2. LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

Eugene Dupont, a student at the Sulpician Seminary of Issy, felt attracted to apostolic work in the missions. Following the advice of his spiritual director, Father Pinault, a friend and admirer of Libermann, he wrote to the latter, who was then in Rome to prepare the foundation of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary.

There followed a correspondence between the two men which extended over a period of two years. Sixteen letters of Libermann have been preserved. One of these contains his sublime commentary on the inspiring prayer, *O Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in your servants.*

Eugene Dupont had aspired to go to Haiti as a member of Libermann’s Congregation, but his wishes were not fulfilled. He eventually became a priest of the Archdiocese of Rouen, but his spiritual union with Father Libermann was never destroyed.

What is implied by surrender to God’s love. The man of God fears no obstacles. Remarks about mental prayer and mortification.

Letter One Rome, August 17, 1840 Vol. 2, p. 168

Dear Brother:

*What is Implied by Surrender to God’s Love]*

May the peace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ and His most Holy Mother fill your soul and animate all your actions!

I received both your letters last night. They came from London (I don’t know why). I admire the way Our Lord
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

deals with your soul. How well He knows how to put into play the resources of His divine Providence to overcome and subjugate you in the least things as well as in those that are dearest to your heart!

You were very anxious for those two letters to reach me and eagerly waited for a reply. There was, of course, nothing wrong with that ardor and that desire, but our admirable Master thought it proper to restrain them; He wanted Himself alone to be the answer to all your requests. I feel sure He has perfectly resolved many difficulties during the time you’ve been waiting for the words of a wretched human being like myself.

So give yourself, dear friend, to our divine and most adorable Lord to die and live in Him. For He does not propose life or death to you as He did to the ancient Israelites. He wants you to choose life and death: the heavenly and the divine life which He has in the bosom of His heavenly Father; a life of love, peace, calm, and repose in God; a life for which the prerequisite is that our most adorable and lovable Lord Jesus acquires full possession of your soul.

You realize that this is not accomplished in an instant. It demands complete death to yourself and the most perfect submission of your nature, with all its passions and sentiments, to the dominion of grace. So don’t worry or become troubled because you still find in yourself those stirrings of the senses which we call passions.

Give full freedom to the operation of our adorable Master; you cannot instantly possess the perfect interior life of Our Lord in your soul. He has begun by taking hold of your sentiments and passions. This is why all the manifestations of the grace of Our Lord in you have acted upon your senses and your imagination.

Note well, dear friend, that whenever the motions of grace made you act so lively, it was less an activity of your senses
and imagination than an impression or impulse that was given to them. This activity did not proceed from your nature as its principle but rather sprang from the principle and under the guidance of God’s prompting. As long as that natural action is animated by such an impression of grace and it is the impulse of grace alone that causes you to act, the action of the senses is good, even excellent. It becomes evil only when you run farther than grace propels you—when you add to it something of your own.

By acting in this way upon your senses, our adorable Master purifies them and detaches them from the things of the earth. He seizes them, takes hold of them, and little by little, He penetrates into the depths of the soul and establishes in it a state of calm and peace which endows it with true, perfect divine love; or rather He Himself becomes in it the source and foundation of peace and perfect love.

So put yourself, with gentleness and perfect surrender, into the hands of your Divine Guide. Follow the more or less perfect impressions He gives you and, with all your soul, strive for that holy peace and tranquillity in all your faculties; these dispositions come from your nature and from the life of Jesus in us.

I am telling you these things so you won’t imagine that your past was totally evil and that, wherever the imagination plays a role, Our Lord is not present. Don’t believe such a thing! Bless our Divine Master for all the goodness He has shown you without any merit on your part.

[The Man of God Fears No Obstacles]

The difficulties [incumbent on missionary work] you mention [in your letter] are great and they may become increasingly so later, although it is also possible that this may not occur. However, I cannot conceive how any man who has even a small grain of faith can offer such objections. If
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

we should undertake only what is easy, what would have become of the Church? Saint Peter and Saint John would have continued fishing on the lake of Tiberias and Saint Paul would not have left Jerusalem.

I can conceive that a man who considers himself important and relies on his own powers, should stop before obstacles; but when our trust rests solely in our adorable Master, what difficulty need we fear? We will stop only when we are blocked by a wall. Then we wait with patience and confidence until there is a breach and resume our march as if nothing had happened. This is the way Saint Paul and the other apostles have acted.

You see, therefore, that I am ready to receive you [into our congregation] with the greatest tenderness of my soul. My only condition is that the question be firmly settled with Our Lord. It is He and His most Holy Mother who must receive you, not I, who am nothing. They have, I hope, already received you in their holy love for you; hence I consider you now and will always consider you as my dear brother in that holy love.

[Remarks About Mental Prayer and Mortification]

In regard to mental prayer, I am not able to tell you much. Your interior condition is not yet stabilized. The state of your soul must have changed somewhat since the time you wrote, that is, during the last three months. A thing always worth saying in this respect and which ought to suffice for you is that you should take Our Lord for your master in that great science and docilely follow His promptings.

You know the famous expression of Saint Anthony, “If we wish to pray well, we ought not to be conscious of our praying.” During your meditation you should pay no atten-
tion to what is taking place in you. Follow the inclination your Lord gives you; that is what is best for you.

Regarding mortifications, do exactly as Father Pinault orders. Mortification, nevertheless, is a good thing; but what can we do? The good Lord holds you there [in a condition where you cannot do any] and I clearly foresee that He will not free you from it. For your consolation let me tell you that external mortifications do not form part of the apostolic spirit.

Love for God, zeal for the salvation of souls, the love of crosses and humiliations are the essence of apostolic zeal, but not [self-inflicted] mortifications. Hence, when Saint Paul desired to prove that he was as much an apostle as the others, he gave a frightening account of all he suffered for the love of our adorable Master; and he drew from it an irrefutable conclusion against his adversaries. But when he said: “I chastise my body and bring it into subjection,” he gave as his reason for it the fear of losing his own soul while saving others.

Consider yourself fortunate when it pleases Our Lord to preserve in you the spirit of mortification (which, however, I doubt He will do), for such a spirit will nourish in you the love of crosses and humiliation, which contains treasures of the apostolic spirit and numerous other benefits.

In any case it is an excellent thing that Our Lord gives you those desires for mortifications. Follow them in all simplicity and try to practice them every time you receive those promptings.

I leave you now, dear brother in Jesus and Mary, in the arms of that Well-beloved Father and Mother.

Entirely yours in their holy love,

Francis Libermann, acolyte
Perfect peace of soul. Self-possession, moderation, simplicity. Mistakes to be avoided. No duplication of spiritual directors. The promotion of fervor.

Letter Two Rome, December 16, 1840 Vol. 2, p. 172

My Dear Brother:

[Perfect Peace of Soul]

It seems that Our Lord Jesus Christ wants to make good use of all possible means to moderate your eagerness and natural activity and make you acquire the habit of restraint, self-possession, and interior peace in His presence. You were very eager to receive an immediate reply to your letter but our Divine Master was not in a similar hurry. Your letter arrived here a few hours after my departure from Rome [in mid-November] to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Loretto, and I just returned here yesterday evening. I hope that in the meantime Our Lord and the most Blessed Virgin have trained you in the practice of patience.

You are very much in need of acquiring gradually the habit of acting with interior gentleness, moderation, and patience in the presence, and for the Love of Our Lord. When I tell you to acquire that habit, I don’t mean that you will immediately possess perfect peace of soul before God and will be the master of its interior movements. It would be a great presumption on your part to claim such perfect self-possession before you have begun to serve God properly.

When our souls have ingrained habits, especially when these are rooted in our nature and our temperament, a certain time almost always has to elapse before those faults are
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

overcome, and such a victory requires great and continuous graces. That is why, when you fail, as will often occur, you should not become troubled, but ought to prostrate yourself in all humility before your Sovereign Master, asking Him to grant you pardon and grace. When you have done this, stop worrying.

[Self-Possession]

When I tell you to acquire the habit, I do not mean either that you can attain this habitual possession of your soul before God by your own powers and that you ought to make sensitive efforts to keep yourself in that state of self-possession. This would merely lead you to bodily exhaustion.

It is in Jesus and Mary that you should find the source of your perfection and sanctification. On the other hand, you ought to avoid whatever constitutes an obstacle for you and prevents the sanctification of your soul. Keeping this desire constantly in your heart, expect everything from Jesus and Mary, but wait with peace, tranquility, and love.

Self-possession consists in avoiding all bitterness, displeasure, and all violence in your activity. If things are not going in accord with your wishes, if you commit faults, make blunders, if men contradict you in some way in any matter whatsoever, if providential circumstances arise that are contrary to your spiritual desires and good intentions—in all such cases and similar ones, remain self-possessed before God, enter into yourself, bring peace and order to your inner self, deaden the agitation of your mind as much as possible and turn to the Divine Master or to His Most Holy Mother.

Pour out your heart before Him and ask Him to give you His spirit of meekness and self-possession, as He infused it in Mary when, for instance, she suffered grief on Joseph’s account before he had been enlightened regarding the mystery of the Incarnation and while he was still unable to under-
stand how she was with child, or when she had lost her Divine Child, and in similar circumstances. Mary’s mind continued to grieve and her heart continued to feel a certain anguish, but her soul was in peace, and the greater her sorrow, the more her heart clung with fervent charity to the great and adorable Object of her holy love.

This is the way you should act when you encounter something that causes you concern. In the midst of your trouble, turn your mind and heart to Jesus, the only love of our souls, and go to Him with most tender love and great confidence.

[Moderation]

Moderation means that you do not allow your natural activity to dominate you, for it would always prevent you from seeing properly what Our Lord demands of you and it would make you resist the good impulses He gives you. Natural activity would make you act in a way that is too purely human and almost independent of the grace of Our Lord. On the contrary, if you endeavor to overcome that natural activity and to act with moderation, you will live and act more easily, dependent on, and animated by the interior promptings of Our Lord.

But see to it that you do not combat that activity by tense constraint, for this constraint also is an action of the senses. It is just as purely natural as the natural activity I asked you to avoid. So, what would be the use of relinquishing one natural condition in order to enter into another that is even worse? It would only serve to ruin your health and would at the same time be perfectly useless as I told you a moment ago. You should, therefore, adopt the means I have suggested. Aim at and seek for that interior moderation; desire it and deaden precipitate moves and your own interior activity. Expect everything from our Lord and beg Him to grant you His grace.
Note well that, while perfection does not consist in this [moderation], it is a necessary means to it. It is a means that virtually insures success for those who earnestly walk in the way of divine love and do not fear to sacrifice everything to that love.

It is this perfect love that you must aim at and for which you should sacrifice everything else. As long as you still cling to anything, you have not taken the right road to perfect divine love. But if we renounce all things and remain faithful, that divine love, of which Jesus is the source and which He makes flow with such abundance, will transform us into that Divine Master and give us His life. This is why it is necessary to do all things in His presence and for the love of Our Lord. Without that love, all is sterile and fruitless, and self-love will run away with the largest part of the spoils.

Patience springs from self-possession and interior moderation. It feeds on both and is a blend of these two virtues. One acquires it by enduring tribulations.

[Simplicity]

This will be enough regarding your general conduct. But even by doing all that, don't imagine that you are doing much. Forget yourself and think only of Jesus and Mary. Act with simplicity and solely with the intention of pleasing Jesus. Be simple in your thinking. Don't aim at high things but rather at rendering yourself agreeable to Our Lord. Always be vigilant about self-love, for in the beginning there is great danger of yielding to it and then we build castles in the air.

[Mistakes to be Avoided]

Don't seek to be too wise or too well informed in spiritual things but only to please Our Lord by doing His will with love and fervor. Don't seek to have lofty thoughts and sublime views about perfection and the life of Our Lord
in souls, but remain always lowly and humble before Him, and try to do all that with love.

Don't say to yourself, "I am going to establish the life of Jesus Christ in my soul," but aim constantly at renouncing the world and all that is in it. In all things overcome your self-love and avoid the faults that you become aware of. Remain in a disposition of self-humiliation in Our Lord's presence; and wait peacefully until He wishes to communicate Himself to you; for it is not something you can seize; it is not something taken but only given. The Divine Master does in this what He pleases, but He always gives Himself to souls that are faithful.

Do not seek anxiously and eagerly to scrutinize the interior condition of your soul, don't seek to discern what Our Lord's conduct toward you might be. Apply yourself always to self-renunciation and try to unite yourself to Him alone in all humility and love, being satisfied with everything that He gives you, and endeavor to please Him in all things. For we ought to remember that the important thing in Christian perfection is not to know, conceive and judge things, but to do—to act.

Be on your guard not to allow your mind to judge others. Never judge anyone, nor examine the actions and the conduct of others. Judge only yourself; and when others have ideas that are contrary to yours, when they do things which you think they ought not to do, restrain your tendency to judge them and preserve the same love and charity toward them. If judgments come to you of their own accord, disregard them and lovingly humble yourself in the presence of Our Lord.

[Avoid Duplication of Spiritual Directors]

Don't have two spiritual directors. Father Pinault is the one who suits you. Stick to the advice he gives you. I know the rule of Saint Sulpice [Seminary]: if it pro-
hibits you from going to confession to Father Pinault because Father Gosselin [the Superior] absolutely does not want it, it is also certain that you are not forbidden to give your confidence to Father Pinault and follow his counsel in everything. . . . Since the spiritual direction of the assigned confessor does not suit you, follow what he tells you in confession regarding the things that pertain to the sacrament of Penance, that is, to make you avoid sin and the occasions of sin. If he tells you anything regarding your spiritual life, propose it to Father Pinault and do what the latter tells you, without paying attention to what your confessor has said. If your confessor says something in confession which tends to influence your spiritual conduct, speak about it to your director and do what he tells you.

In general, confession and the confessor (in your present condition) are not for the purpose of obtaining advice, but are for obtaining pardon for your sins. Your director is the one to give you counsel and guidance. This rule I give you is not a new one. All religious who desire to live according to the perfect spirit of their state and rule, must generally act in this way. They confess to a priest who, most of the time, does not even know the spirit of their Order, and they act according to the counsel of their superiors. If, however, you do not wish to offend your confessor, speak to him from time to time about things in which he will not be able to trouble your mind.

If you act in this way, your soul will enjoy interior repose and you will advance toward God with assurance. I tell you nothing about your studies, for you see Father Pinault regularly. He is in a better position than I to give you advice in that matter. Act in accord with whatever he tells you.

[Promotion of Fervor]

To foster fervor in the seminary, always follow the fundamental principles that govern the matter and never abandon
them. The first and most important thing is to work for your own sanctification. Without this you would be like a breath of wind which exhausts itself at once. If you have no genuine piety, you would be filled with wind and you would breathe wind into the hearts of others and empty yourself of the little virtue that you might possess. Hence you ought to establish yourself strongly in fervent self-renunciation and divine love.

Regarding those who desire to unite themselves with you [in a common effort to strive for perfection], draw them to you and endeavor to work for perfect union among yourselves; encourage one another in the pursuit of greater perfection, perfect renunciation, divine love, and union with Jesus and Mary....

Your humble servant,

Francis Libermann, acolyte

P. S. I have offered you and warmly recommended you to our good Mother in her little house of Loretto.

I have replied to Father Pinault's question regarding the Venerable Sister Catherine Emmerich. Ask him to inform you after he has read the short note which I beg you to hand over to him.
A commentary of the prayer: “O Jesus, living in Mary.”

Letter Three Strasbourg, April 1, 1841 Vol. 2, p. 456

May Jesus live in us as He lived in Mary, but by means of His Holy Cross!

[Dear Brother:]

You ask me to explain the prayer “Jesus, [living in Mary]”, a request you made also a long time ago.

[O Jesu, vivens in Maria,  
Veni et vive in famulis tuis,  
In spiritu sanctitatis tuae,  
In plenitudine virtutis tuae,  
In perfectione viarum tuarum,  
In veritate virtutum tuarum,  
In communione mysteriorum tuorum.  
Dominare adversae potestati,  
In spiritu tuo,  
Ad gloriam Patris. Amen.]

O Jesus, living in Mary,  
Come and live in Your servants,  
In the spirit of Your holiness,  
In the fullness of Your power,  
In the perfection of Your ways,  
In the truth of Your virtues,  
In the communion of Your mysteries.  
Overcome all inimical power,  
In Your Spirit,  
For the glory of the Father. Amen.]

Here is what I am able to tell you.

[Introductory Considerations]

I don’t know the history of that prayer. The only thing I learned was that it was composed by Father de Condren. It has always seemed to me that he wrote it for the purpose of honoring the sacred mystery of the Incarnation and the effects it produced in Mary, and secondly, that he desired to draw down those admirable effects into our own souls.

We ought never to forget that whatever God gives us He will not take away ever again. His gifts are without repentance, says Saint Paul. If we lose them, it is by our own fault, our weakness, our imperfections, our cowardice, and our lack of correspondence with those divine gifts.
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Our Blessed Mother, however, was not exposed to the danger of losing, in that manner, the gifts she had once received. On the contrary, her purity and holiness increased constantly and her admirable Heart, which should be our great treasure, grew constantly with the fire of love. She was always most faithful in all things. In her, those graces and gifts bore fruits which far exceed our powers of comprehension. Those gifts of God, then, remained permanently in her. They unfolded and even grew when they were capable of growth. Thus, although Our Lord did not continue to live bodily in Mary, her unfathomable union with the Divinity, which the Incarnation accomplished in her, remained throughout her earthly life and will remain throughout eternity.

All the gifts and graces which preceded the union, those that accompanied and followed it, will forever adorn Mary's holy soul, together with all the divine perfections given to her by the three adorable Persons in their respective relations with her.

The great mystery of the Incarnation contained in itself, as in its principle and germ, all the graces, gifts and mysteries of the God-man. And Mary, at that precious moment, received the principle and the germ of all the graces and gifts and mysteries which developed in her in time and with the degree of perfection that was proper to her.

This, then, is the reason why we beg Our Lord to come into our souls and establish that same life in us, if not as perfectly, at least, in the same manner as is expressed in that prayer. And we ask that He may communicate to us the same graces and gifts contained in all His mysteries.

We could have in mind the moment of Holy Communion when Jesus makes us share, as far as possible, in the holy mystery of the Incarnation, and ask Him to continue [in us] His life in Mary according to the manner expressed in that prayer.
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["O Jesus!"]

This invocation springs from a soul that contemplates Jesus living in Mary. The soul beholds, in her own way, Jesus dwelling, resting, living in Mary. She considers Him operating, acting in Mary in a living and vivifying manner. She lies prostrate and, as it were, reduced to nothing in reverence for Him. She remains interiorly silent and aware of her nothingness. She admires the great things she faintly perceives or even is unable to see, she rejoices in it; she praises and blesses Jesus and glorifies Mary.

We should try to imagine the divine impetus of love which strove to attract and carry off her soul toward Jesus in the most wonderful divine operation that ever took place.

Our soul, although abased and dragging its weakness, sighing at the sight of so holy and divine a spectacle, nevertheless conceives desires for itself; and these desires, far from being wicked or imperfect, are a necessary result of every grace and gift bestowed on us by God. At least, they follow naturally from these graces and gifts.

Being thus transported in a lively though gentle manner, a manner both strong and weak, our soul in this state pours herself, as it were, into the bosom of Jesus to draw Him into herself and make Him live in her the life He lived in Mary.

The soul sighs "O Jesus!" Notice dear friend, that this sigh is accompanied by a glance that is full of a soul's languishing love. She feels a violent want. It is love which creates this want and makes it so violent. She is unable to satisfy that desire of love and the violent want that results from it. Feeling too weak and powerless for it, our soul tends to that immense furnace of love which attracts and at the same time consumes her, and she endeavors to attract it into herself. This is why she addresses to Jesus that sigh so full of love, of weakness, and at the same time so full of confidence: "O Jesus living in Mary!"
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Note that the soul does not simply invoke Jesus, but “Jesus living in Mary.” It is this which is the object of her admiration, her joy, her tenderness, her violent and loving desire.

[“O Jesus, Living in Mary!”]

The soul here is not thinking of the life of Jesus in Himself, but of the divine act by which and in which He lives in Mary. It is this life of “Jesus in Mary” which the soul beholds, which enraptures her, attracts her, and in which she wishes to participate. Note carefully that the prayer does not say, “O Jesus, who lives in Mary,” but “living in Mary.” If it were by reasoning that we had obtained the conviction that Jesus lives in Mary we should say, “O Jesus who lives in Mary.” It would be like saying: “I am sure [Jesus] that You live in Mary; well, You whom I know to live in Mary, come and live also in me.” We should then address Jesus in particular. But we say instead, “living in Mary,” which shows that the soul contemplates, beholds Jesus living in Mary. She contemplates Jesus in His life in Mary; she contemplates the divine operation by which Jesus is living in Mary. This enraptures her; she sighs and is transported by love; she desires and wants to draw that divine life into herself.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the soul’s principal consideration, her loving tendency and desire to attract that life to herself are directed to Jesus. Although she is particularly moved, affected and drawn by that divine and adorable sight of Jesus in Mary, she is all the while occupied with, and fascinated by the sight of Jesus operating in Mary, that is, Jesus living in Mary.

This view of the life of Jesus in Mary is not always clear. It is sometimes obscure, and contemplated only with the eyes of an ordinary faith that is more or less vague and confused. Even when the vision is clear, it will happen that the soul’s
view is more or less of a "sensible" nature. It will also be
general and remain vague, for it is not possible to get a distinct
concept of Jesus’ operation in Mary, since such operations far
surpass anything that other creatures are able to conceive.

That view will sometimes be concerned with a particular
object such as Jesus’ humble life or His life of love in Mary.
Sometimes, however, and this is ordinarily the case, the view
is more general. But this does not matter. What is important
is that we follow the interior impetus of our soul and pour
ourselves out, as it were, into the bosom of Jesus living in
Mary.

The sacred names of Jesus and Mary are expressed simply
and without any addition. This simple invocation of the Holy
Name of Jesus who is living in Mary, is proof of the loving
familiarity of the soul that contemplates Jesus thus living in
Mary. Very great is the simplicity of the soul’s transport
toward the Well-Beloved, of her admiration and love, at the
sight of the divine work of Jesus living in Mary. The soul’s
familiarity is based on a loving confidence and a tender giving
of herself into the arms of Him who so lovingly draws her
to Himself.

That simple invocation could also be based on the fact that
the soul fails to see clearly that life lived by Jesus in Mary. As
we said before, it is then impossible to conceive anything that
is distinct. If, in her transport toward the divine Object of
her love, the soul beheld a distinct form, a well-defined way
of being, in the life lived by Jesus in Mary, she should then
of necessity use certain more definite terms that express such
a form of that life and the particular object of her admiration
and her love. But, as she sees nothing distinctly, and yet
sees enough to be transported by love and desire, she speaks
to our Divine Love with that expression of familiarity, which
also contains the love with which we are animated. Moreover,
the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary are names that are full
of sweetness for a soul that is full of love and takes delight in pronouncing them.

"Come"

This word is full of holy desires, of tender and loving aspirations. The soul feels a transport of eager desire, while at the same time languishing with love. She is keenly aware of her weakness and her incapacity to go and plunge into the bosom of Jesus—to be drowned in His divine life that is so full of love. Burning with thirst and unable to be satiated by His divine love, she remains prostrate before Him in her nothingness. She tends to Him with a look of love and a strong desire and so she says to Him: "Come." She begs Him to come; she desires to draw Him into herself since she is unable to go to Him.

"And Live"

It is this the soul beholds in Mary and it is this the soul desires for herself. She stretches out her hands toward Jesus whom she beholds with great transports of love, living in Mary, and she beseeches Him to come and live also in her. By this, she does not merely signify that He is asked to live in her as He lives in a temple, as He lives in a tabernacle where He lives in Himself—and the tabernacle is thus greatly honored by His presence by containing Him who is living in Himself—but she asks that He may live in her as He lives in Mary.

The soul asks that Jesus may live in her, establishing His perfections in her, uniting her perfectly to Himself, animating her most interior and intimate actions, becoming the principle, the living soul of all her movements, diffusing in her all His gifts and graces, so that all her actions, sentiments, judgments, and volitions, and in general, all the acts of her life, proceed from Jesus living in her and communicating to her His own
life, His own sentiments, affections, inclinations, desires, and motions, so that her life is no longer hers but the life of Jesus which was also the life of Mary.

"In Your Servants"

These words give expression to the humble character of the soul's desire, for, though her desires are great, she also feels how insignificant and unworthy she is and she humbles herself. There is a great difference between the life of Jesus living in Mary and the life we can desire for ourselves.

The life of Jesus in Mary is that of the Son in the Mother, after the manner of that admirable and perfect union which the Mother achieved with Him when He was in her womb, and it is related to that union. Jesus lives always in Mary, as He lived in her in His Incarnation, with this difference: that this life became constantly more perfect and more fully developed, according as His divine mysteries gradually became fulfilled.

The vital relations which He had with Mary were those of a son, and those of Mary with Jesus were those of a mother. Jesus, communicating Himself to Mary, gave Himself as a son, with the sentiments and dispositions of a God toward His creature but, at the same time, with those of a son toward his mother, and the effects produced in her were of a similar nature.

Who is able to imagine the special, unique intimacy between the Son and the Blessed Mother which cannot be granted to any other creature? What an effusion of filial love, for she was the Mother of God, Mother of the Son of God, Mother of the Eternal Word! Hence what effusion of graces in that outpouring of the Son into His Mother as well as of God into His creature! Filial love, we know, is quite different from every other kind of love.

Mary, on her part, had sentiments, effusions of love, supernatural relations of a mother similar to those of a
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mother for her son, as well as those of a creature toward her Creator.

We, on the contrary, have the happiness—the extreme happiness—of being servants; and our relations with Jesus are the relations of servants. However, we were adopted as His brothers and for this reason we dare to show a loving familiarity with Him. Nonetheless, fundamentally we remain His servants. Hence His life in us is the life of the Master in his servants and at the same time that of a brother in His brothers. We became brothers only because He reduced Himself to servitude for love of us: “He took the form of a servant.”

Aware of Jesus’ divine operation in us, we are at first inclined to remain in our nothingness before Him. We are astonished, we are confused at the sight of so much goodness, even as the most vile and despicable of slaves would be if his master were to embrace him, clothe him with his own garments, make him eat at his table, and give him a share of all his riches. Seeing then, that our great and glorious Lord Jesus, Sovereign King of Heaven and earth, comes in us and lives in our souls, we would like to humble ourselves deeply before Him. Our very love of familiarity is permeated with our condition as servants and this is why we ask Him to live in his servants in the spirit of His holiness.

“In the Spirit of Your Holiness”

To beg Jesus to live in us is equivalent to asking that His Holy Spirit may live in us, to establish in us the life of Jesus, to make us live the life of Jesus. For the Word of Life lives in us only through His Holy Spirit, who dwells in us. Here, then, we do not ask once more that He live in us with His Holy Spirit but with His spirit of holiness, that is, with His state of detachment from all creatures, His horror for, and separation from everything that might divide Him
from His Heavenly Father; with that life which was entirely consumed in His Father and through which the holiness of His Father was His own holiness.

Now we beg Him to come in us “in that spirit of Holiness” and we pray that He may remove, cast out, exterminate from our soul all life that is foreign to the life of His Father in Him and to His life in His Father. We ask that He may purify our souls from all that is foreign to God, that He may separate us from all creatures, withdraw our affections from every created object and from our own selves, so that He may attach them, together with His own, to His Heavenly Father and may establish in us His own life of holiness.

“In the Fullness of Your Power”

We want Him to come and live in the fullness of His power, that is, to become the absolute Master of all the powers of our souls, and to work out in them that holiness with all His power, to which we shall not offer resistance. We are concerned here with that power of will by which He will so dispose things and so fill us with Himself that we shall not offer Him any opposition. We also ask Him to place His power in us so that we may cast ourselves into His arms and surrender to Him with that power with which He acts in us; and then our holiness will soon be achieved.

“In the Perfection of Your Ways”

We may find three meanings in those words, but they can be reduced to one. We can desire Our Lord to come and live in us in the perfection of the ways that lead perfectly to Him. For the soul feels her weakness and imperfection, and desires to enter a way that is perfect, that leads perfectly to the Well-Beloved, for Our Lord can live
in a soul and yet this soul might not live in the way that is most perfect.

Secondly, it can also signify the way by which Our Lord leads us to His Heavenly Father. This meaning is really the same, for we go to the Father through the Son but in the same way in which we go to the Son.

Our ways, however, are varied for we can go by a way that is imperfect; we can go limping, as it were; we can go, remaining half attached to creatures and half clinging to God; such a way is very uneven. We can go by the way of hard labor that costs us much and yet produces little when we compare it with the perfect ways, for in this way [of great personal effort] the soul does much but Jesus does little. We can go by the way of repose in which Jesus does much and the soul little. There is also the way of faith, in which the soul allows herself to be guided by her Well-Beloved, remaining as it were, blind as to the senses, but full of a great interior light. Lastly, there is the way of love, in which the soul flies instead of walking and is more in Heaven than on earth.

Thirdly, it can mean Our Lord's way in souls—ways truly admirable and hidden. He has various ways for each individual soul, so we ask that He come and live in us in His perfect ways, so that we will have a greater share in His holiness. Jesus has a definite design of holiness and love in His entire conduct of our souls and in each of His operations in us. He always follows a divine and most admirable plan and direction. His ways are more or less perfect, being proportioned to the state of each soul and the varying degrees of divine mercy toward it. So we ask that His ways may be perfect.

Finally, there is still another meaning, namely the ways of Jesus on earth by which He tended divinely toward His Heavenly Father. These ways are twofold: interior and exterior; this is why we say "ways" in the plural.
All the actions of Our Lord and all the interior movements of His most holy soul, although accomplished for the greater glory of His Heavenly Father, according to His adorable Will and to please Him alone, were also done for us and belong to us. Jesus applies their merits and graces when He pours His life into our souls. He gives us His own admirable, divine and adorable interior movements. He even prompts us to practice His exterior ways, in proportion to our weakness and our imperfections, with varying degrees of perfection in different individuals. This is why we ask for the perfection of His adorable ways.

How great this object of our petition! What sanctification for the soul! The ways of Jesus were absolutely perfect and divine. Imperfection enters only when they are applied to our souls as we are asking. We ought to make the various ways Jesus operated in Mary the special object of our meditation; these are the ways the soul desires in prayer.

“In the Truth of Your Virtues”

Our virtues can be false in two ways. Sometimes they are purely natural; God then is not at their source; He is not the principle from which they spring. There is in them a mixture of imperfections and faults. The virtues of Our Lord are always true in every respect. When Our Lord lives in us and causes us to bring forth His admirable virtues, we mingle with them our faults, our self-love and other natural and even evil affections. In this way, we falsify them in part.

Jesus suffered no such insults on the part of Mary. His virtues in her were always perfectly true. Now, as we behold this with admiration and love, and at the same time realize our extreme wretchedness and note how we constantly inject impurities that are in opposition to the divine virtues of Jesus, we earnestly beg Him to “live in us in the truth of
His virtues.” It is a petition for an admirable purification that will free us from our affection for creatures, deliver us from our self-love, make Him take us entirely into Himself and establish His perfect life in us. Such was the life of Jesus in Mary, a life lived in a degree of perfection that lies beyond the power of our comprehension.

“In the Communion of Your Mysteries”

While walking on earth and while ascending to Heaven, Our Lord worked out the various mysteries which contain all the graces of our justification and sanctification, and in the divine life which He brings into our souls He gives us a share in those mysteries.

This share and participation attained a most marvelous perfection in Mary. Jesus communicated to her the immense graces contained in all those sacred mysteries, as these unfolded gradually in the course of time, and He lived in her in a life of most perfect communication of all His mysteries.

By the fact that Our Lord lives in us, we participate, in varying degrees of perfection, in some of those mysteries. As the soul beholds the perfect accomplishment of the life of Jesus in Mary, she conceives the desire to participate in all the divine mysteries, and so begs for that universal participation. Such a participation contains immense perfection.

“Overcome All Inimical Power”

We realize that our Well-Beloved is living in us; but we realize also that this life is unlike that which He lived in Mary. By this petition, we beg Jesus to grant us that perfect life. We feel that many powers offer opposition to that life, that they have, until now, put obstacles in the way and we are afraid that those powers might similarly impede our future progress. We feel incapable of resisting them, so we pray to our Well-Beloved to rule over us and control those powers that war against our happiness.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

We realize that those powers will never be annihilated as long as we are on this earth, but we beg Our Lord to dominate and subjugate them, keeping them in chains. The inimical powers are the devil, the flesh and its lusts, our inclinations, our faults, our nature, our natural, purely human life.

As long as our soul is subject to these powers, it is impossible for us to possess that perfect life of Jesus in our soul. If Jesus rules over them, our enemies will still be able to make assaults on us in the flesh, but they will no longer exercise dominion of any kind over our souls, for Jesus alone will then reign in them. Those inimical powers are outside the soul in such a case; the soul is closed to them and it no longer lives except in and by the life of Jesus.

We therefore express the desire that Jesus, living in our souls, may repel and shackle our enemies, banishing them to our flesh, and acting as sole Ruler over our souls.

"In Your Spirit"

We add, "in Your Spirit," by which we mean the Holy Spirit who constantly wars against the flesh—the flesh which so constantly opposes and combats the soul. Jesus, living in this manner in our souls, diffuses in us His Spirit of hatred toward those mortal enemies, while extending in us His dominating power through and in that adorable Spirit.

Being thus animated, vivified and strengthened by the very life of Jesus, Our Lord, and by His Spirit, we resist all inimical powers, dominate and repel them. Or rather, it is not we ourselves but the Divine Spirit of Jesus who repels and dominates them. He does this for "the glory of the Father."

["For the Glory of the Father"]

This is the one and only purpose and end for which Jesus lives in Mary and lives in our own souls. The soul adopts the
same views, intentions and purposes. She does not desire all those graces for her own aggrandisement but for "the greater glory of the Father." This pure and holy desire is born in us as we behold Jesus living in Mary. Amen.

No Signature

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Letter Four Strasbourg, June 19, 1841 Vol. 2, p. 478

J. M. J.

Dear Brother:

[Be on Guard Against Self-Complacency]

Although I am busy, I'll put everything aside to do what you wish, for the love of God. I am always ready to comply with your wishes when they are good and agreeable to God. I beg you, in turn, not to do the things I want, but to be always gentle, humble and full of love for Jesus and Mary, docile and disposed to do everything or abandon everything so that you will be pleasing to our adorable Master.

Never put confidence in yourself, in your ideas or powers. Never esteem yourself as capable of doing anything of value. Never see in yourself anything but lowliness, littleness, infidelity to God's graces, resistance to the excellent designs of our good and most lovable Lord Jesus, who humbled Himself unto the death of the Cross to gain the spiritual advantages which He wishes to grant you.

Dear friend, don't make bad use of the great humiliation to which our Well-Beloved subjected Himself for love of you.
Don’t become exalted in your own eyes on account of the graces He gives you, for they have cost Him so many humiliations and such great abasement. Accept them with the most profound humility of your soul. Humble yourself more and more, scarcely daring to raise your head in His holy presence.

Love Jesus with all the powers of your soul. Abandon, surrender yourself entirely to Jesus, but love Him humbly as I explained to you on another occasion. Consider the abasement of Jesus before His Father. Humble yourself also at all times before Him. The greater your love, the greater also will be your abasement. It is my desire that true, deep, intimate, and solid interior humiliation will become so engraved in your soul and so pervade it that all its acts and motions will adopt its form, its color, and its taste. This, dear friend, constitutes the true spirit of religion which we ought to possess and which ought to animate us as we walk before God.

Another thing I wish for you and pray God to grant you is that you may not make use of the graces which have cost our adorable Master so dearly, for your own selfish interests.

Whenever we indulge in self-complacency, take satisfaction from the consideration that God gives us those blessings, or when our ideas of perfection are not wholly pure, we are taking personal advantage from them and using them to feed our self-love.

Note well, dear friend, that all I’m saying here and what I’ve said to you in my last letter, doesn’t mean that I find these faults in you. I simply want to call your attention to them so that you will be on your guard. Your present state exposes you to the danger of committing such faults because of your character, your natural defects, and the particular interior condition of your soul.

Don’t worry therefore, and don’t think that I suspect and worry especially about you in this respect, for this is not so. But your soul is particularly dear to me and I want carefully to anticipate all the evils the devil might arise in you
and the harm that might result. What I'm telling you will give you a certain fear and distrust of self. If nothing more were gained than this, that in itself would be very profitable to you. But it is my intention to obtain even more through God's mercy.

[A Source of Self-Complacency]

I shall now explain what constitutes one of the sources from which springs that sort of complacency and satisfaction you might feel when you consider the spiritual goods you possess or the ideals of perfection you entertain, thus turning them to your personal advantage. I say this because in your present condition you have ideals of perfection that exceed the perfection you have actually attained. Having these lofty ideals in itself is a great grace and I hope that God's goodness will enable you to attain such high perfection in due time. However, this takes time. You now have not only those views of perfection but also strong desires and great eagerness to realize them. All this is very good and you ought to remain constantly prostrate in all humility before God because He deigns to look mercifully on your poor soul. Yet you should also be on your guard and try to be very faithful lest you fall into great trouble on the occasion of this divine favor.

In the meantime, and while you are waiting for the moment when God's great mercy will take possession of your soul—unworthy as you are—you may be sure that the devil does not remain inactive. Finding in you a remnant of the old love of self, of your desire for greatness, your envy and ambition, he might make a breach, entering your soul and producing in it great evils or at least considerable agitation. This is why you ought to watch those weak spots with care—not by becoming anxious or making self-reliant efforts, but by exercising gentle, peaceful, and loving self-distrust and interior self-humiliation in God's presence.
I did not yet show you the cause that might produce those evil effects and others of the same kind which I need not now describe in detail. The agent who produces those things is the devil but the condition is this: since your knowledge [of that state of perfection] is experimental and of an intimate sort and also accompanied by a certain pleasure in your will, you get the impression that you have already attained that goal.

Now, in reality, the perfection that is thus seen and savored so vividly, is not yet something that truly belongs to your soul, for your soul is not yet informed by it. On the contrary, there remains much of its former imperfection, a faulty self-centerededness and a craving for its own excellence. This is why the greater the graces and spiritual goods found in a soul and the more vivid its realization that it possesses them (I mean especially when they are above the ordinary), the more also is there a danger of grasping and using them for personal advantage. This sometimes happens without being noticed, namely, when we suffer illusions. There is no more fruitful and dangerous source of illusions than that self-centerededness and that eager seeking of one’s own excellence.

Other causes are also at work but it suffices to mention this one. That is why I must tell you, dear friend, to walk with fear in the way of divine love: “Work out your salvation with fear.”

However, that fear and distrust of self should not prevent you from proceeding with fervor, with a pure and strong love that overcomes all difficulties, with peace, mildness, tranquility, and even with great confidence that Our Lord will grant you the immense grace of making you attain the perfection of His divine love and His life in your soul.

[Avoid Tension in Your Desire for Perfection]

Let that confidence and those other dispositions remain truly imbedded in you, while at the same time you always
remain in a most profound attitude of self-abasement. Also be particularly careful not to become tense in that attitude of fear and self-distrust and let it not be the source of any trouble or anxiety of mind; your fear and self-distrust ought to be full of love and humility. This was the attitude of Saint Paul when he said, "I have nothing on my conscience, yet I am not thereby justified." See how that vessel of divine election distrusts himself and fears! If he hadn't had that distrust and fear, perhaps he would not have become a vessel of election. But note, at the same time, that this great hero of divine love surrendered with the greatest fullness, vigor, and devotion to the great love that consumed him.

If you wish to make progress in the interior life and avoid the greatest dangers, it is necessary that divine grace operate in you by two activities that must become, as it were, the soul of your soul and constantly counterbalance each other. On the one hand, there is love that gives you the impetus, that puts and holds you under God's power so that Our Lord lives constantly in you, making you always tend toward Him and act solely in virtue of His divine influence. On the other hand, there is fear, self-distrust, constant self-abasement before God, but all this should be animated by that same divine love.

When I say that perfection is not yet a property fully possessed by your soul, I must add that it will never truly abide in your soul and be established in it except by means of crosses.

[Love of Crosses]

You desire and tend to perfection. That desire and that tendency will develop the seed [of perfection] more and more. But in order to become truly established in perfection, in order that it may become the form and property of your soul to such an extent that the soul is transformed
into Our Lord, you need the help of the cross. The cross is, as it were, Our Lord’s seal, by which He imprints on our souls all the divine perfections which He wants us to share with Him.

You will see later, when it pleases our good Master to give you a small share in His Cross, how empty of perfection you are at this moment and how all your interior and exterior works are infected with natural imperfections.

You are right in so ardently desiring crosses. It is only through them that the reign and the life of Jesus can be established in you, unless God grants you extraordinary privileges. But, once more, in all that, dear friend, desire those things with humility, thinking of your lowliness and poverty in His presence and asking that perfection with fear and love. Otherwise, if Our Lord does not sustain you in a special way, you run the danger of becoming discouraged and, almost inevitably, you will commit more or less numerous faults when you are confronted with your first crosses. This is why you should always strengthen your soul by remembering your wretchedness and weakness. I say “strengthen,” for Our Lord will then truly be your strength and support.

[Aridity of Prayer]

Regarding the fact that you no longer have those sense consolations, I don’t think that this condition will last. Sickness may have something to do with it, as sometimes happens, but this is only temporary. Sense consolations do not usually cease so suddenly. Moreover, there is in that neither good nor evil, or rather there is always some good in it, whatever be the way in which Our Lord desires to lead us. It matters not what this way might be, provided we remain completely His, tend to Him in all things, and act as much as possible under His influence alone.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

[Openness to Spiritual Director]

You are quite right, my friend, in not feeling embarrassed and telling me all that is taking place in your soul. I can assure you that if I noticed the greatest faults in you, they would not in the least make me lose one particle of the affection of charity which Our Lord gives me for you, and they would not even give me the slightest unfavorable disposition toward you. Still less would they put me in a bad humor and make me become displeased with you.

I expect that you will continue to have defects and will continue to commit a number of faults for some years to come; you must expect this and it ought not to give you even a slight feeling of discouragement or the least anxiety.

I would tell you the same things even if I had not known you, and I’ll say the same to all who wish to give themselves earnestly to Our Lord. You are in the midst of a struggle. It will take some time before you are able to reach a certain degree of progress and a certain amount of stability in true perfection. It would be very foolish of me if I were to become angry with you because I find some imperfection or defect in you. Both of us would be foolish, too, if we conceived a high esteem for ourselves because of the favors which Our Lord grants us in His great mercy.

I have spoken to you about these things because this is the time to deal with them. When you were a very small child, it was necessary to give you nothing but milk, for it was then a question of getting you started, of not discouraging you in the least, of not causing you any interior trouble or embarrassment, for that would have been dangerous for you.

Now, however, since it has pleased the Lord to strengthen you a little, it is an essential duty of true charity to make you see all those defects so that you may gradually recognize your real worth and may live with greater humility and love in holy and complete subjection to Our Lord. If I had
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

remained silent about all those dangers, it would have been because of a merely natural affection or through indifference. But, dear friend, I think I can truthfully say that I am far removed from both these sentiments.

So do not let your heart grieve or your mind entertain the least anxious thought. Unite yourself to me in the charity of Our Lord and His holy Mother. In this charity your soul is much dearer to me than you can imagine, and in it I am,

Your poor brother and servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

P. S. Write to me immediately whenever you have any trouble, whether it proceed from what I have told you in this letter or the previous one or comes from some other source.

I have undoubtedly forgotten to reply to several points which you mentioned in your letter. I leave to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother the care of giving you the answers in your own mind. They will do this better than I can possibly do.

Regarding your health: avoid the two extremes of negligence and exaggerated attention. Father Pinault will know better than I how to advise you in this matter as well as in all others.

That essay on the interior life [which I wrote] is too long and yet not complete. Have it examined and shorten it, if this is considered advisable. I don’t cling to the way I wrote it but wish only that it be found useful.

1 This remark probably refers to the Short Treatise of the Interior Life, whose final version will be included in the volume containing Father Libermann's Spiritual Writings.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

10

Attitude toward unconquered vices. Keep control over your senses. The source of spiritual illusions and how to recognize them. Advice regarding a fellow-seminarian.

Letter Five   La Neuville, November 12, 1841   Vol. 3, p. 53

May the love and peace of the Heart of Mary fill your heart.

Dear Brother:

I wish I could have seen you and learned more about your spiritual condition. I also wished to have such a visit with you because of the union of charity that unites us in Our Lord. But the Divine Master has not seen fit to fulfill that desire, so I hope that He Himself will make up for it.

[Attitude Toward Unconquered Vices]

Don’t become discouraged at the sight of the vices you discover in yourself. It is an excellent thing and a great grace for you to notice their presence in you. Enter into Our Lord’s designs in this respect; remain before Him as a poor wretch who is good for nothing; acknowledge that you are not better than any of the wretched, proud people in the world.

Rejoice, however, at the same time, with all your heart because our adorable and gentle Master desired to draw you to Himself and keep you in His service in spite of that monstrous vice of pride which is not yet extinct in you. Rely on His goodness for you and don’t be afraid that He will abandon you. He has chosen you and will not reject you.

The pride you notice in you is very real, but you are no longer its slave. Your soul is not ruled by pride but by the
most gentle and humble Lord Jesus who reduced Himself to nothing for her sake. You are truly fortunate if you realize all the misery that results from the pride that dwells in your flesh; for, when you feel it so keenly, you will perhaps in your turn reduce yourself to nothing for the love of your most beloved Lord Jesus. If you now suffer the assaults of that vice, it is because you were formerly a slave of it and often followed its inspiration. You are now united to Jesus —this I hope and believe—but pride resides in your senses and your flesh and it does not want to leave them; the old habit is ingrained in them. The affective consolations of the spiritual life which purify the senses of their gross affections, and even of the grosser forms of self-love, do not cast out subtle pride.

Have patience and courage. Wait until the divine Jesus becomes complete Master of your soul and establishes His dominion more firmly in it. He will then make use of His great weapon, the cross, and humiliations, contradictions, and the other efficacious means which He uses so well to destroy our self-love. Abandon your lot into His hands. Be merely a man of desires but let those desires be peaceful and mild and surrender your entire life to the hands of Jesus and Mary.

[Keep Control Over Your Senses]

All the evil of pride, as presently found in you, derives from the fact that your senses are not sufficiently purified, but in the depths of your soul you do not cling to such evils. Nevertheless, your soul is constantly harrassed and troubled and sometimes yields to pride through fragility and weakness. It would be much more pleasant for you if you were pure and holy before God, but you should submit and remain before God in all your misery.

With respect to mental prayer you tell me that you find it extremely difficult to let your heart express itself in words
of love. My reply is, "Why do you want to draw forth from your heart those words of love?" Leave them in your heart; Jesus is there; He will take them there Himself.

Your present condition of soul demands that you remain before Jesus with interior love; it does not demand outward expression. Incline always to Our Lord by the desires of your soul and do it with profound self-humiliation. Remain always like a victim before this sacrificing Priest. He will sacrifice you at the time He chooses; in the meantime be ready to follow every wish of your Lord.

When Jesus [formerly] made His presence felt while He dwelt, as it were, in your senses and from there acted upon your soul, your senses were active, they had to act, although the Divine Master at the time granted you great peace. But He now wishes to establish His throne in the depth of your soul and now you must hold yourself interiorly before Him as a "nothing" before the Creator, in all your poverty and misery, waiting until He chooses to move you and give you life, and keeping yourself always ready to be sacrificed for His glory in accordance with God’s will.

Don’t give much play to your senses but keep them in tranquility and repose. By permitting but little activity to them, you will more easily resist self-love, and you will not feel its effects so much. If you examine your self-love, you will notice that it manifests itself mostly after or during some activity of your senses. To resist it, you have merely to calm your senses and prostrate yourself at the feet of Our Lord.

You can count on it, my friend, that I will not forget you or your conferees during the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar. If you are obliged to have Our Lord as your only guide, you are not badly off! Your present state of soul is such that you are not greatly in need of a spiritual director. But be careful not to be misled by illusions. Always be docile and supple at the hands of Our Lord.
Regarding detachment from human affections, you should also avoid illusions here, for we sometimes confuse pure truth and that kind of affection. I don’t have time to explain fully now.

The danger for you at present lies in the fact that you have not yet reached a state in which you have a stable and clear view of divine things. Be patient and don’t lose courage! If you are faithful you will attain such a stage.

You feel forsaken by God and perhaps consider this an evil. Yet this condition should lead you to that stage by purifying your soul of self-love, at least in part, and preventing your senses and imagination little by little from mingling actively with divine graces and supernatural lights. Once you have been weaned from such things for a sufficiently long time, you’ll lose the habit of thus mixing the activities of the senses and imagination with divine things. Then the infused light of faith will become clearer and you will learn to distinguish the good from the evil.

Self-love, the senses, and the imagination are the three sources of illusions. They are three great obstacles that prevent the communication of supernatural light concerning divine things; once those obstacles are removed, we see more clearly. Although they re-awaken from time to time, it is only in a passing way, if we are well established in renunciation and self-surrender to God.

It follows, dear brother, that you ought to distrust yourself always and in all things and should not proceed with excessive boldness. Nevertheless, you should also avoid being timid and embarrassed. Daring and too much self-assurance, especially in souls that are still in danger of becoming victims of illusion, lead to presumption. On the other hand, we must not confuse generosity and the forcefulness with which we follow Our Lord with the kind of
daring that is evil and estranges us from our only Love. Generosity and forcefulness reside in the will; daring and boldness, which are ordinarily accompanied by enthusiastic excitement of the mind or the imagination, reside in the mind, and they tend to make us feel satisfied with ourselves rather than leading us to God.

[How to Recognize Illusions]

I should like, on this occasion, to give you a general rule which will help you to recognize illusions, or at least to make you wary of them. Every time the impression you experience or the impetus you receive, is centered in your mind, you are in danger, at least in your present state of soul, and this will probably remain true for two or three more years. This is especially so if the principal impetus is imparted to your mind, if there is a kind of soaring flight and excitement of your mind or your imagination. When I say "enthusiasm" and "flight of mind" I do not mean the sort that gently raises you to God and unites you to Him, for this kind of enthusiasm is fundamentally in the will. I have in mind a flight of mind and enthusiasm that is vague. It may be accompanied by the thought of God, by the consideration of being agreeable to Him, of doing His will, procuring His glory, etc., and yet it is confused, vague, and gives little impetus to the heart, just as it does not always proceed from the heart, that is, from the will.

Such a flight of mind imparts too positive a tone of soul. It is usually accompanied by sternness and rigidity of the mind. In any case you must exercise distrust, humble and calm yourself, eliminate the evil you notice, and pray with confidence.

On the contrary, if the impression and the impetus is in the will, if your mind is not very active, if your enthu-
siasm is calm and gentle, if it fills you with God and is transmitted through a feeling of the will, if it propels you toward God rather than toward the object that occupies you, if it produces mildness, a calm and humble moderation in your mind, if the action is centered in the will and not in the mind, then you have a sign that all is well. (The mind, however, might be afire, but as fired by God alone, in a manner that is altogether gentle and in no way stiff or harsh.)

I am afraid that I have not explained my thought with clarity. Such things are hard to explain. If you have difficulties or mental troubles, please tell me, for the only reason for my detailed explanations is my desire to see you sanctified. Believe me when I tell you that I desire this greatly. Forgive me, therefore, dear friend, for being so long-winded.

[Advice Regarding a Fellow-Seminarian]

I beg you to leave Mr. Bureau in peace. I don’t think that his spiritual condition is due to his character. It is possible that his character might exercise some influence on his conduct, as ordinarily happens in all the interior details of the activity of our souls, but fundamentally his state is the effect of God’s will which guides him in a manner that is entirely different from what usually takes place in spiritual things.

If Mr. Bureau is faithful, he will sanctify himself. I must confess, however, that I see danger in his present condition; but speak to no one about it. I am afraid he might become discouraged. I do not consider that he is in the state of laxity and, if you could read the letters I send him, you would notice that I don’t treat him as one who has become lax. If you were in his situation, it would perhaps take only twenty-four hours to make you fall in despair.
I don't think I am mistaken about him. The proof is that all the details I have given him regarding his interior state have always proved exact. Moreover, although my letters to him are always very firm, he always likes them very much. This I regard as a good proof and something in his favor.

Pray for him but don't haunt him. I shall be grateful, nevertheless, if occasionally you speak to me about him in your letters.

Enough for this time, my well-beloved brother in Our Lord and in the very sweet and dear Heart of our good Mother, in whose love I am,

Entirely yours,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

P.S. Tell our dear brothers "in the Heart of Mary" that we do not forget them. May they always be children who comfort that Heart, which we love so much.

Tell Mr. Coyer, please, that I'll write him in a few days. I'm unable to do so today. For some time we shall be very busy with manual labor because we have no Brothers right now. The Good Lord will no doubt send us some very soon. This I hope to obtain from His bounty.
May the Divine Child be the life of your soul!

Dear Brother:

[Docility to God’s Grace]

I desire with all my heart that our good Mother may obtain for you the continuance of the wonderful grace which her Divine Child has bestowed upon you. I shall continue to pray earnestly for this intention. Strengthened by that grace, enter into the dispositions which Jesus inspires and to which He attracts you with His usual gentleness.

You can expect that you will continue to be very often unfaithful, as has been the case in the past. But try to develop a readiness to let yourself be led [by the promptings of grace]. Do not follow vivid and sensible impressions. Although they are sometimes good and holy in themselves and emanate from God, they often lead us to serious mistakes and make us abandon the particular state of soul in which our Divine Guide has placed us. These mistakes are not the direct effect of such impressions, but they result from our natural activity and our self-love—two evils that are hard to overcome. Natural activity and self-love find an ally in our imperfection and use it to set us in motion; they cause us to abandon the particular state of soul in which our Divine Master wishes to keep us captive.

Remember this word, dear friend: Our Lord desires you to be “His captive.” He wants to see you bound and shackle
as the Divine Child Jesus was wrapped and pinioned in His swaddling bands. He wants to have you in a state where nothing remains of your self and your activities. He wants all the faculties of your soul to rest in Him and rely on Him alone. He claims for Himself the exclusive privilege of setting those faculties in motion and handling them in His way and to the extent of His wishes. We counteract that dominion when we surrender to those impressions, even when they are in themselves supernatural.

God knows why He gives strong impressions and it is not for us to know what His designs might be. Our mind ought not to have any opinion about that and our soul should act only to the extent and in the way He prompts it; this is a great fundamental principle of the life of Jesus in our souls.

It is Our Lord who gives us those impressions and who wants us to act accordingly. It is for Him to make us repose on His Heart, without any other ideas or thoughts than that of our Master and of the impression He deigns to give us. Even the thought or impression He communicates to us ought to be transitory as it were; we should not try to keep it longer than it is entertained in our mind by our good Master.

Dear friend, how great was the grace you received at Christmas! The Divine Master held you inactive in respect to your natural activity. He wanted Himself to become the energy and motive power of all the actions of your soul.

Recall what I told you in one of my last letters: the state of emptiness and insensibility in which you found yourself was more profitable to you than your previous state of soul. You are now able to understand the reason: it is by that means, so it seemed to me, that the Divine Guide of your soul desired to sap the foundations of your natural activity. I think you understand what I explain here so badly, for I
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

refer to things which you experience in your soul. If you have any difficulty, tell me and quote my words. Now, let me try to make myself a little clearer, with the help of Our Lord.

[The Total Surrender to God]

When a person is truly in a state of surrender to God there is then no accompanying sensible impression by virtue of such a state, neither is there any sensible action, by which I mean one of which we are aware. In such a state of complete surrender, Jesus who dwells in the inner depth of our soul, is Lord of all its powers and He holds them at rest in Himself. He manages and guides them according to His own good pleasure.

The soul, for its part, resting thus in its Well-Beloved, surrenders entirely to Him. It does not wish to have any action of its own; it lets itself be handled by Jesus as He pleases. There is then no opposition offered by the soul Jesus guides. The soul follows and lets itself be handled without offering the least opposition. In such a state therefore there is neither resistance nor disturbance of any kind.

Before we reach that stage of complete surrender to Jesus, we desire, and even strongly so, to reach such a state. It is Jesus Himself who impresses such a state on us. We follow, however, with a vigor that is greater than His impression and inspiration. The reason is that, in all that we do, we combine our natural efforts with the divine action. Our will acts vigorously and so does our mind. Now this is a great obstacle [to grace], especially in souls which still receive impressions from time to time, for these impressions always leave an idea in the mind and we secretly want to develop and explicate this idea on our own. We should, however, preserve no remnant of this idea; the only thing that should remain is a union of our will, not with that idea, but with
Jesus, who is always its true object. I pray Our Lord to make you understand what I explain so poorly.

Now to come down to some practical application. I told you that I was delighted to learn from you that you had received a special grace at Christmas. I am not so enthusiastic, however, about the second grace you mentioned. The Lord forgive me for saying such a thing! I love and want always to love what He gives you, but I notice that those impressions cause you to abandon the holy state in which the Lord wants you to be, the state of true surrender to His action and His guidance.

When I consider the dispositions and state of your soul, I see that only two things are suitable for you and these are emptiness of self and inability to act on your own. This is a crucifying state but\(^1\) not always. It was painful for you at Christmas, but remember it is a salutary state which will purify the action of your soul and place you more and more under the perfect dominion of your Well-Beloved Lord Jesus. Watch over yourself!

When a soul is in a state similar to the one in which you are at present, when God holds her bound and subject, though she is in sweet repose, she nevertheless soon becomes bored because she is so inactive. She then feels a need for action. She experiences in turn desires, tedium and other sentiments, all of which urge her to become active. It happens sometimes in such a condition that the soul breaches that state of spiritual and sacred repose. She awakens the Divine Child Jesus, as it were, or at least is favorably disposed to the promptings of the senses; an opening is made and there is a stir; old impressions are re-awakened and revitalized.

