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## Francis Libermann: A Spiritual Guide for the Twenty-First Century

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## FRANCIS LIBERMANN: A SPIRITUAL GUIDE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

### INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) affirmed that every member of the church is called to holiness (LG, no. 39). This sometimes forgotten truth germinated a seed deeply planted in the church from its beginning and flourished variously in different places at different times. The prodigious publication of spiritual classics,<sup>1</sup> academic interest in spirituality,<sup>2</sup> and new contemplative practices, for example, centering prayer,<sup>3</sup> have opened up many new paths to holiness. How are Catholics to discern the reading, study, and practices best suited to them in their quest for holiness?<sup>4</sup> Vatican II proposed a gospel and ecclesial path provided by our common Christian heritage (LG, nos. 40–42) and looks to religious congregations to share ways to holiness inherited from their founders, that can “give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality” and wise spiritual guidance for all the baptized.<sup>5</sup> One such founder is Venerable Francis Mary Paul Libermann (1802–52).

Francis Libermann (second founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, “The Spiritans”) is a well-known name in the missionary annals of the nineteenth century. He, along with Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (founder of the Society of Missionaries of Africa) and Bishop Daniele Comboni (founder of both the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus and the Comboni Missionary Sisters) were pioneers “stretching beyond the parameters of the official church in Europe in their time.”<sup>6</sup> His 1846 Memorandum to *Propaganda Fide*<sup>7</sup> “is now regarded as one of the greatest missionary texts of the 19th-century.”<sup>8</sup> It clearly demonstrates that “Libermann promoted missionary accommodation to African customs, formation of indigenous clergy and subsequently bishops, and evangelization of Africans by Africans.”<sup>9</sup>

Libermann was also one of the great spiritual directors of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Roger Tillard, a Dominican priest, described his “openness to the Spirit and to the world” as “revolutionary” for its time particularly as “systematic and methodical drilling in holiness becomes flexibility and profound respect for each person and his or her mode of being.”<sup>11</sup> Tillard ranked him, along with Saints Benedict, Francis, and Ignatius, as a pivotal figure in the history of Catholic religious Orders. The Spiritan Bishop, Mgr. Jean Gay, recognized the relevance of Libermann’s spirituality in the wake of changes following the Second Vatican Council. “We, as Spiritans, have the precious advantage of possessing a guide who was of extraordinary virtue,

wise and well balanced, whose supernatural impulses never go in opposition to practical common sense, and in whom we can oftentimes discover the solution to today's challenges."<sup>12</sup>

The former Spiritan superior general and theological adviser at Vatican II, Fr. Joseph Lécuyer, writing in 1980 on Libermann's spirituality noted that he "refused to be bound by Gallican, nationalist, colonialist, political, racial or social ideologies whatever their origin."<sup>13</sup> Adrian van Kaam proposed Libermann's spiritual guidance as "transcultural," in that it possesses "elements that are fundamental for any spirituality and, *a priori*, for a transcultural, missionary spirituality."<sup>14</sup> Pierre Blanchard, professor at the Catholic University of Lyon, in an article which first appeared in the French review, *La Vie Spirituelle*, claimed Libermann as "a spiritual guide for our contemporary world,"<sup>15</sup> particularly as a "practitioner in directing souls" rather than "a theoretician of mystical theology."<sup>16</sup>

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## STUDYING LIBERMANN

The burgeoning interest in Libermann in the 1980's was prompted by the Spiritan General Chapter of 1976, which recognized that the congregation's renewal in the light of Vatican II required the research of its founding charism. It called for a study of Libermann's thought and apostolic vision, "so as to derive inspiration from them" (GA 49). The Chapter added, "It is particularly important to interpret and adapt his teaching to the needs of our times" (GA 49) and "to spread a knowledge of Spiritan spirituality and traditions" (GA 51).

