“MAKE YOURSELVES NEGRO WITH THE NEGROES”

THE MISSIONARY STRATEGY OF A MYSTIC (1847)

Extract from Coulon/Brasseur, Libermann 1802-1852, 489-546

“Make yourselves Negro with the Negroes”: this concise and striking recommendation given by Libermann to his missionaries in 1847 is indubitably his best known phrase. In itself, it has made a brilliant career, removed from its historical and literary context (… and sometimes from its author), raised up to the rank of a quasi-proverbial saying. But more than anyone else, there is an African author who has quoted it a lot, integrating it in his system of thought and in his own vision of the history of the encounter between Europe and Africa: Leopold Sedar Senghor.

In 1939, the general conscription affected Leopold Sedar Senghor, then a senior grammar teacher at Marcelin-Berthelot high school in Saint-Maur-des-Fosses, turning him into a second class soldier in the colonial infantry. He had just participated in the collective editing of a journal known as “Présences” whose objective was the colored person. The intention of this journal was to respond to two questions: “How are the relations between Whites and people of color being worked out today? In what direction should one hope to see them develop?” Senghor’s contribution – one of his first texts ever to be published – had the title: “What the Black man offers.” Remembering his primary education by the Spiritans in Senegal, from 1913 to 1925, first in Ngazobil, then in Dakar, Leopold Sedar Senghor quotes Father Libermann:

Quite a good number of works have come out regarding the negro mentality. It has remained a mysterious forest below flying aeroplanes. Father Libermann used to say to his missionaries: “Be Negro with the Negroes so as to win them over to Jesus Christ.” That is to say that the rationalist conception and mechanistic-materialist explanations do not explain anything. Here even less than anywhere else. How many, devoured by the Minotaur, may not have not lost their way with the complicity of Ariadne, of Emotion-Femininity? It belongs precisely to a very confusionist rationality to try to explain the Negro by his utilitarianism, when he is pragmatic; by his materialism, when he is sensual. Is one willing to understand his mindset? Let us fashion for ourselves some sensitivity like his.


3 Ibid., foreword, p. i.


5 L’Homme de couleur, (“Colored Man”), p. 294 ; Liberté I …, p. 24. Nevertheless, one will observe the approximation: Libermann wrote: “Make yourselves Negroes …” (“Faites-vous nègres”) and not, as Senghor quotes: “Be Negroes …” (“Soyez nègres”). The nuance can be important. Libermann’s approach implies a movement of volition and an active effort … In the preface which he accepted to write for this volume, L. S. Senghor, upon reading our work, explains why, in his opinion, his memory retained “Be Negroes” (“Soyez nègres”) rather than “Make yourselves Negroes” (“Faites-vous nègres”). But one will note that, after writing this preface, Senghor has undertaken to quote Libermann exactly. Thus, in the preface to a later work: Éthnologiques. Hommages à Marcel Griaule, (“Ethnologics: Tribute to Marcel Griaule”), Paris, Herman, 1987, p. vi.
The whole Leopold Sedar Senghor is already there in this first piece of writing. A few lines further, one finds the famous and controversial formulation: “Emotion is to the Negro what reason is to the Greek”. Put otherwise, the quotation from Libermann in this particular context is drawn in the sense of an “emotive” identification (stricto sensu) with the Negroes on the part of the missionary: understand less (the Hellenic “rational”) than sympathize, “feel” deeply “with”. So it will have to do with a method of cultural adaptation to Africa.

In 1981, forty years later, the older and widely respected L. S. Senghor picked up the same quotation from Libermann, in the preface to an “introductory” work on Africans, exactly in the same sense of sociocultural adaptation through interior sensitivity (stricto sensu), something for which he paid tribute to the author of the work:

Pierre Alexandre is a linguist. It remains that, beyond his discipline, he knows Geography and History, having assimilated them, and even Prehistory, Sociology or, better still, Negro-African civilization. Knowing that discursive reason, even when backed up by numeric facts, could not grasp reality as a whole, he wanted to make himself “Negro with the Negroes” according to the recommendations of the Reverend Father Libermann. Without doubt, he did remember the catchphrase of our respectable old men who would put it plainly, while adopting you: “I want you to feel me”.  

This is a good example of continuity in thought and of fidelity to Libermann’s formula which, ruminated over, has become a building block in the construction of his own conceptual edifice within which, as we know, the notion of “cultural interbreeding” occupies a central place. Is it, therefore, a possible interpretation of the phrase in question? Perhaps. But could an interpretation that considers such a formula irrespective of its historical context as well as the epistolary structure that contains it, to say the least, yield its symphonic fullness of meaning? Without being pedantic, we must admit that linguistic sciences have taught us to read texts differently, to respect them more. We ought to apply to Libermann the same rules and approaches as those fine-tuned in the area of biblical exegesis for the interpretation of the “Scriptures”. Today, we know only too well that we cannot remove a gospel verse from its context and make it say whatever suits us … Indeed, we must acknowledge the fact that the

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7 Ibid., p. 5.

8 It is not surprising, therefore, that while receiving him into the French Academy on 29th March 1984, Edgar Faure naturally quotes these words from Libermann to evoke Senghor’s youth: “The same society [of the Holy Spirit Fathers] opens in 1923, in Dakar, a timely seminary-college with the name of Father Libermann which opened its doors to you; the very Libermann, author of the famous maxim: ‘Be Negro with the Negroes’” (L. S. SENGHOR, E. FAURE, Discours de remerciement et de reception à l’Académie française (“Vote of thanks and acceptance speech on the occasion of induction into the French Academy”), Paris, Seuil, 1984, p. 57.

9 See, in the preface done for this volume by L. S. Senghor, his insistence on the theme of cultural cross-breeding with regards to the works of Virgil Elizondo. Among others, see also the article by Robert JOUANNY, “L. S. Senghor et le métissage culturel ‘Nègritude/Antiquité’” (“L. S. Senghor and the ‘Nègritude/Antiquity’ Cultural Cross-breeding”), Suid, n° 3, 1986, p. 23-34.

10 We must recognize our indebtedness here to the doctoral seminar, under the direction of Bernard Plongeron at the Catholic Institute of Paris, which is devoted to the study of texts by the method known as “discourse analysis by discourse”. The method pays absolute attention to the text itself in its internal functioning. It is in this seminar that we first worked on the text of Libermann studied in this chapter. See the Instrumentum laboris of this seminar which are published annually with the title L’Autorité et les Autorités en régime de civilisation chrétienne (“Authority and Authorities within the realm of Christian Civilization”), Institut catholique de Paris, 10 volumes out in 1987, in vol. IV (1980-1981), p. 115-162, and in vol. VIII (1984-1985), p. 159-200.
quotation from Libermann, along with the paragraph that accompanies it, has had a huge literary success in the collections of selected pieces. When it comes to speaking about missionary action in the 19th century, much in the context of colonial history as in the history of Christianity, one is sure to find mention made of Libermann’s text, more or less abbreviated, but always containing the famous phrase: “Make yourselves Negro with the Negroes.”

Libermann’s text, from which the “famous adage” comes, occupies such an important place in libermannian thought as well as in missionary history over the last century that we must try to take a closer look at it. It has to do with something other than a pleasant formula. It has nothing to do with a “recipe” to facilitate the missionary’s “intercultural contacts”. It has everything to do with an expression that translates a whole mystical theology of mission which does not stand out until we situate the sentence within the entirety of its text and in the complexity of its historical context. Text without context can only spell the ruin of discourse.

“Make yourselves Negro with the Negroes” is found in a letter written by Libermann, the 19th of November 1847, to the community of his missionaries in the Apostolic Vicariate of the Two Guineas, residing in Dakar and in Gabon. Written on the spur of the moment, without any crossing-out, this text is far from being simple in its inspiration. We have to understand it within the context of the community of Dakar assembled around Truffet, their young bishop. The latter’s personality, as well as his relationship with Libermann, ought to be specified. In general terms, this letter is well understood only if we have in mind what took place in the small missionary society in the course of the last two years, 1846-1847. We cannot but deal with this briefly. Without going back to what has been said in earlier studies by P. Brasseur and I, we will simply offer some further clarifications on Libermann, on Bishop Truffet and his missionaries. The most essential aspect would remain the study of the text itself, which we will consider as one of Libermann’s most important texts.

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“Business does not move swiftly in Rome”

Right after his return from Rome which consisted in a long digression through the west, to end his “tour de France” (Marseille, Castres, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Nantes, Saint-Malo, Paris and finally La Neuville, 26th September), Libermann found himself caught up in the whirlwind of the ordinary affairs of a religious society in rapid expansion: a house has been bought (an old girls’ orphanage) in the neighborhood of Noyon in Amiens, then the Abbey of Notre-Dame-du-Gard close to Picquigny (not far from Amiens), whereas La Neuville had been sold while still staying there for the winter. Libermann had remained in La Neuville with nine novices, of whom six priests. Moreover, there were twenty-eight theology and philosophy students in Gard, as well as eight brothers.

If, at this period, Libermann writes some important letters in which the conception of mission streamlined during his stay in Rome appears clearly, one has the feeling he is waiting with a certain impatience for the answer Propaganda will give after examining his Memorandum. Indeed, as soon as October, so it seems, Luquet informed him that the examination had taken place during the plenaria of 22nd September and that “he had been accorded an Apostolic Vicar”, but without communicating to him neither the vicar’s name nor the answer to the other issues raised, with regards to jurisdiction over Senegambia and Dakar in particular. Of course, he knows that “business does not move swiftly in Rome”, but this is taking so long, and all the more as he does not even have a printed copy of the Memorandum, of which he had apparently not kept any manuscript either. To Blanpin, gone back to Rome where he became a star in the city following the miraculous healing of his voice in front of a Mater admirabilis painting, Libermann writes on 26th November 1846:

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13 To get an idea of what happened during this return journey so important in terms of the people he met, see the summary in the “Biographic Chronology” above, p. 107-108; see also ND, III, p. 283-302, for the correspondence written in the course of the journey; a lot of precisions in later correspondence.

14 On that whole issue, see, among others, the letter to Fr. Blanpin (Rome): La Neuville, 6th November 1846. ND, VIII, p. 344-347.

15 Notably the one to M. de Saint-Antoine, secretary of the Africa Institute: 19th October 1846, ND, VIII, p. 317-320; and the one of which we have given the text in the Sources (above, p. 271-279), to Fr. Percin: La Neuville, 2nd November 1846, ND, VIII, p. 333-342.

16 On 7th November 1846, Libermann replies to a letter from Luquet: ND, Compl., p. 78. In the list of letters written by Fr. Luquet to Fr. Libermann as communicated to the General Archives in 1950, Canon René Roussel, from the Major Seminary in Langres, drew attention to the presence in Luquet’s archives of a letter dated 5th October 1846. CSSp Archives 24-B-II.

17 Libermann to Luquet, letter dated 7th November, loc. cit.

18 Ibid.

19 As he wrote it to the community of the island of Bourbon to explain the length of his stay in Rome, early December 1846 [3rd December 1846: re-established date]: ND, VIII, p. 367.

20 Gone back from the Pyrenees to Rome to spend the winter on the recommendation of doctors, Blanpin got cured on 7th November 1846 in Mount-Trinity convent. The 10th of November, he is received in audience by Pius IX who listened to everything. Then he is introduced to the Vicar-Cardinal Patrizzi, “tall, fat and very good”, notes Blain in his notebook, etc. See G. PUDOR, “A propos de la guérison du P. Blanpin” (“Concerning the Healing of Fr. Blanpin”), extract of Echos de Santa Chiara [Pontifical French Seminary, Rome], vol. XXXIV, July-August, 1939, p. 280-293.
Do not send to me by hand copies of my memorandum to the cardinals. Send me a copy by post; in the meantime, you can put the rest on the stage-couch or send me three or four via the embassy, courtesy of Bishop Luquet and you will bring us the remainder. Mail sent by hand is never secure enough. I will be very pleased to know at what stage our affairs are with regards to the other points; inquire from Bishop Luquet or from Fr. Theiner. Have we obtained what concerns the jurisdiction of the Senegambia? Inquire also whether they will delay in dispatching all our affairs.21

Writing to the central councils (Paris and Lyon) of the Propagation of the Faith to solicit supplementary funding for the Guinea mission, Libermann underscores the new situation that is going to arise: “Propaganda has judged it worthwhile to give an Apostolic Vicar to the Mission of Guinea. We have not yet received official information on that […] but our agent in Rome has announced to us that the nomination has been done.”22 In December, Libermann got news from Dakar in a long letter from Arragon, dated 15th November:23 there are problems in the community in Dakar and Fr. Gravière, Apostolic Prefect, is the prime suspect. Obviously, it is high time things were reorganized around the new Apostolic Vicar. But who would it be? Coming by an opportunity, Libermann puts forward a demand to Cardinal Fransoni in a letter on 23rd December 1846: “I dare to ask Your Eminence to kindly

21To Fr. Blanpin. La Neuville, 26th November 1846. ND, VIII, p. 356. On the 28th, he wrote again to Blanpin and speaks again about the Memorandum en terms which indicate that he doesn’t even have a copy of it in his possession: “I’m in a hurry to get a copy of it so as to do my tract for the seminaries” (Ibid., p. 359). At the end of the day, the parcel sent by hand having gone astray, Libermann would still have nothing in his hands early in February 1847 (ND, IX, p. 31-33 and 34). On the contrary, on the 12th of February, it seems to have gotten the Memorandum: “I’m not sending you for the time being any copy of the memorandum I submitted to Rome. Bishop Truffet will bring it along” (to Arragon, on February the 12th 1847: ND, IX, p. 42); and on 27th March 1847, to the community of Dakar and Gabon: “I’m sending to you the memorandum I submitted to the Sacred Congregation last August” (ND, IX, p. 97-98).
22Needless to say, “our agent in Rome” – he has got nothing to hide! – is Bishop Luquet. F. Pinus was the first to give publicity to an unknown letter from Luquet to Libermann, of which a copy exists in the archives of the major seminary in Langres (Luquet, Active Correspondence, vol. IV). See F. PINUS, Monseigneur Luquet and the Instruction ‘Neminem Profecto’. La question du clergé indigène durant les années 1844-1848. Contribution à l’histoire de la théologie missionnaire (“Bishop Truffet and the Instruction ‘Neminem Profecto’. The Question of Indigenous Clergy in 1844-1848: A Contribution to the History of Mission Theology”), licentiate dissertation, Catholic University of Lille, 1959, 291 p., p. 224-226. Written from Rome on the 8th of December 1846, this letter suggests to Libermann the approach to follow, now that an Apostolic Vicar has been given him, in order to thoroughly apply the principles for organizing the mission such as Luquet had indicated. He points out to him that objections had been raised against Libermann, accused of having big ambitions, apparently by the “Jesuit” party. Africa, they were saying, was certainly not as simple as Libermann held it to be, since the Jesuits “to whom it was confided in principle” did not maintain it. There is allusion here to the trials for volunteers to undertake the re-establishment of the Jesuit mission founded in 1604 by Father Bareira sj, and the Rev. Dr. Edward Barron […] and the Rev. John Kelly […] at once offered themselves” (“The Mission to Liberia. Diary of the Rev. John Kelly”, The United States Catholic Historical Society, Historical Records and Studies (New York), XIV, May 1820, p. 120, and ND, V, p. 145).
23Arragon to Libermann, “Lettre confidentielle pour Monsieur le supérieur tout seul” (“Confidential letter for the special attention of the Reverend Superior”), finished on 15th November 1846. C’Ssp Archives 152-B-V1. We will come back to this letter of Arragon containing some important reflections on the mission and on the community.
send to us the resolutions of the Sacred Congregation”. 24 This letter which was recorded in Rome on 31st December, happened to cross ways with a letter from Cardinal Fransoni, signed the 28th December, 25 which contained all the expected answers: the nomination of Benoît Truffet “to the episcopal title of Callipolis in partibus infidelium and to the Apostolic Vicariate of Upper and Lower Guinea” 26 as well as the answer to questions concerning jurisdiction over Senegambia and the extension of the Vicariate.

