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Joseph Lécuyer

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FATHER LIBERMANN AND THE CURSE OF HAM

In a recent article in the international review **Concilium**, Father Sidbe Semporé, O.P., Professor at Cotonou, writes:

"... ever since Luther's Commentary on Genesis, the Christian West has found in Chapters 9 and 10 of Genesis the biblical justification it sought for the slave trade, for colonial conquests, and today for apartheid: the Blacks, they said, are the object of a special curse from God, a curse uttered against Ham, son of Noah, and declared to be 'the father of the Black race.' Father Libermann gives witness to this belief when he writes that *blindness and the spirit of Satan are too deeply rooted in these people, and the curse of their father still rests upon them; they will have to be redeemed by sufferings united to the suffering of Jesus . . . so as to wash away God's curse.*¹

This text of Father Semporé was what spurred me on to do the research whose results I wish to present here. I do not pretend to have exhausted the subject, but it seems to me that the several documents I shall quote can shed some light upon one aspect of Father Libermann's thought.

The Genesis story is familiar enough. After the deluge, Noah planted a vineyard and was able to make some wine. Not knowing its effect, he drank so much of it that he became drunk. Then he fell asleep — naked — in his tent. His son Ham saw him in this condition and made fun of him? Ham's two brothers, Sem and Japheth, on the contrary, showed respect for their father and covered his naked-

¹ Sidbe Semporé, "Les Eglises d'Afrique entre leur passé et leur avenir," in *Concilium*, 126, 1977, p. 14. The Libermann quotation is taken from his letter to M. Lairé which we quote farther on, and which is borrowed from G. Goyau's book *La France missionnaire dans les cinq parties du monde*, II, Paris, 1948, p. 177.

ness. When Noah woke up, he found out what had happened and he placed a curse — not directly upon Ham, but upon Ham's son Canaan (Gen. 9 : 20-27). A little farther on, in Chapter 10, Genesis tells us that the descendants of Canaan are the inhabitants of Phoenicia, a part of the coast of Syria and Palestine extending as far as the valley of the Jordan. According to this, therefore, the Canaanites were the occupants of the Promised Land, the people whom the Hebrews would have to fight for possession of the land and whom they would make their slaves. By saying that Canaan and his descendants would be the slaves of the children of Sem and Japheth, the Bible describes what will indeed happen to the Canaanites after the conquest of their territory by the Hebrews returning from Egypt.

We must admit that the Genesis story remains very mysterious for us: Why did Noah curse Canaan when it was Canaan's father who had sinned? Why Canaan rather than any other one of Ham's sons? But, the most astonishing thing of all is the way this curse came to be interpreted later on: it was applied to the Black peoples of Africa. It is true that, among Ham's posterity, as listed in Chapter 10 of Genesis, there are "people of the southern country" (Egypt) (Gen. 10 : 14); but those peoples are not descendants of Canaan. Besides, it is hard to understand why there were not included under the same curse the peoples whom Genesis lists as Canaan's descendants, particularly the Phoenicians. (Gen. 10 : 15).²

It is not my intention, however, to solve all the enigmas in the Book of Genesis. I shall limit myself to a study of the texts of Libermann which deal with the curse of Ham and its application to the Black race. In a second section, I shall look at what Libermann's contemporaries had to say. Then I shall raise the question as to the possible Jewish origin of this opinion. As a conclusion, we can try to summarize the real position of Libermann.

² For the geographical distribution of the children of Noah as described in Chapter 10 of Genesis, one can consult: *Recueil Edouard Dhorme. Etudes bibliques et orientales*, Paris, 1951, pp. 167-189. Nowadays all exegetes agree in seeing the curse of Canaan as an announcement of the defeat of the Canaanites who occupied what is now Palestine, and who would be driven out by the Hebrews when they returned from Egypt.

I – TEXTS OF LIBERMANN

Let us read the texts of Libermann which deal with our subject. I do not present these quotations as a complete list, but they will suffice to put the question in its proper context.

