11. LETTERS TO A. DE CONNY

Mr. de Conny became acquainted with Francis Libermann when in 1832, at the age of fifteen, he entered the Seminary of Saint Sulpice. At his request, Libermann endeavored to lead him on the path toward holiness and to help him overcome his faults. After Libermann's departure for Rennes, they remained in correspondence. Later they met again in Rome, where de Conny had gone to finish his studies, and Libermann went to obtain permission to found his own congregation. As we have seen in preceding letters, de Conny did his best to thwart the aim of Francis Libermann's voyage to Rome.

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Trust in Jesus. Leave the realm of the senses in order to be truly spiritual. Seek God alone instead of multiplying devotions. Keep your soul in repose before God.

Letter One Rennes, February 11, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 403

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Mr. de Conny:

I am exceedingly glad in Our Lord to receive a letter from you at long last. You know how great my desire has always been to see God reign in your heart, and I assure you that this desire is still the same.

I did not write to you first, for fear that it might not be agreeable to you. I shall therefore tell you in all simplicity and frankness what, as it seems to me before God, should be useful for the sanctification of your soul.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

[Forget Your Faults and Trust in Jesus]

I must confess that I have not yet decided to renounce to my prophecy [about you]. I beseech you by the love of our Lord Jesus and His most holy Mother, to be of good cheer. One of your great faults is that you have too bad an opinion of your spiritual condition. You do not value the grace of God enough, and you allow yourself to be cast down too easily by the thought of your infidelities and your natural laxity. This fault has its origin in self-love.

If you wish to make any progress in perfection, you must not reflect so much on your laxity, your weakness and your misery. Sursum corda! Raise your soul and keep it in God’s presence by putting your whole confidence in Jesus and Mary, and by forgetting, to a certain point, your imperfections and even your faults.

Another defect of yours is that you grieve too much when you cannot go to God in accordance with your desires. You then make some momentary efforts, which are not successful, for you cannot force things in this way. Your efforts are purely organic. Your will belongs to God; and this is even the reason why you are pained to be but a tissue of distraction, flighty thoughts, and all kinds of fancies. This is something excellent already: your will belongs to God; but you do not know what to do in order to succeed in uniting yourself with this dear “object.”

[Leave the Realm of the Senses and be Spiritual]

Your fault lies in the fact that you employ your sensible organs to seize upon Him and cling to Him. You are at fault. This happens to you not only in prayer but in everything that relates to God. In the practice of the virtues, you wish to seize upon them in a sensible manner and to render an account of them to yourself, although God does not want
you to act in such wise. And what is the result of this? You
do not succeed; you live in grief and discouragement.

Follow another course, and I am convinced that you will
succeed better. This course will at the same time be easier.
Try to acquire the *solidity* and the *truth* of the virtues in-
stead of their *sensible impressions*. Until now you have
aimed at acquiring virtue and prayer at the moment only
when you had to practice them, and you wished then to
grasp and enjoy them, as I said above. It is better to set
about them from afar and to aim at the highest perfection—
an entire and complete perfection and not do things only by
halves.

Why do you wish to vegetate during your whole life, to
stand undecided on the threshold of a holy life and of a
natural life? What are you afraid of? Can you not accom-
plish as much as others who certainly must contend with
greater obstacles than yours? Don’t imagine that the feat is
so difficult. Don’t think that you will have to be sad all your
life and mortify your body with disagreeable austerities. The
perfect life is purely spiritual.

Our Master said: “We must worship in spirit and in
truth.” Have you not a spiritual soul, as well as the greatest
saints? And why then shouldn’t you serve God in the
intimacy of that soul? Why do you always prowl around
with the senses in order to enjoy, to taste piety, and to seek
to render an account to yourself of the sentiments that are
in you? Why do you always think of self? Why should you
always be in interior trouble and confusion?

*[Do Not Multiply Pious Practices, But be Attached
to God Alone]*

Pardon me, dear confrere, for speaking to you in this
fashion. You know the source from which all my remarks
spring. You know that I desire with all my heart to be agreeable to you in all things. However, since you want me to speak freely, I hope that you will receive with pleasure all that I tell you and that you will pardon me if I cause you some grief. I will therefore propose to you now the general idea of a course that you should follow in all your actions. The thing is very simple and very easy. It is a great principle in the spiritual life that we ought to simplify matters as much as possible. The simpler and more uniform our conduct is, the more perfect it is and the more easily we can also sustain ourselves in it.

I am therefore of the opinion that henceforward you should not attach yourself to a multiplicity of pious practices, but that you should try only to perfect the interior of your soul, giving yourself entirely to God in truth and reality and not in sentiment and affection only. Do not, therefore, resolve to practice such or such a virtue in this or that circumstance, or to have such a sentiment or such an intention in your actions. Do not attach yourself to anything of this kind; attach yourself directly to God alone, for whose sake you should do all things.

[Keep Your Soul in Repose Before God]

See how simple the thing is that I have in mind: Aim only at one point in everything, namely, to maintain your soul in peace before God, not in a sensible manner, but in simple repose in the sight of God. Your whole care will consist in rejecting peacefully, without trouble, without agitation, without worry, and without violence, everything that might disturb this repose. The point is to calm every passion in your soul, and to put silence and peace there.

You have acted only through passion until now, even in the things of God. Do so no longer. No more of this vio-
ience, this grief, this worry, this vexation, but all things in peace and repose! Do not worry when you see that some virtues are wanting to you. Everything consists in removing the obstacles that prevent the reign of God in your soul; not just a few, but all, must be removed.

If you wish to advance in this way, you must not say: "I should willingly do this, but I should like to preserve that." Quietly reject everything that is opposed to this permanent peace. I promise you that by this means you will attain very great perfection in a very short time. Thus, everything depends on not wishing to love but for God and in God alone, in breathing, feeling and doing all things for His sake only and according to His good pleasure. This state will be reached at first only in desire and intention; and though we fail very often, we gradually become stronger in attaining our desire. In practice—which is the only thing that ought to occupy our attention—we must keep ourselves interiorly in repose and in a certain state of peace before God, that is, with a view to God, doing everything in this peace.

Our soul should remain in a certain uniform position with respect to God, and not quit a certain state of repose even for indifferent things. Quietly remove all obstacles to this repose and peace. Let this be your whole life, your whole mortification, your whole resolution—in a word, the whole occupation of your day. Do this simply but seriously, avoiding tenseness and effort, for these are diametrically opposed to peace and spiritual repose.

This is all that you have to do. It seems very simple. I know that objection can be made against it. If you judge it proper to take the matter seriously, please write to me, for it is worthwhile. In any case, dear friend, you know how glad I am to receive your letters and to reply to them. My reply will sometimes come late, like the present one; but I
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

hope that you will not be vexed with me for that. I assure
you that I will always try to satisfy you as soon as possible
and I will always be ready to be useful to you, if God gives
me that grace for the sanctification of your soul.

[Obstacles Which You Must Overcome]

Among the major obstacles that are present in you [and
impede the execution of these Counsels], I must name your
tendency to make a joke of everything. It is opposed more
than you can imagine to the true spirit of prayer. You are
also flighty of mind and inconstant of will. You have a
curiosity of the mind, which occupies itself now with one
thing and then with another, which likes to vary its object,
and easily betakes itself to something new. Moreover, your
mind is preoccupied with things that please it and oblige it
to apply itself strongly, especially when these objects are
multiplied.

Such are the principal obstacles, in addition to those I’ve
mentioned above. Nevertheless, don’t worry in the least.
Enter into the arena, and you will see those enemies fall at
your feet. I guarantee you success if you set yourself to
work. God will fight for you; what can you fear?

I should have liked to speak to you about the questions
you have asked. But I am a babbler and I’ve already said so
much that I feel ashamed of it. There is no more room on
this sheet to speak to you about the things you asked me. I
apologize for having waited so long before replying to you.
Another time I will be more prompt.

Adieu, dear confrere. I am, in Jesus and Mary,

Your humble servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE

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LETTERS TO A. DE CONNY

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Rejoice in the Lord that you are weak. Childlike surrender to Jesus.

Letter Two Rennes, April 4, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 404

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

I bless Our Lord for the dispositions which He has deigned to accord you.

[Jesus Loves you Despite Your Faults]

I know that you have very often been unfaithful to the favors and graces which He has bestowed upon you. But I find that you are really wrong in believing yourself in such a bad condition. You feel so much weakness, so many faults, so many vices, so many evil inclinations in you, that you believe yourself unworthy of God's grace. This is undoubtedly true; you are certainly unworthy of attracting the look of mercy of our good Lord Jesus upon you. But this very thing should cause a great joy in you.

Just consider for a moment how kindly this sweet Lord treats us. We always oppose His will, we do everything to make Him abandon us; and despite all this, He still comes to us to overwhelm us with His kindness and His favors. He wishes to have us in spite of ourselves, as if He were in need of possessing us. And what will He have gained when He has a worm of the earth in His possession, a being of no value, a soul rebellious against all His wishes? No matter! He wishes to have us and He perseveres in His design. Take courage, therefore; He will finally triumph and possess you entirely.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

You tell me that you are always the same, and that you have made no progress. To know this is very difficult, not to say impossible. I am convinced of the contrary. You certainly have not made as much progress as you would have made had you been faithful to our kind Master. But this does not prevent Him from being more your Master than He has been in the past. The proof of it is that you still persevere in the resolution of belonging to Him alone and that you still detest the world.

All these dispositions, as well as others which Our Lord deigns to cherish in your heart, surely give evidence of a certain amount of progress; for if there were no progress, you could not have these dispositions, and you would necessarily have fallen very low. But no, dear friend; have confidence in our kind Lord Jesus and in our good Mother.

[Jesus is Our Strength; Rejoice Therefore That You are Weak]

Your character presents certain difficulties for your spiritual advancement, but they are not insurmountable. Moreover, what man does not encounter difficulties in the path of holiness? We bear the whole weight of our sin in our flesh; we must drag along this wretched flesh which does not, and cannot belong to our Master.

What can we do but go ahead all the same with the full confidence that our beloved Jesus will not abandon us? He knows better than we do how poor and weak we are, and He promises to be our strength and our support. Remember that, unlike us, He is not a liar. When this dear Lord has said anything, He accomplishes it. What else can we do but place our whole confidence in Him?

You certainly can have great confidence. All that He has already done for you and the dispositions that He gives you even now in the midst of the weakness which grieves you,
LETTERS TO A. DE CONNY

are a proof that He has some design of mercy upon you. Therefore, do not lament so much that you are weak and miserable, but rejoice over this very weakness in our good Lord Jesus. Let it be your glory and your joy to see yourself so incapable by yourself, and therefore obliged to have continual recourse to your well-beloved Savior Jesus.

This poverty and weakness subdue us and place us in great dependence on our dear Lord. At all times we are obliged to keep our eyes turned toward Him. This is a great advantage. Do not fear your flesh, therefore, but despise it. It will certainly at times influence your soul, but take courage and have confidence in Jesus. It can never dominate you because you belong to Jesus. Belong entirely to Jesus, therefore, but completely and without reserve. Try to avoid the faults that, relying on your charity, I had the boldness to point out to you in my last letter. Do not look so much toward the past or the future. "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." We should occupy ourselves only with the present. Maintain continually in your soul the desire of living for God alone, and try to render yourself pleasing in His eyes in everything.

It matters very little what road you follow, so long as your director indicates it to you. Provided you wish to live for God alone, and apply yourself earnestly to His most holy love, you are always sure of being perfectly agreeable to God and of making progress. I implore you by the most Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, never to worry about the weakness and cowardice you complain of, never to be discontented with yourself. Proceed in all gentleness and meekness, as a child of God should never cease to do.

[Act as a Child of God and Not Like a Servant]

Always look upon yourself as belonging to Our Lord, and as being the object of His kindness and complacency, even when you are at fault. Do not indulge in a certain distrust,
a certain timid reserve, when you have committed a fault, in the thought that He is not satisfied with you. Be confused before Him in all meekness and gentleness at the sight of your poverty. Always go to Him with full confidence and with a certain familiarity, but a familiarity at the same time humble and modest.

Be not a servant, I beseech you by the most Holy Name of Jesus, but be a child of God. Why should you worry about your vocation already? Remain undisturbed on this subject as well as on all others. You can neither give yourself a vocation nor decide on one. Leave it to your dear Master; he will manifest to you His most holy and adorable will.

Abandon yourself fully and entirely to this dear Lord in the most important affairs, as well as in the least and most indifferent of your actions. We do not live for ourselves, but for Him. It is for Him to employ this life which is His, and for us to be silent and to wait in all peace and repose.

Adieu! Best regards in the most holy love of Jesus and Mary,

Your humble servant,

Francis Libermann, acolyte

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Reflexions on the subdiaconate.

Letter Three Rennes, May 29, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 405

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

[You Are Now Irrevocably Consecrated to God]

I was delighted in Our Lord, to see by your letter that you are going to be a subdeacon. What happiness to conse-
LETTERS TO A. DE CONNY

crate oneself entirely to God! It seems to me that this is the only thing I should desire, if God permitted it. Rejoice with me, therefore; but rejoice in a holy manner, for He to whom you will henceforth belong is infinitely holy. Oh, what a word has escaped me just now! It should be and shall be, I hope, eternally written deep down in your soul.

How could one expose himself to a devouring fire without being consumed? How could one approach God, abandon and surrender himself entirely into His hands without being sanctified? Neither one nor the other is possible. You may therefore base the greatest hopes on this precious grace of the subdiaconate. In this holy order God will take hold of you, by separating you from the rest of creatures, in order to hide you in the secret of His countenance, that is, in His own immense holiness with which He will cover you.

However, don't expect to be so changed that all your shortcomings will disappear, and that you will, henceforth, be like the angels in heaven, who live without fear, without mistrusting themselves, and without temptation. Your flesh will always be flesh, that is, wretched, feeble, poor, full of corruption and sin. But, what difference does that make to a soul altogether given up to God, whose life is no longer here upon earth, and whose joy and happiness will now be in God alone, to whom it entirely belongs? Do not worry, therefore, about your weakness and your temptations. Give up your soul to Him who has such great claims upon it, and who will take it, never more to release it.

[It is Time Now to Overcome Your Tendency to be always witty]

I think it would be necessary for you to acquire a little more seriousness. Henceforth, being a man of God, you should live like one, and, on that account, you should maintain yourself in great modesty, as well as interior and ex-
terior gravity, and should not give yourself up to pastimes and jests.

I shall take the liberty of calling your attention to a habit which, I think, is hurtful to you, namely, that of jesting and indulging in witticisms. I don’t think this is founded on your character. It seems to me that it is only a habit of childhood. Your temperament may indeed be a little light, but I think it is sufficiently inclined to gravity, and is naturally borne toward it.

The levity of youth has been an obstacle until now; but I am convinced that the subdeaconship will give this levity a strong blow. This turn of mind, which makes us amuse ourselves constantly by trying to be witty, causes great harm to the interior spirit. It nurtures vanity and self-love, often injures charity, keeps us preoccupied with trifles, whereas we have need of filling and entertaining ourselves with the most intense desires for our sanctification.

Such a habit is also a powerful obstacle to the acquisition of true, divine prudence, and even of real, human prudence. I beseech you, for the love of Jesus and Mary, not to worry about this, nor about the other difficulties which you will encounter in the spiritual progress of your soul. It is sufficient for you to acknowledge your defects. I think that you are now almost acquainted with them all, at least with the most dangerous and tenacious ones. And with this knowledge, can you fail to triumph?

[God Has Made You His Chosen Vessel]

Thanks to the divine mercy, you have a real and very strong desire of completing your sacrifice. It is certain that God has some designs of bounty and special predilection upon you. And you, why should you fear? Should you not be confident? Do not inflict this injury on your dear father and Lord Jesus, and on His well-beloved Mother, who
would seem to exhaust themselves for the purpose of enriching you, if they were not inexhaustible.

However, dear confrere, do not disregard this incomprehensible love of our Master for you. Give Our Lord love for love; correspond fully with His admirable designs. He wishes you to consecrate yourself, to deliver yourself, entirely to Himself. Well then! Consecrate and deliver yourself entirely to our sovereign Lord. Be His friend, as He has said in His Holy Gospel, but His friend alone. Jesus is the Spouse of Holy Church; to Him belongs this bride so holy, in whom He is well pleased. And you, dear confrere, you are His friend, to serve Him and enter into His secrets, for He will tell you everything that He has learned from His Father, provided you are pure and holy in His sight.

Your joy will be great, on account of the presence of the divine Spouse, whose voice you will hear in your soul; and this voice will fill you with love, and will be your supreme happiness. But you must be pure and holy for that. Be full of confidence in your beloved and divine Friend.

It is not for nothing that He will consecrate you irrevocably. You will, henceforth, be a vessel of choice and election, wholly set aside for the use of the most holy Master who has chosen you. A chalice that is consecrated to God must not be used for anything else but His divine service. It would be a dreadful sacrilege to use it for profane purposes, and the more so, if you were to fill it with filth.

This is what you will be henceforth: an object of veneration for the angels and saints, a vessel of election, consecrated to the use of the Master alone. He has chosen it for Himself. All the faculties of your body and soul must be employed only in the service of God, and never to the profit of self-love, for you no longer belong to yourself but to God. Nor must you ever give them up to creatures, for that would be filling a holy vessel with filth.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

[Be Joyful, in All Humility, and Surrender Fully to Jesus]

You are very great, dear and venerable brother, and very respectable in the eyes of all creatures, for the name of the great Master is marked upon you, and His coat-of-arms is engraved on your soul. How I respect that dear soul, and how I venerate it! I assure you, the tears come to my eyes when I say that.

Take good care of that soul, so beloved and so filled with the greatness of the sanctity of God. but do not let this incomprehensible grandeur elate you. It should, on the contrary, keep you, unceasingly, in an abyss of humiliation, before the author and consummator of all sanctity. Think a little of what you are and of what God wishes to do with you and in you.

How can we ever comprehend that God, who is supremely holy, should thus have taken and chosen a vulgar vessel to make out of it an ornament of His palace? A carnal man, to make of him a friend of His well-beloved Son? What love! what power! what wisdom! You may rely on it, dear friend, that He will succeed.

Be full of joy and gratitude toward Him, but keep yourself before Him in your lowliness and humiliation. Be full of confidence and love. Be generous; you have every reason to hope; but it will cost you dearly, it will cost your whole self. You must sacrifice yourself to God without reserve.

You are making this sacrifice willingly, with the help of the Blessed Virgin, to whom you owe everything. You are only afraid that the victim is too unworthy. You are right in thinking so; it is, indeed, unworthy; but that is none of your business. He who chose it, knew that far better than you. Abandon yourself, therefore, fully into the arms of Jesus and Mary, and make your sacrifice with fear, but in
peace, joy, contentment of heart, confidence, love, and without consideration or reserve.

I shall pray and shall have others pray for you. I am, in the charity of Jesus and Mary,

Your poor servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

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A child of God should love God blindly rather than be full of fear.

Letter Four    Rennes, August 23, 1838    Vol. 1, p. 405

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

[Why Such Fear When God Loves You?]

I admire God's mercy toward you; but I must confess that His designs in your regard are hidden from me. He overwhelms you with graces; He nurses you and preserves you from all danger, as is His wont with the children of His choice and predilection. Yet, in spite of all this, you are in a constant state of fear and anguish. Truly, this puzzles me. How can you entertain feelings of fear, after so much kindness of God toward you? And especially, how can you harbor such fears when you realize that you are a child of Mary?

It is certain, and you cannot deny it, that the Blessed Virgin has taken you under her holy protection, and that you have never ceased for one instant to have the greatest devotion toward, and confidence in her. That is why I fail to understand how you can yield to such fears and such hesitancy. I think, however, that this fear may prove to be a true grace for you, provided you do not exceed the limits set by the good Lord.
By temperament you are inclined to levity, and crave natural enjoyment and human comfort. You have, besides a special position in the world which might have occasioned many dangers and exposed you to the loss of your soul. Now, this salutary fear of displeasing God, of estranging yourself from Him, and of losing your soul, is an excellent stimulus to prevent you from falling a victim to your self-love and to the snares which the enemy is constantly preparing for you.

But in order to profit truly by this grace, you must be careful not to exaggerate things. As soon as you notice these sentiments of fear, occupy your mind, gently turn away your attention; make an act of confidence in God, of filial surrender into the hands of the most holy Virgin, or make an act of love toward our divine Lord. Desire with all your heart to fulfill His divine will in all things. Make an act of humility, prostrating yourself interiorly before the Most Holy Trinity, remembering your poverty, your infidelities and your unworthiness. Express your gratitude because it pleases the divine bounty to favor you and overwhelm you with blessings in spite of your weakness.

Nevertheless although this fear is good to a certain point and may even prove useful, I do believe, dear friend, that you should try to moderate and even shun it as much as possible. But do not try to dispose of it by giving way to mental dissipation and levity, or by becoming engrossed in the pursuit of earthly pleasures. Do not strive to do away with these fears by seeking created consolations, but seek all your joy and all your consolation in Our Lord Jesus and in the most holy Virgin.

If you fail to put order in all this, and to combat these fears and apprehensions, they will end by discouraging you
entirely and will make you become lax. Or again, they may become the source of scruples. And you know very well that both are profitless. Aim therefore at preserving calm and peace of soul, but always do so before God. You are a child of God; live as such. You are even a privileged and favored child; be tranquil and peaceful before your heavenly Father, who loves you with so much tenderness.

True love of God will never establish itself in your soul, if you accustom yourself to entertain fears and apprehensions. If you desire to acquire strength against yourself and the enemies of your soul, you must banish all this anguish from your heart and mind. A soldier who must be beaten in order that he may go into battle will never perform heroic deeds; for fear never produces courage. I know well that you cannot entirely master your fears, but try to overcome them by desires, through prayers, by contrary acts, and by distracting yourself from those thoughts.

[The Basis of Your Fearfulness]

A fundamental reason for those fears seems to be your habit of approaching God through sentiment. Those evil apprehensions are to a great extent the product of sentimental effort. Approach God by the practice of the virtues, not so much the exterior as the interior ones. Accustom yourself, dear friend, to offer Him all your actions and to perform them solely out of love for Him. In all this, do not seek to feel the effects of that love, but simply to preserve this habitual will, frequently repeating and renewing that intention, but gently and peacefully.

I know that you find in yourself something that is a constant source of trouble namely your nonchalance, or rather, dejection. But it is precisely in this matter that you should endeavor to practice the great virtue of sobriety, about which, I think, I have already spoken to you. Do not
give to your body all the rest and all the enjoyment which it craves for its well-being, and try to become more energetic in your manners and bearing. It is not a question of imposing great privations upon you, but you should not yield to a love of ease and physical well-being.

Be strong and manly before God. Accustom yourself to tire your body a little, and do not make great haste to give it relief. I think that your body is sufficiently developed, and that such a practice will not cause illness. On the contrary it will even help to increase its vigor. If you act thus, for the most pure and sole love of God, you will draw much benefit from it. Your soul also will be considerably strengthened. Moreover, dear friend, this is part of the vow of virginity which you have made; perfect chastity demands complete sobriety. Be brave! The most holy Virgin is your mother. I beg of you, do not seek what satisfies your senses but seek what is solid.

[Jesu Did Not Come to Judge You, But to Save You]

I assure you that I am without fear concerning all the things that frighten you. Be not so much the theologian. Do not measure God’s gifts by means of a theological compass, but use as a standard the immense love of our most beloved Master. Do not turn the graces of God against you by considering the misuse which you believe you may make of it. Why wrong the kind Lord in this manner, a Lord who loves you so tenderly? Believe me, the theologians are ignorant of many a secret in the matter of grace and predestination, and if we knew these secrets, it would be a great preventive against harboring such fears.

Do not abuse the goodness of God in your regard. For the love of God, do not abuse grace! It is an abuse, a very considerable abuse, to imagine that this grace is going to be our condemnation, whereas in very truth it will constitute
LETTERS TO A. DE CONNY

our salvation and our eternal happiness. Our Lord has said that He had not come to judge the World, but to save it. Why, then, do you say that He has come to judge you? Dear friend, do not give the lie to our good Lord Jesus. Rather say He has come to save you and sanctify you. He gives you His grace for this purpose, and His grace will attain it.

Do not try to find replies to my arguments, do not reason so much, but follow Jesus. May your soul be full of love. Love does not reason; it is blind. It is Jesus who closes its eyes. Blessed blindness which will sanctify you and render you perfectly agreeable to Jesus! If love drives that fear from your soul, your salvation is assured. Forget self. Think rather about loving God from the bottom of your heart, and consider only the things which can encourage you more and more in this holy and divine love.

[Sundry Counsels]

I believe that community life would be a great grace for you, and that you would be a hundred times more happy in it than in the world. But if the good Lord does not want it, remain tranquil, trying to grow strong and courageous in the world. Your fears and anxiety in regard to your vocation may vanish at the end of even the first week. It is almost certain to happen if the good Lord calls you. Therefore, why worry? It is only the first step that is costly. But in all things, the advice of your director must be your infallible rule, to be followed always with the assurance of having accomplished God's will. I certainly do believe that you should abide by his decision, at least for the moment. Later, if the good Lord decides otherwise, you can always follow God's voice wherever and whenever He may call.

I do not speak to you about your vacation, because I think, as you do, that it will do you no harm. You are
accustomed to the persons in your surroundings; you know their conversation and their manner of acting; this contact will not make a bad impression on you, although some might perhaps act in a worldly way. The only thing that could be harmful is if you gave yourself a certain freedom of action, and became nonchalant. But if you are faithful to your pious exercises and exact in your ordinary devotions, you will find help in them; the breviary will also serve as a great preservative for you. Moreover, Our Lord and the Most Blessed Virgin will watch over you and will not allow you to suffer any serious harm.

I am truly in admiration everytime I consider the care which God has taken of your soul to preserve it against all the dangers to which it was almost sure to succumb.

May His most Holy Name be blessed. Be full of joy and peace before Him, at the sight of so much goodness. Be confused and shamed of not being a great saint; yet remain full of hope and love.

Entirely yours in the most holy love of Jesus and Mary,

Francis Libermann, acolyte

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The way of confidence and loving surrender to God.

Dear Confrere:

[Loving Surrender to God Smoothes All Obstacles]

Your latest letter has given me much joy and consola-
tion in Our Lord. The grace which He has granted you
during your retreat is a very precious one. It is a royal road
which divine goodness has opened for you, a road which will enable you to reach the priestly spirit in its highest perfection without difficulty.

This does not mean that you will not encounter any suffering or hardship. No soul was ever sanctified without pain and affliction; but there is this difference: in imperfect souls there is ordinarily a great deal of self-love, of desire to please self and make all sorts of detours. These souls also suffer much more and yet are almost unable to surmount obstacles, because of their extreme weakness. And so their life is one of trouble and affliction, yet they do not attain true self-abnegation nor a true knowledge and love of God.

On the contrary, if it pleases God to lead you to the smooth road of loving surrender to Him, all the pain and all the obstacles which you meet in the priesthood, in the angelic life of Our Lord’s priesthood, will be immeasurably diminished, because of the confidence and the love with which you will place yourself entirely into the hands of Our Lord. You will be able to surmount any sort of evil and contradiction. Little by little your soul will attain a gentle and peaceful stability, you become unshakeable in the presence of all efforts of the enemy, and of all contradictions, pains and afflictions, and preserve a sweet peace before God.

What is still better: if you are faithful, you will reach the point where trials and contradictions, humiliations, and even the contempt of men will become for you a subject of joy, of consolation and love, in our most adorable Lord Jesus, at the very time when such afflictions are piercing your heart. This sorrow and this affliction of your heart will be a joy for you in and before God. It will be a sweet and delightful wound.

[The Soul That Trusts in God is Master of Heaven and Earth]

I am sure that you do not understand this at present but I hope that, through God’s mercy, you will experience it.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

You realize that a priest full of zeal for the greatest glory of his Master will work wonders, when he has reached this degree of love for God. You cannot understand, dear friend, the number and the greatness of all the advantages which a soul receives from this life of confidence and loving surrender into the hands of God. Such a soul is lord of heaven and earth; it is above all creatures, but it is especially master of itself, its passions and inclinations. There is no true greatness except in this entirely heavenly life of divine love. You will no longer live yourself, but Our Lord will live and act in you, in His mildness, His peace, His strength and his love. If you thus remain in Him in peace and confidence, He will speak to your heart, and his sacred and delightful words will penetrate to the very marrow of your bones, to the “division of your soul.”

I realize that you will not reach this from the first moment. Time, labor and fidelity are needed in order to reach this point. But do not fear, dear friend. Our Lord has opened the door; He has made you take this road; He will certainly be able to lead you to the end.

[Cast Out All Thoughts of Fear]

Do not allow your mind to play with thoughts of fear and distrust. Of course, you don’t deserve to reach this state of perfection—but should you build on your own merits? Even if you had the holiness of St. John the Baptist, you would be lost if you placed your confidence in your own merit. No, dear friend, see in yourself nothing but poverty, lowliness, infidelity, cowardice, weakness and misery, and glorify Our Lord for having deigned to cast a look of pity upon you. May the sight of your misery fill you with new confidence and new love, and may it at the same time form the subject of your deepest humiliation in God’s sight.
LETTERS TO A. DE CONNY

Try gently and simply to overcome those fears. Do not reason against all those thoughts of distrust, for that is not the proper remedy for them. But, as soon as they present themselves, gently turn your soul to Our Lord and to His most holy Mother, in order to abandon yourself with confidence, humility and love, to their guidance and their good pleasure. Do this with perfect simplicity, gentleness, and peace. Cast toward them a glance of love and open your soul before Jesus, showing Him your wounds, hoping that He will heal them. After this, go back to your work without any more worries. If you act in this way, this sort of temptation will soon disappear.

[Not You, But God Will Make You Holy]

Up to the present you have been in the habit of laboring yourself, and you have considered your labor and your endeavor as having some value. That is why, seeing your weakness, you get discouraged; but, once you abandon yourself to the hands of God, you will, little by little, accustom yourself to see your great uselessness and incapacity. You will recognize that God alone must be and must do all things in you. Then you will cast yourself headlong into His arms, remaining in your lowliness and your poverty. You will take a singular pleasure in the sight [of your poverty] and you will then begin to make some progress.

Fear nothing. Your natural cowardice will give way; just make some effort for overcoming it. Avoid occupying yourself with the future: “Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.” Avoid considering the difficulties, and all the things you will have to give up. Walk blindly and expect everything from the divine goodness of our most beloved Jesus. Aim at walking humbly and simply in this way of confidence and loving surrender, and Jesus and Mary will bless you.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

May the peace and the love of Jesus and Mary dwell in your soul.

Entirely yours in their holy love,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE

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Remain full of confidence now that you are going to share in the priesthood of Christ.

Letter Seven Rennes, May 13, 1839 Vol. 1, p. 496

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

[God is Drawing you Nearer to Himself]

You are getting ever nearer to the holy priesthood of Our Lord and will constantly grow in grace, and in spiritual and supernatural wisdom before God and men. Grow then and may your soul develop through the greatness and power of the divine grace with which you will be filled. Our Lord takes delight in you; live lovingly and fervently in His sight. I tell you in all truth, dear friend, that I feel extreme joy at the thought and the hope that our good Master will draw you perfectly to Himself and will make you share most intimately and permanently in His divine holiness and love. Be faithful, dear friend, to that excessive mercy with which He deals with you. Enter gently in that simple but truly holy way of surrender that is mild, full of love, and full of confidence in His divine goodness. Preserve and persevere in that way of acting in His sight and you will see more and more the light of grace
LETTERS TO A. DE CONNY

descending into your soul; you will feel increasing strength and will gradually live in a stable and uniform state. It is in this alone that solid virtue and true perfection are found.

[The Grace of the Diaconate]

As you advance in the divine priesthood, you will acquire an increasing facility to preserve that firmness in the ways of God. For, although the priesthood is given you for the sanctification of souls, it nevertheless contains a superabundant grace that is full of power for the perfecting of your own soul. The diaconate, as you know well, contains that divine strength of Our Lord by which you resist all inimical powers. The gift of strength which you receive is based solely on Our Lord and contains a heavenly sweetness. Human power is full of rigidity and violence; divine power is gentle, fills the soul with mildness, and makes our activity uniform.

Consider St. Stephen and you will see the prodigious strength that was manifest in Him, but at the same time notice that this divine strength had all the characteristics which I have just described. Abandon yourself, then, to the divine Spirit of love, that He may act on your soul with all the power of the great sacrament you are going to receive. Your whole preparation must consist in recklessly surrendering to the Spirit of Our Lord. Desire no longer to have any movement or life of your own; remain disposed before Him that He may come in you according to the fullness of divine mercy for you, and may work in your soul the wonders of His most adorable love.

[Remain Full of Confidence in Jesus]

Rejoice then fully, dear friend, seeing the great goodness of our dear Lord Jesus toward your soul. Cultivate an ever increasing holy, humble, gentle and loving confidence in
Him. You have every reason to hope for, and have a right to expect, the greatest favors of our most adorable Master. If He has been so good to you and has given you so many graces during the time when you were serving Him badly, what favors and what delight can you not expect now that you have begun to desire so sincerely and so strongly to belong completely to Him? He himself has thus opened your soul to receive His graces and mercy. It is true that in all He does He will fill you in proportion to the extent to which He has opened your soul. That first grace and that opening He gives you, coming at the moment when He makes you enter into the sanctuary of the great priestly grace, will complete what His divine mercy has begun. . . .

I will pray fervently to Our Lord for you, that He may make everything help you in sanctifying yourself. I hope that you will have the goodness of writing once more before your departure.

May Jesus and Mary live in your soul, in the most profound peace and through their most holy love, in which I am,

Your poor confrere and servant,

Francis Libermann, acolyte