2. LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

Eugene Nicolas Tisserant was born in Paris on November 15, 1814. His father was a French pharmacist; his mother a daughter of the Haitian General Louis Bauvais.

Eugene entered the seminary at the age of twenty. He spent a few months at the Grande Trappe, but it was not his vocation to remain there. He returned to St. Sulpice and was ordained to the priesthood on December 21, 1840. In August, he entered Father Libermann's Congregation at La Neuville, near Amiens. In October of the same year he was sent to Martinique in the West Indies for the purpose of attempting to remedy the religious situation of Haiti. Forced to leave this country in 1844, he returned to France and was made Prefect Apostolic of Guinea in 1845. He embarked at Toulon at the end of November of that year and died in a shipwreck at the age of thirty-one.

Together with Frederic Le Vavasseur, Eugene Tisserant was one of the two seminarians who conceived the idea of evangelizing the Negro slaves which led to the foundation of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary.

200

True and false humility. The practice of perfect obedience. Spiritual direction.

Letter One September 30, 1837 Vol. I, p. 474

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Friend:

[Everyone Talks About Humility, But Hardly Anyone Possesses It]
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

I wish that the love of our Lord Jesus and of His most holy Mother may fill your soul. May it accomplish in you what He usually accomplishes in the souls that God invites to walk before Him in great perfection and detachment from all creatures. That is, may He always keep you deeply humble and as nothing before and in Him, so that you see but Him alone in self and in others. May He give you a perfect understanding of true humility and show you that it does not consist in words, or in playing with ideas or fancies.

If you have a real desire to practice this virtue, don’t be satisfied with talking about humility from morning until night. Our Lord Jesus said that He does not count among His own all those who cry, “Lord, Lord.” The same is true of humility.

I have seen great errors committed in regard to this virtue. Everyone considers it laudable to speak constantly about humility, but hardly anyone possesses that virtue. It is scarcely possible to open one’s mouth about any spiritual topic whatsoever without somebody saying immediately, “But there is no virtue like humility.”

The right means to acquire humility is not to have the word constantly on your lips. I have often noticed that this word rarely has any genuine meaning when used by the greater number of seminarians. It is for this reason that I rarely named it in our spiritual talks, because the term has been so often misused that scarcely anyone understands its true meaning.

Many who claim to understand it desire to acquire it by natural activity, by strenuous efforts, by troublesome and anxious endeavors. Strange humility! You should take care that your virtues are not merely topics of speech, products of the imagination, natural efforts and anxious endeavors of your mind, which becomes troubled and painfully scrutinizes
itself in order to find out whether you are humble and to what extent you possess that virtue.

[The Nature of Genuine Humility]

Genuine humility does not consist in anything of that sort. It does not consist in external activity, in anxiously seizing upon everything that is outwardly humiliating. It does not consist in lowly and humble attitudes or actions in the presence of others. Such attitudes and actions may indeed be, and often are, the result of genuine humility. True humility is an awareness and interior conviction which prompts us to acknowledge, with perfect peace, meekness and love before God, that we are but poverty wretchedness, and incapacity and that we are detestable on account of our many sins.

Such a knowledge that is full of love and silent submission to God makes us preserve peace and meekness in His presence, in spite of our utter baseness. We realize our baseness and abjection and how contemptible we are before God and men. But we are at the same time full of joy, realizing that He alone is all beauty, grandeur and perfection. We cast a peaceful and loving glance at our great wretchedness and even look at our miseries in detail, but far from being disturbed by the sight, we remain before our great Master in loving lowliness.

When this sort of humility has reached perfection, we are delighted to be known and spoken of as the most despicable of all creatures. This degree is very perfect. Those who have reached this love of abjection do things that render them abject in the eyes of men. Examples of that extraordinary external humility are found in life of saints like St. Vincent de Paul and Father Olier. But we should not imagine that everyone who performs outward humiliating actions is always most humble.
[False Humility]

There are those who act in this self-humiliating way to satisfy themselves and convince themselves that they are humble, or again to make others believe that they are. They often scarcely notice their real motives. Sometimes the whole thing remains on the level of the imagination. In reality those people would be very much pained if others actually despised them or ill-treated them.

And they would be particularly resentful if others despised them for other reasons than those that have their approval. To give an example, if, in order to parade his humility, a person performed an action that would indicate a low degree of intelligence, he would be very annoyed if someone actually concluded from it that he is wanting in intelligence. To give a second example, a person might feel very sad if he were looked upon as possessing only ordinary holiness or even false notions of sanctity.

This goes to show that all such seeming humility does not have true humility as its foundation. Genuine humility is based upon complete disregard of self, and upon perfect union with God, who alone can give it to us.

[Perfect Obedience Does Not Require You to Consult Your Director for Every Trifle]

Now a word about obedience. I tell you frankly in God’s presence and in a spirit of charity that, to my mind, you have practiced that virtue very imperfectly ever since I made your acquaintance. You never performed the smallest action nor took the least step, nor did you even desire to entertain the least plan or idea without having it prescribed or determined by your director. You rushed to your director whenever you had the slightest doubt or the smallest difficulty, and you wanted him to solve those problems. In all this
you did not act according to proper discretion and prudence according to the mind of God. You acted like the Israelites before Mount Sinai; they told Moses that they wanted to hear the word of God only through the instrumentality of his mediation. This was all very nice, but would it not have been better for them to hear God Himself?

[The True Practice of Perfect Obedience]

Let me explain. I should like you to practice obedience in accordance with the following suggestions:

Endeavor to conquer and deny yourself in everything; let the carnal man be dead, let him be reduced to nothing. Renounce yourself and all creatures. Remain constantly united to God in an attitude of profound humility as I have explained above. Be perfectly submissive and abandoned to His pleasure in a spirit of great faith and love. All your actions, all your conduct should be animated by those dispositions. It is in this that you must place your progress, not in the mask of obedience which you formerly put on. Seek all light and spiritual life in God alone and sacrifice at the same time all love and affection for self.

