Libermann's Respect for Persons (Continuation) Libermann and Human Freedom

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LIBERMANNN'S RESPECT FOR PERSONS

"In our day, there is a livelier awareness of the dignity of the human person. More and more people are claiming for man the possibility of acting in terms of his own choices and with full freedom and responsibility - not under pressure or constraint - while still being guided by knowledge of his duty." Those are the opening words of "Dignitatis Humanae", the Second Vatican Council's decree on religious liberty.

Nobody understands man as well as those authentic Christians, the saints. Nobody else has as broad or as correct a vision of man and his dignity.

On April 6, 1976 the Permanent Delegate from Mauritius to the United Nations, a Hindu, presented to his country a bust of Father Laval. In his address to all the notable religious and civil personalities of the Island, the diplomatic corps and the Parliament, he praised Father Laval as "that man who, during his lifetime and since his death, never stopped - and still has not stopped - teaching a lesson of humility, of love for one's neighbor and of the dignity of man." He continued: "I can't keep from thinking that we, members of the United Nations, have been nothing more than poor fellows trying to parody what our nobler predecessors had already proclaimed. Without any doubt, Father Laval was one of the noblest of them all."

At the end of his talk, the speaker expressed his dearest wish: that Father Laval get us to understand "that humility, mutual respect, charity, love of neighbor... are the essential tools, are the examples we can still give to the whole world and are the things that must give meaning to the life of every Mauritian."

Anyone who knows the life of Father Laval can have no doubt about the truth of these words. We can also apply

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1 Speech by His Excellency Mr. Rada Karishna Ramphul, April 6, 1976, cf. also Pentecôte sur le Monde, No. 118, July-August 1976.
them to Father Libermann. Laval and Libermann, who were both taught in the school of Christ who "came to save mankind", both spent their entire lives fighting for the rights of man as a child of God, especially those men who were the most miserable, the weakest, the most abandoned. They loved and respected all men, of every race, on every continent, of every color, in all sorts of conditions. I hope to demonstrate this in this article.

* * *

If you take a superficial look at certain expressions of Libermann; e.g. "God is all, man is nothing", you might form the opinion that he despised humanity. Nothing could be farther from the truth. He has too great an esteem for the human person – body and soul – to be able to despise it. His expressions must be read in the light of his understanding of the Absolute that God is. If God is all, then man must be nothing. But Libermann is also aware that God loved this "nothing" and predestined a marvelous dignity for it, hence he too loves man.

Like St. John whom he quotes, Libermann also has "a strong love for God and great charity towards his neighbor... Perfect charity necessarily leads to charity towards our neighbor. St. John demonstrates this in the following way: he says it is impossible to have the Holy Spirit within us if we do not love our neighbor, because God loves all men, He gave His Son for them and the Son humbled Himself to redeem them. Therefore, if we act according to the movement of the Holy Spirit, we will necessarily love all men; if we don't love them, we do not have that Divine Spirit within us."²

Care for One's Health

Libermann, therefore, loves man as he is, body and soul, since the whole man is the work of God, called to union with God... "Your body belongs to God, just as

² "Écrits Spirituels", "Suppléments", pp. 96-98.
much as your soul does."

Therefore he advises his missionaries "not to ruin their health", "to take a little nap during the day... if sleep overcomes them", "to avoid too much privation", "to tell the superior all their infirmities and fatigues", whenever "it is a question of serious illness."

Libermann writes to a priest who wants to enter the Congregation: "The Rule for the missionaries is sufficiently broad. Missionaries should not be constrained too much. We have no austerity in our Rule; a life of interior perfection; simplicity, charity and zeal should be our chief virtues. We oblige ourselves to poverty and obedience... Our food is the food of the poor, but solid and substantial. A missionary's health is too precious, – it must be maintained."

The same Rule imposes upon superiors the duty of watching over the health of the missionaries: "The superior will take... great care of the health of his missionaries, never giving them heavier burdens than they can bear, and not waiting until they are too worn out before taking care of them."

