

## Letter 104

## L. 17 to Mother Barat

SS. C. J. et M.

Saint Charles, Missouri, October 8, 1818<sup>1</sup>  
Commended to Saint Anthony of Padua

My venerable Mother,

After longing and sighing for news of our dear Society, finally we received three packets at the same time, two addressed by Father Barat and one by Mother Girard;<sup>2</sup> doubtless they arrived at different times in New Orleans, but the same steamboat brought them to Saint Louis, where they waited even longer and came by opportunity with our first three boarders,<sup>3</sup> who arrived last Saturday with all the dear news from France. The Blessed Virgin on this day dedicated to her added to the many favors we owe her that of the foundation of our first American boarding school and the arrival of the copy of the letters from Rome.<sup>4</sup> We are invoking her under the title of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, as we promised the kind Ursulines we would do. We shed happy tears on learning that the Sovereign Pontiff [Pius VII] has added his approbation and blessing to the many signs that our mission is the Will of God! Tomorrow we will sing the Te Deum and have a Mass of Thanksgiving offered. Imagine our joy in hoping for two new foundations, at the progress of our boarding schools and schools for the poor, in learning about your trip to La Louvesc and the conversion of the English lady, about the vows of our sisters and the enlargement of the house in Paris,<sup>5</sup> the retreat and the news of all our dear ones, even of the deaths of our sisters, so precious in God's sight.

I shall answer all these letters by way of New Orleans, as will my sisters; this one will be less voluminous, as it will go through Washington; that is how I sent the last letters I wrote from Saint Louis and the first from Saint Charles. You will have seen how Providence has brought us to the remotest village [a city here] in the United States. It is situated on the Missouri, which is frequented only by those who trade with the Indians. They do not live very far away from here, but I have not seen any little Indian girls in the month since coming here, only a half-breed who is promised to us as a domestic or postulant, depending on her ability; there is not the same prejudice against this race as there is against Negroes and mulattoes. The bishop has said positively that we may not admit them to either of the schools and had appointed one day a week for the religious instruction of people of color; otherwise, he said, we would not keep white children in the schools. He told us about an experience of his at the college in Baltimore,<sup>6</sup> which shows how difficult it is to overcome racial prejudice in this country. He consulted his archbishop [Archbishop Carroll] on the matter and was told that this attitude would have to be maintained as the last safeguard of manners in this country.

I am sending you the bishop's approbation,<sup>7</sup> as far as he has been able to give it without having read the Constitutions. He is now at the Barrens or *Bois-Brulé*, near Sainte Genevieve, where he is founding his seminary, paid for by a congregation made up of Americans from Kentucky, who have been instructed by Bishop Flaget and the Trappists. They live like the primitive Church in Jerusalem or like the Guarini in Paraguay.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original autograph, C-VII 2) c Duchesne to Barat, Box 2. Postmark: Paris, January 17, 1819. Cf. J. de Charry, II 1, L. 104, pp. 157-164; Hogg, pp. 107-113; Ch. Paisant, pp. 199-203.

<sup>2</sup> Henriette Girard was then secretary general in Paris.

<sup>3</sup> Emilie and Thérèse Pratte, and their cousin, Pélagie Chouteau.

<sup>4</sup> The copy of the letters of Cardinals Litta and Fontana to Father Perreau, about the approbation of the departure of Philippine and her companions to America by Pius VII.

<sup>5</sup> The Society of the Sacred Heart rented the house on rue de l'Arbalète, adjoining that of rue des Postes.

<sup>6</sup> Bishop Dubourg had been superior of the college at Baltimore before being named apostolic vicar of Louisiana. His archbishop was Bishop Carroll, a former Jesuit.

<sup>7</sup> The establishments of the Society of the Sacred Heart were then diocesan and remained so until the approbation of the Constitutions by Leo XII in 1826. The house in Saint Charles in 1818, therefore, depended on Bishop Dubourg.

