



**1888:** Lavigerie writes to the President of the Congress of German Catholics meeting in Freiburg im Breisgau: on the anti-slavery work.

**Letter to the President of the Congress of German Catholics (28th August 1888)**

As long as Europe was unaware of the vile deeds that today have been revealed to it, Catholics in the various States could do nothing about them. As long as they were not interested in the situation in virtue of the new sovereignty that their countries have acquired, they had no special duty in that regard. But today, not to act would be cruel; even to stay silent would deserve condemnation.

It is not necessary to send numerous armies down there... What they must attempt, in effect, is not to occupy everywhere in one go or even to go everywhere, but simply to erect barriers everywhere the caravans must pass to reach either the public markets of the interior or the secret markets of the coast... It is these same troops who would have the duty of applying the law of disarming the Muslims and the half-casts as they appeared with their human prey. In a very short time, Africa would be cleared of the brigands that oppress it.

I speak only of the heart of Africa. The populations there are pagan, the Muslims till now have penetrated there only in very small number... so there are only five hundred Muslims at most to disarm and send back to the countries from which they came; but here it is necessary to recall the words of Cameron (the English explorer): "It is not by discourses or writings that Africa will be reborn but by deeds."

Stopping the slave trade, and using force to do so, is necessary to save the population in the pagan regions of Africa; but the evils of slavery do not end there. I have already said, the most deplorable effect of the slave trade is not merely the destruction of human life, but above all the absolute disorganization of the original social order that existed in the interior of Africa.

The bonds which linked the inhabitants of these savage regions in a common order were no doubt elementary, but they were real. They were those of patriarchal families. Today, as result of the Muslim invasions, of violent capture, of the flight of

populations, of the arming of so many blacks to make them serve as auxiliaries in the banditry, everything is up in the air on these high plateaus formerly so peaceful. Order, authority no longer exist there, and to save them, the social order itself must be re-constituted.

That is the fundamental work of the Catholic anti-slavery societies, once the shedding of blood and of human life has been stopped by force which alone, I will never repeat it enough, can now put an end to it.

Doubtless part of this work of reconstitution could be done by the preaching of the faith, as happened in all the barbarian regions. Whatever one may say, the majority of African tribes are very capable of an intellectual, religious and moral culture. For me, according to the testimonies of my own missionaries in all the tribes where they are established, and they are the only Catholic missionaries present till now on these high plateaus in the heart of Africa, the populations of these high plateaus, who are the authentic type of the African, offer the greatest hopes in this respect.

I do not speak of what we have seen, scarcely two years ago, in the Christian community of Uganda, where the harvest of the apostolate germinated and ripened almost at the same time, and in such conditions that numerous neophytes, almost children, did not hesitate to shed their blood for the faith. Leaving aside these circumstances where the intervention of a force superior to that of man is visible, we have found in our blacks seeds of intellectual and moral progress that we did not expect.

That, it is true, I repeat it, is the special objective of the Propagation of the Faith; it is for that it receives our contributions.

