



**1882:** Lavigerie receives the cardinal's hat at the Consistory in Rome.

**1891:** Lavigerie blesses the 10th caravan at Our Lady of Africa Basilica.

### Conference given at Saint Sulpice (1st July 1888)

It is by the missionaries that I have heard of the lamentable lot endured by the negroes of the Great Lakes region – chased and hunted down like animals, abandoned by the slave traders. I would have wished from the very first days when I heard what has happening, to have made known to the whole world what was going on in these regions. Nevertheless, I hesitated. I asked myself if my revelations would stimulate the hatred of those I was going to condemn and would in turn condemn my sons to a sure death, thus depriving the black population of the support they so badly were waiting for.

But time has moved on. The explorers have increased in numbers. Perhaps they have not been able to tell everything they have seen and experienced because someone who is only passing by cannot tell everything. Whereas someone who stays in one area can see more than enough. Moreover, Europe is now turning towards Africa. The Powers have in fact divided it up. That which was not possible ten years ago, is possible today. One can now hope to see forming, in spite of divisions among themselves, what Montesquieu was calling already in the time of colonial slavery, a “League for Mercy and for Pity”. This is not only my wish, it is also the wish of the Head of the Church: and that is why following on a time of keeping silence when there was no hope, now comes a time for speaking out.

You should know, dear brothers, that for more than half a century, Islam has quietly invaded, without tiring, half of Africa. In certain regions, those which are neighbours to us, the followers of Islam, have founded empires; in others they have caused slavery to come about. Please, Dear Lord, may I not

make use of this occasion to throw out accusations against population and peoples. I am living, moreover, in the midst of Muslims. Even if they do not look upon me as their Father, I must, in my capacity as Pastor, look upon them and love them as my sons. But I cannot prevent myself from stating, today, that among the most harmful errors in Africa, the saddest of all is taught by Islam, that humanity is made up of two distinct races: that of the believers, destined to rule over the others; and that of the accursed, as they call them, destined to serve. In this second category, they say that the Negroes are the lowest of the low, on the same level as animals. According to Leo XIII, in their eyes they are described as beasts destined for the yoke: *Nata jugo jumenta!*

Through conquest, the Muslims have penetrated to the centre of a continent peopled by a black population. The Muslims have then started work at justifying their doctrine. Bands of evangelists, set up by them, have advanced into the interior, coming from Morocco, from the land of the Touareg, from Tunisia, towards Timbuktu and the countries which surround the Niger, from Egypt, from Zanzibar onwards towards the Great Lakes, and finally as far as the Upper Congo and nearly to the borders of the English possessions and the Cape colonies.

Sometimes the kidnappers hide along the tracks in the forests, in the middle of the crops, and take by force the women, the black children who are alone in these areas. Things have arrived at such a state, near to the Great Lakes, and here I quote textually the words of one of my missionaries, that now “every woman, every child who wanders off even for just ten minutes from their village, is not certain to return”. There is absolute impunity. There is no black chief of the small independent tribes, in which the entire country is divided, who has the power to stop this violence. The slavers, made up of Arabs and half breeds, of negroes coming from the coastal regions, are armed to the teeth. The savage populations of Africa’s high plateaux only have as arms, stones, sticks, arrows and lances. It is impossible for them to fight against the brigands who invade them, or to escape.