5. LETTERS TO LOUIS MARIE LANNURIEN

Louis Marie Lannurien was born March 10, 1823, at Morlaix, Brittany. He first studied at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice and then entered Father Libermann's novitiate in 1845. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1846 and taught dogmatic theology first at Notre Dame du Gard and then in Paris. He became Father Libermann's assistant in 1849, founded the Pontifical French Seminary of Rome in 1853, and died there September 5, 1854, at the age of thirty-one.

220

Your vocation still needs to become more mature and strengthened. Replace your worldly manners by the simplicity of the Gospel. Do not reason with your temptations against the faith, but simply disregard them.

Letter One La Neuville, October 23, 1841 Vol. 3, p. 43

J. M. J.

Dear Mr. Lannurien:

[Your Vocation Still Needs to be Tested]

Your letter brought me great joy, for it showed me that the good Lord has touched your heart and inspired you with affection for our poor Negroes. It would give me great consolation if He gave you to the [Society of the Holy] Heart of Mary for the salvation of those wretched souls. So I am far from rejecting your offer. I believe, nevertheless, that we should give your inclination to our holy work

137
a chance to mature. When a farmer casts a seed in the ground, the one who will do the harvesting does not quickly pull out the young shoot that appears above the ground; he waits until there are flowers and fruit. If I were to admit you immediately, your vocation would be insecure and it might be destroyed at the first temptation that you would have to bear. Moreover, it is difficult for me to discern whether it is God who is knocking at the door of your heart and whether the call comes from Him. You must test the spirit that prompts you and find out whether it comes from God or not, and you should not put faith in any suggestion or inclination.

I propose to you a very simple test, one that will surely be useful to you. You remember that our divine Master said: “The tree is known by its fruits.” Allow then that fruit to mature during the present year, tasting its sweetness and its strength. Thus you will be able to discern if it is truly the fruit of the tree of life. Have patience, therefore, dear friend, until the end of the year, and do your best to make that good desire bear fruit for the spiritual advancement of your soul. If you persevere in your resolution, this will already constitute a solid proof, for what proceeds only from our nature does not last long, especially when we consider that until now you have had the habit of enjoying comfort and ease, and suffering no want of any kind.

[Practice Internal Renunciation]

I should like you to do even more than that. I should like you to apply yourself to the practice of interior renunciation in view of that vocation, to give yourself to God with great generosity, overcoming yourself in all things and not “bargaining” with our Lord Jesus Christ, but seeking to please Him in everything and everywhere.
Do not imagine that you ought to practice exterior mortifications, unless you feel a strong urge for them; but joyfully seize upon the providential privations that come your way of their own accord; also avoid "letting yourself go," surrendering to the pleasures of the senses in things that bring you ease and comfort. Try to be indifferent in regard to the things that concern your body. Whether your soul feels comfort or not, it should not grieve on that account, but you must abandon yourself lovingly into God's hands.

To sum up, practice sobriety in the use of creatures and do it in order to please God and out of love for Him. Practice interior sobriety, refusing to indulge in keenly enjoyable pleasures; practice external sobriety by not running after what can give ease and comfort and well-being to your body. Besides this, practice submission to God's will, a loving submission amidst all the privations that occur in the ordinary course of divine Providence and on account of the actions of men. Aim at this perfection; do not think that you will immediately reach that goal. If the thought of that holy vocation makes you efficaciously strive for that perfection, it is proof that your vocation comes from God; for such a perfection is a requisite for those that follow such a vocation.

[Do Not Cultivate Worldly Manners]

Again, do not seek to observe meticulously the fine points of etiquette and worldly manners. Abandon as much as possible those worldly ways, and adopt manners that are simple and dictated by the spirit of the Gospel. Practice a "negative" politeness, by which I mean that you should avoid everything in your manners that might be offensive, as also in your words and your bearing. You need not even think of that, for you have an instinct for good manners and have acquired the habit of tact; practice charity, that is, have a true and supernatural affection that makes you act to be
pleasant to everybody. This will make you obliging, gentle and humble; it will prompt you to bear patiently your neighbor's faults. But do not reverse that order, as is done by worldly people who boastfully claim to "have religion"; they have an "active" politeness and a "negative" charity. Their politeness exceeds their charity; their heart is not in tune with their lips.

[Do Not Reason With Temptations Against the Faith, but Disregard Them]

In regard to your temptation against faith, do not worry. Those temptations have greatly harmed you because you did not handle them properly. They have influenced your conduct and have slowed you up in the way of perfect renunciation. The weakness resulting from your indulgence to the cravings of the flesh, was the reason giving rise to those temptations against the faith.

