

Letter to the scholastics in Carthage (1st January 1888)

My dear Sons,

I am touched and thankful for the wishes that you have expressed to me on the occasion of the New Year, but even more for the witness to your good will which Reverend Father Provincial has provided. The more our [missionary] endeavours develop, the more clearly do I see the need to strengthen the formation of the missionaries of the future. I spoke to you about this at the beginning of your retreat this year. Do not forget my recommendations concerning this matter.

Piety and a delicate conscience [are necessary] before all else. After that, study and the acquisition of knowledge. With regard to the latter, the weakness of a large number of you makes me really ashamed. I have just received proof of this general weakness in a way which was particularly painful for me. I am alluding to the impression made on the college of Propaganda Fide by the arrival of four of your fellow students, chosen from among those who were thought to be the most capable. They were found to be really bottom, and after having been placed in the classes which corresponded to the number of years of study they had completed, it was found necessary to put them in lower classes.

The Reverend Prefect did not hide from me the fact that such results were far from doing you honour, and that every effort should be made to do much better. In particular it is esteemed that they have not been trained in the use of the language of theology and that scholastic theology is completely foreign to them. To be judged in this way is a real disaster for the Society to which you belong, because in Rome impressions are long-lasting. It could happen that one day preference is given to missionaries who are more capable, especially for the difficult missions, and that one of those that, at my request, had been originally entrusted to you might be taken from you. There is therefore a need, my dear sons, for a bit of a shake out of your torpidity, and for you to profit more from the courses provided for you.

Letter to Father Deguerry (19th January 1880).

My dear Son,

I have been ill for 15 days. Now I feel better and am getting ready to leave for Algeria. In the meantime, I approve your Council decisions, but wait for me before making the appointments. Today I am sending you Mr Joubert (Saint Joubert !), the captain in the Pontifical Zouaves whom General de Charette has finally agreed to let us have and who is going to do his noviciate as an auxiliary at Notre Dame d'Afrique where he will soon be joined by some Belgians. He is French and comes from Brittany. Get him settled in straight away and give him his small Rule book. I shall settle the other matters on my return. We have not opened a new minor seminary in Belgium, but we have managed to get the King to pay for the board and lodgings of twenty children at the minor seminary in Turnhout (diocese of Malines). We shall bring them to Algiers later, after they have been tested.

