Ignatius offers this letter, combining firmness with humility, as a response to Nicolás Bobadilla's outspoken protests against Ignatius's regulations concerning letter writing. Ignatius confesses to a blunder (addressing a letter to Bobadilla in a king’s palace rather than the court) and asks for correction in such circumstances. “For this is my desire in this life,” he writes, “to be set straight and corrected in all my faults by being given loving fraternal correction for them all.” He recounts to Bobadilla how, after Bobadilla’s profession, Ignatius had “earnestly asked and implored the entire Society that whenever anyone detected anything amiss in me, after first praying to God our Lord and conferring about it with his Divine Majesty, he would let me know my faults so that I could be helped and amended in our Lord.” Ignatius also states here that he would give his vote to Bobadilla for general if half of the Society voted for him as well. It is interesting that when Ignatius was himself elected general of the Society, Bobadilla's vote had not yet arrived in Rome.

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

While I find myself by his infinite grace more inclined to humble myself entirely rather than defend myself in part, I have nevertheless, judging it for his greater glory, decided to employ both measures.

1. Regarding a certain fraternal correction among ourselves which I decided to make for God’s greater glory, you say that you understand my mind but fear that not all would take it with your own understanding and sincerity. By “all” I suppose you mean all who belong to our Society, since I wrote only for them. But if you see that some of them are not taking my remarks with your own sincerity and purity of soul, let me know, and I trust in our Lord that I will accommodate myself to each and every one of them, to your own and their complete satisfaction.

2. With the argument that styles of speaking and writing are quite different, you demonstrate the impossibility of my correcting everyone’s taste but my own. I recall twice after being written the first time and corrected, it should then be copied or handed over to another to copy a second time, so as to avoid the disadvantages of unconsidered writing which I felt some of us were guilty of. If we all did this—myself first of all, since I think I have greater need—we would be a greater help to each other in the Lord. I did not and do not mean that a person with one style needs to write in a different one, or that a person with first-level skills has to write in a second level. If I cannot raise my own poor and mean native understanding to a level higher, I can hardly do so for others, since to give much or little belongs to our Creator and Lord. I only meant that if in the case of main letters everyone should write a first draft, correct it, and then recopy it or have it recopied, since in this way we each do what we ought for the other. Neither I nor anybody else can give to another more than he has, but by making this effort each of us gives the best of what he has received from his Creator and Lord. Consequently, I do not believe I am setting myself up as a universal norm.
3. You consider it a good idea to write summary or abbreviated letters, for making copies only, but not giving us the full account that we want. You are quite aware of what I wrote you and of what we are all agreed upon: that the main letter should give any matters that are at all edifying, according as God our Lord works through each individual for the spiritual good of souls; and that anyone wishing to give further information—about news, illnesses, problems, and the like—should write as fully as he wishes on separate sheets or in a separate letter.

4. You observe that in the copy of your letter I had said, “I try to expedite [expedir] my time,” when I should have said, “expend [expender] my time.” If you had looked closely at the letter, you would have seen that in my own hand I had written expender, not expedir. However, perhaps the copyist here did write expedir for expender; I did not personally check the final version but relied on someone else, since it was not a main letter that was to be shown to others. I confess myself as guilty as you may judge me to be in our Lord.

5. As for the blunder you point out in my addressing my letter to you “At the palace of the King of the Romans,” that is indeed what I wrote, thinking that you would be better known in the palace, a house where you frequently appear, than in the court at large spread all over the city. Hence, since I blundered in writing “of the Romans,” I shall in future address letters to you “At the court of the King of Romans.” If, as you say, everybody had a laugh over this, I would have thought that when you saw people laughing, you would stop showing it around. I will be very grateful in our Lord if you show this letter around too, so that having been corrected because of the first letter, I can obtain further correction through this one. For this is my desire in this life—to be set straight and corrected in all my faults by being given loving fraternal correction for them all. Indeed, I recall that right after you all made your profession, I earnestly asked and implored the entire Society that whenever anyone detected anything amiss in me, after first praying to God our Lord and conferring about it with his Divine Majesty, he would let me know my faults so that I could be helped and amended in our Lord.