Act, then, with more vigor; be a little more energetic in the things you do for God, and do not reason so much. When those thoughts against the faith arise in your mind, never seek to convince yourself of the truth of the contrary by your reasoning. It is this habit that has increased and strengthened those temptations; such a method is always perfectly useless. You should not even pay attention to all those things. You do not need conviction; your mind is fully convinced of the truth.

Those thoughts arise in the imagination and merely touch the surface of your mind; and because nature always craves consolation and pleasures, and faith refuses them, it prompts, as it were, a desire to be rid of the faith and its truths because these tend to restrain those pleasures. But in reality you do not desire such a loss. There is question only of one of the many tendencies of the flesh to oppose the spirit. This movement of laxness and heedlessness of the flesh affects
LETTERS TO LOUIS MARIE LANNURIEN

the surface of the mind and keeps it, as it were, bound and crushed under the weight of that thought against the faith.

Note well that that despondency touches only the surface and the sensible part of your mind; in the spiritual depths of your mind the habit of faith remains, and the will clings to it. You then want to reason and convince yourself, not because your mind needs to be convinced, but in order to get rid of that thought that causes you despondency and embarrassment. That approach is bad and produces harmful effects, for the evil comes only from the laxness of the flesh, and it is this that you must try to overcome. It is this evil that you ought to attack at its source.

In regard to your temptations of doubt, do not seek to overcome them, but reject them and bear patiently for the love of God the pains and the burden that afflict your soul. The embarrassment that results from them you must suffer lovingly and peacefully as a sort of penance.

In regard to the thought itself against faith, gently distract your mind from it without becoming troubled. Do not become fearful when you feel the oncoming of that temptation; despise it, raise your heart to our Lord, and gently appeal to the Blessed Virgin with great confidence and love.

I think I have explained this matter sufficiently; since you are undergoing those things, you certainly will understand. I leave you, placing you in the hands of Jesus and Mary, in whose love I am,

Your poor servant,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

The physician you mention is a bit of a quack, as are almost all the physicians in Rome. His medicine was a mixture of tonics, antispasmodics and a third ingredient whose name I cannot recall but which was supposed to purify the blood. This compound, it is claimed, can cure fifteen kinds
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

of ills! It is powerful stuff, which can do some good when an illness is on its way out, but it might be dangerous to put oneself into the hands of such a medical man. If you want those medicines I shall send them to you; I still have the prescription.

I forgot to mention that it would greatly be to your disadvantage to come here for your studies in theology. You are much better off at Saint Sulpice.

221

Libermann replies to several questions raised by his correspondent.

Letter Two La Neuville, December 12, 1841 Vol. 3, p. 68

J. M. J.

Dear Confrere:

May the peace of our Lord protect and guard your heart and especially your mind. May it enable you to advance constantly and grow in divine love.

I would be delighted if it pleased our divine Master to give you to our poor Negroes, but I would not want to grab and steal you. Jesus is the one who is to give you to us. Let us wait in peace and love until He judges it opportune to reveal His will to us.

I shall now do my best to reply to your questions, relying on the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[The Desire to Save Souls]

You desire to work for the salvation of souls; this is a good desire. You see directly that souls are lost, and this sight affects your will which thus indirectly desires to work for souls; you thereby aim indirectly at procuring God’s
LETTERS TO LOUIS MARIE LANNURIEN

glory, and grace is at work prompting that desire. Saint Paul very often showed similar sentiments toward souls. Nevertheless, I should like to see in you from time to time a direct impetus toward God. But let us allow God to do what He pleases; the things I hope for will come about.

[Self-Detachment]

The desire for perfection is also good: “Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for justice.” Yet that desire is still somewhat beyond you. No matter, keep going. What I mean is this: If you desired perfection solely for God’s sake, you would already possess it; but at present you are merely tending toward it. However, keep going and your longing will lead you to the desired goal.

[Self-Love]

You speak of your “evil inclinations, especially self-love.” This is a quite common disease! It is indeed a very great evil which has to be cured, but it is impossible for you to be your own physician in that respect. Humble yourself, constantly annihilate yourself, as it were, before our Lord, letting Him cure you and adopt that attitude especially whenever you suffer some humiliation. Overcome self-love also in regard to things you do not like to do. For instance, you feel ashamed of leaving a few mouthfuls of food on your plate; well, act against your repugnance; leave some food on your plate, not precisely by way of mortification but in view of overcoming your self-love, and do this in all gentleness, without tension, in God’s presence.

