

1892: The symptoms of a cerebral congestion worsened. Lavigerie receives the extreme unction.

Letter promulgating the decisions of the first General Chapter (11th November 1874)

The Spirit of the Society - Before concluding this Letter, which is perhaps the last direct communication that I will address to you, my dear Sons, I wish to give you three recommendations that seem to me required for the success and preservation of your works.

The first is that you never lose sight of the specific character and spirit of your Society. Indeed, it has a special purpose, from which it should not detract without losing its reason for existing absolutely. It is intended for the non-Christians of Africa. It may not or must not undertake anything that does not have this aim in view. Not only does it have this special purpose, but also it must achieve it by special means - that its action has a specific character. This character is to approach the local inhabitants in all external habits, in language firstly, in attire, in food, conforming to the example of the Apostle: 'Omnibus omnia factus sum ut omnes facerem salvos.

You should know that every time, through an unreasonable sense of innovation, you depart from these two points, you destroy, as far as you are capable, the reason for existing of your Society. It is only in fact to supply this great need of poor African souls and to supply by this means that you have been founded. Let the other Congregations follow their way; they are up to it; they do it better than you would do yourselves; do not invade their territory and keep faithfully to the little parcel of land that the Father of the family has commissioned you to cultivate.

My second recommendation, my dear Sons, is to continue to combine prudence, patience and charity in the exercise of your zeal. Prudence, because if you seek to hasten or exaggerate affairs, you will do great harm instead of doing good. A single imprudence from one of you can set back, for a long time, perhaps for centuries, the salvation of many peoples. Patience, because your Mission is hardest amongst all and it is only in knowing how to suffer

much without discouragement and complaint that you will overcome obstacles.

Finally, charity, because it is the major armament, the one that pierces hearts and makes wounds for eternal life. Let this be the whole secret of your action. Love these poor non-Christians; do good to them. Nurse their wounds. They will give you their affection firstly, then their trust and finally their souls.

My final recommendation, my dear Sons, the most important of the three, the one without which all the others would be futile is the recommendation of the aged Apostle of Ephesus: *Filioli, diligite invicem. Love one another. Remain united, United in heart, united in thought. Form a truly single family; in the Christian and apostolic sense of this word, hold strongly to the esprit de corps. Protect one another; support one another, always help one another. Let not discord ever penetrate you; may you be constantly ready to protect one another mutually as a single person against all outside adversaries. In a word, be not only united, but one. It is the only grace that Our Lord, when he was leaving them, asked from his Father for his Apostles, knowing that this grace would bring all others, and in its wake the conversion of the world: Ut unum sint. It is also the only grace I ask for you, the fundamental law that I leave you, the one that will guarantee victory over all your enemies, over all the obstacles that confront you: Ut unum sint. Pater serva eos in nomine tuo quos dedisti mihi.*