The Spiritan Studies Group set up shortly after that Chapter to help realize these goals discovered that Libermann had little significance for many in his own congregation. Research concluded that "those who are searching for authentic religious missionary renewal are much more likely to turn to contemporary authors who know the problems, the needs, and the hopes of today's world."<sup>17</sup> The group comprised confrères from different parts of the Spiritan world. Their work, beginning perhaps as a babel of confusion, moved towards a profound re-discovery of Libermann's life and writing. From 1976 to 1988, they published twenty-two issues of *Spiritans Papers* in French and English. Libermann was the subject of twenty-one articles with a variety of topics covering aspects of his life, writings, missionary vision, and spirituality.

Libermann was French, wrote in French, and was a key figure in the French missionary movement of the nineteenth century. He continues to be a subject of research for French missiology and spiritual theology.<sup>18</sup> The congregation's archives at Chevilly-Larue, a suburb of Paris, preserve

Libermann's original letters, writings, rules and general documentation associated with his life and work.<sup>19</sup>

Since Vatican II, there has been increasing interest in the study of Libermann in English. A small group of Spiritan scholars, such as Frs. Henry Koren, Adrian van Kaam, Bernard A. Kelly, and Seán Farragher, presented him to an English-speaking audience. There was also an increasing interest in translating Libermann into English with pioneers such as Spiritan Frs. Walter van de Putte, F. X. Malinowski, and Myles Fay leading the way. For the most part their work provides literal translations of Libermann's writings.<sup>20</sup> Fay noted that he translated Libermann's *Commentary on St. John's Gospel telle qu'elle* (as is). Recognizing the time-specific nature of the writing, he proposed the possibility of its transposition "into terms current in some modern writing, terms like enrichment, commitment, polarity, dynamics, vulnerability, brokenness, awareness, challenging, beautiful, exciting, having a feel for or a sense of, being authentic and so on . . ." However, he chose not to do this, as "they would ring false in the context."<sup>21</sup>

### TRANSLATING LIBERMANN

In the Foreword to Fay's translation of Libermann's commentary, the editor, Fr. Brian Gogan, C.S.Sp., noted a problem for readers. "The journey the reader takes is two-fold—back to mid-nineteenth century France to Francis Libermann—and secondly, in his company, to the faith world of St. John."<sup>22</sup> But, he added, "If they can cross these barriers, then they will find themselves immersed in a profound and loving awareness of the one true God made flesh in Jesus Christ."<sup>23</sup>

*The challenge is not to repeat Libermann's words*

The challenge is not to repeat Libermann's words or explain his concepts in the language borrowed from his time and place, but to interpret Libermann in contemporary terms. In other words, we need a Libermann hermeneutic that connects him with spiritual seekers today. The work of interpretation will flourish only when there is confidence that his life and thought is valuable for today, and can transcend its own time, place, language, and world-view.

A particular difficulty in translating Libermann is that he "was over twenty when he learnt French. He learnt it sufficiently to make it a clear and adequate instrument for his thoughts, but not sufficiently to become a Racine or Victor Hugo (born the same year as Libermann). His vocabulary remained limited."<sup>24</sup> However, there is a directness and clarity in Libermann that allows for a faithful rendering of his thought through a creative interpretation that retains its original insight and power for the contemporary reader.

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*attentive to human experience and open to the multi-faceted inspirations of the Holy Spirit*

*His method was existential; that is why it remains relevant*

## INTERPRETING LIBERMANN

Libermann's broad anthropological approach of accepting people as they are and not wishing to change them or "make them better" according to some social standard of his time, makes his writing both amenable and insightful for today. His gentle voice speaks through the ages, of God, the human person, and the relationship between them—spirituality's perennial quest. We find in his writing a holistic understanding of the human person, a quest for the sacred and for life's meaning and purpose, the notion of personal flourishing and the search for ultimate value.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary Western spirituality reflects the postmodern culture in which it operates and often defines itself in secular terms.<sup>26</sup> An act of faith is required not only in Libermann's ability to speak, but in our ability to hear him.

