

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 103

OF THE

VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, August 29, 1880.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

I tremble while writing under such an awful date. The 29th of August is the day of the execution of the wicked Decrees of the 29th of March, in France; and to-morrow we may hear of the sad and long looked-for expulsion of our Fathers from Paris, etc., *in the name of liberty!* Let us pray for the dear birth-place of our Congregation. But if our good will is refused and mocked beyond the waters, we must try to make it more than ever efficient in this New World.

The opening of our schools affords us all a precious opportunity by which everyone of us should profit in order to make of this scholastic year an unprecedented success, not so much from a material point of view as for the eternal benefit of the youth entrusted to our care.

Hitherto, God has blessed our efforts in many a place, but not equally in all; and where we have succeeded best, alas! what a room left for improvement! To deny it, would be an insolence deserving even severer punishment. What I want in this Circular, is to bring our whole Family to a new and lively sense of our duty on the vital question of Catholic Education.

The daily and universal demand from the Catholic press, and many private high quarters, that Catholic educators should not be satisfied with the mere name of Catholic Institutions, but should more amply prove the real and thorough Catholicity of the education imparted in their schools, cannot be set aside as unfounded. Even what was deemed sufficient a few years since, does not *now* meet or answer the increasing wants of an age remarkable, above all others, for its incessant progress in infidelity, materialism, and actual enjoyment, all of which cannot be refuted or resisted any longer save by a superior and fuller training in the positive teachings and moral habits of religious practices, without which Catholic Education is only a name. Understand me well: to-day, more than ever before, Catholic education, as we pretend to give it in our schools, means for our youth a knowledge of Divine truths, more comprehensive and developed; more visibly sustained by daily Christian practices, cheerfully accepted and faithfully observed, by them as an indispensable evidence of their initiation to a Catholic life, of which they may well feel proud all their life, and not ashamed or tired, as so many are, when entering upon their duties in society; evidently because their early training never made a basis to stand anything.

Of every child confided to us by Catholic parents, we must, first of all, make a practical Catholic for life. This is our first duty; to overlook or discharge it negligently, would be a heinous offence to society, and a serious sin against God. We know by heart the Divine warning: "Woe to him who does negligently the work of God." Each time a child is presented and received, a contract is entered upon, with a clear obligation on our side, to train that immortal soul for the Court of Heaven. To one assuming such a responsibility, that child shall be, the whole year, an object of constant solicitude; otherwise, there is wanting even a sense of common honesty; with such a charge none, but light-minded officers can trifle.

To assist you somewhat in this most important and difficult task, let me draw from personal experience some counsels and suggestions, which, if received in a spirit of humility and true zeal, will not prove entirely useless words:

1st. When a new scholar is presented, every pains should be taken to obtain from the parents a complete knowledge of the same. This will be a mark of interest as pleasing to parents as useful to those who now step into their place for a proper training of their offspring. A quarter of an hour thus spent in earnest inquiry into the past, the best and worst dispositions, the acquirements and deficiencies, the temper, the habits, the health, the intended career of the new scholar, the course of studies, etc., etc., the expectations, the fears of interested hearts, their special recommendations, etc., etc., attentively listened to, will form at once between the two parties a link of mutual confidence gratifying to both; when they leave, parents will feel their child has another home, and not a hotel for a night or a week among careless strangers. Here begins the sacred task to make of the new-comer a Christian and a scholar, for both of which God's grace must be solicited and suitable attention secured from

teachers and Prefects. For the fulfilment of such a task, I refer you to our Rules, which must be studied and scrupulously carried out, instead of personal notions and whimsical views, always destructive of all rules and traditions.

2d. I have just named two things ever precious to real and true Religious. Why are they both so little thought of among us? And yet, is it not evident that having Rules written for us, we should consult them and follow them as our safest guides? Our first ambition should be to excel our immediate predecessors, by a closer adherence to our Rules. Taking our inspirations from the same Rules would have made traditions a treasure of which all Congregations, duly alive to self-respect, are justly proud everywhere. I trust it will be sufficient to call your attention to the above important points, to create an opinion, or rather to revive among you a sense of duty, from which no careless or vain Religious should ever be suffered to depart. Let the Rules prompt and govern everything. Heaven will bless such a lawful and harmonious effort.

3d. Knowing the source from which to derive blessings in general, we now come to the special channels by which that heavenly grace may be distributed upon our individual exertions, viz.: Catechism, Confessions, Communions, Religious Associations, Retreats (annual and for First Communion), Spiritual Reading daily, for fifteen minutes, immediately before supper, the results of which can scarcely be over-rated, if properly appreciated. Here is the time and place to explain regulations, to prevent disorders and kill them in their incipency; to show children that they are objects of real interest, and attach them to the House, etc.

But such a programme, you say, will absorb all our time. What else have you to do? When you have done as much in the saving education of children as St. Joseph Calasanctius, whose feast we commemorated a few days ago, I will say, you have done enough. To his last breath (92 years) his zeal for the education of children knew no bounds.

4th. To this day, the spiritual children of that glorious Saint continue the work of their Father, long since in heaven. They are everywhere the guardian angels of the poor little ones on earth. They venerate, they faithfully follow the traditions and maxims of their holy Founder. Here is what I want you all to be—the guardian angels of the dear young souls Divine Providence entrusts you with; sparing no pains to sow deep in their minds and in their hearts the seed of eternal salvation, to give them daily proofs of your abiding interest in their welfare; and this, whether directly or indirectly concerned in their happiness. Oh, where a whole house is thus heartily, devotedly, continually striving for the eternal interests of its inmates, God cannot refuse His blessings upon it; it cannot fail to be a success.

5th. Need I recommend our publications to our own Religious, and warn them once more against non-Catholic and objectionable school books? We all know by this time that this is the chief ground for the complaints alluded to above.

6th. Religious should show themselves everywhere, before their pupils, perfect models, not only of virtue, but also of *manners and refinement*. It is only where both are united, that a power for good is created among children.

We must impart a more Catholic education than we have done hitherto; the amendment must be felt. To this everyone must lend a willing and effective co-operation instead of looking to the head officer as exclusively responsible. What can the head of a House do alone? the head of the House must give the impulse, but that impulse must be caught by all around; the best orders of a General on a battle-field, if not promptly obeyed, will not prevent a disaster.

May we all enter upon our new labors in this religious spirit, and the scholastic year 1880 and 1881 will soon show what devoted Religious can do for the vital question of the day, when they use the above means to secure the blessing of Heaven. May the grace of God be with you all!

E. SORIN, C. S. C.,
Superior General.