

LETTERS OF SAINT BRUNO

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I. Letter to his friend Raoul

TO MY ESTEEMED FRIEND RAOUL, Dean of the Cathedral Chapter at Rheims, I, Bruno, send my greetings, as all my heartfelt affection toward you bids me.

The loyalty you have shown during our long and mellowed friendship is all the more beautiful and remarkable in that it is only too rarely found. For, even though a great distance and many years lie between us, your kindly sentiments have always been with me. This is certainly clear enough from your wonderful letters, in which you have professed your friendship over and over again, and from the many other indications you have given of it, including the favors you have so generously shown, both to me, and to brother Bernard on my account. For all this, I give you my thanks, dear friend, not in a way that could ever be commensurate with what you deserve of me, but springing, at least, from the deepest source of sincere love.

Some time ago I have sent a messenger with a letter to you, who had proved reliable on other occasions. However, since he has not yet returned, I thought it best to send you one of the brethren. He can give you a fuller account of how things are here by word of mouth than I could ever do with pen and ink.

I assure you, first of all, that my health is good, thinking that the news will not be unwelcome to you. I wish that I could say the same for my soul! The external situation is as satisfactory as could be desired; but I stand as a beggar before the mercy of God, praying that he will heal all the infirmities of my soul, and fulfill all my desires with his bounty.

I am living in the wilderness of Calabria, far removed from all habitation. There are some brethren here with me, some of whom are very well educated, and they are keeping assiduous watch for their Lord, so as to open to him at once when he knocks. I could never even begin to tell you how charming and pleasant it is. The temperatures are mild, and the air healthful; a broad plain, delightful to behold, stretches between the mountains along their entire length, bursting with fragrant meadows and flowery fields. One could hardly describe the impression made by the gently rolling hills on all sides, with their cool and shady glens tucked away, and such an abundance of refreshing springs, brooks, and streams. Besides all this, there are verdant gardens, and all sorts of fruit-bearing trees.

Yet why dwell on such things as these? The man of true insight has other delights, far more useful and attractive, because divine. It is true, though, that our rather feeble nature is renewed and finds new life in such perspectives, wearied by its spiritual pursuits and austere mode of life. It is like a bow, which soon wears out and runs the risk of becoming useless, if it is kept continually taut.

In any case, what benefits and divine exultation the silence and solitude of the desert hold in store for those who love it, only those who have experienced it can know. For here strong men can enter into themselves and remain there as much as they like, diligently cultivating the

seeds of virtue, and eating the fruits of Paradise with joy. Here, they can acquire the eye that wounds the Bridegroom with love by the clearness of its gaze, and whose purity allows them to see God Himself. Here they can observe a busy leisure, and rest in quiet activity. Here also, God crowns His athletes for their stern struggle with the hoped-for reward: a peace unknown to the world, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Such a way of life is exemplified by Rachel, who was preferred by Jacob for her beauty, even though she bore fewer children than Leah, with her less penetrating eyes. Contemplation, to be sure, has fewer offspring than does action, and yet Joseph and Benjamin were the favorites of their father. This life is the best part chosen by Mary, never to be taken away from her. It is also that extraordinarily beautiful Shunammite, the only one in Israel able to take care of David and keep him warm in his old age. I could only wish, brother, that you, too, had such an exclusive love for her, so that, lost in her embrace, you burned with divine love! If only a love like this would take possession of you! Immediately, all the glory of the world would seem like so much dirt to you, whatever the smooth words and false attractions she offered to deceive you. Wealth, and its attendant anxieties, you would cast off without a thought as a burden to the freedom of the spirit. You would want no more of pleasure either, harmful as it is to both body and soul.

You know very well who it is that says to us, “He who loves the world, and the things in the world, such as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and ambition, does not have the love of the Father abiding in him”; also “Friendship with the world is enmity with God.” What could be so evil and destructive, then, so unfortunate, or so much the mark of a crazed and headstrong spirit, as to put yourself at odds with the One Whose power you cannot resist, and Whose righteous vengeance you could never hope to escape? Surely we are not stronger than He! Surely you do not think He will leave unpunished in the end all the affronts and contempt He receives, merely because His patient solicitude now incites us to repentance! For what could be more perverted, more reckless and contrary to nature and right order, than to love the creature more than the creator, what passes away more than what lasts forever, or to seek rather the goods of earth than those of heaven?