This letter reached La Neuville on the day of the Epiphany, January 6th 1847:

This day had been precisely set aside for the admission into the Congregation of Frs. Truffet, Boulanger and Bouchet (Marie, brother of Maurice, who died in Australia). The letters arrived at a time I was going down for the ceremony. I said nothing about it up to the following Saturday. The good Fr. Truffet was in full security; he was expecting nothing of what was awaiting him. When I announced it to him on the 9th of January […], he was quite appalled. He could not answer me a single word. I told him to go down to the chapel and iron out this important matter with Our Lord and his Holy Mother. 27

The answer of Propaganda and the nomination of a new head for the Africa mission will release latent energies in La Neuville. Prior to the embarkation in Paulliac (Bordeaux) on 15th April, Libermann and Truffet, as well as all those designated to accompany the new bishop – Frs. Chevalier, Marie Bouchet and Dréano, all priests; Gallais, sub-deacon; Lamboise and Durand, clerics, – took care to prepare what would finally put the Guinea mission on a good footing: by means of reflection, through prayer and by way of material organization. From Dakar, where Bishop Truffet and his companions arrived at the beginning of the month of May, shared reflection with Libermann continued through the slow rhythm of letters. Indeed, 1847 was the year of all hopes for Libermann’s young society … before becoming the year of all dangers, looking at Truffet’s death (23rd November 1847) with hindsight.

24 We have quoted the original text: Archives of the Propaganda Fide, Scritture Riferite (Congo, Senegal …), vol. 7, f. 165r-166v. A copy with significant variations in ND, VIII, p. 386-388. The event was the sending of Bishop Barron’s resignation letter to Propaganda, stepping down as Apostolic Vicar of the Two Guineas. Barron had sent the letter to Libermann to be forwarded on. Libermann’s health is quite bad at this period. He took to bed and was not functional for three weeks from 8th December onwards.

25 The note of minutes-taker on the original.


27 Libermann to the community of Gabon. La Neuville, 4th February 1847, ND, IX, p. 36. Truffet, on his part, was to write to a friend, Fr. Belville, pastor of Lamotte-Servolex (Savoy), on 10th February 1847 (unpublished letter): “On the day of Epiphany 1847, I did my profession. And on that same day four apostolic letters arrived, determining my destiny. By the time we got to know the contents, my vows had been pronounced […] What could your friend do, faced with the authority of the Pope and of the confessor put together? No one had consulted me; they just impressed on me the will from on high and my duties.” (a copy in CSSp Archives, 153-A-III). To Cardinal Fransoni, Prefect of Propaganda, he wrote his acceptance letter on 15th January 1847 saying: “I was full of confusion and of terror” (letter quoted in the preceding note). ND, IX, p. 277, gives the trio that Libermann had proposed to Rome to be made Apostolic Vicar: Benedict Truffet, M. Boulanger and Jerome Gravière. Curiously enough, there were similar circumstances with the Marists around the nomination of Bishop Douarre as coadjutor of Bishop Bataillon, Apostolic Vicar of Western Oceania: “The 8th September 1842 […], Rev. Fr. Colin […] made him [Fr. Douarre] pronounce the three religious vows that day, then gave him the papal bulls he had obtained and for him brought from Rome” (G.-Cl. MAYET, Quelques souvenirs sur Jean-Claude Colin [“Some Memories about Jean-Claude Colin”], chosen and presented by Jean COSTE sm, Rome, Via Alessandro Poerio, 63, 1981, p. 83).
We leave here the unfolding of events of which the chronological biography given at the beginning of this volume offers a sufficient outline. We will bring together under several subheadings some ideas and facts from the ending of 1846 and 1847 which form the backdrop for Libermann’s letter to the community of Dakar and Gabon, on 19th November 1847. In order to do this, we will limit ourselves essentially to the three stakeholders and eyewitnesses to whom we were much attached in the chapter dealing with 1846: Libermann, Truffet and Chevalier. With deep regard to methodology, we will only refer here to what Libermann had learnt concerning what was happening in Dakar, as of the date of 19th November 1847, and not what he will get to know (be it positive or negative) after the death of Bishop Truffet.

**God speaks in history**

Claude-Denis Chevalier set in motion a whole missionary movement in his native Jura, associating parish priests (thus Fr. Billet, pastor of Rahon) as well as teachers in the minor seminary of Nozeroy (Fr. Cornu) with the major seminarians of Lons-le-Saunier and ordinary people. By the end of summer 1846, 1,067 people participated in the collection of pious and useful objects in Lons-le-Saunier region. In a letter dated 16th January 1847 to his benefactor, Fr. Billet, Chevalier declares his faith in the future of the mission of the Blacks: “Our congregation is increasing little by little. It seems to us that the time for mercy has arrived for the people of the black race, abandoned for so long.”

A month later, knowing well he will be ordained priest by Bishop Truffet on 27th February and that he is destined to go to Africa, Chevalier writes to Fr. Cornu on February 16th, on his behalf and on behalf of Libermann:

> A remarkable thing indeed! Today everybody is looking after the blacks, with nothing having seemed to have led to this movement. The entire Europe has suddenly become interested in their lot, and you know well how much politicians today are blowing their trumpets as to how they are providing them with protection which, from a providential point of view, could perhaps effectively work for their good. While everybody was busy agitating on account of these unfortunate people, along came two poor seminarians of Saint-Sulpice, Mssrs Libermann and Le Vavasseur, who, completely unaware of what was happening on the outside, conceived in their turn the project of coming to the rescue of the black race in a different manner. Does this coincidence not seem to be a clear sign of Divine Providence whose action provides, little by little, the means of execution when his day of mercy arrived?

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29 See above, P. COULON, “L’effervescence année 1846 et la genèse du grand Mémoire de Libermann à la Propagande” (“The Effervescent Year 1846 and the Genesis of Libermann’s Long Memorandum to Propaganda”), p. 401-455.
30 And so we will not delve into what the posterior letters of Arragon and particularly Chevalier, as well as Briot’s long report dated 29th November 1847 (a newsletter), will tell him about the decisions of Bishop Truffet, the “statutes” of the mission elaborated by him, his ideas on the training of an indigenous clergy, etc. On that and other issues, see the contribution by P. BRASSEUR above, p. 457-487.
31 Details given by Cl.-D. Chevalier to Fr. Billet, pastor of Rahon (Jura): La Neuville-les-Amiens, 16th January 1847, CSSp Archives, 22-A-V.
32 Ibid.
33 Chevalier, deacon and novice of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, to Fr. Cornu, a teacher in the minor seminary of Nozeroy (Jura), 16th February 1847. Copy in CSSp Archives, 22-A-V. The title we have given to this paragraph “God speaks in history” is that which Henri de Lubac sj chose for his little commentary of Vatican II’s constitution on “Divine Revelation”: H. de LUBAC, *Dieu se dit dans l’histoire. La Rédévelop divine* (“God speaks in history. Divine Revelation”), Paris, Le Cerf, coll. “Foi vivante”, 159, 1974.
A theology of Liberation

Even if public opinion in its entirety is not concerned, in a major way, with the question of the suppression of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery, the debates on these issues intensified in the legislative chambers and in concerned circles all along the year 1847. At the beginning of January, Chevalier spelt out to Fr. Billet what looked like one of the dominant themes of his correspondence:

There is nothing as far reaching as the abolition of the slave trade which does not contribute to the good of our missions, because slavery is not less opposed to religion than it is to humanity and we are especially apostles of liberty, being destined to deal the last blow to slavery by converting the people amongst whom slaves are exclusively procured.

Consecrated bishop in Our Lady of Victories on 25th January, Bishop Truffet begins a letter as head of mission by making useful and symbolic contacts. The struggle against the slave trade comes back often in the letter: to him, as well as to Chevalier, the Gospel rhymes with liberty. We will cite two unpublished texts. To king Charles-Albert whose subject he is, coming from Savoy, he presents his mission:

Sir, you desire the abolition of the trade in living human flesh; well then! One of your subjects is sent by Pius IX to work patiently and effectively in closing these infamous markets. The establishment of the reign of God is the most solid guarantee for human liberty.

On March 1st, the missionary bishop writes a variation on the same theme to members of the municipal council of Rumilly which had sent a delegation to his consecration:

The mercy of Providence, the Heart of the mother of God and the concern of the Holy See have turned their eyes towards these immense regions inhabited by almost forty million Blacks under the ravages of servitude, Mohamedanisme (sic) and fetishisms. The slavery of error predisposes to that of the whip. Both disappear before the cross which is the standard of charity and liberty.

Even if the word has taken on a particular meaning these recent years, in such a way that it would be anachronistic to transpose it as such to the 19th century, we may speak of a

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35 Letter already cited above, n. 31-32.

36 See the same themes in the letter by Bishop Truffet to M. de Saint-Antoine, secretary general of the Africa Institute, 14th February 1847, in the contribution by P. BRASSEUR, “A la recherche d’un absolü missionnaire : Mgr Truffet, vicaire apostolique des Deux-Guinéés” (“In Search of an Absolute Missionary : Bishop Truffet, Apostolic Vicar of the Two Guineas”), above, p. 461.

37 Draft conserved in CSSp Archives 153-A-III. Date established through the catalogue of his correspondence coming from Truffet, CSSp Archives 153-A-III.

38 Eod. loc. as with the preceding letter. Date established in the same way.
theology of liberation (salvation and liberation) vis-à-vis the thought strongly expressed by Truffet and Chevalier. 39

Lest one believe that this fight is engaged in by means of prayer and pious wishes alone, Chevalier delivers an interesting and novel witness which shows us how the mystic (Fr. Desgenettes) knew how to inspire the politician (Montalembert). Speaking of the episcopal consecration of Truffet at Our Lady of Victories, Chevalier writes:

According to those who have often heard him, Fr. Desgenettes had never been as eloquent and as touching. He recalled that France and the entire Europe had been unjust and cruel towards the black race, that a huge reparation was due and that the consecrated bishop and his confreres, missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary, were destined by Providence to accomplish that reparation […] All the social brass that our bishop saw did show him the greatest goodwill. Mr. de Montalembert, one of the three lay people present at the bishops’ diner in Mr. Tayard’s house, asked Bishop Truffet to send him all the possible documents to enable him to deliver the last blows to the hideous and degrading slavery. With regards to Mr. de Montalembert, let me tell you something that will rejoice and edify you. It is on the instigation of Fr. Desgenettes that the noble deputy took on his apostolate in the Chamber. All the times he has to speak, he goes to communion in the morning and, after the sitting, he goes to spend an hour in meditation in front of the Blessed Sacrament to leave at its feet both successes and pitfalls. 40

In the same letter, Chevalier reminds his friend of their mutual youthful zealously in the struggle for the abolition, something which his missionary vocation had not wiped away:

Furthermore, the missions of Guinea will afford me the means of fulfilling a desire which, you know, has nourished my heart for a long time: while working towards the conversion of these people, I will be working indirectly, as a matter of fact, but effectively for the abolition of the dreadful slavery. Do you remember a toast proposed, at the house of the parish priest of Nozeroy, to the death of slave tyrants? I will have only one thing to change: I will drink forever to the death of slavery and to the conversion of tyrants. That will be a little bit more apostolic.

There were, therefore, people who could get passionate for the cause of the abolition, who were members of the clergy. Incidentally, that very day (30th March) when Bishop Truffet and his companions left Paris for Bordeaux, their boarding port, a lively debate was in the offing in the House of Lords, dominated by Montalembert, when Count Beugnot had announced that “three thousand petitioners, among whom are some bishops

39 That is why one cannot agree with certain generalizations which tend to amalgamate the entire evangelization of Black Africa with all historical periods, particularly the 19th century, under a single “model” based on a “theology of the curse” or a “theodicy of domination”. Yet, this is what J. Achille Mbembe still does in 1987 in his contribution “Va-t-on reconstruire une Europe chrétienne? Questions africaines préalables” (“Are we going to reconstruct a Christian Europe? Prior African Questions”) in the collective work directed by Paul LADRIÈRE and René LUNEAU, Le Retour des certitudes. Événements et orthodoxie depuis Vatican II (“The Return of Certitudes. Events and Orthodoxy since Vatican II”), Paris, Le Centurion, 1987, p. 178-193. Such language appears to us to be so “abstracting” of history – which is more nuanced and complex – that it betrays reality … In the same book, R. Luneau, while speaking of a “derided Africa”, takes much care to flesh out his remarks by historical periods: “many missionary documents written between 1880 and 1940…”. The resumption of mission before 1850 does not happen in the same intellectual and moral context as that of the end of the century.

40 Chevalier to Fr. Cornu, quoted letter of 16th February 1847. See n. 33.
and a big number of ecclesiastics, are demanding the immediate abolition of slavery in the French colonies.”

Bishop Truffet meets with great success in Bordeaux during the Easter week (4th April) when he goes from churches to salons, missing no opportunity to speak about the Blacks and the abolition. Chevalier, entrusted by the bishop with the responsibility of “writing a journal” intended for Libermann “of all that took place which was of the least interest since the arrival in Bordeaux until our embarkation for Dakar”, notes that, Tuesday 6th April, in the Saint Paul’s church, “in spite of the contrary interests of many inhabitants of Bordeaux, the bishop was not afraid of speaking freely on the big question of the emancipation of the Blacks and his words produced an excellent effect.” Invited to a picturesque lunch at the house of Mr. Isaac Louverture, Bishop Truffet proposed a toast “to unfortunate Haiti for which Mr. Louverture’s agent was leaving in a few days and in whose presence the bishop took great care to develop his ideas on freedom for the Blacks so that the Haitians would learn from him what they had to be afraid of from catholic missionaries.”

