

Foreword

Mauritius or Isle de France, as it was then called was a French colony from 1715 to 1810. On December 3rd, 1810, the British conquered the island and gave it back its initial Dutch name Mauritius. After a century and a half of British rule, on March 12, 1968, Mauritius became an independent State, and in 1992, a Republic.

Last year, the Catholic Church in Mauritius celebrated the sesquicentenary of the foundation of the Diocese of Port-Louis (1847-1997) under the English Benedictine Bishop William Bernard Allen Collier (1811-1890).

The English Benedictines were in charge of the distant mission territory for just under a century (1819-1916). Over that period, seven bishops had in turn been dispatched from Britain to head the local Church. Surprisingly enough, during that time only eight Benedictine monks worked as missionaries on the island, and very few of them came purposefully to undertake parish ministries. As a rule, they accompanied the bishops to the colony and then served as personal secretaries to them while in the meantime also doing parish work¹.

My aim is to survey briefly the century-long apostolate of those Benedictine bishops, assess the impact and significance of their pastoral ministry and evaluate the religious legacy they have handed down to us.

As a preliminary step, in order to put their apostolate into perspective, it might prove useful to present the Catholic Church in the Isle de France under the *Ancien R~gime*, during the French occupation.

'The English Benedictine Prelates:

- . Edward Bede Slater .1819-1832. (*died at sea in 1832*).
- . William Placid Momi .1833-1841. (*buried at Downside Abbey .1873*)
- . William Bernard Allen Collier- 1841-1847. (*buried at Saint Osburg, Coventry . 1890*)
- . Adrian Michael Hankinson- 1863-1870. (*buried in Saint Louis ~iJathedral, Mauritius*)
- . William B. Scarisbrick- 1871-1887. (*died at Great Malvern*)
- . Peter Augustine O'Neil .1896-1909. (*buried in Saint Louis cathedral, Mauritius*)
- . James R. Bilborrow .1910-1916. (*buried in Saint Louis (i~athedral, Mauritius)*)

The Benedictine monks who accompanied the Prelates:

- . Bernard Colyar
- . Lewis Cutlibert Spain
- . Maccario Piccoloinini (*Italian*)
- . Edward H. Clifford
- . Francis Stanislas Giles

- . John Stuart

- . James R. Bilborrow

- . W.R. Ludford

Chapter I

'The ~Frençfi Occupation

During the French occupation of Isle de France, Catholicism was the official religion. During the 18th century up to the French Revolution, the colony lived under what was known as a *regime de chr~tient*². As from 1803, under Napoleon, the Catholic Church was governed by the articles of the *Concordat*³. The ecclesiastical status of the French colony was at the time that of an apostolic prefecture. The Lazarists - Congregation of the Mission founded by Saint Vincent de Paul - were in charge of the ministry in the colony.

The head of that colonial Church, the apostolic prefect appointed by the Holy See, had necessarily to be also the vicar general of the Archbishop of Paris. Actually, he was under the jurisdiction of the latter and had to report to him.

The inhabitants were mainly on the one hand the white colonists of French origin, harbouring deeply entrenched French patriotic feelings over several generations, and on the other hand, the black slaves, along with some hundreds of free mixed-blood coloureds who together, formed the bulk of the population. The Lazarists were parish priests to the former category and missionaries to the servile class. On the island also lived a few free Hindus and Muslims from India.

The slaves were subjected to their own secular proper legislation - the *Code Noir* enforced by the King of France - that encompassed the whole range of the existence of the slaves from cradle to the tomb. A set of clauses of the *Code Noir* dealt specifically with the compulsory practice of Catholicism by the slaves in theory, although hardly in actual fact.

²*R~gi~e de chr~tient~*

The phrases *Regime de chretiente, socu~te de chretien~, civilisation de chretien~* describe a period of European history, when the main aspects of social life, such as government, judiciary, legislation... were formulated in close link with the Christian religion. In that context, civil legislation was deliberately inferred from the Catholic Church's teachings.

~ The *Concordat*, signed by the French First Consul Bonaparte and Pope Pius VII in 1801, governed the Church-State relationships in France. The implementation of the *Concordat* brought about a code of ecclesiastical law (*arr~tes consulaires*), decreed by Bonaparte in 1802 and enforced in the Isle de France as from 1803.

Chapter I

When the British

~~capitulated to the British in 1781~~

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'The (D?itisli co(onia(policy on religion

Britain had conquered Mauritius. It still had to win over the Mauritians and, better still, to secure their allegiance. For the inhabitants, the free Whites, were Catholics and French-speaking, who hardly nurtured any sympathy for the British.

Diplomatically enough, Protestant Britain adopted a liberal policy towards her recently conquered Catholic and French-speaking colonies, Mauritius and the islands of the West Indies.

In England, Anglicanism the Established Church – was the state religion. The Emancipation Act in favour of Catholics was not enforced until 1829. Yet, at *Downing Street*, the Colonial Office had no difficulty in drawing a liberal enough blueprint of its policy for its Catholic colonies. That policy was elaborated and consistently implemented by the Secretary of State for Colonies, Lord Bathurst, who held that office for the inordinately long period of fifteen years (1812-1827).

In a nutshell, the policy advocated and implemented by *Whitehall* was a compromise between a Church *Concordat* and that of a *regime de separation*.

Straightaway, Lord Bathurst engaged in negotiations with Pope Pius VII through Bishop Poynter, the apostolic vicar of the London District. The latter dutifully engineered and operated the communication line between *Downing Street* and the Vatican.

Surprisingly, the Colonial Government took over the financial commitments enshrined in the French *arr~t~s* of the *Concordat* and included the Catholic clergy on the Establishment. Ever since, Catholic priests have drawn their salaries from the Public Treasury.

However, the overriding pre-requisite in the nascent colonial policy on religion was the severance once for all of all links whatsoever between Port-Louis and Paris. Lord Bathurst made no bones about it. The Archbishop of Paris was to have no say in religious matters in Mauritius no recourse to him was allowed by the apostolic prefect or the clergy of the colony, neither the least interference on his part

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in matters pertaining to religion in Mauritius⁴. Henceforth, therefore, no apostolic prefect could ever be sent from France to the Indian Ocean Island.

The second claim from the Colonial Office addressed the recruitment of the clergy all priests sent to Mauritius should be "*British born*". That exigency, however unrealistic, recurred time and again in the colonial governors' correspondence⁵. It provoked an incessant State--Church wrangling up to the 1860s, when the naturalization of alien priests in Mauritius became feasible⁶.

Now, *British born* Catholic priests were hardly to be found in the first quarter or even the first half of the 19th century. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars and given the alienating and discriminatory laws against Catholics --a legacy of the Reformation--British missionaries were very scarce. This situation worsened by the restricted number of Catholics in the country. According to statistical information, in 1800 there were only about 30 000 Catholics in England⁷.

Because of that dearth of British born missionaries, the British Government half-heartedly allowed a trickle of European priests to come and work in the colony, provided they took the oath of allegiance and had the British Apostolic Vicar to stand surety for them. Notes of caution such as the following were frequently penned by colonial governors:

*"When British subjects cannot be found who are conversant with the French language, vacancies on the Roman Catholic Establishment may be filled by foreigners, ~f they take the oath of allegiance --Swiss or Belgians being preferred to subjects of other Governments."*⁸

In practice, that tolerance was subjected to a see-saw motion that engendered many hard feelings between the faithful and the authorities, alongside an idle if not bitter, exchange of correspondence between the heads of the Colonial Church and the Colonial Authorities.

⁴*Mauritius Archives*. SA 8. Lord Bathurst's dispatch to Governor Sir Lowry G. Cole, November 30, 1825.

⁵*Th, dem.* SD 19. Dispatch of governor Sir Lowry Cole to Lord Bathurst, 25th February, 1826.

SD 19. Dispatch No 9 of February 22, 1841, from governor Sir Lionel Smith to Lord Russell.

⁶ Amédée Nagapen, *La Naturalisation des Prêtres I-D. Laval et des missionnaires spiritains. Un volet de la politique coloniale britannique de l'île Maurice*. Diocese de Port-Louis, 1992.

⁷ *Catholic Herald*. No 5826, 4th January 1998. **John Jolliffe**, *An option for the rich* "In 1800 there were only about 30 000 of us in the country, but by 1850 this figure had, astonishingly, risen to about a million. This was partly due to the immigration of thousands of Irish. But, more fruitfully, it arose from public spiritual renewals, the greatest being the Oxford Movement, which was to bring Newman into the Church, and countless others after him."

⁸ *Mauritius Archives*. SD 55. Dispatch No 143 of 17th September 1860, from Sir William Stevenson to the

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Duke of Newcastle.

- . SA 68. Despatches No 300 of October 29, 1860 ; No 12 of 9th January 1861 ; No 14 of 12th January 1861 .from Lord Russell to Governor Stevenson.
- . RA 654. Letter of Geo. Dick, Colonial Secretary, to Bishop Collier, on 24th September 1841.

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If exceptions, albeit rare,

Now, genuinely

~~could be said to be the only ones that are not~~

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Compared with State—Church relationships during the French period, the British colonial policy on religion in the 19th century shows a strange volte-face.

