1. LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

Frederic Le Vavasseur (1811-1882) was a native of the island of Reunion. In 1829, he went to France, where he unsuccessfully studied engineering at the *Ecole Polytechnique*. He next studied law and then entered the Sulpician House of Philosophy at Issy in 1836. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1841.

As a seminarian, he conceived the idea of christianizing the slaves of his native country. He and another seminarian, Eugene Tisserant, who had similar missionary ideas, were thus led to consult their common friend Francis Libermann. Both also especially invoked the help of “Our Lady of Victories” in Paris. This resulted in the formation of Libermann’s Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary.

After his ordination in 1841, Frederic entered Libermann’s novitiate of La Neuville and, having made his apostolic consecration, spent seven years as a missionary in his beloved Bourbon (Reunion). Having returned to France, he in turn fulfilled the functions of superior of Holy Ghost seminary, novice master, provincial, and Superior General of the Holy Ghost Congregation (1881). He died on January 16, 1882.

This brief sketch fails to reveal the extraordinary life of this truly extraordinary man. Frederic was both endowed with great intellectual power and strongly impelled by a fiery temperament. In his early religious life he gave frequent proofs of impetuosity, of immoderate zeal in the practice of penance, of extremism in his pursuit of perfection and in his direction of others. But he gave a chance to grace to mold him, and in the end his character mellowed and he was enabled to crown a saintly life as religious priest and missionary with a saintly death.
The need to struggle against nature is a valuable grace. Total surrender to God in distrust of self. Remaining with Jesus in utter uselessness. Advice regarding mental prayer and spiritual friendship.

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

[I am Happy to See That You Still Have to Struggle Against Nature]

May the Holy Spirit superabound in your soul as He did in Mary our good Mother. I rejoice before our Lord in seeing that you are still a poor man, struggling constantly against his natural activity and vivacity. It is certain that this activity is a great treasure for you, and I consider it a special favor on the part of our Lord that those combats still continue in you. You may rest assured that, if you had overcome that wretched activity from the very beginning, you would never have accomplished much for your interior life.

In such a case you would have entertained a good opinion of yourself. You would have taken pleasure in considering your spiritual condition, and you would thus have lost everything. You would at least have entered upon the road to perdition by thus contemplating yourself, and it would have proved calamitous for you. But now you have no time to consider yourself with complacency and you are forced to be always on your guard. You see that whatever you may possess does not amount to very much, and you constantly feel a certain apprehension and a fear that you
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

may not attain the desired end. This will probably make you conceive a little distrust of yourself.

[Total Surrender to God Requires Self-Distrust]

You ought to know that if we desire to give ourselves to God by way of total surrender, we need a good dose of self-distrust. Otherwise we run the risk of falling into an abyss, or of building a castle in the air, or using a foundation of straw and dust. This is why I tell you that God is bestowing a true favor upon you by leaving you in your wretchedness. Be satisfied, therefore, with your present condition. Be little and poor since this is what our Lord desires.

When the hour of your deliverance has come, accept it gratefully, but preserve an attitude of lowliness, poverty and mistrust of self in God's presence. In the meantime remain meek, reserved and peaceful. You will be able to achieve this by gently calling your mind back when it has wandered off, by arresting it quietly and without contentious effort, keeping it before God and united with our Lord in gentleness and peace.

[Remain Before Jesus in Your Uselessness]

Do not imagine that you are less united to God than you were formerly and are more dissipat ed. You may be led to think that you are in such a condition because you sometimes are deprived of feelings. At least, you are not aware of all the attention and care you ought to take and of the care you actually do take to repress that over-activity. You may even lack a certain sensible attention to the task of repressing that activity, but what can you do about that? There is no great evil in it.

You are much more in need of God now than you were before. You are more aware of your incapacity and the need of God's support. Endeavor to remain quietly united
with this beloved Master, so that He Himself may take up all the wretchedness for which you know no remedy. Remain constantly in His presence in your extreme poverty, incapacity, and uselessness.

Never indulge in anxious desires to be “somebody” or to accomplish something. Your only desire should be to lie crushed and prostrate at the feet of our Lord, to be nothing in your own eyes, before God and all creatures, to forget yourself and to be forgotten by everybody, so that Jesus may be praised, blessed, and glorified by, in and with His Father, and by all creatures. What else ought we or could we desire in heaven and on earth but that?

This is why you should never be satisfied with what you are nor pleased with what you are able to do, nor even delight in the graces which Jesus bestows upon your soul. But let all your complacency and all your mental effort and all the joy of your heart be concentrated on Jesus alone. For to Him alone, in His Father and with the Holy Spirit, belong all homage, all glory, and all love; and to us, all contempt, disgrace, ignominy and confusion. This is the sum total of your life. But all this must be accompanied by great peace, gentleness and tranquility; it must take place without any purely natural effort of the flesh.

[Do Not Analyze Your Mental Prayer
But Follow Your Attraction]

You can put your mind at rest regarding your meditation and continue in the manner you have adopted. Do not analyze what takes place during and after your meditation. Seek only one thing, for it alone is important: to live for God and in Him alone at the expense and to the detriment of your self-love and all your self-seeking.

The method you use to attain this goal matters little, provided you are successful. This is the only thing that is nec-
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

ecessary. Remain quiet during and after your mental prayer. Remain quiet throughout the day, and may your every desire be made in God’s presence and for Him alone. It would be well for you to examine the things that attract you in our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph or in other Saints, but all this should be done without tenseness or worry. If you feel some attraction in that respect and you feel capable of following it, yield to it. If not, remain quiet and live for and in God alone.

[Spiritual Friendship]

You should also distrust yourself in everything that concerns your repugnances or your inclinations, in regard to conversing with various persons. Neither act hastily toward those for whom you feel a repugnance nor act readily against your feelings. I assume that you dislike to speak to such people about spiritual advancement or to be on intimate terms with them concerning such matters. You would run the risk of being gravely indiscreet. If you speak to them in spite of your disinclination, take care to measure and weigh your words. Advance only where the way is clear.

God alone touches the heart. You should not advance too far, but leave always a larger share of the work to Him. Act, but do it with moderation and caution, in a supernatural spirit. If someone does not proceed according to your desires, do not worry or get excited about it. Quietly follow your taste and attraction and constantly mistrust your corrupt nature which is ever putting in a claim for a share even in the holiest things. But you need not discontinue to be intimate friends on that account, for your attraction is not purely natural. There is always an element of the natural, even in true charity. We ought to overcome ourselves in this, but should not reject charity on that account.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,
FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE
Libermann encourages his friend in his plan for organizing the apostolate among the Negro slaves.

Letter Two  Rennes, March 8, 1839  Vol. 1, p. 638

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

"Act manfully and may your heart be strengthened." I hope that our Lord will realize the project\(^1\) he has prompted you to undertake for His greater glory. Pursue that object with confidence and for the love of our Lord. He has merciful designs for the salvation of those poor souls who have been neglected until now. I advise you to undertake that great work and apply your earnest endeavors to it. Do not trust in yourself nor in your own devices and schemes. Do not try to persuade anyone, but let the Master of the house act. It belongs to Him to choose the laborers whom He wishes to send there. Your great task for the present consists in humbling yourself very much in His sight since you are a great obstacle in the way of what He plans to do for those poor souls that are so dear to Him.

\[\text{[Disregard What People Will Say About You and Your Plan]}\]

At the same time, however, you should entertain great confidence in, and love toward Him, and act energetically. Don’t become discouraged by the difficulties you will meet or because of the criticisms and the false judgments that will be made about you, your conduct and anything you will

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\(^1\)To organize a society for the apostolate among the Negro slaves.
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

do. People will consider you weak-minded, imprudent and proud. They will say all kinds of things about you, not only in your own country but even in Paris. Even respectable persons will disapprove you, accuse you, brand your plan as the product of a hot-headed youth, as folly. They will say that you are undertaking the impossible. This is what one can expect even from those that are very wise and best intentioned.

When they see difficulties which to natural-minded men seem insurmountable, they declare that the thing is impossible. But, dear friend, all this ought not to discourage you nor ought it to delay you even for one moment. Even when the most devout and the wisest of men oppose such a project, persevere in it before God. Not feeling interiorly the prompting of our Lord for such a good enterprise, they imagine that the difficulties render such a task impossible. This is why you ought to remain always united with our Lord in a spirit of great humility as well as of love. Let Him act in you instead of acting yourself; follow His inspirations and the desires He inspires with all gentleness, peace, love, and the most profound humility of heart. And especially when you are in the midst of difficulties preserve patience, remain gentle, be humble and calm, in God's presence, toward all who cause those difficulties and troubles.

[To Succeed, the Work Should Be Undertaken by a Congregation]

I have proposed the project to the Superior of the Eudists. It gave him very great joy and he told me that he would most gladly receive you and that he would be most pleased if the poor Congregation of Jesus and Mary could undertake so great a work and one that is so agreeable to God. Such an arrangement would be very advantageous for yourself and even for the good of the work. It
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seems almost indispensable for that sort of work that it should be undertaken by a Congregation. If the task were undertaken by isolated individuals, the individual spirit would soon manifest itself and the work would have no stability, for it would lack unity of spirit; and there are many other reasons besides. Moreover, it is absolutely necessary for you to prepare yourself for so important a ministry by a few years of retirement from all occupations.

It is for this reason that I greatly favor the opinion of Father Pinault that those who engage in that work should live as members of a congregation. If the good Lord directs you toward our Congregation, this will give me great consolation and it will at the same time be beneficial to this poor congregation which is now so useless in France; it would at least enable it to procure God's glory elsewhere. Moreover, our Constitutions are good and you will not have to change anything in regard to your project; they lend themselves perfectly to it. Our spirit is nothing but the apostolic spirit, and everything in our Constitutions is intended to form missionaries according to the spirit of our Lord. That is their entire foundation.

