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### 15. To Eliman, the King of Dakar

Christian de Mare CSSp

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## To Eliman, the King of Dakar<sup>1</sup>

*"My Heart belongs to the Africans"*

*Father Cabon, who compiled the large collection of the "Notes et Documents", told us that there are two versions of this letter to King Eliman. We have a rough draft in the handwriting of our Venerable Father, and a final copy drawn up by his secretary, Father François and signed at the end by Libermann. The two versions are so different that both are given in the "Notes et Documents", the first being that of the rough draft. In this Anthology we give the second version because it is the more complete. It is dated the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1848. However, Libermann only got news of the death of Bishop Truffet around the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1848, in a letter from Father Briot which came via England. Father Cabon thinks that this present letter to King Eliman was written on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1848.*

*Bishop Truffet died at Dakar on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1847 as a result of his imprudent and excessive fasting. His diet was simply insufficient to maintain life in the tropics. Libermann was very sorry to hear of his death; in a short space of time, the Bishop had managed to win the affection of everyone he met, especially the Africans, who genuinely mourned his passing. In order to console them, Libermann wrote this letter to King Eliman and his nephew. Here we note the simple language which Libermann uses when writing to these two Muslims.*

1<sup>st</sup> (or 26<sup>th</sup>) January 1848

To King Eliman of Dakar  
To Suleiman his nephew  
To all the local Chiefs

I send you greetings and pray that you will receive blessings from God our father and giver of life to all creatures.

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<sup>1</sup> N.D. X, pp. 22-26.

I felt you would be happy to receive some words of consolation from me after the unexpected death of the good Bishop Benoit Truffet. The Pope, the Father of all Christians, sent him to Dakar out of love for the peoples of Africa. Divine Providence has taken the Bishop very quickly from this world, which is a vale of sorrow and of tears, in order to reward him for his devotion and virtuous life.

I was broken hearted when I heard the news because Bishop Benedict was a very close friend of mine. I felt sorry also for you, because you have lost a man who loved you and all the black people so deeply. I am in mourning not only for my loss, but also because I share your sorrow. I want you to realise the pain I feel because my heart belongs completely to you and to all Africans, whose souls are so good and whose hearts are so sensitive. I love you all with great tenderness, and I would be overjoyed if you loved me as you loved the good Bishop, my dear friend.

Often, when reading in his letters of the happiness he felt when meeting you and your black brothers, who are also our own well beloved brothers, I was filled with joy and consolation. My own heart was heavy because I could not be among you. I could not be with you to suffer out of love for the black peoples, nor do my utmost to make them more and more happy. Please believe me when I say this, because I am only speaking the truth. I am a servant of the God of truth and all my words and feelings must accord with this truth.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the God of the Christians, the God of the whole universe. He is the well beloved Saviour of everyone and is beautiful, mighty, powerful, loveable, glorious and merciful. He is filled with love for all people, and he loves them all equally, black and white. All are his beloved brothers, so if they are good and devout, they will live for all eternity with him after this life of sadness and pain and enjoy an

immeasurable and never ending happiness in his immense temple of glory which is in heaven.

I am a servant of this Jesus. He wants me to love everybody, as he loves them; but he has given me a special love for his dear brothers, the black people. Because I love the Africans so much, I wish to follow the command of Jesus Christ, my Master, and spend my whole life trying to bring about their happiness. And not only in this world, but above all to prepare them for the immeasurable and endless happiness in the temple of God's glory which is in heaven. I hope that I am not upsetting you by talking like this: if I thought my words would cause you the least offence, I would not have written them. But I believe you will be happy to receive my words.

I know that you are not Christians, but I also know that your hearts are good and that you love whatever is good. Jesus Christ is good; he is the master of all good people. His teaching is good, pure, holy and full of consolation for good living people. I know that sometimes you see Europeans acting badly. When this happens, please do not say that they are servants or friends of Jesus. They do not love Jesus and Jesus does not love them, because they are evil. They do not want to do what Jesus has said they should do; they do not wish to act as he did. If they were good, Jesus would love them as he loves everybody, because it is his desire that everybody should be good and upright.

Bishop Benoît Truffet is dead, but do not be too sad or think that we will not send any more missionaries to Africa. I will ask the Pope in Rome to send another Bishop who will be good, and the Pope will agree because he also loves the Africans. The people of Dakar are good: they know God and so they are not unhappy. But in the great continent of Africa, in places far from Dakar, there are very many black people who do not know God. They are unhappy on earth and will be even unhappier after they die. They will always be sad if they do not

learn to know God and to be good. They have good hearts, very good hearts, and yet they do wicked things because they do not know God. They do not know how to go about being good; they do not know how they should act in order to be happy. We wish to teach them how to know God and Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We want to teach them the way to be good and happy, both in this life, and after they die.

We are sending missionaries to Dakar. They love the people of Dakar and the people, in their turn, love them. They are so happy to be with you and they see clearly that at Dakar the Africans are good people. The missionaries do not fear death. They will suffer it gladly out of love for the black people who live far away from you and who are unhappy. They will travel from Dakar to teach the Africans in those distant places how to know God and to help them to be good and happy.

I ask God, the all powerful, the all merciful, the God who loves everybody, to fill King Eliman, his nephew Suleiman and all the Chiefs of Dakar, with blessings, happiness and holiness. I ask God to give his salvation to you and to all your subjects, so that everybody will be happy throughout their lives and for ever, after this life on earth. Amen.

*F. Libermann*  
*Priest*

Written at Amiens in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1848,  
in the month of January, the first of the year.