6. You say you think I should not waste time correcting such trivial matters, and that people who did not know me might think I had nothing better to spend my time on. I recall that, besides repeated discussion and agreement among ourselves, I wrote you at length begging you to write your main letters twice in the manner, and because of the difficulties, mentioned above. I wrote that unless you did this I would be forced, with a view to our common spiritual good and my own conscience, albeit much against my character, to command you under obedience to do so. I recall that you received my letter and answered with considerable edification and satisfaction. But then in your first letter after that you wrote opposite to the way I had so earnestly asked and begged you in our Lord to do. You wrote in your main letter all kinds of news about the situation there which we would all have been delighted to have if it came in a separate letter or on separate pages, such as information about your own person and how you had a touch of rash that was killing you—all of which could have been put on a separate page as we had often agreed among ourselves to do, so that everybody could have a dish to his own taste, and all for the good. For we have numerous friends and acquaintances who learn we have received letters from the Society’s members; they want to see these letters and enjoy reading them. If we do not show the letters when asked, we alienate them; if we show letters that are disorderly, they are disedified. Actually,
I was not so much anxious to correct the phrasing of your letters as desirous of your own entire perfection—assuming, of course, that a part of that perfection consists in your humbling yourself and obeying the one into whose hands you made a vow of obedience, particularly in matters that are good or indifferent and without sin. Hence, while deeming up until now that it was to the greater glory of God our Lord and our own spiritual good for me to expend some of my time on this matter, if you think otherwise I shall in the future be able to conform myself to what you think best in our Lord; for I am sure of receiving as much benefit in his Divine Majesty from you as from any of the others.

7. You write: “You imagine that everybody is edified by these copies of yours. I rarely show them around or read them myself—I don’t have the time. Two letters could be made out of the superfluous matter in main letter.” Of course I never imagined that you would show your them to everybody or that everybody would be edified. I thought you would show them to a few people who would take them in good part, as I have learned has been the case so far with all the others to whom I have sent this same main letter (unless I am deceived by what they write me)—even Doctor Ortiz and his brother Fray Francisco, and Doctor Picart of Paris. As for your not deigning to read my letters for lack of time: by the grace of God I have more than enough time and inclination to read and reread all of yours. To get you to read mine, I will cut out whatever you think superfluous and make whatever adaptation I can in our Lord; once I have got your opinion, I will work hard on this. I will do the same for all others to whom I have written who are of your view and complain of superfluous matter, provided you let me know about it. For it would be quite a mistake on my part to spend so much time and labor only to annoy people uselessly. I therefore beg of you by the love and reverence of God our Lord to write me how you think I can best write you, whether by myself or through somebody else so that I will not go wrong but fully satisfy you. Meanwhile, not knowing the right way to do it, I will await a letter from you—or I will commission someone else to write, however I perceive is to your liking.

Similarly, since you already know my own wishes in the matter, I ask you by the same love and reverence of his Divine Majesty always to write me the best way you can—as I have repeatedly asked and implored you and now implore you once more in our Lord, being apparently unable to obtain my most urgent requests because of my utter unworthiness—or however you think best. If the Society, or one half of it, agrees, I give you my own vote—for what it is worth—offering you willingly and with the greatest joy of soul the charge that I hold. I not only give my vote to you but, if you prefer, I am ready to give it to anybody else named by you or by any of the others, considering that whatever was thus decided would be for the greater praise, reverence, and service of God our Lord and for the greater spiritual solace of my own soul in his Divine Majesty. For the very truth is that, absolutely speaking, I would prefer to remain lowly and to be free of this burden. Thus, completely and fully setting aside my own poor judgment, I constantly hold, and hope always to hold, that whatever you and the Society determine, or a part of it as mentioned above, will be far the better thing; and this determination I herewith approve and confirm in my own hand.

Meanwhile, with respect to providing for your personal needs there, while it is our profession to offer ourselves to be sent wherever and in whatever way the Vicar of Christ our Lord may decide, without
ourselves requesting any provision, nevertheless, since I judged that I might lawfully, speaking through others, explain or intimate your need there so that they could provide for it or not as they deem best for the glory of God our Lord, in accord with what you wrote me I spoke to Cardinal Santa Croce [Cervini] and also to Cardinal Morone. If I were there, I would rest satisfied with this and accept what I needed from any hand that I thought came from God our Lord. If occasionally I seemed not to have enough, I would take it that God was deigning to try me thoroughly so that I could acquire greater merit in his greater service, praise, and glory. But I need enlarge no more on this, for I think I know your disposition for far more than this in our Lord.

I was late in writing you because I did not know where you were, since you had written me about the baths and I did not know where you would end up.

May it please God our Lord that this letter finds you in entire health and in the place or situation where you can best serve him and always praise his most holy name.