

On Interior Formation¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Nemours, Tuesday, November 6, 1866

[...]

My Sisters, the subject of this conference is interior formation. This is not exterior formation that consists in the virtue of respect towards God, charity for our neighbor, and support for oneself. I will not talk about that. I want to talk about interior formation.

Interior formation for adoration consists in learning to think, to speak, and converse with our Lord. All formation consists in this, to teach children to think rightly, and to speak properly. They must choose their words with a certain tact, and then they must learn to converse and be able to follow a conversation. Children finish conversations quickly, because after a few words they say: I don't know any more. Ah! How delightful! Poor children, they don't know any more; they've said it all. I don't know any more. How lovely!

I said that we must learn to think properly. Each vocation has its own way of thinking, according to the purpose of its life, and its language. Those who do not have a very clear vocation do little thinking, sometimes none at all. In the sciences, one without a definite goal cannot succeed. Similarly a Christian who does not have a definite vision cannot grow. Everything that makes us follow the law of God... for example, a Christian who is a mere Christian does not think as a religious; he limits himself to the law. Devout persons who are developing their piety will begin to think because they have a definite goal, but in their exercises, in their actions, and in their thoughts, whatever they do is often natural. They think of the virtue they want in a practical way. However, you will rarely find a religious thought in those persons.

It often happens that pious persons no longer make a habit of thinking with a religious and divine thought in mind because their virtue becomes a circle that never changes. In this way, they live a devout life, but their heart is not stirred, not outgoing. Their learning, like their grace, does not go any further. Let me tell you this is not where you belong, for you would become mere pious persons with a very limited piety. Those persons are like a tiny stream flowing in a narrow river-bed, without searching for new areas to expand. Your thoughts must not be drawn merely from your actions or practices. You would then be devout persons, but not religious. You must aspire to constant growth, to what is new. Genuine religious are persons who always aspire for new perfection.

Now, our topic is divided into two: religious life as means, and religious life as end.

The first provides means in a more perfect way than in the world, because through vows and constant obedience, the religious is not concerned only with practicing virtue, but also with living the evangelical life of our Lord. He does not have a limited circle² of pious exercises. This is what we find in all religious communities whose goal is their own perfection. If a religious does not place himself in the spirit of the gospel, in the love of our Lord, in spite of having a great vocation, he will end up in routine – even more seriously than persons of the world. Religious who don't have a great love of God may well end up by falling into religious routine. It is more difficult to lead a religious stuck in routine to go higher, than to lead a pious person of the world, because the religious says, I'm in the way to perfection; while the person in the world says simply: I'm searching.

¹ Number 606. *Sur l'éducation intérieure.*

² This contrasts with the little circle of virtue of pious persons mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

I assure you that there are many religious who don't think about loving the religion of the gospel, and who end by not even thinking about the presence of God. I assure you, and I sincerely mean what I say, How unfortunate! I have discovered that such pious, even very pious persons are no longer reflecting and no longer have a recollected life. They are surprised; they do not think of going any higher because they tell themselves: I'm in the state of perfection. They end up acting like small stockholders who no longer work. And I would say – my Sisters, I don't want to shock you! – that these persons would have done better to serve God by remaining in the world, than enter into a mixed religious life. Why? Because by their vows they wrapped themselves with a leaden mantle. They are good workers but not religious. I met many who complained to me saying, I was more recollected in the world; it seemed that I belonged more to God. I didn't say "yes" to them – I was not in a position to do so – but that did not prevent me from thinking that it was true.

So you are religious, never enter into a mixed vocation. What amazes me is that superiors of active vocations use their religious to plough the fields and neglect their interior life. They are not concerned about that. As a result, one that had the gift of prayer upon entering the community loses it little by little, no longer knows how to pray. One can make progress only insofar as taught to speak with God, getting sufficient interior nourishment. Let me tell you that many religious are merely externally pious because they can appreciate and become attached only to exterior actions, but they don't develop their interior life. They lose sight of it and can no longer be directed. A reflective person can be placed anywhere, for she is afraid of nothing. Sometimes I ask such persons, Do you think of God? – Not too much. I have to think about thinking of Him, otherwise I don't think about Him. How unfortunate! When told that even in the Society of the Blessed Sacrament there are some who work a lot, I say [?] ...

I'm amazed that so many people stay in religious life when they have no vocation. This is the greatest misfortune. It's also unfortunate when the superior thinks only of external things. It would be better to take care of cows. These superiors will have a strict accounting to render before God; they are merely creating bodies without souls.

My good Daughters, your vocation binds you to an interior life, a life of intimacy. I know full well that you can develop the habit of living an active and personal life in the midst of all the graces of the Eucharistic life. This is a sad and unfortunate talent! You will avoid this trap by forming the habit of proper thinking. **Your thoughts must have a particular trait; they must be for our Lord, by our Lord, and with our Lord in the most Blessed Sacrament.** Ultimately you ought to think of nothing else but the Holy Eucharist. This is your particular grace. It is your service and need to draw all your thoughts in that direction. How else can you adore in spirit and in truth? (cf. Jn 4:24) You will become but a shell. Everything must lead you to the feet of the Blessed Sacrament. The Blessed Sacrament will be the unique thought of your life, you will see nothing else. I'm not sure whether we succeeded, but this is the heart of the rule we have given you. It centers entirely on the Blessed Sacrament. Were it anything else, it ought to be destroyed.