So, what do you think ought to be done, dear friend? What else, but to trust in the exhortation of God Himself, and to believe in the Truth which cannot deceive? For, He calls out to everyone, saying, “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Is it not, after all a most ridiculous and fruitless labor to be swollen with lust, continually to be tortured with anxiety and worry, fear and sorrow, for the objects of your passion? Is there any heavier burden than to have one’s spirit thus cast down into the abyss from the sublime peak of its natural dignity — the veritable quintessence of right order gone awry? Flee, my brother, from these unending miseries and disturbances; leave the raging storms of this world for the secure and quiet harbor of the port.

For you know very well what Wisdom in Person has to say to us: “Whoever does not renounce all that he has, cannot be My disciple.” Who cannot perceive what a beautiful thing it is, how beneficial, and how delightful besides, to remain in the school of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there to learn that divine philosophy which alone shows the way to true happiness?

So, you must consider the facts very honestly: if the love of God does not succeed in attracting you, nor considerations of self-interest spur you on in the face of such enormous rewards, at least dire necessity and the fear of chastisement ought to compel you to move in this direction. For you know the promise that binds you, and to whom it was made. It is none other than the omnipotent and awesome One to Whom you consecrated yourself as a pleasing

and wholly acceptable offering. To Him it is not permissible to lie, nor would it do any good, besides; for He does not let Himself be mocked with impunity.

You remember, after all, the time that you and I, and Fulk One-eye, were together in the little garden adjoining Adam's house, where I was staying at the time. We had been discussing for some while, as I recall, the false attractions and ephemeral riches of this present life, and comparing them with the joys of eternal glory. As a result, we were inflamed with divine love, and we promised, determined and vowed to abandon the fleeting shadows of this world at the earliest opportunity, and lay hold of the eternal by taking the monastic habit. We would, indeed, have done so forthwith; but Fulk went off to Rome, and we postponed our resolution in the expectation of his return. He was delayed, however, and other things got in the way as well, so that, in the end, fervor vanished, and resolve grew cold.

So, what is left, dear friend, but to absolve yourself as quickly as possible from the obligations of such a debt? Otherwise, you run the risk of incurring the wrath of the All-powerful for such serious and longstanding deception, not to mention the frightful torments that are its consequence. What potentate, after all, of this world would ever leave himself unavenged if he were cheated by any of his subjects of a promised gift, especially if he considered it to be of outstanding value? So, never mind me; simply listen to the Psalmist, or rather to the Holy Spirit, who declares: "Make your vows to the Lord your God, and perform them; let all around Him bring gifts to Him Who is to be feared, Who cuts off the spirit of princes, Who is terrible to the kings of the earth." It is the voice of the Lord that you hear, the voice of your God, the One Who is to be feared, Who cuts off the spirit of princes, Who is terrible to the kings of the earth! For what reason does the Spirit of God make such a point of this, if not to prod you into acquitting yourself of your vow? Why do you find it burdensome, since it entails no sacrifice or reduction of your good, and heaps up benefits rather for yourself than for the One Who receives what you pay?

Do not let the deceptive lure of riches hold you back, since they cannot remedy the real poverty of our soul; nor let your position detain you, since you cannot occupy it without notable jeopardy to the spiritual life. For, it would be repugnant and wicked indeed, if I may say so, to convert to your own use the goods of another, since you are, in fact, their steward, and not their proprietor. In addition, if you should become desirous of vaunting your wealth in empty show, and keep a large retinue for this purpose, will it not be necessary, in some way, to snatch from one person what you bestow with great largess on someone else? Your own resources, after all, would not suffice. Yet, such a procedure would be neither generous nor to good effect; for nothing can be considered generous which is not at the same time just.

You must also be careful not to be allured away from the demands of divine love in your attention to the needs of the Archbishop. He has great confidence in your counsel, and relies heavily on it; but it is not always an easy matter to give advice that is both useful and just. It is rather divine love which proves itself the more useful, precisely to the extent that it is more in accord with right reason. For, what could be beneficial and right, so fitting, and connatural to human nature, as to love the Good? Yet, what other good can compare with God? Indeed, what other good is there besides God? Whence it comes that the soul that has attained some degree of holiness, and has experienced in some small measure the incomparable loveliness, beauty, and splendor of this Good, is set on fire with love, and cries out: "My soul is thirsting for God, the God of my life; when shall I enter and see the Face of God?"

My sincere hope, brother, is that you will not spurn the counsel of a friend, nor turn a deaf ear to the words the Holy Spirit speaks within. As my very close friend, I hope you will grant these desires of mine, and put an end to my long vigil in your regard. Otherwise, I will continue to be tortured with solicitude, anxiety, and fear for you. God forbid that you should

die before acquitting yourself of your vow; for, in that case, you would leave me to pine away with unremitting sorrow, without ever any hope of consolation.

