PIERRE FAVRE THROUGH HIS LETTERS

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PIERRE FAVRE (1506–1546) WAS DECLARED a saint by Pope Francis in 2013. His spiritual diary or Memoriale has become well known since it was translated into a number of languages in the second half of the twentieth century. But a book containing all his letters in translation was published only in 2017. These letters serve to enrich our understanding of the saint and his life.

Favre was born in 1506 in Villaret in the Haute-Savoy, a hamlet, not even a village. In 1525 he went to Paris to study philosophy and theology. He moved into the Collège Sainte-Barbe, where he shared a room with Francis Xavier. In 1528 Ignatius of Loyola left Spain for Paris—alone and on foot—aiming to continue his studies. In 1529 he became the room-mate of Pierre Favre and Francis Xavier.

Favre, who was fourteen years younger than Ignatius, nevertheless became his tutor in philosophy. Ignatius was at that time 38 years old, and already had much personal spiritual experience as well as experience in directing others. Little by little the pupil became the spiritual director of his teacher. A deep friendship developed between them. Favre opened his heart to Ignatius, and Ignatius taught him how to interpret and manage his inner movements—especially his many scruples. With Ignatius’ guidance, Favre acquired the qualities to become a spiritual director himself; indeed, it emerges from his letters that he was much in demand as a director. Ignatius himself would say that, among the First Companions he gathered in Paris, Favre was the best giver of the Spiritual Exercises.

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1 The Memoriale was translated into French by Michel de Certeau (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1960); into German by Peter Henrici (Trier: Einsiedeln, 1963); into Italian by Giuseppe Mellinato (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1990); into Portuguese by Armando Cardoso (São Paulo: Loyola, 1995); and into English by Edmond C. Murphy and Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).


Pierre Favre, Apostle of the Spiritual Exercises

Favre did his first apostolic work in Parma, Italy, during 1539 and 1540. In one of his letters of that time he wrote to Ignatius, ‘I am giving the Exercises to two important men from this region. Two ladies from the nobility receive every Sunday the holy communion, as do more noble ladies. Most of them have done the Exercises with much fruit.’ To Francis Xavier and Pietro Codazzo, Ignatius’ secretary, he wrote:

Concerning the Exercises, there is nothing special to say, except that a great number are giving the Exercises—we don’t know how many. Everybody wants to do the Exercises, both men and women. And when a priest has done the Exercises, he starts by giving them to others.

Here are some other quotations from a letter to Ignatius and his secretary:

Parish priests give the Exercises to the faithful of their parish. When we came to Parma, we started by explaining the commandments. The improvements were so big thanks to men and women who had done the Exercises, and thanks to the teachers who had given the Exercises of the First Week to a great number of pupils .... All the priests who, after having done the Exercises, took the decision to live an honest life are persevering in their resolution.

Renewal and Healing of Divisions in Germany

In October 1540, Pope Paul III ordered Favre to accompany Doctor Ortiz, the ambassador of the Emperor Charles V, to Spain. But just as the journey started there came a message countermanding the order. Ortiz should represent the emperor at the Colloquy of Worms, a conference seeking theological reconciliation with the Lutherans. Favre arrived at Worms on 24 October. It was the first time he had confronted the divisions that the Reformation had brought about in Germany. In a first letter from Worms to Ignatius, Favre wrote:

I have an appointment for tomorrow with the dean of the city to start the Exercises. He was for many years vicar general and ecclesiastical inquisitor. He resigned because he did not see how to continue his pastoral ministry for people who are already spiritually dead ....

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4 Favre to Ignatius, 21 March 1540, MHSJ MF, 20. (The original Dutch version of this article made use of Pierre Emonet’s French translation of Favre’s letters.)
5 Favre to Xavier and Codazzo, 21 March 1540, MHSJ MF, 22.
6 Favre to Ignatius and Codazzo, 1 September 1540, MHSJ MF, 32–33; see The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, translated by Edmond C. Murphy and Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 319.
7 Favre to Ignatius, 27 December 1540, MHSJ MF, 46–47.
Some days later, we read:

In a former letter I wrote to you about this dean who is ‘acting bishop’ here in Worms, but who has resigned his pastoral mission because he doesn’t see how to exercise this mission in such a difficult time any more. He is doing the Exercises. He told me this afternoon that another two persons want to do the Exercises. The blind Doctor spoke today with another dean of the cathedral suggesting that he do the Exercises, to which he happily agreed.⁸

In another letter Favre rejoined: ‘My exercitant, the dean of Saint Martin, makes good improvements day after day, but he cannot wait to encourage other people from his circle of acquaintances to do the Exercises’.⁹

Favre’s opinion was that the official talks between Catholics and Protestants were going in the wrong direction. All sides hardened their own positions about theological issues, and no one really listened to anybody else. He thought another way should be found to engage with the Protestants. Favre wished to meet Melanchthon, a Lutheran-minded reformer, himself. However, as this was not the mission he had been given, it did not happen. Favre was convinced that this was a missed opportunity.

The Colloquy of Worms was adjourned in January 1541, with the discussions to be resumed at Regensburg. Favre went to Speyer, where he found a stronger Catholic community. Before leaving Worms he had met Johann Cochlaeus, an important and well-known theologian, who decided to do the Exercises. Unfortunately, they had just started when Favre had to

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⁸ Favre to Ignatius and Pietro Codazzo, 1 January 1541, MHSJ MF, 56–57.
⁹ Favre to Ignatius and Pietro Codazzo, 10 January 1541, MHSJ MF, 59.
leave the city, though he was able before he went to give Cochlaeus a
conference on the difference between to ‘know things’ and to ‘feel
things spiritually’. Favre wrote: ‘The theologian said with a smile: I am
so happy that I finally found masters in the affective life’. The emperor
then became ill and Favre had to stay longer in Speyer. He wrote to
Ignatius:

Thanks to this unexpected delay I started to give the Exercises to
the vicar general of the city. We will be able to finish the part on the
Examens. The man has good culture and sane judgment. He wishes
that I could remain in Speyer. The bishop himself promised
yesterday that he might do the Exercises in Regensburg, where he
will go as a prince of Germany. Doctor Cochlaeus, too, will continue
his Exercises in Regensburg.

Favre kept Ignatius informed about his pastoral activities, and
especially about giving the Exercises:

Eleven days ago, I started to give the Exercises to the local bishop,
on his explicit request. He finished the exercises of the First Week,
with much more profit that I can describe .... Many important persons
came to me, spontaneously or recommended by Doctor Ortiz ....
The Doctor encourages many to go to confession and to do the
Exercises.

He always followed the same pattern, contacting priests and people
with responsibilities in the Church. He proposed that they make the
Exercises, and because of their own experience they became the best
advocates of the Exercises to others. Most of his contacts were with these
‘multiplicators’. A characteristic aspect of Favre’s way of proceeding
while travelling through Europe was his many visits to the families of
his Jesuit companions and the benefactors of the Society.

Favre arrived in Regensburg on 23 February 1541, where the imperial
diet was assembling. The emperor was already there, as was Doctor
Ortiz. However, the diet could not start because of the absence of the
papal nuncio Gasparo Contarini. During all these travels in Germany,
Favre remained the spiritual director of Doctor Ortiz. He had no
mission to intervene in official talks or discussions. This gave him the
opportunity to continue his vocation as apostle of the Exercises.

10 Favre to Ignatius and Pietro Codazzo, 25 January 1541, MHSJ MF, 64.
12 Favre to Ignatius and Pietro Codazzo, 5 February 1541, MHSJ MF, 69–70.
It is clear that Favre moved in the highest church circles and at the court of the emperor, where he resided as spiritual counsellor of Doctor Ortiz. He had fewer contacts with simple German people because of the language; with people who had finished their studies at the university or with important church people he spoke Latin. He wrote to Ignatius from Regensburg:

I have nothing special to say only that I started to give the Exercises to someone of the court of the emperor, a doctor in law, an important man. This morning I started with the ambassador of Portugal, who came spontaneously to me. He asked me to reserve one or two hours for him every day from next Monday on.\(^{13}\)

All this suggests that Favre liked to emphasize his contacts with important people. He knew that his letters could give this impression but, on the other hand, he explicitly asked Ignatius never to make known the names of his exercitants to anybody.