My good Daughters, we need unity in our life. You must develop the habit of thinking only about the Blessed Sacrament. You might say, I cannot always be thinking about the Holy Eucharist. What do you mean by thinking about the Eucharist? – **I mean our joy when we have the feasts of our Lord, and it is the feast of the Eucharist in all the feasts, his feast is every day.** Can't you see that we must clothe all our actions with the color of the Eucharist, and take our Lord – past and present – and continue his life of love in the Eucharist? In fact, we celebrate in the Eucharist the permanent love of our Lord until the end of the world. This thought must prevail. How sad it would be if you did not like to think about the Eucharist for and in everything. All our thoughts must return there. Besides, you must love our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament with a royal love, a final love, loving all the rest only for our Lord in the Eucharist.

Thought follows love. If you love our Lord you will think of him spontaneously, without any effort. Then, what happens? This knowledge is better than all books; **you have the master of all the books,**

our Lord who is life. The purpose of books is to awaken in us the thought of the Eucharist initially. Do not stop there. How can those authors satisfy you? Most of them are not religious. Besides they don't know your vocation. While they set you on the way, it is up to you to find our Lord. To anyone who has not reached the point of having an overriding Eucharistic thought, I say, You don't know your profession. How is it that you don't know how to think in our Lord; what are you doing? You don't love our Lord, for, if you loved him, you would know how to think about him! That's clear! – But I think about him very little. – Then, you love him little. – But, I never think of him. – Oh! Then I must say that you don't love him. – How unhappy such a heart must be.

[...]

When I meet a traveler, I ask about his language. Language reveals a person's way of thinking. Politeness requires that conversation enter into this person's area of knowledge. This is what gives pleasure. Upon meeting a Sister, **one will know that she loves our Lord when she speaks about him.** Where is her love centered, in what mystery? If she prefers the passion, enter into this topic. Since this is her center, she will never run out of words in talking about it. What does this lead to? Our sisters must learn to think of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, not in paradise. Think of him where he actually resides. You may also think of all the mysteries of our Lord. Present among us, our Lord shares with us all the rays of his life. If he sends you to the north, reflect on his birth; to the south, think of Nazareth; to sunset, see yourself on Calvary; and at twilight, accompany him to the tomb. Just go where the Lord sends you.

My poor Daughters, you must come to learn how to converse with our Lord. If you became blind, and could no longer read, what would you do? If you lost your memory, a book would be useless for you. But if you still know how to think, then, at any time, you will always have something to say. That's why, when you go to adore, do not use a book. Use your own thoughts, and tell your divine master to teach you, and proceed. Be sure that an adoration made with your own weaknesses, with all your faults, is worth more than all the books in the world, because it comes from you. Prayer books are excellent to set us on our way, or at a time of great dryness, great aridity, because that is an extraordinary state. But in ordinary times, we don't need them. Consequently, if you know how to think, and you borrow in a book the ideas of someone whom you don't know, who does not have the grace that you have, that makes no sense. I know very well why we take a book. It is because we lack the courage to accept times of aridity and dryness.

Some of my religious are always in a hurry to take up a book. Unfortunate souls! They behave like parrots! The young ones actually reflect on some thought in order to build it into a sermon. I warn them that this is like approaching someone and saying: I would like to speak to you like Bossuet, but since I cannot do so very well I will merely read from his writings. As a result, you might be sent to Bicêtre³. Why is it that God frequently clouds our thinking? We tend to be overly talkative. We want to talk to him, but our Lord shuts down our mind and tells us to enter into the heart. One still insists, my God, I want to tell you that I love you very much. Then the heart dries up like kindling wood. If, however, I say, my God, I offer you my poverty, my dryness, all that I am. God will then be pleased and respond with love, saying, here is one who loves me more than feelings, more than my graces. My Sisters, this is how you must behave.

When you read, keep only the thoughts that help you; set aside the others. You must not become the slave of any thought, or any book – not at all. Learn to think, have the courage to think, not only at the prie-dieu, but in your work and in your rooms. Oh! Nothing is so pleasant as to sit down and look at the sky or at the Blessed Sacrament. You can dream of God, and compose a divine love story with God. Yes, dream of God and enjoy this scene out of love for him. In this representation of God, a well-led soul lifts itself to God restfully because it is thinking. Love this thought because grace forms it. Let it grow in the heart that wants to go to God, and to live in contemplation. Become adorers who think, not silly women who depend on books. Develop a Eucharistic way of thinking. This is not

³ That is, to an asylum.

tiring. There are some in our Society who do this, but it can be done only by loving and persevering in love. If you search for God, you will rejoice upon finding him. This is my wish for you.

There is a principle that says that you will always find words to express a clear thought, They say that we know what we understand. **Therefore, my poor Sisters, you will speak clearly to God. You will tell him your inner feelings; your adorations will then always be new, because your thoughts will be new, you will always be new.** Let this be your goal. This is what it means to live; indeed all the rest is death to self. Then there will be happy moments, beautiful moments because you are always in something new. One must love the Lord through the truth, love him through charity, and through union with God. That's the grace that I wish for you.



Points for reflection:

This conference sets the foundations for religious life and for the interior life; it determines the spiritual character of our Eucharistic life and of prayer. What strikes you the most?