

Circular Letter 14
Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix, Le Mans
September 1, 1841

My dear brothers in Jesus Christ:

Plan of government for the congregation

On the eve of attaining the end I had in view in transferring your novitiate from Ruillé to Sainte-Croix and in organizing the magnificent establishment that this transfer has given us, I feel the need of laying before you in writing the plan of government that I have definitely adopted. I also wish to sketch for you a summary of your duties and, at the same time, to tell you what I have done in return for the confidence with which you have honored me.

Far from me be the thought of attributing to myself the merit of the truly providential works that have just arisen under my direction. After God, who alone is the author of all good, it is to the devotedness of my fellow priests and to your own spirit of cooperation that we owe the astounding work of Holy Cross as it exists today. I have been but a simple instrument, which the Lord will soon break that he may substitute for it others more worthy. In his plan, they are to develop or, at least, to solidify what I have begun. In the midst of the most painful trials, I have never lost hope in providence or in your fidelity to the sublime vocation that God has given you. I have counted on the apostolic spirit of the virtuous priests who have willingly shared my labors, on the cooperation of all the members of your institute, and on the charity of the faithful. The five years of experience which have just passed are sufficient evidence that my trust was not in vain.

Nevertheless, this important work which has been entrusted to us is not yet completed. It still calls for many sacrifices and much labor. I am well aware of all that still remains to be done to form our subjects to the religious life, to afford them an intellectual formation in keeping with the needs of the times, and to establish uniformity in their conduct and their teaching methods.

Qualities of a perfect life in Christ

I firmly trust, however, that the same God who has begun this work under such favorable auspices will carry it through to its completion. This he will do, provided that you strive constantly after the perfect life. This perfect life is characterized by obedience, discipline, punctuality, community spirit, zeal for the interior life, edification, and devotion to work. The perfection of this life stands out, particularly in that purity of intention that seeks not self, but God alone; aims only at heaven and not at anything earthly; strives for nothing but the happiness of possessing Jesus and belonging to him and to his blessed mother; and directs all interests, goods, and rights to the sole honor of the divine master and the salvation of souls. Obedience will so completely animate the whole tenor of such a life that no one will engage in any activity except at the will of the superior. This kind of life will be marked by devotion to regularity and punctuality, by a constant and universal fidelity to the rules and constitutions of the society in a spirit of love rather than of fear, and in a spirit of faith rather than for human motives.

This life will promote community spirit by humility, meekness, and charitable forbearance with others. It will follow scrupulously the maxim of the pious author of the *Imitation*: "We must mutually support, console, aid, instruct, and admonish one another." Such a life will give edification by its modesty, its sacrifices of personal

viewpoints, its self-forgetfulness, its religious gravity, and its careful avoidance of all criticism, unkind jesting, and even the slightest trace of frivolity. It will be a life of devotion to the work of teaching or of any other employment, to punctuality to the common exercises, and to the shunning of idleness. Lastly, it will be an interior life, elevated to God by the habitual practice of acts of faith, hope, and charity, after the example of Jesus Christ, who is to be the particular model of our conduct. Unless we wish to ruin the work of Holy Cross, it is absolutely essential for us to lead with our Lord a life hidden in God.

Now this perfect life, on which I cannot insist too much, will reenact before our eyes the life of our Savior, which was divine in every detail. Our life of obedience will reflect his life of subjection to the miseries of our humanity, even to disgrace, sufferings, and death. Our spirit of discipline will imitate his habitual conformity to the will of his Father, while our community spirit will reflect his life in the company of our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph, and his apostles. Our life of edification will reproduce his life of good example in the midst of the world, and our spirit of work will mirror his labors and his cross. Lastly, our interior life will emulate his hidden life at Nazareth, which is so fraught with lessons for us and so calculated to inspire us with a holy fear of all outside ministry. Oh, to what marvels of grace your young society would give rise if you could succeed in thus reproducing the life of Jesus Christ.

