Conference given at Saint Sulpice
(1st July 1888)

Finally, the marketplace is reached, where those surviving among the poor black people, are led. Frequently it is only half of them, or even just a third, sometimes even less from those who had been captured at the departure.

Now begins scenes of another kind, but no less odious. The captive negroes are stood up for sale like beasts. In turn their feet, their hands, their teeth, in fact their entire body is examined, to prove that they can carry out the services which will be required from them. The sale price is discussed in front of them, just like for any animal, and when the price is agreed upon, they belong body and soul to whoever has bought them. Nobody is held any longer accountable for the sufferings, nor for the deaths of the slaves.

The great and intrepid Livingstone summed it up. For many years he had been witness to these inhuman goings on and he wrote as follows. I beg you to think long and hard about what he says:

"When I consider the slave trade in East Africa, I have been careful about what I have to say. I do not want to be held guilty of exaggerating, but in all truth, the subject does not allow one to exaggerate. To amplify the evils of this dreadful commerce is simply not possible. The spectacle I have before me, the on-going incidents of this trafficking, is of such horror that I make every effort to drive them away from my memory, with no success. The most painful memories are erased as time passes; but the atrocious scenes I have witnessed come back to me and, during the night make me leap up, horrified by the intensity of the image".

But it is not just the general aspect of these dismal scenes, our Fathers have been witness to even more horrible details. They have seen the executioners, boiling with rage with the thought that their victims were going to escape, draw their sabres with which they were armed, and which they used to cut off heads with a single blow, cut off one arm first of all, then a foot, and seizing this debris, throw them onto the edge of some nearby jungle, shouting out to the terrified prisoners: "These are for the leopards which will come to teach you to march".

In addition (and I tell this for those who deny the possibility of rescuing one day, this oppressed race), faced with the perspective of so much shame and suffering, the savage strength is raised to the sublime. Women captured during a hunting expedition, torn from their children, from their husbands, so as not to become victims to the debauchery, have seized a poisoned lance and plunged it themselves into their breasts.

This, then is what is taking place in the interior of equatorial Africa, in fifty places at once. This is how the Muslim slave traders trample down human laws, divine laws, the natural law, not only creating these ineffable miseries, but preparing shortly the destruction of men, of families, of villages, of provinces of the interior of Africa, in order to bring about an immense desert.

I am not exaggerating anything, and I can only repeat, moreover, with Livingstone that one cannot exaggerate when it comes to African slavery; I am only repeating what my own missionaries have written to me about, and what the most trustworthy English and French, Protestant and Catholic explorers have already recounted in part. Never, and now I take up my own reflections, never the world has witnessed so many sacrilegious excesses. One has rightly spoken out and acted against the colonial slave trade. But the colonial slave trade with its negro slaves was not on the same level as the man hunts, such as now practiced, even more cruelly, every day, in the interior of Africa. It is not on the same level in so far as the number of victims are concerned, the executioners' beastly cruelty, the extent of the disasters.