[Right Now Your Only Task is to Prepare Yourself for the Work Through Greater Holiness]

I advise you not to occupy yourself as yet with the details of the rule that you will follow. It is enough for the present that you have a general idea of the work. If, at a later date, you come with us, we shall regulate the details according as it is granted to us from above. If the good Lord leads you elsewhere, then similar arrangements will have to be made. However, it would be dangerous for you to busy yourself with such matters at this time, for the moment for such regulations has not yet arrived. Simply aim at present to prepare yourself for so great a ministry. Do this with
calm, peace, and interior humility of soul and by leading a life of love and holiness, endeavoring to render yourself ever more pleasing to our Lord and more capable of serving as a faithful instrument in His hands.

I don't know why Father Galais thinks that we ought not to speak about those things; this is why I cannot say anything to you about that. I realize that we ought not to be hasty in the works of God and must allow Him to act instead of acting ourselves. Nevertheless, there is no evil in speaking about it if there are no reasons against it. In certain circumstances it would be necessary to speak about that affair. But, as I have said, Father Galais no doubt has his own reasons for taking that stand, though they are unknown to me. If you ask Father Pinault get in contact with Father Galais regarding that matter, the two could decide what ought to be done.

If I had not been afraid of spoiling things I would have written a few words about it to our friend Mr. de la Brunière, but we should let the good Lord act. I will nevertheless say a little about it to Father Pinault and Father Galais.

Adieu, dear friend. May Jesus be your refuge, hope and love.

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

P. S. Do not reflect on the question of the choice of your Patron or of the one to whom your work should be dedicated. Leave this quite simply in the hands of Jesus and Mary. I, too, feel inclined to dedicate it to the Cross, which should be your inheritance.
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Our plans for the new congregation must mature before we undertake anything. We will need fervent and generous souls, not weaklings. Relying on God alone, we need not fear adversities and human disappointments.

Letter Three  Rennes, October 28, 1839  Vol. 1, p. 661

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

[We Must Let Our Plan Ripen in God’s Presence]

Mr. de la Brunière came to see me last night to urge me to offer Holy Communion to God on behalf of the poor and beloved Negroes, because it was the feast of the Holy Apostles Saints Simon and Jude. We have done so, and the good Lord has given me a little enlightenment. However, I do not want to tell you about it, for I prefer to allow that plan to ripen in God’s presence. In this way, if it be agreeable to His goodness and to His well-beloved Son, that small spark will develop and become a more vivid light. Before attempting to spread such plans, we should be able to present them with sufficient clarity so that everybody can weigh them before God.

Pray and ask all our confreres to pray likewise. The matter is important; it is very great; we also will pray for it for some time to come. Always encourage our dear friends in their love for those poor Negroes. Tell Mr. Tissierant to send me his memoir.

I shall give some thought to the constitutions during my free moments. Once more pray for this also. I would
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

have preferred to postpone reflecting upon those things until the affair had passed through the hands of the Holy See. But Fathers Galais and Pinault desire it, and I see some advantage in having the constitutions examined before they are presented to the Holy See, especially in regard to the way in which they should be formulated. I think that my plan will meet with difficulties. I will follow it nevertheless, letting our Lord take care of removing every obstacle.

[An Apostolic Congregation Needs Fervent Members, Not Weaklings]

Mr. de la Brunière encourages me, and he is in perfect agreement with me. I should like to have something established that is solid, fervent and apostolic; all this or nothing! But “all” will be much, and weak souls will not wish to give or do so much. This ought to be a source of joy for us, for a congregation that is wholly apostolic should not have weaklings. We ought to have nothing but fervent and generous members who give themselves entirely and are ready to undertake and suffer all things for the greater glory of our most adorable Master.

It seems to me that all who are apparently called to give themselves to God in that holy enterprise are disposed to undertake and suffer anything. They will feel additional spiritual joy when they see that the Rule demands a higher perfection and that it will sustain them in a more perfect holiness and in greater devotedness to God. Encourage them and tell them to make themselves ready before God to undertake anything, to suffer death—even the death of the cross. It is only at this price that we share in the spirit and the apostolic glory of Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Lord and the great Model of apostles.

Please tell Father Pinault that I am almost getting angry with him. He never tells me anything about that great and
beautiful work and leaves me entirely to myself. I hope to write to him within two weeks, telling him what the good Lord will deign to make known to Mr. de la Brunière and to me.

[If We Place Our Hope in God Alone, We Need Not Fear Adversities]

We have already met disappointment and some hopes have been frustrated, but this ought not to discourage us. We should wait until our Lord and His most Holy Mother develop what is their work. Tell all those who wish to join that they ought not to indulge in excessive sensible joy at the sight of the work's progress, as happened when Mr. de Brandt seemed to desire to become a member. Tell them not to yield to sadness when they meet with adversity and their hopes do not materialize. But let them remain constantly in dispositions of humility, lowliness and poverty before Him who is the Head and Lord of all whom He destines for the apostolate. Let them humbly put all their hope in His goodness and love.

Mr. de la Brunière and I will offer Holy Communion for our dear Negroes on the Feast of All Saints. Unite your intention to ours. Ask Fathers Pinault and Galais to do likewise, if you consider it proper.

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

Francis Libermann, acolyte
Letters to Frederic Le Vavasseur

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The Holy See encourages us in our undertakings. Why should we worry about difficulties? The devil may try to sow discord among us.

Letter Four Rome, June 12, 1840 Vol. 2, p. 82

Dear Confrere:

I want to reply immediately to the letter that I have just received which contained another letter for Father de Reginier and a cheque.

I was very glad to learn through Father Pinault that the Superior of the Holy Ghost Fathers is so well disposed toward me, for, until today, the good Lord has sent me nothing but contradictions and obstacles, and I was afraid that there would be opposition from that quarter also.

[The Holy See Encourages Our Undertaking]

On the very day that brought me the letter of Father Pinault, God gave me an additional consolation that greatly encourages me in regard to our dear undertaking. It is a letter from Cardinal Fransoni, the Prefect of Propaganda. I had not hoped for such a thing nor had I asked for it, as I explain in the letter I am sending to Father Pinault. That letter will perhaps arrive later than the present one, for I have sent it by the ambassador.

His Eminence makes mention of all of you as well as of myself, and he exhorts us to persevere in our vocation and do all that we can to remain faithful to it.

Let us note that his exhortation has very great authority, not only because the Cardinal is a saint and is appointed by the Pope as General Superior over all the missions, but also because he reports everything to the Holy Father and
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acts only according to the orders of the latter. For all the Cardinals act in this way and nothing is done without passing through the hands of the Supreme Pontiff, except routine affairs.

Moreover, the Cardinal Prefect, before writing that letter, proposed our project to the assembly which has the function of examining such projects. This assembly or “congregation” is composed of the principal Cardinals, several Archbishops, Bishops and Prelates, and some religious who are outstanding for their merit and their piety. The Cardinal says explicitly in that letter that what he writes is in agreement with the “congregation.”

You see then, dear friend, that we ought to bless and praise God for the grace He thus grants to us. We should encourage one another more and more in the vocation and in its spirit, for God’s will in our regard could not be more clearly expressed.

I don’t want to say more about that matter. My letter to Father Pinault will explain why we did not meet with such a favorable reception at the beginning, or rather why [Propaganda] seemed even unwilling to listen to me, and why things have changed since then, without anyone else or myself doing anything to produce such a change.

I assure you that when we consider the circumstances, it is most astonishing that His Eminence sent a letter. This alone is a certain proof of his good dispositions toward us and of the fact that he considers our work to be truly in accord with God’s will.

[Why Should We Worry About Difficulties?]

Do not worry about the difficulties that were mentioned by the Superior of the Holy Ghost Fathers and will probably be mentioned also by others. It even astonished me that that word “difficulties” is constantly brought up. Is there
any work of God that is not accomplished in the midst of difficulties? Have we not been aware at all times that we would meet with obstacles? We certainly have, and the obstacles will be considerable. If we were able to foresee them, we would study them and devise good means for overcoming them; but if this is impossible and we cannot choose such means, let us remain quiet. In any case, we should put our trust in God. When the time comes, we shall do what we can to bear the pains, afflictions and contradictions, and avoid as much as possible or overcome the difficulties that will stand in our way. Above all, let us put our entire confidence in Jesus and Mary alone; they will be our only resource, our only support on this earth.

We have difficulties which, I trust, will sanctify us; this is exactly what we need. Woe to us if we do not have such difficulties! It is by the cross that we ought to sanctify both ourselves and others. We are not made to live in peace and tranquillity, but to suffer for the greater glory of God. . . .

Pray much. Although things everywhere are taking a good turn, I still expect a number of reverses. Let us be always in God's hands, ready to live only according to His most holy will, with a loving and humble heart, willing to accept anything He may have in store for us. Let us bless God for everything He does to us and beg Him to give perseverance to all whom He will send us.

[The Devil May Try to Sow Discord Among Us]

Be in peace and do not worry about anything. Be full of confidence in our Lord and His most Holy Mother. Union and charity are precious treasures, and I firmly hope that the divine Master will grant them to all of us.

We should not be astonished if the enemy does his best to sow trouble among us; but let us be courageous, practice
patience, and refuse to attach exaggerated importance to such things. You know how great is the happiness that results from peace, charity and union among you; and you strongly and earnestly desire and pursue them. If sometimes, or even very often, contrary sentiments arise, it is not your fault. Never yield to anxiety on their account, but say to yourselves that the devil is trying to play with you. Bear patiently and with a sort of indifference what he does to you, and go on as if he did not interfere. At a later time when we are engaged in our labors those things will surely vanish.

I do not consider it necessary to say more about this matter. Please be satisfied with these few words. Best regards to all in the holy charity of Jesus and Mary.

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, ACOLYTE

Do not worry about your interior life. Continue to walk in all peace. Tomorrow I will pray that our Lord may live in you in all His fullness and maintain in you the spirit of the subdiaconate.

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Bishop Collier is an exception to the rule that men nearly always tend to interfere with God's plans. We must not rush ahead of God's guidance.

Letter Five Rome, July 12, 1840 Vol. 2, p. 85

Dear Confrere:

We owe our Lord and His most Holy Mother a debt of profound gratitude for all their goodness toward us and the consolations they have given us. If we succeed in
arranging our affairs in agreement with Bishop William Collier and, as I hope from God’s infinite goodness, if we are favored with His grace, everything will go well. We have good reasons for believing that the bishop will try to secure a small foundation for us at Cambrai. If he did not make definite promises, it was because he was not sure that he would succeed.

