

## 8. LETTERS TO FATHER STANISLAS ARRAGON

Stanislas Arragon was born on May 6th, 1819 at Chapareillan in the Diocese of Grenoble. He entered Father Libermann's novitiate in September, 1843, and was ordained the same year. Together with Father Tisserant he left for the island of San Domingo (Haiti) in 1845. After the failure of this mission, he was transferred to the mission of Guinea on Africa's west coast. He died at sea on his return voyage to France in 1855.

Father Arragon was a man with a most violent temper, little self-control, and a penchant for extreme measures. Advising a confrere about the "real savage" who was going to be stationed with him, Libermann wrote: "Trying to make Father Arragon a man of moderation, polished and amiable in his measures would be like trying to build castles on the clouds. It would be easier to stop the sun in its course."<sup>1</sup> Hence it is not surprising that Libermann on occasion had to be quite firm and use rather severe language in his letters to this recalcitrant priest. Yet he loved Father Arragon and knew how to handle him "firmly" and "without allowing him to meddle in things that do not concern him."

### 250

*Father Libermann explains that the acceptance of a mission in Australia was not undertaken lightly and should not be a reason for dissatisfaction among the African missionaries.*

---

<sup>1</sup>N.D. Vol. 8, p. 113.

LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

Letter One

{December, 1845}

Vol. 7, p. 403

Dear Confrere:

Let me begin with the thing that has given you so much grief. I thank the Lord because you experienced grief at the news that we had accepted to work in New Holland [Australia]. For it shows how attached you are to the poor Negroes. Persevere in your attachment to the work undertaken for the salvation of those who are the most neglected among men. . . .

We had strong reasons for accepting that distant mission, so strong in fact that all here agreed upon undertaking it. The situation of Guinea was extremely uncertain; there was a possibility of abandoning Bourbon; Haiti was in a desperate condition; and Madagascar was out of the question, because we did not want to risk another disaster.

I know very well that our conduct should be based entirely on confidence in God. We must, nevertheless, not neglect the means which Providence offers us for the stability of the Congregation. We must have the same confidence that God will send us enough men to support the missions confided to us. Provided we don't act lightly, we can count on God and our hopes will not be confounded. . . .

Don't worry. Guinea will, I hope, always be our cherished mission. It has cost us too much not to be dear to us. . . .

I agree with your remark about what Father Briot said to the effect that the Europeans who live on the coast are as much "neglected souls" as our Negroes. Very well! Let's do ministry for them. Let us not allow them to perish when we are able to help them. But do not forget that this is only an accessory ministry. . . .

[No signature]

*Furious about the acceptance of the new mission in Australia and the appointment of a superior he did not like, Father Arragon wrote a most violent and abusive letter to Libermann. The Venerable replied in a severe yet fatherly reprimand couched in the following terms.*

Letter Two

May 8, 1846

Vol. 8, p. 142

J. M. J.

Dear Confrere :

I received your terrible letter of March 25th. If I didn't know you, that letter would have caused me the most profound sorrow. I shall, nevertheless, tell you all that is in my mind regarding it and do it in all simplicity.

1. [*Your Lack of Self-Control Endangers the Mission*]

If you continue to act in the way you have been doing, you will wreck the mission, no matter what else you do. Or, at least, you will nullify the natural talents, the zeal and the graces God has bestowed upon you, and you will be a curse to your confreres. You will merely discourage them and be an obstacle to them in their works. That is why I beg you for the love of Jesus and Mary, use moderation and don't follow the promptings of your fiery nature.

Let me now take one by one the remarks you have made in your letter and reply to them.

I want to say first in a general way that you plunge into activities with excessive eagerness and excitement. Realize that the Spirit of God is not in such behavior. Stop and ask yourself whether the radical way in which you judge things is in harmony with the mind of God. If I were

## LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

ninety and had fifty years of experience behind me, I wouldn't dare to speak about things in the categorical way you do.

There is presumption in talking that way. And yet I feel certain that it is not presumption that makes you speak that way. God knows that I eagerly desire that you make observations regarding everything and I want you to do it in a spirit of obedience. But I wish you would express yourself with more calm and moderation. Though being morally certain that there is no presumption in it, this element will enter into it and there is danger that it has already mingled somewhat with your remarks.

### 2. [*Do Not Write Letters When You Are Furious*]

Your language is too abrupt, harsh, excited, and bitter. For the love of God don't write any more when you are in such a state of excitement. Calm yourself and let wisdom be your guide when you express yourself in writing. Consider and judge for a moment: You tell me you were ready to form an agreement with your confreres for the sake of choosing another superior and refusing the one I am sending you. Read and examine the Rules and see whether they permit such a thing. Consult the Rules of every congregation and order in the world and tell me: Do you expect to find any that allow that sort of thing?