Isaac Louverture had known Libermann through the intermediary of another inhabitant of Bordeaux, Mr. Germainville (1801-1881), a humanitarian who was long since in contact with Libermann whom he finally convinced to open a community in Bordeaux. At the end of July 1847, Mr. Germainville came to Amiens to settle this question. He brought in his luggage a parcel confided to him, certainly during his passage in Paris, by Mr. Bissette, a colored man from Martinique and a restless militant of the abolition, always campaigning around for petitions to be sent to the Chambers. The parcel contained abolitionist pamphlets intended for the clergy (most probably the famous 1844 appeal: The Slaves of the French Colonies to the French Clergy, containing the Apostolic Letters of Gregory XVI on the slave trade), as well as the notebook for a petition to be circulated in order to obtain signatures. Thus reconstituted, this context makes very interesting the note which Libermann addresses to Mr. Bissette, the 17th of August, by way of response to the consignment. Indeed, it is the only text from him which allows us to see what his position was with regards to the abolitionist campaigns of 1845-1847. To dare to use him as a relay, Bissette must have had favorable information (through Mr. Germainville?) on Libermann. And in fact, Libermann clearly affirms his position in principle:

I am quite obliged to you for the confidence you reposed in me; you treat me as a friend of the black race and as a man who earnestly desires their emancipation and you

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41 L’Ami de la religion (Catholic Review “Friend of Religion and of the King”), vol. 133, Thursday 1st April 1847, p. 18. The debate is reported on pages 18-20: Baron Dupin and minister Mackau respond to Montalembert. The latter’s speech is on “The Emancipation of the Blacks. Religion in the Colonies” has been reproduced in extenso in MONTALEMBERT, Discours, (“Speeches”), vol. II, 1845-1848, Paris, Lecoffre, 1860, p. 460-472. This debate, which accused the Seminary of the Holy Spirit with regard to its academic curriculum and its formation program, kept bouncing back for a whole month, with fresh motions being moved.

42 This long newsletter from Chevalier is in the CSSp Archives, 153-A-III. He finished it on 17th May, the day Bishop Truffet also wrote his first letter to Libermann since his arrival in Dakar on the 8th of May.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 See above, P. COULON, “L’effervescente année 1846…” (“The Effervescent Year 1846…”), p. 408-413, along with notes 43-44.

46 One finds it reproduced, including, for once, the crossed out lines of the draft, in ND, IX, p. 253-254. It is certainly because Libermann crossed out an entire passage that this text has come down to us. He might have corrected this text to dispatch it (microfilm of the autographic letters, reel 4, n°22).
are quite right; I take glory in that and my happiness would be great if God were to lend me enough days to see the accomplishment of my desires.\textsuperscript{47}

In practice, Libermann took measures to ensure that the pamphlets were distributed and he even gave some to Mr. Germainville\textsuperscript{48} for him to distribute them on his part to the clergy in Bordeaux. As for the petition, it is another problem. He does not see any inconvenience in getting it signed by the priests of Amiens who would do it “with satisfaction”, but he does not succeed “in putting the notebook into the hands of a third party” (people who are ready to commit themselves are therefore not all as many as that!). Indeed, Libermann reckons that, in his personal position, he cannot sign or get it signed: “Grave reasons forbid me from it. On my first journey to Paris, I will explain these reasons to you.” Before writing these last words, he had written a much more precise paragraph which he crossed out, certainly afraid that these written explanations may not be sufficiently clear for Mr. Bissette (orally, one can respond to objections). Here is what he had written before crossing it out: “But prudence forbids me here any such move, being at the head of a work like the one which I am taken up with, because this move will sparkle a lot; I will stand out as a tough and haunting adversary.” Caught between his heartfelt convictions and the “political” exigencies of the superior of a society dealing with the government, Libermann chose prudence. Truffet perhaps might have called that a deal rather than compromise, but more than Truffet, Libermann knew that in the society of men and not that of ideas, government is the art of what is possible at a given time, while knowing how to keep focused on the ideal…

A clear-cut theology of mission

In Truffet’s missionary thought, one has a clear feeling of the influence of Propaganda’s 1659 instructions, such as he got to know them with Libermann, through Luquet and the recent Instruction \textit{Neminem Profecto}.\textsuperscript{49} It is the ideas, sometimes the very words, of Luquet and of the instructions that one can read from Truffet’s hand:

We are not going to establish Italy, France or any other country in Africa, but only the Holy Catholic Church devoid of any nationality and any human system. […] I will strive to follow this procedure [the training of an indigenous clergy], so that the mission may gradually become a church governed by common law and living by its local resources under the paternal supremacy of the Holy See.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{47} This quotation and the next are taken from \textit{ND}, IX, p. 253-254.

\textsuperscript{48} Mr. Germainville returns to Bordeaux from Amiens on 7\textsuperscript{th} August 1847, taking along with him Fr. Boulanger and Br. Thomas Mabit, joined sooner on by Fr. Clair, for the foundation of the community of Bordeaux.


\textsuperscript{50} Bishop Truffet: To the Honorable Members of the Central Council of the Propagation of the Faith in Paris. Paris, 28\textsuperscript{th} March 1847. Reproduced above in P. BRASSEUR, “À la recherche d’un absolu missionnaire…” (“In Search of an Absolute Missionary…”), p. 462-465. Already, on 14\textsuperscript{th} February 1847, he had written to Mr. de Saint-Antoine of the Africa Institute: “Rome has charged us not only with bringing up Christians in Guinea but to establish Christendom, to constitute churches which will soon become strong by their union with the large catholic family” (draft in CSSp Archives, 153-A-III, and above, P. BRASSEUR, “À la recherche…” [“In Search of …”], p. 462). This phrase completes another one in this text on the training of “a hierarchic and indigenous clergy”. One senses the direct influence of the ideas propagated by Luquet and by Propaganda towing the same line.
Nevertheless, this will for independence in relation to Europe goes hand in hand with Truffet’s strong conscience which he demonstrates in all his moves and in his correspondence that he is not going to Africa without strings, like an uprooted person. On the contrary, he writes to all the authorities but also to his friends that if, as an Apostolic Vicar, he is the envoy of Pius IX, he equally has the profound feeling of representing the Christians of Europe and in that wise he asks them to kindly consider Guinea as their mission, particularly by praying for it, for their prayer has an essential missionary dimension. That is how, on Fr. Cornu’s initiative, de Nozeroy (Jura), a friend of Chevalier, himself and Libermann put together an “Association of prayer” which established, alongside “preaching missionaries”, a society of “praying missionaries” with the slightest obligations (one *ave Maria* per day) but capable of creating a fundamental missionary “communion”:

Yes, sir, I know well enough your majesty’s heart so as not to be afraid of displeasing you by requesting your prayers.53

Come on, my dear confrere, make up your mind; […] form an association which will recite everyday one *ave Maria* for the savosian Mission of the Two Guineas. Do not refuse the favor that your friend, a missionary, is asking of you.54

In Bordeaux, the Association’s registers fill up during the days Bishop Truffet and his missionaries spent there on their way out. From Africa, the Apostolic Vicar writes to Fr. Desgenettes: “Tell your pious and splendid evening assemblies [of the arch-confraternity of Our Lady of Victories] that the bishop of the Holy Heart of Mary is their representative in Africa; that he implores them to think about his mission as their own.”55 Lastly, one of his most significant letters will be the one which he writes a few days before his death to the bishops of Savoy, with whom he has a feeling of solidarity in what we would today refer to as the episcopal college, and whom he reminds of this solidarity on the missionary level:

Oh! It is not money that I need most […] My Lord, I have never understood the power of prayer as profoundly as God has done me the favor to understand now. And that is thanks to the support of your prayers, the prayers of your fellow diocesans, which I implore today.56

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51 Chevalier to Fr. Cornu, a teacher in the minor seminary of Nozeroy (Jura). La Neuville-les-Amiens, 16th February 1847: “I saw our venerable superior this morning who directed me to write to you on his behalf and on behalf of myself. We have examined the big question of the proposed association and here is the answer. He considers the idea of this association as an excellent one and believes it to be coming from God” (copy in CSSp Archives, 22-A-V).


53 Bishop Truffet to King Charles-Albert, king of Sardinia (1798-1849, father of Victor-Emmanuel II, the future unifier of Italy). Draft manuscript in CSSp Archives, 153-A-III. Date: 15th February, on the handwritten catalogue of Bishop Truffet, keeping note of his important letters: CSSp Archives, 153-A-II.


56 This is the next to the last letter in the collection of Bishop Truffet’s drafts. It is dated *at the very end*: “Ndakaru, Feast of Saint Andrew, the Apostle, 1847” (= 30th November). Now, Bishop Truffet had died by that
The Bishop and the Superior General: Dialogue, Confidence and … Convention

As soon as Bishop Truffet was appointed, there is no doubt that communication between him and Libermann increased, the latter considering him as head of the mission on behalf of the Church. This comes out clearly in Libermann’s letter to Arragon (Dakar) on February 12th, 1847.57 Therein he replies, for the second time,58 to Arragon’s long letter (23 pages, Dakar, 15th November 1846)59 in which the latter, on the basis of his fifteen months’ African experience and from the observation of Senegalese priests, Boilat and Fridoil, who were trained in France, delivers judgment on the “project for the salvation of the people of the coasts of Africa” presented by Libermann to Propaganda in 184460: “I think it is absolutely necessary to abandon the project of your institute in Rome or in France. Here is how I believe we could save Africa through the training of an indigenous clergy, necessary everywhere but indispensable in Africa and in all our missions.”61 Libermann responds to this remark from Arragon and from others as well:

The plan which you propose to me for Africa’s salvation includes some excellent elements that fit in perfectly with my ideas which have changed on several issues ever since I have been able to reflect for a long while over this matter.62 […] I shall read your letter to Bishop Truffet; I am convinced that he will approve several of your ideas and even the entirety of what you are saying […] The ideas that I am sharing with you are exactly those of Bishop Truffet.63

The preparation of Bishop Truffet’s departure goes on, therefore, in a climate of shared reflection in confidence and in dialogue, of which Libermann renders account to the community of Gabon: “What gives me the most pleasure and hope is that Bishop Truffet is sincerely attached to the Congregation.”64 It is evident that Libermann has in mind the rumors of the discussions in Rome, in the summer of 1846, between himself, Fr. Colin, Bishop Luquet and Fr. Theiner on the likely sharing of responsibilities between the bishop, who is in date! By all indications, it had been postdated for some symbolic reasons: on the feast of an Apostle of whom the bishops of Savoy and himself are successors. The last document of the drafts carries the date of 10th November. This letter was, therefore, written early in November. Original draft in CSSp Archives, 153-A-II. Published in part (probably on the basis of this draft in the archives) in L’Echo des missions d’Afrique de la congrégation du Saint-Esprit et du Saint Coeur de Marie ("Echo from the African Missions of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and of the Holy Heart of Mary"), 2nd Yar, n° 6, March 1885, p. 86-88. This letter seems to have been sent, as it is written on the draft, “To Their Highnesses, My Lords de Chambéry, de Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne and d’Anneci [sic]”. Archbishop Billet of Chambérye received it since he cited it in an article he wrote on Bishop Truffet after his death (article published where and when?) and which was reproduced in the bulletin Les Amis du Vieux Rumilly et de l’Albanais ("Friends of Old Rumilly and of the Albanian"), n° 3, 1986, p. 32. [‘Old name for Dakar. Trans.]

57 Libermann to Arragon. 12th February 1847. ND, IX, p. 42-48?
58 Libermann had already replied to this letter from Arragon on 29th December: ND, VIII, p. 400-402. He started all over again because they had written to tell him that they were not getting his letters. See the reference of this letter in note 23.
59 See above, p. 211-220, for the text of this 1844 project. Arragon has no knowledge yet of the 1846 Memorandum, of which he asks for news …
60 Cited letter from Aragon, 15th November 1846, p. 3 of the original, CSSp Archives, 152-B-VI.
61 La Neuville, 4th February 1847, ND, IX, p. 36. Several time will he write remarks of this kind, to reassure the missionaries, but one can see there a reflection of his own fears too … which he attempts to set aside.
charge of the Apostolic Vicariate on behalf of the Church, and the Superior General of the missionaries working there. It is not surprising that pages 21-25 of his 1846 Memorandum deal with this issue. Besides, the rapporteur of his Memorandum to the cardinals of Propaganda at the 22nd September 1846 sitting, Cardinal Fransoni in person, had explicitly asked a question ("dubium") to know whether the assembly would approve the solutions proffered by Libermann. The latter could not but take notice of Propaganda’s prudent answer: "Ad tertium: Habebitur ratio suis loco et tempore”, which may be rendered by: “One will settle that according to the place and the time”. For want of precision, Libermann will move forward in the sense of the general principles of the Memorandum and of what he thinks is the wish of Propaganda:

The bishop will have [...] no power over what concerns the internal life of communities as communities [...] In contrast, the appointment of missionaries and all that pertains to the mission’s administration is under the sole power of the bishop. This is a minor modification of the rules of the provincial superior or visitor general, but Rome insists on it; and the good of the mission will come out of it.

That will lead to a “regulation” or convention between the Apostolic Vicariate of the Two Guineas and the Superior General of the Holy Heart of Mary “to found and consolidate the Catholic Church in the Two Guineas in accordance with the intentions of the Holy See”. This convention was signed on 18th March, and a copy sent to the Propaganda. On 27th March, the day Truffet left La Neuville for Bordeaux via Paris, Libermann gave him a letter for the community of Dakar and Gabon in which he lengthily explains the convention at which, one gets a good feeling, the missionaries might take umbrage, feeling threatened as members of the congregation by the all too powerful bishop:

I am the one who drafted all the articles of the accord signed by Bishop Truffet and myself [...] I did enter into the accord without informing you because I did not make any

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66 See above, Source 4, p. 250-254 (Memorandum, p. 21-25; ND, VIII, p. 251-254).
67 The Ristretto con Sommario (“summary with table of contents”) of the 22nd September General Assembly of the cardinals of Propaganda can be consulted in Arch. Prop. Fide, Scritture Originali, secunda serie, vol. 986, f. 829r and ff. The printed text of Libermann’s Memorandum constitutes n° 3 of the “summary”, f. 845-863. The text of the questions raised (Dubia) along with the answers given en latin has been reproduced in ND, IX, p. 413-414. The third question was formulated thus in italiano: “Se abbiano ad approvarsi i regolamenti proposti sia per ordinare le relazioni dei Vescovi coi loro Missionarii, sia per la retta administrazione temporale dei beni delle Missioni?”
68 To Fr. Briot (Gabon). La Neuville, 8th February 1847. ND, IX, p. 39. He write the same thing to Arragon (Dakar) in his 12th February letter: ND, IX, p. 47-48.
69 ND, IX, p. 90-95.
70 Libermann to the Cardinal-Prefect of the S. C. of Propaganda Fide. La Neuville, 27th March 1847. ND, IX, p. 101. The text of the convention is also available: Arch. Prop. Fide, Scritture Riferite (Africa…), vol. 7, f. 178-180. Propaganda will remain prudent, probably keeping fingers crossed. Libermann had to write to Fr. Theiner in Rome on 21st July 1847: “I transmitted, since the month of March, the articles of this convention to Propaganda, I don’t know what they think of it; I haven’t been replied on this issue.” (ND, Compl., p. 87). Besides, this agreement will not survive Truffet. His successor in Dakar, Bishop Kobès, passing through Rome, will write on the very text conserved in the Propaganda’s Archives, in the same vein as Libermann: “The present arrangement supposes that the Apost. Vic. is not at the same time the provincial, but Libermann has abandoned this principle right after the death of Bishop Truffet. Since then, the Apost. Vic. is provincial at the same time in accordance with the instructions of the S. Prop. […] Rome, 5th October 1853” (Arch. Prop. Fide, Scritture Riferite (Africa…), vol. 7, f. 181).
concessions regarding the rights of the Congregation; and in the principles set up, I have done nothing more than to follow the Holy See’s formal directives.  

