



Letter to Father Deguerry (14 November 1887)

My dear Father,

I waited before answering your letter of 23rd October, until the acrimony it caused had subsided enough to allow me to remain self-possessed. I can say to myself today only one thing: Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me. This is also what I say to myself when re-reading the sad letter in which you summarized, as if with pleasure, with the cold harshness that characterizes you, the insults and calumnies that I have received over the last twenty years. You would have saved yourself such a serious wrong if you had questioned me before accepting as truths hypotheses and reports which are unsupported. In point of fact, I certainly have no intention of doing anything in Carthage for our little Society until the end of the international crises that are threatening us. Therefore, you do not have to concern yourself with anything in this respect.

I could stop there, my dear Child, by simply reminding you of the Honora patrem tuum as the condition for God's blessings on you. However, in the midst of all the reasons you seek to gather from all sides, you touch upon a question which, once put in this way, is far too important for me not to tell you clearly my opinion, because it would be weakness and cowardice [on my part] to avoid doing so. The question is that of maintaining the Mother House at Maison Carrée. If it were only a question of feeling, I could agree with you. I am attached to it [Maison-Carrée] by all kinds of memories. But the experience of fifteen years shows me that this house, although useful to the Society from a temporal point of view, is calamitous for it from a spiritual point of view. This is because it is at the same time the ordinary headquarters of the Superior, as well as his council, and the centre of a large agricultural holding.

Through a temptation, initially imperceptible and subtle, which then became insurmountable, the superiors are turning into farmers. The same remark could be made of Trappist Monasteries, but since in that case there is only the one house in which the superior resides, the amalgamation does not have such disastrous consequences. In the case of a congregation which is extensive the results are terrible. The Superior is really holding on to only one house, one place of residence, as a peasant holds on to his

farm. Not only is he holding on to tit, but he is becoming materially preoccupied by it. It is in the very nature of labour on the land to produce this effect. No more taste for piety, for study, but a kind of intellectual numbness and moral indifference that increasingly gains ground leading to the neglect of the most sacred duties of the Regular Superior, I mean attention to his own spiritual culture, the direction of the souls of his confreres, zeal for supervising them from the religious point of view. From that point on, everything in a community loses flavour. This is the very word of the Gospel. It is the Superior who should be the salt of those under him. Quod si sal evanuerit, in quo salietur?

Your two predecessors did not remain long enough to be tempted and to have the occasion to reach this point. They would have become like you to the point of no longer even suspecting the danger, and increasing it further by planting, with nothing to stop them, hundreds of hectares of vines! It is doubtless a beautiful form of cultivation, but is it for this that a Regular Superior of a community of apostles is appointed? While he acts like a farmer, his flock is abandoned by the pastor. What misfortune and shame follows! I make no accusation of bad will; the temptation, however, is stronger than the will itself. Maison-Carrée, with its crops and vines, is made for a novitiate of brothers, but not for the residence of the Superior, nor even for that of the novitiate of the Fathers who witness there too much work, too much commerce, and too many Fathers who are unedifying.