Examine yourself in God's presence and ask yourself if you are acting according to the Spirit of Our Lord, according to the Gospel. Let us suppose that I am the worst of men, that I am, moreover, what you think I am, that is, that I have no confidence in any of you, wouldn't you have to submit to God's will in virtue of obedience? Otherwise what would become of the virtues that should be practiced in the Congregation? What would become of union, charity, religious cordiality, if a member could safely act in that independent way?

LETTERS TO FATHER STANISLAS ARRAGON

3. [*I Formally Order You to Accept the Superior I Have Sent to You*]

You accuse me of not having confidence in anyone of you. This is completely untrue. Is it right to maintain that I have no confidence in a missionary because he is not named superior or prefect apostolic? I certainly have sufficient trust in Father Bessieux, for I am naming him superior to take the place of Father Briot. I certainly have enough confidence in you since I have named you first assistant for a post from which the superior will most probably be absent for a long time.

I must confess that your last letter causes me anxiety. You have a terrible antipathy toward Father Gravière. If you continue to behave as you have done, God alone knows what the result might be. Why not recollect yourself, let grace act in you, be faithful to it and don't surrender to the wicked promptings of your fiery nature. Be docile like a child. Treat Father Gravière with respect, and the affection that are due to a superior, to a representative of God. Your language about him is abominable. Suppose he does make mistakes, suppose the works suffer because of his mistakes, suppose much harm is done on that account, does this concern you? You will not have to give an account to God for that.

Calm yourself and don't upset everything by your impetuosity and excitement. Moreover, the matter is settled and it was decided even before I received your letters about it. Should you now break all the rules of religious life and bring disorder into the community because I didn't follow your opinion or have made a mistake?

I command you, therefore, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ to accept Father Gravière with affability, charity,



## LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

with the sentiments you owe to superiors.<sup>1</sup> Why would you wish to discourage him? He has already experienced enough repugnance toward accepting that mission. He is severe but just. He is active, wide awake, and knows how to make decisions. I want you to write immediately to me and assure me that you will behave properly toward him. Do all you can to encourage him, to preserve peace and union with him and among all your confreres.

#### 4. [*Any Observations You May Have to Make Should be Presented with Humility and Without Anger*]

You wanted me either not to name a prefect apostolic or to give the nomination to Father Bessieux. But it doesn't belong to you to act as judge in that matter. As bound by obedience, you should submit to the will of God in respect to the superior who is given you.

If you have observations to make, do it modestly, calmly and with submission to God. I love and sincerely respect Father Bessieux, but I did not think it proper to present him as a candidate for the function of prefect apostolic. You should assume that I have examined the question in God's presence.

You object and tell me that Father Gravière did not stay long enough in the novitiate. Granted—but the circumstances were so pressing, so extreme, that I felt obliged to go beyond the Rules and make an exception. Believe me, such a procedure is as painful to me as to you. Your reproach revives vividly the pains I felt when I saw myself obliged to take that extreme step. I am determined never again to send anyone to the missions before he has finished his novitiate. My heart bled when I felt obliged to transgress the ordinary rules.

---

<sup>1</sup>This is the only example of a command in the name of obedience found in Libermann's correspondence.

## LETTERS TO FATHER STANISLAS ARRAGON

You reason endlessly, regulate, settle affairs, because you don't realize what it means to administer the Congregation, and lack experience. Hence don't denounce my conduct the way you have done. I can't render you an account of it, but believe that I am not acting inconsiderately.

You are doing wrong, dear confrere. If Father Gravière is insufficiently acquainted with the Rule, you should encourage him by your good example and thus make him adhere to it. Watch yourself never to make observations to him when you are excited. Calm yourself and speak to him with gentleness and modesty. You may and must instruct me regarding his conduct, especially in regard to the Rule. Do this, it is your duty. But, I pray you, never do it in an excited way, for you will put me in a quandary because I will not be able to judge whether your observations are right or wrong.

### 5. [*We Do Not Have to Accept Your Advice About Affairs That Do Not Concern You*]

You state that I pay no attention to your advice. I don't know what advice you are talking about. I have always been careful to act taking account of your ideas. I cannot act otherwise than seeking information about the condition of the country where you live and I have always urged you to give me details.

