



1863: Lavigerie writes a pastoral letter to the clergy of the diocese of Nancy-Toul

1891: Lavigerie founds the Armed Brothers of the Sahara, also known as the Pioneers of the Sahara. Solemn inauguration of the house and chapel of the Armed Brothers of the Sahara.

Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of Nancy (5 april 1863)

Along with devoted sons, I will also have the prodigals, and, far from the faithful flock, I will need to go after the lost sheep. These are the ones for whom it is said that the Good Shepherd must leave everything else to pursue them and bring them back to the fold. I will join with you to retrieve them, no matter how far they have wandered. You will hear my voice to encourage your zeal, but I tell you beforehand that you will not hear words other than those of charity and gentleness. I assure you I took a commitment, at the feet of the most gentle of Pontiffs, that I would not dishonour my ministry and yours by insults or abuse. Nothing harsh or hurtful will ever come from my mouth, even against the most unjust enemies of our faith. I learned from the one who sent me to respect the sputtering flame and the crushed reed; if we must always vindicate his glory, it must only be vindicated in forgiveness.

May I give you this first piece of advice? Always bear in mind these rules of genuine zeal in relation to those who do not share our beliefs or have abandoned them. Remember this phrase of a great pope that 'whoever teaches without gentleness shows that he is looking for other than the truth and that there is no charity in his heart'. Even when you are provoked, believe me, only reply with kindness and making allowances. I would say with Saint Augustine, 'Love peace; love peace; and if those who are separated from us do not love it, appease them by simply pointing out the truth to them or even in keeping silent, rather than reproving them. You love the light of day, but are you vexed because of blind people? No, you pity them, you know the goodness of which they are deprived and you consider them worthy of compassion. I beg you, show our 'separated brethren' the same gentle and Christian charity.'

You see, in preaching virtue to you, we will above all seek to make it desirable. Likewise, when preaching faith to you, we will seek to imitate all the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, in demonstrating its harmony, its perfect alignment with right reason.

It is often said around and among you, I know, that the works of human reason, its progress, institutions and legitimate aspirations are condemned by faith. It is one of the most harmful objections spread around today against religion and the Church. In addition, some conclude that faith has run its course, and that the world is drawn towards other horizons; it is now necessary to break with religion as it is opposed to human progress. Nothing could be more widespread, dangerous, or false than this discourse. It is true that these harmful principles were upheld by a famous school of the last century. It taught that nature can only produce evil and therefore all its acts, philosophy, science, social institutions, and human freedom are reprehensible in their essence. However, the ever-wise Church, always and equally far from extremes, has struck down these senseless doctrines with its solemn condemnation.

In more recent times, a haughty and hotheaded genius, heir without knowing it perhaps, like so many others, had the same preconceived ideas and errors. He sought to bring the world back to the faith by proving the absolute powerlessness of human reason and the incurable vanity of its entire works. Once again, the Church condemned in the author of this system what it had condemned in his predecessors: the absence of moderation and common sense, i.e., true wisdom.

The Church is not the enemy of your intelligence, philosophy, science, industry, the works of human genius, freedom, or progress in human societies when these matters remain within the limits of reason and justice. On the contrary, the Church rejoices. We its intermediaries rejoice with it, in all that enhances this patrimony of glory, riches, honour, well-being, and the produce of intelligence and labour. The Church only asks of you, in the exercise of the powers and in the enjoyment of goods that you have from God, to remain faithful to the rules of the moral order and of truth. Above all, the Church asks of you to remember that you have a destiny greater than the world, that you need the help and light of faith. Temporal things ought to be held by you so that they lead you to wealth that endures and to a homeland that cannot perish."