My request, therefore, is that you will agree to go on pilgrimage to Saint Nicholas, and from there make your way to us. Thus, you will be able to see the one who loves you as no one else, and we will be able to speak face to face about our religious life, and how things are going, and whatever else might be a matter of common interest. I trust in the Lord that you will not regret any trouble involved in such a journey.

This letter is not as succinct as it ordinarily ought to be; but that is only because I do not have the joy of your presence. As a result, I desired to prolong our conversation, at least in writing, and thus have the pleasure of your company.

So brother, stay in good health. Accept my ardent wish that you will take my words very much to heart. P. S. Would you send us the Life of Saint Remigius? It is impossible to obtain it here.

Farewell.

II. Letter to his sons of Chartreuse

To MY BROTHERS whom I love in Christ above everything else, greetings from your brother, Bruno. Now that I have heard from our dear brother Landuin a detailed and moving account of how firm you are in your resolve to follow a path of life so commendable and in accord with right reason, and have learned of your ardent love and unflagging zeal for all that pertains to moral rectitude and the fullness of Christian maturity, my spirit rejoices in the Lord. I truly exult, and am swept away by my impulse to praise and thanksgiving; yet, at the same time, I bitterly lament. I rejoice, as is only right, over the ripening fruit of your virtues; but I blush, and bemoan my own condition, since I wallow so listless and inactive in the filth of my sins.

Rejoice, therefore, my beloved brothers, over the lot of overflowing happiness that has fallen to you, and for the grace of God that you have received in such abundance. Rejoice that you have succeeded in escaping the countless dangers and shipwrecks of this storm-tossed world, and have reached a quiet anchorage in the security of a hidden harbor. Many would like to join you, and many there are also who make a considerable effort to do so, but fail in their attempt. What is more, many are shut out even after having attained it, since it was not in the plan of God to give them this grace.

Therefore, my brothers, count it a certitude, proven time and time again: whoever has once experienced such an enviable good, and subsequently lost it for whatever reasons, will grieve over his loss to the end of his days, if he has any regard or concern for the salvation of his soul.

As regards you lay monks, brothers so close to my heart, I have only this to say: My soul glorifies the Lord, since I can perceive the glories of His mercy toward you from the account of your beloved father and Prior, who boasts a great deal about you and rejoices over you. I share in this joy, since God in His power never ceases to inscribe on your hearts, however little education you may have, not only love, but understanding, of His holy law. For you show by your lives what it is you really love, and what you know. That is to say, when you are careful and zealous to observe a genuine obedience, conceived not only as the carrying out of God's commands, but as the original key to the spiritual life and its final stamp of authenticity, demanding as it does deep humility and outstanding patience, as well as sincere love for the Lord and our brothers, then it is clear that you are gathering with relish no less than the most delectable and life-giving fruits of Holy Scripture.

So, my brothers, abide in that which you have attained, and avoid like the plague that baneful crowd of would-be monks who in reality are as empty as can be, peddling their writings, and speaking in hushed tones about things they neither cherish nor understand, but rather contradict by their words and actions. They are lazy, and wander from place to place, slandering all those who are conscientious and dedicated, and imagining themselves worthy of praise if they blacken the name of those who really are. To them, anything resembling discipline or obedience is loathsome.

As for our brother Landuin, I had intended to keep him here on account of his rather serious and recurrent illnesses; but he would have none of it, claiming that there could be nothing worthwhile for him, no health or joy nor zest for life, apart from you. With repeated signs, and a veritable gushing fountain of tears for you, he laid before me how much you

mean to him, and the unadulterated affection he bears for you in the Lord. As a result, I have not wanted to force the issue, lest I cause grief either to him or to you, who are so dear to me for your maturity and excellence of spirit. Wherefore, my brothers, I am very serious in my request, at once humble and insistent, that you manifest by your deeds the love you bear in your heart for your Prior and beloved father by kindly and attentively providing him with everything he needs for the various requirements of his health. He may be unwilling to go along with what your loving solicitude may dictate, preferring to jeopardize his life and health rather than be found lacking in some point of external observance. After all, this is normally inadmissible, and he might blush to hold the first rank among you, and yet trail in these matters, fearing that some of you might become negligent or lukewarm on his account. Yet, I hardly think there is any danger of that; so, I hereby grant you the necessary authority to take my place in this particular, and respectfully compel him to accept whatever you accord him for his health.

As for me, brothers, I would have you know that the only desire I have after God, is to come and see you. As soon as I can, God willing, I will do just that.

Farewell!