

**Henri-Dominique Lacordaire:
Letter to Prosper Lorain
11 May 1824¹**



Sharing the News of His Conversion

Prosper Lorain (1799–1848) was a fellow student at law school in Dijon, and President of Dijon’s Société d’Études. (Lacordaire Archives)



**Paris
11 May 1824**

My dear friend,

Few words are required to say what I have to tell you, and yet my heart has a need to express itself at length. I will be leaving the bar; we will never see each other again. The dreams of the last five years are not to be. Tomorrow morning, I am entering the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, and I pray for your forgiveness that I have not informed you up until now of this decision which touches our lives so deeply, and which I have been thinking about for a long time. You surely understand that it was not to this plan that I was alluding when I said that the horizon of my existence would be broadened during the month of May. The chimeras of the world

were still filling my spirit at that time. Even though religion was already present, it was fame and renown that were my future. Today I place my hopes higher, and I ask nothing more of my life here than obscurity and peace. I am totally changed, my friend, and I assure you I do not know how this came about. When I examine the course of my thoughts over the past five years, the point where I began, the degrees and latitudes which my mind traveled, the definitive result of this gradual progress bristling with obstacles, I am astonished and feel moved to adoration of God. My dear friend, this makes no sense except for him who has passed from error to truth, who, aware of all his previous ideas, which he had seized upon and allied himself with . . . strange alliances . . . a gradual enchainment . . . and who now compares them to different stages in his move toward certainty. A sublime moment it is, when the last trace of light penetrates into the spirit, and reattaches in a common center the truths which are scattered there; there is always such a distance between the moment that follows and the moment which precedes, between what one was previously and what one is after, that the word “grace” has been created to express this miraculous turn of events, this illumination from above. It is like watching a man move forward haphazardly, blindfolded; the

blindfold begins to loosen bit by bit, he catches a glimpse of daylight, and, in the instant that the handkerchief falls from his face, he finds himself facing the sun.

Here I am, therefore, more than ever distant from you, my dear friend; there is now only the connection of friendship to unite us. All the connections which make up the world, and by which it [the world] passes the time, are broken between us now; but they are replaced now with a new connection which will be born of our different states of life, from the center of activity where you will live and from the place of contemplative retreat in which I will have buried myself, from the meeting of our two spirits brought about in the midst of a contrast of ideas. How warmly received your letters will be in my desert! I would love still to hear about the goings-on of the world, if it is you who is telling me about them, and I will offer consolations that no one else can give you. Go, my friend, everything is for the best; but I ask you, look at me from afar, look at me one more time before I separate myself from the world, so that my features remain engraved upon your heart.

I am omitting many details, my friend; but I only had time to think of the most pressing things. Inform Boissard and Ladey about my new destiny, and embrace them for me. I have already informed Foisset; I had some wrongs to right with him, and my wish is that from now on you will live harmoniously. Good-bye,

my dear Lorrain; I promise to cherish you always, to remain always Lacordaire.

Affectionately,

J.B. Henri Lacordaire

Endnotes

¹Translation from the French © 2010 cdtansey. All rights reserved. Translated from *La liberté de la parole évangélique: écrits, conférences, lettres*, 1996 (texts chosen and presented by André Duval and Jean-Pierre Jossua)—with the kind permission of Les Éditions du Cerf (Paris).