[Man Nearly Always Tends to Interfere with God’s Plans]

What seems very nice on the part of the bishop is the fact that he does not appear to make the appeal exclusively for his own interests. He is working for the good of his diocese, but he also takes care not to harm the work that is proposed to him. He wants to benefit by the enterprise, but he does not seem to want things to be done according to his own fancy or ideas. He acts as if he felt that he ought to let things develop according to the good Lord’s designs and the ideas our Lord has suggested to us for our project.

This way of acting, which I consider most wise and in conformity with God’s will, is something I have not met with anywhere until now. Everyone wishes to change and arrange things according to his own ideas, and such a method is precisely the one that opposes, arrests, and sometimes almost destroys God’s works. It is a way that is even contrary to the rules of human prudence, for those who are planning such projects know the requirements much better than a stranger who is not engaged in the enterprise and judges things only according to first impressions. Moreover, those who aimed at giving themselves completely and sacrificing themselves for God’s glory in an enterprise which God prompted them to undertake, lose half of that resolution when they are forced to abandon half of their project or are asked to execute God’s plans in a way that differs from His designs.
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We all act alike in such matters. Man has always the tendency to interfere with God’s works. Whenever we judge as men, according to pure human reason, such interference will take place. We then find it necessary to change, to modify things; we upset things, for there are no two minds that think alike, but every individual has his own point of view. When, however, we look at things from God’s standpoint, we easily agree, for we then prefer to place our trust in what the good Lord desires to do according to His designs. We then yield to others more easily and are not so anxious to scrutinize their plans and find out whether they might not be wrong. We realize that if they are wanting in experience, they will acquire it with the help of God’s grace; and if they happen to be men of good will, they will change their views once they discover that they are wrong.

When I visited Cardinal Fransoni he did not say anything about making changes, and I learned that it is the rule with Propaganda not to disturb people, but to allow them to follow their attraction. The Cardinal spoke to me about one country that is very much in need of help, but he suddenly corrected himself and without finishing the sentence, said, “O, I was forgetting that your project is directed solely to the Negro.” Everyone, with the exception of the men at Propaganda and Bishop Collier, wished to change the plans, and each wanted to have things done according to his own views.

[We Must Not Run Ahead of God’s Guidance]

I do not see that it will be difficult to begin the novitiate next year. However, it might be useful for me to take time out, visit some good dioceses, and look for devout priests who are suitable for our work and whom the good Lord wishes to send us. In this way we could form a complete
community from the start and would not have to send men
to the missions before they have had the benefit of observing
the Rule while living in community.

To succeed, I would have to set out very soon, but this
is not feasible. We would then have to delay the novitiate
until the end of the winter. We must not act with haste,
lest we run ahead of the good Lord. The right procedure
is to follow Him always faithfully step by step and not to
run ahead of Him. Moreover, it will be difficult to make a
decision about those matters before two months have elapsed.
We shall then know what turn things are taking. Let us
always obey the impetus given us by the good Lord as a
ship obeys every gust of wind in its sails.

Regarding money, I have no particular need for the
present. I think, nevertheless, that you would do well to
reserve your alms for us and to save some money. We shall
thus be able to pay for traveling expenses and for other
things we need. . . .

I am full of joy at the thought of the good dispositions of
all our dear confreres. Let us pray constantly to our Lord
and the most Blessed Virgin, asking them to make them
advance in fervor and sanctity.

May the peace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ grow
and increase in your soul and in the souls of those dear
confreres.

Entirely yours in the holy love of
Jesus and Mary,
FRANCIS LIBERMAN
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

Father Le Vavasseur's extreme rigorism caused constant conflicts in the newly opened novitiate of La Neuville. Four months after its opening, he departed for his native island of Bourbon (Reunion), but promised Libermann not to sever relations with the Congregation. In the present letter, Libermann stresses the need for unity and harmony, while rejoicing over his resolution to remain in the Society.

Letter Six  La Neuville, February 4, 1842  Vol. 3, p. 126

Dear Confrere:

[We Greatly Need to be United in the Charity of Christ]

I am very unworthy of the consolation that our Lord bestows upon me, for I deserve nothing but pain and tribulation. God knows that I do not refuse such afflictions. I ask Him to grant but one thing, that we may have a holy union among ourselves in His divine love. I trust that He has given this great grace, a grace that I would be glad to earn at the price of the most severe afflictions He might desire to send me.

Set your mind at rest. I have no more fears, for I hope that the Holy Heart of Mary will have compassion on us and will not permit the enemy to sow trouble among us, especially at this time when we are so greatly in need of peace and union. The Blessed Mother has granted you a signal grace. It is my hope that I too will benefit by it for the good of my soul. You are making a great sacrifice, and this sacrifice was so much greater because of the violence of your temptation. The reward, I hope, will also be great for this small society and the salvation of numerous souls.

I have done nothing and deserve nothing, but at least I am offering myself to our good Master and our Holy Mother,
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

ready to suffer any sort of pain and affliction according to the wishes of divine Providence for the good of this poor little work. I think that I would feel a most profound joy amidst the most severe pains and, with the help of God's grace, would bear them gladly, if we were well united in the charity of Jesus. That charity is found in such fullness in Mary's Heart, from which we ought to draw it as from a common source.

[Through Lack of Union We Might Spoil Everything]

Let me tell you that I have often reflected on the Order for the Redemption of Captives and also on another—I cannot recall its name—that had several founders, and my heart was oppressed with grief because I saw with what perfect union and understanding those saints lived and sought to labor for the glory of their Master within their Order. But we, poor individuals, so incapable of doing anything for God's glory, so much in need of such a union, we do not have it and are thereby losing the sacred trust that was confided to us. However, we are, all of us, children of Mary, as those Saints were.

[I Trust in Mary's Protection]

I can tell you now what I feared to mention to you when you were still with us: that thought [of discord] broke my heart, for I thought that the enemy still exercised power over us. The thing that consoled me and gave me great hope was the fact that, in spite of it all, Mary our most beloved Mother had revealed her protection over us on several occasions. This made me believe that it was her intention to destroy the power of the enemy. You know that I have repeatedly mentioned this to you. O the goodness of our dear Lord! That hope has not been frustrated. Mary has given us her hand; she will complete the overthrow of that
wretched enemy and will make us triumph over all his wiles and ruses.

Forget the past, dear friend, and rejoice in the present. Be wholly devoted to Mary and to her most Holy Heart and live as a true child of the sweet and humble Heart of Mary, which is so full of love for you.

Adieu, my dear confrere.

Entirely yours in the most holy love of the
Holy Heart of Mary,
Father Francis Libermann

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Your apostolic labor must be based on a love full of humility. Trust in God’s providence. Safeguarding the congregation’s internal autonomy. Advice concerning the way of handling subordinates.

Letter Seven March 4, 1843 Vol. 3, p. 202

Jesus, Mary, Joseph

Dear Confrere:

May the peace and love of our Lord and of our most Holy Mother increase and grow ever stronger in your soul.

I am sending you Fathers Collin and Blanpin, in the name of our Lord, to be your associates in your apostolic labors. “Increase and multiply and fill the earth.” This is the greatest desire of my heart. It is by your zeal for the salvation of souls that you will beget a multitude of children for our heavenly Father. Those men, with sinful souls blacker than their bodies, will become white as snow, thanks to your care and the blessings which Christ’s grace will pour on your labors.
Always remain gentle, recollected, peaceful, filled with love and especially with humility. The spirit that ought to be the soul of all your works is a love full of humility and a humility full of love. Remain constantly aware of your poverty before God, but at the same time keep alive a filial love and confidence. While preserving that attitude of lowliness in His presence, allow yourself to be carried off by divine love and act vigorously, propelled by the power of grace and the love of Jesus Christ which abides in you . . .

[Trust in Divine Providence]

[Regarding the travel expenses and salaries of our priests, the government has] promised to pay for the voyage, but added that our men would not receive any salary. I assure you truthfully and sincerely that I am very glad of this. You see, dear confrere, that we should abandon ourselves to divine Providence. God takes care of everything. It would have been difficult for me to refuse the salary if it had been offered. I even thought that God's will and the rules of prudence dictated acceptance of such money. After that, I abandoned everything to divine Goodness which takes such wonderful care of its poor insignificant servants. I beg you never to relinquish this kind of attitude and conduct. God will bless you as long as you act in that manner. May our ways be identical, especially in regard to acting on true principles; this will be our strength, and it will draw God's graces and blessings upon us . . .

[Safeguard the Congregation's Internal Autonomy]

The Prefect of Bourbon seems to be very fond of us, and he has sought to render us every possible service. We

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1Administrative parts of this and the following letters have been omitted.
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

must keep this in mind; nevertheless, you should not allow him to become the master of your community. Agreements must be kept. As soon as the Rule and the spirit of the Congregation are involved we should resist, doing this, however, with gentleness, humility and modesty. When they are not involved, we ought to obey and try to satisfy him and give him all possible comfort. This is how God's servants must act towards their ecclesiastical superiors.

[When Father Collin is in a Stubborn Mood, Allow the Evil Moment to Pass]

I appoint Father Collin as your first Assistant. He is a good man and very simple, resourceful and devout; he has ardent zeal and is as constant as he is courageous. He has good judgment and much firmness and is very gentle when he is faithful to grace. But when he follows the evil tendencies of his nature, he is very rigid, hard and stubborn and will have arguments with everybody. Do not offer him direct resistance; don't try to make him give up his wrong views immediately nor correct him at the time when he is acting in that fashion. Do not oppose him in a stiff and rigorous manner. Allow the evil moment to pass, and when the storm is over, reason in all gentleness with him. You will then be able to make him accept everything you wish.

[Encourage Him When He is Downcast]

Father Collin is also greatly inclined to be angry with himself and to become discouraged. On such occasions you should try to restore his confidence in God and make him abandon himself to our Lord. Let him remain in God's presence like a wretched man who desires nothing but God's good pleasure and that His will be accomplished. When he happens to make a mistake or commits a fault, he should
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

gently return to the presence of God, remain there in all his poverty, and restrain any sentiment of ill will toward himself.