1) Letter to M. Gamon, January 3, 1843

Father Libermann had just accepted the mission in Guinea offered to him by Bishop Barron, and he was in La Neuville preparing for the departure of his first missionaries. He wrote to his Sulpician friend, who was then Director of the Seminary of Mont-Ferrand: *We are going to have a very important new mission, but it is also a very difficult one. It is in Guinea. That's the home of our poor Blacks. These Blacks, children of Ham, are abandoned there, just as they are everywhere else, and are just as poor . . .*³

2) Message sent to some Belgian Priests (November 15, 1844)

*Our work takes in the entire Black race scattered over the globe . . . They lack everything. One would say that the curse of God Still rests upon them today. O Divine goodness of Jesus, you are at last going to take pity on those unhappy souls and You will choose your elect from among them just as from the rest of humankind, and, just as they have been deprived of your favors up till now, You will be bountiful towards them from now on!*⁴

The curse of God that Libermann talks about here can only be the curse of Ham. However, he speaks of it in a somewhat doubtful tone: *one would say . . .* It is interesting to note that the author is convinced that the curse has no place from now on, and that the Blacks will in the future have just as great a share in God's blessing as all other peoples. The document goes on to point out that he sees a sign of this in the interest all of Europe is beginning to take in the

³ *Notes et Documents* (hereafter referred to as *N.D.*), IV, p. 63. The underlining has been done by us.

⁴ *N.D.*, VI, pp. 433-434.

Blacks, whether the reasons be religious, philanthropic, or commercial.

3) Memorandum to Propaganda, August 15, 1846

*When one thinks of these Black peoples, wherever we find them in the world, one would be tempted to believe that there is a curse of God following their race from its very beginning and keeping them bent over under the weight of ignorance and misfortune.*⁵

Here again, it is only by way of hypothesis (*one would be tempted to believe . . .*) that he speaks of a curse. The rest of the report affirms Libermann's conviction that *the time of salvation has at last come for these poor peoples, . . . they too will finally be called to receive their share of the graces of Jesus Christ and to take their place in Holy Church.*⁶ He goes on at length to defend the Blacks against the accusations brought against them by Europeans.

4) Letter to the Dakar community, January 26, 1848

This letter was written after the announcement of Bishop Truffet's death (November 23, 1847): *God will bless you. He will bless your patience. He will sanctify your souls, and, through your sanctification, He wants to prepare his blessings for our poor, dear Africa. How much care, how much suffering will be needed to wipe out the curse which even till our day rests upon that unhappy and desolate land, so long held in the grip of the demon! . . .* (N.D., X, p. 27).

5) Letter to M. Lairé, May 8, 1851

In spite of some expressions which seem to place in doubt the existence of a curse, Father Libermann continued to speak of it as of something admitted by everybody. Thus, on May 8, 1851, he writes to M. Lairé, a missionary in Grand-Bassam: *This African people does not need, and will not be converted by, clever and capable missionaries. It is the holiness and sacrifice of the Fathers that will have to save them. Blindness*

⁵ N.D., VIII, p. 223.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

*and the spirit of Satan are too deeply rooted in these people and the curse of their father still rests upon them; they will have to be redeemed by sufferings united to the sufferings of Jesus . . . so as to wash away God's curse.*⁷

6) Letter to Dom Salier, May 30, 1851

A few days after his letter to M. Lairé, Father Libermann wrote again to his friend Dom Salier: "The **curse placed upon the children of Ham** is terrible, the demon has ruled among them until now."⁸

Here again the Founder speaks of the curse as something everybody knows about. We shall see farther on that this was indeed the general conviction.

We have gathered together several quotations from Libermann which speak about the curse placed upon the children of Ham and apply it to the Black race. There may well be other texts which I have missed, but they would not add a great deal to what these texts tell us. Now I should like to look for the origin, and perhaps also the explanation, of this conviction among Libermann's contemporaries, and especially in his own case.

