



Letter to Missionaries (18th September 1874)

My very dear Sons in Our Lord,

I can finally officially pass on to you the text of the Decree of our Provincial Council, which praises and encourages your Society of the Missions of Africa. I am communicating this to you with a double joy. It is not only, in fact, the word of your Bishops, that of the first Council of the Church of Africa resurrected, which congratulates you and approves of your undertaking. A higher significance and authority are given to this already solemn Act, by the approval with which the Holy See has invested the Decrees of the Provincial Council of Algiers.

However, even if this favour is extraordinary, I must, to give thanks to God with you, recognise that his blessings on your emerging Society had already prepared you. May you now be able to respond to this by a boundless dedication to the salvation of your brothers and above all recognise with humility that you are nothing, in spite of everything, but useless servants! This is the feeling that fills me. I am astounded that God willed to choose me to work towards, despite my weakness, an undertaking so great and so difficult.

Only a few years ago, not only did your little Society not exist, but also, even in the conditions applied to us in Algeria, it seemed impossible. How could we have dreamt of making our colony the centre of a Mission that would penetrate the depths of Africa, whereas the apostolate could not be exercised in Algeria itself?

However, God willed it. He wanted this conquest, the last of the most Christian kings, to be also the last crusade, the one that ought to be waged with truly apostolic arms of charity and martyrdom. He wanted new apostles to leave from these shores where the holiest of our kings met his death.

We have also seen, in the midst of countless calamities and problems, troubled times, when we wondered daily if Catholic France, if the whole former Christian world was on the way to destruction. Whereas persecution held sway against the most venerable Orders, your Work germinated in African soil, from an idea born of charity and faith. It took root and became a tree where the birds of the air began to find shelter.

Six years ago you numbered three or four at the most, united in a notion of apostolic dedication; today, Fathers and Brothers, you exceed 100. Then, you had only one house under your supervision, born of painful necessity; today, your buildings multiply step by step to the Sahara Desert. Where could you find, I repeat, a mark of Heaven's blessing more striking? I therefore hope that it will predestine you to be the instruments of his mercies for so many souls plunged in the most terrifying darkness of barbarism. I hope that the light of truth will rise on this land previously accursed. After having for so long undergone the effects of divine anger, may the sons of Ham feel the effects of his mercy through you.