The commentary on this same article says: "He owes this to his missionaries, who have given themselves entirely to the community, giving up all that belonged to them; they owe it to the good of the Missions, because the accomplishment of that good requires missionaries who can make use of their bodies, their mouths to speak, their lungs to support apostolic endeavors, their feet to run after the lost sheep, their hands to administer the sacraments...; he owes it to the Holy Spirit, since their bodies are the temples of the Spirit and hence instruments which must be re-

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3 Letter of January 26, 1848 to the Community of Dakar, N.D., X, p. 29 (N.D. : Notes et Documents).
5 Letter to Father Le Vavasseur, April 18, 1843, N.D., IV, p. 196.
6 Letter to Father Bessieux, N.D., VIII, p. 297.
7 Règle Provisoire des Missionnaires de Libermann, "La Nais-sance d’un Code de Spiritualité Missionnaire", Pro manuscrito, p. 35.
8 Letter to Father Boulanger, April 17, 1845, N.D., VII, p. 155.
pected, maintained and renewed when they are worn out..."^9

Libermann gives the example himself. He writes to Father Briot, a missionary in Africa: "Don't be impatient in your undertakings... Don't give yourself up imprudently to an over-heated zeal which tends to ruin one's health. What good would it be to gain a few souls for God and lose your health in the process, and thus make yourself useless to a much greater number? To give up one's life for the salvation of one soul is a wonderful thing to do, no doubt about it; but to save one's life for the salvation of one hundred others is still better. Not to be afraid of sickness or of death, – that's the mark of a zealous missionary devoted to God alone; but, to take precautions to keep alive in order to save a greater number of souls, – that's the mark of a missionary who knows how to join perfect prudence to his perfect zeal and his perfect devotedness..."^10

To the community of Dakar he wrote that "as concerns bodily privations", they must follow "what the Rule says; do nothing except in obedience; your body belongs to God just as much as your soul does; you cannot dispose of them without His permission. I want you to get good food that can restore your strength and maintain it until the new Bishop arrives. I shall have a talk with him about this before he leaves here..."^11

Unfortunately, Bishop Truffet did not follow Libermann's recommendations about food. On the contrary, he and the missionaries who lived with him, "in order to live in a more apostolic way and to get closer and closer to the people they had to evangelize, adopted the same diet as the people of the country. They banished bread, meat and wine from their table.

They ate only rice (cooked with water and salt), couscous, manioc, potatoes and yams, with fish once in a while. They drank nothing but water... After six months they all fell sick. On November 23, 1847 Bishop Truffet died.

^9 Règle Provisoire, p. 35.
^10 Letter of June 8, 1845, N.D., VII, p. 194.
Libermann comments: "He was a holy man... but he was too enthusiastic, and his imagination was too active and too impressionable. That's what made him adopt that unfortunate diet which took him to his grave. But, it is God's Will, - may His holy Name be blessed!"

Even though Libermann was able to see the finger of God in this event, - "He wants to be seen alone in his work, and He chose... his servant not to found a beautiful Mission in that country but to sacrifice himself for it and be its intercessor in glory" - still, he blames Bishop Truffet for having made "two mistakes which seriously compromised the Mission... The first mistake was the one which cost him his life..."  

On January 26, Libermann wrote to Father Arragon: "I hope you have changed the food. If you haven't done it yet, you must do it at once: bread, meat and wine, within reason, and according to the demands of the climate."

As a matter of fact, Libermann sent out his missionaries not only to lift the native peoples out of their moral misery, but also to help them materially, since "those poor people are the most unfortunate on earth... These people, so unfortunate in the supernatural order, are equally so in the natural order (...). They are burdened with work from morning to night, exposed to the hottest climate and burning sun in summer and the beating rains in winter. They are cruelly beaten for the slightest faults... They are treated like beasts of burden..."

He also deplores the way these poor slaves are fed: "Their food consists of a root they call sweet potato, cooked in water with salt, and rice cooked in water serves as their bread. That is their only food day after day. They get some meat once a year. They cannot earn anything for themselves... to obtain any comfort or satis-

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12 Letter to the Community of Bourbon, February 18, 1848, N.D., X, pp. 68-70.
13 Letter to Father Chevalier, January 1848, N.D., X, p. 32.
14 "The second fault was an administrative one..." Letter to Father Le Vavasseur, February 24, 1848, N.D., X, pp. 79-80.
faction. Men, women and children work without any respite and have no reward but that miserable food..."16

Miserable conditions, miserable food! The missionaries don’t go to Africa to dive into this material misery, but to lift out of it the natives they have to evangelize, “raise them out of their brutalized condition...”17

That is why Bishop Truffet made a serious mistake, one which proved fatal to himself and his co-workers.

