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06. Presentation of a Memorandum on the Black Missions in general and that of Guinea in particular

Christian de Mare CSSp

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Presentation of a Memorandum on the Black Missions in general and that of Guinea in particular

*To the Cardinals of the Propaganda Fide
from Fr. Libermann¹*

This is a covering letter to Libermann's Memorandum of 1846 (the following text in this Anthology) to the Cardinals who made up the Council of the Propaganda Fide. It gives an outline of the document to facilitate their reading of it.

Rome,
The Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, 1846

Your Eminences,

We are taking the liberty, and at the same time fulfilling our duty, of presenting this Memorandum to you in the hope of receiving your encouragement, which will give us the light and the strength to carry out the will of God and persevere with courage along the difficult road of the apostolate.

We committed ourselves to this mission in the hope of doing something for the glory of Jesus Christ, being largely unaware of the difficulties that awaited us. We now have a much better idea of all that it entails and can foresee that the problems will multiply as the work expands. We are happy to have taken on such a work and we hope, by the mercy of God, that we will never repent of what we have done. But now that we understand better the size and difficulty of the undertaking, we feel the need to seek encouragement and assurance at the source of divine inspiration and the spirit of the apostolate.

¹ N.D. VIII, pp. 219-220.

It is easy enough to start a Mission, to try to achieve some success by the grace of God; that is the duty and the main concern of every missionary, seeking the glory of Jesus Christ. But there are many difficulties and heavy responsibilities that rest on the shoulders of those who are directing such an important task. They have to gather together the resources to increase, spread and strengthen the initial success; set up a work which is solid and stable; protect it from all those enemy forces which wish to do it harm; foresee obstacles and take action to avoid and overcome them; finally, to form a solid base on which can be built the apostolic work as instituted by Jesus Christ. It is a crushing responsibility for us. We have to keep constantly in view the ultimate aim of the whole enterprise and to take all necessary steps to achieve it. We must also express our opinions, receive your orders and carry them out faithfully.

This, your Eminences, is what has brought us here to Rome. The Memorandum starts with some details about the people we have been asked to evangelise. We show the difficulties of their situation, the countries they inhabit and the circumstances which surround them. We then move on to the only means for obtaining solid results and overcoming these difficulties.

There comes an overall plan and a detailed organisation that we are setting up for ourselves. This must be followed from the start of the mission, as far as circumstances allow, and will be completed as the mission advances. The salient points of this plan are to spread the Gospel, form a clergy from the local people, prepare catechists and teachers, instruct the people in those things which are useful for living, introduce a degree of social development consistent with the capabilities of the people, prepare Bishops to replace the Prefects Apostolic and draw up rules for preserving the dedication of the missionaries

and the unity between them and the hierarchical and religious superiors.

We conclude with some proposals for Guinea which are important for the success of that particular mission. Firstly, we give the boundaries of the mission, preceded by an explanation of the topography of the areas concerned; secondly, some observations concerning Senegambia; thirdly, the Episcopate. Following the wise advice given to us by the Secretary of your Congregation, we are not asking for titular Bishops in this Memorandum; we are simply requesting a Vicar Apostolic. But to help him in administering this enormous mission and to prepare the ground for a full hierarchy in the future, we suggest that the mission be divided into five Pro-Vicariats.

We have expressed our thoughts in all simplicity and we are confident that you will kindly receive our suggestions, because we know how concerned you are for the salvation of souls and that the spirit of God inspires your paternal love.

I am the devoted and humble servant of your Eminences,

F. Libermann, Priest
Superior of the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary