



1871: Lavigerie sends a notice on the Society of the Missionaries of Africa to priests and seminarians in France to encourage vocations.

1880: 6th General Chapter. Charbonnier was first elected assistant and appointed by Lavigerie as Vicar General.

Letter to the missionaries (19 September 1885)

Superiors are the first to suffer from these imperatives, because of the practical difficulties they often experience in conciliating everything. But at least they have the right to count on your filial cooperation. Instead, you add to their difficulties by bringing in the bitterness of your criticisms and your hidden opposition. They keep silent, they do not justify themselves, because the very existence of the [missionary] endeavours and the reputation of the persons involved are at stake, and you, at the risk of compromising everything, take advantage of their silence to speak, most often, I repeat, without realizing what is at stake or appreciating the reasons for their actions.

I could multiply these questions and perhaps come to issues that concern not only the authority of your Council, but also the higher authority, which represents the authority over you of the Holy See itself. I prefer to appear to prejudge nothing or to know nothing, because I have already forgiven everything I have come to know. What I cannot dispense with, however, is to emphasize forcefully to you the danger of such tendencies; to make you consider that they do not belong to the children of light but to the children of darkness, and that they are the very tendencies that the spirit of evil is using at this moment to upset and ruin the world. Do you want to upset and lose your little Society some day, when you have sworn to serve it until death, precisely under the direction of your superiors?

I beg of you, my dear sons, to make a generous resolution in this regard. I appeal to all at this

time; to those who are in need of correction so that they may reflect in their own minds and stop doing such a destructive work in your midst. When the authority of the leader is contested or diminished, each one acts, in fact, according to his own understanding, and discord then reigns. But even to those who are personally beyond reproach, I make an urgent appeal and ask them never to put up with the fact that, in their presence, the decisions of superiors are criticized in this way, so that their authority is diminished. In a community one may be guilty not only of doing evil, but also of tolerating it out of weakness, thus allowing it to spread and, in the end, to dominate.

Therefore, my dear Children, be of only one heart and one soul; only in this way will you retain the grace and strength to face the difficulties of the outside world, whatever happens. For if it is said: *Civitas contra se divisa, non stabit*, it is said again: *Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*, and it is said above all: *Ego et Pater unum sumus...*, *sint unum sicut et nos*.

After the intimate union which is born of complete submission to the direction of the superiors and the respect [for them] which is inspired by faith, what I find most opportune to recommend to you at this time, my dear Children, is zeal, and the zeal manifested in its most essential form, I mean dedication. Zeal is, in fact, the proper and distinctive character of the missionary: one enters the missionary life only because one is impelled by the ardent desire to save and sanctify souls. This is the supernatural feeling that led you yourselves to enter the Society of Missionaries of Algiers and to devote yourselves to the missions of Africa. But when zeal is not inspired by thoughts of faith, by the example of our Lord and of the saints, it sometimes lacks lasting enthusiasm. When it is born of natural taste, of the desire for adventure, it soon weakens, cools down, and dies out. See then, my dear Children, if this misfortune has not already happened to you and if it cannot be said of you what was said to one of the angels of the Apocalypse: *Habeo contra te quod charitatem tuam primam dereliquisti*.