It is in the light of the Will of God “who wants all men to be saved”18 that Libermann takes care of the health of his missionaries – the instruments of salvation – as well as of his own health, because he has a mission to accomplish: to save Africa. He spares nothing when it is a question of the health of his sons who are missionaries and who are all in need. He accepts with resignation and simplicity doctors’ prescriptions and his confreres’ advice when his own health is in question, for he is aware of having “a poor body which he will have to drag along till the end.”19

Father Blanpin was taking a cure at Eaux-Bonnes in the Pyrenees for a serious throat disease he had contracted in the mission of Bourbon and which had left him almost entirely without the power of speech. Libermann writes to him on August 7, 1846: “As far as the doctors in Eaux-Bonnes are concerned, if you don’t see any use in consulting them, don’t do so; but be sure you don’t make that decision just to save a few francs. God and his Holy Mother will know how to pay all that back to us with interest.”20

One month later, on September 14, he wrote to him again: “Ask the doctors whether it would be better for you to spend the winter in Rome or in the south of France. If it’s the latter, we can probably get permission from the Superior of the Seminary in Toulouse for you to be received there as a boarder... You could do some good among the seminarians and attract some of them to the Missions. Understand however, that is not a reason for you to prefer

16 Letter to Father Gamon, December 20, 1841, N.D., III, pp. 76-77.
17 Letter to the Director of the Colonies, Mr. Galos, September 22, 1842, N.D., III, p. 283.
18 I Tim., 2: 4.
19 Letter to Dr. Samson, July 6, 1842, N.D., III, p. 218.
20 N.D., VIII, p. 218.
that arrangement. It is your health that counts... If Rome is better, then go to Rome...

"when we find out what expenses are to be paid and what sacrifices have to be made, we shall do it gladly. You know I am telling you the truth, There is no cost too high if it will obtain the recovery and the peace of mind of a conferee who got sick on the Missions."\(^{21}\)

As far as his own health is concerned, he tells his brother the doctor the regime he is following: "As to food, here is what I take: bread and water in the morning (I believe that is what agrees with me best, ... in this case mortification seems very good for the body); at noon... and in the evening... the doctor wants me to eat some roast meat at noon; I have not followed his advice up to now."\(^{22}\)

Later he will admit explicity in one of his letters that he made a mistake in not following the doctor's advice. The Fathers in the community obliged him to follow it. On September 6, 1845 he wrote: "Some time ago our men here got together and laid down the law that I must get as much sleep as all the other members of the community... They also decided that I must follow a diet altogether different from the rest of the community. The doctor had already prescribed this diet several times, but I could not bring myself to live delicately and in a different manner from the others. I believe I must obey what my confreres demand with respect to my person, and I am being faithful to it. It costs me a very great deal..."\(^{23}\)

One month later he wrote with some humor: "We have three cows, one horse, some hens, ducks, geese, turkeys and pigeons. All these are for the use of the house. As to our food... I'm the only one on a special diet; they are fattening me up like one of the boarders mentioned above that I would be ashamed to name here for fear of shocking you... That's enough for this time. The clock is just striking ten and I must go to bed, otherwise I shall be wanting in obedience..."\(^{24}\)

\(^{21}\) N.D., VIII, pp. 291-293.

\(^{22}\) Letter to D. Samson, July 6, 1842, N.D., III, pp. 218-219.

\(^{23}\) Letter to the Community of Bourbon, September 6, 1845, N.D., VII, p. 291.

\(^{24}\) Letter to Father Bessieux, October 28, 1845, N.D., VII, pp. 345-346.
When we bear in mind all Libermann's worries about his missionaries, and, at the same time, the strength and courage with which he bore his infirmities all his life, we can only apply to him his own words: "An apostle is not like a child: he does not feel sorry for himself and his own troubles; he has learned to forget himself and to go along with head bowed in the face of afflictions. He has a heart as strong as a rock, as far as his own pains are concerned; but the tender heart of a dove, when it's a matter of someone else's sickness..."  

Libermann and the Unfortunate

The final words of the preceding paragraph give a good summary of the whole life and activity of Libermann. Wherever there was suffering to be relieved, wrongs to be righted, there was his heart, "gentle and tender as a dove" to be moved to pity, "strong as a rock" to bear his own troubles and the burden of the troubles of others.

His work, destined at first for the evangelization of the liberated slaves of Bourbon, Mauritius and Haiti, soon extended itself to include the whole black race, "the black peoples wherever in the world they are to be found... Everywhere, until now, they live in misery, in a stupid ignorance...; and no one is thinking about lifting them out of it. And still these people are made in the image of God just like everybody else, and are disposed to receive the treasure of the Faith which they don't know about..."  

Later, his work extended to all the unfortunate.

"When the Venerable Father passed through Bordeaux on his way back from Rome in 1846, he was struck by the charity of Father Germainville who kept 10 or 12 different works going in his house, – all of them very interesting. He promised to help by sending a priest and paying his way. To maintain community life, he decided to send another confrere, along with a brother. The foundation began in August 1847..."

26 Memorandum of 1846, N.D., VIII, p. 223.
RESPECT FOR PERSONS

Of the many works of Father Germainville, the Fathers retained only three or four; – in particular the work for the soldiers which “consisted in welcoming soldiers in the evening, teaching catechism to all of them and giving academic classes to the illiterate, and providing wholesome activity for their leisure hours.”

Libermann refers to this foundation in his letter of August 9, 1847 to Father Le Berre, a missionary in Gabon: “We have opened a small establishment in Bordeaux. We shall work there for laborers, sailors, and for the poorer classes in general...”

On the following October 14, he explains the purpose of these works to Father Le Vavasseur: “our field of work in Europe would be among the poorest classes, who... are in great need of help, such as sailors, soldiers, workingmen in general, the still more miserable class of galley-slaves, prisoners, beggars. I don’t need to tell you that these would be excellent works...”

To make all their undertakings more effective, Fathers Germainville and Libermann launched the idea of holding meetings periodically in Paris of people interested in needs of this kind. “The general purpose of these meetings would be: to procure the salvation of the poor and laboring classes by means of religious and secular instruction and by all other means; to uplift their moral state and improve their material conditions... The particular purpose: to establish a close relationship and common outlook among those inspired by God to devote themselves to this work;... finally, to decide upon the way of giving the work the fullest possible extension in the different provinces and among the various classes of the most neglected and needy.”

In the letter to Father Germainville which we are quoting, Libermann continues: “As to questions of detail, here are the suggestions of Mr. Cacheleux:

“1) What would it be most useful and advantageous to do for the orphan apprentices?

28 N.D., IX, p. 249.
29 N.D., IX, p. 288.
2) What more is to be done for the workmen who come from the apprentice class, orphan or not?

3) What is to be done for workmen who are sick?.." 30

When he moved to Paris after the fusion of the two Congregations, Libermann was able to give himself more to these social works, especially those among workingmen. On February 19, 1849 he wrote to Miss Guillarme to invite her to join this new Mission to the Workers: "Only a few days ago we opened the chapel to some poor laborers who are out of work, reduced to the depths of misery, without bread, without clothing, without consolation. Our men are giving them instruction and supplying them with vouchers to buy vegetables, and we hand out to them things that are given to us: shirts, trousers, stockings, etc. It would not be possible to engage in a finer work... but, to keep it going, we'll need some resources. Come to our aid..."

Libermann adds a postscript: "If, by way of the people you know, you could obtain different things I need, you would be doing something pleasing to God... If you were to give some money, that would be excellent. Every week we give them vouchers for vegetables, – each one costs a sou. First there were 150 of them; the second week, last Sunday, there were more than 400. The number will grow. Thus, every week we shall need enough for 500 or 600; i.e. 29 or 30 francs." 31

As a matter of fact, this crowd of laborers grew considerably. On March 29, Father François, Libermann's secretary, gave the following details in his name to Father Lossedat: "...we have in our chapel every day, every evening, meetings of workingmen or rebels... This work is admirable and touching. The bad newspapers scold us; the good ones and all men of good will applaud and offer something to help. All this does good and arouses greatly the zeal of all the students in the house. It initiates us a little into your great work of the Missions..." 32

30 Letter of November 6, 1847, N.D., pp. 314-315.
31 N.D., XI, pp. 48-49.
32 Letter from Father François to Father Lossedat, N.D., XI, pp. 95-96.
Libermann says the same thing himself to Father Schwindenhammer: "We gather here in the chapel the poor laborers of the area. They come three times a week, about 400 or 500 in number. Yesterday there were 700... The great majority of these men are rebels from June (1848) who fought at the barricades... The socialists are furious with us... I have received an anonymous letter, addressed to all the priests which, without introduction, begins with the words: "Pack of churchmen". In it we are called reactionaries, assassins, hypocrites, scoundrels..." 33 The quotation ends with words which I pass over in silence so as not to shock sensitive ears.

Another similar work was that of the Holy Family, "a meeting of poor families which takes place in our chapel every two weeks," writes Father Lanurien, "it includes fathers, mothers and children. We say Mass for them and give instruction. Then a talk is given by a layman... Finally, the meeting ends with a small lottery, and everyone goes away happy either because he won something or because he has hopes of winning some other time..." 34

We can say that Libermann had a life-time program of restoring man, disfigured by sin and material misery, to his original dignity, called as he is to be a child of God. With regard to all these unfortunates, he strives to actualize the ideal he presented to Father Chevalier, the director of the Junior Seminary of Dakar, as an objective to be attained in the formation of his seminarians: "Study, gain a deep knowledge of the character, the mental stamp, the depths of the being of the Blacks. Don't stop at the externals, which can only deceive a superficial judge and which unfortunately do deceive many people.

"Be convinced that their exterior is that of people abandoned to all that is vicious in their nature... This exterior is clothed with all the miseries of humanity. Take the case of a poor nobleman who has fallen to the lowest of beggary, - wash off the mud that covers his face, heal the wounds on his body, give him rest and nourishment and

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33 Letter to Father Schwindenhammer, N.D., XI, p. 100.
34 Letter from Father Lanurien to Father Le Vavasseur, May 10, 1489, N.D., "Compléments", p. 128.
put good clothes on him, and you will find that he is quite handsome, – his features will change completely.”

Libermann had already shown this compassion for the unfortunate long before he thought of the Work for the Blacks. “One of his companions at St. Sulpice tells of being responsible with him for the distribution of alms, especially clothing, to the poor. One day this young man was annoyed at those who were too quick to grab things and thus created confusion. He wanted to warn them that they would receive nothing next time. Libermann’s reaction was immediate: ‘What? impose a penance upon the unfortunate!’ But he said it in a tone of surprise and tender compassion.”

* * *

Suffering does not find its source only in corporal pain and material misery. There are also the sufferings of the soul which come from contradictions, persecutions, misunderstandings, despair and sin. He wanted to be the good Cyrenaic to all who were suffering: “I hope that Our Lord,” he wrote to Miss Guillarme, “will always give me courage to be able to support all souls who are suffering and need help.”

The same young lady, a pious and apostolic soul, had a strong tendency to cling to her spiritual directors. Libermann scolds her for it in a fairly severe letter. His words must have caused her sadness, so he hastens to console her: “I am coming to console you in the name of our good Mother, because my words have upset you. You gave them more weight than I did. Calm yourself. I shall leave this note in case I don’t find you at home... My answer to you is that there was nothing seriously wrong in all that you said to me...”

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35 Letter to Father Chevalier, November 23, 1847, N.D., IX, p. 360.
36 N.D., I, p. 127.
38 N.D., VII, pp. 11-12.
In Libermann's eyes the unfortunate were always right. Recommending a German girl to the care of Miss Guillarme, he wrote: "The poor German girl is in despair. We must run to the rescue of this poor lamb... Help her, find her a good place... This soul is near the edge of the precipice; despair could carry her off...

Go and console her, in the Name of Our Lord."

And he adds a postscript: "It is not a question of going to a perfect soul: this is a burden which must be taken up... Be careful... don't be disgusted by the imperfect character and bad manners, by the prideful, violent and difficult ways of acting of poor, weak and imperfect people... Put yourself in their place... Don't judge them, don't say that they are wrong, that they are full of faults. An unfortunate person must never be wrong in our estimation, because our kindness and compassion for them should soften our hard hearts and calm our impatience and unwillingness to help... Do you want to participate perfectly in the love of Jesus? Your zeal and your love of souls, especially the most unfortunate and burdensome, must surpass all other affection and carry you beyond all difficulty and annoyance."³⁹

On November 20, 1842, Libermann speaks to Father Dupont about this same German girl: "The poor German girl who has been converted from Protestantism... is very unhappy just now; she is in Paris without any money, staying in a boarding-house she can't pay for. If you know some good person who would find her a place... it would be a good act. I have to tell you that she has a terrible character. As a result of her misfortunes, she has fallen into a state of exasperation which makes her very hard to get along with. She is difficult and sensitive. But, she is a soul be saved... If there is anything you can do for her through your acquaintances, don't do it directly. She is one of those poor people who are ashamed and proud at the same time, and you will hardly ever find anyone more irritable... Pray for this poor German girl."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ N.D., III, pp. 344-345.
Making reference to an aspirant sent away from the convent of Castres, Libermann wrote to the Mother Superior: “A few days ago I saw poor Miss Morillon... The poor girl was very troubled. I tried to console her as best I could. It is hard to see the suffering of another person...”

Advising Miss Barbier not to hold a grudge against those who had injured her, Libermann wrote: “Don’t be angry with people who cause you harm... Above all, don’t hold a grudge against your poor brother. Don’t be his accuser, rather be his advocate before God and Mary... If he is guilty, he is already more an unhappy man than a criminal. See only his unhappiness, not his fault, and love him more than ever.”

In order to be always at the disposition of needy souls, one needs a great spirit of service. Libermann had it “I am the servant of all the souls who belong or who want to belong to Jesus...”

The priest has to be a man for everybody, has to belong to everybody. That’s what Libermann recalls to Father Bouteilhe, a parish priest in France: “Avoid getting involved in political questions... The priest is the man of God, ...his politics must be those of God... The priest who gets mixed up in politics... repels a certain number of souls... Be a man for all men, by your universally charitable way of acting in moderation, modesty and benevolence. Spend more time with the poor than with the rich, but without neglecting the latter-they are to be saved too. Don’t be fawning or flattering. Be polite and benevolent with the rich; be kind and charitable with the poor, and see that your charity is effective in practice... Don’t take meals in the houses of the rich, so as not to lose your priestly spirit, and because you cannot take meals in the houses of the poor. They must all be equally dear to your priestly heart, but lean a little more towards charity and concern for the poor.”

41 Letter of March 20, 1844, N.D., VI, p. 128.
43 Letter to Miss Guillarme, July 17, 1843, N.D., IV, p. 269.
44 Letter of Novembre 30, 1850, N.D., XII, pp. 481-482.
Libermann shows that he is the defender of the poor, but still he recommends prudence. "We must do all we can to establish between rich and poor, between whites and blacks, that Christian charity which leads all men to think of themselves as brothers in Jesus Christ. In that way we can hope to extinguish both scorn and indifference on the one hand and jealousy and hatred on the other. But, great prudence is needed in doing this, lest everything be lost." 45

The commentary develops the meaning of this: "We must always work for the establishment of fraternal charity among men. We must always take up the cause of the unfortunate. But, in doing this, we must act not only with zeal, but also with prudence." And Libermann comes right down to a burning question of the day: "For example, although it is our desire that all slaves be freed, let us be careful about expressing this desire in the colonies: we would only succeed in turning the masters against us and thus making it impossible for us to do the good for the unfortunate blacks which we could do by acting prudently." 46

Looking at things in the light of faith, nobody is more wretched than sinners. That is why Libermann asks confessors not to be severe: "In your ministry," he writes to Father Dat, "take this as a general rule: severity loses souls; gentleness saves them... As a general practice, lean towards indulgence to weak souls, don't be stiff. In doing so, you will imitate the conduct of our Divine Master and you will do good to souls... It is through discouragement that most souls are lost." 47

He gives the same advice to Father Tisserant when he was working in Paris as an assistant to Father Desgenettes: "In confession... treat sinners with the greatest gentleness and kindness. Never be rigid or hard. Get them to realize the evil they have done, but without hurting them, al-

45 Règle Provisoire, 1e partie, Chap. IX, art. 14, p. 57.
46 Ibid, p. 57.
47 N.D., VIII, pp. 65-66.
ways gently. Almost never answer severely. Don't preach a rigorous doctrine. I am not a theologian. I dare to assure you that rigorous principles are ruinous to souls."

Father Lostedat was indignant about the bad conduct of some priests in Haiti, where he was a missionary. Libermann wrote to him on September 17, 1844: "Avoid being bitter in dealing with sinners. Open up your soul when you meet sinners. For you to become irritated about their abominable sins, would be to act in a manner diametrically opposite to that of Our Lord. Be full of deference towards priests who are doing their duty. Your job is to win them over, not to grow bitter against them. Be gentle with sinners, gentle with yourself."

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I bring to a close this series of quotations from Libermann with an episode from his life, one which witnesses to his good-heartedness towards those in need. I think it will be best to transcribe the summary of a letter he wrote to Mr. Demeuré on November 27, 1851, shortly before his death:

"Dear Sir:

Today I had a visit from your son. He finds himself in an embarrassing situation. On his way to Saumur, the poor fellow passed through Paris and I suppose he wanted to see the sights of the Capital. He stayed four days and spent all his money. As he did not have enough to pay his hotel bill, the man in charge would not let him go and spoke about taking him to the Chief of Police. In the midst of his troubles, our young man remembered my name and address. He came here, followed by the hotel man who would not let him out of his sight. I gave him a warm welcome, as I recalled his good family and all the kindness they had shown Father Schwindenhammer. And myself. He told me his story. However, as I did not rem-

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49 *N.D.*, VI, p. 344.
ember having seen him when I had the honor of visiting you. I wanted to make sure of his identity. He went to get his travel documents, still accompanied by the man from the hotel. I brought him up to my room by himself and, afraid that he had been reckless in spending all the money you gave him for his trip, I pretended to be a bit difficult so as to sound him out and give him some good advice. It did not take me long to see that he is all right... I didn't think I had to be too hard on him. Wanting to do what would please you... I advanced him the sum he needed...

I gave him some good advice and sent him off happy with the recommendation that he continue his journey today. He shook hands with me and left...

The next day, Libermann added this postscript: “Your son came back looking for me this morning. Yesterday he said that 9 francs would be enough to pay his way to Saumur. This morning he tells me... that they asked for 17 francs... he was obliged to spend the night in Paris; this cost him 10 francs and he had only 2 francs left. I let him see my displeasure and talked to him rather severely.

Still, I could not abandon him. Thinking it would be in line with your intentions, I gave him 17 francs more. When I gave it to him I told him that, if he did not get on his way by the very first train, I would have nothing more to do with him, he would have to get along however he could. However, don't be anxious, - if his light-headedness should cause him to make another mistake, I shall not abandon him, but I shall send someone along to pay for him. Thus the total amount I have advanced to him comes to 72 francs. I am convinced that what happened to your son is just a bit of foolishness and comes from the inexperience of youth... Your son seems to me to be a good boy...; I hope he will persevere in the right path.”

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What is the origin of this unusual love for the unfortunate? It seems to me that we discover its roots in the fam-

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50 N.D., XIII, pp. 391-393.
ily home in Saverne. Lazarus Libermann, Jacob’s father, although a Jew, had the soul of a Christian. “The unanimous report of all the people of Saverne—Jews, Catholics and Protestants—witnesses that Rabbi Libermann was an upright man, honest and, above all, filled with an altogether Christian charity. There was a room in his house... ready to receive, night or day, the poor who knocked at his door. He took care of them at his own expense and never turned anybody away.”

Without doubt, this example of his father was for Libermann the first source of his love for the unfortunate. Another source—this one negative—was the hard manner in which he was treated by his teachers of talmudic science at Metz, so different from the kindness and hospitality he knew in his father’s house.

Libermann later said that he had counted upon the charity of a rabbi to whom his father sent him. Instead of that, he was badly received, and then scorned,—all for reasons he considered outrageous and futile: the study of profane languages. This rejection lessened his respect for his religion. “So it wasn’t as high or as great as he had thought it was!”

Later on, in his life as a Christian and a priest, he would always say that: “Religion pure and blameless before God our Father is this: ‘to visit orphans and widows and to keep oneself free of the corruption of the world,’”

All during his life—we see it in his correspondence—Libermann strove, in his relations with others, to avoid everything that could turn them away and to do whatever he could to help them.

More than once, Libermann experienced what it is like to be alone, abandoned by men. The anguish he felt within the four bare and austere walls of his room at Collège Stanislaus, far from his own people, apparently abandoned by his God who is, however, “close to those who are broken-hearted,”—that anguish led him throughout his life.

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51 N.D., I, p. 9.
52 N.D., I, p. 94.
53 James, 1:27.
54 Psalm 34:19.
to think of those who suffer from solitude and who lack help and comfort.

Himself an unfortunate in the eyes of men – "I have neither resources nor home; "I am taking to the streets and Providence will lead me where It wants me to go"55 – he will be an object of compassion for those same men, who decided to keep him at St. Sulpice even though they thought his terrible epilepsy incurable. He could never forget such humaneness and tried to find ways to thank the Lord by placing his whole life at the service of men, especially those most disinherited by fate.

This love of Libermann for people went on growing as his love for God grew also.

Amadeus Martins
(to be continued)