Render a faithful account to your director of everything that takes place in you, but do it peacefully without anxious scrutiny, with perfect simplicity of mind and heart. Carry out promptly and exactly not only his orders but also his counsels. Do not look for another Moses in order to obtain knowledge and the light of God, but expect them directly from God, in an attitude of deep humility, great docility and meekness, and with peace of mind and heart.

Having decided what you ought to do in your difficulties, according to your own lights, tell your director what you believe to be God's will. After that, ask his advice and do what he recommends. But never go to him without having previously consulted God. And don't go to your director for
every trifle; accustom yourself to let God's light be your guide.

Visit your director at the time appointed for direction and tell him simply what your past conduct has been. If something comes up suddenly that you believe might be dangerous for you to decide even after invoking God's aid, consult your director. But if you are not in a state of perplexity or doubt, settle the matter with God and speak to your director afterwards. Don't imagine that when you are continually running to your director you are prompted by a supernatural spirit of obedience; this is not so.

[Spiritual Direction]

Stick closely to what Father Pinault will advise you in regard to the choice of a director. Let him read this letter so that he may be able to clarify whatever might be obscure.

I don't reply to your other difficulties because I don't have the time. Do everything that Father Pinault will tell you. He will suggest the means that will enable you to avoid the dangers to which you might be exposed and to get rid of the trouble you have mentioned. The latter was but an illusion of the imagination, accompanied by a natural desire to practise a virtue which you greatly admired after all that you had heard about it. Practicing it [in the way which you imagined necessary] would do you harm and you would render yourself incapable of doing anything whatsoever for the salvation of souls and the greater glory of God.

Apply yourself to God; this is your business; but do it in all humility, in perfect submissiveness and obedience of mind and heart.

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

Francis Libermann, acolyte
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

201

The life of Jesus in our souls. Peace of soul in God alone. Distractions, external practices, and sundry counsels.

Letter Two       Rennes, January 14, 1838       Vol. 1, p. 475

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

[We Must Die in Order to Let Jesus Live in Us]

May Jesus be all things in you and may His Holy Spirit be the only life of your soul. Go forward, or rather follow your divine Guide who dwells in the center of your soul. Always preserve interior peace, love and gentleness. Rejoice at the sight of your weakness, abjection, uselessness and nothing-ness. Remain thus absorbed in our Lord who is in you and become, as it were, annihilated in order that He alone may exist in you.

Your meditation is all right; continue in that way. Don't worry about distractions and failures; as you know, a stagnant pool does not distill perfume. The fact that of yourself you are only corruption is one more reason for surrendering entirely into the hands of our good Lord. He will know how to cause glory and holy love to spring from your weakness. Die to and in yourself, and the life of Jesus will establish itself in you. When we come to realize how loathsome our own life is, ought we not to desire to be entirely dead so that Jesus might live and reign in us with His admirable love?

How beautiful the life that Jesus leads in our souls! But our souls should be, as it were, reduced to nothing and dead. They should have no proper life or movement. This is why you should continue your meditation in the way you have
been doing. Let your faith be pure, without any admixture of self. It is through faith that our divine Master lives abundantly and all alone in us. Don’t worry about anything, but go right on.

I am not astonished that you experience spiritual darkness. You find nothing to feed and sustain your sensibility, and your spirit, left to itself, sees nothing. Jesus lives in you through faith—that is, without communicating anything to your spirit that will make it act. He is satisfied with keeping it in a state of death; let it remain dead. May Jesus live in your soul as He wills, in accord with His good pleasure.

I think you will do well to seek habitually the company of the most fervent seminarians; this will enable you to perfect and strengthen your interior life. However, do not entirely avoid others; be open and peaceful with everybody. . . .

[Forget Self to Find Peace of Soul in God Alone]

When we are moved by an interior impulse to humble ourselves and unite ourselves with God, we need not have fears that this might be a devil’s trick. Hence have no fears; merely continue to distrust self. Keep a peaceful watch over yourself before and in God, advancing always, while humbling and abasing yourself and uniting yourself more and more closely to your divine Master who desires to live fully in your soul.

Be perfectly at peace. Tend quietly, humbly, Godwards in all things, and in all simplicity, without following ideas and imaginations but moved solely by the interior impulse of faith. Aim at denying yourself in all things and always purifying your heart, forgetting self completely, in order that your mind and heart may tend to God alone. This is the basis and source of peace of soul and of that union with God which we must strive for and in which alone our perfection consists.
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

[Distractions in Prayer]

When saying the rosary, do not try to make your own every thought and sentiment which the prayers suggest. Remain peacefully united with God and the Blessed Virgin without trying to think of everything which the words are capable of bringing to our minds. You could also unite yourself to the intentions and desires of the Blessed Virgin. Union with God is all that is necessary. Do not worry if you have distractions [in saying the rosary].

The same happens here as in mental prayer and the same rule of conduct applies to both. As a rule, let your interior and exterior actions of the day be ruled by the same principles as your mental prayer; this is very important. In regard to reading at table and the particular examen, act likewise, preserving the same spirit as during meditation.

Your mind, [you say], is sometimes less closely united to God. This is of little importance, provided you remain in the above-described attitude of union with God. Do not worry, but proceed with all peace and simplicity before God.

[External Practices]

Don't become attached to external practices. Perform them in an interior spirit, that is, keep your soul in the same state as in your mental prayer, united to God. Don't worry about special intentions; if they arise spontaneously, act accordingly; if they fail to come, keep yourself united with God; this suffices.

Best regards in the charity of Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, acolyte

P. S. Pardon me for making you wait so long for a reply. I did not have one moment to write to you; this grieved me, but the good Lord desired it that way.
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

[Sundry Counsels]

Don’t waste your time with a search for the source of your temptations, asking yourself whether they come from your temperament or are a punishment of God. Fight against them as you have been doing, by casting a look of love and surrender toward God.

External mortifications are very good for those whom God induces to practice them. If your director does not permit them to you, aim at interior self-denial in everything by moderating your spirit and forgetting yourself in all things, so that you will see God alone.

Regarding your meditation, do not crave spiritual consolations; seek God alone and purely in accordance with His most holy will.

Your letter came just now. Write as often as you feel need of it and don’t become discouraged because I make you wait for a reply; this will not always happen; I have been very busy and had to neglect a number of things.

Don’t say to yourself that God is far away from you when you are in the midst of all those temptations. Your mental prayer is sound, it is even better sometimes in such conditions than when you are full of spiritual consolation. All those imperfections you have mentioned can very well exist after a very good meditation. Always tend peacefully to God. Remain in His presence in an attitude of humility and self-annihilation, and let Him do with you what He pleases.

In regard to recreation follow your inclination in this as in everything else; I mean, remain in the same interior state as during mental prayer. Speak [about pious subjects] when God prompts you to speak, but speak with moderation. Avoid trying to force things. If at present you do not have a good understanding of union with God, count on it that you will understand it better at a later time.
Avoid over-confidence in self, as well as over-activity. Humility. Advice regarding preaching.

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

[Avoid Too Much Self-Confidence]

May God enable you to keep the resolutions which you took during your retreat; but don’t forget that it is our Lord Himself who must execute the good desires which He has inspired, for you are utterly incapable of engraving them in your heart and fulfilling them. You should therefore place all your confidence in Him alone. Be on your guard against self-confidence. Be docile and humble in God’s sight; in your own small way and in all humility fill yourself with the desire of pleasing Him. Don’t presumptuously aim at high things, but be satisfied with dragging yourself before the divine Master in all your poverty with the intention of being agreeable to Him in all things.

You know very well that you are miserable, weak and incapable of accomplishing anything worthwhile. Constantly renew before God your desire of acting always with that consideration in mind; this will enable you to become reserved, moderate and peaceful. Remain always prostrate before God; keep your mind constantly turned Christwards or withdrawn in the interior of your soul, in an attitude of perfect lowliness and self-effacement, having no complacency in your actions but in God alone. But this requires constant
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

interior peace and repose and a deadening of the activity of your mind.

[Moderate Your Over-Activity]

I don't know your present status in regard to that eager, hasty over-activity, that precipitation with which your mind pours itself out and gets lost in all sorts of things. Once started, your mind was like an engine whose wheels spin around noisily and rapidly until it is stopped by an obstacle or runs out of fuel. I presume that you have not yet been able to overcome the over-eagerness of your mind completely, so I urge you to moderate it. Never indulge in that precipitation and over-eagerness, but seek peace in and before God, and try to act always in a way that is properly weighed and measured. Otherwise you will never attain to solid and permanent prayerfulness. On the other hand, don't let this trouble you in the least, but abandon your soul to your good Master.

If you want to acquire and establish yourself in a spirit of prayerfulness, you need interior solitude before all else; labor also will be required, sometimes arduous labor, and very great tribulations. But all this will receive an abundant reward once the divine Spirit of Jesus dwells permanently in your soul. In the meantime long for Him, labor in peace, be faithful in all things, and live as much as possible for and in Him alone. He will always be in you, but His beneficial and fruitful dwelling in your soul is not yet perfect.

[Humility]

Scorn vanity, turn your mind to our Lord every time you experience such sentiments; do it with deep humility and interior self-annihilation. After this, remain peaceful, but try to fortify your will and avoid sloth. Walk energetically in
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

the way of holy love. Jesus is with you; He fights for you; He wants you to walk behind Him with the alacrity, love and vigor He Himself shows.

[Advice Regarding Sermons]

Regarding the matter of preaching, you will have trouble, even when you have the best good will in the world, and you will find it impossible to practice the true principles of the art. Don't worry about that, but persevere in your desire of doing everything in a spirit of recollection similar to that which you have during meditation and prayerful union with our Lord.

When it will please God to take you to His Heart, your soul, transformed in Him, will utter nought but His own divine language. Before you reach that stage you will have to purify your words, and you will progress according to your progress in the interior life. "He who is of the earth speaks of the earth." Hopefully long for this great grace, for this gift of Jesus' love. Walk with simplicity, gentleness of heart, and tranquillity of mind. Realize that you are but a wretched man; but do your best with what you are and have.

Adieu, dear friend.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, acolyte

77
Libermann encourages him in his plans to organize an apostolic work for the Negroes.

Letter Four  Rennes, {March 25} 1839  Vol. 1, p. 648

Dear Confrere:

Rejoice with all your heart at the thought of God's goodness toward you. Who are you, dear friend, that He deigns to cast His eyes upon you, to employ you for the great work that He wishes to undertake according to His merciful designs toward the souls whose salvation is encompassed with so many dangers?

[Humbly Accept the Work God Has Chosen for You]

Humble yourself constantly in His sight and be always afraid of putting obstacles in the way of His merciful designs through your infidelities. It is my opinion, dear friend, that you should accept the mission which God's goodness wishes to commit to you, and you ought to do it with a heart that is full of joy and love. I don't need to enter into detailed explanations; they have no doubt been given you by those whom you have consulted and who know the subject better than I. I merely wish to say that I agree with those Fathers and add that it is God's will that you should engage yourself in that work in union with others whom the good Lord will call. I do not yet know all the present members of that enterprise, but it is my sincere and ardent desire that God will send you many and that they will be fervent men, men filled with divine love.
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

[You Need to be Demanding in Admitting Others]

Please tell Mr. Le Vavasseur not to admit weak and cowardly candidates. You need men truly devoted to God's glory, men who earnestly wish to leave all things for Him, who have already conquered their faults or have at least made great progress in that way, men that give a solid foundation for great hopes and who are capable of enduring extreme troubles and humiliations.

I realize that you will not find many who will be able to suffer such pains and humiliations with patience, but let them at least ardently desire such pains and humiliations of all sorts for the love of God. Let them now learn to bear such pains, to humble themselves and overcome themselves in every circumstance. It is also required of all who wish to undertake that holy work that they have a docile and flexible mind, being willing to submit to any superior and obey exactly his orders as well as the rules prescribed for them. For, whatever your particular work might be, it is necessary that you live in community and that the members be governed by a firm order. Otherwise, if there is one among you who happens to be obstinate and wants to have his own way, it could well happen that he will prevent all the fruitfulness that would otherwise result from the enterprise. It is preferable to have but a few members, and these well united and fervent, than to have many among whom there is no order nor unity. . . .

Belong entirely to Jesus and Mary, and make fervent preparations for the great grace which God destines for you in that holy mission.

Francis Libermann, acolyte

79
Dear Confrere:

Be always totally devoted to Jesus in the love of the Heart of Mary. I was glad to get a short word from you, for it was a long time since I had heard anything about you. I know where you were and had heard that Bishop Collier [of Mauritius] wanted to ask the Archbishop of Paris to release you to him, but I am not sure about your actual situation.

[Prepare Yourself for the Apostolate Among the Poorest of All]

It is a great blessing for you to be with such a good priest as Father Legras certainly is; I know his zeal and his piety. Our Lord seems to take hold of your cause and give you the means for following your holy vocation in behalf of the poor Negroes. It is providential for you to be in a parish of poor people where you can minister to the unfortunate. This will be a good preparation for the much more painful labors that your adorable Master reserves for you in behalf of souls that are incomparably more wretched.

Be on your guard, dear confrere. Do your best to preserve your interior life, to practice renunciation in all things; avoid attaching yourself to the present life, worldly pleasures of any kind. When we are living in the midst of the world, we are always tempted to give back to nature some
of the things which divine grace prompted us to give up when we were living in retreat from the world. We ought, on the contrary, to despoil ourselves of whatever still remains, so that we may belong entirely to God and live wholly in Him.

[The Apostolic Life]

The apostolate for the Negro demands complete death and full [spiritual] life. There must be complete death to nature, complete renunciation to natural satisfactions, and, on the other hand, Christ should be given the opportunity to live perfectly and fully in our souls. This is why I strongly urge you to deprive yourself greatly of things. I do not mean in regard to those that are necessary and useful for the body to preserve its strength, for the apostolic life is not precisely a life of mortification but a life of love. Moreover, a missionary needs his body to go wherever the will of God, the glory of Jesus Christ and the salvation of souls call him. The apostolic life is a life of interior deprivation of all that pleases sensibility and self-love. A missionary ought to place his joy in God alone, in God's glory and in His love. You are now in most favorable circumstances; you are with a pastor who aims at living an interior life. He will make it easy for you and give you all the means to practice such a life. This life is the easiest approach to, and the source of that spirit that I explained just now.

[The Affair of My Ordination]

It is probable that I shall remain in the Diocese of Strasbourg, for conditions seem more favorable here to our project than anywhere else. I don't know when I shall be ordained, but if it be our Lord's will that I be ordained, I think that I shall receive the subdiaconate on the Feast of
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

the Holy Trinity and the diaconate at the end of the [academic] year, if this be our Lord’s holy will.

[I am Happy That Father Laval Has Joined Us]

Please tell our dear Father Laval that I rejoice with all my heart in having him as a confrere. I would have liked to speak with him for a while, but our Lord has arranged things in such a way that I ought not to expect to see him in this world. Hence we shall have to wait to embrace each other until we are in the Father’s heavenly kingdom, which, I hope, divine mercy will grant us.

Father Laval is fortunate: he is getting the first fruits of the labors which our Lord reserves for all the dear confreres. Let him not become discouraged during this year when he will have to be alone. He will not really be alone, for our Lord and the most Holy Virgin will be with Him. Moreover, we will all be united with him in the bonds of the charity which our Lord will deign to pour into our hearts. I hope that this charity will be very great and that it will never be extinguished.

Father Laval can meanwhile prepare the way for the confreres and arrange things to insure more efficacious work.

Adieu, dear confrere. Best regards in the most ardent charity of the Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, in which I am

Entirely yours,

FRANCIS LEBERMANN, acolyte

P.S. Please give my best regards to the Reverend pastor. Thank him in my name for the great kindness he has for us in general and for me in particular. I hope to have
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

the occasion of profiting by his kind and charitable invitation when I shall come to Paris.

205

Advice regarding his conduct in connection with the opposition provoked by his intention to become a missionary.


[Patience and Fortitude]

Dear Confrere:

May Jesus, our most lovable Lord, triumph gloriously in your soul as He gloriously rose from His tomb.

Let us be patient and put all our trust in Jesus and Mary, and all will go well for the glory of our adorable Master. I infer from what you have told me that our Lord is making all the preparations in you for your departure and your service of our beloved Negroes. I think that the pastor and the other priests of St. Eustache will soon recognize their mistake and will put no further obstacles in the way of your vocation. Let us give full rein to our adorable Master and refuse to put our trust in our own efforts. All you have to do is to act wisely and prudently according to the circumstances and I feel sure that everything will come to pass according to your desires.

You will need great fortitude in your resistance to the assaults that will be made against your vocation. You will also need constancy and great gentleness in your conduct, especially at times when you meet opposition, disapproval and resistance, for you might then be tempted to yield to harshness. Be on your guard at such moments and try to be more gentle than ever. Show great modesty on such occasions and be full of deference, politeness and charity toward everybody.

83
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

[Prudence and Reserve]

You will have to practice great prudence. Be reserved in your conversations according to your plans. The other priests will have to show you some respect as long as you do not become too familiar with them. You are by nature inclined to such familiarity; nevertheless, while striving to keep that reserve of which I spoke, avoid becoming too serious. When you have the opportunity to speak with those Fathers, do it with gentleness, gaiety and openness of heart, but not with openness of mind; say pleasant things but don’t indulge in effusiveness. When matters of devotion are discussed, do not reveal your own opinions, but seemingly approve the conduct of your interlocutors and in general act this way toward everyone. Speak with equal readiness to all, even to those who are most dissipated and most opposed to you, and do this with a uniform gentleness. Never show preferences, that is, do not seem to have a greater esteem for anyone in particular, and remain always both a stranger and a friend in regard to all.

When the other Fathers attempt to rule your conduct, listen calmly and gently; do not show your disapproval, but afterwards do what you think to be in accord with God’s will. Do not reply directly when they reprove you, but sidetrack the question as much as possible, either by saying pleasant things or in some other way. By “saying pleasant things” I do not mean telling funny stories that will produce familiarity with them, for such familiarity will give them a handle for annoying you more easily, but I mean say something to divert their attention, in order to evade the question in a pleasant way, or do something leading to the same result. (Regarding funny stories which make people laugh uproariously, it would not be good to tell too many of them.)

Remain faithful to your exercises of piety and to your resolutions, thus avoiding the foul ways of the world, its likes
and habits. At the same time, also avoid wounding charity in thought or in conduct. Act generally so as to give the impression that you are just a good fellow, a poor man who has good will, but is somewhat weak in the head, scrupulous, narrow-minded and without any clear idea of piety. This will worry them; the fathers will sometimes be impatient with you, but you will not violate charity; you will, at least have done what the good Lord demands of you, practicing charity and at the same time serving the well-being of your soul.

[Be Silent About Your Vocation]

It is important that you do not speak to anyone, not even to the pastor, about your vocation. It will be fortunate if he believes that you are no longer interested in such plans. However, do not say anything against your vocation, nor do anything that would indicate that you have lost interest in it. It suffices that they no longer occupy their minds with your plans. In due time the good Lord will arrange things for you. But in the meantime we ought to reflect upon it and give ourselves completely to the Lord to be used according to His holy will. If you act in the way I have suggested, the Fathers will lose the desire to retain you.

If the pastor speaks to you about your conduct and tells you that you ought to change it, answer him in a noncommittal way. Do not explain the reasons for your conduct. It is important that you never give details about your conduct and never reveal the principles that govern your spiritual and priestly life. Be always docile and submissive to your pastor in everything that does not concern your conscience and in regard to everything that will not lead you to lax behavior. For the rest, always admit that others are right in opposing you, but remain faithful to God. Preserve peace of soul in the midst of your difficulties.
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

[Sundry Counsels]

In regard to spiritual union with the pious priest you mentioned, you risk nothing in trying it out. However, do not build on such a foundation, for in all probability you will not agree with him on every point. Avoid especially imitating his practices, but follow your own interior attraction.

Regarding meditation, do not worry. Be full of faith and love and strive to unite yourself in all things with our adorable Master through that faith and love; all your actions will then be a prayer of “pleasant odor” before our Lord.

May our souls be devoted to Jesus and Mary and may they be totally consumed by the fire of the holy love of their Sacred Hearts, in which I am,

Entirely yours,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, acolyte

206

Self-sanctification and the sanctification of souls for a priest working in a parish.

Letter Seven¹ June 16, {1841} Vol. 2, p. 472

[Dear Confrere:]

[Self-Sanctification and the Salvation of Souls are Interconnected]

You have asked me to give you a fundamental plan for your ministerial work in the parish. You should take care of two things: your own sanctification and the sanctification of the souls that are entrusted to you. These two are mutually de-

¹Only a part of this letter has been preserved.
Letters to Eugene Tisserant

It is not possible to sanctify yourself without laboring with all your power for the salvation of those souls, and you will not be able to sanctify those souls if you neglect yourself.

This is a very important principle. It happens frequently that priests think only of their own sanctification and neglect souls. They more zealously seek the virtue of recollection and other virtues that serve their own sanctification than the salvation of souls. This is a great fault. Once we have become priests we no longer belong to ourselves but to souls, according to God's will; we are in His employ to render service according to His designs.

On the other hand, there are priests who, under the pretext of zeal for souls, completely lose themselves in labors of the ministry and neglect their own sanctification, thus suffering spiritual harm. The latter are doing even more harm than the first. It is the duty of a priest to procure God's glory first in his own soul. Moreover, saintly priests save a greater number of souls and accomplish it with much less activity. Hence we ought to do the one without omitting the other.

[Means of Self-Sanctification]

In regard to your own sanctification, use the means that are necessary to remain faithful; these are your exercises of piety such as meditation, examen, spiritual reading, coupled with habitual recollection. Strive for exactitude in these things and permit exceptions only rarely. Devotions to the Most Blessed Sacrament and to the Most Blessed Virgin are essentials for a priest. If you have an attraction for some other devotion, follow it as long as you feel drawn to it, but in regard to the two devotions I have mentioned, determine upon the practice of regular exercises such as visits, the rosary, etc.

Be on your guard against laxity. We yield a little at one time and always have good reasons, but these are not always as sound as we might imagine, and we end by being quite dif-

87
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

ferent from what we used to be. Have few contacts with the world, but occupy yourself with your various functions. You cannot afford to lose time, and you will notice that you have scarcely enough time to fulfill your ordinary duties. If possible, do not pay many visits to confreres of the parish; it is easy to do this in Paris; I don’t know how things are situated in San Domingo.¹

Never reveal your spiritual ideas to those priests [who oppose you], and do not explain to them the conduct you have chosen. If you meet fervent priests, be reserved at first until you know exactly their ideas of piety and their ways of exercising the priestly ministry. Avoid familiarity with anyone and become intimate only with the fervent, not acting hastily in this regard; test the terrain and proceed slowly.

Be gentle and considerate toward everybody. Show great respect toward all, avoiding affectation; limit yourself to what is proper, and act in a way to give pleasure to others. Be humble always, without affectation but also without weakness. Be cordial and open, but do not become effusive, and preserve interior reserve. Say only what is proper and prudent, by which I mean a prudence that is according to God. Avoid weakness; be faithful to your resolutions and do not yield when God’s interests and the salvation of your soul are at stake; but do this with gentleness and modesty, avoiding harshness, affectation or trouble. Preserve a free mind in your relations with everybody; avoid timidity while preserving modesty.

[The Salvation of Souls]

In regard to the second point, namely the salvation of souls, you should be full of zeal, a zeal animated by love and fervor. But this zeal should not cause constant agitation,

¹Father Tisserant wanted to go to the mission of San Domingo or Haiti.
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

anxiety or disorder. You will know that your zeal is true and good when you notice that you are becoming interiorly more fervent, more recollected and have a greater desire to please God while you are engaged in those works than when you are not engaged in them.

Thus in the matter of preaching, if you do it with true apostolic zeal, you will be more full of God after than before the sermon. If on the contrary, you are not inspired by true zeal you will then be more full of your self, more occupied with what men are saying about it than with God. When we are animated by true zeal, we are in a state of great calm and peace during and after that particular action. When zeal is faulty, we are excited during and after the function. May you have a zeal that is strong, holy, pure, humble, fervent, animated by pure love for God and the desire of His greater glory, by a true interior spirit.

[How to Preach]

Regarding the exercise of works of zeal, seek to perform the divine functions of the priesthood with suitable dignity. You should have great respect, great recollection and a great spirit of faith while administering the sacraments and offering the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Your preaching ought to be apostolic, after the example of the divine Master and Saint Paul. Do not speak with the intention of delivering an [eloquent] sermon; but speak for the purpose of sanctifying souls. Those who preach intent on eloquence are pleased when their sermons are written and are even happier when they have delivered them; they pay more attention to the way of ordering of ideas and uttering sentences, than to saying things that are able to sanctify souls.

Don't aim then at delivering beautiful sermons, but preach apostolic ones. Remain recollected while learning your sermon, and deliver it in the same spirit. Make a half hour
meditation before ascending the pulpit; and when there, forget all creatures; consider yourself as God's ambassador, sent to proclaim His holy will to men, as the representative of Jesus Christ. Represent Him in a worthy manner; act without fear or timidity, but also without self-love. Proclaim the word of God with fervor and with a readiness to sacrifice yourself for the divine truths which you are going to deliver.

Avoid speaking in oratorical fashion, but use the manner of good conversation. Don't say to yourself, "I am now going to preach a [great] sermon," but say to yourself, "I am in the midst of God's children; I have to explain to them what is the will of their heavenly Father and I want to fill them with love for Him." After the sermon, pray to Jesus and Mary, asking them to bless those souls and to make the small seed you have cast into their minds develop and bear fruit. After that occupy yourself no longer with your sermon; don't give it any more thought and above all don't speak about it under any pretext whatever.

[Catechism]

The catechism is taught in the same way with slight changes. Realize to whom you are talking; imagine the little minds of the dear children; try to feel things as they feel them so that you may reach their level of understanding. The principal qualities of teaching the catechism are clarity and simplicity. You ought to prepare your lesson with care but in a spirit of prayer, so that you may speak with unction. For it is not enough that the children know the sacred truths of religion; they should learn to relish them. Nevertheless, you need not say many useless words; everything you say ought to be aimed at explaining things to them; but those explanations, though simple and solely instructive, should at the same time have a certain tone of piety.
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

At the end of the lesson make a short exhortation which is capable of moving their hearts. I believe that this custom of Saint Sulpice is very useful; it is called a “homily,” and its purpose is to touch hearts rather than to instruct. You see then that that function ought to be performed according to the spirit of God. If you have to teach small children, make them instruct themselves; after they have recited their lesson, ask them questions which serve to explain matters further, and if they don’t know the answer, ask another; when they give a partial answer, help them, adding a word here and there. If you give them lengthy explanations, they will not listen to you. You must seek to catch their interest and to move them. They have good will and their will is very straight; their minds are simple and ready to take the “fold” or bent which we give them; there are almost no obstacles to grace in their souls. The only difficulty is their light-headedness, the weakness and mobility of their minds; you must try to fix their attention; if you succeed in this, there will be no other difficulty.

Treat them with kindness, gentleness and firmness, but a firmness that does no injury to gentleness. Avoid familiarity with them. Inspire respect and affection, but never seek to win their attachment to you; direct their love Godwards. This rule—namely, to make them love God rather than ourselves—applies to all and it should be observed by all.

[Confession]

As regards confession, I have little to say to you. Be always united to our Lord and place your confidence in Him alone. Use the maximum of gentleness and tenderness in your dealings with sinners. Never be harsh or rigid. Make them realize the evil of their ways without wounding them; but do this always with gentleness; almost never reprove them with severity. Pray to God and have recourse to Mary
in order that you may touch the hearts of sinners. Avoid using severe doctrine. I am not a theologian and should not deal with such matters; nevertheless I dare assure you that severe principles are ruinous for souls. Follow Saint Liguori without hesitation.

[Simplicity and Gentleness in Dealing with People]

Be always simple, gentle, considerate, modest, without ever adopting the manners and customs of the people of the world with whom you happen to deal, especially when they are truly worldlings. Be all things to all men; be considerate toward them as much as this is possible. Descend to their level without ever leaving the spirit or the way of the Gospel, for a priest is obliged to preserve them, and shun anything that breathes vanity and worldliness. It is not in the latter way that we are asked to become all things to all men.

Be extremely reserved in your relations with persons of the other sex. Be more modest with them than with other persons; do not pour out your heart to them; speak with them about what may be useful for their salvation but never or only rarely about indifferent things. Leave out of your conversation everything that suggests familiarity. However frequent your conversations with certain persons, retain always almost the same reserve as at your first meeting with them. Never say things to them to make them indulge in excessive laughter; be grave also in your relations with them, without falling into excess. Do not treat them rudely nor talk with them in a dry manner; do not act toward them with a certain indifference, and do not give the impression that you do not care for them. Such ways would estrange them from God.

You have the duty of giving yourself to their souls as well as to others; hence you should act toward them with the gentleness, charity and benignity, which Jesus exercised in
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

his relations with Saint Mary Magdalen and the Samaritan woman. Show that you are interested in their souls and deal with them according to their needs, their weaknesses and the faults you discover in them.

Do not manifest an interest in their persons as such, their personal manners, their character and other qualities, for this is always dangerous; but give your interest generally to their soul. If you meet women who are pious and holy, be more careful than ever. One begins by conceiving esteem for their virtues; next one loves the divine grace found in them and, after that, takes satisfaction in the consideration of their beautiful spiritual qualities; one descends gradually, admiring their character, the pleasant quality of their mind and their ways; and then ends by feeling human affection which may degenerate into passion.

Keep your soul pure and clean; keep your heart free, so that Jesus alone may be at the source of all its sentiments. Do not seek to attach those persons to yourself, but attach them to Jesus Christ.¹

[Yours in the holy love of Jesus and Mary, Francis Libermann, Subdeacon]

¹The end of this letter is missing.
Libermann advises his friend to face the storm raging around him in a supernatural spirit.

Letter Eight  Strasbourg, July 9, 1841  Vol. 2, p. 485

Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere:

[In the Midst of Your Troubles, Seek Consolation in God]

You have probably suffered greatly in those terrible circumstances from which you have now been delivered by the grace of God—if, indeed, you are now freed from them. Your heart probably was in a constant state of agitation.¹

Try to calm your mind, dear friend; gently repose your heart on the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Seek consolation in the holy love with which the divine Heart burns for you and for all who belong to Him. Let us hope that our Lord will order everything for His greater glory and that, protected by the most holy Virgin, you will be enabled to fulfill God’s holy will. Do not imagine that your difficulties are at an end; I feel certain that those men will not let you off so easily after the scenes through which they have forced you to pass. But do not let your heart be disturbed; those difficulties will only serve to purify and mold you.

It is easy to serve God when we meet nothing but joy in his service; but this is not the way He plans things for us nor the way of which He himself gave the example. Persons who enjoy a peaceful life, who have no crosses and

¹Father Tisserant’s great zeal had brought him into conflict with the less fervent among the twenty-one priests attached to the parish.
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

meet with no contradictions, do not sanctify themselves. They remain more or less immersed in vices; they are full of faults; they do not learn to love God in a pure manner. Thank God and His most holy Mother, then, from the bottom of your heart, because He has allowed you to pass through that storm, though leaving you with its bitter aftertaste.

[Be Fearless But Prudent]

I think that [those priests] will do their very best to get you away from the parish and to have you appointed somewhere else. And if this happens you will perhaps meet with prejudice in the latter place, and priests there also will annoy you. Don’t grieve and do not become anxious on that account. Let our Lord do what He pleases. Those who antagonize you will be instruments for your sanctification. Be prudent, peaceful and reserved in your conduct. Fear nothing; but also keep a quiet watch over yourself so that others may not find in you any reasons for reproof. They will make use of your least misstep to create a new uproar.

Don’t be afraid of their judgments or their vocal thrusts. Who is able to hurt you if our Lord is with you? Be faithful to your adorable Master. He will always be at your side. Their lashes will not wound your soul, but they will hurt those who fling out such words. Do not take those things so much to heart; helped by our Lord’s grace you can constantly say to yourself, “We have not here a lasting city.” If it pleases God to withdraw you from that mess, you will have had the benefit of tasting a little the bitter fruits that the world produces.

In the meantime remain quietly in God’s hands and be faithful to our Lord. Whatever your circumstances, do not give up leading an interior life. Don’t worry about the opinion of others; the thing that matters is that our Lord have not too bad an opinion about you. After all it is He, not
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

they, who will be your judge. Nevertheless, try at the same time to accomplish your work without harshness, sternness, rigidity; labor with gentleness and kindness in the sight of our Lord.

[Do Not Judge Your Opponents and Remain Full of Charity to Them]

Take care not to judge those who judge you, for if you judge them, you thereby lose your defense before the Sovereign Judge. Don’t be too eager to excuse yourself; it is of very little importance that men should know how wrong they are in their conduct toward you. Nevertheless, in your conversation with them you must tell the truth, but do it without accusing others.

Be gentle, peaceful and reserved in your conduct toward them. Love them interiorly; pray frequently for them; do not suspect that they are acting against you or that they talk about you. Let them act and say what they please. Do not occupy your mind with them or pay attention to them; such reflection will serve only to keep trouble in your mind and agitation in your heart.

You remember that when Semei cast stones and dust at King David during the latter’s flight, and cursed him, the holy king said to Abisai, who wanted to avenge him: “Let him do what he likes; perhaps God has told him to curse David.” Say in like manner, “It is our Lord who allows them to act in this way for my sanctification.”

Rejoice when you hear all those things against you and thank the most lovable Lord for His great goodness toward you. Although you ought to be full of charity toward those priests, do not seek their company; approach them only when it is necessary and then act without familiarity; be modest and reserved; but above all preserve peace and the charity of God in your soul and refrain from judging anyone.
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

[Do Not Worry About What People Say]

I shall not go to Paris during the holidays; otherwise I would accept your invitation. Don’t be angry with Father Carron. I feel certain that he said those things in a casual fashion. It is his habit to speak that way, but there is no gall in his words. Moreover, we should not be astonished that he is taking such an attitude; surrounded by persons who see things from a different angle, he is unable to learn the other point of view.

Once more, dear friend, let men say and think what they please. They are but “flesh”: “What is born of the flesh is flesh.” Their words cannot add or remove one hair from your head. What is important, very important, is that you be found pure and holy on the great Day when all those who were your judges will be judged together with you.

The great lesson you should draw from your trial, beside the good it will do to your soul, is to realize how wicked and detestable it is for a person to let self-love be his guide in his judgments of confreres, and never to put faith in such judgments, for men generally allow themselves to be misled by their prejudices and their passions.

Adieu, dear friend. I am writing in a hurry, for I have little time. I have to study several courses to make ready for my ordination to the diaconate, which I shall probably receive on the tenth of August, if it be God’s holy will. . . .

Praised be Jesus and Mary, in whose love I am,

Entirely yours,

FRANCIS LIBERMAN, subdeacon
LETTERS TO CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

208

Let us rejoice now that people calumniate us because we want to live and work for God's glory.

Letter Nine    La Neuville, October 8, 1841    Vol. 3, p. 35

J. M. J.

Dear Confrere:

I am writing this hurriedly, for I have only a brief moment to give you. We received the packages . . . but you forgot to send me my Novum Testamentum, which I greatly need. . . .

Do not grieve because there are people who wish to harm me. I know something about what you tell me in regard to the Bishop of Amiens.¹ It must have made him a little prejudiced or at least given him apprehensions, but he is so good and devout that he certainly will not do anything against us on that account. We must be on our guard; that is all. We live in retirement and silence and shall let men cry out against us as they please. We must leave everything in the hands of our good Mother and rejoice with all our heart when people calumniate us and treat us as wicked.

If we wanted to live according to our [evil] inclinations and our malice, those people would leave us perfectly alone and not cause us any trouble. But we desire to labor for the salvation of souls who are in danger, and we want to consecrate ourselves wholly to the divine love of our good Master and, lo and behold, we are calumniated and perse-

¹The bishop had been warned against Father Libermann's "intrigues."
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

cuted. This is a good sign which should give joy to our hearts, according to our Lord's command or counsel, "When men calumniate you for my Name, be glad and rejoice."

We are permitted to believe that, since we seek the glory of our Lord and labor for love of Him, we are thus despised, disparaged, ill-treated and calumniated everywhere; for the only reason for this is our desire to serve Him in conformity with His love for us and His zeal for poor and wretched souls that dwell in the shadow of death.

I have written to Father Carbon and explained the situation to him. I have proposed to him beforehand what could be done to overcome the difficulties that might arise on account of the prejudice against myself. . . .

Let us place ourselves completely in the hands of our Lord and His most holy Mother and consider ourselves blessed when we live nailed to the cross. We can then confidently hope to have a small share in the holy love and the ardent zeal that burned constantly in Mary's Heart.

Let us always remain united by this intention and by prayer in that holy love, in which I am.

Entirely yours,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN
Refused permission by the Archbishop of Paris to enter the novitiate in order to prepare himself for the mission of San Domingo (Haiti), Father Tisserant wanted Francis Libermann to appeal to the Holy See to obtain the desired permission. In his reply Libermann explains the supernatural and natural reasons why he cannot take such a step.

Letter Ten    La Neuville, January 21, 1842    Vol. 3, p. 111

Dear Confrere:

[I Cannot Agree with Your Proposed Plan]

I have put off replying to your letter because I wanted first to consult our Lord in regard to your problem. The thing that matters is that we always act in accordance with God's will; and if it is clearly His will, it does not matter that it be according to our own tastes and ideas or not; we can then have peace and assurance. Hence let us place ourselves in the hands of our good Master and allow Him to do in us what He pleases.

You had a great, a burning desire in your soul which was inspired by our Lord; you had besides the advice of men who were full of wisdom and the spirit of God and yet, as I noticed in reading your letters, your soul was not at ease.

Let me now tell you what I think before God concerning that matter, adding that Father de Brandt is in perfect agreement with me. I am afraid of saying this, but it is a fact that we hold an opinion that goes counter to the views of all those priests in Paris. I feel ashamed of having to confess this, for why must a poor man like myself oppose the ideas of so many respectable men who are full of the spirit of God?
Nevertheless, what else can we do? I have examined the matter and considered it from every angle in God’s presence, and my mind remains settled. Please explain my reasons to those Fathers and ask them to recommend this affair to the most Blessed Virgin. I believe that I would act against God’s will if I already now took the step that you have suggested; it might also prove harmful to our work.

[There are No Signs That God Wants Us to Act Now]

First of all, I see no sign indicating that God wants us to take such a step; and if there is no sign, how can we believe that God wants immediate action? The only result of such action would be that you would stay for [a longer] time in the novitiate; but I do not consider this a sufficient reason for hurrying things.

The miracle which our Lady has worked in our favor does not signify that immediate action is in order. When external graces of that nature are given to make us act, a corresponding interior grace will also be given and will strongly and yet gently impel us to act. Now I do not believe that such an interior grace has been at work. Moreover, I think that I too would have felt prompted to act if such a grace had been at work. If the affair of San Domingo required your immediate departure, we could then take those steps, for God’s will would then be evident; but considering things as they now stand, it might be harmful to take those steps [immediately].

We are all blind. Very often when we seem to see things as white they are black. In such times we should let divine Providence be our guide and wait peacefully until God’s own moment has arrived. Who knows if this moment is still far off? Let us then continue to wait patiently for a few months.

It would seem that the Blessed Virgin wants us to wait. It is clear to me that the favor she recently granted us was
meant to encourage us while we were waiting, for she has taken the work in hand, while at the same time she has not urged us to act [immediately].

[Your Immediate Entrance into the Novitiate is Not Desirable]

If you were to come to us now, you would in all probability leave for Bourbon at the end of the year. Suppose then that at a later date we had to try to send men immediately to San Domingo: we would be forced to wait for at least six months. But if you were not able to go to labor in San Domingo before the coming year, what would you do in the novitiate for such a length of time? There are great disadvantages in keeping inactive for two years in a novitiate those who are destined for the missions—that is, for a very active life.

You tell me that you are afraid that you will not be able to spend sufficient time in our poor little “nest” of La Neuville. I personally entertain no such fears. Moreover, if that were to happen, I don’t see that great harm would result. The “novitiate” you are presently making under the auspices of the most Holy Virgin and her beloved servant [Father Desgenettes] will be as profitable to you as our own, especially if it be God’s will to have it that way.

[Harm Could Result from Precipitation]

Secondly, your coming to us now might do much harm to our work. If I were to write to Rome at this time, I would not be able to say anything about San Domingo, and if I nevertheless spoke about it I would be told that I am starting too soon on such a project, for the Roman authorities would think that I am acting hastily. . . . Rome might easily think of us as men who are wanting in prudence and experience,
LETTERS TO EUGENE TISSERANT

young men who want to win a battle with a bishop through violence. They would think that we are acting hastily, prompted by an inflamed imagination which refuses to wait until the time determined by divine Providence has arrived.

It is difficult to foresee all the disadvantages that might result from taking those steps. If they once judge it premature and disapprove of it they might be led to conceive other unfavorable ideas in our regard. My Jewish origin and the fact that my ordination to the priesthood was postponed will be additional reasons for thinking ill of me....

Adieu, dear confrere. May the peace and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ fill your soul.

Your poor servant in
His holy love,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN