

DIEGO R. SARRIÓ CUCARELLA*

LAVIGERIE AND ISLAM
AN AMBIGUOUS LEGACY

SUMMARY: In a recent article on the contribution of the White Fathers to the renewal of Catholic attitudes towards Islam, Rémi Caucanas rightly notes that their founder's legacy "was not without ambiguity" in this regard and that this missionary society's option for dialogue took place only in the first part of the twentieth century. After briefly recalling the biography of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (1825-1882), this article attempts to sketch his evolving views on Christian-Muslim relations as reflected in his vast personal correspondence, his pastoral letters and the detailed instructions he wrote for his missionaries.

In a recent article on the contribution of the White Fathers to the renewal of Catholic attitudes towards Islam, Rémi Caucanas rightly notes that their founder's legacy "was not without ambiguity" in this regard and that this missionary society's option for dialogue took place only in the first part of the twentieth century¹. In what follows, after briefly recalling the biography of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (1825-1882), this article attempts to sketch his evolving views on Christian-Muslim relations as reflected in his vast personal correspondence, his pastoral letters and the detailed instructions he wrote for his missionaries².

Born in Saint-Esprit (today part of Bayonne) on 31 October 1825, Charles-Martial Allemand-Lavigerie manifested at an early age his desire to become a priest³.

* Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, M.Afr. holds a licentiate in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI, Rome) and a PhD in Theological and Religious Studies from Georgetown University (Washington, D.C.). His research and publications focus on the intellectual history of Christian-Muslim relations and the continuing reciprocal theological constructions that this history has bequeathed to Christians and Muslims today.

¹ R. Caucanas, "Encountering the Muslims: The Contribution of the White Fathers", *Oasis* 12/09/2010: www.oasiscenter.eu/en/150-anniversary-white-fathers-encountering-muslims

² I would like to thank Dominique Arnauld, Francis Nolan, Michael L. Fitzgerald, Rene Dionne and Jason Welle for their helpful comments and suggestions. The reader should bear in mind that this article is a summary presentation, not an in-depth treatment, of the development of Lavigerie's thought on Islam. The place of Islam in Lavigerie's anti-slavery campaign and his missionary idea of influencing the milieu rather than aiming at individual conversions, for instance, deserve a much fuller consideration.

After completing his seminary formation at Saint Sulpice in Paris, he was ordained in 1849. He went on to obtain doctorates in letters (1850) at the *École des Carmes* and in theology (1853) at the Sorbonne, to which he would add later the Roman doctorate *Utriusque Juris* (1861). Lavigerie taught Church history at the Sorbonne from 1854 to 1859. In 1856, he became the first director of the *Œuvre des Écoles d'Orient*, a French organization that supported Catholic schools in the Levant⁴, and in this capacity visited Lebanon and Syria in late 1860 to bring relief to the Maronites, following a massacre by the Druze. This was his first direct experience of the Islamic world and Eastern Christianity. Shortly after returning to Europe, Lavigerie was appointed French *auditor* (judge) of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota in late 1861. Two years later he became the youngest bishop in France at the see of Nancy where he proved his capacity as an administrator. In late 1866 he accepted an invitation to take charge of the see of Algiers, recently elevated to archdiocese.

Lavigerie considered Algeria the gateway to the evangelization of the whole of Africa. Soon after his arrival in Algiers in May 1867, his activities in favour of Muslim orphans after a famine brought him into conflict with the French military administration. The need of personnel to take care of the orphans accelerated his plans for founding religious orders for the evangelization of Africa. In 1868 Pius IX entrusted Lavigerie with the newly created Apostolic Prefecture of the Sahara and (French) Sudan. The same year he founded the Society of Missionaries of Africa (popularly known as the White Fathers, after the white local dress they adopted) and the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa one year later⁵. As well as revitalising the ancient Church of North Africa, Lavigerie secured an appointment as Apostolic

³ On Lavigerie's life, see, among others, J. de Arteche, *Lavigerie (El Cardenal de Africa)*, Icharopena, Zarauz 1963; English trans. M. Mitchell, *The Cardinal of Africa: Charles Lavigerie, Founder of the White Fathers*, Catholic Book Club, London 1964; L. Baunard, *Le cardinal Lavigerie*, 2 vols., Poussielgue, Paris 1896; L. Cristiani, *Le cardinal Lavigerie. Un grand bienfaiteur de l'Afrique (1825-1892)*, France-Empire, Paris 1961; G. Goyau, *Un grand missionnaire, le cardinal Lavigerie*, Plon, Paris 1925; F. Jammes, *Lavigerie*, Flammarion, Paris 1927; F. Klein, *Le cardinal Lavigerie et ses œuvres d'Afrique*, Poussielgue, Paris 1890; R.X. Lamey, *Le cardinal Lavigerie: choix d'articles*, Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique, Rome 1990; English trans. *Cardinal Lavigerie: Selection of Articles*, Society of Missionaries of Africa, Rome 1990; X. de Montclos, "Charles Lavigerie", in M. Greschat (ed.), *Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte*, vol 9, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart-Berlin 1985, 196-207; J. Perrier, *Vent d'avenir. Le cardinal Lavigerie (1825-1892)*, Karthala, Paris 1992; English trans. J. O'Donohue, *Wind of Change: Cardinal Lavigerie 1825-1892*, St. Paul, Middle Green 1993; F. Renault, *Le cardinal Lavigerie 1825-1892. L'Église, l'Afrique et la France*, Fayard, Paris 1992; English trans. J. O'Donohue, *Cardinal Lavigerie. Churchman, Prophet and Missionary*, Athlone, London 1994.

⁴ See D. Trimbur, "Entre politique et religion. Les origines et les premières années de l'Œuvre des écoles d'Orient", in H. Legrand and G.M. Croce (ed.), *L'Œuvre d'Orient. Solidarités anciennes et nouveaux défis*, Cerf, Paris 2010, 109-128, and J.-M. Ticchi, "Les directeurs de l'Œuvre d'Orient et leurs moyens d'action de 1861 à 1914", in *Ibid.*, 143-171.

⁵ L. Duchêne, *Les Pères Blancs 1868-1893. Depuis l'origine de la société jusqu'à la mort du fondateur*, 3 vols., Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique, Alger 1901-1903; J.-C. Ceillier, *Histoire des*

Delegate for Equatorial Africa in 1874. He immediately despatched his missionaries into the heart of the continent.

As the years went by, Lavigerie abandoned his earlier Gallican sympathies. Increasingly convinced of the importance of unity with Rome among Catholics, he saw no reason for opposing a declaration of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council (1869-70). Twenty years later, he would play a leading role in furthering the policy of Leo XIII, directing French Catholics to rally to the Third Republic⁶. The same pope had appointed Lavigerie administrator of the Apostolic Vicariate of Tunis in 1881, conferred the cardinalate on him in 1882 and made him archbishop of the newly restored see of Carthage in 1884, while exceptionally allowing him to retain the see of Algiers. Lavigerie spent the last years of his life promoting the anti-slavery movement in the capitals of Europe, where his eloquence moved large audiences⁷. He died at Saint-Eugène (today Bologhine), a suburb of Algiers, on 26 November 1892.

