

# Charles Martel Allemand Lavigerie Biography

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# Contents

<a href="#">Charles Martel Allemand Lavigerie Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>

# Biography

Charles Martel Allemand Lavigerie (1825-1892) was a French cardinal who founded the White Fathers and the White Sisters in Africa. He was a leader in abolishing slavery in Africa.

Charles Lavigerie was born on Oct. 31, 1825, in Bayonne. After studying at St-Sulpice in Paris, he was ordained in 1849. He received his doctorate in letters in 1850 and in theology in 1853. He was made associate professor of ecclesiastical history at the Sorbonne, becoming titular of the chair in 1857. Lavigerie spent years in Syria as a relief worker after the Christian massacre there in 1860, and for the rest of his life he cherished the ecumenical vision of recognition of the Eastern Churches.

Appointed bishop of Nancy in 1863, Lavigerie sought to manifest in concrete acts the one word of his episcopal arms: *Caritas* (love to all). This episcopate was "too small" a challenge, so after 4 years he accepted the call to the unpopular "colonial" see of Algiers. There he began to fight for life issues of the Church in a global context: freedom of religion (inclusive of liberty of Christian propagation), all sorts of social work, and the conversion "of the whole barbaric continent of 200 million souls" as he tried to reach out into the "heart of Africa" from Algiers. For this purpose he created the orders of the White Fathers in 1867 and the White Sisters 2 years later.

Lavigerie's instructions for the preparation of Africans for baptism are still valid today. As a Christian statesman, he could not fail to see the scars slavery had brought to his adopted continent. Together with Protestant missionary abolitionists, Lavigerie became a major voice in Europe for the liberation of slaves. He could speak for the whole continent, as he became a cardinal in 1882 and was created primate of Africa in 1884.

Lavigerie was convinced that French civilization and Christian missions had to go hand in hand. That was accepted in his early days. "As missionaries," he said, "we also work for France." The tricolor and the cross he had merged in one symbol of liberation.

On Nov. 12, 1890, Lavigerie created a sensation when he proclaimed before an assembly of officials in Algiers the obligation of French Catholics to support the republican regime. For this the monarchists severely criticized him. He died in Algiers on Nov. 26, 1892.