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Where are you? A short retreat for men and women in hiding: A few steps into the open with Francis Libermann

Bernard Kelly

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A short retreat for men and women in hiding
A few steps into the open with Francis Libermann

Presented by Bernard A. Kelly, CSSp



FRANCIS LIBERMANN



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Bible quotations are from the New Jerusalem Bible

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Introduction



The man and his wife heard the sound of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden. But Yahweh God called to the man. ‘Where are you?’ he asked.

‘I heard the sound of you in the garden,’ he replied,

‘I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.’

‘Who told you that you were naked?’ he asked.

‘Have you been eating from the tree I forbade you to eat?’

(Genesis 3:8-11)



They had hoped that wisdom would be theirs, wisdom beyond what was otherwise possible. The wisdom of God’s word, once so exhilarating, now seemed confining. Their humanity cried out for a wider experience, a more far-reaching consciousness: “the tree...was enticing for the wisdom that it could give.” (Genesis 3:6) It seemed such a legitimate human aspiration. Was it the way to go? Or did wisdom still lie hidden in God’s command?

We had hoped that our eyes would have been opened and that we would know it all. Our eyes have been opened all right but to notice our nakedness. Call it pride, disobedience, ambition or just curiosity, it has changed the way we see things. We are no longer at ease with each other or with God. We cover up, we go into hiding. Somehow shame has attached itself to our nakedness. It is no longer a grace, it has become a disgrace.

It is not a reflection on our body. Our body remains just as delightful as before. It will continue to afford us pleasure. It has not changed, but the way we look at it has. We are now in a wounded state and we see things differently. The most troubling effect of this is our estrangement from God and from one another. Previously we were at ease with each other, now we are uneasy in each other’s presence. Friendship is still possible and love remains our lifeblood, but hidden in the moments of greatest intimacy is the worm of alienation.



Francis Libermann

The word of God alive and active (*Hebrews 4:12*)

Most commentators on the first chapters of Genesis insist that they are about today, about our present situation. Their truth is about the human condition and it transcends the ages. We can therefore expect them to find an echo in the consciousness of today's men and women struggling to make the most of their lives. Now as then, the same ethically doubtful shortcuts beckon. Our pride and ambition are no less. We listen to the tempter and the deed is done. We reaffirm the disobedience of our first parents and we have the same struggle with the disorientation that results. Afterwards it seems our situation has not changed at all. We still do the same things, hug the same people, enjoy the same diversions. In another way our situation has changed utterly because something is missing. We have lost the original blessing that made us carefree. Now there is a lurking malaise that continually threatens our enjoyment and our peace of mind. Bargaining has got into our blood. We have lost the ecstasy of giving. We often miss our noblest calling — forgiving.

As we look around us today we see a world in turmoil. No one wants to see people suffer violence, to watch people starve. But there is great division about how to solve our problems. There is no agreement about the importance of dialogue, about the use of force, about the place of forgiveness. The disturbance in the world reflects the disturbance in our own hearts.¹ It is within our own hearts that destructive forces first gather. It is during a time of quiet reflection and humble prayer that we can give attention to the orientation of our heart.

Francis Libermann, friend of outsiders

The man who will guide us in our retreat, Francis Libermann, lived in France from 1802-1852. He was a convert Jew from Saverne, who went through a period of revolt against all religion before being baptised in Paris in 1826. He entered Saint-Sulpice seminary but his hopes of ordination to the priesthood were dashed by the onset of epilepsy. He was kept on at the Saint-Sulpice house at Issy largely out of sympathy and he proved to be gifted in helping the seminarians with their prayer life. This led to his becoming novice director for the

Eudists at Rennes, where everything went wrong. It was the dark night of the soul and he was seeing, as he put it, “like a blind man at midnight”.

It was at this low point in his life that he was invited by two Créole seminarians, Frederick Levavasseur and Eugene Tisserant, to become involved in the Work for the Blacks, a missionary project to liberated slaves. He tried to keep this unasked-for challenge at a safe distance by offering to help without leaving the Eudists. But in spite of himself the dream took hold. It would not go away. He found the courage for one more adventure. In 1848 he wrote to Eliman, king of Dakar; “My heart is yours; my heart is for the Africans, wholly for the Africans.” When he died in 1852, he had greatly contributed to the revival of Catholic missionary activity in Africa.

We live in a shrinking world. Increasingly in our hearing, unfamiliar voices speak languages we don’t understand. Not only is our neighbourhood changing, but the world takes turns that unsettle us. So we seek shelter. We probably can’t afford to live in a gated community or in a super-secure condominium, but not even these can shut out the voice that continues to enquire: “Where are you?”, the voice that continued to disturb Libermann at Rennes and to nudge him out of the harbour into the open sea.

The theme of this retreat is that of leaving the protective harbour, of giving up the seemingly safe haven. The ‘emergence’ of Libermann is not studied systematically but evoked obliquely by looking at his life through a series of windows, his ‘given’ name and then the names he himself chose. In the choice of these windows, his baptism holds pride of place. Then come the names associated with his baptism. This is not in response to any theological imperative but simply to give a variety to our perspective.

Apart from an introduction and a conclusion, there are five chapters, each of which could be taken as material for a day’s meditation and prayer. Alternatively, after a general reading, specific items could be chosen for their particular relevance to your experience. In this way your own questions will suggest themselves. I have provided a few questions at the end of each chapter as well.

Chapter 1, *Jacob*, the ambitious man of faith who wrestled with God, evokes Libermann’s early twenties. Chapter 2, *Baptism*, establishes God as the one who makes the first move. By coming among us, He has already revealed His intentions and expressed His hopes to us. He has called us friends. Chapters 3,4 and 5, *Francis, Mary and Paul*, reflect Libermann’s original choice of baptismal names. This choice was influenced by the friends who supported him at the time.² It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship with his heavenly patrons. They would become Libermann’s companions in the faith, who stayed close to him with their encouragement and their inspiration. In our effort to leave our various hiding places and to return to God’s presence, we need all the help we can get. We can benefit from Libermann’s interaction with his heroes in the faith. Hopefully their dialogue of life will help us to take some steps out into the open.

Question



1. How would you answer God’s question: “Where are you?”
(Genesis 3:9)

Chapter 1

Jacob

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry, — and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

(from "The Kingdom of God" by Francis Thompson)



The first time I visited Taizé and entered the enormous tent where prayer and worship took place, the symbol that immediately caught my eye was the huge ladder suspended at the back of the sanctuary. It was Jacob's ladder and as it stretched upwards, it was a sign that heaven was open and that angels of God descended and ascended (Genesis 28:12). It recalled God's promise to Jacob, "Be sure I am with you; I shall keep you safe wherever you go..." (Genesis 28:15), Later it would express the largesse accompanying Christ's ascension, his taking possession of his cosmic kingship (John 1:51).

