

Duquesne University

## Duquesne Scholarship Collection

---

A Spiritan Anthology

Anthologie Spiritaine

---

1-1-2011

### 07. Educating young bishops

Christian de Mare CSSp

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/anthologie-spiritaine-english>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

---

#### Repository Citation

de Mare, C. (2011). 07. Educating young bishops. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/anthologie-spiritaine-english/92>

This Chapter V is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthologie Spiritaine at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in A Spiritan Anthology by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

## Educating young bishops

*To Bishops Bessieux and Kobès<sup>1</sup>*

*Bishop Bessieux and Bishop Kobès boarded the ship "Acheron" at Toulon on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1849. With them were six priests, three Brothers and six new Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Castres (the "Blue Sisters") who were on their way to Gabon.*

*On 20<sup>th</sup> March, Libermann received a letter from the two bishops. It was dated Cadiz, 28<sup>th</sup> February. In it, the bishops demanded more missionaries as a matter of urgency. They insisted that Libermann should concentrate on sending men to Africa rather than to the French colonies under his care. If he did not agree, they threatened to contact other religious orders with a view to obtaining the required personnel.*

*Libermann fell gravely ill towards the middle of April. On 5<sup>th</sup> June he left Paris to recuperate in Lower Normandy, in a town called Lande de Lougé. He was staying with the family of Father Léon-Michel Le Vavasseur<sup>2</sup>. It was from their home that he replied to the letter of our two bishops.*

Lande de Lougé, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1849

My dear Bishops,

I am writing to you jointly because I am not well enough to write many letters at the moment. I am sending you these few lines to assure you and our dear confreres about my present situation and that of our two houses. The cholera which has been raging throughout Paris has not affected us here. We lost Father Musson with typhoid fever. There is cholera at Amiens, but Notre Dame du Gard has not been affected. The

---

<sup>1</sup> N. D. XI, pp. 128-132

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

epidemic is getting less and I hope that the good Lord will protect us from such a scourge in the future.

As for myself, I have been seriously sick for the past two months and have been unable to do any business whatsoever, even writing letters. I was in danger of death on several occasions. The illness started with high fever but then I felt better and started a kind of convalescence; but I had a relapse with very violent colic and much pain on the side of my liver. This all happened when the cholera outbreak was at its peak as a result of the tropical temperatures we have been experiencing in Paris, with thirty five to forty degrees in the shade. I was not out of danger by any means, because all illnesses seemed to be ending up in cholera, and more often than not the kind which takes people off without delay.

However, I recovered from that relapse and the convalescence seemed to work for about two days. Then I had a second relapse; I had a severely upset stomach and I was sent away from Paris to this house in the country, owned by the parents of Father Léon Le Vasseur. They have taken very good care of me in the eight or so days I have been here, so I am now feeling much better. The fever left me on the third day and my stomach settled to the extent that I consider myself cured. However I will not be returning to Paris until I have made a complete recovery.

I am still too feeble to reply to the two letters you sent. I will only say that I felt very upset because your letters were seen by our confreres in Paris; the first was actually addressed to Father Lannurien<sup>1</sup> and the second arrived when I was at my lowest ebb and it was read by the confreres.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Index of Names

What you wrote, how you wrote, and the fiery words with which you made your demands, caused a great deal of concern for everybody in the Mother House. For my own part, I was worried, not about the matters involved, which we can discuss later, but because it concerns questions of the utmost importance; but you seem to have come to your decisions in a thoughtless and excitable frame of mind. You appear to have ignored the feelings of the rest of the Congregation because there was virtually no consultation on the question. You threatened to contact other religious orders if I did not immediately give in to your demands and all that was contained in the letter you wrote even before arriving in Africa. Your second letter, written from the mission itself, underlined what you said in the first and caused further pain to all the confreres.

I have used my enforced rest to think seriously about the whole matter. While I was considering the affair, I was convinced that I would soon be meeting my Maker because I was so ill. I assure you, that in those moments, when mere human considerations seemed of no importance whatsoever, I was just as hurt and worried as I am at present. For the love of God, please use more moderate language, think of the whole Community and do not speak in a way calculated to bring disunity into our ranks.

I expect you from now on to stop being indifferent to what concerns our Congregation of the Holy Spirit. I am certain, for my part, the tone in which you write is only your unfortunate way of putting things. If you really were indifferent, I assure you it still would not lessen the sincere regard in which I hold you both. Nor can it diminish the commitment with which I will do everything possible for the good of the mission. But writing as you did muddies the waters and causes awkwardness and

disharmony. Why do you think Propaganda Fide<sup>1</sup> has put missions in the hands of religious congregations, allowing them to propose candidates to be Vicars Apostolic? Surely it is because Rome wants to see the Missions being run in a concerted way. This unity is so important and even necessary for the success of the mission, but it is simply being destroyed by your brusque and abrasive way of expressing yourselves.

You mentioned in your second letter that you have the grace of state. It was read out to me when my sickness was at its height. I felt in mortal danger and I said to myself: *"If I were to appear before God, what would what would I have to say about the attitude which lay behind these letters?"* I was certainly convinced that they were not written under the influence of the grace of state!

I would not use words like these unless I was sure that I could depend on your feelings for me and that you were convinced of my love for both of you. You are bishops, and I am nothing but a poor man, but I know who I am speaking to and you know me well enough to allow me to speak in this way. So I tell you that you have leapt into enumerating your needs far too quickly and in words which are severe and rigid. That is not the way the Spirit of God works. I am convinced that if you do not deal with matters more gently, slowly and wisely, you will reverse all the good that has been done in your mission and may even cause it irreparable damage.

For the moment, I will limit myself to saying the following: I am sorry if I have caused you any suffering and I forgive you for what you have said to me. Your words caused me anxiety rather than suffering, but I place all my trust in God. It is He who will guide and enlighten you.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Roman Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples.

I will deal with this matter at more length in another letter. To put your minds at rest, I can tell you that we have all but abandoned the idea of sending personnel to the colonies. We are convinced that we are doing the right thing because of the great needs of your mission of Guinea. It looks as if our negotiations regarding Mauritius will not come to anything. That means we will probably be able to send you more missionaries than we had first intended. You are just beginning the rainy season out there, but if you want us to send somebody to you before Autumn, then let us know. Tell us also if the mission is willing to pay for their outward passage. From all appearances, the Government is not very eager to cover the costs.

I beseech you once again, not to be so impatient, severe, or thoughtless in the way you run the mission. Do not cut yourselves off from the Community, and do nothing without consulting it. If you carry on as you have threatened in your two letters, you will cause nothing but confusion.

Father Briot is busy seeing to the purchases you asked him to make. There is one point however which needs clearing up. In the matter of wooden planks, you have asked for twenty five cubic metres. With that number of planks you could build a whole town! All the forests of Alsace and the Vosges would not suffice to supply enough wood and the cost would run into more than a million francs. I presume that somebody has made a mistake. I have asked Father Briot to buy a reasonable quantity of planks, unless you indicate in your next letter just how many you want.

Please write a letter which can preserve and increase the love between us. I can assure you that it has not yet diminished, but I have to admit that we are worried.

Please give my warmest regards to all the confreres<sup>1</sup>.

My dear Bishops, I remain in Jesus and Mary you most devoted and poorest servant.

*F. Libermann, priest*

---

<sup>1</sup> A further letter from Libermann to these bishops on the same subject can be found in Chapter VI, Text 7.