[Lest His Self-Love Increase, Do Not Let Him Play the Theologian]

Father Collin lately earned great success in his studies and his mind attained a great development. This made him feel a certain satisfaction with himself; he was prompted to think well of his talents and inclined to self-sufficiency and presumption, especially in matters of theology. He thus was apt to make peremptory pronouncements. That is why I advise you not to consult him regarding matters of theology or the rubrics. Similarly, I would but rarely discuss questions of theology, especially in regard to positive law. Regarding natural law your common sense knows as much as his does. It would be well not to let him make professional use of his knowledge of theology within the community for some time to come. However, you should permit him to spend two hours or more every day in perfecting himself in theological science, for he studied only the first elements and he did it rapidly.

It would be well also not to launch him directly into preaching, for the same reasons. I believe that he would be perfectly successful, but you should handle this young man with care, lest he fall a prey to self-love. It remains true, however, that he was almost untouched by that vice for a very long time. He is as obedient as a child, is full of faith and good desires. If you act with gentleness, confidence and affection of heart toward him, you will do him much good and will take the lead over him.

He has also worried me lately; he has become prejudiced against me, whereas until now he had been very docile, full of confidence and respect. This change in him pained
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me greatly. It was occasioned by the relations he had with a novice who suffered temptations for quite a length of time. Those prejudices have done some harm to Father Collin, although they are not of long standing. His presumption, or inclination to it, of which I spoke a moment ago, has contributed somewhat to that. But do not worry about all that; he has great confidence in you and is full of joy at the prospect of working with you and being formed by your counsel. Act unhesitatingly with him, but do it with gentleness, as I have explained.

[Father Blanpin is Still an Adolescent and Needs Experience]

Father Blanpin is a saintly "child" in the full sense of the word. In fact, I have never met so much simplicity and innocence. It is easy to direct him. He will give you great satisfaction because of that simplicity and docility. He is somewhat awkward, and this, together with a certain naiveness and his carelessness for all earthly things, makes him sometimes annoying. He has no wide outlook; he needs experience in every field, and it is possible that he will acquire it with difficulty. I believe that he will do very much good; his charity and gentleness will never fail. He will be a tireless worker in behalf of the Negroes.

May Jesus and Mary guide you in your conduct with those dear confreres and the souls you are called to save.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,
FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN, missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary.
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The Spirit of Christ, as well as human prudence, demand gentleness and charity in dealing with government officials.

Letter Eight August 22, 1844 Vol. 6, p. 316

Dear Confrere:

I have read your report with great interest. However, it seems to me that you are making use of a somewhat bitter tone in your reply to the Director of the Internal Affairs of the Colony. It would have been preferable to use more charitable words and expressions that did not hurt anyone. I don't mean that you are actually insulting, but, without saying it explicitly, you imply that there was bad faith on the part of the Director. I do not doubt that there actually was bad faith and a bad intention on his part, but, instead of implying this, a tone of moderation, gentleness, and charity in your reply would have been more in accord with our own spirit. Our Lord sends us as lambs among wolves. A lamb does not bite the wolf that attacks it.

I think that you should have assumed that there had been an error on the part of the Director. You could have told him, for instance, that in all probability he had received wrong information from people who were either ignorant or ill-intentioned; that it was regrettable that a man who was well-intentioned like himself should thwart your good desires and put obstacles in the way of the good you would like to accomplish. After that, you could have shown clearly and firmly, though with calm and gentleness, that the information given him by others in your regard was not correct. This sort of moderate and peaceful language is in harmony with the spirit of our divine Master. A lamb does not defend itself against the wolf by attacking it. Be-
sides, speaking humanly, the kind of language I have suggested is much more effectual than one that is violent and petulant; it tends to make others favorably disposed.

It seems that the Director will return to Bourbon. However, don’t worry about the past; we have to make foolish mistakes sometimes in order to gain experience about men and things.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,
FRANCIS LIBERMANn,
missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary.

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*We have suffered severe losses in Africa. Yet I remain full of confidence in God.*

Letter Nine Paris, October 16, 1844 Vol. 6, p. 374

Dear Confrere:

I received your reports and the one of Father Blanpin concerning the mission of Colimaçon. . . . The knowledge of what you are doing gives me great consolation, and it is a great encouragement for all of us.

We need such consolation greatly because of the misfortunes we suffer in Guinea. The blows struck by our Lord were very severe, and I could not help recognizing them as a singular act of His divine Providence. Everything seemed to point to a success in that vast and neglected mission. The information that I had received from all sides caused us to believe that we would be able to save that country with slight losses for ourselves. God has judged differently: He has tried us in a most painful manner; may His Name be blessed.

I received a letter from Bishop Barron, dated August 6th, in which he announces our new losses, Father Audebert
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

and Father Bouchet. He told me that he would take the necessary steps to save the three that remain; but I feel certain, or at least consider it most probable, that they too have succumbed.

I feel sure that I have acted according to God's will and that I would have committed a fault against Him if I had refused to accept that mission. It was impossible for me to obtain adequate information concerning that country because there are at present no persons who possess such data. I am sure of this; hence my soul remains in perfect confidence and repose before God. Yet my heart is wounded with a sevenfold sorrow as was that of our Blessed Mother, at the thought that we ought to procure the salvation of that vast neglected country. That is why I feel sure that it was God's desire, in His Goodness, to offer our seven missionaries to Guinea, not as apostles, but as intercessors before His throne of mercy.

There are extraordinary features in their attitude. Although our dear confreres realized that the unhealthy climate was unbearable, they did not want to leave because they realized they had been sent there under obedience and they saw the good dispositions of the people.

Bishop Barron, who ought to have forced them to leave, let them remain, and he himself intended to stay with them. As soon as I received the first news of the unhealthy condition of the place, I wrote to them and urged them to leave and go to Goree, which is a healthier spot. I sent two letters in succession, but none reached our confreres. They had been sent to be immolated for the salvation of those countries!

My desire for the salvation of those vast multitudes is stronger than ever. I am firmly resolved, God helping, never to abandon those poor souls, unless God's will points in a
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different direction and shows that I should give up this work, a thing which I don't think He will do.

Do not worry, however; I will not send our missionaries again [under such conditions]. I will adopt a new method so that, humanly speaking, there will be no more victims. I trust that God's goodness will be satisfied with what we have already sacrificed. . . .

If I were to listen to the pain I feel in this difficult function [of superior], I would run away and hide somewhere in solitude; but there is no danger of my doing such a thing! It is necessary for us to be consumed in affliction and labors for the glory of our Master.

Courage, patience, humility and confidence! With these God will achieve His work using the most wretched instruments. Don't worry; those losses will not harm us.

Adieu.

Entirely yours in the charity of Jesus and Mary,
FRANCIS LIBERMAN
priest of the Holy Heart of Mary
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Greatly disturbed by the fact that Libermann had sent him a confrere who did not measure up to his own severe principles, Father Le Vavasseur became discouraged and wanted to withdraw from the Congregation in order to join the Jesuits. In a reply, which brings to mind St. Paul’s eloquent description of his trials and tribulations, the Venerable endeavored to justify his procedures and to calm Le Vavasseur’s apprehensions.

Letter Ten January 28, 1846 Vol. 8, p. 28

Dear Confrere:

[You Are Wrong in Entertaining Thoughts of Discouragement]

I want to reply immediately to your letter in which you speak about Father Plessis and your desire to send him back to us. You have my approval to send him back. I was at fault when I admitted him; so it is up to me to bear the embarrassment he causes. However, you break my heart by your discouragement and the other unfortunate feelings to which you have yielded. Your letter shows me that you are deeply depressed and are worried to death about the condition of our society. I do not want to reprove you for thus plunging me into new sorrow, yet your words are a sword with which God desires to pierce my heart.

God is overwhelming me with this most troublesome work for which we need so much patience. He even wishes those who are most firm and more valuable than myself to strike me, whereas I should wish them to support me in my weakness. May his Holy Name be blessed. Be it so, provided His humble work may make progress; and I must say that it is evidently developing more and more.
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You talk about abandoning the work to which God called you and of which you were the first to be put in charge. Your words are full of discouragement. I believe that when you wilfully entertain such thoughts you are doing something that is most displeasing to God.

[Shall We be Able to Face the Sovereign Judge If We Give up the Work Through Discouragement?]

Be on your guard, dear confrere. You do not know God’s designs in your regard. You do not see what function is destined for you; you do not see what God has in mind. God’s providential designs are hidden from me also, but I can see that the wilful entertainment of such thoughts is an act of serious unfaithfulness.

Let us suppose for a moment that you abandon this work of God and that, I in turn, become discouraged like yourself. What then shall both us say to the Sovereign Judge to justify our yielding to discouragement? And let me add that, where you could mention but one reason for discouragement, I would be able to muster a hundred. For I am burdened with the duties of superiorship; I bear all the solicitude and responsibility for the enterprise; I bear the brunt of all the most violent attacks, the afflictions and trials which divine Providence deigns to send; I suffer in sympathy with all the worries that accompany the missionary undertakings; I have worries about the novitiate, the studies, the various houses of missionaries, the arrangement of affairs, the rules that have to be perfected, and the solid foundation that has to be insured for our society. I am all alone here, having only one confrere able to help me effectively in introducing and preserving proper regularity in this place. I have the full burden of the correspondence; I have to deal with a variety of persons; I have to make the right choice of candidates; and there are a multitude of other things that can become a source of preoccupation and anxiety.
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

[My Heart and Soul Long for Solitude, But I Must Continue to Bear the Burden God Has Imposed on Me]

I have not had one moment of peace and consolation since the time when God placed me in this work. My spirit seems to have become dull and insensitive to everything that could give me pleasure and consolation, but I am at the same time supersensitive to pain; and God's goodness has not spared pain.

Consider for one moment how I suffer and grieve because I find not one minute throughout the day to occupy myself with the salvation of my soul. Yet you know how ardently and constantly my heart longs for retreat and solitude. I greatly abhor the world and sometimes feel an almost insuperable repugnance toward it, but I am obliged to keep contact with it. I find it very difficult to converse with men, but it is my duty to do it at every turn. I must be occupied with giving direction to others from morning till night, in spite of the mortal repugnance I feel for it. I constantly have to give instructions, and the least subject of meditation that I am called to prepare for others upsets me three hours before I have to propose it.

