6. LETTERS TO FATHER MANGOT

Venerable Francis Libermann’s extensive correspondence with Father Mangot originated with his journey to Picardy and the work of the Pious Associations of Seminarians, and it is probable that the two met on the occasion of that journey. In any case, the apostolate exercised by Libermann among the Picards of the seminary of Paris and the good he accomplished at the Seminary of St. Sulpice prompted Mr. Mangot (then still a seminarian) to seek advice from him in order to produce similar results among the seminarians of Amiens.

We can judge how greatly Libermann’s letters were appreciated by Father Mangot from these lines which he wrote on July 30, 1878:

“I re-read what I have preserved of the writings of this venerated priest and I have to confess that nothing is more beneficial to me than those letters. They are a relic which I prefer to any other that should contain his bones, his heart or even his body. I have merely to read them and I find refreshment amidst life’s tribulations."

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On spiritual direction. Self-denial. How to be a fervent seminarian.

Letter One {undated (1836?)} Vol. 1, p. 271

Dear Mr. Mangot:

I have delayed long in answering your letter which, however, has given me great pleasure. We have had some sick people in the infirmary whom I could not neglect, al-
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though it would have given me pleasure to write to you. I shall try to make up for my neglect by writing you a long epistle, for I foresee that there are many things I shall have to tell you.

[On Spiritual Direction]

I thank God and the Blessed Virgin for the grace which you have received, and which you desired with such ardor—that of having a good director. You see what care God takes of those who sincerely seek Him. He provides them with all possible means for their sanctification. You have now almost everything that we have here, and nothing is left for you to desire. If you do not make good use of that grace God gives you, you deserve to be whipped!

From now on you should think only of one thing, namely, of reaching the highest perfection. This is why I shall say a few words about what I have seen practiced by the most fervent seminarians that I know.

Let us first speak about direction. With regard to this, let me warn you against an abuse that I have observed in certain seminarians who were animated with the best of intentions but had little courage. They boasted, praised and fell into ecstacies over the skillfulness of their directors; they said with a great deal of joy and satisfaction: "I cannot help becoming a saint; my director is a saint and he has the reputation of being a very skillful guide, so he will infallibly make me advance."

Such joy and such language would have been perfectly proper had not those persons stopped there. But instead of making use of the holiness of their director in order to imitate him, and of the wisdom which God gave him, they fell asleep in their hopes, and made no effort to conquer themselves and to arrive at the holiness that they wished to acquire. You realize that it is not the director who makes us
holy, but our fidelity to grace, and the sincere and efficacious desire of advancing.

The importance, the necessity, of having a good director is exceedingly great; but the firmness and the perseverance of our will in the service of God, and the continual and fervent desire of living for Him alone, are infinitely more important and more necessary.

Our Divine Savior did not say in His holy Gospel that he who wished to be perfect should take a director; but He said: “Let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.”

We need a director, just as an army needs a general. Nevertheless, an army without a general will do more than a general without an army. You would not have made much progress without a director; you would have only vegetated. It is, therefore, a wonderful grace that God has bestowed upon you in giving you an experienced guide. It is now a question of making use of that grace by an ardent desire and a firm will to die henceforth to the world and to all that it contains, and to live for God alone and in God alone.

You will have to wage great battles, and they will last a long time, especially if you are not truly generous from the very beginning. If, on the contrary, you go at it in a whole-hearted way, you will succeed beyond your expectations.

Do not let these combats frighten you; you have an innumerable army of graces and blessings of God within your soul. Your director is their general, and he will know how to use them against the enemy. Don’t be cowardly or timid; for if you are, he will not dare to dispose of the forces that are in you. He would be obliged to humor you, and to allow you things that he would not concede to a fervent seminarian. If you are full of the most ardent desires, and are guided by a good director, the affairs of your soul will get along splendidly.
On this occasion I want to quote a fundamental rule of conduct adopted by twenty fervent seminarians whom I know at St. Sulpice, so that you may mould your life by it, if you find it good: "God has not placed us upon earth for the purpose of enjoying and satisfying ourselves, but to suffer and to please Him in all things."

That is why they seek to deny themselves in everything, everywhere, and always. If they perceive in the course of a day that they have taken pleasure in anything, and that they have not resisted this natural feeling, they reproach themselves with it; they take the resolution of correcting and watching more closely over themselves, and they make it a point to ask God's pardon. To such a degree are they anxious to lead a pure, holy and angelic life upon earth. They aim in all things to become detached from self and from every creature, and to live for God alone.

When we lead this crucified life, the love of God grows so strongly in our souls that we are at length completely filled with it. Only in the beginning are we tempted to believe that such a life is a hardship. We say to ourselves: "How can I live upon earth without allowing myself any pleasure or satisfaction?" But we are badly mistaken for true happiness lies in self-denial only. And this happiness is so great that it makes us wonder why the world is not filled with saints, since the mere wish and endeavor to become a saint afford us such happiness.

We are not upon earth in order to enjoy but in order to suffer; consequently, we must not ask ourselves if we can be satisfied or not in working out our sanctification. We must only consider that our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us to act in such wise; that He has given us the example of it, and that all the saints, without a single exception, have walked in His footsteps.
LETTERS TO FATHER MANGOT

[Self-Denial Gives Us True Freedom]

There is another temptation. We imagine that those who wish to act in this way are sad and down-hearted; that they are always ill at ease and embarrassed, and that they always live in worry and trouble. Those who speak thus, simply show that they are cowards, and that they have never tried what they judge so unfavorably. They thus display their gross ignorance, for it is precisely the contrary that takes place.

Nobody has his mind more at ease and liberty, his heart more joyful, open, simple and calm, than he who gives himself entirely to God. I should like to explain to you the source of this openness of mind and heart and this profound peace, and how to preserve them; but I cannot do so in this letter, because I have to speak to you about other things.

Do not therefore allow yourselves to be deceived by this false reasoning; but take up, with heroic courage, the important and only affair of the perfection and the advancement of your soul. Jesus and Mary will be with you, and who can then injure or stop you?

Do not say; "I am too feeble, too cowardly, too vain, and shall never attain this high degree of holiness." I have known others much more feeble and more miserable, who nevertheless succeeded in breaking with everything in a very short time. Be of good cheer, therefore; with unlimited confidence in Jesus and Mary, we can succeed in everything.

[The Fervent Seminarian]

I must add a few words about the mode of action followed by these fervent seminarians, who place all the affection of their heart in God alone, to the exclusion of all creatures.

