9. LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

Jules Cahier was born in Paris in 1807. He entered La Solitude, the Sulpician House of Studies at Issy, in 1823. After being bursar of this seminary for three years, he was sent to Clermont and to Nantes, where he fulfilled the same functions. Later he returned to Issy, where he died on March 9, 1871. Nearly all of the letters addressed to this ailing priest are a kind of running commentary on the Pauline idea of “being crucified together with Jesus.”

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Rejoice that Jesus keeps you on His Cross. Perfect surrender to God.

Letter One Rennes, September 11, 1837 Vol. 1, p. 384

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father and Friend:

I thank Our Lord with all the joy of my soul for what He is pleased to do with you, in you and for you. I think I may boldly use this language, which sounds so barbarous and cruel to worldly men; I prefer expressing myself in this way to putting on a look of sadness and sorrow in order to console you in the trial to which our good Lord Jesus subjects you.

Besides, it would be a positive lie for me to talk to you otherwise. For why should I not rejoice, when I behold that Jesus is pleased with your soul, that He attaches it to Himself, and places it in His earthly paradise in order to operate in it a little of what His Father accomplished in Him during
His mortal life? He admits you to His table, nourishing you with that heavenly and sanctifying food, with which He nourished Himself during the time He spent among us.

You complain that until now you have only suffered in patience. Well! this is something already, and patience leads to greater perfection: "Let patience have its perfect work." We begin by suffering patiently; little by little this disposition is perfected, and, finally, after a very short time, we abandon ourselves entirely to our Lord Jesus to be a playing, as it were, in His hands.

In this condition we no longer think of ourselves, of anything that concerns us, of what we have done, or of what we might do. The same is true for sickness and for health, for trials and for well-being. We lose sight of ourselves entirely for the purpose of fixing our mind on Jesus alone, of directing all our intentions toward Him, the well-beloved and only treasure of our soul. We then enjoy great repose in the midst of all the troubles, sufferings, afflictions, and contradictions that we experience; or rather, real suffering and real contradiction no longer exist for us.

We still feel the shock of the sorrow that has stricken us; our flesh is even at times downed by it. But deep in our interior, we belong to God and are in God alone; and this terrible shock, which would have overwhelmed us at another time, cannot penetrate into our soul now, because it is united to Our Lord who resides there. His throne is firmly established in our innermost soul.

Oh! how true it is that patience contains a perfect work! Entire perfection is found there. This is the great reward for sufferings and for crosses. Blessed, therefore, is he who is favored with them, and who makes good use of so beautiful an opportunity in order to attain total forgetfulness of self and of all creatures, and perfect union with Jesus living in his innermost soul. . . .
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

In charity be always well united with me in the holy love of Jesus and Mary.

Your poor servant in this holy charity.

Francis Libermann, acolyte

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Jesus is destroying all natural life in your soul

Letter Two Rennes, March 7, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 387

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father and Friend in Our Lord:

[Jesus Wants to Tear Out What is Evil in Your Soul]

I perceive that God is pleased to sacrifice and immolate you to His divine love. He crushes your poor nature, He leaves it but a little breath of life, and He will not rest until it has given its last sigh. So much the better! God will then live and reign at ease and in perfect freedom in your soul, as He should do fully even now. But "there is a time to destroy and a time to build up." The time of destruction has arrived, and Jesus, our divine architect, is going to work seriously. He shows that He can destroy as well as build up. May His most Holy Name be blessed and adored throughout all eternity.

Let this well-beloved Lord destroy, crush, cut, retrench, and annihilate. What can we, poor men, do but remain prostrate and annihilated before this great and kind Lord, and let Him carry out his work according to the divine will of His Father? Shall we resist this powerful will? And

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who can resist it? And who would wish to resist it, if he could? This will is rich in power, greatness, glory and love. Let us not resist and it will inundate us with the treasures of Jesus, it will drown us in His love.

Besides, who would wish to resist a will so dear, so sweet, so beautiful, and gracious? No, indeed, we will not resist. We will allow the divine hand of Jesus to accomplish the will of His heavenly Father in our poor nothingness. We will allow Him to labor in us according to His sweet pleasure, and effect the destruction and annihilation of everything that is corrupt in our souls. We should indeed be wretched if we resisted so great a Master, who aspires to fashion a masterpiece destined for the glorification of His Father.

[Do Not Try to Oppose His Action, But Allow Him to Work as He wishes]

This idea suggests a very important observation. When Our Lord deigns to cast a look of tenderness and perfect love upon us, when He wishes to apply His omnipotence to the work of destroying the old life in us, our mind always finds a reason and a means of justifying our desire to quit this condition and live according to our own ideas. Now this, I maintain, is a great misfortune.

When Jesus is thus engaged in destroying all human life, all self-will, every natural movement and contentment, our soul should keep itself in profound respect before Him. Our mind should think only of keeping itself in respectful and gentle repose before the great Master. It should be constantly, but at the same time calmly and peacefully, turned toward Him, so that it never raises an obstacle to His divine work. We should scarcely dare to move for fear of impeding His divine will and His action; for the action of Jesus in our soul is an extraordinary thing.

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LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

This action is indeed painful to the flesh, because it has a tendency to destroy and annihilate it. Yet it is glorious for our soul, because Jesus will communicate His own life to us through it, and this life is all holy and hidden in His Father. And the more He keeps our own natural life chained down, the more abundant will be the divine life that He will lead in our soul.

That is why I rejoice with all my heart at the sight of the perfect nothingness and uselessness in which He is pleased to keep you. And why should you be sad? Is it because you can no longer work for His glory? On the contrary, you are really working for His greater glory, since it is for you a question of annihilating the old creature, so that you may have no other life, no other movement but that of Jesus and His Holy Spirit. He wishes to be the absolute master and the mainspring of your soul.

Besides, why should we wish to procure His glory in spite of Him, and in a manner different from the one that is pleasing to the divine will of His Father—in a manner more glorious and more pleasing to man? It is far better to be crucified with Jesus and to be of no account whatsoever than to act according to our own taste and convert the whole world.

[The Death of Self Brings Us the Life of God]

There is one thought that causes me real joy when I behold you in your present state, namely, that the Junior Seminary of Clermont can carry on without you, provided the grace of God is with him who is charged with it; whereas you cannot be sanctified without crosses. And the heavier these crosses are, and the more contrary they are to your desires and tastes, the truer will be your sanctification.

Jesus could not rise and ascend into heaven, until He had died upon the cross. Our poor afflicted nature weeps
and laments; well, let it weep and lament. This will finally cost it its life, but, as a compensation, we shall possess the life of our divine Jesus and His well-beloved Mother.

I therefore beg our good Master to complete in you, for His greater glory and His most holy love, this admirable operation of death and extermination, so that the life of His divine love may exist in your soul.

In this divine love I am the last and the poorest of your servants,

Francis Libermann, acolyte

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The love of Jesus and the love of our fellow-man.


Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father and Friend in Our Lord:

[Jesus Alone]

It seems that Our Lord has heaped all possible ills upon your head, as if He wished to overwhelm you. He sees that your heart is still too sensitive to the evils of this earth and He treats you in that manner in order to accomplish His designs. He pierces that heart, rends it asunder and crushes it, for it is necessary.

Allow me to speak the truth to you. Be merciless toward yourself. Present yourself to our good Lord and tell Him to tear out your heart and trample it under foot. Let there be no pleasure for you on earth, not even the satisfaction we
experience when meeting fervent souls who give great promises for their sanctification and that of others.

We must have a heart that is entirely empty if we wish to have a perfect spirit of privation and detachment before Our Lord. Man should no longer figure in our plans; Jesus alone should be everything to and in our souls. We should give up everything that is not the spirit of Jesus, and this means that we should get rid even of that which is for Him.

[Do Not Love Men in Jesus but Love Jesus in Men]

We must be content with loving all things for and in Jesus. It is better to love Jesus alone, in Himself and in all creatures. We shall then no longer love men or enjoy our relations with men, but we shall love and possess Jesus in them and enjoy Jesus alone.

We must love Jesus in men as we love a fruit in its shell. It is a matter of indifference to us when we see that shell broken and crushed into a thousand pieces. Provided the fruit remains within, we are satisfied. It is thus also that we should love men and have a gentle and holy compassion for men, loving Jesus in them. If our divine Master wishes to break them like a reed, we must rejoice with a holy joy before God, provided the divine fruit within be well preserved.

It is true that we should feel compassion for men as though we ourselves were broken and as if we ourselves had received every blow struck to our dear brethren. We are even permitted to sigh and weep before God, but in our sadness we must remain united with our divine All and completely abandoned to His most holy will. We shall experience sadness because of our share in the sorrow of our brethren, but we shall at the same time have joy because we behold the Master Himself and His divine will, establishing His reign over every creature.
That is not an ardent, ebullient or glorious joy, but one that is sweet and, as it were, the soul of that sadness. It is a joy given us by the Spirit of Jesus who operates in the tried soul and is united to the soul. Joy and peace are always the fruits of the Spirit of Jesus, but since in this case He operates by means of crosses and afflictions in the afflicted soul, He does likewise in us. You see, then, how ideal it is to be empty of all existence in creatures and by creatures, in ourselves and by ourselves.