Other congregations have made that act of faith in their founders. The American Franciscan spiritual writer, Fr. Richard Rohr, sees the teaching of founder, St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), as relevant for today. He speaks of "Franciscanism" as "a sidewalk spirituality for the streets of the world, a path highly possible and attractive for all would-be seekers."<sup>27</sup> Jesuits have adapted and re-presented the *Spiritual Exercises* of their founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola (1492–1556), as a program of spiritual development to meet the needs of modern people.<sup>28</sup> One adaptation, by Monty Williams S.J., is a good example of this. Williams explains that, "the language we use in this exploration of the path of intimacy is Christian. It emerges from a religious tradition in Catholic spiritual life articulated by St. Ignatius of Loyola."<sup>29</sup>

How can Spiritans develop Libermann's spirituality to achieve the "modest goal" set by Pope Francis of a "call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges, and opportunities"?<sup>30</sup> Libermann had a practical approach to holiness. He was attentive to human experience and open to the multi-faceted inspirations of the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup> A life experience that knew deep family belonging and rejection, much success and failure, and dramatic change and new trust in God energized his spirituality. As Alphonse Gilbert put it, "Francis was a mystic before everything else: he spoke from experience when he elaborated on the spiritual ways. His method was existential; that is why it remains relevant."<sup>32</sup> He knew that human endeavor could not exhaust the mystery of the individual's relationship with God. "Divine and interior things must not be subjected to the examination of our reason."<sup>33</sup> Rather he emphasized that grace operates primarily at the level of the human heart. In spiritual direction, he prioritized the will over the intellect for "mental

*Libermann is also aware that God loved this 'nothing'*

preoccupations” often disturb the freedom and simplicity in which we are to live.<sup>34</sup>

Libermann’s spirituality begins and ends with the assertion, *Dieu est tout, l’homme n’est rien*, “God is all, man is nothing.” These words come from his own journey to Christian faith and, spoken on his deathbed, bear testimony to his life. This is the quotation most associated with him, a proclamation of faith, which “must be read in the light of his understanding of the Absolute that God is. If God is all, then man must be nothing. But Libermann is also aware that God loved this ‘nothing’ and predestined a marvelous dignity for it, hence he too loves man.”<sup>35</sup>

### **LIBERMANN, THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE<sup>36</sup>**

A rare study in English on Libermann’s spiritual teaching, written shortly after the hundredth anniversary of his death, by the Irish Spiritan, Bernard J. Kelly, suggested that the people of Libermann’s time knew him best as a spiritual director.<sup>37</sup> According to Kelly, a professor of spiritual theology, Libermann “had a rare understanding of the workings of human nature and of grace which fitted him most particularly for dealing with the practical problems of the soul’s ascent to God.”<sup>38</sup> Kelly considered Libermann more a practitioner than a theoretician, more a spiritual guide than a spiritual author. He saw the importance of spiritual accompaniment for those who took Christian living seriously. Those setting out on the journey of Christian discipleship benefit greatly from a spiritual companionship that the direction relationship provides.

In the considerable correspondence with his brother, Samson, the first in the family to convert to Catholicism, we discover not only a deep fraternal attachment, but also a significant amount of spiritual guidance. In one letter, Libermann addressed Samson’s difficulty with meditation and, a reluctance to receive Holy Communion due to scruples. His advice was clear. “Make the state of your soul known to a prudent and wise man and your fear will disappear.”<sup>39</sup> He added, “Make known to a man of God everything that takes place within you, and then be guided by his counsels.”<sup>40</sup>

*Libermann set great importance on spiritual direction for growth in Christian holiness*

Libermann set great importance on spiritual direction for growth in Christian holiness. At the same time, he relativized the role of the director, urging in one letter, “Do not put your confidence in my words, in my direction of your soul, but seek to obey God alone and to follow his guidance. Never base yourself on what you might think to be good in me.”<sup>41</sup> He understood his role simply as a transponder for the Holy Spirit’s guidance of another.

