a means of treating fever or pneumonia.

h) Rom 8: 29; 11: 2; 1Pet 1: 2.

i) This was a way of emphasising God's commitment to the sick person.

j) Fr. Barre refers to his relative's deteriorating health and the illnesses from which she suffered.

k) PM 5; PM 31; L 18; L 44.

l) Sg 1: 1.

Letter 35

To a cloistered Religious

This is an encouraging letter to a religious who has progressed in the love of the Lord through her fidelity and acceptance of suffering. Fr. Barre's desire is that she be grateful and full of joy.

O Jesus! O Love!

May your whole life reflect continual thanksgiving to God for His mercy, total commitment to do His will and unshakeable fidelity in His service. I am saying this because of the extraordinary grace which God is giving you, to which you referred in your last letter. Since I have come to know you, I have never seen you so well disposed to give yourself entirely to Him, as you are at present. To God belongs the glory as well as to the Cross and what it has taught you, leading you to accept it wholeheartedly. These are the two main paths along which He has been leading you and through which He has been desiring to reach you for some time.

My dear child of God, you have reason to rejoice in the midst of your suffering. Treasure your pains and infirmities, because they are chains of gold, sacred chains, which detach you from what is created, including the deceitful and bewitching vanity of the world, and attach you to the glory, truth, grandeur, true pleasure and joy that is God. Your disordered nature, flesh and blood (a), would want to take away this happiness from you. But have courage, do not let yourself be seduced by these agents of Satan. Give yourself to the One who possesses you more than ever before and who desires to unite Himself to you more and more. Therefore, be faithful to Him and be assured that I am ready to help you in whatever way I can, in the spirit of our Lord, in whom I am.....Yours.....

Notes

a) Jn 1: 13.

Letter 36

To a cloistered novice

Fr. Barre encourages her to respond to the personal love of God through:

- . adoration
 - . silence
 - . obedience
 - . humility
 - . self-emptying, through which her whole being is handed over to His love.
- O Jesus! O Love!

May the holy name of our Divine Master be forever blessed for the graces He bestows on you. Dear child of God, let your life be characterised by wonder, adoration, silence, nothingness, obedience, humility and loving to the point of totally dying to yourself (a). There you have your life traced out for the rest of your days.

First of all, dwell on the wonder, allowing yourself to be taken over by a sense of awe and admiration at the sight of the majesty of God reaching down to you, as though you were His only servant and beloved daughter. Let your wonder extend to the abundant outpouring of hidden and mysterious grace into the depths of your heart as well as to your being numbered among those whom He has chosen to be His living temples (b). Reflect seriously and attentively on this God of infinite Majesty and the eminent vocation to which he has called you. Above all, consider your unworthiness, inadequacy and inability to do any good. Take time to ponder on all of this in amazement and be assured that God will continue to shower His graces on you as long as He is calling you to the Order to which you belong. Therefore, may your wonder and amazement never cease, but continue to be re-awakened, lest you find yourself guilty of unbearable ingratitude.

In order to arrive at this sense of wonder and amazement, bow down in [adoration](#) before Him whose immense and unlimited greatness (c) far exceeds the sum total of that of an infinite number of people who are as holy and as renowned as they can be. Since God's Majesty can never cease to be what it is, you must go on adoring, but with the fullest and most profound adoration possible, following the example of the angels, knowing we can never hope to reach the depth and profundity that would render God the worship that is His due. May you bear outward witness to this continual adoration, which should always engage your mind and will, keeping them attached to the will of God. May your whole behaviour be such that it reflects the deep humility and reverence you experience before God's greatness. This does not mean that you will not often fail in this. You will find many obstacles in your way: depression, weakness, frivolity of the human mind, freedom- seeking (d) and chatter (e).

However, you must be patient, you are only a child (f), you are not in a position to run along this heavenly and admirable road. Be sensible, prudent and discreet in the exercise of these virtues.

Remember that adoration is not a question of words but of good deeds as well as being a matter of the mind and heart (g).

In order to arrive at this, it is important to preserve an inner and an outer [silence](#). Outwardly, use words sparingly and avoid useless conversations. It is impossible to be truly devoted to God without curbing one's tongue (h). Do your best to develop a strong desire for silence, disposing yourself for it by saying only what is necessary and useful in a very unassuming way. Pay attention also to inner silence, which means quietening one's thoughts, emotions and any impulses which give rise to anxiety. It may mean reducing the number of unnecessary acts of devotion. All this inner activity prevents us from hearing God's gentle voice in the depth of our soul (i); rather, it produces clouds which veil the splendour of the divine presence which is seeking to penetrate and illuminate your heart.

Let your habit of silence be such that it leads you to a sense of your own nothingness. Enter into your nothingness then, humble yourself always in the presence of God by lowering yourself to the depths of the earth, to the extremity of the underworld, to the lowest of the low. You must place yourself lower than all that is God and all that comes from Him, in order to render Him the most befitting homage possible. Since all creatures bear some mark of the Divinity (j), you must render Him homage everywhere. Moreover, you know that of yourself you are nothing. Therefore, give all to God and be happy with your nothingness. Ask for nothing more and desire nothing more.

It is not enough to reach this stage in thought and desire, you must also reach it in truth and reality (g). That is why you must obey, but an [obedience](#) which involves carrying out what you are told to do in a spirit of humility and docility, obeying everyone out of love for God. Obey those whom God has given you as superiors; obey them without reserve (k), it is up to them not you to make exceptions. With regard to those who are not your superiors, be discerning, gentle, loving and humble in the way you obey them (k). Obey in all things and obey everywhere. Think, speak, endure and act only in a spirit of obedience and dependence, without any anxiety or fuss, but quietly, calmly and simply.

Then you must turn to [humility](#), which will not be difficult for you after all that I have said about adoration and nothingness. Therefore, throughout your life, always seek humbly to remain among the ranks in the monastery, not only as though you were the last among all the others, but a stranger, a beggar, a poor wretch for whom the door of the monastery has been thrown open in charity, not even deserving of the water that is offered (l).

Not only are you the servant of others, but you are less than the beast of burden in the monastery because you are good for nothing except to offend God and lessen the value and virtue of the community (l). Do your best to insert these attitudes as deeply in your heart as the marrow in your bones. Remember that you in your poverty and weakness will never come near to experiencing the humiliations you deserve, nor those which your adorable master, Jesus, endured all His life for you.

If God sees you working energetically, faithfully and effectively to acquire charity, the wonderful mother of all virtues, He could come, take you by the hand and confide you to the care of your unique All and spouse, Jesus. That is why I have added this word: Love. God must always be loved, nevertheless, it is only the humble who love wholeheartedly. Impelled by the power of love, it is only a humble person who can truly say: "My beloved is mine and I am His" (m). My loved One is mine and all that I am is totally His. "May your lips cover me with kisses" (n). May He kiss me with a kiss of His lips and of His heart: words which are put into the mouth of the humble rather than words spoken by them; words that come from the bottom of the heart, of which they are often unaware. This is the extent to which humility puts in the shade all graces and caresses which God gives to His lovers. O Jesus! O Love! My dear, do you realise how few there are who love in this way, who are rich and poor, happy and dissatisfied at the same time?

After all that, there is nothing left except death to self. There are two aspects to this:

- i) To merit this true love and grow strong in it demands [dying to oneself](#) continually and being absorbed into God through a twofold mortification, inwardly and outwardly, actively and passively;
- ii) There is a passing from this life to the next so that this love may reach its climax in its true state in Paradise, since the abode of the Blessed is the true homeland of Divine Love.

Dear Sister and child of God, this is what God your Father has communicated to me for you. If you find something of benefit to you in it, make the most of it and remember sometimes the one who does not deserve to be called... Yours....

Notes

- a) All this will lead her to find God.
- b) 1Cor 3: 16 – 17.
- c) Eph 3: 18.
- d) Non-acceptance of certain obligations of the monastic life.
- e) Seeking occasions to talk; meetings in the parlour that focus on gossip, which were quite common at the time. All this becomes an obstacle to the development of a spirit of adoration.
- f) 1Cor 13: 11; 3: 1.
- g) 1Jn 3: 18.
- h) James: 1: 36.
- i) 1Kgs 19: 12.
- j) Humility is linked to the awareness of God's greatness, present in all His creatures.
- k) MD 45.
- l) This image, also found in MIS, is meant to convey the need for an attitude of profound humility. It does not imply contempt for the person, but is an invitation to share in Christ's own humility and enter more deeply into His love.
- m) Sg 2: 16
- n) Sg 1: 2.
- o) MAP 204 (v).

Letter 37

To a devout young lady

The whole of one's life and search for God should be governed by obedience; an obedience based on faith rather than on human preferences. Even if God seems to be pointing out other ways to us, the surest way for us to draw close to God, even without our knowing it, is through humility and obedience.

God !

May all your longings and desires be centred solely on God.

Don't ever forget to remember in your prayer the person you referred to in your letter. You are much indebted to him and benefitted greatly from what he had to offer when in better health. It is only right that he should now benefit from your prayers and the graces God has given you, especially since Divine Providence is allowing him to experience such distress, partly because this seems good to God in His Wisdom and partly because of his own disobedience and imprudence in his spiritual life (a).

Let us learn from this example to develop an attitude of dependence with regard to everything, even in regard to what appears to be very good and in harmony with God. Serve God, not in the way you want, following your own opinions and judgment, but in the way He wants, totally surrendering your ideas and desires, no matter how spiritual they appear to be, since priority should be given to obedience, allowing it to guide and direct everything. Obedience alone is capable of making us holy, without which the other virtues would be valueless. Obedience is basic to them and guarantees our peace with God.

True virtue and sound insights are gifts from God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is a well known fact that it is only to the humble that God freely gives His greatest gifts, and there is no real humility without obedience. This obedience must be all-embracing, that is, there must be unity of mind, will, desires and judgment in carrying out what is asked of us. For this reason, do all that you can to make obedience your guiding and motivating principle. This is a supernatural rather than a natural obedience, that is, an obedience which is more closely linked with the promptings of grace than just doing what we are asked to do by those in charge. Let obedience govern all that you do or omit to do and all that you think or say. Resist even God, if I may dare say so. Disregard His attractions, inspirations, revelations and communications if required by obedience. In other words, may your basic attitude be to allow yourself be guided only by obedience in your desire to belong, listen, pay attention and be united to God alone. Let this be your attitude in life and in death (b).

Try to keep a spirit of silence as far as possible. Unless it cannot be helped, never allow yourself to

receive praise or applause. Regard this as the desire of the evil one to trick you and make fun of you. Shun all this as if it were a snare of the devil in which you would be trapped if you did not keep away from it. Similarly, avoid all self-complacency, self-praise and thoughts of oneself. You are but a poor unfortunate creature, always offending God, deserving to be excluded from the company of the good and therefore not deserving of religious life. Remain in an attitude of pleading with God, waiting patiently for his mercy.