It is clear that Libermann wanted to be faithful to the ecclesiological “principles” strongly underscored by Luquet, by the Instruction Neminem Profecto and also by Fr. Theiner so much so that he bears witness to his fidelity to the reflection they shared in Rome, in 1846, by writing to him on 21st July 1847:

Bishop Truffet (that is the name of the bishop) is entirely agreed with me on the true principles [note the expression]. Before his departure, we made a commitment based on the principles set out in my Memorandum […] The core of the regulation which we agreed upon [sic] are contained [sic] in two general points: the bishop’s absolute power in his Mission, perfect guarantee for the Community’s religious life.

It is important to take good notice of this sharing of tasks in order to understand the tone of the 19th November 1847 letter to the community of Dakar and Gabon. Libermann means to limit himself to the principles of missionary community life without intervening in the actual missionary pastoral program, which is the bishop’s domain. Bishop Truffet will put it in clear and categorical terms when, just arrived in Dakar, he writes to the superior of Gabon, Fr. Briot: “Write only to the representative of the Church [= the bishop] on what concerns the mission. Write to the holy priest, Fr. Libermann, on whatever touches on the rule and on ascetic life.” And on this last point, Bishop Truffet was of the sincere opinion that Libermann had an important role to play as spiritual guide; for that matter, he continues to address himself to him as a son to his father. Truffet’s letter to Libermann dated 1st September 1847 bears good witness to that. Libermann had received that letter when he wrote to the community on 19th November 1847, and he takes into consideration, in his letter, precisely what Bishop Truffet had told him in his last letter: “Please do accept to enlighten them [the members of the community] in case of temptation […] Venerable and dear Father, recommend to the priests as well as to the Brothers the constant practice of the whole simplicity which is the spirit of the Rule.” Besides, there are two points about which Libermann and Truffet had some worries and shared the same feelings: the importance of a community faithful to its missionary charism and a correct understanding of the current situation of mission. We have to say a word on that, for it is the real backdrop of the 19th November 1847 letter.

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71 To the community of Dakar and Gabon (27th March 1847), ND, IX, p. 98.
73 ND, Compl., p. 86.
74 Cited letter (original not to be found) by P. DUPARQUET, Notes historiques sur la mission des Deux-Guinées (“Historical Notes on the Mission of the Two Guineas”), chapter XI, p. 4. Manuscript written in 1865, conserved in CSSp Archives, 149-B-VI.
76 “It is impossible for me to express to you the consolation that your last letter, dated 1st September, gave me”, writes Libermann at the beginning of a letter which he took three or four days to write and which bears, at the very end, the date of 22nd November 1847: ND, IX, p. 333.
77 Cited letter, 1st September 1847. ND, IX, p. 449 and 452.
Guarantor of the mission, the fidelity of the community  
“in the true apostolic way” and “in the path of evangelic simplicity”

Right from the end of the year 1846, one of the major worries of Libermann comes from the problems he sees arising in the community of his missionaries. Now, any internal division, any infidelity to one’s own grace which ought to animate one from deep down, compromises missionary work because it weakens the instrument which God wants to make use of. It is on this level of depth that we ought to locate his anxiety upon reading Arragon’s letter, written from Dakar on 15\textsuperscript{th} November 1846, which has been already cited severally: 78 “Let us get to the community about which I have only got sad things to tell you”, writes Arragon who attacks the head of mission, Fr. Gravière, Apostolic Prefect, “a soft and peaceful man, but weak and undecided, as a result little fit to govern” and who, furthermore, “does not observe the rule”: there follows a series of details about modified timetables, amputation of prayer time, too long recreation, etc. “You can understand the disorder that reigns here.” As if that is not enough, Fr. Gravière criticizes “the novitiate administration, the theological teaching in La Neuville and the spiritual formation given to novices”. Standing accused are Libermann himself, Schwindenhammer his councilor and the role of the Mother House with regard to Africa… Libermann is not annoyed by the attacks on his person, and he drives home the point with Arragon: 79 “Do not be afraid of telling me things that you feel might hurt me”. 80 But for him, the most important thing is mission: it is a spiritual adventure and not a propagandist enterprise; what is proclaimed is not different from what is personally lived both in community and in the congregation. All these elements are tightly packed together in the letter he addresses to the Dakar and Gabon community on 27\textsuperscript{th} December 1846, following the information provided by Arragon:

I am pleading with you, my dear confreres; love one another as I love you, tenderly and wholly in Our Lord. I am not asking you that for the pleasure of being loved […] But if we so love one another, if we are in such a perfect union in this holy and pure charity, your souls will benefit from it for your sanctification, for the faithful observance of the rule, for the consolation of your souls and their moral support in the apostolic virtues and in community life, and for the good of the work to which you sacrifice yourselves […] … I feel the need to tell you all these things so as to forewarn you of grave harm for the Congregation in general and for your Mission, most of all for the sanctification of your souls in particular […] The future of our rules in the Missions depend on you; if you observe them well today, those who will join you will observe them too; if you do not observe them, you take upon yourselves total responsibility for the future. 81

Obviously, Libermann and Truffet discussed the issue at length before his departure. The entire teaching of the rule and the entire novitiate went in that direction. When Libermann drew up the convention he signed with Bishop Truffet, we find at the top of the

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78 See the reference in note 23.
79 Arragon is familiar with tough letters. To the extent that, after a “terrible letter” dated 25\textsuperscript{th} March 1846, Libermann replied to him: “For God’s sake, don’t ever write again when you are annoyed; calm down and write with wisdom” (ND, VIII, p. 143).
80 To Fr. Arragon, 12\textsuperscript{th} February 1847, ND, IX, p. 45. In fact, this letter is the second reply from Libermann to the letter of 15\textsuperscript{th} November. See above, note 58.
81 To the community of Dakar and Gabon. La Neuville, 27\textsuperscript{th} December 1846. ND, VIII, p. 393-394, 398.
“principles”: “1. For the Mission to succeed, it must be provided with men detached from themselves and devoted to Jesus. 2. These laborers must have in themselves and around them the priestly virtues and the enthusiasm of the apostolic life.”

Thus it is not surprising that, once he arrived, Bishop Truffet made it a point to take hold of the community in order to give it the “true principles” of mission, certainly alerted by Libermann but also driven by the systematic inclination of his mind as a former teacher of rhetoric, who loves to teach and train disciples … Libermann is very attentive to the news he receives from Dakar on behalf of his missionaries and from their bishop. Arrived in Dakar on 8th May, the latter wrote to Libermann on 17th May: “We have done our arrival retreat […] The community is functioning, with encouraging simplicity, on its two bases: love of the Church and love of the Rule. I believe that prayer and consistency shall do more for the establishment of the reign of God than would our plans and our words”.

A month later, Bishop Truffet returns to the same theme with other clarifications:

The Community is living out the Gospel and the Rule. I commented for my dear co-workers Propaganda’s 23rd October [sic] instruction as well as our 18th March 1847 convention. […] With prayer, consistency, charity and appropriate truth, we shall be instruments of divine mercy for a solid good in Senegambia. If man does not hurry and is happy to associate himself humbly with God, the greatest blessings are in stock for these regions.

Seemingly, the members of the community bought completely into this highly spiritual missionary viewpoint: “His Lordship, the young cleric Lamoise (twenty-three years) writes to Libermann, is currently instructing us on the training of the indigenous clergy. I am happy, my good father, to redo what seems to be a second novitiate [note the expression] before working in all earnest for the salvation of souls. It is prayer that does everything.”

We are far away from the restless and hasty activity to be expected in the pioneering beginnings of a mission. Matters are being looked at from the upper side. In the last line of his June 1847 letter to Libermann, Truffet incidentally had a captivating formulation while referring to students and novices getting prepared in France: “I pray to God that they may detach themselves completely from Europe: to be a missionary in Truffet’s view supposes both an interior “ascetic and mystical” renunciation in evangelical terms and a “cultural” renunciation in line with the instructions of Propaganda (1659 and 1845). These two dimensions, ecclesial and ascetic, stand out clearly in an original letter by Truffet to Libermann on 7th July 1847: “We are all doing well in Dakar. The theology of the Church, the ceremonies, hymns and prayer take up the time for acclimatization. We are striving to remove from our midst those obstacles we present to the grace that wants to convert Cape-Verde. The work may be slow, perhaps, but solid.”
Towards the management of the mission
Bishop Truffet in close synergy with Libermann

At last, to definitively clarify the 19th November 1847 letter which we undertook to analyze in detail, we must have in mind three other texts. On one hand, there is this long and meticulous letter that Truffet wrote to Libermann on 1st September.88 Libermann had received it by the time he wrote on 19th November to the Dakar and Gabon community89 and, moreover, the issues he took up with the community had explicit reference to what the Apostolic Vicar told him about the state of the mission and of the community, so that – in accordance with the sharing of responsibilities agreed upon between the bishop and the superior of the congregation – Libermann could intervene in his own capacity. Besides, at the same time as he wrote to the community, Libermann responded to the bishop with one of the longest letters in his correspondence (20 printed pages) where he took up again each of the points raised by Truffet on September 1st, so much so that the letter to the community and the letter to the bishop are two sides of the same coin, constituting an overall answer in which the entire founding charism of Libermann, real “father” of the mission of the Two Guineas,90 unfurls. The third and last text to provide a context for the 19th November 1847 letter is the Missionary Instructions to the First Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Castres on their way to Africa: Libermann had interrupted his letter to Truffet to write these instructions. They were written in the same state of mind as the 19th November letter which they complement marvelously. We will come back to that.91

Bishop Truffet submits his diagnosis of the beginnings of the mission in Dakar to Libermann, asking him to liaise with certain persons. Indeed, the missionary conduct and attitudes of certain members of the community left much to be desired because they were not very clear “on the essential ideas that must preside over the cradle of the Mission.”92 Arragon and Warlop were having difficulties buying “into the true apostolic pathway” which consists in “simplicity of faith and complete abandon into God’s hands”: “Without admitting it to themselves, they may have the tendency of managing a Mission like a trading house, with human schemes. Living in Gorée has done them a lot of harm: unawares, they have contracted there a practical contempt for the Blacks.”93 The missionary method adopted with regard to Islamic preachers was affected in the beginning: “The missionary’s conduct was a little bit hard; unfortunately, they remembered that they were Europeans and that the others were Blacks.”94 Truffet verifies on the ground what he was always convinced of and which one

89 Writing to Bishop Truffet in a letter which took several to complete and dated at the very end 22nd November, Libermann says: “It is impossible for me to express to you the consolation that your last letter, dated 1st September, gave me” (ND, IX, p. 333).
90 Here are the exact references of this letter already cited severally, To Bishop Truffet. Dated at the very end: Amiens, 22nd November 1847 (the Post scriptum is probably dates 27th November). ND, IX, p. 333-353. In the title of this section, we employed the word synergy: this term has passed from physiology (association of several organs for the accomplishment of a function) to sociology (convergence of activities in the form of cooperation and interdependence).
91 Concerning these Instructions, see the text and the introduction we have done for it above, “Source 6”, p. 261-287.
93 Ibid.: ND, IX, p. 449; P. BRASSEUR, cited article, p. 480.
94 Ibid.: ND, IX, p. 450; P. BRASSEUR, cited article, p. 480.
finds so strongly underlined in Propaganda’s instructions of 1659: “The king told me in confidence: whenever the missionaries would appear to be backed by some temporal influence, or seek something other than God, one will be wary of them. One wants to see in them true envoys of heaven: on that condition, hearts will open up.” And the bishop paints a not so flattering portrait of the European species, “plague of the African coasts”, “traders of hot drinks, of cupidity and of guile”.95

Since his arrival, Bishop Truffet has tried to put into practice a “non-aggressive” conception of mission “in line with evangelic simplicity”:

We are living here peacefully, waiting for the will of God and accomplishing the points that He manifests to us as of now.97

You see, my good Father, here we ought to be just, good and charitable, preach the Gospel softly, when will grasp the language, engage this religious people to pray to the Father of all light and pray with them.98

It is difficult not to be captivated by the evangelic tone of this letter of 1st September. Libermann is conquered (he does not yet know the bishop’s heroic and mistaken obstinacy on certain issues…) and wrote to him in his letter of 22nd November (… which the addressee will not read, as he dies on the 23rd!):

You buy fully into all the views that God in his goodness had given me since the beginning for the salvation of the Blacks, with the only difference that, given your episcopal standing and the light of the Holy Spirit that surrounds it, you move with more certitude than I may have when it comes to execution. […] I would never have been able to manage the Mission practically well, albeit our views may entirely be the same. […] Fr. Chevalier’s letter,99 which gives details on the mission of Dakar, confirms further to me the perfect harmony that exists between our two lines of thought whose execution is being carried out more perfectly than I would have been able to do myself.100

Libermann then takes up the different points that are the concern of the Apostolic Vicar. He acknowledges but takes the heat out of them down, given his knowledge of men:

Do not be surprised that our good confreres who went before you did not follow the narrow way, despite their excellent will. They are young and without experience. They are like most men, acting without a plan of action. […] I did tell Frs. Arragon and Briot not to rely on the reports of those going to and fro, but to scrutinize on their own and deal with in depth […] This latter reflection disturbed me most of all, because of the opinions they might have formed about the situation and the moral state of the people, following

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95 Ibid.: ND, IX, p. 450; P. BRASSEUR, cited article, p. 481.
96 Ibid.: ND, IX, p. 451; P. BRASSEUR, cited article, p. 481.
97 Ibid.: ND, IX, p. 450; P. BRASSEUR, cited article, p. 480.
98 Ibid.: ND, IX, p. 451; P. BRASSEUR, cited article, p. 481.
99 Libermann alludes to a letter written by Cl.-D. Chevalier to Fr. Boulanger (of the same novitiate with the latter but stayed back in France as bursar in Notre-Dame-du-Gard), 29th August 1847: ND, IX, p. 458-464. This letter speaks of the running of the work for children as the core group for the future indigenous clergy and of the directives and measures by Bishop Truffet to avoid any Europeanization of these children. On 23rd November 1847, Libermann wrote to encourage Fr. Chevalier in his work: ND, IX, p. 359-361, followed by a letter for the children themselves, 27th November: ND, IX, p. 361-364.
100 ND, IX, p. 333-334. See the references to this letter in note 90.
the false reports of European seafarers whom prejudice, frivolity and passions will always mislead in this context.101

As to the manner Bishop Truffet intends to start his mission with a time for teaching and reflection on the basic principles, Libermann subscribes entirely to it, counting it as a heavenly inspiration:

It is delightful that, on the field of combat, Divine Providence leaves you with sufficient time to commune with God in prayer in order to examine everything by His divine light and in the silence of contemplation and withdrawal from all things. You have the time to ponder the depth of your work, or rather God’s work, the difficulties to be overcome, the means to employ, the resources which Divine Mercy gives to you and the opposing forces which you may discover in yourself, within and without the community.102

These lines concern the bishop himself but, of course, are applicable to the community.