Libermann’s spirituality bears testimony to his experience

of God's call revealed in a powerful conversion experience at his baptism when he was twenty-four years of age. His response, by joining the seminary, and the deepening of that choice through sickness and adversity, schooled him in the way of Christian suffering, emptying him of any sense of self-importance and prompting him to place his trust in God alone. Perhaps the most significant moment in Libermann's life, second only to that of his conversion and baptism, was in 1839, when at thirty-seven years of age, he decided to travel to Rome and there, against all the odds, seek permission to found a missionary society for *l'œuvre des noirs* (the Work for the Blacks). Bernard A. Kelly refers to this as his "second conversion" when Libermann gave sublime expression to the conviction that "God is all" and describes it as nothing less than "a complete surrender of himself into God's hands."<sup>42</sup>

### TOWARDS A LIBERMANN HERMENEUTIC

How are we to interpret Libermann's life experience and spirituality? We can begin, as he did, with the New Testament. In this, we are in tune with contemporary Christian spirituality, as all Christian spiritual traditions "are ultimately rooted in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, particularly the teachings of Jesus Christ in the four gospels."<sup>43</sup> The gospel model of Christian discipleship begins with a divine call prompting a human response that matures into participation in God's mission in the world. Jesus chose those he wanted—without any reference to human qualities to justify his choice. They were to leave all things to follow him, to the extent of giving up their lives out of love (John 15:12-13) and share in his mission to bring about God's Kingdom in the world.<sup>44</sup> Libermann's commentary on John's gospel transposes the call of John's two disciples (John 1:35-39) into the language of a spiritual relationship beginning with attraction and desire that leads to knowing the Lord and, finally, commitment to discipleship.

Libermann described maturing in discipleship as "three movements in the human soul that gives itself wholly to our Lord."<sup>45</sup>

*All three function in virtue of his grace, which acts on our various powers. The first is that attraction to him, that seeking and desire, which carry us along towards him. The second is the application of our mind in order to see and know him and be taken up with him; this movement was still at work in the two disciples. The third comes after these other two, and only when one possesses him: the will enjoys him and commits itself to being entirely, definitively, directed to him alone.<sup>46</sup>*

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The Libermann hermeneutic offered here is informed primarily by a letter Libermann wrote from Rennes to a seminary director in 1838<sup>47</sup> and his spiritual commentary on the Gospel of St. John, written two years later in Rome. The letter describes Libermann's method of spiritual direction and the commentary provides a gospel narrative for the guidance he offered.

### ***1. The Call to Relationship with God***

Libermann presented “the high ideal of Christian perfection” to those who aspired to “the perfection of the interior life.”<sup>48</sup> The spiritual journey into union with God begins as a quest for the sacred, a desire for God, put there by God, who approaches us according to our imagination and feelings.<sup>49</sup> The classical expression of this desire is found in the Confessions of St. Augustine, “For yourself you have made us, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” The aspiration for holiness is the starting point for the journey to spiritual perfection. God takes the initiative, igniting enthusiasm for the spiritual by exciting the imagination and stimulating the senses.<sup>50</sup> Beckoned by Philip, Nathaniel came to Jesus who, seeing his sincerity and good faith, “imparted a strength that penetrated to the very depths of his soul.”<sup>51</sup> Those seeking a spiritual guide do so because they feel drawn to God. They want to set out on a journey of exploration and seek a guide to help them. If there is no enthusiasm, there is no journey!

The role of the spiritual guide at this stage is twofold. First, to validate the desire for God as an operation of grace. Libermann warns that directors “cannot guide souls properly unless their principal attention is fixed upon the activity of grace.”<sup>52</sup> This is not a time for moderation, Libermann says, but a time to “run and fly in an outburst of faith.”<sup>53</sup> He discouraged prudence calling it “a very dangerous virtue to want” at this stage, as it is a prudence “of ‘self-love’ instead of the prudence of God.”<sup>54</sup> The important thing then is to let God act freely and “to fix attention on the universal personal Truth that is Our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>55</sup> It is the guide's task to recognize and remove the obstacles in the way of divine action, rather than impose a system or a method.