<sup>8</sup> From 1609 the Jesuits organized in Paraguay a project of evangelization and human development in favor of the Guarani Indians, the famous "reductions," in which they sought to imitate the ideal of the early church. They

In Saint Charles where we are, it is quite a different country, although there are some signs of improvement. A few years ago, however, one might have witnessed conduct comparable to a pagan bacchanalia: girls scantily clad, holding a bottle of whiskey in one hand and a man with the other, dancing every day of the year and never doing any work. Now there is more exterior decency, but these people are as ignorant of morality as the Indians are. In our free school, we now have twenty-two children, and in proportion to the population, this equals a school of a hundred in France. These children have never heard of Our Lord, of his birth or of his death or of hell, and they listen open-mouthed to our instructions. I have to say to them continually, "Yes, this is really true." All except two are learning the alphabet. Among the children who pay a little tuition, there is the same ignorance. When we complain to the bishop that we have no "savages," he replies, "Indeed you have, and your work among these children will be wider and more lasting because of the influence over the poor." We have to combat worldliness as well as ignorance. Some of the boarders have more dresses than underclothes or handkerchiefs; they have embroidered dresses of brightly colored silk with lace trimmings and fancy sleeves of net or lace.<sup>9</sup> The pupils of the free school dress on Sundays like our boarders in Paris. They scorn black shoes and must have pink or blue, yellow or green ones, and the rest to match, but they do not use handkerchiefs. We have had to require them to do so at school.

We are very inconveniently lodged here and shall have to go elsewhere at the end of a year, for we are paying nearly 2,000 francs for seven small rooms badly in need of repair, a large garden, orchard and woods, left uncultivated, and we have no one to work them. We need a French gardener. Our baker and carpenter are French. As we cannot find a larger house, we shall have to build.

In this neighborhood there are more Americans who speak English than there are French or Creoles, but as both languages are fairly well understood and the children are accustomed to hearing both, Mother Octavie can take care of the English part of the school for the time being, as all these children are very ignorant. The bishop is not quite convinced of this. He had her read aloud to him and Eugenie too, and he thinks it will be six months before she will be able to manage. She must have been intimidated by him. Everyone likes her, and when we are all three together, all eyes are on her, especially when she speaks, even in English. This pleases the Americans who disdain anything that is not American, and as they are not given to flattery, I see no harm in her pleasing them for the good of the boarding school. It seems that a complete change came over her on the steamboat; now she has the bearing and all that is needed here to be a mistress general; she is that as well as secretary and mistress of class, if you approve; her regularity is perfect with what you have already given her. Sister Eugenie is also very good; she is mistress general of the free school, sub-treasurer and vestiaire. Marguerite is sub-infirmarian and cook; she is virtuous but so slow at everything that it cannot last; it could even tax her virtue because she is so embarrassed. Catherine would have done better [lines crossed out are illegible]; she is exact in her employments as sub-vestiaire, portress, refectorian of our little household.

Our effects arrived in good condition. The bishop was very pleased with the chapel furnishings. The Blessed Virgin is over the tabernacle and touched the ceiling of our tiny chapel, about the size of the sanctuary in Paris. But everything is very devotional in the little corner. There is a picture of the Sacred Heart with more than fifty figures; it comes from Rome; one of the Savior opening his heart also came from Rome, a Nativity and an Adoration of the Magi, both ravishing; a reliquary containing fragments of the True Cross, the thorn, the sponge, the crèche, the straw and relics of all Jesus' family, of all the apostles, popes, doctors of the Church, etc., relics of Saint Ignatius and Saint Regis, more than you have, and some very devotional pictures and lastly the one of Saint Regis that was found in the trash in the church at Grenoble, which I had promised him to have honored if he brought me to America; it was above the tabernacle on the day it was framed and the Mass in honor of the saint was said.

All the notebooks that came from Grenoble, thanks to Mother Adrienne,<sup>10</sup> have all the French

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disappeared after the suppression of the Society of Jesus in Spain and all Spanish territories (1768). The Trappists, under the leadership of Dom Augustin de Lestrang, were established in the United States in 1801.

<sup>9</sup> Philippine specifies what kind of lace with two French words: "la levantine" is a light silk material; "la blonde" is a lace made on a spindle.

<sup>10</sup> Adrienne Michel, RSCJ, was mistress general and mistress of studies in Grenoble from 1815.

poetry we need; we need the English and geography in French verse;<sup>11</sup> we need seeds for trees and vegetables and samples of English handwriting.

We would have great need of an English religious or someone who is fluent in English and knows petit point tapestry, crochet, lace design, the piano. I have already asked for one, and I am emboldened by the kindness with which you tell us to tell you everything.

Time and paper leave me only the possibility of assuring you of the obedience of your daughters, of sending our greetings to our fathers, mothers and sisters and of being at your feet.

Philippine

[On the reverse:]  
To Mother  
Mother Barat, rue des Postes  
n° 40, care of Mr. Roussel  
Paris  
France

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<sup>11</sup> In her letter of November 9 to Mother Barat, Philippine also speaks of a geography and of verses “from the hand of Mother Balastron.”