



1853: Lavigerie is the winner of the competition for chaplains of the church of Ste Geneviève. On the same day, he was appointed assistant professor of ecclesiastical history at the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne.

1888: Lavigerie's anti-slavery conference in the church of the Gesù in Rome.

Conference given at Rome in the church of the Gesu (22nd December 1888)

If I cannot treat this grave question with all the details it would require, I will at least say what is necessary, and will try to make up for the rest by a clarity that, I hope, will enlighten your minds. And first of all, is there any obligation for the Christian peoples, for you Catholics, in the measure possible, to come to the aid of populations so cruelly, oppressed? On this point, there cannot be any doubt to the eyes of faith. It is the law itself of love, of Christian solidarity, that is to say, of the whole Gospel.

Not only does this law oblige us to love one another as brothers, it teaches us that God considers done to himself what we do for those who weep, for those who suffer, for those whom injustice or force hold in irons. It teaches us that on the last day, it is on this precept that God will judge us, calling to himself, for an eternal recompense, those who came to his aid in the least of men, condemning, driving away those who refused to come to his aid. You cannot be in any doubt, then, that Christians, learning of the sufferings of so many human creatures, have the obligation, formal and absolute, of doing whatever is in their power to help them.

I have already expressed myself to the other Christian nations of Europe, on this sacred obligation. Nobody has called it into doubt, no son of the Church has denied it. But in the crowd that has gathered from all parts to fill this church, there are perhaps people who do not believe as we do, and I want to address myself to them nonetheless, in a cause which concerns the whole of humanity. Slavery, as it is practised in Africa, is not only, in fact, opposed to the Gospel, it is contrary to the natural law. That is what our great Leo XIII affirms, with a freedom and a vigour that have never been surpassed, in his Encyclical on slavery: “*Contra quod est, dit-il, a Deo et a natura institutum.*”

Now the laws of nature apply not just to Christians but to all men. That is why I appeal to all, without distinction of nationality, or party, or religious confession. I do not appeal just to faith, but to reason, to justice, to respect, to the love of freedom, that supreme good of man, as our Pontiff has likewise said. No doubt I am pleading this cause today in a temple, and before altars, but I am ready to plead it everywhere. I have pleaded it in Princes Hall, before the English protestants, in salons, before philosophers, before non-believers, and always I have found in people's hearts the echo of the sentiment expressed by the ancient poet: *Homo sum, et nihil humani a me alienum puto* (Quote from Terence: *Heautontimoroumenos*, v. 77) I am a man and nothing of what is human is foreign to me. It is a cry that came out from Rome and which, also, has its echo through the whole universe. I am a man, injustice towards other men revolts my heart. I am a man, oppression fills my nature with indignation. I am a man, cruelty against so many of my fellows inspires nothing but horror in me. I am a man, and what I would want done to give me freedom, honour, the sacred bonds of family, I want to do to restore family, honour, freedom to the sons of this unfortunate race.

What I say of individual men, of each of you, in particular, my very dear brothers, I say it of peoples, and I am only interpreting their heart-felt wishes, I know, crying out to the four winds of heaven every day: “Enough blood! Enough vile captures! Enough tears! Enough children taken from their mothers! Enough men torn from their villages, from the peace of the domestic hearth, to be thrown at the discretion of a cruel master into the shameful practices of debauchery! Enough, not just in the name of religion, but in the name of justice, of solidarity, of human nature and of the One who has engraved his law in our heart. *Homo sum et nihil humani a me alienum puto.* I am a man and nothing of what is human is foreign to me.