May Jesus alone animate and possess our souls in and by His divine Spirit. For this purpose He will deeply wound the heart. But is He not the Lord and is He not permitted to act as He desires? Ought we not to consider ourselves supremely happy when He acts with us in that manner? Must He not tear up our soul when He wishes to annihilate our self and then live and exist therein all alone?

Hence I must tell you frankly, although it might seem cruel, that my heart rejoices when it beholds Him acting with a force that you are unable to resist. You might try to resist Him with all your power but to no avail. Jesus triumphs and you will not be able to rob Him of His prey. He is like a lion holding a trembling little animal in its grasp. And who would desire to tear you away from His grasp? Oh! How I praise and bless Our Lord for His incomprehensible kindness.

This is His method when He is determined to possess a soul of His special predilection. He does not wait for reasoning but uses force. And he uses force in such a way that the poor creature, not knowing what to do, has to yield; it cannot tear itself away from His hands.
Here, then, is a beautiful way that leads to a soul's nakedness and perfect surrender to God. But, someone might object, there is no merit in that. Well, shall we always remain wretched? Shall we forever seek only ourselves? Let us refuse to grieve over that so-called lack of merit and the violence which our dear Love uses to make us suffer. This is His affair. We on our part ought to be satisfied when we belong to Him and to Him alone.

Our Lord desires, I think to make you totally self-forgetful and indifferent to everything that concerns your own person. That you be useful or useless and harmful does not concern you. Moreover, He wishes to purify your soul from everything that may be too natural in your charity toward those whom the divine Master has deigned to unite with you in His Holy Name and His Spirit.

Please pardon me, poor man, for daring to speak to you as though I were somebody and had a right to speak. I trust that you will forgive me and will beg Our Lord to have pity on me and cure my pride, which is very great.

Your poor servant in Jesus and Mary,

Francis Libermann, acolyte
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Libermann’s own worries. We must not seek to scrutinize Jesus’ action in our souls.

Letter Four Rennes, June 10, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 389

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father and Friend in Our Lord Jesus:

[In Spite of My Blindness I Must Continue to Direct Souls]

Since it is the will of Our Lord that I should write to you, and you desire it for and in His love, I suppose I shall have to do it. But I assure you in all sincerity that I do so with the greatest fear and apprehension. If you knew how wretched I am, and how I poison everything I touch, you would not even wish to look at me, much less to have an intimate union of charity with me.

I was blind during the whole time of my stay in the seminaries of Paris and Issy. Our good Lord has deigned to show me clearly a part of the harm that I am doing in the spiritual relations, in which, however, He wishes me to continue with those whom He loves most.

No doubt, you are not aware that for some years past I have lost several souls at whose service God placed me, and I do not know what may yet happen in the future. May God be praised, as much as all the grandeur and immensity of His wisdom, His love, His mercy and His holiness deserve. I assure you I am overwhelmed with sorrow, while saying these things. But I am resolved to go forward constantly, in as pure and holy a manner as is given to me from above.

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It belongs to our Divine Master to soften the bitter poison of my own wisdom, to make it even fructify, and produce fruits of divine love and holiness. What can I do? On the one hand, the divine will urges me; on the other, the frightful evil that I cause terrifies me, I am distressed, but I must go ahead; the Master wishes it. I see but one thing to do, and that is to cast myself headlong into His arms, in order that He may put a stop to all the evil and may effect all the good, or rather that He may do everything Himself and prevent all other action, in order that He alone may live and reign in souls, by his own grace and action.

[Let Jesus Act as He Wants]

This Divine Master is so kind, so holy, so admirable in regard to the souls who give themselves to Him without reserve, that it seems that every creature should remain silent, respectful and admiring, letting Him act according to His wishes and accomplish the perfection and holiness of those souls. They belong to Him and not to themselves. That is why He desires to act as their sovereign Master; it does not belong to us to ask Him what He does, or the how and wherefore.

We must yield, under His protection, to His divine guidance and incomprehensible operations. And when He operates powerfully through His Cross, we must be more dead than ever as we rest in His hands; we must not stir.

It seems to me that in the latter case His ways are much more obscure than on other occasions. He cuts, retrenches, tears out, ruins, annihilates, and we are unable to size up what He does or discover the manner or the reason. We feel the violence of His blows but fail to see clearly, and the more violent His blows, the more He puts us in a sort of stupor and stupidity in His presence.
Our happiness, however, is immense at such woeful moments, for we see, do, and can do, nothing. Jesus alone acts with sovereign power and authority. Now what more can we desire? It seems to me, therefore that our one and only duty then is to remain in that sort of stupidity and incapacity before Him. I believe that on such occasions we should not even open our mouth to manifest our joy and our desires to Our Lord. And if we desire to express our feelings, I think that we ought to do it in a minimum of words and not too often.

I think that it is best to remain in His presence letting Him strike us according to His wishes, and to look on with a sweet joy, complacency, union of love, respect and perfect consent and total surrender.

However, if we felt increasingly weak or in need of expressing our wishes and interior dispositions to our Divine Master, I think that it would then be a good thing and not evil to give expression to them, although, to my way of thinking, it is better as a rule to remain in respectful adoration before Him, for how can we dare to stir when Jesus is clearly at work operating for our sanctification? We ought to be as crushed and annihilated beneath His feet.

It is certain that the action of the divine Cross is one of the holiest, and perhaps the most holy, means that Jesus makes use of to establish His life and reign in a soul that He has chosen with special predilection.

[Do Not Scrutinise His Actions But Remain Motionless Before Him]

We must be particularly careful not to scrutinize anxiously the course which our Master is following in our souls or discover His intentions and plans. We must be content to be ignorant and give our selves up blindly to the Spirit of our Lord who is so powerfully at work in us. This volun-
tary blindness and ignorance will not prevent us from being enlightened very often by rays of brilliant light; but we ought not to seek for them. We must leave our kind Master free to do whatever He pleases and considers proper.

You think that it would be well for you to lose all human support and desire to possess nothing upon earth so that you could say truly, God alone, God alone! I must say that this would certainly be a great grace and it would strike a last blow at the flesh; but it belongs to the Master Himself to accomplish this. I believe, seeing that our kind Lord is operating so powerfully and determinately in you, that you should simply not stir at all. Let me, then, state to you what I think about that.

Do not desire things, but allow Jesus to act, and let Him desire in you. True, all your desires are desires of the cross and therefore they are generally those of Jesus. But I believe that not only ought He to originate them, but it belongs to Him to keep them up, perfect and execute them. Hence, in my opinion, with regard to that desire and similar ones, you should merely preserve them in your heart, neither rejecting them nor following them up or expressing them.

It should be enough that you have that desire in your soul and, while keeping it before you, look with joy and surrender upon Jesus. I know this crucifies you, for you have a natural craving for expressing your mind. But this is precisely what is necessary for you; it is good for you to be thus crucified and to suffer because you are unable to pour out your heart. Those feelings of oppression from which you have been freed show you clearly what you are in need of and make you realize that you can stop those effusions.

[Sundry Remarks]

We have prayed fervently for the soul of the good novice of La Solitude who died and also for the one who is

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ill. We too are going to lose a good man but not through death. I mean Mr. de Brandt. His bishop is calling him back and he must obey. This causes me much grief, but the good Lord has accustomed me to undergo greater pains than that, so that this does not trouble me, thanks to His grace.

The crosses I had to bear and about which Father Pinault spoke to you were very great and they were of a sort that prevented me from speaking to you about them. I had to mention them to Father Pinault because he was somewhat involved in the case and had his share in them.

I think that you were right in not seeking to hold conversation with our fervent seminarians in Paris. Jesus desires to be all you need. I believe that having Him you can do without everything else.

Your news about Mr. Guéraud filled me with great joy. I was somewhat worried about him because I did not know what had become of him.

Adieu, dear Father in Our Lord. May Jesus be your only and crucifying love, and may every creature perish before Him.

It is in this dear love and in that of Mary, our good and most lovable Mother that I am,

your poor servant

Francis Libermann, acolyte
Christ cleanses your soul through crosses. Beware of exalted thoughts and self-esteem.

Praised be Jesus and Mary

[Our Lord is Cleansing Your Soul Through the Cross]

I think that you have great reasons for rejoicing and for praising and blessing Our Lord for His incomprehensible goodness toward you. It seems evident that He is definitely leading you on the hard, the most difficult way of the divine cross. His pursuit of a soul is always the same; and I think we have reason to hope that He will not soon let it go. May His Holy Name be ever blessed. It is hard to see, I think, what He is aiming at and what He desires to accomplish in you by His wonderful way of dealing with you. He will, little by little, empty your soul of all that is superfluous. He roots out and removes all that does not belong to Him alone, and we may confidently hope that He will finally establish you in that interior nakedness which your holy founder, Father Olier, so insistently demands from his children.

