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### 01. People must be led freely, with kindness and flexibility

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## People must be led freely, with kindness and flexibility

*To Father Gaudaire<sup>1</sup>*

*In this letter, Libermann is replying to Father Gaudaire, an Eudist<sup>2</sup>. The Eudist Congregation was trying to re-establish itself after being suppressed at the French Revolution. It was experiencing much difficulty and Gaudaire had asked Libermann for his thoughts about the reasons for it and what remedies he could suggest. It seems that the aims of the Eudist Congregation were too vague, and that it was involved in too many works which were not compatible with its ethos. The Rules were not clear, the members or candidates for membership were unsure about their real vocation, and the superior was overwhelmed with work and inclined to be too rigid when dealing with people. When Libermann looks at the possible ways of righting this precarious situation; he advises that the Rules should not be imposed from above, but should be discussed by the members of the Eudist community who can then have the final word on the matter. In particular, this letter suggests that only those rules should be kept which will be useful for the members. We can appreciate here the flexibility which Libermann had learnt during his two years in the Eudist novitiate at Rennes.*

Rome 5<sup>th</sup> July 1840

[...] I believe you should give in on certain points of the Rule which are being questioned, such as poverty and stole fees, I think people have already made up their minds on that, and will probably not be open to further discussion. If you decide to

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<sup>1</sup> N. D. I, pp. 570 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Index of Names

concentrate on Junior Seminaries, I don't think you will need a very strict rule. Poverty and other such matters were necessary above all because of the Missions.

There is something else which crosses my mind. Those kinds of Rules are all very well when they are adopted willingly. In that case they can be very beneficial in a community. But fervour doesn't always continue for very long, and none of you have made a vow to be poor. If people are forced to live in poverty against their wills, then we can only expect the worst and, in any case, the desired effect will not last very long. Nevertheless, all the needs of the members of the community must still be met, and nobody should have to buy anything out of necessity, but only when it seems useful. What really is important is that everybody has the same form of dress, and that simplicity and equality are observed by all the members.

*[It would seem necessary that the superior of the community agrees to have a house council, and take note of the opinions of the members. It is also important that the members of the council should not be sticklers for principles. Is Father Leray sufficiently humane to be in charge of men?]*

Father Leray is a good priest, who is full of zeal for the Congregation and able to serve it well. On the other hand, he is too severe and too emotional. He shows his strictness by always adopting rigorous principles and wants the rule to be perfectly observed, with no half measures. He demands all that in a severe and harsh way which displeases everybody. As for his emotionalism, he embraces ideas with too much vivacity and pursues them almost aggressively. This sometimes prevents him from seeing things clearly and leads one to question his judgement. (What I really mean that he has the tendency to make bad decisions). He also holds on too strongly to his own opinions. I don't ever remember seeing him giving in graciously in any matter whatsoever. If he does

seem to compromise, you can be sure it is only apparent. Deep down he has not changed his mind in the least. All those things are very harmful in a community and prevent him achieving the great good he could do were he to be without such failings. He really has to correct those faults and you have the duty of trying to make sure he does.

When he examines things, he only sees the principle involved and wants everything to conform to it. However, in difficult matters, we can only act prudently when we take into account not just the principles involved, but also the need to have one eye on the situation as it exists. We must look at the men in question and at the circumstances in which they find themselves. I agree that we have to try and bring everything back to first principles, but at the same time, we must be ready to modify, explain, and apply the principles according to the actual circumstances in which people are living. The person who does not know how to bend and apply principles prudently, should never be put in charge of such a work. Neither can he be considered a perfect priest, even if he has the name of being a miracle worker.

I take my leave of you, dear Father Gaudaire.

Your most devoted brother and servant in Jesus and Mary,

*F. Libermann, acolyte*

As regards the three hundred francs, I intended to use them to buy a man out of the army camp at Filouze so that he would not be conscripted. If it is not needed for that purpose, please send the money to me here in Rome. Father Cottineau will be able to tell you if the man needs it. I have already sent him six hundred francs which I was given for that very purpose, so the total now comes to nine hundred francs. I think that even that

amount will hardly be sufficient. However, if there is any money left over, you can send it to me. My address is,  
c/o Signore Patriarcha,  
Vicolo del Pinacolo, 31,  
Rome.