Besides the work of the Exercises there were also many spiritual conversations and the apostolate of hearing confessions. Favre accepted a huge number for spiritual direction. The sacrament of reconciliation and the eucharist were at the centre of his pastoral ministry. He preached little, saying that he did not have the charism necessary to touch a big crowd; he was more a man of personal spiritual ministry.

When possible, he liked to visit the sick in the city. Favre was not able to respond positively to all the demands made upon him, so he asked Ignatius to send more Jesuits to Germany. He wrote that he could be fully occupied with the Exercises alone because there were so many requests. The need was immense, and Favre was convinced that his companions in Rome did not know what was really happening in the Church there. He suggested that Ignatius read Melanchthon’s *Confessio Augustana* or another text, perhaps by Luther, so that he could better understand the situation in Germany.

From Regensburg he wrote to Ignatius a wonderful story about a man from the court of the emperor who came to see him: Juan Rodrígues de Figueroa. For eighteen years he had been the inquisitor in Toledo, and as such he had to give his opinion about Ignatius’ activities in Alcalá (1526–1527). While he was there Ignatius was accused of being an *alumbrado*. Favre writes about this Juan Rodrígues de Figueroa:

\(^{13}\) Favre to Ignatius and Pietro Codazzo, 26 February 1541, MHSJ MF, 74–75.
You can imagine that, if the Inquisition of Toledo had had some distrust or bad information about us, this señor, who was well informed about our activities, would not have taken me as his confessor. Figueroa is one of my regular visitors. He knows us better than anyone else, since he, years ago, had to investigate Ignatius’ ideas.14

I conclude this account of Favre’s first stay in Germany with a longer quotation from a letter written in Regensburg on 28 May 1541, addressed to Ignatius:

I can assure you that, concerning my priestly ministry, were we here with ten Fathers of our Society, we would have all much apostolic work to do along our vocation …. But since I don’t know how long I will remain in this poor country … my priority is to give the Exercises to Germans. I count on Doctor Cochlaeus from whom I expect many fruits in our Lord. He accompanied the bishop of Meissen to the general confession, the end of the First Week—with great satisfaction. The doctor from Scotland accompanied three persons until the confession, namely the bishop of Speyer, a physician and a priest …. Don Sancho de Castillo, who was my first exercitant from the court of the emperor, accompanies two Spanish señores.15

Spanish Intermezzo

On 27 July 1541 Favre left Regensburg, together with Doctor Ortiz and all his household. They went to Spain, where Ortiz—finally—arrived in the parish for which he was responsible at Galapagar, a small city north-west of Madrid. From this period—October 1541 to March 1542—only seven letters have been preserved. These have a different tonality: they make clear to Ignatius how fruitful the climate was in Spain for the Society and its apostolic works.

Favre visited several cities in Castile. He wrote to the Jesuits in Rome from Galapagar:

I continue to produce fruits in three ways: by explaining to children the foundations of the Christian faith, by giving Exercises to people with responsibilities—namely to a master, the vicar of Doctor Ortiz, and to a priest from the court of the Doctor—and thirdly by preaching to the people every Sunday and on feast days.16

14 Favre to Ignatius and Pietro Codazzo, 20 April 1541, MHSJ MF, 90.
16 Favre to the Jesuits in Rome, 30 November 1541, MHSJ MF, 138.
He found the general situation in Spain more favourable than in Germany, even if his heart remained with the German people. He had no problem with the language, since Spanish was the most common language among the first companions of Ignatius. Nevertheless, he remained convinced that preaching was not his greatest talent. One difference between the letters he writes from Spain and those he writes from Germany is that the former do not mention the names of those to whom he gives the Exercises.

Suddenly, in December 1541, like a bolt from the blue, Favre received a letter from Cardinal Alexander Farnese with a mission, in the name of Pope Paul III and of holy obedience, to go immediately to the bishop of Modena in Italy, Giovanni Morone. Morone had been appointed as papal legate in Germany to mediate between Catholics and Protestants. The two chaplains of the infantas (the daughters of Emperor Charles), whom Favre had met at the imperial court, would accompany him, along with the chaplains Alfonso Álvaro and Juan de Aragón. They wanted to learn how to give the Exercises and desired to become Jesuits, and Favre became their private ‘novice master’. When Favre left Galapagar, he also had to leave Doctor Ortiz. His mission now was to be at the service of the papal legate, Morone.

**Germany Again**

From April 1542 Favre returned to Speyer for five months. He knew the city, and many were happy that he had come back. He was shocked, however, to see so many cities and villages in Germany without priests, or with only one priest for a large region. Since the papal legate was no longer there, he was free to do what he thought was most important. Writing to Ignatius, he said,

> It is not my habit to do nothing …. Anyway, the two chaplains of the infantas [who had come with Favre from Galapagar], started making the Exercises eight days ago. I cannot express how much I admire and appreciate even only the half of all the good I find in them both …. The vicar general started the Exercises, hoping to make his general confession soon. Also Otto Truchsess started the Exercises.\(^\text{17}\)

In other letters to Ignatius during this second period in Germany (1542–1544), Favre continued to report on his work with the Exercises,

\(^{17}\) Favre to Ignatius, 27 April 1542, MHSJ MF, 164; *Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, 334–335.
but some new aspects appear, such as his friendships with the prior of
the Carthusians in Cologne, Gerhard Kalckbrenner, with Peter Canisius
and with Diego Laínez, a companion from the first group who gathered
around Ignatius in Paris. More quotations concerning these friendships
will appear later.

Asked by Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg, Favre arrived in Mainz
at the beginning of November 1542. From there he wrote to Ignatius:

Since I have been here, we have had a lot of spiritual conversations
and we made some arrangements for the Exercises. Four or five
days ago I started the Exercises with an important priest of the main
church. He is full of good intentions and wants to make progress.
He said that Our Lord had sent me to Germany for the good of his
soul. Another priest, a real pastor, promised me to make the Exercises.
I myself, I started today giving the Exercises to two bishops …. I
expect from these two bishops as great a good as I have ever seen
in Germany.18

In another letter we read:

I wrote to you already about these two bishops who started the
Exercises. Each of them has made his general confession and has
now started with the contemplation of the life of Christ, according
to the prescribed method …. Father Juan [de Aragón] started giving
the Exercises to a very simple parish priest, who also made his
general confession and has started with the contemplation of the
life of Christ …. Two others started the Exercises with me, and
another one promised to do them.19

Peter Canisius came to Mainz in 1542 to meet Favre, who convinced
him to make the Exercises. Favre directed him, and a deep friendship
arose between them.

In August 1543 Favre arrived at Cologne. He was very upset to hear
that the archbishop, Hermann von Wied, had tried to introduce Lutheran
ideas into his ministry. Favre wrote a long letter to the papal legate,
Morone, urging him to motivate the emperor to intervene. Nevertheless,
in Cologne the work of the Exercises continued. He wrote to Ignatius:

One of the persons whom I let you know was going to make the
Exercises has started doing them. He had much profit from his

18 Favre to Ignatius, 7 November 1542, MHSJ MF, 187; Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, 339.
19 Favre to Ignatius, 22 December 1542, MHSJ MF, 189.
general confession, with much satisfaction for his soul and mind. Another person is ready to start the Exercises today or tomorrow. A third one had asked his mother, a rich widow, for permission to make the Exercises in seclusion. We may thank God our Lord that she doesn’t hinder this retreat but, on the contrary, she makes the issue easier. Her son received an amount of money for works of mercy.  

_Favre at Louvain_

Again, Favre was asked to move on: Ignatius sent him to Spain and Portugal. On his way to Antwerp to embark, he visited the community of young Jesuits in Louvain, who were guided by Corneel Wischaven, dean of St Peter’s church. Later on, Wischaven himself would become a Jesuit and be sent to Sicily, where he became the first official novice master of the Society. Most of the students in the community were Spaniards who had been studying in Paris but had to leave France in 1542 because of the war between the Emperor Charles and the French King Francis I. At Louvain, in the Low Countries, which were under the authority of the emperor, the Jesuits found not only a house but also a university where they could study. Favre’s letters from there cover the period from 19 October 1543 to January 1544, not much more than two months.

Here it became clear that Favre had the qualities to work well with young candidates for the Society. The two chaplains of the Spanish _infantas_ who had accompanied him from Galapagar wanted to be instructed in how to give the Exercises and to become Jesuits. In different letters Favre not only tells of their progress with the Exercises, but also how they endured the ‘experiments’, or practical training, including surviving a pilgrimage of several weeks undertaken with no money in their pockets!

Favre sent a group of young candidates whom he believed had the potential to become Jesuits to Portugal to be trained. In a letter to Simão Rodrigues, the Jesuit Provincial of Portugal and a friend from the time of the First Companions of Ignatius, Favre wrote:

>You will have a lot to do with the group I am sending to Portugal. Perhaps you will find that what I send you is not always of good quality. But, first of all, they have to make the Exercises, and there we will discover what is really is in each of them. The reason why I send so many young men to you is that I desire that as many

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20 Favre to Ignatius, 27 September 1543, MHSJ MF, 221.
co-workers as possible could be formed who speak the language of
the country. Therefore, I implore you in the love of Christ our Lord
to love each of them for what he really is. They are not yet capable of
discerning the Spirit who visits them or knowing how to retain him
when they received him. So, it will be necessary to work in depth
so that they can decide to persevere [in their vocation] without
reserve. You will also have to examine who, in your opinion, needs
more study and who needs less, or doesn’t need to study at all.  

This quotation tells us not only about the young men sent to Portugal,
but also about the spiritual care Favre had for them.

In a letter to Francis Xavier, written from Cologne two weeks after
that to Rodrigues, Favre described the fruits of his apostolic work in
Louvain. There were also problems in the small community there,
and some of the young men left the group.

You will have heard from other letters of the effervescent spiritual
results of my short stay in Louvain. When the news was heard that
we all would leave the city, different students wanted to follow me.
First of all, Master Pieter de Smet, bachelor in theology, plus eight
students who wanted to renounce everything and are ready to
leave Louvain to follow me wherever I would go. Five of them are
masters in philosophy, another one is bachelor in theology, another
is a professor in moral theology …. The other ones who don’t yet
have a master’s degree are all good Latinists …. We should praise
Jesus Christ for the deep consolation each of them had experienced
in the Holy Spirit for their vocation. All have made their confession
and have received Holy Communion on the feast of the Three
Kings. Each of them has opened his heart to me and they have
listened to my words with great attention.

Finally, eight members of the group embarked at Antwerp for Portugal.
Favre himself left for Portugal from Veere in Zeeland on 12 July 1544;
he arrived in Lisbon on 24 August.

*Favre and the Crisis in Portugal*

The Portuguese Jesuit Province was in a state of crisis when Favre
arrived. This was occasioned by the intense spiritual enthusiasm of the
young Jesuits at Coimbra, which was an important formation centre.
They prayed for many hours a day and undertook extreme flagellation

\footnote{Favre to Rodrigues, 8 January 1544, MHSJ MF, 231.}

\footnote{Favre to Xavier, 24 January 1544, MHSJ MF, 233. Pieter de Smet (Peter Smith, or Pedro Fabro in
the Spanish) took this name to honour Pierre Favre.}
and severe fasts, all things that Ignatius did not wish for the new Order. The central government of the Society in Rome was greatly concerned about the situation, as was the Portuguese Province itself. The Provincial, Simão Rodrigues, nevertheless did not take any decisions; on the contrary, he did not intervene in the situation in Coimbra at all.

In addressing this crisis in his letters to the young Jesuits in Coimbra themselves, Favre showed great prudence, preferring not to make explicit references to the situation. In his letters to Ignatius he avoided taking a position, and in those to the superior of Coimbra he was very mild. As for Simão Rodrigues, Favre had been his friend since the very beginning of the Society, and remained a friend for ever. He wrote three letters to the Jesuits of Coimbra, more or less one each year from December 1544 to January 1546.