Jacob, an unlikely patriarch

Jacob was ambitious. He relieved his brother, Esau, of his birthright in very opportunistic fashion. Then, with the complicity of his mother, Rebekah, he fraudulently received his father's blessing by daringly impersonating Esau. It was now time to leave home and undertake the long and dangerous journey to his father-in-law Laban's house.

It was on the way, at Bethel, that it became clear that he was a man of destiny. In a dream he saw the ladder joining earth and heaven. God spoke to him, renewing the promises made to Abraham and to Isaac, and pledging His protection. This did little, however to smooth his way with Laban, himself an inveterate deceiver. Adversity slowly worked a change of heart in Jacob.

On his return journey with his wives and family, hopeful of reconciliation with Esau, but fearful of a violent reaction, attack came



from a very unexpected quarter. Jacob may be most remembered as the man who wrestled with God.

“That same night . . . someone wrestled with him until daybreak, who, seeing that he could not master him, struck him on the hip socket, and Jacob’s hip was dislocated as he wrestled with him. He said, ‘Let me go, for day is breaking.’ Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’ The other said, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Jacob,’ he replied. He said, ‘No longer are you to be called Jacob, but Israel, since you have shown your strength against God and men and have prevailed.’ Then Jacob asked, ‘Please tell me your name.’ He replied, ‘Why do you ask my name?’ With that, he blessed him there. Jacob named the place Peniel, ‘Because I have seen God face to face,’ he said, ‘and have survived.’” (Genesis 32:23f).

Jacob’s position as a patriarch was assured. God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Jacob did not give up the struggle until he received the blessing. God did not give up until Jacob realised that a blessing comes only as a gift and not by extortion or subterfuge. As a blessing seeps in, it changes the heart. And now Jacob had a limp to prevent him forgetting God’s favour.

By Jacob’s Well

Long after his death, Jacob’s well became the site of one of the most revealing and endearing episodes of Jesus’ mission. It was a place where barriers were knocked down, cultural taboos were brushed aside and a brave woman moved centre stage with Jesus. Her earlier evasive tactics were gradually abandoned and when she received the “living water” her enthusiasm could not be contained and she ran to share it with the people of her town (John 4: 1-42). Here is how the meeting begins:

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Give me something to drink.’ His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew. How is it that you ask me, a Samaritan, for something to drink?’ — Jews of course do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied to her:

‘If you only knew what God is offering
And who it is that is saying to you,
‘Give me something to drink,’
You would have been the one to ask,
And he would have given you living water.’

“You have no bucket, sir, she answered, ‘and the well is deep: how do you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?’ Jesus replied:

‘Whoever drinks this water
Will be thirsty again;
But no one who drinks the water that I shall give him
Will ever be thirsty again:
The water that I shall give him
Will become in him a spring of water,
welling up for eternal life.’

(John 4:7-14)

Son of the rabbi of Saverne

On 12 April 1802, Lea, wife of Lazarus Libermann, the rabbi of Saverne in France, gave birth to their fifth son. He was named Jacob.

Even though the decree of enfranchisement of all Jews in France was passed in 1791, little had so far changed in the Jewish ghetto in Saverne. Jacob grew up in a very sheltered Jewish environment. His mother died when he was 11 and his father remarried. A certain prestige attached to being rabbi and Lazarus dearly wanted to have one of his sons follow in his footsteps. When his son Samson turned to the study of medicine, he transferred his hopes to Jacob, who at the age of 20 went to study at the Talmudic School at Metz.

Away from home for the first time, Jacob was at a loss to deal with life in a city. Accustomed in his father’s house to a hospitality that was cheerfully given and never refused, he was deeply hurt by the coldness of his reception in Metz by his fellow Jews. In stark contrast, a Christian, from whom Jacob had been taught to expect only hostility, was friendly and gave him free language tutoring. Cracks were beginning to appear in his inherited worldview.

Reading Rousseau

The Talmudic school was very conservative in outlook and Jacob found himself going beyond the curriculum, studying Latin and reading the modern authors. Rousseau in particular caught his fancy. Before long he had given up the practice of his faith and in fact was in revolt against all organised religion. When his brother Samson converted to Catholicism, Jacob's only reproach concerned the pain that would be caused to their father. His own wrestling with God comes through clearly in a letter to Samson of this time.

... I have formed my own religion based on my own reason, and I don't think that I would commit a crime even if I erred in some of my maxims, provided I don't harm my neighbour....

How can we believe that God showed his favours for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by so many wonders?... Why didn't God have a like interest in so many philosophers of antiquity?....

The same applies to the punishment of Adam... Must I be so unjust as to believe that God avenged the crime of Adam in the latter's descendants?... Is not this blasphemy, does not God Himself give the command 'Do not punish the children for the crime of their father'?

Would it not be unjust on the part of God to choose a single people on earth to enlighten and to reveal the true principles of religion?

I conclude from all this that all God demands of us is to acknowledge Him, to be just and human....So it makes no difference whether I am a Jew or a Christian, provided I adore God, and whether He is one Person or in Three... This is also why I excuse you for changing your religion....³

Jacob has wrestled the God of the Bible to the ground. In tackling the great human problems, Christianity is no more coherent than Judaism. And in the atmosphere of further studies at Metz it is these human problems that are claiming his attention. "All that God demands of us is to be just and human." We can admire the taking of a personal stance, the struggle for understanding, the passion for justice. We can detect the influence of Rousseau. God does not intervene in the world, this would imply a creation in need of repair.

Ten months later Jacob was in Paris. He had the blessing of his father but was puzzled as to how it had come about. Scarcely had he arrived home in Saverne when his father began a conversation about the Talmud. Jacob had been dreading this moment because of the complete neglect of his rabbinic studies. To his surprise and to his father's delight, he found himself answering fluently all the questions put to him. Where had this enlightenment come from? Could it be from the God who doesn't intervene in the world?

Paris, in a room without a view

In Paris Jacob had a position in a Catholic college through the influence of Dr. David Drach, a friend of his brother Samson and also a recent convert to Catholicism. He was impressed by the obvious happiness of Felix, another of his brothers who had become a Catholic and who was a bookbinder in Paris. He visited the chief rabbi and borrowed a book, mainly to cover his tracks from his father. But the strain of keeping up appearances was now beginning to tell on Jacob. His new outlook on life had difficulty dealing with the way things were turning out. Had he really wrestled God to the ground? In his garret at College Stanislas, he did a dangerous thing. He decided to pray again.