Did Bishop Truffet on his own think of starting off his mission in this way or was he not influenced by a famous historical antecedent which Luquet took care to underscore in his Letters to His Lordship the Bishop of Langres?103 In the beginnings of the society of Foreign Missionsiv, the first thing that the Apostolic Vicars appointed by Rome in 1658 did to apply the new missionary policy outlined in the 1659 Instructions, when they finally got to Siam in 1664, was to go on retreat and to hold a synod in Ayutthaya.104 This synod undertook to put in place Missionary Instructions105 as practical complement to the instructions of Propaganda. Luquet provides in the appendix to his Letters an analysis of these instructions (in Latin) along with the translation of certain pages. Truffet, formerly a candidate of the Foreign Missions, most probably might have read the Letters published in 1842. His manner of imposing a retreat on his missionaries right on arrival reminds one of the Ayutthaya synod. In the newsletter written for Libermann on Truffet’s request, Claude-Denis Chevalier, the nearest person to the ideas of the Apostolic Vicar, said in conclusion: “We ended yesterday, 16th May, the small retreat that His Lordship made us do so as to help us recover from the dissipations of the crossing. Here we are, all of us definitely settled in on African soil to continue our novitiate in the apostolic life”.106 Space does not permit to emphasize here the

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102 Ibid., p. 350-351.
106 Chevalier to Libermann. Completed in Dakar on 17th Mai 1847. CSSp Archives, 153-A-III.
very great similarity of thought and interior attitude towards mission between the Ayutthaya Instructions and the entirety of the directives, attitudes and words of Bishop Truffet while starting off the mission of Guinea and concerned about starting well. Hence the basic dispositions necessary for mission according to the first Apostolic Vicars of the Foreign Missions: “dispositions which consist in exclusive confidence in perfect submission to the will of God, in the power of prayer and good works and with great reservation in what concerns human means”\textsuperscript{107}, all these aspects are present as a leitmotif in Truffet’s writings and in his words.

One can rightly speak of an evangelical radicalism in the case of Bishop Truffet or of “the search for an absolute missionary”, to use P. Brasseur’s excellent formulation.\textsuperscript{108} And whatever the Spiritan tradition might have said about that afterwards,\textsuperscript{109} Bishop Truffet cannot be ignored because, in his fundamental inspiration, himself and Libermann were quite on the same wavelength. Libermann took quite a while to understand the catastrophe of his death. Perhaps, he had underestimated Truffet’s capacity for obstinacy and dogmatic clinging to ideas that were, “in themselves”, quite correct. To his Sulpician friend and confidant, Fr. Gamon, Libermann later emptied his mind in February 1848, by a theological interpretation of this death: “Our dear brothers in Guinea have committed some imprudence and the Mission is paying a heavy cost. Bishop Truffet and his co-workers, living in Dakar near Gorée, have led a Trappist lifestyle, eating neither bread nor meat and drinking only water.” There follows the “victim-like” interpretation of the death of Bishop Truffet:

See therefore how Divine Providence deals with us! For I cannot just attribute this loss to pure imprudence. This imprudence is so unthinkable; it sins so much against the best of good sense, which Bishop Truffet and his confreres could not have committed in any ordinary situation […] At the end of the day, God in his goodness was happy to accept just a single victim, sparing the lives of the others.\textsuperscript{110}

Today we might consider this as extreme theology … But it is the extremity of the ordeal that imposes the search for paradoxical meaning in the nonsense of the Cross; for, as in

\textsuperscript{107} J. F.-O. LUQUET, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 525. It should be noted that during the defense of the doctoral dissertation on Libermann by Canon Pierre Blanchard, on 25\textsuperscript{th} April 1959, Prof. H. Gouhier (who had read the Luquet’s \textit{Letters}) raised the question of the relationship there seems to be between Libermann and the inspiration of the “Instructions” of Ayutthaya: “Since he [Libermann] had maintained relations with Bishop Luquet, did he read the “instructive” communications addressed […] the Apostolic Vicars of the Foreign Missions of Paris addressed to their priests?” Oral witness from Jean Guennou, archivist of the MEP (Foreign Missions), who was present at the defense. The candidate does not seem to have clearly replied in what concerns Luquet’s influence on Libermann … (On our part, we think we have answered this question clearly enough in this very volume.) In the report by the review \textit{Spiritus} (n° 2, October 1959, “Libermann in the Sorbonne”, p. 167-183), the author does not seem to have well understood Prof. Gouhier’s question which he notes rather erroneously (p. 182). On P. Blanchard’s dissertation as published, see above, P. COULON, “Inventaire critique des etudes historiques sur Libermann” (“Critical Inventory of Historical Studies on Libermann”), p. 133-160.


\textsuperscript{109} See P. Brasseur’s conclusion, cited article, p. 487. More violent and even more surprising, Fr. Charles Duparquet wrote in 1865, speaking of the “unfortunate principles” of Bishop Truffet, referring to them as “the sorry utopia of a lively and systematic imagination”, which does not lack a pinch of salt when one knows the personality of Duparquet! (See C. DUPARQUET, \textit{Notes historiques sur la mission des Deux-Guinées} (“Historical Notes on the Mission of the Two Guineas”), chapter XI, p. 3-4, unpublished manuscript, CSSp Archives, 149-B-VI.

\textsuperscript{110} To Fr. Gamon [February 1848], \textit{ND}, X, p. 63-64.
the case of martyrdom it is the cross of Christ that offers explanation, God’s wisdom being stupidity to humans. Mission is the imitation of Christ’s self-humbling. That is exactly what the analysis of the 19th November 1847 letter to Dakar and Gabon community will show us. But this theological-spiritual explanation does not rob Libermann of the capacity for objective analysis. In a “confidential” letter to Le Vavasseur, we find him putting the principled accuracy and the personal holiness of Bishop Truffet in rigorous perspective with the error of judgment and the lack of experience which he showed:

In spite of Bishop Truffet’s great and lofty mind, he committed two faults which gravely exposed the Mission. The two faults came from his extreme enthusiasm and his zeal for the glory of God and the exaltation of the Holy Church, and moreover, from some inexperience in matters which, I can see quite well, cannot be supplanted by the holiness and the virtue of devoted souls with strong imagination.111

Was Libermann’s own genius as a founder not precisely in being able to combine, in his own person, holiness as well as human experience…?

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111 Confidential letter to Fr. Le Vavasseur, 24th February 1848. ND. X, p. 79.
To the Community of Dakar and Gabon

Amiens, 19th November 1847

My dear Confreres,

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ overflow in your souls and make you apostles full of virtue and holiness! We should be filled with gratitude and love for our Lord Jesus Christ because of his generosity towards us and the poor, abandoned souls to whom he sends us.

You will soon be welcoming two new priest confreres and three Brothers. They will help you in your work for the salvation of souls, each according to the talents he has received from God. A year from now, I hope to be able to send you even more missionaries, as the preparatory work of founding the Church proceeds. The number of laborers will increase to help clear the ground that has not yet been cultivated and God, in his mercy, will water it with his grace so that it will bear much fruit. I was very happy to learn of the piety, regularity, peace and love that reign among you. I see in that a great promise for the future of the mission, a future which depends entirely on you.

As I sometimes told you during your novitiate, and I repeat again here and now, your sins will be original sins while your virtues hold some power and very special graces. God founded his work on his all-powerful will and his mercy. He vivifies it with his grace and love – a foundation which will last forever, I am confident about it, and a spirit we will unceasingly return to. But it is equally true that he has chosen you to be the first stones of the building. If the first stones are not properly placed, all the rest will be out of line. You must realize, my dear brothers, that if you were to have the misfortune of getting it wrong, those coming after you will only make it worse.

But, on the contrary, if you continue as you have started, you will have a powerful influence on your successors. All the fruits of their devoted labor and the salvation and sanctification of the people they minister to, will, in great part, be thanks to you. It will cost you more or less continuous suffering, but on this earth, the servants of God can expect nothing more; it is by the sweat of their brows that they will reach the practice of perfection. But once you have I adopted this way of proceeding, you will no longer count the cost. You will have risen above the pains and sufferings of this world and God himself will be your reward. At the present moment, God in his goodness is offering you the chance to become holy within your community. I see in that a sign of his merciful Providence. If you had been plunged straight into active ministry right on your arrival, you would not have had the time to put all that you learnt during your novitiate into practice. You would not have got to know yourselves sufficiently. Now, you are doing what amounts to a second novitiate, but this time, a novitiate in practice. You are on the field and you can see first-hand the dangers and difficulties you are going to meet.
With good will and a sincere desire to be true servants of God, true apostles, you can now seek out the best way to prepare yourselves to fill that role. During your novitiate, you made resolutions in words, sometimes based on imaginary situations: now your resolutions will be based firmly on reality.

Dear confreres, try to make the most of God’s moment. He will give you his insights and his grace will be there to help you. Learn how to be real community men and true apostles. Learn the wisdom of God, so that each of you, according to his capabilities, can contribute to bringing the great work which He has entrusted to you to a successful conclusion.

[Two long passages of the letter are omitted here which develop lines 45-46 on the question of “real community men” and the life of “true apostles”.

One final word: Do not easily give ear to what people, who travel up and down the coast, say when they speak to you about groups of people they have visited, even if they have been there for many years. Listen to what they say, but do not let their words influence your judgment. These people look at things from their own point of view and through the prejudices they have built up, so they will only distort your own assessments. Listen to everything but remain peaceful within yourselves. Look at the evidence objectively in the spirit of Jesus, setting aside any former impressions or prejudices. Be filled with the love of God and with the pure zeal which his Spirit gives you. I am sure you will judge our poor Blacks very differently from all those people who talk about them. You know that if we had listened to what was said unanimously by those who could inform us about the Blacks in the colonies, what was said and affirmed by otherwise good people, we would never have dared to undertake the missions of Bourbon and Mauritius. And yet our dear confreres have worked marvels there and have taught us to judge in a totally different way from what others said and judged things to be. Do not judge by first impressions, by what you have seen in Europe or by what you are used to in Europe. Rid yourselves of Europe, of its mores, its mentality. Make yourselves Negros with the Negros, and you will judge them as they should be judged. Make yourselves Negros with the Negros, so as to train them in the manner they ought to be trained, not along European lines, but in according them what pertains to their way of being. Relate to them as servants would do to their masters, adapting yourselves to their style of doing things, as servants to their masters’ ways. Your sole purpose in all this must be to perfect and sanctify them and to raise them up from their oppressed state so as to gradually form them into a people of God. This is what Saint Paul calls making oneself all things to all people so as to win all for Jesus Christ.

This has been a very long letter, my dear confreres, but I never notice the time passing when I am talking with you. My heart goes out to you. May yours always be with Jesus and Mary and be filled with their love and gentle peace.

F. Libermann

PS.: I have not given you any news in this letter: Father Bessieux and his two companions will tell you everything when they meet you.
PART THREE
A FOUNDING TEXT, A FOUNDER’S TEXT
AN ANALYSIS OF LIBERMANN’S LETTER OF 19TH NOVEMBER 1847 TO THE
COMMUNITY OF DAKAR AND GABON

I

A letter with a dose of Pauline inspiration:
when mission is identified with the Servant Figure

Introduction

From a neutral point of view, this is how we may summarize the 19th November 1847 letter: From France (Amiens, on 19th November 1847), the Founding-Superior of a missionary society (the Holy Heart of Mary) wrote a letter to the community of his missionaries in Dakar and in Gabon to share news with them, to encourage them and to specify to them the state of mind in which they ought to carry out their nascent apostolate.\textsuperscript{112}

We can break down the structure of this letter in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction:</th>
<th>\quad \text{Greetings and thanksgiving (l. 1-7).}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part one:</td>
<td>\quad \text{News (sending of new missionaries) and remarks on the beginnings of the Mission: the importance of laying good foundations (l. 8-48).}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Part two:</td>
<td>\quad \text{To be real community men (omitted passage).}]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Part three:</td>
<td>\quad \text{To be true apostles (omitted passage).}]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth part:</td>
<td>\quad \text{To beware of the judgments of Europeans. To rid oneself of Europe and make oneself Negro with the Negros (l. 49-74)}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion:</td>
<td>\quad \text{Charity and peace (l. 75-80)}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A pastoral Letter with Pauline Inspiration

Looking closely at the text, even before we get down to considering its discursive function in itself, the first thing that stands out is the striking parallelism which we discover between Libermann’s letter and the letters of Saint Paul. It is not that Libermann might have gone out of his way to “copy” or to “paraphrase”, but rather the proof or a deep assimilation. The following table is glaring.

\textsuperscript{112} Out of this letter from Libermann, we have only given here the beginning and the end, for the purpose of our analysis. The text proved much longer to be taken in its entirety. But on one hand, the two passages presented are the best known, because these are the ones that are often cited and they operate almost within themselves in the “tradition”, without the rest of the letter. On the other hand, the two sections omitted already appear in the first part by anticipation. In the textual analysis that follows, we refer to line numbers of the text with the letter “l” followed by a figure (l. 63-74 = lines 63-74). [From the translator: the numbering of the lines has obviously changed in this English version.]
Libermann, 4-6:
“May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ overflow in your souls […] We should be filled with gratitude and love for our Lord Jesus Christ because of his generosity…”

Libermann, 11-14:
“… As the preparatory work of founding the Church proceeds. The number of laborers will increase to help clear the ground that has not yet been cultivated and God, in his mercy, will water it with his grace so that it will bear much fruit.”

Libermann, 18-23:
“God founded his work […] But he has chosen you to be the first stones to be laid. If they are not properly placed, all the rest will be out of line.”

Libermann, 46-48:
“Learn the wisdom of God, so that each of you, according to his capabilities, can contribute in bringing the great work which He has entrusted to you to a successful conclusion.”

Libermann, 55-57:
“Look at the evidence objectively in the spirit of Jesus, setting aside any former impressions or prejudices. Be filled with the love of God and the and with the pure zeal which his Spirit gives you.”

Libermann, 63-74:
“Do not judge by first impressions […] Rid yourselves of Europe […] Make yourselves Negros with the Negros…”

“Relate to them as servants would do to their masters […] Your sole purpose in all this must be to perfect and sanctify them and to raise them up from their oppressed state so as to gradually form them into a people of God. This is what Saint Paul calls making oneself all things to all people so as to win all for Jesus Christ.”

1 Cor. 1, 3-5:
“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge.”

1 Cor. 3, 6-10:
“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. […] For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.”

1 Cor. 3, 10 ff.:
“According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. […] For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Eph. 2., 20-22:
“… Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”

1 Cor. 2, 7:
“But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.”

1 Thess. 5, 19-22:
“Do not quench the Spirit. […] but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.”

1 Cor. 9, 19-23:
“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. […] To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

Ph. 2, 6-11:
[See below for a study of this passage.]
Libermann, 76-77:
“My heart goes out to you. May yours always be with Jesus and Mary and be filled with their love and gentle peace.”

The conclusion of Eph. 6, 23:
“Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Cor. 1, 4:
“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
[See also 2 Cor. 6, 11-12.]

Mission as Conversion: cultural and spiritual Kenosis

The last part of Libermann’s letter constitutes a separate whole, quite clearly indicated in the discourse: “One final word …” (l. 49). As a matter of fact, a striking structure is discernible here which is in parallel with the text of Saint Paul in Philippians 2, 5-11, of which a literal translation can be given as follows:113

6 He who, though was in the “form” (μορφή) of God, did not boast of being God’s equal,
7 but wiped himself out (εαυτον εκενωσεν), taking the form of a servant (μορφή δουλου).

Having become similar (εν ομοιωματι) to humans and considered as human in form (σχμματι),
8 he humbled himself (επεκεινωσεν εαυτον), and became obedient to the point of death, death on a cross.

9 That is why (διο) God exalted him (υπερψωσεν) and gratified him with the name that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, among heavenly, earthly and infernal beings,
11 and every tongue should confess: Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In the text of his letter, Libermann does not make any direct reference to this passage of Phil. 2, whereas he refers explicitly in lines 73-74 to another passage from Saint Paul: 1 Cor. 9, 19-23 (see the table of parallel passages above).

And yet, what appears to structure Libermann’s discourse and thought in this passage, even if he is unaware of it, is the very movement of Phil. 2, 5-11.

From that we conclude that, in the eyes of Libermann, mission is to be thought and lived out in terms of conversion (first movement: l. 49-63) and in terms of both cultural and spiritual kenosis (l. 63-74), in imitation of Jesus Christ.

The very structuring of the discourse highlights Libermann’s missionary theology: a biblical theology (the servant-figure that refers to Christ in his kenosis must configure the missionary. We will come back to that later.) which ties in with his personal spiritual experience. While in minor orders and suffering from epilepsy, God chose him to be the founder of a missionary society…

In the following table, we will put into parallel columns the two sequences of Libermann’s text and that of Saint Paul, each column to be read from top to down:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIBERMANN</th>
<th>SAINT PAUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st sequence</strong></td>
<td><strong>2nd sequence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Judgment and sayings of EUROPEANS (l.49-51)</td>
<td>What you are used to in EUROPE (l. 64-65). Rid yourselves of EUROPE (l. 65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) The Spirit of Jesus Christ and God’s love (l.55-56)</td>
<td>Make yourselves Negros with the Negros (l. 65-67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) You will judge … very differently (l.57-58)</td>
<td>Servants/Masters: as servants would relate to their masters (l. 69-71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Among the “poor Blacks” (l.56), “confreres have worked marvels (l.62)</td>
<td>Your sole purpose … to perfect and sanctify them and to raise them up from their oppressed state so as to gradually form them into a people of God (l. 71-73)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can interpret the conclusions drawn from the table above as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1st sequence</strong></th>
<th><strong>2nd sequence</strong></th>
<th><strong>Phil. 2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MISSION = CONVERSION (cultural and attitudinal)</td>
<td>AND KENOSIS (cultural and spiritual)</td>
<td>IN IMITATION, IN THE FOLLOWING OF JESUS CHRIST</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But we may also represent the same discourse in the form of a U-shaped graphic curve spreading across time and space in mission and salvation history:
That Libermann’s thought defines the internal and external movement of mission with reference to Philippians 2, unconsciously, without any explicit quotation, appears to be of huge theological and spiritual import.

As a result, mission is defined by what underlies the thought of Saint Paul himself, i.e., the Servant hymn of Isaiah 52, 13.-53, 12.\footnote{In our concluding part, we will develop some aspects of this mission theology with respect to the Servant Figure.}

One cannot find any “dispositions” in the missionary other than those “one ought to have in Christ Jesus, He who …” (Phil. 2, 5), nor any other “form” than that of “the Servant” (Phil. 2, 7). This is so much pronounced that one could safely apply to the missionary of all

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**Kenosis**

gr. *kenôsis*: “the emptying, the wiping out”. A theological term used to express the “effacement” which the passage from Philippians treat of: “He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant …” (Ph. 2, 7).

time what L. Cerfaux says of the “apostolic life” of Saint Paul: “Paul was, so to speak, the ‘locus’ of the revelation of God’s Son for the benefit of the Gentiles”.  

It should be noted, however, that in Libermann, if the first term of the dialectic humility/elevation certainly affects the missionary, the second term (elevation) is related to the “subjects” of the missionary apostolate, the “Negroes”. From being objects of commerce they become, by God’s action in Jesus Christ, subjects in whom the power of God is working “marvels” (l. 62).

One cannot but be overwhelmed by the goal that Libermann sets for mission: raising up a “people of God” (l. 72-74). We are far from a mission theology that simply underscores the individual salvation of souls. Mission is participation in the paschal mystery: the self-effacement of the Cross which becomes the raising up of the “Negroes” as “people of God” “‘won’ for Jesus Christ” (l. 72), in other words, members of a single body, the Body of Christ.

**Libermann as heir to a multiple tradition on service and on kenosis**

Thus Libermann, far from conceiving the African mission simply as an exotic change of setting (leaving one’s home), presents it as a kenotic change of setting (going out of oneself). But is that really the point of Libermann’s thought? We think it is so, for Libermann’s thought – from a historical point of view – was informed by its contact with diverse traditions which accorded an important place to Pauline kenosis in their theology or in their spirituality. We will give a brief outline of these traditions by means of some references and quotations.

**The horizon of the French School of Spirituality**

The major meditation of the entire life of Bérulle was that of Phil. 2, 5-7, from where he was to draw two major themes of his spirituality: exinanition (kenosis) and servitude (“formam servi”) which are at the heart of the mystery of the incarnation. Libermann had no direct knowledge of Bérulle but spent much time on his disciple, Fr. Olier (1608-1657), the founder of Saint Sulpice, who refers, for instance, to Phil. 2, 5-7 in his *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes* (*Introduction to Christian Life and Virtues*), to Jesus Christ “who imparts to us, if we so wish, his inclinations and all his feelings, most particularly that which he had for self-effacement. […] As servants of the Church, we need to go down at the feet of every faithful, taking them to be our master.”

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115 L. CERFAUX, “L’antinomie paulinienne de la vie apostolique” (“Pauline Antinomy in the Apostolic Life”), in *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux …* (“Lucien Cerfaux Collection…”), *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 456. Cerfaux’s affirmation, in what concerns this quotation, is strongly linked with Galatians 1, 15-16. But Paul himself operates a transposition when he speaks of his ministry: see 2 Cor. 1, 6; 12; 11, 7. To clarify the whole of this part, see in the same vein the good article by M. TRIMAILLE, “Existence missionnaire et mystère pascal selon saint Paul” (“Missionary Existence and the Pascal Mystery according to Saint Paul”), *Spiritus* 44, 1971, p. 32-46. [A suggestion from Claude Tassin.]


The horizon of tradition from the origins to the Holy Heart of Mary

If the meditation on Christ in all his “states” – in bérullian terms! – was at the heart of Libermann’s long years with the Sulpicians, just as it was the case for Le Vavasseur and for Tisserant, it is not surprising that one find its inspiration in the founding of the Work of the Blacks and that of the Holy Heart of Mary. The terms “servant” and even “servitude” [= slavery], as best defining the missionary vocation, are found in all of Libermann’s writings during his year in Rome, the founding year.

Article 5 of the first chapter (part 1) of the Provisional Rule (1840-1845) indicates: “They will always have in mind that they are devoted to these poor souls, considering themselves as their servants, having no other thoughts, desires, nor occupation than for their salvation”.118

In a long letter to Luquet, then seminarian in Saint Sulpice and candidate for the Work of the Blacks, Libermann writes from Rome on 4th August 1840, while commenting 1 Cor. 12, 5: “Saint Paul adds: Et divisiones ministrationum sunt. He speaks of the administration of graces and spiritual goods which must be distributed to souls; this is the real servitude to which we must reduce ourselves in order to serve Our Lord in souls”.119

At the same period, while writing his commentary on the Gospel of Saint John, he speaks in a very bérullian fashion of the “inconceivable self-emptying of the Incarnate Word” with reference to John 1, 14: “Et verbum caro factum est”. Connecting Saint John with Saint Paul, he adds: “These words say almost the same thing as those of Saint Paul: exinanivit semenstipsum, formam servi accipiens”.120 Further down, on the sacrifice of Christ: “The first sacrifice took place at the Incarnation. The Word empties himself. Indeed, it is in the emptying that the sacrificial act consists. Right from this time, this entire sacred and divine life was an emptying up to the consummation of the sacrifice and its completion on Calvary.121

Back to France, Libermann was in the Major Seminary in Strasbourg to get ready for his priestly ordination when he accepted to comment the prayer “Ô Jesus vivens in Maria” attributed to Fr. de Condren, disciple of Bérulle. It was recited every day in Sulpician seminaries. In a letter to Dupont, seminarin at Saint Sulpice, dated 1st April 1841, he wrote: “Ô Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in your servants …”: … “some of us are lucky, very lucky to be servants, and we relate with Jesus as servants […] We have become brothers only because he reduced himself to servitude for love of us: Formam servi accipiens”.122

It appears, therefore, that Phil. 2, 6-11 is a basic text at the heart of Libermann’s Christocentric theology and spirituality in the same line as Bérulle. But other texts from the “Holy Heart of Mary” years show that mission is effectively lived out in the spirit of service and kenosis.
In this wise the Creole, Tisserant, would write to Libermann from Haiti on 17th November 1843: “I hold so dearly and so tenderly in my heart all my unfortunate Black brothers of Guinea, – indeed I am really proud to be descended from this despised race, because it gives me further reason of being entirely the slave of former slaves.”\footnote{To Fr. Libermann. Haiti, 17th November 1843. \textit{ND}, II, p. 419.}

Once again, it is in Bishop Truffet that we find the most captivating formulation of this state of mind which presided over La Neuville. In his letter to the central councils of the Propagation of the Faith, 28th March 1847, we find the same kenotic movement as in Phil. 2, 6-11: “The first and, perhaps, the most difficult duty of the apostle […] is the abnegation of his entire being which brings him down to the level of his neophytes, to be humanly identified with them so as to spiritually identify them with himself.”\footnote{Paris, 28th March 1847. Archives of the Propagation of the Faith, Paris, G 16. See above, P. BRASSEUR, “A la recherche de …” (“In Search of…”), cited article, p. 464.}

Fr. Briot, eye-witness of the last weeks of Bishop Truffet’s life in Dakar, would write about him at the end of a long newsletter: “He could not suffer himself to be served by the Blacks because, as he used to put it, they had been slaves for too long. It is their turn to be served and it behooves us to be their servants.”\footnote{Fr. Briot to Fr. Libermann. Ndakar, 29th November 1847. Copy in CSSp Archives, 153-A-III. Text published, shortened and reworked, in \textit{Annales de la Propagation de la Foi} (“Annals of the Propagation of the Faith”), vol. XX, n° 120, Sept. 1848, p. 313-329.}

\begin{flushright}
\textit{The horizon of the great missionary tradition}
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First of all, we refer the reader to what we developed in the chapter on “The Effervescent Year 1846 and the Genesis of the Libermann’s Long Memorandum to Propaganda”.\footnote{See the indicated chapter above, p. 420-421, along with note 80.} We demonstrated there the influence that a whole series of texts from the great missionary tradition of the Church had on Libermann, via Luquet, notably Propaganda’s 1659 Instructions along with the directives saying the same thing “Make yourselves Chinese with the Chinese”.\footnote{Ferdinand DONNET, (1795-1882) became Archbishop of Bordeaux in 1837. But he had been coadjutor of Bishop de Forbin-Janson in Nancy since 1835. Perhaps was it in the contact of the latter, who had a great passion for the missions (\textit{ad intra} and \textit{ad extra}), that Archbishop Donnet drew his interest for the cause of the missions? He made Bishop Truffet very welcome at the time of the embarkation early in April 1847. He was one of Libermann’s interlocutors when the establishment of a community in Bordeaux was being worked out.}

While reading Luquet’s \textit{Clarifications on the Synod of Pondicherry}, Libermann had in front of him the first words of a Memorandum on the different types of studies that are fitting for the foreign missions, by Fr. de Fleury (\textit{Ecclesiastical History}), submitted in 1689 to Bishop Laneau, Apostolic Vicar of Siam: “You need to begin by ridding yourself of all the prejudices you carried along from Europe …” This is a traditional teaching that one finds similarly expressed in a pastoral letter by Archbishop Donnet of Bordeaux\footnote{The “Lettre pastorale en faveur de la Propagation de la Foi” [1841] (“Pastoral Letter in Support of the Propagation of the Faith”), is found in \textit{Œuvres oratoires de son Éminence le cardinal Donnet, archévège de Bordeaux} (“Rhetorical Works of His Eminence, Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux”), column 214-220 [quotation column 215], in \textit{Collection intégrale et universelle des orateurs Sacrés} (“Complete and Universal Collection of Sacred Orators”), 2nd Series, vol. 81, Petit-Montrouge, Migne, 1856.} in support of the Propagation of the Faith (in 1841): “We go down with missionaries to unknown beaches […] We follow them in their apostolic treks […] and if we do not take immediate notice of the neophyte getting civilized to follow the apostle, we always see the apostle making himself savage in order to tread on the same path as the neophyte, finally winning him over to God and to the Church, by dint of that attachment.”\footnote{The “Lettre pastorale en faveur de la Propagation de la Foi” [1841] (“Pastoral Letter in Support of the Propagation of the Faith”), is found in \textit{Œuvres oratoires de son Éminence le cardinal Donnet, archévège de Bordeaux} (“Rhetorical Works of His Eminence, Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux”), column 214-220 [quotation column 215], in \textit{Collection intégrale et universelle des orateurs Sacrés} (“Complete and Universal Collection of Sacred Orators”), 2nd Series, vol. 81, Petit-Montrouge, Migne, 1856.}
Conclusion. A unique source: from contemplation to mission, from “interior life” to “apostolic life”

The interesting thing to notice in Libermann is that the passage from a “confined” life in Saint Sulpice for many years to missionary action extending to “the ends” of the known world takes place without discontinuity, for these two “lives” proceed both from the same existential experience: the shock of the discovery of Christ-Jesus by a young man of twenty-four, coming from Judaism, who no longer ceases drawing from the unique wellspring, the mystery of the Incarnation. “Sulpician” spirituality is profoundly apostolic in inspiration, and by that fact missionary. The contemplation of Christ in his “states” and in his “mysteries” leads us to be servants like Him: “The heart of the apostolic spirit is there”, comments Libermann.129

This perspective is profoundly unifying inasmuch as it inseparably affirms the urgency of mission (apostolic life) and the urgency of sanctifying contemplation (interior life) combined in a “contempl-action” which Libermann calls a “practical union”. Haunted at the end of his life by the possible separation of these two areas in the life of his missionaries, Libermann would draft his Instructions to Missionaries130 of which we have a summary in his letter of 8th May 1851, an outburst on the necessity of holiness, to Fr. Lairé, a young missionary of twenty-five: “Your major preaching lies in the holy life which you must lead in order to give a good example and draw the grace of the divine Master […] The African people need no skillful and capable missionaries and will not be converted by the efforts of these: it is the holiness and the sacrifice of their priests that must save them.”131

In conclusion, we can summarize the thinking that underlies the 19th November 1847 letter in connection with the whole of Libermann’s writings in the following terms: by abandoning oneself, by making oneself a servant, the missionary embraces the self-effacing movement of the Word coming in flesh and participates in the sacrifice of the Cross. Through his identification with Christ – holiness consists in that – he takes part in the redemption of those he evangelizes. Therefore, the more the missionary will be holy, the more missionary will he be. As a result, the death of Bishop Truffet and that of any missionary, beyond all that explains it and even condemns it as a clear lack of prudence (an error of judgment but not a sin), takes on a meaning that is humanly unexpected – in fact unacceptable – but quite profound in terms of faith: it becomes a sacrifice for Africa, a supreme annihilation and abandonment with the value of martyrdom without having its glory … In the life of Libermann, “mysticism” is the first source before any missionary “policy”.132


130 Began in April 1851 but left uncompleted in July the same year, the “Missionary Instructions” can be found in the volume Ecrits spirituels du Vénérable Libermann (“Spiritual Writings of Venerable Fr. Libermann”), Paris, Pousielgue frères, 1891, p. 356-560.