It is possible that that [second grace] you tried to describe in your letter is something of that nature. Although the

\(^1\)Reading *mais* instead of the unintelligible *car*.
soul's repose is not interrupted, it undergoes changes and another taste or attraction appears. What I mean is that the satisfaction and the effect produced in the soul by such impressions are of a different kind than those of a genuinely spiritual repose.

Those who have enjoyed this kind of spiritual repose for a long period of time clearly see the difference, and the taste of those impressions gives them a feeling of displeasure. It is as if someone, after tasting sugar, were eating a bitter fruit. If impressions come from God, they have of necessity the same kind of taste and are of the same sort as the repose one enjoys in such a state.

[The Desire for Martyrdom]

To reply directly to your second letter, let me tell you that the desire for martyrdom is good when it is in us as a result of an impression received in a quasi-passive way. However, even in this case, we should not allow our minds to embroider it. We must be content with staying within the bounds of that desire and remain passive without trying to go farther than the divine impetus will carry us. This is but an application of the general rule that is true of all passive graces. In other words, although your desire for martyrdom might be good, you should not permit it to influence your conduct at any time and should never draw conclusions from it for your behavior.

Let me confess, that in my own case, if I had drawn conclusions for my conduct from passive graces which I received, I should not now be a priest, and yet, I believe that I did not act contrary to God's will when I consented to be ordained to the priesthood.

Remain quiet then and do not go beyond that impressed [desire for martyrdom]. Further, do not desire to feel it and in no circumstances try to arouse it in yourself.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

When the desire for martyrdom does not come from a passive impression made by God on our soul, or when we go further than the impetus given by a passive impression may take us, we are on dangerous ground. A certain amount of self-love will almost always be present in such a case.

If you are mischievous you will say that I want you to join us. However, I don't in the least suspect that you entertain such an idea about me. I would, of course, give thanks to our good Master if He gave you to us, but I have no wish to accept any but those whom He sends us.

This, my friend, is what I have to tell you now regarding the state of your soul. I will pray with all my heart that the Divine Master may live in you according to the fullness of His power, so that His good pleasure may be perfectly accomplished in you.

Adieu, dear friend.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

P.S. When I tell you that the desire for martyrdom should be a passive impression in order to be good—at least in order that it may not be dangerous—I am not thinking of the case when one is called to confess his faith, that is, when one is brought face to face with martyrdom. I used the term "passive impression" because I did not want to indulge in long explanations. In reality, it is not entirely and absolutely "passive." . . .

I want you to burn this letter, for it would appear obscure to anyone who disapproves the interior state of your soul at this time and it might even be obscure to you also. . . .
The reason why Father Libermann's congregation presently prefers to work among the Negroes. More explicit considerations of the desire for Martyrdom.

Letter Seven  
{January, 1842}  
Vol. 3, p. 93

May Jesus be your Life to the full extent of His merciful designs for you.

In this letter I shall do my best to give you all the requested explanations with the help of Him who is our only Wisdom and in whom alone I would like you to live.

[Libermann's Preference for Work Among Negroes]

To resolve any difficulty that might arise from the expressions I used in the rule [of our congregation], I did not want to say that we have any other aim beside the apostolate among the Negroes. This is our only aim at this time but, properly speaking, the object that we aim at and desire is to work for the poorest, the most despised and the most neglected of all souls.

More specifically expressed, [let me say this: we want to work for] those who are despised because of their poverty and their extreme needs of body and soul, for those who are most neglected, and who at the same time give the assurance that great good can be accomplished among them. Now, applying these conditions, which move us so deeply, we have decided to labor for the Negroes, or rather it is God who has united us and touched our minds and hearts with compassion and zeal for the salvation of the Negroes. They fulfill all these conditions more than anyone else.

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In other words, thanks to God’s grace and light, what touched us most when we considered the Negroes was their pitiful situation, their utter wretchedness, both physically and spiritually. From this we naturally draw two conclusions: first, since we are apostles of people who are in such a wretched state and are so abject in the eyes of men, we must live in a spirit that is suitable to this situation. Secondly, in case there is no longer any useful work to be done for the Negro, that is, when they become liberated from their wretchedness and are no longer despised and neglected, but in the same condition as the peoples of Europe, we shall then turn to others and will look for people who are in a greater misery. Here you have the essence of what I have in mind.

On the other hand, we may feel confident that we shall be able to consecrate our whole life to the Negro and that for a long time to come our successors will not have to look for any other mission. For the present the Negro alone ought to occupy our attention. If God is willing to make use of us, San Domingo and Madagascar will suffice to keep us busy for a long time.

[More Explicit Considerations Regarding the Desire for Martyrdom]

As to the question of martyrdom, I told you in my last letter that you should not entertain such a desire in earnest and as a practical issue unless it were inspired by divine grace. Even when it comes from God, you should not proceed further than His inspiration impels you. We should be on our guard against drawing conclusions from such a desire for our conduct, unless divine grace itself inspires such a conclusion and we ourselves do not enter into its formulation. It must not be something arrived at by reason, even when we have a feeling for it in our heart.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

If we were in the midst of persecution, we should, of course, have to prepare ourselves for martyrdom and dispose ourselves for it. In such circumstances the grace of martyrdom would become a grace commonly given to many. Everyone would be expected to dispose himself actively for it, just as one disposes oneself for the observance of other divine precepts of the Lord.

But even then we should never expose ourselves to danger unless we are prompted to do so by the Holy Spirit. No one may claim a right to enter into the nuptial banquet hall unless he is invited. And such an invitation is never an ordinary grace—it is a special one.

In time of persecution, that special grace is granted to many, but no one should seek to obtain it, for particular graces are gifts and not virtues. I call "virtues" those dispositions which God demands of us, to which we must contribute something and at which we must aim in order to attain a higher perfection. Examples of such virtues are the renunciation of all creatures and perfect union and charity which makes us share in the life of Jesus to the full extent of our capacity.

This, I think, is enough for us "poor fellows"! To this category [of virtues] belongs the readiness to give, not only one life, but a hundred million lives, if it were possible, for and through the love of our most adorable Master, and to suffer all pains and the most terrible afflictions for His good pleasure. If, after that, Our Lord desires to expose us [to martyrdom], His grace will be with us. Then it will be our duty to be faithful to it and to act according to those holy dispositions which constitute the perfect Christian.

Note, however, that a mere disposition and readiness to sacrifice one's life for the love of God is far removed from a practical and effective desire to suffer martyrdom. A practical and effective desire for martyrdom is a gift of God and He gives it to whom He pleases. He sometimes gave it to
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

souls that were very imperfect. Others, greatly advanced in perfection, never even thought of it, and yet they were most willingly disposed to sacrifice themselves if God had ordered it. I mean by "gift," that which does not belong to the core of Christian perfection, which is not of the essence of Jesus' life, although it might serve accidentally to foster spiritual growth. Now, dear friend, this is the desire for martyrdom as you described it to me, and I need not add many explanations to make you understand it.

Suppose that the Father had not decreed from all eternity that His incarnate Son should be crucified for the love of His glory. In such a case that well-beloved Son would not have been a martyr of love for the honor of His Father and the salvation of souls. Yet would we say that His love in that case would have been less holy and less perfect? Surely not! This shows that the essence of holiness does not consist of actual martyrdom, and also that it does not consist either of the desire for martyrdom of which I spoke above. We must be careful then, dear friend, to follow our Model, and not a mere idea we ourselves have conceived.

If the divine Savior had not been ready to die for the glory of His Father when this was His Father's will, such an attitude would not have been in harmony with His divine and admirable holiness, for such a willingness does not depend on the special will of God but is of the very essence of divine love and hence belongs to the very essence of holiness.

I think this will suffice to make you see that the practical and effective desire for martyrdom ought to exist in your soul only as a gift of God or through a passive impression (which comes down to the same thing). This then, dear friend, is what I wish to advise you regarding that desire: Act in this respect as we must relative to all passive graces, all divine impressions which lead to holiness and which, of themselves are not holiness and do not establish us in any degree of holiness. As long as it pleases God to give you
such a holy impression, accept it gratefully and with love. Use it to advance more and more in holiness, in the purity and perfection of His divine love, since it is for this purpose that it is given. But be on your guard, dear friend, against attaching yourself to that grace, to that gift of the Divine Spouse of your soul.

Do not even attach great importance to an actual fulfillment of this desire if it is inspired by divine grace. You are permitted to desire such a fulfillment, but let it be with great humility and only to the extent that that holy impression prompts you to do so. You may hope that God’s goodness will grant you that great favor, but let your hope be joined with great humility, great distrust of yourself, and do not let your hope go farther than grace prompts it.

Do not try to maintain this desire in your soul, however holy it might be, do not seek to increase or diminish it. Do not think about it; rather occupy yourself with what constitutes the essence of holiness, namely, to renounce yourself and unite yourself more and more to your adorable and most lovable Master who became a martyr for you and who perhaps will not grant to you the privilege of becoming a martyr for Him. And if it pleases Him to grant it to you, you should occupy yourself with it only to the extent that He draws your attention to it. Your share in it should consist of merely permitting yourself to be drawn, gently and humbly, by that divine attraction.

If you knew dear friend, the dangers and illusions that mingle with such preoccupations, even if we merely allow ourselves to be carried away by such an attraction and refrain from adding anything to it. I think you might be inclined to beg Our Lord not to give you such desires any more.

The dangers are particularly great if we take a certain satisfaction in such gifts, if we willfully occupy our minds with such things. The least of the dangers would be that we
might unconsciously strengthen our self-love and fill our minds with something that in no way perfects our souls. It does not make them more holy or more pleasing to God, but often makes us commit faults.

On the contrary, if you discard such thoughts you can concentrate the powers of your soul on the essential requirements of your own sanctification. The desire for martyrdom could serve to make you fervent, but it will often happen that it produces only a fictitious kind of fervor.

I urge you then, dear friend, to accept everything Our Lord offers you for the increase of your fervor and to avoid all that is fictitious, especially when it is accompanied by dangers. What you particularly need in your condition is to apply yourself exclusively to the internal means of sanctification, to keep your soul pure and holy before God, and to preserve the greatest possible calm. Let the Master act according to His own desires. Have no desires of your own in this matter and don't attempt to tell Him what to do. Will nothing but Him, but Jesus reigning and living in your soul in a spirit of holiness and love. If He wants you to have other desires and pursue some special object, He will give them to you. But do not try to advance further than His gifts and inspirations prompt you to go.

Remember also, dear friend, that God has His own views when He inspires desires in us and that we should always refrain from examining what these views are. He knows why He gives us those desires. One who reasons and draws conclusions from his desires, is already the victim of an illusion. It is almost certain that he will have even more serious illusions and, I may add, deservedly so.

Although conversations on the subject of martyrdom could be instrumental in fostering fervor, don't imagine that you ought to engage in such conversations for the purpose of arousing a practical desire for martyrdom in others. Such
desires would certainly be illusions if they are produced by such conversations. They might at most produce a speculative and remote desire, and even this sort should not be entertained.

In regard to suffering martyrdom in our missions, it is quite possible that some of our priests might do so in Madagascar and San Domingo, where we shall probably exercise our ministry. Of course I cannot guarantee it, for it depends on God’s will. Let me add that I would not like to accept a vocation based on such a desire, unless again I were certain that God willed it in this particular case.

Entirely yours in the charity of Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

13

Remarks about spiritual conversations. Libermann objects to circulating his writings.


J. M. J.

Dear Brother:

[Remarks About Spiritual Conversations]

Don’t be anxious about the way you act in spiritual conversations. I believe that the way you conduct yourself on such occasions is more or less as Our Lord demands of you. Try merely to control your imagination and don’t allow it to become excited. Speak with mildness and peace of heart.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

Such conversations should tend to establish peace and calm in the hearts and minds of others.

Your words ought not to arouse the minds of your hearers, but should inspire fervor and, by that very fact, your listeners' imagination will be peaceful. To produce such an effect in them, you yourself must, as much as possible, be in the state of peace, mildness and self-possession. I do not mean a peace and self-possession on the level of the senses, but an attitude of repose of your soul before God. Neither should you try to make an impression on others, for your function is rather to pour grace in souls.

Consider Jesus, our great Model, as He stands revealed in the first four chapters of St. John's Gospel. That is the way He acts and He does not seem to aim at saying striking things or things that will cause wonder in the hearers. There are, of course, circumstances when such admiration is produced in His listeners, but this is ordinarily not so. Moreover, don’t be at all embarrassed. Allow yourself to be moved by the impetus Our Lord may give you and don’t worry about anything. Continue to have recourse to Jesus as you have been doing.

You’re right in what you tell me about the help we get from the subtlety and vivacity of our mind, but subtlety and the other natural talents aid in the field of ideas alone and offer no help for the principal purpose of such conversations. Don’t be concerned, dear friend. It is of very little importance that you say beautiful things, but it is important that you speak in a holy manner. Hence it is this you should principally strive for. It suffices, as Father Pinault used to say, that we have the Word in our mouth, and I think there is no danger that it will be lacking in you. If you have this kind of facility, that is enough. It matters not what you say. Speak only “in” God, and all that you say will be profitable for the sanctification of souls.
Regarding lithographic reproductions—since I am but the servant of all of you, I can claim no rights in respect to my words or my writings. I belong to everybody and every one has the right to dispose of such things according to God's good pleasure. But, dear friend, I beg you to have pity on a poor man and not to destroy him in that way by delivering him to the demon of pride.

Don't make lithographic copies of those things, I beg you, for the love of God! If they could produce some good—well our good Master can produce that same good without them. I will ask the most Holy Virgin, our beloved Mother, to grant that grace.

I cannot send you the copybooks containing my notes on St. John's Gospel, for at this time they are in the hands of Father de Brandt. I shall send them as soon as he returns them. Mr. Senez has played a mean trick on me by having copies made of those notebooks—I knew nothing about it. I have no right to refuse it, for the word of God belongs to all His children. I have less right to it then all of you.

It is possible too, that you have procured copies for yourself, for you are not the man to leave such things in the hands of others without wanting to have your share. You have a better right to them than Mr. Senez, for I am more your servant than his. I beg you, and Mr. Senez as well, to have pity on me and not permit any more copies to be made for others.

I feel sure you will accept my reasons. I have not asked anyone to make a strict examination of these notes. I don't know whether everything I wrote down is correct and in accord with sound theology; and once copies are in circulation I shall no longer have control over them.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

As for [going to] San Domingo, our rule permits members to express their desires to their full extent, but not their "will." Desire things according to the inspiration of divine grace and be thus disposed to docility and submission of mind and will.

Adieu, my friend.

Entirely yours,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

14

Consequences of the imprudent circulation of Libermann's writings.

Letter Nine  La Neuville, January 28, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 122

Jesus, Mary, Joseph

Dear Brother:

I beg Our Lord to be all things in you!

I am going to grieve you in this letter, but Our Lord will give you the strength to bear it. I've received horrible news from Paris and in this affair your prudence does not receive high praise. But don't worry too much, dear friend—put yourself in the hands of Jesus and Mary and have no anxiety about the opinions of men.

There are complaints to the effect that you are working too hard to attract people, that you are making lithographic copies of my letters and my notes on Saint John's Gospel and showing them to everyone. These are all capital crimes that will lead you to the gallows! However, you are not lost as long as Our Lord doesn't order your execution and the Blessed Virgin doesn't put the rope around your neck.
So don't lose courage and don't yield to grief because of what any creature might have against you, or even because of what saints might say, imply or do against you. You will not suffer alone. I shall have a good portion of your pains. It is even possible that I'll be their prime target, for everything falls first on my shoulders. Rejoice alone with Our Lord because of what you may have to suffer on account of what others will say or think about you. Be happy because you are able to suffer something for your faults.

As always, however, those imprudences do contain a fault. When we commit a blunder, it is because we have mingled something of our defects with our works. Our [natural] activity and other deficiencies stand revealed in such mistakes, but is that a reason to be sad? No, far from it! What we ought to do is to prostrate and humble ourselves before our good Master because we are such poor men and always spoil all the good He wants to accomplish.

Let us rejoice therefore that our wretchedness and faults make people condemn us. Such a condemnation is a good fortune for a soul that is humble and truly united with Jesus in divine love. Go then to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and remain prostrate in mind before Him; beg Him to draw you completely to Him and to keep you in His mildness, peace and love.

I must insist, however, dear friend, that you stop making and circulating any copies of my letters. You see, people are scandalized—in particular, the letter that deals with the rule should not be shown to any one except those who belong to our society. As for the notes on St. John's Gospel, don't show them either and once more, don't have them copied. [From this reaction] you can see for yourself that they should not be lithographed. I feel certain that you are no longer contemplating such a project, for I begged you in my last letter not to do it.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

Submit peacefully and lovingly to God's will. Don't seek to attract people to our holy work. It is the work of Our Lord and the Heart of Mary. We ought not to get too much involved in it. I would be very displeased if any one tried to join us without being drawn by our Divine Master.

I leave you in the arms of Jesus and Mary. Preserve peace, self-possession and the love of Jesus and Mary, in which I am

Your humble servant,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

15

Restraint of eager occupation with external things. The influence of our temper and character on holiness. Abstain from judging others.

Letter Ten  {La Neuville} August 9, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 255

Jesus, Mary, Joseph

Dear Son in Our Lord:

I find it hard not to comply with your wishes. The charity which Our Lord inspires obliges me to satisfy you and contribute to your sanctification, however great the cost might be. Here then is the summary of the conversations we held during your stay with us.

Article One

Freedom from Occupation with External Affairs

I mention only some of the principal reasons why you start with the principle that the "Kingdom of God is within you."
From this draw two conclusions: first, that the work of becoming holy must take place in the interior of your soul; secondly, that external works, however holy they might be, are agreeable to God only because of the interior dispositions accompanying or inspiring them.

[Holiness Lies in the Soul and Not in External Occupations]

Our good Master pours His grace into your soul in order to establish divine life therein. He prompts you constantly in all you do to make this divine life develop and foster Jesus' holiness in you. This requires that the powers of your soul be well-disposed and flexible so that divine grace may permeate them and that it may be easy for Jesus to diffuse His own holiness in you.

The Divine Savior is in our souls after the manner of a spark, received in baptism, which constantly tends to inflame everything in us that is capable of burning with that divine fire. If this divine fire of Jesus' love is to burn in us and inflame us, it must find openings through which it can penetrate and it must not meet with any obstacles. Our natural affections are essentially an obstacle to that fire of love. When any action of our soul is inspired by an urge, a sentiment, a desire, or pleasure that is natural, such an action is incapable of inflaming our soul. On the contrary, it deadens the workings of grace in us. Now, my dear friend, in your eager occupation with external things you consent and yield to all kinds of natural urges and sentiments.

If we want that spark to spread, to inflame all the powers of our soul and affect all its operations, we must remain "within ourselves," we must live in a state of great calm and interior peace. God waits until we are peaceful and interiorly receptive before He communicates that spark to us. The greatest obstacle to the development of the grace of life,
which Jesus gives to us with that spark, is our own activity, especially if it is very intense.¹

[Activity Should Find Its Source in God’s Grace Alone]

What is necessary is that divine grace be the source of all our actions and that all the movements of our soul follow its guidance. But your natural activity is constantly blocking the action of grace. Our Lord is in you but His action is blocked. He wants to act and often begins to make His influence felt. But you stop Him, you block Him by your eagerness to become personally active.

You will end by acting habitually at the instigation of your self. You will then be your own master and Jesus will no longer find any entrance into your work. Although you will continue to love Him and do all sorts of good things for Him, it will be only on the condition that He keeps quiet and lets you do what you please.

You know that the great means for attaining perfection consists in removing all obstacles that stand in the way of divine grace, thus enabling it to influence your soul. You have removed the principal obstacles, the spirit of the world and the like. These were external obstacles and you withdrew from their evil influence, but you still have to remove the internal obstacles which consist principally in self-love, self-confidence, intellectual satisfactions and character faults.

To be practical about it, how would you manage even to become simply aware of those obstacles when you are so immersed in intense occupation and excessive activity? True, you may notice something from time to time—even frequently—but it is as if you did not notice it. Your busy mind is distracted by this or that eager pursuit and your will no longer has sufficient energy to resist the inclination of the moment,

¹The text of the last two sentences has been modified here as required by the original manuscript of Father Libermann.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

and thus you prefer to deceive yourself. The illusion and weakness of the will are nourished by self-love which has a great share in that lively activity and that craving for intellectual satisfaction which you find in a multiplicity of intense actions.

Do you want an efficacious means which will permit divine grace and the life of Jesus to develop and permeate all the operations of your soul? It is always to remain in His presence in a spirit of peace and mildness, and to avoid all natural eagerness. But how can you attain such a state if your mind is always racing from one thing to another? You must keep your mind peaceful, self-possessed and calm. But how would this be possible in the midst of such a variety and multiplicity of occupations?

You imagine that Our Lord could be displeased if you let any good work pass by without occupying yourself with it, and so you seize everything that presents itself to you. You fail to realize that you are thereby pleasing the enemy of [your sanctification.]

[Holiness, Not Works of Zeal are the Purpose of the Formative Years]

For the sake of one superficial good work done at this time, you sacrifice the salvation of a multitude of souls whom you would have won at a later date if you had been an "interior man," but whom you will not save if you remain a man lost in external occupations.

The present is the time for you to form the life of Jesus in your soul. It is not the time to labor for others. Once Jesus lives fully in you, He will make you work for the salvation of others. Until the moment this labor for others arrives, you should remain quiet. Thus, when the Savior will finally make you do this work, you will not be the slave of your own activity that you are at present.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

You imagine that you are accomplishing something by those exterior works—but your external activity has value only in virtue of the interior dispositions from which it springs. When a priest mounts a horse, when he races to visit a dying man and has the good fortune to find him still alive so that he can transmit Our Lord's grace to him, has the horse any merit in the action? Yet it is the horse that procured the salvation of that soul. And the sacrilegious priest who causes Jesus to live in a soul, has he any merit?

You see, then, that our external works have no merit but for the interior dispositions that lie at their source, that accompany or inspire them. If this is so, merit evidently increases in proportion to the perfection of those dispositions. Now our actions are agreeable to Jesus only to the extent that they are meritorious in the eyes of His heavenly Father.

If necessary we shall converse at greater length about this topic. In your present condition you ought to be especially watchful with yourself. You are at a stage where you run the risk of fixing yourself in a permanent interior state; if you get the habit of [self-directed] activity, you will remain in it and there will be a spiritual void in your soul.

Article Two

The Influence of Our Nature and Character on Holiness

[All Holiness Has Its Source in God]

How great the difference between the teaching of Saint Teresa [of Avila] and that of Father Courbon! Desiring to correct the errors in which I thought you had fallen regarding the influence of nature and character on holiness, I gave you the fundamental principles of the spiritual life. All holiness lies in Our Lord Jesus Christ. In our own nature there is nothing but sin when it acts by virtue of
the corrupt inclination which it has inherited from Adam through original sin, or else there is nothing but action that is irrelevant and devoid of value for our sanctification when we act by virtue of a principle of reason.

Our Lord establishes holiness in us by means of His divine grace. Sanctity can come in us only through the grace of Jesus, by means of which we participate in His life. Our nature, with all its powers, is always incapable of giving us the least degree of holiness. We are completely dependent on Our Lord, who alone is able to communicate that holiness to us as it pleases His Heavenly Father, and He can do this regardless of the condition of our nature. It is this life of Jesus, this grace of life, which is our holiness. The more this life is developed in us, the holier we are. We have no merit of ourselves. Jesus alone is the source of all merits. It is Jesus who merits in us and in our works.

[We Must Cooperate with God's Grace]

Here, however, we must avoid two extremes. The first excess would be to believe, with Luther, that since all merit is in Our Lord, we need only to believe in Him to have all His merits. On the contrary, we need a practical faith that is animated by charity, a faith by which we adhere to Our Lord in and through our works.

The second excess is to make everything depend upon our works. We should adhere [to Christ], and Our Lord's merits are of no avail for a soul that does not practically adhere [to Him] by its will. But when we truly adhere to Him by our will and yield to the movement of interior grace, it is then no longer our own action or adherence that merits, but instead the merit of Our Lord is drawn into us and applied to ourselves.

We see, therefore, that all merit and sanctity reside in grace. Hence the varying degrees of supernatural virtue that are found in a soul do not depend on the varying amount
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of its personal work but rather on the varying amount of grace that is present in and influences the soul’s activity.

We must work, we must cooperate. Otherwise the grace that impels us would not truly be in us and would not be applied to our conduct. But, while working and cooperating, we must remember that it is not our work but grace that makes us merit. Our work would be sterile and useless if God did not begin by arousing us through His grace, if His grace did not pursue and aid us throughout the time of our activity, and if it did not also make us finish the work through its influence.

[Character and Perfection]

God has to give grace to our will and to our action to make us work. This goes to show how empty and worthless is our own nature. Now, if our nature is of so little value, how could varying degrees of disposition to virtues and piety be of great assistance to us? The only thing that could be advantageous in having such natural dispositions could be that certain obstacles would thus be removed. Some natures and temperaments contain great obstacles; others have no vices and present few obstacles. The latter obey divine grace with greater facility, but it is always grace alone that is at work and we merely follow its promptings with our will and freely determine ourselves by means of another grace.

All temperaments are equally capable of reaching perfection. However, every temperament needs the [necessary] graces, graces more or less strong, varying and proportioned to the particular difficulties of each. I have thus replied to the question regarding the influence of character on perfection. I have shown that its influence is merely negative, that is, that certain characters offer fewer obstacles.

To explain this matter more fully, I told you [in our conversation] what is meant by “character.” It is a kind of form, mold, or mode of being of the soul which modifies
its operations. Considered in itself, this modification implies neither vice nor virtue, for it does not bring about any essential change, it does not make the nature of the soul and its operation fundamentally different. This explanation was a little too philosophical so I did not greatly develop it. But I concluded that character cannot be a positive and efficient cause of holiness, for holiness is something that inheres in the soul and brings about a change in its nature, permeating it and thus raising its operations to a higher level.

Note well, that holiness is something positive and a gift of God: it is sanctifying grace. Its increase also is something positive: it is a greater abundance of sanctifying grace. Now, how could that "sanctification" which is merely a way of being, [a natural character,] produce such a positive good? How could a purely natural mode of being endow the soul with a positive supernatural quality?

To discover in what way and to what extent character contributes to holiness, it is necessary to recall that the soul, existing by itself and separated from the body, would not have that moral form which we call "character." The character results from the union of body and soul; temperament has great influence on character and accounts for the variety of characters. Hence it is character that puts a certain form or stamp on the sensible operations of the soul, modifying the soul in regard to its sensible activity; hence it influences directly only the lower part [of the soul]. Consequently, it cannot contribute directly to holiness. Grace, on the contrary, acts directly on the higher part of the soul; it is there that Our Lord dwells through sanctifying grace, and it is from there that he wants to rule over the lower and sensible part of our soul.

[Character and Its Influence on Holiness]

For this reason, as I explained to you, character has great influence in the beginning, when we are still sense-bound.
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But later, when we have acquired control over our senses, when we are no longer their slaves, when the soul is in a state in which its operations are more intellective, we no longer notice that coloring by our character to the same extent. Character then exercises but little influence, for it is then under the control of grace; it shows its true nature as a simple form; sanctity is then greater because grace exercises a greater and wider influence over the soul.

In the beginning, character is more dominant and manifests itself over the entire range of the soul's action; therefore also the operation of grace lies entirely in the field of the senses. This is why character is then more in evidence and colors everything, and why consequently the soul's holiness is of a lower order. The more our actions are influenced by our character the less holy they are; and the smaller its influence, the more holy our actions will be.

The natural character is always more or less defective. It participates in the vices of the flesh because it is intimately bound to the organs of sin. Sin resides in our flesh, springs from the flesh, and from it spreads through our senses; hence they influence our character. Besides, it is intimately connected with our temperament, and is, therefore, tainted with the vices and defects that flow from our temperament, such as sadness.

The more a soul yields to these vices, the more strongly the character will likewise be tainted by them, for habits produce form. Keep a tree or a twig bent for a long time in a certain position and it will remain in it. But when grace takes the upper hand it changes the character greatly. Grace gives holy habits to our soul and in this way the soul takes a certain form and mode of action; for example, it assumes an attitude of peace, calm, or gentle joyfulness. Grace does not completely destroy the natural form because this form results from our particular bodily constitution and the union

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of the body and soul; but it modifies this form in part. Hence we should not too readily repeat to ourselves, "I cannot act otherwise, that's the way my character is." We should make grace take the upper hand. Grace will change the vices and defects of our character and will transform its natural state.

[Consequences for Spiritual Direction]

What can we conclude from all this? When we are called to direct a soul, we must begin—and this is the principal thing—we must begin, I say, with the examination of its interior supernatural state, to find out its particular condition relative to grace and to the action of grace on the soul. Next, we must consider to what extent this soul adheres to the grace which it possesses at the time and in what measure the life of Our Lord and His divine grace are dominant in this soul and its operations. This first study is of the utmost importance. If you know well the particular state of a soul, the way God operates in it, and the power grace exercises, you have discovered almost all of God's designs in regard to that soul.

But this is not all. We must next examine what opposition and obstacles that soul offers to the action of grace. It is in this respect that we have to examine how the soul acts, the character, vices and faults of the particular person. If we discover extraordinary obstacles, extraordinary graces will then be needed and, because the grace that is given is extraordinary, it will generally lead the soul very far. Noticing this, we are apt to say, "This person makes wonderful progress because he has a generous, lively, ardent character." But in saying this, we fail to take cognizance of the fact that it is grace that has fired that character; it is grace alone that has accomplished everything.
Isn’t it true that there are many persons endowed with a very ardent character, who give themselves to God, who serve Him with a great desire to do well and to attain holiness, and yet do not advance very far? Others, on the contrary, who are soft by nature, progress wonderfully well because they are animated by grace.

If you carefully examine the writings of Saint Paul and the Holy Gospel, you will not find in them any praise of a good character as being the source of great holiness. On the contrary, you will see on every page how grace does everything and how nature is held in low esteem and discounted. In one place, Saint Paul tells us that no man should glory before God for being something. Whatever man has in the supernatural order is due to divine grace: “Who singles thee out?” he tells us [I Cor. 4:7], i.e., in what can you claim superiority over others as regards supernatural perfection? Who sees in you something more than what he sees in others and which would permit you to glorify yourself? “What hast thou that thou hast not received?” What degree of holiness have you that you did not receive as a gift from heaven through divine grace? “And if thou hast received it, why dost thou boast as if thou hadst not received it?” This is a text that can be used in reply to all those who glory in the riches of their natures and their characters. I believe Saint Augustine used it against Pelagius.

Finally, in order to make a soul advance in perfection, we must constantly bring it back to the source of holiness—to the divine grace that is present in it—and urge it to be docile so that grace may increasingly triumph in the soul.

If you desire to influence a person’s character and make it adopt God’s designs instead of resisting them, become acquainted with and penetrate his views and his way of being. Little by little the person’s character will adapt itself to, and follow divine grace. Then grace will establish holiness in him.
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If you wish to activate the person's character and make him seek the good to the fullest force of his character, fervor, ardor, and so forth, work on him through his imagination, for this faculty brings his character into play and gives it great development. In this way you will make him adhere to God to the extent that you are able to capture his imagination. Note, however, that when the play of imagination ceases, everything will collapse unless, in the meantime, you have been able to establish the soul in a solid condition, so that the person is more docile to grace which then exercises greater influence on him. Before this condition is reached, the holiness of such a soul is very mediocre. A holiness based on character is a holiness that is almost nil, for grace has little part in it.

A method like the one I have just described seems to consist solely in keeping a soul occupied with the play of the imagination in order that it may remain in good disposition so that grace may gradually produce virtue, and so that, when finally it is solidly established, it may acquire real holiness, not through nature but through grace.

All this shows us plainly that character and nature have almost no value in respect to mental prayer. Both character and temperament may be obstacles, in consequence of original sin, which introduced disorder in our nature, infected it, and perverted our character. All this is a great impediment in the practice of mental prayer. On the other hand, character and nature cannot have a formal and positive influence on our mental prayer, for the latter unites us to God, and grace alone, to the exclusion of our nature, is capable of bringing about that union.

[Avoid Systematizing Spiritual Life]

You can now appreciate the difference between the teaching of Saint Teresa, who seems to attribute everything to
grace, and that of Father Courbon, who seems to attribute much more to nature. Which of the two is to be preferred? To my mind, Saint Teresa’s. We should follow her doctrine much more than that of Father Courbon. In fact I find Father’s teaching reprehensible on several points. The Church has approved the doctrine of Saint Teresa. Father Courbon is merely an author who is fashionable with some individuals.

Saint Teresa does not exactly say that the mental prayer of contemplation of which she speaks is passive. What she does is to show that it is always grace which is operating and that nature is incapable of doing and producing what is taking place—and she is right. All mental prayer, whether affective or contemplative, is possible only in virtue of an impression of grace that is more or less strong, and this we cannot give to, or obtain for ourselves by our own powers.

That impression is made on the senses in affective mental prayer. In contemplative prayer it is made on the higher and intellectual part of our soul. Grace propels us—draws us Godwards—and our soul, feeling this impression of grace, acts passionately in affective prayer but calmly in contemplative prayer. So it is not a passive prayer since our soul acts. In passive prayer, that impression is so strong that it deprives the soul of action. The impression alone then exists and it varies according to God’s designs.

Father Courbon makes some good remarks, but I have told you the final impression which his teaching left on me. It seems to me that he is too systematic. God is the master of His gifts and although, in His providence, He establishes an orderly state of things, even in the order of grace, He nevertheless is not as regular and systematic nor as confined in His ways as Father Courbon would have us believe.

I have never seen things happen in the sequence described by Father Courbon and I doubt that things have ever oc-
curred in that order. I don’t believe that such a regular procedure takes place, namely, that a soul begins with the first kind of mental prayer and then ascends by every step to the last. It seems to me that such a systematic process should be rejected. It is pleasing to the mind and seems reasonable, but that is not the point. We should not believe that which is in conformity with the inclination of our mind, i.e., our taste for systematization, but should rather accept what is true and proved by experience.

If you desire to direct souls properly some day, you should avoid a systematic spirit. To set up a regular plan within which God ought to operate in souls, is to construct something false, at least when we make such a plan the general rule.

Don’t judge this matter of [spiritual progress] by the norms pertaining to the order of nature. In nature everything depends solely on the will of God and He follows a systematic order. When there are occasional exceptions, we justly consider them to be monstrosities; they result from some exceptional circumstance.

On the contrary, in the order of grace, several factors combine to play a role; consequently they prevent us from following the same order and sequence which God places in His works [of nature], for in the order of grace we are not always aware of all the factors that enter into the combination, nor do we know to what degree they enter into it.

The factors I refer to here are:

1. The eternal predestination of God for each soul, its degree of glory and its degree of grace.

2. The malice of each individual person who works against that grace, that is, the degree of that malice is not known to us.
3. The human will, with its various leanings and affections, which corresponds to that divine grace in a greater or lesser degree.

4. The person’s character, temperament and interior dispositions, which so greatly modify the action of grace.

5. The external circumstances in which the person is placed.

All this has considerable influence on souls and produces numerous variations in their interior state.

I gave you a general rule which we can accept: God begins always with the mental prayer of meditation or with affective prayer but never with contemplation. Souls whom He causes to advance to great heights [of perfection] usually begin with affective prayer. God’s impression in this form of mental prayer is centered in our senses and fills them; from this prayer the soul rises to contemplation. The affective impression becomes more and more pure, centers more and more in the intellect, and ends by being purely intellectual; prayer is then wholly contemplative. This comes about gradually in accordance with the soul’s increasing detachment from earthly and sensible things and from itself. Once on the level of contemplation, the soul passes through various stages and states, for mental prayer becomes more and more perfect as one advances, but I do not believe that there is a step by step uniform and gradual progress and sequence. The sequence and order depend entirely on the perfection of our progress and on God’s particular design for each of us. Distrust authors who know all and regulate everything.

[The Gift of Tears]

Another objection I have to Father Courbon is that he does not seem to be exact and correct in all that he says. Things
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do not happen in the way he paints them. I remember he claimed that some passive gifts are confined to certain states of soul. Now these gifts are frequently present in other states. Again he connects certain gifts with contemplation alone, whereas they are found in affective prayer, and sometimes those he attaches to affective prayer are found in contemplation.

I remember only one of those gifts, and I spoke to you about it, namely the gift of tears. He places it in affective mental prayer. Now this gift is found also in contemplation. It seems to me that he makes that gift consist of the soul's contrition for having offended God—at least this is what it seems to me he says. But that gift does not consist of contrition. Sometimes it may have contrition for its object but at other times it is prompted by the sight of Our Lord's sufferings, the consideration of His love for us, and such.

We should also keep in mind that the gift of tears is entirely independent of [the consideration of] such truths. It is a gift in itself, an impression which God makes on our soul, producing tender love in us. It does not consist in the effort of a soul that is inclined to weep at the sight of this or that truth. Neither is it the result of natural feeling that is aroused by the consideration of one's sins; this natural feeling does not have much significance. On the contrary, the gift of tears is a grace of God, an impression He makes on a person's senses, which produces in him a tender love that acts on his organs and causes him to shed tears. What is important is not the tears or the organic condition, but the interior impression. It is this which is most precious and operates great things in our soul. It constitutes the essence of the gift of tears and ordinarily causes the soul to become absorbed in the object which is its occasion.

If you want to test the truth of my statement you have merely to consider Saint Mary Magdalen kissing the feet of
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Our Lord, or falling at His feet after the death of Lazarus, or again when she was looking for Him at the tomb. You will find the same thing if you consider the life of Saint Francis of Assisi.

[Concluding Remarks]

Be on your guard about such matters. Man’s mind can indeed penetrate into human things but not divine things, as Saint Paul has told us. Hence we should not say, “This system of spirituality is to my liking; it seems to correspond with my turn of mind and therefore it is true.” To know such things, we need to live an interior life; we need the grace of the Holy Spirit and experience; we need an experimental, not a speculative knowledge of things.

To complete what I wanted to tell you about Father Courbon, I added that this author has nonetheless very good things to say on that particular state. The majority of his descriptions are exact as I recall although it is a long time since I read him.

I have been somewhat long-winded on that point. I recall almost everything I told you in the three conversations we had. At that time I attached great importance to it and I still do because you have suffered great harm from following an erroneous opinion. By attributing to nature what comes from grace you would soon have acted solely by virtue of your own powers and worse things would have resulted. I gave you the terrible example of a young man who lost his faith by following such ideas. At the beginning he relied too much on nature and he ended by attributing all the virtues of the saints to their natural dispositions.

I won’t say anything about your mental prayer, your examen, and such things. We shall talk about them at our next meeting. I’ll only say a few words about the other
things we discussed, for otherwise my letter will become a book!

**Article Three**

**Concerning Judgments**

*He Who Judges Others Condemns Himself*

"Judge not," said the Lord. Why do we judge others? Because we are "full of ourselves." The spirit of God does not judge. Our Lord said: "The Son of man did not come to judge the world." If we judge our neighbor we are not acting as children of Our Lord. Whosoever judges, judges himself, for by that fact he confesses that he is not acting according to Jesus Christ, and he manifests the interior vices that make him pronounce such judgments. He who judges without being obliged to do so by his function and he who, obliged to do so, judges without charity, pronounces judgment on his own faults.

He who judges his brother puts himself above him. What right has he to do this? His judgment springs from a combination of pride and a lack of charity and, in "pious" persons there is, in addition, an illusion of the imagination which makes them believe that they have good reasons and devout intentions in judging.

Although I am explaining here the sources of such judgments, what I say should not be applied universally. There is much variation in such matters. If you examine this well you will notice that very often, after you have made an unfavorable judgment about someone, you make a kind of reflection on yourself that is inspired by self-love. Compare this interior movement that accompanies those unfavorable judgments with the good movements imparted by God or His promptings to humility and you will realize how different they are.
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[Self-Complacency as the Source of Judgments]

Unfavorable judgments of one's neighbor are the products of the mind in collaboration with the will. Here is the way they usually are made by pious souls, especially those who are very fervent and generous and are in a state of spiritual exaltation and enthusiasm. Such persons have a great esteem for their interior state and imagine that they have a holiness or possess gifts of God above the ordinary. They are inclined to self-love in the sense that they imagine to be destined to leave behind the status and condition of ordinary men and they believe they are somebody, even though, at the same time, they humble themselves on several points. These acts of humility are sometimes sincere and sometimes not; but, fundamentally, such persons always think well of themselves and their own conduct. They have a certain self-satisfaction and self-complacency because they feel they have privileges that others do not possess. I do not mean that their good actions are animated by that spirit. Yet the soul is puffed up as it were by that feeling of superiority, in a vague and indefinite fashion. That is why such persons have great confidence in their own conduct and especially in their own judgment as to what constitutes perfection.

Usually such persons at first see only one way of perfection, namely, the one which they personally esteem highly and which, in fact, may be good. But, don't forget, it is impossible for such a view not to be tainted with several errors having their source in what I have just described. Their view of perfection is more imaginary than real. I mean, the mind is not enlightened, although it sometimes might seem to be on account of the truths which are seen in the imagination, and this is why such a view is accompanied by a sort of interior exaltation and enthusiasm which, however, is not always manifested externally. All this is not bad, but it remains imperfect until the soul enjoys true peace. Now this peace
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will be reached only when it no longer resides in the senses and the imagination. To obtain this, much time is required, and the soul will need constancy and perfect perseverance in self-denial—especially denial of its self-love and pride, which is the greatest and last obstacle to be overcome.

[Why Pious Persons Are Often Too Rigid]

The will of persons who have this self-esteem and who are in that imaginary and sensible state is usually very rigid. Even weak characters have this rigid attitude, but those who are strong and generous sometimes push their inflexibility to extremes.

That tenseness and inflexibility of the will comes principally from two sources. First, the person wants to unite himself strongly to Our Lord and seeks perfection, and he wants it largely through his own force of will. Perhaps, most of the time, there will be a mixture of good will, which is based on grace, and of the desire for his own excellence, a desire to be above the ordinary—above the common herd. In the beginning it is difficult to avoid mixing that evil principle with good ones. Only gradually and little by little the soul becomes purified.

The second source [of that tenseness and rigidity] is precisely that esteem of one's own [spiritual] state and the self-complacency that accompanies it. This complacency is nothing but self-love although it has various disguises. This self-love produces the contrary of charity; it makes us react uncharitably against our neighbor every time he fails to agree with us and it draws us toward those who agree.

This satisfaction with our own condition and esteem for our state prompts us to reduce our regard for others as soon as we notice in them a condition or a way of behaving that differs from ours. We then feel a certain antagonism or at least a certain amount of contempt for those who act
in ways which differ from ours, and who refuse to change, especially when they in their turn judge and condemn our conduct.

The rigidity of our will then shows itself in the harshness of our judgments, which are always more unfavorable than they ought to be, and our will reacts against those who judge us unfavorably.

Our imaginary state produces sometimes, [perhaps even] always, a readiness to judge and condemn, for in general our judgments are then of the condemnatory type. It also leads us frequently to suspect evil where none is present, for we pronounce judgment on the flimsiest foundations.

When our mind is ardent, we make rash judgments, and sometimes such unfavorable judgments are influenced by a bitter, harsh character.

When persons who judge in that manner happen to be pious, they suffer a certain illusion which results from that imaginary state in which they live; they color those unfavorable judgments with apparently good and pious reasons, but in reality this is false piety.

How do such judgments arise? Sometimes they are evil from the start, namely when we actually desire to pass judgment. Sometimes we are not guilty at first, for instance, when we suddenly see something evil without having looked for it. Note that I am speaking only of those who have no right to judge, whose function does not make it their duty to judge.

That first glance does not depend on us; we are passive. I cannot prevent my mind from seeing evil and at that point I have not done anything to make me see it.

The second act is evil. It consists in examining the case and pronouncing judgment under the influence of the will. This occurs when, shocked as we are by the sight of evil, or prejudiced against a person or in respect to the act to be
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judged, our will is hurt and goes to the attack. Prompted by our will, our mind then takes part in the quarrel and, siding with the will, applies itself to the examination of the case. Various sentiments enter into this action, but self-love is always the root, at least in part.

The third act comes about when the will, finishing what it began, determines itself in conformity with the mind and adopts that judgment and verdict.

[How to Overcome the Tendency to Judge Others]

There are three means by which to overcome this fault [of judging others unfavorably] and to resist it.

1. The first consists in convincing the mind of the contrary of what it wishes to judge [and condemn]. The use of this means has a twofold advantage: the will acts contrary to the impression of malice that is suggested by self-love and retracts the evil; in addition, the mind convinces itself of the contrary of what it is inclined to accept, and so extinguishes even the last spark of it.

This, however, is a difficult method because we are not always able to free ourselves from the evil impression. It can be dangerous even because it will often happen that we'll thereby convince ourselves more and more of the presence of the evil which we saw only dimly before we began to examine it. Our difficulty lies in the fact that the fault in us comes from a certain bitterness of our will and from its malice. It is principally the will that needs to be cured.

[For this reason the use of this method] often is unrealistic. We retrace in our thought and our imagination the favorable factors, but in reality there is nothing in the mind by which it can convince itself. We go through the motions in order to be able to say to ourselves that we did not
pronounce judgment, and afterwards we note that we have the same bad feeling as we had when on other occasions we pronounced judgment.

2. The second method consists in arresting the action of our mind as soon as we notice the evil and at the same time calming our will to make it favorably disposed to the person concerned. I say “calming the will,” which entails entertaining great sentiments of charity, making acts of charity, asking God to give us that grace, forbidding ourselves any act that conforms to our evil inclination, by distracting our mind from this subject and thinking of other things.

We should act here as when we chance to see indecent pictures. We erase from our heart the evil impression made on it or we prevent the impression by turning our eyes elsewhere. We cannot avoid seeing such pictures, but we do not have to look at them. So with the mind: it is impossible not to see evil at times, but we should not stop and look at it.

Superiors who have the obligation of judging others should empty their will of all malice so that they have no rancor against those whom they judge. They should, on the contrary, love them tenderly, for this is the only means at their disposal. I have no time to develop this point here.

3. The third means of triumphing over these judgments [of others] consists in judging ourselves as soon as we notice what our mind is up to. This we should do before it has time to go into action. To judge ourselves means to acknowledge before God that we are poor wretched men; it means to humble ourselves profoundly. This method is in reality part of the second.

[Concluding Remarks]

Therefore, be greatly on your guard [not to judge] especially in the matter of perfection, for the principle that
underlies such judgments is wicked. One very common error is that people always judge perfection by its externals. This man, let us say, speaks perfectly about divine things. So people conclude that he is perfect. Another cannot conduct a [spiritual] conversation—he constantly wanders away from the subject—so he is spiritually poor. It's no use to say we esteem him in spite of all, for this is not true. We have a kind of half-contempt for him and yet such a man might be wholly devoted to God in his conduct. Another might not follow our particular way, but give himself whole-heartedly to God in a way that is more difficult. He is good, but we judge that he hasn't the right view of things and in this way we degrade him and put him below others.

In general, we judge too much on the basis of certain gifts, which in no way constitute perfection. Those who possess a little of such gifts judge and condemn others who do not possess them; yet the latter are often more perfect than the former. Examine things carefully and you will see that in matters of perfection the judgers are usually inferior to the judged.

Generally also, those who judge are incapable of judging and those who possess the ability to judge do not want to judge. Ordinarily there is an inclination to judge when the lights of the critic are more imaginary than real.

Persons who, after twenty years of fervor, have reached a degree of perfection that gives them solid peace, and in whom the light of faith is sufficiently strong, usually do not desire to judge others. I say twenty years, for it is now fifteen years that I have been trying to accomplish something and I assure you, in all truthfulness, though you may not wish to believe it, that I am not yet far advanced, and I will need at least that much more time to reach the point from which I would have liked to start.
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I must stop now my friend. I've said what was most important. Please be satisfied with it. I'll not come to see you until I hear from you and will let you know the date.

I beg you to show this long dissertation to no one. This is not a mere wish but I will it absolutely. It is for you alone my friend. Your soul alone must draw profit from it. Put into practice what I have expressed in a theoretical way.

Entirely Yours in Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

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God molds the soul in suffering. Wrong reactions to what others say about oneself.

Letter Eleven  La Neuville, August 21, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 276

Jesus, Mary, Joseph

Dear Brother:

[God Molds Your Soul in Suffering]

Jesus and His Holy Cross are your inheritance, and the Most Holy Heart of Mary is your refuge.

When I told you that I wanted to see you “torn to pieces,” it was because I realized that this was necessary for your sanctification. I don’t think I was mistaken and I believe that Our Divine Master confirms that sentence: your nature is sentenced to death and destruction, but it is a sentence of life and eternal glory for the spiritual man in you.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

Remain, dear friend, before your Divine Master like an anvil before the blacksmith, or rather like a red hot iron which he holds in his tongs. He strikes it over and over again and the iron assumes every shape he wishes it to take. You are still like crude, unwrought iron, rough, hard, and unyielding. Our Lord has to break you and render you supple by means of contradictions and crosses. Don’t worry when your heart is torn by opposition and crosses. I hope that the pain resulting from them will be very strong and penetrating, for it is only then that the full effect intended by the divine wisdom of Jesus will be achieved. No perfection or imperfection is found in either suffering or not suffering those heartbreaks in the life of the senses.

You know very well that your most admirable Model was crushed and torn and overwhelmed by pain and sadness unto death. The only difference between Him and us is that He suffered because it was His will and only to the extent of His will. We, on the contrary, wretched creatures that we are, would like to evade suffering, and our flight from suffering is either dictated by our pride, because we imagine ourselves to be more perfect if we play the part of stoics, or we reject suffering through sensuality and cowardice. But, whatever our reason, we suffer all the same.

So suffer the pain that results from your faults, from your relations with men, from their wickedness, or because God wants it. Whatever the sufferings or their origin and source, suffer to the fullest extent of your natural sensibility. Relish them, drink the chalice to the dregs, but, in the midst of your pains, remain prostrate in your poverty before Jesus, ready to accept any pains He sends you without rejecting even a single twinge.

Maintain peace and calm in your soul and moderation in your imagination. Prevent its activity regarding the object of your pain; avoid growing bitter. If you act that way you will see how useful your sufferings are to you.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

I guess that your principal troubles came from Mr. Letaille and the booklet he wrote.¹ Don’t allow yourself to be disturbed on that account. Take care not to despise those who will continue to persecute you during the coming school year. Don’t harbor ill will toward them; they think that they are doing right and are acting for the love of God. They might even be right. It is possible that there is something reprehensible in your conduct. I don’t want to examine that, for it would be useless. In any case, believe that the Good Master is making use of those things for your sanctification.

[How Not to React to the Others’ Bad Opinion About Oneself]

There are two other things you should avoid most carefully. The first is to counteract and overcome the bad opinion of others by a certain kind of indifference to what they say and think about us, for this is an indifference that has its source in self-love. Be on your guard. Do not exalt yourself when others belittle you, but remain instead humiliated in your interior—not before men but before God. You should disregard men, not through pride which does not care about what they are, say, or do; but your indifference should be founded on humility. This will make you remain habitually prostrate in all humility before God, so that you will not occupy yourself with men or consider anxiously what they say or think about you. When such troublesome thoughts come, the soul should immediately accept them, prostrating itself before God, and express its willingness to suffer everything which our Divine Master might desire.

¹Eugene Dupont was involved somehow in a brochure about François Liévin, written by Letaille. Its author implied that Liévin’s way of union with God was the only valid one. He “seems to say,” Libermann remarked, “that he wrote this brochure on my advice . . . [but] I knew of its existence only when it came off the press” (vol. 6, p. 218). The brochure caused a good deal of commotion and had to be withdrawn from circulation.
The second thing you ought to avoid—and you will if you observe the first point—is letting yourself sink into a certain natural humiliation. Your mind is overwhelmed by some humiliating notion; this affects your soul, you are embarrassed and remain in a state of natural lowliness. This sort of low feelings leads to discouragement. Sometimes it so upsets us that it makes us do all sorts of foolish things, for it troubles our mind, prevents us from having a sane view of things, and it weakens our will. The course I have suggested above is the remedy for that harmful evil.

When you are ready to return [to the seminary] tell me how things stand, so that we may determine what conduct will be suitable for you. I know that Father Icard was not pleased and neither was Father Gallais.

I think it is better for me not to go see Father Couillard. He would imagine that it is for the purpose of making you join our congregation. Moreover, I would expose myself to questioning. For this reason I prefer to remain here in peace, but perhaps it is also my dislike to go out and meet people. Let us place our hope in God; He will help you.

When the bishop of San Domingo¹ comes, it will perhaps be possible to have him ask in person to release you. He will overcome all resistance by storm.

You are acting wisely toward your parents. Hold yourself on the defensive and don’t give clear explanations regarding your vocation; reserve is what is important in your circumstances. . . .

Don’t speak about the things which I asked you to keep secret. Preserve your soul in peace and divine love.

Entirely yours in the holy love of the most lovable Heart of Mary,

Father Francis Libermann

¹At that time there were rumors that a bishop for Haiti had been consecrated at New Orleans (Vol. 3, p. 314).
Remarks about the Rule. Works of zeal during the formative years. His vocation.

Letter Twelve  La Neuville, October 9, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 313

Praised be Jesus and Mary!

Dear Brother:

I am to blame for keeping you so long without a reply. I hope that Our Lord and you also will pardon me.

[Remarks About the Rule]

I have examined your plan for an orderly arrangement of our Rule, but I don’t think it ought to be put in that form. This sort of arrangement is not the kind that is suitable for a Rule. It would be good for a work of theology, but an artful arrangement should not be too evident in a Rule. An orderly arrangement is, of course, necessary, and the more perfect it is the better, for it satisfies the mind and makes the reading easier and more pleasant, but the arrangement ought to be such that the mind is not attracted and absorbed by it. . . .

I do not want to make any changes now. It would not be convenient, for in six or eight years the Rule will have to be revised in accordance with the advice of all the members of the Congregation to give it a permanent form. On that occasion, we’ll make also the necessary changes in the order and sequence of the content. . . .

We shall not be wanting in work. As things look now, Madagascar will be given to us. May it be God’s will that you will be one of its apostles! But you should prepare for
it with a great spirit of humility, gentleness, charity and fervor.

[Works of Zeal During the Formative Years]

Watch over yourself, dear friend, and during the coming year do not allow yourself to be carried away and distracted by external occupations. Live in peace and tranquility. Occupy yourself with your interior life and your studies. You will be teaching catechism and this will give you something in which you can exercise your zeal. Take care not to be carried away by such external occupations; the time for such labors has not yet arrived. Wait until you are prompted by God's will. Do not run ahead [of grace], lest you be led by your natural impulses and suffer harm.

Here is a rule which you would do well to observe. Every time a lively thought concerning something for God's glory appears in your mind, let it remain unexamined for a few days and consider it only when you are no longer attached to it. If we really wish to know God's will and to examine whether something is in accord with God's plans and inspired by His Divine Spirit, we should first put ourselves in a state of perfect indifference in its regard. When this is attained, we then examine the matter with the desire of doing God's will, in a spirit of great piety, mildness, and humility in His presence.

I beg you, dear friend, do not occupy yourself any more with affairs that are foreign to the seminary, with good works that exist outside its walls and with running errands. Excuse yourself the best you can when some one wants to entrust such jobs to you.

I, for my part, shall do my best to give you as few commissions as possible. If you are afraid that the business regarding the statue of the Blessed Virgin gives you too much trouble and disturbs you, entrust this affair to someone
else. We'd be happy if we had it for the Feast of the Presentation, but we can't expect that. We'll have it at least for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Don't worry about the possibility that the price might be raised. True, our expenditures are very great, but I trust that Our Lord will not abandon us.

[His Vocation]

In regard to your vocation, I approve of everything that you have done and I believe that you have acted prudently. As for asking the advice of Father Lesure, I can't say anything. Speaking generally, we should not ask advice from someone we don't know. Abandon this affair into God's hands. If He wants you He will get you, no matter what men might do against His designs. Merely make sure to dispose yourself so that you will faithfully follow His holy designs. Write often, my friend.

Entirely yours in the holy love of Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

P. S. I don't know who might have spoken to the Superior of the Seminary of Mont-aux-Malades about your stay at La Neuville. I did not say a word about it to anyone. . . . I recommend to you all our secrets which you know well!
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

18

Even in our holy desires we must be fully submissive to God. Surrender to God your desire for holiness.

Letter Thirteen November 10, 1842 Vol. 3, p. 334

Jesus, Mary, Joseph

Dear Brother:

[Even in Our Holy Desires We Must be Submissive to God]

Now you see that our Good Master does not always grant us everything we desire. I really wanted to see you during the holidays but Jesus has not seen fit to fulfill my wishes. This is how he weans us sometimes even from the things which we desire for love of Him, so that we may not yield too much to the satisfaction their fulfillment gives us, even when they are pure and holy, for often natural desires mingle with the spiritual. What ought we to do in such circumstances, except remain in our poverty before Him, willing only what He wills and rejoicing in all that is agreeable to Him? This is also the way you should act in your present interior state.

You do not have the interior state which you would like to have. You still feel the promptings of nature. Neither do you find in yourself the surging love [of God] which you'd like to have. Humble yourself at the feet of Jesus. Remain calm, full of confidence in Him and in the goodness of the most Holy Heart of Mary.

You [complain that you] still are in the same [interior] state. There is no harm in that. You have but one thing to do: abandon yourself to the guidance of Jesus, peacefully
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

watching over your interior so that you may be faithful to the divine inspirations of that Good Master. Be on your guard against yielding to anxiety. You want very much to attach yourself fully to Our Lord. Have courage; [in time] your desire will be fulfilled.

Here is the practical conduct I should like you to follow: preserve in your heart the desire of belonging entirely to Jesus. Constantly aim at that goal, but, while tending toward it, expect everything at all times from His divine goodness and not from your own efforts nor even from your violent prayers.

[Surrender Your Desire for Holiness to God]

You should put yourself in a state of holy and loving interior patience. Open your heart before Our Lord and let Him see your needs. Having shown Him, as it were, the wounds of your soul, and its nakedness and poverty, be content with casting a longing glance toward Him. Preserve that desire in your heart and, from time to time during the day, cast a glance at Jesus. All this must be done without many words, even interior words, and without violent efforts to produce those sentiments and desires.

The manifestation of your desires should not only be gentle and gracious as I have explained, but it should be humble as well. In those desires you should consider yourself most unworthy to raise your eyes to Our Lord and unworthy to expose your needs to Him in that familiar and loving way. The manifestation of your desires must also be full of complete submission to God’s will, who has been pleased to let you drag yourself in your wretchedness until now. Add to it a true childlike confidence, and you may rest assured that you will be heard, even in part, without suffering difficulty.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

Ask that you may have your heart glued, as it were, to the Heart of your Master and, while asking this favor, cling immediately to Him. This should not be done with the eagerness of a feverish person who trembles when pressing his lips to the cup, but with the gentleness and peacefulness of a child who rests on the bosom of his mother. Be, as it were, without movement or life, so that Jesus alone may vivify and animate you. Moderate any violence, or rather that constriction, that tightness and tenseness of your desires. Give yourself to Our Lord by means of your will; desire the things you need but at the same time do not absolutely want them. He who desires is a little like a poor man who asks for an alms without having any right to it; his prayer is mild and humble. But he who wants those goods, resembles a workman who demands the wages due to him; he asks but, while asking, wants his money absolutely.

Never occupy yourself with the future: “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” I hope you will persevere to the end. Give yourself to Jesus and Mary; the peace of Our Lord will be with you: “peace unto men of good will.”

Be gently watchful so as not to become dissipated by external occupations. Fulfill your functions as “chaplain” with peace and gentleness and in a spirit of faith.

Adieu, dear brother.

Wholly yours in the most holy charity of Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN
Crosses are more fruitful than youthful fervor. Let Jesus do in you what He wants. Attitude toward others. Words of consolation.

Letter Fourteen

July 26, 1843

Vol. 4, p. 274

Dear Brother:

May the divine mercy of Jesus constantly increase in your soul! Don’t worry, my friend, I understood perfectly what you wanted to tell me. You didn’t give me a perfect explanation of all that is taking place in your soul, but you did tell me enough for our Master in His divine goodness to make me see what is the main part of it.

[Crosses are More Fruitful than Youthful Fervor]

You are right in saying that your present state is for the purpose of purifying your soul from pride and freeing you from all self-seeking in your actions and relations with others and from your natural activity.

I tell you in all sincerity, dear friend and beloved son, that your letter fills me with joy in the presence of Our good Master—the joy of seeing the condition to which God’s divine goodness has brought you. It is not because I behold very great perfection in your state of soul, but I clearly see the Cross of Jesus and His divine hand fashioning your soul.

O no, my friend! Never say, “This is enough!” Jesus, our good Lord, is with you in your interior tribulation. It is He who has sustained you in the past and He will continue to sustain you always. Don’t fear! He will not allow you to fall: “He has given His angels charge of you.”
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

would give all the beautiful fervor of your first two years [in the seminary] in exchange for one week of your crosses.

Remain prostrate before Our Lord, allowing Him to pierce and consume your soul, to overwhelm it, and to do with it as He pleases. Even when anguish overwhelms you, remain as having no movement, no life, no desire, or thought [of your own], remain as if you did not exist, to permit Him to do absolutely everything He desires in you and with you. Whatever your anguish, whatever the cause of your trouble, remain dead, as it were, before Jesus. Surrender to Him and allow Him to act for His glory, accomplishing His will at any cost—to your detriment or your destruction if this were His wish.

[Let Jesus Do in You Whatever He Wants]

What does it matter if a poor wretch is overwhelmed, crushed by the divine power of Jesus, provided His glory and His adorable Will be accomplished? Deliver yourself then to whatever divine action He wishes to exercise in you. And, while abandoning yourself to Him, forget your wretched self, forget what is good or bad for you, your joy, your sorrow, your peace and your anguish.

One thing alone ought to occupy your mind, namely, that Jesus may do with you and in you absolutely everything He wishes, for His glory, for the fulfillment of the eternal designs of His Heavenly Father. Death, ruin, destruction, annihilation for everything in you that is opposed to the accomplishment of that divine and adorable will of the Father, fulfilled by the Son; and for all that offers resistance to the pure and holy operations of the Divine Spirit! Of course, this implies suffering, [like grain that is] being broken, ground and crushed under a millstone. You were by nature greatly inclined to evil: proud, very self-confident, excessively active, and relying too much on yourself in the things of God. This nature of yours has to be overwhelmed;
it is presently being crushed and it is my hope that it will be crushed even more.

In this way Jesus will triumph and establish the reign of His love in your poor soul that is so dear to Him. In the meantime you are and will continue to [feel desolate] "like a lonely sparrow on the housetop." All consolation, all help will be wanting and gone. Jesus Himself is in hiding, but He is hidden in the depths of your heart, unknown to your soul. From there He will sustain you and make you pass safely and unharmed through this deep valley of darkness.

Your poor reason, which last year was eager to rule and dominate, will step down and surrender. Being plunged into darkness, it is forced to realize its utter lowliness, wretchedness, weakness, its nullity, its incapacity. Jesus alone will reign in you. All creatures will disappear and be like nothing in His divine presence. You see, dear friend, how well our Master knows how to humble whatever wishes to exalt itself in His presence. How mighty is His mercy!

[Attitude Toward Others]

I approve greatly of your not speaking [to others] about what is going on in your soul. At most, tell Father Pinault about it, and even this is not necessary. You ought to seek strength and support in Jesus and Mary alone. Be on your guard, however, against having contempt for men, against assuming a certain attitude of independence which springs from self-love. Put yourself below all. Consider yourself a poor man in God's presence. In practice, forget men, that is, have recourse to Jesus alone, but do not act this way as a consequence of judging, saying to yourself, e.g., that you do not need men. Make use of men when circumstances require it to give yourself completely to our Divine Master, but do not think of them when your soul feels capable of abandoning itself to Jesus. When something out
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

of the ordinary occurs, consult men, but put your confidence in Jesus and not in the one whom you consult through love of Him and to do His divine will.

[Words of Consolation]

I don’t think that Father Pinault considered you to be, [as you say,] “a man who is on the way to perdition and who does not realize it.” If this were his opinion he would have spoken to me about it, but he did not say one word along that line, when your name came up in connection with Miss Guillarme. But he said nothing, absolutely nothing unfavorable about you. That thought might have entered your mind when you became horrified by the sight of your soul’s interior condition. This statement that “you are a man on the way to perdition” is, as you say yourself, neither “entirely true nor very true.” It is not even partly true! You are in a state of mercy, not in one that calls for God’s condemnation. It is a state of grace, and not one of a soul whom God has abandoned, a state of purification, not one of decadence.

Be fully reassured, my dear confrere. If I were bold enough to ask some favor for myself from the Divine Savior, I would ask to have your condition, for I am very much in need of it.

Walk in all purity, simplicity, and humility before the Divine Master. Do not try to “re-establish contact” with Him. Always approach Him in an attitude of prostration, reduced to nothing, having no mind, will, or life [of your own], desiring that He may be the absolute Ruler in you and over you. Don’t worry in fear that you may scandalize your fellow seminarians.... Be peaceful and open and

1 A pious lady who was mentally somewhat unbalanced and the center of controversy among the clergy. Father Libermann tried to give her spiritual direction, but had to proceed secretly lest he jeopardize his own work.
have a certain gaiety in your relations with others. Act in such a way that no one will notice your interior afflictions.

You do well to keep busy; this is a good thing in your present state of soul. Teaching catechism is an excellent work. Try to sanctify those little souls whom the Master entrusts to you. Sanctify yourself for them, “that they may also be sanctified in truth.”

I free you from the burden of doing errands for me, except when I have something in regard to Miss Guillarme. You know what I already told you: her great virtue, her special grace, is the simplicity of the dove, but she seems to be lacking the prudence of the serpent—I mean spiritual prudence, for I think she has good judgment. It is precisely on this account that I shall need you. . . .

May Jesus and Mary be everything for your soul.

Entirely yours in their holy love,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

19

We must avoid undue haste in evaluating the spiritual life of others.

Letter Fifteen August 3, 1843 Vol. 4, p. 283

J. M. J.

Dear Brother:

... The letter [of the Superior of the Junior Seminary of Rouen] which you sent me does not tell me much. I read it twice but found only vague things in it. I was certainly not predisposed in favor of something miraculous,
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

for I neglected to go and see that poor woman\(^1\) during my two journeys to Paris. It was only the third time that I paid a visit to her, and I did it for fear that she might turn out badly, or at least might take a wrong direction.

I have seen her three times and have questioned her in every way. I found faults, as I have already told you—I still see some in her letters—but until now I have not discovered anything that could be interpreted as a "dangerous illusion." Neither do I find that she suffers from a general illusion which influences all the rest. Here and there I noticed a little self-love, but saw it to be rarely at the source of her conduct. It forms part of the faulty way in which she acts, as I explained to you, but I did not see that it influenced her entire spiritual conduct.

You know that it is on account of these defects that I have postponed judgment in her case. This is why I want her to make a retreat under my direction. This is also why I believe that no one has the right to condemn her after a single conversation with her.

\[\text{[Conditions That Must Be Fulfilled Before We Can Judge Someone's Spiritual Life]}\]

In order to know a soul and pronounce on its condition it is necessary:

1. Not to be misled by any prejudice or predisposition for or against the person.

2. To preserve toward her a neutral kind of charity, being neither too credulous to believe the good, nor too hasty in suspecting the presence of evil.

3. Not to pronounce a judgment too quickly, but remain peacefully before God, listening, seeing everything, consol-

\(^1\)Miss Guillarme. See footnote to preceding letter.
ing, sustaining that soul, speaking to her—sometimes with firmness but without ever discouraging her, at other times gently but without flattering her—praying and listening to God. When we pronounce a judgment too quickly, we always err, even when we happen to be right, for even then our judgment is based on chance, and our mind lacks a proper basis for pronouncing judgment.

4. We must have had a chance to see and hear the person in question.

[Do Not Lightly Accept or Reject What Comes From Respectable Sources]

Although the Superior of the Junior Seminary does not seem to have followed all those rules, we should not, on that account, reject his words and his opinion. He is a wise, pious and respectable man. He is not one who acts in a haphazard way. Try therefore to find out what he knows and on what he bases his judgment; also from whom he got the information. If he tells you nothing but vague things, I don't think these are sufficient to serve as a foundation for the unfavorable judgment about her, and for believing a greater evil than what we ourselves might have discovered.

Judging from what the Superior of the Junior Seminary says, he obtained, so it seems, information so positive that no doubt was left in his mind about the evil condition of that poor soul. Try to find out what that information is, and we can then examine whether they are facts or fancy. Some of the information may have come from the pastor of Argenteuil. Even if this worthy priest told you the most positive things against Miss G[uillarme], do not yet pronounce judgment on her.

I plan to bring her soon to Amiens (in secret) to make a retreat. I shall then be able to examine her soul more
thoroughly. After the retreat, if the Good Lord makes me know her true condition, I'll inform you about it.

I should like to get these details gathered by the Superior, before her retreat; try to send them to me as soon as possible. In any case, I am determined not to abandon that good soul who is so sorely afflicted. I don't have much else to tell. I ought to have a long conversation with you. If you can get your parents' permission to spend a few days with us at La Neuville, it will give me great pleasure. I think this will be very useful for your soul in its present condition. I received the package.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

Father Francis Libermann

Your journey to La Neuville would be very useful for both of us.

20

Disregard what people say about you. Principles concerning the judgment of others. Attitude toward people in whom we see evil. Parental opposition to his vocation. Vocations are not to be forced.

Letter Sixteen  La Neuville, August 13, 1843  Vol. 4, p. 308

Jesus, Mary, Joseph

Dear Brother:

[Disregard What People Say About You]

I still owe you a reply to your previous letter. It is my opinion, my friend, that you are too sensitive to what men are saying and too afraid of making a mistake in regard to that poor soul [Miss Guillarme]. Restore your confidence
and cast out your worries. You never made any positive pronouncement about the state of her soul and you have drawn nothing but profit and strength for your own soul from your dealings with her.

Suppose for a moment that you did make a mistake about her. What would it matter? The world and even devout persons will say that you are an ignoramus, that you love the extraordinary and are easily taken in. Frankly, I must admit that I myself am hurt when such a thing hits me. My wretched pride and my excessive sensitivity are deeply wounded and torn, but should I worry on that account? So much the better for me if I am beaten; so much the better if people have a bad opinion of me and despise me. Only one thing is worthy of my attention, namely, that in the midst of all such trouble my soul remains united to God and to Him alone.

[Principles Regarding the Judgment of Others]

I beg you to adopt the following principles, which every soul that belongs to God ought to be guided by in its relations with others:

1. Do not judge anyone except when you have authority over them and are obliged to do so, and then judge them with charity.

2. Before examining a person, set aside all prejudices. From the very start, make a spirit of great charity prevail. Believe the good rather than the evil, and give a good interpretation to things rather than a bad one.

3. When you come across something that seems to indicate the presence of evil, be on your guard against making a definite judgment, but follow up the person and submit the case to a more thorough scrutiny.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

4. When you actually discover something evil, trace it to its source. This procedure is very illuminating; sometimes evil is much less than we expected, and, moreover, we may discover the means to cure it.

5. When you come face to face with something that is truly evil—and you should not make this judgment until you see it very clearly—it ought not to prevent you from being on your guard against [the promptings of] your own nature which is full of malice. We are always inclined to see evil, to punish and detest it when we find it in others, but as soon as we ourselves are involved, we judge things differently. We are always inclined to absolve ourselves.

Divine grace and the light of the Holy Spirit act in a totally different manner. The Divine Spirit is charity personified; He does not criticize nor prompt criticism. He keeps us occupied with ourselves and our own wretchedness; He inclines us to believe more easily the good than the evil in others. When He makes us see evil in our neighbor, it is not with that sentiment of horror, displeasure, and antipathy toward the person in whom the evil is found. On the contrary, we are then animated with affectionate compassion and strive to remedy the evil in our brothers with gentle kindness.

[Attitude Toward Persons in Whom We See Evil]

My friend, it should not be hard to have compassion, to have special affection and tenderness for persons in whom we find evil, and especially for those who suffer such evils as a result of illusions. We have merely to cast a glance at ourselves. Poor wretched creatures that we are! We are full of base desires, filled with moral ugliness, and we are lucky if others deign to pity us and to bear with us.

Have we never suffered from illusions? Shall we never again fall for them? Who has delivered us from them in the
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

past? Who will deliver us from them in the future? Surely not our own strength, which is but a broken reed, but only the goodness of our Sovereign Master. He had compassion on us and still has pity with us every day; otherwise we would perish a thousand times over. How wretched we are! God is good, tender and full of compassion toward us, and yet we don’t want to be compassionate toward others!

Nevertheless, compassion is what God wants us to have. He ordered the Israelites to have compassion on slaves and strangers because they themselves had been slaves in Egypt, and it was He who had delivered them from their servitude.

I myself have been guilty, very guilty in this respect, and such a fault is a very grave one for one who has been overwhelmed by God’s graces. I have judged much more than I have sought to excuse others. This is why I am trying now to be most careful. It was necessary for God to make me feel very keenly the evil of such judgments by letting men judge me. I am still proud and I still feel very keenly the barbs and thrusts of men. Yet I feel such joy when those things happen to me that it is like having found a treasure.

It is a treasure! For, by it, we learn to curb the evil tendencies of our nature and follow grace with docility. Don’t judge, dear friend, except when God wants you to judge, and then do as I have told you. Be inclined to see nothing but good in others rather than to believe evil, unless you see it clearly. This inclination will be a charitable tendency which doesn’t make you prejudiced but leaves you free to judge one way or the other as the case may require. You must be an indifferent observer but also one who is animated by charity. Don’t forget one last principle, namely, that we should never judge anyone at first sight. Such a judgment is a hasty judgment. I said “at first sight,” but I can say as much of the sixth or the eighth time. You ought to proceed very slowly.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

The first judgments will usually be false, either entirely or in part. Even if the judgment is not without foundation, it can only be based on conjectures—hence it rests on chance rather than certainty. A rash judgment ordinarily arises from presumption, from a certain good opinion of ourselves, from a lack of charity or from a certain itch to occupy ourselves with others and even to put ourselves above others. I tell you these things, not to accuse the good ladies who passed judgment on Miss Guillarme. It seems quite clear to me that I have no evil thought against them and, in making these statements, I was not referring to those good people. . . .

[Parental Opposition to His Vocation]

I am sorry to have caused grief to your good mother. If the words in my letter were a little hard, it was wholly against my intention and contrary to my heartfelt affection for her. I had a great desire to give her the consolation she needed. The Good Lord has not wished this result. He has His own designs. The thing that pains me in this is that I caused her sorrow whereas it was certainly not my intention to do so. . . .

I have to admit that I didn’t understand very well what your mother asked me in her letter. She told me that, regardless of cost, she would be resigned [regarding your vocation to the missions] as soon as she clearly saw the will of God (or something like that). Now this is a resignation that yields only to necessity. It is the usual kind of resignation of mothers, even of those who are very Christian. . . . She also said that she would not give you permission to leave [for the missions] until she had evident proofs [of your vocation for such work]. . . . That is more or less what I remember of her letter.
I replied to her, without wishing to make a decision, that I had perceived the ordinary signs of vocation in you, and that I did not want to make a decision, that all kinds of precautions were necessary, that we did not at all proceed hastily, that even now the matter had not yet been decided, and that a year of novitiate would be required to enable me to state my opinion. I was afraid that she herself wanted to decide your vocation, so I urged her not to occupy herself with it because a mother easily makes mistakes, and so forth.

I have no doubt spoken too harshly. Don't worry! If the Good Lord has taken a hand in it, He has done it for a good reason. If it is through my fault, this will not thwart God's plans for you.

[\textit{Vocations Should Not Be Forced}]

If I desire to see you it is solely because of my interest in your spiritual life and not at all because of your vocation. That matter I leave entirely in God's hands. More than ever I am firmly determined not to do anything to decide a vocation. God alone must send laborers into His vineyard. If men believe the contrary [namely, that I want to force vocations] this is not an evil; it will teach us to remain in our little corner and not to long for reputation and the esteem and affection of men.

So much the better [if they misjudge us]! Such trials are as precious as gold and we cannot have too many of them. They teach us not to judge others too readily, because we see how easily others err in their judgments of us. I don't think that I'll be able to go on to Rouen. Bishop Barron\textsuperscript{1} will soon come to see us. Moreover, it would not be proper for me to go to Rouen since your parents and the Superior of the Junior Seminary do not feel kindly toward me at

\footnote{\textsuperscript{1}The Vicar Apostolic of the Vicariate of the Two Guineas.}
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

present. They could and would have to think that I would come to mislead you. If you are not able to come here, let us submit to God's will. This ought to take the place of everything else.

Adieu, dear brother.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN
missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary

21

Miss Guillarme: an extraordinary case of spiritual life¹

Letter Seventeen October 12, 1843 Vol. 4, p. 392

Dear Brother:

I shall not satisfy you completely at this time... regarding the retreat of Miss Guillarme... I wrote you about her, but the letter must have gone astray.... So I will repeat some things about her retreat....

[Miss Guillarme's Retreat]

I began by carefully examining her case in God's presence. I came to the conclusion that the one thing I ought to try to achieve by means of her retreat would be to establish that good lady in her state of mental prayer.² Here are my reasons:

¹Although this letter will not interest the average reader, it may be of help to priests who have to give spiritual guidance to holy but strange characters.

²By a person's "state of mental prayer" Father Libermann means the habitual attitude of a person toward God when he or she in fervent prayer feels really in contact with God. This personal state varies from one individual to another and is subject to modification according as the soul advances in perfection.

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First, I wanted to find out the precise nature of her interior state. This I considered to be of the utmost importance. I feel certain that as long as she is willing to remain before God in that interior state of soul, she will not become the prey of her pernicious illusions or at least she will not remain their slave for very long, nor will she have that tenseness and rigidity of will, for if she happens to commit a fault she will soon return to her state of mental prayer.

My second reason was that if I had the opportunity to study her when her mind was calm and in the supernatural state God desires for her, I would more easily discover what was the source of her faults and, especially, I could more readily make her realize that they were truly faults. When she is out of what I call her state of mental prayer, it is impossible to make her see her faults.

The first topics I proposed to her for her meditation were a combination of mental discourse, affective prayer, and contemplation. I learned that she was in a state of contemplative prayer which was very interior. I had expected this, for it seemed impossible to me that a soul that was so pure, that had served God for such a length of time with great fervor and generosity, and had received so many graces, would not yet have attained the contemplative state. After that I gave her only topics for contemplation and her soul let itself be molded like wax. She became profoundly absorbed [in contemplation] and spent days on end in it. She could have remained easily for two months in retreat. The two weeks she had passed like a dream. I did not remain inactive in respect to her mental prayer but sought to make it practical, while making her remain in her personal state of mental prayer.

During the last two days of her retreat, the subjects of her meditation were: self-sacrifice, devotion to the Most
Blessed Sacrament, and lastly, Jesus living in Mary and Mary living in Jesus. These subjects gave me the opportunity to point out her principal faults and the way she could combat them.

[Evaluation of Her Spiritual Life]

Strange to say, although this good soul has really reached the state of profound contemplative prayer, she remains nevertheless in the stage of "life of the senses." This is something I've never encountered before. All her difficulties and faults are the result of the fact that she is still anchored in this way in the senses. . . . Her life is guided by instinct and not by reason. I mean that in all her conduct she is not guided or prompted to action by a consideration or view of reason but by a kind of sensitivity which acts in her as an instinct, taste, or sentiment. She is repelled and withdraws when she meets something that is repugnant to that instinct or sentiment, when she feels a distaste for it or disgust. On the contrary, when objects please her and attract her sensible instinct, she ardently pursues them and it is this attraction or distaste that in great part determines her choice.

She has both a natural and a supernatural "instinct." When grace touches her, it acts on her [supernatural "instinct"]. When this happens, she is carried away by it and capable of practicing the noblest virtues and highest heroism according to the "form" impressed on her "instinct." She does not reflect or reason, but sees God, loves Him with all her heart, and follows Him blindly and enthusiastically.

On the other hand, when she is acting on the natural level, she is carried away in a similar fashion, but never without an interior struggle, for Our Lord does not give up His place in her soul. Then come the illusions: since her will is forcefully attracted and her reason is not accustomed to guide but only to receive impressions from her instinctive
movement, her mind sees things only according to the received impression. This is why she sincerely believes that she is doing right when in fact she is doing wrong. It is the reason also why she commits the most foolish and senseless mistakes.

The difference between the natural action and the supernatural action on her instinct is this: the former contains something troublesome and painful while the latter is gentle and mild. The natural action is accompanied by trouble and struggle, but the supernatural action is nearly always without any trace of struggle. In the latter case struggle is out of the question because the entire impression and guiding principle of the lady's action resides in her feeling and "instinct."

As soon as an evil impression influences her instinct, she is immediately attracted to evil; if it is good, it leads her to good. This is why that good lady has no acquired virtues. All the virtues she possesses are infused. She has never been capable of acquiring virtues. Our Lord must love that soul very much to conduct her in this way, as by the hand, and preserve her from evil, for you realize that, living in such a condition, she is in constant danger.

Another distinction to be made here is that on the natural level her will is tense, rigid, and arid; and her mind is upset, harsh, and inflexible.

What is important for Miss Guillarme then is that she remain in her personal state of mental prayer. If she does that, she will never be taken unawares by sense impressions on the natural level. These impressions make her become harsh and inflexible both interiorly and toward the object that causes the impression; her mind is darkened and her will becomes rigid. This is why in that condition she is terribly obstinate and, as it were, shut up in herself, incapable of opening her heart to those who, she suspects, would combat that instinctive impression.
Her instinctive supernatural impression, on the other hand, makes her rebound into her interior near Our Lord. It unites her to Him and makes her act with a lively and even clear faith—a strong faith that is animated by ardent charity. For this movement is immediately transmitted to the intellect by the action of faith and to the will by the operation of the virtue of charity. Her union with, and adherence to God is then powerful and she would be capable of accomplishing the greatest and the most difficult things. Literally nothing would be beyond her.

This goes to show that, although she has reached the contemplative stage, she has nevertheless not acquired one spark of the "spirit of understanding." When she is in a supernatural condition, it is wisdom and not understanding that is her portion, for she does not have the habit of acting by a faith that is pure and independent of instinctive impressions, whereas other souls that have reached her contemplative state have a faith that is independent of such instincts and sentiments. It is my opinion that the reason for her state of "instinctiveness" is the fact that she has not acquired the habit of remaining in her true state of mental prayer.

She has often received bad spiritual direction. Her directors often made her abandon her state of mental prayer. Her activity came in spurts and it disturbed her contemplation too much; I mean external activity disturbed her interior activity. She poured herself out also too much "in the senses" and fed her instinctive sentiment. What she ought to do is to get the habit of remaining interiorly near Our Lord amidst her activities and always return to Him to attach herself once more to Him.

She should also become familiar with the spirit of sacrifice, accepting and relishing impressions of pain, distaste, and disgust, prostrating herself before God and in Our Lord Jesus Christ.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

What I have said may help you understand the singular and faulty features you have noticed in her. When those two ladies arrived, her sensible instinct was ruffled and there was a struggle; her mind was embarrassed and then—well you know what happened.

That’s enough! My dissertation has become rather long and is probably also somewhat obscure. If you still see difficulties in the case, tell me, for they could help me to see clearer in her case.

When all is said and done, I believe that her condition is good—very good even. She is not at all in a state of “illusion,” although she may have erroneous ideas regarding certain points and is sometimes caught in passing by shorter or longer illusions that are more or less dangerous. We have reasons for hoping that, in spite of everything, she will gradually correct those faults if she remains in her state of mental prayer. If she corrects her ways, she will probably attain a very high degree of perfection, so that, in spite of all her defects, she seems to be more pleasing to God than you and I and many other people like ourselves who “reason about such things.”

Adieu, dear brother. My soul is always yours in Jesus and His divine love.

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

P. S. Sorry! I forgot that you’re on retreat.
Libermann consoles a soul which experiences the dark night of the senses.

Letter Eighteen

La Neuville, December 4, 1843

Dear Brother:

[Your Present Darkness Leads to the Divine Light]

I shall begin with the last sentence of your letter. You tell me you are no longer what you were when you were a seminarian at Issy. This is very true, and it's time for you to be different. There is a time for laughter and a time for tears. It is absolutely necessary for you to pass through your present state. I assure you in all sincerity that this state gives me true joy. Be faithful, dear friend, so that the Good Master may be able to mold you. Yours is the ordinary way by which He leads souls whom He loves in a special way; He makes them pass through this stage to bring about their sanctification. Even if it were not the way He acts toward the rest of His children, He would nevertheless have to act this way in your case, for your nature is terribly active and has to be tamed by means of being left in darkness, embarrassment, troubles, temptations, and trials of every kind.

After you have passed through this stage, your soul will be established in a state of solid peace; your spiritual habits will be more assured, more calm, more consistent, more uniform, more even before God. You will be more convinced of the evil that exists in you and the little good you possess. You will realize your weakness and incapacity.
Even if the conviction is not keenly felt, it will be real, interior, and practical and you will be more detached from yourself. You will gradually become accustomed to forget yourself or avoid pre-occupation with yourself. In a word, you will thus be empty of self, and Our Lord will occupy the place that is left vacant. You will lose your natural defects of temperament and character, and grace will mold and fashion you. All this will take place, not in the senses, but will be a solid and practical habit of the soul. You will be established in that holy way of perfection according to the degree of your fidelity to all the divine graces which crucify you at this time.

[It is Time to Realize How Imperfect You Are]

You tell me that "you are most wretched ..." So much the better! Humiliate yourself before God. Drag yourself before Him in all your poverty. Learn to realize how wretched you are. Learn to serve God no longer as prompted by personal ambition.

Realize, my dear friend, that until now your views and desires regarding your sanctification did not possess the purity they should have had. This is why God's goodness now does some deep plowing in your soul. Hitherto, God has let you see only a little of the riches of His grace and favors. This gave you lofty ideas and you devised great projects for your sanctification. This you did according to the will of your divine Master, but you mingled with it your own ambition and hoped that you would be better than others. To the pure views of your Master you added the impurity of the love of your own excellence and superiority.

All the same, it is necessary that Jesus alone should reign in your dear soul. He shall reign there, beloved brother, but it will be at the cost of your self-love, and your heart of
flesh will be torn and your self-love destroyed. Cast yourself before God and allow His hand to press heavily on all that is still defective in your soul. He is merely using his customary means. Don't be afraid, you are not in an evil state. Be docile under His hand and bear peacefully the present distressing situation. God's hand strikes only for the purpose of curing you. He demolishes only so that He may build up again. Be flexible and humble under His divine guidance. Be willing to remain in your distress as long as He desires, to remain in darkness and uncertainty. Simply put your confidence in Jesus and Mary. Pray that they may always consider you as belonging to them.

[You Have Not Lost the Faith]

You say that "you have no faith." This is not true, dear friend. You are merely lacking the sensitive feeling of faith. On the contrary, your present condition will be instrumental in establishing you in a firm and unshakable faith. Until now your faith has been very imperfect; your soul exercised its acts of faith only through the senses and received impressions of faith only through them. But the senses are very imperfect agents, and they were at the root of the imperfections and impurities of self-love which you mingled with your works. The senses need purification. To some degree they are now directed toward God, but they still contribute something of their own meanness. They have taken this inclination and direction because they were influenced by that holy faith. But now divine Wisdom is doing more. It purifies your senses and makes them let your soul act with pure faith, while hitherto the senses were an obstacle to this pure faith.

That purification is accomplished through terrible darkness, loneliness, and so on. Submit to everything with
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

love and humility, and light will come after darkness. But then it will no longer be a light that is darkened by the fumes of the senses and of self-love. It will be the pure light of faith in the Master.

[Let God Act in You as He Wills]

Courage and patience! Let Him act. Remain before Him like a dead man. You "have no fervor," that is, no sensible fervor, for your senses are entirely deprived of that feeling of fervor or zeal. This privation is a temporary suspension which is proper to your present state, and your disgust and repugnance toward devout things are due to the same causes. Your present condition does not require that you push yourself Godwards, as it were, but that you remain before Him like a beast of burden so that He may charge you with heavy loads and strike you while you do nothing to escape from His hands.

You have done well to suspend your penitential practices. They are not suitable for you in your present condition and would only lead to discouragement. Do not occupy your mind with the examination of the reasons that have prompted you to give them up. You need not find this out, for at this moment you are not able to discover what is taking place in you and still less able to discern the root of your actions. Be content with having good desires and the will to belong to God. And even in this you ought not to examine yourself too much to learn whether you have such a good will. Don't torment yourself, if you think you don't have it, for you are certainly not in a position to find the answer. You are not able to "remain recollected" as you call it, but you may believe and hope quite firmly that you still belong to God and that you will continue to be His through His mercy.

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[Revival of Self-Love]

Don't be astonished, and don't torment yourself, when you witness an increase of that fever of self-love. It will follow you everywhere. The reason is this: your senses (by which I mean your sensible self) are sick. Here is the nature of your sickness: until now the sensible portion of your nature participated more or less in the divine gifts which Jesus had placed in your soul, but it has now been gradually weaned and your senses are completely dry. They are famished and suffer complete privation, and this privation makes them excessively restless. In this restlessness and effervescence, they follow the ordinary course; not finding nourishment in spiritual graces, they fall upon self-love and here they find something they can devour. Here lies the source of that constant self-complacency and its accompanying imaginations.

Don’t worry about them and don’t make violent efforts to get rid of those imaginations and phantasms—you will not be able to get rid of them. What you should do is to renounce them with all your heart and will and frequently to disavow them during the day. Then despise them and gently turn your attention elsewhere, peacefully distracting your mind from them. They are unimportant, and I promise you that they will not last. Those foolish ideas hardly imply any guilt; they may even be entirely without any guilt on your part, and they will not harm your soul.

Imagined humiliations will trouble you more than real ones. The reason is that all their self-love, which frightens you so much, exists only in your senses and your imagination. Your will abhors them, although it is not yet perfectly cured of them—but it will be cured when this trial is over. It follows from this that when your imagination pictures humiliations, it inevitably also pictures at the same time a great horror for those humiliations; hence you experience
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

greater fear and trouble in your senses than if you had been actually humiliated instead of merely imagining that you were.

Moreover, during those representations of the imagination, your will remains, as it were, in a state of paralysis. It is unable to counteract the effect produced in the imagination and the senses. The only thing it can do is to silence the imagination, to make it stop the pictured situation, but sometimes this takes time. Hence this feeling of fear, of horror, and the like, in regard to the humiliations, exists without the will taking part in it and without its having the power to resist such sentiments directly.

It happens sometimes that one is excited by those fears in imaginary scenes, whereas in experiences of actual humiliations one remains calm and peaceful. At other times one is affected by a real experience of humiliation, although one suffers less than when one imagines a humiliation; but the will then resists because it is not paralyzed. Finally, at other times the force of the impression made on the senses, even in an actual and real occurrence, is so great that the will is paralyzed and has no longer any power of action.

Whatever the case, remain full of confidence, in peaceful repose, before God. Those impressions, far from harming you, will be the occasion for much good for your soul.

[Additional Counsels]

I realize that you don’t like to receive Holy Communion without preparation in your present situation. However, don’t worry about it, for you are hardly able to prepare yourself in the way you desire. Receive with confidence and tell Mary to prepare your soul. Go to Communion with confidence and don’t skip even a single occasion. Our Lord is with you, dear brother, in the midst of your miseries and your servitude.

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You will always do well to tell your director [of conscience] what troubles you. This will always give you assurance in your ordinary conduct. Even if you’re afraid that he doesn’t understand you, it won’t do any harm. You can at least tell him the things that concern the ordinary practice [of Christian life] and any troubles of conscience. If he does not explain the reasons for his decisions, he will at least tell you what to do or avoid.

You are not going “from bad to worse.” Be patient with yourself, and trust in the goodness and love of Jesus and Mary for you. You belong to Jesus and will always belong to Him.

Adieu, dear brother.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN
missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary

23

The effect of infidelity to God’s call. Its source.

Letter Nineteen {April 5} Good Friday, 1844 Vol. 6, p. 159

J. M. J.

Dear Brother:

Your letter moved me to tears, for it made me realize how much affliction God’s goodness sends you to make you return to the road He wants you to follow to your sanctification and the salvation of many. Be faithful from now on, my friend, so that God’s merciful designs may be accomplished in your soul.
LETTERS TO EUGENE DUPONT

[The Effect of Infidelity to God’s Call]

It has always seemed certain to me that your doubts in regard to your vocation, which I have noticed for a long time, were rooted solely in a certain weakness of your life of faith and an attachment to the natural life. They supplied motives that went counter to the true practice of evangelical perfection and many doubts and much incertitude regarding everything that pertained to supernatural life, perfect faithfulness, and the true spirit of holiness.

Since faith was no longer the foundation and unique source of your activity and the soul of all the operations of your mind, you were dominated by purely natural human reason which acted independently of faith, or at least strongly influenced your imagination. Since your mind followed its natural propensities, you were most frequently inclined to laxity and to what was opposed to a life of faith. Your imagination lacked a sensitive impression of a supernatural kind; it was uncertain and had nothing that could attach it to a life of faith. Thus, your natural inclinations were reawakened and strongly influenced your imagination; they dragged it away and prompted it to indulge in views that were purely natural and even wicked. Every time that your will was called to combat the inclinations of your sensible nature, it felt weak and was reluctant to adopt a view of faith which required a sacrifice and an intellectual privation.

I didn’t know what it was that affected your will in that evil way, because I didn’t know whether that sort of infidelity to your vocation had come before or after this weakening of your will, for I continued to consider your condition as a trial sent to you by God. I still consider it to be of that nature. By means of this trial, He desires to establish your soul in the interior disposition which accords with His plan.

It seems to me now that your infidelity to your vocation preceded the weakening of your will and that your trial is
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

a result of it. Because of your infidelity your soul was disjoined, as it were, torn from its attachment to God. You were still holding on to Him but not on the side on which He wanted you to cling to His Will.

[Its Source]

Your will was still good, even very good. You wanted God, you tended toward Him, but not in the way He desired. You made great resolutions, but you would not have had the power to execute them except in a superficial way and only to the extent that your sensible nature was not opposed to it.

You would have been capable, at times, of making great sacrifices, but only when these sacrifices seemed pleasing to your imagination. In other words, your life of faith would have been superficial and subordinate to your sensible life. Your life of faith would not have slowed up at times when your sensible nature was favorably disposed; but whenever unfavorable sense impressions appeared, your life of faith would have been non-existent and you would have followed the dictates of your lower nature—even those that were evil. Your soul then had no life of sacrifice; it was like a tree whose main root is diseased. Such a tree continues to absorb nourishment through lesser roots, but this sap is insufficient to make the tree grow strong. Your soul clung to God, but the chief "root" of your will was sick and your whole life was affected by it.

I formerly thought that the evil resulted entirely from your mind which is inclined to excessive activity. Now I think that the evil sprang entirely from your will as you yourself suggest in your letter. The evil resided in your infidelity, in the disease affecting the principal root which should have kept you united with, abandoned and clinging fully and strongly to God, without any reservations.
LETTERS TO EUGÈNE DUPONT

Your will strongly desired God but it did not want Him from one standpoint—a standpoint that was one of capital importance. You have thus good will—very much so—but the capital root, which is the source of sanctity for you, is lacking. You clung always to God but did not have God's life fully in you. Your intellect was affected because of the evil that affected your will. Your mind clung to God and was submissive to faith but it did not live by faith. Faith was no longer the basis, the principle and the soul of your actions and it was always for the same reason: there was a hard core of opposition to the life of faith; hence faith only partially influenced your life. Moreover, your mind even opposed the impressions of faith as soon as they affected that central core. In this central core your mind rested on itself and on the impressions received by the will which were transmitted to the mind. In this way divine grace and the impulses of faith were arrested, rejected and combated, which explains also the great darkness, agitation, anxieties, and all sorts of disorders in the intellectual part of your nature.

I am inclined to believe that even if you had persevered in your opposition, you would nevertheless have saved your soul. You would have been unhappy and would have committed many faults—especially those of self-love—but sooner or later you would have come back and returned to the way of God, for I think that God's mercy would not have abandoned you.

You plan to return to Europe after you have spent some years in Madagascar seems good and is in perfect accord with my own views. You may firmly promise this [to your parents] . . . , but it is of no importance. Nevertheless, you can mention it to your parents if it helps to console them. I've spoken about it with the Prefect Apostolic of Madagascar. If you can pay him a visit, you'll be greatly encouraged and consoled. . . .
Feel certain at all times that through God's mercy your soul will always be most dear to me in the charity of Jesus and Mary.

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

Missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary

P. S. Father Dalmond, Prefect Apostolic of Madagascar, looks kind of cold and aloof. But in conversation he becomes quite charming. He is a very saintly man.