Everything within me seems to go counter to my remaining in my present situation. Every attraction of nature and of grace points in a different direction. There is not one fibre in my body nor one tendency in my soul that does not prompt me to seek solitude. In spite of all that, however, I would consider it actually a crime to entertain such a thought in my mind. God binds me and chains me to that task which is crucifying, yet most dear to my heart. I realize fully that in order to obey His powerful will, through which He has taken possession of me, I must sacrifice my rest, my consolation and my happiness. I must sacrifice infinitely more—namely, my spiritual progress, for which I am now not able to labor; this makes me shed bitter tears. I beg
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God to pardon me for my tears and my grief. I fully submit with all my heart to the divine will which imprisons me in those heavy chains. I think I can say truthfully that I have never moved even one finger to loosen those chains. It is better for me to be the last in the kingdom of the heavenly Father, and to go there in obedience to His holy will and for the salvation of so many neglected souls, than to be in the front ranks after having left the way traced for me by that adorable will.

[I Would Sin Gravely If I Were to Dismiss You as You Desire]

You are considering abandoning the work that causes you pain. Suppose I die before the work has been solidly established. You would then have taken precautions to gain rest for yourself and the satisfaction of your own desires, but the souls which God prompted you to pity so deeply might thereby perish by the thousands and suffer eternally in hell.

Be careful, my dear confrere. You have not yet learned to suffer for the love of God and to sacrifice yourself for His glory. You want me to dismiss you. By so doing, I would commit a most grievous fault before God and against your own soul. You are bound to God and the most Holy Heart of Mary, your dear Mother. Any thought of breaking that bond is an illusion. Many a servant of God lost everything when he allowed himself to be misled by a false view of seeking a state of higher perfection. If you examine yourself carefully you will see that your imagination and self-love contribute greatly to your trouble.

[What Would Have Happened If You Had Become Superior of the Congregation?]

You feel very keenly the burden of superiorship and the difficulties that stand in your way. I don’t know how you
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

would have managed if, in accord with Father Galais’ ideas, you had been put in my place. Instead of your present ounce of difficulties and solicitude you would have had to bear a hundred pounds! On many occasions, acting upon your present ideas you would have said: “God does not want this work; it will never be successful.” And yet it is certain that God does want it, and it is evident that it will succeed. The more I examine it, the more I realize that your yielding to views inspired by trouble and anxiety would constitute a serious infidelity.

I feel certain that all your former ideas concerning myself have returned to your mind. However, I can say truthfully that all this has not caused me grief; it has not even ruffled the surface of my soul. You should not allow yourself to be led astray in such a fashion by your lively mind. Recall the past and you will see that here is one more artifice of the devil and that bitter consequences would result if God’s goodness did not grant you its protection.

[I Have Made Mistakes and Will Make Others]

To come back to the case of Father Plessis, it was a great mistake on my part to admit him to the subdiaconate and the priesthood. This has been the cause of great remorse and anguish of heart, but it was too late. The mistake was occasioned by my lack of experience and my want of confidence in God. I sent him to you because I was hoping that you would be able to undo the wrong I had done.

Do not hesitate to send him back to me; your reasons for returning him are good; I have to accept my punishment. But don’t allow yourself to be trapped by the devil on account of this event. Try to calm your mind and stop entertaining anxious thoughts about the admission of candidates to our society. My own worries about Father Plessis have caused me to be more demanding. I expect nevertheless
that we shall make other mistakes; there is no one who is immune from error or from being caught by surprise. Things will go more smoothly once we have established a regular state of affairs; but we shall have to wait two more years before achieving such a condition. Our risks will be lessened from now on, for the greater number of our missionaries will be taken from our own students. We have thirty at this moment. Of these, eight or nine are very solid; three or four are somewhat doubtful, and we have almost decided to send two of these away. The others are good. At the end of the two or three years which they will spend here, we shall know what turn things are taking.

[Don't Be a "Savage" in Dealing with People]

You are at war with me and using fighting tactics, so I am going to do the same. (You see that I am once more talking in the gay fashion usual between us and discarding the sad tone with which I began this letter. . . .) I have already fired more than one shot since the beginning of this letter; but I was on the defensive; I now want to take the offensive and attack you!

I find that you are a "rough customer." I trust, however, that you will not be as harsh in your relations with others as you are with me; for otherwise you would spoil everything and upset everybody everytime you met with trouble. Don't be a savage with people. However, you can make an exception in regard to myself. Your thrusts against me produce an effect which you would not understand, but let me say that I will never bear a grudge against you on their account. Remember, however, that everybody will not react in the way I do.

Distrust your sensitiveness and your natural impetuosity. Whenever you are moved by a strong emotion against someone or some object, you run the risk of saying terribly harsh
things in a horrible way. In such moments you are the slave of wild exaggerations that obscure grace and reason and rob you of wisdom. You become terribly impatient, not in regard to what concerns you personally, but in regard to your dealings with men and the administration of affairs. This impatience tends to produce such a profound discouragement that if you had been here [to share my burdens] you would have been incapable of overcoming it and would have been crushed over and over again.

[If I Had Followed Your Principles, I Should Have Dismissed You From the Novitiate]

You judge that I lack wisdom and prudence. Well, I believe that you are impatient. You want everything to be perfect at once, and you take no account of the troubles and perplexities that attend the beginnings of an enterprise. This results from another thing I want to mention: You do not judge things in a practical, realistic way. You reflect on the old established orders and demand that everything in our society be run with the same kind of regularity. You should realize that this is not possible. Your rigorous way of looking at things prevents you from seeing them realistically. We are just beginning to be settled. But you already are judging, condemning, and drawing conclusions from your own ideas, and this leads you to extreme resolutions. In this you do not give evidence of wisdom.

Practice patience. It is clear that we need time to get established. Wait until things are stable and in shape. Don't ask for perfection from the start. See then whether I ought to have been so severe from the very beginning. The work was too frail and too unstable, and my authority was too weak. Judge all this in view of what occurred in your case and that of Father Tisserant. If I had acted upon your own principles, I would have found it necessary to dismiss you
or to keep you for two years. Do not forget the temptations from which you suffered. Well, do you think that it would have been wise for me to act according to your principles in your case? Don’t you think I would have acted imprudently by following those principles?

[Flexibility is Necessary in the Beginning of a New Foundation]

In the beginnings of an apostolic enterprise there are numerous circumstances that forbid the strict application of general rules. At present, we are already in a much better position to observe them than you think, but now and then situations will still arise that prevent us from observing the letter of those rules. How important is discretion in the administration of the works of God! You were wanting in this virtue when you yielded to your ardent temperament.

I do not say that I have not made many mistakes nor ever acted wrongly. My acceptance of Father Plessis proves the contrary. Neither do I maintain that I shall not commit errors in the future. However, I think that as a rule my conduct is wiser and more in accord with the spirit of our Lord than the course you want me to adopt.

Thanks to my method and the concessions I have made, the work is established and beginning to develop. Men who are wise and know the difficulties that accompany the foundation of a society are astonished that we were able to obtain so great a regularity in such a short time, for we have been in existence only four years. Several years from now, when we shall have the personnel we need here in Europe, I feel confident that our community will possess the same character as a long established society.

If, on the contrary, I had used the unyielding method which you want me to adopt “not one stone would have been left upon another.”
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

[Men Cannot be Handled Like Puppets]

Let me say something about the members of our congregation. Well, I can tell you truthfully that all, with the exception of Father Plessis, are very fervent and solid men. There was one who deteriorated because he had remained too long alone in Haiti; but he has now returned to normal. I cannot form an opinion about Father Blanpin, for it is impossible for me to know exactly what his situation is.

You proclaim a principle that is so severe that it is absolutely impractical. You want all the members of a community to be so perfect and so detached that they can be handled as if they were puppets. This, of course, would be very nice, but this sort of thing has never existed in the Church, nor will it ever exist.

[Your Principles Would Force the Jesuits to Dismiss Three-Fourths of Their Members]

The Jesuits [you admire so much] are certainly one of the most fervent religious societies in the Church. And yet, if your severe principles were applied to them, at least half of them should be dismissed. More than this; you may rest assured that, at the most, only one-fourth of the members of that worthy society possess the dispositions of renunciation which you desire to require of candidates to our society. I do not know very many members of the Society of Jesus. I have known some who were admirable, but I also know several others who are very weak, very imperfect, very inferior to Father Blanpin. Yet, according to your description of Father Blanpin, he seems to be the member of our society that ranks lowest in perfection.

Refrain therefore from judging matters of such importance like an adolescent. Here, it seems to me, is the general rule we ought to adopt, one which I am trying to follow in the matter of admitting candidates. I will not accept any one who
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does not offer guarantees, who does not offer moral certainty that he will persevere in a priestly spirit. When I discover faults, I try to correct them or to lessen them as much as possible. If the faults are of such a nature that they point to future trouble, I dismiss the candidate. Until now, with the exception of Father Plessis, I have not accepted anyone without observing the conditions of that rule. If the faults of the candidate are not of a nature to inspire fears for the future, if they seemingly do not spell trouble for a later date, I accept the candidate. Of course, I have already made mistakes and will be caught again and again in the future, but people who are more clever than myself likewise get caught.

If you want me to give proof that I am not always more accommodating than the Jesuits, let me mention Father Maurice, a man who gave me more reason for doubt in regard to the matter of accepting him into our society than anyone else. He was excessively fainthearted and full of perplexity. I have never come across a man who had those defects to such a degree. Besides that, he had a funny streak of mind and imagination that gave him great trouble in the past. Yet he was very pious in the midst of all that. I admitted him with great fears and was always anxious about him. He went to our mission in Guinea, but because of his funny streak of imagination and his lack of courage he returned to us, and I was greatly relieved. He next entered the Society of Jesus and has been with the Jesuits for about eighteen months. Now, they know his condition; they spoke to me about it, and in spite of all that they are retaining him. And yet there are in him major defects and deficiencies, weaknesses that had an unfortunate influence on his conduct during his stay with us, and faults which cannot be eliminated during a novitiate. I mention this to show you that you ought to relax your principles a little. Examine things in a practical, realistic way. I tell you in all truth: if Father Maurice were to
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

seek admission with us now, I do not think I would accept him.

