LETTERS TO PAULINE LIBERMANN

X. LETTERS TO PAULINE LIBERMANN

Pauline Libermann was the eldest daughter of Dr. Samson Libermann, Venerable Francis Libermann’s brother. She was born in Strasbourg, Bas-Rhin, on March 28, 1824. At the age of eighteen months, she, and her parents who had become converts from Judaism, were baptized. On that occasion Jacob (Venerable Francis Libermann) “first bitterly reproached Dr. Libermann for what he called his apostasy, for the Jew was still alive in Jacob, and in spite of much incredulity he still adhered to the shell of his Jewish religion.”

From the very beginning, Francis Libermann was interested in Pauline. In 1828 he wrote about a visit which she, then four years old, had paid to him: “She spoke French relatively well, and had profited greatly, especially with regard to her piety, from her stay at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Paris. This visit to Paris was a special grace which God had granted to her.”

In 1830, he wrote: “It is no longer the ‘little Pauline’ but she is now a great lady. I hope that she will take care of the little children, especially of her little brother.”

Pauline studied at the Convent of the Sisters of Providence of Ribeauville. She entered the Convent of Louvencourt in 1844 and at her profession took the religious name of Sister St. Leopold in honor of her godfather, The Right Reverend Father Liebermann, who was Vicar General. (He was not related to the family of Father Libermann). Sister St. Leopold was first attached to the community of the Sisters at Amiens, where Father Libermann set up his novitiate. After that she worked for thirty years in the Convent of Dunkirk. She was finally sent to the Convent at Doullens, where she died on November 11, 1891.
Dear Pauline: (aged 12)

I promised you, my dear niece, that the first letter I would write home, would be to you. It is easy for me to keep my word, for it gives me very great satisfaction to be able to talk to you for a few moments. I was sorry that I could not see you and be with you as long as I should have liked, and I think that you were also sorry that I could not stay with you longer than one day. But what more would we now have if we had been able to prolong our conversations? Even if I had remained a whole month with you, that time, just like the one day, would be now gone. I know quite well that I might have been able to be of use to you if I had remained longer, but we should be satisfied with everything the good Lord desires. He did not allow me to spend a longer time with you, so let us be satisfied and at peace.

I stayed longer at home (with Dr. Samson) but there too the time arrived when I had to say goodbye. It was, however, very consoling for me to see how full of piety and good dispositions they were. I feel certain that, if I had remained longer with you, I should have learned to know you a little better, and this knowledge would have given me even greater consolation. I hope, my dear child, that you will make up for the brevity of my visit by the letters you will write to me from time to time. Do not feel in the least shy with me but speak to me with an open heart. If you only knew how dear you are to me and how delighted I should be every time you wrote to me cordially and openly as you would to your mamma, I would certainly receive many letters and you would be very happy to write to me. Give me this pleasure then by writing often.
When some sorrow or pain troubles you, tell me about it, and I shall be delighted to console you. I will always be ready to give you any advice you may need. If you wish to make progress in holiness, I will consider it my greatest joy to help you.

Above all else, my dear child, love the good Lord with all your heart and soul and strength. In your relations with your companions do not be too touchy and sensitive. If some one says or does things which you consider insulting, do not become angry. Remember that you also often insult the good Lord and it is His wish that you should pardon others. What you should do is to pray for those who injure you. Remember that, very often, they have no intention of causing you pain; and even when they have such an intention, it is only because of a momentary fit of temper and not because they are fundamentally opposed to you.

Be on your guard, also, against making rash judgments about your neighbor. Never tell yourself that this person did this thing for such or such an evil intention, for you should not judge the intentions of others. The good Lord does not want us to do so, nor does He want us to speak evil of our neighbor.

My dear friend, do not be troubled in mind because I speak thus to you. It is not because I think that you are guilty of such faults that I speak thus, but, knowing that you have to live in the world and that, in the world, we are exposed to the risk of committing such faults, I would like to forewarn you so that the desire I have that some day you will be perfect in wisdom and virtue will be realized. Be holy, therefore, and filled with the love of God. Be gentle and unassuming with others, especially with your regular companions. Be quick to forgive and give good example to all. Be obedient to your teachers, and work hard to prepare your lessons with care.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

Have a special devotion to the Blessed Mother, for this is the sign of the good Christian. When you plan to go to Holy Communion, prepare for it with fervor and especially make some good resolutions. After Holy Communion make a good thanksgiving, and try to carry out your good resolutions.

This is all I have to say to you for the present. I know that your parents have great hopes for you, and it is my wish that you will justify their trust. They are model Christians in their parish, and have an earnest and sincere piety, and so I am not surprised that they are full of joy at the thought that you will one day be a model in their family. Do not fail them, my dear child. They love you and so do I. I say this in all sincerity. I am convinced that our hopes for you will not be confounded. I will always pray for this intention and I think that the good Lord will hear my prayer.

Adieu, my very dear niece. I leave you in the hands of the Most Blessed Virgin. Pray well to her, and be grateful to her for her goodness and love for you. I know that you have a very sensitive heart, for I came to know you a little during the short time I was with you. Your heart is capable of loving and honoring the Blessed Virgin, your good Mother and mine. Do not allow it to remain idle and inactive. I embrace you with all my heart and leave you in the arms of Mary, recommending you to her loving care and tenderness.