Do not worry about postponing what you feel called to until such time as God makes it possible for you. You can be a religious at heart, maintaining an inner silence. Never say anything that would be harmful to another and refrain from speaking about yourself, whether it be good or bad. Do not let an hour go by without turning to God in your heart and making an act of adoration to His Majesty. Give time to prayer and spiritual reading everyday. Regard suffering, humiliation, scorn and opposition as the most valued things of life, as gifts and means of advancing in true love and being plunged into the divine abyss of humility and obedience. Gradually you will find yourself being immersed in God, without even knowing it, because if you were aware of it, it is in yourself you would become immersed, thinking you were in God. I remain.. Yours.....

Notes

a) Fr. Barre is probably speaking from experience. In obedience to his superiors, he had to reduce the penances he had imposed upon himself; an obedience which bore fruit.

b) MD 45

Letter 38

To a very devout person

Fr. Barre is writing to the spiritual director of a person who has been told of someone who is involved in witchcraft or "diabolical possession" among her friends.

He gives some advice on how she may be saved from the influence of the devil. This involves:

- i) offering oneself to God for this conversion;
- ii) uniting oneself with others in prayer, in a spirit of faith and with perseverance.
- iii) entering more deeply into the saving work of Jesus, continuing to hope even when there appears to be no hope or no evidence of results;
- iv) expecting many difficulties;
- v) being strong in oneself against the attacks of the evil one, which can be quite severe.

One must work at this person's conversion for the following reasons:

- A. the love of God is expressed in love of others;
- B. the awareness of this person's misfortune is a strong call to work for her conversion for the glory of God;
- C. her case is not hopeless, since she still has the seeds of faith in her;
- D. other people may be lured away by her;
- E. God has limited the power Satan can have over her.

O Jesus! O Love!

Since you are expecting a reply as well as an opinion from me on the contents of the very surprising letter I received from you, I am doing so, having implored the help of the Holy Spirit. But it is in fear and trembling that I do so, since I regard this as an important issue in the area of spiritual direction and also in view of the inner kingdom which God wishes to establish in the depths of our hearts (a). This kingdom, which Jesus desires to establish and spread, belongs to the invisible world of the mind, perception and inner being, which is different from the kingdom established within people in general (b).

In the case of the person in question, we must regard her as the most needy person in the world. Because of her great potential, she is all the more prone to greater sinfulness (c). In fact, there is so much evil in her, that one could say an evil spirit or a condemned soul could not be as stubborn, contemptuous and persisting or as hateful, blasphemous, defiant and offensive towards God as she, who is among the most lost and infamous there is.

From the way in which you describe her, it would appear that the devil in hell has no one as devoted and attached to him as she is. She is the zealous worshipper of Satan, in whom and through whom

he triumphs. It looks as if he avails of this opportunity to breathe contempt on God, towards whom there is no one as devoted and attached among all the faithful of the world, as this unfortunate person is to the prince of darkness. On hearing, or reading, about this situation, it amazes and baffles me to compare our poor efforts at serving God with the extraordinary, but repugnant, way this person is devoted to Lucifer. It makes me feel both ashamed and horrified. On the other hand, it enables us to become more aware of the holiness and zeal we need in order to belong totally to God, loving and adoring Him in a praiseworthy and admirable way (d).

The effort to dethrone Satan from this advantageous position and restore this person to her unique and real Master, Jesus, is a very worthwhile task which would bring much glory to God. To take away this possession from him would be one of the severest blows one could mete out to the evil one. It would be a proportionately significant honour to Jesus Christ to participate in bringing this soul back to Him, with the help of His grace and mercy, without which it would be impossible to do anything.

Therefore, according to my humble judgment, there are five or six points I would like to make:

i) One must be ready to dedicate and sanctify oneself for this intention. This is particularly true for those who are made aware of the situation and above all for the person who has written to you. May she come to realise that it is through real love of her neighbour that she will give true glory to God and experience the abandonment of losing herself totally in God and in the fulness of His love. She must learn to forget herself, stop crying over her sins, concentrate only on rescuing this unfortunate slave of Lucifer and offer up all her sufferings, difficulties, devotions and prayers, which should be more sincere and fervent than ever, for this intention. She must be ready to accept whatever suffering God may send her and so make up for the way He is being treated by this unfortunate creature. May she regard herself as extremely honoured to be involved in such an admirable mission, to which she should devote herself even though she may not consider herself worthy of it.

ii) A group of as many devout people as possible must be gathered together, forming themselves into an army to battle with Satan, even at the risk of enduring suffering and distress at the hands of this enemy of God and His children.

Those who suffer most in this war are the bravest, most victorious and most highly esteemed soldiers of the General in God's army: Jesus (e). There is no trial in spiritual or inner struggles which does not contribute in some way to bringing about and building up the Mystical Body of Jesus and His Kingdom, thus being a source of honour and eternal glory. Therefore the person to whom this deplorable situation was made known, as well as the person who told her about it, and ourselves also, Reverend Father, must make every effort, with all the strength that comes from God(f), to conquer the hardened heart in question.

iii) We must hope even when there appears to be no hope (g) and believe that this soul can be won over for God. Our firm confidence will attract God and lead Him to come to the rescue. This hope

should characterise our living and our dying, even if after many months or years of work, struggle and pleading, we do not see any results. This requires a staunch and everlasting faith and exceptional perseverance, which the situation well deserves. Extreme means and remedies must be used to deal with extreme ills. It would be great, if after many years, as a result of our efforts and struggles, this lost and cursed soul were finally to die in the grace of God; we would then be able to live with her in peace for all eternity. We would then receive abundant reward for our trouble and zeal, and Satan, who hoped to take eternal possession of the unfortunate whom he had filled with his malice, would be left in eternal shame. Our most important task in life is to conform ourselves to Jesus and follow Him along His ways. He has given His life to save sinners. This particular person is so full of evil that in saving her, one could be said to be saving a thousand at the same time.

iv) We can expect many challenges from God and fail to see any value in our efforts; it may even seem good to us to give up our efforts. We must rise above all of this and with God's help respond to His challenges. We must surrender our feelings and spiritual inclinations to a pure and naked faith, and to a shattered love because of an impression of being cut off from God. We must face God like the two great masters of souls, Moses and Paul. We must be ready to lose Him in order to find Him and be deeply united with Him. We must let go of the human in order to abandon ourselves to what is superhuman and spiritual. Moses and Paul would not have been chosen by God to rescue and lead His people, if they had not been gifted with surpassing love and zeal for the salvation of their neighbour (h).

v) We can anticipate severe torments from Satan, since we are undertaking to besiege the town or at least one of the principal places of his kingdom, in pursuing the conversion of this soul; he is wont to lash out furiously and harshly against his besiegers (e). But we must stand firm through the holy and all-powerful virtue of humility, through hope and unshakeable faith and by a purposeful and ardent zeal to serve Jesus and carry out His will no matter what the cost to ourselves. "There were those who through faith conquered kingdoms" (i). We can be assured that the heavenly armies, led by St. Michael, are all on our side, and that the attacks of the evil one on the just are permitted by God for their sanctification. "You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (j). These sacred words contain many mysteries and much stimulation to sustain us.

We must work for this person's conversion, while at the same time overthrowing Satan and glorifying Jesus, and strengthening our own faith and hope, for the following reasons:

A. Apart from zeal and the salvation of souls, it must be of great concern to us that Satan can succeed so powerfully and arrogantly. As children of God, we could not remain indifferent to the arrogance of the principal enemy of God, our Father, without feeling ashamed, troubled and distressed. It would be a detestable form of self-love to centre on oneself and not be concerned about God and our neighbour. Love of God, to be genuine and true, cannot be limited and narrow. It has to extend beyond ourselves. We must not belong to those of whom St. Paul says: "These were a self-centred

people" (k), which is at the root of all the disorders he goes on to describe.

B. We cannot but be concerned about this person's misfortune, which God has very clearly made known to us. He would be angry and exacting with us for our hardness of heart, especially after the advice which He has inspired me to give, if every effort is not made to work for His glory in this startling and extraordinary situation.

C. We feel impelled to do something as it seems evident that this unfortunate person has not lost her faith totally. What is surprising is that in spite of the sinfulness, bad will, attraction to all sorts of heresies and erroneous ways, she still accepts all that the Catholic Church believes is true. Acting out of this conviction, she offends God in an extraordinary way and commits sins which neither atheists nor heretics would commit. God apparently wishes the seeds of faith, on which salvation depends, to remain in this devilish person. Hence, when God, through His mighty grace, desires to give this soul back into the power of His Son Jesus, her faith will be the foundation stone for His admirable designs.

D. Since she is not yet publicly recognised for what she is (l), she cleverly uses her keen mind and gracious demeanour to make a good impression and keep her evil ways hidden very skilfully and wickedly.

E. We must examine what she is doing and what she has done, as a witch and magician, to make the devil visible and familiar to her and enable him to take complete possession of her; we notice she can never arrive fully at this goal since God always holds back and limits the power of the prince of darkness.

For these reasons and motives, we know that it is God's will for us to do our best to save this unfortunate person. Since it is an exceptional suffering, it requires God's exceptional compassion, which we feel impelled to go to great lengths to obtain.

Moreover, we must not seek to take on this person's conversion by means of talks, discussions and arguments. We must enter into the depths of our nothingness and inadequacy and acknowledge that it is far beyond our natural and collective strength. Then in a deep spirit of humility before God and relying solely on His power, we can say: "As for us, we have called on the name of the Lord" (m).

In addition, I would like to say that through our prayers, we must get the attention of all the saints in heaven, especially the Mother of God, to whom it belongs to crush the head of the serpent (n) and throw him off balance totally. We can all learn from this situation that God never fails to remind us of the concern we should have for Him and for our neighbour; that God is to be loved in deed and in truth (o) and that we should cease loving our miserable selves, as we may have done up to the present time. May God transform us into Himself and make us worthy of carrying out His will profitably and purely. These are my wishes...Yours....

Notes

a) Lk 17: 20 – 21.

b) God's reign, which we pray for in the Our Father, establishes itself in our hearts in proportion to our openness to God. There is a mysterious communion with the invisible world of mind, being etc. Fr. Barre distinguishes between the relationship with God and participation in His Kingdom, experienced by people in general and the way in which God takes total possession of a person, following a spiritual struggle against evil in the person of Satan.

c) Fr. Barre declares that people of great intellectual ability risk getting caught more deeply in evil than those of less ability.

d) The rest of the text develops the idea that the worship of Satan by the person in question is of greater intensity than that given to God by the majority of believers. This is a challenge to the faithful to take their relationship with God more seriously.

e) These images of war would have been very meaningful for the people of the time.

f) Ps 136: 12, which refers to the strength that comes from God.

g) FM 13.

h) This paragraph expresses the contradictions that can occur in the life of an apostle, who can sometimes be tempted, in the name of faith and mission, to abandon the work undertaken or succumb to discouragement when God does not appear to give the grace of conversion in proportion to the efforts made.

i) Heb 11: 33.

j) Ps 91: 1.

k) 2Tim 3: 2.

l) The person about whom this letter is written is not yet known publicly to practice witchcraft. Such practices were relatively frequent at the time, often causing scandalous law-suits (sometimes quite unjust), as well as imprisonment or even death.

m) Ps 19: 8.

n) Gen 3: 18.

o) 1Jn 1: 18.

