

6. LETTERS TO FATHERS THIERSÉ
AND THÉVAUX

François J. Thiersé, born in 1817, in the diocese of Strasbourg, entered Libermann's novitiate in 1845. He made his Consecration to the Apostolate and left for the mission of Australia, September 1845. He later went to Mauritius (1848) where, after about thirty years of labor, he died at Port-Louis in 1880.

François Thévaux, born in 1820 in the diocese of Clermont, entered Libermann's novitiate in 1844, became professor at Notre Dame du Gard and left for Australia in 1845. He afterwards went to Mauritius, where he became Provincial Superior in 1862. He died in 1877.

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Libermann exhorts the two priests to charity and mutual forebearance in their extremely difficult situation in Australia.

Letter One *November 24, 1846* *Vol. 8, p. 349*

Dear Father Thiersé:

[*Love Each Other in Christ*]

. . . .What I am writing to you applies also to Father Thévaux. Try dear confreres, to have but one heart and one soul, in order that the blessing of God may rest upon you. Recall always that loving word of our Savior: "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." And elsewhere in his prayer full of love, at the time of His passion, He said: "Holy Father, keep in thy name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one even as we are." Enter therefore into the spirit of His divine

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love. Always remember that you are the apostles of that divine love. There is no more precious treasure for you than that love of Jesus in which you love each other. Let both of you realize that that mutual love is not something you have by nature. Nature seeks only its own interest, the moral and intellectual well-being of its own self, its own glory, and its own interest. When a brother hurts our self-interest, our well-being, our glory and our self-love, our soul becomes sad, our imagination is aroused, our sensibility grieves and is badly and dangerously excited. From this come antipathies, oppositions, irritations with all their consequences.

[Don't Allow Nature to Get the Upper Hand]

My dear sons and brothers, be on your guard against that monster which is born of our corrupt nature. You have immolated yourselves to the glory of our God. You have sacrificed all your interests, all the satisfactions which your nature longs for. You have despised the glory of this world and relinquished all that could keep your self-love alive. You have said "anathema" to everything that flatters nature. Will you now allow that wicked nature to subjugate you? Will you permit the very least of these wicked tendencies to grow up in your souls? No! that should not be. You, children of Our Lord, children of His Heart as well as the children of His Blessed Mother, will, I feel certain, be children of His grace, of His glory, for your own sake, in your relations with each other and toward all who are about you. Make the world know who you are, not for the sake of ostentation or in order to reap glory from it, but through the holiness of your conduct, your love and humility.

Children of God, love each other and you will accomplish wonders. Never imagine that your evil nature is already dead. Now and then—for a long time to come—you will see it rise and manifest itself in the way I have just described.

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But let grace raise you above your nature. Stamp out its impulses as soon as they spring up in your souls. Calm your feelings when they are aroused. Calm your imagination, renounce everything for the love of Jesus. Suffer all things for His love.

Never pay heed to anything evil. When you want to read each other's thoughts, sentiments, imagination, and heart, let it always be in the light and with the graciousness of a charity that is pure, gentle and peaceful, never in the darkness of irritation and suspicion.

Be frank and open among yourselves; always preserve the peace of God which surpasses all sentiment, in the grace of His holy charity which is accompanied by a gentle family spirit. Be not harsh or abrupt toward one another, but let the sweet charity of the most Holy Heart of our good Mother be the habitual bond that unites your souls in Jesus Christ, to whom they belong. If you have ever failed in these matters make up for it, weep before God because you are poor and weak, and love each other all the more from now on in proportion to the gravity of your past failings.

[When the Peace of Jesus is in You, You Can Give That Peace to the World]

How greatly I wish I could spend a few hours among you to bind you more and more in the bond of Christ's divine charity! Especially if there had been a failing in that respect.

But what am I saying! You do not need the presence of a poor man like myself. The spirit of Jesus is in your midst. He unites you in His divine charity and will unite you more and more in His holy love, which embraces all His own in His Heart. He will teach you to bear with each other, to yield to each other, to be flexible, mild, and humble of heart. He will give you His own Spirit and will make of you children of love and lambs of peace. The wolves bite and devour one

another. The lambs, and especially those of Jesus who are sent among wolves, the lambs of the most lovable and sweet Heart of Mary, look at one another and graze in peace under the eyes of the Divine Shepherd. When the peace of Jesus is in you, you will give that peace to the world.

I must finish, for how can I express all that I feel about that divine charity and its extreme importance for a missionary? And how can I realize all that it contains that is great, beautiful, holy and glorious for God and blessed for men? Who can ever understand, who has ever understood all the super-eminent knowledge of the charity of Jesus Christ?

The Heart of Mary alone has sounded its depths and felt its marvelous effects. Let us go to that Heart and draw from it a boundless confidence. If we have been wanting in it, we do not need to yield to a troubled mind. We have only to humble ourselves and hope even more than we humble ourselves. Let us humble ourselves, but in peace and love of our souls.

[Jesus and Mary Are Our Strength]

Moreover, let us never lack courage. Jesus is with us, Mary protects us. Let nothing in the world ever cast us down. With Jesus and Mary, our souls will always be strong, always buoyant, always full of gentle joy, always humbly free, always generous and great, always ardent in their desires, calm and moderate in their actions.

I wish and pray with all my soul to the most dear Lord Jesus and the most loving Heart of Mary that you may be firmly established in that holy virtue; and that the peace of God which surpasses all understanding may keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, our Good Master.

Best regards in the sincere affection of the Most Holy Heart of Mary, in which I am,

Entirely yours,
FRANCIS LIBERMANN

He consoles them in their severe trials and promises relief.

Letter Two La Neuville, February 17, 1847 Vol. 9, p. 55

Dear Confreres:

I am greatly afflicted by your troubles and tribulations. I should like to give a positive answer to your letter of June 1, which arrived just a few days ago, but this is difficult, for I should first receive orders about it from Rome. I will immediately apply to the Propaganda, so that regularity may be restored to your affairs and I will then give you a prompt reply.

The Lord is certainly subjecting you to severe trials! Have courage, patience, and confidence in Jesus and Mary. I feel sure that God's goodness allowed you to undergo this trial for the good of your souls and the souls of others. Submit fully to the will of the Lord. Rest assured that I shall not fail to do all I can to bring you relief. We will make the situation known to the Holy See and then abide by the decision of the Propaganda. If, after that, you are called to suffer every evil in the world—if nothing is left for you to do but to suffer—your soul will be at peace and I will submit to God's will as you will also desire to do.

You have no idea of what I suffer at the sight of your excessive trials, but what can we do? I was led into error as you too have been; we had no way to discover the error and there were no other means to get more complete information. Well, may God's will be done!

I shall not give you any particular advice for the present; I prefer to wait a month or six weeks longer for I trust that, after we have received the answer of the Propaganda, I shall be able to give you more suitable counsel. . . .

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Best regards, beloved confreres, in the charity of the Most Holy Heart.

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

Priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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It grieves us to abandon the Australian natives, but what else can we do?

Letter Three Amiens, May 2, 1847 Vol. 9, p. 138

My beloved confreres:

At long last I have just received Rome's answer to my request, which I spoke of in my last letter to you. You cannot imagine how my heart was crushed at the news of your pains and sacrifices as you described them in your letters of the month of August.¹ God will sanctify and bless you; this I hope for from His mercy. It was this that made me write to Rome to prevent further sorrows. I copied extracts from your letters and sent them to Propaganda. I also expressed the wish that you would be permitted to leave that Mission and I gave my reasons. The letter of the Cardinal Prefect which I have just received tells me that the Sacred Congregation is in no way opposed to our leaving Australia; hence we have resolved to give up that country.

I must confess that this grieves me greatly but what else can we do? Those poor souls, the most despised and the most neglected in the world, seemed to ask for our help and to have a claim on our service; but, on the other hand, are we permitted to sacrifice four missionaries and three brothers for the sake of a small number of souls, however wretched their lot might be?

¹In addition to suffering from extreme want, one of the two priests had been arbitrarily suspended by the local bishop. Cf. Koren, *The Spiritans*, pp. 96 f.

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These four missionaries and three Brothers would do so much good elsewhere! We ought also to remember that the service of that poor country of Australia requires men who are full of every virtue and the spirit of renunciation, because of the great sufferings they are expected to endure and, secondly, because the good done there will find only a few pagans who can benefit from it. Missionaries in those parts would have great pains and yet would reap but very little fruit from their labors.

This was a most grievous concern and a great sacrifice. Perhaps even the greatest of all sacrifices is demanded of a man of God who has to decide to give up such a work. You have felt this; you have had that thought, that sorrow, dear confreres, but you have submitted to the good pleasures of God and it was an immense source of consolation for me in my grief at the sight of your sufferings.

My greatest sorrow during that most difficult situation was the fact that I had little hope of reaching you by letter. I was unable to send letters to Bishop Brady for the reasons which you expressed to me; and I have no other intermediary in England. . . . My heart bleeds when I consider your affliction and my powerlessness in my attempt to console you. But God will finally put an end to your sorrows.

As soon as you receive this letter, go to Bishop Brady and make arrangements with him to leave Australia as soon as possible. . . . If new difficulties crop up in regard to your departure from Australia, do not seek to consult me. The distance that separates us is too great and you might perish before receiving my reply. Discuss the matter among yourselves and act in accordance with what you think is God's will. . . .

Adieu, dear confreres. I remain

Entirely yours in the charity of
the most Holy Heart of Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

Ministry and observance of the rule. The merger of Libermann's congregation with that of the Holy Ghost.

