CHAPTER SEVEN

THE DRIVING FORCE OF THE CONGREGATION:
FATHER LIBERMAN'S SPIRITUAL AND
APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE

The history of a religious order is not the proper place for a full presentation of the spiritual and apostolic doctrine it regards as its own. On the other hand, one would hardly be justified in omitting entirely the driving force which, since the middle of the nineteenth century, has animated the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and influenced the accomplishments of its members. History is not merely a collection of facts and dates. Above all it strives to achieve an insight into the motives which have guided men and their actions. For this reason, we have added here two short studies: one concerning Father Libermann's spiritual doctrine insofar as it applies to men engaged in the active life, and another regarding his missionary theory.

It is particularly important that his teaching on those two points should be considered here because they differed significantly from the commonly accepted views of his contemporaries and because they still exercise a profound influence far beyond the relatively narrow confines of his Congregation. In these, as in many other spheres, he proved himself a pioneer. He introduced a concept of spirituality whose essential features were later popularized by the Little Flower, St. Therese of Lisieux, as the way of "spiritual childhood." We are glad to note that Libermann's role in this renewal of spiritual thought and practice is becoming ever more widely recognized. As Pierre Blanchard, Professor at the Catholic University of Lyons and a well-known authority on ascetical theology, recently wrote:

R. V. C. 106

The claim is often made that it was St. Therese of Lisieux who caused a real revolution in the history of spirituality and the realm of mortification by substituting an asceticism of the little for the asceticism of the great and the search for crucifying deeds. . . . But from 1835 to 1850 in France the Venerable Father Libermann had already started this revolution in the
direction he gave to the innumerable souls who entrusted themselves to him.

His missionary theory was likewise strikingly ahead of the times and has since found official confirmation in many of the more recent pronouncements of the Holy See.

1. Father Libermann's Spiritual Doctrine

Although Father Libermann never wrote a complete treatise of spirituality, specialists in ascetical theology do not hesitate to follow Pope Pius XII and call him "an outstanding master of the spiritual life." His spiritual teaching is to be found in his voluminous correspondence with seminarians, priests, sisters and pious persons in the world, in a number of conferences and instructions published after his death, and in his commentary on the Gospel of St. John.

It may not be amiss to point out here that Libermann's spirituality contains nothing which restricts its usefulness to a single nation, to a certain period of time, or to the members of his own congregation. Ascetical writers and spiritual directors often permit national characteristics to color their thought so extensively that their work loses much of its value outside the confines of their own country; others become outmoded with the passage of time because they have relied too heavily on contemporary trends of thought; still others associate their teachings so closely with the mentality proper to their own religious order that their spiritual legacy has little importance for outsiders.

Father Libermann's science of holiness escapes the confines of his native France, rises above the romanticism and self-conscious mortification of the nineteenth century, and exercises its appeal far beyond the personnel of his own congregation. The universality of his spiritual doctrine flows from his emphasis on the Holy Spirit's operation in the individual soul. Paradoxically, it transcends the limitations of time and space by its very concreteness, for Libermann is concerned with the soul—any soul—in the exact situation where Divine Providence has placed it. This concrete

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wholesomeness in Libermann's approach gives his spirituality a kind of timelessness and occasionally seems to confer on it a modern touch. One might even characterize it by the currently fashionable term "existential."

_Contemplation and Practical Union._ Father Libermann soon realized that _contemplation_ is a form of perfection rarely attained by men who are engaged in the active life. A supernatural state of soul in which man is so lost in God that he forgets the world around him presupposes as a natural condition certain favorable circumstances which are not easily fulfilled by people whose lives are enmeshed in mundane things. For this reason Libermann devoted much of his attention to _practical union with God_. In such a union the soul is faithful to God's grace in all the big and little circumstances of everyday life and sees everything in its relationship to God and God alone.

_Total Surrender to God._ The only way to reach this union lies in what he calls "abandon," which perhaps may be best translated by the phrase "willing and total surrender to God." By this term he understands the submission of all our powers and activities to the will of God, no matter in what way this will manifests itself, whether it be through the special illumination of the Holy Ghost, the commands of superiors, the accepted rule of life, or in the external historical setting in which divine Providence has placed our lives. Thus "abandon" means a total and unconditional surrender of ourselves to God.³

A soul which has surrendered itself to God in this way allows Him to do to it and in it whatever He wants; it places itself at God's disposal without any reservation regarding its own aspirations, impressions and comforts. It is as a plaything in the hands of the Divine Child, allowing Him to do as He likes. It is con-

²The term "existential" may shock the reader whose only contact with it has been the sorry and farcical excesses to which Sartre's atheism has led many of his followers. The sane existential approach, however, is a plea for concretiveness in place of excessive abstraction and systematization. It exercises a profound and generally wholesome influence on philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences insofar as its students now try to see their issues in the concreteness of man's situation in the world.

³One is struck by the fact that Libermann's reaction against exaggerated systematism in spirituality and asceticism occurred just when Søren Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) revolt against Hegel's rationalism laid the foundation-stone for an existential approach to philosophy and religion.

³Others have characterized his spirituality as one of self-denial, passivity, or spiritual poverty. Cf. Réti, _op. cit._, p. 10; Blanchard, _op. cit._, p. 20.
L. S. I, 295

This doctrine avoids two opposite extremes—the one which tends to leave everything to God and remain purely passive (for Libermann insists that the soul must act according as it is directed by the Holy Ghost); the other, which strives to take the initiative in everything (for Libermann wants the soul to act only under the influence of God's grace). Libermann's total surrender must not be confused with the total passivity of Molinos, for it is not merely the attitude of a mind desirous of perfection. His total surrender implies considerable personal effort on the part of man to control his impulses, master his impatience, and overcome self-set patterns of judgment and activity.

The total surrender to God's grace does not fit into any predetermined system of spirituality, for the simple reason that systems are something abstract and artificial, while all souls are concretely different and therefore influenced by God in different ways. It is not surprising, therefore, that Father Libermann disliked spiritual systems and abstract patterns of spiritual life, because these nearly always constitute an obstacle to the free action of God's grace on the individual soul.4 His dislike was shared by that great Saint of our times, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, whose spiritual message so strikingly resembles Libermann's surrender to God, not only in doctrine but even in expression.6

Total Surrender and Self-Renunciation. By self-renunciation

Libermann does not mean that we should inflict all kinds of positive mortifications on ourselves. In fact, he was definitely averse to such practices.6 Instead, he recommends that we remove from

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4L. S. I, 349: "You must not follow any system of the spiritual life; otherwise you will do harm to souls... I consider it a cardinal point of direction that grace be permitted a great freedom of action."


6Cf. N. D. 4, 315: "All your mortifications are nothing; your prayers unimportant; your good works valueless... I laugh at your good works and am really not interested in your mortifications. I ask you only one thing: your heart... for the divine Jesus Himself."

N. D. 9, 195: "The greatest temptation I had to fight against in him was his desire for mortification. I finally took away his discipline and forbade him all kinds of mortification."

D. S. 338: "Mortifications are very good and very useful for our sanctification, but only if God calls us to do them and inspires us with an attraction for them."
ourselves all attachment to our own views, our own comforts and our own inclinations, for it is these that hamper grace. This attachment finds its source in self-love and sensuality, which are the twofold root of all our spiritual evils. By self-love man allows himself to be guided by considerations which center in him instead of in God. He replaces God by himself. Through sensuality man yields to created goods instead of surrendering himself to God. These two roots of self-love and sensuality should constitute the object of our efforts at renunciation. Here, again, Libermann rejects the artificiality of any spiritual system which advises us to attack our defects one by one until none are left and holiness is reached. Instead, he wants us to strike down the evil in its very roots and thus remove all defects by depriving them of their ultimate source of life and growth.

In the ordinary process, perfect self-renunciation is not something to be reached or even approximated by a single act of will, even though such an effort may be prompted by grace. Normally the process advances by stages. First the soul striving for God tends to avoid seeking its own self and such pleasures as would involve a complete break with God through mortal sin. The second stage is reached when man tries to become detached from himself wherever attachment would imply even the slightest deviation from God's law. Finally, he becomes so detached that he wants only what is most agreeable to God. These are the three stages traditionally described as the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive way.

Total Surrender and Mental Prayer. For a soul that sincerely endeavors to surrender itself to God, mental prayer does not mean an interruption of its ordinary life to consider something which normally receives only occasional attention. It means leaving aside for some time the everyday cares and relations with other men and creatures to devote itself consciously and fully to the God who always dominates its every action. Thus again there is no need to follow any special method of mental prayer, whether it be Sulpician or Ignatian, except perhaps at the beginning of one's spiritual life when the soul has not yet become sufficiently engaged in God. As soon as possible these artificial methods of prayer have to be given up in favor of a simple contact with God. The prerequisite of mental prayer is recollection, which means the renunciation of our own self during the time of prayer. Such
recollement is possible only if we endeavor to live with God during the day. For one whose life moves on a purely natural level and tends to stay there, mental prayer will always be nothing but a dreary exercise, an unpleasant way of wasting time, a burden to be dropped as soon as possible.

Persons who lead an active life, beset with all kinds of cares and occupations, may experience great difficulties in recollement, even though they sincerely try to practice surrender to God throughout their work. To such people Father Libermann offers this advice:

Make your method of mental prayer as simple as possible. Do not make too many considerations. Do not seek to follow slavishly the method of St. Sulpice; this would not benefit you at all. In what, then, ought your mental prayer to consist? It should consist in remaining restfully, peacefully and truthfully in the presence of Our Lord. That is all. Do not aim at making numerous reflections or eliciting many affections. Force nothing; abide in Christ's presence as a wretched little child before his father; that is enough. Do not seek to express to Him the sentiments you have or wish to have; do not violently expose your wants. Keep your soul at his feet in all its poverty and weakness. Put yourself at His disposal that He may do with you what He pleases. Regard yourself as a thing belonging to Him, which is in His presence that He may use it to the full extent of His will. Do this without effort and avoid a multiplicity of interior or exterior words. The soul must be accustomed to live in God's presence, and then, during prayer, be interiorly separated from all things, in order to lay itself open before the Divine Lord. . . . Remain in His presence, willing to be at His disposal. Let it be enough for you to direct your soul's gaze on Him from time to time with this intention. When distractions come, try now and again to put them gently and quietly aside, and be content with looking peacefully at Him to whom you belong.

Surrender and Sin. Surrender must be practiced even with respect to our sins and our desire for holiness. Constant self-analysis puts the soul in considerable danger of self-love, self-complacency and presumption. Impatience with ourselves is a sign
of natural activity—we are trying to make ourselves holy, whereas God alone can sanctify us. As to sin, he advises us "to seek less to know in what things we fail in regard to God than to strive peacefully to please Him in all the acts of our souls."

The main fruit of such a total surrender to God during our life is a profound peace of soul whose inner depth no trials, no temptation and no discouragement can disturb. Having no desires of its own, the soul rests in the embrace of God, it has obtained "the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

Such in brief outline is the basis of Father Libermann's spiritual doctrine insofar as it concerns people who are engaged in an active life. As Bishop Gay summed it up in a few words:

Never act with violence. Combat your defects without tenseness or impatience. Learn to be patient with yourself. Put yourself simply at God's disposal. Abandon yourself to grace without endeavoring to exceed it or go beyond it.

Father Libermann's spiritual writings were submitted to the Sacred Congregation of Rites in the course of his process of beatification. After a searching and detailed analysis from the dogmatic and ascetic viewpoint, which lasted from 1883 to 1886, the Sacred Congregation delivered its "Nihil obstat." On this occasion, Cardinal Oreglia remarked: "It is rare that in a cause of beatification the examiners arrive at so favorable a verdict." In the fifteen volumes submitted to their critique they had been able to find only a single text which did not quite meet their approval, and this text was concerned with something of relatively minor importance.

2. Libermann's Missionary Doctrine

Father Libermann's importance in the history of modern missiology is rapidly gaining widespread recognition. Thus for example, Father Rétif, S.J., writes: "In the history of missionary thought time will assign a special place to him as one who was strikingly ahead of his age." John Dindinger, O.M.I., gives a detailed analysis of all his writings "because of his extraordinary importance," and declares that his work was "of decisive importance for the Negro mission." The best tribute of all, however, lies in the fact that, as was pointed out by Bishop Chappoulie, he was a "precursor whose ideas will be found in the Pontifical documents of the twentieth century."
In the following pages we will present a brief survey of Libermann’s missionary doctrine and show how they have found an authoritative and official affirmation in the pronouncements of the Holy See.

a. **PERSONAL HOLINESS AS THE BASIS OF THE APOSTOLATE**

In the preceding pages we have seen the spiritual principles which in Libermann’s view constitute the basis of all apostolic labors. As he expressed it,

D. S. 191

The mission is the purpose, but religious life is its necessary condition.

D. S. 183

The people of Africa will not be converted by the work of clever and capable missionaries, but through the holiness and sacrifices of their priests.

His position is diametrically opposed to that of certain modern minds who, neglecting the supernatural aspects of missionary activity, concern themselves solely with the missionaries’ natural talents for management and organization. Thus they reduce the expansion of the Mystical Body of Christ to the level of a purely human society, as if it were a business enterprise or a political colonization.

In his apostolic letter *Maximum Illud* of November 30, 1919, Pope Benedict XV stressed the idea which Father Libermann shared with many other founders of religious societies: “The missionary who wants to be fully equipped for the apostolate must first of all acquire the indispensable and most important factor of all—holiness.” Previously, Pope Leo XIII had sounded the same warning when he condemned the errors of Americanism: “It is difficult to understand that those who are imbued with Christian wisdom can exalt the natural virtues above the supernatural ones and attribute to them a greater efficacy and fruitfulness.”

The fundamental reason for this viewpoint is rather obvious. As the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church is a supernatural organization in which God, and God alone, constitutes the source of all life and growth. The role of men in the Church is the humble role of being “instruments in His hands.” The most man can do is endeavor to be a perfect instrument which offers no resistance but operates at all times under the influence of and in accord with the will of the craftsman. In other words, the more man abandons
his own views and follows God's guidance, the better his missionary activity will be.

Apart from this reason, which applies not only to missionary work but to any kind of labor in God's service, Libermann indicates two others that are specifically proper to the missions. The first is that missionaries labor among pagan or newly converted peoples who are not yet fully transformed into branches of God's Church. Lacking the traditions of long-established centers of Christianity, this neo-Christian environment depends almost entirely on the missionaries' example for its edification and imitation. Thus, as he expresses it, their "sins would be original sins" transmitted to the newborn Christian community, just as their virtues would impress a lasting stamp on it. One is reminded here of St. Peter's definition of the missionary bishop's tasks in Apostolic times: he was to be the forma gregis, the model of his flock.

A second special reason is that the missionary meets with many difficult situations which demand a much higher degree of virtue than would be required of him in a traditionally Christian society. Patience and perseverance in the face of seemingly endless failures and extraordinary willingness to take up the cross daily.

**Natural Talents.** The emphasis which Libermann placed on the supernatural basis of the apostolate should not give rise to the impression that he scorned the missionary's natural talents as a powerful asset in the work of Christianization. After all, an instrument must be suitable for the purpose assigned to it. A sledge hammer would be of little use in adjusting the delicate mechanism of a watch, and a saintly missionary who is woefully lacking in natural talents is just as unfit for apostolic endeavors. It is hardly necessary to point out that Libermann nurtured no false concepts of the grace of state, such as are sometimes found among religious superiors who presumptuously call upon it to make up for a lack of ability in their subjects. In fact, he was so convinced of the usefulness of natural talents and training that he always directed his missionaries to prepare themselves for their task and carefully plan their work. For the same reason he stressed natural gifts whenever he presented the names of priests as candidates for the

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7Thus, for example, when religious point out that they are completely unprepared to teach a certain subject, or assume an administrative post, or undertake specialized professional duties, their superiors sometimes answer this very real objection with: "But God will give you the grace of state!"
episcopacy, always characterizing them as "well-educated," "capable," "conciliatory," "used to dealing with men of the world." For the same reason again, he wanted his priests to take such worldly business precautions as insuring their luggage and packing adequate supplies instead of leaving everything to divine Providence. For the same reason finally, he insisted that aptitude and desires be taken into account in giving appointments to the members of his congregation.

b. Purpose of Missions

Establishment of a Native Church. The collapse of so many flourishing missions established in former ages had made a profound impression on Libermann.

Everywhere our Holy Church wants to conquer souls by her prayers and sighs, by labor, sweat, privations, and even blood, to produce something solid, stable and secure. Nevertheless, as we see with sorrow, for many of these missions it seems that any ill wind is enough to destroy everything. Several, even of the most brilliant conquests, have collapsed at different times, at the very moment when they were at the height of their bloom.

Africa itself presented just such a sad spectacle in the ruined missions of Angola and the Congo, where in former centuries the Capuchins alone had maintained four hundred missionaries. Undoubtedly, in these territories,

The [early] missionaries . . . must have made manifold conquests for Jesus Christ and his Holy Church . . . and produced numerous Christian communities, [but] perhaps without using sufficient means to consolidate the fruits of their labors by giving to these communities the stable force of a Church.

In an effort to avoid repeating this mistake, Francis Libermann saw the necessity of clearly impressing on his missionaries the exact purpose of their work and the general plan of action to be followed. In a memorandum addressed to the Propaganda in 1846, as well as in numerous letters, he boldly and unhesitatingly outlined his thoughts, which deviated considerably from general contemporary practice.
The purpose of the missions, he wrote, is "permanently to implant our holy religion" by "beginning the construction of the stable edifice of a canonically established Church." Pope Pius XI later stressed this same idea in his encyclical Rerum Ecclesiae:

What is the purpose of the missions if not to found and implant the Church of Christ permanently in these immense regions?

Of course, this idea was not exactly new in the history of the Faith. The Apostles themselves had propagated the Church by founding local branches wherever they went. However, in the course of time, their modus agendi had been largely forgotten. Missions had come to be established more and more as "foreign religious colonies," and even though natives were allowed to join them, the whole mentality of the operation remained proper to the colonizing power. All too frequently, also, missionary efforts were directed to the immediate conversion of the greatest possible number of individuals rather than to the planting of a new branch destined to take root and thus safeguard the future of a whole people. Against this shortsighted view Libermann argued:

I perfectly understand your grief to see so many souls on the road to perdition and your desire to go to their aid. . . . [However], do not forget that you are there not only for the present, but to build for the future. . . . The ten souls you save by a hurried and ill-conceived step, by a measure which produces an immediate good result, may perhaps mean the loss of more than a hundred thousand. . . . [The loss of souls] certainly is a great misfortune, but it would be incomparably more unfortunate if in your hurry to save a few of these souls you allow a whole people to perish.

As to the desire for martyrdom which in the past often seemed to dominate missionaries, Father Libermann soberly remarked that his priests should "not go to seek death in the missions, but to work for the salvation of souls." He added that ordinarily he "would not want to accept a vocation based on such a desire." Because their lives were consecrated to the service of God, he told his missionaries to take care of their health:

8Term used by Bishop Constantini, the Secretary of the Propaganda, in describing the method formerly used in missionary work. This method produced only "miserable results." Cf. Missiewerk, 1940, pp. 86 ff.
L. S. IV, 223 f. To sacrifice one's life for the salvation of a single soul is undoubtedly something excellent, but it is still better to preserve one's life for the salvation of a hundred others. To fear neither death nor disease is the mark of a zealous missionary dedicated to God alone, but to take precautions for the safeguarding of one's life in order to save a greater number of souls marks the missionary who unites perfect prudence with perfect zeal and perfect dedication.

Native Clergy. Libermann's campaign for native Churches necessarily implied as a *sine qua non* the formation of "a natural clergy," a "native clergy, rooted in the country, a native hierarchy."

N. D. 8, 235 To arrive [at permanent success], only one way seems practical to us—namely, to base ourselves from the very beginning on a stable organization inherent in the soil which we want to cultivate.

D. S. 537 The formation of a native clergy... supplies the only means whereby the light of the Gospel can be widely diffused and the Church solidly established in the countries which we are called to reclaim.

N. D. 8, 235 The newly established bishop should not be satisfied with having a "flying column" of missionaries, but should form a native clergy rooted in the country, a native hierarchy. Undoubtedly, in the beginning he would need white priests, but if the preservation of an exclusively white clergy would be a policy adopted permanently or at least for too considerable a time, decay [of the new Christian community] would be inevitable.

Here again his words find an echo in the Apostolic Letter *Maximun Illud* of Pope Benedict XV:

A. A. S. 11, 445 Wherever, therefore, there is a well-trained native clergy, worthy of its vocation, in adequate numbers, there one may rightfully say that the work of the missionary has been brought to a happy conclusion and that the Church has been excellently established.

The insistence of Father Libermann on this aspect of missionary work explains why his priests, within a few years of their arrival, opened seminaries wherever they were sent.  

It was not always easy to get the idea of native priests accepted. Father Le Vavasseur, for instance, wrote from Réunion: "If they knew that we were even thinking of sending a negro to France to become a priest, they would literally hack us to pieces."  

N. D. 6, 611
He likewise encouraged native religious foundations of Brothers and Sisters and urged that they be fully adapted to the condition of the land of their origin. Thus it was wholly in accord with his views when his missionaries founded religious congregations of native Brothers and Sisters within a few years of their arrival in Reunion and in the Two Guineas.

c. Means for Accomplishing This Purpose

Religious Life. As a safeguard for the personal holiness of his missionaries, Libermann insisted that they carefully observe the practices of the religious life. "Although the apostolate is the purpose," he warned, "the religious life is its necessary condition." It was his firm conviction that

If we maintain ourselves in fervor and piety, we will work with more zeal and have better results than if we become lax, as is bound to happen without fail to most of us living in isolation.

The regulation of our time, our main activities, and our contacts with others bars the entrance of our soul to a host of bad habits and dangers. The practice of poverty protects us against the desire to seek our ease. . . . Obedience makes us practice the most intimate of all self-denial, that of our intellect, and thus cuts down the very root of egoism. . . . Having all the time before our eyes the edifying example of our confreres, obliged to perform every day several religious exercises, we are ceaselessly filled with the desire to sanctify ourselves.

Evidently, what Libermann means here by religious life is not just taking public vows of religion—they were introduced only in 1856, after his death—but the practice of community life according to the rules of the Congregation.

Representatives of the Church. To make sure that the natives could recognize his missionaries as sent by the Church and not by a political power, he warned them:

Take care never to go beyond the sphere proper to a minister of the Gospel. The people must never consider you as a political agent of the French Government, but should see in you only the priest of the Almighty.
Pope Benedict XV in *Maximum Illud* wrote:

A. A. S. 11, 447

The Catholic missionary worthy of the name must always remember that he represents the interests of Christ and not at all those of his country. His conduct should be such that everyone unhesitatingly recognizes in him the minister of a religion which extends to all men who adore God in spirit and and truth and therefore is not foreign to any nation.

This motive was one of the reasons why as his first bishop in Africa Libermann chose Father Benedict Truffet, a native of Savoy, which then was still independent of France. Bishop Truffet echoed the doctrine in his well-known words:

Pitra, 448

We do not go to Africa to establish there Italy, France or any other European country, but only the Holy Church of Rome, without regard to nationality. With God's grace we will divest ourselves of everything that is exclusively European and retain in us only the thoughts of the Church.

To protect his priests against any narrow-minded preference of their own congregation to the detriment of their function as missionaries, Libermann wrote:

N. D. 12, 464

Before everything else the missionaries must be men of God and of the Church, and only in the next place members of the Congregation.

N. D. 10, 512

They will never aim at their own interests or even those of the Congregation or any other human object, but only at the interests of God and His glory.

Pope Pius XII says much the same thing in his encyclical *Evangelii Praecones*:

A. A. S. 33, 506

The missionary certainly should dearly love his fatherland and his order, but the Church should be loved with a still more ardent devotion. And let him remember that nothing will be to the advantage of his own order which is detrimental to the good of the Church.

*Extending the Frontiers of the Church.* Even the purest intention of acting only on behalf of the Church, however, leaves room for considerable variation in policy. Is it better, for instance, to concentrate on a small number or to occupy in short order
as much territory as possible and postpone until a later time the intensification of the Christian spirit? Here, again, Father Libermann’s answer is quite definite. Replying to Father Le Vavasseur, who wanted all available resources concentrated on his little island of Reunion, he wrote:

N. D. 6, 112

I think that the apostolic spirit consists rather in extending the frontiers of the Church than in perfecting a small part. If we can achieve an extension of these frontiers and prevent Protestantism from establishing itself in all these vast territories, then, I think, we will have done something stable which will last even through the coming centuries.

The great missionary Pope Pius XI approved Libermann, for in *Rerum Ecclesiae*, he recommended:

A. A. S. 18, 79 f.

Take care to disperse the sacred preachers in such a way that no part of the territory is deprived of the preaching of the Gospel and reserved for later.

In contrast to the narrow vision of his first followers, Libermann was not afraid of thinking and planning in a big way. Instead of limiting himself to Reunion, he gradually extended his cares to Africa, Australia, South-America, the West Indies, Madagascar and even India. “If we could only expand and embrace everything,” he said.

He maintained that the practical way to occupy a large territory with relatively little man-power was to found central residences from which his priests could fan out over large areas where simple stations would be erected:

N. D. 7, 269

Stations consist in stopping for a sufficient time in a definite section to instruct the poor people in our holy religion by means of formal catechism lessons for the children and a series of instructions for the adults.

Then the missionaries were to leave the station and perform the same ministry elsewhere, returning in a regular cycle to each post. Between these visits, the stations were to be taken care of by catechists. Once every two months at least, the priests were to return to the central residence “to be together for a few days and refresh the fervor of their interior life.” Pope Pius XI confirmed this idea in his oft-quoted encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae*:
Advance your residences as far as possible by establishing your missionaries in a central place, surrounded on all sides by smaller stations, which are entrusted at least to a catechist and provided with a chapel. From this central residence the missionaries should go and visit these stations from time to time at fixed dates to carry out their ministry.

Libermann wanted these catechists to be recruited from students in the central schools “who show talent and ability and reveal signs of sincere piety, without being able to advance to the priesthood... They are to be given a solid course of instruction and taught the chant and the ceremonies of the Church.” Going back to the practice of Apostolic times, as he so often did in his plans, Libermann even suggested that they be given tonsure and minor orders and allowed to wear a cassock in the church, because in this way they will be gently encouraged in their zeal for the spiritual welfare of their fellow countrymen; they will be obliged to lead an exemplary life in their families and among their fellow citizens; they will be more respected and thus able to do more good. Finally... being minor clerics, they will be able to replace the priests to some extent by presiding at the meetings of the faithful, leading in public morning and evening prayers, singing the offices on feastdays, and giving suitable instructions to the people.

Father Libermann could have appealed here to the Council of Trent which in its 23rd Session had declared:

In case there should not be at hand unmarried clerics to exercise the functions of the four minor orders, this place may be supplied by married clerics of approved life.

Though Rome did not dare to accept his suggestion of conferring the minor orders on the catechists, Pope Pius XI gave the official seal of approval to the other ideas expressed by Libermann with respect to the catechists (*Rerum Ecclesiae*):

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10In the liturgical congress held at Assisi in 1956, Bishop William van Bekkum, S.V.D., and other prelates went even further than Libermann and suggested that married laymen be raised to the diaconate and allowed to assist the priest at High Mass.
It is hardly necessary to point out to you what the catechists must be and how they ought to gain pagans for Christ less by their words than by the example of their life. Take it as your inflexible rule, Venerable Brethren and Beloved Sons, to train them with the greatest care. They must have a thorough knowledge of Catholic doctrine, and when they explain or comment on it, they should be able to adjust themselves to the mentality and intelligence of their listeners.

Libermann suggested also the formation of lay associations of men and women, whereby he hoped to inculcate "industriousness, Christian life or at least good moral conduct and the proper education of children." In addition, he made efforts to have laymen participate in the planting of the Church. For this reason he was happy to accept a young physician, Dr. Brunet, as an agrégé of the Congregation. Later Pope Pius XII was to write (Evangelii Praecones):

We desire that everywhere, insofar as it is possible, there be constituted associations of Catholic men and women, of students, workmen, and craftsmen, of those who are interested in sports and gymnastics, of other societies and pious sodalities which can be called the auxiliary forces of the missionaries...

As to medicine and surgery, it will certainly be advisable to enlist the services of laymen also.

Mission and Civilization. According to Libermann, one must do more than simply preach the Gospel to establish native Churches; civilization must be brought to the people.

We think that our Faith will never be able to acquire a stable form among these peoples nor will the nascent Churches ever have a secure future without the aid of a civilization that attains a certain degree of perfection.... By such a civilization we mean one that is based on science and work in addition to religion.... It is not sufficient to show these new men the practice of work. Rather, they must be taught slowly how things operate so that they may gradually reach a point of understanding that will enable them to continue working without the aid of missionaries. Otherwise, these people will never progress beyond a sort of childhood from which they will fall back into their barbarous condition as soon as the missionaries begin to withdraw.
The missionaries themselves must perform this work of civilization. As Libermann pointed out:

N. D. 8, 248 f. Civilization is impossible without Faith. Hence it is the task—nay, the duty of the missionary to work at it, not only insofar as morality is concerned, but also in its intellectual and physical aspects, i.e. in education, agriculture and technology. By virtue of his supernatural authority as an emissary of God, by his charity and priestly zeal, he alone is capable of producing a complete effect; therefore, it is on him alone that the task rests. Moreover, if the missionary takes charge only of the moral aspect of civilization, without worrying about the rest, others will take over, and he will often see them destroy in a short time what he has tried to build at the cost of so much trouble and labor.

In Libermann's opinion both civilization and the establishment of a native Church were to be reached by means of schools and education. Nonetheless, it was hard for him to convince his priests of the necessity of founding schools and colleges for the natives. He did not want them to leave this most important educational work to other orders or congregations as if it were something that exceeded the scope of their own task, for "otherwise disorders and misunderstandings are bound to arise." When they objected that "the missionary is not a school-master," he replied:

N. D. 9, 50 I understand that it would cost the missionaries very much to act as teachers. Nevertheless, it is urgent to take this step in order to consolidate their efforts and aim at the formation of a colored clergy, of teachers and of catechists.

N. D. 9, 44 In my opinion, to abandon the schools is to destroy the future of the missions. Your reply that you will start them again at a later time is a joke. Once badly started, a mission is difficult to bring to a successful conclusion. Just because the work of schools is time-consuming and full of trouble, it is important to undertake it from the very beginning.

Pius XII urged the same ideas in Evangelii Praecones:

A. A. S. 33, 514 f. Since young men, and especially those who have had the advantage of a classical and liberal education, will direct the course of the future, no one can be blind to the supreme importance of devoting the best of care to elementary schools,
high schools and colleges. Therefore, with paternal solicitude
We exhort Superiors of missions to spare neither labor nor
expense in proportion to their means in vigorously promoting
this phase of missionary activity.

His Masterplan of Education. Libermann was not satisfied
with vague suggestions about starting schools, but proposed a com-
plete masterplan of education. Everywhere elementary schools
were to be established which would be open “to all who present
themselves.” The most promising of the children in these schools
were to be kept at the mission in a kind of native boarding school
where their aptitude for higher education would be tested. The
best of them were to be sent to centrally located schools of tri-
partite character, offering classical studies for those who revealed
themselves suitable for the priesthood; pedagogical instruction for
others who were capable of becoming teachers and catechists; and
training in agriculture, crafts and trades for the rest. For all,
however, this advanced education in secular knowledge was to be
accompanied by equally progressive religious and moral training.
In this respect, he made some very astute observations:

The science of the lay scholar must be based on the same
foundations as that of the cleric. Moreover, the influence of
these sciences must tend to the same purpose—namely, to
enlighten the peoples and to confirm them in virtue and reli-
gion. . . . In addition, the men destined to spread civilization
among the Africans must tend to the same goal and live
according to the same principles as those who are charged
with their moral and intellectual training. Otherwise, what
one builds another will immediately tear down.

We see here clearly how Libermann insists on the formation
of an elite whose leadership, example and labor will gradually
penetrate the masses.

What will be the result of such a program? The Venerable
indicates it in these words:

The execution of this plan will result in the perfect educa-
tion of our African negroes. Religion will influence their
intelligence and the moral order generally; it will render them
more perfect and give them a spiritual and superhuman happi-
ness. The trades and skills of civilization will rule the social
and civil order and teach them how to secure for themselves an honest well-being on the natural level.

**Adaptation.** If missionary activity is to lead to the implantation of the Church in a new region as a self-sustaining Christian community, it will have to be rooted in the mentality, customs and culture of the people and not in the civilization proper to the missionary’s home country. Father Libermann vigorously insisted on this point, long before the question was agitated among missiological theorists under the name of “acculturation.” With a deep sense of urgency, he wrote:

N. D. 9, 330

Do not judge according to what you have seen or have been accustomed to in Europe. Divest yourselves of Europe, its customs and mentality. Become negroes with the negroes, and you will judge them as they ought to be judged. Become negroes with the negroes, to train them as they should be trained, not in the European fashion but retaining what is proper to them. Adapt yourselves to them as servants have to adapt themselves to their masters, their customs, taste, and manners, in order to perfect and sanctify them, to raise them from their low level and transform them slowly and gradually into a people of God.

N. D. 10, 452

[The missionaries] must pay particular attention to which customs and habits [of a people] are characteristic of the people and the nature of the land. They must carefully avoid disturbing these customs (unless they are against God’s law) and modifying them in a European fashion. They will simply try to make [the natives] more perfect in their own way of life and in accord with their own customs.

Pope Pius XII stressed the same idea in *Summi Pontificatus* and *Evangelii Praecones*:

A. A. S. 31, 429

When the Gospel is being introduced into any new land, let it not destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess of the naturally good, just or beautiful. . . .

Whatever there is in native customs that is not inseparably bound up with superstition and error, will always receive kindly consideration and, when possible, will be preserved intact.

A. A. S. 33, 523

The office of an apostle does not demand that he transplant an exclusively European civilization and culture to foreign soil,
there to take root and propagate itself. His task in dealing with these peoples . . . is to teach and form them so that they are ready to accept willingly and in a practical manner the principles of Christian life and morality—principles, I may add, that fit into any culture, provided it be good and sound, and which give to that culture greater force in safeguarding human dignity and in gaining human happiness. Catholic inhabitants of missionary countries, although they are first of all citizens of the Kingdom of God and members of His great family, do not for all that cease to be citizens of their earthly fatherland.

Libermann energetically and repeatedly protested against any attempt to describe the Africans as an inferior race, destined to remain forever on a low level of civilization and incapable of intellectual achievements. "The negroes are not less intelligent than other peoples," he maintained, and he went on citing numerous examples to prove his point. If so many of them seem inferior, the reason is that they have been forced to live in extremely harsh conditions and have been deprived of any semblence of instruction.

Pius XI in Rerum Ecclesiae states:

It is wrong to consider the natives as dull-minded inferior beings. Long experience has shown that people living in the distant regions of the East and South do not have to yield place to those of our regions and that their brilliance of mind allows them to compete with the latter. If one finds among people coming out of a barbarous condition an almost extreme intellectual slowness, it is a necessary consequence of the fact that their exercise of mind has been limited to the bare necessities of life.

Adaptation presupposes exact knowledge of native mentality, customs and language. Hence it is not surprising to hear Libermann demand that his missionaries

Study the tastes, inclinations and likings of the natives. In this way they will be able to use the correct means to acquire authority over their minds, admission to their hearts, their good will and their confidence.

This demand did not fall on deaf ears. As early as 1854, Spiritan studies on ten different African languages had already appeared or were in preparation. So much emphasis was placed on the necessity of learning native languages that Libermann's suc-
cessor, in indicating the purpose of residences in Africa, always used the formula: "the conversion of the pagans and therefore the study of native languages." As early as 1847, the first native printing press began to function in Dakar, thus anticipating by a hundred years Pope Pius XII's exhortation about "the usefulness of printing and publishing suitable works." The Holy See has also repeatedly stressed the necessity of studying the native languages. *Maximum Illud* for example, emphasizes that one of the primary duties of a missionary is to study "the language of the people to whose salvation he will devote himself."

d. ECCLESIASTICAL AND RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS

In mission territories, as a rule, the Ecclesiastical Superior (Bishop, Vicar or Prefect Apostolic) belongs to the same society as the priests working under his direction. Nonetheless, the relationship between the Ecclesiastical Superior and the Religious Superior of the missionaries has always constituted a thorny problem. It was still more so in the nineteenth century when the Holy See had not yet laid down any firm directives in this regard.

D. S. 443

At first, Father Libermann thought that complications would be avoided by uniting the two distinct powers in the one person of the Ecclesiastical Superior. However, in 1846, after careful study of the situation, he definitely changed his mind and urged that the two jurisdictions be vested in distinct persons. Here are his reasons:

N. D. 8, 208

No matter how regular a missionary bishop is and how much he loves the Congregation to which he belongs, once he is the head of the mission, he wants to be just that. . . . It is in the nature of things that once a man is placed in charge of a mission he gradually becomes detached from the rule. . . .

N. D. 8, 210

It is sufficient that the Bishop have enough respect for regularity and the spirit of the community to realize their necessity for maintaining the missionaries in their fervor. I say that this is enough, because the Bishop must not be Superior of the community and represent the Superior General. We need a separate

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11If he had been able to foresee the future, Father Libermann probably would have been very pleased with the way most Spiritan bishops continued to observe the rules of their society and with the fraternal attachment they displayed in its regard.
Superior for this purpose... The difficulties are the same with respect to a Prefect Apostolic, and perhaps even greater... It should be noted too that in Rome the Superior of the Congregation will always be wrong when there is a disagreement with a Prefect as well as with a Bishop... In Rome they are wholly in favor of the head of the mission, who is always right when he pleads his cause, even when he is wrong... If an Apostolic Constitution had given positive rules, one would know what to do, but there is nothing.

Fully aware of the evil consequences which were likely to follow if, in the mind of his priests, the Bishop's authority seemed to be in opposition to the Religious Superior's authority, he continually stressed the importance of unity and harmony:

Unity is the only view that must be suggested to the missionaries. They should see this unity in the Congregation to which they belong. Let there never be question of a distinction between the Bishops and the Congregation. The Bishops are one with the Congregation to which they belong. They are the head of the mission which is entrusted to the Congregation.

After describing the practice followed by other Superiors, who tried to retain full control over the members of their societies, he continues:

I do not like to go against the intentions of the Holy See nor do I like those continual struggles. God's spirit is not in them. Therefore, I am going to try another way, which could be successful without resulting in new inconveniences.

We can see from this that Father Libermann was fully aware that he was proposing a new way of handling the relations between religious and ecclesiastical superiors. It is remarkable how closely the well-known Instruction of the Propaganda of December 8, 1929, parallels his rules and practices in many points. As Libermann himself had summarized them, they meant "absolute power for the

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12 When the Propaganda received Libermann's proposed regulations, it praised the wisdom of his rules and considered the feasibility of adopting them for general use. However, in 1857, after careful examination, it decided to maintain the status quo. It was not until 1929 that this supreme governing body of all Catholic missions finally attached its stamp of approval to Father Libermann's proposals.
Bishop in his mission, and a perfect safeguard of religious life for the Congregation.” For the sake of comparison we will place the Instruction of the Propaganda side by side with the rules which Libermann had written over eighty years before. According to Libermann:

N. D. 8, 249 f.

A source of the trouble lies in the two interests existing in the missions. These two interests are represented by two authorities: that of the Bishop, who is the head of the missionaries as missionaries, and that of the religious Superiors, who are heads of the missionaries as members of the community. If harmony exists between these two representatives of authority, the two interests will aid each other powerfully; if not, then they tend to destroy each other, and great evils may result. Therefore, rules must be fixed to reconcile the two interests, maintaining to its full extent the power of the Bishop in his mission, yet at the same time giving the community sufficient guarantees for the maintenance of its rules and spirit.

The Propaganda confirms this view, saying:

A. A. S. 22, 114

Although each of the two has a sphere of action that is proper to him and wholly distinct, one being in command of the missionaries, the other ruling the religious as religious, nevertheless anyone can see how important it is that they act in harmony, because their actions concern the same persons . . . Therefore, to avoid as much as possible a conflict of the Superiors’ authorities and to make both powers tend in perfect harmony to the good of the missions and of souls which they so ardently desire, it will be useful to say something more about their mutual relationship.

We now give some of the rules formulated by Father Libermann:

N. D. 9, 91

The Superior of the Congregation does not claim any right over the administration of the Vicariate and the action of the missionaries in anything pertaining to ecclesiastical ministry, appointments, or canonical and liturgical discipline.

The Superior General of the Congregation retains his full authority over all the members of the said Congregation in everything concerning the internal direction of the communities,
the perseverance and spiritual progress of the individuals, and their relations with their local superiors. The special superiors named by the Superior General for the direction of the various communities will have the same power in the district of which they are in charge.

N. D. 10, 456

A certain number of communities established in the same region shall constitute together a Province. Every Province shall have its special Superior, aided by two assistants.

In a similar vein, the Propaganda writes:

A. A. S. 22, 112

The only true Superior of the Mission is the one named by the Holy See. ... Accordingly, in the [mission] territory he is charged with and controls all activity which aims at making converts to the Faith. ... Without him, no one, no matter what may be his authority, can start, change or suppress any work in the missions. ... 

A. A. S. 22, 113

It is excellent that the Institutes [religious congregations and orders] to which the Holy See entrusts these missions appoint regional Superiors. However, their task, as defined by the statutes of their order, is wholly limited to the religious life of the missionaries. They are in charge of these missionaries as members of a religious society to provide for both their spiritual and their temporal needs and conveniences.

A. A. S. 22, 114

It is the task of the Superior of the Mission to appoint the Superiors of the mission stations, to transfer them, as well as the missionaries, to another place, to use them for the various positions and offices according as it is necessary or useful for the missions.

Libermann:

N. D. 8, 252

When the Bishop wants to assign a post to a missionary or change him, it will be advisable that he give his orders, as a rule, through the religious Superior of the mission to which the missionary belongs. At least, he must notify him of these orders. In this way, the Bishop will often obtain information about the value of the missionary (whom he cannot know as well as does the [Religious] Superior) with respect to the position he wants to give him or the location to which he wants to assign him.
The Propaganda:

A. A. S. 22, 114

In appointing or transferring the superiors of stations or in choosing missionaries for the various functions and offices, [the Ecclesiastical Superior of the mission] should make use of all the assistance the Religious Superior can offer. Because of his position, this [religious] superior usually knows his subordinates more fully and has a better understanding of their temperament, capacities, mental abilities and aptitudes for the various offices. Therefore, the Religious Superior should propose suitable men as superiors for the different stations or for the various offices, but the Superior of the Mission appoints them.

Regarding the foundation of religious establishments whose purpose is not limited to one mission territory, Liberman wrote:

N. D. 8, 252

The Bishop of the place will have no right to use these missionaries outside the house or to regulate their occupations in it. If he needs their help, he will have to ask the Superior of the house, who alone is charged with the direction of these young priests.

Or again:

N. D. 9, 93
N. D. 9, 92

The Superior [of this house] will be appointed in accordance with article eight [which states that] the Superior General has the right to appoint and depose local Superiors in accord with the Rules [of the Congregation].

The Propaganda recognized the usefulness of such foundations:

A. A. S. 22, 113

With due observance of the laws, it is not forbidden to establish in the missions religious—even exempt—houses or even religious provinces. The Sacred Congregation is very much in favor of such foundations, not only because they are wholly in agreement with the desires expressed by His Holiness Pope Pius XI in his encyclical "Rerum Ecclesiae" but also because they are highly useful, especially when there is question of a mission to be entrusted to the native clergy.

Finally, Father Libermann entered into a special convention with Bishop Truffet, the Ecclesiastical Superior of the Two Guineas. Concerning such conventions, the Propaganda declared:
All this does not prevent the Ecclesiastical Superior from making special conventions with the Institutes of both men or women to arrive at an equitable agreement concerning their mutual rights. To give these conventions a greater force and stability, it is customary to submit them to the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith [i.e., the Propaganda].

e. RELATIONS WITH CIVIL AUTHORITIES

From the very beginning, Father Libermann laid down certain rules to be followed with respect to the civil authorities governing the countries in which his priests were to work. These rules aim at preventing conflicts and securing good-will, while at the same time safeguarding the essential freedom of the priests in their special sphere. We have already pointed out above that he warned them not to do anything which in the eyes of the people would reduce them to the status of political agents. On the other hand he insisted:

Be on good terms with the authorities, for this is God’s will and is demanded by the good of souls. Endorse their plans and help them as long as these plans remain within the limits of justice and truth and are not opposed to the propagation of the Faith and the moral order.

Even if the government officials’ conduct is far from edifying, it is important to retain their benevolence.

Should you become angry with them, he asked, when you see them commit grave sins? That would not be advisable. Imitate our good Master, who was so kind to sinners. Always adapt yourself to everyone and have patience with the faults of all without bitterness or rigidity. You know that this is a general rule which all our missionaries must observe.

The reason for this insistence on good relations with the government is plainly set forth as Libermann continues:

Although government officials have no spiritual powers, they can cause you trouble and frustrate you in many ways. On the other hand, if they think well of you, they can be useful in advancing the work of the salvation of souls.
To prevent troubles, he suggests that the following rules of prudence and diplomacy be observed:

N. D. 9, 241 f.

1. As much as possible avoid giving the impression that you have any doubt regarding their good will toward you. Such an attitude would be enough to turn them against you. If you appear to have confidence in them, and act as if you suspected nothing, they will often lack the courage to show their ill-will.

2. Do not speak and act in an authoritative way, i.e., with an assumed air of authority. The haughtiness which they reveal in the exercise of their powers in civil and military matters must not show up in your conduct of ecclesiastical administration. Be firm in everything that belongs to your duties of state, but be firm in a kind and humble way.

3. Take care to avoid clashes. These men are never accustomed to being worsted by their subordinates. Therefore, once they have taken a position, they do not withdraw, and if by steps that they cannot prevent you succeed in getting the best of them, they will make you pay for it on other occasions.

4. If a conflict is inevitable, and your conscience obliges you to hold out against the will of the French Government agent... and you get the best of him, do not take on an air of triumph and make him feel that it is you who have won. Be nice about it and avoid discussing anything that could bring up the question again. Be humble and charitable and do not humiliate others under any pretext whatsoever.

5. Finally, avoid as much as possible any exchange of letters and official requests. Go and see them, and gradually bring the conversation around to the point. Prepare the ground and make your request orally. Even if you make a decision which is within your competence alone and you want to notify the commander, it is often better to speak to him about it [first].

Above all, there should be no systematic opposition:

N. D. 9, 233

Once war is declared, they will not give in. Therefore, take your precautions lest there ever be any declaration of war,
even when government agents ask you something which you cannot do in conscience. Briefly, kindness and charity will always be of great help, while rigidity and inflexible ways of acting will always be interpreted as intolerance. And you know that once you are considered as intolerant, you will be good for nothing.

That Libermann practiced what he preached appears from the fact that he nearly always succeeded in obtaining what he wanted from the Government, whether the officials he had to deal with were fervent Catholics or full of Voltairian ideas. As an example we may refer to the foundation of the dioceses of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Reunion. The French Government had always been opposed to bishops in these colonies, fearing that their influence would diminish that of the local Governors. Yet in spite of all opposition, Libermann succeeded in bringing the Government around to his view.