King John III of Portugal was the early Society of Jesus’s strongest royal supporter. All the more painful to the Society, then, was a serious quarrel that broke out between the Portuguese king and Pope Paul III after the latter appointed the former ambassador of Portugal as a cardinal. The king responded by recalling his ambassador from Rome. Writing in the following letter to Simão Rodrigues, leader of the Jesuits in Portugal, Ignatius explains that the Society has an obligation to do all it can to heal the rift. He also expresses the assurance felt in Rome that King John III would never go the way of Henry VIII of England and separate from the Catholic Church.

May the sovereign grace and eternal love of Christ our Lord be always for our continual favor and help.

Considering in his divine goodness (and ready to defer to better judgment) how, of all imaginable evils and sins, one that most merits the loathing of our Creator and Lord and of every creature capable of his divine everlasting glory is the sin of ingratitude, being as it is the refusal to acknowledge the goods, graces, and gifts that we have received, and so the cause, principle, and source of every evil and sin; and how, on the other hand, acknowledgment and gratitude for goods and gifts received is so highly loved and esteemed both in heaven and on earth, I thought I should recall to you how since our arrival in Rome we have in numerous matters enjoyed the full and continuous favor of the Pope, receiving special benefits from His Holiness; and at the same time how clear to the entire Society—and to yourself, who are present there, more manifestly of all—is the extent of what we all owe to the King, your lord and ours in our Lord.

First, because of the many spiritual graces which God our Creator and Lord has bestowed upon him, choosing to raise him up every way through his accustomed grace to his own greater service and praise, and looking with infinite love as Creator upon his creature, for whom, being infinite and making himself finite, he chose to die.

Second, who are we, or where did we come from, that God our Lord should have ordained that so distinguished a prince should take notice of us, and that either of his own initiative or at the suggestion of others, without our having in any way imagined or contrived it, and even before the Society’s confirmation by the Apostolic See, he should have asked the Pope so insistently to have some of our men for his service in our Lord, showing us such great favor at a time when our teaching was under no little suspicion?

Third, since your arrival there you will have been more fully aware (not that it is concealed from us) of how he treats you with great affection and love, even with material subsidies such as not all princes are accustomed to give. From the abundance of his heart and his affection for us, he has offered to found a
college and to build houses for this Society, so unworthy in the sight of our Creator and Lord in heaven and of such a prince on earth; even more, he has taken under his wing all the men we have sent from here to study there.

My purpose in recalling all of this to you is so that you there and we here—all sharing the same goal of serving our Creator and Lord ever more intensely, maintain complete loyalty and utter gratitude towards persons to whom under God’s supreme goodness we are so indebted—might strive with all the strength granted us from above to bear our part in the many spiritual and corporal travails which the enemy of human nature, for the opposite purpose, had tried to interpose between these great and important personages.

Now, since you doubtless are aware there just as we are here of what has been or is occurring, it only remains that, with all of us being so indebted and obliged, you there and we here should all zealously take up our spiritual arms (since we have relinquished temporal arms forever) and pray fervently every day, continuing to remember this especially in our Masses, begging and beseeching that God our Lord will deign to interpose his hand and the fullness of his grace in this affair, so difficult and so deserving to be earnestly commended to his infinite and supreme goodness. And while I am convinced that with God's grace the enemy will never prevail in this situation, no little harm and confusion to many souls would result if things were to go on like this for even a very short time.

In a long conversation about this with the Cardinal of Burgos, who in all our affairs has been our very special lord and advocate in our Lord, he said something to me in confirmation of my own view which brought no little spiritual consolation to my soul. He said, “So-and-so was talking to me and said that it was rumored or that it appeared the King of Portugal was leaving the Pope’s obedience.” The good cardinal would not hear of it, and answered indignantly: “Who says so? Even if the Pope were to tread the King of Portugal underfoot, he would never do that. Do you think that the people there are like the people here, or that their king is like the English king, who was already halfway outside before he declared himself? Do not think such a thing of so Christian and so conscientious a prince.”

Although I would like to write a letter to the King myself, I have held back, partly at seeing how slight and unworthy I am for such a step, and partly because, seeing you there on the spot, I consider myself excused: it is your place to show him complete reverence and to speak for all of us as well as for yourself. However, if you should judge otherwise, I would not wish or desire to be wanting even in the slightest detail in our Lord.

Since, at the pope’s command, Master Favre has left Spain, Master Bobadilla the Cardinal of England’s legation, and Master Jay Cardinal Carpi’s diocese, all bound for Germany, we have had letters from the latter two, dated February 15, reporting how they had arrived safely in Speyer six days earlier and were going about their preparations to enter the wilderness. We have had no word from Master Favre about his arrival in Germany. Regarding the nuncios [Broët and Salmerón] to Ireland, though they set sail, we have had no word of their passage or landing there.
Since I have written fully elsewhere about the dispersed Society and the spiritual fruit which our Lord is deigning to produce through them, there is no more to say here. May he always in his infinite and sovereign goodness be for our continual protection, favor, and help.

Rome, March 18, 1542

A week ago today the King’s ambassador left for Portugal.

Yours in our Lord,

YÑIGO