

**Race, politics and religion:
the first Catholic mission in Zululand (1895-1907)**

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Abstract

This paper explores the strategies deployed by the Catholic authorities in the late 19th century to gain access to Zululand, their approach to race relations and their relationship to the colonial enterprise in general. The first Catholic mission in Zululand was established in 1895 through a remarkable conjunction of events: the intervention of an ecclesiastical visitor, the decision made by John Dunn, the “white chief”, on his death bed to entrust the education of his children to the Catholic Church and Bishop Jolivet’s friendship with the British resident commissioner. The Catholic missionaries empathised with the Zulu culture, but remained imbued with colonial prejudices. They treated the first black Oblate and the first black priest in a discriminatory manner.

Catholics were latecomers in Zululand. When they established their first mission at Emoyeni in 1895, the Lutherans and the Anglicans had been in the field for decades. Today, with two dioceses and thirty-five parishes, they are present in the entire region but numerically weak – only 81,500 church members in the diocese of Eshowe and 23,350 in the diocese of Ingwavuma, according to the Catholic Directory.¹ This is much less than in the rest of KwaZulu-Natal and in many South African other provinces. The bulk of the population has joined African indigenous churches.

Yet the history of the Catholic Church in Zululand is not without significance, especially in the early period. The leaders of the church skilfully accommodated to the political constraints of the times, using personal connections with colonial officials to overcome the disadvantages of their rather isolated position. They also played with race: while firmly embedded in the colonial culture, they found new ways of relating to black and mixed-

¹ *The Catholic Directory 2009-2010*, 80th edition (Pretoria: South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2009).

race people. Almost from the start, Zululand became a laboratory for their attempts at establishing an indigenous clergy.

A few scholars have written on the history of the Catholic Church in Zululand. Joy Brain, the Catholic historian, dedicated two sections of her PhD thesis to the mission in Zululand.² Godfrey Sieber, currently the abbot of Inkamana Abbey, devoted a chapter of his book on the Benedictines of Inkamana to Emoyeni and Ebuhleni, the first Catholic missions in Zululand.³ More recently, George Sombe Mukuka analysed the history of Edward Mnganga, a Zulu priest active in Zululand at the turn of the century, in his doctoral thesis on the first black priests in the Catholic Church of South Africa.⁴

This paper will make use of the material gathered by these authors. Particular attention will be paid to the early years of the history of the Catholic mission in Zululand in the late 19th century and early 20th century with a view to understanding the strategies deployed by the Catholic authorities to gain access to this new territory, their approach to race relations and their relationship to the colonial enterprise in general.

Zululand, unchartered territory

Until the 1880s the Catholic vicariate of Natal, created in 1850 and entrusted to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a predominantly French missionary congregation, had made little headways in penetrating the black population. Apart from Louis Mathieu, who spoke Zulu fluently, the Oblates had no personnel able to evangelise black people. The situation changed with the arrival of the German Trappists, led by Abbot Francis Pfanner, at Mariannahill near Pinetown in 1882. They founded their first outstation in Reichenau on the Polela River in 1886 and by 1909 Mariannahill had 28 dependent settlements in Zululand, as well as Pondoland and Tembuland in the Transkei.⁵ The Trappists, however, did not manage to start work in Zululand. In 1886 Pfanner sent a Trappist priest, Gerard Wolpert, and a brother, Nivard Streicher, on a reconnaissance mission in Zululand. They made a second trip a year later with the blessing of the Catholic bishop, Charles Jolivet. They

² J.B. Brain, "History of the Roman Catholic Church in Natal 1886-1925, with special reference to the work of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate", thesis for the degree of D. Litt. and Phil. of the University of South Africa, 1982, published under the title *Catholic in Natal II 1886-1925* (Durban: Archdiocese of Durban, 1982), 113-120, 223-230.

³ Godfrey Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana* (St Ottilien: Eos Verlag, 1995), 473-490.

⁴ George Sombe Mukuka, "The establishment of the first Black Catholic Clergy in South Africa, 1887-1957", PhD thesis, University of Natal, 2000, published in a revised form under the title *The other side of the story: the silent experience of the Black Clergy in the Catholic Church in South Africa (1898-1976)* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008), 46-67.

⁵ J.B. Brain, *Catholic beginnings in Natal and beyond* (Durban: T.W. Griggs, 1975), 173.

visited King Dinizulu's kraal but, suspected of being spies, they were held under guard and told to leave the country. They made a third attempt in 1890, but this time it was the secretary for native affairs in Pietermaritzburg who opposed the move. There was no space, according to him, for a Catholic mission in Zululand.⁶

It is not clear why Catholic missionaries were not welcome in British Zululand. By then Lutherans from Hans Schreuder's Church of Norway, the Hermannsburg Missionary Society, the Berlin Missionary Society and the Church of Sweden had missions all over the territory, the Anglicans already had a diocese and the Salvation Army had just arrived.⁷ It was feared, perhaps, that the arrival of Catholics would create trouble in a territory in the hands of Protestant missionaries. Some anti-Catholic sentiments may have influenced the officials of the Natal colony even though all restrictions on Roman Catholics had been lifted since 1829 in the United Kingdom.

The only form of Catholic presence authorised at the time was that of a chaplain who paid regular visits to the Catholic soldiers stationed in Eshowe. An English Oblate, William Murray, was assigned to this task. He was, according to a report, "in good terms with the authorities".⁸

In a letter to fellow Oblate Marc Sardou of June 1895, Bishop Jolivet did not disguise his sentiment that the Trappists were better equipped than the Oblates to embark on missionary work among the indigenous people. "We already have three beautiful black missions", he wrote in reference to the Bluff, St Michael's and Oakford missions, "but for the black people I put my hope in the Trappists who already have twelve beautiful missions".⁹ But Cassien Augier, the assistant general of the Oblate congregation, who had been in the country since February and was about to conclude his visitation, was of a different opinion. Before leaving South Africa he enjoined the bishop to open a mission in Zululand. "For the scholastics in Europe", he argued, "the very name of Zulu missions will excite their ardour and keep alive the idea that the mission to the savages needs courageous missionaries".¹⁰ Murray, he suggested, "should not find it difficult to obtain a resident chaplain's salary of about £100".¹¹ But the English priest was soon asked to take over the duties of Justin Barret, the vicarial bursar, who was

⁶ Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 115-16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 115

⁸ "Father Anselme Rousset and the Zululand Mission. Extracts from Oblate Rome Archives", 4. Typewritten document previously in the possession of Fr Denis Howard St George OMI and kindly communicated to the author by Prof J.B. Brain.

⁹ OMI Archives, Cedara, Correspondence of Bishop Charles Jolivet, B10/9/c/2/3: Charles Jolivet to Marc Sardou, 20 June 1895.

¹⁰ Délibérations du Conseil du vicaire apostolique, 30 July 1895, quoted in Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 116.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

ageing and Anselme Rousset, a young priest then ministering to the Newcastle congregation, was called to replace him.

The white chief, the resident commissioner and the Catholic missionary

It was at this point that John Dunn, the “white chief” of Zululand,¹² passed away. He died on 5 August 1895 of dropsy and heart disease, leaving behind twenty-three wives and seventy-nine children. For more than three decades, the hunter-trader turned administrator, for a few years the traditional leader of the biggest of the thirteen chiefdoms carved out of Cetshwayo’s kingdom after his defeat in July 1879 at Ulundi, had lived a polygamous life while maintaining the style and decorum of an English gentleman. In total he had forty-eight Zulu wives and more than hundred children.

This apparently unrelated episode was to be of great significance for the Catholic mission in Zululand. Realising that his life was nearing an end, Dunn discussed the future of his family with the British resident commissioner at Eshowe, Marshall Clarke, and as a result of this conversation the Catholic Church was asked to intervene.¹³ Dunn’s relationship with the Protestant missionaries present in the area had always been difficult. In 1877 he had refused to give back to Friedrich Volker and Hans Schreuder the mission stations given to him by King Cetshwayo after the missionaries had abandoned them subsequent to the murder of Zulu mission residents. By then the missionaries wholeheartedly supported the High Commissioner Bartle Frere’s drive to annex Zululand. The most militant and uncompromising of them, Robert Robertson and Ommond Oftebro, had called for the abolition of the Zulu customs that conflicted with Christianity.¹⁴ Dunn, the white man who practised polygamy, was their favourite target. But in January 1879 the British defeat at Isandlwana had radically changed the situation. The “settlement” imposed by Garnet Wolseley, the new High Commissioner, on Zululand a few months later, after the battle of Ulundi, had marginalised the missionaries and promoted instead their arch-enemy, John Dunn, to a position of power and influence.¹⁵

According to his biographer, John Dunn was not a soulless atheist. But his idea of God was “conveniently loose and flexible, one that did not

¹² On John Dunn, see J.R. Botha, “John Dunn”, in *Dictionary of South African Biography*, vol. 1 (Pretoria: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1968), 260-62; Charles Ballard, *John Dunn, the white chief of Zululand* (Craighall: Donker, 1985); [P.J. de Vos, ed.], *The Dunn Reserve, Zululand*. Natal Regional Survey, Additional Report, No 4 (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1953).

¹³ Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 117.

¹⁴ Ballard, *John Dunn*, 160-61.

¹⁵ On the Wolseley “settlement”, see Jeff Guy, *The destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* (Johannesburg : Ravan Press, 1982), 69-79.

attempt to impose any religious creed on man".¹⁶ He believed that one faith was as valid as another, whether rooted in European Christianity or African animism and spirit worship. Yet if, as a chief and a trader he was opposed to the Christian missionaries, as a white man in a black country he needed them for the education of his children. While refusing to allow the children to mix socially with Europeans, he discouraged them from entering into close contact with the African people.¹⁷ He wanted to train them to live as Europeans. This is why, despite his aversion for the missionaries, he sent his children in the early 1880s to St Andrew's, an Anglican mission school close to Mangete, his main residence.¹⁸ As Dominique Dunn, one of the children, pointed out in his memoirs, John Dunn wanted his progeny to stand out: "Maybe [my father] thought that by having his children baptised and belatedly encouraging education among them they would be able to maintain themselves at a higher level than the Zulu tribes folk all about them."¹⁹

At first they were taught by Henrietta Samuelson, a school teacher and fluent linguist, daughter of Silvert Martin Samuelson, a Norwegian missionary who had joined the Anglican Church after a fallout with the Norwegian Missionary Society.²⁰ Dunn, however, found this arrangement unsatisfactory after his children complained of having to mix with "native" children and he built a private one-room school on his property. Henrietta Samuelson followed Dunn's children to Mangete. Upon her departure in 1886, the school was closed. In 1891 Dunn built another school at Emoyeni, his second residence. His children were subsequently taught there by Sigurd Sivertson a Norwegian, Mr. Warner, a Scotsman, and Mr. Burnett, an Englishman.²¹ According to James Thomas Carmichael, an Anglican missionary stationed in Mangete between 1882 and 1884, although Dunn's wives were married to him according to Zulu custom, many were baptised, and all his children were raised in the Christian faith and received some measure of schooling.²²

¹⁶ Ballard, *John Dunn* 173.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁸ St Andrew's, Tugela, was a mission farm on which indigenous people willing to be taught were invited to live for a small rent. See Cecil Lewis and G.E. Edward, *Historical Records of the Province of South Africa* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1934), 668.