On the one hand, the Colonial Authorities, from the moment of conquest.

repeatedly stated that the island would *in no circumstances* return to France. So, there could be *no link whatsoever* between the Church in Mauritius and the Archbishop of Paris. That *accounted in part for the reluctance of the British to allow* into the colony priests of French nationality. Besides, they overtly and shamelessly professed to be a Protestant government. Consequently, Catholic elites and priests were *time and again slighted, as preeminence, precedence or privileges were granted rather to the clergy of the Established Church, although the Anglicans were only a few hundreds whereas the Catholics totalled over 100,000.* But the rationale behind such policies was that the colonizers were *'a Prote~/(anf I)eoille and Govern,nenC?'*. However, it should also be noted that if the colonial governor~, subordinate officers.

were prone to act as petty potentates, the ministers at Downing Street. as a rule, displayed a good deal of fair play, even to the extent at times of disowning the British governors of Mauritius"

On the other hand, the Colonial Office strove to foster harmonious relations between the heads of the civil administration and of the Church in the Colony, while in the same breath emphasizing the distinction between civil authority and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Contrary to the French period when the State had the upper hand over the Church, Whitehall directed the colonial governors not to meddle with spiritual matters and not to hinder the religious heads in the Church organization and management.

Better still. Whitehall requested the Court of Rome to grant to the Colony an ecclesiastical superior holding a higher rank than the traditional position of apostolic prefect. The Holy See readily complied with Whitehall's wishes, by taking two

¹⁰ *Mauritius Archives*. SD 37. Dispatch No 31 ~ 14th August 1849, from Sir William Anderson to Lord Grey.

Ibidem. SAB. (*Sepwaftr*) Dispatch of 30th November 1825.

SA 40. Dispatches No 35 of 26th September No 42 of 6th October No 50 of 30th October 1846,

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horn Lord Grey to Sir William (joinin.

. SA 43. Dispatch No 284 of ,th December 1848 from Loid Gie~ to Sir William Gornrn . *Public RecordOffice*. CO 167. 77. Handwritten notesbyLordBatlmisi.

. *Maurilius Archives*. RA 367 . Bishop Slater's letter to Governor (ThIville. 27th January 1832.

-*Mauritius Gazette*. No. 278, 31st July 1830. *

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immediate steps. First, it created an apostolic vicariate encompassing a vast area of the southern hemisphere, comprising Saint Helena Island, South Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Australia and New Zealand. Secondly, at the head of that immense ecclesiastical organization, Pope Pius VII, himself a Benedictine monk, appointed an English Benedictine, Edward Bede Slater, who was at that time staying in Rome, as the apostolic vicar. He received the episcopal consecration in Rome in June 1818. Fifteen years later, on the 5th February 1833, his successor, Dom William Placid Morris, chosen by him James B. Ainslie, as vicar apostolic for London, was ordained a bishop at St Edmund's College, Old Hall, Walsingham. He too was a Benedictine.

Slater and Morris were two widely different characters. The appointment of Slater, in particular, given his confirmed shortcomings in financial management and his other deficiencies, hardly stirred up any wide acclaim within the English monastic walls¹². Yet, they both had in common their appointments by the Holy See without prior consultation with or presentation by the English Congregation. Besides, both had to manage an inordinately vast expanse of the southern hemisphere. Such an unrealistic and unmanageable jurisdiction could very likely be accounted for by the impulse that, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, Pope Pius VII was giving to overseas missions, a prodigious missionary revival that would be stimulated by the efficient and powerful reorganization of the *Propaganda Fide* Congregation, first by that same Benedictine Pope in 1813, then with an intensified boost by his successor, Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846).

Furthermore, both Slater and Morris worked under the constraints of the British colonial policy on religion in Mauritius and both resided in a slave colony, where the servile community formed the majority of the population.

Both prelates tried to embark the English Congregation in the wake, first, of the British colonial expansion and secondly, in the missionary epic many European Churches were increasingly engaged in. But the General Chapter remained as impassive as marble.

Thus, during the four-yearly Chapter at Downside in 1818, chaired by Dom John Bede Brewer, the capitulars became acquainted with a letter from Cardinal Litta, Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, and another from Cardinal Pedicini, Secretary! Both addressed to Dom J.B. Brewer, informed him that, given the useful services rendered to the Church by the English Congregation, Pope Pius VII had entrusted the latter with the mandate of evangelizing the Cape of Good Hope and its vicinity. To that effect, the Pope had promoted F. B. Slater a bishop and placed him at the head of the newly created apostolic vicariate of southern Africa. Therefore, Cardinal Litta called upon the English Congregation to send two able experienced monks to

¹² *Anpleforth Abbey Archives*, England. MSS 166, Doc. xx Peter Mountassie Allanson, *Biographies*

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of the English Bene(hclmcs, panes 275-286.

– *Amp/eforik Jow-nal*, 1 832. *Bishop Slater o.s.b.* by Li. Ciwnnins,

· **Ami~d~e** Nagapen, J. *Zghse ~ Manrice .1810-1841*. Poit.-L*mis. 1054, & *Suppl~rnuit*, 1986.

~ *!Ji~io~re (Iii il Zr?elle des Aliss ions (iTatlioliqu~ Les Alissio,o conh Anporuim Z (18 00— 1957).*

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accompany Bishop Slater and to open on the spot a monastery that would secure the stability of that nascent mission.

The English Congregation, confronted with a dire shortage of staff, regretfully declined the invitation of the Holy See. Bishop Slater had to submit to such a decision from his own religious Order.

Later, when Bishop Morris entertained the idea of having a community of English Benedictines in Mauritius², he too received a negative answer.

However, the English Congregation did not object to individual monks volunteering their services and being enlisted by Bishop Slater or Bishop Morris³.

Thus, both Slater and Morris were able to recruit a few English or Irish priests for the Cape of Good Hope and for Australia. They successfully made arrangements with the British Authorities in London for salaries or subsidies to be paid to these missionaries. They also assigned responsibilities to the latter⁴. Paradoxically, once arrived in Port-Louis, both apostolic vicars hardly paid any further attention to these unfortunate missionaries. Worse still, they developed so uncaring an attitude as not

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to even acknowledge letters from them

In any case, so vast a canonical jurisdiction was so unmanageable that soon Rome started partitioning it into more rational entities. In 1829, Madagascar was joined to Bourbon island, a neighbouring French colony. In 1834, *Propaganda Fide* created the apostolic vicariate of Australia¹⁸ and four years later, in 1837, that of Cape Town, South Africa. Later, under Bishop Collier, the Seychelles archipelago too was excised from Mauritius and became an apostolic prefecture in 1863.

With time, the missionary drive of the English Benedictines started budding. Thus, under the presidency of Dom John Birsall, the English Congregation began to involve itself in missionary work. Dom J. Birsall was instrumental in sending Dom J.B. Polding, apostolic vicar of Australia and later archbishop of Sydney, as well as some nine Benedictine priests. By then, the English Congregation had also taken Mauritius under its wings and up to early 20th century would select and send Benedictine bishops and priests to the small colony.

It is certain that both Bishop Slater and Bishop Morris could be credited with a commendable set of pastoral activities and initiatives.

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~ 1LN. **Birt**, *Benedictine Pioneers in Australia*, p. 78.

¹⁵Cf. Footnote 1.

¹⁶Bishop E.B. Slates recruited for South Africa Dom Clement Risliton o.s.b. and H. Scully (from

Ireland) ; and for Australia Philip Conolly and John Joseph Therry (both from Ireland).

Bishop W.P. Morris recruited for Australia William Bernard Ullathorne o.s.b., from Downside Abbey. The bishop appointed him his vicar general for Australia.

¹⁷RN. But, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

~ **Ralph M. Wiltgen**, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania*. ~2chapter 21, p. 347-357.

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They both carried out pastoral visits to the five parishes. Better still, they even volunteered to fulfil parish duties in far-away places. Both performed regular ministry in Saint Louis church in the capital. Besides, Bishop Slater was military chaplain and therefore ministered to the Irish Catholic soldiers at the Line Barracks in Port-Louis and at the barracks at Mabebourg where he also shouldered parish responsibilities. Likewise, Bishop Morris had a chapel built at Mapou, a northern village, and regularly went and said mass there²⁰. Being given that dwelling-houses on plantations were in remote areas, where often there existed no parish church, at times the apostolic vicars, at the invitation of the interested parties, would go to the plantation houses for the celebration of religious marriages²⁰.

Furthermore, both prelates were in the habit of teaching catechism to youngsters. As from their episcopal ordination, bishops are entrusted with the pastoral care of teaching, each of the two published his own catechism in French²¹.

In the true Benedictine tradition, both prelates presided over pontifical masses, heightened by music and singing, with the liturgical ritual of the Church (liturgical colours, vestments, incense...) well thrown into relief The Catholic community Whites and Blacks alike highly appreciated those solemn ceremonies²²

Education was another topic where too swiftly and too sweepingly both Slater and Morris have been credited with poor records. Actually, they were alive to the necessity of promoting education. But in everyday occurrence, they had to contend with heavy odds.

First, there was a shortage of clergy. Those few priests at work could hardly be interested in upholding the cause of education and in running schools, especially being given the exacting conditions and the absolute control demanded by the Colonial government.

Secondly, French teachers were needed to educate those French-speaking pupils. But, on that score, the British authorities were adamant. No French religious

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or nuns were to be admitted to teach young Mauritians, actually British subjects. Finally, by dint of perseverance, in 1831, Bishop Slater secured from governor Colville permission to open two mission schools, one in Port-Louis and another one at Mahebourg²⁴. Bishop Morris, so to say, was more fortunate. In 1836, thanks to

Am~d~e Nagapen, *L'Église à Maurice— 1810-1841*, p. 283.