Letter 39

To a Prioress

Fr. Barre is advising a prioress to encourage one of her Sisters who is experiencing spiritual trials.

O Jesus! O Love!

Tell the person about whom you wrote to me that she should not worry about anything. Tell her to be at peace and as resigned and humble as she can before God, preserving a spirit of silence both inwardly and outwardly; to accept patiently her difficulties, the darkness she is experiencing and the shame of her unfaithfulness; to enter into her nothingness in the face of all her suffering and never grow weary of the darkness and misfortune. There is nothing but good in all these trials.

She ought to receive Holy Communion as usual and overcome her difficulties, while at the same time, keeping her troubles to herself. She ought to go to Confession as she would do normally and avoid dwelling on things too much or analysing what happens to her or still less start talking about any extraordinary inner experiences she may have. This would only be a cause of embarrassment and perplexity.

It would be good for her to receive Holy Communion more frequently with permission. Externally, she should not make any change in her behaviour. Internally and in her life of prayer, she should come before the majesty of God with all her nothingness, in a spirit of abandonment and total acceptance. My wish is that you would attend to all of this and help her to observe everything faithfully, because this is what God is asking of her.

Letter 40

To the same person

Fr. Barre gives advice to a prioress regarding one of her Sisters who is experiencing difficulties and temptations while endeavouring to work on her conversion. He deals with ways in which she can go through the suffering and regain peace.

O Jesus! O Love!

I hope this brief letter about the poor unfortunate whose notes you sent me (a), may be of help. I hope she will come to realise that her temptations and difficulties are in fact a spiritual cleansing, without which her soul which was as black as a devil would never become white. If she can endure all this she will win God's favour. She can expect her suffering to continue for some time yet as worldly ways (b) are very deeply rooted in her. She should abandon herself totally to God, give Him the freedom to do as He pleases and not block Him by any act of her own will. Do not encourage her to be spending too much time with you and do not allow her to tell you about her temptations (c). Disregarding God, she has amused herself in conversations with people. For the remainder of her life, she must live with the dissatisfaction and loneliness of being distanced from people, that is, she must withdraw from people and they must withdraw from her. She must undertake all this regardless of self, be prepared to suffer and die without help, friendship or support from others, otherwise the cleansing will be neither effective nor complete. One must always be ready to begin again without making too much progress.

She must be ready to obey because this is what God wants. She must be prepared to experience feelings of being cut off from God, as if He did not want her, so that she may be chastened because of her uncleanness and resistance. She must also withdraw from people whom she has treated badly and remain, as if she were under Satan's power, the executor of God's mighty and sovereign justice (d). But since no one should be asked to suffer without benefitting in some way, she should realise and believe, despite her own experiences and feelings, that the more she tries faithfully to assimilate and fulfil all that I have outlined here, the less she will sin, and all her past and present sins will be changed into sorrow (e). This sorrow and distress will lead to love and an awareness of God's just anger towards her, provided she has patience and keeps what is going on to herself. A sense of God's love will in turn lead to being imbued profoundly with God's outstanding and compassionate goodness, which will bring to completion what justice will have begun and thus win her God's favour. This is the way she will progress from her state of being cut off from God - a state which is both cursed and blessed at the same time. She is only too aware of how cursed it is. She will experience the extent of its blessedness if she decides to accept it and abandon herself to it totally and forever; if she keeps her experiences to herself and withdraws from all relationships, thoughts or support arising from others. This is the challenge presented to her if she wishes to live and die in this way. Amen (f).

Notes

- a) The Sister had written some notes, describing her difficulties, which the prioress sent to Fr. Barre, in order to get his advice on how to help her.
- b) This probably refers to a lax and worldly life which had crept into many monasteries at the time; one such laxity was time spent in idle conversations with others.
- c) MD 31 - 35. Fr. Barre recognises that the Sister has a sincere desire to change her life and for this reason advises the prioress to act in this way.
- d) Job 1: 8 - 11. At this stage in the O.T., "Satan" is not to be treated as a proper name. The signification is Adversary (2Sam 29: 4) and prosecutor (Zech 3: 1). When "the Satan" is used, it signifies a child of God who has taken on the task of spying on and accusing people and putting them to the test. For this reason the Septuagint version uses the word "calumniator" in Job 1:6.....In the N.T., Satan became the "god of the world" (2Cor 4:4) and is mentioned very frequently. Here temptation is presented as a test; a test of the sincerity of one's desire to draw close to God.
- e) Sin will give way to true and sincere sorrow for having offended God.
- f) With his usual paradoxical method, Fr. Barre describes the mystical experience as an invitation to a person who has decided to work on conversion, not to run away from spiritual difficulties, but on the contrary to embrace them fully and wholeheartedly and re-discover God's presence there.

Letter 41

To a cloistered Religious

Fr. Barre is encouraging a worried religious and helping her to arrive at inner peace, which is possible only through the serene acceptance of difficulties. He cautions her about all that could distance her from total union with Jesus.

O Jesus!

May the peace of Christ be deep in your heart so that God alone may dwell there (a). Do not disturb or upset this peace by worrying about the validity of your confession. Be guided by your superiors and spiritual director and avoid setting yourself up as judge of the qualities required in those who administer the sacraments to you. Be at peace in this regard. If, having made the resolution, your anxieties return, ignore them and if they persist, put up with them patiently without giving in to them. Deal with all other troubles or worries in the same way. God loves you too much to allow you be taken over by the injurious self-love of which you believe yourself to be full. All your desires for inner peace and serenity spring from an inordinate self-love which slyly and very subtly alienates you from God, depriving Him of the full and entire possession of your heart (b).

Rejoice when you are surrounded by thorns, powerlessness and darkness. The peace of God which I desire for you, should be like roses that are always surrounded by thorns, if it is to be steadfast and true. This peace will always be surrounded by difficulties and at the same time it is necessary to remain patient, silent, trusting, totally abandoned to God, while enduring devastating blows in a heart that is wounded, afflicted, troubled and distressed. Where patience, death to self and abandonment are present, the divine life will be enshrined and enclosed, to the extent that we have been, and are, fully resigned to our suffering. While we may not be aware of the presence of God, we know He is always present, although he may hide Himself from us for our greater good. We can neither be nor have anything of value without spoiling it with our sinful nature, which is so full of self-love, self-gratification and self-satisfaction.

Some time ago you suggested making a novena of Communions. What is done is done, but I would not suggest you do it again. You do not deserve to receive Holy Communion every day (c), you could however do so a few times a week. You also referred to some prayer association; it would be better to keep away from anything like that. Do not look for any association apart from Jesus, the Church in general and your community. Withdraw from all in order to belong to all. While living in the world, you must cut yourself off from it for two reasons: i) so that your union with Jesus may not be impaired; ii) in associating with others, you are more likely to do them harm than to be a source of support and growth for them. However, if you still desire to be associated with others, do so with those who are out of sight for you, that is, the saints in heaven, the souls in purgatory, the Indians or those you are unlikely ever to meet on this earth. You can be united with all of these while at the same time

preserving the purity and totality of your union with God.

Humbly accept deceptive temptations with the difficulties they bring and do not allow them interfere with your Communions. Since with the help of God's grace, your will is strong enough to resist these temptations, there is no need to go to confession too frequently (e) and do so only out of self-abasement. You should concentrate very seriously on developing this attitude, since it will lead to growth in the wonderful and admirable virtue of humility, to which our whole life should be devoted so that it may be totally spiritual and holy. Do me the favour of praying for this grace for both of us. I remain... Yours....

Notes

a) Jn 14: 23; Rev 3: 20.

b) even the desire for peace, when it becomes a preoccupation, could block the acceptance of the true peace that comes from God.

c) cf. SA 1; The Council of Trent recommended frequent Communion i.e once a month and sometimes every week. Between the 10th and 16th centuries, the practice had been 3 or 4 times a year. There was much public discussion on the issue following the Council of Trent's recommendation. Those opposed argued on the basis of the unworthiness of the human person to receive such a wonderful sacrament. Fr. Barre was among those who defended frequent Communion (RA 8). Nevertheless, he was worried about the person who was receiving Communion every day for a time and advises her to spread out the time a little more.

d) Union with God, the ultimate aim of every human person, is the only way which will lead this Sister to Him and keep her united with the Church and all humanity.

e) Temptations are not sins and are therefore not matter for Confession. We do not will them but we may be failing to love God as we should and our desire is to try to avoid displeasing Him. If failure to love God is sometimes expressed humbly in the sacrament of penance, it could help us progress in the spiritual life.

Letter 42

To a notable servant of God

It is thought that this encouraging message is addressed to John Baptist de la Salle. Fr. Barre is encouraging him to persevere in the direction he has chosen to follow, irrespective of difficulties he may encounter.

O Jesus! O Love!

Be courageous in your undertaking. Do not let your conscience worry you (a); be at peace, have no fear of what people say; they neither know what they are talking about nor what they are doing. Do not pay any more attention to them than to the wind. Know that God is your witness, His eyes are ever on you. He is your faithful judge and a true supporter of your excellent plan. You must realise and take comfort from the fact that angels have been commissioned to come to your assistance in this situation where you have declared open war on the devil. Do not be surprised if you feel pressurised to abandon your project, either inwardly through sly threats from the evil one, or outwardly, by the world (b).

Be courageous then even in the midst of feeling discouraged. When you seem to be left without all help, both inwardly and outwardly, take obedience as your guide and do not allow yourself be deterred by any obstacle.

Let me know if the person to whom I am recommending you does not see his way to helping you in this evangelical undertaking. If God does not wish you to be helped by that person, I will see if I can find someone else. In the spirit of Jesus, I remain.... Yours.....

Notes

a) Some anxieties still remain for this person because the decision in question is a very big one.

b) Fr. Barre's role in the life of John Baptist de la Salle is mentioned twice by Fr. Bernard (1721) in the account of the foundation of the Brothers:

. the decision to go and live with the masters (1681);

. not using his own inheritance to endow the schools i.e. giving them financial security with family income.

These two decisions were debated very strongly by some of his colleagues in Rheims.

Letter 43

To a friend

This friendly letter is addressed to a young religious, encouraging him to abandon himself totally to God who alone can satisfy his desire for happiness.

O Jesus! O Love!

May our heavenly Father fill you and touch you with His mercy and keep you so closely united to Him that you may never become separated from Him.

I do not deserve such expressions of friendship or so much kindness from you; neither do I deserve your concern about my health or indeed about anything that relates to someone as unworthy as I.

First of all I want to begin by asking you to forgive me for my long and deplorable silence in your regard; a silence which was all the more difficult for you, given the difficulties you were experiencing regarding your vocation. In setting aside this time for you today, I hope I will be able to make up all that I owe you for the past two months. I want you to renew your conviction of the need to give yourself to God and to persevere in doing so. I will offer you some suggestions which may help you.

Commit yourself to God in a spirit of total and unconditional abandonment, now and forever.

Captivated by Him, let it be a real act of self-giving into His keeping, to be renewed every day and every moment of our lives, at the expense of anything we could wish for or have in this world.

We must give all in order to have all, let go of the false in order to have what is true (a), leave one's nothingness for God. There are many valid reasons why we should do this: there are those that concern (i) God, (ii) ourselves, (iii) creation, (iv) evil spirits. These are the main points we should recall to mind and keep before our eyes in order to be faithful to the greatest undertaking of all (b).

(i) We should give ourselves entirely to **God** because

- . it is fitting that a servant should serve the Master;
- . it is a question of justice;
- . we would never otherwise know peace;
- . God wants us to share in His divine life, by transforming our life into His, delivering us from our infirmities so that we may share in His power, releasing us from our poverty that we may share in His riches. To realise this union, we must be united with Him in mind, will and heart; have no other desires but His; no other attachments or plans apart from those He would wish us to have, otherwise there would be division, divergence, separation, resistance, so that we could neither possess God nor be possessed totally by Him (c), who is the one and only reason for our existence.

(ii) Regarding **ourselves**, we make a commitment to dedicate and devote ourselves to the service of God and all that pleases Him. If we really love ourselves as we should, the benefits to us will be genuine, joyful and advantageous.

Genuine: nothing surpasses union with God. Through this union we become servants of God only to

become kings. We also become children, brothers, sisters, spouses and mothers of Jesus Christ, as He has told us in the Gospel (d). Decide then whether the angels are right in loving us, in surrounding us with kindness, holding us in their arms and serving us as children of the Prince and Sovereign. "They will carry you in their arms...they are all ministering spirits.." (e). This is the reward of a generous resolve to desire and seek only to serve God and do His will.

Joyful: this brings with it an inner peace and quiet, which is God's gift to us, in virtue of efforts we have made ourselves and the lessening of life's pains and difficulties.

Advantageous: nothing is more advantageous than the generous and admirable desire to belong totally to God with all one's heart. All that we do and endure, both at a natural and supernatural level, will be transformed through this giving of the whole of ourselves. When our hearts and wills are totally at one with those of Jesus, all that we do and endure will flow from His heart and will, which gives infinite merit to the least act of love done in the name of Jesus.

(iii) We now consider the impact on us of the rest of [creation](#), which serves God so faithfully and regularly (f), as we observe with the sky, stars, elements, plants and animals. We notice that the whole visible world is fully obedient to God the Creator. There is only our wretched heart which fails in its duty, which breaks this admirable harmony and prevents the rest of creation from turning fully to God (g). It is up to us to complete the circle, to facilitate and effect the relationship between the inanimate world and its Creator.

Another aspect of this link with creation is its limitations and lowliness in comparison to the human mind and heart which has the potential to receive the inexhaustible, immense and all-powerful goodness of God. When the heart reaches out to all of creation, there will always be an emptiness there if it is not filled with God. According to St. Bernard: "Nothing less than God can satisfy what is capable of being filled with God". Let us therefore be totally detached from all creation and from all greatness, showing no interest in anything less than God.

A further aspect is the frailty of creation by comparison with the immortality of the mind, soul and heart. Let us therefore give our attention to what pertains to us.

(iv) Finally, in order to take a stand against the [evil one](#) and surrender ourselves entirely to God, there are two points to keep in mind.

Firstly, the enmity that should exist between us and the evil one, whose hatred for us is extreme. Our degree of animosity will only be what it should be, when we give ourselves fully and generously to God. It means opting, more or less, either for war or peaceful coexistence with the evil one to the extent that we intensify or lessen the total giving of ourselves to God.

Secondly, there is the risk that we give the evil one what we no longer give to God. This is rather startling and horrifying and should be examined carefully in the presence of God so as to understand and weigh it up well.

There are two masters in search of our heart. One is lawful and unique: God; the other is a usurper and tyrant: the evil one in the guise of undisciplined self-love. If the evil one fails to take full

possession of the heart, he tries to get at least partial possession. He does his best to install himself with God in the human heart; in the abode which God prepared and set up for Himself (h). Only those who give themselves totally to God, as I have explained above, are exempt from this ignominy. Shall we allow the evil one to insult God in this manner in our own heart? How stupid and appallingly ignorant we can be! Let us become more aware of this plight and make sure that we do not get caught in it. Let us strive, keep watch and struggle everyday lest this become our fate.

I want to assure you that I am aware of the distress you have experienced, to which I have added by not replying earlier. In sending you these affectionate greetings, there are three emotions surfacing in me: shame, compassion and joy.

I feel ashamed when I recall having asked you to leave your country and friends for the desert, thus depriving you of human kindness and enjoyment. Having overtly and honestly deluded and enticed you, assuring you that you would not be without help and support, nevertheless, I abandoned you and left you in the arms of Him, who, without any doubt, is all-powerful, but to whom you are not yet close enough, to enable you to survive without any human and visible support. This is what upsets me in your regard and it worries me not to be able to do something about it in the way I would like.

Secondly, I feel a sense of compassion because I can visualise the way you are suffering, both inwardly and outwardly. I am aware of the persistent ways in which you are so often disturbed by the world, the flesh, the devil and disordered nature. These desolations arise from your aversion, lack of enthusiasm, apathy in prayer, half-hearted resolutions to begin again and feeble efforts to repent of this way of life. For better or for worse, have courage; you are experiencing abandonment in the desert; you are doing penance through your suffering; you are experiencing death-blows in your struggle; you are cut off from God and the doors of heaven are closed to you through your experience of hell.

My dear beloved one, there is a secret in all of this, a true and hidden reason for all this suffering. This is what gives rise to the joy that I feel.

Thirdly, this feeling of joy surpasses all the others, since I know that as long as you continue in the state you have chosen, God will support you in a powerful and invincible way. No matter what the resistance, He will continue in His great, admirable and divine work. My joy is increased further by the spirit of humility and sense of unworthiness which I observe in the great pain you feel at the sight of your continual unfaithfulness to God. I notice the way you are surprised when people of renown and of piety praise you, while you believe yourself to be of little worth, always displeasing and offending God. This feeling of dejection which you find hard to accept is a source of joy for me, since this is the channel God uses to fill you with His grace. You will become more aware of this when, in the midst of your suffering, you can devote yourself faithfully to God and do what He wants of you.

I remain....Yours.....

Notes

- a) Ps 18: 31 - 32; Ps 31: 4; Ps 61: 4; Ps 144: 2.
- b) This refers to religious life.
- c) cf. AD 10. This is mystical language e.g. we are in God and He is in us.
- d) Mt 12: 46 - 50; Mk 3: 31 - 35; Lk 8: 19 – 21.
- e) Ps 91: 12; Heb 1: 14.
- f) Bar 3: 34 ff...; Ps 104: 4; Job 36: 27 ff...
- g) Rom 8: 18 – 22.
- h) Rev 3: 20; Jn 14: 23.

Letter 44

To the same friend

In this friendly letter, using many images, Fr. Barre gives advice to the young religious who is experiencing spiritual dryness. He encourages him to stay with this experience and to wait for enlightenment from God.

O Jesus! O Love!

May the Spirit of God, hidden in the depths of your heart, strengthen you in the generous resolution you have taken, in response to His will and to the special grace he has chosen to bestow on you. I would like very much to meet you and to see for myself what God is allowing you to endure (a), not in order to change it, but to encourage you and help you to desire and accept it courageously and wholeheartedly, as deeply as you now experience the suffering. Did you not join the workshop (b) of our crucified Saviour in order to be moulded and fashioned by God, bringing with you an untamed nature and continually resisting the wishes of our sovereign and unique Prince ? Having arrived there, you would be extremely annoyed if no one did any work on you. You did not claim to be perfect on entering it, but desire to be perfect on leaving it. You know that there is a vast difference between perfection and the stage at which you have been and are. Do not be surprised by the difficulties and hardships you will encounter. You will need lots of them before discovering the true state of happiness.

Thinking of you, I sometimes imagine you as a child of six weeks or two months old, who has to do without his nursing mother whom he needs so badly. You wanted to be born of God and truly and firmly let go of your tainted and disordered human birth of flesh, blood and obscurity (c), and yet here you are in the unhappy state of having to beg for life, without getting any response. It is as if you were abandoned by father and mother; by God who is your Father and who does not even appear to know you, and by your directors as by a mother; so much so that nothing remains only an inner pleading from a distressed heart, which never leaves you.

After all that, you are not allowed to turn back lest you be guilty of infidelity and be anathematised. You must continue walking through the thorns and the thick darkness, even if you faint at every step. No doubt you will ask if this is the way to get to God. Is it possible to approach Him only through the experience of constant rejection? Does one have to remain static, being faithful to one's spiritual exercises and devotions, prayers, confession, Communion, Retreat, silence, reading and all that the rule of life prescribes, when there is no more satisfaction than if one were chewing wood ? Is it through being blind and groping one's way along that one arrives at truth and light ? Is it through persistent infidelity that one arrives at true and radiant faith ? Does one have to be surrounded and besieged by folly and impurity in order to reach wisdom and purity ? etc. My response to all these questions is 'yes'. Have faith and do not worry about anything. Be obedient always and there is no

need to fear getting lost. In fact the more you are ill-treated the better it will be for you.

Come and see me as soon as you can, so that, with the help of God's grace, I may be able to share with you more meaningfully what I have been saying to you at a distance in writing. You are always present to me in spirit, but this is not enough for you because you are still but a weak infant, unformed and earthly (d). Come, and hopefully I will be able to do my duty for you, at least partly. May you remain in the mind and heart of Jesus. Yours.....

Notes

- a) God allows us to experience trials. It is only afterwards, through faith, that we can see the way in which God was present.
- b) "the workshop of our crucified Saviour" signifies the purifications necessary for the one who is setting out on the road to follow Christ.
- c) Jn 1: 13.
- d) The image of a child is repeated; 1Pet 2: 2; 1Cor 3: 2.

Letter 45

To the same friend

This the third letter to the same religious. He continues to experience trials and feels a sense of being abandoned. The temptation to turn back has become very strong and he finds it difficult to resist. Fr. Barre encourages him to pull himself together and persevere without being concerned about his progress.

I am writing to offer you some consolation, enlightenment and encouragement. I have no doubt that the way in which God has tested you has been right. I can understand how, in your wretched and pitiable state, you have often felt the urge to react and rebel against the severe and harsh way in which God appears to be treating you.

No doubt, from a human point of view, you have wondered why the officers of the court of the great King, Jesus (a) have to endure such distress and subjection in order to serve Him. The truth is that the world and the devil are secretly in league with human nature to shake off the yoke of God's service, especially in the case of someone committed to it. At the beginning, we can often be held by God's grace, which is not alone powerful but overflowing with God's tender and compassionate love. But these feelings do not stay with us as time goes on; usually God withdraws these and appears to leave us entirely to ourselves. We feel as if God has abandoned us and get discouraged, imagining Him to have grown tired of our unfaithfulness and broken off with us forever.

Sometimes temptation can go so far that, no matter what is said to us, no matter what encouragement and support we receive from our Directors, we remain unmoved and continue to feel dejected in the midst of all the help offered. This apathy and apparent indifference on God's part can have such a numbing effect on us that we do not have the strength to put one foot beyond the other. We can reach a stage of feeling such a sense of rejection that we feel gripped by an aversion towards everything that savours of the Divine, including all people associated with God and His principles. We become unbearable to ourselves and are greatly tempted to return to the world, go into business, set up a home, get involved in human relationships and give up religious devotions, especially when we regard ourselves as doing nothing worthwhile or think that by continuing we would only be piling up transgressions.

My dearly loved one, I have begun by sketching this dark picture for you, so that having being forewarned you will avoid obeying the devil rather than God and His angels, whether visible or invisible (b). Come then, unhappy as you are, and reach out your hand to me. Arise and pay attention to me; and if you feel you are not man enough to do so, then do it as a clumsy animal, unmindful of self. Obey blindly all that you are told to do.

Do not worry as to whether you are making progress or not. Keep going, that is all I ask of you. Go back to the direction you were following and if you do not want God to grow tired of blessing and

loving you, even though you may feel unmoved, do not ever give up serving Him in small and meagre ways. Let perseverance characterise both your living and your dying and be assured of the help you will receive inwardly, often unseen, from your faithful friends, among whom you can count me.

Yours.....

Notes

a) This image refers to priests and religious consecrated to God. Evidently the young religious had thought that having responded generously to God's call, he would not have any more major difficulties in life.

b) In the biblical tradition, the angels are God's messengers. Hence this applies to every person through whom God communicates to another.

Letter 46

To a priest

Fr. Barre wishes to help this anxious priest to abandon himself confidently to God. It is not only a matter of deciding to be faithful to prayer and regulate one's life, it is a grace to be received from God. He is the Master. Therefore, he needs to learn to live more through love than through fear.

O Jesus! O Love!

You must take care never to omit your meditation, except when God wills it so, as for example, in the case of illness or when somebody in your area of ministry is in urgent need of help. This is my humble opinion. You should give yourself a structure for your morning, midday and evening prayer and never waver from that, except for a serious reason. Above all make sure to make your meditation in the evening as well as in the morning. I do not think you should worry when you are not in a position to do what you want. God often tests our fidelity in this way, allowing us to reach the stage where we allow Him to act in us. We want so much to be in control that whenever He takes this possibility away from us, we think we are doomed. He wants us to abandon ourselves totally to His guidance. Going back over the cause and subject of our dryness is an indication of our desire to be in control. Whether this dryness has come about because of our infidelities or is the work of the evil one or if God, who acts justly and never otherwise, seems to withdraw from us (b), it helps us become more aware of our own poverty and unworthiness and to accept serenely all that God sends our way.

As I see it, the fragility you experience at the level of faith, is but a means of strengthening your faith. It is not connected to the zeal or deep feeling with which God sometimes fills the heart in allowing us to share in His divine mysteries. In this situation, faith is not really practised, so to speak, because when God penetrates all our senses in this way, what we are asked to believe becomes more apparent. Faith is really only practised when God removes all that is perceptible and leaves us totally empty. It is then that the bond of faith becomes difficult, but at the same time it becomes more real. One could say that faith without the perceptible enables one to persevere in whatever one has undertaken to do and in the faithful practice of all that that implies.

You are well aware that God loves you with the love of a good father who knows his child's weakness. He does not leave you long in your desolation, but from time to time, allows you to experience the joy of His love, filling you with peace and serenity. But this cannot be your basis for knowing if what you are doing is right and in tune with what God wants, since the least scruple upsets and disorients you. While all of the above is good and very beneficial for you, you must not become dependent on it, but rather learn to rely on naked faith, without experiencing or feeling anything. Thus you will come to know that God is He who is (c). Hence we must constantly give over the whole of ourselves to Him, since this is the whole purpose of our being. Whatever is not directed towards this goal is a misappropriation of what belongs to God alone.

Have courage, do not be surprised by the difficulties; there is always a sense of joy for the one who knows how to love. From what I know of you, you would do better to allow love rather than fear be the guiding force in your life. When you consider your accountability for all the natural and supernatural gifts God in His mercy has given you, you must remember that He who is your judge is also your Father. Do not spend too much time thinking of what disturbs you, as this is what makes the evil one very happy.

In my humble opinion, you should go to Confession only when you know clearly that you have sinned. The main concern of the evil one is to take away your peace and block your union with God. This is one of the tricks He uses to discourage us in the face of our infidelities. We will frustrate him by disregarding his devices, since we should regard our weakness and unworthiness in a gentle, humble and serene way, by entering into our nothingness and immersing ourselves in the infinity of God. By immersing everything in Him, we will come to see only Him in all things and all things in Him. We will be very unhappy if we stay with the emptiness of creatures when we can be filled with the infinite Being of our Creator. Fidelity to the presence of God will facilitate detachment from self.

Notes

- a) In this letter, Fr. Barre shows much kindness to a priest who appears to be scrupulous. He is both gentle and at the same time firm with him . MD 26.
- b) The fact is that it is we who separate ourselves from God. God does not move away from us, but we do not feel His presence. We would then experience moments of darkness when God seems to have deserted us.
- c) Ex 3: 14.

Letter 47

To a cloistered Religious

In this letter, Fr. Barre expresses his joy in meeting someone with a sincere desire to belong entirely to Jesus.

O Jesus! O Love!

May God be blessed a million times over for the way in which, in His sovereign goodness, He has used my visit to draw you totally, firmly and steadfastly to Himself. This was my principal aim. Having seen the way grace and virtue were entangled and mixed up with what is purely human in your life, and not wishing to compound things for you, I felt, having talked with you and considered you to be someone of mediocre virtue, that it would be better for me to discontinue with you. I have difficulty disposing myself to guide people who are not committed to seek only Jesus (a). My greatest desire is to devote myself to people who are prepared to give themselves totally to Him, not allowing any other human or spiritual outlook to get in the way.

Fundamental to everything for me is the reign of Jesus and the accomplishment of His will now and for all eternity. Whatever happens is in His hands and not in ours since He already knows the plans He has in mind for us. May His will be done even in ways unknown to us and without our having any guarantee, idea or sense of what may happen to us. All this applies to the inner life.

With regard to the outward expression of your inner life, you should pay attention, not only to what is being done in the monastery you are in, but to what should be done. You should carry out all your duties faithfully in accordance with the good spirit you have and the great graces you have been given. For many years I have been hoping for a happy outcome for the monastery (b). Maybe you will be instrumental in bringing it about. If not you will have failed miserably in cooperating with God's grace. Yours.....

Notes

a) MD 29, 30, 34.

b) Apparently Fr. Barre wanted a reform of this monastery. Hence, he is inviting his directee to be more authentic in responding to her vocation and thus help bring about the reform he has dreamt of for many years.

Letter 48

To a dedicated young woman(a)

The spiritual life is a difficult journey which demands great patience. Human efforts alone do not produce fruits. Obedience to God's will is the sure way. The greater the awareness of one's own weakness, the more open to God one is going to be.

O Jesus! O Love!

You must make up your mind to have patience and accept the feelings of being forsaken and abandoned by God. It is no use tormenting yourself, crying over your sins, referring to directors, staying away from Communion, practising penances, living in solitude, anxiously examining your conscience, questioning your vocation, searching for the will of God and a sure way to salvation, being faithful to meditation or abandoning it; all this will not prevent you from feeling dejected and wretched before God, the angels and humanity. The only remedy is to have patience and always expect worse.

If you find it hard to be patient, keep working at it and then all will be well in spite of all the difficulties. If you want to avoid offending God again, you have only got to obey and do as you are told despite your qualms of conscience and continue your present work.

If your suffering and the consequences of your sinfulness and difficulties continue to increase until the time of your death, if you continue to be obedient through all of this, either with regard to Communion or fidelity to your work, and if your obedience extends to those who do not understand what is going on and even oppose it, you will die a happy death, passing from a meritorious and purifying experience to a paradise of eternal joy (b).

Therefore consider yourself never to be sufficiently derided or maltreated by God or by people and never to have sufficiently practised blind obedience, despite your own feelings and opinions. The whole of paradise will take delight in seeing you regard yourself in this way, knowing that God is hiding His admirable graces in the poverty and unhappiness you are experiencing. These graces far outweigh the sense of nothingness you feel arising from your sufferings. So much the worse for you if you do not believe all this. Such are my thoughts. I remain in the Lord, Yours.....

Notes

a) A dedicated young woman at that time meant a consecrated woman who did not make vows but was involved in ministry in hospitals or some form of education.

b) PM 36; MI 6.

Letter 49

To a holy person

This letter is in the form of a parable. We should always be motivated by the pure love of God without worrying about fatigue, effectiveness or reward. If we can do this, God will reward us beyond all our expectations.

Jesus!

Imagine a poor woman who, with not even a single piece of bread to eat, is employed to draw water by someone very rich. The latter gives her a huge barrel to fill and strikes a bargain with her, promising to pay her two crowns for each fill. The poor woman is delighted at the prospect of becoming rich. She sets about the work bravely but notices that despite her efforts the barrel is not being filled. She begins to get discouraged and tries to find out what is wrong. She notices that the plug had been removed, so she replaces it and sets to work with greater zest. But her employer comes along and gives her a good scolding, saying that this was not part of the agreement; she had not been employed to do things her way. He asked her to remove the plug and continue her work without worrying about the outcome. She continues for some time and then slackens off, grumbles and begins to feel discouraged again. The master arrives again and asks why she is not working. She tells him that there is no point since all her efforts appear to be in vain. "In fact, I have been doing this work for several years", she says, "and it is all a waste of time. No matter how little I gain from my work, I would be happy if I knew that the water I draw were at least to water your garden or benefit you in some other way. But seeing that I am wasting my time discourages me from doing any more work."

"What!," answers the master, "is it not enough to have told you that this is what I want ? Should this not be sufficient for you ?" At these words she cheers up, realising that her master wishes her to work without knowing the outcome. She is very happy to be able to do what pleases him. She gets on with her work without ever complaining and is even happy to do so.

Having worked for a long time in this way, the master came back to see her saying he wished to reward her and work out his accounts with her. The poor woman was surprised and said she deserved nothing. On the contrary, she felt more deserving of punishment for all her grumbling and for having wasted time and worked so badly. Then he showed her an enormous reservoir filled with clear water. He told her that this was the fruit of her work; this was what she had filled and he had counted and measured the barrels. Since she had worked courageously and continuously for love of him, he would now double reward. Instead of two crowns per fill, he would now give her four, thus making her rich forever. Imagine the woman's joy and reward, especially as she thought she had been working in vain.

So it is with those who work purely for the love of God and the advance of His glory, for the salvation of souls and their sanctification. Even though they do not see any reward or progress, they still persevere without seeking any recompense. We must always remember our poverty and lowliness and consider ourselves only too happy to be accepted into God's service (a).

Notes

a) Lk 17: 10.

Letter 50

To a friend

Fidelity to prayer requires faith and perseverance. Like a spring of water which gushes forth after much digging, so God's love fills the soul of the one who searches humbly and faithfully.

Jesus!

You can expect to spend many years often thinking that instead of praying all you are doing is offending God and misusing His graces. Think of a woman who is very thirsty and is asking everyone for water. She approaches someone who could give her some, who could even supply her with an inexhaustible living spring, but instead of giving her what she asks, he replies: "Dig a hole in the ground and you will find some (a)". Burning with an insatiable desire to find the promised water, she then digs about a hundred fathoms (b), but seeing no trace of water, she says to the person who raised her hopes: "Are you not making fun of me in making me dig like this? I am finding nothing and it does not look as if I will ever find anything". He says to her again: "Continue to dig, do not give up, take my word for it, you will find water. The more digging you will do the better the water you will find." And so she is encouraged. Finally, having worked hard, digging into the depths of the earth, she notices a tiny stream of water (c) seeping out from a small hole, which she blocks in order to dig a little deeper. Therefore, she is encouraged and works harder still. Gradually several small streams of water begin to seep out on several sides. Again, she blocks them and continues digging. Finally, a great spring, impossible to block, bursts out in the middle and fills the deep well at which she had worked so hard. She now has to move away lest she be engulfed by the waters.

In the same way the Lord rewards us for labouring faithfully on His behalf. If we are really in possession of the mind of God, we will never complain that nothing is happening in our prayer. Let us acknowledge that it is our lower nature which is at work each time we find ourselves grumbling. Remember that when you think you are doing nothing while at the same time you are trying to avoid the least wrong, then all is well with you. God is more pleased than ever when your self-love is not fulfilled.

Let us work for the pure love of God and for His greater glory. Let us do all that we can to carry out our duty well and above all with great fidelity. God will certainly not fail to reward us both in this world and in the next. But it is not the thought of a reward that should motivate us, rather it is pure and holy love that should animate us.

The children of Jesus Christ endure everything, acting sincerely in the presence of God, never wavering in their duty no matter what happens and eventually dying in the struggle. From whatever side the storm may break, they always accept whatever God wills for them.

Notes

- a) This metaphor of water is similar to that developed by Teresa of Avila in her autobiography, Chapter 11, where, in reference to prayer, she talks about the garden of the soul being irrigated by water from a spring or falling rain.
- b) A unit of measurement. 1 fathom = 6.5 feet = 1.94 metres.
- c) Ezech 47: 1 - 7.

Letter 51

To a holy person

Fr. Barre responds to the anxieties of a scrupulous person. The way in which he analyses temptation and sin reflects his sound theology as well as his broadmindedness. He outlines for this person a fairly definite guideline for the spiritual life to help her overcome her exaggerated worries.

Jesus !

There is no need for you to refrain from going to hear the talks you referred to, unless they really upset your conscience, which is already upset enough. There is no need to be anxious about making a general confession, those that you have made already suffice. Continue then to be guided by an unailing and sacrosanct rule regarding the whole of your past life, that is, following the confessions you have made, the only thing you have to be ashamed of and sorry for is your sinfulness and unfaithfulness to God's grace. This applies in particular to:

- i) the frequent or unceasing practice of the presence of God and prayer;
- ii) trust in His infinite goodness and mercy despite the fears and the reproaches of conscience which can be discouraging and out of proportion (a);
- iii) surrendering oneself obediently to the perception and advice of one's director and confessor despite the resistance arising from one's shameful and disobedient lower nature.

You will carry this resistance with you to the grave and should continually seek to overcome it, in spite of the efforts of Satan, king of the headstrong, to lead you astray. He always tries to get you on his side and to trap you in his way of thinking, thus always keeping you in a state of anxiety, worry, gloom and bad humour. This makes it difficult for you to pray, to surrender yourself to God's love and to serve your neighbour in a God-like way.

Do not worry about your past life. With regard to the future, let the following be your guiding principle: with regard to inner sins of rash judgment, impure thoughts and emotions, envy or jealousy, hatred and aversion, or any other matter, remember that these are but temptations and at most venial sins. An act of contrition and love of God absolves these and should not prevent you from receiving Communion frequently. When you confess your sins, it is sufficient to do so in general without going into too many details.

However, if you are conscious of having fully consented to and desired evil and thus committed mortal sin, then do not believe it to be a mortal sin, unless you are really sure to have deliberately dwelt on ways of devising grievous and notorious transgressions over a period of time. There is no reason to be upset by the temptation. Always keep this principle in mind and while many might ignore it, you especially have nothing to fear in following it but everything to fear if you do not, right up to the time of your death; you may even find yourself being overcome by feelings of despair. On the other hand if

you pledge yourself to obedience, you will experience a deep sense of God's tenderness and heavenly blessings, as never before, because your offering will be acceptable to Jesus, to whom you listen in listening to His ministers.

My dear one in Christ, after all this there is no need for you to write any more or to expect a response from me, lest we both be guilty of offending God; you, by upsetting yourself as before in making your troubles known to me, and I, by listening to you halfheartedly and diffidently instead of patiently and lovingly.

Hopefully Mr N will be aware of all this and lead you forward rather than harming you with kindness. Do not let a day go by without giving an hour to prayer and spiritual reading, whether it be a full hour given to either one of these exercises or a half hour to each. Your fidelity to this should be such that if one day you miss out, you will make up for it the following day. Go to Mass every day and say the rosary or the Office of the Blessed Virgin or the seven psalms (b) and the litany of the saints, so that no day passes without your having recited one or other of these three prayers at least once. If you miss one day, then on the following day you will say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys with arms outstretched.

Every hour of each day, you will recall the presence of God by an act of adoration or contrition or desire etc... you will do this every hour from 4 a.m. until 10 p.m. (c) and for every time you miss you will say the Glory be to the Father... or the Lamb of God..., while kissing the floor.

You will examine your conscience three times daily during whatever space of time it would take to say "Out of the depths.." or the "Have mercy on me..." (d). The first examen will be in the morning, having first adored God, given Him thanks, asked pardon of Him, offered Him all your actions and asked for the grace to live only for Him, in Him and through Him (e).

The next examen will be at midday in order to redirect your heart and be better for the rest of the day. The third will be in the evening, beginning with the same acts as in the morning.

You will go to confession once a week, and Communion three or four times if you have tried to live according to the above recommendations.

So be it through the grace of Jesus !

Notes

- a) MD 26, 28, 45...
- b) The penitential psalms: 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142.
- c) The Spiritual Clock as in L 25.
- d) Ps 129 & Ps 50.
- e) the doxology at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. cf. RC for other general points in this letter.

Letter 52

To a holy person

Fr. Barre comments on a rule of life sent to him by one of his directees. He approves of it and emphasises humility, obedience and reliance on God through which, deceptions that can be a great obstacle to God's love may be avoided.

Jesus !

I am returning your paper so that you can copy it out neatly and read it often. I think the kind of prayer you have described is good and I agree that you could use it when you receive Communion, that is, on entering into the depths of your nothingness and sinfulness and your sordid and tainted nature (a), you will then enter into the spirit of the feelings to which you have referred. When you come before the Lord, do not give up the sense of shame you have because of your great unworthiness, which must be detested by everyone. Stay with this for a full four months. Believe firmly that there is nothing more loathsome in the sight of God or the saints than your wretchedness. If you do not keep this attitude in the forefront of your mind, you will be more preoccupied with love of self than with love of God.

Do not fail to re-read this paper every two weeks, as well as the one you already have. Then recall that it is Jesus who leads you through His minister and the most unworthy of His subjects. In this spirit of obedience and trust in God, you will be saved from illusions or deceptions and all presumption to which your lower nature would tend to lead you. Without fail, this will become your lot if you allow yourself become attached to your director or anyone else. Let this be deeply engraved in your heart and pray for me, Yours.....

Notes

a) In the biography of Fr. Barre written by Raffron in 1719, we find: "Even though he was very humble, gentle and kind with everyone, he knew how to be firm as appropriate. Acting zealously and with a certain authority, he sometimes used strong and surprising language, in a desire to promote the glory of God...It is not surprising to find, in his Letters, similar expressions which cannot be omitted as they portray an important trait of his as a spiritual director."

Letter 53

To a holy person

The letter speaks of finding joy in suffering and preserving a spirit of humility.

Jesus !

When you feel forsaken and dejected, or tempted to be so; when God seems to withdraw, heaven seems to close its doors, the underworld rears its head, persecution comes from all sides and you feel a strong resistance in yourself, it is then you have reason to rejoice. "Consider it a great joy.." says St. James (a) and be assured that it is the reward of great souls. This is the only road to greatness. Perceptible graces are only for the insignificant and leave them always in that state. But this does not mean that you should consider yourself to have been of worth, to be of worth or ever to be of any worth. Do your best to imprint all these truths on your mind and still more on your heart. Try to receive Communion three or four times a week. I remain always in the Lord, Yours.....

Notes

a) James 1: 2.

Letter 54

To a friend

This letter is one of the few in which Fr. Barre shares something about himself. In order to encourage his friend, he reveals some of his own spiritual struggles, his temptations to despair, his feelings of being abandoned by God. However, with the strength that comes from God, he is able to understand what others are going through and to help them, especially the Sisters whom his friend recommends to his prayers.

Jesus !

I would be glad to share with you something of the way heaven deals with me (a). In the course of my struggles, I send letter after letter to heaven in the form of prayers, cries, pleading, calling out, agonizing; all of which seem to drive me to discouragement, despair, blasphemy, atheism, to the point of abandoning God and all heaven. Believe me, I summon up all my faith, hope, love, patience and courage and cry out with all my strength without receiving any perceptible response, or any assurance that my pleading is heard or that heaven is in any way concerned about me.

What is more, heaven seems to be made of bronze where I am concerned and the ministry of angels, usually bearing light and heavenly consolation, is withdrawn, whereas the ugly trapdoor of hell is raised to allow the evil spirits to come out and torment me and incite me to give up completely. At the same time, they dissuade people from helping me or showing me any compassion (b). It is as though free rein were given to the seven accursed demons: the seven deadly sins, and to the infernal wrath: the eleven passions (c), to overpower, crush, besiege and devour me.

How often this happens on that admirable but incomprehensible road of the spiritual life, where the progress we make is proportionate to the suffering we endure and stay with, in the absence of any feeling of consolation. To all outward appearances, heaven leaves us in the dark while at the same time strengthening us profoundly and imperceptibly.

This, Father (d), is the explanation of what you see happening in the case of our poor, but rich, Sister N... She writes, cries out for help, prays, pleads and distresses herself in her letters. I can see all this and yet heaven does its best not to allow us help her or if we succeed in offering her help, it does not reach either her or her companion. Nevertheless, both are advancing in grace, virtue and inner blessings to the extent that they are at the same time deprived of the tangible and outward help that is their due. Indeed I feel touched by their admirable patience, which heaven also recognises. May I ask you, Father, to share this letter with these two good ladies (e). They should be well able to draw some benefit from it.

Be assured of my deep, unflinching respect and gratitude for the great supernatural charity you exercise towards these two servants of Jesus Christ. I remain, Yours....

Notes

- a) In speaking of his struggles, which remind us of those of Job, Fr. Barre appears not to want to blame God for them. Maybe it is for this reason that he uses the word 'heaven' .
- b) This may be an indirect reference to the suffering and lack of understanding he experienced from members of his Order.
- c) The seven capital sins: pride, avarice, lust, envy, greed, anger and sloth. The eleven passions were classified at the time as follows: sensual pleasure, distress, greed, evasion, love, hate, hope, despair, audacity, fear and anger.
- d) This letter is addressed to a diocesan priest, who was director or confessor to the persons referred to in the text.
- e) The French term used here: "filles" , as used in the 17th. century, signified consecrated women who had not made vows but whose ministry was in schools or hospitals. It could be that this letter was addressed to Fr. Philibert, who is mentioned in the letter to Anne Le Teinturier (L 60). There are similarities in the contents of the two letters.

Letter 55

To a prayerful person

This seems more like an extract from a letter than a complete letter. The main point in it is that constant union with God is the source of all true fruitfulness.

Jesus !

Try not to let any hour of any day go by without casting a glance at Jesus, who is your One and Only, your All; a glance either of love, trust, pleading, wonder or surrender, irrespective of whether you feel totally dry or spiritually empty or full of supernatural affection. A loyal and generous spouse never complains, convinced that this apparent desertion by her All and her spouse serves but to test, increase and confirm her love.

Since love is fruitful, it is not satisfied with either leaves or flowers but tries to produce a steady abundance of fruits (a), fruit that is ripe and if possible, befitting and palatable to our King, Jesus, who longs only for souls that have been cleansed of their defilement.

Therefore, let us do our best to purify ourselves. That is the greatest pleasure we can offer Him and one of the greatest benefits to ourselves.

[Notes](#)

a) Rev 22: 2; Mk 4: 20.

Letter 56

To a prayerful person

By using a number of comparisons, Fr. Barre seeks to help this person understand that it is more important to trust and love God than to be continually harping back on one's weaknesses.

Jesus !

I implore you to be firm in abandoning all self searching. Be satisfied to feel poor and dejected in the presence of God, of the Virgin Mary and the whole heavenly court as well as before all people, without going into the depths of this utter sense of unworthiness and indignity. The darkness in which you find yourself is so muddled and intensified that you would not be able to find either a beginning, a middle or an end to it.

In your extreme poverty, present yourself before Our Lord Jesus Christ, His mother, the angels, saints and all the heavenly kingdom, just as the boldest and most arrogant beggars do on earth, even at the risk of being beaten with sticks, which are but great and extraordinary blessings in disguise. Notice how these bold and arrogant beggars behave towards the rich and upper strata of society from whom they are determined to get something. Thus you will learn that there is no existence on earth more peaceful, more free from perplexity and anxiety than that of these apparently wretched people, who would not exchange it for an empire (a).

So too in the spiritual and mystical life, there is no better or more valuable way of life, which is more blessed by God in time and in eternity, than the life of those deprived of all things, although most of the time they are not aware of it.

Go then at once to challenge that young Lady (b) in the village who always carries a mirror in her pocket to admire herself fifty times a day (c). By that I mean that she thinks too often, and to no purpose, about her deprivations, trials and sense of worthlessness, and not bearing the sight of her own inner state, as she sees it, she begins to worry and get distressed and moody. Is that the attitude a poor beggar should have in the presence of Jesus Christ and His court ? Is it not rather the result of a hidden pride, unbearable to the saints, to want to appear beautiful and well-dressed in this dungeon of a world ? What can the inhabitants of heaven be saying as they watch out for us constantly ? Let us turn aside from all of this and be patient, taking no interest in ourselves and giving all our attention to those whom Jesus Christ has confided to our care.

At our death He will find us ready for Him or if we are not, He will make us so at that moment (d). He will remove our rags and what is despicable about us and we shall shine in glory like the angels. But I would like to emphasise that all this will happen on one condition only that we courageously work on the points I have outlined above.

In the forty four years I have dedicated to the spiritual life (e), I have found that to be the shortest, surest, noblest and most peaceful path to follow. Far from discouraging us, the sight of our wretchedness is a further encouragement to trust God still more. Should the thought of reproach or condemnation come into our minds, knowing that this is what we deserve in accordance with God's saving justice, we will enter more deeply into our nothingness and lowliness. We never give up trusting in God and surrender ourselves to Him for time and eternity.

Moreover, we should never complain of not receiving enough grace. No matter how little we think we have, we should consider it to be too much. We should be glad to see others being blessed spiritually as well as temporally, while we ourselves feel troubled and disregarded (f). Try to make these dispositions your own with the help of the grace that Jesus gives, in whom I remain, Yours....

Notes

- a) This is not a general reflection of the situation of the poor. It refers to people, who without ever doing any work, were very clever in knowing how to obtain money from the rich.
- b) A member of the nobility.
- c) This image expresses exaggerated preoccupation with self and one's external image.
- d) RR 10: parable of the leper; PM 10.
- e) The 44 years refers either to the time since he gave his life to God or since he started as a spiritual director. This would indicate that this letter was written towards the end of his life.
- f) MAP 205.

Letter 57

To a friend

This extract from a letter is an invitation to leave self behind and serve others, following the example of Jesus Christ.

Jesus !

I suggest that you take the focus off yourself in two ways that would be very pleasing to God. Firstly, in times of misfortune, forget about yourself and willingly embrace the cross, suffering and opposition. Secondly, in times of prosperity, leave the narrow confines of self-love and devote yourself to the salvation of others. This will result in a great bursting forth of all your gifts for the benefit of others.

But we must continue to keep before our eyes our own lowliness and God's greatness. The more aware we become of our lowliness, the easier it will be to draw close to the cross. Those who are deeply convinced of their extreme need and the tremendous efforts they have to make, which is like an experience of hell for them, do not find the cross painful or difficult any more. They are constantly striving to work along these lines and, when compared with the state they are in, do not find anything too difficult. Besides, in considering the infinite majesty of God who, great as He is, desires to give Himself to us (a), we become more aware of His great love which penetrates our hearts and enkindles love for our neighbour. This love leads us to do whatever we can, to give whatever we can and to undertake whatever we can for the good of the other, without any distinction while forgetting our own concerns.

Notes

a) SR 1: 2

Letter 58

To a friend

Some suggestions to help put on the mind of Jesus:

- . entering into one's nothingness as fully as possible;
- . allowing one's whole being to rise again through the power of God;
- . an ardent desire to bring others to God;
- . a continual return to one's nothingness.

Jesus !

There are four important principles which you must always bear in mind in order to become more like Jesus.

Firstly, there is the moral, mystical and even physical self-emptying of the whole of your being, power and all your actions, as though you no longer even existed.

Secondly, there is the recovery of your resources and spent energy, since you must get back your whole being, power and activity, not in the former proprietary fashion but through the Spirit of God who not only accompanies you but dwells within and takes possession of you (a). The greater your self-emptying and the more faithful your co-operation with God's action (b) have been, the greater and purer this kind of resurrection will be.

Thirdly, there is the outpouring of this twofold spirit of self-emptying and rising again, which is directed to the sanctification of others, leading them to the holy, perfect and pure love of God. The will of God and His glory consist in loving Him completely and entirely and helping others to do the same (c).

Fourthly, there is the constant renewal of these principles, especially the first, staying there as in one's own personal and permanent home, leaving it only if God so desires, prompted by His inspiration and whenever He judges it to be for His glory.

Notes

- a) These terms evoke the action of the Spirit at the moment of creation and at the Annunciation.
- b) The action of God: the work He accomplishes in the mystery of each person and in all creation.
- c) Fr. Barre applies Phil 2: 5 - 11 to the movement of the spiritual life. "He emptied Himself, but God raised Him up, and every tongue proclaims that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father."

Letter 59

To a friend

Silence is indispensable if one desires to be fully open to God's grace, both inwardly and outwardly. One must be faithful to it in all situations.

Jesus !

We must keep God before our minds continually, be silent and speak only if necessary and always in God's presence. Our unending struggles and problems should make us feel ashamed and be resigned to God's holy will.

We must faithfully devote two hours per day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, to cultivating silence. This will help us become more sensitive to God's presence and more open to His inspirations and divine action within us. If we have to speak during this time, we should do so quietly and with great recollection, recalling that we are in God's presence.

This silence of the tongue will spread imperceptibly to all our inner senses and will then become a deep inner silence, freeing us from inordinate passions, desires and worldly ambitions. Eventually we will reach a much deeper inner silence which will envelope and free the understanding, will and memory, giving us a wonderful sense of peace, enabling us to hear the voice of God and surrender ourselves to His action within us, when and as He desires, ready to receive whatever he may be pleased to send us. All this will come about with the help of His grace, to which we do our best to be faithful. "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready" (a); ready, according to St. Bernard, to accept prosperity, adversity or anything.

We must keep working patiently at the development of this deep inner silence. In imitation of the valiant woman (b) and with the desire to become a worthy spouse of Jesus, we should have a preference for aridity, difficulties and desolation rather than love, affection and consolations which tend to satisfy us emotionally, in spite of being supernatural. We must persevere throughout our life, never giving up any of our practices, inwardly or outwardly, no matter what temptations, trials or obstacles may arise.

