

# LETTER OF CONSOLATION

*To Comfort the Faithful  
Who Endure Persecution for the Name of Jesus  
and to Instruct Them How to Govern Themselves  
in Times of Adversity and Prosperity  
and Strengthen Them against the Trials and Assaults of Death*

*Revised and Augmented*

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*Translated from the French by Christian Fantoni*

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# INTRODUCTION

For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it. For what shall it profit a man though he should win the whole world, if he lose his own soul. (Matt. 16:25)<sup>1</sup>

**P**ierre Viret (1511-1571) devoted his entire life to the establishment of Protestantism in Europe, and he changed the world. A giant among giants, he toiled alongside Guillaume Farel, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and many others to take on the mighty Roman Catholic Church, and his letters reveal the intensity of his life and the incredible drive with which he faced adversity. Their opponents were formidable and the task at hand enormous: changing the ways people thought and planting the Protestant Faith in the heart of Europe. This required exceptional human beings, and Viret was exceptional. He was a theologian who wrote many books, but

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1. For all the biblical passages we have used the text of the 1599 Geneva Bible.

he was also a man of action, a soldier of God, and a devoted pastor. A superstar in Switzerland, he began his ministry five years before Calvin joined him there. His reputation as a preacher was such that he was wanted everywhere: Bern, Neuchâtel, Lausanne, Geneva, all requested him. This great fighter of the Reformation was reliable. Was preaching needed? He was there. Was a theological dispute organized? He was ready. Did his sheep need their pastor? Viret met their needs tirelessly. He advised them, consoled them. He was there for them, all the time. His dedication was unsurpassed. To his persecuted brothers and sisters in France he wrote many a letter of consolation, including the one translated here. Let us follow now the footsteps of this outstanding Christian and faithful servant. Let us see him at work.

## THE REFORMER

Viret lived during the early years of the Reformation. He experienced first-hand the evangelical renewal that took place in France. Born to a Roman Catholic family in Orbe, a little town in the Pays de Vaud in French-speaking Switzerland, right on the border of Lake Geneva and France, he first heard “Lutheran” ideas from his teacher, Marc Romain.<sup>2</sup> But it is in Paris that he converted to Protestantism while studying at the *Collège de Montaigu*. At the time, the evangelical movement was spreading rapidly in France. This spiritual revolution was spearheaded both by the *Devotio Moderna*, a new

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2. For a recent biography of Pierre Viret, see R. A. Sheats, *Pierre Viret. The Angel of the Reformation* (Zurich Publishing, 2012). For two older but important biographies, see Henri Vuilleumier, *Notre Pierre Viret* (Lausanne: Payot, 1911) and Jean Barnaud, *Pierre Viret. Sa Vie et son Oeuvre (1511-1571)* (Saint-Amans: G. Carayol, 1911). For a study on Viret’s thought and theological works, see Jean-Marc Berthoud, *Pierre Viret. A Forgotten Giant of the Reformation. The Apologetics, Ethics, and Economics of the Bible* (Zurich Publishing, 2010).

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*By Pierre Viret. M.D. LIX.*

And now also is the axe put to the root of the trees: therefore, every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire (Matt. 3:10).

**T**o All Who Suffer Persecution for the Name of Christ,  
Greetings, grace, peace, and mercy from God our Father through Jesus Christ our Lord. May our good Lord, Father of all mercy and consolation (2 Cor. 1:4), bring you comfort and strength through His Holy Spirit amid the trials and afflictions of this miserable world so that you may not grow weary, but persevere with a steadfast heart in the grace to which you are called, casting the anchor of your hope onto Jesus (Heb. 6:19), who reigns in heaven at the right of the Father Almighty (Acts 1:9, 3:15, 7:55-56; Mark 16:19). For He will not allow a single hair of your head to fall to the ground without His consent (Matt. 10:29-31). He alone can do all He pleases (Ps. 114), and He wants nothing that will not serve His honor and glory and the salvation, edification, and consolation of His elect, for whom “all things work together for the best” (Rom. 8:28).

### **THE SUFFERINGS OF THE CHRISTIANS**

Therefore, my dear brothers, since we are members of Jesus Christ, we must not be amazed or surprised if we share His cross and His afflictions. For if we desire to reign with Him (Rom. 8), we must also suffer with Him. Since He is our Head and we are His members, the Head cannot take one path and the members another. The body and all its members must necessarily follow the Head which leads and governs them (Eph. 2; Col. 1). Therefore, if our Head was crowned with thorns, we cannot be in the body of which He is the Head without feeling their sting and the pain piercing our hearts. If our King and sovereign Master, naked, bleeding, rejected, and despised was raised and hanged on the wood (Gal. 3:1), we should not expect to always sleep comfortably in this world and to receive honors and dignities, or to wear purple, velvet, and silk garments, like the wicked rich man (Luke 16:19). If we are citizens of the

Kingdom of heaven, we should not expect to have all our pleasures and delights in this corrupt earth, like the children of this world. If our Lord Jesus, in his extreme afflictions, having shed all his blood, about to surrender his Spirit to God His Father, did not even have water to drink, but instead was given vinegar, gall and myrrh (Matt. 27:34; Luke 23:36; Mark 15:23), we should not be surprised if we do not have sweet and delicious wines and delicate foods every day to satisfy the pleasures of our flesh.