Your affectionate uncle,

Francis Libermann, acolyte
My dear Pauline: (aged 13)

You have been waiting a long time for a letter from me. It has certainly been slow in coming but here it is at long last.

I cannot reply to your own letter, since, after I had read it, I passed it on to your Uncle Felix and he promptly mislaid it. Unfortunately it has not turned up since. I am sorry about this as I needed it in order to reply to you. I suppose you spent your Easter holidays with papa and mamma. What a joy this must have been both for yourself and for them.

Caroline and Marie are anxious to see you. I myself would also have been delighted to have been able to spend at least eight days with you, but God did not will it so, and we had to be satisfied with seeing each other for just a few moments.

I have good news for you which, I am certain, will give you pleasure. You remember how lacking in piety your uncle Christopher was, how, when he came to Illkirch, he never wanted to go to church. We were unable to persuade him to pray to God, and he always wanted to eat meat on Fridays and Saturdays. His lack of piety was the reason why you disliked him. He often told lies, and all this was ugly and detestable. During the holidays he was home with me for eight days; Caroline wanted him to say his beads, and all the children constantly urged him to say grace before and after meals. But all to no avail, he was hardened in his evil conduct and stubbornly refused to serve God or to pray to Him. This was a cause of sorrow for papa, mamma, and me. We prayed much for him and God heard our prayers. Before he left for America to join uncle Alphonse, big bluster- ing Christopher was converted, and he promised that he would
be faithful to God from that on. He received Holy Communion on the Feast of Corpus Christi, and his conduct was quite good while he was here. He assured me that he would persevere in his good conduct and would always live as a good Christian.

I think that if you had seen him in Paris before his departure you would have been reconciled with him. God has pardoned him and therefore you should no longer hold anything against him. We must love him with our whole heart as God does. I know very well that you were not angry with him, but, still, you did not love him as you would have done had he been devout. Thank God and the Blessed Virgin for the conversion of your uncle, and promise them that you will be even more faithful to them in thanksgiving for this great favor.

Always love the Blessed Virgin. I presume that you are filled with love for this good and dear Mother who loves you now and will always love you more than you can ever love her. I have no doubt but that, during the beautiful month of Mary just past, you have doubled and tripled your love and devotion for this well-beloved Mother of all Christian souls. Be careful to preserve the fruits you have gathered from the exercises of this solemn month. Resolve, dear child, to perform every day some special exercise of devotion in honor of your dear and holy Mother so that you may become more pleasing to her. Get one of your teachers to decide on that devotion for you.

Further, make another resolution which will greatly please the Blessed Virgin. Resolve that if one of your companions offends you and you are angry with her, you will forgive her for the love of the Blessed Virgin. Do not keep ill-will towards her in your heart, but love her with all your heart and speak to her kindly for the sake of the Blessed Virgin, your Mother. Think of the Blessed Virgin as, not only your
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Mother, but also as the Mother of the companion who offended you, and because of this you must forgive her and love her with all your heart.

Give my regards to your good teacher, who was so kind as to write a few words to me at the end of your letter. It is unfortunate that your uncle Felix lost your letter so quickly. However, although I cannot remember the contents, I remember that it made me feel very grateful to that kind mistress who loves you very much and has a keen interest in your welfare. Thank her for me, and show yourself obedient and grateful to her.

Adieu, my dear niece. Be good, gentle and pious. This is all I ask for you from God and the Blessed Virgin.

Your uncle,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

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Letter Three  Rennes, December, 1838  Vol. 1, p. 371

My dear child: (aged 14)

I was delighted to receive your little letter. You had not written for a long time, but I do not blame you for that, since I well know that you are not always able to write when you would like to. Rennes is very far from Strasbourg and the cost of postage is high, and when papa and mamma write to me, they do not always leave room for you to add a few words. Frequently you do not even know that they are writing to me.

You fear that I suspect you of forgetting me. Oh no! I, on my part, do not forget you either. I pray for you to
the good Lord. You told your papa to ask me to recommend certain intentions of yours to the Blessed Virgin, and I have done so.

I trust that Mary will take care of you during the coming year. She is a very good Mother. Love her and teach all your little brothers and sisters to love her too. Pray to her with all your heart and with childlike confidence, ask her to preserve you from all sin. May she prevent you from acting according to the spirit and vain standards of the world. Imitate her example. She lived in the world but never adopted its spirit. Like her, be sweet, charitable, modest, pious, peaceful, humble, and avoid all vanity. Never speak ill of anyone; judge and condemn no one; do not envy others, especially those who act in a worldly way, but be always modest, sweet, and pious, in faithful imitation of Mary.

These, my very dear niece, are the things I ask Our Lady to give you this year. They are good and holy New Year gifts. Profit by them, and you will draw great fruit from them throughout your life. They are the sincere and heartfelt wishes of your uncle.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, acolyte

Letter Four La Neuville, November 9, 1841 Vol. 3, p. 50

My dear niece: (aged 17)

Your letter gave me great joy and all the more so since I did not expect to hear from you so soon. I am always delighted to get your letters.
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I can well understand that you are worried about your brother Francis. I foresaw that he would not do brilliantly this year, but you should not be angry with him, as I am sure it is not his own fault. The reason why he does not work well is that he finds the work difficult and is not sufficiently adapted to that sort of study. It is quite natural to have a distaste for a subject in which one is not successful and which demands much pain and labor.

Besides all this our good Francis is by nature somewhat negligent, but all his shortcomings can be traced to discouragement. That is why I repeat what I said so often when I was still with you, that you should not try to rouse him by harsh words or by telling him that others have a low opinion of his ability. On the contrary, we should always speak encouragingly, inspiring him with hope of success and exhorting him in a kindly way and from good motives to work well. Force and pressure will close his mind entirely, and expressing our poor opinion of his talents only discourages him.

His father will never be able to control his own impatience in dealing with poor Francis. You, therefore, must act as an intermediary between them. Try to console this poor friend when he has been ill-treated and gently urge him to work better. Finally do all you can to spare him suffering.

If you are able to win his heart, you will get much more out of him than his father. This will be very useful for the future, for Francis is in danger of following false paths when he reaches the age when the passions are strong. He is in danger even of losing the faith, for his judgment is not sufficiently firm to protect him against seduction.

I am almost certain that he will associate with bad young men who will ruin him. It will be a miracle if this does not happen. Try then to restrain yourself, and never lose patience with him. Treat him with kindness and affection, never
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oppose him, and in order that you may win his friendship, never say anything against him. You may, in this way, save him from many future evils.

Tell Caroline that I recommend Francis to her also. Tell her to take an interest in the things that concern him and to treat him in the same way as I have recommended to you. Later you will realize how helpful it is for a poor boy like Francis to have been treated with such care.

As far as learning is concerned I have no fears for Francis. It is not necessary that he succeed. If he only partly succeeded it would embarrass us more than if he did not succeed at all.

I have written so much that there is scarcely room for a word concerning yourself. Be on your guard against the world and its spirit. We can live in the world while abhorring its spirit, its vanity, its lukewarmness and its pursuit of pleasure.

I am very glad that you have found a good confessor, for this is a great grace from God. I shall pray the Lord that you may benefit from it and make progress in holiness and Christian virtue.

I will tell you why you should register in Paris for the Archconfraternity, but you must keep this a strict secret, as otherwise it might cause trouble between Father Muhe and myself, and I should regret this. The pastor of Our Lady of Victories told me that there was something lacking in the aggregation of the group in the Confraternity at Strasbourg and that they did not gain the indulgence attached to membership. He told this also to Father Muhe but the latter refuses to believe it. Therefore, see that you be enrolled in Paris, without however telling anyone about it, then follow the exercises in Strasbourg and you will gain the indulgences as if you followed the exercises at Our Lady of Victories itself. Send me your name and the names of the others and let me know on what day you wish to be enrolled. You will be able
to gain a plenary indulgence on that day. Make sure that I get the names on time to send them to Our Lady of Victories before the day on which you wish to be enrolled.

If Marie wishes to become a member of the Archconfraternity, I see no obstacle to that. Tell your mother that I shall do what she asked on December 4. Tell Elisa that I am not forgetting her. She may think that I do not love her but she is very much mistaken. Next time I shall enclose a short letter to her, and I would like to get a short letter from her.

Adieu, dear Pauline.

Your uncle,

Father Francis Libermann

P. S. Give my best wishes to Francis. I hope to hear the joyful news from him that he is first or, at least, second in his class. I strongly urge him to be devout and well-behaved. His behavior will depend on the company he keeps, so tell him to avoid roughnecks and children who have no religion.

Henry and Leon are in the new school. Henry will soon be a learned man. He must try to fulfill all his tasks. Leon is, no doubt, very good and obedient to his little godmother.

Letter Five  October 6, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 311

My dear niece: (aged 18)

Since I have been slow to reply to your letter, I am all the more obliged to pray for the intention which you recommended to me.

You want to know what are the signs of a vocation to the religious life. Two things must be considered: first, in gen-
eral, whether God wants you to enter a religious Congregation, and secondly, what particular Society He wants you to enter.

Does God want you to enter a religious Congregation? I can tell you that, since you have no marked love for the world, you could with a sure conscience withdraw into a convent, and you would find there a great abundance of graces and a much greater chance of salvation than you would find in the world. Nevertheless, this is not a positive sign of a vocation. The following are the signs of a vocation:

1. The fear of losing your soul if you remain in the world, especially if, added to that, is the desire of saving your soul in a convent. This sign is more sure if, because of your temperament or faults or because of particular circumstances, you are in greater danger than other people.

2. A certain distaste for the world and the things of the world. By this I mean, a dislike for its customs, its ways, the things the world demands from those who follow its customs, as, for example, visits, compliments, parties, etc. These things are lawful in themselves, but God makes them disagreeable to certain persons who wish to withdraw from the world and enter a religious society, since in convents relations are more simple and family-like and they impose less conventional restrictions.

If, added to that dislike for the world and its ways, there is an attraction to the type of life lived in religion, then the sign of a vocation is stronger. Let me add that it happens often that those who are called to the religious life and have a distaste for the world and an attraction for the convent are not clear in their minds about things. The sign I have mentioned is, as it were, lacking in clarity, because they, at the same time, feel a craving for earthly pleasures and joys. Such a craving is evil, is displeasing to God, and therefore, should
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not be considered as an indication that one has not a voca-
tion. It is really a temptation. We can recognize whether our
craving for worldly pleasures is evil, if, when we satisfy that
craving, we are disturbed and troubled in mind, if we tend
to grow lukewarm and lax in piety, if our minds are filled
with idle thoughts, and finally, if, after we have tasted of
such earthly joys and satisfactions, we feel a certain void, a
certain dissatisfaction with ourselves, even though we did
not commit any serious fault.