That moment was a very painful one for me. The sight of that deep solitude, of that room where the only light was from a skylight; the thought of being so far from my family, from my acquaintances, from my country, all that plunged me into a deep sadness: my heart felt weighed down by a most painful melancholy.

It was then that I thought of the God of my fathers and I threw myself on my knees and begged him to enlighten me concerning the true religion. I prayed to him, that if the belief of Christians was true, he would let me know and that if it was false, he would at once remove me far from it. The Lord, who is near to those who call on him from the depths of their heart, heard my prayer. In an instant I was enlightened, I saw the truth: faith penetrated my mind and my heart.⁴

Throughout the struggle, Jacob showed great courage. He fought for as long as he could to get his way. He admitted in the end that his

way was leading nowhere. He fell to his knees and did not let God go until he received the blessing. And the limp? The limp would come later with the onset of epilepsy.

Libermann locations

There is no well called after Libermann that I know of, but in the current Spiritan Directory I counted seventeen communities on four continents that bear his name. All the way from Libermann Haus in Knechtsteden, Germany to Comunidad Espiritana Padre Libermann in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. These Libermann communities are all places where Jesus is honoured as present, where he can be at home and slake his thirst, especially his missionary thirst. His desire to give the gift of “living water” has not abated.

In Francis Libermann High School in Toronto a brave young woman arrived from another Samaria, from the distant world of Buddhism. As a stranger she appreciated the warm welcome, the sense of community. She was intrigued by what might be their source. Watching and listening, she slowly discovered that they came from faith in Christ which pervaded the atmosphere of the school. A little uneasy and afraid of being caught up in an alien belief, her experience of daily life in the school gradually overcame her hesitation. She decided that she wanted this “gift of God” and it was granted her.

In Saverne, where there is a Libermann-inspired museum; in Rome, where the attic room Libermann lived in during his time in Rome in 1840 was saved from demolition and transferred to the roof of the French seminary; in other places associated with Libermann, “living water” is available to pilgrims. Visitors become pilgrims if they have a good disposition and don’t retreat when Jesus advances.

Libermann, in his commentary on John 4:6, points out that the memorial to Jacob is a well and not flowing water. To benefit one has to be prepared to draw the water. It takes effort, but as it turns out the effort has to do mainly with taking off our mask, with slowly, haltingly letting ourselves be known by Jesus. When we abandon our defence mechanisms and come out into the open, he can give us his gift, rejoice in our happiness and bless our enthusiasm to share it.

Questions



1. Where do things stand in your struggle with God?
2. *“If you only knew what God is offering...” (John 4:10)*
What is God offering you?
3. *“The other attendants arrived later. ‘Lord, Lord’ they said ‘open the door for us’. But he replied, ‘In truth I tell you, I do not know you.’” (Matthew 25:11-12)*
Is there someone who really knows you?

Chapter 2

Baptism

“Who told you that you are naked?”

(Genesis 3:11)



When we lost our innocence, we became self-conscious about our nakedness. Our healthy perspective was gone. No amount of nonchalant disrobing, even for artistic purposes or in genuine pursuit of a nudist lifestyle could restore it. Seeing someone naked can be very exciting or profoundly boring. Such a line of speculation is not relevant to our concern. We are less concerned with nakedness itself than with the personal disorientation that it symbolises.

“Who told you that you are naked?” Why do we shrink from self disclosure? Why are we so reluctant to let ourselves be known? Why are we hesitant to come into the presence of God? Why do we go into hiding rather than meet Him? Our nakedness arouses shame because somehow it reminds us that we have turned away from Him. We have done wrong. We don’t want to bring the matter up. We turn our face away. And the question now becomes: “Is there a way to turn back?” If there is, we want to know about it because, despite our reluctance to reveal ourselves to each other, we yearn to find someone to whom we can say clearly who we are. We don’t like to hold back, but in a world on the lookout for weaknesses to exploit, we feel compelled to protect ourselves.

The road back

We call turning back to God “conversion”. The stories of those who turn back to God all speak of God taking the first step. Somehow He catches our eye. We come to our senses. We overcome our

confusion and we start the journey home. “I will leave this place and go to my father” (Luke 15:18). Our carefully prepared request for forgiveness is interrupted by God’s embrace. “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20). Reconciliation has taken place and must be joyfully celebrated.

In the Catholic church we celebrate this taking possession of our true self sacramentally; initially in baptism and subsequently in the sacrament of reconciliation. In baptism we are born again of water and the Holy Spirit. Now we can come out of hiding and once again feel at home with God, address Him as “Abba” (Father). This does not mean that we will never again run for cover, but we know the situation is retrievable, our project of self-sufficiency has been found wanting and in principle abandoned. It may raise its head again and beckon enticingly from the shrubbery. Temptation survives but the spell has been broken. However weak we may be, our decisions are in our own hands.

The ultimate good fortune — knowing that you are loved

It is humbling to realise that we had to be rescued. It is exciting to think that God considered it worth His while. For some reason, in the midst of all our posturing, He loves us. At the sight of all our brokenness, He is not repelled. Hopefully our baptism brings home to us that we are loved by God. We may not actually hear the words from heaven “You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you” (Mark 1:11) but we can claim their echo. We have become God’s beloved sons and daughters, His beloved disciples in the making. His favour rests on us. John Shea speaks about the difference between knowing who you are and not knowing who you are. You know who you are when you realise you are the beloved.⁵

Libermann’s baptism

Libermann received the sacrament of baptism at the age of 24. It came at the end of a few tumultuous years of searching but when it came it brought peace.

I cannot admire too much the wonderful change that occurred in me when the waters of baptism flowed over my forehead. All my doubts and fears suddenly disappeared. The priestly cassock, towards which I felt something of that deep repugnance proper to the Jews, no longer appeared in the same light. Instead of being afraid of it, I was attracted to it. Above all I felt an invincible courage and strength to keep the Christian law: I experienced a gentle liking for everything that had to do with my new belief.⁶

From scattered remarks remembered by fellow students we can gather that he was in ecstasy during part of the ceremony. “When the holy water flowed over my forehead, I thought I was in the middle of a large ball of fire.” A transformation took place. The transcendent God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had become God unexpectedly available in Jesus Christ. Libermann was overcome by this new dimension of God’s love for him. He recognised himself as beloved in a new way. Painful uncertainty gave way to knowing who he was and what he had to do.

Questions



1. What is your experience of being loved? For whom are you the beloved?
2. How has the reality of your baptism helped you know who you are?
3. Has God caught your eye recently? Did He succeed in getting your attention?

Chapter 3

Francis

For the first time in history, we have come together from everywhere,
Christian churches and ecclesial communities and world religions,
in this sacred place dedicated to St. Francis, to witness before the world,
each according to his own conviction, about the transcendent quality of peace.

(Pope John Paul II at Assisi, 27 October 1986)



Pietro di Bernardone, was a wealthy silk merchant in Assisi. At the turn of the 13th century in feudal Italy wars between rival cities and towns were frequent. Battles and economic skirmishes between Assisi and nearby Perugia formed the prevailing context of his time and place. His son Francis participated in these with relish for a time but God called him to a different way of advancing a kingdom. By living a life of poverty he would become a faithful follower of Christ, challenge the prevailing preoccupation with possessions, be a friend to the poor and show them a way to peace. And not just for a while but through his followers for centuries afterwards.

By being true to himself Francis incurred the wrath of his father who saw his disregard for material things as irresponsible at best. Storm clouds were gathering. “He (Francis) was angrily denounced by his father as a madman and disinherited in one of the most dramatic scenes in religious history.”⁷ The commercial consciousness, even when tempered by family feeling, could not understand or accept a stance that seriously undermined it. A few years later Clare too had to go against her family to join the movement associated with Francis.

Family ties

Family affection ran high in the Libermann family. Francis had a special relationship with his elder brother Samson but even this faded before the great respect and love he had for his father. His only real criticism of Samson’s conversion to Catholicism was the sorrow it would cause their father. The reaction that his own conversion might



cause did not bear thinking of. His father was old. Maybe he need never know? In his heart Francis probably knew that this was a forlorn hope and he broke down and wept when a letter of malediction from his father was delivered to him in Saint-Sulpice. He replied to the accusations of deception and treachery as best he could but he never heard from his father again.

Those on whom God has special designs are often called to go against those they love the most. The confrontation is heartbreaking but much depends on it. This is clear from Libermann's reflection on the event eighteen years later.

When all is said and done, I acquired nothing, nothing in the way of intellectual knowledge, no power of will, no practice of virtue. God gave me everything. He drew me (to Himself) without asking my permission, and with a violence that I have not so far remarked in anyone else. At first I was very lax, very indifferent, worthless with regard to any supernatural life. Our Lord gave me the grace to stand up to my father, who wanted to tear me away from the faith. I renounced him rather than the faith. Whereupon the good Master came without warning to tear me from myself and he held my faculties captive and absorbed for about five years.

During all this time, it never occurred to me to work on one virtue or another; my whole concern was to be with him and this was very easy. During all this time I didn't have a single clear idea of spiritual things.⁸

Libermann rarely talks of his personal struggle and this letter had to somehow survive the instruction in the postscript; "You will burn this letter on the third day after receiving it." From it we can see that Libermann has discovered where his treasure is. He has been seduced by God in a way that demands major sacrifices, which initially at least, come easily to him. It is not that life has dealt kindly with him; during the five years referred to in the letter, Francis experienced his first *grand mal* epileptic seizures, he could not proceed with his priestly formation, he became a sort of gardener/messenger at the Sulpician house at Issy. The important thing is that, as Francis did not flinch from taking a painful stance on His behalf, God drew close to him and gave him peace.

Peace is the climate of the kingdom

"Make me a channel of your peace,
where there's despair in life let me bring hope."

When we come across this modern calling card of Francis of Assisi, this echo of his desire for the world, we understand why in October 1986 Pope John Paul II chose the Portiuncula in Assisi as the site for the coming together of the world's religious leaders to pray for peace. He wanted them to drink from the same well as Francis, that medieval master in "church repair". He wanted them to come closer to each other, he wanted them to find peace.

Francis Libermann sought the same peace. He frequently spoke of "the peace of God which is beyond our understanding" (Philippians 4:7) It is this that sustained him in every discouragement, whether in the throes of his illness or in the organisational hassle of his missionary ventures. This peace has nothing to do with indifference or lack of sensitivity, it is the fruit of sacrifice:

Pay special attention to this peace and aim at it constantly before God and in God. But let it be a peace of renunciation and death, not a peace of indifference; a peace of union and of love and not an artificial peace, which comes about either by simply forgetting what troubles us or by human effort. Your peace ought to neither fear nor always flee difficulties and temptations but overcome them.⁹

Libermann describes the very climate of the kingdom in terms of peace and prayer. "The great means of establishing in us the wonderful reign of Christ are precisely a prevailing spirit of prayer and peace of soul."¹⁰ His peace was contagious. Agitated students came away at peace after a short time spent with him. One priest testified that just rereading a letter of advice he had received from Libermann was enough to restore his peace.

What is at first complicated may become simple

In 1839 Libermann wrote to a seminarian:

You want to be able to be always alone with God; this is a very excellent thing and, if it were possible, you would be very happy.

However don't be upset if it is not possible. Here is a thought of Saint Francis of Assisi that will show that this is not necessary for a true servant of God. He says that *"our brother the body is a cell, and our soul is the hermit who goes there to think of God without ceasing."* If a religious person is not at peace in the cell of his body, exterior cells will be of little use to him.

These words from the mouth of this great saint, show how the life of a Christian should be.¹¹

Francis of Assisi and Francis Libermann show us that life according to the gospel is simple, very difficult but simple. It requires us to abandon all complicated gear and paraphernalia. In the quiet time of retreat or of prayer we gradually move towards personal integration of our life. We accept our body and feel happy in our skin. God loves us as we are. Complications fall away. Prayer is as important as ever but it is now a simple, peaceful and confident presence before God, nothing more.¹² Worries return later on of course, but we are in a different space. Instead of gnawing away at our heart, they only snap ineffectually at our heels.

More know what to do than are prepared to do it

The phrase attributed to St. Francis that sounds the clearest echo in Libermann is probably the one that points to the eloquence of example:

Proclaim the gospel at all times,
If necessary use words.

Libermann is certainly a disciple of St. Francis in his ideas of the limitations of learning over against the power of simple daily living. Explaining is important but it is not as persuasive as faithful witness. Libermann emphasises the importance of holiness in missionaries.

The Africans do not need and will not be converted by the efforts of clever and capable missionaries. It is holiness and the sacrifice of their priests that will be the instrument of their salvation....Be holy and urge your confreres to be holy...¹³

Holiness for Libermann, as for Francis, had to do with a quality of life, which carried more transforming power than any discourse.

When Libermann went to Rome in 1840 to seek approval for the Work for the Blacks, he had already developed a habit of turning to Francis for encouragement. In that year of uncertainty, he made a pilgrimage on foot to Loreto. On his return journey he veered slightly north to Assisi to pray at the tomb of St. Francis. Upon returning to Rome he enrolled in the Third Order.

Questions



1. Are you avoiding a confrontation that is really necessary?
2. *"As Jesus drew near and came in sight of the city he shed tears over it and said 'If you too had only recognised on this day the way to peace! But in fact it is hidden from your eyes!'" (Luke 19:41-42)*
Do you know the things that are for your peace?
3. Have you discovered a key to personal integrity?
Is there one thing around which all else revolves?

Chapter 4

Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.



At his baptism Libermann was surprised by grace. “When the baptismal water flowed over my Jewish head, I suddenly loved Mary whom I previously detested.”¹⁴ In Francis’ new conversion perspective, God’s dealings with His people took a completely unexpected turn in the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. Here everything had hinged on the faith and courage of a young Jewish woman. Fr. Pierre Blanchard reminds us that for Libermann, Mary was the one in whom Israel came into its own. In his commentary on St. John’s gospel, Libermann reflects on Jesus’ words “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22) principally as a springboard towards a worship in spirit and in truth. For him Mary is a daughter of Sion but clearly she was to become much more. Taking her place in the long line of brave and faithful Jewish women, her response to God was without reserve. In return she was drawn into the family life of God: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow.” (Luke 1:35)

There is a litany of Marian titles. Each one of us has a favourite title, which may change from time to time. Pope John Paul II referred to Mary as “the first believer”, the US bishops called her “the woman of faith”. I have always been attracted to “fair as the moon” (giving real and welcome light, but borrowed light) to go along with my first favourite “Refuge of sinners”. Libermann was greatly influenced by the Sulpician perspective, in which the Christian life centred on participating in Christ’s mysteries. Mary was the one who did this most perfectly. What came across was her intimacy with her son. Her heart beat in unison with his. This aspect was further emphasised when



Liebermann was with the Eudists and discovered the devotion to the hearts of Jesus and Mary together and perfectly in tune.

Mary's practical union

The life that Mary shared with her son was the original example of “practical union”, the reality behind the most popular teaching that Liebermann bequeathed to his followers. This is how it is put in the Spiritan Rule of Life #5 (1987):

We live out our mission
in willing obedience to the Holy Spirit,
taking Mary as our model.
This condition of habitual fidelity
to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit
is the “practical union”
of which Liebermann speaks.
It is the wellspring of our apostolic zeal
and leads us to being completely available
and making a complete gift of ourselves.

Our relationship with God cannot have our attention all the time, but it does not by this very fact lapse. Rather it continues with its own momentum, unless it is broken by sin or interrupted by activity for purely personal advantage. This teaching was of great help to busy missionaries, who had so many demands on their time and often many distractions in their prayers. It was not a cut-price spirituality for busy people, it was a glorious reminder of God's desire to be with us. It was not a concession to the pastorally overburdened, it was a challenge to test the calibre of each one's personal commitment. Have I surrendered my will wholly to God's purpose? Is it an unconditional surrender? “Practical union is like an instinct of the heart for a person who, having made the sacrifice of self, has become ‘free ever after to devote himself completely to others and to bring them along to God.’” (Spiritan Rule of Life #88)

Learn from me (*Matthew 11:29*)

The *anawim* in the Old Testament were the unlikely keepers of the flame. They were the lowly ones, the faithful ones, the ones who

put all their trust in God. They were the guardians of human authenticity against frequent aberration around them. Jesus describes them from the inside in the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). Mary is their great representative. She is not excused the worry and suffering of being a mother. She learns about life and love the hard way. And in learning through suffering she discovers the promised treasures, as set out in the informal charter of the *anawim*.

Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened
and I will give you rest.
Shoulder my yoke and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.

(Matthew 11:28-30)

Liebermann was greatly influenced by this text. One reflection on it dominated his advice to a young French missionary. The year before he died he wrote to Fr. Charles Lairé, a Spiritan working in west Africa, and spoke of gentleness and humility with surprising insistence:

May the spirit of Jesus animate your actions; may He form all your sentiments and deaden and moderate the impetuosity of your mind and all your inclinations to be harsh and unyielding. In a word, may He control whatever is passionate and unruly in you, govern all your impressions, and direct all the movements of your soul. May Jesus grant you the gentleness and humility of which He has given you so perfect an example. How very important is humility and gentleness, and how few possess these dispositions!

A missionary who has these two virtues profoundly imbedded in his soul, who makes them permeate his interior habits and actions, is truly sanctified by the spirit of God. And he who lacks those great sanctifying virtues is a freak so far as Christ's apostolate is concerned, even when he is as zealous as Saint Paul or Saint Francis Xavier, for he lacks the foundation: the spirit of Jesus cannot animate him, and most of the time, it is replaced by the missionary's own spirit and sometimes even by the spirit of darkness.¹⁵

Blessed are the gentle, they shall have the earth as an inheritance (*Matthew 5:4*)

Libermann did not neglect the importance of zeal and other virtues but he considered the attitude of the *anawim* as the foundation of all Christian living. Gentleness became his signature tune. It began with gentleness towards oneself and it influenced all activity including administration. In April 1846 Fr. Joseph Lossadat, superior of Dakar and Goreé, discouraged at the lack of progress there, received a letter from Libermann.

I am well aware of the fact that your mission is a difficult one. Yet it is my opinion that you are exaggerating certain difficulties because of the trouble you are experiencing. Let us put our confidence in God. Don't think that Mary will abandon you. I feel sure that there are grave difficulties which you have not even noticed and which I consider to be most serious. However they do not frighten me....

When you see that your confreres don't share your views, even when it is evident that they are not choosing the better course, it is preferable not to cling too much to your own ideas and not to contradict them.

Allow everyone to follow his own ideas and accomplish the good in his own way and encourage them doing so. This method will make them yield the maximum they can produce. They would have accomplished more if they had had other ideas but that can't be helped. They don't have those ideas. If you try to force them to adopt your own ideas, in general much less good will be accomplished. They will be upset and might even become discouraged.

It is difficult to understand the importance of tolerance. We can't expect people to have identical views. When we are intolerant we arrest the good, we are always in trouble, we deprive ourselves of the necessary rest, discourage others and often discourage ourselves. On the contrary, if we let everyone act according to his character, mentality and his whole make-up, great good will be accomplished.

“Let us put our confidence in God. Don't think that Mary will abandon you.” This is the sure foundation for all Libermann's initiatives. The most difficult and the most significant decision of his life

was his decision to participate in the Work for the Blacks. He was leaving whatever small security he had achieved and going to Rome to seek approval for a missionary project, inspired principally by two Créole seminarians who were rich in conviction but poor in patronage. He described his situation to his friend Paul Carron. He felt he had nothing going for him. Just Jesus and Mary. But that was enough.