We must never omit the practice of the presence of God, God beholding us and we beholding God. We must work hard at acquiring this contemplative attitude which is the basis of the whole spiritual life.

I know that you understand very well all that I have said, but understanding is not enough. It has to be put into practice. Let us work while we have time; eternity will be long enough for rest.

Notes

- a) Ps 56: 8.
- b) Prov 31: 9 - 31.

Letter 61

To a Sister of the Institute

Paris, 25th May 1686.

This is one of Fr. Barre's last letters. Too weak to write it himself, he dictated it and then signed it six days before he died. He talks about his desires concerning the next spiritual director for the Institute. He reminds the Sister to whom he is writing that one of the most important characteristics essential to the Institute is: total abandonment to God.

Jesus !

My dearly beloved Sister, as you know I have been very ill for a long time, so I have had to ask someone to write my reply to your letter.

You wish to know if I have given thought to my successor as spiritual director of the Institute (a), or rather the Institute of the Holy Infant Jesus. I am praying daily to the Lord for this intention.

Some years ago, the Rouen administrators (b) were enquiring about this matter and begged me to say which of our Fathers I would consider most able and suitable to guide the Institute. I had to give the names of several of those I thought best suited. I hope that these upright gentlemen, in cooperation with the spiritual director, will discuss and decide together what is best for the Institute and the progress of all concerned. I hope that Dacville and Epinay will continue to give the same support they have been giving up to the present, following the example of their fathers' devotedness in this good cause.

You must all pray for this intention now, placing yourselves under the care of Divine Providence. With regard to your desire to be enrolled in the cord of St. Francis of Paola (c), I willingly give my consent to you and your companions, since all four of you have been asking for it for some time.

If God gives me back my health, I will reply to the other questions you put to me regarding your spiritual life.

My dear Sister, whatever happens be always at peace and trust in God; what you will experience will be in proportion to your faith, your hope and your love, and even more abundantly than that. Please accept all this as coming to you from Jesus rather than from me, while I continue to be interested in and committed to your sanctification so that others may also be sanctified through the grace that comes from Jesus.

Nicolas Barre,

Religious Minim, even though unworthy.

Notes

a) FM 5.

b) SR 14; SA 5,6; FM 2,6,7. These were lay people who had come to appreciate the importance of Fr. Barre's work and its spirit.. Their role is outlined in Sr 14. We do not know anything about the Paris administrators. There is no reference to them in the documents.

c) The cord of St. Francis of Paola was a belt made of black wool, with three knots in it. It was worn by the Minim tertiaries.

Letter 62

To a Sister of the Institute (a)

This letter is written to a Sister who was teaching in a school in the country. She was experiencing some difficulties and felt tempted again to consider leaving the Institute. Fr. Barre encourages her to face up to her responsibilities.

My dearly beloved Sister Marie Catherine, when are you really going to do what you have promised so many times, before the whole company of heaven, that is, to give yourself totally and forever to Our Lord Jesus Christ and to His blessed Mother, so that God's will may be done in your life ? Are you not aware of the extent to which you are offending Him in yielding to unhappiness and dissatisfaction in finding yourself assigned to one of His country schools (b) ? Have you not been created for Jesus and for Him alone ? Did he not come into the world for you ? He came to save you, but on condition you return to your former dispositions and, if possible, give yourself over to Him totally, knowing only Him, desiring only to be among the least and the servant of all (c).

All this resistance (d) is coming from your being so headstrong, your desire to be in control and your odious self-love, which makes you want to be with Jesus, but in such a way that He may take responsibility for your insignificant and illusory salvation as if it belonged to you by right. This will turn you away from Jesus completely and from being with Him on His terms. If you can let go to Him, you will be able to conquer your disordered nature and devote yourself honourably and supernaturally to the greater concerns and desires of Jesus.

Open your eyes then, if you can, and even if you still have difficulty in seeing the point clearly, allow yourself to be guided blindly by those to whom He has confided you more especially. When I wanted to send you away (e), you resisted it and, facing up to your unhappy situation and repenting, you caused me to change my mind, even though I had firmly decided that you should leave because of your headstrong, domineering and self-willed nature. Then my confidence in you was renewed when I saw the way in which you turned back to Jesus in humility, kindness, generosity and obedience and observed the way God transformed you in our Minim chapel. I call this chapel "the Redemption of all" because of the only picture (f) over the altar, which shows Jesus dying on the cross for all time in the company of His mother, St. John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalen, the female apostle (g).

Now that you are again being troubled by your disordered nature, you are asking to leave, of your own accord this time. You have never wanted this before, having been willing to accept patiently whatever obstacles came your way as well as whatever God would have wanted for you, in spite of yourself. Of your own accord, you now want to leave the schools or Jesus rather, who is more fully present in the country and among the poor than in the towns and among the rich (h). You are choosing Adam instead of Jesus (i).

You do not want to stay where you are. You would prefer to be cast aside by Jesus by leaving the place whether or not I agree. What a situation to be in ! Do you want it to be said that having been and continuing to be the recipient of so many graces every day; graces which you are often not even aware of or which you have not even asked for; graces that were given to you as if you had been an animal without any intelligence. Yet, after all that, you can walk off unashamedly. If you do that, you will certainly be deserving of much suffering.

Since through the grace of God I am committed to work for the salvation of souls, my primary concern is for those of our Sisters who teach in the country schools as they are the principal servants of Jesus (j). It is not possible for me or for any of the administrators or Sisters, however zealous, to go further afield in search of souls and not do something in this particular situation. How can we allow something like this to happen? Are you not one of the first of these Sisters about whom, despite your faults, Jesus wishes us to be concerned?

Let us suppose that God has touched you in some way and brought back by means of the truth that I have spoken, allowing your disordered nature to be subdued, would you then accept not only a school but a seminary at Vaucouleur (k) or any other place designated by Mr. Bonnaire (l). It is Mr Marthe (l) and you in particular who introduced me to this servant of Jesus. He zealously desires the glory of God and is very well able to recruit and form the men and women called to be members of the Institute, without any desire to dominate or control. He will be ready to listen to you and will do all he can to make you happy. You must do your best to follow the advice I have given, taking responsibility for your own life in accordance with God's desires for you, which He appears to be manifesting through me and others involved. We shall all now pray very specially that this may and will happen for you. Therefore seek to do what God wants of you. This obedience will sustain, strengthen and guide you and give you hope, even when at a human level all appears to be lost and ruined; you can believe me.. (m).

Notes

- a) This is a rough handwritten copy of a letter found in the Archives of the Sisters of Providence of Rouen. It appears to have been written by a Sister whose knowledge of language and of spelling was limited. Some parts which were impossible to decipher have been omitted.
- b) TS 17, 18, 19, 20.
- c) MIS 4
- d) Resistance to what the superiors would have wanted.
- e) cf. FS; the commitment made by the first Sisters was not definitive. It depended very much on their fidelity to the apostolic commitment in total abandonment to Divine Providence. Sr. Marie Catherine was about to be dismissed at this stage.
- f) The fact that this was the only picture may indicate the simplicity of decoration in the Minim chapel.
- g) This reference to a female apostle is rather unusual for the time. Fr. Barre is underlining the importance of the apostolic vocation of women in the Institute which he founded, as well as the call to

a sinner to become an apostle. This is the example being presented to Marie Catherine.

h) At this time in history, there was much more poverty in the country than in the towns, because of the wars, poor harvest and taxes.

i) RR 4, 1Cor 15: 22. Rom 5: 12.

j) L 45.

k) Voucouleur is a small town in the East of France.

l) Mr Bonnaire and Mr Marthe were either parish priests or lay helpers.

m) She is being encouraged to persevere in the Institute, cf. FM 13.

Letter 63

To a Sister in Rheims (a)

20th. February 1676.

This is a call to live in peace and serenity.

Jesus !

My dearly beloved Mother (b), I have received all your letters. It would have been wrong for me to reply to you much and all as you desired it. If you reflect well on what I have said, it should help to alleviate your doubts and suffering. You will find another letter enclosed which is open for you to read. When you have read it, I rely on you to forward it as soon as possible, having closed and sealed it appropriately so that nobody would know (c).

I am happy that you are being treated so firmly. I am sure you have difficulty believing the extent to which your mind is filled with pride and presumption and your heart with self-love. You must surrender to everything as calmly as you can despite the impression you have that God is asking the opposite of you.

The person who advised you not to take a vow, as was being required of you, was very wise; you must hold to that (d). You must also be prepared to accept being refused absolution and Communion as well as the contempt you may experience (e). God allows you to be tested in this way and it will never last very long. If you are not impatiently seeking to shake off all that you have been unjustly blamed for, you will be exonerated by degrees; it is your great anxiety which will prevent this happening (f).

You need much more patience, humility and abandonment in regard to God's true and eternal will. You also need much more self-forgetfulness in order to stop complaining to God, as you are wont to do in your over-eagerness. I have already mentioned to you in a previous letter that your misconception does not have anything to do with what is basic to salvation and will not prevent you being saved. It concerns rather the fulness of salvation from which very few are exempt. It is a well-known fact that self-love is as much part of us as the marrow of our bones (g). This is true for everyone without exception. It can also take possession of our minds.

It would be better for you to continue in the house as you are and if someone else is asked to replace you, so much the better for you and for the house. However do not have any strong desires one way or the other.

I have not been able to respond to your request (h).., being too busy at present (i).

I remain always by the grace of Jesus and in Jesus, Yours.....Nicolas Barre, Religious Minim, though unworthy.

Notes

- a) This is a rough copy of a letter kept in the archives of the Sisters of the Infant Jesus in Rheims. It may have been addressed to Francoise Duval who went to Rheims on the 27th December 1670. She left when the Rheims Sisters decided to take vows.
- b) This is the only known place where Fr. Barre addresses a Sister of the Institute as Mother. It therefore leaves us with a doubt as to the identity of the person to whom the letter is written.
- c) Fr. Barre is making sure the Sister realises he is enclosing a letter for another.
- d) If it is true that this letter is addressed to Francoise Duval, it cannot refer to the taking of vows in the community in Rheims in 1676. Nicolas Roland was still alive at this time, he died in 1678. Vows were taken for the first time in 1683 when another Sister was in charge of the community. However, they had been encouraged to take private vows prior to that.
- e) The Sister's confessor had not allowed her receive frequent Communion and had even refused her absolution. This was not uncommon at the time. Fr. Barre suggests that the Sister accept this willingly, humbly and calmly. Extreme over-eagerness to live in union with God can be an obstacle to this union.
- f) This expression was often used by Fr. Barre, e.g. L 6, 7, 36.
- h) It is difficult to decipher the original here. It could refer to the name of a person whom Fr. Barre is not now able to send.
- i) The meaning is not clear here. It could be that Fr. Barre is not able to send the Sister he had promised, or that the Sister in question is not free to be sent now.