²⁰ *Soci-t- de l'histoire de Vile Maurice, Le.s Causeries*. **France Staub**, *Le Chemin de Case*

Noyale. 31.3.

Am~d~e Nagapen, *op. cit.*, p. 109, footnote 3.

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²¹ *Catéchisme... et l'usage de Vile Maurice par Mgr l'Évêque de Ruspa, Vicaire Apostolique* -First

edition: 1821 ; second edition:1825, printed in Port-Louis.

Catéchisme... publié par l'autorité de Mgr William Morice, Evêque de Troie, Vicaire Apostolique .
Printed in Paris.

~ **IM.A.C. Bartrum**, *Recollections of Seven Years Residence at the Maurilius, by a lady*. James
Cawthorn, London, 830, **pp.7-8**; 126; 133-134.

²³ *Mauritius Archives*. SA 29. Dispatch No. 31 of 18th August 1839 from Lord Nonnamby to
governor Sir William Nicolay.

²⁴ *Maurilius Gazette*, No. 329, 23rd July 1831.

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Those first two apostolic

~~these are the first two apostolic~~

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Mauritius Archives & Public Record
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Chapter IV

Clilie sowing season: 'The pastora(pohcy of (Bishop ColTier

During the century-long presence of the Benedictines in Mauritius, the episcopate of Bishop William Bernard Allen Collier (1841-1863) stands out remarkably as the period during which the Catholic Church experienced a conspicuous spiritual regeneration: on the one hand, a revitalization that contrasted with the asthenia, the debility, that it had endured over the first three decades of British colonization; on the other hand, a state of spiritual fertility that overflowed and abundantly watered the Christian life of the ensuing generations.

Undoubtedly, the lasting impact of Bishop Collier's episcopate sprang from a pastoral plan that he had actually conceived, although nowhere formulated on paper. It probably originated right from the time he was designated the vicar apostolic of Mauritius.

The outline of his policy can sketchily be drawn around the following guide-marks:

- . reading the signs of the times;
- . recruitment of clergy;
- . founding of new parishes;
- . introduction of religious congregations;
- . catholic education;
- . lay apostolate;
- . status of the Catholic Church.

Reading the signs of the times

As soon as he set foot on the island, he became aware of the real nature of the motley population : religious life was a mere veneer of catholicism. The majority of the population was formed by the large class of Blacks, former slaves recently emancipated. In that impoverished and illiterate community, tens of thousands were not even baptized ; educational institutions for boys as well as for girls were really scarce.

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Besides, he was quick in observing a few Wends that were gradually modifying the profile of the colony, especially the influx of Indian immigrants working on the ever expanding sugar cane plantations. Similarly, he was attentive to the repeated calls from the small dependency of Rodrigues, and as soon as he could spare a priest, he began the evangelization of the neighbouring island.

Furthermore, as time elapsed, conflicts arose between Government and Church. On these occasions, Bishop Collier's reactions enable us to picture his views on the State-Church relationship.

In order to effectively bring the Gospel to such a large and variegated population, the bishop needed collaborators, especially priests. So, his primary concern was to recruit missionaries from abroad.

Recruitment of the clergy

An adequate number of suitable priests was of paramount importance to evangelize the inhabitants of the colony. When he embarked for Mauritius on board the *Tanjore* in 1841, he took along with him an English Benedictine, Dom Stanislas Giles, an Irish priest, John Larkan, another one from Savoy, the Abbe Rovey, and the (Blessed) Jacques D~sirc Laval, a French missionary, whose priestly ministry was to operate a real transformation of minds and hearts and to cause the Christian faith to take root in an enduring way in Catholic families³⁰. On his arrival, the Bishop had found eight priests in the Colony. However, without losing time, he had to interdict three of them and soon afterwards, two others left the island.

Bishop Collier was but two years in Mauritius when he decided to return to Europe on a recruiting spree (1843-1845). His mission was a fruitful one. He was able to enlist eight priests, of whom were six Irishmen and two Belgians. One of the Belgians, the Abbe Xavier Masuy, proved a most successful apostle of the educated white classes. Later, the Bishop was successful in bringing in other Belgian priests, such as the Reverend Paquet, and the Reverend Frederick Muylhe³⁰.

Then as from 1846, through a liberalising step taken by Downing Street, he was enabled to admit alien priests as well, even those of French nationality. At his request, the Holy Ghost Congregation of Father F.M. Paul Libermann³¹ started sending missionaries to the island. When he finally left Mauritius in 1862, his clergy had reached the impressive total of 35.

³⁰ **Joseph Michel**, *Le Pore Jacques Laval, le "Saint" de Pile Maurice, 1803-1864*. Beauchesne, Paris, 1976 (4^e edition:1990).

³¹ Mauritius Archives. SA 70. Letter of Bishop Thomas Grant. Time 26, 1861. Despatch No 454. In 1840, the *Congregation du Saint-Ca?ur de Marie*, founded by Francois-Marie-Paul Libermann, was approved by the Holy See, and had Bishop W.BA. Collier o.s.b. as its protector. Thus

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Father Laval and his first fellow-missionaries in Mauritius belonged to that Congregation. However, in 1748, the latter merged with the *Congregation du Saint-Esprit* and *Propaganda Fide* decreed that the joint institute would be called *Congregation du Saint-Esprit* (Holy Ghost Congregation). Father Liberman and his first batch of missionaries were ordained to the priesthood in Europe through dispensatory letters from Bishop Coffier.

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Better still, as from 1860, non-British priests were authorized to apply for naturalization. That process initiated by Bishop Collier had far-reaching consequences over the following decades and on the future of Catholicism in the Colony. Henceforth, the “*open sesame*” enabled alien priests to freely undertake missionary work in Mauritius and to earn their salaries from the Public Treasury. From that time to the end of the 19th century, over 94 alien priests all of them Frenchmen, save two Belgians and two Italians –thus took advantage of legislation to apply for and to obtain their naturalization as British subjects in Mauritius³².

With the increasing number of priests, the educated classes –White Voltaireans and gallican Catholics, as well as Coloureds with an inclination for Protestantism – were brought back to the Catholic fold. A few priests, like the Abbe Xavier Masuy” dedicated themselves with success to that apostolate. Furthermore, the black maids and servants who were being evangelized by the (Blessed) Father Laval in turn evangelized their white employers.

Evangelization of the Blacks

The major change in the profile of the Catholic Church under Bishop Corner was clearly the conversion of the black community – black being a misnomer that included emancipated slaves, free *cr~oles* and a motley of mixed-bloods. As from his arrival in 1841, he assigned that black community to Father J.-D. Laval. As from 1846, the steady arrival of fellow-missionaries from Fr. Libermann’s Congregation³⁴, enabled the team led by Fr. Laval and backed up by Bishop Corner to sow the seeds of faith into the hearts of tens of thousands of poor, unfortunate and neglected coloured people. By 1863, when the bishop retired, it was estimated that Laval and his missionary team had baptized around 66 000 people. Laval and his fellow-missionaries led so many souls to Jesus Christ and undertook to anchor so many families so firmly into the Catholic Church thanks to a prophetic four-point plan, the elements of which would, a century later, be endorsed and propounded by the Second Vatican Council:

- . Indigenous catechists : lay men and women, many of them married couples, many of them former slaves and virtually illiterate, but thoroughly well catechized.
- . The setting up of innumerable small Christian communities.
- . The apostolate of the Blacks by the Blacks.
- . A network of places of gathering and of worship.

³² **Am~d~e Nagapen**, *La naturalisation du P~re J. -I). Laval el des missionnaires spiritains –Un vol el de la politique coloniale britannique ~ l’Ile Maurice*. Diocese de Port-Louis, 1892, p. 82-95.

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Le Cern~en -No 1938 .July 1845.

Le Cern~en -No 1970 .13th September 1845.

³⁴**Am~d~e Nagapen**, *op. cit.*

Joseph Michel, *op. cit.*

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Above all, the secret of this successful and fruitful apostolate lay in the prayerful and holy life of Father Laval³⁵. On April 29, 1989, Pope John Paul II beatified him in Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome, and fixed his liturgical feast on September 9.

The Indian Mission

Well before the French Revolution in the 18th century, Indians had come to the colony either as slaves or as freemen. At the British conquest of 1810, a great number of them were already Catholics.

In the wake of the abolition of slavery and the expansion of the sugar cane industry, an ever increasing number of extra workers were needed. So, the British started the introduction of indentured labour from India (1829-1923). In 1861, the Indian immigrants had reached a total of 192 634 of a population of 310 050 inhabitants.

In such circumstances, Bishop Collier applied for Jesuit missionaries. In 1861, the first two missionaries landed from Trichinopoly, India: Fathers Francis Roy S.J. and Lawrence Puccinelli S.J. They established the Indian Mission that continues to operate well after the independence of the colony (1968)³⁶.

Clergy for the future

In order to provide the colony with an adequate clergy in the future, Bishop Corner launched a three-pronged strategy:

First, he observed sympathetically, if cautiously, the attempts of Father Libermann to provide "British born" priests to Mauritius. On February 19, 1842, only five months after his landing in the colony, he stated his intention of directing English or Irish seminarians to Paris with the hope that some of them would join the missionary institute of Father Libermann³⁷.