II – OPINION OF LIBERMANN'S CONTEMPORARIES

We have seen that Libermann speaks of the curse of Ham upon the Blacks as a fact admitted by everybody in his day. In this second section I should like to give some examples of this conviction.

Let us begin with the testimony of a man very close to Libermann—Bishop Barron. As we know, he was Vicar-General of Philadelphia when he volunteered for the evangelization of the Blacks newly liberated and settled in Liberia. After an exploratory visit, he stopped in Lyons and sent a report to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda. This report is dated July 25, 1842 and it is highly probable that Father Lib-

⁷ *N.D.*, XIII, p. 143- This is the text quoted by G. Goyau and Father Semporé.

⁸ *N.D.*, XIII, p. 172.

ermann knew its contents. In it we read these words: *Notwithstanding the fearful condition of the descendants of Ham, I have reason to believe . . . that the Missions on this coast will produce consoling results . . .*⁹

The following October 3, Bishop Barron was appointed Vicar-Apostolic of the two Guineas and of Sierra Leone. At the end of December of the same year he met Father Libermann at Notre-Dame des Victoires and arranged with him to have missionaries sent to Guinea.¹⁰ The first text of Libermann about the curse of Ham which I quoted above dates from a few days after this event.

We cannot conclude from this, however, that the Founder got this idea from Bishop Barron. That same year, 1842, R. F. Rohrbacher had just published the first volume of his **Histoire Universelle de l'Eglise Catholique**. In it we read that the entire posterity of Ham; i.e. all the inhabitants of Egypt and Africa, came under the sentence of slavery pronounced against Canaan. The historian even thinks that this curse extends to the people of Cuba, basing himself upon what the Mexican historian, Fr. François Xavier Clavijero, wrote in his **Storia antica del Messico**, (published at Cesena in 1780): according to this author, the nudity of the Cubans was a punishment for Ham's mocking attitude towards his father.¹¹

Ten years before Rohrbacher's book, in 1831, the **Annales de Philosophie chrétienne** published an article by Th. Froisset, a judge of the court of Beaume, entitled: **New proofs that the Negroes descended from Ham**;¹² and the same review quotes at length from a book by J. J. Virey which also defends the thesis that the curse of Ham extends to the Black race.¹³

Froisset's article quotes approvingly the **Etudes de la Nature** by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, whose first edition goes back to 1784. Here are some passages from it:

⁹ *N.D.*, V, p. 17.

¹⁰ *N.D.*, V, p. 133.

¹¹ Cf. R. F. Rohrbacher, *Histoire Universelle de l'Eglise Catholique*, second edition, Vol. I, Paris, 1850, pp. 151-152; F. X. Clavijero, *Storia antica del Messico*, Vol. 4, Cesena, 1780, p. 16.

¹² *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne*, III, 1831, pp. 430-435.

¹³ J. J. Virey, *Histoire Naturelle du Genre Humain*, second edition, Paris, 1824, Vol. II, pp. 49-60 and 83; quoted in *Annales de Philosophie chrétienne*, III, 1831, p. 316.

It seems that some sort of destiny condemns them (the Blacks) to slavery. We seem to recognize in them the effect of that ancient curse: cursed be Canaan! . . . It is not my wish to use the sacred authors . . . to justify the tyranny we exercise over them. If a father's curse was able to have so much influence upon his posterity, the blessing of God, which, according to our religion, extends to them as well as to us, establishes them again in the full freedom of the natural law.¹⁴

I have not been able to verify P. Charles¹⁵ and G. Goyau's¹⁶ statement that de Lamennais' newspaper *L'Avenir* echoed this same opinion in 1830 or 1831. However, the indications we have given show well enough that there existed a certain consensus on the matter in the Catholic world of Libermann's time.

We find a supplementary proof in a letter from someone very close to the Founder: Father de Régnier, one of the very first missionaries sent to Guinea by Libermann and one of the victims of that first effort when it turned out to be a tragic odyssey. De Régnier arrived at Cap des Palmes on November 30, 1843 and died there the following December 30. A few days after his arrival, on the Second Sunday of Advent, he wrote to Father Libermann: *Poor Africa! upon which the curse of Canaan still weighs so heavily! Still, we hope that the curse will be changed into abundant blessings since the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for these poor people also, and they too are children of the Blessed Mother . . .*¹⁷

It is normal to wonder where this conviction came from. Clearly, it is not possible to devote ourselves here to an exhaustive inquiry, interesting as that would be. In his book *L'Eglise en Marche*, G. Goyau gives some clues: we can find it taught in the *Chronographie* of Dom Gilbert Générard, O.S.B. which appeared in 1580. Générard states that the curse of Ham is at the origin of the state of slavery of many African peoples. Torielli also believes that the curse of Ham

¹⁴ According to the edition published in Paris by Firmin-Didot, 1868, pp. 70-71. We could also quote the *Géographie Universelle* by Conrad Malte-Brun, Vol. 1, fifth edition, Paris, 1842, p. 21.

¹⁵ P. Charles, *Races Maudites?* in *L'âme des peuples à évangéliser. 6^e Semaine de Missiologie de Louvain*, Louvain, 1928, p. 15.

¹⁶ G. Goyau, *L'Eglise en Marche*, third series, Paris, 1931, pp. 229-230.

¹⁷ *N.D.*, V, p. 255.

is at the root of slavery, but he formally excludes the idea that the black color of Africans is also a consequence.¹⁸

We might also mention Dom Augustin Calmet's *Dictionnaire de la Bible* (first edition in 1722). Under the words *Ham* and *Canaan*, it applies to Africans the curse uttered by Noah. On the other hand, N. Bergier's *Dictionnaire de Théologie Dogmatique* (several editions since 1788), in the article *Negroes*, opposes this opinion.

It seems that the most influential study was the pamphlet by the Protestant Professor Jean-Louis Hannemann published at Kiel under the lengthy title *Curiosum Scrutinium Nigredinis Posterum Cham; i.e. Aethiopum, juxta Principia Philosophiae Corpuscularis Adornatum*.¹⁹

Hannemann follows Luther's teaching, and for him the descendants of Ham are the Ethiopians (Section II); but for him that name includes a great part of the peoples of Africa Sub-Sahara and particularly of the regions of the Congo (Section IV). He notes that many of these people are slaves, not only in Africa but elsewhere as well, in Asia and in America, and this is clearly an effect of the curse of Ham (Section VI). But the curse is also one of the causes of black-colored skin. To support this contention, Hannemann quotes an ambiguous text of Luther according to which *Canaan was painted the ugliest colors by his father*.²⁰ According to an ancient trad-

¹⁸ Cf. G. Goyau, *ibid.*, p. 231. G. Générard first published a short *Chronographia* in Louvain in 1570. In it he states only that the descendants of Ham occupied all of Africa (p. 9). In 1580 he published in Paris a new and more important book: *Chronographiae Libri Quatuor*. On page 10 he connects the curse of Ham with slavery to which "many peoples of Africa" are subjected. A. Torrielli (*Annales Sacri et Profani* . . . , second edition, Antwerp, 1620) takes up Générard's statement which we have just mentioned (p. 193, section 5). He too connects practically all of Africa with the descendants of Ham (p. 212, section 19). He even thinks that Chus, the son of Ham, who was to be the ancestor of the Africans, was black from birth; however, he refuses to see in this any effect of the curse Noah uttered against his father (p. 218, section 27).

¹⁹ This pamphlet has no pagination properly-so-called. We indicate the paragraphs which are found in the printed edition.