So far as I am concerned, dear friend, you see what my situation is. I am abandoned and without any help. I don't even have any income or livelihood. I have no place where I can live and no hope whatsoever of human help. That is surely enough to drive a poor man like me to despair. But Jesus and Mary are my all.

I am going to undertake the work mentioned above, I am going to speak to important and powerful people — but will they even look at me? Obviously, I am hopelessly lost. Thinking about the whole matter, I must confess that I consider it a foolish undertaking. I would hold it to be very presumptuous on my part if I did not feel in my soul a great humiliation before God in the fact that I dare to get mixed up in such an enterprise. I cannot understand it at all and sometimes am so surprised (by my own daring) that I don't know what to think of it.¹⁶

Sharing the risk with Mary and Jesus

Libermann's recourse to Mary always includes Jesus. With them he puts his complete trust in God. He then engages in careful preparation and detailed planning, though he does have reservations about publicity. In another letter to Fr. Paul Carron, he writes:

I don't make any efforts to get novices, but wait for the Lord of the vineyard to send them to us. I don't send away those who offer themselves and are marked by the sign of God's will, but I refuse to accept those, who, I think, are not destined for us according to God's designs.

I take as my fundamental principle that I am not in charge of a business belonging to me, but of a work that belongs to God.¹⁷

Mary had shared with him the fundamental outlook of someone whose life was given over to God's work. No more than for Mary did this make for a peaceful journey through life, but it did provide the still point that could survive any storm.

O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you

Devotion to Mary was flourishing in Paris in the 1830s. In 1830 Our Lady appeared to St. Catherine Labouré at the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in rue du Bac, an event that gave rise to what is referred to as the Miraculous Medal. In 1836 Fr. Desgenettes inaugurated the Archconfraternity of the Holy Heart of Mary at his parish of Notre Dame des Victoires, taking as its first emblem the Miraculous Medal. In this confraternity the project of the Work for the Blacks was nurtured in the minds of Eugene Tisserant and Frederick LeVasseur.

In USA, Fr. Edward Barron, Vicar General of the diocese of Philadelphia, was sent to care for liberated slaves in Liberia. After an exploratory visit and a report to Rome his responsibility grew. In 1842 he found himself consecrated bishop and entrusted with an ecclesiastical territory that included almost all of West Africa. Desperate for priests to help him in his task, he came to Notre Dame des Victoires in Paris. He shared his predicament with the pastor, Fr. Desgenettes, who knew that at the time Libermann was seeking a mission field for his priests. A meeting was arranged and a daring missionary venture got underway. When it comes to mission, Mary often manages to connect the dots.

In Rome in 1840, Libermann made no progress in his efforts to outline a provisional rule for the proposed society which he and LeVasseur wanted dedicated to the Holy Cross. When he turned to Tisserant's idea of dedication to the Holy Heart of Mary, he found an unexpected fluency. Towards the end of the year in Rome he made a pilgrimage to Loreto. He returned to find that the bishop of Strasbourg had accepted him as a candidate for ordination. Examples of his devotion to Mary were many. All were expressions of an affinity of the heart. As Libermann died in Paris, the chanting of evening prayer could be heard from the nearby chapel. It was the Magnificat, the canticle of Mary, anthem of the *anawim*.

Questions



1. "You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38)
Can you echo Mary's response to God's invitation?
2. "Shoulder my yoke and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart."
With instructions like these, how do you hope to make a difference in the world?
3. Who is Mary for you? Have you a favourite title or phrase that tellingly expresses your relationship?

Chapter 5

Paul

“But when God, who had set me apart from the time when I was in my mother’s womb, called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son to me, so that I should preach him to the gentiles, I was in no hurry to confer with any human being, or to go up to Jerusalem to see those who were already apostles before me. Instead I went off to Arabia, and later I came back to Damascus.

Only after three years did I go up to Jerusalem to meet Cephas.”

(Galatians 1:15-18)



Paul’s dramatic experience on the road to Damascus changed his whole life. From being the persecutor of Christians, he became the fountainhead of Christian mission. God had designs on Paul from his birth, but only now showed his hand, only now revealed his Son to him so that he could “preach him to the gentiles”. God’s choice was a surprise, a grace, completely undeserved. Later Paul’s missionary journeys would crisscross Asia Minor, take him to Macedonia and Achaia and ultimately to Rome. But not immediately, “I was in no hurry to confer with any human being...”

This man is my chosen instrument *(Acts 9:15)*

Libermann’s ‘road to Damascus’ experience came when he was twenty four. He too was to be surprised by a call to mission. But not immediately. Thirteen years later he was in his second year as director of the Eudist novitiate in Rennes and was staring failure in the face. A seminary director wrote asking for advice. Libermann replied:

I am a poor man with nothing to say. In all truth, my good Father Féret, I am good for nothing, I assure you. I have been given a great reputation, but the pure and simple truth is that I am a useless vessel in the Church of God. In the presence of Our Lord Jesus, who knows better than I the truth of what I say, I am telling you that I am here like a piece of rotten wood, which hardly catches fire at all and which gives light and heat to no

one. I feel only the deepest dejection and a great inner frustration before God. I am like a paralytic who wants to move but is unable....

My desires know no bounds but they are ineffectual, barren and dead. In the extreme incapacity in which I find myself there is only one thing I can do: prepare to die in a Christian way.¹⁸

In a letter to Fr. Carbon a month later there is the same interior conflict, a crushing sense of uselessness relieved only by a restless if vague desire to accomplish something for the glory of God.

There I was, enclosed in a novitiate with three or four people around me, to whom I brought little or no spiritual benefit....

I can truly say that the greatest (suffering) of all was seeing myself useless in the Church of God.... This realisation was accompanied by such an ardent desire to do something for the glory of God, that this was my heaviest cross.¹⁹

It wasn't as if Libermann had no idea of what he should do. The Work for the Blacks was persistently beckoning. Levavasseur had received the approval of his spiritual director at Saint-Sulpice. A professor there, Fr. Pinault, had given encouragement. A talented and well connected young man at Saint-Sulpice, Maxime de la Brunière, had become an enthusiast. The plan was that he, the likely leader, and Libermann would go to Rome to seek approval for the missionary project. After four months there, de la Brunière decided the venture was unlikely to get off the ground, so he returned to France and joined the *Missionnaires de Paris*. Libermann stayed. Now a missionary, he was learning that putting all your trust in the Lord did not necessarily expedite dealings with the Vatican. But "when obstacles appear, we must go forward, forward all the time, stay at the foot of the wall, wait until it falls, and then continue on."