Finally, when I take under consideration the acceptance of a candidate, I examine his community spirit, his obedience, simplicity, and regularity, and I ask myself how much probability there is that he will fit into the life of a religious community.

[Trust in God’s Providence]

You don’t know yet what God has destined for you. Abandon yourself to His providence; in the meantime, continue to do good in the work you have undertaken and wait for God’s own moment...

It may be that I say things to you that sound severe. Don’t let this grieve you. I have no desire of causing you pain, and I can assure you that if there is severity in the terms, there is none in my heart. May God’s peace be with you.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary
FRANCIS LIBERMANN,
priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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The opposition of the Holy Ghost Fathers should not make us act hastily. True humility does not cause discouragement. The source of your own discouragement.

Letter Eleven {Feb.-April, 1846} Vol. 8, p. 99

Dear Confrere:

I am in Paris, and it is from this city that I am writing this brief note. I hope that my last letter will have reached you before this one and that your discouragement has become a thing of the past.

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Not long ago I received a letter from the Minister. He asks us to send four missionaries to Bourbon in addition to those already there. . . . Nevertheless, I have refused to send more missionaries to Bourbon for the following reasons:

1. Your latest letters expressed such deep discouragement that I did not dare to undertake anything before consulting you once more about conditions.

2. I judged that it would be very imprudent for us to engage ourselves seriously in enterprises in Bourbon before the settlement of colonial affairs. I have found the Ministry so variable and vacillating in regard to those affairs that I find it necessary to wait until those matters are regulated.

If full control were handed over to the Holy Ghost Fathers, I sincerely believe that we would be obliged to pack our bags and leave Bourbon (keep this to yourself), for Father Leguay, their superior, is very angry with us. You must have guessed this when I wrote urging you to use certain means of resistance if attempts were made to forbid the exercise of the ministry to you. Father Leguay made terrible threats, and he has carried them out in Goree and Senegal. You see that if he were the master in Bourbon we would not fare well over there.

It seemed at one time that he had won the favor of the Ministry. At the present moment, however, the affairs of Holy Ghost Seminary seem more precarious than ever. It is not possible, however, to foretell how things will turn out. This does not make us anxious, for there will always be plenty of work. However, we should not act hastily. As you realize, it would be imprudent for us to abandon the work of Bourbon at the present time. Let us wait patiently; there is no need for hurry since you are doing good over there. Let us allow divine Providence to act, and try to be faithful and patient instruments in God’s hands. Above
all, do not let Father Collin indulge in excessive ambition. He is not satisfied with what he is doing because he is so anxious to do more.

[Genuine Humility Does Not Lead to Discouragement]

I should like to make an observation to all the confreres in regard to this matter. Humility should never be an occasion for discouragement. When you compare yourselves with others, you imagine that you are not accomplishing anything worthwhile and that you are useless. It is good that you remain very humble in God's presence and consider yourselves useless servants, but you ought to avoid grieving over your lowliness. Humble yourselves with all gentleness before God, but remain in peace, for otherwise such sentiments of unprofitableness might become a temptation. They might even be inspired by the devil. Our best method consists in walking in the Lord's presence in all simplicity, always remaining good-natured and doing the little of which we are capable for His greater glory, without trying to measure ourselves or our achievements in comparison with others. If we wish to make such comparisons, our self-love ought to be perfectly dead, for otherwise we run the risk of falling into temptations and illusions.

[Your Own Discouragement Springs from Your Inflexibility and Fiery Imagination]

I have already replied to you in regard to the question of your vocation. I sincerely believe that you will have to render an account to God for infidelity in allowing yourself to be carried away by the thought of abandoning God's plan in your regard. I will never consent to it because I refuse to be unfaithful to my God.

I think that the source of your trouble lies in a certain natural inflexibility and in your fiery imagination. From
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

this springs discouragement, though you are not always fully aware of it. I beg you, therefore, to try to be more steady, more calm, more moderate in your interior. Avoid tending towards inflexibility; strive rather to be moderate, for otherwise you will often be unfaithful to God. You will raise obstacles to your work and plunge yourself into a sea of trouble. You ought to remember that we are three thousand leagues apart; hence, when you write, you should weigh your words carefully. If you were with me and became excited, we would reach an understanding and would know what to do the next day. But between Bourbon and La Neuville lies a stretch of six months of trouble before we can find out how things stand.

Let us suppose for a moment that we had decided to undertake the mission of Bourbon on a large scale and had given you eight or ten missionaries as you desired in your famous letter. Suppose also that, after that, I had suddenly received your letter so full of discouragement, but that I had already promised the government to send that number of missionaries: do you think that I would then have dared to send you men? We should have been forced to withdraw our offer to the government, and I wonder what reasons we could have given for doing so. What would they have thought of us, and how damaging this would have been to that work.

[Learn to Distrust Your Demand for Absolute Perfection]

Believe me, dear confrere, when I tell you that I love you sincerely. I love you cordially and tenderly and I don’t want to cause you pain, but believe me also when I declare that there is evil in your complaints. There is evil in your discouragement, in your fears of superiorship, in your desires for change. There is something evil in your demand that your confreres be perfect, although you are perfectly right
in your estimate of Father Plessis and probably to some extent also in regard to Father Blanpin. But you are too categorical, too harsh, too violent in your judgments. The spirit of God is not present in such conduct; it could not be. Don't be astonished about this, for we are all wretched men. But learn to distrust everything that urges you to be violent, harsh and rigid. When thus tempted, try to calm yourself before God. Don't say one word; don't act until you have regained mastery over your soul, until you have regained perfect gentleness, peace and moderation. Otherwise your imagination will be in command and be your lord and master...

Soften your heart once and for all in the Heart of Mary, making it peaceful and gentle. Try to overcome everything in you that tends to make you depressed and saddened, or rather give your heart to Mary in order that she may purify it of all those depressing notions.

To help you in recovering your peace of mind, let me prove to you that we have become increasingly severe in our admission of candidates. We recently let go a priest who was ready to leave us his whole fortune of 75,000 francs, and ready also to leave home and parents to whom he was excessively attached. He begged me to admit him. I likewise refused to accept two young men, one of whom was very devout and had made good theological studies. He came from the seminary of Marseille, had received tonsure, and brought good recommendations from Father Perrée who is known to you.

Entirely yours in the charity of Jesus and Mary,
FRANCIS LIBERMAN
Despite Libermann's letters, Father Le Vavasseur's discouragement persisted and led him to write that his mind was definitely made up to leave the Congregation. He wanted, however, Libermann's consent. In his reply, Father Libermann explains why he cannot give him the requested permission.

Letter Twelve {December 3, 1846} Vol. 8, p. 361

Dear Confrere:

It has taken me a long time to reply to your letter. I am sorry, although I can say that it was not my fault. Your letter arrived during my absence, and since then I have been overwhelmed by most urgent and absolutely necessary work.

[The Excellence of a Society is Not the Decisive Factor in Determining a Vocation]

I have carefully examined the content of your two letters, the last dated June 29, and reflected upon it in God's presence. It is absolutely impossible for me to yield to your desires. I believe that I would be failing toward God, for I think that it is not according to His will that you should leave the Congregation and enter the Society of Jesus. It seems to me that there is no need of entering into a detailed discussion of everything expressed in your letters, for this would not be profitable.

I shall content myself with stating one thing: You have a higher esteem for the Society of Jesus than for our own. I am in perfect agreement with you on this point. Without attempting to act as a judge and determine which society now existing in the Church is the most fervent, I would certainly put the Jesuit Fathers in the first rank, and I do
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

not know whether any other society is equal to it. But this is not a basis for a vocation. Neither is it something that gives assurance that one will reach a greater perfection in that society, for otherwise everyone called to the religious life would have the obligation of becoming a member of that society. It happens frequently that a person sanctifies himself in a state that is less perfect in itself whereas he might have been a very poor servant of God in another society that was more perfect in itself.

[God's Will for You Should be the Decisive Motive]

It is God's will that decides everything, and the divine will manifests itself in a variety of ways. I truthfully believe that God gave very clear proofs in regard to your own vocation. There is no longer any need of trying to ascertain that vocation; the matter is settled. If I had to change my mind now and give you permission to leave our society, I would need much weightier reasons than the ones you have advanced. I shall say more: I assure you that the whole content of your three letters in which you deal *ex professo* with this matter, as well as the others which touch it incidentally, show clearly the presence of nearly all the elements that are usually a source of illusions.

On the one hand, therefore, I find no solid reason for granting you your request; on the other, there are signs that make me fear that I would act against my conscience if I followed your wishes. If you leave the society without my consent, I shall not be responsible for your meeting with anxiety, trouble, mental anguish and perhaps discouragement where you had thought you would find a higher degree of perfection. I have seen that sort of thing happen in cases similar to your own, and it might happen to you also. Your mind as well as your character and temperament have even a predisposition for that sort of reaction.
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

[Make Your Decision and Let Me Know]

Don’t imagine that I am trying to frighten you; God forbid! Neither ought you to think that I am trying to keep you by every possible means; this is not so. My act of resignation is complete. I would be sad, but I have experienced greater sorrows, and I also earnestly believe that it would not be the last of my sorrows. Hence I do not beg you to remain with us, but I refuse to give my consent [for leaving us]. All I ask you is, "quod facis, fac citius" [what thou dost do quickly]!

Pardon me for using that expression! I assure you that I have no intention of making an odious allusion. The expression flowed spontaneously from my pen and I do not want to begin my letter all over again in order to erase it. Make your decision and let me know.

All your hesitations cause me embarrassment, and might cause us to lose the mission of Bourbon. Things were going better and I had made plans to send missionaries there. The government had asked me to give missionaries to that colony; it insisted, and I was not able to comply with its request. It is greatly to be feared that if I do not reply within a few months, I shall create a bad impression at the ministry. Answer me “yes” or “no,” so that I may be able to make a decision. You are embarrassing me not only in regard to Bourbon but also in regard to Mauritius and Australia, for your decision will unavoidably affect my choice of missionaries. It now appears that we need no longer worry about Mauritius. The difficulties that remain now concern Bourbon, and the next will be that of choosing missionaries for Australia. . . .

