



1878: Livinhac is designated for the Equatorial Missions.

1886: Lavigerie leaves Algiers for France to preach in favor of the missions

Letter to the missionaries at the Tabora mission (24th March 1883)

My dear Sons,

Let me tell you first of all how much I regret not having written to you or having given you my instructions for such a long time. The extraordinary upset caused, for two years now, by my dealings in Tunisia and then my promotion to the cardinalate have prevented me from communicating with you and giving you my fatherly instructions.

I must tell you, however, that you are very rarely far from my mind or my heart and that I have received and read with the greatest interest the letters you have written to me telling me of the happy and the sad events at your mission. In particular, I see with great joy that Our Lord has deigned to bless your efforts; these poor African children you are bringing up and even the adults around you are opening their hearts to your words and are inspired by God's grace. Continue to work zealously for them and, as you notice more and more your neophytes' good frame of mind, broaden the way of salvation for them, too.

You have asked me for some explanation or some of you have even complained to me about my having forbidden giving baptism to adults before an adequate catechumenate. During my last trip to Rome, I spoke about this to the Holy Father Pope Leo XIII himself. He gave his broad approval to this restoring of the ancient catechumenate among your pagan populations, so consequently I think you would do well to maintain this practice under the terms I laid down. Just this week I had a letter from Lille telling me about a Father Desribes, of the Society of African Missionaries of Lyons, who has been telling hurtful calumnies by saying that you believe too easily in the Africans' good frame of mind and are baptising them without any precautions. This is a bare-faced lie, but what would people say if you went along with this by your careless behaviour?

There are, however, exceptions to this rule, as there are for any rule; for example, for the children of your catechumens. Exceptions could be made for the adults themselves who showed heroic traits of character, like the one whose story Father Lourdel

told in a letter which all the newspapers have published. It is for the Father Superior to decide on these exceptions.

But it is not on any particular practical point that I want to dwell today. I want to insist, my dear Sons, on begging you to remember that you are apostles; that you have gone into the interior of Equatorial Africa to save souls and establish the Kingdom of God. I am so sad, when I read in some of your letters that certain confreres, in other mission stations, seem to busy themselves only with material matters. It is scandalous that priests in your circumstances seem to forget so completely to mention in their letters both the Kingdom of God and souls, which should be their sole concern.

Think of all the sacrifices that have been made for you, of the huge sums already spent, of the confreres who have died, of your own sufferings... Think even more of the sufferings of Our Lord who shed his blood for those poor savages. If you consider all that to be useless by reducing yourselves to the condition of simple tourists, travellers, doctors, camp superiors, what responsibility are you not bringing on yourselves, what curses are you not calling down on your heads, both from men and from God? Once again, I beg of you, be true priests, all the more faithful to everything that can rekindle the interior life in you in that you are more exposed to being carried away by the preoccupations of the material world.