I think you are speaking about Australia, but your advice cannot make any change in that project. You have conceived the idea and you continue to repeat that that new mission will cause a loss to the mission in Guinea. What can I do to eliminate that thought from your mind? I don't see any connection between the Australian mission and the ruin of that of Guinea. I have already told you and will continue to repeat that Guinea will be our first mission and that we will take the very best care of it. You may be sure that you will more quickly become discouraged about that mission

## LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

than myself. If I were to send to Guinea ten missionaries instead of the seven which you now number, would you achieve more at the present moment? Would you find work for them?

Hence let me act. The general administration rests on my shoulders. You did not receive the grace of state to argue about that matter. You state that we are giving to the mission of Guinea a direction that is diametrically opposed to the conviction of the missionaries. This is totally false. On the contrary, we have adopted all your views and are completely in agreement regarding the way we should proceed.

You have expressed the desire that we ought not to accept Australia, but that has nothing to do with the direction of the mission of Guinea. You have your own reasons which seem serious to you in your opposition to Australia. But to us those reasons seem valueless while ours are grave. Would you have wished me to follow your advice in a matter that in no manner regards your mission, and to discard my own view? But in so doing, I would also have discarded that of all our confreres who are at La Neuville. Suppose that we had considered your view to be wiser than that of all of us, we would not have been able to follow your advice because you are not acquainted with the Australian situation.

Hence do not permit your mind to be darkened with violent ideas. I am ten times more attached to Guinea than you are and am more interested than you in its success. I am better acquainted with the situation, have more experience than you have, and I see no way in which the good of Guinea is compromised. Moreover, even if you were more capable of deciding such things than I am, you had no right to rebel against a decision that had been taken so conscientiously.



LETTERS TO FATHER STANISLAS ARRAGON

6. [*Overwhelmed with Work, I am Unable to Write as Often as I Should Like*]

You make the reproach that I am not writing to you. First of all, the majority of your letters did not require any reply. They were instructions that were useful to us and I wish you would continue to send such information. If I were not overwhelmed with work, I would reply to every single one of your letters, but I have no one to help me in the administration and so am forced to limit myself to the necessary. Have pity on me then. Am I not suffering enough already because I am unable to converse with you as much as I would like? There is really no need to prod me to action in this matter, but what can I do? I simply am unable to do what I would like. Be patient. As soon as I am able to entrust the direction of the novitiate to someone else, I will find more time to send encouraging letters to the missionaries. I have always replied to all letters which required an answer or when it was useful. In all probability my letters do not reach you as fast as you would wish, because of the slow means of transportation. I have sent you more than eight letters.

7. [*No Decision Has Yet Been Made About Our Jurisdiction*]

You reproach me also for not having instructed you regarding the [question of the extent of our] jurisdiction. I did so in a letter as much as I was able and I have told you that I would act for that purpose. Nothing has yet been decided. I shall go to Rome in order to determine that personally. I have even told you in one letter not to build yet in Dakar until that business is arranged. You have begun to build because you did not receive my letter in time, but I was unable to write you earlier. As soon as the doubt arose

## LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

I wanted to stop that work. Decisions about jurisdiction are not made in one day. You must practice patience. It is a necessary virtue for a missionary.

### 8. [*I Do Not Want "to Send My Missionaries to Their Deaths"*]

You tell me that the Government is deceiving me. That is false. I know the state of affairs in that regard. You say that "I want once more to send my missionaries to their death, but that this time they will refuse to go." You do wrong in saying this to a man who loves you more tenderly than you have been loved by your father and mother, and who would prefer to die himself rather than to see you die. You add: "They will not go." I know that, speaking absolutely, they may not be obliged to go there, but you commit a fault by stating such a thing. I tell you also that they will not go. I have told Father Gravière to examine the matter thoroughly. I write the same thing to you and the others and tell you not to go [to the proposed new post] if that country is unhealthy.

This is my rule of conduct, or rather these are the principles that guide my conduct with the Government. We can march without the Government, but we cannot march against it. If the Government is against us, the mission will soon be ruined. Hence we must treat it with consideration and prudence and yet act in all things according to the Rule, that is, through the orders issued by the spiritual authorities.

### 9. [*I Do Not "Despise Our Missionaries"*]

You say something horrible in your third observation: "Take care lest your missionaries whom you and your grave councillors despise, despise you in their turn." But, dear friend, why allow anger to guide you? In regard to Father

## LETTERS TO FATHER STANISLAS ARRAGON

Schwindenhammer to whom you allude, he is perfectly innocent of all that your impetuosity prompts you to say. I beg you, calm yourself, for you offend God. Moreover, when I am in Rome, I shall give an account of our conduct in respect to the Government and feel sure that it will be approved. If they disapprove, I will obey the orders that are given to me. . . .

