



1857: The Archbishop of Paris is assassinated by a priest in the church of Saint Etienne du Mont. Lavigerie goes to the bishop's bedside. He learns with sadness that the murderer is one of his classmates at the junior seminary of Paris.

1867: At the request of Lavigerie, the diocese of Algiers is erected as an Archbishopric and two suffragant dioceses are created: Constantine and Oran.

1878: foundation of the mission station of Rhadamès (in the Sahara, Libya). The station was abandoned after the massacre of the 2nd Sahara caravan (20 December 1881).

1910: Final approval by the Church of the Congregation of the MSOLA.

Letter of greetings to the missionaries (3rd January 1881)

My dear Sons,

In previous years, I have only responded to your New Year greetings by sending you my paternal blessing, along with an expression of my thanks. Due to the gravity of the situation this year, I wish to benefit from this occasion to convey to you some news which I believe to be useful. From one moment to the next, the storm could break and you ought to know, but not by groundless rumours, the measures already taken or being prepared, at my request, for quite some time now, for your superiors to alleviate the trials you will have to face and even to have them turned, if possible, to help develop and profit our work, under the protection of Our Lord and Our Lady of Africa. I hope that your knowing precisely how to handle this situation might give you grounds for peace and confidence and that, for me, being able to show you, in this way, a further sign of my care for you will be a consolation.

For several years now we have sadly foreseen a violent persecution against the church in France and in Algeria. This persecution started to break out during the year which has just finished, and it is set to continue without interruption. After the unauthorised congregations, it will be the turn of the authorised congregations and then the secular clergy. Those who cannot see this are blind. It is logical to suppose that it will follow its course and there is nothing we

can see in France, and even less in Algeria, which could stop it.

Convinced of this for a long time now, I have had to envisage that all our mission work would be systematically persecuted, destroyed and made impossible in our colony and I have made plans to meet this eventuality. All my efforts have been devoted to saving them by having them transferred, little by little, outside, without waiting for it to be too late before the storm engulfs everything. I began by asking the Council of your Society to close down the most distant posts established in that part of the Sahara which belongs to the diocese of Algiers and transfer them to the actual Mission of the Sahara itself, to Ghadamès and then to Tripoli and soon, I hope, to Ghat and among the Touaregs.

For the same reasons, we have mortgaged the two large properties at Maison-Carrée and Saint-Charles and we have sought to sell, or we have already sold, everything we could dispose of, so as to deposit the money safely in banks or in foreign stocks and shares. At Les Attafs, we have suspended the setting up of new villages and we are trying to get rid of land which we shall no longer be able to use. We have gradually found placements as servants for our orphan boys and girls so that, should the storm break, they are not in our charge, and we have decided to transfer the young Negroes to a foreign country. Finally, we have founded the houses in Tunis and Jerusalem and in Equatorial Africa.

The purpose of these various measures has always been the same: to anticipate the storms which are breaking today, and which will quickly overwhelm us and to provide safe havens for the Society's missionaries and at the same time a welcome boost to their zeal until the revolution passes.

