



Ruling on the study of theology and on correspondence with the Superior General (December 1874)

My dearly beloved Sons in Our Lord,

One of the most sacred obligations that the Church imposes on its priests is the attainment of theological knowledge. Indeed, this knowledge is absolutely necessary as much to understand and teach religion as to fulfil, themselves, their challenging obligations. *Labia enim sacerdotis custodient scientiam, et legem requirunt ex ore ejus.*

However, for Missionaries, the study of theology has another advantage no less significant. Often, in the midst of material tasks, such as treating the sick, they receive unending distractions that society and conversing with non-Christians create. There are greater dangers in which they can find themselves as a result of distance and of bad examples before their eyes; then the study of theology can lift the soul towards higher regions, oblige the soul to turn to eternal realities and finally safeguard the soul from idleness.

For all these serious reasons, it seemed appropriate to the Chapter of the Society legitimately assembled and presided over by Us, to impose for ten years dating from their ordination, as is practiced in the greater number of dioceses, the obligatory study of theology for all young Missionaries, so that in the space of ten years, they will have reviewed entirely their theology twice.

The point of the Rule that stipulates writing to the Superior General is absolutely essential for the maintaining of unity and common action and to uphold regularity in the Society. It is therefore urgent to ensure its performance and since experience has shown that it can easily slide into neglect, the Chapter legitimately convoked, assembled and deliberating under Our authority, decided that a sanction would be fixed to it.

It is therefore prescribed that Fathers of each house or Mission other than those near the customary residence of the Superior General, will write to him or one of his Assistants, (who would be designated to replace him on this point,) on the last day of each month; local Superiors will write twice a month.

Now, for this correspondence to be useful to the Work and the Missionaries themselves, it has to touch on all the points essential to make known to the Major Superiors. Consequently, we point out the issues that the Missionaries should always address:

- 1) Has the Rule been read in common, as prescribed once a month – on the eve of the retreat?
- 2) Have theological conferences taken place regularly?
- 3) Were the spiritual exercises that should be done in common, i.e., prayer, particular examen, spiritual reading, always done? How many times were they missed and why?
- 4) How is the state of health? Has one had what was required? Has there been any wastage or waste of money in this regard? Does the Father Bursar fulfil his duties regularly?
- 5) Does charity prevail among the Missionaries? Is anyone of them in the situation of compromising the Mission by any imprudence?
- 6) How many children have attended school? Are there many sick to treat?
- 7) Is there anything out of the ordinary on the part of the local inhabitants or on the part of the authorities? 8) Has there been any proposal for a new establishment? Has there been any threat to existing ones?

One can add, if desired, other details on the Mission, on the works, on one's person, but these eight questions, to which everyone must always reply, ought never to be omitted. These letters are by their nature confidential.