It is not certain at all that the Jesuits would accept you, for admitting you might cause friction between several members of our Congregation and the Jesuits. You could not give as a reason that your salvation is endangered by remain-
ing with us, so you could not use this argument to counterbalance the fact that you would irritate the sensitivity of our congregation. As you know, in spite of your faults and weaknesses, you are not just an ordinary member in our society.¹ But among the Jesuits, you would occupy no special position. I trust that your departure would not irritate me, but I cannot answer for other confreres, nor can I foretell what might happen to you at a later date.

May Jesus and Mary watch over your soul in order that you may do only that which is pleasing to God.

Francis Libermann
Priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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Two months after the preceding letter, Libermann received word that Father Le Vavasseur's "great temptation," as he called it, had passed. He now desired to remain in the Congregation forever. Libermann immediately sent words of reassurance, followed up by this letter.

Letter Thirteen Amiens, April 27, 1847 Vol. 9, p. 128

J. M. J.

Dear Confrere:

[Do Not Fear That I Retain Any Resentment]

I should have written to you a long time ago. I don't know what kept me from doing it until now. Your poor heart must feel oppressed and it is in need of some words of peace. I can assure you that I retain no traces of grief from

¹Father Le Vavasseur was one of the two seminarians who had conceived the first plan for the founding of Libermann's congregation,
all the things that have taken place. I am, on the contrary, full of joy and consolation since I received the first news of the change which God's goodness deigned to bring about in your soul.

I have frequently felt intense pain at the thought that my second last letter, which reached you after that change, must have caused you sorrow. However, when I reflect on what I actually said in that letter, I see that it ought not to give you much grief, for it goes to show that I considered that terrible squall to be only a violent temptation to which you were subjected, and I never felt any resentment against you. I was merely oppressed by a great burden, but God never permitted me to succumb under its weight.

[Both of Us Have Gained From Your Temptation]

I feel certain that all that tribulation has been useful for both of us. We were in need of this sort of thing, and it will in the end be instrumental in giving glory to God. We can readily see how useful that temptation has been for yourself. I trust that the lessons it has brought with it and the very strength it has occasioned will turn to God's glory and sanctify your soul. You may have been guilty of some faults that were more or less displeasing to God, but you will draw profit even from them for your soul. It would already be a great gain if you had merely acquired self-distrust, an awareness of your weakness, and knowledge of your faults as a result of that temptation.

However, I expect more for you from the goodness of the Holy Heart of our Mother. No doubt, she has already given you abundant consolation. You will have more strength to walk in God's way. Helped by His grace you will acquire gentleness, vigor, constancy in His service, true humility, confidence and abandonment to Jesus and Mary, patience with your neighbor, sincere charity toward others. You may
also acquire many other graces and virtues that are destined for you from all eternity through God's mercy.

That trial was also necessary for me. For some time our great mission of Guinea had been taking a good turn; new graces were reserved for us, God's blessings upon us here in France increased; there was danger that the sudden prosperity might be harmful to me. I was in need of a counterweight to keep my balance. God's hand put that counterweight in my soul. That affliction was so much more painful to me—I must say this in all truthfulness—because you are the confrere the thought and remembrance of whom gave me most joy and consolation, for I have a stronger attachment to you than to the others. I always felt a special need of conversing with you and pouring out my heart to you.

[I Want to be "One Heart and One Soul" with You]

This is why I should have liked to be constantly with you to discuss our plans, our troubles and our consolations. It was my desire that in every circumstance nothing should be undertaken without our previous mutual understanding and agreement. I should have liked to be "one heart and one soul" with you in the charity of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother. It is precisely at this point that the good Lord was waiting for me; He broke us like so many reeds. But I see that His mercy remains with us. The most lovable Heart of our good Mother has maintained God's favor in our behalf. God's goodness will not abandon us. We shall henceforth be united in the grace and the charity of the divine Master and, helped by His light and love, we shall construct our work according to His merciful designs. It will not be our work, but His and that of His Blessed Mother.

We shall live in perfect union. We shall try to be more faithful to His voice to enable us to give a solid foundation to the work of God. It is God who has united us for the pur-
pose of establishing that work, and who can separate what God has joined together? Until now we were not in a condition to be perfectly united by divine charity. Our minds were not sufficiently ready to receive the spirit of God who would enlighten us with His light and cause us to be perfectly united in mind.

[We Can Now Work Together at Giving Our Work a Stable Form]

The work had not developed sufficiently to enable us to be perfectly united by grace and to be used by God as if we were but one person, and the work could not be moulded according to the Heart of His Holy Mother and the will of her divine Son. But the time is now approaching; things are clearing up; the time for perfect union has come and divine Providence has not remained behind.

You cannot imagine what consolation I draw from the consideration of the kindness with which God has acted toward us and how he unites our minds and hearts for the accomplishment of His designs at the exact time He has destined for them.

I fully realize that we ought to be together to speak of all the things that preoccupy us in regard to the firm establishment of the work of God, to discuss all these things peacefully, with interior silence of soul, with humility, gentleness and the charity of Jesus. We ought to agree on fundamental principles, draw practical conclusions from them, apply them to the existing conditions of our society. We have the task of forming its spirit, regulating its administration and insuring its existence. How many things we have to do! How numerous the ideas we have to communicate to each other!

I know very well that the time has not yet arrived to give the work a stable and absolute shape and form, but we
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

must prepare the materials for it. This requires that we be together. It seems to me and has always seemed that, in accord with God’s plan, we ought to do those things together; and we should be guided by God’s spirit alone in all prudence and wisdom. This requires that we be perfectly united; we are then but one mind and one heart, animated and guided by the Spirit of light and charity, and we would then direct the work toward the goal which God had in mind when He united us. We would give to the work the specific shape and form willed by God.

[I Want Your Views, Not Blind Obedience]

Please examine this in God’s presence. Consider whether you are all that is required in order that such a perfect union may exist among us, whether we can be faithful instruments in God’s hands. In such a case I trust that God’s goodness will bring you back here and make you stay with us. We shall live together, at least for some time—that is, for the time that will be necessary to accomplish our object. With God’s help and the protection of our most lovable Mother, we shall be faithful to divine inspiration in constructing a work according to her Heart. Give me an answer as soon as possible.

Do not reply: “I am ready to do all that you command me to do.” I want you to tell me how you feel about it. It is not sufficient in this case that you practice blind obedience. We need perfect, full, complete union so that God may use us both as if we were but one person and thus fashion His work. There ought to be no prejudices, no repugnances; we should be one heart and one mind; otherwise I shall have to come to the conclusion that God’s moment has not yet arrived. In such a case we should have to wait a little longer, but I feel certain that God’s moment will come, if it has not yet arrived.
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Adieu, dear confrere. I hope that henceforth a permanent peace will reign in your heart. Abandon yourself to Jesus and Mary in regard to anything that might take place.

Entirely yours in the charity of Jesus and Mary,
FRANCIS LIBERMANN,
Priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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Libermann sends confidential information regarding two confreres. In the process he reveals his way of dealing with human frailty.

Letter Fourteen Paris, June 15, 1847 Vol. 9, p. 190

Dear Confrere:

I am sending you Fathers Blanpin and Jerome Schwindenhammer. Here are a few remarks concerning these confreres.

Father Blanpin

[His Religious Ideal Has Changed for the Worse]

I noticed at the time of his return from Bourbon how much he had changed. He had acquired totally different ideas about religious life. At present things are even worse. His throat trouble has embittered him. He is still very sensitive and needs to be handled with much care and tact. Besides this he has developed a certain dislike for regularity, obedience and, in general, for all the religious virtues. He has very inaccurate concepts about such things and prejudices concerning a number of points.

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LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

His stay in Rome caused his [spiritual] condition to grow worse. I was obliged to leave him there alone, because I could not have brought him to Amiens, for this would have caused his ruin. His illness had taken a dangerous turn and the cold and dampness of Picardy would infallibly have led to tuberculosis. I thus felt obliged to leave him in Rome for a whole winter, and our Lord seems to have approved my action, for He worked a miracle in his favor.¹ It was after his return from Rome that I noticed how greatly his ideas had changed even in comparison with those he had when he returned from Bourbon; and the change was once more to the detriment of his religious life.

I would have greatly preferred to keep him here or send him to Guinea, but for reasons which I am not able to reveal, I found it necessary to send him back to Bourbon, although I knew this would cause you grief and perhaps also cause pain to Father Blanpin. Don't blame me for it and don't yield to discouragement. Be faithful to God and suffer in peace. The evil is not as great as you think. Father Blanpin alone will suffer from it and you together with him, but the community will not be affected; this I know for certain. Our own community has not been affected and it scarcely noticed even that anything was amiss. The trouble existed only between him and myself.

Here now is the thing that is wanting in Father Blanpin. I shall try to express it as clearly as possible although a headache is now bothering me. My remarks are intended to help Father Blanpin and to assist you in your conduct toward him.

Father Blanpin has a very strong prejudice against the Jesuits, and I believe that this is the principal reason for his prejudice against the rules of religious life, against poverty

¹Cf. Libermann, Letters to Religious Sisters and Aspirants, pp. 52 ff.
and obedience and, in general, against the very name of "religious." The friends he met in Rome only served to aggravate those prejudices, and yet these companions were very pious and zealous. However, they were greatly opposed to the Jesuits and hence also somewhat set against religious societies, although the latter opposition was not deliberate. I need not name those persons; you know some of them.

[He Wants to Be Independent]

Our dear confrere is somewhat ashamed of his past simplicity, and yet this was his most beautiful virtue. He thinks that he acted too childishly and allowed himself to be led too much by others. Now he wishes to have money at his own disposal in order to be able to give alms. I told him plainly and formally that I was unable to give him such permission; that no member can without the superior’s permission have anything that belongs to him or even is at his free disposal; and that, as a general rule, the Superior cannot and ought not to permit this, except for a limited time when there are serious reasons. I showed him the dangers and the inconvenience of a missionary’s having money at his free disposal while his confreres lack similar privileges, and the evil that would result if all were given free disposal of money. I think that he understood and that he has given up this idea.

[The Way I Deal with His Difficulties Regarding Obedience]

He has become very sensitive. He suffers pain from the least want of attention and the slightest fault committed against him. He easily yields to anger and attributes wrong intentions to others in his regard. We ought to act in all simplicity with him, but also with gentleness and tact. He finds it very difficult to obey when one does not show great gentleness and when one seems to impose on him or to
force him. I must add however, in all truth, that I have never experienced any difficulty with him in this respect. I have had more difficulty in regard to his sensitiveness.

I always spoke to him in my usual way, without sternness, using nothing that could suggest that I was assuming authority or wished to give him a command, but I used gentleness and simplicity. He always did what I asked him to do, without offering objections, even when what I wished him to do was contrary to his liking. I had tried to analyze his particular likings in my own mind and did my best not to contradict them. Hence he has always been docile with me and also asked permissions from me for the most insignificant things. If I had frequently refused those permissions, he would have acted differently. When I refused something, I gave him my reasons for doing it. Father Blanpin complained that you wanted to busy yourself with every detail of his ministry, that you directed him like a child, and he was afraid that he no longer saw eye to eye with you. I beg you to handle him with prudence and consideration.

[The Source of His Troubles]

In regard to the matter of his sensitiveness, I must say that I have suffered a little from it. He often had suspicions about things that never had entered my mind. This should warn you that you can expect difficulties and that you ought to act with circumspection, reserve and gentleness, and treat him as a confrere, not as a child. The thing that pains me most of all is that this poor man, after being cured through an exceptional favor of God, should be expected to be quite a different sort of person. I am afraid that this might be a case of abuse of grace. I mean that our poor friend received a great deal of publicity on account of that miracle, but that he is not sufficiently humble to know how
to bear that stroke "of good fortune." It is certain that self-love has played a great part in all this, but it is my hope that this trouble will not last.

Father Blanpin is at present in a state of excitement, but I trust that his emotions will quiet down and that the monotonous voyage will give him a good opportunity for serious reflection. He feels that he is at fault. The Blessed Virgin will not abandon him. Realizing his condition, I have released him from his [private] vows, lest he should sin frequently against them. The evil from which he suffers is not rooted in a bad will, but in his erroneous judgment. He is firmly resolved to behave properly toward you, to keep peaceful relations and union with you, to practice obedience, or rather subordination, by which I mean that to my mind he has no correct notion of perfect obedience. All his trouble springs from a certain self-love that is accompanied by great sensitivity and poor judgment; and he has also an unsteady mind, lack of attention and thoughtlessness.

[The Way I Intend to Deal with His Suspicion That I am Interested in His Money]

Now one word about the source of the special difficulty between him and myself. That good confrere seems to think that I am a moneygrabber and that it is because he happens to have substantial revenues that I treat him with mildness and consideration. . . . (You know that he transferred his revenues to our house, to the amount of 3,000 francs per year.) I thought at first that this was just a passing fancy, but I have noticed since that there are still traces of that prejudice in his mind.

For this reason, after considering the thing properly before God, I have thought it preferable to refuse the three thousand francs from now on. I hesitated for a long time, being afraid that my desire to refuse that revenue might be
prompted by self-love. This is why I have given the matter prolonged and calm consideration; at the end I felt morally sure that I was not prompted by self-love. I believe that I would be acting against God’s will if I accepted that financial assistance under those conditions, and that such acceptance would turn to the detriment of the donor. I have not yet mentioned this to Father Blanpin, but I will explain it to him before his departure. I will not change my resolution, unless I see that he has totally different dispositions in that respect. In that case, I will act only after consultation with the Council. . . .

Father Jerome Schwindenhammer

It might be well for you to call him simply “Father Jerome,” which is what we call him here. You will be satisfied with this young man. He is an excellent religious, full of love for the rule, obedient, cherishing poverty, faithful to his spiritual exercises. His intellectual powers are not beyond the ordinary. I feel sure that he will adjust himself well to the sacred ministry. When Fathers Thévaux and Thiersé will have joined you from New Holland, you will, I trust, have a fervent community. The wandering imagination and false ideas of Father Blanpin will not affect or upset the others; for those two Fathers as well as Father Jerome are community men and they have a great love for the religious life.

[I Have Had to Act Against His Tendency to Mortification and Tenseness]

Father Jerome spent about three years with me. I had to combat his tenseness and over-eagerness, but this fault has now been overcome. Every winter he suffered from chronic constipation, which greatly depressed his mind. The first winter his troubles were particularly violent because of his
habitual excited eagerness and tenseness which he did not sufficiently keep under control. The second winter his troubles were not so strong; he more quickly overcame them and they did not reach the same degree of intensity. The last winter, things went much better and he had greater self-control.

The principal thing against which I had to battle was his intense desire for mortification. I finally took his discipline away from him and forbade him to practice any kind of mortification.

He has already great confidence in you. After he has reached you, do your best to brighten him up, for in all probability he will have suffered from constipation during his voyage, and tenseness and excitement will as usual have been its accompaniment. Provide relaxation for him; take him along on your visits to the Negroes, and you will see that he will soon be all right again.

[Missionaries Need Readjustment After a Long Voyage]

This, moreover, is to be a general remark on my part. I have discovered from the little experience I have had personally and from what I have learned from the heads of various missionary societies, that long voyages always produce very unfortunate changes in the dispositions of the missionaries. It would seem that this is something that happens to almost all of them. Only in a few there is a good result. Now, it is most important to take care of a prompt readjustment of those who have been affected by the voyage.

Try also to give Father Jerome a proper formation for his sacred functions. . . .

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary
FRANCIS LIBERMANN,
Priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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How to deal with Father Blanpin.

Letter Fifteen Amiens, June 28, 1847 Vol. 9, p. 208

Dear Confrere:

I must send you a short word by mail, although it is only about trifles. I should have written to you on the day of the departure of Father Blanpin or on the day following it, but attacks of migraine have made it impossible. I told you before that I had decided to refuse to accept the yearly revenue which he gets from his property. I had the opportunity to speak to him about it only at the moment of his departure from Paris. He accepted so graciously what I told him and then asked so sincerely that I would accept that income, offering heartfelt excuses, that I was afraid of causing him grievous sorrow at the time of his departure [if I refused his offer]. So I told him to write and make his mind known to me after he had arrived at Bourbon, for I was afraid of refusing right there and then and causing him sorrow. On the other hand, I did not want to give him any occasion for entertaining his temptation of prejudice against me, by accepting his offer. He insisted so much and showed so much concern about having given me reasons to worry that I gave him hope that I would continue to accept that revenue for our community. . . .

[It is Less a Question of Ill-Will Than a Lack of Judgment]

I here repeat to you what I told this poor young man. There is in him less ill-will than error of judgment. He is scatter-brained, thoughtless and does not sufficiently reflect on his conduct. He is easily upset and readily becomes
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

the prey of prejudice. Hence the wrong he has done is to be attributed more to erroneous judgments than to laxity; he needs to be handled with consideration.

You told me once that, if he had remained longer in the novitiate, he would have a better religious spirit. I believe that, if Father Blanpin had remained four years in the novitiate, he would have behaved properly throughout that time because he would have kept a childlike spirit, simplicity, a humble opinion of himself and hence a distrust in his own capabilities. But, so it seems to me, as soon as he would have been placed in circumstances similar to those in which he has been since, he would have become the same that he is now in regard to religious life. No one who knew him and his simplicity when he was a novice could have been able to foresee what he would become at a later date in regard to religious life.

[Be Gentle But Firm and Overlook Little Things]

Father Blanpin's erroneous ideas regarding religious life are due to the circumstances in which he has been placed and his contact with outsiders. Having him now in this particular state, we should deal with him as with a sick man, handling him with consideration and gentleness. We should not give him orders in an imperious way; we should not appear to be annoyed or troubled when dealing with him; nor should we give the impression that our gentleness is artificial and our attention is forced. Let our conduct with him be natural, simple, truly gentle, and affectionate while at the same time we do not yield when matters of importance are at stake. On the other hand, we must not appear to pay great attention to small things. Of course, again, we cannot permit anything that is not good or that is contrary to the Rule and the spirit of the society; but we should not always appear to take notice of what is not right.
LETTERS TO FREDERIC LE VAVASSEUR

[I am Sorry that I Have to Send You a Cross]

I have sent you a cross! I assure you that this was most painful to me, but I saw myself obliged to act this way on account of the circumstances. I would have liked to keep that cross for myself. After all, the poor man would have done pretty well with me; he did so well in the past that in the novitiate, and at Notre Dame du Gard the others never noticed that there was anything wrong. Of course, they remarked that he was sensitive and that he was inclined to be remiss in regard to the spirit of poverty, but his failures were so small and so rare that he did not scandalize them or otherwise have any bad influence on their minds.

I must confess that this dear confrere is a source of great worry for me. I am afraid that he is abusing graces. If so, this would be very grave, for his cure was evidently miraculous, inasmuch as we are able to judge such things.

If Father Blanpin were to return to the world, he would greatly endanger the salvation of his soul. Don’t tell him this, for it would do him harm. But if you notice that he is unable to adjust himself or do things properly over there, send him back to me and it will not cause me any inconvenience. I could either make use of him in Europe or send him to some other mission, if his dispositions seem to permit such a move.

Finally let us pray that God’s goodness may redouble its graces in that good soul. I trust that, in spite of everything, this dear confrere will realize his mistakes, at least to some extent. I thought it was my duty to speak to you about it at some length so that you might help him.

[I Greatly Desire Your Company Here]

All is well here. Our confreres live in union, harmony, proper obedience and regularity.
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

In regard to yourself, I beg of you, for the love of God, be humble, gentle, calm and full of confidence in God, thus practicing great abandonment toward God and enjoying steadiness and equanimity. I also hope that the good Lord will grant us the grace of coming together again and speaking about the things that concern God’s glory and the spiritual interests of the enterprise for which He wants to sacrifice us. How great is my desire for your company! But it must be in the peace and union of charity of the divine Master, and our action must be unified in His divine Spirit.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,
Francis Libermann,
Priest of the Holy Heart of Mary.