¹⁹ Killie Campbell Collections, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, KCM 98/54: Dominique Dunn, 'This is my country. The memoirs of a Coloured South African', (c. 1955), Preface, 5.

²⁰ Ballard, *John Dunn*, 168. Silvert Martin Samuelson had been sent to Mapumulo in the 1850s to assist Bishop Schreuder. He established the first Anglican mission station in Zululand, St Paul's, in KwaMagwaza near Eshowe in 1865. See Lewis and Edward, *Historical Records*, 656.

²¹ Dominique Dunn, 'This is my country', 10-11. See Ballard, *John Dunn.*, 225.

²² [de Vos, ed.], *The Dunn Reserve*, 3. Carmichael then moved to Nqutu where he replaced Charles Johnson, on furlough in England. He left Zululand in 1887 to join the Brotherhood of St Augustine in Modderpoort. He died in 1947.

In his memoirs, Dominique Dunn recounted that it was his father's wish that his children should be educated by Catholic missionaries:

Early in 1896 we were visited by Roman Catholic priests Father Murray, Matthew [Matthieu] and Rousset. Later I learnt that this was in response to a dying wish of my father conveyed to the resident commissioner in Eshowe.²³

According to an oral tradition kept by Rousset, on his death bed Dunn had asked for a "minister", either an Anglican or Lutheran, to see to the education of his children, but his request was turned down. It was after this refusal that he had decided to entrust the task to a Catholic priest:

After forty years of life in Zululand Dunn became seriously ill and is said to have sent for a minister to make his peace with God. The story goes that this minister sent back his answer in these words: "John Dunn has lived like a dog, let him die like a dog." The tradition goes on that before his death Dunn called his coloured children and their mothers and addressed in these words: "During my life I have neglected your religious education. You are almost pagans. This is my wish, that you should become Christians and that you should enter the Roman Catholic Church."²⁴

From Rousset's own admission, the information that a Protestant missionary turned down Dunn's request to educate his children was based on hearsay. But it is corroborated by Murray's testimony in a letter to Ignatius Jutz, one of the German Benedictines who ran the Emoyeni parish after the departure of the French Oblates in 1921. This important document throws light on the circumstances of the Catholic missionaries' arrival in Zululand.

When Murray arrived in Zululand in mid October 1895 to prepare the foundation of a Catholic mission,²⁵ his first move was to seek a meeting with Sir Marshall Clarke, the British resident commissioner in Eshowe. He was soon invited for lunch at the residency. In Zululand since 1893²⁶ Clarke was better disposed towards the Catholic Church than other British officials. His

²³ Dominique Dunn, 'This is my country', 18.

²⁴ "Father Anselme Rousset", 4-5. The author of this compilation quotes "from an original article prepared for de Mazenod Circle, Ireland, from an original paper, since mislaid, which Anselme Rousset wrote at the request of Bishop Delalle after the Oblates left Zululand [in 1921]."

²⁵ OMI Archives, Cedara: Charles Jolivet, Journal, 14 October 1895.

²⁶ Henry Rider Haggard, *Diary of an African journey (1914)*, ed. Stephen Coan (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000), 214.

friendship with Bishop Jolivet, his co-detainee during the siege of Potchefstroom by the Boer army in December 1880²⁷ and his host in March and April 1886 in Basutoland where he was administrator,²⁸ explains why he approached Catholics for the education of Dunn's children. He had "tried the other Missionaries", he told Murray, "but none of them would undertake the work".²⁹ This conversation was deemed sufficiently important to be reported almost immediately to the secretary of state, Robert Cecil, in London.³⁰ It was with the support of his principals that the resident commissioner entrusted the care of Dunn's children's education to Catholic missionaries.

What credit should one give to the claim that the Protestant missionaries refused to educate Dunn's children? Did not Henrietta Samuelson, the daughter of an Anglican missionary, teach them at St Andrew's mission and in Mangete in the 1880s? According to Rousset, it was Dunn's polygamous lifestyle, a practice in plain contradiction with prevailing European Christian teaching, and his constant rebuttals of missionary authority which caused them to turn down Clarke's request to educate Dunn's children. This argument has some value, but does not explain everything. The missionaries resented Dunn's defiant attitude, particularly during the years of Wolseley's "settlement" in the early 1880s and they hated his polygamous life style. On the other hand, they were keen to establish a *modus vivendi* with him as he was one of the few whites settled in Zululand. We know that the Anglican missionaries tried to evangelise the Dunn family.³¹ Why, then, did the various Protestant missionaries reject Clarke's offer?