I am grieved because of what you say about Father Schwindenhammer. He sacrifices himself for the Congregation, he spends himself for it, he is as much interested in its welfare as I am myself. I add that he has a very good spirit, that he knows the spirit of the Congregation, that he is a pious and reliable priest. I cannot understand why you have allowed yourself to become so aroused in his regard. It is not he who has been instrumental in determining the acceptance of Australia. And if he had done that, he would have done a good thing.

### 10. [*Control Your Imagination and Your Temper*]

Hence let that question of Australia alone. You are permitting your imagination to be fooled by idle fancies. If I had fifteen missionaries at my disposal, I would not send three more men to Guinea. That work must first be well started and put on a solid foundation. Only then will its needs become clear, and I will send you the confreres that are needed.

As regards Father Gravière, you are exaggerating things and your violence could do harm to your relations with him. It is not at all Father Schwindenhammer who has given me advice in this regard. It is solely because of the embarrassment of that moment that I had to take that step prematurely. It still grieves me now, but it was necessary, absolutely necessary to take this step. Moreover, you should in no way seek to control my conduct, for you do not know

## LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

the state of affairs. Try to console your superiors when they are in a difficult situation, instead of grieving them even more by reproaching them for things they feel most sorry they had to do.

Be careful in your relations with Mohammedans. Do not speak against Mohammed. Do not use brusque methods. You would risk ruining everything. Follow the method you chose at the start, namely, that of winning their confidence.

I shall pray with all my heart to our Lord that He may grant you peace, moderation, docility and charity. Do not become discouraged because you have given free rein to your temperament. Regain peace and God will be with you.

Best regards in the charity of Jesus and Mary.

Entirely yours,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

252

*Libermann expresses his sorrow for having had to speak so forcefully in the preceding letter. Gentleness and consideration in the relations with confreres. Prudence and moderation in dealing with government officials.*

Letter Three

September 13, 1846

Vol. 8, p. 288

Dear Confrere :

*[I am Sorry I Had to be So Outspoken in My  
Preceding Letters]*

My last letter must have caused you profound grief. I tell you truthfully that my heart was oppressed after it had been mailed. I have felt the same sorrow every time my

262

## LETTERS TO FATHER STANISLAS ARRAGON

mind reverted to it. I am doing nothing for God's glory while you sacrifice yourself, and I then come along and afflict you in the midst of your labors by a letter that would distress you! Yes, this thought oppresses and afflicts me.

However, it was necessary, for I was afraid that there would be disorder and trouble in the mission. Foreseeing the loss of souls that would result from that disorder, I saw myself forced to act. I earnestly beg you, dear confrere, be a little more moderate, and preserve peace among our confreres and good order in the mission.

Do not worry about the future. The things I have arranged in Rome and which, according to the Cardinal, should be effective will, I hope, put the Mission in good condition and will serve as a remedy for all the fears you have shown in your terrible and famous letter.

### *[Be Gentle and Considerate with Your Confreres]*

Work therefore at all times with zeal and fervor. Never yield to discouragement; be always gentle and calm, humble and peaceful with your confreres. You can always count on my most tender affection for you. Try to be less abrupt, less rigid. Watch over your self-love when you are successful and arm yourself against discouragement in times of failure. . . .

Your scrape with Father Lossedat is ugly. You acted too brusquely. Try to win him back. Treat your confreres with consideration, do not hurt their sensibility. Be indulgent toward them when they have real defects, even when they commit true faults. You ask whether you were right or whether it was Father Lossedat who did the right thing. Father Schwindenhammer has given me an analysis of it. I am not able to give a precise answer to that. But I can tell you that Father Lossedat felt certain that he was right. However, due to agitation and grief he upheld something



## LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

which he knew well was not so. Do you now see how important it is to handle your confreres with consideration? Very great evils result from a want of forbearance and a lack of union with them. . . .

*[Moderation and Prudence in Dealing with the Government]*

Regarding your relations with government officials and commercial agents, you as a missionary should avoid yielding to impatience. You are all terrible men; you understand nothing about the business and the administration of a mission. You will do great harm to it and create many difficulties and obstacles if you follow the promptings of your fiery spirit. But if you act with prudence and moderation you will greatly lessen the difficulties. Being impatient, you all repeat that it would have been preferable to refuse the proposals of the Ministry.<sup>1</sup> This shows that you know neither men nor things. You may be sure that if we had not accepted those proposals, far from being free in our religious work, we would have suffered great restrictions. We would have run the risk of losing the mission.