Second, the guide needs to make interventions that conserve the enthusiasm and channels the initial energy towards long-term discipleship. We have an example of such an intervention from Libermann's correspondence with a seminarian who wanted to be a missionary. Eugene Dupont wrote to Libermann expecting a prompt reply and immediate enlightenment on his desire. Some months elapsed before Libermann could reply.

*The aspiration for holiness is the starting point for the journey to spiritual perfection*

*to recognize and remove the obstacles in the way of divine action, rather than impose a system or a method*



He interpreted this unavoidable delay as providing a lesson for Dupont on patience and trust in God. His letter began, “It seems that Our Lord Jesus Christ wants to make good use of all possible means to moderate your eagerness and natural activity and make you acquire the habit of restraint, self-possession, and interior peace in his presence.”<sup>56</sup>

## ***2. Leaving all to follow Him***

Libermann recognized the need to move beyond the senses and the imagination to a deeper relationship with the Lord that discerns in faith what is invisible to the naked eye.<sup>57</sup> The “Feeding of the Five Thousand” (John 6:1f.) provides a gospel narrative to illustrate this transition from imaginary to real discipleship. Many failed to comprehend that Jesus offered not only food that would satisfy their physical hunger for a short time, but also spiritual food that would last to eternal life. They did not believe, for “no one can come to me unless the Father draw him” (John. 6:66). Commenting on this verse, Libermann remarked “it is not nature that gives perseverance, but grace.”<sup>58</sup> Many “withdrew from the way of perfection which our Lord taught and returned to their former life of flesh and blood.”<sup>59</sup>

Like the apostle Peter, those who choose to stay with Jesus will say, “No! We do not want to leave you, we want to become ever more attached to you, for no one else has that word of life which thrills us and gives us life.”<sup>60</sup> These will advance in the way of spiritual maturity by attentiveness to the working of God’s grace. “We try to do nothing; we try to quiet all the movements of the soul and we gently correspond to the grace which is in us and prompts us in all our interior and exterior actions . . . [You are to] follow grace; never proceed, never run ahead of it.”<sup>61</sup>

The role of the spiritual guide at this stage is twofold. First, to point out any thinking or activity that prevents God’s free action in the human soul. We are not to hurry in with solutions to relieve anxiety and a sense of emptiness. Rather we are to guard the sacred space and not obstruct the free movement of grace. We are to remain passive and open to the Spirit’s promptings.

Second, the spiritual guide encourages the seeker to continue the journey. Libermann often encountered a sense of defeat and discouragement among those he advised.<sup>62</sup> On experiencing setbacks, they began to blame themselves and forgot that the primary agent of their holiness is the grace of God. To a seminarian in this condition he wrote, “Your long catalogue of faults doesn’t frighten me at all. None of them is a true obstacle to the stream of divine graces, which our Good Master destines for the poor, abandoned souls through your service. Cheer up, therefore, and be full of confidence.”<sup>63</sup>

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### **3. At One with Him**

The goal of the spiritual journey is a discipleship free from any support of the senses, imagination of the mind, or force of human will. A state of pure faith and simple prayer brings about contemplative union with God. It is entirely the work of grace, the action of the Holy Spirit. The gospel narrative of Mary hurrying outside the village to meet Jesus (John 11:29-30) after the burial of Lazarus, her brother, prompted Libermann to reflect as follows:

*Jesus does not come to us or into us but rather draws us to himself*

*The divine will attracts us to the Word through the grace that the sacred humanity communicates to us. This grace brings about this union. It comes about through the movement of our heart towards the one who draws us. This takes place through faith, hope, and charity. From all this it follows that Jesus does not come to us or into us but rather draws us to himself. Once we are united to him, he becomes our life by communicating his life to us, a life which is the same as that of the Father and is in him substantially through the Word.<sup>64</sup>*

