Letter to a friend, Bishop Cousseau, on Mission, Rome, and the Holy Father (20th April 1867)

Dear and Most Reverend Lord Bishop,

I was exceedingly touched by your kind greetings. I would have replied to thank you if they had not reached me in the middle of all the bother and feelings on leaving. The antiquarians were right and our predecessors even more so in opposing translations. Ah! Dear Bishop, leaving one's Church and clergy is a real act of dying for the first time. Only one thing sustains me. It is the idea that God will approve of my sacrifice and will enable me to work effectively to develop my distant mission, for I am now truly a missionary bishop. Lots has been done, but what is that in comparison to what remains to be done in the presence of three million Muslims, whose conversion will require centuries, especially if we are not given full and total freedom in their regard.

Unfortunately, I cannot travel to Angouleme for the moment. I am leaving in a fortnight for Algiers and I need to hurry to avoid the heat. I will also go to Rome in June. There are some remarkable things being said about the plan of some people who would seek in a surprise move to remove a dogmatic definition of the personal infallibility of the Pope. I am not looking into the core of the matter, which I consider quite plausible, but the form seems to me making a regrettable precedent.

Moreover, I would be more wary of major drawbacks in the climate of ideas especially in Italy and Germany. Many of our colleagues think the same. I heard one of them, venerable for his virtue and his age, say that if a like scheme were attempted in Rome during the meeting, he would take his hat and leave within the hour. Others, more well-known, would perhaps do even worse. All this is a worry, as it seems to me today more than ever that we must be of one heart and mind with one another and with the Holy Father.

I confide all this to you, my dear Bishop, so that your prayers may ward off, if possible, all the dangers I foresee and even others I cannot trust to paper and ink.

Letter to Father Charmetant, Superior at Biskra (12th April 1873)

My dear Sons,

I will begin by scolding Father Richard who has not written to me, as required by the Rule; this done, I thank Father Charmetant for the details he gives me. I wish to receive by the very next post the particular rule of your community life, which I shall sign and will send back to you to serve as law. The absolute obligation of always speaking Arabic among you and with the local people has to be observed. Without this, you will make no progress and Father Richard will not succeed. I recommend Brother Laurent to you. Look after him and treat him like a brother.

My dear sons, live at home as much as possible; don't make unnecessary visits, especially to women and keep busy with the local people. I approve of you receiving children, but only for assessment. You must not keep those who have improper attitudes or those who lack intelligence. Experience tells us that we ought to bring up educated men, catechists, priests if we can, but not workers or farmers. On these terms, I accept the little orphan of Tebessa for Saint-Eugène, and later your orphans, when you will know them sufficiently.

Here, everything is going quite well. The Nortbertines are leaving, and we are taking over Our Lady of Africa next week. Father Charbonnier will take charge. In Kabylia, we are going to make two new foundations. The novices will not come. Only two arrived from Rodez