There is no doubt, as you tell me, that your soul contained a great number of useless things in which Jesus had no part at all. These our good Lord wishes to cast out in order that He may be the sole master of your heart, and may find your soul pure and free from all that displeases Him, from all that is not God, and from all that is not destined to remain for all eternity. That is why He leaves you no joy, no satisfaction to which you can cling or with which you can occupy or amuse yourself. He wants your soul to be spiritually naked and empty of all that could give
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

you satisfaction or might somewhat compensate for sorrows and afflictions. Nothing must be left for your sensibility, not even anything spiritual; nothing even for the deepest aspirations of your soul, except Jesus, but Jesus crucified.

One would have thought that you would have found some relief and distraction in the work which Father Mollevault gave you, but this has now been taken away from you. It seems to me that this deserves your special attention. You see what interior purity, what detachment, what self-forgetfulness Our Lord wishes to establish in your soul. This means that from now on you must place your happiness, your joy, taste, love, satisfaction, and your desires in Our Lord alone; you must have but one aim—to please Him.

[Avoid Exalted Thoughts and Self-Esteem]

Regarding God's guidance of your soul, I think I must call your attention to a certain mental exaltation which makes us esteem and seek high and great thoughts, and sometimes even makes us strive for things that are extreme. Now, such things are without any value and make us lose the fruit of God's grace. We should receive the graces, especially those of the divine cross, with profound abasement and very great simplicity.

We must continually drag ourselves before God in our utter lowliness, refraining from thinking high thoughts, aiming in all simplicity and peace, and according to the littleness and poverty of our soul, at pleasing Our Lord, and acting in all things in conformity with His every wish.

There is another thing which you ought to fear—namely, self-esteem and a certain all too human complacency in crosses. We appreciate, at least in part, how great is the grace which God bestows on us; we realize that it tends to lead us to a very high degree of perfection. We behold God's action with a certain human satisfaction, which we
easily hide from ourselves under the cover of very plausible pretexts. We end by being pleased with those graces and those views of perfection which God mercifully grants us, in a human and self-centered fashion.

That sort of thing is very wicked and a terrible abuse of a most precious grace, of the grace of the holy cross of Our Lord. It is a sacrilege and a profanation, and I wonder if it does not fall into the category of the sins against the Holy Ghost which are never left unpunished. As soon as we abandon our condition of profound wretchedness and extreme abjection, we lose everything, even the most precious graces. I believe that this is the last trench from which the enemy needs to be expelled.

When we are stripped and freed from all earthly things, and all our affections are centered on Jesus alone, we must remain in our lowliness and self-forgetfulness. This is the last deprivation which the divine cross must operate in a soul, but it is also I think, the most important of all. In order to respond truly to this great grace, it is essential that we stay in our lowliness and forgetfulness of self. I don't think that true interior life can possibly exist if we do not constantly keep in mind our lowliness and wretchedness in God's sight.

I consider your uncertainty about your future a blessing. This ignorance is like an exquisite seasoning for all the crosses which Our Lord is pleased to send you, and it renders them all the more savory. It obliges you to satisfy your hunger with those sufferings and to make them your daily food. They are most certainly a most substantial nourishment.

I must end this letter. The Blessed Sacrament is exposed in our Chapel, and I must go and give homage and adoration to Our Lord. I shall offer myself in union with you to Him and to His Father. What a happiness, if it
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should please Him to hide us in His divine holiness, and to fill us with it; but this requires a great many more crosses and humiliations.

We are indebted a thousand times to you for your goodness: you have the generosity of taking interest in our poor little house and praying for us. Jesus and Mary, who are our Superiors, will, I hope, thank you for it.

Your devoted and poor servant in the most holy love of Jesus and Mary,

Francis Libermann, acolyte

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The dangers of an active life versus the blessings of being crucified with Jesus.

Letter Six Rennes, August 3, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 391

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father and Friend in Our Lord:

It appears that Our Lord continues to be pleased to present you before His Father in a state of crucifixion similar to His own. Man of sorrows and of crosses, how blessed you are to have so excellent and continual a part in the divine cross of Jesus. What can a servant of God desire beyond these great graces and privileges? To labor for the glory of God, to convert souls, is doubtless a beautiful thing. But, I tell you in all truth, I do not esteem it to be so great and so glorious as the abundant participation in the cross of Jesus. Above all, it is not so great a help toward our own sanctification, nor does it fill the heart with so great a confidence in God’s mercy as that divine cross of Jesus.
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

[Spiritual Dangers Involved in an Active Life]

A person who labors for the salvation of souls, who spends himself for the glory of God, is able to do his own will, to follow his own judgment, and he can be unfaithful on a great many occasions. He often rejoices, is frequently pleased with himself; he possesses the esteem of men, sometimes even seeks it; and this he does almost without noticing it. He often abandons himself to a certain natural activity. He imagines that he is doing wonders and loses sight of God in order to occupy himself with creatures. If he is successful he is pleased, he rejoices, and sometimes believes that he is useful to God and capable of accomplishing something worthwhile. If he fails, he is saddened and afflicted, he worries and frets, under the pretext that the work of God is not going the way it should.

In reality this sadness is prompted by a human sentiment of disappointment. He likes it when men love him. If they dislike him, he is severe toward those who fail to give him their affection. He does not lead a hidden and forgotten life. He wants to be known. These are a few of the evils found in varying proportions in men who labor for the glory of God, if Our Lord does not hold them by the hand, and does not lead them and govern them by His almighty mercy.

[The Blessings of Being Crucified with Jesus]

But a man who is crucified and reduced to the state in which you are at present, is far from all this. He is miserable, poor, nil, incapable of anything whatsoever, a burden to himself on account of all the care which he is obliged to bestow on his flesh, and of all the affliction which he undergoes in his mind. Besides, he is a burden to others; a burden to those with whom he comes in contact, and to the company in which he lives. He eats the bread of the poor, without being able to do the least thing to earn it.
He is occupying the place of another who would render the services of which he is incapable; he is nothing to himself, of no value to the world, nothing before God, worthless before men, despised, forgotten, neglected, and regarded as of no account, as a useless man.

Some are compassionate to him out of charity, pity him as a poor man who is incapable of doing anything, or because he is the object of opposition and neglect on the part of all his brethren. He is kept in the community merely out of compassion and for the love of God; for there is no prospect of drawing any good from him, except that he will provide an opportunity to practice patience. Sometimes he annoys his superiors and those who have to bestow more care upon him than upon useful members of the community. What a life for a man of clay and ashes! What a terrible ordeal for pride, especially when there is no hope for a change! But for the man of God, who has nothing as much at heart as to enter into the designs of holiness and love which God has in his regard, all these evils are so many treasures. He fully realizes the extent of his wretchedness, his poverty and his nothingness, and his soul enters into dispositions of profound humiliation and self-annihilation before God.

[Remain in Joyful Humility Before Jesus in the “Cell” of Your Soul]

He sees that men forget him, disregard him as a man of no account, and are occupied with everybody else. He knows that no one thinks of him, or if someone does, it is merely to regard his life as meaningless. He is aware of all this and feels it keenly, but his soul pours itself out before God with great love and deep self-abasement. In this way he begins to enter into the holiness of God by being separated from and relinquishing all creatures, by self-annihilation and perfect helplessness. His soul is always prostrate before God. Unable to find any help or consolation anywhere, he
ends by being loath to receive such help from anyone but God alone. Finding and possessing nothing either in himself or in others, he enters into the interior of his own soul, which you call a “cell,” and remains there in nakedness and utter helplessness, before the Sovereign Lord who dwells and labors therein, full of mercy and love, while the flesh lies overwhelmed and crushed at the Master’s feet.

It is a great blessing to be able to dwell a while in this “cell,” which is the unique abode of Jesus dwelling in our souls. We do not always feel His presence, even when we are admitted by His divine majesty. But that does not matter, provided we are there. Our eyes, at that moment, must not consider what is found in that cell; they must look only at the holiness of Jesus, who is present and governs it as a Master, and this we must do with gentle reverence and interior modesty.

We should not take pleasure in the adornments which God’s hand deigns to place in that “cell,” but delight in Jesus alone who dwells therein. We must, therefore, not seek too much to behold things or even to delight in that complacency of Jesus, at least, we must not delight too much in it or desire too much to remain in that complacency. We should rather remain quietly and respectfully [before Jesus], keeping ourselves, as it were, motionless, satisfied with a respectful and loving gaze, and prostrating ourselves in spirit at the feet of Jesus.

What boundless love and what admirable holiness are to be found in afflictions and humiliations! O man of sorrows! rejoice exceedingly! Jesus’ love for you and His merciful designs are great indeed. But rejoice before Him and before all His creatures in a most profound humility of heart.

[Indifference Toward Your Future Function]

If you experience anguish at the sight of a function assigned to you or one that will apparently be given to you,
let this not disturb you. Accept this suffering, place it in your heart and rejoice in having one more cross. Delight in it before Our Lord, carry it, embrace it, accept without resistance any function which may be imposed on you, and acquit yourself of it to the best of your ability. Say nothing, do nothing at present, either to obtain this function or to avoid it; do not speak or even think about it. Be not curious to know what your appointment will be, nor imagine the way in which you will acquit yourself of it.

Entirely yours in the holy love of Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

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Crosses detach the soul from self and from all creatures.

Letter Seven Rennes, August 29, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 391

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father:

I have received your letter through the good offices of Mr. Frederic Le Vavasseur. I agree with you that this year has been for your soul a year of graces, of blessings and of mercy on the part of God. The time of this life is passing. There are in this world those who enjoy themselves; there are others who suffer, through the mercy of God. Time passes equally for both; when it shall be over, they will no longer experience either the joy of their amusements or the pain of their sufferings; but the fruits will remain before God and His holy Angels.
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

[Without Crosses, the Soul Remains Self-Complacent]

Blessed are those who suffer, for theirs is the Kingdom of God. Past sufferings can no longer afflict them, but they have worked great perfection in the souls of the just. Incomparably more than anything else, these sufferings have made their souls pleasing to God and have established them in interior grace. This grace enables them to triumph under the blows of the enemies, and fills them with joy and happiness in the midst of sorrows and humiliations. When the soul is not subject to any suffering, humiliation or contradiction, it is scarcely able to leave its own self. Instead of seeking God alone, it is always seeking Him in itself, or rather, it is in reality seeking itself while apparently seeking God. The soul still finds it hard to get rid of self-complacency at the sight of all that it is, says or does. It sees only self everywhere and in all things. Even in moments when it seeks to disentangle itself and makes considerable efforts in this direction, it continues to seek and find complacency in self.

Oh! how difficult it is to go out of ourselves, to divest ourselves of self, to be unreservedly detached and abandoned! This we should never be able to attain, if God did not aid us with His mighty power. But, desiring to take pity on us, He overwhelms us with crosses and, whether we wish it or not, we must leave self, forget and lose ourselves, and thus belong to Him alone. Our dependence on His divine grace and on His Divine Spirit grows in proportion with the increase of our sorrows, our troubles and our needs.

If our afflictions are continual and without respite, so much the better for us, for we are then obliged to remain constantly prostrate before God, keeping our eyes always fixed on Him in a great spirit of lowliness and interior humiliation, yet full of confidence. If our afflictions increase,
so that they become continuous and universal, and leave us nothing to which we can remain naturally attached, our humble and sweet confidence will grow in the same proportion, and so will our love.

In the midst of these great sufferings, our soul is in a state of great humiliation, abasement and profound self-annihilation before the divine Majesty. This deepens our sense of dependence on Him. The sufferings and humiliations become more savory. They are filled with joy and love, so that we seem no longer to live or suffer.

This interior lowliness and humiliation is, it seems to me, an exquisite disposition. It is most salutary for us to preserve it, for we need always to crawl and drag ourselves, as it were, in God's holy sight. Our mind, while humbly prostrate at His feet, must constantly and lovingly unite itself to Our Divine Lord; our eyes at all times must constantly be fixed on Him. That is why I esteem it proper for you frequently to look upon the lowliness and abjection in which you find yourself before men, to consider their constant forgetfulness of you, as well as your own uselessness, your weakness and total incapacity to do good.

[The Cross Detaches Us from Creatures]

There is yet another evil which may afflict us during times when we are enjoying repose: we may then be very little concerned about, or interested in divine things. The grace of God, being unable to penetrate into the interior of our soul, cannot get to the root of our intellectual faculties to vivify them. Our Lord remains in us in a wholly superficial way. He cannot enter more deeply, because of our frivolity of mind and our heart's attachment to amusements. These obstacles act as a barricade arresting His divine grace, and preventing its entrance to the interior of our souls.
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

How unfathomable is God's goodness! The gentle and divine Lamb, prevented from living in us in a more interior and intimate way, accepts the limited space which our infidelity, our thoughtlessness, and our stupidity leaves open to Him. But when His infinite mercy prompts Him to take the fort by storm, He comes with His divine cross, with His humiliations, sufferings and sorrows. With these He penetrates into the very depths of our soul to establish there His own life, to make us practise perfect abnegation of creatures and of self, and live a life entirely dedicated to His divine love, of perfect and complete union with him, and of that divine contemplation of which you speak. Nothing equals interior and exterior sufferings, humiliations and afflictions to make us attain true recollection.

Therefore, it is absolutely certain that you should be most grateful to Our Lord for His mercy toward you, and that you should wait peacefully and lovingly for whatever He shall be pleased to accomplish through you and in you. Keep yourself in a state of expectation and of complete surrender to Him. Wish no longer for life or action. Have no longer any desires or a will of your own, but remain with the eyes of your soul trustfully turned toward the Divine Master, allowing Him to govern you, and to act in you, according to His most loving designs and His sole good pleasure.

Praised be Jesus and His divine love. May all affection for creatures perish in His sight.

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

Francis Libermann, acolyte
Jesus holds your soul in a crucifying embrace, in order to make it His, and His alone.

Letter Eight  Rennes, October 5, 1838  Vol. 1, p. 391

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father and Friend in Jesus and Mary:

I pray our most lovable Lord Jesus to be your strength and your peace in the midst of the tribulations in which He is constantly keeping you. We must admire our Divine Master for placing you in such a plight and making you incapable of acquitting yourself of what you are supposed to do. His loving design for your sanctification is thus made plain; He desires to crush you completely and to cast you down at His feet. Remain prostrate and annihilated before this great, dear and most admirable Master! Do not speak, do not even give a thought to your present state. Be always before God, like a lamb that is brought to the slaughter. It follows trembling, without emitting a sound. Allow your beloved Lord to do what He likes and wait unto the end. Be content with fixing on Him a look of love, of sorrowful love; yet never complain. Always say "Yes," however hard His blows; but say "Yes" silently, so that it be understood only by our most dear and crucified Love.

O love of Jesus! how hard and painful you are to those whom you desire to overpower! But let us remember that, however hard and violent His loving blows, they render Him constantly more sweet and pleasing to the soul which He overwhelms. Remain therefore prostrate in His sight and allow yourself to be crushed by Him. Jesus will reign gloriously, He alone! You will see how powerful and
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

admirable He is in the soul which He takes by storm. Nothing will be left in you that you can call your own. All will belong to Jesus. You will never be able to glorify yourself for any deed, but all the glory will be for Jesus.

Let Him therefore tear you to pieces, and crush you in the violence of His divine and crucifying love, in order that He alone may dwell and act in your soul. This love of Jesus and His operation in your soul, no doubt, truly tax your nature, but they produce a wonderful effect of sanctification. Allow Him, then, to act in peace and in the fullness of His divine activity. Do not stir, but in all things submit to His divine operation. Wait in silence before Him, lest you spoil the extremely delicate work which the sovereign Master has undertaken in your soul. Do not seek to guess His designs, to understand what He is doing, or to examine what His reasons might be. Be satisfied with delivering yourself into His hands, and allow Him to act in you, as if His action did not concern you any more than if He were acting in a stranger.

If you are unable to fulfill the functions that are entrusted to you, be not in the least disturbed on that account. Be content with doing what you can. Leave the rest to our most lovable Jesus.

I have to leave you now, for I am very busy. I have written these words very hurriedly. Our retreat begins this evening. Please pray for us.

Your poor brother and servant in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

P.S. I am very late with my reply. I was absent when your letter arrived; it was sent to the place where I was supposed to be staying but I was gone when it arrived; and so the letter was sent back here. You see that the good
Master wanted to deprive you of those consolations in your trials. May His Holy Name be always praised and blessed in everything and everywhere.

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*In sickness and health, seek only the Cross of Jesus. The desire to be cured for God’s glory may be inspired by self-seeking.*

**Letter Nine  Rennes, November 29, 1838  Vol. 1, p. 392**

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father in Our Lord:

I wish with all my heart that the divine cross of our good Master will not be taken away from you. It seems that Our Lord desires to cure you of your illness only little by little. If this is His desire, let us rejoice, for all that He does is most admirable and most delightful for those who belong to Him. But if His divine wisdom first asked what we wretched souls desire outside His divine, most holy and adorable will, which is our sovereign rule and ruler in all things, I would be somewhat embarrassed, for I must frankly admit how cruel I [would seem to be]. And yet I would be prompted by that most admirable charity, of which Our Lord has been pleased to give me a small spark.

I think that Our Lord Jesus is powerful enough to save souls without you. I even believe that He will save them without giving you much consolation, at least in the near future. How great and noble a thing, to be crucified in the hands of Jesus and Mary! If the good Jesus wishes to free you from this beloved illness, I hope that He will not leave
you without crosses. He will surely not reject you from before His face, and He will know how to make compensation for the loss of that cross by giving you another, perhaps even a heavier one. I consider that you must nourish your soul with crosses, as one feeds [the body] on bread.

[The Cross Transforms the Soul]

The most holy cross is always at work before nature is deadened. It casts nature down, afflicts it, confounds it and takes away all its life. When it has once killed that old corrupt nature, when it has finished exterminating all its affections, desires and human views, it then unfolds, with a certain glorious display and with great profusion, the great marvels which it possesses. It elevates the soul even to the divine union, to divine consummation or transformation. When this stage has been reached, one desires no longer to be free from crosses. On the contrary, one does not, one cannot live without them. And when they are lacking, the soul is hungry and thirsty; it experiences a void and a pain, which cannot be conceived by those who have never experienced them. That is why I believe, dear Father and friend, that you should try to be no longer occupied with your body, and should entertain a certain joy when you are in affliction. Attach yourself with the heart to the divine cross, be pleased with it and enjoy it at leisure, in order that the reign of God may be established in your soul and that He may complete your sanctification just as He began it. Do not become troubled on account of His way of dealing with you. Allow Him to pursue and finish the battle against the flesh. Be in repose and, as it were, neutral during the battle. Steadfast and perfectly abandoned to His divine guidance, receive all His blows, hiding them in your interior.
This indifference, and this surrender into His arms, this loving adherence to His most sweet, lovable and divine will and direction, is a great grace, for both body and soul, to be asked for from the divine Master. Pay no attention to the pills and remedies which you are taking, but use them as if you used them not. Consider Jesus alone living and reigning everywhere and in everything, and desire but to live in Him alone, to die to self and in self, so that He alone be in you, and you be a stranger to your own self. If you do this, you will not pass from joy to sadness according to the alternating good and bad conditions of your health.

I know that, whether we want it or not, nature experiences a certain relief when there is an improvement, and it is depressed when it sees itself getting worse. But in order to enter perfectly in the views and direction of the Holy Spirit, the soul must give and abandon itself so completely to Him, that it prefers to bear grief rather than to enjoy well-being.

The soul must not be prompted to desire bodily well-being simply because the state of bad health prevents its speaking about God and procuring His glory. Generally, we must consider God as acting in us, and simply strive to be agreeable to Him. Through this desire and this love, we shall seek to have Him reign in souls. But it must be this interior movement that prompts us, and not our own movement. Hence we must make it our chief endeavor to entertain and nourish in our soul these holy relations with God, and to consider all the rest as of secondary importance. When, through His will, we are incapable of doing anything for His glory, we do indeed experience a certain grief, sometimes even a considerable one. But our peace, our
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

love, and our union with God should increase as a result of this grief, since it is an impression received from God. If, on the contrary, this supernatural and holy movement has an admixture of our own activity, then, when we are incapacitated as you are at present, we experience a certain disquiet and agitation, embarrassment and sadness. They cause us to turn our thoughts inwardly, to be disgusted, and to give way to similar human emotions. “What is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the Spirit, is Spirit.”

[God’s Ways are Not Our Ways]

This is why, in my opinion, you should not be troubled because you are not able to do what you desire. Do not force things either, but spare yourself and wait for God’s will. I do not mean that you should lose sight of the sanctification of souls or of the efficacious means to be employed, but that you should go no farther than the divine will guides you. However, do not conclude from this that God does not want you to do anything in Rheims. God ordinarily chooses, for the end which He has in mind, means that are the contrary of those which we judge necessary, and He thereby wishes to confound our human wisdom.

That is the reason why I believe that in all things we should not seek to guess what the divine Master wants to do in and through His little servants. But we should go simply forward on our way, never ceasing to obey blindly His every wish in whatever way He may make it known, remaining faithful to His divine voice speaking in our souls, and growing in love, praise and thanksgiving toward Him, without worrying about anything, and allowing all things to come to pass according to His divine good pleasure.

I believe that He makes use of the same means in regard to our congregations [The Sulpicians and the Eudists] let’s not try to scrutinize God’s action [in their respect]. Let
us simply seek to accomplish His divine will without inquiring or worrying about the way He will do it and what He intends to do. ... In the things of God we must know how to act patiently and proceed slowly; we sanctify ourselves by it and greatly foster the work of God.

[Sundry Counsels]

I am not astonished that you experience difficulties in mental prayer. The state [of prayer in which you are] usually does not remain fixed in sensibility, but at least tends to change; the absence of painful crosses has also its influence; but I do not see any reason why you should worry on that account. Far from considering that there is something evil in the insensibility you experienced in the past, I think that it is a grace of God and is also due in part to your particular state of mental prayer.

If your mind sometimes returns to the house of Clermont, it is because the imagination ordinarily brings back, in spite of ourselves, things that have pleased our nature in the past. But this, I think, will diminish. Formerly you were, I think, too inclined to entertain those feelings and reminiscences.

Regarding Saint Francis de Sales, I see nothing wrong in reading him. There is some curiosity of yours in this, but we have to read something. I believe nevertheless that it would be better to read lives of the Saints, for in them you see practiced what was taught by Father Olier.

God be with you and Mary also.

Entirely yours in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Francis Libermann, acolyte
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

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Gentleness in bearing the cross together with Jesus. Instead of considering yourself, look only at the soul of Jesus.

Letter Ten Rennes, February 17, 1839 Vol. 1, p. 393

Dear Father in Our Lord:

[Suffer Your Crosses Gently in Union With Our Gentle Jesus]

It appears that the good Lord Jesus has chosen you to be with Him on His divine Cross. What a blessing to be called to keep company with this most sweet and most lovable Lamb. Behold His sufferings, His afflictions, His heaviness of heart! But notice also how gently, peacefully and lovingly He endures and accepts all these great evils. Unite your soul to the divine soul of Jesus. He will pour in it a little of the immense sorrows with which He was filled, but He will also communicate to it a share of the divine Spirit which animated Him in His holy and admirable sorrows. Your mind, instead of fixing its attention on its own troubles and their aggravating circumstances, should endeavor to enter into harmony with the mind and the holy soul of Jesus.

Turn to His adorable mind and see how, on the one hand, it is united with the Divine Word, wherein it beholds the immensity and the wonders of perfection, of holiness and blessedness. Consider, on the other hand, how it is bound up with the flesh which, while holy in itself, is filled, penetrated, covered, and, as it were, clothed inside and out with all the horrors of our sins, with a deluge of evils which overwhelm it. Consider at the same time the incomparable workings of the Holy Spirit in the most holy will of Jesus. Consider all the evils and afflictions of this beautiful and
adorable will, and the divine impressions which the Spirit of God works in it.

[Unite Yourself to the Soul of Jesus Crucified]

In order to perceive properly the wonders worked by crosses and the admirable dispositions of the most holy soul of Jesus, it is not necessary to use reasonings, still less to stir up the imagination. Simply begin by gently recollecting yourself; turn your eyes to Jesus in His crucified state, open your mind before Him, and remain in nothingness and humiliation. Try to enter very gently into relation and union with the holy soul of Jesus, as you do ordinarily in mental prayer. Once united to the divine soul of Our Lord, we gradually realize that an opening is made, and that light, coming from this well-beloved and sacred soul, begins to enlighten the darkness of our own. Our will participates also in the divine impressions constantly present and renewed in the will of Jesus, in which the Holy Spirit acts without intermediary and by way of an ineffable communication. When we thus receive in ourselves these divine impressions existing in the soul of Jesus, we are transformed into Him and possess in ourselves the very life of Jesus.

[Cease Your Preoccupation with Self and Consider Only Jesus]

When you thus possess the crucified life of Jesus, you will no longer have to fight so much against self in order to relish your sufferings, nor to reason with yourself and seek to persuade yourself that it is good for you to suffer and that you need to abandon and deliver yourself completely to God’s will. This is why I advise you to occupy yourself henceforth with the sufferings of Jesus and with His interior dispositions, especially with the action of God in His soul. Forget self and all that is taking place in you. Occupy
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

yourself solely with contemplating Jesus and entering into His divine interior and allowing His divine life to be born in you.

You have for a long time proceeded in a different way. I believe that it is well for you to adopt this new method which is more efficacious. The word of God, says St. Paul, which is the Word, is living, vivifying and efficacious, and it penetrates to the division of the soul and to the very marrow of our bones. You should therefore apply yourself henceforth solely to this adorable, vivifying and efficacious Word, putting self aside entirely and making complete abstraction from all that is bound up with self.

May the love of Jesus then live in you as it has lived in Mary. Do you see the divine Mother at the foot of the Cross? She puts self and any self-concern aside to see and consider only her Jesus. That is why her communion with Jesus was perfect. May then, the love of Jesus and Mary live in your soul; but let it be their crucified love.

Your poor servant in their holy love, 

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE

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How crosses operate in the spiritual soul.

Letter Eleven  Rennes, April 28, 1839  Vol. 1, p. 393

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father and Friend in Our Lord:

I see that Our Lord has finally been pleased to mitigate your sufferings. May His holy Name be blessed for it as for everything else. His designs are always full of mercy and
love. It seems that the time for harvesting has come. I think, nevertheless, that it will not be a harvesting accompanied solely by joy and gladness. There will still be pains and labors, but these will not be as severe as those of the man who has to plough and break up the soil or of him who still has to sow the seed and sees no signs yet of any fruit of his labors.

Yes indeed, great is the difference between the trials [that lead to our sanctification] and the troubles we experience when we have happily attained a condition of being firmly established and fortified in grace on the divine cross.

[How Crosses Operate at the Beginning of Our Spiritual Life]

Crosses in the beginning are hard and painful. They tear up, plough deeply, "penetrating to the very division of the soul." But they are necessary in order to do away with our self-love and wicked affection for earthly things, that are like briars and thorns growing in, and covering the soil of our wretched soul.

Those crosses have still another result: they soften the hardness of our heart and make it receptive for the seed which the Divine Master desires to cast in our soul. In fact He sows seed more or less generously according to the dispositions He finds in us and according to the wishes of His heavenly Father. He sends us from time to time a sweet and satisfying rain of divine grace in order to moisten the dry and arid soil and give it productive power. This grace strengthens us and makes us cling and submit to all those crosses.

[What the Cross Does to the Purified Soul]

Later, when nature has been somewhat tamed, and the soul has acquired the habit of thus adhering and submitting
entirely to the good pleasure of God, trials are no longer so hard to bear, because the senses are subjugated. Little by little there comes about a sort of separation between the spiritual powers and the senses. The soul then acts less through the senses, but it goes to God more directly and with more freedom. The mind proceeds less through reasoning and more through a simple intention and adhesion of faith. It acts no longer by detours or through bodily organs, nor does it borrow its objects and views from them, but it goes straight to God through a simple look of faith. No longer given so much to reasoning things out, it is now contented to see them and to submit.

This view is sometimes very obscure, especially at the beginning of this state, because the mind is entirely incapable of giving an account to itself of what it sees or does; it is unable to analyze, and this sometimes causes great suffering. We need then to remain in peace, confidence and complete surrender to God's goodness which is leading us. This confidence is based solely on the mercy of God, and coupled with great self-distrust and a deep interior humiliation before Our Lord.

In addition to this simple view of our mind, our will is established in God and is in everything directed toward Him. Freed from a multitude of created affections and self-seeking, it goes straight to God and acts without hesitation, with purity and straightforwardness. The flesh remains wretched in spite of this. We continue to have all sorts of evil affections which spring up in our heart, but they do not reach our soul, or at least they affect us much more rarely than formerly. We even undergo evil temptations, but the soul possesses a certain confidence which causes it to preserve peace in the midst of all such troubles.

The soul has a fundamental tendency then of tending unceasingly toward God, and it strives to Him with all its
powers. It turns constantly toward the Well-Beloved through intentions that are more simple, more pure and less reasoned, or not reasoned at all. The imagination then has less dominion over our deeds, our affections and our devout thoughts. It is not dead, but is much more calm; it is no longer in control, and if it manages at times to let itself go, it is no longer so violent or lasting as formerly.

In this state, our senses may still suffer pain, anguish and affliction; but our soul rises above it all. These feelings no longer reach the depths of our soul, because of the separation mentioned above. The soul feels this anguish and may even feel it very keenly, but it is no longer overwhelmed or dominated by it. The best feature is the fact that all these trials, humiliations and other spiritual evils, which formerly tended with all their might to pull the soul away from God, to make it self-centered and incapable of applying itself to God and to the things of God, have now the opposite effect. The more violent these troubles and tribulations, the more intimately the soul is united to God, and the more vigorously it applies itself to the work of God which it has to accomplish. Thus the direct result of these sufferings is to unite the soul to God.

When we have the happiness of reaching this point, we then find our delight in crosses. When they are present, we would like to keep them forever, and we experience a void in our interior when they are gone. We are then like one who for some time has enjoyed the company of a beloved friend. When he is gone, we experience during the first days that something is missing; the house seems empty. When it pleases the good Lord to give us this grace, crosses become powerful means to sanctify our souls...
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

[Sundry Counsels]

When we are not certain about the will of God in some matter, and we do not know whether it will serve the glory of the Master, we should incline against undertaking it. Keep your soul in peace before God, and wait calmly for His orders in your interior.

I have read the prophecy of which you speak. It contains things that surprise me, if we have to accept that it is as old as it is claimed to be. I am of the opinion that you would do well not to put any faith in it, before the time when those things come to pass. Let the world become what it wants! All that really matters is that we be faithful to our divine Master.

Let us always be filled with the divine love of Jesus and Mary, in which love I am,

Entirely yours,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

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The soul of Jesus crucified. Peacefully rejoice that men disregard you.

Letter Twelve Rennes, October 17, 1839 Vol. 1, p. 394

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father and Friend:

[Consider the Soul of Jesus on the Cross]

I assure you that I would have answered your letter immediately if it had been at all possible, for I know your
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

state of suffering and affliction. The sacred cross is a bond of love which obliges us to love more tenderly those who are attached to it, especially if they are attached to it with heart and will as well as in reality. I pray Our Lord to allow you to penetrate into the interior of His crucified life.

O my God! If we were able to conceive but a little of the interior state of the most holy soul of Jesus in His crucified life! We should then be carried away with joy and admiration and would desire no other life than that of the cross. This is the fountain of living waters. The crucified soul of our divine Master is a treasure full of graces. A soul attached to the cross must constantly turn its gaze to the holy soul of Jesus, and never cease to consider its loving surrender.

[I am Happy That You Are No Longer Esteemed]

What I find particularly beautiful and worth envying in your troubles is the last point you mentioned to me and whose extraordinary value you seem to begin to appreciate: everybody is abandoning you; you are becoming more and more like trash in the eyes of men. The seminarians consider you with indifference, they esteem this one and the other, but they do not even have one thought for you, either to esteem or to despise you. You have become a man about whom no one is any longer concerned; he is put aside, and others are loved, esteemed and praised instead.

Remain in this oblivion and in your nothingness. Nourish yourself with opprobrium and your universal worthlessness. Sink in this same lowliness and annihilation before God, before Our Lord and His most holy Mother. Do not leave it at any time. Live in your lowliness as a worm remains hidden underground; it chooses to dwell there, covers itself with earth as with a garment, feeds on it,
LETTERS TO FATHER JULES CAHIER

and fills itself with it, it is immersed in it, finds in it its whole existence and all its satisfaction. This is the exemplar on which you must model yourself before God. I beg you never to leave this state of interior humiliation. If you pay attention, you will notice that every time you abandon it, you will feel a certain freedom of mind which is not according to God, and you will even experience a certain interior uneasiness.

[Do Not Seek Consolation, But Remain in Peace on the Cross]

This great oblivion, and this sort of lowliness and nothingness in which you are forced to remain, is no doubt causing you sadness, depression of spirit and heartaches. I find no evil in this; it is nature suffering from the blows it receives. Accept this very sadness and these heartaches as instruments to achieve the spiritual repose which Our Lord desires to give you. Keep your soul in lowliness before God, without seeking to console it; at least do not entirely eliminate these sorrows and heartaches. Merely do not permit them to make you downhearted and despondent, and never allow the imagination to indulge in this sadness. Furthermore, in the midst of this delightful anguish, in which you will repose in the Lord's presence, keep your soul in peace and quiet, both toward itself and toward others; the cross will then become more and more a means of sanctification for you.

Do not think of the termination of this sacred tragedy. So much the better if the remedies do not work, and if you cannot see the dawn of any new day. God alone! Let God alone be your only hope, not as one who will cure all your ills, but as He who will crush the old creature in you, in order to form in your soul the life of Jesus crucified. Therefore allow this miserable flesh to die; let it expire in sorrow,
in afflictions and in the greatest humiliations; and may Jesus alone live and reign in your soul. Do not fear the aridity of your soul and do not worry about it. Live in your abjection and be contented with it: this suffices and most advantageously takes the place of all the rest.

I want to recommend to you a work that is most excellent for the glory of God and the salvation of an innumerable multitude of poor souls. Offer yourself to God to undergo all the sorrows and humiliations which He may desire to send you, in view of this work. Do this in union with Jesus and His love for souls, as He hung on the cross.

Entirely your in that holy love,

Francis Libermann, Acolyte

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Libermann relates his pilgrimages in Rome and urges his friend to join him on his visit to Loretto.

Letter Thirteen Rome, July 6, 1840 Vol. 2, p. 136

Dear Father and Friend:

I beg you in your charity not to be angry with me for leaving your letter so long without a reply. I was so busy and had to write so many letters that I had to postpone the answer. I begged Father Pinault to ask you to excuse me but, knowing his habitual distraction in such matters, I also asked someone else to do it for me. To make things even worse, your letter got lost and I do not know exactly what was in it.

1. Founding of Libermann's own congregation.
I have done the holy errands for you and done more even than you had recommended. I have prayed for you at the "Confession" of St. Peter and St. Paul, in the catacombs of St. Sebastian [Cemetery of St. Calixtus], which is for me a favorite place of devotion. Unfortunately I cannot go there often, for it is over a league away from the place where I am staying. You realize that it is worth visiting, since the relics of a hundred and seventy thousand martyrs have been removed from that place. Still found there are an ancient altar on which the holy Sacrifice was offered during the persecutions and several chapels where the Christians gathered to pray and took part in the holy Sacrifice and Sacrament, where they spent days and nights, months and years perhaps, to evade their persecutors. What fervor must have animated those who dwelt in those places! That is why, when we enter, our soul is touched to its very depths and we feel the desire to remain there forever.

I remembered you also when I visited the Coliseum. This is the ancient amphitheatre where so many fervent Christians were exposed to the beasts and gave their lives for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. The vast edifice is in ruin, but it is one of the finest and best preserved of all the ruins found in Rome. The interior of the amphitheatre where the martyrs were torn to pieces by the beasts is completely preserved. It is one of the most precious spots in Rome and one that is most capable of arousing devotion. During the last forty years more than five hundred thousand francs have been spent for the preservation of that structure.

The other places of devotion are numberless. This week, for example, I visited the prison where Saint Peter and Saint Paul were held captive before their death, and the house in which Saint Paul was imprisoned for two years, after His arrival from Jerusalem. The first is called the
Mamertine prison; it is over forty feet under ground. The second is not so deep; it is the lower part of the house over which a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin was constructed. In both there are fountains which were used by the holy Apostles to baptize those whom our Lord converted at their word. At the Mamertine prison, the fountain was obtained at the prayer of Saint Peter. There he baptized the prison keeper with his whole family and a multitude of others.

On the Feast of Saint Paul, I went to the great church of that holy apostle, which is being rebuilt. It will be consecrated during the month of September by the Pope himself, who is afraid he might die before being able to consecrate it. To give himself that consolation, he is urging the workers to labor assiduously, so that it will be finished before his death. It will be a great ceremony. On the same day, I attended Mass on the very spot where Saint Paul was decapitated and where there is a small column to which he was attached before being executed.

I have drunk of the water of the three fountains which, according to tradition, gushed forth on the three spots where the head of the great apostle rebounded. In the same enclosure there is another chapel which contains the prison in which the Saint was placed for a few hours, while awaiting for his execution. In the vault of that chapel are buried Saint Zeno, with more than ten thousand martyrs. It was at the altar of that chapel that Saint Bernard said Mass and was favored with a vision of the Blessed Virgin. During this Octave, people still go to Saint Peter's in montorio, where that apostle was crucified and at Saint Peter's in vincoli, where his chains are preserved.

You see, from these examples that Rome is par excellence the Holy City. They will enable you to form an idea of the rest. I would never end if I were to enter into details.
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Try therefore to spend your vacation in Rome; this journey would be beneficial to your throat, and your faith would be strengthened and nourished by all the wonderful things you would see. The expenses are not very high. I believe that you would not need more than five hundred francs for the round trip and a stay of six weeks in Rome.

If you came during the month of September, we could go together on a pilgrimage to Loretto. I hope to go there during that month, together with several priests who are studying in Rome. I almost have qualms of conscience in urging you to come; for, if it fails to go through, it will be a heartbreak for you during two months and one cross to add to all your others. I have met Father de Champgrand here; he left toward the end of May for the Holy Land.

To Jesus, to Mary, to whom alone our souls belong with all their desires and actions! Let there be nothing in you for yourself but let all be for Jesus and to Jesus through Mary and with Mary, whose charity should fill all our souls.

Entirely yours in holy charity of Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE
Jesus wants to keep us in a state of uselessness, why should we complain? Yet God seems to draw me now to an active life.

Letter Fourteen Strasbourg {August 10, 1841} Vol. 2, p. 490 J. M. J.

Dear Father and Friend:

[Let Jesus Do With Us What He Wants]

May Jesus live in your soul by His holy Cross. How admirable are His merciful designs for those whom He loves with predilection, and who is able to fathom them? Sometimes He is pleased to use a poor man whom He enriches with His gifts for the sake of saving a great number of souls. At other times, on the contrary, He leaves us poor and wretched, lost in our nothingness and uselessness. Even when we are in this state of uselessness, He grants us great graces and overwhelsms us with favors. He gives us ardent desires for doing a few little things for the glory of His Holy Name, but at the same time keeps us chained to weakness and incapacity. Poor ants that we are! We desire to leap forward and free ourselves from those bonds, but our efforts are useless. A power greater than our own holds us bound and pinioned and we are not able to do the least thing.

That is why I think it quite wrong and useless, a foolish affliction of mind, when we make all those efforts, lament our lot, grieve and worry about our nullity. Do we want to force our Master to accept our services when He does not want them? And what can we do without Him? There is one remarkable thing which, I think, we should carefully keep in mind in order to avoid illusions of self-love. It is the
fact that our adorable Master very often gives graces and favors that seem to render His wretched servants capable of doing something for His glory and the salvation of souls, yet at the same time He wishes to keep them in obscurity, contempt and nothingness. And what happens then? They imagine that they are sent by Him; they push forward; they act strenuously, but produce nothing substantial. And they suffer interior desolation and humiliations and sometimes undergo external ones. This is the only advantage they reap, through the mercy of their adorable Master and for His glory.

[Rejoice that Jesus Keeps Us In Our State of Nothingness]

Now this is your state and it is mine. Do not feel sad about it, but, on the contrary, rejoice in it with all your soul. For, if our Master wishes to keep us thus in poverty, weakness and nothingness, and takes delight in it, is it not proper that we who are such wretched servants, should rejoice when we see that our sovereign and well-beloved Lord does with us according to His wishes and at our expense?

Suppose even that we could make use of admirable graces and gifts such as we behold in saints, we should not be able to succeed. This shows us how weak we are, how utterly incapable of accomplishing anything that is worthwhile. We are not even capable of using the things Our Lord puts at our disposal and in our hands. He Himself has to launch, propel, conduct us at every step and in every one of our actions.

Let us, then, remain in His hands like empty vessels. If He chooses to use them for something that is useful in His house, He will do it in His own time and place, when it suits Him. If He wants to make us useful, let us hope that, as in the case of useless and purely ornamental things found in the palaces of princes and kings, He will use us to manifest the right order and the riches of His heavenly
 SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

palace, and allow us to serve His glory in what is smallest in the holy mission of His Church. We are permitted to hope that He will grant us that favor. If we consider what He has done in the order of nature, how He has adorned and enriched so marvelously the smallest and meanest insect which the eye of man is scarcely able to see, is it possible for us to conceive what He will do for His chosen ones, for those for who's sake He delivered Himself to suffering and death?

[Avoid Self-Centered Sorrow]

If the sight of your uselessness and incapacity causes you pain and sorrow, prostrate yourself before Jesus and don't be afraid to have in your heart a wound which His beloved Hand has inflicted, a wound which He wishes to renew constantly. Since Jesus delights in afflicting and humiliating you, you ought to place your happiness in this affliction and embrace it with all the love of your soul. When you feel heartpangs, anguish and similar sentiments, give your soul to Jesus and forget yourself, for you are being tried. Pain, sorrow, sadness, and interior humiliation are excellent when they cause us to plunge into the bosom of Jesus and His divine love, when they cause our souls to expand. They are evil when they tend to make us self-centered, when they constrict our hearts. I hope that the good Lord in His excessive love for your soul will take away such a temptation from you.

[Though I Desired Solitude, God Has Drawn Me to Active Work]

Let me now say a few words about ourselves. I became a deacon this morning. Those good Fathers [Le Vavasseur and Tisserant] have made me join their holy foundation for the Negro. I shall have to remain in France in order to receive the candidates who will present themselves for it and
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shall have to form them according to the spirit of the foundation.

During my stay in Rome I had a strong desire to remain there and withdraw into some isolated place in Italy, for I felt that I would never accomplish anything that was worthwhile. I had then and still have a great longing for a retired life. But I am afraid of not following God’s will and causing the loss of several souls. That is why I have abandoned myself into the hands of divine Providence to be advanced to the priesthood itself. We shall see later what the Lord will decide, in His own time and place.

My health has greatly improved. I have not had an attack [of epilepsy] for over three and a half years and the nervous contractions are diminishing. However, I am not cured. I have not yet perfect control over my speech and hence could not take a chance on preaching. I shall remain in some secluded place in Strasbourg. I will explain the situation more fully on another occasion.

Adieu, dear Father and friend. Live in the Lord, and may He live in you as Mary lived in Jesus and Jesus in her, so that their holy love may triumph and reign always in your soul.

Entirely yours in that holy love,

FRANCIS LEMBERMANN, DEACON

P.S. “I am a deacon,” I’ve said, without any comment. I want to add one more word, for there is still room. Who is there who can explain this great grace? It would be impossible for me to express to you what the good Lord has done in me; but one thing I can say and it is that I am perfectly unworthy of it. I beg you, for the love of God, to offer the holy Sacrifice for me. Beg Our Lord that the great gift of God may not remain sterile in my soul, that it may serve the salvation of many.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

[I Hope That God Will Allow Me to Labor for Him]

I must no longer be useless, as I told you at the beginning of this letter, which I began before receiving that great and sacred Order. Now my desire of doing something for God's glory is immense; and I should be grieved if I had to remain as fruitless as I was in the past. You at least have done something; would I, then, be obliged to bury my talent as soon as I have received it? Pray therefore for me, for I greatly fear, in spite of the mercy of God. However, if this were the holy will of Our Lord, I would have to suffer it and remain lovingly in that state of uselessness. But I would then be inclined to say what He said to His father: "Let this chalice pass from me." May He will to let me labor just a little. Nevertheless, in the last analysis, may the will of the Lord be done.

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Value of being on the Cross. God is blessing our little congregation.

Letter Fifteen  La Neuville, October 12, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 316

Dear Confrere:

It is quite a while since I received a letter from you, but knowing that we are united in the charity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I have not worried about it. I have contented myself with inquiring about you whenever I met persons who had seen you. Father de Brandt, among others, gave me some news about you after his retreat.

[The Best Moments of Our Life are Those Spent on the Cross]

I am perfectly certain that the very best moments of your life, whether past, present or future, are those spent


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upon the cross. It is here that Jesus is always to be found; everywhere else we run the risk of finding only ourselves even when we think that we are with Jesus.

One remarkable thing about the times when we are crucified is that we then receive great lights about our past life. We then become aware of how much self-centeredness mingled with our holiest actions and with the greatest graces we received from God. We are very poor, very wretched. Our Lord has to chastise and try us in spite of His tender love for us, for otherwise He would have to perform constant miracles to keep us straight.

[Illness Enables Us to become More Perfect Instruments of God]

I know that if you were in better health you would do more good than during your illness, but you would then perhaps be building for others. On the contrary, when you are ill you are building a house of God in your own soul. Moreover, while doing good [to others] you would inject many of your own imperfections into the fine flour of God’s grace. We need great purity if we want to be faithful instruments in God’s hands; this is a thing I realize better every day. Hence you must consider yourself very fortunate because you are thus tied by God’s hands. This is a precious time for you, for you will prepare yourself carefully to become a faithful servant and a perfect instrument for the time when the good Master will say “Ephpheta” to you.

If you are unable to work for the spiritual welfare of the house as much as you desire, you will occupy yourself so much more with your own spiritual good by keeping your mind humbly, peacefully and lovingly before the divine Master as you remain faithfully as His feet. You will, no doubt, be less sensibly aware of your progress than at the beginning when you tried to sanctify yourself; you will not have as vivid a sentiment of God’s presence. You are no
longer carrying, as it were, that golden cross which you used to feel clearly to be of great price. Your present cross is much poorer; it is the cross of your Master, a wooden one. But it nonetheless is a genuine cross, as long as you have true dispositions of humility, peace and love in the depth of your soul. They detach you from yourself and cause you to tend Godward in all things.

[God is Blessing Our Little Congregation]

The good Lord has blessed us in our little enterprise far beyond what we could have hoped for and infinitely more than we deserve, for He should have rejected us as poor wretched creatures. But He has overwhelmed us with blessings. We are now twelve in the novitiate and the good Lord allows us to enjoy great peace. I hope that, toward the end of this winter, we shall be able to send seven to the missions. We receive great encouragement from our ecclesiastical superiors; this is for us a source of joy, for it is the peace of God.

The Cardinal Prefect in a third letter of encouragement told us that “what this Sacred Congregation hears about you and your associates, gives us reason to rejoice and hope that finally it will be possible to provide in a more suitable fashion for these regions [the old French colonies].” And he adds other most encouraging words, urging us to continue with even greater care and fervor in the work we have begun. I don’t have the time to copy the entire letter.

I leave you to Jesus and Mary and beg you not to forget us in your prayers and sacrifices.

 Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

Father Francis Libermann
Joyfully surrender into the arms of Jesus, and seek only Him. Jesus knows how to draw delicious fruits from the bitter roots of nature.

Letter Sixteen La Neuville, September 16, 1844 Vol. 6, p. 357

Reverend and Dear Confrere:

When I received your letter, I said to myself, “Let’s wait a few days before replying, to allow divine grace to triumph by itself alone without the help of the words of a friend, for the result will thus be more sanctifying for this tried soul.” I have regretted this since, because lately I have not been able to find one moment to write to you.

[Surrender Fully to Jesus]

May the Holy Name of our good Master be blessed. He pursues you into the very last stronghold of your poor nature. He wants you to lie dead in His hands, so that He can revive you by the divine life of His grace. Surrender to the divine Jesus. Abandon yourself completely to His holy guidance, which is full of mercy for you. Rest in His arms with a profound conviction of your littleness, your poverty and weakness. Seek no joy, satisfaction, no complacency, no esteem or affection from men. Turn your mind away from men, avoid thinking with pleasure about their relations with you or the delight your sensitive nature might draw from such relations. Your heart ought to turn away from all such things so that you will not have food for self-complacency or capture their affection.

Jesus wants your interior free from all natural affection, complacency and satisfaction. He wants you to empty yourself of your sensibility and all craving for intellectual satisfaction and self-contentedness. He does not want you to
rest in the least on yourself, on men or on things. It is in Him alone that you should find all the repose of your soul. All else is nothing, is futility; and it will keep you always imperfect and weak.

[Seek Jesus Only in Himself and for Himself]

Our divine Jesus categorically desires that you seek nothing but Him alone, and that you seek Him in Himself and for Himself. I underline those two words. I say “in Him” which means, seek Him not in your relations with creatures, for they always bring in imperfections, and seeking Him that way will never be pure. When we seek Jesus in Him alone, we act then toward creatures with a charity that is pure in their regard and we do not desire to have more relations with creatures than those given us by divine Providence. We then embrace with ardent love the means which the divine Savior offers us to sanctify creatures and remain in repose when those means are wanting.

I say “for Jesus,” and not for us or for creatures. We then do not exalt ourselves on account of the good He gives us to accomplish and are not discouraged when He leaves us to ourselves and in a state of inaction. We then have no complacency and self-esteem amidst success nor have we excessive grief when we fail. We are in perfect peace when men forget and neglect us and are indifferent when they esteem us and give us their affection. We are like inert instruments before the divine Master and He can leave us lying about unused by Him. We remain at rest, accomplishing peacefully and humbly whatever work He wishes us to do. We are docile and faithful, allowing Him to manipulate us through His divine grace whenever He deigns to use our service.

A tool remains on the ground as long as the workman does not pick it up to use it. And when it is in his
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hand, it does nothing until he applies it to a specific use, and the tool submits to every impulse of the workman, to his every wish and whim.

[From the Bitter Roots of Nature Jesus Draws Delicious Fruits]

This, Reverend confrere, is what the divine Master wants to do in your soul. It requires suffering. Nature will rebel; self-love will reawaken, but this is nothing. The Master who handles you is almightily and wise. Abandon yourself to Him and fear nothing. Remain prostrate in His presence in all your poverty, wretchedness and weakness. Humble yourself and remain in your nothingness, abandoning yourself humbly, peacefully and lovingly to Him and to the pain which springs from your defects.

Relish your sorrows, heartaches and despondency, prostrate yourself before Jesus and reject the wrong thoughts that are at the source of those pains. Those thoughts are worthless, but the sorrows are excellent. The tree that produces those bitter fruits is evil, but they will be rendered sweet by the superabundant love and the humiliation of the heart and mind into which the divine Master will plunge you as you humbly and lovingly surrender into His hands. These thoughts are comparable to bitter and worthless fruits that become excellent when they are preserved with sugar and aromatic herbs.

This is why I rejoice with all my heart as I behold the graces which God's goodness pours into your soul.

I remain, in His most holy charity,

Your devoted friend,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN
Libermann confirms the disaster that has struck his first missionaries in West Africa and expresses his intention not to abandon the African mission.

Letter Seventeen  La Neuville, January 7, 1845  Vol. 7, p. 9

Reverend and Dear Confrere:

The news you have read in the Ami de la Religion is unfortunately absolutely true. I have been waiting eight months for that desolating news.

I made use of every means to let my dear confreres know that they should leave that country, or at least the unhealthy districts and establish themselves in a part that was more salubrious but it was all in vain. My letters never reached them although I sent them at various times. God has demanded the sacrifice of those fervent missionaries. I trust that He will deign to accept their sacrifice and mine for the salvation of so many souls.

This must be in conformity with God’s designs, for otherwise it is impossible to understand how such a thing did happen. I had been led into error by all the information I had gathered regarding that country, not only in regard to the healthiness of the place but also concerning good and bad seasons.

Our Fathers realized the unbearable conditions of that spot and I cannot understand why they remained or how they were able to decide to remain in good conscience. They should have judged that obedience did not impose on them the duty of perishing and should have presumed my intentions. Obedience and their desire to do good led them to certain death because they paid no attention to the great obstacles in their way. What astonishes me most is that
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Bishop Barron did not use his authority to withdraw them from that dangerous district. When I reflect on all that, I become convinced that a merciful Providence permitted those things in order to draw God's blessings upon those countries.

The evil caused by that catastrophe is not really hurting our weak little Congregation. The good Lord has given us seven new members this year; they have finished their novitiate and six of them are ready to leave. The seventh will remain to teach the course of theology we have organized. All seven have begged me insistently to send them to Guinea. I have had to command them not to torment me any more with their requests; we simply cannot send men to that country for the present; the wound is too recent. If we were to meet with new misfortunes, a great evil might result. We have to take other means; we will make careful use of them and it is my hope that we shall now act more efficaciously in those parts than if our dear confreres had been alive, for we would not have thought of using such means at the present time. Moreover, at a later date, once we have men who are accustomed to the tropical climate, we will choose some and place them in the healthier spots of the coast of Guinea.

Finally pray, help us, by being united with us in prayers and good works, to procure the salvation of those countless multitudes of souls that are so neglected and have never heard the good news of the Holy Gospel. We may not and cannot abandon that mission, unless Our Lord tells us otherwise. There are more than fifteen million people in those countries; protestants are making great efforts among them. Europeans everywhere make commercial establishments; very soon, if we do not come to the assistance of those poor people, they will all be lost.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

I rejoice seeing that God has blessed your submission to His holy will.

I remain in Jesus and Mary, your most devoted and affectionate confrere and servant,

Francis Libermann,
priest of the Holy Heart of Mary