3. When, weighed against the normal manner of life of
people of our social status, we are little suited for a life in
the world; and when, at the same time, we are attracted to
life in religion and believe that we could easily fit in to such
a life.

4. When we have a certain esteem for the religious life,
when we have a desire to be called to that life, and have a
feeling of pain at the thought of having to live in the world.
This sign of a vocation is strengthened and becomes decisive
when we have a positive desire for the religious life and
suffer real pain if we have to live in the world.

5. When the thought of entering religion inspires us to
live more perfectly, more piously, when it impels us to over-
come our faults and make sacrifices for God, when it gives
us peace of soul and devotion to God. This is all the more
significant if the thought of living in the world causes us to
be more slothful in fulfilling our duties, causes a lessening
of fervor, and arouses the desire to satisfy our cravings and
the unruly demands of nature.

6. Finally, when, in moments of recollection and fervor,
after Communion and in similar circumstances, we feel the
desire of entering religion. It is at such times that God
speaks to our hearts through the good inspirations He gives
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us and which are ordinarily in harmony with His designs in our regard. If, on the contrary, at such times, our heart turns elsewhere without any effort on our part, and does so peacefully and with interior calm, we have then a proof that we have not a vocation; at least, we should then make a thorough examination and not make any hasty decision. Good desires that truly spring from grace are accompanied by great peace and a strong determination to do what is pleasing to God.

It is not necessary that all these signs be found simultaneously in a person. It suffices that some of them be there, provided always that there are not an equal number of signs to the contrary. If this condition is fulfilled then a person has a vocation to religious life.

B. In order that a person may decide to what religious Society God is calling her, she should look for two signs:

1. An attraction to one Society in preference to another. This attraction should be a spiritual and holy attraction. We can recognize it as such if it is accompanied by holy desires, the desire and hope for salvation, the desire to serve God more faithfully and to please him more perfectly.

If the taste and attraction is only a natural one, it does not prove anything in favor of a vocation to this or that Order. Examples of this would be, if we are attracted to one Order because there is in it a person who loves us and whom we love, or if we think to find in this Order comfort and similar advantages, etc. However, it happens sometimes that a genuine supernatural taste for a certain Society which truly aims at pleasing God, is accompanied by such a natural attraction. We must then purify our heart from such evil cravings and reject the purely human desires, so that we may enter religion in a particular Society with a pure desire of pleasing God.
2. The second sign is aptitude. If things are so arranged in one Society that we can be useful there, in contrast to another where this is not so, then we have an aptitude for the former. You, for example, have received a certain kind of education and formation, you have certain natural abilities, you have this or that kind of knowledge. You will find in this Society the means of making use of that education, that natural talent, knowledge, ability. In another you would be useless; you would run the risk of being always bored, and of being beset by temptations which you might find it difficult to overcome. In this case you must give preference to the Community which is best suited to your natural aptitudes, and in which you will more easily find rest for your soul and the means of salvation.

Sometimes also, Providence uses certain events to guide a soul to enter one Convent rather than another.

Let me return to the matter of aptitude so as to explain it more fully. Carmelites live a life of retreat and constant prayer. Poor Clares and Trappistines apply themselves to the practice of mortification. The Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul are engaged in works of charity towards their neighbor and they care for and instruct poor young girls. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd work for the conversion of penitent women. Other Societies are occupied with the instruction of children; and the type of life and the work of the latter Societies varies from Society to Society.

You should examine this question during prayer, placing your confidence in Our Lord, so that you may find out which Society is best suited to your temperament and abilities, which would be most in harmony with your spiritual taste, and which would the more easily help you to sanctify yourself.

When making your choice, do not allow yourself to become perplexed. Once you have decided to enter religion, examine for some time, together with Our Lord and Our Lady, which
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Congregation of those you know is best suited for you. If your heart draws you more particularly to one of them, describe your taste and desire to your confessor and then follow his advice without fear. You will then be doing the Holy Will of God.

I do not wish to say any more about the excellence of a religious vocation. The great love I have for your soul makes me tremble with joy at the thought that you will enter a religious Society in the near future. May Our Lord and the most Holy Virgin hasten the decision in this matter, and may they help you to fulfill your desire. My greatest joy after that would be to see our most dear Caroline follow your example. Oh, how I would like to see that dear child in the house of God and away from the ugly world. Adieu!

Your uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

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Letter Six La Neuville, February 8, 1843 Vol. 4, p. 97

J. M. J.

Dear Pauline: (aged 18)

Have courage and be full of confidence in the goodness of God. He never abandons those who trust in Him. Urge your mother to pray with confidence. Tell her to have no fears and to accept with resignation the pains caused by the temporary financial difficulties in which God in His goodness places your dear family in order to sanctify it.

You are all dear to Jesus and Mary and all of you desire to serve God faithfully. Why then should you imagine that
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God is abandoning you? If he leaves you in your pain, this affliction will be temporary and the reward will be an immense amount of happiness and glory.