Libermann, the missionary, is, as spiritual guide, at his most mystical in his writing of our union with the Lord in terms of the union of the Son with the Father through the Spirit of Jesus. Commenting on John 10:41-42, “. . . many of them believed in him,” Libermann wrote, “Once a soul comes close and follows him, he lets it see some part of the divine wonders he embodies; then the mind reflects on things, learns to know our Lord, becomes clear and convinced and the will comes into play. When will is joined to reason, the soul is established in faith through perfect adhesion to our Lord and his divine word.”<sup>65</sup>

*True prayer is a constant self-abandonment to the will of God; a constant thirst for God*

There is need to nurture an integration of prayer with daily living. As Christian disciples, “we are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission.”<sup>66</sup> The phrase, “practical union,” is part of the Libermann lexicon. The mutual enrichment of prayer with action was not only evident in his life, but a key principle of his spirituality. God perfects the spirit of prayer within us so that there is a movement from reflective prayer to a prayer of communion with God in which we simply come and rest in faith before God. “True prayer is not a question of voluntarism or a tensed action; it is a constant self-abandonment to the will of God; a constant thirst for God.”<sup>67</sup> Prayer is openness to God in whom we find our ultimate purpose and identity as children of God.

Kelly, in his study of Libermann as a spiritual director, understood the importance he gave to the action of the Holy Spirit in the direction of souls. “Our Blessed Lord, acting in souls through his Holy Spirit, is the supreme Pastor and hence the supreme director.”<sup>68</sup> He stressed the need for a spiritual director at the beginning of the spiritual journey, but when “a soul has arrived at a relatively stable spiritual condition, and has learned by experience the difference between the ways of nature and those of grace, the need for a spiritual director is much less.”<sup>69</sup> Libermann had many spiritual conversations with others discerning God’s will in decisions he would make, but we do not hear of a spiritual director. At the same time, Libermann warned against self-delusion. He feared illusions in himself, particularly at the time in Rennes when he was discerning what God’s will was for him. “Feeling himself particularly vulnerable to illusion, he set high store by the advice of others.”<sup>70</sup> We are to protect ourselves against illusions by overcoming our self-love and surrendering ourselves entirely to the mercy and love of God. We are not to take ourselves too seriously, however, as “there is probably no saint in heaven who has not had a great number of them [illusions] in his life, excepting, however, the Blessed Virgin, and a few others.”<sup>71</sup>

The Spirit is at work in and through spiritual friendships and community discernment. “We do not live for ourselves, nor should we live in, or by ourselves.”<sup>72</sup> A shared life in common for the glory of God and the evangelization of the world was Libermann’s vision for his followers. The Spirit of God enables community and empowers mission. This is summarized by the *Spiritum Rule of Life* (SRL, 39), “the Spirit’s greatest gift, is the sign that it is the Lord who brings us together and sends us out. ‘It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognize you as my disciples’ (John 13:35).”

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## CONCLUSION

Libermann’s goal of union with God achieved through a dialogue of the heart and openness to the Spirit culminating in an integration of action with prayer marks him out as a spiritual guide for our time. Van Kaam concluded his biography of Libermann by noting that he “was destined to shine, not within the household of Judaism, but across broad stretches of the outer world, a veritable light shining unto the revelation of the Gentiles. He became the pioneer and fountainhead of the doctrine of simplicity and childlike surrender to God, which in our times has become the commonly travelled path to holiness.”<sup>73</sup>

Commenting on the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, Libermann noted, “It was a

