CHAPTER SIX

FATHER LIBERMAN AS SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE HOLY GHOST FATHERS, 1848-1852

1. The Entrance of Father Libermann and His Confreres into the Congregation of the Holy Ghost

From the very beginning of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary there had been some discussion about incorporating its membership in the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. Rome itself had proposed the idea rather bluntly in 1840, when Francis Libermann presented his plan for a new congregation. "You want to raise altar against altar," he was told. "The Society of the Holy Ghost takes care of this work. You are not needed." For this reason, as we have seen above, contact was sought with Father Fourdinier, but without success. The time was not yet ripe for such an association. Nevertheless, Father Libermann did not give up hope and continued working toward it. As he wrote in 1848:

The union of our two societies has always appeared to me as being in line with God's will. The societies have the same purpose and work along the same lines. It is not in the order of Divine Providence to raise up two societies for a special work if one can suffice.

In 1845 the Propaganda itself again suggested that the two combine their efforts, but the temporary status of Father Warnet as Superior of the Holy Ghost Congregation prevented him from taking action just then. As we have seen, Father Leguay, his successor, refused to have anything to do with Libermann. After his resignation, Father Monnet took the helm. He knew the priests of the Holy Heart of Mary from personal experience, for he had worked with them in Reunion. His relations with Father Le Vavasseur were particularly cordial. As a matter of fact, Monnet originally wanted to join Libermann's congregation because it was dedicated to work among abandoned slaves and Libermann had even considered admitting him without requiring him to return to France for the novitiate. Nothing had come of this plan because Father Le Vavasseur recommended Monnet as an excellent mis-
sionary but a poor candidate for life in a religious community. Despite the break-down in negotiations, however, relations continued to be friendly on both sides. It is not surprising, therefore, that Father Monnet was not troubled by that dark prejudice against Libermann which nearly all the older Holy Ghost Fathers, except Father Warnet, shared. The same might be said of Father John Loewenbruck, who had joined the Congregation only in 1847 and who was destined to play a decisive role in the impending incorporation of Father Libermann and his priests.

In general, the atmosphere was more favorable toward a union than it had ever been before. Therefore, when Mr. Schoelcher wanted to nominate two unsuitable priests as Prefects Apostolic in Martinique and Guadeloupe, one can understand why Father Monnet sought contact with Libermann to prevent the nominations. In his reply, Father Libermann pointed out that he not only wished to live in harmony with the Holy Ghost Fathers, but sincerely desired to see the two congregations united into one. His letter arrived at a moment when Warnet, Loewenbruck and Monnet themselves were thinking of seeking a way to reach a decision on this same question. Father Monnet jumped at the offer, for Mr. Schoelcher once more was threatening to by-pass the Holy Ghost Fathers, and this practically amounted to a threat of suppression.

He set out at once for Notre Dame du Gard to open negotiations, but the affair developed into a protracted process. Several Holy Ghost Fathers, notably Father Gaultier,1 were still vehemently opposed to any idea of union. In view of all the stories that had been circulated in Paris about the ambitious plotting of the convert Jew, one cannot blame them for the aversion they experienced. Moreover, Father Monnet's desire for the union was inspired for the most part by the difficulties he met in his relations with the temperamental Mr. Schoelcher. As Schoelcher's animosity against the Spiritans rose or fell, so did Father Monnet's enthusiasm for the union. Then too, a newly appointed official Commission for the Clergy unexpectedly turned out to be quite favorable to the Holy Ghost Fathers. Lastly, a governmental reorganization was in the air, and it was hoped that this would remove most of the problems.

1 He remained opposed to the very end. However, once the decision was taken, he was loyal and did his utmost to secure its success. Libermann made him his first assistant.
N. D. 10, 356 When this Commission began to operate late in 1848, it transferred responsibility for religious service to the colonies from the Navy to the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, then headed by a pious Catholic, who sincerely desired to give the Church all possible freedom to organize itself overseas. With this new development, most of the difficulties experienced by the Spiritans were on the point of disappearing—at least temporarily, for the only permanent feature of the French government was its instability. This explains why Father Monnet was no longer in a hurry to achieve a union.

N. D. 10, 397 Fortunately, he had already appointed Father Loewenbruck to negotiate an agreement with Libermann and his priests. Loewenbruck was quick to realize Father Libermann's exceptional abilities. Having considerable experience himself in handling men and affairs, he clearly saw that Father Monnet lacked the diplomacy and abilities needed to administer and lead a congregation, despite his unquestionable talents for missionary work. He feared the worst unless someone of Libermann's caliber assumed the helm. For this reason he applied himself successfully to overcoming Father Monnet's hesitancy.

N. D. 10, 416 On the Feast of Pentecost, June 10, 1848, both parties gathered in formal session at Holy Ghost Seminary and unanimously accepted the union in principle, leaving the settlement of details for a later date. The most important issue was the identity of the new Superior General. Nearly all agreed that it should be Libermann and not Monnet. However, a simple resignation was not the answer. Apart from making it look as if Father Monnet had been coldly pushed aside, it would have caused serious trouble with Archbishop Affre of Paris, whose dislike of Libermann was a matter of common knowledge. To make matters worse, the Archbishop had just made Father Monnet his Vicar General. Thus, if Monnet was to be replaced, it had to be by way of promotion. Father Libermann knew a possibility: the Propaganda was looking for a suitable candidate to be promoted to the episcopacy and sent to Madagascar as its Vicar Apostolic. If Rome could be persuaded to accept mission-minded Father Monnet for this post, the problem would be solved to everyone's satisfaction. At least, it was worth trying. They all decided, therefore, that Libermann and Monnet should both go to Rome to consult the Propaganda.
Before this decision could be executed, new political events caused a change of plans. The year 1848 was a year of revolutions all over Europe. France had opened the series by its February Revolution, but a single one in such a monumental year apparently was not enough. Before the end of June another broke out. Much of the fighting was concentrated in the area around Holy Ghost Seminary, which was completely surrounded by barricades. Though the bloody struggle lasted only a few days, the situation during the following weeks was so uneasy that neither Monnet nor Libermann could leave their congregations unprotected. Therefore, they resolved to make use of Father Loewenbruck's diplomatic abilities. He was sent to Rome with two letters—one from Father Monnet, explaining the desirability of the union, the other from Father Libermann, recommending Monnet for the Vicariate of Madagascar.

In Rome, too, revolution was in the air. In a fever of anticipation, the pontifical offices were operating with abnormal rapidity, doing their best to expedite unfinished business before political events could stop the affairs of the Church from running their course. Thus, Father Loewenbruck was able to achieve quick results: the Propaganda was fully in favor of the plans and quite willing to consider Father Monnet as a candidate for the Vicariate of Madagascar. The official answer, they said, would be dispatched to Paris immediately after a decision had been taken by the Council of the Propaganda in its meeting of September 14 and its approval by the Pope. Happy to have succeeded and anxious to escape another revolution, Father Loewenbruck returned to Paris with the good news.

To his surprise and pain, his reception was far from enthusiastic. Under the influence of Father Gaultier, Monnet had changed his mind again. He no longer wanted a union. Only after considerable effort on Loewenbruck's part could he be induced to look kindly on it again. Ultimate success was due in large measure to the fact that Loewenbruck could repeatedly point to the episcopal nomination which was expected at any moment. August 24, 1848, both parties signed an agreement which stipulated the conditions of the fusion. These were the salient items:

1) that the title and rules of the Holy Ghost Congregation were to be retained, 2) the practice of poverty was to be re-established,
and 3) the second order was to be suspended till a decision respecting it could be obtained from the Propaganda. On this occasion also, the negotiators unanimously accepted Monnet’s proposal that Libermann be the new Superior General. A month later, on September 26, 1848, the Propaganda sent the promised official approval, and on October 3, Father Monnet was named Vicar Apostolic of Madagascar. The document read in part:

N. D. 10, 375 f. It is your task to bring this union of your two congregations to a conclusion in such a way that from now on the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary ceases to exist and its associates and members are aggregated to the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, thereby becoming its associates and members, sharing the same rights and privileges and being subject to the same disciplinary rules.

Both congregations gained great benefits from this aggregation. The case has sometimes been represented as if the Holy Ghost Fathers were the only ones to benefit, while the others came away with only additional burdens. For this reason it may be useful to point out the strengths and weaknesses of both bodies.

At the time when Libermann and his confreres entered, the Congregation of the Holy Ghost had thirteen members, while about thirty others were making their novitiate in the colonies prior to being accepted under the modified rule introduced by Father Leguay. The Seminary contained sixty aspirants to the priesthood, who, according to the rule revised by Father Leguay and approved by the Holy See, were to be considered as aspirants to the Congregation. Most but not all of these novices withdrew under the reform introduced by Father Libermann. According to Father Le Vavasseur, none of the novices in Reunion were good enough to join the Congregation; yet one of them, whom he would “never consent to admit,” was accepted by the Trappists.

2Because it is often said that there were only four or five, we give here the list of their names: Father Monnet, Father Warnet, Father Gaultier, Father Hardy, Father Loewenbruck, Father Vidal, Father Weber, Father Hervé, Father Hersent, Father Cheroutre, Father Orinel, Father Lucienne, and Father Richard. Cf. N. D. 10, 352 ff. and 11, 92 and 582.

3"Pro fine habet ... SODALES educare," as the rule of the Congregation still reads.
Among the thirteen old Holy Ghost Fathers there were men of outstanding ability, such as Father Gaultier, a close collaborator of Migne, who was renowned for his theological learning; Father Loewenbruck, a famous preacher of popular missions in France, whose diplomatic abilities so impressed the Propaganda that he was charged with a delicate mission to Corfu and even designated to become Archbishop of the place; Father Monnet himself, whose real talent lay in missionary work; Father Vidal, who became Préfet Apostolic of Senegal. What they lacked was a man who could solve the ever-recurring crises resulting from government interference in the ecclesiastical affairs of the colonies and exercise strong leadership within the walls of the Seminary itself.

In the current situation, any serious conflict of views between the Government and the Spiritans immediately became a threat to the very existence of the Congregation. Their independence was far too limited by the single aim of training colonial clergy. In fact, the turbulent first half of the nineteenth century emphasized this serious defect in the organization of the Congregation. Membership was largely restricted to the minimum required for the proper functioning of the colonial seminary and the small number of members offered only a small chance of finding one of outstanding ability, capable of assuming the leadership.

Moreover, while other congregations and orders had been able to concentrate on rebuilding their ranks after the Revolution before they resumed their apostolic labors, the Holy Ghost Fathers were not given a chance to do likewise. The reason lies in the anomalous position in which they found themselves at that time: they had to supply priests for the old French colonies where the Revolution had decimated the clergy, and yet the government interfered at every step. Paris insisted on having priests and more priests for the colonies because, since the abolition of slavery was imminent, all eyes were fixed on these territories and everyone feared the revolts that might occur if there were no priests to prepare the slaves for their freedom. At the same time, as we have seen, interference continued to make a normal development of the seminary impossible. The Spiritans had to send every available priest to the missions and never had a chance to resume their eighteenth century custom of retaining the best products of their seminary to strengthen their own ranks. Finally, out-
Father Nicolas Warnet, Eighth Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost (1845).

Father Alexander Leguay, Ninth Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost (1845-1848).

Bishop Alexander Monnet, Tenth Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost (1848).
siders who were foreign to the traditions of the Congregation had to be called in to help operate it, with such disastrous consequences as we have related in the case of Father Leguay.

N. D. 10, 345 The entrance of Father Libermann and his confreres brought remedy to these evils. It strengthened the ranks of the Holy Ghost Fathers with thirty-four priests and ten novices. In addition, Libermann had thirty-four aspirants in his senior seminary (twenty-one in theology and thirteen in philosophy), along with twenty-eight brothers. Father Libermann himself possessed abundantly all the qualities necessary for leadership; he enjoyed the esteem and confidence of many high government officials; and he was beyond all dispute one of the ablest directors a seminary could desire.

Materially and financially speaking, the Holy Ghost Congregation was neither rich nor poor. Its seminary was well-equipped, free of debt, and enjoyed an independent income of about 8,000 gold francs a year. The Government paid its professors a small salary and provided for the maintenance of sixty seminarians. This income, however, was too dependent on the vagaries of governmental decisions to provide any permanent security for the functioning of the seminary. As a matter of fact, in January 1849, the government allocation was arbitrarily reduced by fifty percent. One could hardly say then that Father Libermann was attracted by the riches of the Holy Ghost Seminary. Nevertheless, he had to deny repeatedly the widely circulated story that, being on the verge of bankruptcy, he was trying in this way to recoup his finances. It must be admitted that the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary possessed little or no fixed income and had to manage quite economically to make ends meet. The bottom of the money box was continually visible, even though its income nearly always stayed a few francs ahead of expenses. Despite this record of solvency, the official report of the Propaganda states that without the union Libermann's congregation "would necessarily have to be disbanded for lack of economic resources." Libermann himself merely admits that "through the union we will secure for ourselves to some extent the resources [we need] for the maintenance of the novitiate and the support of missionaries who are no longer able to work." As we have seen, the only independent income that could be diverted to such a
purpose amounted to only 8,000 francs a year, just enough to maintain sixteen persons.