²⁰ Canaan is "parentis faedissimis coloribus depictus" (quoted by Hannemann, section XIV). I shall return later to this quotation from Luther which Hannemann interprets as having to do with the black color of Ham and his descendants.

ition reported by Cassian²¹, Ham had given himself over to demoniacal magic even before the deluge and it was he who handed down these evil secrets to posterity. Hannemann also suggests that the name *Ham* comes not only from the root *ham* meaning "warm," but also from the root *hum* meaning "burnt" or "black" (Section XV).²² Thus Hannemann concludes that we cannot exclude the curse as one of the causes of the black color of Ham's descendants (Section XXI).

Could these speculations of Hannemann have had an influence upon Libermann? I don't think so. The mere fact that they were written by a Lutheran makes me doubt it. However, like Goyau, we might imagine that Hannemann was influenced by Jewish traditions which were influential in Amsterdam, and which, as we shall see, were also known to Libermann.²³

Before touching upon that point, however, it may be useful to take another look at Luther's thinking. We have seen that Hannemann invokes Luther as an authority. Fr. Charles states: *It was Luther who, in his Commentary on Genesis, first proposed the idea*,²⁴ and Father Sidbe Semporé echoes this statement.

It is true that, in his Commentary on Genesis, Luther dwells at length upon the curse of Ham. We read there, among other things, the expression quoted by Hannemann,—but with an important difference. Luther writes that, in the Genesis story, Ham is *foedissimis coloribus depictus*, and this can be translated *Ham . . . is painted in the ugliest colors* (or, *in the blackest colors*); but clearly we have here a figure of speech and not a question of the black skin of Ham and his

²¹ Cassien, Coll. VIII, c. 21 (*P.L.*, 49, 758-759; Pichery edition, Sources Chrétiennes 54, p. 30). This conviction that Ham had given himself over to magic was very widespread.

²² The word *HUM* is found three times in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 30 : 32, 35, 40), and is usually translated by *black*, although it is not certain that this is the meaning. G. Castellino (article "Cam", in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, III, p. 419) also suggests an Egyptian root *Km.t* (*Kemi* in Copt) which means *Black*.

²³ G. Goyau, *L'Eglise en marche*, third series, Paris, 1931, p. 231. It is a fact that Hannemann often quoted Jewish non-biblical sources, as does also Dom Génébrard.

²⁴ P. Charles, "Races Maudites?", in *L'âme des peuples à évangéliser*, 6^e Semaine de Missiologie de Louvain, Louvain, 1927, p. 14.

descendants.²⁵ Indeed, Luther admits several times that Ham's posterity inhabits Africa, but also Arabia, Babylonia and Assyria. There is nothing that justifies the suspicion that he makes the curse of Ham fall especially upon Africans of the Black race. It would seem that Hannemann either misquoted or misunderstood his master.

III – THE CURSE OF HAM IN JEWISH TRADITION

If Father Libermann did not draw the conviction we are talking about from the Catholic world, he had a very special reason for being aware of it: he was of Jewish origin and had spent many years studying the Talmud, so he certainly knew what Jewish tradition thought about the curse of Ham. We find their thinking in many documents, particularly in the Talmud and in commentaries upon it. Now we know from the testimony of his brother that Jacob Libermann, until he was 18 or 20 years old, made these writings *the sole object of his meditation*.²⁶

The Babylonian Talmud — as well as other ancient Jewish documents — certainly applies the curse of Ham to Africans of the Black race. The black color of Canaan's descendants is considered to form part of the punishment merited by Ham's sin.²⁷ It is true that the connection between the sin and the black color is often not very clear, and is interpreted in different ways. Similarly, the choice of Canaan as bearer of the curse leads to various hypotheses, in particular to the one which attributes to Canaan a certain responsibility for his father's sin,—A hypothesis which is maintained by several Fathers of the Church.

²⁵ *Luthers Werke*, Vol. 42, Weimar, 1911, 0.384, lines 9-11. The first edition appeared at Wittenberg in 1544.

