

# **Finance, cooperation and autonomy in the early years of the Natal Vicariate 1851-1903**

*Alan Henriques*

Theology Department: Church History,  
St. Joseph's Theological Institute, Cedara, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

## *Abstract*

The article will consider the issues of financial cooperation rather than autonomy as a means of growth in the early years of the Natal Vicariate 1851-1903. It covers the period of the first two bishops in Natal, Allard and Jolivet, and indicates how the various persons and groups became more autonomous as they became established within the mission territory. The finances of Father Sabon are discussed, the visitation of Father Martinet is reviewed and, finally, the article examines the collaboration between Bishop Jolivet and the Holy Family Sisters.

## **Introduction**

In discussing the finances of the early years of the Natal Vicariate, which came into existence in 1851 with the appointment of Bishop Allard as the first Vicar Apostolic until the end of the term of office of the second Bishop, Jolivet in 1903, the structure of religious life and in particular the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience played an important role in the establishment of the Vicariate. In addition to the structure of religious life, it needs to be borne in mind that the need for cooperation and the personal aspirations for autonomy were at play in the establishment of this new Vicariate which covered the Free State, Lesotho and the Transvaal. The enormity of the territory and the task of first evangelisation set forth important challenges for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the other religious congregations that embarked on the joint-venture of evangelisation in this newly established mission territory.

In this article, three issues will be investigated: the first being the life of Father Sabon the first priest in Durban, the second being the visitation of Father Martinet (which serves as a point to summarise the ministry of Bishop Allard and prepares the way for the arrival of Bishop Jolivet on the scene) and, thirdly, the close relationship that existed between the Sisters of the Holy Family and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the early years of the Natal Vicariate. These three aspects of investigation present us with a good picture of the finances of the Catholic Church in the early years of the Vicariate. Through mutual cooperation and support, the needs of this new mission territory were put before the needs of individuals – this bears testimony to the richness that religious life brought to the life of ministry within mission territories, and strongly suggests that much more was achieved by doing this than would have been the case if a simple business model had been adopted in the early years of the Vicariate.

Given the challenges of the limited funds at the disposal of the first two bishops of the Natal Vicariate, both men are to be commended for their astute purchases of land on which they build churches, schools and hospitals in collaboration with other religious congregations who worked in conjunction with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Joy Brain points out the following:

Allard particularly showed considerable acumen in selecting property and in manipulating his very limited funds to enable him to purchase it and erect buildings. Jolivet acquired land in Pretoria and in the Transvaal goldfields, undertook the construction of churches and of a convent school in Pretoria, and took advantage of the liberal British Administration to lay down the foundations of the Church in that territory. He also initiated building operations in the Orange Free State and in the diamond fields.<sup>1</sup>

By accruing land and buildings, and by working together in cooperation and harmony, the Natal Vicariate was built despite the egos of the individuals involved and their personal needs for autonomy within their various endeavours. If it had not been for their readiness to make sacrifices, the Natal Vicariate would never have grown so rapidly.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joy Brain, *Catholic Beginnings in Natal and Beyond*, T.W. Griggs & Co. (PTY) LTD, Durban, 1975, pp. 181-182.

## Father Sabon and his mission in Durban

Jean-Baptiste Sabon was born on 17th June 1817 at Rochegude within the Diocese of Valence. He was ordained to the priesthood on 6th July 1844 and took his vows as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate on 30th July 1848. In that same year, Father Sabon's Novice Master wrote the following about his character: "Sabon seemed to me, in some circumstances, to follow his own will. For the rest, he is a good priest, a good religious, solid in his vocation. He will be an excellent missionary."<sup>2</sup> The following year, 1849, he was sent to Algeria and then later received an obedience to go to South Africa in 1851. On his arrival in Natal in 1852 he spent a few months in Pietermaritzburg, after which he was posted to Durban where he spent the rest of his life until his death on January 13, 1885. In 1860 he took charge of about 300 Catholics from Calcutta and Madras who had landed in Durban to work in the Colony of Natal. Father Sabon learnt Tamil and did remarkable work among these and future generations of Catholic Indians who entered the Colony of Natal.

Of special interest to our study are a series six letters originally written in French, during the period of 26 January – 1 November 1865, by Father Sabon to the Superior General, Joseph Fabre, of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in which he relates some of his troubles in the early days in Durban. Note that, for this study, I have used Fathers Boule and Vogt's English translation of this body of correspondence. Father Sabon explains his mission in his correspondence with the General Superior:

I am in charge, as you know, of the Coolies or Catholic Indians who are in Natal. I cannot say that my care is very successful: these poor people are spread here and there in the Colony; the greater number, being household servants, live with the farmers so that it is impossible for me to gather them together and when I wish to speak to them I can only do it in the evening when the day's work is ended. My desire to instruct them is therefore handicapped. However, I baptise all their children and have even given baptism to twelve pagans who have become Catholic since their arrival in Natal, that is in the last five years.<sup>3</sup>

Concerning the finances needed for this venture, Father Sabon had built a six roomed house which had cost him £360. £200 had been given by the Vicar Apostolic of Natal and the rest was collected as donations from both the Catholics and Protestants in the Colony. Despite many other pressing needs, Father Sabon comments on the state of his chapel and his plans for the future:

But I do not want to stop there; my chapel is small and in a very great state of disrepair; to repair it is practically impossible; I should have a new one but how can I carry on without money? I have made beautiful plans, it is true, but the difficulty is how to put them into effect; I need about £700.<sup>4</sup>

The combined contributions of what had been collected by that stage in both Durban and Pietermaritzburg amounted to £200. Apart from receiving help from Father Barret in Pietermaritzburg, Father Sabon planned to go as far afield as Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth in asking for money for the new church in Durban.

In his second letter, 6 February 1865, Father Sabon informs the Superior General that receiving correspondence should be easier since there were now steamboats going regularly between Mauritius and the Colony of Natal. In addition there is the news that the Vicar Apostolic of Natal had given permission for him "go and beg in favour of my church in the neighbouring Dioceses".<sup>5</sup> To this end, he had obtained the assistance of a certain Mr O'Mahoney to receive help from other bishops, and he tells us that they had received already a collection of books from the Bishop of Dublin for the library at D'Urban (Durban). The atmosphere appears tense as Sabon reports: "We must ever be on our guard for we are everlastingly among the gaze of a number of protestant ministers who watch us very carefully

---

<sup>2</sup> Yvon Beaudoin, Jean-Baptiste Sabon, in the Association for Oblate Studies and Research (AOSR), *Historical Dictionary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Vol. II*, Rome, 2010, p. 574.

<sup>3</sup> Hurley Archives, SJTI, Letters of Father Sabon, D'Urban, 26th January 1865, p.1. (Confer *Missions 1867*, pp. 187 ff) There are six letters written in the course of 1865.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Hurley Archives, SJTI, *Letters of Father Sabon*, p. 2.

and if we were to take a false step we should easily undo all the good that we have tried to do since 1852.”<sup>6</sup>

In the third letter of that year, 6 July, Sabon reports that the Colony has been going through a “slump”. Despite all the previous signs that the Colony had a bright future ahead of it, this period was marked by numerous commercial breakdowns and as a result Father Sabon had to change his tactics: “As our Catholics are generally poor, their condition is very sad. I have held up my collections, but hope to be able to begin again later.”<sup>7</sup> Sabon had wished to send the General a report of the spiritual and temporal state of the Mission, but says that this will have to wait until later.

In the fourth letter, 5 August 1865, Sabon expresses his joy at having received a reply from the Superior General. He then goes on to report that the chapel is to be 56 feet in length and 16 feet in width. This was due to the fact that the chapel was intended as a temporary structure. Sabon then goes on to say: “If my plans succeed it will be in the future a school which I hope the Sisters of the Holy Family will take and then I shall build a large and beautiful church.”<sup>8</sup> In the fifth letter, 4 October 1865, the news is good regarding the progress in the mission and the building of the chapel. Father Sabon tells the General:

The work on my chapel is going full speed ahead; in a few days time the altar will be put up; it is really very beautiful: it is square and rests upon six small columns which have been turned and given by a protestant gentleman: there is great enthusiasm among my Catholics. I am happy with the enthusiasm that is shown in favour of my dear chapel. Expenses all told will be about £ 400.<sup>9</sup>

The letter was written on 1 November 1865, and relates the story of the inauguration of the new chapel on 29 October 1865. Sabon says: “At first I had only to repair the chapel, but the alms received allowed me to build a new church.”<sup>10</sup> This was due to the generosity of Catholics and Protestants alike, who favoured the renovation of the original chapel. The new tabernacle for the chapel cost £14.<sup>11</sup> The chapel was filled to capacity with an extra hundred people who had to stand outside. Father Barret preached at the mass and Father Sabon had to take up the collection:

I had asked on that occasion Father Barret to preach the sermon and to sing the Mass: my task was to do the collection: now, when I was about to begin, I saw the multitude made up of Wesleyans, Methodists, Calvinists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, etc., devout, silent, respectful, the greater number of them praying on their knees, I felt faint and it was with the greatest difficulty that I was to go through my duty, yet it was not a very difficult one: that collection brought in £23.<sup>12</sup>

As a reward for all his efforts, Father Sabon had secured for himself a new chapel that would serve the Catholic community in Durban well for the next ten years. Sabon’s pleas had not fallen on deaf ears – his dream of a new chapel had been realised. His chapel matched the other churches and had a beauty and style befitting a Catholic church. Sabon ends his final letter to the Superior General with these words: “Therefore Glory to the Lord and may His Holy Name be blessed!”<sup>13</sup>

In summary it can be said that Father Sabon is the only Oblate from the original group that arrived in 1852 who remained in Natal and who was faithful to the obedience given him to evangelise the people of Natal. Others moved onto Lesotho or Rome while others left the Congregation altogether. Father Sabon was based in Durban and had a parish that covered an area including Verulam in the north to Umzinto in the south. Father Sabon taught himself Tamil and had made efforts to open a school for Indians in Durban in 1863, but the government refused to finance this project. He then went ahead and started a school in 1867; this school had 30 pupils, three desks, two maps and a blackboard. The colonial government eventually gave a grant of £25 to the school.<sup>14</sup> Father Sabon made many sacrifices for the sake of his mission. He was also fortunate enough to receive books written in Tamil from the Oblates in Sri Lanka. Sabon had lived out his Oblate identity as a missionary not so much among the indigenous people of South Africa, but among the Indian Catholics and others that were part

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Hurley Archives, SJTI, *Letters of Father Sabon*, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Hurley Archives, SJTI, *Letters of Father Sabon*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Hurley Archives, SJTI, *Letters of Father Sabon*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Hurley Archives, SJTI, *Letters of Father Sabon*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Hurley Archives, SJTI, *Letters of Father Sabon*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> [http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/EDU/Articles/Rambiritch\\_B\\_Review\\_Indian\\_Education\\_Natal\\_1962.pdf](http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/EDU/Articles/Rambiritch_B_Review_Indian_Education_Natal_1962.pdf), Dr. B. Rambiritch: *A Brief Review of Indian Education: 1860-1960*, p. 1.

of his Durban-based parish. Those who cooperated and worked with Father Sabon in his later years in Durban included Father Monginoux (1873-1874) and Father Alexandre Baudry (1883-1885). In his final days Father Sabon was nursed by Brother Ferdinand Manuel until his death in 1885. When he died, in his last will and testament he bequeathed to the Oblates of Natal a piece of land that had been donated to him during his lifetime. The property was situated at the west end of Durban and was marked “A” on the large general plan of the town that was deposited in the office of the Surveyor General. So even in death Father Sabon was faithful to the ideal that what was held by one individual was, in fact, for the benefit of the entire Catholic Mission in Natal.

### **The visitation of Father Martinet and its consequences for the Vicariate**

The apostolate of Fathers Sabon and Barret in Durban and Pietermaritzburg respectively ensured the foundation of the Oblate ministry in Natal. The success of the ministry of Father Joseph Gerard in Lesotho (1862) led to Bishop Allard taking up residence in Lesotho. In some ways the failure to evangelise the Zulus initially led to vindication of the ministry among the Basotho as a sign that the Lord was blessing His vineyard within that Natal Vicariate. However, problems continued to persist to the point that, on the 17 July 1871, the General Council of the Missionary Oblates took a decision that it was no longer advisable for Bishop Allard to remain as the Vicar Apostolic of the Natal Vicariate.

The point being raised in this section amounts to the fact that if the organisation to which pastoral workers belong does not operate according to agreed rules, then this reduces the level of cooperation and productivity among those of its members who are involved in common projects. It also makes the point that poverty is not just about money, but is also part of leadership and a style of administration that either leads to more efficiency or to a disgruntled group of individuals who are unable to function properly as a group. The personality and character of the leader also has a role to play in the problems that are experienced in any missionary territory. Bishop Allard’s austere nature and his strictness in discipline were not always appropriate to the conditions that predominated in the mission in Natal and beyond. Allard had served as Novice Master in Canada before taking up the post as the first Bishop of Natal. His insistence, for example, that all religious exercises be attended by missionaries in houses meant that, even after long journeys (on horseback or on foot), the missionaries had no time to relax and recuperate. Furthermore, Allard’s tendency to dominate and “take over” in local situations did not help local leaders to fulfil their roles as leaders (to give but one example). These are some of the issues that are raised by Father Martinet who came to the Vicariate of Natal on a visitation in September 1871.

The following lists the issues raised in Father Martinet’s report:<sup>15</sup>

- 1 That the acts of the Chapter at Autun held in 1867 be applied to the Vicariate of Natal.
- 2 The need for a more efficient running of the Natal Vicariate since the Vicar Apostolic was now residing in Lesotho. The following was suggested: that Fathers Gerard and Deltour remain in Lesotho, that Father Barret become vicarial-procurator and remain in Pietermaritzburg, that Father Bompart was to be the superior in Bloemfontein and that a new superior be found for Lesotho since it was not appropriate for the Bishop to be engaged in fulfilling the duties of a district superior.
- 3 “That each of the administration should be called on to carry out the duties confided in him to their full extent – neither more nor less.”<sup>16</sup> Concerning the duty of the Bishop in particular Martinet pointed out: “He should never allow himself to become so absorbed in work of purely local interest as to forget the rest of the vicariate. It was his duty to be available to all.”<sup>17</sup> This was to prevent petty squabbles arising between the bishop and the members of the Vicariate over local, specific matters.
- 4 That books of finance be kept and updated on a regular basis in all the houses of the Vicariate. Father Martinet laid down “detailed procedures for the keeping of books, the examination of accounts in January and June each year, the duties of the procurator and rules for the ownership of property”.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Joy Brain, *Catholic Beginnings in Natal and Beyond*, Op. Cit., pp. 133-135.

<sup>16</sup> Joy Brain, Op. Cit., p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Joy Brain, Op. Cit., p. 134.

- 5 Father Martinet cautioned against saving money by asking priests to do manual work for which they had not been trained. Within the Vicariate priests had been used to serve as builders and wagon drivers and this had not always achieved the desired results. If the priests enjoyed such work they neglected their priestly duties and if they did not like such work it left them disgruntled. Martinet goes on to say: "Do not strive to work for economy by doing something for nothing – that kind of work will always amount to nothing."<sup>19</sup> Building projects were to take into account the cost of the material and for the work to be completed with a good level of quality by skilled workmen trained to use the correct equipment required to complete the job.
- 6 The final point of the report deals with the fact that priests "should not be prevented administratively from exercising their faculties"<sup>20</sup> and that the laity should exercise free choice when choosing a confessor. This situation was made more urgent given the shortage of priests in the Vicariate and the prohibition placed on younger priests not to hear confessions for whatever reason, including what had been termed as for the maintaining unity or simply as a disciplinary measure imposed by the local ordinary.

Other issues are raised by Martinet in the second part of his report, which contains his more personal observations. Here he expresses the opinion that, if there were harmony in the Vicariate, this would make it easier to receive volunteers who could serve as extra staff within the mission territory. For example, another priest was needed in the diamond fields. Concerning the establishment of schools here too Father Martinet exhorted: "High standards should be aimed at and a permanent, trained teaching staff should be appointed."<sup>21</sup> Martinet's point was that good schools had been established in Cape Town, Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth and the same should occur in Natal. The need among the Oblates to improve their command of English was a point of contention precisely because it opened them up to criticism from, for example, their parishioners. Buildings were to be put up with a comprehensive plan in mind and should not just consist of additions made to a small cluster of isolated buildings; this was true of the situation in Lesotho and the diamond fields. Martinet criticised priests' attire and the practice of wearing "glaring colours" under the customary black clothing. At times the black clothing faded because of the cheap material used. Martinet also noticed that more reading material was needed for the houses, and that there a need for proper linen which helped one to get a good night's sleep and thus be more productive in the morning. According to Martinet the following may be observed: "sleeping in woollen blankets without sheets is possibly a cause for insomnia".<sup>22</sup> It was Martinet's opinion that South Africa was a rich country and that proper fund raising should be done to meet the needs of the mission in South Africa.

Bishop Allard and Father Sabon's reactions to the report differed markedly. Bishop Allard conceded and now allowed all the priests in Vicariate to hear confession, but nevertheless insisted that he needed more time to study the report. Father Sabon, however, readily accepted all the terms of the report and hoped that Bishop Allard would do the same. The report had spelt out, in detail, all the complaints received by the Superior General in the seven years prior to the Martinet visit; the report was therefore based on facts. In February 1873 Cardinal Bernabò judged the dispute and found that Martinet, during his visit to South Africa, had exceeded the scope of his powers. Bishop Allard was called to Rome and, in June 1874, Cardinal Bernabò then informed the Oblate General Council that Bishop Allard had resigned for health reasons. By October 23 1874 the Holy See had appointed Charles Jolivet as the successor of Bishop Allard to lead the Oblate Mission in the Vicariate of Natal. Bishop Jolivet was more gregarious and sociable than his predecessor and had the advantage of the Martinet report to help heal the situation (relationships among the Oblate missionaries in the Vicariate had deteriorated seriously and needed attention). Due to lack of finance the fabric of the human relations needed to be worked on in order to achieve the harmony that Father Martinet had written about.

The growth in the Vicariate had been slower than expected and the coveted success in the evangelisation of the Zulus did not occur until the advent of Father Louis Mathieu to the Mission at Oakford (1884) and Father Anselme Rousset to Entabeni, near Emoyeni, in Zululand (1896). The door to Zululand would in effect be open from then onwards. The challenge of first evangelisation took longer than had been expected by any of the confrères in Europe. However, to these remarks it needs to

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Joy Brain, *Catholic Beginnings in Natal and Beyond*, Op. Cit., p. 135.

<sup>22</sup> Joy Brain, Op. Cit., p. 136.

be added that, although the Oblates in Europe had worked in the revivalist missions in parishes that had already believers within the parish, first evangelisation was altogether a new challenge in places such as South Africa. Much more time was needed for the faith to take root; also, the difficulties caused by knowing the local languages and faction fighting also acted as impediments to the success of the Oblate Mission in Natal and beyond. Fathers Rousset and Mathieu were to become the “Oblate heroes”, two men who were able to make a success of working with the Zulus and who had an adequate knowledge of the local language and customs to do so effectively. The initial mandate to evangelise the people of Natal included, in no small measure, the evangelisation of the indigenous people of South Africa, so it was only when the Oblates had worked successfully in evangelising the Zulu people that the missionary venture in Natal could be considered as being completed in its aim of evangelising all the peoples in the area rather than just the colonists.

### **Bishop Jolivet and the Holy Family Sisters**

In 1874 the Holy Family Sisters accepted the missionary mandate to run schools for the white settlers where the Missionary Oblates worked within the Vicariate of Natal. Later, their commitment would extend to working among the Indian and Black communities also. The main centres where it was anticipated that the Sisters were needed were Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Bloemfontein and Kimberley. On the 25 January 1875, fourteen Sisters accompanied Bishop Jolivet to Port Natal aboard the *Syria*, and all departed from Southampton. The group arrived in Durban on the 4 March 1875.

The founder of the Holy Family Sisters was Father Pierre Noailles, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate. Sister Melanie O'Connor points out that: “Shortly before his death in 1861, Father Pierre Noailles, the founder of the Association of the Family in Bordeaux, France, in 1820, confided the spiritual care of his Sisters to Bishop de Mazenod, the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.”<sup>23</sup> This created a close bond between the Holy Family Sisters and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Further to this point the Generals that govern the Oblates were to become the Directors-General of the Holy Family Sisters as well. What was envisaged was a type of “holy alliance” between the two congregations, and since the Oblates were a missionary congregation, this had a significant influence on the Sisters of the Holy Family. O'Connor goes on to say:

Bishop Jolivet owned and controlled everything. All monies that the Sisters raised or were given had to be handed over to him. He could say after the first concert evening put on by the Sisters: “£400 for the Convent in Bloemfontein.” (Jolivet: 20 June 1876) Any understanding, thereof, of these foundresses and the task entrusted to them, more especially during the years 1875-1887 while Bishop Jolivet had the role of being both their Provincial and Bishop, has to be partly seen within the context of this relationship. We must always remember that in the ‘Missions’ the task of evangelization was the responsibility of the Clergy (McNamara 1996:588) and “everyone else was auxiliary to the priests” (1996:588). They were not co-workers, in other words.<sup>24</sup>

This meant that the process of becoming co-workers in the joint project of evangelisation of the peoples of southern Africa was an awareness that had to be fostered and developed and would only bear fruit in the later years of these two orders working together. However, the extent of Bishop Jolivet's success is staggering. By 1899 it had been reported in the *Natal Mercury* that “Bishop Jolivet had built 99 churches and chapels, 82 schools and 14 convents, orphanages and hospitals, had raised the number of his clergy from 6 to 114 and had brought 284 Lay Brothers and 900 Sisters to South Africa.”<sup>25</sup> This gives us some idea of the scale of the resources that were at the disposal of the Vicar Apostolic. The Catholic ladies of Kimberley had a bazaar in November 1875 and raised £828 for the building of the Convent in Bloemfontein. In 1878 the Catholics of Kimberley again raised a sum of £1 400 for the construction of the Kimberley Convent. In 1887, for example, the missionary society of the Propagation of the Faith gave Jolivet 21 000 francs and the Holy Childhood Association gave 3 000 francs: Bishop Jolivet used most of this money for the acquisition of land.

The Holy Family Sisters had made an agreement with the Oblate General, Father Fabre, that they would reside in a house located on the church land and owned by the Vicar Apostolic. This was in accordance with the way in which the Holy Family Sisters first established themselves in England and Ireland (for example). This arrangement would later cause conflict and it was the decision of Bishop

<sup>23</sup> Anna Brigid Melanie O'Connor, *The Holy Family Sisters: Pioneering Missionaries in South Africa. 1875-1922*. Unpublished Master's Thesis: University of KwaZulu-Natal: Pietermaritzburg, 2005, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Anna Brigid Melanie O'Connor, *The Holy Family Sisters: Pioneering Missionaries in South Africa. 1875-1922.*, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Anna Brigid Melanie O'Connor, *The Holy Family Sisters: Pioneering Missionaries in South Africa. 1875-1922.*, p. 68.

Jolivet that they should purchase the properties on which they resided. There involved various options and the general feeling in France was that they did not wish to purchase property in South Africa. At this stage the Holy Family Sisters were giving (annually) to the Bishop all proceeds from bazaars and concerts held for the maintenance and enlargement of existing buildings. Mother Mouëzy, who was aware of the precarious situation of the Sisters in South Africa, made the following remark to the General Council on the 4 September 1888:

If I had stayed in France I would probably have opposed the buying, but when we see the flourishing state of the Works, the promises of stability of the future of the Colony and considering all the annoyances which are caused by our situation of dependency, then one repeats involuntarily that now the door of salvation has opened up and one wishes heartily not to let it close again.<sup>26</sup>

It was Father Soullier who took the initiative and bought the two properties for the tidy sum of £5 000 – the remainder of the debt was paid by the Sisters in France over a six-year period at a rate of £400 per year. This caused tension between the Vicar Apostolic and the Sisters, given all that the Sisters had performed in service to the Vicariate from its beginning; however, it opened the door to the Sisters of the Holy Family. Melanie O'Connor points out that: "It was a first step taken towards some autonomy for the Sisters in South Africa."<sup>27</sup> The Sisters were grateful for the "paternal protection" provided by the Bishop during the early period when they were his "dedicated auxiliaries". However, the subordination that the Sisters endured while having the Bishop also serve as their Provincial, and deal with matters such as religious professions and so forth, went far beyond what they might have desired. Gradually, however, the relationship evolved into one of the two communities working as co-workers in the same vineyard and the relationship between the two groups improved.

## Conclusion

Money is always a sensitive issue and begging is always a difficult duty to have to perform. One sees this in the private reflections of Father Sabon when, in his little chapel in Durban, he had to take the collection in a service that was attended by a number of pious Protestants – he tells us that he "felt faint", although he was to find out that it was not such a difficult task after all. Father Martinet felt unhappy about the lack of proper linen in the Oblate houses at the time of his visitation, but these were the same beds and the same conditions that the missionaries had to use, given their financial situation. The Holy Family Sisters needed more autonomy from the Vicar Apostolic, but still needed the Bishop's ongoing support and protection as he had the power to make their lives difficult if he felt that they were not willing to accept his authority on matters of mutual interest. Concerning the situation of the Holy Family Sisters, Melanie O'Connor makes the following observation:

There were many sacrifices and deprivations that the Sisters were willing to undergo to build up the schools. There was the particular problem of very limited financial and structural resources in the initial years because of the terms of the agreement under which the Sisters were contracted by the Oblates. This threatened their security. More value had to be placed on economic independence and acquiring structural resources for the sake of security and a healthy co-operation in mission.<sup>28</sup>

As important as the initial sharing in the missionary endeavour was, as each group became established, it was important to clarify who owned what. Autonomy became an important goal only once each of the congregations had established themselves in the missionary territory. However, these congregations owe their very existence to the sacrifices made by the early pioneers of their orders. Those willing to make such initial sacrifices stood to prosper in the later years of missionary activity in South Africa.

## Works consulted

Association for Oblate Studies and Research 2010. *Historical Dictionary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Vol. II, The Oblates outside of France at the Time of the Founder*. Rome.  
Brain, Joy 1975. *Catholic beginnings in Natal and beyond*. Durban: TW Griggs & Co (Pty) Ltd.  
Brain, Joy 1982. *Catholics in Natal II*. Durban: Archdiocese of Durban.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Brigid Melanie O'Connor, *The Holy Family Sisters: Pioneering Missionaries in South Africa. 1875-1922*, p. 81.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Anna Brigid Melanie O'Connor, *The Holy Family Sisters: Pioneering Missionaries in South Africa. 1875-1922*, p. iii.

- Brain, Joy 2010. The Centenary of the Augustinian Sisters in Natal. *Natalia* 21 (1991). Natal Society Foundation.
- Duminy, Andrew & Guest, Bill (editors) 1989. *Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910: a new history*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Kotze, Steven 2010. Une souvenir du France. *Natalia* 30 (2000). Natal Society Foundation.
- O'Connor, Anna Brigid Melanie 2005. The Holy Family Sisters: Pioneering Missionaries in South Africa 1875-1922. Master's thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Spiller, Peter 2010. Architects versus Catholics: the Emmanuel Cathedral controversy. *Natalia* 15 (1985). Natal Society Foundation.

*Hurley Archives: St Joseph's Theological Institute*

*Letters of Father Sabon to the Superior General*, dated 26<sup>th</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> November 1865 and was written from Durban. (The original letters in French were published in *Missions 1867*, pp. 187 and following, the English translation made available in the Hurley Archives was translated by Fathers Boulle and Vogt.)

*Websites*

Rambiritch, B. A Brief Review of Indian Education: 1860-1960  
[http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/EDU/Articles/Rambiritch\\_B\\_Review\\_Indian\\_Education\\_Natal\\_1962.pdf](http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/EDU/Articles/Rambiritch_B_Review_Indian_Education_Natal_1962.pdf)