



1870 : Le postulat des Frères à Chassagne, le noviciat des Missionnaires d'Afrique sont fermés par suite de la guerre.

**Conference given in the church of St. Gudule, Brussels, 15th August 1888**

My very dear brothers,

You know why I am in your midst. The great crowd pressing round this Basilica and filling it, at this moment, would be enough to prove it. You have, then, heard tell of this old Bishop, who despite the weight of years and African fatigue, wanted to leave all to plead before the Christians of Europe the cause of the poor blacks whose pastor he is, and who, in Upper Congo, suffer the horrible agonies of slavery. But since you know my story and that of so many unfortunate creatures, I do not want to repeat what I have said elsewhere. You can read it, perhaps you have already read it, in my Conferences published in London and Paris. Since it is to Belgian Catholics that I speak today, I want to speak to them only about what concerns part of Belgian Africa: the sufferings of the blacks held in slavery. I want above all to explain to you how it is the responsibility of you, Catholics, to remedy so many evils, out of a sentiment inspired by religion, Christian piety and patriotism. To convince you of this, I must tell you everything.

You will not be surprised, then, by the freedom with which I speak. I am a missionary; I preach only the truth as apostles must preach it. I am sure, moreover, that whatever I may say to you, I will not hurt you. I am sure of this because I love Belgium, your country. I love it for its generous faith. For many long years, I have never found anything but marks of sympathy and charity for my works. If, then, what you will hear may at times surprise your ears, you will understand, simply by the tone of my voice, that I do not want to wound your hearts. What I must remind you of, or bring to your awareness, has nothing, moreover, that is out of the ordinary. I only find in this history of the Belgian Congo, what I find in the history of all the noble enterprises, and I cannot give you any better proof of this than by showing you how Our Lord spoke about it himself nineteen centuries ago for the future instruction of Christian peoples.

He gave this lesson in the form of a parable. You will find it, if you wish to read it again, in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Our Lord tells there the story of a man who goes out to sow a good seed, bonum semen, in his fields. But once the seed had been sown by him, his people went to sleep and while they slept, cum autem dormirent homines, the enemy sowed darnel in the midst of the good seed. The darnel soon grew to the dismay of the servants, and no doubt regretting their negligence, they rose and said: "Do you want us to uproot the darnel that is growing in the midst of the good seed?" If you have understood this well, it is what I am going to set out for you today in new terms. The man who sows the good grain is the Prince who conceived the noble thought of sowing civilization, progress, and at a future date, riches, assured riches for his people, in an Africa till now barbarian. The people sleeping around him, alas, are you yourselves who have not always supported him as much as you could, Belgian Catholics, in what concerns the works of faith and humanity (for these are the only ones that I wish to and can speak from this pulpit.) The darnel which is sown is the slavery which is developing and seems ready to cover everything. Finally, the workers, who, filled with regret, arise to root out the darnel which has grown up, will be you, I am sure, my very dear brothers, when you have heard this talk. But see in my words one desire only, the desire to enlighten your consciences and to render service to your sense of Christian honour. Any other thought is foreign to me. In my mouth, politics, human interests, even distant allusions to them, would be contrary to the duties of my sacred ministry.