The really priceless possession enjoyed by the Holy Ghost Congregation was its legal recognition by the French Government, dating back to the times of King Louis XV. The value of this recognition was demonstrated very clearly in 1901 when the anticlerical government of Combes could find no legal way to expel the Congregation and confiscate its properties. In fact, the Supreme Council of State, by an act unique in its history, had to reverse itself and rescind its own decree of suppression. Libermann lacked such a recognition and realized that it could no longer be obtained. Yet, in the words of the Propaganda, his congregation needed it, "in order not to be subject to dissolution in the near future." The Venerable himself appeared to allude to this when he wrote:

If we had remained separate, the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary would have been exposed, if not to shipwreck, at least to a lingering existence for a considerable time and to experience perhaps some years hence such difficulty and opposition that all its efforts would have been thwarted.

Thus we see that the legal status of the Holy Ghost Fathers was one of the major considerations that inspired Libermann to seek the union.

A second impelling reason was the fact that the Holy Ghost Congregation was officially in charge of the old French colonies, where Libermann’s priests had begun their work. Serious jurisdictional conflicts were bound to arise and had, in fact, already occurred in Reunion and Senegambia. Libermann was very much disturbed by them and realized that he was at a disadvantage because the Spiritans had the official recognition of both Church and State, while his congregation had neither. In one stroke the union removed forever any possible source of further conflict of this sort.

Apart from the Holy Ghost Fathers, only three clerical societies enjoy legal recognition in France. They are the Vincentians, the Sulpicians and the Foreign Missions Society of Paris. Like the Spiritans, all three obtained it before the French Revolution of 1792. During the Second World War the Vichy Government extended it to the Carthusians.
Tabulating the position of both congregations in the summer of 1848, before Libermann became Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers, we arrive at the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missions</th>
<th>Holy Ghost Fathers</th>
<th>Fathers of the Holy Heart of Mary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| territories | 1. St. Pierre et Miquelon  
2. Martinique  
3. Reunion  
4. Guadeloupe  
5. Senegal  
6. Guiana  
7. Pondicherry  
8. Madagascar  
9. Malgaches Islands* | The Vicariate of the Two Guineas  
One foundation in Mauritius and another in Reunion |
| personnel | about 180 secular priests; 7 members | 26 priests  
10 Brothers |
| Europe | houses | personnel |
| Seminary in Paris  
one country house | 6 priest-members  
2 others | 8 priests  
18 Brothers |

*After the death of Bishop Monnet in 1849, Madagascar and the Malgaches Islands were handed over to the Jesuits. Later, the Holy Ghost Fathers were to take charge again of about one-third of Madagascar.

2. Reorganization

A young and vigorous branch had been grafted onto an aging tree. Would it flourish or would the two organisms show so much incompatibility that the branch would wither away and the old stump itself would be bereft of life? Everything depended on the adaptability of the men who had formerly belonged to two separate groups and on Libermann’s ability to cope with difficulties as they arose. His election as Superior General—the eleventh in a line started by Father Poullart des Places—and the incor-
poration of his associates into the Holy Ghost Congregation placed on Libermann's shoulders these three additional burdens:

1. overcoming internal and external opposition to the new state of affairs;
2. giving proper direction to the colonial seminary;
3. solving the religious crises of the old colonies.

a. Internal Opposition

With respect to the first item, much depended on how the members would react to unification. The old Holy Ghost Fathers in Paris caused no great concern. Libermann himself was able to report soon after his election as Superior General:

We no longer have to fear any difficulty on the part of the old members of the Holy Ghost. They are no longer attached to the former state of affairs. Our moderation, kindness, and confidence in them has won them over completely.

As we will see, only one of them, Father Hardy, was going to cause any trouble in the future. Three of them became Vicar or Prefects Apostolic shortly after Libermann's accession—namely, Father Monnet in Madagascar, Father Weber in the Malgaches Islands, and Father Vidal in Senegal, while Father Loewenbruck was constantly occupied in Corfu by a special mission for the Propaganda. Of those in the colonies, some accepted the new arrangement and remained members, others gradually dropped out. All of them were isolated in colonial parishes and would not have been able to cause trouble even if that had been their intention.

Surprisingly, the greatest opposition came from Father Libermann's own confreres of the Holy Heart of Mary. Mail service at that time was rather slow, and he had been forced to proceed without consulting those who were scattered through Mauritius, Reunion, and Africa. He had tried to keep them informed by letters, but off in the distance, with wild rumors reaching them from every side, it was difficult for them to get a clear picture of the whole affair. Some, including Father Laval in Mauritius, apparently learned of the union through the newspapers before word reached them from Father Libermann. Father Duteil, a Benedictine, poured fuel on the discontent by stories about quarrels.
between the two congregations. Father Thiersé declared that he would be anything rather than a Holy Ghost Father. However, when it became clear that, apart from the name, nothing much had been changed in their status and that they would “continue to live in the missions as they had done before,” they soon regained their composure and accepted the new order of things.

In Notre Dame du Gard, however, there was at first an angry outburst. Father Kobés, then assistant novice master, happened to be near the door when a postman delivered the document from the Propaganda addressed to Libermann. Impulsively he tore open the letter, read it, and stormed into the community room where Father Libermann was giving a conference to the novices. “Treason!” he shouted, “We have been betrayed!” He, as well as the others, had expected a substitution of their own congregation for that of the Holy Ghost or at least an ex aequo union of the two. Instead, the Propaganda had simply suppressed the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary and directed its members to enter the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. The document did not even recommend retention of the rule or the combination of names. Even Father Lannurien, Libermann’s intimate friend, called the decree a betrayal of the whole past.

Francis Libermann’s personal reaction, unlike that of his confreres, was the acquiescence of a saint. As Father Le Vavasseur testified in the apostolic process dealing with the heroic nature of the Venerable’s virtues:

“In order that the Congregation of the Holy Ghost might not be considered as a new Congregation, Father Libermann eagerly accepted the decree of the Holy See by which his own Congregation was totally dissolved before its members entered that of the Holy Ghost.”

5Father Loewenbruck had not dared to mention these two points in his negotiations at Rome because he feared that it would jeopardize the whole union. Only a few months before, the Propaganda had approved Leguay’s revision of the rule. He was afraid that they would object to another radical change coming so soon after that one. At least, it would have delayed the whole affair and, with a revolution hovering over Rome, there was no time for delays.

In his article “Le Bienheureux Père Eymard,” Études, July 1925, p. 136, Paul Dudon claims that some of Libermann’s confreres refused to follow him into the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and organized a short-lived independent community at the Rue d’Enfer, Paris. The records of Libermann’s suppressed society published in Notes et Documents, vol. 13, App., pp. 44 ff., clearly show that the author’s assertion is utterly without any foundation: not a single member of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary left at the time of the “fusion.”
After all, Libermann was not too worried over the omissions. He was convinced that Rome would allow him to make the necessary changes. As a matter of fact, a few weeks later he travelled to Rome and obtained without difficulty the suspension of the second order, the restoration of poverty, and the insertion of the Immaculate Heart in the title of the Congregation. The full title, which is used only in certain official ecclesiastical documents, used to be “The Congregation of the Holy Ghost under the Protection of the Immaculate Virgin.” This now became “The Congregation of the Holy Ghost under the Protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”

Fortunately, Libermann’s tact and patience eventually succeeded in overcoming the opposition of his own confreres. Slowly they came to accept the union as it had been ordered by the Propaganda. Many, however, objected for a long time to being called Holy Ghost Fathers and in their writing and thinking continued to oppose the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary to that of the Holy Ghost. They could not bear to think that Libermann’s congregation had simply been disbanded and suppressed by Rome.

Even his successor, Father Schwindenhammer, continued to speak about the “former” Congregation of the Holy Ghost, and he referred to Libermann as the Founder of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Immaculate Heart of Mary and its First Superior General. Traces of this resistance can be found even in our times. Some, for example, out of habit still say that Libermann was the first Superior General and others still call him the Founder. In later years, as we shall see, this reluctance to face facts and submit to the decision of Rome gave rise to a severe crisis for the Congregation in France.

Now, with peace more or less restored among his own spiritual children, Libermann set himself to the task of supplementing the brief rule of the Holy Ghost Congregation by a set of additional regulations covering the many points in which the old rule was insufficient for the new state of affairs. Being careful to consult the old Holy Ghost Fathers on the matter, he was happy to report that

---

6The second part of the new title not only resembled the old one in meaning but did not even alter the aspect under which the Congregation honored the Mother of God. In 1828, long before Libermann’s congregation came into existence, the Spiritans erected in their Motherhouse the Confraternity of the Most Pure Heart of Mary.
"they were delighted" with his additions. The necessity of adding these new regulations, which constitute the basis of the present Constitutions of the Congregation, gave him a welcome opportunity to revise his own provisional rule by discarding impractical points and incorporating the experiences of the previous eight years.

**D. Conflict with the Archbishop of Paris**

While internal difficulties were being solved in this way, a major problem arose from an unexpected angle: Archbishop Dominic Sibour of Paris, the successor of Archbishop Affre, who had been killed on a barricade during the June revolution of 1848. Following the example of Father Monnet, Libermann had abstained from asking the Archbishop of Paris to confirm his election as Superior General. According to the rules approved by the Propaganda, the right of confirmation now belonged to Rome. This was too much for the Gallican tendencies of the new Archbishop, whose chancery was full of Libermann's enemies. In a bitter and injurious letter he accused the priests of the Congregation of misleading the Propaganda, of celebrating Mass, preaching, and hearing confessions without his permission, and even perpetrating open acts of hostility. Moreover, he warned them that their withdrawal from his control had made them lose their legal recognition. Father Libermann's reply failed to soothe his ire. He demanded a return to the ancient rule of 1734, which had been approved by his predecessor.

Realizing that Rome would never allow a Congregation with works on four continents to return to diocesan status, Libermann told the Archbishop that such a decision could be taken only by the Propaganda and suggested that the Archbishop apply for it. His Excellency, however, was not attracted by the prospect of altercations with Rome. He ordered Libermann to request the change as if the idea was initiated by the Congregation itself. All the while he kept insisting that a return to his control was necessary for legal recognition.

When none of Father Libermann's proposed drafts of a letter to the Propaganda proved satisfactory, the Archbishop ordered him to sign a letter composed by the archiepiscopal secretary. Meanwhile, Libermann was having a legal expert examine the Archbishop's claims regarding recognition. The lawyer concluded that
a change in rule approved by Rome had no influence whatsoever on the legal status of the Society. It was obvious that the question had been raised only as a pretext to regain control over the Congregation. To avoid sharpening the conflict, therefore, Libermann signed the letter. But the Archbishop had forgotten that more than one letter can be written. Father Libermann had no scruples about sending a confidential note to the Secretary of the Propaganda explaining the background of the whole affair and asking him to tell the whole story to the Cardinal Prefect.

The papers reached Rome just when the long-expected revolution had broken out in Italy. With the Pope in exile at Gaeta, the central offices of the Church were so disorganized that they could expedite only the most urgent questions. The little quarrel of the Archbishop was not important enough to fall into this category and no answer whatsoever was given to the request. As Libermann himself had advised, it was better to delay a decision and give time a chance to solve the problem.

Meanwhile the Archbishop continued to raise difficulties. Efforts were made in all secrecy by members of his chancery to have Libermann and his priests removed from the Seminary and to place the institution under the direction of a diocesan Vicar General. When Sibour's signature was needed to legalize a bequest in favor of the Congregation, he refused to give it and thereby caused the loss of the legacy. In 1851 the Venerable began to fear that his priests would be refused faculties in the Archdiocese. Then the Vicar General of Paris, Father Lequeux, offered his mediation. Knowing the extreme Gallican tendencies of this priest (who was soon to be condemned by Rome), Libermann feared the worst and decided to reject his offer. He did this, knowing full well how angry the Chancery would be. "I have become hardened," he said, "against all these anger both official and unofficial. Let the good God do with us what He will. We cannot give way to thunder."

With no reply from Rome and no concessions from Libermann who, incidentally, was supported by other French bishops, Archbishop Sibour's campaign made very little progress. The affair was still unsettled in 1857 when a murderer's hand put an end to the Archbishop's life. Libermann himself had died five years before. Their respective successors, Cardinal Morbot and Father Schwindenhammer solved the problem without too much difficulty.
C. S. 11, 56  The settlement left the Congregation under the authority of Rome, except for the normal jurisdiction exercised by any bishop over non-exempt religious in his diocese. Underlying the whole dispute had been the outspoken pro-Roman tendencies of the Congregation, whose Parisian Seminary traditionally had been a stalwart proponent of papal supremacy. In fact, just at the time of the union, Father Gaultier had made many enemies among the French clergy by his staunch defense of the Pope's prerogatives. Now Libermann's influence had given further impetus to this anti-Gallican trend. Thus it is not surprising that prelates who were still imbued with ideas of French independence in Church affairs tried to regain control over this stronghold of opposition to Gallicanism.

With respect to the outside world, including even ecclesiastical circles, it was important to achieve full realization of the changes brought about by the new organization. From now on there had to be a clear distinction between members of the Congregation and the secular priests who had studied at the colonial seminary. Until the union, both members of the Congregation and the secular priests trained by them had been known everywhere as Holy Ghost Fathers. Henceforth this title, or its popular form "Spiritan," was to be reserved exclusively for members of the Congregation. Although it was some time before the distinction was generally recognized, it is from this moment on that we must cease to pay special attention to the secular clergy of the old French colonies. Its history is no longer a history of the Holy Ghost Fathers.

C. R E F O R M O F T H E S E M I N A R Y

The venerable Holy Ghost Seminary was showing unmistakable signs of the critical times it had weathered since the death of Father Fourdinier, three years before. Far too often and too long its Superior had been absent on recruiting journeys through France without being replaced by someone who was capable of adequately directing the seminarians. As a result, these young men were often left to their own devices and discipline suffered greatly. The house was always full of priests on their way to or from the colonies, and

7 However, Archbishop Darboy, his successor, who was in conflict with Rome because of his Gallicanism, reopened the battle. It ended definitely only when Father Schweinhammer saved the life of his Vicar General during the brief communist rule of 1871. The Archbishop himself was murdered. Since then relations between the Congregation and the Archdiocese have always been excellent.
these visitors would harangue any audience they could muster about their views on the emancipation of slaves, the iniquities of the colonial Government, the unreasonableness of their ecclesiastical superiors, and their fears of what might result if Libermann were to take over. In addition, the Seminary had been in the midst of the two bloody revolutions of February and June 1848, just before Libermann assumed charge. Barricades around the house and the crackle of gun-fire are not exactly conducive to the recollected atmosphere that a seminary demands. Finally, although a large majority of the seminarians were suitable candidates for the priesthood, certain members of the student body simply did not belong there.

Strictly speaking, the presence of a few unsuitable candidates is nothing special in a seminary, for one of its very functions is to probe the character and motives of aspirants to the priesthood. Obviously, there will always be some who fail to pass the test. Holy Ghost Seminary usually had a relatively high number of these misfits because it received aspirants from all over France and some foreign countries as well. Contrary to the usual procedure in other seminaries, its directors were unable to interview candidates before their admission. They often had to rely on information supplied by distant pastors who were personally unknown to them, and misplaced pity sometimes induced these priests to give unsuitable candidates another chance in different surroundings. Without a capable director at the Seminary, the presence of these misfits gave rise to dangerous consequences.

At first, Father Libermann did not encounter any great difficulty. The Government had just reduced its support of the seminary by fifty percent, and this justified his dismissing fifteen of the more doubtful characters. Those who were left received his fullest attention and in general responded fairly well to the guidance of this expert director. Unfortunately, in April 1849, Father Libermann fell seriously ill when the cholera swept Paris and it was six months before he could return to the seminary.

During his absence, agitation started. At first it began with the usual trivial complaints about the quality of the food, the parsimony of the bursar, and the restrictions of daily life. The

---

8Although the Seminary was in one of the most infected areas of the city and his priests fearlessly visited the sick, the dread disease struck only one of those living in the Seminary.
unusual feature of these customary complaints, heard in any seminary, was that they were circulated all over France and communicated even to the Government. Soon the affair became more serious: the Congregation was accused of wanting to close the colonies to the secular clergy and of using the Government subsidy for its own interests. The first climax was reached when, after Libermann's return, five newly-ordained priests decided to hold a demonstration and collectively refused to accept their appointments for Guiana. Libermann's quiet reaction succeeded in bringing them back to reason, but in the excitement of the moment these demonstrators revealed who was behind the wave of discontent—Father Hardy.

As we have mentioned before, Father Hardy suffered from a mental and emotional imbalance which was shrouded in a deceptively pious exterior. In 1844 he had been expelled by Father Fourdinier, but Father Leguay took him back later. At first he graciously accepted Father Libermann, but when a new General Council was chosen and he did not receive a single vote, he flew into a rage and sought to avenge himself.

The easiest way to achieve his end seemed to lie in causing as much trouble as possible in the Seminary. He had ample time to foment dissension for, under the pretense of illness, he had never accepted any work. Joining forces with certain persons at the diocesan Chancery, he plotted the expulsion of the "Libermannists" and their replacement by a Vicar General of the diocese, a function to which he himself aspired. At night he went to the rooms of the seminarians to announce the impending expulsion of Father Libermann and his priests and to feed the fires of revolution. Feigning innocence and submission to the Superior, he devised a secret code of communication by which he could keep the ringleaders informed and the resistance active. The whole affair was plotted and executed with the utmost secrecy. Seminarians who were involved in it took great care not to commit any overt act that could cause their expulsion. They obeyed all rules scrupulously until they had received major orders. Then they threw off the mask, in the belief that now it was safe for them to act openly.

Complaints were sent to politicians and to the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs about Libermann's embezzlement of funds; Father Warnet and Father Gaultier were brought to court for allegedly having falsified, to the detriment of Father Hardy, the
last will of Father Fourdinier; the Government was petitioned to expel the “Libermannists” from the seminary. Even an accusation of simony was drawn up to be sent to Rome. It claimed that Father Libermann had sold a bishopric to gain control of the Holy Ghost Congregation.

The Venerable Father found it difficult to take any action against Father Hardy, because too many of his opponents in the Chancery were watching for a chance to openly attack the new regime at the Seminary and institute expulsion proceedings against Libermann. Of course, there was little hope of success in such efforts, but the resulting publicity would certainly have had an adverse effect on the Congregation and the Seminary.

The situation soon became intolerable. A solution had to be found, no matter what the consequences. Father Hardy was told to move from the Seminary to Notre Dame du Gard or, if he preferred, to the colonies. When he refused to obey, he received his canonical warnings and was excluded. However, he merely took lodgings nearby and continued his nefarious work until the end came suddenly for him in January, 1851. On his way to secure the support of a visiting colonial bishop, he slipped before the entrance of the seminary and fell in front of a heavy water cart.

Its wheels crushed his abdomen. Carried inside the house, he was given the last sacraments and died the following day among his former confreres whom he had so furiously and so bitterly fought.

With his death, the agitation and discontent at the Seminary came to an end. Deciding to clean up once and for all, Father Libermann expelled all those who had taken part in Father Hardy’s various plots. However, he recommended to other seminaries those whom he still considered capable of becoming good priests. As one of the ringleaders wrote to him after his dismissal:

I dare say this: in everything that happened we were only little wheels and blindly obeyed a director whom we falsely believed worthy of our respect. Yes, it was Father Hardy alone, who through his gestures and suggestions maintained a violent hatred of the Directors of the Holy Ghost Seminary in the minds of all without exception. He told us a thousand times: “I guarantee that you will not be expelled. Go on acting as you have done till now and I will take full responsibility.”
d. **The Solution of the Religious Crisis in the Old Colonies**

It may be useful to point out here that this crisis was not caused by the corruption of the clergy trained at Holy Ghost Seminary. Although the opposite view was generally accepted in France, it was based, not on facts, but on unwarranted generalizations drawn from a few isolated scandals and on a host of unproved rumors. Not a single one of the colonial priests who had been educated in the junior and senior seminary of the Holy Ghost became a bad priest in the colonies. Those who had spent at least a few years in this seminary were nearly all beyond reproach. This is a record that is rare even in the best seminaries of the Church.

However, these priests constituted only about half the colonial clergy. The rest consisted of volunteers from various dioceses and a small number of drifters who had gone to the colonies without any authorization. Because of the chronic shortage of priests, these wanderers often managed to get themselves accepted after their arrival. Nearly every scandal that occurred in the colonies had its source in them. Because priests occupied an official position in the French possessions, these scandals received great publicity, not only in the colony itself, but also in the homeland. As usual, a few cases were sufficient to lead most people to the conclusion that the whole clergy was corrupt.

Even a man like Father Libermann was far from flattering in his appreciation of the colonial clergy, at least before he became Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers and was able to know the whole situation from first-hand information. Then he did not hesitate to change his mind. Thus, for instance, in 1850, he wrote confidentially to Father Schwindenhammer:

> The majority of the colonial clergy is just as good as the majority of the French clergy. The clergy of Britain are generally held in high esteem. Nevertheless, most of these priests, if they had been transferred to the colonies, would not have done better than those who are there.

If the clergy of the colonies had been as bad as has often been suggested, they would never have succeeded in raising the Church from Revolutionary ruins to an established hierarchy in a few short years. The most serious fault of this clergy was its lack of subordination to the local Ecclesiastical Superiors.
Undoubtedly, there was a religious crisis in the colonies, but its cause did not lie in the corruption of the clergy. Its main factors were to be sought in the insufficiency and lack of homogeneity of the colonial clergy, the weakness of the authority of the Prefects Apostolic and their utter dependence on the civil administration. A few words must be said about each of these points before we can consider how the Venerable Francis Libermann succeeded in arriving at a solution.

**Insufficient Clergy.** In 1849 there was one priest for every 761 souls in France; in the old colonies there was only one for three times that number. Yet the colonies should have had more priests than France because of the absence of good roads and means of communication, the greater frequency of illness, and above all the urgent necessity of caring for the former slaves whose religious and moral training had so long been neglected. Libermann calculated that more than three hundred additional priests would be needed at once to obtain an average of one for every eight hundred souls.

**Lack of Homogeneity of the Clergy.** The constantly changing attitude of the Government regarding Holy Ghost Seminary had resulted in the necessity of recruiting priests elsewhere throughout France. According to Libermann’s calculation, merely to maintain the existing proportion of one priest per 2,250 souls there should always be at least sixty seminarians in training for the colonial clergy. Since the Government grant did not provide for that many, about half the priests had to be taken from among those offering themselves for this work. Far too often these volunteers were wholly unprepared for church work in tropical lands. Even at best, they were set in their habits and wanted to work in the manner they were accustomed to at home, although conditions overseas did not remotely resemble conditions in France. Then, when they died or were transferred, another priest would arrive from a different part of France and begin to run everything just as he used to do it in his old parish at home.

**Weakness of the Ecclesiastical Authority.** Each of the old colonies was governed by a Prefect Apostolic. This ecclesiastical superior did not possess the episcopal dignity; he was not even entitled to the purple robes of a Monsignor, because at that time
it was not yet customary to give Prefects this honor. He was just another priest among many and the precise nature and extent of his powers had not yet been determined by canon law. The priests within his jurisdiction received their faculties directly from the Propaganda, not from him. Thus the Prefect’s authority and moral ascendancy depended to a large extent on his personal qualities and understanding of the numerous factors entering into the government of human beings.

Moreover, it often happened that new ecclesiastical superiors followed each other in quick succession. For instance, Senegal alone had eleven Prefects and Vice-Prefects between 1817 and 1849, and Guadeloupe had four between 1844 and 1849. It is obvious that these men simply did not have the time to achieve effective control over their clergy. This weakness of ecclesiastical authority was rendered still more acute by the Prefects’ utter dependence on the Government. In fact, when the Governor of Reunion was in conflict with the Prefect he arrogantly said, “I am the Bishop here.” For the most part, Prefects were considered as just another type of state official who had to act in accord with the wishes of the civil command. When they refused to do so, they were often unceremoniously shipped back to France.

As one would expect, conflicts between the government and a Prefect usually resulted in a divided clergy, some siding with the Prefect and others with the Governor. This was especially true when civil authorities assigned priests to their posts and transferred them without too much concern for the opinion of the Ecclesiastical Superior. The constant insubordination of the clergy that is characteristic of this period, therefore, is understandable when viewed in this unfortunate political and canonical context.

Libermann’s Plan. To remedy these evils, Father Libermann developed a project which struck at the very roots of the problem. His plan, which he outlined in long memoranda to the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs and to the Propaganda, aimed at homogeneity in the clergy by insisting that only alumni of Holy Ghost Seminary be admitted to the colonies. This forced priests from elsewhere to spend at least a year of training in his Seminary. The ecclesiastical authorities of the colonies were to be given proper control over their clergy and adequate independence from civil authority by being raised to the episcopal dignity, at least in the
The scarcity of priests was to be alleviated by governmental support of the seminary sufficient to maintain at least sixty clerical aspirants. Finally, a native clergy was to be built up in the old colonies so that their missionary status would not be permanent. For this purpose, Libermann advocated the erection of junior seminaries in the principal colonies. Finally, religious communities of priests should be founded to take care of extra-parochial works.

While both the government and the Propaganda ultimately gave him nearly everything he had asked, it was not simply a matter of presenting his suggestions. First, the departmental ministers themselves had to be won over to his plan. This in itself was not an easy task, for the government had always insisted on retaining as much control as possible over the colonial clergy and their ecclesiastical superiors.

Fortunately, Libermann presented his plan at an auspicious moment, for just then a sincere Catholic held the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. The powerful Minister of the Navy and the Colonies was also persuaded to support these recommendations, and much of the credit for this was due to his wife, whose aid Libermann had previously enlisted. Though the government fell before the affair was concluded, the successors of these two Ministers were also brought into line. Next, Parliament had to be lined up to vote the necessary funds. To this end, Libermann managed to win influential politicians over to his proposal and even to convince that fanatical enemy of Holy Ghost Seminary—Mr. Schoelcher—that the plan had merit.

Because of the delicacy with which these multiple negotiations were carried off, Libermann gained quite a reputation for diplomacy. The Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs held him in such high esteem that he readily struck from the slate of episcopal candidates anyone to whom Libermann objected. This tremendously advantageous arrangement assured the elimination of schemers who might have sought one of the new bishoprics for themselves or for their friends. With a strong colonial hierarchy thus virtually guaranteed, the Holy See caused Libermann's cup of joy to run over.

Libermann tried to have Guiana erected as a Vicariate. However, death took him before his negotiations with the Government had been completed. It was only in 1934 that his wish was realized. The other colonies (St. Pierre et Miquelon, Pondicherry and Senegal) remained simple Prefectures.
overflow by instructing its new bishops to accept no priest who had not spent at least a year in Holy Ghost Seminary.

Cl. C. 212 ff.

Due to the government's liberal support, Holy Ghost Seminary entered into a new period of bloom after 1850. Applications were numerous. Screening was rigid. Only rarely were transfers from another seminary accepted and then only when their record was unblemished. The student body increased so rapidly that by 1857 the ordination class numbered forty-five. Usually there were about eighty seminarians, though at one time the total reached as high as a hundred and five.\textsuperscript{10} Between 1850 and 1878 the Seminary was able to send over 360 well-trained priests to the colonies. A decline in numbers, but not in quality, set in after 1890 when a resurgence of anticlericalism in France once again cut the resources of the Seminary. Then, with the separation of Church and State in 1905, the numbers began to drop sharply. The nadir was reached shortly before the First World War when only eight students occupied the Seminary.

However, after the war a slow rise began and the total levelled off at between thirty and forty. It has remained there ever since.

B. G. 43, 473

More recently, in 1954, the Seminary was transferred from the noise of Paris to a quiet spot at Croix-Valmer (Var), in Southern France. Most of its students nowadays come from the colonies themselves and thus constitute a genuine native clergy.

N. D. 13, 94

Libermann's final recommendation, viz., that religious orders take responsibility for non-parochial works in the colonies, came to function more slowly. He led the way by sending his own men to Guiana where they served leprosaria, prisons, and other houses of correction. As time went on, moreover, large numbers of Spiritans fanned out through all the old French colonies. But of this, more anon.

3. \textit{Works in the Homeland}

Thus far most of our attention has been devoted to the eighteenth and nineteenth century missionary activity of the Congregation and its revitalization by the entrance of Father Libermann and his priests. This kind of work was and still is the main apostolate engaged in by the Spiritans. However, there is another

\textsuperscript{10}This all-time high resulted from the entrance of Haitian candidates for the priesthood. Later Haiti opened an independent seminary near Guiclan in Finistère.
large field of activity in which Libermann’s sons had already begun to function during his life and which under the rule of his immediate successors acquired an ever-increasing importance, viz., educational and social works. To understand that these phases of the apostolate did not constitute a deviation from Father Libermann’s intent, we may find it helpful to examine certain aspects of the Venerable’s plans which hitherto have been almost completely neglected.

a. The Origin of Educational Institutions

When Father Libermann wrote his provisional rule in Rome, prior to the foundation of his Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, he had fixed as its general purpose the evangelization of the most abandoned souls. He had further specified this purpose by saying that “missions in foreign and distant lands” were to be the aim of his priests. His intention was to keep in the homeland only such personnel as would be strictly necessary for the maintenance of the Congregation. He had even explicitly formulated a rule that his priests should never teach anything except theology.

Strange as it may seem, as soon as he had entered the seminary of Strassburg to prepare himself for the priesthood and for his role as the Superior of a new society, he felt himself again super-naturally attracted toward the training of priests. The word “again” is used advisedly, for prior to becoming involved in the missionary project of Father Le Vavasseur, his whole Christian life had been dedicated to this work. In the houses of St. Sulpice he had been the heart and soul of little groups of seminarians who earnestly aspired to intimate union with God. He had continued in this role even when his epilepsy seemed to bar him forever from the priesthood. As Novice Master of the Eudists, he had devoted all his time to training priests in the religious life.

In the light of past events, therefore, it is hardly surprising to see Father Libermann’s desire to educate priests revive as soon as he re-entered a seminary to prepare himself for ordination. There is, however, one noteworthy aspect to this desire as it returned to flood his soul in 1841. He now wanted to give it fulfillment through the foundation of his own Congregation. He had heard about the sad condition of the clergy in Germany and aspired at making himself “useful to this country by aiding in the education of holy priests.” For this reason he intended to establish the new con-
Gregation in Strassburg, close to Germany. In a long letter to Father Le Vavasseur he explained that his priests could perform this task without betraying the purpose of the new society. It would be extremely interesting to see how the Venerable managed to reconcile this work with "missions in foreign and distant lands," but this letter has not been preserved.\(^{11}\)

He had already rented a house in Strassburg to serve as the cradle of his Congregation and was earnestly negotiating with German priests when he was brought up short by a painful surprise. His shock and disappointment are expressed in a letter to his friend Dr. Drach:

Without my knowledge, several priests who are interested in our little work for the Negroes have taken steps to get our foundation established in "the interior" of France.

Most prominent among these priests was Father de Brandt, formerly his most troublesome novice in the Eudists' house at Rennes, who had left that Congregation and was now Secretary to the Bishop of Amiens.

Humanly speaking, Father de Brandt's appearance at this juncture should have impressed the Venerable as another effort to thwart his plans. However, Libermann was accustomed to take the supernatural rather than the human view. Father de Brandt was able to offer him not only an assurance of ordination by the Bishop of Amiens, but also a house in the diocese to receive the first members of his nascent foundation. The offer possessed too many advantages to be rejected and Libermann accepted it because "he thought to see in it a sufficiently clear indication of God's will." Nevertheless, he added, the decision was a painful one, for he wanted to make himself useful to the German clergy and attract German vocations to the Congregation. To his future successor, Father Schwindenhammer, he confessed:

As far as Germany is concerned, I am forced to give up the idea. It causes me great pain, but what can I do about it? Our Lord has not judged me worthy of such great work.

\(^{11}\)At least, it is not included in the 13 volumes of *Notes et Documents*, unless the passage alludes to *N.D.* 9, 282 ff., which, however, does not speak of the training of priests and is also of much later date.
Nonetheless, the idea continued to haunt him. He must have spoken about it frequently to his confreres for, a year after his death, Father Lannurien, his confidential secretary, mentions once again the direction of “seminaries, whether in Germany or in other lands,” as proper to the Congregation. Ignorant of the future, Libermann did not see why God kept inspiring him with a desire to work at the training of priests, while at the same time arranging things in such a way that this desire could not be satisfied. It was only later in his life that the ways of Providence became clear.

For the moment, we merely wish to point out that even at the very time when he was founding his missionary congregation he was already thinking and making plans for this type of educational work in the homeland. It is irrelevant to point out that the project of his earliest collaborators was purely missionary and that he himself had written a rule specifying work in “missions in distant and foreign lands.” We have to take into account not only what was concretely the starting point of his work but also how it developed under the direction of this man who did not make any move unless he clearly saw it was God’s will. In a letter to Father Le Vavasseur he does not hesitate to say that if this rule has to be interpreted in such a way that everyone must go to the missions and that “we may not have several houses in Europe, it is important that the constitution of the Congregation be changed.” Despite his explicit order not to engage in any teaching except that of theology, he wrote as early as 1844: “The Rule says that we must not undertake the instruction of youth. However, conditions show that probably we will be obliged to take charge of it.”

The whole question of assuming educational work outside the missions became acute again in 1848 when his own society was dissolved and its members entered the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. As we have pointed out before, the Holy Ghost Fathers were primarily and traditionally a society of educators and professors, although a minority of their members had gone to the missions. When Rome demanded that Libermann and his con-

---

12 It may be useful to remind the reader that before the French Revolution they conducted not only the seminary of Paris but also the senior seminary and the seminary-college at Meaux and a seminary at Verdun, and that after the Revolution their first work again was a seminary-college.
freres accept the rules of the old Holy Ghost Congregation, it meant that they had to share in the task of training seminarians.13 More concretely speaking, it implied a broadening of the aims which Libermann and his associates originally had in mind. His God-given desire to make himself and his priests useful in the training of clerical aspirants suddenly found ready release when the fusion with the Holy Ghost Fathers became a fact. In addition to missionary work, in the proper sense of the term, they had to undertake the education of future priests as well. The difficulty was that practically all his confreres wanted to be missionaries and nothing else. Thus it should not surprise us to hear that “nearly all or perhaps even all” of them were against their incorporation into the Holy Ghost Congregation, and that Father Lannurien called it a “betrayal of the whole past.” Only gradually and through repeated conversations with the Venerable did he come to the conclusion that he and his confreres had been too one-sided and too much inspired by their own personal preferences.

Father Lannurien’s conversion to Libermann’s view is important, for all recognized that, as the confidential secretary, he had been Libermann’s closest associate during the last years of his life. It was for this reason that after the Venerable’s death in 1852 the others asked him to explain exactly what their Superior had in mind during the last decisive years of his life. In a long memorandum, Father Lannurien stated inter alia:

[Libermann] either betrayed his mission, trespassed the commission God had entrusted to him, and gave a mortal blow to his work and the Congregation . . . [or acted in accord with] God’s plans. . . . If God had called Father Libermann only to found a Congregation of missionaries for Negroes and other abandoned souls, it would be difficult to see for what special reason He had given him such extraordinary talents for

---

13Let no one say that this responsibility was limited to the training of priests who are members of the Congregation because the Latin rule reads: "Sodaliti finis est . . . sodales educare." The term "sodales" or "members" was substituted for "clericos" by Father Leguay in his ill-advised attempt to incorporate the clergy. It has been maintained in an effort to retain as much as possible of the rule as it was when Libermann entered. However, the ineptness of the expression is striking. No religious society has as its purpose the education of its own members. What would the educated members do? Educate other members and so on to infinity? To make any sense, there would have to exist a kind of an inner circle, to which alone this rule would apply. However, such a circle does not exist and never has existed in the Congregation.
spiritual guidance and training for the interior life. ... Therefore, both the fusion with the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, which was so dangerous for us, and the nature of the special gifts of grace possessed by Father Libermann appear to me as signs of the second purpose of his foundation and vocation—namely, that God had also destined his spiritual sons for the training of holy and zealous priests. Accordingly, I do not at all consider it a coincidence that the first new foundation of the Congregation after the death of our beloved Father was the foundation of a seminary and this in the most important city of the world, the very center of the Church.¹⁴

For this reason Father Lannurien concluded that, to remain faithful to Libermann's idea, the Congregation had to expand in Europe by accepting "seminaries, whether in Germany or in other lands." An echo of the same idea could be heard in 1927 when the French Seminary in Rome, founded by Father Lannurien, celebrated its diamond jubilee. On this occasion, the Bulletin of the Congregation spoke of the work of training future priests:

This work corresponds in two ways with the Congregation's aim as it was when the fusion of 1848 called forth a second founder to further define its organization.

Father Libermann did not merely theorize about the question. In 1850, Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati came to Paris and offered him the direction of his senior seminary. The Archbishop wanted this seminary to become a central interdiocesan institution serving the whole ecclesiastical province. "Despite the pressing needs of the missions and the colonies," therefore, Libermann accepted the offer and chose Father Ignatius Schwindenhammer as Superior of this work. Three others were to follow later. In July 1851, the new rector booked passage on an American steamer, but for some unknown reason Archbishop Purcell had to leave suddenly and the plan came to nought. Nonetheless, although the project fell short of realization, it clearly demonstrates Father Libermann's position regarding the scope of his society's work.

No doubt, more than one modern Spiritan will ask how all this can be reconciled with the general purpose of caring for the most

¹⁴The Seminary in question is the Pontifical French Seminary in Rome in which, since 1853, the Holy Ghost Fathers have trained the elite of French aspirants to the priesthood.
abandoned souls. As far as we know, Father Libermann himself has not offered any explanation. Nevertheless, it is easy to see the thought behind it. As Father Lannurien explained to his confreres,

Arch. Lann. 74

With this union [with the Holy Ghost Fathers] God had another and permanent aim in mind. This aim, I think, is that Father Libermann’s Congregation, in addition to the apostolate exercised by its own members, should be charged with the training of secular priests, filled with a similar spirit of zeal and dedication, suitable for the apostolic care of souls and especially the preaching of the Gospel to the lower classes of society, the poor, who long enough have been abandoned to their fate and who now are destined to play such an important role in society.

In other words, just as the old Spiritans had aimed indirectly at the apostolate among the poor by way of priests trained under their care, so now Libermann’s spiritual sons, their successors, were to undertake this indirect apostolate along with their direct ministry among the abandoned and neglected of the earth. This thought of an indirect apostolate was explicitly mentioned by Libermann’s successor, Father Schwindenhammer, when he justified the acceptance of a college and junior seminary in Martinique:

B. G. 1, 552

This establishment is destined to produce great benefits not only among the students themselves, but also through them among the poor colored class of the colony, on which the higher white class has always exercised a considerable influence for either good or evil.\(^\text{10}\)

As experience has proved over and over again, junior seminaries often function best when they are an integral part of a college destined for all students who desire a thoroughly Catholic education. In this way the aspirants to the priesthood are more likely to obtain a better education because the college is forced to maintain standards which stand up under outside scrutiny and, at the same time, additional vocations may be fostered among the non-seminarians. Moreover, the arrangement is advantageous in

\(^{10}\) Another typical example of this indirect apostolate among the poor was the College of Lima, Peru (1892). Through the education of Peru’s leading classes, it tried to imbue the future leaders of this nation with sound Catholic principles.
establishing more widespread interest in the works of the Congregation. For these reasons there is nothing abnormal in the fact that soon after Libermann's death the Holy Ghost Fathers began to run large educational institutions, most of which were combined seminaries and colleges. Undoubtedly, not many of their lay students will ever be able to give the lay apostolate such a world-wide impetus as did Frank Duff, the founder of the Legion of Mary, who received his secular and religious training from the Holy Ghost Fathers at Blackrock College, but there are legions of Spiritan alumni who, thanks to the initiative of Father Libermann, were prepared to take part in the apostolate in less spectacular ways.

It should be noted here that Father Libermann made no recommendations regarding the extent to which his Congregation should devote itself to such educational endeavors. As usual, he wanted to be guided by Divine Providence and its various manifestations in the evolution of history. For that reason, he preferred to leave the decision to his successors in the Generalate. As we shall see, they did not betray his trust. According to the exigencies of time and place they have always kept faith with Spiritan traditions by forwarding the apostolate through whatever channels the known Will of God directed them and their men.

D. THE ORIGIN OF SOCIAL WORKS

We have noted above how Father Libermann had pointed the general purpose of the Congregation toward the care of abandoned souls. In his travels through France it did not take him long to realize that many of the poor in Europe were almost as much abandoned as were the people in mission territories. Specifying what he means by "the poor," he indicates "the working classes in general," to which he adds "seamen, soldiers, ... forced laborers, prisoners and beggars." All of these groups lived beyond the reach of ordinary parish agencies, for even at that time the laborers of France had already lost much of their contact with the Church. The parish meant little or nothing to them. In that sense they were abandoned souls and Father Libermann wanted his priests to work among them. In a letter to Father Le Vavasseur he explains his position:

N. D. 9, 288

These works are not against the purpose or the spirit expressed in the Rule. True, in the beginning we did not think
of them, but this does not prove that God did not want them. Here is my plan: The work which we will undertake in Europe will be concerned mainly with the salvation of the working class, sailors, [and] soldiers. . . . We will begin our establish-
ments in the principal ports serving our missions, such as Bordeaux, Marseille, Toulon, Brest, Nantes and Lorient.

N. D. 10, 314

Work among the laboring classes was not to be limited to catechetics. It was to include also “their instruction in profane science, . . . and the improvement of their material condition.” He was not satisfied with merely undertaking it in an amateurish way. Instead, he regarded this kind of work as “one of the most important” tasks of the Congregation and desired “to give it the greatest possible extension according to the resources in personnel and funds that Divine Providence might supply.” He wanted his Congregation to become a veritable center for this work:

N. D. 9, 290

Many priests and zealous laymen are actively engaged in this kind of apostolate, but there does not exist a single work that is formally dedicated to the purpose. The old religious orders do not undertake it because, at the time of their founda-
tion, there was no need for it and they did not engage in it then.

N. D. 10, 313

Sensing that results were poor because a systematic approach was lacking, Libermann tried to start an organization which would cover all kinds of social work and act as a clearing-house for ideas and methods in this new form of ministry. Even though the revolutions of 1848, the added burdens resulting from union with the Holy Ghost Fathers, and his premature death in 1852, prevented him from executing all these plans, he saw to it that the Congregation began social and religious work among the laborers and servicemen of Amiens, Bordeaux, and Paris.\(^\text{16}\) He was even on the point of accepting the chaplaincies of the French navy, a commitment which would have required about thirty priests at a time when the whole potential of the Congregation did not amount to more than fifty Fathers. However, political events prevented the execution of this plan.

N. D. 9, 274

\(^{16}\)Better than many contemporary priests, the Socialists realized what would have been the result if Father Libermann’s social program had become a reality. They began a violent newspaper campaign against him and his companions. Anonymous threats were made, one of which ended with: “You rabble! Your heads are going to roll soon. Swine, your grease will come in handy for the illumination.”

N. D. 9, 246; 11, 48, and 95

N. D. 12, 182 f.

Griz. 91

N. D. 11, 100
In addition to these educational and social works, he planned to establish a "house of diocesan missionaries" in Brittany, whose personnel would engage in the preaching of parochial missions and closed retreats.

From all this we may infer that Father Libermann definitely did not consider the Congregation as a purely missionary institution which was engaged only by accident in works outside the foreign mission field. The establishment of seminaries was inspired by his whole-hearted acceptance of the indirect apostolate of the old Holy Ghost Congregation, and by his desire to strengthen the Society at home. As for social works, he was fully convinced that they fell within the scope of caring for abandoned souls.

However, there was still another reason why he seemed so anxious to give the Congregation a broader base in Europe. The decay of the old Holy Ghost Society showed him what a sad fate can befall a religious organization which systematically sends every available man to the missions and resigns itself to being "purely and simply a mission seminary." Its authority over the personnel sent to the missions is soon reduced to "zero or almost zero," because of the power of the bishops to whom these missions are entrusted. Yet, it is "of the greatest importance" that "the balance between these two powers be preserved," for otherwise the Congregation cannot "maintain the spirit of its Rules and the bond resulting from its constitution." Moreover—and here again the old Holy Ghost Society could serve as an example—with the personnel at home reduced to a skeleton staff, inevitably the time will come when the Congregation will not have enough qualified men at home. When this happens, it will be useless to appeal for help to the missions, for "we would never get the most capable men." The reason is clear:

The bishops would not be obliged to allow those we want to return to Europe. Moreover, capable candidates who are doing good work would themselves be loath to return. If any difficulty were to arise between the Bishop and the Motherhouse—and this is bound to happen—the Motherhouse would have to give in, even if it saw the spirit of the Rule in danger. The bishops will always have the fate of the Motherhouse entirely in their hands, for they only have to send back to it men of mediocre talents in order to ruin its influence and authority completely.
If, however, works are established in the homeland, the Congregation "could always be certain to have at its disposal a number of wise, serious, capable, learned and experienced men." The same idea again is expressed in a letter which Libermann's secretary wrote on his behalf to Father Schwindenhammer about the excessive demands made by the African missions:

Va. 205 f.

Our beloved Father reproaches you for having believed that Guinea is gaining the upperhand. He says that you should lay down the following principles:

1. When Guinea asks something reasonable, it should be examined and, if it can be granted, it should be given. If not, then not. Therefore, do not feel disturbed.

2. The course which we have hitherto taken must necessarily lead to our total ruin. Therefore we have to change it. This modification will consist in a delay in sending missionaries—a delay that has to be accepted—in order to strengthen the life of the Congregation by undertaking works which can help it to expand and consolidate itself now. During this delay we will do what we can.

3. It is the task of the Superior General and of him alone to determine what can or cannot be done for the mission.

4. He cannot agree to consider the mission as the only work of the Congregation. Therefore, if the Vicars Apostolic find that the Congregation is unable to fill their wants, it is up to them to try something else—such as addressing themselves to other congregations. All we can do is promise to help them always to the best of our ability, without however doing harm to the life and development of our own congregation.

5. One cannot reject this view without going against the intentions of Rome, which certainly wants the Congregation to secure its existence and development, on which the missions of the Guineas depend perhaps exclusively. It is not enough to do and die, but we must do and keep alive to do again and keep doing.

c. THE QUESTION OF PERSONNEL FOR THE NON-MISSIONARY WORKS

What about the problem of supplying personnel to operate all these domestic works? Were the missions to be deprived of priests
who had entered the Congregation with the intention of becoming foreign missionaries? On several occasions Father Libermann considered this question and his answers show clearly that he did not conceive of the Congregation as a purely missionary society. He admitted two kinds of members: those destined for the missions, and others intended for the homeland. With due regard for aptitude and character, the choice between these two categories was left to the individual in question. He even allowed a further distinction to be made between missionary work in uncivilized regions and missionary work in the more civilized old colonies. His thoughts on this subject are appended herewith:

N. D. 6, 115 1. If we succeed in founding a seminary for Guinea, we will establish it in France. In that case it will be staffed only by men who have no vocation for the missions.

N. D. 7, 281 2. Our rule is to send to the missions in uncivilized countries those who show a pronounced inclination for them, and to the missions in the colonies those who desire it or do not show too much interest in savages. Of course, we could not accept anyone who makes it a condition of his entrance that he be sent to this land rather than that. The acceptance of members making conditions would result in grave inconveniences for any congregation.

N. D. 7, 305 3. I have not hesitated to accept your young deacon. However I have formally declared to him that I am not taking him for the missions, but for Europe.

N. D. 9, 52 f.

N. D. 9, 290

4. It is our policy not to run counter to a given calling. Those who are really anxious to go to the missions must be sent. I cannot keep them home. . . . Why don’t you look for some good priests who would like to join our Congregation? They could make their novitiate and then be sent to help you staff your [proposed social] works.

5. It will be an absolute rule with us that any cleric who comes to our novitiate with the formal intention and the positive desire to go to the missions cannot be used in Europe in this kind of establishment [social works]. . . . The houses in Europe will be staffed only by missionaries who are unable to stand the African climate and secondly, by those who will offer themselves to us with little definite attraction for the missions.
in foreign lands or even with sufficiently pronounced desires for ministry in Europe. We will never, or hardly ever, accept anyone on the explicit condition that he be kept in Europe. However, in actual practice, we would keep him there if he came to us with this preference. If it is God's will that we undertake this work in Europe, I think that such candidates will present themselves.

N. D. 10, 201

6. It would not be permissible to retain missionaries when only the interest of the European work itself is at stake. . . . In the beginning we could make use of a few of those destined for the foreign missions to give diocesan missions. When the work becomes more extensive, the vacancies should be filled only with new arrivals who from the very beginning have no definite vocation for the Negro missions. In a few years' time I think, there would be a sufficient number in Brittany to join us for this purpose [diocesan missions].

N. D. 10, 451

7. The priests of the Congregation whose vocation appears to be definitely for the missions must not be used in the works [of Europe].

N. D. 11, 323

8. I should not want those who have a positive calling for the missions to be used in this work [chaplaincies of the Navy]. . . . If I find enough vocations to fill the staff of thirty [Navy chaplains], it will be of a twofold advantage to us. The most weighty point is that we will be putting an important work back on its feet and thereby do a real good; the second is that it would be a substantial source of income for the maintenance of our novitiate.

N. D. 13, 172

9. If there are clerics who are suitable for the exercise of their sacred functions in France and want to enter the Congregation, we would be willing to accept them and use them in France. It would not be prudent or fitting that they make it a condition of their entrance to stay in France. We could not accept them on such a condition. However, if we see in them the desire, vocation and aptitude for the works in France, we would be happy to use them there and certainly we would not send them to the missions.

From these many texts we may gather that Libermann did not want anyone with a missionary vocation (i.e., aptitude and desire)
to be held back indefinitely in the mother country. On the other hand, he positively refused to make it a rule that everyone had to go to the missions. Moreover, he allowed certain preferences to be voiced regarding the two kinds of missions and the various works of Europe, for he distinguishes, on the one hand, work in uncivilized countries from work in the old established colonies, and on the other, candidates for naval chaplaincies from prospective diocesan missionaries.

That his distinction between foreign missions and domestic assignments was not purely theoretical appears from Libermann's letters. For instance, writing to Father Lamurien, he said:

Tell Mr. Levavasseur not to be afraid: we will arrange everything in accord with his desires; he is and will remain destined for the missions, unless his attraction changes and we find him more useful for Europe. Those two factors have to concur.

Moreover, another one of the early novices, Father Delaplace, wrote to his mother:

Father Libermann has promised me that I will exercise the ministry in Europe, inasmuch as everyone is free to go to the missions or not.

People unacquainted with the internal workings of societies engaged in missionary work may find it strange that Father Libermann should have adopted this position. Many of them labor under the misconception that all candidates for such organizations must go off to foreign lands. Others assume that the requisite number of missionaries would never be met if individual preference and aptitudes were taken into account. As a matter of fact, the great problem that has always plagued Father Libermann and his successors is the difficulty they have encountered in recruiting enough priests and Brothers who do not positively want to labor in distant fields. They have consistently found it difficult to staff the less romantic works at home.

We have stressed this question of Libermann's attitude toward the foreign and domestic apostolate in order to avoid any misapprehension about Spiritan aims and purposes. A religious society can expect the blessings of God only when it knows and follows the intentions of its founder and its place in the Church can be un-
derstood only in the light of those objectives. Like all orders and congregations, the Holy Ghost Fathers trace their development through a series of historical complications, accretions, and adjustments, but despite the accommodations to time and place which wisdom dictates, it is important that there be no basic departure from the ultimate goal. When this happens, any group becomes disorganized from within and anomalous from without. A clear statement of policy constitutes the best safeguard against such a debacle. Fortunately, Father Libermann left us one in unequivocal terms.

4. Libermann's Death

The multitude of activities described in the foregoing pages are not nearly a complete enumeration of Father Libermann's endeavors. Nothing at all has been said as yet regarding his work in Europe itself. We have thus far limited our attention to the importance of his position as renovator of the African missions, restorer of the old Congregation of the Holy Ghost, and diplomatic saviour of the old colonies. While his multiple activities in other fields will have to be passed over in silence because they have no direct bearing on the history of the Congregation as such, we must reserve for later treatment his development of a new asceticism and his contributions to modern missiology.

In 1851 the Venerable began to feel very tired. “The care of all the churches” was wearing him down. The Two Guineas, Reunion, Mauritius, Guiana, Australia, French India, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Senegal, St. Pierre and Miquelon, Madagascar—all clamored for his attention. Nonetheless, his Congregation could look into the future with confidence. In Africa, several bases had been firmly established and the work of Christianization was seriously under way. True, his men on the West Coast would have to wait fifteen years before another order of priests, the Society of African Missions, would come to share in the vast undertaking; and his spiritual children would work alone on the East Coast from 1862 until the White Fathers came in 1878 to organize their caravans at a Spiritan base for their daring push to Uganda. Nevertheless, the work in Africa went ahead purposefully aiming at the establishment of native churches, and in Mauritius and Reunion Spiritans were working wonders among the liberated slaves.
In 1842 Libermann had said that he needed ten years to bring his task to a successful conclusion and felt God would grant him that much time. The allotted decade had now elapsed. While much remained to be done and no one could have done it better than himself, it was time for him to pass the torch to his successors. A moment comes when every organization has to be separated from the physical presence of its founder or restorer and begin to function independently through the spiritual impulses he has communicated to it.

In October 1851 Libermann began to complain of extreme fatigue. His health, always dangerously fragile, now deteriorated rapidly. Intestinal troubles developed and a kind of stupor sometimes seized him after his frugal meals. Nevertheless, he continued to work to the utmost of his ability. Sick as he was, he travelled to Notre Dame du Gard in the beginning of December, when the proclamation of the Second Empire caused fear of a new revolution. Most of his stay there was spent in the infirmary. When a new nervous attack seized him, his confreres decided to send him back to Paris where more competent medical care would be available. Soon he was unable to retain any food. By the end of January it was evident that he had only a few more days to live. It was at this time that he indicated Father Ignatius Schwindenhammer as the one best suited to be his immediate successor. A few days later, on February 2, 1852, at 3:15 P. M. his soul went forth to see the God to whom his life had been wholly dedicated. In the adjoining chapel, the choir was chanting the Vespers of our Lady’s Purification. It had just reached the words of the Magnificat, et exaltavit humiles (He hath exalted the humble), when Libermann expired.

The first official steps in the long process of his beatification were taken in 1868. At first the difficulties seemed insurmountable. Roman circles were rather sceptical about a candidate who was formerly a free-thinking Jew, a psychologically disturbed epileptic with strong suicidal inclinations, whose enterprises had often encountered disaster and whose spirituality deviated so sharply from the well-trodden traditional paths of holiness. Even the saintly Pope Pius IX felt little enthusiasm for the introduction of this cause. Nevertheless, in 1876 he signed the official decree that started it on its way.17 In 1886, after careful scrutiny, Libermann's

---

17Libermann’s letter about Pius IX (N. D. 9, 276) seems to have changed the Pope's attitude toward him.
numerous writings were found to be free of any errors. The heroic character of his virtues was officially recognized by the Church in 1910. Again the incumbent Pontiff, Saint Pius X, had at first been reluctant to issue the decree of heroicity because of the nervous disorders from which the Servant of God had suffered. For this reason, the Congregation of Rites had instituted a more than usually rigorous examination of Libermann's life. In the end, there could be no doubt at all about the heroic nature of his virtue.

Since the founding of the Congregation of Rites in the Middle Ages, Libermann's process was the first one ever introduced in favor of a Jew. It has progressed to a point where only one major step remains to be taken before his beatification: the approval of miracles obtained through his intercession. In this respect, the cause has not gone forward. Not that there has been any lack of extraordinary cures. No less than thirty-four of them were presented at the apostolic process of 1881. However, they did not possess the strict juridical form required by the Congregation of Rites and were therefore disqualified as evidence toward beatification. No doubt in his own time and at the moment when God wills it, the Venerable will satisfy the desire of his spiritual sons and of the many souls all over the world who are devoted to him.

5. Profiles of Some of His Early Collaborators

a. Father James Laval, 1803-1864

James Laval was born in Croth, Normandy, on September 18, 1803. His father was a wealthy landowner who had been forced, when the grandfather died, to give up a legal career and return home to manage the family estate. On these ancestral acres, the six Laval children spent a happy childhood that was saddened only by the memory of James's twin brother Michael, who died soon after birth. James himself enjoyed excellent health, however, and when people asked him what he planned to be when he grew up, he invariably answered: "Either a priest or a doctor." Little did he or they suspect that both ambitions would ultimately be fulfilled.

At the age of fourteen, he went to live with his uncle, a priest. Formerly a teacher in a junior seminary, this country pastor used his spare time preparing half a dozen boys for college or the seminary by private tutoring. After three years under the direction of this kindly old man, James was sent to the Seminary-College of
Evreux. He withdrew twice because of homesickness and returned to his father's house, but Laval père was not the man to stand such nonsense. Realizing that firmness was necessary, he listened to his son's complaints about the difficulties of academic life, and then quietly replied: "So, Latin makes your head spin? All right, I'll give you something that will make your arms spin in their sockets." Whereupon he assigned him a full share of the heavy farm labor. The ruse must have worked, for James soon asked permission to resume his studies. Just to make sure that he would not be coming home again with another spell of homesickness, Mr. Laval decided to send him to St. Stanislaus College in Paris. But James had learned his lesson and now applied himself earnestly to his work. In 1825 he graduated from St. Stanislaus with a bachelor's degree.

La. 16 ff.

Now he was faced with a decision about his future. For a while he thought he might enter the seminary or else go off to America, but in the end he resolved to study medicine at the Sorbonne. Five years later he took the Hippocratic oath and obtained his doctor's degree with a dissertation on articular rheumatism. Then he returned to Normandy and set up practice in the little town of St. André, where he soon became very popular. The poor especially liked him because he was not in the least concerned about payment for his services. Instead, he preferred to live on the income of the legacy his deceased parents had left him.

La. 22 ff.

Although James had remained a sincere and practising Catholic despite the ridicule of his fellow students and professors in Paris, a change came over him in the little town where he now lived. Gradually he became ashamed of the fact that he was the only educated man in the place who was still going to church. Little by little he gave up the practice of his Faith. For several years he did not even fulfill his Easter duty. Instead, he became interested in flashy uniforms (he was commander of the National Guard), horses, dancing, and parties. However, his conscience gave him no peace. He had to struggle bitterly to keep up a false front that did not conform to his own inner convictions. Instinctively he struck up a friendship with a neighboring priest, who gradually induced him to make his peace with God. In 1835, five years after his graduation from medical school, he made a sorrowful confession and returned to the practice of his Faith.
La. 30 ff. The young doctor had been converted as only a Frenchman can be converted—radically. Gone were the beautiful uniforms, the costly furniture, the elaborate dinners, the thoroughbreds, and the dances. Savings thus realized were lavished on the poor. Instead of going to parties, he now spent long hours before the Blessed Sacrament. As a fee for his medical services to the poor he invariably requested a decade of the rosary. It was not long before his thoughts returned again to the priesthood. After much prayer and consultation with his confessor, he came to a decision: in the fall of 1835 he entered the seminary of St. Sulpice.

La. 36 ff. It was not easy for the thirty-two year old doctor to adapt himself to the restrictions of seminary life. Nevertheless he set himself resolutely to the task and succeeded in becoming a model seminarian. Among his best friends were Frederic Le Vavasseur, Eugene Tisserant and Francis Libermann. James himself wanted to become a missionary and had been thinking of joining the Vincentians. However, he was advised against this step and told to wait till there would be an opportunity to become a missionary in some French-speaking territory.

La. 60 ff. Obedient to the decision of his director, Father Laval returned to Normandy in 1839, there to await a call to the missions. The Bishop assigned him to the small country parish of Pinterville, a spot where he worked and prayed for two years among indifferent parishioners. In the summer of 1840 he heard about the plan of his seminary friends to start a new congregation for the care of abandoned souls in the colonies. Seeing in this new venture the long-awaited opportunity, Father Laval immediately expressed his willingness to join them.

La. 92 ff The call came in the spring of 1841 when he was told to hold himself in readiness to accompany Bishop Collier, the newly appointed Vicar Apostolic of Mauritius. In May he was on his way to this distant island lost in the Indian Ocean. Before leaving France, he had generously given Father Libermann his own personal fortune to aid the new congregation.

N. D. 2, 42 ff. Two years earlier, in 1839, the British Government of Mauritius had granted complete liberty to about sixty thousand slaves in this former French colony. At first, for nearly all of these new freedmen, liberty consisted in doing no work. Soon, however, those who had been born in slavery realized that one had to work
to live. They quickly returned to their jobs as craftsmen or house-boys. The large majority, however, were natives from Africa or Madagascar who been forced into slavery. These rebelled against any kind of work, for they were unable to do anything but the heavy plantation labor which they so detested. Instead of working, they preferred to beg or steal. Crimes of every kind were rampant among these unfortunate victims of the slave trade. Yet it was among these people that Father Laval was destined to work miracles of grace.

On September 14, his ship entered the harbor. No crowds or delegations were waiting to welcome the Bishop and his priests. The newspapers limited themselves to a line listing their names among the new arrivals. Readers would not care about the arrival of a few priests anyhow, for religious ignorance on the island—even among the educated classes—was appalling.  

Early in 1842 Father Laval was able to begin his apostolate among the liberated slaves. His first concern was to adapt himself as fully as possible by learning their creole language and sharing their abject poverty. The beginning was not easy. After three months of hard labor he had succeeded only in converting five persons.

The situation quickly improved when he learned the correct method. Instead of travelling around from one estate to another, he decided to concentrate on Port Louis, the capital. Day after day he spent most of his time instructing little groups in the rudiments of the Faith. At night he held larger gatherings which were open to all who wished to come. At these meetings he instructed his listeners and replied to their questions. Because at that time a color bar in the only church in Port Louis relegated the Negroes to a few pews in the back, he introduced a special Mass for them at noon. His kindness, perseverance and radiant holiness did not fail to make a profound impression on these former slaves. They felt that here at last was a man who was their friend. Gradually the numbers of those willing to be instructed increased to an encouraging degree.

As could be expected, opposition developed in proportion to his success. The British Government feared the influence of this

---

La. 111 ff.

La. 134 ff.

La. 159 ff.

18 Shortly after his arrival, Father Laval was called to the sickbed of a rich merchant for a blessing "to put an end to his sufferings." On leaving he was asked: "Father, should we need you again and you happen to be absent, who can we inform? Can your wife take the message?"
Father Eugene Tisserant, one of Francis Libermann's first collaborators.

Father James Laval, the Apostle of Mauritius, who converted 60,000 former slaves. His process of beatification recently took an important forward step.
La Neuville, near Amiens, France, where Father Libermann started his Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary.

Shrine on Father Libermann's grave in Chevilly, France.
French priest and for six years refused to allow any others to come and share his labors. Protestant ministers campaigned against him. People who felt themselves personally attacked by the conversion of their partners in sin looked for vengeance. Ribald songs about the poor missionary began to circulate and even became the customary tune for a "Laval dance." Others tried to ambush him and give him a severe beating. Once they went so far as to slink into the church looking for women while his instructions were going on. He chased them indignantly, and when they threatened to kill him, he calmly replied: "I am not afraid of your threats or of death." Pointing to the cross, he added: "Here is my Master. He is the only one I fear. If you want to kill me, know that I will presently be walking back to the rectory." On another occasion a furious and frustrated Negro gave him an unmerciful thrashing. When it was over, the culprit was so struck by the priest's patience and forgiveness that he became a convert and led many others into the Church.

The increasing number of converts forced Father Laval to avail himself of catechists who were specially trained to give religious instruction. He soon had dozens of them working all over the island. Each one set up a little chapel and many of these subsequently developed into full-fledged parish churches. Thanks to this system of catechists, in a few years' time he was able to number his converts in the thousands. He himself took care of all final instructions. They literally enjoyed going to confession to Father Laval. Whatever time he could spare from his instructions was spent in the confessional. It became, as it were, a private pulpit from which he preached to each of his penitents.

Throughout all these years there was one thing that seriously troubled the holy priest: who was going to take over the work when he would no longer be there? Hitherto all of Bishop Collier's and Father Libermann's efforts to arrange for the admission of other French priests had been in vain. Fortunately, in 1847 the British Government relented sufficiently to give one other priest a renewable permit for three months. Shortly after, two other confreres arrived in Mauritius from Perth, the survivors of the ill-fated Australian venture. They also secured permission to stay. From then on, of course, the work went ahead in giant strides. The confidence of the former slaves, old and young alike, in Father Laval knew no bounds. For instance, it was a customary
thing for girls to visit him and say: "Father, I am now fifteen years old. I would like to get married. I have no special choice. I will marry whoever you suggest." Father Laval would then counsel them to begin a novena while he looked around for a suitable partner. After that, a second novena would be held in preparation for the wedding with the candidate he had chosen. Strangely enough, countless happy marriages were arranged in this way.

The transformation brought about by Father Laval in the former slaves slowly made its influence felt also among the white population. The ladies especially were the first to see what a profound change religion had made in their servants. Admiration was followed by esteem and in many cases by a return to the half-forgotten practice of their Faith. In this way family life all over the island gradually became Christian once again.

Fifteen years of this incessant labor, coupled with severe penitential practices, sufficed to exhaust the strength of the missionary. In 1856, and again in 1857, he suffered a stroke while hearing confessions. The next year he had another attack in the pulpit. When two more seized him shortly afterward in the confessional and during a sermon, Father Laval realized that his active work had practically come to an end. From now on he could only suffer and pray for his beloved converts. When he felt well enough, he still managed to give religious instructions to the little children and even to adults from time to time. In addition, he continued giving spiritual advice to those who came from all over the island to visit him at his rectory. Most of the time, however, he could be found in a little corner near the altar, silently adoring the divine Master to whom he had dedicated his life. In 1859 he had the consolation of pronouncing his perpetual vows in the Congregation, which he loved with all his heart. Death came to him in 1864 on September 9, the feast of St. Peter Claver, that other great apostle of the slaves.

About sixty thousand souls had been converted by him during the fifteen years of his active life. Ten thousand of these had preceded him into eternal life, struck down by the various epidemic diseases which afflicted the island during those years. Where there had been no one to welcome him on his arrival in Mauritius, more than forty thousand people accompanied their beloved apostle to the grave. Nor did his spiritual children cease to have confidence in him after his death. The little monument erected over
his grave has become a shrine at which great graces and miraculous cures have been obtained through his intercession. It is a center of devotion not only for the Catholic population but for many others—even Mohammedans—who come to pray at his grave. Each year, on the anniversary of his death the number of pilgrims exceeds thirty thousand.

In 1893 the first steps were taken in the process of his beatification. It was officially introduced in Rome after the first World War. Since then it has slowly continued to make progress.

B. Father Frederick Le Vavasseur, 1811-1882

Frederick was born in Reunion on February 25, 1811, of a Creole family that owned large estates on the island. After a thoroughly irreligious upbringing by his non-practicing parents, the boy came under the influence of Father Warnet, a Holy Ghost Father who had recently arrived in the colony and had taken over the direction of the local college. Naturally inclined to be generous and kind, and easily driven to extremes, Frederick gave himself as wholeheartedly to God as he had formerly dedicated himself to pleasure, to the great disgust of his father who did not want to have anything to do with what he called piety.

At the age of eighteen, Frederick went to France to develop his great intellectual gifts by further study there. Before he left, his father told him: “Become whatever you want, even a gangster if necessary, but do not become a priest. Otherwise I shall no longer recognize you as my son.” “Don’t worry,” he answered, “I have no intention to study for the priesthood.” In Paris the boy threw himself so ardently into the study of mathematics that he soon had a nervous breakdown and failed his examination. In addition, he was becoming scrupulous. It took him several hours, for example, to prepare himself for confession because he felt that he must shed tears to be sure of his sorrow. Giving up his idea of becoming an engineer, he transferred to law in order to help his father, whose business affairs had just suffered severe reverses. Meanwhile, however, the thought of becoming a priest had entered his mind and it annoyed him constantly. At last, after consulting the Bishop of Versailles, he announced his decision to his parents. Unexpectedly, he succeeded in obtaining the consent of even his father, although the old man cried when
his son came home for a short visit and he saw him for the first time in a cassock.\textsuperscript{19}

In the fall of 1836 Frederick entered the Sulpician seminary of Issy. Once there, he was given over to the care of Francis Libermann, the "guardian angel" of all newcomers. Two more opposite spiritual temperaments were hardly conceivable: the fiery Creole, inclined to exaggeration in everything he did, plagued by scruples, given to extraordinary penances, bent on making himself holy by sledge-hammer blows; and the apostle of childlike and total surrender to God through peace of heart, averse to positive mortification, quietly willing to let only God act on his soul. Nevertheless, the two saw in each other an equal sincerity in their desires for God and immediately felt attracted to each other. Thus it is not surprising that Frederick kept in touch with Libermann, even when the latter had to leave the seminary to become novice master for the Eudists. During these years, it was Le Vavasseur who interested Francis Libermann in the apostolate among the neglected slaves. We have related above how this interest gradually led to the foundation of a new Congregation, the resumption of the African missions, and Father Le Vavasseur's appointment to Reunion to inaugurate there the missionary work which he had so ardently promoted.

On February 16, 1842, he sailed from Brest, via Rio de Janeiro, to Reunion in the Indian Ocean, where the vessel arrived on the evening of June 10. Since he was not expected, no one was waiting for him at the port. As he walked up to the local rectory, however, he saw himself suddenly surrounded by about two hundred Negroes dressed in white, who greeted him most respectfully and happily. They were first communicants, and they had been prepared by their pastor, Father Alexander Monnet, whose story we have told above. Under such favorable auspices he set to work in his homeland.

He soon realized that not everything was as rosy as this first encounter. Part of the clergy looked askance at this newcomer who was going to work outside the traditional framework of parochial activity; most of the white population saw him as a kind of a revolutionary who was bent on causing trouble among the slaves; and the Government distrusted this priest who refused to be inscribed on the list of Government-paid and controlled

\textsuperscript{19}Later Frederick had the satisfaction of seeing his father converted.
clergymen. Contrary to the practice of Father Laval in Mauritius, Le Vavasseur decided to work by erecting small chapels on the large plantations and visiting them in turn to instruct the slaves. Despite the opposition, he had success, and when reinforcements arrived in the persons of several confreres, there was already enough to do to keep all of them very busy.

Va. 91 ff. One of these confreres, though a good and pious priest, did not show all the energy and initiative required by the standards Father Le Vavasseur had set for himself. Impetuously, as always, Frederick jumped to the conclusion that Father Libermann was becoming too lax and therefore the Congregation was doomed to failure. Sending the priest back to France, he hurled dire reproaches at the Founder and forthwith announced his intention to leave the sinking ship and become a Jesuit, if Libermann would give him permission. The Venerable's calm reply that "with principles as severe as yours, you would have to expel at least half the members of the Society of Jesus" failed to make the slightest impression on him. Again, he insisted on permission to join them. Pointing out that by agreeing to the request, he would fail in his duty to God, Libermann added:

N. D. 8, 28 ff. Do not think that I am trying to retain you... I do not ask you to stay, but I do not give you the permission... Make your decision and let me know.

As suddenly as it had arisen, Father Le Vavasseur's "great temptation," as he himself later called it, vanished. In his next letter he had reached the opposite extreme:

Va. 95 At the moment I would endure anything rather than leave you... If you send me away, I will act like a dog and lie down at the door.

Va. 101 ff. After this episode, Father Le Vavasseur continued his work with his accustomed zeal and impetuosity. When the Prefect Apostolic wanted him and his confreres to take regular parishes, he threatened to leave; when he was forbidden to ring the bells at 4:30 A. M. for the Mass of the slaves, he again threatened to shake the dust from his feet; when a French petty officer refused to leave the church during his instruction of the slaves, he took him by the arm and put him out. On the other hand, when the shouts of "Drown Monnet!" penetrated into the church where he
was gathered with hundreds of the slaves, he managed not only to restrain himself but also to prevent his audience from joining the fracas and seeking bloody vengeance for the insults showered on their apostle.

Meanwhile, the long-expected liberation of the slaves was about to take place. There were between sixty and eighty thousand of them on the island, as against about forty thousand free people. Everyone feared the riots and bloodshed that might follow. Violence had already occurred in Mauritius in 1835, a few years before Father Laval's arrival, and by way or repercussion, there had been a plot in Reunion to set fire to all "white" property and kill the "bad white people." Fortunately, the plot had leaked out in time to prevent its execution. What would happen now when the government commissioner was coming to announce the liberation in Reunion itself? The commissioner was wise enough to realize the extent of Father Le Vavasseur's influence and to seek his advice about the best way to proceed. The priest urged him to give the whole affair a strongly religious character and to go about personally explaining to the little groups of slaves under his direction exactly how freedom would be given them. Accordingly, on the appointed day, December 20, 1848, a solemn High Mass was celebrated in every town, then trumpets sounded and guns saluted the new free men. There followed a sermon explaining the rights and duties of both white and colored, and then the official declaration of freedom was read. In the evening an open air Benediction and a freedom torchlight procession took place. Thanks to this religious approach, there were no riots, no fires, and no murders, despite the fact that it was necessary to announce a two-thirds cut in wages to prevent general bankruptcy on the island. A totally different scene occurred in Martinique, where our old friend Mr. Schoelcher noisily presided over the liberation.

Now that the slaves were free, it became more important than ever to teach them to work. For this reason, the tireless missionary was induced to found a number of trade schools. Right on the island of Reunion he opened a novitiate for Spiritan Brothers in order to supply trained personnel for these technical schools. Then, when religious vocations for the Sisterhood made their appearance, Father Le Vavasseur became the founder of a new congregation of Sisters, the Daughters of Mary (1849).
Their success was so great that they later spread to Mauritius, Madagascar and East Africa.

At about this time, there was much discussion regarding the question of establishing a hierarchy in the colonies. Bishop Monnet, who knew the capacities of Le Vavasseur, made efforts to have him appointed as the first Bishop of the island. Although Libermann did not want to interfere, he wrote to him:

My conduct in this affair has been to remain perfectly neutral. I was and I am still convinced that you will do more good by remaining in the Congregation than by being at the head of a colony. God has inspired you first with the idea of the foundation of our work. It seems evident to me that he destines you to be its support. . . . Returning to France will be a great sacrifice for you, but I know that this will not stop you.

Totally disinterested in the prospect of an episcopate, Father Le Vavasseur at once returned to France, leaving Father Collin in charge of the Sisters' congregation he had just founded. It was now his task to help the Venerable in the problems raised by the fusion with the Holy Ghost Fathers. His first assignment was to make a trip throughout France recruiting personnel for both the colonies and the Congregation. The unfavorable public opinion about the Holy Ghost Fathers in France, caused when the name was usurped by those who had no right to it, shocked him horribly. Fortwith he wrote Father Libermann a letter, demanding that he close Holy Ghost Seminary, return to Notre Dame du Gard, and abandon the colonies. Once more, the Venerable had to calm down his impetuosity by a letter that said in part: "I am convinced that this would be one of the gravest faults and one of the most serious injustices our Congregation could make itself guilty of before God." Once more he warned Le Vavasseur against his exaggerated quest for perfection in frail humanity:

Beware of that imagination which drives you to want absolute perfection in human beings, institutions, and things in general. We must have the desire to see everything perfect and quietly do our best, with moderation and wisdom, to lead men and things to perfection. However, we should be absolutely convinced that wherever there are human beings
we will find imperfection. We should try to obtain what is possible without breaking everything; otherwise the loss will be twenty times as great as the gain.

Letters like this and, to an even greater degree, the continuous presence of Father Libermann gradually succeeded in subduing the impetuosity and extremism of the fiery Creole.

During the next few years Father Le Vavasseur expended all his energies on Holy Ghost Seminary at Paris and on the various religious and social works attached to it. Libermann made him Provincial Superior of France. When the Venerable lay on his death-bed in 1852, Le Vavasseur, reminded the dying man of his impetuosity and thereby succeeded in eliciting an expression of preference for Father Schwindenhammer as Superior General. In deference to this last wish, the latter was elected, and Le Vavasseur became his assistant.

Despite the temperamental gulf that separated the precise, methodical and somewhat distant Alsatian who was inclined to excessive regimentation, and the impressionable, sympathetic, and exuberant Creole, the two got along very well. With complete freedom, Father Le Vavasseur would remind Schwindenhammer of the faults he detected in him: too much interference in the details of the work of others and too great concern with affairs foreign to the Congregation. In this way, for nearly thirty years they worked together most effectively to consolidate and develop it.

Le Vavasseur took an active part in the foundation of the Archconfraternity of the Holy Ghost and in 1854 he arranged for the Congregation's acquisition of the famous twelfth century Cistercian abbey of Langonnet. He converted it into a combined college and junior seminary. The next year he was entrusted with a particularly delicate mission. A huge institute for orphans at Saint-Ilan was threatened with disaster, because the association of "Leonist" Brothers who conducted the orphanage had shown themselves unable to give a firm direction to the work. In his distress, the layman-founder, Achilles du Clésieux, searched for a substitute congregation. He was referred to the Holy Ghost Fathers, who confided the task to Father Le Vavasseur. After a quick visit, the priest transferred the Brothers'

---

20 Originally started in 1861 by Miss Emma Boulargey as the Association of the Holy Ghost to work and pray for the missions.
novitiate of the Congregation to Saint-Ilan and then took charge of the place. The Leonists did not relish the arrival of these "strangers" and complained bitterly to the Bishop. His unexpected reply was: "Thank God. Allow yourselves to be directed by the Holy Ghost Fathers, for you are unable to direct yourselves." Almost immediately, Father Le Vavasseur brought both the Leonists and the Spiritan Brothers together for a common retreat. The eloquence of the preacher and the fervor of the retreat so impressed the Leonists that they asked to be incorporated into the Congregation as Holy Ghost Brothers. Only one of the thirty dissented and left.

Va. 229 ff. The next year Father Le Vavasseur took over an orphanage at Cellule, and to this he soon added the newly restored junior seminary for the colonies which Father Bertout had originally started in 1808. Through it all, the old French colonies remained his work of predilection: he was officially in charge of everything concerning them and became the guiding spirit behind their development in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Va. 253 ff. In 1868, when the Superior General became gravely ill, he replaced him temporarily. From that time on he had to assume a great deal of responsibility for the central administration, for the General's health remained seriously impaired. When Schwindenhammer died a dozen years later, Father Le Vavasseur, despite his objections, was elected as his successor. By this time, his character had considerably mellowed. He had gained in wisdom what he had lost in impetuosity and extremism. He was not called, however, to remain long at the head of the Congregation. Soon after his election in August 1881, a serious illness struck him down. On January 16, 1882, he ended his holy life with a peaceful death. His body was buried alongside that of Father Libermann in the little shrine at Chevilly, the Senior Scholasticate of the French Province.

c. Father Eugene Tisserant, 1814-1845

N. D. 1, 623 ff. Eugene was born in Paris of a French father and a Haitian mother who was the daughter of General Louis Bauvais. When the colored people of Haiti took up arms to gain their freedom in 1791, they chose Louis Bauvais as their chief. He soon forged the motley crowds into a well-disciplined army and succeeded in vindicating the rights of the non-whites. Two years later, slavery
was abolished in Haiti. Freedom, however, was followed by civil war between opposing factions. General Bauvais refused to take sides in the internecine struggle and resolved to take his family to France. When their vessel was wrecked by a storm and there was not enough room in the single lifeboat, he gave up the place assigned to him in favor of his wife, convinced that their children would have more need of a mother than of a father. Later, one of these children married a French pharmacist and became the mother of Eugene.

In his young manhood, Tisserant entered the seminary of St. Sulpice with the idea of going to Haiti as a missionary. However, the Archbishop of Paris was reluctant to release him for this island, since its clergy had an unsavory reputation. Very emphatically he stated his position: “Do you think perhaps that we take so much trouble to educate good priests and then send them to their perdition in Haiti? As long as I live, I will never give you this permission.”

The Archbishop’s opposition will perhaps be better understood if we devote a brief word to the religious situation in this island. When the French Revolution broke out, most of the Dominican and Capuchin priests working in Haiti were dispersed. The few who had remained left in 1804, when Haiti declared itself independent of France. Only one or two stayed behind to set up a kind of schismatic Church. From 1820 on, the island became a haven for all sorts of clerical characters who had been expelled from their dioceses or their orders. They had no contact with Rome and were simply appointed by the President of the Republic. One can easily imagine, therefore, how corrupt such a clergy must have been and how sadly the religious interests of the people were neglected. The leading classes, both white and colored, were imbued with the ideas of Voltaire and Freemasonry, while the lower classes, though baptized, lived in complete paganism. In 1821 Rome had vainly tried to remedy the situation by sending a Vicar Apostolic. As soon as he arrived, he was forcibly driven from the island. In 1834 Bishop England, of Charleston, was appointed its Apostolic Delegate. He resigned four years later, convinced that the Government would never cooperate in reforming the clergy and establishing the hierarchy.

As early as 1838, Father Tisserant had entered into relations with the Haitian Government to obtain permission to enter the
island. Though he could appeal to his Haitian origin, even he did not succeed. Moreover, as we have said, his Archbishop refused him permission to go. Shortly after, however, in 1841, the Holy See appointed a new Apostolic Delegate, Bishop Joseph Rosati of St. Louis, and the Propaganda recommended that he get in touch with Father Libermann. In Paris, Bishop Rosati met Father Tisserant, then an assistant director of the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victories. The end result of this meeting was that the Propaganda asked Libermann to send priests to Haiti.

Before this request could be acted upon, a violent earthquake shook the island. In the ensuing chaos, negotiations between the Holy See and Haiti were broken off, so that the priests assigned to Haiti had to be sent elsewhere. Nonetheless, Father Tisserant himself was sent to the West Indies to study the situation in Haiti and enter it at the earliest opportunity. When he tried at first to stay in Martinique, he was taken for a "spy" by the local Vice Prefect Apostolic and was refused permission to exercise his priestly functions. He therefore went to the more hospitable island of St. Lucia, in the Vicariate of Trinidad. After a few months in St. Lucia, the Bishop was about to send him to the island of Tobago, which had been without a priest for thirty years, but in August 1843, he at last had a chance to enter Haiti.

Father Tisserant arrived just when a new revolution had overthrown the government. After obtaining permission to preach and administer the sacraments, he entered into negotiations with the provisional government in order to arrive at a solution for the religious crisis. When these negotiations seemed to be successful, Rome, in January 1844, appointed him Prefect Apostolic of Haiti.

However, the situation was so delicate that he did not dare to make his appointment publicly known. In a short time, Libermann was able to send him two priests and one Brother, but when they landed, a new revolution had broken out; the Spanish-speaking East was bent on separation from the French-speaking West, and in the West itself rival parties were battling for control. Despite this political chaos, Father Tisserant managed to obtain the creation of a government committee to examine the religious problem. He was even officially recognized as the "Head of the Catholic Church of Haiti." The situation began to look a little more hopeful.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate island was plagued by a yellow fever epidemic which swept through the population. Both Father
Tisserant and his confreres contracted the disease while ministering to the sick. In August 1844, he went to Europe in search of a cure for his shattered health and an answer to his personnel difficulties. During his absence, one of the priests in Haiti, Father Cessens, ambitious to become "Head of the Church," began to act more openly against the Prefect Apostolic and succeeded in creating a strong opposition. The newspapers supported the plot and began a violent campaign against Father Tisserant and his confreres.

In February 1845, when Tisserant returned to the island with four Spiritan recruits to aid him in his work, new political disorders had broken out. Again there was a new government, and this one was unfavorable to him. The ecclesiastical control it demanded as the price for recognizing him was completely inadmissible. When, despite his protests, the President of the Republic began once more personally to appoint priests of his own choice as pastors, Father Tisserant displayed a deplorable lack of diplomatic abilities to deal intelligently with the new situation. At least he might have kept open some line of communication with the Holy See by appointing one of his confreres as Vice-Prefect, but he chose instead to withdraw all his priests and return to France. Eighteen years were to pass before the perennial religious crises of Haiti could be solved through the creation of the Hierarchy.

Meanwhile, a new appointment was waiting for him. Libermann had him made Prefect Apostolic of Guinea and he sailed to his new post in November, 1845. On December 6, the ship was caught by a violent storm and thrown on a sandbank. While wave after wave battered the stricken vessel, Father Tisserant prepared the crew and passengers for death and baptized a Jew, who at this supreme moment wanted to become a Christian. During the early morning hours the few survivors of the sinking ship were still clinging to the mast. In a desperate effort to obtain help from the land nearby, the intrepid priest jumped into the raging waves, hoping to be carried ashore. Instead, a treacherous current seized him and hammered him to death against the hull of the boat. Thus ended the short but eventful life of this co-founder of Libermann's Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary.
d. **Father Stanislaus Arragon, 1819-1855**

The informed reader undoubtedly will ask what Father Arragon has done to be singled out for inclusion among Libermann's early collaborators. The reason lies in our concern for historical objectivity. By speaking only about those who excelled through holy lives or great deeds, we might create the impression that Libermann was surrounded only by near-saints and shining heroes in his congregation. As a matter of fact, the situation was quite different. Most of his associates were thoroughly average, hard-working priests. Then there were others who did not measure up to what might have been expected. Thus we find, e.g., a Father Louis Acker, who was so anxious to stay another year in the novitiate that he refused his appointment to the Australian mission and had to be expelled. There was Father Stephen Clair, who under Libermann was successively Novice Master of the Brothers, Director of the Senior Seminarians in philosophy, and Professor of theology. Nonetheless, a year after Libermann's death he left the Congregation, brought several lawsuits against it, and ended sadly as an apostate. Finally, there was Father Stanislaus Arragon. He never left, but he proved that even very imperfect men can be useful members of a religious congregation if they are carefully handled.

Stanislaus Arragon was born near Grenoble, the son of a moderately wealthy family. At the age of twenty-four he entered the novitiate. Ordained shortly thereafter, he made his consecration to the apostolate and in 1844 was appointed to Haiti. As we have related above, the Haitian mission failed and Libermann's men had to return almost immediately after their arrival. In May 1845, therefore, Father Arragon was back in France. The next month he was appointed to the Two Guineas, where he spent the ten remaining years of his life. Thus, the main external facts of his life have nothing very exciting to offer except a fairly substantial amount of travel. What is interesting about him is the fact that, despite Father Arragon's extremely difficult character, Libermann managed to mold him into a useful member of the Society. He provided a living illustration of two principles which Libermann regarded as essential to the good administration of his Congregation.

The first of these principles demanded that each superior treat his men as human beings and not as puppets. In this vein he wrote:

N. D. 7, 349

N. D. 13, App. 50

N. D. 13, App. 44
The norm you propose is so severe that it is completely impractical. You would like all members of a Community to be so perfect and so given to self-renunciation that they can be handled as puppets in a Punch and Judy show. That would be very nice, but such a thing has never existed and never will exist in the Church.

Or again:

The most important means I use to direct confreres is to tolerate those defects which I feel I cannot correct. I occasionally put up with the most improper and crude behavior, and above all I leave everyone to his own way of being and try to perfect him along the lines in which he is naturally constituted.

Libermann's second principle was concerned with the minimum conditions required before one could become a member of the Congregation. We have it expressed in his own words as follows:

Regarding admission to the Congregation, there is no difficulty in making a decision with respect to candidates who are all-perfect. Likewise, there is none if they are all-bad. The difficulty arises only when they combine both good and bad features. Then we must examine whether the imperfections are such that they can do harm to the confreres in the community by introducing laxity, bad spirit, grave disorder, etc. For these dangers, compensation is not possible. Such a candidate is unsuitable and must not be admitted. On the other hand, the imperfections of the candidate in question may inconvenience only himself or be disagreeable to his Superior or his confreres—to the Superior, because he is not easy to handle and is likely to be whimsical in his functions, etc.; to his confreres, because he is gruff and touchy. In such a case one must see how deeply these faults are ingrained in the candidate. If they go so far as to give rise to fear of disorder in the community, he falls into the preceding category and cannot be admitted. If they do not go so far, but one foresees nasty disagreements and difficulties, then one must take into consideration the needs of the Society and of its missions and the service such a candidate can render. If his usefulness is greater
than the inconveniences, he must be admitted. If, however, the inconvenience surpasses the usefulness, he must be refused admission.

Father Arragon was not exactly a man to be handled like a puppet. He had a most violent temper, little self-control, and a penchant for extreme measures. Libermann described him as a "real savage" and sent this advice to a confère who lived with Arragon:

Trying to make Father Arragon a man of moderation, polished and amiable in his manners, would be like trying to build castles on the clouds. It would be easier to stop the sun in its course.

When Arragon’s mother sent money for a new soutane and complained that her son’s clothing looked dirty and worn, Libermann replied: “Madame, we will have a new one made for him, but I can guarantee its newness only for the first day. Two days’ wear by your son is enough to make any soutane look quite ‘venerable’.”

The temper and impetuosity of this man may be judged from a few examples. In 1846, a native tribe captured both him and a Brother in the course of an exploratory trip they were making. The naval commandant at Gorée, who was responsible for the safety of the missionaries, sent an armed vessel to the rescue. Later, he made a few polite remarks about the dangers of going on such explorations and asked that henceforth the authorities be notified of their general direction. Furious about this “interference in ecclesiastical affairs,” Arragon wrote him an insulting letter and declared that all relations between the mission and the Navy were severed.

The next year, he heard that Father Gravière was coming to take charge of the mission and that a new effort had been undertaken in Australia. His rage knew no bounds. In a biting letter, the twenty-seven-year-old hothead told the Venerable Francis Libermann that he was not going to accept Father Gravière as Prefect:

The appointment of Father Gravière is evident proof that you have no trust in your missionaries or confidence in their courage. . . . I am so mad about it that I would like to invite the other missionaries to a meeting to elect a Superior and
refuse the one you are sending. . . The possible reaction of your missionaries carries no weight with you. The African missionaries are only children and idiots: they need a mature man to direct them. Beware lest these missionaries, so despised and disgraced in your eyes and the eyes of your grave counsellors, despise you in turn. . . . You want to send your missionaries again to certain death, but this time they will not go.

In 1848, when he needed some money for his mission, he simply wrote a bank-draft in the amount of 10,000 francs against the non-existent funds of the Congregation without even notifying Father Libermann. It was only with the greatest difficulty that Libermann succeeded in honoring the draft and preventing either the mission or the Congregation from going into bankruptcy.

Improbable as it may appear, this "savage" was ferociously—that is the proper word for it in his case—attached to the Rule wherever any concrete situation had been definitely regulated. His impulsive refusal to recognize Father Gravière was motivated by the fact that this priest "had not been long enough in the novitiate" and "did not know the Rule well enough." Libermann countered this by a formal command—the only one that seems to exist in his extensive correspondence: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I order you to receive Father Gravière kindly, charitably, and with the dispositions one should have towards his Superior." The command immediately produced the desired effect.

After the death of Bishop Truffet, when Arragon was temporarily acting as Superior, he did not dare change the starvation diet previously prescribed by the prelate. He even imposed the same regime on Father Briot who was merely passing through Dakar on his way to France. When Briot became so ill that there was serious question about his ability to reach the ship, Arragon told him that it was more perfect to die at his post. Being reasonable, Father Briot thought it better to stay alive and work. He finally succeeded in obtaining the necessary food and recovered almost immediately. Only then did Father Arragon dare to discontinue the diet that the Bishop had imposed on the community.

Having heard by chance that Father Schwindenhammer kept a chalice in his room, he jumped to the conclusion that private property was being countenanced. The usual formal protest was immediately sent off to Libermann and the Venerable had to pacify
this recalcitrant son by pointing out that he personally had put that chalice there for temporary safekeeping. Arragon was so much concerned over uniformity in the community that he addressed a reproach to Father Libermann for having more furniture in his room than the novices had. Again, Libermann had to justify himself by showing that as Superior General he needed at least a desk that could be locked.

Despite all these annoyances, Libermann loved and trusted Father Arragon. He knew how to handle him, in friendly but firm fashion as one would handle "a boy or a child," without "allowing him to meddle in things that do not concern him." By means of numerous letters he kept close watch over him and his work. Guided in this way, Father Arragon did excellent work in the mission. He prepared useful studies of the Wolof language, learned Arabic, and became the founder of several missions. The most important of these was established near a wretched native village, called Ndakarou. Struck by the potentialities of the location, Father Arragon concluded a treaty of friendship with the local king and secured his protection. With the aid of his confreres he manufactured bricks and put up a substantial building that measured a hundred and ten by forty-six feet. He had judged the site very well. Ten years later France claimed the area as a colony and Ndakarou became Dakar, one of the largest cities of Africa. In addition, he founded the Missions of Ngazobil, Joal, and St. Mary's in Gambia, which is still the chief residence of the Bathurst diocese. In 1855 he set out for Europe to restore his broken health. However, he was not to see his native country again. Shortly before the boat was due to enter the harbor, Father Arragon died off the coast of France.