[Unruly Activity of the Mind]

Your spiritual troubles are not really caused by the diversity of your inclinations, although these may sometimes
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

influence you; it is rather the unruly activity of your mind that is the cause. I don’t find the exact terms to define my thought, but let me say that you should pay direct attention to that activity, for you might otherwise suffer great harm. It is possible that your mind acts somewhat in a jumpy fashion, by fits and starts, and that it does not act in a uniform manner; this, of course, favors those disorders.

The second principle that seems to be more definitely at the root of that noxious evil is the fact that your mind is too wide open to all sorts of foolish ideas, too uncertain regarding a general plan of conduct, too vacillating when it ought to reject all that foolishness and act firmly and uniformly.

Now, dear friend, here is the way to combat that great evil through an easy remedy. Try to keep your mind in a state of great calm before God and at the same time avoid all over-eagerness and tenseness in that endeavor. Your conduct in general and in all its details should reflect a gentle peacefulness of mind, motivated by your great love for God. This peacefulness should enliven your resolution and facilitate its execution.

Every time a silly idea appears before your mind, follow the invariable rule of paying no attention to it, whatever the nature of that thought. Make no efforts to reject such ideas. Do not act harshly or impatiently in combating such ideas and don’t be impatient with yourself. As soon as you become aware of them, gently raise your mind to our Lord or the Blessed Virgin. Elicit an act of the will, such as an act of offering yourself in sacrifice, an act of love, of self-humiliation, etc. Such acts will help you to restore peace to your soul, try to forget the thought and with perfect gentleness distract your mind from these thoughts. It is important for you to give a larger share of activity to your will, and a lesser one to your mind. And you should curb your mind, not permitting it to act in spurts. Accustom yourself to act with
LETTERS TO LOUIS MARIE LANNURIEN

greater seriousness. I think you know what I am driving at.

It is also important for you to prevent your mind from being the plaything of those sallies, those fickle thoughts that arouse your mind from all sides. Act toward them as you do with small flies; pay no attention to them. If you examine and analyze them, you will see that those thoughts are no thoughts at all; they are physical reactions produced on your brain by a habit you have acquired that reacts on your imagination. Such an analysis will reveal that those reactions are more material than spiritual. Hence pay no attention to them, even when doubts enter your mind regarding actions that concern God's glory.

[Peace of Mind]

Here is a general rule that you ought to follow most faithfully and as a matter of conscience: every time a thought presents itself to your mind and causes a certain embarrassment or tension, a certain harshness, struggle and trouble, you must treat it as a temptation and reject it, as I told you above. In other words, you must calm your mind in God's presence and sacrifice yourself to His love. Never act otherwise, whatever may be the nature of that doubt.

Do not be afraid that you will be unfaithful to grace and yield to nature. In regard to mortifications that are accompanied by those symptoms [of fear and anxiety], you should always choose the milder course until you have overcome that fault [of anxiety]. Don't be afraid; when something is prompted by grace, there is never any accompaniment of that kind of hesitation, for grace is manifested in the will and puts the mind in a state of great repose.

When a battle is taking place between the flesh and the spirit, it always occurs in your cowardly will. Every time God moves your will, your mind is at rest. Act fearlessly according to my advice. I take full responsibility for any
evil consequences, provided you keep your mind calm and do this with perfect gentleness and without violent efforts. Do not seek to clear up the doubts that assail your mind at the time when they tend to disturb you; have then but one intention, namely, to restore calm in your soul at any cost. This, dear friend, is the Gospel's pearl of great price; sell everything and buy it at the expense of everything else. Having that repose of mind, you possess a precious treasure, and I guarantee that you will go forward with giant steps.

Let me make use of a comparison to explain this still more. If the devil makes faces at you, close your eyes in order not to see him; do not run to him and slap his face. Be indifferent to his grimaces. The sallies that bother you so much are but grimaces. Gently close the eyes of your soul and seek to establish great calm in your mind in our Lord's presence. Turn your attention away from those foolish things and with gentle love fix it on the divine object of your love.

[The Reading of Scripture]

It is more useful for you than for anybody else to read Holy Scripture with devotion and in a way that will serve to nourish your heart. I cannot now develop this point, for I have not the time. Read with piety and recollection. When reading the Old Testament, dwell devoutly on the figures that foreshadow the various subjects of the New, and meditate on the prophecies that announce our Lord and His law of grace. Never amuse yourself making considerations that satisfy your curiosity or that are merely interesting from the standpoint of human science. If [during the spiritual reading of Scripture] you make reflections, let them be in doctrina spiritus. Give food to your soul, considering what spirit animated the ancient patriarchs and prophets.

In regard to the New Testament, seek to nourish your soul with the doctrine so full of love and grace that is found
therein. Enjoy it, taste it, relish it, and relish also the knowledge it gives you of our divine Master, but let this knowledge be practical and of a loving kind.

*The Study of Theology and Church History*

Study your theology methodically. Try to grasp what you are studying and do not worry about your poor memory; you will end by remembering those things; at least when you have become accustomed to that kind of study. If you have not been advised to study Guénon because of his supposed importance for you, leave that author aside. He will do you harm because of the particular bent of your mind and will offer you little advantage. You will soon forget the substantial things that might be found in him, but will retain only his startling remarks and things that can amuse the mind.

Church history is a useful subject. Do not be satisfied with reading it, but endeavor to get a solid grasp of what you read and put events in proper order. Reflect, compare, make a serious study of the matter. But take care not to lose your interior spirit, do not forget renunciation to self and all other things, and remain in a spirit of abandonment to our Lord.

If you are a bit of a "Gallican," inclined to be prejudiced against Rome, I advise you not to read Fleury, for he has an evil mentality. Read Bérauld instead.

*Spiritual Reading*

Regarding spiritual reading, the best book for you is the one you relish most. Read the books you have mentioned; they are excellent, and are especially good for you at this time on account of your state of soul. When you are no longer able to read such things, take a life of a saint, one
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

that produces a good effect on you and gives you fervor and courage.

Bear in mind the principle that you should not read the spiritual authors for the sake of learning the theory about the interior life. I do not want you to know this life in any way other than as a result of personal practice. And you will acquire this practice by always acting with the good will God gives you and trying to do all you can to be agreeable to God and become a man who is truly “renounced” and lives interiorly.

[Follow the Promptings of the Holy Spirit]

You do not need to be aware of your progress, for such progress depends not on you but on the Holy Spirit. He, and not your own spirit, must be your guide. It suffices that the Holy Spirit knows how He guides you. Your only role is to follow His divine inspiration at all times and grow constantly in longings and love for your divine Master, sacrificing to Him all the satisfactions of your soul, seeking to please Him alone and fulfill all He asks of you. And this you must do moved by the sentiments He communicates to your heart and not by the ideas that come into your mind, for it is not by such ideas that grace will operate in your soul. You should be indifferent to any idea of your mind that is not accompanied by a strong impression in your will, as I have already explained to you.

I advise you to put aside the copybook in which you have written all the things you find good in your pious reading. Do not read in order to remember, but in order to be edified and to apply yourself to the practice of what is good. If you are too intent on the task of keeping things in your memory, you will not be edified and will not properly practice those things. Entrust yourself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and do not indulge in reasonings about what you
ought to do. You should go to God more through the heart than through the mind. If you approach Him with a determined will that is full of love, your mind will have sufficient knowledge for your conduct. . . .

[Ejaculations]

When the bell calls, repose for a moment on the Heart of Christ and make acts of the will, few acts of the mind. Your use of "Jesus, Mary, Joseph," could very well be nothing but something that flashes through your mind if it is only a recalling of those names.

Your conduct at the time when you go from one exercise to another is good. Nevertheless, here again be not content with pronouncing those words with your mind, but let them be cries of the heart. At least make those ejaculations with the heart, while keeping your mind calm. Your trouble is that in your acts of devotion you allow your mind to orate when it should keep quiet; let your heart speak, and let it do so only when it is prompted by grace.

[Meals]

At meals eat as much as is necessary for your good appetite, but do not stuff yourself. Pay no attention to the quality of the food. "The kingdom of God is not in food and drink."

[Monthly Retreat]

The practice of the monthly retreat should not consist in reasoning about what can make you acquire perfection; rather, it consists in putting into practice what the good Lord demands of your heart. Resist the tendency of softness and laxity in your will, and refrain from acting with harshness of mind.
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

[Relics]

Keep the relics that are given to you. If they are not very useful to you now, they may serve a good purpose later on. Do not devise a practice to honor them, but when you feel the need or are prompted by devotion, offer some act of respect, it matters not what, provided this springs from the heart.

[Examination of Conscience]

Your examen, even when preparing for confession, should be a simple glance, and not a careful examination of each action; it should not be a labor of the mind. Place yourself peacefully before God; desire that He make known your faults to you and dwell peacefully on your principal actions. When you notice some faults, stop your mind, silence it, and yield to the sentiments of your heart. In examens dwell more on the evil affections that accompanied the evil actions than on those actions themselves. If you forget a few, there is no harm done. Your surrender to our Lord will make up for it.

Adieu, dear friend.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANNA
God must decide the matter of your vocation. The apostolate requires mortification, but only the negative kind.

Letter Three  La Neuville, February 8, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 128

J. M. J.

Dear Friend:

I am very late in answering your letter of January 23rd, but I have been so busy with a lot of things for the past two weeks that I have been unable to read all the letters brought to me by Mr. Bouchet. I think that the good Lord must have given you a little patience, for, as is said in today's Epistle of St. Paul, "charity is patient."

[God Must Decide in the Matter of Your Vocation]

Don't be in a hurry to decide your vocation to the Negro missions. We know of course that the needs of the Negro are very great. Many souls perish because of want of help. That is why I should like very much to have you with us, the more so because this might foster the sanctification of your own soul; at least this is a thing we can hope for.

All such reasons, however, are insufficient. We have to find out if God wants you to be one of us. As I have told you before, whatever my own desires might be, I do not want you to come unless we feel certain, or at least have a well-founded hope, that the Master is sending you. Pray therefore, put your confidence in Jesus who has given you so many graces, and have recourse to Mary, our good Mother.

We should not base our decisions for or against a vocation upon guesswork. Listen to God in your interior; if He wants you, He will dissolve the obstacles that might
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

stand in your way. Try merely to be faithful in following only God’s will, whatever be the side to which He might incline you. If He inclines you to work among our poor and beloved Negroes, have the courage to conquer the obstacles, aided by God’s grace. If on the contrary He destines you for ministry in France, purify your views and intentions in order that, when making your choice, you are not led by your own inclinations.

[Negative and Positive Mortification]

Having no desire to influence your vocation, I shall not reply to the questions regarding your difficulties. I leave them to the care of Him who has the authority to call you and for whose love you must offer yourself. Let me say merely that the spirit of mortification is something that is necessary for the apostolate. But the only kind of mortification that is necessary is what we would call "negative," one that makes us detached from earthly pleasures and prompts us to deprive ourselves of everything out of love for God.

In regard to "positive" mortification which we inflict on ourselves for that same love, a thing you admire so much in St. Peter Claver, it is not essential to the apostolic spirit. It is not on that kind of mortification that the abundant fruitfulness of a missionary’s work depends. Positive mortification is a special grace that God granted to Peter Claver and to some other saints. When mortification is practiced to the extent that they practiced it, it is very beneficial; but such a practice is possible only through an extraordinary grace. We are not permitted to prescribe such a thing as a rule that we ought to follow.

Moreover, our rules do not forbid mortifications; they even suggest them to some extent, although the spirit that animates our rules is not one of mortification. If you consider the case of Peter Claver well, you will see that even his spirit
was not one of mortification. It was his great love of God that constituted the spirit, the soul of his entire life, and it was from this source that he drew a desire for mortification. Again, you should remember that our way of life is already sufficiently mortifying in itself. We have no superfluities. Whatever we have is poor and ordinary; our food will be like that of the poor whom we evangelize, but it will be wholesome and substantial. The common rule will be such that all are capable of bearing it, although at the same time we shall be faithful to the rules of [negative] mortification which I explained above.

In regard to the amount of food you should take, examine before the good Lord what is sufficient for you in each meal, and then keep to what you have determined. . . .

Please excuse me this time and pardon me for not saying anything about the virtue of religion about which you questioned me. I am so pressed with work that I hardly find time to finish this letter which, by the way, I began three days ago! Our “Brother” [the cook] has departed and has left everything in disorder.

I also beg you not to feel embarrassed; write to me every-time you desire it and think that it might be of any profit to you. If I have little time, I will reply in a few words.

Speak to me another time about the virtue of religion. My greatest satisfaction as well as one of my chief duties is to serve you in everything that could be useful to your soul.

Your poor servant
in Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIEBERMANN
The virtue of religion. No constant self-scrutiny but love of God. Sundry counsels.

Letter Four La Neuville, May 5, 1842 Vol. 3, p. 182

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

May your heart always belong to God and belong to Him alone. Esteem and love nothing but Jesus, and love everything else for Him and in Him alone. Seek only to please Him in all that you do; this is what your virtue of religion ought to be.

The virtue of religion consists in [1.] giving your whole being so that it may be completely immolated and sacrificed to God's glory; [2.] having a sovereign reverence for Him and for everything that concerns Him; [3.] and in loving Him above all things. All these duties should be fulfilled not by feelings and sentiments but by genuine desires and efficacious will which are translated into action on every occasion.

[The Spirit of Sacrifice]

In regard to the first aspect [of the virtue of religion], the spirit of sacrifice, you must remain before God ready at all times to have God's will fulfilled in you, even at the cost of all that you are and possess. Dispose yourself to serve Him in the souls whom He desires to have and reward eternally. Be ready to follow His every wish and disposed to sacrifice to Him your parents, friends, country, pleasures, reputation—in one word, everything which He might wish to ask of you. Be ready in all gentle peacefulness to be a
LETTERS TO LOUIS MARIE LANNURIEN

perfectly supple instrument in His hands, even if this means that the vile instrument will suffer harm or be destroyed in the process.

[Reverence]

The second aspect of the virtue of religion is reverence. The necessity of adoring God demands that you remain in an attitude of profound modesty and humility. Do not endeavor to accomplish this through violent efforts and tense-ness of mind, but let it be more an attitude and disposition than a sentiment. Be full of respect in holy places and toward sacred things.

[Love]

The third aspect is love. This should inspire a great desire to please God. When you know that something is agree-able to Him, execute it immediately with a good heart, in all gentleness and peace. The service of God requires great peace and great mildness of us. Also love all your confreres, treat them with gentleness and charity out of love of Him, and for the same love bear your pains, humiliations and afflictions. This, dear friend, is all you need to know in regard to the “spirit of religion.”

[Work Out of Love for Jesus Without Constant Self-Scrutiny]

It is childish constantly to wish to account for what you are doing and ask at every moment, “How should I do this in order to do it well, or what must I do to make this work useful?” The answer is, “I must do it out of love of my Jesus and with the desire to please Him, and then that work will be very useful.” After replying in this way, work, read, etc. out of love of Jesus, and don’t worry about the “how” and the way you are doing it.
If that thought of the "how" comes back dancing before your mind, pay no attention to it. Act as when a fly lands on your cheek. Don't become impatient. Gently dismiss that thought with a sort of indifference and continue your work or your reading without stopping. The thought will annoy you for some time; but try to practice indifference and it will finally leave you alone. It is as when a small dog is barking at you. If you pay attention to him and defend yourself, he will bark more loudly and will continue longer; if, on the contrary, you continue your walk without paying attention to his barking, he will soon stop.

[Sundry Counsels]

In regard to the distaste you experience in your spiritual exercises, my reply is, as you have already guessed, to accept this evil with patience. I add: consider yourself most fortunate to be able to suffer some little thing in God's service; have the courage never to yield to what that distaste might suggest and do not shorten your exercises at any time on that account.

Regarding your vocation, consult your director. I can tell you now that if your director prompts you to decide in favor of our poor Negroes, I will not put any obstacles in its way. I will accept you with joy, for the love of Jesus and Mary.

I am not permitted to prescribe anything to you except what you are actually doing, for otherwise I might disturb God's own plans in your regard. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the circumstances to be able to offer suggestions.

Beg Mary to grant you peace, and exercise yourself so that you may attain it, but act with the greatest gentleness. Seek to give great liberty to your mind; don't ask yourself at any time how you ought to do this thing. Act as it were
mechanically; merely see to it that you are acting out of love of Jesus. Ask our most holy Mother for the grace of acting in that manner; she knows how to give good lessons in regard to peace of soul.

Don't seek to practice mortifications, but strive to free yourself from your embarrassment of mind, and do it with peaceful love for Jesus.

It is a good thing to recount the holy deeds of men who are still living, of men who are full of the love of God, provided this is not reported to them and they do not learn how greatly they are esteemed on account of their good deeds.

Regarding praising men, I believe that, generally speaking, this ought not to be done except for men who are truly perfect in their participation in the holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ, men who are perfect models of fervor and can be proposed as examples in every part of their conduct. But, if everything is not perfect and worth imitating, it is preferable to praise only their holy actions. Otherwise, although such persons are very pious and very pleasing to our Lord, you may risk having others imitating them in things that are not in accord with our Lord.

Adieu, dear friend.

 Entirely yours in
Jesus and Mary

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN
Live with the freedom of the children of God, free from anxiety and tension.

Letter Five La Neuville, October 3, 1842 Vol. 3, p. 295

Dear Confrere:

It was by accident that I failed to reply to your letter immediately after its reception. I just now opened a package in which that letter had been enclosed, and this will make my advice seem out of date, for in all probability your mind has changed since the time you sent your letter.

[Peace of Soul]

Accustom yourself to living with the holy liberty of children of God and preserve peace of mind. Bring calm and gentleness into your interior. Look upon those agitations [you experience] as annoying things that you should suffer with patience; and see to it that you do not react violently to them. Don't be astonished that you experience such things, and don't be preoccupied with your interior condition. Accept all those things with patience and gentleness as things that are willed by God's providence, to which you ought to submit with love, and then seek to distract your mind from them. Later on, I hope, those thoughts will no longer invade your mind when you will be engaged in the works of the ministry.

While you are in the seminary you have no such activity and your attention is given to a narrow field. Your mind is somewhat "jumpy," and it does not find there objects that can arouse enthusiasm; and so this "jumpiness" transfers to your interior and you amuse yourself pursuing minutiae....

158
LETTERS TO LOUIS MARIE LANNURIEN

[Avoid Tension and Anxiety in Your Spiritual Life]

Put your mind at ease in regard to the manner in which to perform each action. In general, adopt the disposition of doing everything for God and with submission to His will. Renew this desire and intention frequently; after that, in each action, act according to the first thought that comes to your mind, directing your heart to God. Never hesitate. When you are unable to decide because of your reasoning, put reasoning aside and act according to what suggests itself to you at that moment. Of course, I am supposing that you are observing your particular rule.

In regard to study, determine, in understanding with your director, what subjects you ought to study each day and the amount of time you should consecrate to them. After that preserve a free mind.

Concerning your fears that you might perhaps not be observing this or that rule or regulation of the seminary, it is sufficient for you that you give yourself to the good Lord with the desire of doing everything that is agreeable to Him. Don't complicate matters and avoid worries about those things. If through inattention you sometimes fail in the observance of this or that rule or regulation, there is no evil in that; at least the evil is not great and it will not have bad results for your soul. But that agitation, that constant disquiet, is a real evil in the sense that it prevents substantial progress in the perfect life, in the life of a child of God, a life of peace and love. "Love and do what you please" [St. Augustine]. Be more intent on giving yourself interiorly to God than on striving with that sort of tension to practice those external acts and on scrutinizing your way of doing these things.
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

[Live with the Holy Liberty of the Children of God]

During recreation entertain genuine love for those who are with you. Preserve a peaceful mind and be at ease. Don’t seek to be edified by others nor try to edify them. I mean, don’t plan that sort of thing in advance. Go to recreation as to any other exercise, for the sole purpose of pleasing God, and entertain no further thoughts about it. Merely seek to be with those who are good, whether they are “old timers” or newcomers. After that, . . . all you have to do is to give your mind and heart to Jesus and Mary, having merely the pure desire of pleasing the Well-Beloved of your heart.

Having this disposition, remain in peace and follow your inclinations during your conversations with others. Don’t ask yourself, “Am I generous or selfish?” but think merely of giving yourself to God during recreation and pleasing Him. When you wish to speak, speak; when you have nothing to say, keep quiet; don’t, however, make plans about either talking or keeping quiet, but let yourself go in all that to what is agreeable to God and according to the inclination of the moment.

Avoid tension, and don’t try to go beyond what is doing you good, but act freely and with simplicity in God’s presence, and don’t indulge in examining everything that you do and the manner in which you conduct yourself. Be fully surrendered to God, keep your heart wide open in His presence; enjoy great interior broadness of mind concerning everything; feel very free in regard to external actions. This is the surest way that will lead you to God and will sanctify you.

Eat as long as you feel a need for food. It is God who gives you your craving for food, and you must satisfy it. Don’t be fastidious about food; take what is put before you. Despise the esteem of men; reject in a spirit of indifference the feelings and desires they arouse in you, but do this in all
LETTERS TO LOUIS MARIE LANNURIEN

gentleness. Humble yourself on the occasion of such sentiments in an attitude of peace in God’s presence, and distract your mind from those things.

Prepare yourself for your ordination without trouble, abandoning yourself in peace to God, with confidence in Mary, with freedom of mind. Don’t seek to do anything beyond that.

Entirely your in Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

225

Abstain from constant self-scrutiny and be like a child with God.

Letter Six  February 11, 1843 Vol. 4, p. 104

Jesus, Mary, Joseph

Dear Confrere:

[Abstain from Self-Scrutiny]

Your major difficulty is your habit of self-scrutiny. For the love of our Lord try to become a bit careless. Let me explain. When, for example, you stop at some passage of Holy Scripture which you do not understand very well, you reflect upon your mental activity and become embarrassed, asking yourself, “Did I stop long enough to consider this point, or ought I to read further?” Forget yourself! Walk with more freedom and don’t examine your actions so carefully.

For the love of our Lord, proceed with a certain carelessness when you are reading or doing anything else. Be in-

161
different to the "how," the manner in which you should do this thing or another. Be satisfied with performing those actions, that reading, out of love for the divine Master, without worrying about the way you are executing your actions. For you the "how," the manner of doing things, is simply to remain calm and at peace. This applies also to your prayerful way of reading holy scripture: be calm and restful, desire to please our Lord and to have a spirit of faith; such is our method of studying Holy Scripture.

[Be Like a Child With God]

You ought to have a sort of indifference of heart in the way you go to God. Keep your heart at peace and do things with simplicity and without too much reflection. Simply desire to please God and have the good will of accomplishing what is pleasing to Him. It is important for you that you do not strive too much for that which is pleasing to Him and do not search for what is most pleasing to Him. Act like a child that loves his father. A child cannot examine and scrutinize what is most agreeable in this or that circumstance. He cannot make that kind of a choice. Now this is your situation. What does a child do? He acts upon the first thought that comes to his mind. This, it seems to him is what will give pleasure to his father; so he does it immediately. Act in a similar way. The child sometimes makes mistakes; you also will make mistakes, but there is no harm in that. He for whose love you are doing those things knows your good will, and this good will is pleasing to Him. This unconcerned way of acting is something that is necessary for you; it will perfect you much more than your method of excessive care and self-scrutiny.

It is good that reflections do not play a great role in your mental prayer. It will be the better for it. If resolutions upset you, don't make them. You will notice that your
LETTERS TO LOUIS MARIE LANNURIEN

mental prayer will be just as good if you always make the resolution of preserving peace of soul, while seeking to please God in your actions, without examining the "how."...

Adieu, dear confrere.

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

FATHER FRANCES LIBERMAN, Missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary

226

Meditate in such a way that your mind has something to do without, however, making meditation a reasoning process.

Letter Seven March 28, 1843 Vol. 4, p. 166

Jesus, Mary, Joseph

Dear Confrere:

[Do Not Make Your Meditation an Intellectual Game]

I fully understand the difficulties you experience in your mental prayer. When you reason, meditation becomes an intellectual game or a laborious job. If you do not reason, your mind that is accustomed to activity becomes bored and is in a hazy cloud. It is this vagueness that is burdensome to you and disturbs you. You could perhaps choose a more definite subject for your meditation without, however, choosing one that is metaphysical or that you will reason about.

Take for your subjects of meditation the mysteries of our Lord or of the Blessed Virgin. Consider the divine
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

Savior in His mysteries and His various states of life. Look at Him in His various actions as shown in those mysteries; consider in a practical way How He acts and how perfect is the way He accomplishes those things; finally consider the principles that are the soul of those actions, the interior activities of Christ’s soul and how He executes those actions.

Take for each meditation two or three practical considerations which are usually subdivided into various points. Stop from time to time to produce affections if they arise spontaneously. If you have no affections, adhere with will and mind to what you behold in Jesus, not in the sense that you must say over and over again that you adhere to them; but cling to them from the bottom of your heart. When a sentiment does not flow, as it were, of its own accord, remain in silence and adhere [to Jesus] with a certain attitude of faith and desire.

[Example of a Suitable Meditation: Jesus’ Gentleness in His Passion]

You could take as your subject, for example, the gentleness and peacefulness of Jesus in the midst of His torments and humiliations during His Passion. How did He act in those circumstances? This is a first consideration. You could consider the various things He did and the various things He had to suffer, and how He accepted his sufferings and the treatment He received. See how He let Himself be placed on the cross; how He extended His arms and permitted His executioners to stretch His body on the Cross. He said not one word, did not cry out with pain but raised His eyes to His heavenly Father. How gentle and peaceful His glance toward His torturers. Consider the sentiments and thoughts present in His interior: His complete submission to the will of His Father; His indifference for what concerned Himself; the generous love that animated His
sacrifice; His compassion toward the wretched persons who made Him suffer when He beheld their blindness, the loss of their souls; His desire to save them.

Why did He suffer in that way and with those dispositions? Look at His interior dispositions and consider them in a practical way: His compassion for our wretched condition, His desire to sacrifice Himself for the glory of His Father, His horror for sin, the way He looked upon sin for which He was offering expiation, the will of His Father who wanted Him to suffer in that way.

After each particular consideration stop a moment to produce some affection or act of faith, as I explained above. In this way your mind will have a subject with which it can occupy itself, without indulging in a reasoning process. Try and see, dear friend, if you can proceed more or less in this fashion.

[Avoid Self-Examination]

The resolution which [as you told me] you frequently take is very good and is especially useful for you: never to occupy yourself too much with self; not to follow too much the lead of your own mind to get out of the habit of acting upon its lively impulses; to calm yourself gradually. You should never voluntarily entertain ideas that make you think of yourself.

Give yourself to our Lord in peace and gentleness, and quietly calm your mind. . . .

Adieu, my dear confrere. Best regards in the most holy charity of Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN,
Missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary

165