Missionnaires d'Afrique (Pères Blancs). De la fondation par Mgr Lavigerie à la mort du fondateur (1868-1892), Karthala, Paris 2008, English trans. A. Shorter, *History of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers). From the Beginning of Their Foundation by Msgr Lavigerie until His Death (1868-1892)*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi 2011.

⁶ The literature on this topic is vast. See, for instance, X. de Montclos, *Lavigerie, le Saint-Siège et l'Église. De l'avènement de Pie IX à l'avènement de Léon XIII, 1846-1878*, Boccard, Paris 1965; J.E. Ward, "The Algiers Toast: Lavigerie's Work or Leo XIII's?", *Catholic Historical Review* 51 (1965) 173-191; J.E. Ward, "Cardinal Richard versus Cardinal Lavigerie: Episcopal Resistance to the Ralliement", *Catholic Historical Review* 53 (1967) 346-371; F. Renault, "Aux origines du Ralliement: Léon XIII et Lavigerie (1880-1890)", *Revue historique* 281 (1989) 381-432; R. de Mattei, *Il ralliement di Leone XIII. Il fallimento di un progetto pastorale*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2014, French trans. M. Perrin, *Le ralliement de Léon XIII: l'échec d'un projet pastoral*, Cerf, Paris 2016.

⁷ See, among others, Ahmed Chafik Bey, *L'esclavage au point de vue musulman. Communication faite à la Société khédiviale de Géographie dans ses séances des 28 novembre et 12 décembre 1890 et 30 janvier 1891*, Imprimerie nationale, Le Caire 1891 (reply to Lavigerie's speech in Saint Sulpice, Paris, on 1 July 1888); F. Renault, *Lavigerie, l'esclavage africain et l'Europe, 1868-1892*, 2 vols., Boccard, Paris 1971; J.-C. Ceillier and F. Richard, *Le cardinal Charles Lavigerie et la campagne antiesclavagiste*, Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique, Rome 2012, English trans. F. Nowak and I. Buckmaster, *Cardinal Charles Lavigerie and the Anti-slavery Campaign*, Society of Missionaries of Africa, Rome 2012; J.-C. Ceillier, "Un engagement pour la dignité de l'homme: la campagne du cardinal Lavigerie contre l'esclavage en Afrique au XIX^e siècle (1888-1890)", *Recherches africaines: l'Afrique et son vécu*, special number (2013) 17-33; L. Magesa, "Fighting genocide: Cardinal Lavigerie and the African Slave Trade", *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission* (2014/2) 6-35; A. Mioche, "De Livingstone à Lavigerie: Élan missionnaire et anti-esclavagisme en France à la fin du XIX^e siècle", *Cahiers Charles V* 46 (2009) 203-239; R. Moloney, "Lavigerie and Slave Trade Abolition: A Forgotten Centenary", *African Ecclesial Review* 31 (1989) 272-281; O. Pétré-Grenouilleau, "Le bien, le mal et le massacre des innocents: le cardinal Lavigerie et la rhétorique de sa 'croisade africaine' (1888)", *Théophilyon* 13 (2008) 251-265; B. Taithe, "Evil, Liberalism and the Imperial Designs of the Catholic Church, 1867-1905", in T. Crook et al. (ed.), *Evil, Barbarism and Empire: Britain and Abroad, c. 1830-2000*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire 2011, 147-171.

First contact with the Islamic world

Lavigerie's first direct contact with the Islamic world – “the world of the infidel”, as he writes – took place at the age of 35. As director of the *Œuvre des Écoles d'Orient*, he visited Lebanon and Syria in late 1860 to bring relief to the Maronites, following a clash with the Druze which turned into a massacre in May of that year. “It was there”, he wrote some twenty years later, “that I found my true vocation”⁸. In Damascus, Lavigerie was deeply impressed by the exiled Algerian Emir Abdelkader (1808-1883), who had protected the Christians in the city and in whom Lavigerie saw an admirable expression of the natural virtue of justice: “I listened with admiration and joy to this sincere Muslim, whose words a Christian might have been proud of”⁹. Several years later, in late 1866, inspired by the fourth-century evangelizer of Gaul, Saint Martin of Tours, and by a dream in which dark-skinned people, living in a strange country and speaking in an unknown language, came to him, the young Bishop of Nancy gave up a promising ecclesiastic career in metropolitan France to take charge of the smaller see of Algiers. To those surprised by his choice, he explained that there was Christian work to be done among Muslims. Lavigerie moreover considered Algeria “a door opened by Providence onto a barbarous continent of two hundred million souls”, as he wrote to some friends in the French episcopate towards the end of December 1866¹⁰.

Traditional anti-Islamic prejudices

French attitudes toward Islam at the time were not generally flattering. The European image of Islam was dominated by a decaying Ottoman Empire which, apart

⁸ “C’est comme Directeur de l’Œuvre des Écoles d’Orient que je me suis trouvé, pour la première fois, en contact avec le monde infidèle. C’est en son nom que je suis allé, il y a près d’un quart de siècle, porter les secours de la charité catholique aux Chrétiens de la Syrie, opprimés par les Druses ; que j’ai visité leurs villes, leurs villages, couverts de sang et de ruines ; que j’ai vu pour la première fois et aimé leur soleil qui est le soleil de notre Afrique ; que j’ai connu ma vocation véritable” (“Lettre pastorale de Mgr l’archevêque d’Alger sur les Œuvres d’apostolat recommandées par la récente Encyclique de N. S. P. le Pape Léon XIII et Avis sur une quête en faveur des Lieux saints”, 2 mars 1881, in C. Lavigerie, *Œuvres choisies de Son Éminence le cardinal Lavigerie, archevêque d’Alger*, 2 vols., Poussielgue, Paris 1884, 2:6).

⁹ “Je l’écoutais avec admiration et bonheur parler, lui, musulman sincère, un langage que le christianisme n’eût pas désavoué” (*Bulletin périodique de l’Œuvre des Écoles d’Orient*, no. 11, avril 1861, 51). Lavigerie would show much less admiration for Abdelkader in a speech delivered on 25 April 1875 at the Cathedral of Algiers: “L’armée et la mission de la France en Afrique: discours prononcé dans la cathédrale d’Alger, le 25 avril 1875, pour l’inauguration du service religieux dans l’armée d’Afrique, par Mgr l’archevêque d’Alger”, A. Jourdan, Alger 1875 (reprinted in *Œuvres choisies*, 1: 23-83).