131 To Fr. Lairé. Paris, 8th May 1851. ND, XIII, p. 143.

132 Scripture scholar, Claude Tassin, read our work and we agreed to make the precision which follows. With regard to the exegetical sciences at the moment, one cannot speak of a “self-effacing movement of the Word
The text we are analyzing contains some word for word or implicit characteristic 
oppositions. Thus the opposition between (first) novitiate (l. 16, 36, 38) and second novitiate 
(l. 38); the opposition between a past and a future: first novitiate / second novitiate; foundations / tomorrow's building; original sins / tomorrow's sins ... That gives us a 
common thread: a past-present-future structure. There is thus a question of time. The problem 
of time combines in the text with the problem of space, the problem of the “field” (both in the 
ordinary and metaphoric sense) of mission: clearing “the ground that has not yet been 
cultivated” (l. 12-13). We have before us the missionary time-space: it has to do with taking 
on an apostolic field “that has not yet been cultivated”, which Libermann understands in a 
temporal perspective.

“God’s moment” for community and for mission

In his letter, Libermann offers his readers a hermeneutic key for their present situation. 
The situation of the community in Dakar at this precise moment – November 1847 – is one of 
foundations marked by reflective preparation for mission under the leadership of the new 
bishop, without intensive external activity. The key given by Libermann is found in lines 32-
33: “At the present moment, God in his goodness is offering you the chance to become holy 
within your community. I see in that a sign of his merciful Providence.”

In other words, your present life (“at the present moment”, “within your community”) only 
takes on sense and value with reference to “all that you learnt during your novitiate” (l. 36). We have here a referential past pointing back to the spiritual and human experience at 
the origin of their vocation as missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary.

After the present and the past, the future shows up in lines 34-37: “If you had been 
plunged straight into active ministry right on your arrival, you would not have had the time to 
put all that you learnt during your novitiate into practice. You would not have got to know 
yourselves sufficiently” and that would have amounted to comprising the future of the mission 
inasmuch as (we will return to this) you would have risked committing original sins (cf. l. 17).

“Now, you are doing what amounts to a second novitiate” (l. 37-38): the urgency of a 
present moment which has the existential value of an injunction, of a concrete imperative (not 
just a pious wish, a simple hope); either you do this “second novitiate”, and the mission will 
work, or you don't do it, and the failure will be assured. “Now” (l. 37) rimes with “novitiate 
in practice” (l. 38).

The crux of Libermann’s interpretation is that the community’s present manifests 
God’s will, with reference to a past and in view of a future:

- We have a referential past, namely not just a chronological past but an existential past 

which refers to the personal and community experience of the group.

coming in flesh” while referring to Phil. 2, 6ff., because the text does not make reference to a “coming down” of 
the Incarnation, but takes its point of departure, right from the first words, from Jesus’ status as human being … 
However, it is true that later spiritual tradition had wanted to read into it the ternary movement 
(incarnation/cross/glory). There is no doubt that, in line with the French School of Spirituality, Libermann could 
not but assimilate this interpretation in terms of the Word himself “coming down”: the texts we have cited from 
Bérulle, from Olier and from Libermann himself, all point to that.
- This referential past functions along with an operational present which Libermann makes it a point to name: “I repeat again here and now” (l. 17), and which refers precisely to the community on the actual field of operation in Dakar.

- This present, according to Libermann, determines the future: in the here and now, “your sins would be original sins” (l. 17); “If the first stones of a building are not well placed …” (l. 22); “if you were to have the misfortune of getting it wrong …” (l. 23-24).

The responsibility of the present moment

The present moment commits a whole social future for “those who come after you” (l. 23-26). To drive home the “adamic” comparison evoked by the notion of “original sin” (l. 17), we can develop Libermann’s thought in this way: if you commit sin at this moment, you will bring forth sinful missionaries tainted by original sin; entire Christian communities will be marked by this originating sin for which you will be responsible as pioneers of the mission. The stakes are therefore very high.

However, that does not depend on you alone. This social present of the mission strategy is “God’s moment”. One can read in line 44: “Dear confreres, try to make the most of God’s moment”. God’s moment, employed here without any other qualification or precision, is really the biblical kairos, “the favorable time, the day of salvation” found in 2 Cor. 6, 2 ff; “God’s today” in Hebrews 3, 7-14, taken up by the “Hodie” of the Christian liturgy.133

There is a game of missionary grace with possible original sin: “Your virtues hold some power and very special graces” (l. 18).

- God “vivifies [his work] with his grace and love” (l. 19).
- “But, on the contrary, if you continue as you have started, you will have a powerful influence …” (l. 25-26).
- “He will give you his insights and his grace will be there to help you” (l. 44-45).

But if you are not faithful to this grace, original sin will occur. This founding sin will bring about a social catastrophe, and not only an individual spiritual catastrophe.

To drive home the image and the biblical reference that nourish Libermann’s reasoning, one can add: you are currently in an initial state of innocence with regards to mission. Everything is still possible and grace is passing by. If you do not seize the opportunity, things will fall apart; the world will fall into a state of sin. Mission is, so to speak, a new creation: Salvation History starts all over (continues) with mission; Today is the “favorable time”, “the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6, 2 ff.).

In other words, it is the strategy of God’s moment that Libermann highlights. Here again, God reveals himself in history …

How to be authentic: the Grace/Truth sequence

God’s moment along with his grace will make you “true servants of God, true apostles, (l. 40). This is the “Grace / Truth” sequence. Indeed, the missionaries could well be hollow shams. In the theological language of the 18th century, there are no exclusive categories for truth and falsehood. There is room for what is “seemingly false”, for falsehood which seems to be true, and for appearances of truth in radical falsehood. So basically, you

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133 We will give further on what appears to us as the biblical foundations of Libermann’s conception of time.
pioneer missionaries could be “seemingly false”: seeming apostles, not “true” apostles. Not apostles who resemble, but rather who have a semblance of, apostles. They may certainly not be gross forgeries but “seemingly false” all the same – which, perhaps, is more serious.

_A present that bespeaks a revolutionized world_

_The present_, if welcomed as God’s moment, if it does not sink into original sin and if it does not inaugurate a broken world, _will be transformative with regard to the future:_

- It brings forth a “difference”, something “totally different” (l. 57-63) _in terms of the missionaries’ opinion_ of the Blacks, a judgment which will be totally different from that of the “world” (in the same sense as Saint John), from that of Europeans and travelers.

- Finally, and consequently, _it reverses the principle of the existing social order, creating a subversive future in principle:_ you shall not only make yourselves equal to the Negros (“Make yourselves Negroes with the Negroes”, l. 65-68), but there will be an upside down reversal of existing human relations since you, European masters, will make yourselves servants of the Negro slaves who will become your masters (l. 69-71). This is the master-servant dialectic drawn from the biblical wellspring.

The whole point of what Libermann is saying is quite revolutionary with regards to the existing state of slavery and with regards to the nascent colonial dispensation. But it is also quite in line with tradition: “Christian subversion (the idea of glory in service) takes its source from within the Trinitarian mystery. This movement is confirmed in the hymn to the Philippians where the 6th verse proclaims “service” in God, the 7th and 8th verses recount “service” in human beings” (Henriette Danet).

At the end of this second reading of Libermann’s letter, it is possible to see how the first reading, which was done in kenotic terms, ties in with this second reading, which centers Libermann’s letter on the analysis of a missionary situation, understood certainly at a given moment in time, but within the ebb and flow of Salvation history. All in all, this is what Libermann is saying to his missionaries: _Given your state of innocence and grace since your novitiate formation (referential past), you are now in a missionary present intended by God (operational present). Everything will work out well in the present if you prove to be faithful to the past that grounds you in view of a revolutionary future, seeing that imitating Jesus Christ, you, the masters or people who might be tempted to behave as such, will make yourselves servants of those who are slaves._

_The biblical roots of Libermann’s conception of time and the time of salvation_

_“Architects of time”_

Must the importance which Libermann attaches to time (past-present-future) be considered as a heritage of the Hebrew thought which he grew up in up to his twenty-fourth year? One could admit it, given the undeniable fact that the mental structure of Israel’s philosophy rests on a specific idea of time and history. Someone has spoken of the Jews as

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“architects of time”, in the same way as the Egyptians and the Greeks were architects of space, the Romans architects of State and Empire, and the Christians architects of Heaven. In his *Philosophie du judaïsme (A Philosophy of Judaism)*, Abraham Heschel commits a brilliant chapter to time and history. Some excerpts will do here: “Judaism is a religion of history, a religion of time …” (p. 214). “If one does not learn to recognize and rightly esteem the instances of time in the same way one does with localized objects; if one does not become sensitive to the unique character of individual events, the meaning of revelation would remain obscure” (p. 217). Judaism “tries to situate itself at a level of reality where events are manifestations of divine norms, at a level where history is understood as the realization of the truth” (p. 218). “Jewish tradition affirms […] that there is a hierarchy of moments in time and that all eras are not similar” (p. 220).

We have underlined the quotations so as to highlight a conception of time, of events and of their significance which one cannot but bring into consonance with the libermannian conception of “God’s moment”.

The structures of spiritual experience of the Old Testament

Libermann spent exactly half of his life in Judaism before converting to Christianity. All that social anthropology has taught us on the “cultural background of personality” allows us to think that, even if Libermann broke up with Judaism, it is impossible for the basic mental structures of his Jewish personality to have completely disappeared.

When B. Maggioni, in the *Dictionnaire de la vie spirituelle (Dictionary of Spiritual Life)*, summarizes numerous works to do a synthesis of the “structures of spiritual experience of the Old Testament”, one cannot but notice the striking similarity between what he says and the structures of Libermann’s thought and spiritual experience. Two points in question:

a) *Obstinate fidelity to history*: “The Old Testament orients faith toward what happens in the world and obliges it to remain anchored in events, whatever they may be. [...] Thus, the spiritual experience of Israel, anchored as it were in historical concreteness, is always open to the challenges and threats of events” (p. 388).

b) *Fidelity to origins and openness to innovation*: “For the Jew […], to enter into the realm of things means to search for God’s unforeseeable and ever free-will; it is necessary to have the sense of an intention still in development, and not a fixed command to be conserved and repeated” (p. 389).

Can we draw a conclusion other than that of the preceding section?

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The New Testament Kairos

There is much less reason for Libermann to abandon his Jewish attitude to time and history, given that there is, precisely on this matter, a perfect agreement between the Old Testament and the New, with transposition in Greek terms.

Thus, in the New Testament, one finds three sorts of time:
- *Time as duration*, linked with the experience of continuity in life;
- *Time as succession* (Greek *Khranos*) designating a determined space in time;
- And lastly, *qualified time*, that is to say a lived moment to which faith in God, the Master of time, accords a particular importance. The Greek work *Kairos* is usually employed to designate the right point, which touches the target, from which is derived either the “critical point” or the “right moment”.

We have here, in the third meaning, “God’s moment” as it appears in Libermann’s letter and as we have highlighted it.

God’s moment: a central theme in Libermann

An additional proof of the exactitude of our analysis, which sees in the strategy of God’s moment the hermeneutical key to the letter of 19th November 1847, is provided to us by the sheer observation of the omnipresence “God’s moment” as a theme in Libermann’s writings. In an index edited on this theme by the journal *Spiritus*, one counts more than 130 references to “God’s moment” in diverse forms.

By way of example, here are two quotations from 1844 in which Libermann speaks of events as the voice of God:
- “Our affairs have progressed in such a way […] that I will consider it a crime to resist to events […] It is necessary to let ourselves be guided by divine Providence” (to Fr. Collin, [August] 1844, *ND*, VI, p. 322).
- “Now, not assured of anything with regards to the will of God, we must let ourselves be guided by the event of divine Providence” (to Fr. Schwindenhammer, in Rome, 20 December 1844, *ND*, VI, p. 488-489).

Texts like these sound well to our contemporary ears. There is no doubt that Libermann’s thought, in the way it appears to us in this letter, is capable of mobilizing fresh energy for today and tomorrow. That is what our conclusion intends to suggest.

CONCLUSION
LIBERMANN: THOUGHT THAT SETS IN MOTION …

The philosopher, Ernst Bloch, put it beautifully that God expects humans to be “monitors of history”. Libermann was a remarkable “monitor” for the missionary Church of the 19th century. Through the Spiritans, among others, he can maintain the same role today and in the future. An English adage speaks of this kind of man as “a man for all seasons”.

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141 See *Spiritus*, n° 6, February 1961. This index was prepared on the basis of numerous references put together by J. HEIJKE for his article on Libermann: “Vingt-cinq ans d’empreinte juive” (“Twenty-five Years marked by Jewish Influence”), *ibid.*, p. 31-48.
Indeed, he continues to raise some fundamental questions for his heirs. The 19th November 1847 letter strongly draws their attention to some points, pertaining to their missionary engagement in the footsteps of Libermann. Here are two of such points.

Paying attention to the “signs of the times”

To avoid any form of anachronism, we have not until now used the expression “signs of the time” which has already become part of common language … Church language, to be more precise! Without doubt, the expression is found in the New Testament (Mt 16, 4). However, using it in theological thought almost as a category is quite recent. It goes back to John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council.

It is evident, though, that the expression “God’s moment” in Libermann, and particularly in this letter of 1847, integrates the same thing. It is, therefore, not out of place to say that fidelity to Libermann calls upon us to take on the theological elaboration of the notion of “signs of the times” and their discernment in the Christian way of life.

Fr. M.-D. Chenu is one of those who have contributed the most in promoting a theology attentive to the signs of the times, and there is a fine text (referring directly to Fr. Chenu and quoting him) by Paul VI to the General Audience of 16th April 1969, where he defines the expression “signs of the times” as designating “a theological interpretation of contemporary history” resulting “from a confrontation of faith with life”. Paul VI underlined the difficulties and the ambivalences of this exercise. At the assembly of French bishops and priests (Paris, 26th-27th May 1969), Bishop Alix (of Mans) listed the conditions for a correct hermeneutic of the “signs of the times”: 1. Good knowledge of the Bible; 2. Real familiarity with salvation history; 3. Enlightened attention and good information vis-à-vis situations, currents and research; 4. Healthy exercise of the critical function of the faith.