In the first letter he expressed his vision on obedience in the Society, but there is no reference to the concrete situation in the college:

It can happen that someone who lives under obedience wants to realise something with love and with the desire to produce many fruits which are predictable, and that obedience orders him to do something different with no apparent fruit, he should remember that he did not make a vow to produce the fruits of love but to obey, that he did not vow to save souls according to his own ideas, but to do what the superior is asking him.  

In the same letter Favre gave some tips for fostering a healthy community life, as for example:

If it should happen that the good spirit in the community is weakening and also the positive opinion we had of others, we have to do all we can to bring that original good spirit back, with prayers and concrete deeds. We should think that the reason for this weakening might come from myself and not from others …. If we should see, by accident, a serious shortcoming in a member of the community, we should nevertheless not lose the kindness we had before. We should not admit becoming bitter or furious against someone, because our conscience could be troubled and our spirit agitated.

The second letter to the young Jesuits in Coimbra is a farewell letter. It is full of love and tenderness; remain rooted in Christ is the heart of his

23 Favre to the Society at Coimbra, December 1544, MHSJ MF, 285; Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, 371.
24 Favre to the Society at Coimbra, December 1544, MHSJ MF, 286; Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, 372.
message. He implored many benedictions for them, and he promised to pray for them, asking them to pray for him, who needed it so much. From Coimbra Favre left for Valladolid in Spain.

In the spring of 1546 Favre was informed that Pope Paul III wished to send him to the Council of Trent. Favre hastened to Rome—where he died on 1 August, exhausted by travel and apostolic work. On 6 March he had written from Madrid, in a note added to a letter to Ignatius, about what he would like to do after finishing his mission at the court in Spain:

I would be happy never to stand still and to be a pilgrim always on new roads to different places of the world …. May Our Lord and your Reverence order me to go to all cities and places where the Society, or a part of it, should be established, as one who should be founding residences and desires not to be fixed there and not to rest.\(^{25}\)

**Letters to Friends**

Many of the letters already quoted give a portrait of Favre as the apostle of the Exercises and an indefatigable missionary. In others he appears

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\(^{25}\) Favre to Ignatius, 6 March 1546, MHSJ MF, 397–398.
as a formator of young Jesuits, full of human and spiritual qualities. However, there are also many that show Favre as a good companion and a loyal friend.

There are four Jesuits who appear in Favre’s letters to friends: Francis Xavier, Simão Rodrigues, Diego Laínez and Peter Canisius. Except Canisius, all were members of the group of First Companions around Ignatius in Paris. But what about Ignatius himself? Most of Favre’s letters are addressed to him (18 to Ignatius with his secretary, and 26 to Ignatius personally). But nearly all these letters are mainly informative: Favre says where he is and what his apostolic activities are. In these letters, Ignatius is the Superior General to whom he reports and gives his obedience—nothing more.

From the beginning of the order Ignatius organized correspondence between every Jesuit and the Superior General and his secretary. Those who were sent somewhere in Italy had to write two letters to Rome every week; those sent to other places in Europe had to send two letters every month. In a long letter they should report mainly about the local situation and about their apostolic activities; they should give more personal and sensitive details in a shorter letter. Using the information given by the longer letters coming from many different places, Ignatius’ secretary in Rome would write a circular containing the most important elements. These circulars were sent out to support the relationships between Jesuits spread throughout the world. The circulars were also sent to bishops, ambassadors and princes, as well as other people with important responsibilities, to inform them about the new Order, their apostolic activities and their way of living. The shorter letters remained confidential.

This organization of correspondence may explain why, in all Favre’s letters to Ignatius, there is never an explicit allusion to the personal relationship which sprang up during his years of spiritual direction by Ignatius. Nevertheless, from time to time, Favre reproaches Ignatius for not answering him ….