¹⁰ “L’Algérie n’est qu’une porte ouverte, par la Providence, sur un continent barbare de deux cents millions d’âmes” (“Lettre à quelques-uns de ses amis dans l’épiscopat”, quoted in A.-C. Grussenmeyer, *Vingt-cinq années d’épiscopat en France et en Afrique. Documents biographiques sur Son Éminence le cardinal Lavigerie, archevêque de Carthage et d’Alger, primat d’Afrique, à l’occasion de son jubilé épiscopal*, 2 vols., A. Jourdan, Alger 1888, 1:107).

from its architectural achievements, was seen as culturally barren. Lavigerie shared this negative view of Islam when he arrived in Algiers on 15 May 1867, with the French conquest of Algeria still underway. "Like nearly all Europeans of the day", nineteenth-century French colonizers in North Africa "hardly recognized Islam as a genuine religion at all, but saw it only as the ideological superstructure of a barbaric Empire, all of whose detestable excesses were also ascribed to Islam"¹¹. Some Europeans in Algeria did recognize that there was a genuine religious sense among the Muslims, but the perception of their own superiority limited the possibilities for mutual appreciation. For their part, Algerians, after being submitted to 'Christian' colonial rule, found in Islam a renewed source of dignity and identity.

In his writings, Lavigerie reproduces traditional anti-Islamic prejudices. He refers to "Muslim fatalism" as the first cause of the ills afflicting Algeria's famine victims, "because it prevents any foresight on their part"¹². In his first pastoral letter as Archbishop of Algiers, he depicts Islam as a "sensual religion" that had spread through conquest and whose armies had massacred the Christians of North Africa¹³. In a letter to the French Governor General of Algeria, Marshal Mac-Mahon, dated 23 April 1868, Lavigerie describes Muslims as "living in perpetual and shameful debauchery under the pretext of divorce or polygamy"¹⁴. It is true that he could recognize a sincere religiosity in the Muslim population of Algeria¹⁵ and he also commended the tolerance

¹¹ Renault, *Cardinal Lavigerie*, 75.

¹² "Ces pauvres gens, dénués de tout, montrent encore un courage, une résignation farouche, qui seraient vraiment admirables s'ils étaient inspirés par un sentiment chrétien et s'ils ne naissaient pas de leur triste fatalisme musulman, qui est la première cause de leurs maux, parce qu'il empêche de leur part toute prévoyance" ("Lettre aux rédacteurs des journaux catholiques à l'occasion de la famine", Paris, 1^{er} janvier 1868, in C. Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres publiées par Mgr l'archevêque d'Alger, délégué apostolique du Sahara et du Soudan, sur les œuvres et missions africaines*, Henri Plon, Paris 1869, 27; see also Lavigerie, *Œuvres choisies*, 1:148).

¹³ See "Lettre pastorale pour la prise de possession du diocèse d'Alger", Paris, 5 mai 1867, in Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres*, 10; *Œuvres choisies*, 1:5. See also Lavigerie's description of Islam as a worship of the flesh ("culte de la chair") in "Compte-rendu de l'administration diocésaine d'Alger présenté à Notre Saint-Père le Pape Léon XIII par l'Archevêque d'Alger", mai 1878, Belin, Saint-Cloud 1878, 22.

¹⁴ "Je leur apprendrai [...] qu'il est mieux d'avoir une famille que de vivre, sous prétexte de divorce ou de polygamie, dans une perpétuelle et honteuse débauche", quoted in Baunard, *Le cardinal Lavigerie*, 1:244. Lavigerie comments on the Islamic practices of marriage and divorce, as well as on the "inferior" condition of the Muslim woman, in several of his writings. See among others: "Lettre au directeur de l'Œuvre des Écoles d'Orient", Alger, 24 décembre 1872, *Bulletin périodique de l'Œuvre des Écoles d'Orient*, no. 74, janvier 1873, 38; "Lettre pastorale de Monseigneur l'archevêque d'Alger pour le carême de l'an de grâce 1880 sur le mariage chrétien", 28 février 1880, A. Jourdan, Alger 1880, 10-11; "Lettre de S. Ém. le cardinal Lavigerie au directeur de l'Œuvre des Écoles d'Orient", Carthage, 1^{er} janvier 1886, *Bulletin périodique de l'Œuvre des Écoles d'Orient*, no. 152, janvier 1886, 197; "Lettre de S. Ém. le cardinal Lavigerie aux membres de l'Association de Marie-Immaculée pour la conversion des femmes païennes", septembre 1886, *Bulletin des Missions d'Alger* 60 (octobre 1886) 486-504, here 488-492.

¹⁵ See "Lettre à M. le directeur de l'Œuvre de la Sainte-Enfance sur l'œuvre des orphelinats indigènes", Alger, 15 avril 1869, in Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres*, 65. See also "Lettre de Mgr Lavigerie,

of past North African Muslim rulers towards their Christian subjects¹⁶. Nonetheless, his essential judgment on Islamic civilization remained unfavourable throughout his life. “Muslim barbarity”, he wrote, “was holding Africa under its yoke and was closing the door to Christianity”¹⁷. Renault speculates that Lavigerie’s knowledge of the Qur’an was probably restricted to the quotations from it in a work which he recommended to his missionaries, *Les soirées de Carthage* (Paris, 1847), by François Bourgade (d. 1866), a French Catholic priest who had worked in Tunisia¹⁸. Lavigerie had encountered him in Paris at some time after Bourgade’s return to France in 1858. Bourgade’s book took the form of long conversations between a priest, a mufti and a qadi in which the priest showed his Muslim interlocutors how, properly understood, Islam’s sacred book confirmed Christian belief. In Lavigerie’s private library, there were no titles of books dealing with Islam or the Qur’an¹⁹. He nonetheless showed accurate knowledge of the Qur’anic position on slavery during the anti-slavery campaign he vigorously pursued during the last years of his life²⁰.

This negative approach to Islam was not only European cultural bias, but also part of the standard Catholic theology of the time. Lavigerie moreover was deeply permeated by the vision, perhaps best exemplified by Chateaubriand’s *Génie du christianisme*, which considered the Christian religion as the most conducive for human integral development, producing moral values and artistic and cultural growth²¹. In his already-quoted first pastoral letter as Archbishop of Algiers, Lavigerie describes France as “la nation chrétienne par excellence, *christianissimum regnum*”²² and invites his

archevêque d’Alger, délégué apostolique du Sahara et du Soudan, à M. le chanoine Dauphin, directeur de l’Œuvre”, Alger, 1^{er} janvier 1877, *Bulletin périodique de l’Œuvre des Écoles d’Orient*, no. 98, janvier 1877, 35: “[les musulmans] ont la foi, une foi pleine et robuste, quoique l’objet en soit faux. Ils respectent leur culte, ceux qui le représentent, et ils auraient horreur de nous s’ils savaient où nous sommes descendus”.

¹⁶ See “Lettre pastorale sur la dernière page connue de l’histoire de l’ancienne Église d’Afrique et mandement pour le carême de l’an de grâce 1883”, 1^{er} février 1883, in Lavigerie, *Œuvres choisies*, 2:471.