All things to all (*I Corinthians 9:22*)

One of the best known passages from Libermann's missionary correspondence is one of the most transparently Pauline:

Do not judge by first impressions. Do not judge by what you have seen in Europe, according to what you have been used to in

Europe. Rid yourselves of Europe, of its customs and spirit. Become black with the Blacks, and you will judge them appropriately; become black with the Blacks, to form them appropriately, not in the European fashion, but leaving them what belongs to them. Be to them as servants should be to their masters, to the ways and styles and customs of their masters, and this in order to bring them to perfection, to sanctify them, and make of them, little by little, a people of God in the end. This is what St. Paul calls making oneself all things to all, so as to win all for Jesus Christ.²⁰

Paul Coulon CSSp has made a very helpful study of this text, where the close examination of its Pauline roots make it even more exciting.²¹ Mission for Libermann involves a conversion, a real Copernican turnabout in our way of thinking of others. We must put aside the ingrained categories of our culture, leave behind the shoreline of our thinking just as the physical contact with our country recedes. This is a frightening challenge involving a personal self-emptying in imitation of Jesus himself as described in Philippians 2:7: "But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are."

This Libermann view of mission in the mid-nineteenth century is clearly prophetic. It has all the hallmarks of enlightened modern missiology. The last time I heard it presented in this sense, the speaker acknowledged its originality and daring, but then asked if the missionaries had lived up to it. Where does the courage come from for so radical a stance? Where does the sensitivity come from for so respectful an attitude? What source of energy can maintain a sympathetic dealing with differences that don't go away? Libermann and Paul answer in unison: only in Jesus is it possible.

Being loved is someone else living in you

Libermann's spirituality was built on sturdy Jewish foundations where God remains faithful to his people, who are always invited to return to Him no matter how far or how often they stray. The influence of Saint-Sulpice could be succinctly expressed in a verse from Paul's letter to the Galatians:

I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive: yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living, subject to the limitation of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

The elusive source of energy previously referred to can be described as God's love for us or the presence of Christ within us. I am now "living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me". This sounds fine but it must come home to us and take possession of us. This happens when we become servants. Our life of faith is a journey, and through the process of self-emptying we must become servants. "Be to them as servants should be to their masters...."

When Libermann was trying to make sense of why things were going so wrong at Rennes after the success of Issy, he wrote: "This is even one of my great faults of the past, namely, that I left my servitude and acted too often as a master. God has punished me severely. But He has had pity on this poor man through His truly incomprehensible mercy."²² For Christ to live in us, we must accept that he comes among us as a servant. (Luke 22:27) We must bend down not only before God but before our brothers and sisters. (John 13:1-15) Like Paul, Libermann learned slowly and painfully that "it is when I am weak that I am strong". (II Corinthians 12:10)

Questions



1. When times are tough, where do you look for the energy to keep going?
2. How do you treat the stranger, the foreigner, the refugee? Can you name the gifts they bring you?
3. "For who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet here am I among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:27)
As you try to make the most of your life, where is your ambition leading you?

Conclusion



All spirituality depends on the movement of the Holy Spirit, who is as elusively present as the air, now a gentle breeze, now a great wind. Only the Spirit can dispel fear and urge disciples to come out into the open as they gather in an eve-of-Pentecost huddle behind closed doors. Coming out into the open is a turning point. The isolation and the estrangement are over. God is our friend. Even people of other cultures and languages seem to understand what we are about. (Acts 2:1-12)

Coming out into the open may not be a repossession of the garden but at least it is a reappearance there. What is required of us if we really want to reverse our run for cover in the garden? To try to reverse the situation is to try to re-establish good relations with God, to somehow undo our futile gesture of self-sufficiency, repair the alienation stemming from our revolt. This requires a heroic move on our part. It demands nothing less than unconditional surrender. Everything in us rebels against such a handing over of our life to God. Even as in another garden Jesus showed us the way in the heart-wrenching experience of Gethsemane, we have to admit that we are less likely to be found faithful at his side than hidden away with the sleeping disciples. (Matthew 26: 36-46)

Libermann was a shy person more suited to the monastery than the market place. He shrank from leaving his hiding place, from going out into the world as an advocate of the Work for the Blacks. He couldn't make out if the pain he was feeling was the approach of

death or the stirring of new life. "I began to think that Our Lord wanted to keep me there to prepare me for death.... But I could not contain the ardent desire, which gave me no rest, to do something for the glory of Our Lord and His holy Mother."²³ He had no idea that he was at the threshold of the most creative period of his life. The Work for the Blacks was to survive into the present day as the Spiritans, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

Once Libermann surrendered himself completely to God, his hesitation disappeared.²⁴ He left the shrubbery, came boldly into God's presence and put everything into His hands. A practical union with God was his anchor in the series of crises that beset the fledgling missionary society. The difficulties were not lacking and the pressure was sometimes intense as he negotiated with the French government, the archbishop of Paris or the papal nuncio. He felt the stress. His health failed at times. When the stakes were high his heart was in his mouth as much as the next person. But now there was a seamless quality to his life. Having painfully moved his centre of attention outside of himself to God, he found new zest for life at the service of the world's most deprived.

I hope you have found this brief acquaintance with Francis Libermann of interest. In your moments with God may you move towards unconditional surrender, come to a realisation of how much you are loved, recognise yourself as who you really are and marvel at how exciting life can be.

Have you ever felt the wonder of a beautiful garden? Just looking out at it is a pleasure. But for the full effect, you have to go outside. You have to walk on the grass and feel the faint intoxication from the colour and the scent. The Holy Spirit rarely uses words. He is in the air and we breathe in beauty.

May the Holy Spirit come to you in his own way and take away all that holds you back.

Francis Libermann

(1802 - 1852)

- 1802 Birth of Jacob (later to become Francis) Libermann in Saverne, France.
- 1813 Death of his mother
- 1822 Departure for Metz, to pursue his studies at the Talmudic School.
He undergoes the crisis of faith of a university student away from home.
- 1825 He hears of the conversion to Catholicism of his brother, Samson.
- 1826 He returns to Saverne to visit his father and earns his blessing on his journey to Paris. Torn in different directions, he finds his life becoming a web of pretence. In desperation, he decides to pray again.
God rushes back into his life. He becomes a Catholic and enters the seminary of Saint-Sulpice.
- 1828 (December) His first serious epileptic attack.
- 1830 Death of his father.
- 1831 He goes to the Sulpician house at Issy. Organisation of prayer groups.
- 1837 He becomes novice director of the Eudists at Rennes. The following summer Frederick Levavasseur comes from Saint-Sulpice to discuss "The Work for the Blacks".
- 1840 Libermann goes to Rome to seek approval for the missionary project (Work for the Blacks).
At length, on 6 June, some official encouragement.
Nov- Dec: Pilgrimage to Loreto. Acceptance for ordination.
- 1841 18 September, he is ordained priest in Amiens, and sets up the first house of the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary there.
Strong association with Notre Dame des Victoires in Paris, where he celebrates a first Paris Mass on 25 September.

- 1842 Levavasseur leaves for Reunion (Feb) and Tisserant for Haiti (Nov).
- 1843 Seven priests and three helpers leave for West Africa with Mgr. Barron.
- 1844 8 October, a letter arrives from Mgr. Barron: all but one of the priests have died in Africa.
- 1845 June, two priests and a brother embark at Bordeaux for West Africa.
16 September, three priests and two brothers leave for Australia.
7 December, Eugene Tisserant dies in a shipwreck off the coast of Morocco.
- 1846 Benoit Truffet, a talented priest from Savoy arrives at the novitiate in Amiens. A year later he becomes the first bishop of the society, Vicar apostolic of the Two Guineas (most of West Africa), but dies after only seven months in Africa.
- 1847 Levavasseur, in Reunion, recovers his enthusiasm for the society after a year's disenchantment.
- 1848 Fusion of the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary and the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. Libermann is elected Superior General.
- 1849 Two recently consecrated bishops, Mgr. Bessieux and Mgr. Kobes, with 6 priests, 3 brothers and 6 sisters of Castres set sail for West Africa.
The Congregation now has 48 priest members of whom 33 are on the missions.
- 1850 Libermann defends the reputation of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit against a wave of criticism. He spends a lot of time preparing the way for the appointment of bishops in Guadeloupe, Martinique and Reunion.
- 1851 Libermann, still writing individual letters to Spiritans, begins to compose a summary version of his concern and advice, *Instructions to missionaries*. At the end of the year his health deteriorates significantly.
- 1852 Libermann dies on 2 February at 30 rue Lhomond, Paris.

Some Spiritan communities named after Libermann

Communauté Fr. Libermann (Namur) Belgium
Comunidad Espiritana Padre Libermann (Santa Cruz) Bolivia
Instituto Padre Libermann (Salette) Brazil
Francis Libermann High School (Toronto) Canada
Noviciat Libermann (Lubumbashi) Democratic Republic
of Congo
Libermann Haus (Knechtsteden) Germany
Maison Libermann (Port-au-Prince) Haiti
Maison Libermann (Mahajanga) Madagascar
Maison Libermann (Rose Hill) Mauritius
Libermannhof (Berg en Dal) Holland
Libermann hof (Gennep) Holland
Maison Libermann (Brazzaville) Congo
Maison Libermann (Libreville) Gabon
Postulantado Libermann (Fernando de la Mora) Paraguay
Comunidade Libermann (Braga) Portugal
Libermann Hall (Bethel Park) USA
Libermann House (New Braunfels) USA

Footnotes

*ND: Notes et Documents à la vie et à l'oeuvre du Vénérable
François-Marie-Paul Libermann*

LS: Lettres Spirituelles du Vénérable Libermann

- 1 “The truth is that the imbalances under which the modern world labours are linked with that more basic imbalance rooted in the heart of man.” (Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World no.10, Vatican II document 1965)
- 2 Libermann’s godparents at baptism were Baron François de Malet and Countess Marie d’Heuzé. Paul came from his good friend (David) Paul Drach.
- 3 Letter to Samson Libermann, 6 January 1826 (Libermann, *Spiritual letters to people in the world*, Duquesne University Press 1963) p 3
- 4 ND I 55-56, Récit de M Gamon 1850
- 5 John Shea, *Gospel Light*, (Crossroad 1998) pp100-101
- 6 ND I 66, Récit de M Gamon 1850
- 7 *Dictionary of Saints* by John Delaney (Doubleday 1980) p 234
- 8 ND VIII 203, Lettre à Jérôme Schwindenhammer, 3 août, 1846
- 9 LS II 26, Lettre à M Leray, 14 juillet 1839
- 10 ND II 198, Lettre à M Clair, octobre 1839
- 11 LS I 69, Lettre à M Leray, 23 septembre 1834
- 12 Alphonse Gilbert, *You have laid your hand on me...* “Mental prayer is an important business but a very simple business...it should consist in a repose which is simple, peaceful and full of confidence before Our Lord; that is all.” (ND VII 37-38, Lettre à M Collin, 29 janvier 1845)

- 13 Letter to Fr Charles Lairé, 8 May 1851 (Libermann, *Spiritual letters to Clergy and Religious* vol.1, Duquesne University Press 1963) p 274-275
- 14 ND I 98 note 1, lettre de M Delucheux
- 15 Letter to Fr Charles Lairé, 8 may 1851 (as previous note 13) p 275-276
- 16 Letter to Paul Carron, December 19,1839 (Libermann, *Spiritual letters to Clergy and Religious*, Vol.2, Duquesne University Press 1964) p 294-295
- 17 ND III 244, Lettre à M Carron, 2 août 1842
- 18 LS II, 293-294, Lettre à M Féret, 13 novembre 1839
- 19 ND I 674-675, Lettre à M Carbon, 15 décembre 1839
- 20 Alphonse Gilbert, CSSp *You have laid your hand on me ...* p97-98 (ND IX 330-331, Lettre à la communauté de Dakar et du Gabon, 19 novembre 1847)
- 21 Paul Coulon CSSp in *Libermann 1802-1852 (éditeurs Coulon et Brasseur) Cerf 1988* p489-546, “Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres” ou *La stratégie missionnaire d’un mystique*”
- 22 Letter to Paul Carron, July 27 1838 (Libermann, *Spiritual letters to Clergy and Religious* vol.2, Duquesne University Press 1964) p265
- 23 ND I 675-676, Lettre à M Carbon, 15 décembre 1839
- 24 Elsewhere I have considered this unconditional surrender in more detail as second conversion in *Life began at forty. The second conversion of Francis Libermann CSSp.* by Bernard A Kelly CSSp, Paraclete Press (Dublin), available from Spiritans, 121 Victoria Park Ave, Toronto, ON M4E 3S2 Canada. \$20 (Cdn).

**Where are you?
A short retreat for men and women in hiding.
A few steps into the open with Francis Libermann.**

by Bernard A. Kelly, CSSp

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