Relations with government officials will be necessary as long as we are on the coast. They are found everywhere and have the power in their hands; they can impede and even nullify all our efforts. If we had refused the help they offered, it is certain that they would have been most distrustful of us and you would have met with great opposition on their part.

Since they are representatives of a political government, they could easily have found good reasons for putting obstacles in your way. But now they are supposed to trust us and you should do your best to eliminate any reasons for distrust that might still remain. Conduct full of moderation

---

<sup>1</sup>The Government had offered aid and protection to the missionaries.

LETTERS TO FATHER STANISLAS ARRAGON

and prudence will win their confidence. You shouldn't be surprised that they act harshly and cause you trouble. They are soldiers ; most of them have no religion and are prejudiced against you. Act in a way that will give you freedom for your ministry. Act with gentleness and prudence. Don't give in to anger because of the faults they may commit against you, however great, or whatever the nature of their failings. . . .

May the peace of Our Lord be with you.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

253

*Religious regularity. Be slow to judge, submissive to your bishop, and moderate in your views.*

*Letter Four Amiens, November 19, 1847 Vol. 9, p. 320*

Dear Confrere :

I am worried because I don't receive any news from you. It is now six months since I received word from you . . . Yet it seems that you have recovered from your illness. So let me have news in the near future. . . .

[*Religious Regularity is Important*]

According to Bishop Truffet's letter the community is doing well. The Rules are observed and the confreres attend peacefully to their religious exercises and their studies while waiting before they engage in active ministry. I think that

## LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

time will come soon for you to spread out; your community will be smaller but in a year or so we shall increase it sending you new confreres. Regularity and the spirit of piety are most important in your community, for it is there that we shall send those who have just finished their novitiate. It will be like a second novitiate for them while they are becoming acclimatized. This kind of second novitiate will be very useful, for they will be able to make an immediate preparation for their struggles amidst particular dangers and arm themselves with the virtues that will be specially needful.

Take the necessary precautions to insure the preservation of the spirit that now animates the community. It is possible that there might be relaxation during the bishop's missionary journeys. You should all persevere in a life of recollection and piety. . . .

### [*Watch over Your Judgments*]

I trust that you are living in agreement with Bishop Truffet. Let me make an observation in that respect. . . . Watch over your judgments. You are young and inexperienced. You will be prompted to judge according to appearances and the way you have dealt with persons until now. Bishop Truffet is a type of man that differs completely from that of most men we have dealt with. Although I myself have not received any education, I know that his type is totally different from mine. The difference in ordinary conduct which in me results from my lack of education has its source in him in his particular turn of mind and his character, as well as in the great energy and superiority of his mind. His mind is vigorous and is strongly colored by his imagination, but the latter does not prevent him from making safe and correct judgments. . . .

Grace and the sublime character of the episcopacy have no doubt caused a development of his character and his ways

## LETTERS TO FATHER STANISLAS ARRAGON

and given him an increased power for doing good. Because of a lack of understanding and on account of your fiery temperament and your disposition to discouragement, you may have yielded to excitement and done wrong. There might be occasions for this, for a man with such a clear-cut and definite character as is possessed by Bishop Truffet has always some defects that are not fully controlled. Such vigorous and eminent minds easily fall into error and exaggeration.

[*Try to Submit Peacefully to Your Bishop and to be Moderate*]

You would do wrong if you yielded to vexation on that account. Calm your mind. Remain humble and submit peacefully to things you think you could legitimately object to. Remember that he is the superior of the mission. He is the bishop, he is responsible before God, not only for his actions but also for yours. He has received a special grace for that mission. Follow him with simplicity and renounce your own judgment. God will reward you for it. Union between all the missionaries will be the stronger and more perfect good will be accomplished.

If your soul suffers, and I know you have to put up with certain things, if your ideas differ from those of Bishop Truffet, . . . it will be for your own benefit. You have an ardent mind; but suffering will serve to rein in your impetuosity and abruptness. Learn to become moderate in adopting an opinion, to defend it peacefully, to relinquish it with humility, and thus to conform your judgment to that of others, especially to the judgments of your superior. I don't know whether those remarks are in order. In any case they are useful.

Your mother sent five hundred francs for you. She is somewhat troubled because she did not receive any news

LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

from you for such a length of time. I put that sum to the account of your mission. Write to your parents. . . .

*Adieu*, my dear confrere. May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN,  
Missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary