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### 07. Libermann's ordeal at Rennes

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## Libermann's ordeal at Rennes

*To Fr. Carbon of Saint Sulpice<sup>1</sup>*

*While on his way to Rome in the company of Maxime de la Brunière with a view to getting approval for the "Work for the Black People" from the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda, Libermann wrote to M. Carbon, a Sulpician and the director of Saint Sulpice Seminary in Paris. He explained what had made him leave Rennes where he was Novice Master for the Eudists, with the possibility of joining that Congregation himself. Libermann was not very explicit about the reason for his journey, but Fr. Carbon was a confrere of Fr. Gallais, also a Sulpician, and he knew all about Libermann's reason for going to Rome.*

Lyon, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1839

My very dear Father,

As you have always been very kind to me, I think I should let you know about my movements and some of the reasons why I have taken this step.

The whole period I spent with the Congregation of Jesus and Mary at Rennes was a time of suffering for me. It was not that which made me leave this poor Congregation but the fact that I felt absolutely useless and incapable of doing anything for the glory of God. I found myself there in the noviciate with three or four people to whom I was of no use whatsoever from the spiritual point of view. I'd be hard put to explain this to you, but I can assure that that was the situation. I spoke, I gave instructions, I tried to inspire fervour, but all my words were dead, unblessed by God and leading to absolutely no spiritual development. It was all the worse during the first year because

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<sup>1</sup> N.D. I pp. 674-676

I had just arrived from the Seminary in Paris where God had blessed everything I did.

Things got even worse during the second year, but I was able to lift myself up a little. I plucked up courage and was now ready to accept all this suffering for the rest of my life if that is what God wanted. The anguish that came from running the novitiate was so intense that I thought I would never be able to support it. I can truthfully say that the greatest pain came from seeing how useless I was to God's Church. This was real, not a trick of my imagination. My uselessness was accompanied by such enormous desires to do something for the glory of God, that the situation became ever harder for me. The whole year was one long interior depression from which there was no hope of ever emerging. On the contrary, everything seemed to be against me and M. Louis himself added considerably to my pain.

That's how things were for the whole of last year. I saw the few years remaining for me on this earth adding nothing to the glory of God, for whom I was willing to give everything. It was like a running sore in my heart and I could see no way of escaping from it; anyone aware of the state I was in would have agreed with me. From time to time, I used to tell myself that I had to put all my trust in Jesus and Mary, the patrons of the Congregation (*The Eudists*); they would protect and guide it so that everything would change. But then I would feel that this was a false hope. My life was passing away and my body was wearing out; I would become totally useless. Nonetheless, in the middle of all this, my afflicted soul opened up before the Lord. I waited for his mercy to come to my rescue, even though I did not deserve it.

So that is the state I was in when I went to Paris in the hope of finding some consolation and good advice. I found the consolation but not the advice. I went back to Rennes, comforted by the thought that the good Lord is served and

glorified by others. But I was still dejected because I could do nothing and I resolved to just go and bury myself for good if that was His will. I began to think that the Lord wanted to keep me there to prepare for my death and I resolved to stop struggling against all the obstacles to my own desires and leave everything in the hands of God. I would make serious preparations for my death. But still I felt this strong and urgent desire that I had to do something for the glory of the Lord and his Mother. My greatest fear was that I would waste the remainder of my life doing nothing.

I finally took the decision to seek advice. As Fr. Louis had the right to read my letters according to the Rule, I used M. de la Bruniere to seek and receive such advice. The decision made was that I should leave and this is what I did. I also sought advice here and was given the same recommendation. When the moment to leave arrived, I was overcome to think of the hardship I was causing M. Louis and the other confreres when they heard of my decision to leave and the harm that my departure would do to this poor Congregation. I ended up in tears in front of M. Louis and was most distressed. But I still left.

So that's how things are. I have left Rennes and put myself in the hands of Providence. I can't tell you any more at the moment, but I will let you know when the Lord makes clear the path I must follow.

When you get the chance, assure M Louis and be good to this poor Congregation in which I retain a genuine interest although I have had to leave it.

*F. Libermann, acolyte.*

I'm not staying at the Seminary but with some people I know, particularly M. Larochette who has helped me enormously.