



1892: Lavigerie's body is transported to Tunis.

Annual report to the Cardinal of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide (1st December 1869)

Your Eminence,

When the Sacred Congregation for Propaganda honoured me by entrusting me, in my capacity as Apostolic Delegate, with the founding of a new mission in the vast lands that stretch to the south of Algeria, I promised Your Eminence to submit an exact annual report of what we had been able to do for the benefit of this new mission.

At the end of this first year and faithful to my promise, I am ready to briefly submit to Your Eminence firstly, what we have achieved until now and secondly, what our needs are and how I think the Sacred Congregation and the Holy See could very effectively come to our assistance, without any burden to them.

On the 1st October 1868, after receiving legitimate powers from the Sacred Congregation for Propaganda, I began the business of founding a mission in the Sahara and the Sudan. For this mission, there was not a single building, priest or even Christian. Therefore, I was firstly obliged to apply myself to preparing the indispensable requirements for a proper effective and enduring preaching of our holy faith. This is what we have achieved to date:

1) Opening a special major seminary and founding a special society of missionaries for the evangelisation of the Sahara and the Sudan. The initial need of an emerging mission is the training of clergy capable of bringing the work of the apostolate to fruition. I therefore thought first of creating it and these are the steps I took. I appealed to young clerics in my diocesan seminary and the diocesan seminaries of France, revealing to them the sad state of abandonment in which the Muslim and idolatrous peoples of North Africa stagnate for centuries. I ask those among them who feel brave enough to do so to devote themselves to this Mission.

From the outset, from early October 1868, six young clerics, two of whom were priests, responded to this initial appeal. I brought them together in the one house and explained the problems and the importance of their mission to them. I also spoke to them of the reasons for the complete failure, in my opinion, of the Catholic apostolate towards the Muslims. In agreement with them we mapped out the first rules of their little society. The main guidelines are the following:

1. They will form a society of missionaries intended solely for the apostolate among Muslim Arabs of Africa.
2. They will live in community and will always be three together.
3. From seminary, the novitiate, they will adopt the food, language, attire, and sleeping habits of the Arabs.
4. They will learn enough about medicine to treat sick people.

The aim of these various rules is to ease their entry into the varied regions to which they may be sent and to win them the trust and affection of the Arabs more easily. This undertaking has been in existence now for fourteen months. Eight others have joined the first six missionaries. They therefore form a community of fourteen clerics ready to leave for the mission. The Jesuits were kind enough to take on the direction of this seminary or novitiate, as it may be called. I set it up last year in a rented house, but with the numbers increasing, I have now situated it at Saint Eugène, in a huge diocesan property.

