



**To the Archbishop of Syracuse, in Sicily  
(17 August 1885)**

Most Reverend Excellency,

I received your kind letter of 31st July last. [It arrived] very late, because it first went to look for me in Algiers before coming to find me in Tunis. I wish first of all to express to you my immense gratitude for the interest you show in my endeavours and then to tell you frankly what my plans are. Your Excellency will then see better for himself if the building of which he speaks to me is suitable for the realization of these plans.

In seeking to found an establishment in Sicily my aim is twofold. The first and principal aim is to open a junior seminary there to receive young Sicilians or even Italians from the continent who would feel a vocation for the African missions. We already have such an establishment in Malta, another in Jerusalem, and two in France and Belgium. At this very moment, our missionaries from Algiers are founding a house [procure] for higher studies in Rome. Sicily, because of the similarity of its climate and because of the material habits that come from the long and frequent relations of your island with Africa, seems to me destined to provide useful subjects for our mission, if God calls them.

This then is my first aim. I have a second of which I do not often speak, it is that of finding a refuge for the novitiates and scholasticates of our Society of missionaries, in the event that that the progress of the revolution will one day oblige us to remove them from France.

I had therefore, for quite some time, been looking at your island, with the hope of finding in the convents and other ecclesiastical establishments confiscated and put up for sale by the State a house that would suit my plans. I wanted [to find] it especially in some country village and not in a large city, in order to attract less attention, as would seem to me to be more appropriate in the present circumstances. Father Long, a Dominican friar from Noto, having come to preach in Tunis and having heard me speak of this wish of mine, pointed out to me the former Carmelite convent of Spaccaforno.

Since I was asked only 7,500 frs for the purchase price, this good offer led me to decide to make this acquisition for which I obtained the necessary faculties from the Holy See. But having recently sent, on two occasions, first a representative of the Society of our Missionaries with my secretary, and then my own chancellor, I am convinced from their reports that it would be an enormous expense to restore this former Carmelite convent to the condition of receiving a junior seminary worthy of the name. The architect, in fact, estimates the cost of this work at no less than 200,000 frs !!!, as has been started, but less than 60.000 frs, if it is limited to what is strictly necessary. These are conditions that do not allow me to consider the Spaccaforno project as feasible for my present purposes.

Now, Your Excellency, since you have been so kind as to take a charitable initiative in this regard, I tell you frankly, as I announced at the beginning, that I would prefer an establishment outside a town for the reasons mentioned above, and only if I find nothing of the kind would I decide for something else. May Your Excellency therefore permit me to ask him whether he knows of any former convent or ecclesiastical property in Sicily, either in his own diocese or elsewhere, which might be for sale or rented for a long time under the conditions I desire. As for the former archiepiscopal seminary of Syracuse, it is not explained in your letter whether the State has taken possession of it and whether it is the State that rents it out to the municipality, or whether it still belongs to the diocese of Syracuse, which itself then rents it out to the city.

This letter is already very long, Excellency, but your charity will excuse me, and I myself am very happy to have been able to find this opportunity to recall your good souvenir and to tell you how grateful I am for the memory of the welcome full of kindness and benevolence that I received twice in your episcopal palace.

May Your Excellency deign to accept the expression of these sentiments as a sign of the devotion and respect with which I have the honour of being, of your Excellency, the most humble and obedient servant and brother in Our Lord .