

VI. LETTERS TO MRS. ARRAGON

Mrs. Arragon, widow, was the mother of Father Stanislas—Auguste Arragon, who had joined the Venerable's congregation in 1843. Two years later, he sailed for the mission of Haiti. When he and his companions had to leave a few weeks after their arrival, Libermann sent him to new missions of West Africa.

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He sympathizes with her in her sacrifice and points out how she shares in the sacrifice of Mary.

Letter One La Neuville, November 17, 1844 Vol. 6, p. 452

Dear Mrs. Arragon :

Please pardon me for not answering to your letter sooner ; I really had no time to do so.

I have wholeheartedly joined in sharing the sorrow which God in His wisdom has desired to send you. I beg Him to give you the necessary strength to bear it with perfect resignation. Our earthly life is but a passage, during which we must prepare ourselves for eternal blessedness. This is why God in His mercy deigns to try us who are still wandering in this world, enabling us to acquire greater merit.

I give your Reverend son permission to remain with you for eight more days. I would like to please you by prolonging his stay with you even more, but we need him greatly here and, besides, I would be doing harm to our community if I permitted him to remain much longer. Our heavenly Father would disapprove it. So, dear Madame, I beg you, do us the favor of returning him to us after one month of absence from us, and I will be very grateful to you.

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I will pray with all my heart for the salvation and sanctification of your soul. Our Lord Jesus Christ will never forget the wonderful sacrifice you are making to God in giving us your dear son. A mother suffers intensely when she has to part company with her son. I assure you that I myself feel that sorrow very deeply, but I take comfort in the thought of the merit which your sacrifice will bring you for all eternity.

Those words might sound strange to you, dear Madame. You might imagine that I am not really grieving at the sight of your son's departure, but I assure you that this is not so. I do not have the honor of knowing you personally, but this is a sorrow which I share with all mothers who undergo that sort of trial. I suffer most keenly because I reflect that I am the occasion of their pain. It pains me infinitely because I am the cause of bringing torment to maternal love; but I am also comforted in the thought that God will greatly reward all such mothers, for I realize that they are offering a sacrifice to God that resembles the one which Mary offered on Calvary. Great are the fruits of such a sacrifice! All the souls who will be won by your son will be like so many precious stones in your crown. How great the joy of the Christian soul who contributes to the crown of the apostles, because of the enormous sacrifice made for the salvation of souls.

I earnestly recommend myself to you in your good prayers and promise not to forget you in mine. This I consider to be my duty so that your sacrifice may be profitable for the salvation of your soul.

Respectfully yours,

Your humble servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN,
priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

Reassurance about her son. News about the African Mission.

Letter Two La Neuville, January 9, 1846 Vol. 8, p. 10

Dear Mrs. Arragon:

I have just received a letter which your daughter Annette sent me in your name. This letter has filled me with consolation, for it shows me the pious sentiments that grace the family of my dear confrere, Father Auguste Arragon. As the mother of one of our missionaries, you have a *right* to whatever spiritual consolation I can offer you in place of your son. But it is a double pleasure for me when I see the Christian sentiments that animate your family. Hence it is with the greatest satisfaction that I reply to the questions you address to me, and I ask you to write me every time you feel the need of doing so.

[*Reassurance About Her Son*]

Have no worries about the state of your son's health. He has suffered in Goree of the same indisposition which afflicted him every year at St. Sulpice and at La Neuville; it is no more than a general feeling of discomfort which lasts a few days and afterwards leaves no trace. Goree is very healthful; people go there to recover from the illnesses they may have contracted in less wholesome climes. Father Arragon will probably remain in Goree or nearby in one of the healthful sections where, I think, we shall build a house, and it is only during the good seasons that he will travel through the neighboring, less salubrious sections. Knowing how little attention he pays to his health, I have most strongly urged him to take care of himself and have ordered his confreres to watch over him. Once he is accustomed to that climate, he will be more prudent.

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Up to now, Father Arragon has not done much in that country; he first had to get acclimatized and to learn the language. He has a great facility for languages. The one that is spoken in and around Goree is one of the most difficult of all the languages of the African coasts. Father Arragon applies himself to that study with his customary zeal and has already made great progress in it.

I found myself obliged to send him to Goree during the worst season. At Goree itself there was no danger, since he would suffer from nothing worse than great heat. I feared, however, that he might commit imprudences by going to unhealthy sectors and this I would not have allowed him to do; but he was so impatient to go to the mission, he was so depressed, so discouraged, and full of fear that he would not be able to leave immediately, that I was afraid there might be greater harm in keeping him here than in sending him away at that time. I took all possible precautions to prevent him from going to unwholesome parts, and he has been faithful to my orders. He is presently in the good season, which began in November, and all the missionaries are very well. They will have the opportunity to get acclimated before the return of the bad weather and will no longer run any risks. Harm could come to them only through some imprudence they might commit.

[*Mission News*]

The resources of the missionaries depend exclusively on what they receive from the Propagation of the Faith. Until now, nothing has been denied our missionaries. They still had a considerable sum at their disposal and this kept them going until November. When they send me word that they want to borrow money from me, I will advance it to them in expectation of the sums which the Propagation will provide. So, Madame, be at your ease; your son will not be wanting

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in the necessaries. He who feeds the birds of the fields will not abandon the servants who sacrifice themselves for His glory.