²⁶ *N.D.*, I, p. 51.

²⁷ *Talmud de Babylone, Sanhédrin* 108 b. I am quoting the edition of Rabbi I. Epstein, London. Cf. also *Genèse Rabbah*, 36, 7 (transl. H. Freedman, third edition, London, 1961, p. 293); L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, I, Philadelphia, 1909, p. 169.

Other Jewish traditions, echoed by the famous Rabbi Raschi (or Rachi) whom Libermann certainly studied²⁸, make the punishment of Ham's descendants consist in their enslavement and their nudity. The curse from Genesis is related to the prophecy of Isaiah which describes Egyptian and Nubian prisoners brought into slavery by the king of Assyria, *naked and bare-footed*. (Isaiah 20 : 4).²⁹

Jewish traditions contain many other details concerning the sin of Ham and the curse of Canaan. Among the sometimes fantastic interpretations are some which make clear reference to people of the Black race.³⁰ It is not necessary for our purpose to go into more detail. What we have said is enough to show that Father Libermann, over and above the wide-spread conviction among the Christians of his time, had a very particular reason for thinking that the curse of Ham had a special reference to Africans.

CONCLUSION: THE TRUE OPINION OF LIBERMANN

Even though it is clear that Libermann, in line with his Jewish training and the Catholic theology of his time, admitted that the curse of Ham had special relevance to the Blacks of Africa, his thinking on the subject is full of nuances. This is brought out particularly in his 1846 Memorandum to Propaganda.

It is remarkable that Libermann takes as his point of departure a question of fact rather than of right: as a matter of fact, he says, the Black people have been up until his time *under the weight of ignorance and misfortune*, to the point where *one would be tempted to believe that there was a curse of God*

²⁸ Cf. Dr. Libermann's letter quoted in *N.D.*, I, p. 36. In line 6, instead of *Rabbi Jaeche* read *Rabbi Jarchi*. Cf. p. Drach, *De l'harmonie entre l'Eglise et la synagogue*, I, Paris, 1844, p. 178.

²⁹ *Genèse Rabbah*, 36,6 (transl. Freedman, p. 292); Raschi, *Commentaire sur Gen. 9:23* (edition and translation by Silbermann, Jerusalem, 1929, p. 40).

³⁰ Cf. in particular L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, I, Philadelphia, 1909, p. 169: a certain number of morphological traits commonly found in the Black races (color of eyes, shape of lips, kinky hair) are explained as being consequences of the curse of Ham.

following their race.³¹ But he immediately adds: *Still, these people are made in the image of God just like everybody else and are disposed to receive the treasure of the Faith which they do not know about.* Faced with the fact of the miserable condition of the Blacks, the Founder then states an undeniable principle: the Blacks have the same dignity as other human beings, they too are called to the faith, and are as well disposed as others to receive it. Even if we must recognize *the hand of God in this almost universal degradation*³² (just as we must recognize it in the most regrettable events which God in his incomprehensible Providence permits to happen), that does not mean that this state of affairs corresponds to a positive will of God: *We cannot believe,* continues Libermann, *that Divine Wisdom and Goodness could have excluded so many people from the immense benefits of the Redemption.*³³ If the Redemption is intended for everybody, it can only be because of the faults or the negligence of men that the Africans have remained so long in ignorance of the faith and in slavery. Discerning what in our day we would call the *signs of the times*, Libermann believes that *the time of salvation has finally come for those poor people, . . . they too will at last be called to receive their share of the graces of Jesus Christ and to take their proper place in Holy Church.*³⁴

So the Founder's position is clear: even if one supposes that the curse of Ham was in force before the coming of Jesus Christ, His coming has liberated all peoples. Back in the second century, St. Justin had already taught the same thing to the Jew Tryphon with regard to the curse: Christ calls all men to the same inheritance, *whatever their origin, whether they be slave or free . . .*³⁵

Therefore, far from finding in the text of Genesis justification for the slave trade and the state of abandonment in which the Blacks had been left, Libermann sees in it, as Theodoret had seen before him, not a curse with inescapable effects, but rather a prophecy of the unfortunate condition in which, as a matter of fact, men would leave or place African peoples for

³¹ *N.D.*, VIII, p. 223.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

³⁵ Justin, *Dialogue with Tryphon*, 139.

many centuries.³⁶ But the hour has struck when that situation must come to an end, and Libermann takes up the work with courage. His ambition, he wrote to M. Percini in 1846, was to destroy *by means of facts, the ridiculous prejudices which unfortunately have conditioned the ambitions and the interests of a handful of men to the detriment of so many millions of souls created in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.* He wanted to make it evident *to the detractors of the African race that, even though they do not have white skin, they are no less children of God than themselves, that they are no less high-minded, that they are no less able to accept the faith, good morals, true principles . . . ; in a word, that their color does not make them inferior in any way.*³⁷

As a final point, we can mention an episode, not well known, which occurred at the First Vatican Council.

In June 1870, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, there was circulated among the Council Fathers a petition which they were requested to sign. Here are a few lines from it:

*Upon the heads of the children of Ham, so loaded down with miseries, there still weighs that curse, the most ancient ever uttered against a people; and the burning lands in the interior of Africa feel more violently and more cruelly the evil force of that curse . . . Since it has been established that the solemn blessing of the New Covenant is to wipe out all the curses of the Old Covenant, it is up to the Vatican Ecumenical Council to make a solemn proclamation that the time has come to bring this about.*³⁸

What is still less known is that the author of this petition was also the founder of a missionary institute, Father Daniel Comboni, who had just established in Verona the Institute of African Missions which would later become the Congregation of the Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Combonians). In the letter that accompanied the petition, Comboni writes:

³⁶ Theodoret, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, Interr. 58 (P.G., 80, 161-164). We should make it clear that Theodoret has in mind not the Africans, but the Canaanites.

³⁷ *N.D.*, VIII, p. 334. M. Percini was a young priest born on the island of Santa-Lucia in the West Indies. After his studies in Saint Sulpice, he wanted to exercise his apostolate in the Republic of Haiti. Cf. the letter to Cardinal Franconi dated February 9, 1846 (*N.D.*, VIII, p. 61); cf. also the letter of December 19, 1847 (*N.D.*, IX, pp. 383-385).

³⁸ The text is to be found in: Mansi, *Amplissima Collectio Conciliorum*, Vol. 53, coll. 634-636.

*No other curse has ever raged within the human race with more cruelty or for a longer time than that pitiless and sorrowful curse by which the Almighty condemned the children of Ham.*³⁹

Comboni's style is very different from that of Libermann, but we find him expressing, twenty years later, the same opinions as the Founder of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary. Libermann's intuition was not in error: however one was to understand the curse of Ham, the time had come for Africa to receive the Good News. After Libermann's disciples, many other apostles would go and devote themselves to the same great task.

J. Lécuyer, C.S.Sp.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 637. One might be astounded at the persistence of this legend, and we can only hope that there will disappear definitively all references to the curse of Ham in connection with Blacks. Let us point out also that, in a letter published in 1905, Bishop Augouard begs one of his correspondents to pray "that God . . . will finally open the eyes of these unfortunate children of Ham" (quoted by B. de Vaulx, *Les plus beaux textes sur les missions*, Paris, 1954, p. 311; this letter was published in *Vinght-huit années au Congo*, edited at Poitiers in 1905. In turn, Father Sidbe Semporé quotes it in his article in *Concilium* which we mentioned at the beginning of this paper). A great number of French Spiritans, upon making their Apostolic Consecration, sang in Chevilly the departure song composed by Archbishop Le Roy; one of the verses makes reference to the curse of Ham: ". . . but Ham will be conquered!"