You are associated with the apostolate of the priests of Holy Cross by the services which you render through your various obediences, either to them personally or to their students, as well as by the instruction you give to the numerous children in your own schools. As an institute of primary teachers, your expansion is no longer confined to France alone, but has spread over into Africa and America. With the sisters who devote

themselves to housework and the care of the sick in our principal establishments, you are united in a spirit of zeal and prayer, and these are bonds of union between you and the community of the Good Shepherd, where the spirit of the gospel lives in the religious, is preserved in the orphans, and is rekindled in the penitents. The development of your institute has been greatly aided by the Association of St. Joseph, which the sovereign pontiff, at the express wish of the good bishop of the diocese, has deigned to encourage by the grant of numerous indulgences. From all this you can see, my dear sons in Jesus Christ, what a source of blessings, success, and merits is yours. You can appreciate the beauty and glory of your calling if you but know how to make yourselves worthy of it by faithfully imitating the hidden and public life of our Lord.

Union

Assuredly, all these different works, with which your society is connected in varying degrees, contain many elements of disintegration. Considering them only from the standpoint of human reason, it is difficult to explain how they could begin, organize, develop, and harmonize up to the present. This is particularly true in view of our slender pecuniary resources, the unfavorable political situation, and differences of personal temperament, not to mention the ill-will of several who tried in vain to ruin what was being undertaken in a manner that seemed to them so patently imprudent.

But, the same spirit that gave movement to the wheels of the mysterious chariot in the vision of Ezekiel; the same spirit that propelled, one before the other, the symbolic animals of varied forms in such a way that, without ever pausing in their onward course and without ever retracing their steps, they tended always to the same end, though by ways apparently most opposed to one another (2 Kgs 2:11-12); this self-same spirit, I say, seems to have breathed on the different instruments of the work of

Holy Cross. Here, notwithstanding differences of temperament and talent, the inequality of means, and the differences of vocation and obedience, the one aim of the glory of God and the salvation of souls inspires almost all the members and gives rise to a oneness of effort that tends toward that more perfect union of hearts which is the foundation of the unity and strength of Holy Cross.

What is true of a palace whose foundations have been laid and which is rising gradually until completion is verified, likewise, in a great work of charity. It is not one alone who builds; nor is it one stone, or one single beam of wood that forms it. Each worker contributes something from his own trade; each stone is cut to fit into its one appointed place; and each piece of wood is arranged and placed so as to enhance the general effect of the entire building. Union, then, is a powerful lever with which we could move, direct, and sanctify the whole world, if the spirit of evil, who has been allowed to exercise his power over this earth, does not set himself up against the wondrous effects of this moral force.

In fact, why are the political parties that are disturbing society today powerful enough to bring about revolutions and upheavals? Is it not because they know the secret of uniting and working for one same end? Would it not, then, be disgraceful for you and for me not to do for the cause of good, for God, and for eternity what the children of the world do every day for the cause of evil, for the world, and for the short day of this life? Ah, we who are disciples of a God who died for the salvation of souls who are perishing, we do not realize all the good we could do for others through union with Jesus Christ in the spirit of our rules and constitutions. It is this touching mystery of religious union that our savior unveiled for us in the gospel when he explained the incorporation of all the faithful with his divine person in the mystical body of which he is the head and we

the members. Since we form with him but one body and draw life from the same Spirit, he urges us to remain united in him, like the vine and branches, borne by the same root and nourished by the same sap, and forming together but one plant.

Read this beautiful simile in the fifteenth chapter of St. John. There you will find all the motives which could induce you to tighten the cords that keep the works of Holy Cross closely united to one another. First of all, there is the motive of family pride, for it is our duty to avoid the disgrace of sterility and to win for ourselves the glory of sturdy growth. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it be united to the vine, so neither can we unless we are united in Jesus Christ, the vine of which we are the branches.

We have, too, the motive of holy fear. If we cut ourselves off from this mystic vine, or if we deserve this penalty and thus become divided amongst ourselves, we, thereby, expose ourselves to the risk of ruining God's work and of bringing down on ourselves the chastisements of his eternal justice. There is, moreover, the consideration of our own personal interests and those of the community. From this union there will flow down upon us, as from a rich spring, every grace and blessing.

Finally, there is the motive of gratitude toward the author and finisher of our vocation. The fruits of our justice and sanctity will glorify God, just as the fruits on a tree are, at the same time, the glory of the tree itself and of the gardener. Beholding the fruits of our mutual union, the world will glorify God, and in his jealousy at such great spiritual and temporal prosperity, the devil will endeavor to destroy it at its very root and to disrupt these works by sowing dissension in the minds and hearts of the members. For, he knows full well that all his efforts will come to naught so long as we remain steadfast in holy union.