Libermann fulfills all the listed conditions. Deeply rooted in his time (attentiveness to the situation of the Blacks, to the struggle against slavery and the slave-trade), sensitive to encountering people from whom he is prepared to garner information and inspiration (Le Vavasseur, Tisserant, Bishop Barron, Bishop Collier, Bishop Luquet, Mother Javouhey, Bishop Truffet), Libermann is capable of discerning the “signs of the times” in things and in people, applying to those signs a biblical vision inherited from his Jewish culture enhanced by the gift of the Christian faith.

Openness to universality due to his Jewish origins in Alsace, more cosmopolitan than nationalistic: “he came from ‘elsewhere’, was freer with regards to social
constraints, more confident in the future, more open to the world and to people” (Paul Sigrist). 148

- Openness to a “prophetic” vision, in the biblical sense, that is to say as somebody who pronounces the word of God on human history grasped immediately in its ultimate significance as Salvation history. That explains his aptitude in drawing up apostolic projects, in foreseeing a future for that Africa which Hegel’s philosophy still excluded from History…

- Openness to a critical vision of the existing social order which he considers in light of God’s plan, for God is acting in history today as well. See his surprising letter (to a certain extent) concerning the 1848 Revolution: “Let us welcome the new dispensation with frankness and simplicity, and let us offer it the spirit of the holy Gospel; we will sanctify the world and the world will cling to us” (20th March 1848, to Fr. Gamon, Sulpician). 149

It is his openness and clarity, faced with the signs of the times, that Libermann leaves behind for us to bring to fruition in new missionary initiatives. In his days, the problem of raising up the Blacks in a context linked with the end of slavery appeared to him as a work of priority. Where are the priorities today? Don’t they come under the headings “struggle for development”, “fight for justice and human rights” without which the announcing of the Good News cannot be possible? Isn’t that the new call from God to take sides with the poorest of all?

The Servant-Missionary

Libermann is said to have been “the Saint Paul of Africa”. In saying that, one thinks most all about his historical role in the evangelization of the continent. He was the pioneer apostle for the effective resumption of missions on the African coasts in the 19th century. Nevertheless, it appears one could even take it deeper. As we have tried to show in the analysis of the letter of 19th November 1847, the very structure of his thought is of Pauline inspiration. Mission, as he conceives and lives it out, is kenosis, humility-elevation, death-resurrection, in the imitation of Christ.

Libermann thus appears quite clearly as someone who could possibly provide inspiration for today’s missionaries, whom a survey done by the journal Spiritus in 1985
shows to have willingly defined themselves as “servants”. Scripture scholar, Claude Tassin, points out in an article of the same journal how Saint Paul appeals to the biblical Servant-figure to characterize his mission as a “living transmission […] of the unique loving act accomplished by the Suffering Servant […] Touched himself by Christ who reached out to him and living out of this love, the missionary is mandated as a Servant-Prophet to carry on the same loving movement towards other people”.

It is necessary to grasp all the connotations of Libermann’s formula: “Make yourselves Negro with the Negroes”. It seems possible for us to establish that, as authored by Libermann in 1847, this formulation is not equivalent to “Make yourselves Blacks with the Blacks”. The weight of meaningfulness is not the same in the two cases, neither are the value judgments implied. Indeed as Serge Daget has shown, in the abolitionist struggle that runs from the Revolution up to the middle of the 19th century, the word “Black” can be used in direct opposition to “slave” and “Negro”: “Because Black is neither tainted with prejudice nor has it already become stereotyped, it pleads against alienation and contributes to founding the abolitionist ideology. Therefore, it is the product of innovation.” From his quantitative survey of the abolitionist literature, Serge Daget does not come to precise conclusions. Historical fluctuations govern the utilization of the words “slave”, “Negro” and “Black” by the abolitionists. In 1847, they continue to speak of “Negro trade”, a term which the general public immediately perceives as referring to the reality of slavery. “Thus, far from insisting on the word supposed to carry some innovative value, [the abolitionist literature] preferred the words which were guaranteed immediate perception, at the risk of providing support for stereotypes. One discerns neither unanimous agreement, nor concerted policy, in the usage of the vocabulary. It remains the act of a personal decision and is never integrated as such in any collective and uniform discipline.”

Quite precisely, Libermann’s evolution in his vocabulary is an example of “a personal decision” linked to personal engagement and sensitivity. We have taken the trouble to carefully note the evolution of Libermann’s vocabulary in his major documents. Anybody can verify that, since the documents have all been reproduced in the present volume among the “sources”.

In the Short Memorandum on the Foreign Missions of 1840, we find the word “Negros” used four times and not one single time the word “Black”. One will note that Libermann does not speak of Africa at all in this Memorandum but only of the Islands of Bourbon and Haiti, and therefore, in the two cases, the word “Negros” designates the black population originally victim of the trade which reduced them to slavery.

On the contrary, the provisional Rule of the missionaries of the Very Holy Heart of Mary, written during the same Roman year, employs the terms “Blacks” and “Negroes” in the

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151 Cl. TASSIN, “Saint Paul et la figure du Serviteur” (“Saint Paul and the Servant Figure”), *Spiritus*, vol. XXVI, n° 101, IV/1985, p. 398-399.
153 Ibid., p. 518.
154 Ibid., p. 544.
155 See above, Source I, p. 197-205.
oldest version to have come down to us.156 Thus in the third chapter of the first part, one can read in the two successive articles: “Art. VII. The Mission which Our Lord is giving us now is that of the Blacks […]. Art. VIII. Even though our whole attention must now be directed to the Negroes …”

Now, four years later, when Libermann sends to Cardinal Fransoni his Project for the salvation of the people of the coasts of Africa (1844)157, it is only the word “Blacks” that one finds (16 times) employed to designate both Africans and the people of the islands with the following distinction: “savage Blacks” and “Blacks from the civilized colonies”.158

This seems to be due to a pronounced will to eliminate the word “Negro”, certainly considered as pejorative, and to replace it with a more noble term. We find the proof of that in the printed version, in 1845, of the Provisional Rule cited above159: the comparison with Arragon’s manuscript, dated 1844, shows that the word “Negroes” is replaced, wherever it appears, with the word “Black”. Thus, in the example given above, article VII remains unchanged since it used the word “Black”, whereas in article VIII, the word “Negroes” is twice removed: “Even though our whole attention must now be directed to the Blacks […]; […] on the condition that the spiritual interest of the Blacks does not suffer any damage as a result.”160

That Libermann uses the word “Black” quite intentionally as more positive, in preference to the word “Negro” with a pejorative tone, is proven to us in clearer terms in the long 1846 Memorandum on the Missions of the Blacks.161 We have noted thirty-six utilizations of the word “Black” (the Blacks or the black population) against two occurrences of the word “Negro”. These two exceptions are particularly interesting, for both of them appear in a context denoting negative value judgment on the “Blacks” or referring to the slave system: “Those people, we were told, in speaking of the Negroes, will never learn to behave themselves […] They are stupid, incompetent, with no heart, they are thieves, etc.”162 “In the colonies, one gives to the unfortunate Negroes so heinous and so disgusting work that they drop it as soon as the whip no longer forces them.”163

Consequently, at the end of the evolution in vocabulary that runs from 1840 to 1846, it seems that the word “Negro” designates, in Libermann’s mind, not only “Black” but Black considered as sub-human and as a slave, the result being the disappearance of the word “Negro” in his writings except when he wants to refer precisely to the negative and tragic aspect of their historical situation marked by slavery and the slave trade.

Incidentally, one must note something of the same nature in the Greek text of Phil. 2, 6-11. When it is said of Christ Jesus that he took “the form of a servant”, the Greek word employed (doulos) carries a similar ambivalence: it means at same time “servant” and “slave”. Jesus makes himself a servant in taking on the characteristics of the slave. A slave is

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156 This is Arragon’s copy, written during his novitiate in 1844 (CSSp Archives, 16-A-V). On this question, see above, F. NICOLAS, “D’un projet missionnaire…” (“From a Missionary Project …”), note 33 along with the corresponding text, p. 306.
157 See above, Source 3, p. 211-220.
158 Ibid., p. 216.
161 See above, Source 4, p. 221-270.
162 Memorandum … (original printed text), p. 3; ND, VIII, p. 225; above, p. 232.
163 Memorandum … (original printed text), p. 9; ND, VIII, p. 233; above, p. 238.
one who does not belong to oneself, but belongs to somebody else: Jesus gave himself up into our hands. He washed our feet.\textsuperscript{164}

“Make yourselves Negro with the Negroes”, put side by side with Phil. 2, 6-11 as we have seen, therefore means, “Make yourselves slaves with the slaves, belong to the Blacks, give yourselves up into the hands of the Blacks like the Suffering Servant gave up his life.” In other words, the linguistic and affective connotations are stronger here than they could have been in the formula “Make yourselves Blacks with the Blacks”.

In the letter of 19\textsuperscript{th} November 1847, the recommendation “Make yourselves Negro with the Negroes” (l. 65-67) is preceded by another piece of advice: “Rid yourselves of Europe, of its mores, its mentality” (l. 65). One can see clearly that Libermann does not only intend to define a purely interior spiritual attitude without any bearing on behavior, but he targets a global phenomenon which we would today refer to as the concrete cultural adaptation of the missionary. We can even speak of the inculturation of the faith in the fundamental sense (but also generally) of Michel Sales who writes: “The term inculturation evokes, by implicit or explicit analogy, the theological concept and the theological reality of the incarnation through which the uncreated Word of God, the Son of the Father, took on flesh by the Virgin Mary and became man, lived, died and rose from the dead for the salvation all people”.\textsuperscript{165}

In fact, as we saw in the analysis of the 19\textsuperscript{th} November 1847 letter to the community of Dakar and Gabon, it is exactly this movement of incarnation and “annihilation” of the Servant-Christ that Libermann intends to propose to his missionaries. We would like to intensify the demonstration on the basis of a text hitherto practically unknown, which we have published in this volume among the “source” texts: the Missionary Instructions to the First Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Castres on their way to Africa.\textsuperscript{166} The instructions present the particularity of having been written just after the letter of 19\textsuperscript{th} November 1847, at the same time as the letter to Bishop Truffet which was completed on 22\textsuperscript{nd} November.\textsuperscript{167}

What does Libermann say to the Castres Sisters? He tells them that they must do everything to “abolish distance” between themselves and the Blacks: “I see everywhere, even in Europe, an unhealthy system opposed to the spirit of the Gospel. It makes people feel there is a distance between them and us, by means of outfit, behavior, the manner of speaking and acting.”\textsuperscript{168} Then he adds: “Our system must be that of Our Lord …” Is the system of Our Lord anything other than the incarnation of the Word whose kenosis somewhat “abolishes distance” between God and humans? Moreover, it is to a real kenotic “emptying” that Libermann invites the Sisters in plain and simple terms and in the spirit of Bishop Truffet:\textsuperscript{169}

“The Sisters must be deeply convinced that they have no idea of what will be theirs to do and the manner they must go about doing the good. […] The reason is that, coming from Europe,
one is too accustomed to the European way of doing things and would like to establish it where the mores and way of life are radically different.” It is important to note the strength of this text! And Libermann drives on by putting to the Sisters a method in line with the great missionary tradition we spoke about; a method which is a program for the missionary’s incarnation in other people so as to facilitate the inculturation of the faith in them. That means engaging the people from within, in view of their transformation. It is important, writes Libermann to the Sisters, “to allow the indigenes the mores and the ways of doings things which are natural to them, to improve them by offering new life based on the principles of the faith and on Christian virtues and by rectifying what is defective in them. We need to take on their mores and ways of doing things rather than wanting to mold them along ours.”

In all truth, Libermann opens up a huge area for the missionary adventure: an adventure not in the sense of an African Safari, but one which takes the form of the Way of the Cross and of the Resurrection, in the Christ’s footsteps. It is an adventure that is co-extensive with people’s history. It is a mission that knows its origins – God’s “plan” of salvation, and knows where it should lead to – the fullness of the Body of Christ finally achieved at the end of time and history. Hence the necessity of not missing “God’s moment” today.

Therefore, let no one be mistaken about the meaning of our quest into Libermann and of our inquiry. Libermannian origins and their tradition interest us inasmuch as they open us today to a greater intelligence of the mystery of Christ in view of the coming of the Kingdom. Indeed, concerning libermannian tradition, one must admit what Paul Valadier puts vigorously about the whole Christian tradition: it is “essentially this rootedness which allows to move forward; that memory which permits to anticipate and without which we would lay no claim to any future because we would lack any presence vested with the past. However, memory and tradition are only but conditions for openness to the One who is coming and whom no tradition can hold”.  

Paul COULON

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170 “Instructions missionnaires aux premières sœurs...” (“Missionary Instructions to the First Sisters...”), Source 6, above, p. 286.
171 Ibid., p. 286.
TRANSLATOR’S NOTES

We have deliberately opted for a literal translation of Libermann’s famous phrase which is commonly rendered in English with the verb “to be” as the equivalent (semantically speaking) of the French reflexive verb “se faire”. There is a certain risk of watering down (under-translating) the full force of Libermann’s imperative – something a literal translation manages to avoid. Indeed, Libermann had the option of using the verb “to be” (être) in French, but did not – which was not simply a question of sheer hazard. Paul Coulon puts it aptly in footnote 5 above: “The nuance can be important. Libermann’s approach implies a movement of volition and an active effort …” As to whether one should translate “nègres” by “Blacks” or “Africans”! as some have done, we simply refer the reader to Coulon’s analysis further in the text, with regards to how the vocabulary was far from being neutral in Libermann’s time and how Libermann himself evolved in his usage of the words. See also Paul Coulon, “Léopold Sédar Senghor, les spiritains et Libermann”, Mémoire Spiritaine, n° 15, 2002, p. 103-134, where the author puts into perspective how Senghor himself admitted getting it wrong on the exact formulation of Libermann’s imperative.

Whilst the original word is “drapeau” (flag), we chose to render it by “standard” (in the sense of “flag”) which may have the double effect of referring at once to a rallying point and to a criterion.

Truffet employs the rare adjective “savoisien” (in contrast to “Savoyard” – inhabitant of Savoy) rendered here by “savosian”, perhaps a neologism in English.

The full name of the Society in French is « Missions Étrangères de Paris » (MEP).

The French word the author employs is a specialist term: « victimale ».

We have followed, to a large extent, the translation of this letter as done by the two Vincents (Griffin and O’Toole) in Spiritan Anthology (p.281 ff.), while adding a number of precisions here and there, the main difference being that all-important phrase: “Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres”.

Scripture texts are taken here from the NRSV.

Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle was the founder of the French School of Spirituality.

In our discussion with Paul Coulon during the course of this translation, he pointed out how crucial the previous chapter (“The Effervescent Year 1846 and the Genesis of Libermann’s Long Memorandum to Propaganda”) in this particular volume is to understanding the present chapter which we have attempted to render here in English.

The expression refers to the year Libermann spent in Rome waiting for an answer to the project of the “Work of the Blacks” which he submitted to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.