Marie Libermann was born at Illkirch in Alsace in 1829. She was the daughter of Dr. Samson Libermann, brother of Father Libermann, and Isabelle Marie-Antoinette Meylert, who embraced the Catholic faith in 1824. Father Libermann was godfather at her baptism and took particular care of her spiritual well-being; Mrs. Halle, her godmother, took her to her own home and raised her.

Marie went to school with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion, a congregation founded by the famous convert, Father Theodore Ratisbonne, and which has always been particularly interested in the conversion of the Jews. After the death of Mr. Halle in 1851, Marie returned to her father's house. When her mother died in 1856, she became the private teacher of Miss T. de Breda-Pitray. Both Father Libermann and Father de Brandt thought for a while that Marie had a religious vocation; in any case she benefited greatly by the spiritual counsels of her godfather and lived a very religious life in the world. Marie died of typhoid fever in Paris, on October 15, 1859, at the age of thirty, seven years after the death of Francis Libermann, her spiritual father.

The following letters show us how a natural affection for close relatives is sublimated and supernaturalized by those who endeavor to love God above all things. The last of the seventeen letters here reproduced was written one year before the death of Father Libermann; it reveals the high degree of divine love he had attained.
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

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New Year’s wishes. Your three “Mamas.”

Letter One December, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 369

Dear Marie [aged nine]:

You, my dear godchild, will no doubt write a nice letter to your beloved uncle! It will already be on its way when you receive this, and you will probably be angry because I am getting there first! Well yes, this time I have come first to wish you a Happy New Year, and you know what I mean by such a wish.

I wish this new year to be very good, very pious and very happy. I wish that the most Blessed Virgin will take care of you, as she has taken care of her dear Child Jesus, for you also are her dear child! You have three mammas: first, Mamma Libermann, then Mamma Halle, but you have a third one, who is even much better than the first two, although they are very good and very lovable. This third Mamma, the most sweet, the most lovable, and the dearest of all, is the most Blessed Virgin. She loves you so much that she has wanted you to bear her name, so that every one will know to whom you belong.

Be then a worthy and loving child of Mary, your great and lovable Mother! Marie, the daughter, must resemble Mary, the very sweet and most amiable Mother. The daughter must be sweet like her dear Mother, pious like her, modest, obedient, good, and charitable as she is. It is especially necessary that little Marie should be an enemy of worldliness. She must avoid vanity and flee from it as one flees from an evil smell or from a plague. She should be modest in everything. Oh! she will then be the well-beloved of her dear and tender Mother!
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

This, my dear godchild, is what I want to wish you. They are very beautiful things which will make you very happy even on earth, but much more so in heaven.

Most affectionately yours,

Your uncle,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN

P. S. Do not forget to offer my most sincere wishes and most respectful greetings to Papa Halle and your godmother. I often think of you in the presence of our good Lord.

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Letter Two La Neuville (?), 1841 Vol. 3, p. 60

Dear Marie [aged eleven]:

Your letter gave me great joy. I knew as soon as I saw the envelope that it came from you. I was beginning to worry about your health. Knowing your heart, I knew that you had a good excuse for not writing; besides, it would be difficult for me to become angry with you, except in the event that you put aside piety and ceased to love the good Lord and the Blessed Virgin.

I am very glad that you are in that new boarding school. The peace and harmony which you describe speak excellently in its favor, for they show that a good spirit and religion reigns in it. It is my hope that everything in that house will do you good. I wish you had sent more details about what you are doing. Are you there the whole day? Are there rehearsals and repetitions? What courses are you taking?
I was greatly pleased to learn that you have pious associations with young ladies who love the Blessed Virgin. You know how much I want you to be a most devoted child of Mary. If you make progress in your devotion toward this lovable and most beloved Mother, your salvation is secure and you may feel confident that you will make a good First Communion. Ask for the grace to make a good preparation for that great act, and place yourself under her protection. Do this not only once or several times but every day.

I was sorry to hear that you were sad, but you did not explain the reason for your sadness. Not knowing the cause of your trouble, I cannot advise or console you properly. I know very well that you were not able to tell me all that you would have liked to say, because your letter was passing through the hands of others, but why not write directly to me by post? You know how dear your soul is to me and how greatly I desire your progress in piety and virtue.

While waiting until you tell me what is troubling you and thus making it possible for me to console you, I urge you to go with confidence to your well-beloved Mother [Mary]. Tell her all your troubles in all simplicity, show her the wounds of your heart, with tears reveal to her that you are suffering, and ask her to cure you. When a small child falls and hurts herself, she runs to her mother crying; she shows her the place where it hurts; she does not even have to ask her mother to cure her; she knows beforehand that her good mother will do all she can to console her. If she is covered with mud, mother washes and cleans her. Act in the same way with Mary and she will give you great help and consolation. There is this difference between Mary and earthly mothers: earthly mothers are imperfect and show their bad humor; they scold their poor children. Mary, on the contrary, can only console, comfort, and purify us.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

[Be Careful in Choosing Friends]

I still have to give you some important advice, my dear child. It is about a difficult matter where your lack of experience might give you trouble while you are in that boarding school; it is in regard to the connections you will form there. Choose a certain number of pious friends, those who can inspire you with a great desire to progress in piety and virtue, especially in devotion toward our Lady. In making your choice, avoid being misled by your attraction for the natural qualities of others, such as a certain loveliness, cleverness, talent, similarity of character, nobility, wealth, and a thousand others which sometimes become the foundation for friendships. If you allow yourself to be carried away by such things, you run the danger of contracting friendships that are false, wicked, and harmful. Never become an intimate friend of a young person who is worldly, or of those who show great self-love, vanity, or any other outstanding faults. Choose devout friends, friends who are simple and whose friendship inspires virtue and religious sentiments, especially devotion to the most Blessed Virgin.

In a boarding school, it is necessary to have several friends, with whom one can speak intimately. You may nevertheless have one with whom you are more intimately connected than with others. But be on your guard not to be alone with her too often during recreations; otherwise your connection will soon become exclusive and will be bad; it then becomes a passion which causes all kinds of sorrow, prevents prayer, makes one lukewarm toward God and the Blessed Virgin and ends by putting oneself at odds with the teachers.

[Charity in Speech]

In your relations with your friends, never talk about others, except to say something good about them; never in-
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

dulge in detraction. I repeat: never talk evil about any one, but above all, never say anything bad about your teachers. And I do not mean only that you must avoid saying such things with the lips, but avoid even expressing such things in signs, gestures, smiles, or certain airs and attitudes which others understand.

So I have given you quite a number of counsels! But, above all, love the most Blessed Virgin! Go to her with the greatest confidence and tell me what is the cause of your grief.

Most affectionately yours,

Your uncle

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

My best regards to Mr. and Mrs. Halle.

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Bear your troubles out of love for God. Practice obedience and charity, without self-pity. Don't seek worldly advantages.

Letter Three  La Neuville, January 13, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 107

Dear Marie [aged twelve]:

I thank you with all my heart for the good wishes you sent me for the New Year. Ordinarily, or at least very often, people wish fine things with their lips, but in their hearts say the contrary. I feel certain that your wishes are sincere. I noticed, however, that you did not express everything that you wanted to obtain from God [for me] by your good prayers—a small Bishopric or a Cardinalate would have flattered your friendly ambition! But, thanks be to God, you do not entertain such hopes, and this gives me great pleasure.
Moreover, my dear child, a crown in heaven is at least as precious as earthly honors.

[Bear Your Troubles out of Love for God]

Don't grieve nor moan, dear child, because of the pains you have to suffer in this world. Pains are a great good, they are true graces with which God favors you. I hope you will profit from them. You were in need of such things to form your character. You are naturally inclined to flightiness, you know, and thus you might form a superficial character. Sorrows will make you a little more serious, thoughtful and vigilant in your conduct. Just be careful not to fall into the opposite excess. Don't be sad! At your age gaiety is "a must", and even at any age joyful characters are the best, provided they do not become lightheaded. Bear all pains with submission to the will of God, who permits them for your good. Not only will they greatly assist you in forming your character, but if you profit by them, they will enable you to develop true piety and solid virtue.

O my dear child, if you knew how great the treasures are that lie hidden under the ugly cloak of pains and contradictions, you would beg the most Holy Virgin to give them to you all the time! But I know very well that you are not strong enough to desire such things and you must not ask for them, either. But at least pray that you may suffer them with mildness, patience, charity, and without too much sadness. You must accustom yourself to put them out of your mind when they are present, and when they are gone do not recollect them and dwell on them.

[Obedience and Charity]

When you have trouble with your godmother and when she scolds you, take care that you don't entertain feelings of
resentment and displeasure, for these will naturally come up on such occasions. Remember always that you must love her, even when she wrongly scolds you.

You must also try to do what she wants you to do, for it will often happen that you think she is wrong when she is right, at least to some extent. But even when she is wrong, the charity you owe her should make you act in a way that will satisfy her. All this you ought to do with a good heart and with very great simplicity. This is a very important lesson I am giving you, dear niece! You must grow in Christian generosity, for Our Lord and the most Blessed Virgin ask this of their children. Try not to be preoccupied with yourself, but learn more and more to pardon perfectly those who cause you pain and are unjust towards you.

My dear child, don't be so anxious to be right in the sight of men; do not seek so much to please yourself, but do everything you can to bear all those pains for the love of God. This will make you practice great perfection, and you will render yourself agreeable to Jesus and Mary if you bear all those pains well and with contentment of heart.

[No Self-Pity]

Remember that I sometimes urged you not to entertain feelings of self-pity. Yes, my dear friend, and I repeat it now, don't be so sensitive in regard to the pains you suffer from others, however unjust and painful they might be, but remain always sensitive to what might displease God and cause pain to your neighbor. This is hard to practice, isn't it? This is why I should like to be with you every week for half an hour, to console and encourage you, but it is not possible, so I pray the most Holy Virgin, your good Mother, to do it for me; she will do this much better than I, so have recourse to her.
Be full of courage: Your good Mother will stretch out her hand to lead you. Try to do what I have told you: apply yourself to the practice of virtue, but do it with devotion, holiness, and generosity. Be worthy to be called a child of Jesus and Mary. Stop grieving about the pains and contradictions you have to suffer; forgive others with most tender charity.

I beg you to explain better some other time what are the sources of your pains. You only mention that your godmother scolds you because you don’t work and you say nothing more. You should give me all the circumstances and tell me what you do to satisfy her, etc. You know very well that nothing you say will annoy me. On the contrary, I will be glad to get the most minute details regarding everything that concerns you and your conduct. Give me details especially about how you conduct yourself in the various circumstances in which you are placed; it is this which will interest me most.

As to the scolding of which you speak, it must be because your godmother would like you to do needlework, and even to help in some way with housework; this would be good for you. Do as much of it as you can. I am very sorry that you have been so brief concerning this matter.

[Don't Seek Earthly Advantages]

I would like to warn you about one thing, and beg you to observe zealously what I am about to tell you: for the love of God and the most Holy Virgin, don’t be attached to Mr. and Mrs. Halle for the sake of some earthly advantage! I know I may hurt you by saying this; you will think that I have very mean suspicions about your feelings. No, my dear niece, that is not so! But I am afraid that, by and by, such thoughts might enter your mind; if they do, chase them far away. Don’t entertain such low sentiments. You must love
your godmother and Mr. Hallé tenderly because of all the affection they have shown you and the careful education they have given you. You might feel sad if Mrs. Hallé seems to have less affection for you than she had in the past; but you must bear this with resignation for the love of God. Refuse at all times to consider the earthly advantages that you can expect to receive from them. Entertain nobler sentiments, sentiments that are more worthy of a child of Jesus and Mary.

I am convinced that you understand all this perfectly, although you are still very young, and that you want to do all you can to render yourself pleasing to God. If this were not so, I would not speak to you this way.

Make a careful preparation for your First Communion. Pray very often to the most Holy Virgin to take good care of you; ask her to give you good dispositions for that great great moment, the most important in your life. I am very glad that you have found a good confessor; this is a great advantage and it will help you greatly to prepare yourself properly.

I shall say Mass for you a week from next Sunday and the following Sunday. I think that you will readily believe me now when I say that I have not forgotten you.

Tell your mamma that I owe her a long letter but as I have told you, I don’t want her to have to pay the postage for another letter right now. I often think of her at the Holy Altar.

Give my best and sincere regards to Mr. and Mrs. Hallé.

I think that, this time, you will not be displeased with my letter. At least its length is quite respectable.

Adieu, my dear niece and godchild. Always count on the sincere affection of your uncle,

Father Francis Libermann

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Your first Holy Communion should be a cause of joy and not of fear. Crosses are better than consolations.

Letter Four April, 1842 Vol. 3, p. 169

Dear Child [aged thirteen]:

Although I am pressed by work, I must write these two letters immediately, one to your papa and the other to yourself. The matter is urgent, for your First Communion is approaching. Don't make a general confession. Be content with an ordinary one. If you have already begun to make one, tell your confessor that I advised you not to make a general confession, but do not tell him that I told you to say this to him.

[Holy Communion is a Cause of Joy and Not of Fear]

A general confession would be harmful at the present time. Try to have a general contrition for all past sins, but let it be a contrition that is full of love for the good Master. Why do you fear, my dear child? Go to Jesus with confidence: you love Him and He loves you. What risks are you taking and what have you to fear? Don't entertain such unreasonable thoughts that inspire fear. Do you want to fear Him who loves you to excess, even with a sort of folly? Yes, with the folly of the Cross! He died for you. He desires so ardently to unite your soul to Himself, that He wants to become the food of your poor soul. He constantly intercedes for you before the throne of His Heavenly Father, and fills you with His graces and favors. Come on, then, dear soul, don't permit the enemy to influence you. He will have attained all his desires if he succeeds in making you afraid, troubled, and disturbed.
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMAN

No! He will never be completely victorious! Mary, your good Mother, will defend you against his arrows. Those fears must never prevent you from approaching your Savior. On the contrary, the more the enemy makes faces at you, the more closely you should come to the beloved Friend of your soul and the more you must seek to fill yourself with the strength which the love of Jesus offers you in His most adorable Sacrament.

Receive communion as often as your confessor allows you. The means you use to put to flight your temptations is very good. Have recourse to Jesus and Mary. When, after that, there still remains an element of sadness, don't be surprised and don't entertain fears on that account. Try only to chase away the evil thought; seek to distract your mind from the object that has produced sadness by occupying yourself with something else. And if, even then, sadness remains with you, offer it to Our Lord; tell Him that you want to bear it for love of Him. Don't be anxious—put your confidence in Jesus and Mary and all will go well. The devil waits to persecute you, because he sees that Jesus loves you and is ready to fill you with His graces. If you are faithful to divine grace you can be sure that you will profit greatly from that temptation. Bear it with peace, mildness, humility, and great love for Jesus, the well-beloved of our heart. Often invoke Mary's assistance and increase your devotion for her daily.

[Crosses are Better than Consolations]

Don't seek so much spiritual joys in Holy Communion; do not esteem them too highly. Such joys are but milk which Our Lord gives to children who are still weak in faith. When He withdraws these consolations from those who desire to love Him with all their hearts and attach themselves completely to Him, it is a proof that He wishes to strengthen them and make them advance in the perfection of divine love.
Benefit then, dear child, by Jesus' kindness toward you. Do not seek His good graces for the sake of the pleasure you find in Him, but with the pure desire to please Him and grow in His divine love. Cost what it may, you must give yourself completely to Jesus. Now, He wants you to go to Him in the midst of crosses and thorns; so much the better! This is hard to bear but it will make your soul strong and later, when you are stronger, the joys and your spiritual happiness will be greater than ever.

Have great courage, then, and submit your soul to the cross and the burden of temptations. If you are without spiritual feeling, make good resolutions, offer them to Jesus and execute them with true love and great fidelity.

Laugh when you feel like laughing, but laugh with modesty, as is proper for a young person. Avoid noisy and wild outbursts of laughter, but I like to see you laugh. Remember God in times of laughter and avoid dissipation. If you act in this way I guarantee that there will be no evil in your fun. Have courage, patience, confidence in Jesus and Mary, peace in your soul, mildness toward yourself and toward others, and preserve a humble attitude before God. This will enable you to triumph over all sorrows and temptations. It will enable you to sanctify yourself by means of those temptations. Apply yourself to those things and with the help of Jesus and Mary you will succeed.

Adieu, dear child! I will pray with all my heart for you.

I am, with all the affection of my heart, and in the charity of Jesus and Mary,

Your most beloved uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

P.S. In the future when you wish to tell me something that is urgent, don't postpone asking me about it until a special opportunity presents itself.
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMAN

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First Holy Communion of a child of Mary. General confession.

Letter Five  La Neuville, April 16, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 174

Dear Child [aged thirteen]:

I congratulate you with all my heart because of the favor you are about to receive from God. The day will soon come when you will have the happiness of being a holy child of Mary. Jesus will be in your soul; He will unite Himself to you in a most perfect manner and will be your happiness. Oh how pleased Mary, your good and most beloved Mother, will be with you on the greatest and happiest day of your life!

[Jesus is Coming to You]

Don't be afraid! Jesus, the most kind and lovable Jesus, will come with great sweetness to embrace you with the unspeakable tenderness of His love. He is not coming to you as a Judge. All the sins of your life will be forgotten. In the outpouring of His tender love He will think only of pressing you to His Sacred Heart. Do you think, my dear child, that Saint Stanislas Kostka was afraid during the vision granted to him, when Mary graciously placed her holy and adorable Child Jesus in his arms? Well, my dear child of Mary, you are one of the dearly loved souls of that Mother of holy love. She will also place her little Jesus in your arms; take care to press Him to your heart with a great effusion of love and do not have any fears.

But what did I say? Mary will place the Child Jesus in your arms? This is not enough! You will be more blessed
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

than the little Stanislas in his vision. Jesus will come with a love that is incomparably greater. He will enter into the depths of your heart; He will inflame your soul with His divine ardor. I beg you, my dear niece, don't be afraid, but surrender to Him with great confidence, with boundless, immense confidence; deliver yourself to joy and love.

When Jesus is resting in your soul, talk to Him, give yourself to Him generously; do not limit in any way your desire to love Him and belong to Him. You should make to Him the sacrifice of your whole self, of all the pleasures and satisfactions of earth. The more generous your heart is the more Jesus will feel at home in it. Sacrifice to Him all your faults; use serious means and sincere resolutions to exterminate them for love of Him; declare war to the death against vanity, which is the dominant fault of your sex. Beg Jesus to help you so that you may be pleasing to Him throughout your life. Offer Him also all your pains, tell Him that you want to bear everything with patience for love of Him. (If you have no pains at this time, say nothing about that.)

[Favors to Ask Mary]

Do not forget Mary, your good and most beloved Mother, on that day of joy and blessings. Do you know the two things you should ask her?

First, that she will not allow you to commit any sin that would separate you from Jesus—that she may make you always pleasing to Him, always His devoted and faithful child.

Secondly, that you become like to Jesus through perfect imitation of His holy life. He gave us this life as a wonderful model of purity, of divine love, charity, mildness, meekness toward our neighbor, of patience, of hatred and contempt for the world, of the spirit of prayer, of Christian humility, and of the other virtues which can enable you to become a saint;
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

yes, my dear niece a saint! You must devote yourself wholly and entirely to Jesus.

Don’t be afraid! The more you give Him, the more you will receive from Him. He promised a hundredfold to anyone who would make a sacrifice for Him, and no one has ever been able to say that He failed to keep His word. Yes, His divine word has always been and always will be fulfilled in such conditions.

I expect then, or rather Jesus and Mary expect, to see a great change in both your interior and exterior conduct, so that the angels themselves will be full of joy and admiration. Don’t worry if you still discover imperfections in yourself. Jesus is coming! He will change everything, turn everything upside down, erase everything, so that nothing is kept in your soul except His Holiness and Divine Love.

If you want always to have joy and confidence, remember His words in the Canticle of Canticles: “My Beloved to me and I to my Beloved.” These words are significant and seem to have been spoken for the day of one’s First Communion.

While waiting for that blessed day, nourish the desire of divine love for that sweet Jesus, and often repeat those other words: “Draw me after You that I may run in the delightful odor of Your ointments.”

[General Confession]

In regard to confession, tell your past sins again to Father Schaff, although they were already confessed; this is not because otherwise you would commit a sacrilege—no, you would not commit such a fault if you left them out, but on this occasion, confess them once more in order to be more perfectly purified. Besides, this act of humility will be pleasing to Our Lord and will be a good preparation for your First Communion.
While making your general confession [as desired by your confessor] try to preserve peace of soul. Take a sufficient time to examine your conscience, but do not become anxious. If you forget one fault or other, it does not matter. The thing that must occupy you most in your confession is sorrow for your sins; try to be truly sorry for them. Ask Jesus to grant you contrition; implore the help of Mary, and you will not find it difficult.

Adieu, dear niece. I will not forget you, especially on the very day of your First Communion.

Entirely yours in the holy love of Jesus and Mary

Your uncle,

Father Francis Liberman

I shall gladly comply with the wishes of Mr. Halle, and will do the errand for your godmother. Tell them that I remain sincerely devoted to them.

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Avoid sadness about your afflictions. Don’t become bitter. Worldly joys do not last.

Letter Six    La Neuville, February 8, 1843    Vol. 4, p. 99

J. M. J.

Dear Marie [aged fourteen]:

This time you will have to be satisfied with a short letter and I ask your permission to say just a few words to you, for I have already written letters to your papa and your sisters, and I have so little time! So I must ask your pardon, just this once!
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMAN

[Avoid Sadness About Your Afflictions]

I like the frankness with which you tell me that you are not keeping your rule, but you don’t tell me why, nor what points you find hardest to observe. It seems that the good Lord continues to afflict you. Don’t let this discourage you, dear child, for He does it because of His great mercy for your soul; this is the reason why He sends those constant afflictions. Those pains have already done you much good. I hope that henceforth they will help you even more, for your soul will be more and more strengthened in divine love. Suffer those pains with submission to the divine Will and count on His goodness. He will always sustain you and will make those pains help you for your sanctification.

The thing I want to recommend to you is to avoid becoming sad on their account. When you feel inclined to be sad, try to distract and recreate your mind, while, at the same time, avoiding dissipation. Confidently raise your heart to Jesus and Mary. Seek consolation in divine grace, in those strong considerations which you mentioned, in the Cross of Jesus and His sufferings, in the sorrows of Mary at the foot of the Cross, in the joy of suffering for love of God. When you feel fortified in spirit, then turn your thoughts elsewhere, but seek first for consolation in God and in Mary, your good and beloved Mother.

[Don’t Become Bitter]

Take care to preserve mildness of character. In the midst of those pains your heart might go astray and adopt a wrong attitude; it might get the habit of entertaining dark, bitter, angry thoughts. Be on your guard, dear child; try always to keep an even temper. When you are sad, let no one notice it and especially let no one sense and feel it. Never indulge in bad humor, in the bluntness and brusque-
ness which are so natural to persons who are suffering pain and sorrow. Great evenness of temper, born of a spirit of faith and the desire to please God, is a great virtue. Be courageous and rejoice because God pleases to try you; it is a proof that He loves you tenderly.

[Earthly Joys Do Not Last]

I am very happy to see that the Divine Master gives you many spiritual consolations; you see that He loves you with great affection! Be generous in turn, my dear child; don't love the world nor the things that are in it, for all that is in the world is pride, the desire to enjoy pleasures, impurity, and the love of riches. Now all these things make people forget Jesus. Love Jesus and make use of the things of this world as if not using them: for the image of this world is passing; eternity remains.

This world lasts but the twinkling of an eye. That we have joy or pain, that we laugh or weep, that we are rich or poor, that we live amid enjoyments or privations, all this does not mean much and it lasts but a moment. Be indifferent then to all that takes place in this vain world. Seek only to please Jesus; in the midst of the world. He alone remains for ever. But, much more than that, He alone will make you happy in the midst of all the passing troubles of this world. Live your own life amid the corruption of the world in a most pure love of Jesus. In the midst of pride, live in the humility, simplicity, openness, and innocence of a child of Jesus and Mary.

Don't worry about your desire to laugh; this is nothing! Laugh when you feel like laughing, just avoid dissipation; it is very easy to become dissipated in the midst of laughter. Men might think that you are frivolous, but Jesus knows your heart. Provided, then, your heart always belongs to Him,
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

and amidst that laughter you think of Him and have the desire to please Him, all is well. 
But I see that I have let my pen run farther than I had planned. When I talk to you heart to heart, I forget myself! So much the better, dear child, God wills it! Profit by what I tell you and my soul shall rejoice greatly. 
Tell Elisa that I will write to her another time. Her three older sisters have stolen all my time! I must finish the letters because I must send them off. I love her with all my heart and as much as her other sisters. I will pray especially for her.

Your affectionate uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

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The emptiness of the world. Surrender yourself to Jesus. Family news.

Letter Seven  La Neuville, October 24, 1843  Vol. 4, p. 404

Dear Mary [aged fourteen]:

[The World is Nothing; God is All]

I know very well how painful it is for you that you have to leave your present boarding school. All things come to an end in this world. All things pass, God alone remains and He always remains the same. He is always full of love and of tender affection for us. If we run after pleasures, satisfactions, worldly happiness, we are chasing phantoms, shadows which escape from our grasp, even when we take hold of them. How silly the world is when it sacrifices everything for its pleasures, its honors, and riches; when

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it has no other goals than those empty shadows of reality, whereas true reality exists in God alone. And yet no worldling wants to seek that reality in God.

You should realize better than anybody else that the world and everything in it is really nothing. My dear girl, do not love this earth. Do not love the world and what is worldly; for all those who love the world and the things of the world, seek pleasures, riches and vainglory. How empty all this is! How little happiness those things contain! How full they are of trouble, passion, and affliction! All is but vanity and affliction of spirit.

Attach yourself to God with all your heart, dear Marie! It is in Him that you will find your highest good. You might still suffer afflictions in this world, but they will not be able to bore into your soul. You will take your cross, humble your soul gently and lovingly, submitting to God and abandoning yourself to Him. The more that creatures grieve and afflict you, the more you must cling to Our Lord and become more perfect in your love for Him.

My dear girl, you know my tender love for your soul and yet I must tell you truthfully that I cannot be sorry because I see you suffer. These pains touch me, but at the same time I rejoice because of them. Rejoice with me. I don't want to love you more than Our Lord loves you nor could I love you more; neither should you love yourself more than Our Lord loves you. He sends you this life of crosses and pains. They are for your sanctification; they must help you to detach yourself from the world and from all that it contains.

[Deliver Yourself to Jesus]

We can live in the midst of the world without loving the world. Jesus, our good Master, prayed to His heavenly
father to prevent us from loving the world. "Holy Father," He said, "I do not ask that you take them out of this world, but that you keep them from evil."

Don't love yourself too much! The more you love yourself with excessive tenderness, the less you draw Christ's love to yourself. Love Jesus, who is the love and joy of our hearts and the life of our souls. This, dear girl, is what your pains and crosses must help you to accomplish in your soul. From them will spring all the virtues and perfections which God desires you to have; you will thus become strong and firm in goodness.

Deliver your soul then to Jesus that you may suffer as much as He wishes. Don't ever pity yourself. Don't indulge in sad reflections. Avoid impatience and excitement, when things annoy and trouble you. Calm your soul in the midst of the pains and agitations which result from such contradictions. In critical moments, when others say hard things to you, recollect yourself in the depths of your soul, in union with Jesus who is in you. Near Him you will find the peace which otherwise you might lose. You will find there the love which you cannot find elsewhere.

Go to church as often as you can, to hear Mass, and when you are unable to go, make a little sanctuary in your own soul. Adore Jesus who dwells there by His divine grace; acquire, by and by, the excellent habit of adoring Jesus there during the day. If you prefer, go in mind to the holy altar and remain there to adore Him whom your heart loves and longs for.

You are a child of grace, dear Marie. Jesus is always with you and Mary watches over you. Turn your mind frequently toward them during the day. Act with gentleness and attention toward your godmother. Don't be angry with her, my dear child, when she distresses you unreasonably. Let your heart be full of the love and mildness of Jesus. Be like that Divine Lamb; He allowed Himself to be torn to pieces, as it
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

were, and offered no resistance to His executioners, nor did He show the least impatience with them. Be courageous; imitate that well-beloved and gentle Lamb. His grace will then increase in you a hundredfold. Don’t talk back when your godmother speaks harshly to you or when she says something against your mother.

Don’t worry about your temptations. Despise them and turn the eyes of your soul elsewhere; try to distract your mind after saying a prayer to Mary. Repeat, from the bottom of your heart: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to You.” And then despise that enemy and never let him make you anxious. Your soul belongs to Jesus; those images which he puts before you are only in the imagination; your will has nothing to do with them and is against them. Of course you feel stirred in your senses, but this happens in your emotional self; your soul is not truly affected by them, for it is pure in God’s presence amid all those things. All that you must do is to reject those thoughts and never worry about them.

I will pray for you and I hope that no evil will happen to you. You will overcome the devil, dear girl, don’t be afraid; you are a child of Mary—you are even a Mary! The devil is afraid of you.

[Caroline is Homesick]

Caroline is well; she spent two and a half hours with me this evening. The weather was fine and we walked in the garden. She is homesick and has shed at least half a liter of tears since Sunday. She does not get much sympathy from others, for she laughs amidst her tears. If Marie were with her, she told me yesterday, she would not be homesick. You see that every one has his own cross to bear. Caroline declares that hers is the heaviest!
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

Today her sickness was less severe, but yesterday, when I was with her, her tears were running like two little streams. I feel sure that she will be happy in that house. Tomorrow her homesickness will be gone, for she will not have the time to think about it. She has a lot of work to do; she is in the first class and the courses are very stiff. She seems not to have much confidence that she will get prizes, but it is too early to judge.

Adieu, dear child! Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary. Thank Mr. and Mrs. Halle for their greetings. I will not forget them in my prayers and I often think of them during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

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About Caroline. Frequent Holy Communion. The choice of a good confessor.

Letter Eight Amiens, January 27, 1844 Vol. 6, p. 25

J. M. J.

Dear Marie [aged fifteen]:

[About Caroline]

I am going to prove to you that Caroline is not totally dead! I have taken a large sheet of paper and you'll be able to see her writing in the same letter. My last one to you must have filled your heart with worry especially my postscript in which I excused Caroline for not writing on the occasion of New Year.

The fact is that Caroline is neither dead nor ill. She is perfectly well, gay, and satisfied. Her only trouble is that she is very busy and perhaps a little . . . . , should I dare to say

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it? Well, she will read my letter, but I must tell the truth! She is a little . . . lazy when it comes to writing letters, even to those who are, as it were, more dear to her than her own self.

Besides, this “laziness” is a good sign; it proves that the small keg of [detested] Sauerkraut [which papa sent] has produced its effect. I mean, her homesickness is gone! She will end by liking Amiens so much that she will not want to return to Strasbourg.

[On Frequent Holy Communion]

You ask me to give you some advice for your conduct. Regarding frequent communion, I not only approve your desire, but strongly urge you to follow it. Approach the Holy Table frequently and take care to prepare well for it. Convince yourself that if you stay away from the Bread of Angels, your soul will become weak and your fervor will diminish. Don’t be afraid to go to communion! Our most sweet Savior is hidden among us on earth for the sole purpose of filling us with Himself. The more confidently we approach Him, the more lovingly He will receive us. If you receive this divine Sacrament frequently, you may be sure that you will persevere in piety. Moreover, if you are faithful to divine grace and strive to acquire solid virtues, you may be confident that this Sacrament will help you greatly and will make you reach solid perfection in a short time.

Be courageous, therefore, in your effort to acquire solid piety; go to Holy Communion frequently to find in it strength and fidelity and an increase of grace! You will see what great blessings God will pour into your soul.
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMAN

[Choose a Good Confessor]

I earnestly advise you to change your confessor. Find a Jesuit Father. Make a careful choice, for, according to St. Francis de Sales, we should choose a confessor among ten thousands. Do not yield to human respect or remorse or worry because of the change. You need it and I trust that you will benefit by it.

I wished you a Happy New Year at the Holy Altar. I am very busy. I had planned to write to all my friends, but it would have taken considerable time (it is getting worse every year); so I decided to beg their pardon. I shall make up for it by praying a little more for their temporal and spiritual well-being.

I beg you, my dear child, to write to me immediately every time you have any difficulty regarding your soul. You know that I am always ready to please you and especially to help you on the way to salvation and make you advance in perfection. You know also what happiness your progress gives me.

Adieu then, dear Marie. May the peace and the love of Jesus and His holy and good Mother constantly increase in your soul!

Your most devoted and
affectionate uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

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Separation from those whom we love unite us more strongly with God. On Temptations.

Letter Nine	August, 1844	Vol. 6, p. 303

Dear Marie [aged fifteen]:

If you were wicked enough to be displeased with me, you would surely be displeased in the present circumstance, for I am taking Caroline and Pauline away from you! I feel certain, however, that you will heartily make the sacrifice to God for the good of Pauline. I trust that the Blessed Virgin, your good and beloved patroness, will console you in your isolation. You will simply attach yourself ever more to Our Lord and be more and more faithful to Him.

[Separation from Relatives Unites Us More with God]

You see how short-lived are the most innocent joys of earth. There are separations and more separations, without end; but it is precisely through such separations that our souls are perfected in true and solid virtue; it is precisely by them that we attach ourselves more and more to God. Blessed are you, dear child, if all those privations and so many others also to which we are subject in this world, make you cling and bind you more firmly to the divine love of Jesus, our eternal Friend. There will never be any separation from Him. When your soul is united to Jesus, it will, I hope, remain united to Him forever and will always enjoy His love. Be courageous in bearing that privation and learn to become even more closely united with Jesus—in Him you will find your only true happiness.

I fully understand what you are thinking: your good mother will grieve in her loneliness and will be eager to have
you with her, but you should discuss this matter with your father before making a decision. It is his right to determine whether you should return home or remain with Mr. Halle. Your line of conduct in this matter (a truly delicate one!) is very simple. When your mother speaks to you about your return home, tell her that you are perfectly willing to return and that you will be happy to be able to console her with your company, that if your father tells you to go back home, you will do so immediately, and that you advise her to speak to your father and make him decide that you will return. Remain quiet in the meantime, and ready to do whatever the good Lord may desire. By this complete conformity of your will to the divine will, you will avoid the embarrassment which you would suffer if you made your own choice about that.

[Strength and Joy Amidst Temptations]

Fear nothing, dear child of Mary! Have confidence in your good Mother. The devil will not be able to harm you in any way. Your dear soul is well guarded; Jesus makes His home in it and He wants to establish His throne in you. Nothing profane will dare to enter the sanctuary of Jesus. Moreover, our Lady protects you and carries you in her arms. All the temptations which the devil stirs up are but grimaces of the enemy; despise them, but don’t worry about them. Don’t worry about anything that is precious on this earth, my dear child, but turn your mind immediately to Jesus and Mary, and fear nothing.

Be fervent, and I promise you that the devil will never have power over you. He can tempt you, but he was also permitted to tempt Saint Catherine of Siena and numerous other most holy souls. Take care not to lose your peace of mind in the midst of these temptations. You did an excellent thing to ask permission to receive Holy Communion frequently.
It is in Jesus that you will find strength and consolation in all painful circumstances.

If you take the precaution which you have laid down for yourself, namely, to flee the occasions of sin, and if your soul is fervent, you may feel secure amidst temptations; they will not be dangerous and you will have no reason to fear that you will displease our good Lord Jesus. On the contrary, they will be an occasion of merit for you; besides, you will have one more reason for clinging more closely to Him and being more faithful.

Do not grieve because you suffer such troubles. On the other hand, be gay, without yielding to dissipation. Don’t be too serious nor too preoccupied—this is of no value. Always preserve a sweet peace in your heart and live with modest joy.

You have a right to such joy and peace, for you are a child of God, beloved by Jesus and Mary; it is not proper for you to be sad and to grieve. If you find that you are poor in virtues in comparison with the Saints, do your best to reach their level. Your aims must be as high as that; and you will be successful, my dear child, if you are faithful. A new-born baby does not grow immediately to adulthood. A soul which enters the road of holiness, likewise, does not reach the highest level at once. First be a child of God, then become an adolescent, and finally reach maturity. Be faithful and Jesus will grant you this grace. Remember that, as with the body, some grow slowly, others more rapidly; so is it with spiritual growth. Pray to our Lady that you may be one who grows rapidly. Adieu, dear Marie.

Your most devoted uncle,

Father Francis Libermann

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III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

P.S. August 13th. I have just written a short word to your papa. It is probable that Pauline will leave Strasbourg at the end of this month. I rejoice because I shall be able to see your good mother once more.

Earthly joys are nothing but vanity. You belong to God: do not serve the world. Display the happiness of a child of God.

Letter Ten  La Neuville, November 16, 1844  Vol. 6, p. 446

J. M. J.

Dear Marie [aged sixteen]:

It is about time to write to you, for you might imagine that I am forgetting you. You might seem to have good reasons for such a complaint, but I can tell you positively that you are mistaken. We often think of you. There is, I believe, no conversation between your sisters and myself in which your name does not come up, and it is clear from the way we talk about you that you are not the least interesting topic of our conversations.

I see Pauline—pardon me, Sister Pauline, our little Sister Pauline—and Caroline once every week. Come too, we shall all have fun together! But what am I saying? This is unkind, for you cannot be in two places at the same time. I know, however, that your heart performs that miracle: it is in two places at the same time, and your mind very often follows your heart as far as Louvencourt, and sometimes drops in for a moment at La Neuville.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

[Earthly Joys Are Nothing but Vanity]

On the other hand, I know very well that such [mental] journeys don't satisfy you. You'd like to bring us all together at Strasbourg, so that your heart would not be divided amongst us and your mind would not be forced to travel so far. But what can we do? This is one of the sorrows of our present life. We must not seek happiness on earth—not even in the most legitimate pleasures. God will one day be our sovereign happiness in heaven. He wants also to be the sovereign Lord of our affections on earth. He desires to show us constantly that all is nothingness on this wretched earth and to prevent us from seeking our happiness in fragile things. He constantly upsets all our plans, destroys our hopes, counteracts all our affections and opposes our desires.

O vanity of vanities! Everything in this world is but vanity and affliction of spirit! Even if we had everything our heart longs for, we should have nothing; and this very nothing would slip away from our grasp like a shadow. What a sad state one is in who chooses to live his life solely from the natural standpoint.

If God were to grant us all the pleasures our poor heart naturally desires, we would lose the little good that is in us; all the wickedness and malice which sin has put in us would reappear; we would be full of faults and miseries which would render us even more miserable than if we were deprived of all pleasures. Even innocent enjoyment becomes like a fertilizer that nurtures the development of vices and defects; and those vices and defects disfigure our souls and render us soft, cowardly, weak, and delicate.

[God, Our Joy, Dwells in Us]

There is no doubt, then, that the best gifts of God's mercy to those whom He loves, are privations, obstacles, pains, and
tribulations. If we are faithful, our souls will find the true happiness which lies in God alone. He alone never turns away from us, never separates Himself from us. In the midst of pains, difficulties and temptations, enter into the depth of your soul and you will find there that true friend, that great and perfect consoler. Seek your joy and happiness in Him alone! Seek your consolation solely in His goodness. Your soul is a sanctuary in which He has established His abode. He does not leave you for an instant; you must likewise never leave Him. He is pleased in making your soul His dwelling place; be happy also to be able to visit Him often within that living tabernacle where He dwells with delight. Make your dwelling more and more pleasing to Him.

[Live in the World but Don't Be of the World]

Do not love the world nor its pleasures and frivolous amusements; Do not love the world’s vanities; do not seek to please or satisfy the world. Dear soul, you are always consecrated by the presence of your God who dwells in you; you are often locked in the arms of God, honored by union with Him and His tender love for you. Privileged soul, beloved of the divine Jesus, do not give to the world what is so dear to our beloved Savior. This would be casting pearls before swine. Live in the world since it is necessary, but don't be of the world.

When we surrender to the world, even when we succeed in avoiding sin, we suffer immense losses. God's Spirit withdraws from us, our love for God diminishes, our taste for piety disappears, our soul is weakened, and our mind dreams only of amusement, vanity and pride. We then idolize our own selves; we no longer see anything but our selves; we love ourselves alone and live only for ourselves; every sort of passion is re-awakened in us; pride is in command; our spirit is darkened and we become insensible, es-
especially to all that belongs to piety; we become indifferent to God; we live constantly in an indescribable vagueness; our heart is a void; our mind is sad, agitated and flighty. We find satisfaction only in excitement and dissipation, or in the glamor and fantasies of pride. This pride in which we seek all our happiness becomes a horrible tyrant who tears our soul apart; it tortures and breaks it in pieces; it worries, harrasses it and constantly throws it out of joint. The desire to please and the fear of having displeased others are the two spurs which pride uses to goad those who abandon themselves to it. Poor souls! They will never enjoy rest during their entire life in this world, and great are the woes they must expect after their death.

How wretched are those who give themselves to the world. They live the lives of galley-slaves! And what remains? What reward? They lose all the virtues they perhaps had acquired, all the graces with which they had been filled, and all the glory which they were destined to enjoy. The time of folly passes very quickly; one moment, the twinkling of an eye, and earthly life is gone with all its pleasures, vanities and frivolous amusements.

Watch yourself then, my dear child. You are now alone. Your devout sisters will no longer be with you to set the good example for you and encourage you in the service of God, in a life of faith and the practice of the Christian virtues. You are now more liable to follow the natural inclination which prompts you to seek amusements, pleasures, and vanity. Be firm in your faith, beloved child of Jesus and Mary! Be faithful to Divine Love. Give everything to Jesus and you will have everything—more than everything, a hundred times more! He said so and His word is eternally true. Have courage, dear child. Preserve purity of soul and simplicity of mind, and keep your heart fervent in the ways of God.
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

[Your Natural Assets May Endanger Your Soul]

Do not associate too much with the world; avoid boisterous pastimes. Make a careful choice of friends; have few and let them be good, fervent Christians. Guard especially against vanity and the desire for the esteem of others. You are in particular danger in this respect, dear child.

You study and your efforts are crowned with success. You have an attractive face and people who are interested in your family like you. All these advantages are nothing and do not deserve our attention. You are young, and at your age vanity and self-complacency are, as it were, woven into the very fabric of corrupt nature. Men contribute to our vanity by praising us, revealing their high opinion of us and expressing their affection. This is very harmful, for it prompts us to esteem ourselves and makes us acquire habits of self-love.

I assure you that I prefer to see you undergoing humiliations and vexations on the part of others, rather than to have you receive their praises and be raised to high heaven by them. I know, dear child that it is not your fault that people praise you and love you, but this, nevertheless, is dangerous for you. Try to give your soul completely and most fervently to the divine Savior. Be constant in your generosity, and give yourself to a piety that is sincere and solid. Be convinced that all natural advantages are nothing in themselves; all is vanity and affliction of spirit in this world because all passes away and ends in nothing.

When our body has disintegrated in the tomb and our soul appears before our sovereign Judge, all our so-called advantages will be valueless. Being fully convinced of this truth, do not esteem nor love anything; attach yourself to Jesus alone, to His Divine Love, and all the perfect virtues that flow from it. In them you have something that is true, substantial and that shall remain for all eternity!
[Be Gay, Serene and in Peace, for you Are a Child of God]

Be modest in your conduct, your bearing, your manners, and your words. Speak little, but avoid becoming taciturn. Always be gay and contented, you are a child of God, you should be contented and peaceful. A multiplicity of words pour out your mind like water and foster the growth of self-love. Avoid also speaking too little, for too great a reserve constricts the soul. Say little or nothing in ordinary conversation about the subjects of your studies or the knowledge you have acquired; otherwise much self-love will mingle with such conversations and it will take deep roots in you.

Now let me give you a fundamental rule for your conversations. Adapt your conversation to the tastes and habits of the persons with whom you speak. However, don’t hold idle conversations with worldly persons whose tastes and habits are full of vanity... It is somewhat difficult to observe that rule. Sometimes conversations are boring and futile, but we must learn to overcome ourselves and bear this annoyance in a spirit of charity, for the love of God. Let me add, however, that you must not seek too much the company of persons whose conversations are of that kind, but adjust yourself to them to the extent that the good Lord desires it and your conscience allows you to yield to the taste of those persons.

I also advise you not to speak too much about science, even with persons who love it; in this we should keep to a certain caution and reserve. Avoid a sharp and dogmatic tone; do not start the conversation on such topics and speak of such things with modesty; avoid parading your knowledge. Do not judge or despise anyone because of his ignorance; be kind and spare those who speak about things they do not know; do not always correct their errors, unless it involves the interest of God's glory—for example when it concerns truths of religion.
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

[Don't be Afraid of God]

Keep your conscience peaceful, tranquil, and free. You are a child of God. Jesus loves you tenderly. Do not approach Him with fear. Cast out every thought that inspires fear and fill yourself with love. Go to God as a child approaches his father or mother. I say all this out of the great tenderness which Divine Goodness gives me for your soul and because I ardently desire to guard you against all evil and make you advance in true virtue.

Nourish your soul as often as possible with the Holy Eucharist. Prepare yourself for it through conduct that is humble, simple and full of love and through the zealous practice of the most perfect virtues of the Christian religion by renunciation of creatures and of yourself.

"If any one wants to follow me," says the Divine Savior, "let him renounce himself, bear his cross, and follow Me." Carry the particular cross which Divine Goodness sends you each day. Bear it with patience, mildness, humility, and submission to God's will. This is the principal preparation for communion. Prepare your soul immediately for it as well—this is useful. Immediate preparation consists of desires, longings of the heart, and exercises of piety performed for that purpose.

I end telling you once more: Be gay, open and tranquil as is proper to a beloved child of Jesus and Mary.

Entirely yours in their holy charity,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN
Love of God and spiritual dryness. Degrees of love. The practice of patience.

Letter Eleven

La Neuville, February 18, 1845

Vol. 7, p. 61

Dear Marie [aged sixteen]:

It’s time for me to reply to your letter of January 5th. I feel sure, dear child, that you are not angry with me because of the delay. I am reduced to slavery and no longer belong to myself. My time is no longer at my own disposal. Everything belongs to the Master, whose slave I am. I must always first accomplish His business. There is no longer any enjoyment for me on earth; I must not seek by own satisfaction in the affection of those who are dear to me; I may grant it to myself only when I find a moment of leisure. Don’t grieve, then, dear child, and don’t think that I no longer love you because I have neglected you. You see that this kind of neglect proves just the opposite—I do not neglect you—I have replied and will continue to reply to all the wishes you express in your letter. I will reply to them at the Holy Altar. Believe me, I am praying constantly for you and hope that God’s goodness will hear my prayers.

[True Love is Not the Same as Emotional Feelings]

Don’t worry about occasional interior dryness. Do not imagine on such occasions that you no longer love our good Savior. The love you have for Jesus ought not to consist in a show of emotion. Our love for God is an interior attachment; it is an attachment of our soul in virtue of which we are ever ready to sacrifice everything to Him and submit,
with all our heart, to all He wills. It makes us accomplish faithfully His every wish, however great the cost. It makes us prepared to sincerely renounce all things and ourselves, to renounce our pleasures and satisfactions for love of Him. This attachment prompts us to deliver our soul generously to God so that He can do with it what He pleases. It makes us bear our pains and daily crosses with peace and for the love of Him alone until at last, we seek to please our Beloved in all things that are in accord with His good pleasure.

True love consists in giving ourselves completely to God alone, even while we experience no emotion. I should like to prove this to you by one example.

You have a great love for your father and mother, but you do not always feel a sensible emotion of that affection. Being always with them you are accustomed to enjoy their company and, although you feel no sensible emotion, you love them. Your habitual and constant exercise of filial love diminishes your sensible awareness of it, while it increases the reality of your love.

There are circumstances that from time to time renew the sensible experience of your love; for example, when your parents give you some mark of affection, or when you fear to have caused them pain. Then you become aware of the various emotions that are rooted in your love. Sometime it is an emotion of joy, as in the first instance, and at other times a feeling of sadness, pain, compassion.

Well, my dear child, doesn't the same thing happen in your relations with our Heavenly Father? Our beloved Jesus is your good Father; you are His child of predilection. As soon as you have the desire to love Him, you may rest assured that you truly do love Him. Every act of desire of that sort is an act of love; hence you are not to be pitied when you are in a state of spiritual dryness. All you have to do in such moments is to remain humbly at the feet
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

of Jesus, being disposed to sacrifice every other affection for Him and, in general, all things and yourself, and to remain in peace and confidence in His goodness and mercy.

[The Degrees of Love for God]

Now, to enlighten you fully regarding the practice of the love of God, let me show you its various degrees.

The first consists in abhorring mortal sin. This is necessary for your salvation.

The second consists in abhorring even venial sin. As soon as you have an attachment to an earthly object, as soon as you cling to anything whatsoever that is somewhat opposed to God, as soon as you entertain in your heart a sentiment which God disapproves, you breach your love for God, you do not love God as much as those other things.

Thus far there is question of a love for God that is necessary and demanded by the order of things. But remember that there is no fault without free consent of your will. Now I can tell you for a fact that your will loves God constantly, and if you commit an occasional fault, it is one of weakness; it is done with imperfect knowledge and in a passing way. It is already a great satisfaction for you to know that your soul dwells in divine love. Poor soul! Be fervent and thereby be happy!

The third degree consists of loving God above all things, even in things that are otherwise lawful. This is perfect love, the love of perfection. In this case we always prefer, from among good and holy things or actions, those we believe to be most pleasing to God. We then still love the things of earth—we still have a taste for, and a delight in creatures and in the satisfactions and pleasures of this world—but we do it with moderation and without offense to God. However, as soon as we know that it would be more pleasing to God to deprive ourselves of something, we immediately
make the sacrifice of it; thus we prefer to please God rather than ourselves, even when we could legitimately indulge in that satisfaction without offending God. When our soul is so disposed, we always try to practice virtue in a perfect degree. We seek always to please God and often offer Him sacrifices and privations.

This thought gives me great joy and consolation, for I behold your soul in that state, with those desires, that tendency. And yet you keep saying that you do not love God! No, dear child, you are not telling the truth when you say that! Try merely to perfect this higher degree of love in your heart. You do not yet possess it to perfection; progress from virtue to virtue; strengthen your soul and be faithful.

Finally, there is the fourth degree, which consists of loving nothing but God alone, and all creatures and ourselves in God and for God. This is the purest kind of love, the love practiced by the Saints. This love demands that there be no more affection for our own enjoyment and satisfaction. It requires complete mortification of our poor soul, a life of grace. All is holy in a soul that loves God alone. A person in this state loves God purely for Himself. Whatever love of creatures remains in her is animated by pure charity. She is completely dominated by grace in all her affections and dispositions. When you read the lives of the Saints, you will notice that it is this degree of love of God that animates their conduct in all its phases. Such a love demands the complete sacrifice of oneself to God.

[The Practice of Patience]

Regarding your lack of patience, I shall prescribe a long range and a short range remedy. As a long range remedy, every day make a particular examen of ten minutes on this subject and always add practical resolutions. Examine the principal circumstances in which you are more frequently
and more knowingly impatient. Examine what in you causes that impatience; you will find that it is self-love. Examine the sort of movement of self-love you have. It may be a certain sensitiveness and self-pity; your imagination is aroused; you become unyielding and stern and your mind indulges in reasonings. Make resolutions and try to remember them at the proper moment. Foresee the circumstances in which you are more likely to become impatient so as not to be caught by surprise.

As a short range remedy, as soon as your godmother speaks to you in an aggravating manner, turn your mind to God and humble yourself; distract your mind from what annoys it and be especially on your guard against saying anything about what is taking place in you. You must on such occasions keep perfect silence. If you open your mouth, your patience will escape by that door!

One important thing to remember: however just your impatience and interior irritation may seem to you, always regard it as a temptation, and you will more easily restrain yourself.

Watch carefully over yourself in regard to pride and vanity, especially in respect to knowledge you have acquired and natural qualities you may possess. Avoid acting and speaking through the impetus of self-love. For the rest, never yield to trouble, fears and anxieties when you find such tendencies in yourself. Keep a peaceful and humble watch over yourself; pray and place your confidence in God and our Lady. Remember that you are "little Marie," the child of the great and admirable Mary. You ought to do on a small scale what she accomplished on a large one. You must especially strive to become humble like her.
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

Enough for this time. Adieu, dear child. Entirely yours in the charity of Jesus and Mary.

Your uncle,

Father Francis Libermann

Unable to visit her, Father Libermann invites Marie to write frequently. Warning about danger of attachment to her confessor.

Letter Twelve 1845 Vol. 7, p. 199

Dear Marie [aged sixteen]:

You will be pleased with me because I am writing you first, before receiving any letter from you. Until now I have done nothing but reply. So, this time, I want to point out to you I am finally beginning to be good and reasonable in my old days. I know that you will be satisfied with me, but I have to tell you something that will cause you a little grief, perhaps even much grief, but the good Lord will console you. I see that you can guess what I have in mind. "Oh that wicked uncle is going to tell me that he is unable to visit us this year!" You’ve guessed rightly, but don’t grieve too much over it. If I don’t come this year, I shall come at some later date; it will be next year. It hurts me, dear Marie, to have to announce this delay to you and it hurts me even more personally. Have courage and do not be too distressed. Submit to God’s will. You’ll see that some fine day I shall be close to you at the Cathedral. I will say Mass for you and will have the consolation of giving you Holy Communion. I prefer to give you that bad news [of the delay of my visit] myself rather than let others tell you in a cold way.

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I suppose you understand now why I have become so kind as to send you this letter so suddenly and unexpectedly. If I don't have the great consolation of talking with you in the near future, at least give me the joy of writing frequently and giving me news about yourself.

[Write Frequently]

Although I do not see you, I nevertheless think very often of your soul, for I desire to help you. I know, too, that if you are so anxious to see and speak with your poor uncle, it is not merely to satisfy your heart, but you want to walk rapidly in the way of salvation. Well, dear girl, let us use a means that will help you while we are waiting for the meeting. Write me every month, and daily take a moment to examine yourself so that you will have something positive to tell me [in your letters].

Every time you have a difficulty, take note of it. At the end of the month read your notes, give me an account, and ask the advice you need.

Your sisters told me that you had mentioned the question of vocation, and that others had also spoken to you about it. The time is not yet ripe for occupying yourself with this question. Don't think about it yet nor speak of it to any one. At your age, such reflection would only do you harm, unless the good Lord strongly impels you in that direction. I don't believe that you would benefit by reflecting on that matter now.

[Avoid Dangerous Attachment to Confessor]

You spoke to me lately about a new confessor you had chosen. I cannot recall who it was and this makes it easier for me to give you advice regarding your conduct toward him. This advice is important. You felt sorry because your former confessor was too dry, etc. . . . This prompts me
now to offer you the following considerations. I did not think of it at the time but I have reflected on it since and I take this opportunity to pass my thoughts on to you.

You are no longer a child; you are beginning to walk in the way of perfection; you have a great desire to make progress and this makes you consult your confessor more frequently. You have a sensitive heart, a rather lively imagination and a frank and open mind. Now my advice concerns the latter propensities. If the confessor speaks unctuously, if he shows interest in you, seems to esteem you, to give special attention to your soul, if he manifests any partiality for you, any preference, you run the risk of becoming too attached to such things. You will develop too tender an affection [for him] and great evil will result. Strong attachments of this sort lead to lukewarmness and ruin piety. I need not develop this further, for I am merely advising you, so that you may take precautions.

To avoid those disadvantages, here is the way you should act, and I beg you, dear child, to observe my advice to the letter:

1. Never consult or visit your confessor in any other place than the confessional; never in his home if he is a secular priest; nor in the parlor if he is a religious.

2. Don’t spend too much time in the confessional. Tell your sins, ask the advice you need, without indulging in long discourses; and never speak about any other subject than your salvation.

3. Never write to him nor seek to receive letters from him, however pious they might be.

4. Never speak about confession to others; never say anything about the things he told you in the confessional. Do not allow your mind to be occupied with your confessor, but let it be occupied with God.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

5. Finally, do not seek to occupy yourself with your confessor nor to make him be particularly interested in you. Those who have a false piety do the exact opposite of what is expressed in those five points and they never attain solid virtue. They end by being empty of God, full of self-love and the desire to satisfy their spiritual sensuality; they seek only consolations which they get from their faulty behavior. They imagine that such consolations are pious and supernatural, when in reality they are purely human satisfactions.

You will probably think that your dear uncle is very severe! Well, he is because your soul is most dear to him; he is jealous of your spiritual progress, and ardently desires your sanctification.

The five points which I have mentioned are urgent. Write to me what you think and give me an account of your soul on those five points. If a hitch develops in regard to any of these points, write to me at once. You see how much importance I attach to this matter. Tell me also the name of the confessor you have chosen.

Adieu, dear niece. You know that I remain always

Your most devoted servant
in Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN
He playfully teases his niece about her disappointment.

Dear Little Marie [aged sixteen]:

You have probably received my little letter and, of course, it must have caused a little pain to your little heart! Oh my dear child, how much I'd like to be able to spend a few days with you. I promise to pray with all my heart and to beg our good Mother to grant us that favor, for it is solely for the well-being of your soul.

Don't become discouraged! Don't give in to sadness. Love God and Mary. Don't become sad, especially because of what I said at the end of that letter. You know the sentiments that dictated it. Write to me.

I enclose a letter for Miss Augustine. Please deliver it to her. If this is not possible, put it in an envelope and address it to the Reverend Sister Anastasia Lescalier, Ergersheim, by Mosheim.

This good Sister, when she opens the envelope, will take care to forward my letter to Miss Augustine. I ordinarily do it that way. It seems that some people are wondering where those letters for the Sister with their postmark of Amiens actually come from. You know how curious people are. They might find out that those letters are destined for Miss Augustine and this would make things unpleasant.

Your poor uncle,

Father Francis Libermann
Avoid self-pity in your sadness.

Letter Fourteen

La Neuville, August 19, 1845

Dear Marie [aged sixteen]:

I am ashamed of what I must confess: I lost your last letter and so cannot reply properly to it. It arrived at the moment when I was leaving for Paris. I took it with me and left it on the table of my room in the Hotel de Strasbourg. A “naughty” servant from Saverne put my belongings and especially my papers in such good order that I have not been able to find a number of letters, and yours was one of them! So, don’t be vexed with me. It is in “Strasbourg” that the letter was lost and it is a good Alsatian—even one from Saverne—who lost it!

[How to Deal with Your Sadness]

Regarding your state of sadness, I think it is due in part to your painful situation. Do not yield to anxiety but bear your sorrows with peace and submission to God’s will; abandon your soul to Mary. From time to time recall some good thought, for example think of Our Lord in the Garden of Olives; or remain at the foot of the Cross with your holy and beloved Mother. Bear that cross of sorrow as a burden that is placed on your soul and carry it peacefully out of love for God.

Try, however, to get some diversion and distraction. Do not indulge in the dreams that might accompany your sadness. Avoid reflecting upon yourself and avoid self-pity. Never let others know that you are sad, that you are day-
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANN

dreaming and suffering. No one should know what is going on inside you; be outwardly cheerful as usual.

Be especially on your guard against putting on sad airs on purpose. Avoid drawing the attention of others to yourself. It happens sometimes when we are sad that we want others to know it and to occupy themselves with us. We don't complain, but our tone of voice, our airs, our ways of acting proclaim our sadness. Do nothing of this kind. Be strong and try to make yourself agreeable to God alone and attract only His attention and that of our Lady.

Have patience! When your father comes here, we shall decide whether you should remain with Mrs. Halle or not. Try to come with him if possible.

I have not given up hope of coming to Strasbourg but this will be at a somewhat later date.

Adieu, dear child. Be sure that you are always very dear to me and that I am, in the charity of Jesus and Mary,

Your uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

P.S. Give the enclosed letter to Miss Augustine but in a way that her parents do not notice it. Put it in an envelope.

Everyone in Louvencourt is doing fine. You will soon hear about Caroline's victories. Mother St. Bernard told me that Theodora has changed greatly for the better. They are very well pleased with her. They find ways to help her—she will succeed. The good Mother wants me to urge your papa to come for the profession of Sister St. Leopold in the month of Mary. Give my best regards to Mr. and Mrs. Halle. I recommend myself to their prayers.
Praise for her self-revelation regarding temptations against purity. How to deal with them.

Letter Fifteen

La Neuville, January 19, 1847

Dear Niece [aged eighteen]:

[Don’t Be Surprised That You Are Tempted]

No! I am not going to scold you because you failed to speak to me about your mental afflictions. These troubles are already hard and painful enough for one who belongs to God and wants to belong to Him forever. I prefer to sympathize with you in your tribulation rather than be displeased with you. Moreover, I understand the great sufferings of one who has such high esteem for the angelic virtue and finds her happiness in it, when she is confronted with such difficulties [as you have mentioned]. For those who love the holy virtue there is no pain on earth like that which they feel when that virtue is attacked in any way, from either near or far.

After the temptations come trouble, disquiet, interior torments and they wonder whether they had the misfortune to yield or preserved their purity intact. And when they must speak about those things, their anxiety increases, the heart beats faster, and it requires heroism to reveal their trouble.

You have performed this heroic act and repeated it. God will bless you. You will, no doubt, be very surprised when I tell you that, far from grieving because you hid your temptation from me, I am, on the contrary, truly glad of it. If you had revealed that trouble to me from the very first moment, I would not have been surprised, for your heart has not hidden nor should it keep anything hidden from me. Yet, to
see that you were so afraid to reveal your struggle to me is a sure proof that you truly abhor the object of your fears. It shows that Divine Goodness desires to preserve in your heart the precious virtue which will be your glory and will make you more and more lovable in the sight of Mary and the holy Angels.

Be courageous, dear child of Mary! Do not fear the attacks of the enemy! Avoid his approach, flee before him, but never yield to timid fears which disturb your peace of soul. Temptation is not an evil. It will teach you that the lovable virtue which Jesus placed in your heart and which Mary preserves there, is a precious treasure contained in a very frail vessel.

Hence you must not be surprised if your heart has emotions that are opposed to the virtue which you want to possess. The senses and the imagination are easily taken by surprise by the things that surround them; hence it is proper to avoid the occasions of sin so that the senses will not receive impressions that disturb the imagination. For, rest assured that your heart preserves its purity. Trouble and unruly activity take place in the imagination. Here then is what you must do:

[Rules] Regarding Yourself and Your Inner Being

1. Avoid giving in to anxiety and do not plague your mind at the approach of temptation. You merely increase the evil when you harbor worries. These make the temptation more tenacious. They cause the return of the temptation and decrease your ability to resist it with sufficient power and to remain master over your mind and its movements, because of the embarrassment which those worries leave behind.
2. Seek to distract your mind, avoid sadness, discouragement. Aim in everything at forgetting yourself and the object of your pains. Avoid in general any kind of daydreaming or imaginings. Try to preserve calm, gaiety, and openness of mind.

3. Do not entertain excessive fears of being attacked by temptation. It is understood that you must avoid everything that might expose you to those temptations and this is important; but when you cannot avoid the occasion, be not afraid, but give your heart to Jesus and Mary with full confidence and submit to the Divine Will which permits those temptations. You must have the firm determination of remaining faithful to our good Lord Jesus and to count on His help and that of Mary, our good Mother. She will not permit her dear little child to fall.

4. Have a profound, filial and constant confidence in Jesus. Put your trust in Him when you are tempted. Look gently and peacefully at Him; forget yourself and calm your inner self; distract yourself from the object of your trouble. Be confident in prayer; do not be afraid of presenting yourself to Him, but do so in all humility and as a beloved child before its loving father. Put your trust in Holy Communion. Never omit communion, whatever the state of agitation of our soul. It happens frequently in temptations of that sort that we don’t clearly see whether we have yielded or not, nor to what extent. This comes from a certain listlessness of the imagination, from a certain vacancy of mind, and sometimes from mental sadness. You then imagine that your will has failed; at least you fear it to a certain point, and this makes you timid and fearful to approach your Divine Savior. Don’t be afraid, my dear child!

You have nothing to fear! Go to Jesus with confidence, humility, and love. Present yourself to Him like a weak and
helpless child. Open your soul and let Him enter to cure and strengthen you. Open your heart to Him that He may seize it and become its absolute master. Tell Him that you want your heart to be wholly His, that you have given it to Him, that you ask Him to exercise full control over it so that He may live in it as a soul lives in the body; that He may reign in it as a king on his throne; that He may rest in it as He rested in the poor little crib. He does indeed find a poor crib in you, a crib truly poor and empty, but since He has chosen it for His place of rest, ask Him to keep it and to become its glorious treasure.

Do not fear! Jesus will preserve the purity of the small tabernacle which He has chosen for Himself. Mary will adorn that poor hovel; she will fix it up and make it worthy to serve as a cradle for the Divine Child. Have courage! Be patient with yourself. Jesus loves you, I can assure you of that! In your suffering you have great need of Holy Communion. One of the first graces that Jesus communicates through it, is the strength against temptations of the flesh whose power He weakens. Go then with confidence to Him and never omit Holy Communion.

[Rules for External Conduct]

Concerning your external conduct in regard to those temptations, it is clear that you cannot avoid all occasions. Proceed with caution, but also with calm and trust in God. Watch over your eyes. Guard both your behavior and your words. Do everything with modesty but without affectation. Let no one ever notice that your soul undergoes anxiety. Don't be pensive, but gay as usual. Speak as you normally do in your habitual easy way. Be modest, but do not let others notice your reserve when you have to reply directly to a young man.
Avoid showing outward embarrassment in your way of acting, your speech, and your bearing. To do this, you must exercise control over your mind and preserve calm in your soul. Distract your mind, diverting attention from yourself, from your temptation and inner troubles. As usual, in the course of the day, make ejaculations to Jesus and to Mary and you will obtain that calm of which I have spoken. Have courage—this storm will come to an end.

[Docility and Patience]

I have just found your second last letter under a heap of papers! It was still unopened just as you had sent it. I read there about your old miseries which are now forgotten and which have been replaced by more recent ones. All that is nothing! God wants you. He has taken you. He will guard you. You will belong to Him and He will not let you go. Be brave again! The good Lord makes you pass from tribulation to tribulation, desiring to mold you. Be supple, docile, and faithful.

You will benefit by the scoldings of your good mother who, in spite of all, loves you dearly. You will perhaps profit just as much from the excellent lessons which your dear father gives you—they are truly precious for you.

You seem to despair of seeing me in the near future. And yet you are wanted here, you are expected somewhere here in Amiens. They ask me: "When is Marie coming? Dear Father, make her come!" And who said this to me? You know! Have courage, have confidence in Jesus and Mary, and all will go well.

(No signature)
Dear Marie:

It is your good mother who will deliver this letter to you. The moment of departure has finally arrived. Theodora, who was so happy the day before yesterday, now looks dreamy.

Your mother has been so happy during her whole stay with us! I found that she had changed considerably in regard to her spiritual condition. She is quite different from what she was when I visited Strasbourg. She is a saintly woman who loves the good Lord with her whole soul, all her heart and all her strength. She already loved Him and perhaps as much then as now, but she was not as detached from the world as at present. I assure you that she has surprised, edified and charmed me. Her health was good while she was here. Let us hope that the good Lord will keep her with us.

One word about Theodora. Your mother worried somewhat but there was really no reason whatever for it. Theodora is very good. She has an excellent heart, is full of faith and well-disposed. She has tact and good judgment. Your mother imagined that Theodora did not love her and this caused the poor girl much sorrow. This good child, though full of emotions, does not like to manifest them. She is not effusive. In this she is a little like your father. Her heartfelt feelings reveal themselves only in her eyes, or in a slight caress that is not very expressive in itself but nonetheless full of tenderness for anyone who knows her.

Your mother, on the contrary, is very effusive and expects something more than that. But if Theodora were to act in
this way, it would appear in her as affectation. Now Theodora is very tactful and has a distaste for everything that is affected. She remains simple and does well when she acts that way. Her greatest fault, to my knowledge, is her impatience and I think that it will take her a long time to overcome it. So when her mother said or did something that annoyed her, she sometimes reacted with impatience, but the very next moment she was sorry for it.

I have no worries at all about her. Her character is very good in spite of her faults. She should be approached affectively, and then you get all you want from her. Tell your father that when he writes he ought not to scold her. We should, on the contrary, always encourage her and always win her through affection. Assure him also that this good child will develop properly.

And now I should like to say a word about your own soul but people are talking all around me! I am writing at the place where your mother has been staying, an hour before her departure. So I’ll content myself with praying for you—yes, you may count on my prayers. Have courage and confidence in God. Say hello for me to Henry, Eugene, and Leo. I’ve asked your mother to kiss them for me.

One word regarding Miss Eckert. She has finally secured a place. I believe that she will be able to discard her prejudices and overcome her difficulties. It is time for me to end this letter!

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

Your uncle,

Francis Libermann
Live in union with Mary. Urge your parents to be patient and gentle with each other. Bear your temptations with patience.

Letter Seventeen

Notre Dame du Gard, August 28, 1847

Poor Marie:

It is about time to reply to your undated letter. Whenever I think of you I suffer somewhat because I say to myself, “That dear neglected soul must be thinking that we don’t bother about her and her poor heart must be sad.” But my pain is not great and I am consoled when I reflect that, in your sorrows, you will raise your mind to Mary and rest on her Heart. I am sure that you thus dispel the clouds and that your heart is comforted and feels renewed power and virtue, because you are more faithful and better than ever.

[Live in Union with Mary]

Yes, my dear child, always be good and lovable in the presence of God and His holy Angels. Live habitually with Mary, who is so great, holy, powerful and lovable. Then “little Marie” will be with the great Mary, a child with her mother, and she will resemble her not merely in name but in fact. She will resemble her by purity of heart, mildness, charity, humility, modesty, heavenly wisdom, self-abnegation. Be a good pupil, a good child of Mary, and your progress is assured.

You may be sure that I pray for you constantly. I put my trust in Jesus and Mary and am convinced that grace will fill your soul. Have courage, patience and confidence. Always regard your soul as belonging to God. Live in peace.
God is with you. Mary leads you, carrying you like a little child, like a poor little sister of her Child, Jesus. Don’t yield to impatience; don’t give in to anxiety. Be faithful to your rule of life. Be faithful to your communions. Approach the Holy Eucharist with peace, calm and confidence. Try always to keep your conscience in peace and at ease. Always preserve the freedom of the children of God. Serve God as a well-beloved child must act toward her Father.

[Urge Your Parents to Be Patient and Gentle with Each Other]

Regarding your good mother, show her that those ugly thoughts have no substance, that she herself puts no faith in them, that she ought to consider them as temptations, as crosses which God leaves with her to enable her to purify her soul; that she should try to profit by those pains for her own sanctification, bearing them with calm, patience, and submission to God’s will.

Show her that she must watch carefully over herself and avoid grieving your father; that God wants her to refrain from giving outward expression to those mental pains and temptations. Encourage her in the practice of that virtue. When she manifests something of that kind, urge your father to treat her with gentleness and patience and to aid her by his counsels. Make him see that God has given him a more enlightened mind and more substantial graces to enable him to support and guide your beloved mother in her trials. Point out to him that she suffers greatly because she has those ideas and that, deep down in her soul and conscience, she does not really believe in them. But she has a lively imagination and, when those ideas affect her, she does not have the power to overcome them. She needs help in those moments; she needs to be led with gentleness. Let him then
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMAN

forget the things that might appear insulting and try to console your mother and teach her how to profit from her suffering.

[Be Patient in Your Temptations]

Poor Marie! How much you are tried by Divine Goodness! Have courage! Love and be faithful! God will sanctify you.

You have temptations; you realize that at your age there are struggles. It is a grace to realize this, but I don’t worry about it. God loves you. He is with you. March on with courage and perseverance; you will triumph! Do not be preoccupied with yourself except in the presence of God. The petty thoughts of vanity which arise in your mind ought not to surprise or trouble you. They will serve to counterbalance pride. If you did not experience all these petty and foolish ideas of vanity, I would be afraid that pride might harm you; but now I am not afraid. Remain in your lowliness before God and give free rein to divine grace; grace is powerful! Be faithful and full of gratitude.

Adieu, dear Marie. May the peace and the blessing of God be with you.

Your uncle,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN

priest of the Holy Heart of Mary
Concerning her possible vocation to religious life. Try to be joyful.

Letter Eighteen  Amiens, December 21, 1847  Vol. 9, p. 385

Dear Marie:

It is about time I replied to your letter of September 20th. I do this with joy, but it would give me even greater satisfaction if I did not remember that I have made you wait three long months! Remorse is a mean companion—it hurts. But you realize that if I didn’t love you, as I must love my dear niece, I would not be suffering now for not having replied to your letter. Take consolation in that, poor neglected child. I must tell you, however, that I didn’t write because I wanted first to talk to Mother Saint Bernard about you, and this good Mother has been absent.

[Regarding Her Possible Vocation]

Here is why I wanted to speak to her first. Not long after I received your letter of September 20th, I had the occasion of meeting Father de Brandt. He spoke to me about your sisters and said many nice things about them—even about Theodora who was then sometimes full of pranks. He was of the same opinion as the Sisters of Louvencourt (which coincides with mine) that this child will certainly turn out well like her other sisters, and that there is no reason for worrying about her.

He then said to me: “How are things going with Miss Marie? Does she want to continue living in uncertainty about her future?” I asked him: “What do you think of Marie?” He replied: “I think that God wants her to be a religious and that she ought to fulfill God’s designs as soon
as possible; that her parents are doing her great harm by opposing that plan. Now is the most propitious time. If she remains much longer in the world, her character will be spoiled, she will acquire worldly habits and she may find it difficult at a later date to adjust herself to life in a religious community.” I don’t recall what I replied to those words but I thought that he was right and agreed with him.

Because my opinion coincided with his, I spoke along the same lines. I saw no serious difficulty standing in the way except the one presented, quite naturally, by your parents who do not think it certain that you have a vocation. They find it hard to deprive themselves of your presence and send you so far away when they are not certain that you will be where God wants you.

I explained this difficulty to Father de Brandt, adding that I saw a way of solving it. Here it is: Father de Brandt thinks that you will join the community of the religious of Louven-court. Providence seems to guide you quite naturally in that direction. Your tastes and character will also push you toward them, once you have decided to enter that convent. Mother Saint Bernard also considers you as her spiritual daughter.

That is why I have proposed that you take a middle course, which will satisfy your dear parents as much as possible and at the same time avoid all difficulties. You could come to Louvencourt to finish your education and this, as you realize, would only be to your advantage. It could not do you any harm. If, later, you see that you have a vocation, all will be ready for you to follow. If, on the contrary, you see clearly that God does not call you to the religious life, you will have benefited by the time spent at Louvencourt and the Sisters will, in any case, be happy to have done good to you.

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Father de Brandt was well pleased with this plan. I was waiting till Mother Saint Bernard returned, so I could propose it to her before writing to you. Since Mother Saint Bernard agrees with that plan, you have now merely to pray and examine this project in the presence of God.

I am happy to report the above conversation, on which you will be able to meditate and reflect, and you will then tell me about your reactions.

[Try to be Joyful—Trust in God]

Always pour out your mind and heart to me when you write. Always describe to me all your difficulties. Don’t be afraid thinking that I am too busy. I shall always have time to reply to you. This time I have been slow to reply, because I wanted to speak to Mother Saint Bernard and I did not know that she was going to be away for such a length of time.

Try to be somewhat gayer and to remain full of confidence at all times. When you feel sad, raise your heart to Mary. Receive communion frequently, preparing yourself for it by the desire of suffering everything for the love of God.

Don’t worry about all those thoughts that flit through your mind. God knows your heart. Give it entirely to Him and don’t worry if your imagination wants to remain on earth. Belong to God and bear the pricks of your foolish imagination with patience, gentleness, humility, and trust in God. Don’t be surprised when you have distractions in your prayers. Be content with raising your heart to God and making some acts of love, humility, sacrifice, and submission in all things to His good pleasure. But make these acts rather with the heart than with the mind, and don’t worry about the rest.

Adieu, dear Marie. Always remember that you are the “little Marie,” daughter of the “great Mary,” Queen of the
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMANNN

Angels and Mother of the God of glory. Have confidence, therefore. Be full of perfect confidence!

Your uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANNN

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He will personally visit her.

Letter Nineteen  Paris, January 22, 1851  Vol. 13, p. 16

Dear Marie:

I have sinned by suspecting that you were not clever in business transactions. I owe you an apology, but my fault is so great that making amends by letter will not suffice. For my penance I must go to Strasbourg and express my sorrow in person. This I intend to do in the near future. I think I shall come during or rather at the end of next week. I shall only stay two or three days with you.

So you were right in not tiring yourself too much by writing me a letter of direction. We shall discuss everything in person.

Thank Mr. and Mrs. Halle in my name for the service they want to render our bursar by offering him a loan on a promissory note. Money has recently come in and our bursar is no longer in trouble. The other matters we shall deal with in our coming interview.

Your devoted uncle,

FRANCIS LIBERMANNN, Superior
Worries about her brother's conduct. How to deal with him when he comes home.

Letter Twenty

Paris, July 19, 1851

Vol. 13, p. 239

Dear Marie:

I am ready to send [your brother] Henry away on his journey and, as time passes, I am more and more convinced that his stay in Paris would be ruinous for him. Henry is a good boy, full of faith, but he is childish in many ways. His character, his easygoingness, his lightheadedness, his desire to show off and pass himself off as a man of importance, his imperceptible selfconfidence—all these things would expose him to the greatest dangers if he were to remain in the city. I know that those dangers exist because of certain things that have happened. They are not at all serious, at least as far as I know, and yet they enable me to realize what we would have to fear from his stay in Paris. Henry needs to be guided with firmness, kindness, and reason. We must avoid showing him ill temper, but also occasional weakness. We should not reprove him about insignificant faults. It is well to save our remonstrances for more important things.

We must pay particular attention to his character and the inclinations of his heart, and when he commits faults that are related to these, we must reprove him with gravity, and with reason, that is, we must show him why they are evil. We should approach Henry "through the heart," arousing noble sentiments in him. We must neither humble nor hurt him, especially when it is unnecessary. I can see that he is afraid of being treated as a child, to be chided, to be handled roughly. This we must avoid. Nevertheless we must not deal with him wholly as if he were a grownup. We must use our
III. LETTERS TO MARIE LIBERMAN

authority, with a good mixture of mildness and firmness, without hurting his self-love by harsh words.

Henry needs to be carefully watched, but we must not show him distrust, for this would make him resort to dissimulation and would corrupt his true feelings. He already lacks openness, and is afraid that other people distrust him. This thought—that others distrust him—is bad for him.

Moreover, it causes me to fear that something wrong has occurred; however, there is no proof of it. He has adopted habits of the Latin Quarter in his way of acting and speaking; we must be on the watch. Henry considers those manners wonderful and is inclined to feel important because of his devil-may-care attitude and his independence of speech.

See to it that he does not suspect that I secretly gave you details about his conduct. It is enough to tell him that I have expressed some concern in general because of his fickleness, his lack of experience and his easygoing ways. But it is better that you say no more.

I have tried to find out whether he goes to Mass on Sundays. It seems that he went regularly, except perhaps on one occasion, though this is not certain. Father Freppel told me that he was satisfied with Henry and that he went to confession—so my last worries had no solid foundation. There is also the question of his going to communion, for if he fails to go to communion it must be for unfortunate reasons. This is an extremely delicate matter and you may not mention it in any circumstances. I have considered that this was the reason why he stayed away from chapel service at the seminary, fearing it would be noticed that he was not going to Holy Communion. This is why I did not insist on his coming to us.

(No signature)
Remain with Mary at the foot of the Cross. Crosses sanctify the soul.

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Dear Marie:

[Remain with Mary at the Foot of the Cross]

I see clearly that the good Lord wishes to keep you at the foot of the Cross with Mary, your good, lovable, holy, and happy Mother. What then should you do? You must stay with her—and there is no better place for us in this world than at the foot of the Cross!

Your crosses resemble those of Mary. She suffered in her heart; you suffer similarly; she suffered because of the pains of her well-beloved Son; you suffer on account of those of your beloved parents. The only difference is in the greatness and intensity of the sufferings. See to it that there be no other difference in the manner of bearing your sufferings than that of the degree of holiness and perfection with which Mary bore her sorrows. Do your best to imitate her as much as is possible for a weak creature to approach the mighty Mother of God.

Mary was good and always remained good even in her sufferings. Act likewise and remain good and mild in the midst of your pains and anguish. Avoid bad temper, capriciousness and the other faults which we naturally commit when we fail to bear properly the pains which God deigns to send us. Be friendly towards all and let no one suffer anything from you on account of what you yourself have to suffer. Preserve serenity of mind so that you may also retain friendliness in the midst of your trials. Avoid sadness, or
suffer it calmly and peacefully. Suffer in a holy manner, and you will enjoy that calm and serenity.

[Crosses Sanctify the Soul]

Nothing is more sanctifying than crosses. Remain constantly in your abjectness before God and tell Him, a thousand times a day if necessary, “Thy will be done.” In those painful moments, abandon yourself completely into God’s hands. Give yourself to Him as a victim that is immolated in holocaust, that is burned and consumed for His glory in the flame of His Divine Love and in conformity with His adorable Will. What, after all, is a poor creature when he stands before God? What can a poor creature offer Him that could truly please Him, especially a sinful creature as we all are?

There is but one thing we can do, namely, to allow ourselves to be immolated for the honor of His holy and adorable Will. This is the only sacrifice that satisfies a soul that is devoted to God. Whatever is not a sacrifice leaves in us the impression that we have done nothing, that we have not given anything to God. Suffer then in that spirit and you will be happy, even in this world, as Mary was happy in the midst of her greatest sorrows.

In regard to your temptations, I have nothing new to tell you. Don’t be afraid; they have no importance. Continue to go to communion as you customarily do. In your frequent communions you will find the strength needed to resist temptations. When you are thus united to Jesus, cultivate those thoughts of sacrifice and the other dispositions of which I have spoken. Give yourself to Jesus in that spirit.

I am glad to have been able to do my share in getting your poor parents out of their [financial] trouble. I fear, of course, that my five hundred francs will be lost, and I could not have
loaned that sum in good conscience had I foreseen that it would be lost, that is, that it would not be paid back. And yet I have not yet lost hope that it will be returned. But don’t worry about that!

I shall see if I can find a place for Theodora. I don’t really know whom I ought to approach. Pray for that intention.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

Father Francis Libermann

P. S. I had begun this letter and was putting the finishing touches to it when I received yours of the sixteenth. Our poor bursar’s money-box is literally empty at this moment. I regret that I cannot help you and your godmother out of your little difficulty.