Letter Four *Paris, February 22, 1851* *Vol. 13, p. 46*

Dear Confrere [Father Thiersé]:

I am glad to have time to write to you at my ease. I say, "at my ease," which is not quite accurate, as long as the bishops of the French Colonies are still with us. I shall not be perfectly at ease before their departure, but after that I shall be able to give all my time to the Congregation. It is a sacrifice that God has demanded from all of us for the great work of the colonial dioceses and this has absorbed all my time.

From now on, since that important business has been disposed of, I shall be regular in my correspondence with my confreres. Illness might still prevent me, but the fact is that I am constantly improving. God's goodness seems to want to give me entirely to all of you . . .

[*Ministry and Observance of the Rule*]

And you, dear confrere—how are you getting along? You were eager to work. Well, you are getting plenty of it! You have it piled up high above your head. Your heart is satisfied, I am sure. However, you must be on your guard not to let God's blessings become an occasion for the drawbacks which ordinarily result from manifold occupations as a consequence of the weakness of our nature. When missionaries have too much work, it usually follows that the rules are less well observed and this in turn results in two evils: it harms their spiritual life and even does harm to their body, for a well-observed rule safeguards our health.

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Now what advantage is there in ruining our frail health? The extra work by which we ruin our health is dearly paid for after a certain time. In the end we pay a fourfold price for that extra work. On the contrary, by observing the rules, we usually get the right balance. We then take our rest during the period that is set apart for it; we take care to perform our exercises of piety, to take our meals and our recreations at the appointed times, unless extraordinary circumstances prevent it.

I am even firmly convinced that souls will not suffer from [faithfulness to the rule] in any substantial way. If you regularize your own life, you will also put order in your ministry; I mean you will regularize it. The work will then be done just as well but in less time, because it is done with greater regularity.

The most important benefit of regularity, however, is its advantages for the spiritual life. We are religious. Our grace is a grace of regularity. Our rule is the expression of the holy will of God for us. Besides, our rule is the safeguard for our perseverance in fervor, and this fervor is necessary for us to be able to labor earnestly for the salvation of souls. It alone will draw more divine blessings than anything we ourselves might do without it. It is even a guarantee in respect to the graces which God wishes to pour into the souls that are given to us.

Moreover, even if we were to accomplish more for the salvation of souls without fervor and regularity (which would be most paradoxical), what will it profit us to have gained the whole world, if we risk the loss of our own souls?

Let us then be on our guard lest, while we are saving others, we harm ourselves. Saint Paul practiced penance for fear that while saving others he himself might become a castaway. Let us do the same. And our greatest penance is community life (*Mea maxima poenitentia est vita communis*).

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I am not telling you these things to make you love regularity. I know that the obstacles you met in practicing the rule were a source of great sorrow for you. For you greatly desire to observe it and hence I have merely to encourage you. Strengthen this desire more and more. Nevertheless, try to avoid entertaining useless worries that are harmful to the soul. Place your confidence in God. Do what you can for the exact observance of the rules. The best thing for you [and your confreres] would be to hold meetings as often as possible, even every eight days, if this is feasible, although I can hardly hope for that.

In these meetings, attention should be called to the rules that are not well observed and means should be devised to insure a better observance. It does not matter that the same observation has to be repeated even ten times. The remark ought to be repeated until the rule is perfectly observed. Your community will be perfect when its members observe the rules.

[Our Merger with the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Was the Work of Divine Providence]

I have also learned that you have had worries regarding our merger with the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. I hope that they have since been dissipated. I think that the devil has done everything in his power to torment you in this respect. The letters of notification and the rules which I sent you always took more than the usual time to reach their destination.

The thing which I can affirm with certainty is this: God wanted that merger to take place. There is no one here who could or does doubt it. Divine Providence arranged things in an admirable way and at the proper moment, and all that occurred clearly showed me that it was God leading us throughout all those negotiations.

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If we had not come to Paris, it is doubtful that we should have been able to provide for our needs; we might not have been able to find even one third of the things we were in need of. Divine Goodness from the very beginning bestowed its gifts in proportion to our needs, and it never gave us more than we required at a particular moment. God has continued to follow this method. Whenever our needs increase, so do our resources.

We had such a special need in 1848 and at that time we received the benefit of the merger of which I have just spoken. Moreover, this merger will, at a later time, enable us to expand our works. It took place just at the right moment. If the merger had taken place one year earlier, we would have suffered a loss; and if six months later, the Seminary of the Holy Ghost would no longer have been in existence. We lost absolutely nothing by our merger with that congregation, but we have gained enormously by it. . . .

Write more frequently from now on. Tell me about all your troubles and trials. Belong entirely to God. May gentleness, peace,—peace above all—humility and patience direct your zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This I beg God to grant you and your dear confreres.

Entirely yours in the charity of
Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN