



1878: Pope Leo XIII approves Lavigerie's mission in Equatorial Africa. The decree of Leo XIII created the mission of Nyanza, and the mission of Tanganyika.

Letter to the Work of the Propagation of the Faith (24 February 1885)

Dear Sirs,

I shall start by summarising in a few words the events about which you have doubtless been informed already by the newspapers and the specialised journals dealing with these regions, mainly in Germany and Belgium. You are aware, Gentlemen, that after having made two successive journeys of exploration, one from Zanzibar to Tanganyka and the other down the river Congo from its source to its mouth in the Atlantic Ocean, Stanley undertook a third [journey]. This, unlike the previous journeys, was no longer of a purely scientific and geographical character. It was a truly political mission, subsidized by the King of the Belgians.

This royal figure had granted me a personal conversation a little more than three years ago when I had the honour of meeting him in Brussels. It is true to say that he was still hiding the true nature of his business though he was no longer hiding his direct action. He said that he was only following a higher inspiration: "When I die I wish to be able to present to God some good work which will merit his mercy, and this is what I have undertaken with that in view." These were the words with which he ended and summed up one of our conversations.

The money spent by him for this purpose has been considerable. It amounts on average to two million per year, something that stirred up greatly the bad temper of the Queen and part of the royal entourage. This meant that those who were suspected of nourishing the King's passion for Africa were ordinarily badly received. Despite this opposition from within, King Leopold held firm. He has hired Stanley, putting at his disposition not only considerable material resources but also a large personnel chosen mainly from within the Belgian army.

Let us add confidentially that while Stanley and the officers he used to establish his posts were enterprising and courageous men, they did not have religious and moral qualities to the same degree. Stanley is literally capable of anything, including assassination, and his companions are generally free-thinkers. However, that may be, thanks to their au-

dacity they have succeeded perfectly in the last undertaking. Leaving from the mouth of the Congo, they have ascended this river step by step. On its banks, and especially on the left bank, they have established numerous posts, in each one of which there is as it were a small garrison, with a Belgian officer in command and a certain number of men, Europeans or Negros from Zanzibar. Two thirds of the Congo is thus occupied.

While Stanley, in the pay of the King of the Belgians, was carrying out this truly remarkable work of invasion and occupation, another adventurer, of Italian origin but a naturalized Frenchman, Mr de Brazza, with the financial support of France and on its behalf, was active in the same region, but on the right bank of the Congo, whereas Stanley and the Belgians were operating on the left bank.

With much less financial aid and less support than Stanley, Brazza is far from having personally achieved what Stanley has done on behalf of the King of the Belgians. Moreover Portugal, which has historic claims to the mouth of the Congo and to a part of Equatorial Africa, but which, for a long time now, had no thought of insisting on its rights, has begun to make loud claims to them once it saw that other nations appeared to wish to establish themselves there. Finally, Germany, attentive to all this movement, did not wish to let it take place without sharing in it itself. At the end of last Summer it therefore entrusted to its consul general in Tunis, Mr Nachtigal, the mission to plant its flag on all the land left vacant on the coast in these regions. This rivalry provides an explanation, Gentlemen, for that which does not seem to have been understood in Europe, namely the need for an international congress in order to fix the limits of occupation of each of the interested Powers. This is what has just taken place at the Berlin Conference.