During his trip across Europe (1843-1845), he applied for seminarians from Baltimore, who would be trained in the French novitiate of Fr. Libermann³⁸.

On the other hand, Fr. Libermann around that period contemplated the opening of a branch of his congregation in Ireland and in England. But that wish did not materialize.

~ **Joseph Michel**, *Le Père Jacques Laval, le "Saint" de l'île Maurice, 1803-1864*. Beauchesne, Paris, 1976 (4^e édition: 1990).

. Mauritius Archives, SA70. Letter of Bishop Thomas Grant .June 26, 1861 .Despatch .No 454.

³⁶ **Amédée Nagapen**, *Histoire de l'Église* p. 112, 118-119, 156, 172, 175-176, 185-186, 193.

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Notes et Documents . Venerable François-Marie-Paul Libermann. Volume 3. Paris, 1933, p. 475.

H. Koren c.s.s.p., *Les Spiritains, Trois siècles d'histoire religieuse et missionnaire.* Beauchesne, Paris, 1982, p. 317, 409.

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Later, in 1849, Bishop Collier entertained the project of sending four young Irishmen, then studying at the Benedictine Douai Abbey in France, to Fr. Libermann, in the hope that they would enter his novitiate³⁹.

In 1853, Father Laval hazarded another suggestion: that of recruiting from the seminary in Rome British students from Malta who would enter the Holy Ghost Congregation and thus could thus be sent to Mauritius⁴⁰? But no real thought was ever given to that possibility.

So, all in all, none of the above endeavours ever materialised!

The second prong of Collier's strategy was directed towards Ireland. During his two visits to Europe (1843-1845 and 1850-1851), he called at the *All Hallows* missionary seminary in Ireland, where he presented his requests. The steps he took met with some success. He enlisted several students for the colony. As a matter of fact, of those enlisted only six in all actually came to work in the diocese. He also addressed similar pleas to *Saint Patrick's College, County Carlow*. There, as well, he made several recruits, but after their ordination, they all opted out and went to minister elsewhere.

However, during his episcopate, thanks to his negotiations, sixteen Irish priests came to Mauritius, although only seven out of that number actually worked for more than seven years in the colony⁴¹.

Thirdly, he set up bursaries to finance the studies of the Irish seminarians. The funds for that purpose had to be raised in the colony. However, the bishop also

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applied to the Colonial Government for bearing those expenses

Strangely enough, while Bishop Collier was striving hard to enlist European missionaries for his diocese, at no time seemingly did the idea of indigenous vocations strike him. Yet, worldwide a process of recruiting and training youngsters in mission territories had already been triggered in the 19th century. The Benedictines in Mauritius, however, looked like having remained impervious to such an eventuality throughout their century of presence in the colony!

Paradoxically, the Protestant Government in Downing Street positively imagined the feasibility of young Mauritians being selected and trained for the

Notes et Documents - Libermann, p. 475

Archives Générales - Congrès-général du Saïff-Esprit. 130ite no. 26. Dossiers A. Lefrès 1835-1864 (especially letters of November 14, 1841, June 4, 1847 ; December 16, 1849 ; August 28, 1853).

-« **Airn Sd & Nagapen**, *La Naturalisation du Père J.-D. Laval*,,, .Appendix II, Le Clergé irlandais

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s~culier ~ Vile Maurice, p. 139-140.

⁴² *Public Record Office* . **CO** 326 . no. 344 . The case of two seminarians who were studying in Dublin.

Mauritius Archives. SA 69 . Bishop Thomas Grant of Southwaxk, London, informed the Colonial Office that 3 Irish students enlisted for Mauritius had dropped out, but that 3 others were studying at All Hallows? Dublin, with a view to proceeding to Mauritius after their ordination.

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priesthood. In his despatch to the governor, the Secretary of State for the Colonies hazarded the view that such a project should be presented to Bishop Collier⁴³.

Establishment of new parishes

As regards places of worship, Bishop Coffier succeeded in materializing that chapter of his pastoral policy.

In 1841, there existed only five parishes. With the increase in population, a good number of villages were therefore far away from parish centres and the faithful in those rural areas kept crying out more forcefully for extra parish churches. As soon as he had recruited a handful of additional priests, he therefore set up new parishes.

With the arrival of more and more priests, Bishop Coffier was in a position to set up additional parishes in various disadvantaged districts. Thus, as by 1846, his clergy had increased to 12, he established 3 new parishes (St. Philomena, Poudredor; St. John, Quatre-Bornes; St. James, Souillac). Ten years later, there were 15 priests in the colony, and in 1861, they numbered 35. Consequently, two other parishes were established in 1849: Holy Ghost, Riviere-S~che; and Holy Saviour, Bambous; in 1859, another one: St. Augustine, Black River, and finally in 1862, that of N.-D.-de-la-Salette, Grand-Bay”.

Religious Congregations

Right from the staff, Bishop Collier justly, maybe instinctively, considered what valuable assets religious congregations would prove in the implementation of his pastoral policy.

His first connexion occurred fortuitously. After his episcopal ordination in Rome on May 3, 1840, he made a stopover in Paris, where he was informed of the nascent institute set on foot by Fran~ois-Marie-Paul Libermann, the Congregation of the *Saint-Cceur-de-Marie*, with the aim of sending missionaries to French colonies. Cleverly and successfully, Coffier volunteered to act as the Bishop Protector that the budding institute was in need of. Thus for the ordination to the priesthood of the founder F.M.P. Libermann and of the first contingent of his followers, Bishop Corner was the one who granted the canonical Dimissory Letters. Astutely enough, as Bishop Protector, Coffier had anticipated the coming to Mauritius of those missionaries. On that score, he experienced real disappointment, as Libermann dispatched his religious priests to other African mission territories. Still, Corner welcomed to the colony the very first missionary of that religious institute, the (Blessed) Father Jacques-D~sir~ Laval, and a few years later a string of other Holy Ghost missionaries³⁴. Better

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still, from 1841 to the present day, the *Holy Ghost Congregation* has unfailingly sent to the country over a hundred religious missionaries, from France, Britain or Ireland,

~ *Mauritius Archives. SA.*

“**Am~d~e Nagapen**, *La Fondation du Dioc~se de Port-Louis –1847*, p. 121.

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who keep involving themselves in a wide range of pastoral activities, from parish duties to educational, catechetical and other occupations.

Mother male congregation that Corner welcomed into his diocese was the *De La Salle Brothers*. Both Bishops Slater and Morris had unsuccessfully tried to bring the teaching Order into the colony. The Reverend J.-D. Laval and X. Masuy, for their part, together with the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, succeeded in enlisting these religious from Reunion Island and thus satisfactorily answered Bishop Collier's expectations. The first De La Salle community landed on 8th December 1859. They straightaway opened a free primary school in Port-Louis, followed by other primary and secondary schools over the island. They operated a breakthrough in the educational field for youths, by organizing evening classes, technical courses, boarding schools and especially by initiating joint school ventures, whereby paid boarding-schools financed the running of free primary schools⁴⁵.

The prelate was also fortunate to obtain nuns for the colony, a result attained only after knocking in vain at several European doors. In any case, on the 8th September 1845, he landed at Port-Louis, accompanied by three priests and eight Loreto nuns from Ireland. In the 19th century, Teresa Ball had inaugurated in Ireland a branch (Loreto) of the *Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, founded by Mary Ward in the 17th century. When, in 1844, Bishop Corner visited Rathfarnham, Teresa Ball was inspiring the community with such a missionary zeal that eight of the nuns readily volunteered to expatriate themselves and to devote themselves to the education of Mauritian girls. In the colony, the Loreto nuns embarked on a pioneering enterprise and their influence on the education of girls, both catholic and non-catholics, as well as on subsequent family life, can hardly be exaggerated. This influence was all the stronger as for over a century no other religious congregation ran high schools for girls and even the government did not open its first college for girls until 1951⁴⁶.

Now Bishop Collier's pioneering drive now led him to found a local congregation of nuns, that of the *Bon-et-Perpetuel-Secours*⁴⁷. At one time, as he carried out parish work in Port-Louis, he had been the spiritual director of a young Mauritian woman, twenty-five years old, Caroline Lenferna de Laresles. He helped her mature her vocation, entrusted her to the Loreto nuns for her novitiate and

received her religious vows in 1850. She had taken the name of Marie-Augustine. The bishop confided to her care the budding diocesan congregation. As he was sailing to Europe, he appointed the able Reverend Xavier Masuy chaplain of the institute.

~ **Am~d~e Nagapen**, *Le Centenaire du Colège Saint-Joseph 1877-1977*. Diocese de Port Louis, 1977.

⁴⁶*Ibidem*, p. 111.

. The Loreto nuns of Mauritius have edited a wide range of publications on their apostolate in the

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country. Some academic memoirs have also dealt with the educational work of the I.B.V.M. in Maunius.

~ **Theodore Thorel o.f.m.**, *Mère Marie-Augustine, Fondatrice des Sœurs de Charité de N.-D.-du-Bon-et-Perpétuel-Secours*. Port-Louis, 1939.

P. Carnielo Conti-Guglia, *Au service de l'Église, Sœur Marie-Augustine, Fondatrice des Sœurs de*

(Yarrité de N.-D.-du-Bon-et-Perpétuel-Secours), [Romel, 1979].