¹⁷ “La conquête algérienne n’était, et ne pouvait être, en effet, dans l’ordre providentiel, que la dernière croisade contre la barbarie musulmane, qui tenait l’Afrique sous le joug, et en fermait les portes au Christianisme. Dieu ne nous avait donné la victoire que parce qu’il nous destinait à porter la vérité et la lumière, dans les ténèbres de cet immense continent déshérité, et comme oublié depuis tant de siècles” (“Lettre de Mgr l’archevêque d’Alger à un séminariste de France sur la Société des Missionnaires d’Alger”, Bureau de l’Œuvre des Écoles d’Orient, Paris 1878, 4).

¹⁸ Renault, *Cardinal Lavigerie*, 89-90.

¹⁹ M. Borrmans, “Lavigerie et les musulmans en Afrique du Nord”, *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 95 (1994) 39-55, here 54.

²⁰ See “Conférence sur l’esclavage africain, faite à Rome, dans l’Église du Gesù”, 23 décembre 1888, in C. Lavigerie, *Documents sur la fondation de l’œuvre antiesclavagiste*, Belin, Saint-Cloud 1889, 384.

²¹ See X. de Montclos, “Lavigerie, le christianisme et la civilisation”, in J.-R. Derré, J. Gadille, X. de Montclos, B. Plongeron (ed.), *Civilisation chrétienne. Approche historique d’une idéologie, XVIIIe-XXe siècle*, Beauchesne, Paris 1975, 309-348; H. Maurier, *La mission civilisatrice du christianisme en Afrique. Lavigerie face à l’Islam et aux Religions Nègro-Africaines*, Petit Écho, Numéro Spécial 5, Société des Missionnaires d’Afrique, Rome 1992.

²² Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres*, 19; *Œuvres choisies*, 1:14.

coreligionists to join him “to make the Algerian land the cradle of a great, generous, Christian nation, of another France... to spread around us, with this ardent initiative which is the gift of our race and our faith, the true lights of a civilization of which the Gospel is the source and the law; to carry them beyond the desert... to the centre of this immense continent still immersed in barbarity”²³. And yet, as has been remarked²⁴, along with this unequivocal sense of cultural superiority, the same letter reveals a profound sense of the equality of all humankind, all created by the same God and all redeemed by Jesus Christ: “I claim the privilege of loving you as my sons”, writes Lavigerie addressing himself to Algeria’s Muslims, “even if you do not recognize me as your father. It is my faith which confers this privilege on me, for it enables me to see you as souls issuing from the hands of the same God and redeemed by the same blood”. Lavigerie tells Muslims that he would hold them, like all the others, in his love and in his prayers, “waiting for that desired hour when there will be only one people, one shepherd, one flock”²⁵. Lavigerie’s missionary plans for the whole continent would thus begin on Algerian soil.

Activities on behalf of Muslims

Soon after Lavigerie’s arrival in Algiers on 15 May 1867, his activities in favour of Muslim orphans, victims of the famine caused by two consecutive years of drought, a plague of locusts and a cholera epidemic, as has been said above brought him into open conflict with the French military administration, which feared that the Muslim population would resent such charitable activities as an attempt to proselytise. In fact,

²³ “Faire de la terre algérienne le berceau d’une nation grande, généreuse, chrétienne, d’une autre France [...] répandre autour de nous, avec cette ardente initiative qui est le don de notre race et de notre foi, répandre autour de nous les vraies lumières d’une civilisation dont l’Évangile est la source et la loi; les porter au delà du désert [...] jusqu’au centre de cet immense continent encore plongé dans la barbarie” (Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres*, 14; *Œuvres choisies*, 1:9-10). See also, along the same lines, Lavigerie’s words in “L’armée et la mission de la France en Afrique. Discours prononcé dans la cathédrale d’Alger le 25 avril 1875”, 61-62: “[...] ô France chrétienne... C’est là ce que tu es venu faire dans ce monde barbare. Tu es venu, non pas seulement y chercher de l’or, mais y porter la justice ; non pas seulement y récolter de plus riches moissons, mais y semer la vérité ; non pas y fonder ton pouvoir sur la servitude et la destruction des vaincus, mais y former un peuple libre et chrétien », reprinted in *Œuvres choisies*, 1:80.

²⁴ Renault, *Cardinal Lavigerie*, 91.

²⁵ “Je vous bénis enfin, vous anciens habitants de l’Algérie, que tant de préjugés séparent encore de nous et qui maudissez peut-être nos victoires. Je vous l’ai dit déjà, je réclame le privilège de vous aimer comme mes fils, alors même que vous ne me reconnaîtriez pas pour père. Et ce privilège, c’est ma foi qui me le confère, parce qu’elle me montre en vous des âmes sorties des mains du même Dieu, rachetées du même sang, destinées, si vous le voulez, aux mêmes récompenses que celles des fidèles confiés à ma sollicitude pastorale. Mais, en attendant cette heure désirée où il n’y aura plus ici qu’un seul peuple, un seul pasteur, un seul troupeau, il est deux choses du moins que nous ne cesserons de faire : la première, c’est de vous aimer et de vous le prouver, si nous le pouvons, en vous faisant du bien ; la seconde, c’est de prier pour vous le Dieu maître et père de toutes les créatures, afin qu’il vous accorde la lumière, la miséricorde et la paix” (Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres*, 25; *Œuvres choisies*, 1:21).

the army had imposed restrictions on Lavigerie's predecessors in the see of Algiers – Mgr. Antoine Dupuch (1838-1846) and Mgr. Louis Pavy (1846-1866) – with regard to contacts with the local population. This measure was not motivated by any particular appreciation for the Islamic faith but by fear that the Church's attempts at evangelization would provoke 'Muslim fanaticism'. Lavigerie however made it clear that he had come to serve the whole population of Algeria, not just the Europeans, and forcefully demanded the Church's freedom to practice charity²⁶. This determination explains his decision to reinforce the study of Arabic in the Senior Seminary of Algiers, a decision already taken by Mgr. Pavy²⁷. In an audience with Napoleon III on 19 May 1868, Lavigerie reassured him of his intentions, a prudent preaching of the Gospel, and requested freedom to open medical and educational establishments, something that even the Ottomans had granted to Christian religious communities in their own realms.

Lavigerie saw in the orphans under his care a providential way to breach the barrier that separated Algerians and Europeans and kept the former under the sole law of the Qur'an. The orphans, whose number eventually stabilised around seven hundred and twenty in the period 1871-1873, were to be the beginning of a new and regenerated Algeria²⁸. This was possible, according to Lavigerie, because these children were still largely ignorant of their own religion and had not come under the harmful influence of the Qur'an, which instilled hatred for Christians and legitimized violence against them: "With the Qur'an, in a thousand years, just as today, we shall be considered *Christian dogs*, and it will be meritorious and holy to slit our throats and throw us into the sea"²⁹. Because of this, Lavigerie could not imagine a way of bridging the

²⁶ See "Lettre au directeur de la Gazette du Midi", 11 mai 1868, in Lavigerie, *Œuvres choisies*, 1:191-195. See also G. Goyau, "Documents inédits sur le conflit entre Mgr Lavigerie et le maréchal de Mac-Mahon au sujet de l'apostolat missionnaire en Algérie", *Revue d'histoire des missions* 2 (1925) 429-435; M. Émerit, "Le problème de la conversion des musulmans d'Algérie sous le Second Empire. Le conflit entre Mac-Mahon et Lavigerie", *Revue historique* 223 (1960) 63-84; A. Dupuy, "La lutte entre prélats et gouverneurs algériens de 1830 à 1870", *La Revue socialiste* 95 (mars 1956) 237-247, 96 (avril 1956) 345-359.

²⁷ See "Lettre circulaire de Monseigneur l'archevêque d'Alger au clergé de son diocèse et Ordonnance portant organisation de l'enseignement diocésain", 31 octobre 1867, Typographie Bastide, Alger, 9-10.

²⁸ See "Lettre à M. le directeur de l'Œuvre des Écoles d'Orient, sur l'emploi des offrandes pour les pauvres arabes du diocèse d'Alger", Alger, 6 avril 1868, in Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres*, 37-44; *Œuvres choisies*, 1:157-166.

²⁹ "Ces pauvres enfants, profondément ignorants de toutes choses, de celles de leur religion comme de toutes les autres, n'ont, en effet, même à ce point de vue, aucun préjugé, aucune répulsion contre nous, et je ne doute pas qu'instruits par nos paroles, par nos-exemples, ils ne demandent eux-mêmes un jour le baptême. Ce sera le commencement de la régénération de ce peuple et de cette assimilation véritable que l'on cherche sans la trouver jamais, parce qu'on la cherche avec le Coran, et qu'avec le Coran, dans mille ans, comme aujourd'hui, nous serons des *chiens de chrétiens*, et il sera méritoire et saint de nous égorger et de nous jeter à la mer" (Lavigerie, "Lettre à M. le directeur de l'Œuvre des Écoles d'Orient, sur l'emploi des offrandes pour les pauvres arabes du diocèse d'Alger", Alger, 6 avril 1868, in *Recueil de lettres*, 41; *Œuvres choisies*, 1:162). See also, along the same lines, Lavigerie's words in "Compte-rendu de

“impassable abyss” that separated Muslims and Christians, barbarity and civilization, other than the conversion of the former to the faith of the latter³⁰. Lavigerie never hid that the religious and moral education given to the orphans was ultimately aimed at baptism; but this was to be done progressively, without exerting any pressure and only at their own request, except for children under the age of reason in danger of death. Lavigerie himself baptized the first six young people who requested it, on 23 October 1869 in the Church of Our Lady of Africa. The first two marriages of orphans took place in the same place three years later³¹. These and other subsequent households were established in two villages expressly constructed for them in the plain of the Chelif, about 135 km from Algiers: Saint-Cyprien (1873) and Sainte-Monique (1875). However, as early as 1876, Lavigerie gave up his hope that these “Arab Christian villages” would have an impact on the surrounding populations and abandoned the idea of Christian villages as the method for the evangelization of Algeria’s Muslims³². He later regretted that the orphans had been educated in European habits that alienated them from their traditional milieu³³.

Personnel for work among Muslims

Before he came to this realization, however, the need of personnel to take care of the orphans accelerated Lavigerie’s plans for founding religious congregations for the

l’administration diocésaine d’Alger”, mai 1878, 21: “Ce diocèse compte, en effet, plus d’un million de Musulmans. Il était, dès l’origine de la conquête, de l’intérêt le plus évident de la France de chercher à amener, par la voie de la persuasion et de la douceur, la population musulmane de l’Algérie à la religion chrétienne. Tout musulman est, en effet, l’adversaire implacable de notre domination. Son Coran lui fait une loi de se révolter contre elle et de massacrer les chrétiens toutes les fois qu’il en peut trouver l’occasion. De là, depuis près de cinquante ans, tant d’insurrections successives”.

³⁰ “Notre mission est de nous assimiler, en les ramenant à notre civilisation, qui était celle de leurs pères, ces populations berbères. Or, au lieu de cela, on les a parquées, jusqu’ici, par la crainte d’un fanatisme en grande partie imaginaire, dans leur barbarie et dans leur Coran, qui les tiennent séparées de nous par un infranchissable abîme” (“Lettre à quelques-uns de ses amis dans l’épiscopat”, quoted in Grussenmeyer, *Vingt-cinq années d’épiscopat en France et en Afrique*, 1:106).

³¹ On these first marriages, see C. Lavigerie, “Lettre au directeur de l’Œuvre des Écoles d’Orient”, Alger, 24 décembre 1872, *Bulletin périodique de l’Œuvre des Écoles d’Orient*, no. 74, janvier 1873, 37-38.

³² A. Philippe, “Le cardinal Lavigerie et ses œuvres de colonisation Agricole”, *Chronique sociale de France* (1924/11) 793-811; J. Tiquet, *Une expérience de petite colonisation indigène en Algérie. Les colons arabes-chrétiens du cardinal Lavigerie*, Société des Missionnaires d’Afrique, Alger 1936; B. Taithe, “Algerian Orphans and Colonial Christianity in Algeria, 1866-1939”, *French History* 20 (2006) 240-259.

³³ “Nous aurions tiré un tout autre parti de nos orphelins, au point de vue de la diffusion de nos idées dans le pays, si nous les avions laissés complètement Arabes, même quant au costume, ne leur parlant qu’arabe, ne les instruisant qu’en arabe et leur donnant simplement un état, comme celui de médecin, qui leur aurait permis de vivre et d’avoir de l’influence dans leurs tribus. L’expérience est faite ; malheureusement elle est mauvaise. Il ne faut pas la renouveler dans l’Afrique équatoriale” (C. Lavigerie, *Instructions de Son Éminence le cardinal Lavigerie à ses missionnaires*, Société des Missionnaires d’Afrique, Alger 1907, 245).

evangelization of Africa. In August 1868 Pius IX entrusted Lavigerie with the newly created Apostolic Prefecture of the Sahara and (French) Sudan. In October of the same year he founded the Society of Missionaries of Africa and one year later the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (White Sisters). It seems that, at this early stage, Lavigerie envisioned his new society of missionary priests as exclusively devoted to work for the conversion of “Arab Muslims” in Africa, as he writes in a letter dated 10 May 1869 to a Superior of a Senior Seminary in France³⁴. Lavigerie regrets that “Mohammedanism” (“mahométisme”) is making progress in Sub-Saharan Africa, where Black Africans have been converted by force. Warrior Muslim tribes, acting according to their religious law, have thus prevented the spread of the Gospel and of civilization³⁵. In the same letter, Lavigerie depicts the French conquest of Algeria as a providential action, “the beginning of the last crusade, a peaceful and civilizing crusade which must complete its triumph no longer by arms, but by charity, by devotion, by the heroism of the apostolate, and assure a marked preponderance in the destinies of North Africa to Catholic France”³⁶.

Lavigerie often quotes Saint Paul’s formula of becoming all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:22) as the fundamental missionary attitude. Missionaries must adapt themselves to the life of the surrounding population in everything that is compatible with Christian faith and morals. This adaptation implied sharing their manner of life – housing, food, dress and even nomadism – and, above all, their language³⁷. Lavigerie organized the formation of his first missionaries according to this principle, with the study of Arabic occupying a prominent place in the programme. Renault remarks that at this early stage Lavigerie had no notion of real “cultural adaptation” beyond external conformity. Nonetheless, “his insistence on a thorough knowledge of the local language pointed in the right direction”³⁸. His recorded interventions during the First Chapter of the White Fathers in 1874 show him defending the study of classical Arabic by the Algerian youth under their care, for “the Catholic Church has always encouraged the

³⁴ “[...] une société qui se consacre exclusivement aux missions parmi les Arabes musulmans de l’Afrique en dehors des possessions françaises” (“Lettre à un Supérieur de grand séminaire relativement à la formation d’une Société de Missionnaires pour le Sahara et l’Afrique Centrale”, Alger, 10 mai 1869, in Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres*, 90).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

³⁶ “[...] notre conquête algérienne, qui est vraiment, selon mes faibles vues, le début de la dernière croisade, croisade pacifique et civilisatrice qui doit achever son triomphe non plus par les armes, mais par la charité, par le dévouement, par l’héroïsme de l’apostolat, et assurer à la France catholique une prépondérance marquée dans les destinées de l’Afrique du Nord” (*Ibid.*, 93).

³⁷ J. Mazé, “Le devoir de l’adaptation d’après Mgr Lavigerie”, in *Les aspirations indigènes et les Missions. Compte-rendu de la troisième semaine de Missiologie de Louvain*, Museum Lessianum, Louvain 1925, 102-110; F. Van den Eynde, “Le cardinal Lavigerie. Un partisan de l’adaptation”, Museum Lessianum, Louvain 1926; J. Perraudin, “L’inspiration paulinienne de Lavigerie. Lavigerie et Saint-Paul”, *Spiritus* 21 (1964) 365-376.

³⁸ Renault, *Cardinal Lavigerie*, 156. See also A. Shorter, “Le cardinal Lavigerie et la culture”, *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 95 (1994) 135-150.

study of literature and the development of the national genius of its children”³⁹. This represents a development from the straightforward assimilation of the Muslim population which he propounded when he first arrived in Algiers in 1867.

Ambiguities

Yet a certain ambiguity remains. The above-mentioned letter of 10 May 1869 to a Superior of a Senior Seminary in France presents the effort at external adaptation in which Lavigerie’s missionaries were being trained as a strategy dictated by Arab Muslims’ pride, which prevented them from receiving the Gospel from men “whom they deeply despise”. Thus, Lavigerie goes on to explain, “it was necessary to begin by giving them this mark of condescension to make themselves, so to speak, similar to them by adopting their outward way of life, their clothes, their food, their nomadic life, their language, by making themselves, in a word, all things to all in order to win them to Jesus Christ”⁴⁰. A similar way of thinking is still present during the 1874 Chapter, when, referring to the work to be accomplished by his missionaries in Algeria, Lavigerie is clear that their efforts at external adaptation are a means to disarm Muslims’ prejudices and thus “increase their influence and work more efficiently for their single aim: to change the religion of the Arabs”⁴¹. And yet, at the same time, Lavigerie states in unambiguous terms that “becoming a Christian means changing error for truth, but does not mean ceasing to be an Arab, much less becoming French”⁴². We see here the remote beginnings of a new way of thinking about the relation between Gospel and culture that would develop in the Catholic Church only in the twentieth century.

Instructions to missionaries in Kabylia

In the summer of 1873 Lavigerie sent his first missionaries to the mountainous region of Kabylia. The Jesuits had been present in the region since 1862. Lavigerie’s

³⁹ “L’Église catholique a toujours favorisé la culture littéraire et le développement du génie national de ses enfants”. Minutes of the 1874 Chapter, session of 14 October, quoted in Renault, *Le cardinal Lavigerie 1825-1892*, 266-267; see also Renault, *Cardinal Lavigerie*, 173-174. On this Chapter, see J.-C. Ceillier, *A pilgrimage from Chapter to Chapter. The first General Chapters of the Society of Missionaries of Africa, 1874-1900*, History Series 1, Society of Missionaries of Africa, Rome 2002, 10-14.

⁴⁰ “On a pensé que, l’orgueil des Arabes étant un des obstacles principaux qui s’opposent à ce qu’ils reçoivent la bonne nouvelle de l’Évangile par le ministère d’hommes qu’ils méprisent profondément, il fallait commencer par leur donner cette marque de condescendance de se rendre, pour ainsi dire, semblables à eux en adoptant leur manière extérieure de vivre, leurs vêtements, leur nourriture, leur vie nomade, leur langue, en se faisant, en un mot, tout à tous pour les gagner à Jésus-Christ” (Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres*, 91).

⁴¹ “Ils ne craignent pas de s’astreindre à toutes ces nécessités, parfois très dures, et cela pour augmenter leur influence, pour travailler plus utilement au but unique qu’ils se proposent : changer la religion des Arabes”. Minutes of the 1874 Chapter, session of 14 October, quoted in Renault, *Le cardinal Lavigerie 1825-1892*, 267; see also Renault, *Cardinal Lavigerie*, 174.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 175.

instructions to his missionaries have been summarised in four pastoral recommendations: (1) to refrain from all proselytising; (2) to win over hearts; (3) to reconnect with the Christian past of the region; and (4) the already-mentioned principle of becoming all things to all people⁴³. Refraining from proselytism – a directive also addressed to the Jesuits – did not mean not speaking about religion at all, but abstaining from overtly preaching the Gospel and seeking individual conversions. Such actions would only arouse the opposition of the colonial administration and the hostility of the Kabyles. It is important to note that the restraint imposed by Lavigerie was dictated by the circumstances, not by theological convictions about the religious life of Muslims, as Lavigerie himself remarks in the first instructions he addressed in March 1878 to his missionaries in Equatorial Africa⁴⁴. Lavigerie's rejection of proselytism was also connected with the danger of apostasy that could result from hasty conversions. Regarding the second recommendation of winning over hearts, this meant accomplishing works of benevolence on behalf of the Muslim population and truly loving them. Lavigerie thought that charity was the key that would eventually open their hearts to the Christian faith: "Love these poor infidels. Do good to them. Nurse their wounds. They will begin by giving you their affection, then their trust and finally their souls"⁴⁵. Like his two predecessors in the see of Algiers, Lavigerie felt called to revive the ancient Church of North Africa⁴⁶. He considered Kabylia more likely than other parts of Algeria to respond positively to the Gospel. This conviction was based on a then popular reading of history, the so-called Kabyle myth, built on the Berber/Arab dichotomy⁴⁷. According to this view, the Kabyles had only converted to

⁴³ See J. Cuoq, *Lavigerie, les Pères Blancs et les Musulmans maghrébins*, Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique, Rome 1986, 32-39. See also A. Prost, "Principes du cardinal Lavigerie sur l'apostolat auprès des Musulmans", *Grands Lacs: Revue générale des missions d'Afrique*, nouvelle série, 105 (1947) 11-24; A. Shorter, "Christian Presence in a Muslim Milieu: The Missionaries of Africa in the Maghreb and the Sahara", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28 (2004) 159-164.

⁴⁴ See Lavigerie, *Instructions à ses missionnaires*, 178.

⁴⁵ "Aimez ces pauvres infidèles. Faites-leur du bien. Soignez leurs plaies. Ils vous donneront leur affection d'abord, leur confiance ensuite, et enfin leurs âmes" ("Lettre circulaire de Monseigneur l'archevêque d'Alger, Délégué apostolique pour les missions du Sahara, aux Pères et aux Frères de la Congrégation des Missionnaires d'Afrique d'Alger relativement à la tenue du premier Chapitre général et l'élection d'un Supérieur de leur Société", Alger, 11 novembre 1884, A. Jourdan, Alger 1884, 6).

⁴⁶ See P.M.E. Lorcin, "Rome and France in Africa: Recovering Colonial Algeria's Latin Past", *French Historical Studies* 25 (2002) 295-329; M. Bergeret, *La mémoire de l'Afrique romano-chrétienne et de Saint Augustin chez Mgr Lavigerie et ses prédécesseurs*, Paris 2016 (MA Diss., Institut Catholique de Paris).

⁴⁷ See L. Duchêne, *Les Pères Blancs 1868-1893. Depuis l'origine de la société jusqu'à la mort du fondateur*, vol 3, *La Kabylie*, Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique, Alger 1903; D. Abrous, *La Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique à l'épreuve du mythe berbère. Kabylie, Aurès, Mزاب*, Peeters, Paris-Louvain 2007; K. Dirèche, "Les écoles catholiques dans la Kabylie du XIXe siècle", *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 75 (2007) 17-27; K. Dirèche, "Coloniser et évangéliser en Kabylie: les dessous d'un mythe", in B. Heyberger and R. Madinier (ed.), *L'Islam des marges. Mission chrétienne et espaces périphériques du monde musulman XVIe -XXe siècles*, Karthala, Paris 2011, 107-127.

Islam superficially and their residual Christian tradition could now be revived. Thus, part of the initial approach to the evangelization of the Kabyles was to tell them stories about their Christian past and the religion of their ancestors. Lavigerie deemed this method the most appropriate for those he condescendingly described as a “primitive people” attached to oral tradition⁴⁸.

The final years: the anti-slavery campaign

Lavigerie spent the last years of his life promoting the anti-slavery movement in the capitals of Europe. He relentlessly denounced the organized slave-trade in Central Africa, then mainly in the hands of Muslim traders from Zanzibar, as an unmitigated evil which demanded immediate action. He even envisaged the establishment of some kind of international military and religious association to work for the suppression of the slave-trade and the protection of emancipated slaves. Some interpreted him as calling for a revival of medieval Crusades against Islam, but Lavigerie rejected such an idea with indignation, “conscious as he was that he had always spoken out against any violence towards followers of other religions”⁴⁹. In any event, Lavigerie’s anti-slavery campaign was not only a humanitarian endeavour. He had been concerned by the expansion of Islam in Central Africa for some time. In addition to Protestantism and polygamy, Lavigerie considered the Islamic religion a major obstacle to the spread of Catholicism in the continent. Already in 1878, ten years before the launch of his international anti-slavery campaign in Paris, in a “Secret Memoir” addressed to Cardinal Alessandro Franchi, Lavigerie sought to galvanize Catholic missionary efforts in the African interior, lest one hundred million souls be lost to Islam or to Protestantism⁵⁰. It is in this context that we find some of Lavigerie’s more severe judgements on Islam and Muslim society. According to him, Muslim society could not exist without

⁴⁸ See “Note to the members of the 1886 Chapter on the apostolate in Kabylia”, in Lavigerie, *Instructions à ses missionnaires*, 129.

⁴⁹ Renault, *Cardinal Lavigerie*, 377. See, for instance, Lavigerie’s letter to the editor-in-chief of *La République française*, published on 18 September 1888, in reply to an article by Charles Bigot that appeared in the same newspaper two days earlier: “Je n’ai jamais, durant ma longue vie, « crié sus » à aucun homme, sous prétexte de religion. Ce n’est pas maintenant que je veux commencer, alors surtout que l’Église sent chaque jour, de plus en plus partout, l’amertume de l’odieuse persécution des athées. Je n’ai en particulier pour les musulmans de bonne foi, comme presque tous ils le sont de fait dans notre Afrique, que des sentiments de bienveillance paternelle. Je suis prêt, non à leur « courir sus », mais à les servir comme je l’ai toujours fait, s’ils ont besoin de moi, à les défendre si on les attaque, à me sacrifier pour eux s’il le faut. La seule chose que je veuille « exterminer », c’est l’esclavage qui ensanglante et perd l’Afrique. Tout ce que j’ai demandé dans mes discours pour les esclavagistes musulmans (des brigands atroces, ceux-là), c’est de leur enlever les armes dont ils se servent pour accomplir tant de forfaits, et de les confiner dans les contrées d’où ils nous viennent pour leurs horribles expéditions”.

⁵⁰ See C. Lavigerie, “Mémoire secret adressé au Cardinal Franchi, préfet de la Propagande, sur l’Association Internationale Africaine de Bruxelles et l’Évangélisation de l’Afrique équatoriale, par l’archevêque d’Alger Mgr Lavigerie”, 2 janvier 1878, A. Jourdan, Alger 1878, 24.

slaves and hence, “the destruction of slavery was the most terrible blow that could be dealt to Mohammedanism”⁵¹. He made the same point in a letter addressed to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith at the end of 1880⁵². In this letter, moreover, Lavigerie described Islam as “le chef-d’œuvre de l’esprit du mal”, because while partially satisfying the religious needs of the human heart, it gave free rein to the passions and legitimized violence. Implicitly recognizing the difficulty of converting Muslims, Lavigerie affirmed that Islam would only collapse under the weight of its own excesses:

The Islamic religion is truly the masterpiece of the spirit of evil. It provides some sort of satisfaction to the deepest needs of the human heart – religious needs – through the portion of truth that it has preserved. At the same time, it removes all the barriers to the passions, legitimizes all disorders of the senses and deifies brute force. How might souls be wrested from its grasp? Mohammedanism can only bring about its own disappearance through its excesses, which are the consequences of its doctrines, and through the death it carries with itself everywhere⁵³.

Conclusion

To conclude, the urgency presented by the orphans’ situation obliged Lavigerie, newly arrived in Algeria, to react according to his sense of Christian charity. Lavigerie felt responsible for those he considered his ‘adopted’ children, having rescued them from dire calamity and, in some cases, from certain death. He naturally felt concerned for their souls’ destiny and wished for them to become Christians. Lavigerie’s judgment on Islam remained negative throughout his life; there was no evolution here. Where we can see some change is in his awareness of the necessity of respecting cultural traditions and the realization that the priority should not be given to seeking individual conversions but to bringing about a gradual evolution in the whole society by infusing it with what he understood to be Christian values. “We cannot hope to bring the natives of Algeria back to the faith of their fathers one by one... We must deal with the people as a whole. The first and most effective way is to educate the children. That will destroy the blind fanaticism which masquerades as faith and so prepare a new way for future

⁵¹ Lavigerie, “Mémoire secret”, 50.

⁵² See C. Lavigerie, “Lettre sur les missions de l’Afrique équatoriale à MM. les Directeurs de l’Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi”, Tunis, le 26 décembre 1880, in *Œuvres choisies*, 2:67-68. We find the same argument in Lavigerie, “Lettre de Son Éminence le Cardinal Lavigerie à Sa Sainteté le Pape Léon XIII pour le prier de prendre en mains la cause de l’abolition de la traite en Afrique”, Alger, 16 février 1888, *l.iii*.

⁵³ “La religion musulmane est vraiment le chef-d’œuvre de l’esprit du mal. Elle donne aux plus profonds besoins du cœur de l’homme, aux besoins religieux, une sorte de satisfaction par la portion de vérité qu’elle conserve, et en même temps elle ouvre à ses passions toutes les barrières, elle légitime tous les désordres des sens, elle déifie la force brutale. Comment arracher les âmes à son empire ? Le mahométisme ne peut périr que de lui-même, par ses excès, qui sont les conséquences de ses doctrines, et par la mort qu’il porte partout avec lui” (“Lettre sur les missions de l’Afrique équatoriale à MM. les Directeurs de l’Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi”, *Œuvres choisies*, 2:55-56).

generations”⁵⁴. The text just quoted shows another factor that informed Lavigerie’s approach to Muslims in Algeria, namely the conviction that it was a former Christian country⁵⁵. He thought that three quarters of the population were of Berber origin⁵⁶. Lavigerie saw himself and his first missionaries as the initiators of a process whose completion he was not expecting to see, as it would require several generations to bear any fruit: “We have to win them little by little, but that may take centuries”⁵⁷. It is God who works in the souls of people and only God knows the times. Not surprisingly, he felt disappointed by the impatient zeal of some of his missionaries: “Truly, my children, I am saddened and confused at seeing how little you understand either your work or the human heart”⁵⁸. The fact that Lavigerie would allow for a long time – centuries even – before one should start baptizing Muslims, seems to indicate that he had a less negative view of the salvation of infidels than some of his contemporaries⁵⁹. Indeed, in a letter written in September 1886, Lavigerie approvingly mentions the views of Catholic theologians who hold that Muslims who, in a state of invincible ignorance, seek to observe what they know of God’s law while living in a general disposition of openness to God’s will, might be saved by their implicit faith in the Redemption and their implicit desire for Baptism⁶⁰.

Because of their North African origins, the White Fathers have kept until now a particular interest in Christian-Muslim relations and several of them would play a

⁵⁴ “Ce n’est pas isolément par de telles conversions téméairement provoquées qu’on peut espérer ramener les indigènes de l’Algérie à la foi qui a été celle de leurs pères, – car à peu près tous, contrairement au préjugé reçu, ils sont de race berbère ; – c’est sur la masse entière qu’il faut agir, et les moyens de le faire efficacement, je vous les ai indiqués plusieurs fois déjà. Le premier et le plus puissant est l’instruction des enfants, qui préparera, avec des générations nouvelles, un avenir nouveau, en détruisant le fanatisme aveugle qui leur tient lieu de foi ; le second est l’exercice de la charité ; le troisième est l’exemple ; le quatrième est la prière” (Circulaire confidentielle de Monseigneur l’archevêque d’Alger au clergé de son diocèse relativement au baptême des infidèles, Tunis, 15 décembre, 1880, in Lavigerie, *Œuvres choisies*, 2:525). See also, along the same lines, Lavigerie’s words in “Compte-rendu de l’administration diocésaine d’Alger”, mai 1878, 39: “Il faut, pour que les conversions soient solides, qu’elles aient lieu en masses nombreuses, alors les nouveaux chrétiens se soutiennent les uns les autres. Pour en arriver là, ce qui est nécessaire est donc de gagner la confiance des masses : nous les faisons par la charité et l’éducation des enfants”.

⁵⁵ This conviction is already present in the letter that Lavigerie writes at the end of 1866 to some friends in the French episcopate. See note 30 above.

⁵⁶ See “Lettre à MM. les président et membres des conseils de l’Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi sur la mission du Sahara”, 27 septembre 1868, in Lavigerie, *Recueil de lettres*, 78.

⁵⁷ “C’est à nous de les gagner peu à peu, mais pour cela il faut peut-être des siècles. En vérité, mes enfants, je suis désolé et confondu de voir que vous comprenez si peu et votre œuvre et le cœur humain” (“Lettre à Francisque Deguerry en Kabylie”, Alger, 6 juillet 1873, General Archives, Society of Missionaries of Africa, Rome, Fonds Lavigerie, C 2/363).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ I owe this point to Michael L. Fitzgerald.

⁶⁰ See “Lettre de S. Ém. le cardinal Lavigerie aux membres de l’Association de Marie-Immaculée pour la conversion des femmes païennes”, septembre 1886, *Bulletin des Missions d’Alger* 60 (octobre 1886) 486-504, here 497-498.

prominent role in the future development of Catholic attitudes towards Islam. Their experience in the Muslim world “has resulted in the development of a distinctive approach to Islam that renounces overt proselytism and espouses a dialogue of life”⁶¹. However, Lavigerie’s initial idea that his missionaries would consecrate themselves exclusively to work among Muslims was already surpassed during his lifetime.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans un article récent sur la contribution des Pères Blancs au renouvellement de l’approche chrétienne vers l’Islam, Rémi Caucanas note à juste titre que l’héritage de leur fondateur « n’est pas sans ambiguïté » à cet égard et que l’option de dialogue de cette société missionnaire ne s’opère en réalité que dans la première partie du XXe siècle. Après un bref rappel de la biographie du cardinal Charles Lavigerie (1825-1882), cet article esquisse l’évolution de sa pensée sur l’Islam et les relations entre chrétiens et musulmans, telle qu’elle se reflète dans sa correspondance personnelle, ses lettres pastorales et les instructions qu’il a écrites pour ses missionnaires.

⁶¹ Shorter, “Christian Presence in a Muslim Milieu: The Missionaries of Africa in the Maghreb and the Sahara”, 159.