

1857: Lavigerie visits the dioceses of France to talk about the work of the East and to collect funds.

1874: Erection of the statue of the Blessed Virgin in the parterre of the Mother House.

1877: The Missionaries of Africa officially become chaplains of the White Sisters. The chaplaincy was abandoned in 1879 and resumed in 1891. In 1894, the Holy See removed the community of the White Sisters from the jurisdiction of the Superior General of the Missionaries of Africa while advising the maintenance of the chaplaincy.

1878: Lavigerie sends to the Dicastery for Evangelization a memorandum on the evangelization of Equatorial Africa

Memorandum on the Evangelisation of Equatorial Africa (1st January 1878)

Your Eminence,

Since the day an International Association for the exploration of Africa was founded, under the patronage of His Majesty the King of the Belgians, I thought that the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda and the heads of the African Missions should follow attentively the progress of such an enterprise. The sparkle that dominated its foundation, the considerable number of important personalities, mainly Protestant, that comprise its membership, the chairmanship of the King, assuring it of the support of European governments, are of a kind to indicate that the outcomes will not be ordinary, for good or for ill. Moreover, I was able to observe in Africa itself, where subordinate officers are less guarded about their thoughts that a distinct movement is in preparation and is already effective. This is in a spirit that is not favourable to the action of the Holy See.

I therefore understand that Your Eminence is concerned by these matters and that You desire to gather information aimed at enlightening Your wisdom and that of Your Eminent Colleagues, the members of the Sacred Congregation of which You are Prefect. You honour me by seeking my opinion. It is a duty for me with all the more concern, since I consider the interests involved more significant and more serious. It is no less a matter than to see permanently opening up to the Church or to heresy the expanse still unexplored of Africa, south of the Equator, from the southern borders of independent Sudan in the north to British possessions in the south and from one ocean to the other.

In area, it is a region as vast as Europe. It measures over twelve million square kilometres. In population, according to the most recent calculations of the Geographical Societies, it numbers almost a hundred million inhabitants. In Missions to establish, those of Africa offer the greatest hopes, because they will be set up among idolaters. However, the more the field is extensive and fertile, the more it is essential to ensure possession and prevent the sowing of darnel in it. What can we expect in this respect from the International Association of Brussels? Will they not favour the Protestant Missions? Will it be a help or an obstacle for the Catholic Missions? What is its power? Above all, what is the guiding principle that directs it? Is it possible to escape the dangers it could give rise to, while benefiting from the advantages it may offer? What practical means must we take to resolve this dual dilemma and solidly base the Church's action in Equatorial Africa, amid the hostile pretensions that will seek to forestall it?

Such are the issues that naturally come to mind and on which Your Eminence needs to be promptly focused, because here, I am not afraid to say, speed is of the essence. The first to arrive and the first to be ready will take all the advantages and every day of delay is a minus factor for success. I will therefore try to deal with this serious matter, while avoiding, for greater brevity, the details that seem to me less urgent. If later Your Eminence needs information or further clarification, I will be, as ever, at your service. For the moment, I press on, so as not to compromise by delay a cause which I consider as one of the most important of the present time, for it is many centuries since the Church and the Holy See have had a more decisive and more favourable opportunity, if we know how to benefit from it, by striking a blow to decide the religious future of peoples and ensure the triumph of the apostolate.

