

11. LETTER TO FATHER CLAUDE CHEVALIER

Claude Denis Chevalier (1818-1852) entered Libermann's novitiate of La Neuville in 1846 and was ordained a priest in 1847. With Bishop Truffet he went to Africa in the same year and became director of the Junior Seminary at Dakar. Returning to France in 1851 on account of illness, he died in Paris, March 5, 1852.

50

*Thoughts on education. Avoid prejudices as well as premature enthusiasm.*

*Amiens, November 23, 1847 Vol. 9, p. 359*

J. M. J.

Dear Confrere:

I can't help making use of this opportunity to write a word to you, although the pressure of correspondence prevents me from making it a long letter.

*[Thoughts on Education]*

The letter you wrote to Father Boulanger gave us great joy and consolation. I hope that the boys will benefit by the training they are now receiving. Try above all to develop their character, to bring out what is good in them, to use this occasion to educate them properly, to perfect the good elements you find in them, to correct what is defective and develop whatever energy they may possess.

Note well that when I suggest that you should correct them, I do not mean you ought to scold them constantly; rather make a prudent use of everything that helps them to

## LETTER TO FATHER CLAUDE CHEVALIER

get rid of their faults without making them acquire other defects, for improper correction often leads to the acquisition of other faults.

I was greatly pleased to see the way you go about that. Your method is in perfect harmony with the ideas I have formed in respect to what lies at the bottom of the character, needs, and dispositions of those children.

It seems to me that it is absolutely necessary to make them overcome their weakness of character, to inspire them with a certain amount of self-respect, to make them understand and appreciate that they are free, to make them realize the beauty of the freedom and equality which they share with all the children of God. We must try to cast out of their minds that idea of inferiority, for it increases their natural weakness; it lowers them in their own eyes, and this is a great, an immense evil.

Once they understand that they are in no way inferior by nature to Europeans, at least when they become practically and experimentally convinced of this in the depths of their souls, it seems to me that they will also have greater zeal for salvation and for the advancement of their own people. For if they acquire the conviction that the members of their own race can and will become like the Europeans in respect to elevation of soul and the development of the intellect, they will of necessity conceive the greatest desire of rescuing them from that sad condition, seeing the profound abasement in which their own people find themselves at present. Who can calculate the good that will later be accomplished by those who are energetic, animated by a lively faith and generosity, and possessed of a cultivated mind?

*[Avoid Prejudices as Well as Premature Enthusiasm]*

A great task is presently given into your hands and you ought to apply yourself to it with zeal and wisdom. Study, penetrate deeply into the character, the mentality and the

## *SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN*

fundamental attitude of the Negro. Avoid judging him by appearances. Outward appearances easily mislead us and prompt superficial judgments and there are unfortunately many who are fooled by such appearances.

Keep in mind that when we look at them from the outside we see them enslaved to all that is vicious in human nature, to all that is defective, and they are lacking in the means to repress those evil tendencies. Outwardly they are indeed clothed in all the miseries of mankind. If you were to find a poor nobleman who has fallen to the lowest stages of mendicancy and you took him and washed away the mud that covers his limbs, healed the wounds of his body, refreshed him, fed him well and put nice clothes on him, you would then see that he is a nice man. His outward appearance would have totally changed.

On the other hand, avoid premature enthusiasm. Do not judge hastily; do not see everything in rosy colors. The Africans, no doubt, have their own particular form of miseries just as Europeans have theirs; but they also must have their proper qualities, as Europeans have. Examine all this calmly, follow closely the judgment of the bishop, discuss things with him often, communicate your observations to him and listen to what he tells you.

It is good, useful, important and even necessary that you be formed under his guidance. Nature and grace tell him more than they tell you and the other confreres, for he has special lights, special experience, and authority is vested in him. . . .

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN  
priest of the Holy Heart of Mary