### **AFFLICTIONS AS BLESSINGS FROM GOD**

What we could suffer is nothing compared to what the Lord Jesus suffered for us. Knowing the weakness of our flesh, He does not put on our shoulders a burden bigger and heavier than we can carry. For as the Apostle says: “God is faithful, which will not suffer you to be tempted above that you be able, but will even give the issue with the temptation, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). Our heavenly Father, who took us in His safeguard and protection, knows what we need better than we do. When He brings hardships to us and gives tyrants free rein to afflict us, He does it and allows it only for our own good, so that our Faith, which is more precious than gold (1 Pet. 1:7), may be tested and refined in the furnace of tribulation, and the dross and any false metal be separated. Just like iron corrodes if it is not used, in the same way the Church and the faithful become corrupt and quickly fall asleep in this world if they are not provoked and tried by many tribulations. The flesh will always be flesh (John 3:6; Rom. 8:6). It only cares about itself. Forsaking heaven and favoring earth, it prefers worldly pleasures which will soon perish, to the celestial, eternal goods. It is therefore no wonder that the Lord wants to test and try us in many ways. He wishes to make us know ourselves as well as the evils and miseries of this



world so as not to put our hearts and hopes in it, make it our paradise, and make our flesh intoxicated with it. He wants us to know that everything in it is corruptible and fleeting, that nothing is permanent, and that everything disappears like the wind and vanishes like smoke. Paul did not say without good reason that “the fashion of this world goeth away” (1 Cor. 7:31). For it is only an image and a shape that deceives those who are attracted to it. The Lord wants us to understand that human life should be called war and perpetual death rather than life (Job 13). It passes by like a shadow. Because of this, we must pursue a new life and lift our hearts to heaven. With Abraham, we should raise our eyes from the earth and look up to heaven (Heb. 11:8). For it is there that God wants us to seek a permanent and eternal city, in which there will be no change, no poverty, no misery, no tears, no weeping, no mourning, no boredom, and no sadness, but complete happiness and blessedness (Rev. 21). It is the house of God, the holy City, the celestial Jerusalem, where the Lord wipes away and dries the tears of his children and servants (Isa. 25:8), where there is no night, and where the sun always shines.

This is, my beloved brothers, the lesson we must learn in the school of persecutors and in the jails and dungeons of tyrants. There the children of God learn and benefit more than the disciples of philosophers and sophists in their assembly halls and universities. By reading the Scriptures, we learn the theory, but we shall never be good Theologians if we do not put into practice this theory of the divine letters. We shall never understand them fully if we are not tested by multiple trials. For this is how we fully understand and experience the things we read. And as we experience them, we taste the goodness, the support, the help, and the favor of God, and we realize how happy they are who trust in Him. For He never abandons them. Without this knowledge, we talk about the Holy Scriptures like untested soldiers, like those who, based on what they

heard, discuss war and other subjects without any knowledge or experience whatsoever.

Therefore, my brothers, let us consider that all the afflictions and persecutions we endure in this valley of misery are great blessings from God. They teach us to mortify our flesh and to remove and replace the old man so that the new man may be more vigorous, and so that the flesh, so carnal, so proud, and so rebellious against the will of God, may learn to humble itself, obey, and be subject to the Spirit (2 Cor. 5). Do we think that God, our good Father, could be so unkind, so harsh, and so rigorous with His own children? Do we think He would have allowed His servants, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, even His own son Jesus Christ, the King and Ruler of all, to be thus mistreated by the wicked and the unbelievers if persecution had not been a special blessing from God? This is how we must think, though the flesh may complain, for it cannot find life in death or blessings in afflictions. Its sight is not clear enough, its eyes are not sharp enough for it to see and perceive what is outside of itself. It never sees life in any creature whatsoever. For the help and the blessings that the Lord has prepared for us are things that can only be seen by the eyes of Faith, which penetrate and pass the heavens and all creatures (Heb. 11). They contemplate and find in God what man cannot see and find in himself.

### **GOD OUR RESCUER**

This is where Faith must display its power, where it must teach and persuade us. We already know this from experience. When we are forsaken by every creature and brought down to the very gates of hell, we feel the powerful hand of God rescue us. He makes our blood cry out, like Abel's, through whom He speaks a language that horrifies murderers, declaring that all who suffer and die for Him do