Woe, then, and anathema to the priest, brother, or sister who, by word or action, would attempt to separate establishments that God has willed to unite under the same general authority. Here we have a striking representation of the hierarchy of the heavenly spirits, wherein all the different choirs of angels are arranged in three orders, which are mutually subordinated one to another. Our association is also a visible imitation of the Holy Family wherein Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, notwithstanding their difference in dignity, were one at heart by their unity of thought and uniformity of conduct. A fearful judgment is in store for whoever would thus paralyze the prosperous development of the three works, for they have been founded on such close mutual relationships as to constitute but one work by their common interests and unity of ideal.

From all this, it follows that, just as in the adorable Trinity, of which the house of Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix is still another image, there is no difference of interests and no opposition of aims or wills, so among the priests, brothers, and sisters there should be such conformity of sentiments, interests, and wills as to make all of us one in somewhat the same manner as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one. This was the touching prayer of our Lord for his disciples and their successors: "That they all may be one, as you, Father, in me and I in you" (Jn 17:21). This it is which prompts me to say to you, my dear sons in Christ, as the apostle said to the Philippians: "If, therefore, there is any comfort in Christ, any encouragement from charity, any fellowship in the spirit, any feelings of mercy, fill up my joy by thinking alike, having the same charity, with one soul and one mind. Do nothing out of contentiousness or vainglory; but in humility, let each one regard the others as his superiors, each one looking not to his own interests but to those of others" (2:1-4).

Hence, unless you wish to see everything crumble and fall into ruin, the rules and constitutions must establish between you and the priests of Holy Cross, between the particular superiors and the superior general, the same interdependence as that which exists between the branches of a tree and its trunk, between the rays of the sun and its fire, between brooks and their source. Now, since this trunk, this sun, this source, which signify the common origin of these three works, is of itself, as a mere instrument, without light, vitality, or water, it must be closely united to God through Jesus Christ, and to Jesus Christ through Mary and Joseph, in order to receive light, the sap of the spiritual life, and the saving waters of divine grace.

Consecration of the three societies

Furthermore, in order the better to cement this union and this imitation of the Holy Family, I have consecrated and do hereby consecrate anew, as far as lies in my power, the Auxiliary Priests to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the shepherd of souls; the Brothers to the Heart of St. Joseph, their patron; and the Sisters to the Heart of Mary pierced with the sword of sorrow.

Relations between priests and brothers

I have not the slightest intention to subject the brothers to the priests in such a way that any priest would have the right to give orders to any brother, or that the brothers would be obliged to obey all the priests indiscriminately. Even though the brothers owe respect and deference to all the priests without exception, because of their sacerdotal character, still the priests cannot give orders to the brothers unless they have been elected to an office or employment to which this right is attached. In addition, both priests and brothers shall always show themselves grateful for the least favors that they receive from one another.

This, then, my dear sons in Jesus Christ, is the plan of government that God wishes to be followed in the administration of Notre-Damede-Sainte-Croix. You see in this outline a brief sketch of what he has inspired me to undertake in answer to your patient waiting. Thank him with me for bringing me into contact with your beautiful spirit of devotion to the Christian education of youth by allowing your venerable founder to ask and obtain my consent, notwithstanding my unwillingness, to shoulder a burden which his ill-health had made him powerless to carry.

Manual of the Brothers of St. Joseph

The better to second the designs of heaven in this important undertaking and to enable you to meditate continually on the obligations of your vocation, I have drawn up a small manual, which will be as a spiritual mirror, showing each one what he must be in order to cooperate to the best of his ability in the development of the work of Holy Cross. What I offer you today is not an extensive collection of practices and reflections; still less is it a course of instruction on all the duties of your state. In the works of the venerable de La Salle or his followers, and in those of Rodriguez, you have admirable treatises that will amply suffice for all the needs of your congregation. Still, I felt that a manual containing all your prayers and ceremonies, your rules and constitutions, and certain customs special to your society would be as acceptable to you as it would be useful. Consequently, I composed it hurriedly and, so to speak, without stopping, leaving to others the work of perfecting it. Receive it as a pledge of my fatherly interest, my absolute devotedness, and my ardent desire to increase your happiness by contributing to your sanctification and the glory of your institute. May you draw from it the spirit of your vocation, and each time that you take it in hand, ask God that, after having worked for others, I myself may not become a castaway.

Yours devotedly,

B. Moreau

Rector, Missionary Apostolic