However, if you deem it proper to make some small sacrifice for the benefit of your son, from time to time, you may do so, and this would be pleasing to God, like any other good work.

The companions of Father Arragon are Fathers Briot, Bessieux, Lossadat and Warlop. The sixth, Father Tisserant, who was to be the head of the Mission, died recently in a shipwreck near the coast of Morocco. He was on his way to Goree and the vessel on which he was a passenger was destined for a mission to be fulfilled at Mogador where it had to bring the Consul; it was afterwards to land at Goree. The loss of that excellent missionary was most painful for us. I hope to find some one to take his place very soon. I use this opportunity to invite you to send me your dispatches for your son within a month; I shall forward them for you.

The Propagation of the Faith has not spoken about us until now, because we have had nothing but misfortune in Guinea, and you know what has happened in Haiti.

I see no inconvenience in your sending the letters of your son to the Propagation; however, I think that they will not be incorporated in the *Annals*, because the mission of Haiti is suspended for the time being; however you are always permitted to send them.

I recommend to your prayers our house and also the Mission of Guinea. Do not worry, Madame, about the prosperity of our society. Pray for us and especially for the Mission of Guinea in which you have your share. We are very numerous and have scarcely room for all.

Your most humble and devoted servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

Priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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A missionary must expect some privations. Reason for his silence. News about her son and the mission.

Letter Three *undated {1847}* *Vol. 9, p. 117*

Madame:

[Some Privations Are to Be Expected in Missionary Life]

I understand perfectly and cannot blame your solicitude for our dear missionary. Nevertheless, we should not forget that he *is* a missionary and a missionary for the Negroes. Hence we must expect that he will suffer some privations, but the good Lord, as well as our good Mother, will know how to lighten his burden without diminishing its value or its merits.

Your relative, the good Jesuit, and his companions may have arrived unexpectedly at Dakar, and if the omelet was good and big enough, if the fish had decent proportions and size, they will have enjoyed a dinner that was sufficiently good for missionaries. Perhaps they will not always meet with better fare at Maduré. In any case the most recent letters of Father Arragon himself and of some others of his confreres do not speak of famine.

In regard to the house, it must have been finished a long time ago; and even before it was completely in order, it served to protect those who lived in it in such a way that they would not have to suffer from the climate. So, there is no need to be excited. Nothing compels us to say that the health of any one of the missionaries has suffered from that state of affairs. The house of Dakar seems to us to be a rather healthy dwelling, so much so that it can be used to house the missionaries while they become acclimated to the vast country to which they are sent. That house is eighty or

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ninety feet long by thirty-six in width. It is, no doubt, the nicest house in that country. That is why it will become the episcopal palace for our first bishop, Monseigneur Truffet, who has just left with six companions: three priests, one subdeacon and two catechists. He will have to establish his cathedral there and his Junior Seminary as well.

[News About Her Son and the Mission]

You see that the good Lord seems to have merciful designs for those poor people who until now have been so very neglected. You will readily forgive your excellent son for not writing more frequently to you and for not entering into long details, when you know that, beside his journeys and other works of zeal in the apostolate, he has often been absorbed in the difficult study of the native language. The latter is of course an indispensable tool; it is also most efficacious in the work of doing good to and converting the population. He has told us himself that he had not found that language as difficult as he had expected. This may be a proof of his special aptitude, of his application, and also of God's protection over him. We expect to receive more and more interesting news regarding that country, and we shall consider it our duty to forward such news to you at the proper time and place if your dear son does not give you sufficient information.

I have gratefully received the help you desire us to send him. And yet I beg you to feel reassured regarding his condition. He will in no way be different from others. If you want to write directly to him, it is sufficient to write via Bordeaux, Le Havre, or Marseille; these are the three principal ports from which vessels leave for those countries. Soleiman [the local king] has not yet been baptized, from what I learn through the last letters. We are hoping that the arrival of a bishop and the stable establishment of the Mission will

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produce a good effect; and yet, we should wait patiently for the workings of grace and the time which Divine Providence has in mind, trying only to hasten them as much as possible by the ardor of our desires and our prayers.

It will be of interest to you to learn that our community has at least doubled since last year. We have had to buy a second house and have at present, beside all those that have already left, about fifty subjects who are preparing to leave in the relatively near future. Please help us with your prayers that we may faithfully correspond with God's designs concerning us.

I am truly sorry that I did not see your dear Visitandine Sister at Annecy. I think it is because it had been suggested to me that she was absent from that city which caused me to forget to ask for her. I beg you to excuse me. Yes, it is I indeed who celebrated that Holy Mass of which she spoke. It was not by forgetfulness either, that on my return journey, I was unable to stop near Grenoble, but I had to go to Amiens to see my growing religious family which I had not seen for more than five months. I hope I shall be luckier the next time I am in those parts.

I will do my best to compensate for all that by wholeheartedly giving you the share you have asked for in my feeble prayers. You are perfectly entitled to it and the devout sentiments that accompanied your request cannot fail to be most pleasing to Our Good Lord.

I am truly grateful to you, Madame, and to your whole family, for the sentiments you have deigned to express and I beg you to believe in the sincerity of my own, with which I remain,

Your humble and respectful servant in Jesus Christ,

Francis Libermann,
Superior of the Missionaries
of the Holy Heart of Mary