In the morning when they awake, they immediately raise their soul to God, the only object of their great love, and
they continue to be intimately united with the God of their love until evening when they are ready to go to sleep. And as their heart is always full of love, finding its only joy and light in God alone, it wakes even in their sleep, never being disposed to do anything from any other motive than from the love of God.

At the first stroke of the bell, they get out of bed, so that they do not yield even for an instant to laziness or to the satisfaction of the flesh. They put on their cassock, kneel down and renew the offering of all they have to Jesus and Mary. They prepare or continue to prepare, the subject of meditation that they chose the evening before. They then go to meditation and assist at Holy Mass, continually renewing their resolution of living for God alone. All their exercises of piety tend to this one end.

They study very carefully but for God alone. The passion for study and the natural desire of curiosity or ambition do not enter into their design. They constantly endeavor to strengthen themselves in the angelic purity of their souls, unceasingly preoccupied to desire and do nothing but for God alone.

They are very careful to make their general and particular examen every day; and if the short time determined by the rule for this exercise does not suffice, they supplement it during the course of the day.

During recreation they are gay, frank, and full of charity, gentleness, humility, and attention for one another. This conduct proceeds from the mortification of the passions, from great freedom of mind, angelic purity of heart, and the delight of God's love with which they are filled.

They make it a point to meet from time to time for the purpose of mutually exhorting and urging one another on to the highest perfection. These conversations are so fervent that all are fired with the burning love of God. They propose novenas of prayers before the feasts of the Blessed
LETTERS TO FATHER MANGOT

Virgin and other great feasts in order to obtain the grace of perfection, which they desire so ardently. During these novenas, which are passed in the spirit of retreat, they study and perform all their exercises as usual, but in even greater union with God and in a state of special recollection.

They sometimes propose to receive Holy Communion for the mutual advancement of their souls.

If you can imitate some of these practices, I promise you that they will do you good. This must, however, be in entire conformity with the rules [of your seminary]. For obedience comes first; it is also a criterion of true fervor, and is a point in which our seminarians are exceedingly faithful. It causes them no trouble, since they explicitly want not to be attached to anything upon earth, and to conquer themselves in everything. If they obey with such simplicity and alacrity of heart, it is because they are full of God's love and of the most ardent desire to please Him only.

In saying this, it is not my intention to praise and extol the fervor of the seminarians at St. Sulpice. It seems to me that I may say with full confidence that such a motive does not enter my mind in any way. I am sure you will admit that it is solely for the purpose of inspiring you with courage to serve God with your whole soul and to tear away all your desires and affections from creatures and from self, so that your heart may live only for God and in God alone. Do this, dear friend, and God will fill you with His graces and blessings.

God be with you and Mary also. If you wish to unite yourself with us in prayer in order to advance from day to day in the perfection of the Gospel, you will give us great pleasure. For myself, I am ready to do anything you wish to help you in attaining this holy love.

Entirely yours in the holy love of Jesus and Mary,

Francis Libermann, acolyte

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God alone should be the object of our desires. Of ourselves we can do nothing for His love. The practice of remaining in God's presence.

Letter Two  
Issy, April 10-22, 1836  
Vol. 1, p. 272

Dear Mr. Mangot:

[God Alone]

I was overjoyed to see by your letters the dispositions which God has deigned to put into your heart, and the ardent desire you have of persevering in the difficult but delightful paths of the love of our Divine Savior. May this dear and holy love live and reign in your heart, but may it live there all alone. Let all your thoughts, all your desires, all your affections, and all the movements of your soul be for God alone and in God. What must we, and what may we, seek upon earth and desire in heaven, except our good and well-beloved Jesus?

How happy we are when He is the delight of our heart! It is only then that we really begin to live. Every desire, affection, wish, thought, and every movement which is not for Jesus alone is dead and lost. Consequently, if we wish to live authentically, it must be only in Him, for Him and by Him.

Let the whole earth and all it contains perish. Let ourselves perish rather than put our delights, our joys, even the slightest satisfaction in anything on earth or in ourselves. Let us not mistake filth and corruption for perfume; otherwise, we shall never perceive the true good odor exhaled by the delicious perfume of the love of Jesus and Mary. God alone, God alone, and nothing more or less. Be
careful, therefore, not to occupy yourself with trifles. Never let your mind or heart be carried away by the frills of earth.

I tell you this, dear brother, because it often happens that we undertake great things, but accomplish very little. We see the beauty of evangelical perfection, and God gives us the courage to undertake it earnestly. But on account of our natural levity of spirit, we allow ourselves to be gradually preoccupied by all kinds of frivolous things. We forget our resolution to live for God alone, or else this resolution exists only in our imagination. I do not mean to say that I believe you are a case in point. No, certainly, such is not my idea; but I like to warn you, so that you may frequently renew your ardent desire to live for God alone, that you constantly be on your guard against lukewarmness, and that the thought of God may be always with you.

[Of Ourselves We Can Do Nothing for the Love of God]

I must also warn you against another temptation, that of thinking yourself somebody. Do not imagine for a moment that, since you have a great desire of serving God with all your heart, you have already attained the summit of perfection. On the contrary, have a great distrust in, and a small opinion of yourself. And never compare yourself to those who do not seem to see clearly the road that they are following. Give particular attention to this matter; for the devil, when he sees that a soul is going to live for God alone and to consecrate itself entirely to His love, always attacks it in its self-love, because he can scarcely find another point which he may assail. This is why the saints took so much trouble to humble themselves and were so very much delighted when they suffered some deep humiliation.

You see, then, dear friend, that you must in no way yield to anxiety when you happen to have some difficulty, distaste,
sadness, annoyance and obstacles in the practice of obedience and the other Christian virtues, or even in mental prayer itself and in the practice of remaining in the presence of God. All such experiences are very precious to a soul which earnestly desires to renounce itself in all things and wants to live for God alone.

I know that it is very painful to see how incapable we are of doing anything for the love of God, and to feel that we are good for nothing except to waste our time, and sink deeper and deeper into the love of creatures. But this should not cause us any anxiety; on the contrary, it should be for us a subject of joy and another motive to love God. We should rejoice when we see that of ourselves we can do nothing, and that we constantly depend upon God. For this conviction detaches us entirely from ourselves, who are but filth and corruption, and unites us more and more with God, who is our strength, our support, our love, and our all.

This is the source of the inconceivable humility of the saints, as well as of their still more inconceivable love. The greatest saints understood how poor and wretched they were, and how much they stood in need of God; then they placed all their love and all their hopes in Him.

[The Practice of Remaining in God's Presence]

You speak to me about the trouble that you experience in avoiding a kind of sadness during recreation. This is what I think on the subject.

Our heart must be in interior peace and joy during recreation as well as at any other time. We must watch over ourselves lest we grow narrow-minded on account of the fear of losing the holy presence of God.

Our true presence of God must consist in having our desires and our affections in Him alone. If we love Him
thus with all the desires, all the affection and all the ardor of our soul, we shall never lose His holy presence. We shall live before Him, even when we do not think of Him. A man who constantly perseveres in the sole desire of pleasing God in all things, and of never satisfying himself in anything, is in continual prayer, even at the moment when his mind is obliged to busy itself with matters that do not tend directly toward God, such as study and recreation. I believe it is in this sense that we must take the words of the Holy Gospel: “It behooves us to pray always and not to faint.”

The life of a true Christian is a constant prayer, because he wishes, on every occasion, even during his sleep, to please God alone. His every desire and his whole will are always directed toward God alone. You see, therefore, how great we are before God and His holy angels, if we try to practice these words of our Lord: “Deny thyself, and follow me.”

We should, therefore, neither worry nor become tense in our mind, either during recreation or during study, in order to have the continual presence of God. During study, in order to have the continual presence of God, we should refrain from giving ourselves over to our work with passionate ardor and, during recreation, from allowing ourselves to be carried away by a dissipating joy. We should always be ready to be agreeable to our brethren. Let us ever have a smile upon our lips; but let us never allow ourselves to be drawn into outbursts of joy and roars of uncontrolled laughter. A modest and temperate joy carries piety and contentment into the hearts of those who surround us.

We should take still another precaution during study as well as during recreation; and that is, to recall, from time to time, the great object of our only love. Besides, let the peace, the love and the gentleness of our Divine Savior al-
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ways be in our mouth and our heart, and then we need have no fear of offending God during our recreations.

[Openness of Mind and Heart Results from Perfect Surrender to God]

You ask me whence comes that openness of heart and mind in those who give themselves entirely to God. It seems to me that it comes naturally, and, as it were, necessarily, from this perfect love. A man who desires nothing upon earth fears nothing either; and a man who desires nothing and fears nothing, must necessarily have his mind and his heart in perfect freedom. For, what is the source of troubles, worry and embarrassment of mind and heart, especially in those who wish to serve God? They arise from the fact that such persons do not give themselves entirely to Him, or do not leave to Him the entire care of their spiritual progress. They resolve to acquire this or that virtue, or to obtain such and such a sentiment; they want to serve God in this or that manner, and imagine that they cannot sanctify themselves in any other way than according to these [self-conceived] ideas.

A man of perfect self-denial, on the contrary, places himself entirely into the hands of God and never seeks himself; and, on this account, his heart is always in profound peace and great freedom. You doubtlessly know the words of St. Augustine, “Love and do what you please.”...

I hope that I have said enough for this time. I have delayed replying to you because I had no one to deliver the letter. If I had not been afraid of putting a burden upon you, I would have sent it to you by the postal delivery service. I beg you not to hesitate to write to me by this means, and do not fear the expense I’ll incur, especially
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when you have some trouble and you think I could be of some assistance to you.¹

With best regards in the most holy charity of Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

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Thoughts about the approach of the subdiaconate.

Letter Three Issy, May 27, 1836 Vol. 1, p. 273

Dear Mr. Mangot:

[There is No Need to Fear to Become a Subdeacon]

May the peace and love of our Divine Savior increase in your soul, and fill it with His power for the accomplishment of His holy will.

I see how you tremble with fear at the approach of the subdiaconate, and I hasten to answer to you in order to renew your courage. I have always noticed such feelings when the time to advance had arrived; but the prevalence of those fears does not justify them. It is possible that if I myself were coming near to that order, I too would experience the same; in other words, I may fail to conceive such fears properly because I have no present fears of that sort. And yet I must say that it has always astonished me to notice how scared seminarians are when the subdiaconate approaches.

How happy you should be to consecrate yourself irrevocably to God! A soul that desires to belong entirely to

¹Prepaid stamped mail was not yet in general use at the time. The addressee paid for the letter.
God, should rejoice when it is able to say: "Henceforth, I am no longer allowed to live for myself, or for the world, or for anything in the world. God is my only heritage, my love and my all; my well-beloved is henceforth mine, and I am His."

I realize that the subdeacon assumes serious obligations, that he is, as it were, forced to love God alone, and put aside every creature; but such obligations should be a cause of joy, triumph, and glory. A subdeacon renounces pleasure and self-satisfaction by the vow of chastity. He declares a relentless and exterminating war against the flesh. But what is there in this that should grieve him? What is there to make him tremble? His soul, on the contrary, should be filled with joy, for our great and good Lord Jesus graciously wills to lift him out of the filth and mire in order to fill him with His love, His peace and His glory. You must not imagine that you are going to wage these combats unaided. Our Lord Jesus has already triumphed over the world and the devil, and He exhorts us not to fear them: "Fear not, I have overcome the world."

It is Christ who will fight and gain the victories; or, rather, He has already gained them; His victory is complete. We walk over the ruins of the enemies whom Our Lord has overthrown, and He delivers them to us, that we may trample them under foot. We insult Him if we tremble before the devil and the flesh. I hope, therefore, that you will be overjoyed to bind yourself to God and to His service by indissoluble ties.

God wishes you to be not only a man detached from the earth but also a man of prayer. Now, this is another obligation which need strike no fear into the heart of a faithful servant of Jesus and Mary. You should, on the contrary, be glad that you have it in your power to draw closer to your kind and well-beloved master. He will embrace you with renewed delight.
You are now like the Apostles when our Lord still lived upon earth. They were, in fact, closest to His adorable Person, while the other disciples generally spoke to Him and dealt with Him only through the Apostles. Moreover, it was only at the end of a certain time, and after having filled them with gifts and His single favors, that Our Lord sent them to teach and to labor in His glory.

You have even a greater advantage over them. They were ignorant, and did not recognize the treasure that was theirs, in being able to approach so closely the Master of all light and grace. They did not know what it was to deny themselves; and, on this account, they could not profit by everything that Our Lord wished to do for them. But you, on the contrary, know, at least partly, all the wealth of grace that God destines for you, in addition to what you have already found in the intimate communion which you are required to maintain with our Well-beloved.

How happy you are, my friend, to be under the strict obligation of uniting yourself more and more to Our Lord, and of living only for Him and in Him. How sweet is His yoke and how lovable His service, even for the simple faithful. How much more is our good Lord Jesus rich, sweet, and lovable, to those whom He has selected, in order to make of them the princes of His people.

If Jesus is the treasure, the joy and the happiness of those who are simply His servants, what will He be to those chosen ones whom He calls His friends? If it is so sweet to renounce all creatures for His sake, what is the happiness of those whom He admits into His intimacy? What love of predilection does He show to those happy men whom He attaches to Himself by the indissoluble bonds of His love? For note that the bonds which He puts upon you are the
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bonds of love; they are the same bonds that unite the angels and saints in heaven to the Blessed Trinity. O sweet and blessed love of Jesus for His friends and brothers!

Be you blessed, dear friend, with all the blessings which our good Master will bestow upon you on your holy bridal day. His heart is filled with joy and tenderness, don't you see? It is wide open and He will send forth from it into your soul the lights and the graces with which it is filled.

[Being More Closely United to God, You Have Nothing to Fear]

All that you have to do henceforth is to unite yourself more and more to our Lord Jesus. You must seek Him alone, everywhere, in everything and always. Try, therefore, to maintain yourself interiorly in great peace, so that the grace of Our Lord Jesus be not in vain in you. If you allow yourself to be worried, agitated, ill at ease, the Holy Spirit cannot operate in you according to His will; He cannot render Himself absolute Master of your soul.

Do not worry about the future; keep yourself peacefully united to the spirit of Our Lord, and the world, which you fear so much, will be like a worm before you. He who is within you has already conquered it and you will vanquish it with Him. Despise this wretched world and distrust yourself greatly. Try to keep your heart free from every earthly affection, and to place all your love in our Lord Jesus, our Master. He will give you the light necessary to avoid the stratagems of the world and the snares that will be set to surprise you.

As long as your heart is pure and detached, as long as you keep your soul in perfect peace and you seek only to unite yourself more closely to God, you will have no enemy to fear. Persevere, therefore, in holiness of life, and God will sustain you.
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I do not wish by what I have said to condemn every kind of fear. I don't believe that there is any harm in feeling a certain respectful fear, when there is a question of presenting ourselves to God for the purpose of approaching Him more closely, and of entering into communication with His most admirable, most secret, and most intimate mysteries. This fear is even very good.

I can imagine that, with the distrust of our own strength, which should always abide in us, we may, at times, feel ourselves incapable of doing anything whatsoever for the glory of God. But worry and disquietude must not enter into our soul on this account. Far from it. The greatness of the ministry to which we have been called, and the extreme misery in which we behold ourselves, should increase our peace and our love for our good Lord Jesus.

[Our Own Wretchedness Makes Us All the More Dependent on God]

Let this thought confound and humble us in His presence. Let us rejoice when we see how wretched we are, and when we realize that God alone is great, that He alone is beautiful, filled with every perfection, worthy of all praise, all love and all adoration.

When we behold how utterly nothing we are and how incapable of accomplishing anything of ourselves, this thought ought to be for us a great source of peace, for it should convince us that God Himself wishes to go to work in order to fulfill in us, and through us, all the great things for which He destines us.

God knows our poverty and misery far better than we do ourselves. But why has He chosen us, since He knows that we can do nothing, unless it be for the purpose of showing, even unto evidence, that it is He who will do the work, and not we?
It seems to me, however, that we have a still greater reason to rejoice. Our extreme misery and abomination make it absolutely necessary for us to have continual recourse to God, and to remain united with Him at every moment and in all circumstances of our life. We depend more upon Him, than our body depends upon our soul. But is it too grievous a hardship for our body to be in a continual dependence on our soul, and to receive from it all its life and movements? On the contrary, it glories in this dependence and is pleased with it because, for this very reason, it participates in a far nobler and more elevated life than it could attain by itself. The same is true of our dependence upon God, but in a superior degree. The more we depend upon Him the more our soul acquires greatness, beauty, and glory—so much so, that we can boldly glory in our infirmities.

The greatness of our joy and happiness should be commensurate with the greatness of our infirmities, because with them grows our dependence upon God and our need of Him. Do not trouble yourself, therefore, if you feel that you are weak. Rather be glad of it, for God will be your strength. Your only care should be to keep your soul constantly directed toward Him in the greatest peace and the most perfect surrender to Him, and the greatest discomfiture and humiliation of yourself.

You need not worry when thoughts and temptations of vanity, which you mentioned, present themselves to you. They are a result of our extreme corruption; we shall be rid of it only at the last moment of our life. But those do not inflict great harm upon us. We need only to keep ourselves peacefully united to God. We need only to humble ourselves before Him, and to watch quietly over ourselves; and if these thoughts still continue, we should go our way as though we had nothing to worry us, and simply turn our
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mind away from these miseries. They are flies that we must drive away; it is not worth our while to worry about them, and to get angry with them.

Besides, the trouble caused by attention to vain thoughts is useless to get rid of them. We should have only contempt for such thoughts and for ourselves, when we behold how poor we are, since we are obliged to combat this petty pride in order to raise our souls to God and maintain ourselves in perfect peace.

I can tell you no more for the present. You notice that I always preach about the peace of Our Lord; it is so important that everything depends upon it.

Adieu, dear friend. Best regards in the peace and in the love of Jesus and Mary, who are all our happiness and all our life.

Your humble servant in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

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Letter Four Issy {July?}, 1836 Vol. 1, p. 274

Dear Mr. Mangot:

[You Are Now Forever Consecrated to God's Service]

I rejoice with all my heart in our Lord Jesus Christ upon seeing you consecrated entirely and without reserve to His most holy love. Henceforth, there can no longer be any question of hesitation of half-heartedness in His service. He
must possess you fully; and there must be nothing in you that is not solely for Him and in Him alone.

By tonsure you were already accepted into His service, although it was only in an indefinite and probationary manner, so that you might understand what it is to belong to God alone. It was still in your power to withdraw and to leave Him; but now this is no longer possible, you are His eternal slave!

God has set the seal and character of His love and sanctity upon you, in return for the perpetual contract of being forever His servant that you have made with Him. You may glory in it before the angels and saints, who are ravished with admiration at the sight of God’s unbounded mercy toward you.

But don’t restrict yourself to rejoicing and thankfully admiring the great glory with which our well-beloved Lord Jesus has deigned to clothe you for all eternity. Consider also what it behooves you to do in the service of this great and lovable Lord, whose eternal servant you have become through your irrevocable consecration.

["My Beloved to Me and I to Him"]

It follows necessarily from your donation to God that you no longer possess anything that you may rightfully call your own. When you received the tonsure, you gave Him all that you are, and all that you can do; but He did not definitely accept this offer and ratify your consecration, until the moment of your subdiaconate, when He made a contract with you which cannot be broken.

It is, therefore, under the terms of this remarkable contract that you must hereafter act. Do you understand its full significance? It implies for you wonderful things of the highest importance in the interest of your soul’s sanctification.
By this fortunate deed you have given and consecrated to God, fully and without restriction or reserve, your soul and body with all their faculties, their powers and capacities; otherwise, it would be no consecration. Consequently, everything that is in you should be employed for God, and for God only. He alone may dispose of it as a chattel that belongs exclusively to Himself, and over which nobody else has any right or control. For this reason you must consider yourself, and in reality be, as non-existent for creatures or for self. With far greater propriety should you regard all creatures as nothing to you, so that you may no longer live but for God and in God. Then only will God live fully in you. You can then say in the joy of your soul and in the exuberance of love: "My beloved to me and I to Him."

Reflect seriously before God on the few things I have said, and the text that I have just quoted. You will readily understand therefrom how necessarily this loving union follows from a real consecration to God, and how supremely happy your soul is in being able to devote itself to Him according to its full capacity. It is only then that you will feel how great and incomprehensible is the immense grace of the subdiaconate and of the vocation to the ecclesiastical state.

I do not wish to dwell any further on this subject. When Mr. Cacheleux comes, he may be able to explain it more exhaustively, for we had a conversation on this topic with several others some time ago. I even remember that somebody very pleasantly remarked that my three negatives¹ were not very pleasing to nature. But never mind, let our foolish nature cry a little; it will finally quiet down and, then through all eternity it will be happy because of the troubles we have given it on earth.

¹Be nothing for self, for creatures, and let creatures be nothing for you.
All this is very appropriate for the coming vacation. It will give you an opportunity to train yourself all the better in the universal war which you must wage against self.

["You Are the Salt of the Earth"]

Remember the words of Our Lord Jesus: “You are the salt of the earth.” God wishes us to spread the good odor of His sanctity among all those who surround us. Just as salt flavors all dishes, so should we also give the taste and odor of the love of God to all those who frequent us. We ought to spread everywhere the gentleness which God puts into a faithful soul, and inspire others with respect for religious persons, and the desire of loving God with their whole heart. We must obtain these results by our kindness, our simplicity and modesty, founded upon profound humility and perfect self-denial in all things.

Be careful not to exaggerate anything, and don’t make a pretence of virtue. Walk simply and frankly in the presence of God, and live in the world as though you were alone with God in a desert. Remember this maxim; I believe that it will prove of great advantage for your sanctification. It maintains us in a great spirit of recollection during our walks, our amusements, and other occupations that we are obliged to engage in with people of the world. It keeps our mind at liberty when men blame us, as well as when they praise us—things to which we must remain utterly indifferent. If we live with God alone in a desert, we do not perform our work for the sake of pleasing men or because of what they will think of us. Let them criticize and talk about us as much as they like; it matters very little to us. Nor do we wish to attract attention. We see God only and we wish to be seen by Him alone. It is a matter of indifference to us whether men think of us or forget us.
LETTERS TO FATHER MANGOT

Our sole occupation is to please God and to sanctify ourselves in all simplicity, and modesty, without any tenseness. We thus draw down the blessings of God on all those who surround us without seeming to occupy ourselves with this purpose. You can easily learn from this how we should conduct ourselves during vacation.

God alone, God alone, always God alone! Vacation, just the same as the rest of the year, is given to you for the purpose of sanctifying yourself; the question is how to profit by it. God should be the only object you have in view in all things, and He ought to be ever-present in your mind. I mean that, in all things, and everywhere, you should keep your will directed toward God; do nothing out of mere self-love and for the sake of gratifying yourself, or with a view to please men. Make use of the diversions of vacation in a simple manner, and do not even fear the interest they inspire. However, turn your soul, with all its affections and desires, toward God alone, in all things and at all times.

It will be very useful to have a particular rule for vacation, in which meditation, general and particular examen are not forgotten. You should, besides, watch over yourself, live in continual distrust of your own strength, preserve in your soul a great peace before God and according to God. We should never take anybody as our model, especially in things that regard our interior life, lest by so doing we lose our fervor.

[Do Not Slavishly Imitate Saints]

If I see a saint do a certain thing, I will not go and imitate him immediately; but I shall examine for myself the expediency of the matter, and whether it is God’s will that I do it. I tell you this especially because of certain things that you are liable to see good priests do and because of the habits they often adopt. You will say to yourself: “I cer-
tainly may do this, for I have seen a holy priest do it.” I believe that we should never act in such a manner.

We have the Gospel; that is our rule. The saintliest authors show us how to put it into practice. The saints make it clear to us by their conduct. We have, within us, a great Teacher who explains it to us in private and teaches us what we should do. Let us listen to Him. By following His advice, we shall become great saints. I do not tell you this because I have any reason to say anything against the priests whom I met last year at Amiens. No, certainly. On the contrary, I was deeply touched by the good examples that I observed there.

[Relations With Others]

Be kind toward men, but do not fear them. Do all things for the love of God; follow your rule, and try to live in a very interior manner. If men contradict you, gently listen to their complaints. Never be abrupt with them, and answer them in a manner that will satisfy them, and then go your way as though nothing had happened. We have all the greater reason to be faithful when we find no opposition in doing what promotes our sanctification.

We should not try to preach to those with whom we live; but we may put in a word appropriately, if we see that it will be well received. It is only a waste of time to speak about God to a man who is not disposed to listen to you; it will not help him to do his duty any better. We should pray, remain tranquil in the presence of God, and wait till He offers us an opportunity of doing good to a soul.

I do not wish to enlarge any further on this matter; I must leave some space to Father Cacheleux, so that he may also say a few words to you as you desire. I shall urge him to decide with you upon some means that will benefit you mutually. It would be advisable for both of you to observe a
LETTERS TO FATHER MANGOT

common rule, and to perform the same exercises. I believe that this would be of great service to both of you.

I must stop now, leaving you in the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Keep this peace constantly in your heart, and consider yourself highly honored and exceedingly happy, since He has deigned to choose you to live only for Him and in Him. Live in such wise, and He will reign in you and sanctify you.

Entirely yours in His most holy love and in that of His and our most Holy Mother,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

113

Reflection on the Feast of Christmas.

Letter Five  Issy, Christmas Day, 1836  Vol. 1, p. 275

Dear Mr. Mangot:

May the peace and love of the Infant Jesus fill your soul.

I am delighted to be able to write to you on so beautiful a day as this. I hope that the Holy Infant speaks to you in the intimacy of your heart at the present moment. He can tell you far more beautiful things than men and angels combined can express. Listen to Him attentively, and do not lose a word of what He tells you; for His words are words of peace and love, and they will gently inundate your soul.

It is in your soul, in fact, that He wishes to establish the place of His repose and of His delights. Once He has prepared this poor soul by bestowing upon it His gentleness, His peace, His mildness, and His love, He will come there
Himself with the delightful and fragrant odor of His virtues and His holiness.

You may then fully rejoice, because you will possess a treasure of grace, of beauty, of light, and of sanctity. Endeavor, therefore, to prepare your soul well, so that the Holy Infant may feel at ease; and He will overwhelm you with His favors. Cleanse, purify your crib, and do not leave the bad odor of corruption there.

Let your heart be pure and free from all earthly affection and all self-love. The mysteries which we celebrate are very great and very wonderful, and it requires a very pure and a very holy soul to attract the graces that are attached to them. There are many things that I might tell you about this feast, which is so touching and so full of grace. It offers innumerable subjects of meditation, and one who would be able to attract unto himself all the graces contained in this mystery, would be a great saint and have the admiration of the angels themselves.

[Through the Holy Infant We are Children of God]

We may consider the greatness of the Lord in this mystery and how deeply He lowered Himself, in order to understand the depths of our misery and our extreme poverty when left to ourselves. At the same time, we shall understand how great our perfection ought to be when we behold the incredible efforts which the Son of God makes to draw us to His Father, to be our Model, to be the inexhaustible source of all graces and all perfections in us, and to make of us children of His own Father, who has engendered Him from all eternity, and who in time has given us life. For, you must remember, that the Word made flesh has become our brother. The dear Infant is our beloved little brother; and, consequently, we are the children of His Father.
LETTERS TO FATHER MANGOT

We may consider how lovable, meek and gentle this dear child is; he is the marvel and the delight of heaven and earth.

We may consider Him as the great treasure which contains all the graces of the eternal Father, and then approach Him for the purpose of gathering them in abundance.

Considering thus our dear Lord Himself in this mystery, we ought to be filled with sentiments of love, of respect, and tenderness for this dear Child. We ought to enter into the sentiments of the Blessed Virgin Mary, reflecting on all that is going on in her on this beautiful occasion, and not forgetting good St. Joseph who, on account of being with Jesus and Mary, is usually neglected at such times. Nobody thinks of him because more beautiful and greater spectacles are offered to our contemplation. He does not grow angry about it, it is true, but he also might teach us some very beautiful lessons.

[Jesu Destitute of Every Worldly Possession]

We may further consider the Child Jesus in His relation to us. This is the gate through which we are enabled to enter into the depths and the greatness of the mystery. We ought to inquire into the reason of His coming, penetrate into His interior, in order to see what is passing there, and render ourselves partakers of the sentiments and the dispositions of the little Infant Jesus.

Why does He come? He comes solely for the greater glory of His Father and for the sanctification of our souls. We ought therefore to establish the glory of His Father in ourselves, and sanctify our souls by a complete separation from every creature. He comes into the world completely naked and despoiled of all things. This is a symbol of the great bereavement and of the interior detachment of His soul. For, in the mysteries of Our Lord the things that take
place outwardly are like sacraments, and indicate His interior sentiments and dispositions. Thus the soul of the Child Jesus was more destitute and detached from created things and self, than was His body outwardly.

The body was clothed in a few old swaddling-clothes that did not belong to Him, but which His mother had prepared without the assistance of the Divine Child. In like manner, in His interior nakedness, His admirably holy soul allowed itself to be clothed by His heavenly Father and all the virtues and all the graces which overflowed and enveloped it. The swaddling-clothes of the Child Jesus were very wretched and contemptible in the eyes of the world. The same is true of interior graces, which the world despises because it is incapable of understanding them, lost as it is in the horrors of its concupiscences. Here you find already something to imitate in Him. Establish in your soul these great enemies of the world: poverty, humility, and denial of every pleasure and satisfaction.

This hatred and this opposition to the world and its manner of looking at things and of judging are very apparent already in the Divine Child. He not only despises the world, but He wishes to be, and really is, despised, ignored, and abandoned by it. And not only He, but all those who belong to Him and are dearest to Him, are similarly treated by the world.

[Virtues of the Child Jesus]

Moreover, the child Jesus comes with the spirit of sacrifice, immolating Himself, annihilating Himself before His heavenly Father, and condemning Himself to every kind of pain and torture. This small Child, so pure, so innocent, and so dear to His heavenly Father, is already covered with our sins without being sullied by them. He already experiences a great joy in sorrows and sufferings;
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He already abandons Himself to His great thirst for suffering and humiliation; and His Father gives Him a portion of the chalice of bitterness, which, later on, He is to drink to the dregs for the salvation of His brethren.

This dear Child of the mercy of His and our Father, on beholding our exceedingly great misery, kindly wished to offer Himself from the first moment of His coming upon earth, in order to lift us from our pitiable state, and to that end, took all our weaknesses upon Himself.

We ought to imitate the meekness and the peace of the Infant Jesus. These two virtues belong to the Infancy of Our Lord. He was infinitely meek and lovable.

He recognized perfectly well the depths of the weakness and misery to which He wished to abandon Himself, but He was at the same time filled with the mildness, gentleness and peace of His Father. He wishes to appear feeble and wretched according to nature, for the purpose of showing us that we should put all our strength and all our glory in His Father alone, as He himself had done.

We ought to imitate, too, all the other virtues of the childhood of this most holy and lovable Infant, especially simplicity, but true simplicity. Quite a number of things might be said about this virtue, for, as a rule, it is misunderstood. It is looked upon as an ordinary thing, and yet it is the virtue of the perfect. It is this virtue which draws down upon us the greatest favors and the greatest knowledge of God, since he who has it, no longer sees, no longer thinks, and loves, but in God, for God and according to God.

[Like Jesus Turned to Mary, So We Should Turn to Our Father]

We may also consider ourselves in our relation to this mystery; and this is a sequel to the life of Jesus in us. The
great effect which He produces is to make us be born and live in His Father. He therefore makes us become the children of His Father, just as He became the Child of His most holy Mother. And what is the relation between a child and its mother? It is always with her, and parts from her with regret. This should also be our disposition toward our heavenly Father when once we are born in Him.

The heart of a little child opens wide only to its mother; it tells her all its little thoughts, and manifests to her all its little wishes. The moment that she reprimands it, it leaves aside everything that might displease her. Its look is always turned toward its mother. If it is afraid of anything, it will immediately throw itself on her bosom; it tells her its pleasures as well as its sorrows, and looks to none other for consolation or encouragement. Let us do likewise with our heavenly Father, and we shall be saved; we shall be perfect men.

We may consider, furthermore, the abandonment of the Child Jesus into the hands of His most Holy Mother. She took Him up into her arms, enveloped Him in His swaddling-clothes, and laid Him in the manger. She took Him up again, undid His clothes and placed Him in the hands of St. Joseph. She did with Him what she liked, and the dear divine Child never resisted in the least. If He cried, it was only because He saw what trouble it cost us to surrender ourselves into the hands of His and our Father. He abandoned Himself to our well-beloved Mother, the Blessed Virgin, and gave Himself up to her without reserve.

You perceive, dear friend, how full of grace this mystery is, and how capable it is of fully sanctifying us.

I should like to know how things are getting along among you. It is a long time since I have had any news from you. Everybody here, with God’s grace, is very
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fervent. I send you this letter through the mail, because I find no opportunity to send it by another other way.

Best regards in the most holy charity of Jesus and Mary.

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

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On patience and humility.

Letter Six    Rennes, October, 1839     Vol. 1, p. 533

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father Mangot:

I have nothing special to tell you regarding your interior; you know pretty well what you have to do: it is merely a question of strengthening your will in order to follow what Our Lord shows you. This is painful and is very hard, but you should constantly have recourse to the Blessed Virgin; it is she who has given you everything you have in the matter of interior life. Since you are still wanting many things, beg for it constantly with love and with confidence that she will give you the rest.

[On Patience]

Try to be more docile and supple in mind and to overcome your bad habit of getting vexed when people talk more loudly than usual, when they show a different mien or face to you. You immediately suspect something and your mind starts working and you become abrupt and stiff—usually for a trifle. In such moments have recourse to Mary and try to
calm yourself; reject all thoughts that come to you regarding the thing that troubles you and occupy your mind with some other object.

Never take any resolution in such moments and never act upon thoughts that come to you at such a time. You ordinarily concoct a multitude of illusions in such circumstances and let yourself be misled by them. In general do immediately, with gentleness and good will, for the love of Jesus and Mary, what a superior tells you, even if it might be harmful to you. Thus when you are told not to work, don't work, but let that inactivity be full of mildness and good will.

Do not worry about whether you are useful or useless in the Congregation. Let it suffice for you to know that Our Lord wants you there; and if Our Lord wants you in it, does the rest matter?

[On Humility]

Be humble in your interior more than in your exterior, in your thoughts more than in your words, in your desires more than in your actions, in your sentiments more than in your bearing and manners. Let external humility, nevertheless, correspond with the interior, but the interior humility must always be the source of all that is exterior and must greatly surpass the latter.

Watch over your imagination; reduce its activity and make it as calm as possible, for it gives you great trouble.

You must expect to have troubles and difficulties in the novitiate as well as anywhere else; bear them with love. You will be better situated there for your interior life and to perfect yourself in the knowledge that is necessary for you.

My difficulties are not as great as people imagine. I have quite naturally had some, being a stranger and without ac-
quaintances. Besides, what would become of me if I had no troubles? If I have mentioned them it was not because they were more grievous than usual; there have been moments in my life when I have suffered much more serious troubles.

Adieu, dear confrere. Always belong entirely to, and live in the love of Jesus and Mary, in whom I am,

Entirely yours,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

115

Perfect union with God demands complete self-denial. The struggle between grace and nature.

Letter Seven   Rome, July 6, 1840   Vol. 2, p. 133

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Father Mangot:

I pray Our Lord and His most holy Mother to give you peace of heart and mind.

I saw by your letter that you are not yet strongly established in that peace of soul which is the portion of perfect souls. Take courage. With the good will which our Lord is giving you and confidence in the most Blessed Virgin, you will overcome all your troubles provided you have patience. It is not in one day that we can attain to the great happiness of perfection. Time and labor are necessary, and prayer and confidence; and we shall arrive only after having risen repeatedly and taken courage to begin over and over again a good many times. Do not grieve or become discouraged therefore, and apply yourself always with all your heart as if you were just beginning.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

[Perfect Union With God Demands Complete Self-Denial]

Remember, dear friend, what I sometimes told you: Christian perfection does not consist in a certain more or less high degree of mental prayer, but in union of perfect love with our Lord, based on complete self-renunciation, renunciation to our self-love, to our will, our ease, our satisfactions and to all that concerns us. The more perfect our renunciation, the more perfect also our love. If we are not well renounced, we cannot have a perfect union with, and love for our Lord. Our nature must die before grace can truly establish itself in it. A natural life is always an obstacle to the life of grace, and we shall attain perfection only when grace has almost completely extinguished and killed nature.

What then must you do, dear friend? You must help the action of grace, and assist in causing all that is purely natural to be extinguished and die in you. Now, there is no better opportunity for that than crosses and contradictions, for in such a moment, nature is attacked on all sides. It feels how greatly it is in danger. It rises, rebels more than ever, and fights in despair. This is why you must profit by that moment in order to triumph over your wretchedness, and give it a mortal blow.

Try, dear friend, to fight constantly against yourself, to make room for the triumph of grace. Never examine whether you are right or wrong, whether they are treating you justly or unjustly. Do not examine the reasons that prompt those who oppose you to act that way, nor what are their sentiments and dispositions. It is not with such questions or objects that your mind ought to occupy itself. The enemy is being attacked; they give you help to weaken, overwhelm and kill him. Act like a good politician, profit by that good opportunity to get rid of that dangerous enemy who keeps you under his yoke, and make God reign in your
LETTERS TO FATHER MANGOT

soul. Whatever the intentions of those who help you, profit by this help and triumph, or rather make Jesus Christ triumph in you.

[The Painful Struggle Between Grace and Nature]

That struggle is painful, but Jesus and Mary are sustaining you, and if you combat with fervor, you will reap great consolations. If, until now, you have experienced nothing but bitterness and trouble it is because until now you have not fought properly. You would like to experience neither trouble nor repugnance, but this is not possible.

That spiritual death of our nature resembles the bodily death of our flesh; in both there are sickness, languor, fever, weakness, and agony that precede it. Pay no attention to those sufferings. They are the forerunners of a happiness which imperfect and carnal souls are unable to understand; and it is in the midst of that great peace of the perfect that the reign of Jesus is established in our souls. We can then become truly useful for His glory and capable of laboring seriously and usefully.

You must watch your love of self. You probably remember that I already warned you about that. Aim at forgetting yourself, and seek only to render yourself agreeable to God in all you do. Why amuse yourself so much in being occupied with the thoughts, judgments and actions of men? You are greatly in need of distracting your mind from all such things. Whenever such a thought seizes you and begins to trouble you, do not wait but immediately distract yourself from it. Humble yourself and give your soul to God; and then, walk your own way without being concerned about it. I don’t want to tell you more about this, for I don’t know the present state of your soul.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIRERMANN, ACOLYTE

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Advice concerning instruction to sisters. Religious exercises. Relationship with pastor.

Letter Eight  La Neuville, January 17, 1845  Vol. 3, p. 27

J. M. J.

Dear Father Mangot:

[Mission News]

Yes, it is true, dear confrere, God has sent us a great affliction because of what has befallen our poor mission of Guinea. We lost Father Roussel and several others died with him. May God be blessed. It has been His desire to have victims for the salvation of those poor peoples. Unite your prayers to ours in order that Our Lord may come to the rescue of so many millions of souls. It is impossible for us to abandon them: but we are a little better acquainted now with the terrain; we shall go forward with more precaution. Pray and ask others to pray. Our novices, far from being discouraged, have all asked to go to Guinea, and they considered it a great favor when I promised or at least gave them some hope, that some would go there at a later date, when they had become acclimated in neighboring countries.

[Instruct Sisters in Solid Piety, But Leave Detailed Directions to Their Superiors]

I didn’t know that you had stopped giving instructions to the Sisters; I was not told. I think you do well to wait until you are asked and to do it only when expressly solicited. Speak with fervor to the Sisters in the confessional, giving them general and practical instructions on solid and
true perfection, on the interior spirit, without occupying yourself with their direction. One can do an immense good to souls by a sort of general impetus toward solid piety, without occupying himself with their direction. No one is more difficult to direct regularly than Sisters; hence I agree perfectly with your sentiment in that regard.

Be content with inspiring them with the desire of perfection, of an interior spirit, love of Jesus and Mary, humility, obedience, simplicity, openness of heart and mind with their superiors and their Sisters, gentleness, charity, fidelity to the Rule, peace of soul, joy in God’s service, and all the general virtues which pertain especially to community life. On the other hand, leave to Mother Superior other matters such as: the direction of the Sisters’ interior life, victory over their various defects, the way to go about it, the method of mental prayer, the way to distinguish the attraction of grace, and the conduct that is necessary to be faithful to it; their interior way and the direction they ought to follow in that way, the particular virtue they ought to be occupied with, the method for making their examens and other exercises, and all other similar things.

Always endeavor to calm and reassure their minds, to fix their confidence in God and keep them in peace, humility and confidence in God. In this way I feel sure that you will make them produce much good and will benefit those souls greatly.

[Avoid Rigidity in Pious Exercises]

You do well to apply yourself a little to teaching catechism; it is all important to know how to do that well. However, remain united to God in the midst of your occupations. Try to do your mental prayer properly, but don’t hold fast with inflexible rigidity to your exercises of piety. The end you are aiming at is important, but do things gently, calmly and in the spirit of Our Lord.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

[Patience with Your Pastor]

I have known for a long time that your good pastor is stubborn and quite excitable; but what can you do? You see how even when one is well-disposed, it is necessary to belong solely to God in all humility and purity of intention! How right you are in applying yourself to calm, gentleness and abandon to the guidance of the Holy Spirit! We are wretched creatures and spoil God's works so long as we have not renounced to ourselves and are not entirely abandoned to the spirit of God with all docility and mildness.

How happy you are that you are able to do something at least, for the glory of the Master! I will always be a poor man, good for nothing except eating, drinking, sleeping, warming myself and doing nothing that is worth anything. What can I do? The potter makes several vases out of the same mass of clay, "one for honorable, another for ignoble use." It is God who is the master; if He wants to leave me in my uselessness, should I ask Him to give an account of His supreme designs? May His holy name be blessed. Beg Him to be merciful to me for my infidelities...

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN

priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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An aspirant to a religious order must be willing to accept any task assigned by the superior. Self-distrust.

Letter Nine  La Neuville, October 20, 1845  Vol. 7, p. 338

J. M. J.

Dear Father Mangot:

I begin with my usual excuses for not replying sooner. That is generally the first verse of all my tales... But let us deal with the business at hand.

[A Religious Must Be Willing to Accept Any Assigned Task]

I am not astonished that the girl did not like the hospital. From what you told me I gather that she is not called to join the Sisters of Charity. Her taste and attraction demand a cloistered order; the kind of life adopted by the Sisters of Charity, which she finds too easy, is demanded by the work in which they are engaged. Hence I think that if she has an attraction for an order that cares for the sick, she ought to apply to the Sisters of St. Thomas of Villanova or to a similar order. The Congregation of St. Thomas of Villanova seems to me to be very good. These ladies have about sixty houses in France and they appear to be fervent; they take care of the sick in hospitals, but also have some schools.

You should warn the girl that, if she wishes to enter in a congregation, she should abandon herself to the discretion of her superiors and should not have any will of her own. If in that order she were given some other task than caring for the sick, she ought not to object. Hence, suppose she desires
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

to enter with the Sisters of St. Thomas of Villanova because of her attraction for work for the sick; when she enters she should not lay down the condition that she should be solely employed in such a function. She may state that from her childhood, all her attraction was directed to the sick and that she still feels that fundamental attraction, which in fact is the reason for her entering that congregation; but she should place herself entirely at the disposal of her superiors in order that they might employ her where they desire. She may, on occasion, state what she might like to do in that matter, but she should not insist on it too ardently, unless the rule expressly permits her to do so. She will especially examine this matter in the presence of God to obtain the grace of being employed by her superiors in the function for which divine goodness gives her so much attraction. But it is absolutely necessary that when she enters religion she should entirely renounce her own will regarding everything. It is even absolutely necessary that she should not have any inflexible and positive desires to which she stubbornly clings. She may have desires, sigh for things before God, but only mildly, peacefully, and with perfect submission. Thus, once she has entered any order, if she happens to be employed as a bursar or a similar office, instead of taking care of the sick, she should not be sad but submissive and peaceful; she should accomplish those functions as if all her attractions drew her to them. Absolute abnegation is a fundamental necessity for a religious....

[Self-Distrust]

Regarding your fears, you don’t tell me what you are afraid of. If you don’t know what it is, it might be that God’s goodness allows these fears to keep you watchful and faithful. “Let he who stands, see that he does not fall.” By vigilance and fidelity to our rule and our pious exercises we
LETTERS TO FATHER MANGOT

protect ourselves against dangers. As long as we fear we distrust ourselves; but to that distrust we must join confidence in God and in Mary. Moreover, I am not astonished that you have fears; why would you be without them while you are in the midst of the world, since there are bad and wretched men even in the cloister? Let us pray for each other.

Entirely yours, dear confrere, in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN

priest of the Holy Heart of Mary