



**1860:** Lavigerie is accused by the newspaper *Le Moniteur* of collaboration and compromise with the French government in the Middle East. Lavigerie asked for the testimony of all the Eastern Catholic bishops in his favour.

**1889:** Joseph Hirth is appointed Vicar Apostolic of Nyanza.

**1890:** Creation of the Apostolic Vicariate of the Sahara and Sudan. Lavigerie is no longer Apostolic Delegate but Apostolic Vicar of Sahara and Sudan.

### Letter to Pope Leo XIII on his apostolic initiatives in Tunisia (14th December 1882)

Most Holy Father,

A justifiable feeling of discretion and of mistrust of myself stop me from writing to Your Holiness as often as I should like, so as not to take up your precious time. The proximity of Christmas, imposing upon me as it does the duty to express my respects and my thanks, removes this impediment. I therefore beg your permission, Most Holy Father, after kneeling in spirit before you to receive your fatherly blessing, to express to Your Holiness my warmest good wishes for a long life and a happy pontificate.

I make so bold as to ask, Most Holy Father, for the help of your prayers for the difficult missions I am carrying out in Africa and for this poor France of ours to which I originally belong. In Africa, Most Holy Father, things have been following their natural course. The missions of the interior are making progress. France has stamped its authority more and more in Tunisia. Before allowing the new Bey to mount his throne, he had to sign a secret treaty which places him completely in the hands of our government, even for small administrative matters, and the authority he now has is purely nominal.

I must say that the French government, which often persecutes the Church and the clergy in France, continues to protect them in Tunisia. All of the Catholic projects there are making good progress. Instead of the fourteen Catholic priests I found here in the regency, we now have fifty-three, not counting twenty-six seminarians or theology students who are studying for the priesthood. I have been able to introduce seven new religious congregations. The places of worship and the presbyteries we have, as well as the bishop's house are adequate. All the expenses I have

incurred up to now, which amount to more than 1,200,000 francs, have been met own to the last centime. Furthermore, I own land to the value of more than one million. I haven't told you about a big lottery which, at my request, the French government has authorised, and which should bring in a further four millions to pay for welfare projects and for places of worship. This lottery is being sent out now and will only bring in results later on.

I enter into these details, Most Holy Father, because Your Holiness will probably have heard of the attacks aimed at me from the minority in our Chamber of Deputies; I have found two types of enemies there; the radical free-thinkers, who can see, with some distress of course, how religion is taking root in Tunisia in a big way, and, what saddens me more, the legitimists and even the Catholics who, just to oppose the government which has taken over the protectorate of Tunisia, take a stand against it, even where the clear interests of religion are concerned. This is what has just happened during the discussions on the budget for church costs, when Bishop Freppel himself saw no shame in siding with some of the party of the right to prevent it from voting for the grants allocated to us.

Let Your Holiness allow me, Most Holy Father, to congratulate you for the deep wisdom and patience which you use in dealing with this poor country of ours. You can see how much such prudent policies answer the needs of the Church in our country. Thanks to you, all our vital institutions are still in place; they would have vanished long ago, if the advice of certain hot spirited individuals had been followed. They did not back away from risking the very existence of religion in their hope to bring about the ruin of the Republic.