So tell your mother that the small pains which the good Lord sends you on this earth cannot be compared with the greatness of the glory and happiness they will merit for you for all eternity. Suffer them with joy, and look on them as treasures sent from heaven. Tell your mother that I should have liked particularly to write to her about that matter but that I am so busy that I don't know where to begin. Ask her to forgive me for not writing to her personally.

And now let me answer your question. Your desire to enter religious life is a good one, and I hope with all my heart that Our Lord will help you to persevere in it. Do not abandon that idea, I beg you, because you think that your mother will be against it. Once she realizes that it is God's will she will readily give her consent.

Do not speak about it to your mother for the present. Prepare yourself so that, when the time comes, you may follow the voice of the Bridegroom who is calling you. In the meantime make ready for the religious life by trying to acquire the virtues that are necessary for so holy a life—recollection, humility, meekness, obedience, modesty, contempt for the world and indifference to its foolish pleasures. It does not matter that you may have to wait a year or more. Do not, however, wait too long because you are just at the right age to be formed to religious virtue.

When the moment arrives do not stop because of the sorrow which your departure might cause your mother. God's interests and the salvation of your soul must come before everything else. Our Lord has said: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." If you are more afraid of grieving her than of failing to follow the will of Jesus Christ, it means that you love your mother.
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more than Our Lord. Moreover, your mother's grief will not last long. Her piety will console her when she considers that she has a child, especially her eldest, who is consecrated to Jesus Christ. And besides all this you will draw down God's blessing on your family.

And what would you do if you remained in the world? Would you not need much more money to set yourself up in marriage? Would not much more be needed than is required for one entering a convent? But do not worry, we will find the means to allow you to enter without having to pay a pension. Have confidence in God, pray to Our Lady and prepare for the religious life by acquiring the necessary virtues. I guarantee that all the rest will be taken care of. Be generously disposed to make every sacrifice that the Lord will demand of you.

It is important that at present you make once for all the unshakeable resolution of consecrating yourself to the religious life, and that you do not waver between the world and the convent. Once you have made that resolution, live as if you were to carry out your purpose immediately. Flee the world to the extent that circumstances permit. Follow no longer its fashions but always dress modestly, and do not seek any more to make an impression on others. If you act in this manner, you may feel sure that Our Lord will give you the means to enter religion.

Adieu, my dear Pauline. Have confidence in Mary and she will take care of your soul.

Your uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

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My dear niece: (aged 19)

I sympathize with you sincerely in your pain and worry regarding your vocation. You feel yourself drawn to the religious life, and I assure you, from what I know of you myself and from what Caroline has told me, that Our Lord wants you in religion and that it is only in the convent that you will find happiness.

Furthermore Caroline has settled your vocation for you, and you cannot suspect her in this matter! She has proved conclusively that the good Lord wants you in the convent, and as she has great authority, I hope that there is no further room for objection or hesitation on your part!

But, jokes aside, I think, my dear child, that you should not be so hesitant. Make, once for all, a good resolution in God’s presence. Consecrate your body and soul to Him. Do not make a vow unless your confessor tells you to do so, but, as soon as you have made a positive resolution, consecrate yourself to Mary.

I do not think that you are meant for the world, and there is great joy in leaving and despising this ugly world. If you remain in it you will experience nothing but embarrassment and you will be exposed to committing a multitude of faults.

I would advise you, therefore, to make a novena to the most Holy Virgin in a spirit of recollection and prayer. Receive Holy Communion and then make a definite resolution. I feel certain that your choice will be for the convent and not for the world. I am convinced that, in your interior soul,
Our Lord often pleads with you to enter religion and that He invites you to peace and recollection. Since all your desires are for that life, why the hesitation? I presume that your wavering is caused by your natural affection for your parents and for the Vicar General (Rt. Rev. Liebermann, her godfather). Such affection is good, and it is to your credit that you feel sorry to cause them grief, but such motives cannot outweigh the interior voice of Our Lord Who inspires, urges, and draws you towards the religious life.

One might ask, why make a final and definite resolution now? There is no call for haste. You could, if necessary, enter the convent a year from now. I say that it is important, my dear child, not to remain so long in uncertainty and hesitancy regarding this matter. Such lack of resolution is harmful to your soul, since you are constantly worried and embarrassed, and that is not good. I would like you to enjoy that peace of conscience which is the peace of the children of God. A soul that belongs to Our Lord should have joy of heart and peace of mind. You are a child of God and should enjoy the privileges which our good Father gives to His beloved children. This depends on yourself, so be resolute and hesitate no longer.

Do not fear to cause sorrow to your mother and to your godfather. Their sorrow will not last. Both of them will be very pleased when they see that you are happy. If you cannot make up your mind, consult a Jesuit Father. These Fathers are accustomed to religious life and know how to discern a vocation. Yours ought not to be difficult to decide. When you have made your decision, you may remain for some time in the world until the time to enter arrives, but during that time the world will be like a prison for you, and your connections with it like so many chains. It will not, however, be able any longer to cause you harm.
I will help you to persuade your mother to give her consent to your entry. Have courage and be resolute. Such important matters need to be weighed but we must not hesitate too long nor remain too long in uncertainty.

Please ask your father to send me the recipe for the stuff that cures pains in the eyes, and ask him to write legibly so that I may be able to make a copy of it. Caroline is doing very well; she works hard and induces everybody to love her.