In his letter to Jutz, Murray gave another explanation. None of the Protestant missionaries would undertake to educate Dunn's progeny, he wrote, "as these children were all coloured and they wished only to deal with the Zulu proper".³² Murray replied that his church would gladly minister to these children. The motive of his goodwill is easy to grasp. In July of the same year the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, until then reluctant to do mission

²⁷ ([Henri] Perennes, *Monseigneur Jolivet, Oblat de Marie Immaculée, Evêque de Bellune, Vicaire Apostolique de Natal* (Priziac: Imprimerie de l'Orphelinat Saint-Michel, 1837, 70-74. Bishop Jolivet elaborated on his "friendly relations" with Marshall Clarke in a letter to Louis Soullier of 14 November 1896 (OMI Archives, Cedara. Correspondence of Bishop Charles Jolivet, B-10-9c/2/4).

²⁸ Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 117, quoting Jolivet, Journal, 23-24 March & 3 April 1886.

²⁹ William Murray to Ignatius Jutz, 6 November 1926, quoted in Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 475. The original letter has recently been transferred from the Inkamana Abbey Archives in Vryheid to the Archives of St Ottilien Abbey in Germany. A long reproduced is published in Sieber's book.

³⁰ Pietermaritzburg Archive Repository, Zululand Government House, 767, no 992: Resident Commissioner to Secretary of State, 15 November 1895.

³¹ Information gathered by Professor Jonathan Draper among John Dunn's descendants in the Mtubatuba area in the 1980s.

³² William Murray to Ignatius Jutz, 6 November 1926, quoted in Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 475. Original in Inkamana Archives.

work in Zululand, had received from the assistant general of their congregation the injunction to “convert the Zulus”. Opening a school for the Dunn children would provide them with the entry point into Zululand that their Trappist confreres had been looking for since the mid 1880s.

Despite their small numbers, the Catholic missionaries made a significant contribution to education in South Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, relying on the professional experience of religious sisters from France, Germany or Ireland to run schools for children of all races. They skilfully adapted to the colonial order. In the latter years of the nineteenth century the government authorities, in the Cape as well as Natal, adopted increasingly segregationist policies and to further that aim they gave grants-in-aid to the missionary societies that were willing to open separate schools for each racial group.³³ This was why, in 1895, David Bryant, the priest in charge at the Catholic mission of Cala in the Eastern Cape, obtained an annual subsidy of £24 pounds “on the express condition that he would only accept half cast children in the school”.³⁴ Interestingly, it was in the same year that Clarke invited Murray to open a school for the Dunn children who were also coloured. Another Catholic school for coloured children was established in Umzinto in 1897, in Genazzano near Umhlali beach in 1899 and in Umtwalini in 1903.³⁵

According to Murray, the Protestant missionaries refused to open a school for the Dunn children because they were of mixed race. This argument is not very convincing. It is possible that, in a context of increased segregation, the Anglican or Lutheran missionaries considered unwise to mix black and coloured children in the same school. But they never refused to provide pastoral care to coloured people during this period. In the 1890s, the Anglican Church established a church, St Luke’s, for the “Eurafrican population” in Pietermaritzburg.³⁶ The Diocesan Board of Education, based in Cape Town, made special provision for the education of coloured children.³⁷ There is no reason to believe that the other Protestant missionaries

³³ Abraham Leslie Behr, “Three centuries of coloured education: historical and comparative studies of the education of the coloured people in the Cape and the Transvaal, 1652-1952”, unpublished PhD dissertation, Potchefstroom University for C.H.E., 1952, 190-91; Muriel Horrell, *African education: some origins, and developments until 1951* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1963), 19.

³⁴ Missions de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, no 150 (June 1900), 216 : “Durant son séjour à Cala, M. l’abbé Bryant réussit à intéresser à notre œuvre le gouvernement du Cap. [...] Il obtint un subside annuel de 24 livres sterling, mais à la condition absolue de ne recevoir à l’école des enfants *half-cast*.” See Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 85.

³⁵ Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 74-75, 100.

³⁶ Lewis and Edward, *Historical records*, 366.

³⁷ For a history of the Diocesan Board of Education, the predecessor of the Anglican Board of Education, see www.anglicanboardofeducation.org/html/history.htm (accessed on 11 March 2010). By 1896, the Diocesan Board of Education had already held 89 meetings. Different

had a different attitude toward coloured children. What is significant, though, is that – at least in the 1920s, when Murray wrote to Jutz – the perception existed among Catholics that their church was more open to children of all races than the others.

On 5 November 1895 Murray informed Clarke that he had met Nontombi Veronica Sokolu, Dunn's senior wife,³⁸ in Emoyeni, fifty kilometres north of the Tugela River. Accompanying him was a magistrate by the name of Hignett. At this meeting it was agreed that one of Dunn's residential buildings would be converted into a school, with the colonial government paying the costs.³⁹ Murray reported that Nontombi had promised that the children of two of the wives who lived at Mangete would attend the school and that she had assured him that the other wives were delighted at the prospect of their children's education continuing.

Nontombi's consent, however, was conditional that Emoyeni would not become a mission station. Dunn's wives did not disguise their fear of being exploited by missionaries:

[The women] did not like the word "Mission Station", so I explained that it would be quite different to the other Missions Stations and would be more an Industrial School, where the girls would be taught sewing, housework, as well as reading and writing, and the boys useful trades. They are afraid, as they say, of the Stations, as they will have to work and feed the Missionary, and their fields be taken from them. I told them that they need not fear this.⁴⁰

This comment perhaps explains why Catholics, rather than Anglicans or Lutherans, were given the responsibility to educate Dunn's children. They had the advantage of being seen as neutral. The Protestant missionaries in Zululand had a long history of rivalry and conflict with Dunn. The Catholic Church was perceived as untainted. A conversation related by Anselme Rousset a few years later confirms this impression. In a visit to a Zulu chief by the name of Umfungelwa in 1906, he heard one of the councillors saying:

arrangements were made for the "Church Schools" (European children), the "Mission Schools" (children of mixed descent) and the "Native Schools" (black children).

³⁸ In his will John Dunn had 'named his first wife, Catherine Pierce, and all her family as his chief beneficiaries. She inherited most of the furniture and effects together with 100 heads of cattle and 50 for each daughter'. The Emoyeni house and its effects went to Nontombi Veronica Sokolu, "his favourite among the Zulu wives and by whom he had had seven children" (Dominique Dunn, 'This is my country', 16).

³⁹ Murray to Jutz, 6 November 1926, in Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 475.

⁴⁰ William Murray to Marshall Clarke, resident commissioner, 7 November 1895, in Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 476-77. Original: Public Record Office, London, CO 427/27, despatch 386 (microfilm Pietermaritzburg Archive Repository).

‘Nkosi, this *umfundisi* is a Roman *umfundisi*. The Romans are not like the others. They do not seek their own interests. They deeply love the *abantu* (the people, meaning the blacks). I know them. I saw them in Natal in several places. I saw how everywhere they treat well the *abantu* and heal the sick.’⁴¹

Murray’s letter reveals another aspect of the problem: the racial tension within the Dunn family. Nontombi did not hide the fact that, being of mixed race, the chief’s children looked down upon their black mothers. They would not necessarily be easy to teach:

I fear there are many difficulties to be met, the mothers have not the influence over their children [which] other Native mothers have, as Dunn showed his children that he considered them superior to their mothers, and they naturally look down upon their mothers – and so it will be difficult to get the children to attend school, more especially the boys, who have all been left to herd cattle, and at present consider themselves independent.⁴²

In a report to the superior general of the Oblates, Casimir Le Bras, head of the Catholic mission at Cala, made a similar observation: “[The half-casts] are a category of individuals that are cut from society everywhere in this country; the whites treat them with disdain and the blacks hate them; the half-casts themselves cannot bear the blacks and see themselves as superior to them.”⁴³

Early missionary endeavours in Zululand

The later history of the Catholic Church in Zululand shows that, in matter of race relations, the Catholic missionaries did not escape the prejudices of their time. Like their Protestant counterparts, they treated people of colour with condescension. The young Zululand mission was the place of assignment of the first two black Catholic clerics in South Africa. Both suffered discrimination in the church, though in different ways.

On 11 November 1895 Clarke formally authorised the Catholic Church to start a mission in Emoyeni.⁴⁴ By then, Anselme Rousset had just arrived. He spent a few weeks with William Murray in Zululand to prepare

⁴¹ Anselme Rousset, “Excursions à travers le Zouloulouland”, *Missions*, 173 (March 1906), 86.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 477. The existence of racial tension in the Dunn family is confirmed in Dominique Dunn’s memoir. See Ballard, *John Dunn*, 223-24.

⁴³ Casimir Le Bras to the Superior General, Cala, 7 April 1900 in *Missions*, no 150 (June 1900), 216.

⁴⁴ Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 477.

the ground.⁴⁵ Aged thirty-three, with only four years of experience as a priest, he was still rather inexperienced. He would spend the next twenty-six years of his life in Zululand.

Rousset returned to Emoyeni in February 1896, this time with three sisters of the newly-founded Dominican congregation of Oakford.⁴⁶ An Oblate brother, Alexandre Bourdon, joined him later.⁴⁷ “The site chosen”, he wrote in a missionary newsletter, “was on a rise amidst gently undulating slopes bordered on the northern horizon by the Ongoye mountains. There were numbers of cattle grazing in these lands and a considerable population without religion”.⁴⁸ Ninety-two descendants of the white chief were living on the property. Rousset took up residence in John Dunn’s house while the sisters found a temporary home in a corrugated iron shed. They began immediately to teach the children. The first baptism was celebrated on 10 May 1896.⁴⁹ Another eleven children had been baptised by August and twelve were receiving instruction.⁵⁰

In his memoirs Dominique Dunn – who was eleven years old when his father died – spoke highly of the Catholic missionaries who, according to him, supported his family in very trying times:

The coming of white missionaries at a time when all of us Dunns, adults and children, felt so forlorn and deserted and despised by white and black was a great spiritual uplift. Arrangements were made for their mission-work to be conducted temporarily from our home. The schoolroom was given over as a church, and our father’s courthouse as a schoolroom. Spare room in the main house were assigned to the priests, and our cottage was placed at the disposal of the nun-assistants.⁵¹

According to Dominique Dunn, prior to the arrival of the missionaries the children were completely uncatechised. The sisters took charge of their schooling and religious instruction, “something”, he observed, they “had

⁴⁵ OMI Archives, Cedara, Correspondence of Bishop Jolivet, B10-9/c/2/4: Charles Jolivet to Louis Soullier, 14 November 1896.

⁴⁶ Jolivet, Journal, 6 February 1896. See Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 118. Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 479, quoting the “Emoyeni Chronicle”, writes that Rousset and the sisters arrived just before Christmas 1895. Jolivet’s version is probably more accurate.

⁴⁷ Bouton arrived in 1896 and left in 1902. He built the school at Emoyeni in 1897. See “Father Anselme Rousset”, 10: Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 483.

⁴⁸ Anselme Rousset, “Seven years with the Zulus”, *Petites Annales*, quoted in “Father Anselme Rousset”, 6.

⁴⁹ Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 479.

⁵⁰ “Father Anselme Rousset”, 6.

⁵¹ Dominique Dunn, ‘This is my country’, 18.

never known before save for a few Bible stories and hymns sang at visits to an Ntuzini's storekeeper's wife".⁵²

In July 1896 Rousset obtained from Nontombi a piece of land on a nearby hill so as to be closer to the Zulu population. The area received the name of Entabeni and the new mission was called Holy Cross Mission. The school having been transferred to Entabeni, the Dunn children went to Genazzano where the Oakford sisters had opened a coloured school because they did not want to mix with black children.⁵³ Meanwhile, with the help of a neighbour, Mr Knox,⁵⁴ Rousset obtained a grant from the government. Drawing on the Trappist missionary model, he started growing food for his needs and those of the boarding school pupils.⁵⁵

David Bryant's arrival at Emoyeni in November 1896 marked a significant development in the history of the Catholic mission in Zululand.⁵⁶ Born in London, the young Bryant arrived unannounced at Mariannahil in 1883, after having heard of Abbot Pfanner in London. While in the novitiate, he started missionary work with great success despite his young age. In 1887 he published his first book, a story of the Mariannahill monastery. Soon fluent in isiZulu, he developed an interest in anthropology and ethnography, which he would pursue until his death. Ordained after studies in Rome, he became one of the most active missionaries of the monastery.⁵⁷ But this was not to last. In 1893, outraged by a Trappist visitor's finding that his novitiate was invalid for having included a certain number of days outside the walls of the monastery, he left Mariannahill, offering his services to Bishop Jolivet.⁵⁸ After a short ministry stint at the Bluff in Durban, he was sent to Cala in the Eastern Cape. It was there that he heard of the new mission in Zululand. He immediately volunteered to join the new mission's team. A few months later, after the bishop had found a replacement for Cala,⁵⁹ he arrived in Zululand.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Sieber, *The Inkamana Monastery*, 481. The Oakford sisters continued to teach the black children even after visitors from Europe encouraged them to concentrate on the coloured children. Ibid., 484.

⁵⁴ Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 118.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 223.

⁵⁶ Alfred Thomas Bryant (London, 1865 - Cambridge, 1953) would deserve a full biography. Snippets can be found in Joy Brain's books. See also Eric Steinhauer, 'Bryant, Alfred Thomas', in *Kirchenlexicon*, 19 (2001), 162-63. An 8-page autobiographical text, entitled 'Some sweet memories' and dated 1947 is kept in the Inkamana Archives.

⁵⁷ Bryant, 'Some sweet memories', 1-5. See also Brain *Catholic Beginnings*, 172.

⁵⁸ Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 92. The story of Bryant's departure from Mariannahill remains largely unwritten. Michael Green, who had access to the Mariannahill archives, refers to it in his historical novel, *For the Sake of Silence* (Johannesburg: Umuzi, 2008), 364-65. In his *Sweet memories*, Bryant maintains a total silence on his change of ecclesiastical status. As a result from the visitation the monastery had to curtail its missionary activities and restore the strict Trappist observance. This was short-lived however. In 1909 Mariannahill separated from the Trappist Order and became an independent missionary congregation.

⁵⁹ 'Father Anselme Rousset', 6.

In a letter to an Oblate confrere, Jolivet described Bryant as an expert in Zulu matters:

It is very likely that we shall be able to found a second black mission in Zululand immediately, if we work on it actively. I have for that mission an English priest who perfectly knows Zulu and does not want to minister to white people. He has written several books in the Zulu language and is regarded as the best writer in his language in Africa. Father Murray wants him to help him to settle.⁶⁰

The claim that Bryant was the best isiZulu writer in Africa was somewhat exaggerated. Missionaries like Lewis Grout, John William Colenso and Henry Callaway had developed a grammar and written texts in isiZulu almost half a century before. A Zulu translation of the Bible had appeared in 1883. The most literate of the *amakholwa* were able to write in English and in isiZulu. Bryant's reputation as an expert on isiZulu language and culture, however, was considerable and that put him in a position of power in his dealings with the Zulu people. It was as if he knew isiZulu better than those for whom it was the first language.

Despite his experience in coloured education, Bryant did not get involved in the Emoyeni school. He went scouting for another mission site and found a four hectare property about twenty-five kilometres further west at the foot of the Ngoye hills:

After I had spent a few months there, roaming the Zulu country looking for a suitable site for my first *Native* mission (R.C.) among the Zulu I at length struck upon one of the loveliest spots in all South Africa and which I immediately named *Ebuhleni*. Situated just below the oNgoye country was an extensive expanse of hundreds of gentle hills, all of various shapes and heights, and all covered with beautiful woodlands, and having numerous crystal brooklets running along the valleys. The whole place was furthermore thickly covered with kraals, all heathen, there being not a single "town Native" anywhere around.⁶¹

⁶⁰ OMI Archives, Cedara, Correspondence of Bishop Charles Jolivet, B10-9/c/2/4; Charles Jolivet to Louis Soullier, 14 November 1896.

⁶¹ Bryant, "Some sweet memories", 6. See Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 579; Mukuka, *The Other Side of the Story*, 49.

Discrimination

Bryant had hardly settled in Ebuhleni when he received an assistant, a Zulu priest by the name of Kece Edward Mnganga.⁶² Born at Umhlatuzane in the outskirts of Durban in 1872 or 1873, had been educated and baptised – in 1885, at the age of twelve – in Mariannahill. In 1887, Abbot Pfanner sent him to Rome in 1887 in the company of Bryant, his future colleague, to study Latin, philosophy and theology at the College of Propaganda Fide. He was ordained there in 1898. Described as very intelligent by a woman who later worked for him,⁶³ he came back from Rome with a good knowledge of Latin, English, Italian, German and Greek.⁶⁴ He was present when the first Mass was celebrated at Ebuhleni at the end of December 1898.⁶⁵

Abbot Pfanner saw the need for an indigenous clergy in South Africa. “We have built this chapel for you”, he declared at the blessing of an outstation’s chapel in 1889, “and we provide a priest for you. But the real church will have to be built by yourselves, and what is more you will have to provide your own priests”.⁶⁶ But he was advised by his former professor of canon law, the bishop of Brixen, that the priests who had studied at the College of Propaganda Fide were at the disposal of the local ordinary. This is the reason why Mnganga did not become a Trappist in Mariannahill and joined instead the diocesan clergy.⁶⁷

Bishop Jolivet does not seem to have shared Pfanner’s vision of a local church staffed by indigenous priests. Mnganga’s ordination and his arrival from Rome were not even mentioned in his journal, which chronicled on an almost daily basis events in the life of the vicariate. The bishop’s attention focused almost exclusively on white Catholics. Mnganga’s name appeared in the journal a few months later in relationship to Jolivet’s visitation to Emoyeni in December 1898, but his name was not given in full, as if the bishop did not remember it. Although he called all the French and English Oblates by their surname, Mnganga was simply referred to as “Zulu”:

⁶² On Edward Mnganga, see Mukuka, *The other side of the story*, 46-67. Additional information based on the Mariannahill archives is to be found in a brochure compiled in 2010 by Fr Henry Ratering CMM under the title ‘The first Zulu priests’. In Europe Mnganga was called Muller – after the name of his godfather in Germany - allegedly because his name was difficult to pronounce.

⁶³ Malukati Mncadi, interview conducted by George Mukuka in September 1994 in Mariathal. See Mukuka, *The other side of the story*, 56.

⁶⁴ Izindaba Zabantu, 7 September 1928, quoted in Mukuka, *The other side of the story*, 50.

⁶⁵ Sieber, *The Benedictines of Inkamana*, 580. See also Brain, *Catholics in Natal II*, 119.

⁶⁶ [Ratering], ‘The first Zulu priests’, 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2. The matter was discussed at a meeting of the Monastery Council on 25 September 1888.

I confirm about thirty neophytes, mostly of the Dunn family. I am very satisfied with the start of this mission. I cannot go to Ebahlene [Ebuhleni] where, in any case, there is not yet a single Christian. Father Edward Zulu is there.⁶⁸

Contemporary sources – Bishop Jolivet’s journal and the Oblate missionary magazines – are equally silent on the investiture of the first black Oblate of Mary Immaculate, Leo Gumede, in 1901 in Entabeni. Born in Isipingo in 1873 the young man was received into the novitiate and invested at the Holy Cross Mission on 7 December 1901.⁶⁹ We know very little about his ministry as a lay brother in Zululand. He did a two-year novitiate and made simple vows for one year in December 1903, for five years in April 1905 and for another ten years in April 1910. He was only admitted into the oblation in December 1919 after eighteen years of religious life.⁷⁰

The few documents that relate to Leo Gumede show that, in spite of his recognised qualities, his superiors always treated him differently because of his skin colour. In a document kept in the OMI Archives at Cedara, the young man was said to have “a very good education generally”, to be able to speak “beautiful English” and to be “at home with most of the ordinary teachings in the church”.⁷¹ The language used in the text reveals that Gumede was seen as almost as good as the other Oblates, yet different. Why saying that had a good education “generally”? Did he miss some aspects of standard Oblate education? And what did his confrere mean by “most” of the ordinary teachings of the church? The wording implies that, for some reason, Gumede failed to assimilate some of the church’s teachings.

In a letter of motivation to the Oblate general administration for the granting of an indult enabling Leo Gumede to be admitted into the oblation at a later age without having to redo a novitiate,⁷² Bishop Delalle, the vicar apostolic of Durban, explained why Gumede was not allowed to do his solemn vows three years after the simple vows as was the custom:

⁶⁸ Jolivet, Journal, 12 December 1898 : “Je confirme une trentaine de Néophytes, la plupart de la famille Dunn. Je suis très content de ce commencement de mission. Il m’est impossible d’aller jusqu’à Ebahlene où du reste il n’y a pas encore un seul Chrétien. Le Père Edward Zulu y est.

⁶⁹ OMI Archives, Cedara, B10-160/A Gumede, L.: copy of Leo Gumede’s obedience card. The original is kept in the OMI Archives in Rome. The author of “Father Anselme Rousset” (see above footnote 8) was the first writer to pay attention to the life of Leo Gumede. See also Mukuka, *The Other Side of the Story*, 139-40.

⁷⁰ OMI Archives, Cedara, B10-160/A Gumede, L.: copy of Leo Gumede’s obedience card.

⁷¹ Quoted in Mukuka, *The Other Side of the Story*, 140.

⁷² An indult in Catholic canon law is a permission, or privilege, granted by the competent church authority.

Brother Leo, a South African native made his novitiate under the direction of an Oblate father, he did his first vows publicly for a year first, then 3 years, then 10 years, then perpetual vows. The reason that made us postpone his perpetual vows several times was a reason of prudence. It was the first native who wanted to become a lay brother, and we did not want to be exposed to a disappointment. This brother has been very faithful and did not give any serious cause for complaint. He is now 47 years old.⁷³

Gumede was treated in a discriminatory manner but, as far as we can judge, he never complained about it and for that reason was held in good regard by his superiors. With Mnganga, who had the dignity of a priest and was well educated, things did not go so well. His story has been told by George Mukuka.⁷⁴ It will suffice to provide a summary.

Initially, Bryant was well disposed towards Edwards Mnganga. On the boat to Europe in 1887, he took the Zulu boy's defence when some passengers insisted that he should leave the dining room table.⁷⁵ But things changed on Mnganga's return from Rome. By then he was a mature man. On 20 March 1903 Bishop Jolivet noted in his journal that there were "difficulties with the mission of Father Bryant".⁷⁶ This may have related to the Zulu priest. In any event, in 1906, Mnganga had a violent altercation with Bryant. The latter called the police and had his colleague interned in the Natal Government Asylum in Pietermaritzburg for seventeen years. The Zulu priest, who considered himself to have been treated unfairly, repeatedly demanded an apology from Bryant and Jolivet. In 1921 a Mariannahill priest offered his mediation and thereafter Mnganga was released from the asylum. He went back to his pastoral duties with great commitment until his death in 1945.

According to Mukuka's oral sources, Mnganga's anger was prompted by Bryant's racist attitude and his interference in his school work. Another reason may have been that Mnganga found Bryant pointing to the private parts of a naked Zulu woman while engaged in his ethnographic work, a posture completely unacceptable in the Zulu culture.⁷⁷

⁷³ OMI Archives, Cedara, B10-160/A Gumede, L.: Statement of Bishop Henri Delalle, Rome, 22 October 1920. Delalle indicated by mistake that, the second time, Gumede made vows for 3 years. He should have said 5 years.

⁷⁴ Mukuka, *The other side of the story*, 46-73.

⁷⁵ [Ratering], 'The first Zulu priests', 2.

⁷⁶ Jolivet, Journal, 20 March 1903. Bishop Jolivet died a few months later, on 15 September 1903.

⁷⁷ Mukuka, *The other part of the story*, 51.

Conclusion

For a long time Catholic missionaries were unable to work in Zululand. They gained access to the Zulu country in 1895 through a remarkable conjunction of events: the French visitor's instruction to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to "convert the Zulus", the death of John Dunn, polygamous father of a large number of children in need of formal education, and Bishop Jolivet's friendship with Marshall Clarke, the British resident commissioner. Marginal in a heavily Protestant section of South Africa, the Catholic Church made good use of the circumstances. Ironically, the missionaries in Zululand almost immediately sent the Dunn children to another Catholic mission. They had been a pretext for the opening of the first mission, but the real aim, as set by the Oblate visitor, was the conversion of the Zulu population.

Race and politics dominated these early missionary endeavours. Murray was introduced to Dunn's senior wife because he did not mind educating coloured children. Dunn's ambivalence in racial matters – he had all the attributes of a Zulu traditional leader, but did not allow his children to mix with black people – also characterised the manner in which the Catholic missionaries related to the indigenous population. Like Dunn they empathised with the Zulu culture, but remained imbued with colonial prejudices. Two attempts were made during this period to incorporate Zulu men into the Catholic clergy. Both were problematic. Leo Gumede's admission into the oblation was delayed for more than fifteen years on the grounds that he was the first "native" to enter religious life. Edward Mnganga had a fallout with Bryant, the man who told his bishop that he only wanted to minister to Zulu people and who was known as an expert on Zulu culture and language. Despite his perceived good deeds among the Zulus, Bryant had Mnganga interned in an insane asylum for seventeen years without verifying his mental state.

In an essay on the Catholic Church under apartheid, Stuart Bate made the point that, by the middle of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church "tended to exist as two largely separate entities: a settler church for whites and a mission church for blacks". The settler church, he continued, "reflected the racist attitudes of white people in South Africa".⁷⁸ This paper shows that the "us" versus "them" attitude went back to the origins of the Catholic Church in South Africa. In a subtle way, as in the language used by Bishop Jolivet and his successor Henri Delalle to describe the first indigenous ministers, or forcefully, when David Bryant sent his black colleague to the asylum after a dispute, the Catholic missionaries in Zululand adopted discriminatory attitudes from the first day. With a leadership better reflecting the

⁷⁸ Stuart Bate, 'The Church under Apartheid', in J. Brain and P. Denis, eds, *The Catholic Church in contemporary South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1999), 151.

demographics of the country and a good record in matters of development and social justice, the Catholic Church of South Africa has moved away from a colonial and paternalistic style of government. But race is still an issue, as protests from disgruntled black clergy remind us from time to time.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ See Dabula Mpako, “The call to action of the African Catholic Priests’ Solidarity Movement”, in P. Denis, ed., *Orality, memory and the past. Listening to the voices of Black Clergy under Colonialism and Apartheid* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000), 275-80.

