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### 16. The hidden cost of missionary work

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## The hidden cost of missionary work

*To Samson Libermann<sup>1</sup>*

*Libermann had always had an excellent relationship with his brother Samson, a medical doctor and the mayor of Ilkirch. Here he opens his heart to him about the enormous amount of work and worry involved in his missionary responsibilities. Samson had evidently been expressing his admiration for the great project his brother had undertaken, but Francis talks of the hidden price that has to be paid.*

1<sup>st</sup> January, 1845

.....You are quite right, my dear brother, in what you have to say about the missions. We now intend to send some of our men to Haiti. In this way, they will become accustomed to a hot climate and in a few years, we will be able to send them to help in the mission of poor Guinea. We have to labour for the salvation of those vast regions with their millions of neglected souls, in spite of all the efforts of the devil to impede us. We must be prudent and then God will help us. Let us both pray for this intention....

You say that the great reward in heaven will go to these sorts of bold projects. You are happy to see that I am involved in such plans, but you must also look at the other side of the coin. Have you any idea of the heartaches, worries and anguish that have resulted from my taking on so vast and difficult a task? There are enormous difficulties with the mission of Guinea, a mission that is very dear to my heart. I am at my wit's end when I realise that it is a poor person like myself who must stir up all those peoples, tear them away from the devil and give them to God; I am astonished to find that I am still alive amidst so much pain and anguish. God, in

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<sup>1</sup> N.D. VII, pp. 3-6

his wisdom, is making use of a very poor lever to lift such an enormous load.

I tell you frankly that if I had known what lay ahead, I would have been terrified and would never have dared to undertake so great a work, one that is way beyond my powers. But I am now in chains and must go on. I will continue to move ahead until this corruptible body falls apart and then God will find another instrument that is stronger and more suitable for carrying out his designs. As for myself, I trust that he will have pity on me and be merciful, but don't imagine that it will be because of the great things that I have undertaken. They are indeed great things, great enterprises, but this is not what will earn a reward, for God does not calculate the value of a beautiful project, but judges according to the dispositions of the heart. I can assure you that I infinitely prefer my sorrows and pains to the pulling off of the most brilliant successes. In any case, I will do whatever our Lord desires, and sacrifice everything to attain success. But it is not this success that will bring reward; on the contrary, the satisfaction resulting from it is always tainted by self-love.

Thank the Lord for your own situation. You are blessed because you are able to feed on the grace of God in the secret of your heart, without being exposed to the gaze of others. The cross and all sorts of sufferings sanctify souls, but great projects often have the opposite effect.

Those who are involved in great enterprises for the glory of God are like the employees of large banks. They have charge of the accounts and the money. They write down huge numbers and make calculations for great sums, but they leave their offices with empty pockets. Much better off is the ordinary man who is at ease with his own modest possessions; the money he counts is his own.

Rejoice because you belong to God and are working for your own sanctification and that of the people you are asked to serve. God is with you. Abandon yourself to his mercy in all humility, confidence and love. This is my wish for the New Year.

Yours in the love of Jesus and Mary, and best wishes to all the children.

*Fr. Libermann, Priest.*