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well, and not a flowing spring, which irrigates the country by itself; this was meant to show that when the divine spring arrived not all the inhabitants of the country would drink of it, but only those who came to draw.”<sup>74</sup> We can liken Liebermann's spirituality to a deep well containing spiritual riches for our time. Only those who draw deeply from it will experience its sweetness and know its beauty. It is for Spiritans today to approach this, their own well, and drink deeply. Then, they in turn, can quench the thirst of those who seek to live out their baptismal calling and say with St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- GA *Guidelines for Animation*. Document of the Spiritan General Chapter, 1974.
- LG Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*.
- L.S. *Lettres Spirituelles du Vénérable Liebermann*. Tome 2. Deuxième Edition. Paris: Libraire Poussielgue Frères, 1891.
- ND *Notes et Documents Relatifs à la vie et à l'Oeuvre du Vénérable François-Marie-Paul Liebermann*. 13 vols. + supplements. Paris. Maison-Mère, 1929–41.
- SRL *Spiritans Rule of Life 2013*. Rome: Generalate, 2013.
- Spiritual Letters of the Venerable Francis Liebermann*. Translated and edited by Walter van de Putte, C.S.Sp. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Volume 1: Spiritual Letters to Sisters and Aspirants* 1963 (eds: Van de Putte & Walter, Collery, James).
- Volume 2: Letters to People in the World*, 1963.
- Volume 3: Letters to Clergy and Religious*, 1963.
- Volume 4: Letters to Clergy and Religious*, 1964.
- Volume 5: Letters to Clergy and Religious*, 1966.

## ENDNOTES

1. One of the recent success stories of Catholic publishing is the popular Paulist Press series *Classics of Western Spirituality*. From several initial volumes in 1979, the series now includes more than a hundred titles. In addition, Orbis Books has published a *Modern Spiritual Masters* collection, with some sixty-five titles.
2. Spirituality is a component of graduate-level curriculums in many colleges and universities. In the USA “The Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality” founded in 1991, and affiliated with the American Academy of Religion facilitates the scholarly examination of spirituality.
3. Centering Prayer is a practice promoted internationally by “Contemplative Outreach” and founded in the 1970’s by Trappist monks of St. Joseph’s Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts. The Abbot, Thomas Keating OCSO, has written extensively on contemplative practice in everyday life.
4. The Church Magisterium provides guidance in this discernment. See *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. October 15, 1989. (AAS 82 (1990) 362–379). Pope Francis in his 2018 Apostolic Exhortation *On The Call to Holiness in Today’s World Gaudete et exsultate*, 35–62, warned against new forms of Gnosticism and Pelagianism.
5. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (1966) 54.
6. Bevans, Stephen B., Schroeder, Roger P., *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. New York: Orbis, 2004, 235.
7. ND VIII. 222–277.
8. De Mare, Christian C.S.Sp., *A Spiritan Anthology*. Rome: Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 2011, 379.
9. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 224.
10. Sigrist, Paul, “Libermann (François-Marie-Paul), 1802–1852.” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. Tome 9. Paris: Beauchesne, 2017, Cols. 764–80, at 775.
11. Koren, Henry J., C.S.Sp., “The Legacy of François Libermann.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28/4 (2004) 174–177 at 175.
12. Gay, Jean, Mgr., “Has Libermann Any Relevance Today?” *Spiritans Papers* 6 (1978) 22–32, at 29.
13. Lécuyer, Joseph, C.S.Sp., “The Spirituality of Father Libermann.” *Spiritans Papers* 12 (1980) 23–38, at 38.
14. Van Kaam, Adrian C.S.Sp., “Firmness and Gentleness in the Spirituality of Father Francis Libermann.” *Spiritans Papers*, 21 (1987) 59–84, at 59.
15. Blanchard, Pierre, “Libermann: A Spiritual Guide for Our Contemporary World.” *Spiritans Papers* 13 (1980) 3–30, at 13.
16. Ibid.
17. Cleary, William, *Spiritans Life and Mission since Vatican II*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2018. 114.
18. Journals, such as *Spiritus*, began in 1959 and *Memoire Spiritaine* began in 1995 and a collection of essays edited in *Libermann 1802–1852: Une pensée at une mystique missionnaires* (1988), edited by Paul Coulon, C.S.Sp. and Paule Brasseur, with preface by Leopold Sedar Senghor demonstrate the depth and breadth of French scholarship in Libermann studies.
19. For a list of these works see *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. Tome 9 (2017) Cols. 768–770.
20. The Paraclete Press Publications of the Irish Province published some translations of Libermann, including Commentary on St. John’s Gospel. More recently, its Office for Spiritans Life has published translations of *La Brève Vie de François Libermann*, and, *Fais cela et tu vivras!: Quelques éléments de la spiritualité de François Libermann* Both were taken from the French Province collection «*Spiritualité Spiritaine*». Duquesne University in its Spiritans Series also published on Libermann, including translations of his letters in five volumes.

21. *Jesus through Jewish Eyes, A Spiritual Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*. Part 1. Translated by Myles Fay. Dublin: Paraclete Press, 1995, xviii.
22. *Jesus through Jewish Eyes, A Spiritual Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*. Part 2. Translated by Myles Fay. Dublin: Paraclete Press, 1999, vii.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Sheldrake, Philip, "Spirituality and Social Transformation." *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Religion*. (oxfordre.com/religion). Oxford: University Press, 2020, 2–3.
26. Biblical scholar, Sr. Sandra Schneiders, defines spirituality as "conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives." See Schneiders, Sandra M., "Christian Spirituality: Definition, Method and Types." In *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Philip Sheldrake. Ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, 1.
27. Rohr, Richard, OFM, *Eager to Love*. Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2014, 4.
28. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/>
29. Williams, Monty, S.J., *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy*. Toronto: Novalis, 2009, 23.
30. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, 2018. 2.
31. Sigrist, "Liebermann," 771.
32. Gilbert, Alphonse C.S.Sp., *A Gentle Way to God*. Translated by Myles Fay, C.S.Sp. Dublin: Paraclete Press, 1990, 70.
33. Liebermann, Letters Vol. 2, 310.
34. Liebermann, Letters, Vol. 4, 63.
35. Martins, Amadeu, "Liebermann's Respect for Persons." *Spiritana Papers* 2 (1977) 25–43, at 26.
36. The general term, "spiritual guide," is used here, as Liebermann, although spiritual director to some of his correspondents, to others who had another as spiritual director (example. Paul Carron, who had Fr. Galais as his spiritual director), Liebermann was an additional spiritual guide.
37. Kelly, Bernard J., C.S.Sp., *The Spiritual Teaching of Ven. Francis Liebermann*. Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1955, 133.
38. Ibid.
39. Liebermann, Letters Vol. 2, 49.
40. Ibid., 50.
41. Liebermann, Letters, Vol. 5, 126.
42. Kelly, Bernard, A., C.S.Sp., *Life Began at Forty*. Dublin: Paraclete Press, 1982, 104.
43. Sheldrake, "Spirituality and Social Transformation," 3.
44. Ibid., 6.
45. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 1, 42.
46. Ibid.
47. *L.S.*, II, 385–391.
48. *L.S.*, II, 388–389.
49. Ibid., 387.
50. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 1, 7.
51. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 1, 45–46.
52. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 2, 98.
53. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 2, 132.
54. Ibid.
55. Liebermann, Letters, Vol. 5, 15.
56. Liebermann, Letters, Vol. 3, 23.
57. *L.S.*, II, 389.

58. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 2, 98.
59. *Ibid.*, 99.
60. *Ibid.*, 100.
61. Libermann Letters, Vol. 4, 46.
62. *L.S.*, II, 388.
63. Libermann, Letters Vol. 3, 211.
64. *Jesus through Jewish Eyes, A Spiritual Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*. Part 3. Translated by Myles L. Fay, C.S.Sp. Dublin: Paraclete Press, 2005, 149.
65. *Ibid.*, 99.
66. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, 2018. 26.
67. Ukwuije, Bede Uche, *The Memory of Self Donation*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2009, 62.
68. *Ibid.*, 133.
69. Kelly, *The Spiritual Teaching*, 136.
70. Kelly, *Life Began at Forty*, 78.
71. Libermann, Letters Vol. 4, 239.
72. Libermann, Letters Vol. 4, 196.
73. Van Kaam, Adrian, *A Light to the Gentiles*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1959, 298.
74. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 1, 101.