Adieu, dear Pauline, may the peace of Our Lord dwell in your soul.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN
Missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary

Letter Eight    April 14, 1844    Vol. 6, p. 166

My dear Pauline: (aged 20)

I am glad that you have asked me for advice about your vocation for it gives me an opportunity of referring to the matter again. I am convinced that you are not made for life in the world and I have not a moment’s hesitation in advising you to enter a religious Congregation.

I have known people whose vocation was not as evident as yours, and who, nevertheless, made great progress in virtue in a religious Congregation. I fail to see how any doubt about your vocation can now exist. You have a distaste for the world and for the things to which persons of your age who are called to live in the world are attracted. If, now and then, you have longed for an evening party or some other
form of entertainment which gives pleasure to people of the world, this was only a passing thing and gave you little lasting satisfaction. I have never noticed that your tastes are those of people who are made to live in the world.

Further, you have had the desire for religious life for many years, your tastes are those of a religious; you have no aptitude for life in the world and have, on the contrary, the aptitudes required for the life of a religious Sister. Think of the number of years you have been in contact with the world and you still do not know how to adapt yourself to it. You have not acquired its ways nor learned to accept its customs, and you even feel awkward and embarrassed in your contact with the world.

I feel sure that after you have been one month in a religious community you will have completely adopted the habits of a religious and will feel perfectly at home with those who live a community life. Do you remember that one day your papa called you “eine dumme Gans” (a stupid goose)? From that moment I felt that God did not want you in the world. I was glad of that which caused you such pain because I said to myself that it would arouse in you a disgust for the world and its practices.

God has fashioned you for the religious life and not for the world. He has given you a simple character, simple tastes and simple manners. Contrast your mother and yourself and you will see what I mean. She was called to live in the world and you know her piety and fervor. If, in religious life, you one day have her piety, fervor, spirit of faith, and love of God, you will become a saint. Your mother has also a heart that is simple and righteous, but unlike you, she has not an unsophisticated character, tastes and manners. Now all this does not harm her piety. But if you were to remain in the world you would never acquire its ways. You would, therefore, find it difficult to live with people in the world and would always feel awkward and embarrassed, or else
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you would adopt worldly ways and this would do great harm to your soul.

Again, my dear child, if you stayed in the world, you would be exposed to dangers. You would risk the neglecting of your religion and the lessening of your piety and devotion. With your temperament you would find it hard to resist the dangers and troubles which would come to you through your family.

It is possible that, in spite of all, you would remain steadfast, but this is not certain. You need help to sustain your fervent piety and your devotion to God. At present such help is available to you and things are going well. But once you had left your parents’ home and were yourself responsible for your conduct and interests, or were in contact with people who had not the piety and virtue of your parents, you would run the risk of becoming spiritually weak through lack of help in overcoming the obstacles you would meet.

In religious life that help will be given to you in greater measure, not only to sustain you but also to make you advance in virtue. You will have the habit, the vows, the rules, community life, the example of others, obedience, and a multitude of other powerful helps for the soul. You will, however, still have difficulties in your interior life, spiritual dryness, interior pains, etc., but all these are but trials permitted by God and they will serve to form and perfect you more and more.

Your distraction at prayer is due to your anxiety and worry about this question of your vocation and to your present vacillation and lack of resolution. You hesitate too much. Pray with confidence in God for a few days and then make your decision. You will resolve to live in a religious Congregation. Then, once you are resolved, act as quickly as possible in accordance with that resolution. This will, once for all, rid you of that indecision which is harmful to your soul.
Do not harbor human fears nor consider human motives. What you think is certainly not the case. Your mother may sometimes have said so to you, but I am sure that it is not really so. My dear child, do not mistake an idea that comes uninvited into your mind for one to which your will adheres. The human motives of which you spoke are fictions of your imagination. You would never, with full deliberation, have said that it was for such motives that you desired to become a religious. The imagination at times conjures up such things but your will has no part in them. Your will sincerely seeks God.

It is possible that if you were wealthy you would be unfaithful to your vocation, but I greatly doubt this, for God would then give you the grace to think otherwise. Now that you are undergoing great suffering, the thought of possessing a great fortune is for you a temptation and apparent obstacle. However, if you had such riches, you would see the vanity of all that and would all the more quickly become a religious. The thoughts about riches are always more dangerous than the actual possession of them. We should, in general, avoid thinking about what we would do in such circumstances, because in thus thinking one invariably succumbs to the temptation, at least in part. Despise all such thoughts and have confidence and peace in your soul.

Adieu, my dear niece, be faithful to God. May His peace be with you.

Your uncle,

Father Francis Libermann
Missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary

P. S. I shall ask prayers for the intentions of the young man you recommended to me.
My dear Pauline: (aged 20)

I was delighted when you told me that you had finally made up your mind to enter religious life. I had never doubted that divine Goodness would grant you the grace of a religious vocation, which is indeed a great grace.

The only outstanding problem now is the choosing of the particular Congregation which you will enter. Do not worry, the principal step has been taken. The next step, the choice of a Congregation, will be taken with less difficulty than you imagine. Put your trust in Mary and you will see that everything will be settled according to her wishes.

You asked my opinion of the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence of Ribeauville. I don't know very much about this Congregation. I had thought that they had charge of boarding schools, but I got information about them recently and it seems that the Sisters work in village schools and that they have only one boarding school, that at Ribeauville. If this is so then I am inclined to agree with the advice of the Fathers you mentioned, unless you feel definitely drawn to this Society.