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A number of young Mauritian women joined the community, which prospered under the holy and charismatic leadership of Marie-Augustine. The co-founders wanted the nuns to look after the poorest and most destitute. She thus opened a variety of charitable institutions, previously unknown hospitals, hospices and infirmaries for the sick and for old people, cr~ches for abandoned babies, orphanages for boys and girls, a Lazar-house for lepers, and above all free primary schools for boys and girls in many localities.

With the encouragement and support of the bishop, the diocesan congregation went on thriving, benefactors assisted with contributions, novices steadily applied for admission to that life of consecration, dedication and poverty. Even Government Authorities paid tribute to the exemplary and dedicated work of these nuns.

Sadly, the behaviour of the two following Benedictine bishops turned out to be abusively detrimental to the developing and delicate congregation.

Bishop Coffier's episcopate might have been enriched with an extra congregation, that of the *Filles de Marie*, a diocesan institute of the neighbouring Reunion Island, founded by Marie Magdeleine de Ia Croix. Assuredly, all parties concerned wanted a foundation in Mauritius. That wish, however, did not materialize owing to an intractable condition on the part of a stubborn Collier. Just as he held full authority over the Bon-et-Perp~tuel-Secours Congregation, a diocesan body, he obstinately demanded that he similarly be the undisputed superior of the Filles de Marie in Mauritius in lieu of the canonical and appropriate superior, the head of the Church in Reunion. Only after Collier had resigned as Bishop of Port-Louis were the Filles de Marie able to install their first convent in Port-Louis~.

For the sake of accuracy, mention should be made of the presence of the French community of *Sainte-Marie-de-la-Famille* which contributed positively in the field of education from 1860 to 1887. Those nuns had been called to Mauritius by the Reverend Julien Pierre Le Boucher, an experienced educationist. Although Bishop Collier had authorized them to stay in his diocese, in point of fact he unaccountably and disdainfully ignored them and their positive apostolate as well⁴⁹.

Catholic Education

Throughout his episcopate, education, at its various levels, had been an overriding concern of Bishop Collier. Even before he set foot on Mauritian soil, he had been giving thought to an educational policy. He was aware of the liberalising move of Lord Glenelg, as mentioned earlier^{25&26}.

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⁴⁸ **R.P. Roger Dussercie c.s.sp.**, *Histoire d'une Fondation, Mere Marie Madeleine de la Croix*
ella

Congtigation des Filles de Marie .Saint-Denis, Reunion .Port-Loins (1949 & 1974), p. 157-162.
~ **Am~d~e Nagapen**, *La Naturalivation du Pare J.-D. Lava!.... Ch. IX, Unpremierp~titionnaire:*
L'abbé Le Roucher, p. 5 1-60.

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A few weeks after landing in Mauritius, he opened a free primary school in Port-Louis, with a dedicated lady at its head⁵⁰. He encouraged the opening of such free primary units, entrusted to lay teachers in several parts of the island⁵¹. Over the years, that diffusion of free education was boosted by the efforts of religious congregations, such as the De La Salle Brothers, the Bon-Secours Sisters and later the Filles de Marie or of lay collaborators, especially the Saint Vincent de Paul Conferences.

Bishop Corner was instrumental in stimulating the development of primary schooling, by obtaining the enforcement of the *Grant-in-Aid System* in 1856. Through that scheme, many Catholic institutions though not all of them benefited from subsidies from the Public Treasury. This policy of government grants provided the Catholic Church with fairly adequate means to maintain schools in Port-Louis as well as in all rural districts. Thus, up to the end of the Second World War, the Catholic Church ran more schools than even the Government.

The educational policy of Bishop Collier encompassed secondary schooling as well. In 1845, as already reported, he succeeded in introducing the Loreto nuns who provided education to girls of all denominations, in the main localities of the country. For over a century, the Benedictine bishops considerately, if inexplicably, saw to it that the Loreto Institute retained the exclusive privilege of girls' secondary education!

In regard to boys' secondary schooling, Bishop Collier strenuously probed several avenues, but with mitigated results. In 1852, thanks to three lay English university graduates, he opened in the capital St Mar~s College, a short-lived venture. Painstakingly, in 1857, he managed to persuade a team of Jesuit missionaries from Reunion Island to renew that experience. The Jesuit institution, enthusiastically and promisingly, got off the ground. However, the following year, the Society of Jesus called back its missionaries. Distressingly, the high school had once more to close down. Fortunately, the Benedictine successors of Bishop Collier were to be favoured with better luck and would accordingly be in a position to promote secondary education for boys in more auspicious circumstances.

Lay associations

No lay associations had existed before the administration of Bishop Collier.

During the 1840 decade, several religious groups came into being, backed up by the clergy. One that did not lack originality was undoubtedly the *Association Chr&ienne*, founded by the young Tristan Bardet in 1848. The latter, laureate of the

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⁵⁰ *Le Cernéen* . No 1941 . 8th July 1845.

Le Mauricien . No 2166 . 25.9.1841 . Miss Irma Lavoipierre. A free primary school for impoverished boys, opened by H. Coquerel, under the patronage of Bishop Collier, at 29, rue des Liinites, Port-Louis.

Le Cernéen . No 1873 . 30th January 1845 . Two schools run by the Reverend J. Larkan at Mahebourg, as from 1842.

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Royal College of Port-Louis, subsequently studied for the priesthood at Oscott Seminary, in England.

Clearly, the most popular associations were the confraternities that sprang from the midst of the communities motivated by Father J.-D. Laval and his fellow-missionaries as from 1846. These associations, firmly structured and regulated, assuredly dynamized the christian way of life of those neophytes. Lads and men followed the banner of Saint Joseph ; young ladies those of Saint Cecilia or Saint Lupercile. Married women and mothers gathered around Saint Anne. A great number of faithful joined the Association of the Rosary. For those black men and women determined to place themselves among the elite of the community, they were enlisted in the *Confr~rie du Saint-Scapulaire*.

In the Cathedral parish, Port-Louis, Father Laval and his missionaries established the *Archiconfr~rie de Notre-Dame-des- Victoires*, directly affiliated with the head office of that international confraternity in Paris.

Father Laval also initiated a fairly far-reaching enterprise a relief fund. He wanted the poor Blacks to be aware that around them were to be found still poorer fellow-creatures. So the faithful set up a *Caisse de Charit~*, to which they contributed in a spirit of solidarity and from which they helped out victims of cyclones, fire and other disasters or they helped finance funeral costs⁵².

Indisputably, the organization that was the most widespread and actually the most efficient one was the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. The first conference was formed in Port-Louis in 1855, and steadily reached the various parishes. Those conferences gave an opportunity to upper class laymen to be involved in charitable activities. On the advice of Father Laval, the Vincentians invested significantly in primary schools for the benefit of the popular masses⁵³.

Bishop Collier encouraged the appearance and expansion of a set of marian confraternities. Thus, the Bon-Secours sisters, with the active support of the bishop, developed in the country the *Archiconfr~rie de Notre-Dame-de-la-Salette*. By 1872, that pious association included over 800 members.

Worthy of mention was the concerted and successful petitions to the Colonial Government of an array of influential laymen over the 1840 decade. These people were not members of any formal religious body. Still, by their addresses to Downing Street and their simultaneous overseas media campaigns, they skilfully and successfully submitted the grievances and expectations of the Mauritian catholic community. An outcome of such bold steps was, among others, the permission for foreign priests to come and work in Mauritius. This liberal measure enabled Bishop Coffier to enlist a steady flow of Holy Ghost and other European missionaries⁵⁴.

⁵² **Joseph Michel**, *Le Pare Jacques Laval, le "Saint" de tile Maurice, 1803-1864*. Beauchesne, Paris, 1976 (4e ~dition:1990).

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Am-d-e Nagapen, *La Soci-ft~ de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul ~ Vile Maurice, 1855-1980 . Les Origines.* Port-Louis, 1980.

~ **Aan-d-e Nagapen,** *La Fondation du Diocese de Port-Louis .1847,* p. 126-128.

Fund-raising measures

Bishop Collier was continually confronted with a distressing want of funds. In fact, money problems have really been a feature of all Catholic Bishops in Mauritius, Benedictine ones as well as others.

The development of Catholicism entailed the building of new churches in the capital as well as in the rural districts. To that end, Bishop Corner set up a *Comite charge de l'œuvre de la construction de nouvelles églises catholiques au Port-Louis*. He nominated to that committee meritorious notables, assisted by a dedicated team of *Dames de Charité*⁵⁵. The latter organized yearly fund-raising activities, charity bazaars, various collections. The proceeds enabled Bishop Coffier to buy several plots of land and to help finance building sites.

However, the large scale enterprise of Bishop Corner that engulfed inordinately large sums was actually the building of the episcopal palace. Unquestionably, the head of the Catholic Church needed a self-contained apartment as well as a diocesan central office⁵⁷. As the construction of the bishop's house spanned over four years (1849-1853), money grew scarce. The bishop embarked on a string of savings and financial cuts that might undoubtedly have caused some harm to a few pastoral activities. It should also be observed that from the start, rightly or wrongly, there were dissident views, some of which were vocally expressed in local

⁵⁷
newspapers

All things considered, Bishop Corner had offered to the Catholic community a Bishop's House, of outstanding elegance, that designedly houses the diocesan head office and that, to the present day, represents an impressive specimen of the Mauritian architectural heritage.

Status of the Catholic Church

Bishop Corner took full advantage of the status ascribed to the Catholic Church by the British Colonial Government, that of a *Concordat* Church under a "*regime de séparation*".

The clergy, as mentioned earlier, were paid from the Public Treasury, subject to the constraints of the colonial budget. As regards public subsidies, it has already been noted that Catholic schools benefited from the Grant-in-Aid System.

~ **Le Mauricien** . No 1747 . 16th January 1846 ; No 1804 . 29th May 1846.

Fund-raising measures

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Am~d~e Nagapen, *l'histoire de l'église de France à Maurice 1721-1968*, p. 120-121.

~ Le Mauricien .No 2194 .29th November 1848 .signed *Un chr~tien* ; No 2198 .8th December 1848 ; No 2200 .13th December 1848 ; No 2201 .15th December 1848 ; No 2202 .18th December

1848. A sharp but ill-natured letter, signed *Un chr~tien*.

Fund-raising measures

Unlike his two predecessors, Bishops Slater and Morris, he was, for his part, able to administer an unhindered and autonomous Church, as the governors were careful not to meddle in spiritual matters.

Even when the sensitive problem arose of practising Catholics who were at the same time affiliated to free-masonry, the Colonial Office, in spite of the acceptance of free-masonry by the Church of England, directed the governor in Port-Louis not to interfere, and to allow the bishop to act according to Rome's teachings. 'Thus, the latter was not in the least hampered by the local authorities on the publication of his pastoral letter on free-masonry and other secret societies, in 1854⁵⁸.

One has to admit that the publication of this pastoral letter caused an uproar, that was at the time abundantly echoed in the Mauritian press. Some local papers even displayed a fierce hostility. Nevertheless, in actual fact, the bishop's directions shone like a beacon that shed an unyielding and uncompromising light on the incongruity of being a Catholic and a Free-mason at one and the same time. The daring but enlightening pronouncement of Bishop Collier served as a worthy guiding-mark for subsequent generations.

On the whole, the bishop showed himself always anxious to comply with the colonial authorities' requests or desiderata, whenever possible. Thus, when the governor passed on to him the repeated appeals from Rodrigues for a priest to be dispatched to the dependency, as soon as he was in a position to do so, he first sent Father F. Th~vaux there, then Fr. LB. Frant~ois, both Holy Ghost missionaries. The latter even made four different pastoral trips to Rodrigues. On his second call there, he accompanied Bishop Corner, who was the first prelate to perform an episcopal visit to that island. Bishop Collier having blazed the trail, henceforth all his successors, Benedictines and others, made it their practice to make at least one voyage to the Rodrigues island⁵⁹.

As regards his loyalty to the Crown, like his two Benedictine predecessors, he unswervingly professed the dutifulness of a genuine British subject⁶⁰ Furthermore, each time he got the chance, he kept assuring the Colonial Authorities, on the one hand, of his deep concern for the British loyalty of all his priests, and on the other

⁵⁸ Bishop WB. A. Collier o.s.b., 7 inai 1854.

⁵⁹ Am~d~e Nagapen, *Le Pare Laval, Fondateur de Ia (7hdtient~ Rodriguaise*. Poit-Louis, 1978.

Cinquantieme Anniversaire de notre "Cath~drale" . Saint-Gabriel, Rodrigues - 1939-

1989, Port-Louis, 1990.

⁶⁰ Bishop Slater's loyal(v:

Mauritius Archives. RA 367 . Letters of December 29, 1829 & September 23, 1830.

PA 478 -Catholic clergy's address, July 26, 1831. Bishop Morris:

Ibidem SD1 4. Dispatch No 32 of 28th March 1835 (Reverend Pirantoni: case). Bishop Collier:

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Public Record Office. CO 167/376. Annual Report for 1855.

Bishop ~v ilouse Archives, Port-Louis. Letter Book 1845-1850. Letter of 30th December 1846, p. 75-76; 80.

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hand, of the joint effort of the bishop and the clergy to inculcate in the hearts and minds of the islanders “loyalty to our Gracious Majesty”⁶²?

Actually, all the alien priests, prior to their starting ministry in the colony, had to take an oath of allegiance to the British monarch. When Bishop Collier had triggered the process of naturalization, the applicant acquired the status of British subject in Mauritius only after he had taken the legal oath, a sine qua non condition.

In Church-State relationships, a difference of views now and again cropped up, especially when favours were granted to Anglicans or to the Church of England.

Anglicans numbered only a few hundreds (around 300) whilst Catholics totalled over

100 000. Still, in matters of-tiquette, especially of titles and precedence, the Catholic

Church in the colony was downgraded below the Anglican Church, because the British were “*a Protestant people and Government*”:

*“I think the Protestant must take precedence of the Roman Catholic Bishop...
“in respect to the Protestant and Roman Catholic Bishops, I have considered that, however desirous we may be to pay every due respect to the Roman Catholic Prelates, yet as Protestant people and Government that we ought to give precedence to the Prelate of our oim Established Church”⁶².*

Unjustifiably, no heed was paid to Bishop Collier’s protests and pleas. It was only by stages, first during the episcopate of Bishop Scarisbrick, then under that of Bishop O’Neill that those unwarranted practices were eliminated⁶³.

Resignation of Bishop Corner

Bishop Coffier left the colony on sick leave on the 6th October 1862. A few weeks later, he tendered his resignation. A lengthy exchange of correspondence ensued between the bishop and Propaganda Fide. Finally, on the 15th September of the following year, his resignation was approved and Dom Michael Adrian Hankinson was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Port-Louis.

Bishop Collier was to live another twenty-seven years. He died at St Osburgh Abbey, Coventry, on the 21st November 1890.

Homage to Bishop Collier

When Bishop Collier landed in Port-Louis in September 1845, accompanied by his fellow-passengers three Irish clerics and eight Loreto nuns – the media gave

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⁶¹ **Am-d&~e Nagapen**, *La Naluralisation die Pere J.-D. Laval et des missionnaires spiritains . Un volet de la politique coloniale britannique ~ l'le Maurice*. Diocese de Port-Louis, 1992.

⁶² *Mauritius Archives*. SD37. Dispatch No 31 of 14th August 1849 from Governor S.W. Anderson

to Lord Grey. *Table of Precedence*.

⁶³ *Downside Abbey Archives, Woolhwnpton*. BOX .RI. Revd. W.B.A. Collier.

Le Cern-en, No 1970 .13th September
1845RD0882MRecord Office, C0167 &

Fund-raising measures

Chapter V

The Fiarc~ 2st-time

For half a century after the departure of Bishop Collier, the Diocese of Port-Louis was administered by successive pairs of other Benedictine bishops Adrian Hankinson (1863-1870) and William Scarisbrick (1871-1887) ; next, Peter A. O'Neill (1896-1909) and James R. Bilsborrow (1910-1916). In between, stood a jesuit prelate, Archbishop Leo Meurin (1887-1897). Oddly enough, the latter was a non Benedictine and more surprisingly, was non British. His candidature seems to have been supported by British Colonial high-ranked officials who had appreciated his spiritual leadership as apostolic vicar of Bombay, India.

In the wake of Bishop Coffier, the management of the local Church was plain sailing for his successors. Coffier handed down to them a rich legacy a diocese bursting into bloom its white, black and coloured communities virtually all baptized and being currently evangelized by a fairly adequate number of missionaries and religious nuns and brothers ; a constellation of churches and chapels dotting the territories of eleven parishes ; a wide network of catholic schools ; the feasibility of recruiting foreign priests who could be naturalized ; an Indian Catholic Mission, staffed by Jesuits from India, to cater for the ever-increasing influx of Indian immigrants ; a mobile team of visiting priests to Rodrigues Island ; and above all, the Church State relationship unfolding within a fairly satisfactory framework.

In reality, all the above pastoral enterprises were still in their initial stages, more often than not in a fragile state, or they were pastoral initiatives yet in an experimental or developing situation. However, in whatever circumstances they currently were, on the one hand, they admittedly fulfilled real pastoral needs, and on the other they arose from a well thought-out pioneering and prophetic policy of Bishop Collier.

His successors found it a challenging task to care for such a legacy, to consolidate the measures taken and to further develop the operations under way. Nevertheless, apart from a few activities that will be mentioned, none of the Benedictine successors of Bishop Collier looked like having formulated a pastoral policy or elaborated a pastoral plan. Rather, they felt themselves called upon to continue the work of their predecessor, a man of rare vision.

Bishops Hankinson (1869-1870) and Scarisbrick (1871-1887)

In the footsteps of Bishop Collier, his two immediate successors strengthened what he had started.

Bishop Hankinson established three new parishes . Notre-Dame-de-la-D~livrande, Long Mountain ; Notre-Dame-de-la-Visitation, Vacoas: Saint Teresa of Avila, Curepipe; whilst Bishop Scarisbrick established five others Saint-Qeur-de-Marie, at Petite-Rivi~re ; Saint Michael, Pont-Praslin ; Saint Anne, Chamarel Sacred Heart, Beau-Bassin, and Sainte-Croix, Port-Louis,

Bishop Hankinson appointed a resident priest at Rodrigues. Bishop Scarisbrick, for his part, was able to visit Rodrigues Island a two occasions.

Both consolidated the clergy. To staff the added number of parishes, both were fortunate in bringing extra secular and religious priests .Spiritans, Jesuits and later Lazarists.

New congregations of nuns were also achnitted the Filles de Marie in 1864 and the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix (along with their Indian affiliates, N.-D.-des-SeptDouleurs) in 1866. Those congregations, along with the Loreto nuns and the BonSecours sisters, entertained as a priority their concern for religious vocations. The response proved satisfactory, beyond expectations. Henceforth, the flow of female vocations never dried up and besides, enabled Mauritian religious missionaries to assist in the work of evangelization overseas.

Under their episcopates, catholic education primary and secondary flourished over the island. The Holy Ghost Congregation ran a college of high repute for boys, the Saint Louis College in the capital from 1868 to 1881. Besides their primary schools, the De la Salle Brothers managed high schools for boys in Port-Louis as well as in rural areas, at Pamplemousses and Mahebourg. Then in 1877, they opened at Curepipe Saint Joseph's College that with time grew into one of the first-rate educational institutions for boys.

Under Bishop Scarisbrick's episcopate, two noteworthy events should be highlighted the founding of the *Union Catholique* and the publication of catholic periodicals.

In 1877, a group of lay men established the *Union Catholique*, endowed with a legal status from the Council of Government and that ever since played the part of an official and influential spokesman of the Catholic community. On many an occasion, the *Union Catholique* has been in a position to bring to the Bishops of Port-Louis its efficient and dedicated co-operation. Over the years, that body had unflinchingly brought its assistance and support, morally and better still financially, to the wide range of pastoral enterprises .spiritual, social, charitable and educational both of the clergy and of the laity.

Bishops Hankinson (1869-1870) and Scarisbrick (1871-1887)

The very first religious periodical, a weekly, came out in 1875 : the *Servant of the Holy of Port-Louis*. In 1882, the *Union Catholique* published a monthly *Annales de l'Union Catholique*, the forerunner of a durable tradition of diocesan publications.

For the sake of completeness, mention should now be made of two dismal events that cast a shadow on that period:

the unjust treatment meted out to Mother Marie-Augustine and the Congregation of Bon-Secours ; and Bishop Scarisbrick's stand on Governor Pope Hennessy. That chapter could aptly be concluded here with a word on Scarisbrick's temperamental personality.

The misfortunes of the Bon-Secours Congregation

Under the episcopate of its founder, Bishop Collier, the Bon-Secours Congregation flourished and prospered. Under his two successors, the virtuous foundress, Mother Marie-Augustine, found countless obstacles in her way. Both bishops, for no valid reasons, subjected her and her religious daughters to ceaseless and undignified treatment. Did they wish the disappearance of that congregation, so that the Filles de Marie could enjoy a clear field for their apostolate in the midst of the poor and down-trodden? The local papers of that period carried many articles by lay Catholics, some pro-Bon-Secours, others pro-Filles de Marie, although in point of fact the two congregations seemed barely to nurture animosity or ill feelings towards each other⁶⁶. Still, the attitudes of those two successive bishops shocked the Catholic community. Ultimately, sensing that the odds were against her, and that her institute would soon be written off, Mother Marie-Augustine decided to by-pass the permission of the bishop, the actual head of the diocesan congregation, and made for Rome to present her case to the Holy See and to vindicate the rights of the

congregation. ⁶⁷ In the final analysis, she was well advised⁶⁸. After having heard Bishop Hankinson and later Bishop Scarisbrick, the Holy See renewed its trust in Mother Marie-Augustine and granted to the Bon-Secours the status of pontifical institute⁶⁹

Actually, everybody remained in the dark, as to the unaccountable attitude of the two bishops. So far, the biographers and historians who have written on the Bon-Secours and the Filles de Marie have omitted to make an in-depth study of that gloomy chapter of the Church in the 1860s and 1870s, which calls therefore for further historical research.

Bishops Hankinson (1869-1870) and Scarisbrick (1871-1887)

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La Sentinelle de Maurice .30 november, 4-23 December 1871.

⁶⁷*Le Cern-en*, 4th June 1869 .Commercial Gazette .26th & 28th June, 2nd & 5th July, 1869.

⁶⁸*Le Cern-en*, 1st, 3rd, 11th, 15th, 27th June 1871.

⁶⁹ **R.P. Roger Dussercie c.s.sp.**, *Histoire d'une Fondation, hl-re Marie Madeleine de la Crois et*

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Congregation des Fdles de Marie -Saint-Denis, R-un ion. Ch. XVI, XVIII, XIX, XXII.

The Pope Hennessy case

Under the episcopate of Bishop Scarisbrick, the State-Church relationships experienced an unexpected change. On June 1st, 1883, Sir John Pope Hennessy landed, the first ever catholic governor of the colony. Oddly enough, Bishop Scarisbrick and Pope Hennessy could not understand one another. As the governor pressed for a greater participation of Mauritians in the management of the country, the English bishop deemed that that high civil servant was not acting in the best interest of Britain ; in short, that his policy at the head of the colony was besmirched with disloyalty⁷⁰.

Obviously, such animosity towards Pope Hennessy displeased those Mauritians who sympathized with the latter's policy. In parts, for this reason, but also for other motives, many of the faithful entertained towards the bishop feelings of suspicion, and worse of insubordination.

As yet, no in-depth study has been made of Bishop Scarisbrick's involvement in the Pope Hennessy case⁷¹.

A temperamental bishop

In spite of his being a highly cultured man, endowed with a nobleness of behaviour and manners, he was actually a temperamental and whimsical being, prone to wrangling with one and all. He picked quarrels with the religious congregations, the Jesuits, the Spiritans, the Lazarists ; with the diocesan priests⁷² with lay associations, such as the *Union Catholique* ; and with Fabrique wardens. His dispute with the Bon-Secours Congregation has already been reported, as well as the string of trying and testing affronts and humiliations that he inflicted on the foundress, Mother Marie-Augustine.

⁷⁰ The governor cracked up the slogan: "*Mauritius to the Mauritians.*"

⁷¹ Vide : Joseph Mamet, *Le Diocese de Port-Louis*, p. 161-167.

– William Newton .*To f.l.E. The RI Hon. Sir A.G.R. Robinson, Her Majesty's Commissioner to enquire into the affairs of the Colony of Mauritius* .1886.

.Sir John Pope Hennessy .*Politique Irlandaise de Lord Beaconsfield* (a translation) .1886.

.James Pope Hennessy, *Verandah .Some episodes in the (Trown Colonies .1867-1889, 1964.*

. Mauritius Newspapers ; Catholic Messenger (Ceylon).

⁷² Bishop's House Archives, Port-Louis. Vol. V, p. 117-120; 154-155. On the 28th January 1875, Bishop Scarisbrick made the following entry: "A letter to Abbe Guy, Grand-Baie, ordering him to act as my deputy and bless the new church of N.-D.-de-la-Salette on the 30th instant ...and to report to me if my orders have been executed." The Abbe Guy hardly cared to comply with the bishop's order, and six months elapsed before that church was inaugurated by another parish priest.

The Pope Hennessy case

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

Archbishop Leo Meurin was the odd prelate out of the Benedictine line. He belonged to the Society of Jesus. Surprisingly, he was not “British born”, his father being French, his mother German and his birthplace Berlin. Apparently, Sir John Pope Hennessy exerted some influence on his nomination to the See of Port-Louis⁷³. In any case, at this juncture, when in certain quarters some Catholics had turned publicly irreverent towards Bishop Scarisbrick, Mauritius was fortunate to welcome a bishop as gifted, as talented and as experienced as Archbishop Meurin.

Bishop Meurin gave a significant boost to the development of primary schools as had done his predecessors. At the end of his episcopate, there were 64 Catholic institutions benefiting from the grant-in-aid system.

He established two new parishes Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, Rose-Hill, in 1890 and St Francis Xavier, Port-Louis, in 1894.

Apart from the missionary clergy that was increasing in number, he succeeded in enlisting a team of religious of the Society of Jesus, several of whom from India were therefore well versed in Indian languages.

These collaborators enabled him to revitalize the Indian Catholic Mission, the centre of which he placed at Rose-Hill, thus facilitating the travelling of the missionaries to all parts of the island⁷⁴.

The bishop carried out four noteworthy initiatives.

First, he set up a programme of parish missions entrusted to the Jesuits. Undoubtedly, those missions that unfolded according to a predetermined calendar went a long way to re-invigorate the religious and spiritual life of the parishioners.

Secondly, he showed a special caring for the working class. He regrouped workers of the capital in an *Union Ouvrière*. Over 3 000 Catholic craftsmen formed part of these associations that looked like premature trade unions. ‘They organized a friendly society, styled *Société de Progrès*. He provided the association of typographers with a printing press, that was run under the registered name of *Imprimerie Cooperative*. In line with the social concerns worldwide, and three years before Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the bishop convened, under the aegis of the *Union Catholique*, an imposing congress on the social question and the condition of the Mauritian worker, on October 14, 1888.

On a third plane, Bishop Meurin fostered the spread of religious literature. A wide range of periodicals, monthlies, weeklies and even a Catholic daily flourished

⁷³ Sir Charles Bruce, *The Broad Stone of Empire* .1910.

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

According to the official 1891 census, the Indo-Mauntian community of 255 920 included 9 990 Catholics. Of the latter, 8 274 were Indo-Mauritian Catholic of ancient stock, while 1 716 were recent Catholic indentured Indian labourers.

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

throughout the end of the 19th century⁷⁵. Two catechisms were printed with his *Imprimatur*, of which the *Cat&hisme en patois creole* (1891), produced by the Jesuits, was the first ever catechism published in the Mauritian Creole language. He himself produced *La Franc-Maçonnerie, Synagogue de Satan* (Paris, 1893), a thick volume of 556 pages, which however a few years later was stripped of all seriousness and authority.

A fourth initiative that he started was the series of public lectures that he delivered under the auspices of the *Union Catholique*.

He furthermore relied wisely and successfully on the *Union Catholique* for several of his pastoral campaigns, for example, on Catholic education and on drawing the faithful away from Free-masonry!

Bishop Meurin is rightly remembered in the country for initiating the canonical process in 1893 that eventually led to the beatification of Father Jacques-Denis Laval (in 1989).

Above all, the plan that he worked out with positive results, a real feat actually, was the establishing of the minor seminary *Seminaire Saint-Louis* in 1889. This unprecedented pastoral feat, aimed at preparing future indigenous priests, as a matter of fact, had been prompted to him by *Propaganda Fide*. In any case, he complied with the latter's recommendations, and over the eight years of its existence the institution was instrumental in sending a few men for ecclesiastical studies in Europe, of whom five were ordained priests. All considered a positive result.

The last years of the bishop were marred by the havoc caused by the destructive and deadly cyclone of 1892. Amidst national catastrophe, the diocese incurred very heavy losses. He boldly solicited and collected funds for the restoration and rebuilding of churches, schools, convents and presbyteries. Nevertheless, he also had to borrow large sums of money.

So, on landing in Mauritius in 1896, his successor, the Benedictine Bishop P.A. O'Neill, found his diocese heavily in debt, in the wake of the fierce and ferocious hurricane of 1892.

The last two Benedictines:

Bishop O'Neill (1896-1909) and Bilsborrow (1910-1916)

In line with the traditional breed of Benedictine prelates sent to the Colony, right from the start, Bishops O'Neill and Bilsborrow impressed everybody as a pair of good-natured and cultured Churchmen. They landed together, the first one being the

~ Monthlies : *La Gazette pastorale de Maurice* (1877) *Le Messager Mauricien du Sacrement* (1888) ;
Weeklies : *La Croix du Dimanche* (1891) ; *Croix du Dimanche & Annales de l'Union Catholique de*

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

Pile Maurice (1896) ; *Le Fiminisme* (1898) ; **Daily:** *La Croix* (1891), incorporating a la-monthly *La Croix .*
dition d'Outre-Mer (1891); *La Croix du Soir* (1893).

La Croix **and** *Les Annales de l'Union Catholique* were printed by the *Imprimerie Coop~rative*.

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

diocesan bishop, the other, Dom James R. Bilsborrow, his secretary. Soon, the latter was appointed parish priest of Moka and afterwards vicar general. When Bishop O'Neill retired, as he had nothing but praise for his vicar general, his recommendation undoubtedly carried such a weight that Rome gave him Dom J.R. Bilsborrow as his successor.

These two consecutive bishops were fine musicians, the first one, a wide-spreading musicologist and a proficient organist, the second an expert-violinist⁷⁶. These artistic talents were of good service to their neighbours, the Loreto Convent pupils, who took music at their Cambridge examinations, which they passed with flying colours.

Bishop O'Neill established four parishes : St Ursula at Central Flacq, Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Chemin-Grenier, St Leo at Quartier-Militaire and St Paul at Phoenix. Bishop Bilsborrow, for his part, established St Michael parish at GrandGaubé.

Bishop O'Neill fostered peaceful and harmonious relationships with everybody, including the Colonial Administration, even for example when he had to adopt a clear and definite stand on education. Under Bishop Bilsborrow, the island experienced difficult political times, strewn with scuffles and skirmishes. In 1914, the first World War broke out and he took the opportunity to publish a prophetic pastoral letter on the miseries and sufferings that would ensue.

As with his predecessors, the bishop had to issue public statements on Freemasonry, to reaffirm the stand of the Catholic Church.

Another peculiar feature that both shared in common was their last years. Each of the two, upon finally retiring as a residential bishop, chose to return to Mauritius to spend their old age. They are buried in the same episcopal vault in Saint Louis Cathedral, Port-Louis.

In spite of the cleverness and ability of both prelates, their love of the poor and their saintly lives, on the whole their episcopates stand out as colourless, on the whole free from any noteworthy dynamism.

First, the prejudice against Bishop O'Neill was that a Benedictine bishop was hardly expected to succeed Archbishop Meurin. The latter had had so fruitful an episcopate, that on his death articles were published in the local press and petitions were addressed to Propaganda Fide, Rome, asking for a non Benedictine bishop, but

rather for one from either the Society of Jesus or the Holy Ghost Congregation⁷⁷

⁷⁶*Douai Abbey Archives, Woolhampton (D.A.A.W.). 2 Boxes -Shelf-Mark 1>111 -A. O'Neill. These*

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

boxes contain a large of collection of Dom O'Neill's varied musical compositions (masses and other liturgical ceremonies, motets, anthems, operas).

D.A.A.E. Petitions of the *Union Catholique* to Propaganda Fide, Rome, dated March 16 and November 5, 1895.

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

'To summarize e~ to concl'u&

Do not fotget those who have **Md** eMige
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**Ile X/I,~
7.**

For just under a century, Mauritius was been blessed with the presence of Benedictine pastors.

In the newly conquered French-speaking island, where the British Protestant colonisers felt distrust of whatever recalled France, the Catholic Church could freely fulfil its mission thanks to its heads, prelates who were British born, who had English as their mother tongue, who, humanly speaking, were on an equal footing with the British Colonial Governors.

These Benedictine prelates were highly cultured men, who besides had a good command of the French language. Several of them had spent several years in France. They could preach in that language, they wrote their correspondence, circulars and pastoral letters in French with mastery and ease.

During that period, female vocations were cultivated and committed girls from various walks of life and ethnical origins were admitted in the existing congregations.

In contrast, this trend was virtu~illy inexistent among young men. Just a handful of Mauritian youngsters became either priests or brothers in religious congregations~⁰. The prelates, for their part, were tireless pilgrims in search of missionary personnel. As a result, their motley clergy . of English, Irish, French, Belgian and Italian missionaries . was hard to manage given their different origins cultures and

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seminaries

Among them worthy of mention is Dom Paul Willhd Raynald o.s.b. (1830-1904). Born in Port-Louis on the 30th Nouvember 1830. he spent his religious life in England, was the author of several publications, especially a modern and widely commended English version of the *Imitation of Jesus Chriert*. At the end of the 19th century, he was prior of Newport Cathedral and in 1900 he held the position of Mitred Abbot of Saint Albans.

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

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Father J.-D. Laval (1841 -.1864) and later Bishop P.A. O'Neill (1896-1909) referred explicitly in their letters to the hiatus that often kept apart nationals of so different countries and cultures.

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

All the Benedictine bishops can be credited with having been efficient promoters of education, of primary schools for all classes of the population and of secondary and boarding schools for the youth of the bourgeoisie. Rightly and wisely, Catholic missionaries saw schooling as essential for the integral development of the human person as well as of the family and the national society.

In conformity with the Benedictine tradition, they developed the taste for colourful liturgy, sung masses, and pontifical functions, that enhanced the quality of religious animation and the degree of spiritual vitality.

All considered, the pastorate of Bishop Collier marked the apex of the Benedictine apostolate. The establishment of the Diocese of Port-Louis in 1847 gave birth to a Church that with the co-operation of (Blessed) Father Laval and others took firm root and grew unflinchingly and steadily towards an ever greater maturity. That Church blossomed out under the stimulus of an appropriate pastoral plan, conceived and implemented by a bishop of vision, whose episcopal priorities were quite clear, and who was never equalled during the century under review.

One feature that characterized the management of virtually all the Benedictine prelates was their financial straits. At times, unpleasant or awkward situations sprang from incompetence in money matters, as in the Bishop Slater's case. At other times, money was needed to finance important building sites, as under Bishop Collier, or to refund loans raised to repair cyclone damages, as Bishop O'Neill had to do. Besides, in spite of theoretical assurances given by Government, in practice money was not easily forthcoming from the Public Treasury for the enlistment of extra and badly needed priests, or for subsidizing building of places of worship and opening of new schools.

Historical research still has to be done in many areas of ecclesiastical life during the 19th century. A case in point would be schooling. If the diocese fostered an island-wide network of primary schools for all classes, and more especially for the impoverished and neglected coloured or black children, at first sight high schools looked like having been run by religious congregations on discriminatory or racial lines, to the exclusion of non white boys and girls.

Another avenue worth probing relates to local clergy. Benedictine prelates seemed to have fought shy of indigenous priests. Nowhere, at least up to now, has any allusion or reference been found from them regarding the eventual fostering of Mauritian vocations. Such circumspection, if not suspicious, appears all the more unaccountable when one bears in mind the request of the Protestant Secretary of State under Bishop Collier, or the emphatic insistence of *Propaganda Fide* under Archbishop Meurin for caring for Mauritian priestly vocations.

Over the century-long pastoral management of the Benedictine prelates, the involvement of the English Congregation confined itself to providing a head for the local Church but not to staffing its clergy. So, when in 1916, Bishop Bilborrow was

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

Actually, from the arrival of the Mauritian

~~apparently, from the arrival of the Mauritian~~

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

A non British born bishop (1887-1895)!

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