Francis Xavier

There are five letters to Francis Xavier, of which three are also addressed to Ignatius’ secretary, Pietro Codazzo. These three are from the period when Favre was still in Parma (1539–1540). The other two were written in 1544, when Francis Xavier had already been in south-east Asia for three years, and were sent from Cologne. In January 1544 Favre wrote about the success of vocations to the Society in Louvain.
In May he described for his friend in the Far East his contacts in Cologne, and especially his relationship with Peter Canisius and with the prior of the Carthusians in that city.

In the letters to Xavier there are not many direct allusions to their friendship. However, in one to Ignatius of 16 April 1540, written from Parma, Favre does speak about his friendship with Francis Xavier. Xavier had wanted to visit his friend at Parma before being sent to Portugal to embark for India. But he arrived the very day that Favre had gone away to visit a young man, Angelo, who was very ill at Brescia. In this letter to Ignatius, Favre speaks about this missed appointment with Xavier:

If we don’t see each other in this world, may the Lord give us the grace to be joyful in the other world for this kind of separation, accepted only for Christ, as well as for our encounters. May he guard us from ever thinking that one spirit unites us and another spirit separates us. Because, if one spirit should unite us and another should separate us, we are heading for disaster. We should ask the Lord, always, that neither the old man in us nor the evil spirit could separate what he has united, except when it is necessary.26

In a letter from 1540 addressed to Xavier and Codazzo, Favre tells a story about a certain brother Raphael who, despite his interesting public lectures on the scriptures, made many people angry by criticizing the traditional works of charity in the Church. Favre concludes this story, and at the same time his letter, with this beautiful prayer:

May the Lord gives us the grace to recognise the great blessing we received by opening our eyes to these kinds of situations, but also by giving us the intuition to be able to discover them even when we don’t see them. Amen.27

Simão Rodrigues

There are also five letters addressed to Simão Rodrigues. In the first, written from Louvain at the beginning of 1544, Favre explained why he could not yet embark for Portugal, where Rodrigues was waiting for him. A short letter written in Valladolid in June 1545 starts as purely informative, but there is this last paragraph which has a very personal character:

26 Favre to Ignatius, 16 April 1540, MHSJ MF, 30.
27 Favre to Xavier and Codazzo, 7 April 1540, MHSJ MF, 27.
Master Simon, my brother, I ask you to write to me regularly, since you know how much I appreciate in the Lord your feelings, your words, your works and prayers. May Jesus Christ open you, and all who are with you, to the feelings of his Spirit, for the words of his love, for the works of mercy and for the splendour of his face full of glory .... May Jesus Christ be with us all, he who belongs to us all, and may we be with him, to whom we belong. Amen.  

Two other letters from 1545 are again primarily informative, and in the last letter, written in April 1546, Favre announced to Rodrigues that he was leaving Spain because he has been appointed as papal delegate at the Council of Trent. He finished this letter with a spiritual instruction (his testament?) in which, again, the relationship with Christ is at the very centre.

Diego Laínez

Favre wrote three letters to Diego Laínez. The first is dated 30 August 1542 and was sent from Speyer. It is a cordial letter in which Favre opens up his most inner spiritual experience:

You cannot image, my brother in Jesus Christ, the consolation I experienced the day I received your letter, written from Rome with your own hand ....

May it please Mary, the Mother of God, that I can give you an idea of all the good that has happened in my heart from the day I took leave of you at Plasencia till today, as well of the growing insight and intuition I have about the things of God our Lord, of his Mother, of the holy angels and the souls in heaven and in purgatory; but also about myself, concerning my ups and downs, the moments I went into myself and the moments I came out, my desire of purity of body, soul and spirit … also concerning my fellow and brother: may the Lord show me the way, the truth and the life to know my brother and to feel what is good or bad for him in Christ, so that I may love him, endure with him, suffer with him and be compassionate; that I may be able to thank and to ask the grace for him, to search how I can forgive and find some excuses, by speaking good about him in the presence of his Divine Majesty and his saints.  

The letter from Favre to Laínez of 7 March 1546 is his best known, because it is quoted in most of the biographies of Ignatius. In it Favre

28 Favre to Rodrigues, 16 June 1545, MHSJ MF, 329.
29 Favre to Laínez, 30 August 1542, MHSJ MF, 180–182; Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, 336–338.
gives guidelines on how to engage with Protestants. You should start to love them, and in personal conversations about things we have in common you should try to obtain their love of us. In the beginning you should start from spiritual experience, not from theology. It is important to speak about the quality of Christian life and to invite them to do good works. Only then can you start to speak about the content of our faith. But Favre knows that all our efforts will have no results without the grace of God. Favre wrote his last letter to Laínez on 23 July 1546. He made it clear how great his concern was for the families of his companions as well for the benefactors of the Society.

Two letters to Peter Canisius should be mentioned here. There is a short letter of 21 June 1543, from Mainz, in which he wrote about Jesuit companions, priests and common friends. The way he began and ended this letter gives us particular insight into Favre’s capacity for friendship:

Most loved brother in Jesus Christ, may the grace of Jesus Christ and the peace which is beyond knowledge comfort and strengthen your heart and your understanding . . .

May Jesus Christ be in your heart and may his spirit become visible in your body. Your brother and great friend in Christ, Pierre Favre.

Some months later Favre wrote from Louvain to Alfonso Álvaro and Peter Canisius giving news about some companions and saying: ‘I don’t want to receive any letter from you which does not mention the prior of the Carthusians and his community, who I hope very much are in good health and planted in all virtues’.

Gerhard Kalckbrenner

In speaking about letters to friends it is impossible not to mention Favre’s letters to this Carthusian prior, Gerhard Kalckbrenner (Hammont). Four letters are addressed to him, three from 1543 and a last one from 1546. Except for one that is very short, discussing the encounters between Favre and two priors of other Carthusian houses (at Trier and Hildesheim), these letters are like small treatises on spiritual life and spiritual friendship.

30 Favre to Canisius, 21 June 1543, MHSJ MF, 207–208.
31 Favre to Álvaro and Canisius, 28 November 1543, MHSJ MF, 225.
In that of 10 July 1543 we learn that Kalckbrenner had asked Favre to become his spiritual director, but Favre answered that it might be better that he himself should receive some spiritual help from the prior. He writes:

I find it difficult—and perhaps this is true for you too—to remain the prisoner of any method which is not coming from the Holy Spirit himself, since he is the only one who knows our coming and going, our progress and our regression: the only one who knows the most extreme corners of our souls.  

He finishes his letter with the following words:

If grace would not be sufficient, nevertheless God is merciful enough to give us his peace, a peace first of all in his cross, and next in his resurrection—through Jesus Christ our Lord in whom I wish you to be well in whatever circumstance, that he may give me what I said in so many words and what could be said in only one word, namely that I desire you to help me as much as you desire that I might help you. In any case, I don’t give up the hope as well for one solution as for the other. He who is all in all will not miss me—in you and through you—in Christ our Lord. Mainz, 10 July 1543. Entirely yours in Jesus Christ glorified, Pierre Favre.

In his letter of 12 March 1546, Favre refers with great thankfulness to the spiritual bond which exists between the order of Carthusians and the Society of Jesus. In a general chapter in 1544 the Carthusians had decided that they would collaborate with the apostolic efforts of the Society, by allowing the Society to participate in the spiritual fruits of their sacrifices, prayers, abstinences and other pious exercises, asking the Jesuits to remember the Carthusians in their prayers and apostolic works.

*The Life through the Letters*

The letters of Favre show us different aspects of his personality. Favre was a Jesuit full of apostolic zeal, always ready to be sent wherever he was needed. Personal spiritual ministry was his charism: giving the Exercises, spiritual conversation, hearing confessions, giving spiritual direction, visiting the sick. But Favre also had the qualities of a good formator,
and he was a man with a great heart, a man of friendship—even if this does not appear in many of the letters, which mainly report on his apostolic activities. These informative letters show clearly how Favre was concerned with the pastoral situation in Germany, where he had his own way of engaging with Protestants. The letters of Favre contain much more interesting information than can be included here. They should be considered as a complement to his *Memoriale*, in which Favre confides what is happening in his interior spiritual life.

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