There is always danger in living alone unless one is strong, very strong. A firm character is needed for this sort of vocation, a conscience that can make clear decisions and is not given to worry of any kind, and a disposition that is not worried and embarrassed by irresoluteness. Those who follow that kind of vocation must be able to be their own guide with regard to their interior life, because they will not always get such guidance from their local pastor. They must also be firmly established in virtue. They must also know how to
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can not be themselves in their relations with others, for they must necessarily have such relations, and must be able to overcome the difficulties they meet if they wish to do good. They live an isolated life and must be able to help themselves since there is no one else there to help them. God's grace helps those who are called to that state of life, but the fact remains that they have less help than those who live in a community.

I think that you, because of your character and tastes, need community life. I also think that you need a community that is engaged in the work of education, for you need occupation. The instruction you got in music will be a help to you in this work. When you are fully decided, let me know, and I will try to find a Congregation that will suit you.

Don't worry about the dowry you will have to bring in order to be accepted. I hope to find a Congregation that will waive that, and that will be satisfied if you bring a suitable trousseau. This matter will not offer any difficulty. Pray to Mary and do not hesitate, and you will see that everything will be settled as you wish. If you would like me to look for a convent, let me know precisely how far you are advanced in the study of music, whether you can teach the piano, and whether you know vocal music.

With regard to the Notre Dame Convent of which you spoke to Father Ratisborne, do not think of it. Do not tell anyone that I said this to you. I want a good Congregation for you, one in which the members are regular and that has been in existence for a long time.

Take courage, my dear child; the matter of your vocation is much further advanced than you think. Be faithful to the good Lord. Keep your soul at peace and rely on the goodness
of Our Lord and the protection of Mary. Pray, be good and devout, and everything will work out well. Adieu!

Your uncle,

Father Francis Libermann
Missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary

P.S. I shall see Caroline tomorrow. They are very pleased with her at Louvencourt. She is willing to remain until next year.

My dear Pauline: (aged 20)

I have given serious thought to the subject of your vocation. Your soul is so dear to me that I feel obliged to do all that lies in my power to obtain for you all the spiritual advantages required for your sanctification. It is more and more clear to me that you should not enter a Congregation in which you might find yourself alone in a village. It is quite certain that you have more means of sanctifying yourself in your own family than in a Congregation of that kind. This type of work is admirable and is of great benefit to the souls for whose instruction the Congregation was founded, but it does not help the religious themselves. That they sacrifice themselves for the salvation of their neighbor makes their life beautiful, but a Congregation of this kind does not provide the means which help towards the sanctification of the members.
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You could, I believe, save your soul in that kind of Congregation, but would, I think, make little progress in the way of perfection. Now, my dear child, you ought to advance your own sanctification, and since I know that this is your greatest desire I have done my best to find the means for its realization.

Your taste and inclination seem to point clearly to a Congregation engaged in the education of children, and you must, therefore, find a Society which has this end. The needs of your own soul require a life that is withdrawn from the world, a life of regularity and obedience, a peaceful life in the company of devout souls who pursue the same end and who, living with you in a spirit of charity, give you the good example of a holy and religious life.

I have been looking for such a Society and have had the pleasure of finding it in Paris. You will not have to provide any dowry nor even pay for your keep during your novitiate. They will accept you without these things. This community belongs to the same Congregation as that of Notre Dame in Strasbourg where Caroline was educated. You are, therefore, acquainted with its Rule and with the life you will be called to live some day. My attention was called to this community by the pastor of Our Lady of Victories who has the highest praise for it. The convent was established by the Dames des Oiseaux, who belong to the same Congregation, and at first it depended on them. The Rule prescribes that each community be separate, and so it is now on its own. It is called Notre-Dame-du-Roule after the name of the Quarter in which it is situated, and they have a beautiful house and garden. It is well placed in a section that is isolated and peaceful.

They demand only that you bring the necessary trousseau and pay your own travelling expenses. They waive the requirements of the Rule for everything else. The divine
Jesus does not ask for a dowry. He only wants yourself; so give yourself to Him wholly without reserve.

You see, therefore, that all obstacles have been removed. Make the necessary arrangements for your journey to Paris immediately. I'll allow you one month to make your preparations. If you are ready sooner than that, come along. Do not allow things to drag on and do not indulge in indecision. This is a favorable opportunity offered you; do not let it slip. If you had a good knowledge of German it would be very useful to you in that convent. I forgot to mention that this convent is characterized by great simplicity.

I shall be in Paris until Sunday next, inclusive, so reply immediately and address your letter to Hotel de Strasbourg, Paris.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

Your uncle,

Father Francis Libermann

P. S. I would like to have written to your good mother to console her, but I have not the time at present.

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Letter Eleven La Neuville, July 30, 1844 Vol. 6, p. 287

My dear Pauline: (aged 20)

I am so overwhelmed with work that I can hardly find time to breathe, but still I feel obliged to write a few words to you to help you to overcome your fears which are perfectly groundless.
Be at peace, be calm and make ready to come to Paris. Cut short the time of waiting instead of prolonging it, and walk with a firm step to answer God's call.

I have explained exactly to the Superior of the convent at Roule what your academic qualifications are. You have all that is required to be accepted. The Sisters are principally interested in your talent for the piano and not in your ability to teach a class. Moreover, you will have enough time during the two years novitiate to perfect yourself in the sciences in which you are deficient. Your father tells me that you know enough German to teach a beginners' class. You can perfect your knowledge of this language and you will be a useful specialist in that subject in the convent. Those who told you that the piano was not taught in that convent were mistaken. It is principally because of your proficiency in that field that they count on you.

You will find in that community good religious who are very devout and charitable. Great peace and union reigns among them. Father Desgenettes told me this. The Reverend Mother is remarkable for her sweetness and simplicity. I did not meet any other members of the community, but I was very pleased with all that I saw and heard.

Be reassured, then, and come without fail during the first days of September. Disperse all those clouds which the devil is trying to spread over your mind. Have confidence, let your heart be detached. Divine Goodness offers you a great grace. Be grateful to Him for it. Be faithful and do not hesitate for one moment.

Your uncle,

Father Francis Libermann

P.S. Miss Henriette Koestler has arrived. Rev. Mother Superior of Louvencourt seems pleased. I have not yet seen Henriette. I wonder what Caroline will say at the news.
Letter Twelve   Paris, July 7, 1831   Vol. 13, p. 30

My dear Sister St. Leopold (Pauline):

You should not be surprised nor anxious when, from time to time, your heart plays tricks on you. The gardener is not surprised that the weeds return after he has raked and cleared the soil. He knows beforehand that some will return and that he will have to repeat the weeding over and over again. What does he do when the weeds reappear? He starts raking once more, and after long and repeated raking, he succeeds in getting his garden in good shape.

We should not allow ourselves to become discouraged. Let us, for love of our Divine Spouse, pull up all that springs from our evil nature, and set to work as soon as something bad appears so as not to allow the evil weed to grow strong. Besides, you should know that weeds grow more quickly in good soil. Sensitive and loving hearts are made to belong entirely to God and to sacrifice everything for Him. But we must expect to find in them the brambles and thorns which you mentioned. You must keep busy pulling them out, and in the end they will disappear. With patience, courage, perseverance, humility, confidence in prayer, you will be able to overcome all difficulties.

Your uncle,

Father Francis Libermann
My very dear Sister:

I am very happy to learn that you have at long last been able to find a good retreat master. You needed such a master and it is good that God has granted you your desire. It seems, however, that you are always on the look-out for something that can cause you anxiety. When the good Lord gives you honey, you very quickly take a pinch of pepper after it. You have scarcely finished telling me that you have drawn much benefit from your retreat when you add: "I believe that the good Lord will demand a more severe account from me because of the graces He has given me." This is what I call taking a pinch of pepper directly after the honey.

Now, why should the good Lord ask you for a more rigorous account? Does a mother give a nice dress to her child in order to have the satisfaction of scolding her when, later on, the child soils it? And does the child who received the nice dress get upset because it was love that prompted the mother to give it to her? On the contrary, the child is satisfied, she is happy. Of course, she does take care not to soil the nice dress which her mother has given her. You should act in the same way. Be pleased and feel happy about God's infinite love for you, and do not insult His goodness and His great love for you by yielding to fears. It is not to make you fear Him that He gives you graces. Therefore, be filled with gratitude to Him for His goodness, and profit from those graces by pleasing Him more and more.

The difficulties you see in the way of your spiritual progress are not as great as you think. They exist solely in your imagination and your feelings, and are not found in the
depths of your soul. You wish to belong to God and you do belong to Him. You desire to belong to Him, not merely in terms of a vague willingness, but also in practice. However, your difficulty is that your imagination does not always permit a sense-perceptible consciousness of God. This in no way affects the substance of things nor does it prevent you from belonging really to God or from practising the virtues that make you pleasing to Him. Your faults, and nobody is exempt from these, make their presence felt in your feelings, but the will does not consent to them. The greatest evil, and perhaps the only evil in your case, is that this difficulty arising in your imagination upsets you. The appearance of a defect in this manner makes you at once tremble with fear. This is the thing that must be avoided absolutely. You must not, therefore, worry about anything. Remain calm and peaceful and full of humble confidence in God, even when you have consented to a fault. If you remain in peaceful confidence, I will vouch for everything. Do not fret, either, when you find traces or remnants of a past emotion in you. Bear this as a cross which you must carry as long as God permits it to remain with you. One thing you must do is to bear it with peace, complete submission, humility, and confidence in God.

Be assured that there is no longer any evil in the things that remain in you and that your will has no longer any share in them. Such emotions leave behind some traces which remain in your senses and imagination in spite of yourself. Remain at peace, then, and despise all those thoughts that come to your mind, and you will the more quickly be rid of them.

With regard to the affairs that concern your beloved Congregation, do not become agitated, but leave everything in God's hands. He will come to your assistance when you least expect it. Let things take their course, have peace of mind,
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and confidence in God; and abandon yourself entirely to God and Our Lady. It is divine Goodness that caused that you should enter religion, and rest assured that you will live and die consecrated to God.

Don’t be angry with Father de Brandt. He acted for the good of your Congregation. If he has erred, God permitted it for reasons known to Him alone. Submit yourself to God with peace and love, and learn to see in men nothing but instruments in His hands.

May the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ remain with you and fill your soul.

Your devoted uncle,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, Superior