

WAR, RACISM AND IMMOBILITY: THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE EARLY SALESIAN WORK IN CAPE TOWN

JOHN DICKSON *

At the first official Conference of the Catholic Bishops and Mission Superiors of Southern Africa in December 1895 it was announced that Bishop Leonard had already agreed with the Salesians of Turin (Don Bosco) to open a house at Cape Town for the recovery of poor boys of an older age.¹ This proved to be somewhat premature because the Salesians did not in fact arrive till the following December but the announcement by this leading figure in South African Catholic history and the subsequent misunderstandings and controversy with him were to mark the Salesian work in Cape Town for the next 50 years. The purpose of this study is to examine how far the Salesians made a significant social impact in Cape Town and to what extent they were actually absorbed by the prevailing culture. The social attitudes of both white South African society and of the Catholic Church in Cape Town inevitably did deeply affect the nature of the Salesian mission in South Africa in a society riven by racial, national and linguistic divisions, exacerbated by the extraordinary economic situation of a diamond and gold rush, and moving rapidly towards the outbreak of a terrible «civil war», the Salesians found themselves in an extraordinarily difficult social context. The purpose of this article is to explore how far the Salesians were shaped by these pressures and to what extent they managed to make their own distinctive mark on South African society.

1. The social context

Diamonds, gold and British imperialism dominated the South African context in the last quarter of the 19th century. From 1867, the identification and exploitation of prolific deposits of diamonds in the rural interior near Kimberley in the Cape Colony and of gold on the Witwatersrand in the Transvaal in 1886 catapulted South Africa out of an isolated rural backwater into the turbulent torrents

* Salesian, Rector, Chaplain of Salesian School - Chertsey (England).

¹ Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide Archive (SCPF) NS vol. 97 p. 174.

of the the world economy.² A rapid acceleration of the pace of social change resulted from the prospect of the vast wealth and profits to be made there and the increasing levels of immigration from overseas and from Africa itself as far north as the Limpopo. Coupled with this economic development, the gradual subjugation of the various native African kingdoms received an added impetus from these discoveries which were largely made on traditionally native lands. Griqualand West including Kimberley was incorporated into the Cape Colony in 1868 with Basutoland. Arguably when Cecil Rhodes and others «bought» native lands in Southern Africa, since the concept of land ownership was totally foreign to the chiefs or kings involved, they thought that what they were being offered was tribute for being allowed to graze cattle and sheep which was a common enough custom for the native peoples. Their surprise may be judged by their shock when the white men suddenly began to put up fences and exclude all the other graziers and demanded that share croppers begin to pay a hut tax. Occasionally this led to war but the famous Zulu victory at Isadhlwana in 1879, where a force of 7,000 British regular troops and 8,000 colonial levies were surrounded and completely defeated by the Zulu warriors was only a prelude to the complete destruction of the Zulu kingdom and the harnessing of its manpower for the developing labour force of the new mining industry.

The white, Afrikaner speaking, largely rural population had its own distinctive social, economic and religious culture which traced its origins to the Dutch and Huguenot immigrants of the 17th and 18th centuries. The Boers found themselves increasing isolated from, and at odds with, the newly arrived white English speaking town dwellers who were anxious to exploit the new economic possibilities, and happy to ignore if not actively despise the Boer farmers. Conflict between the two white groups arose especially when the new gold fields were found to be situated in the Transvaal Boer Republic. The infamous Jameson Raid in 1896 which attempted to destabilise Johannesburg and the Transvaal Republic arose from the strong desire of British imperialists like Cecil Rhodes, (a diamond millionaire who became Prime Minister of the Cape Colony), Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary and Sir Alfred Milner, Governor General of the Cape Colony to incorporate the Boer republics into the Union of South Africa.

This conflict came to a climax in the Anglo-Boer war 1899-1902 which ended in the defeat of the Boers and the incorporation of their territories: the Transvaal, the Orange Free State with the British Cape Colony and Natal into the self-governing Union of South Africa in 1909.

The black and coloured population of South Africa, some of whom had initially participated in the mining boom both as owners and workers soon found themselves relegated to a totally subordinate role by the combined force of the white settlers. As one historian put it,

² L. THOMPSON, *A History of South Africa, Revised edition*. Yale, 1995, p. 110.



«[...] perhaps the most fateful process of the period was the struggle that led to the racial structure of pre-industrial South-African society being applied to its mining industry. This was done by splitting the labour force between white workers with skilled or supervisory roles [...] and black workers devoid of the means to exercise skilled or supervisory roles [...] (thus) a precedent was established for structuring industry (and society) on racial lines throughout the region».³

The early Salesians were not unaware of the social context in which they had to work: *this population ...has made gigantic steps in the path of progress especially in the commercial field.* (Cape Town was fast becoming a major centre for the diamond industry). Fr Frederick Barni wrote in Feb 1897 and commented on his own contrasting situation:

«The present poverty which surrounds us does not frighten me: I walk over the diamond and gold mines and [...] The Salesians will seek to Christianise this material progress; they will lead this immense prosperity, these fabulous riches to a holy and a Christian end, and when we have a house well founded and organised here in Cape Town, it will be most easy for us, with the help which our house at London can give us, to spread ourselves into all the populous citites of South Africa».⁴

2. The Catholic context

Though Vasco da Gama had landed at the Cape and erected the famous Padroado cross in 1497, and probably had Mass celebrated, modern Catholicism was a late arrival in the Cape. It was only after the end of the Dutch administration and the end of British military administration that Catholicism was officially allowed to exist but the Catholics themselves remained a small minority among the white population which was overwhelmingly either Dutch Reformed, Lutheran or Anglican. When the first Vicar Apostolic Mgr. Slater was appointed during the Napoleonic wars he was not even allowed entry by the Dutch Reformed governor. However with the end of British Military Government in 1835, the appointment of the first resident Catholic Bishop Mgr Griffiths was made in 1837, and in 1847 the Cape was divided into two ecclesiastical districts: the Eastern vicariate based in Port Elizabeth and the Western vicariate in Cape Town. Catholics, however, always remained a small minority of the white population and retained that minority mentality in what was seen as a predominantly Protestant and anti-Catholic milieu. The vast majority of the clergy in the Western Vic-

³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, [Feb.] 1897, mc. 3216 D 7 - E 1.

«La presente povertà da cui sono attorniato non mi spaventa; passeggio sopra miniere di diamanti e d'oro [...]. I Salesiani cercheranno di cristianeggiare questo progresso materiale; dirigeranno queste immense proprietà, queste ricchezze favolose ad un fine santo, cristiano; e quando avremo una Casa ben soldata, organizzata qui in Capetown, ci sarà facilissimo, coll'aiuto che potrà darci la nostra Casa di Londra, di spargerci in tutte le popolose città dell'Africa Meridionale».

ariate were Irish ex-patriots, most educated at the College of Propaganda in Rome, and this only confirmed the sense of isolation and narrowing of horizons of a Church in a rapidly changing society. They made almost no attempt to begin mission schools for the predominantly non-Catholic coloured population, seeing this as beyond their scope.

In reply to a questionnaire on schools sent out by the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in 1897, the Bishop of Cape Town replied that he had 22 schools in all, with 1981 pupils of whom 989 were Catholic, 924 were non-Catholic, and 68 were infidel (probably Jews). In reply to a question about schools for black children he replied:

«No: it is not possible for us because of a lack of financial means.

In reply the Congregation commented: In second place the Sacred Congregation learns with displeasure that it is not possible for now, because of a lack of economic means for the Vicariate to proceed to the erection of separate schools for the blacks but it trusts that your Lordship will find a way to provide for the needs of Black Catholics with such prudence as is required by the circumstances of the place».⁵

In contrast the Bishop of the Eastern Vicariate who had 34 schools with 2480 pupils of whom 1330 were Catholics had 5 institutes and 6 schools for black children. In reply to the further question: how do the missionaries try to remove the aversion which is said to exist between europeans and blacks? The bishop of Cape Town said that:

«It is said that this aversion is not so much a question of prejudice, but rather is based on this (and it is well said) that non-Catholic blacks corrupt the morals and poison the values of European boys with the habits they have and that the disease of syphilis is common among the blacks».

His colleague in the Eastern Cape replied:

«Here a real positive aversion does not exist against the blacks but rather an insintinctive unwillingness to familiarise themselves with the blacks because of their customs and because of the fetid odour that comes from their skin. This repugnance the missionaries cannot overcome».⁶

⁵ SCPF NS vol. 97 757-9, 21.8.1897 Leonard to S.C., Non: nec est nobis possibile propter redditeru defectum.

Cong to Leonard: In secondo luogo apprende con dispiacere questa S.C. che non è possibile per le ristrettezze economiche del Vicariato procedere per ora all'erezione di missioni e scuole separate per i negri ma ha la fiducia nello zelo di V.S. che troverà modo di provvedere al bisogno dei Negri Cattolici con quella prudenza che è richiesta dalle circostanze del luogo.

⁶ SCPF NS vol. 97 p. 759 Leonard to S.C. dicendum «est hanc aversionem non tantum ex praejudie o vivi quantum ex hoc (quod bene notum est) quod negri acatholici [...] corrupe-runt more et nocent valetudinum puerorum europeanorum cum quibus consuetudinem. Habent mobus syphlicus vlade communus est inter nigros».

p. 740 Ugo Mac Sherry to S.C.: «Qui non esiste una reale positiva aversione contro i negri avvi soltanto un'istintiva ripugnanza a familiarizzarsi coi negri cagioopata dai loro sudici costumi e dal fetido odore che esce dalla loro pelle. Questa ripugnanza i missionari non possono togliere».

Non-Irish religious orders such as the French Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the German Trappists at Marianhill, the French Oblates of St Francis of Sales and the English Jesuits in Zambesi Province all made very significant contributions to the education and evangelisation of the native peoples but not in the Western Vicariate of the Cape itself.

At the time of the Salesian foundation, various contrasting estimates of the Catholic population are given in the correspondence for 1896 and 1897. According to Fr Barni out of a population of Cape Town of 75,000 only 5,000 were Catholics. However Bishop John Leonard's estimate is much more conservative. He reckoned that including children the Catholic population only amounted to 2,500.⁷ The white population of South Africa according to W. E. Brown had grown from 375,000 in 1875 to 630,000 in 1891 while the Catholic population of the Cape Town District never came to much more than 5%,⁸ which is closer to the bishop's estimate. Either way the Catholic Church was limited to a small community of mostly new immigrants, including some Portuguese and Italian fishermen as well as British and Irish immigrants. However, given the growth of the colony and the opportunities available to Catholics under Liberal British rule, there were already some eminent men among them including lawyers such as the Hon. Alexander Wilmot, a Scot, and member of the Cape Parliament and later Senator, who pioneered a Bill making the sale of intoxicants to Africans illegal and who was charged by Bishop Leonard with inviting the Salesians to Cape Town. Others such as G. O'Reilly, another lawyer who later represented the Salesians as well as J. Nannuci, an Italian businessman, and J. G. O'Malley, chairman of the Cape Town Gas company. They were all successful Catholic citizens and all of them helped the Salesians in their hour of need.

Bishop John Leonard was born in Dublin in 1829, he studied for the priesthood at Maynooth College. After ordination he served as a military chaplain and then as a curate in a Dublin parish where he acted as chief agent for the Vicar Apostolic of Cape Town, having a reputation as a successful fundraiser. His appointment as Vicar Apostolic of the Western District on 1st Oct 1872 can be seen as part of the wider plan of Cardinal Paul Cullen (1803-1878), the masterful Archbishop of Dublin and successful founder of the Irish College, to promote Irish clergy to high office all across the English speaking world.⁹ Bishop Leonard succeeded Mgr Ricards as Vicar Apostolic of the Western Vicariate in 1872 and served there till his death in 1908. He was assisted by Bishop John Rooney as his auxiliary from 1886, for reasons of health, but, perhaps, more significantly he

⁷ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, Feb. 1897, mc. 3216 D 7 - E 1, estimates 5,000 while Cape Town Archbishops Archive box 25, Bishop John Leonard's Letter Book vol. 9, 1893-1902 Bp. Leonard to Durando, 28.7.1896: «It may be well to mention that the Catholic population of Cape Town does not exceed 2,500 including children».

⁸ W. E. BROWN, *The Catholic Church in South Africa*. Cape Town, 1960.

⁹ W. J. DICKSON, *The Dynamics of Growth*. Roma, 1991, p. 37ff.

continued to control the finances of the diocese till his dying day. It is estimated that he raised £16,000 for his diocese between 1879 and 1889. In 1908, Bishop Rooney writing to Don Rua to explain why the Mission could not contribute to the cost of building the Institute, remarked that unlike any other diocese in Southern Africa not one of the diocesan properties was mortgaged, due to his predecessor's careful financial management. Disputes with his clergy over their pay led W. E. Brown, a noted historian of the South African Church to write that:

«It is very likely that some clergy thought John Leonard too much of an accountant in the diocese».¹⁰

It also has to be said that in his latter years Bishop Leonard seemed to suffer from considerable and painful ill health which no doubt did little to soften his temper or extend his patience, as evidenced in his first interview with Fr Barni.¹¹ In his favour, it also has to be said that by 1885 his clergy had increased by five to 21, of whom 2 were South African born, the number of churches had increased by 8 and the parochial schools by 10. During his episcopate he had introduced the Sisters of Nazareth who founded an Orphanage, the Dominican Sisters who had a pioneering School for the Deaf and the Marist Brothers who had founded a Boys Secondary school.

In a wider context, in 1891 Bishop Leonard suggested to the Prefect of Propaganda that they should call a meeting of all the Bishops and Mission Superiors of Southern Africa and various priests to discuss the needs of the missions. The meeting was finally convoked for the 3rd Dec 1895 and was attended by nearly all the bishops, and Mission superiors.

One of Bishop Leonard's own principal concerns was the lapsing of many Catholics into Protestantism due to mixed marriages.¹² The decisions of the conference varied from asking Propaganda to create a Bishop for the Jesuit mission in the Zambesi region (modern Zimbabwe) to asking for an indult that would allow Catholics not to fast on St Patrick's day even though it fell in Lent. One can see the concerns of Bishop Leonard at work in another main decision of the conference which was to forbid mixed marriages (Catholic/Protestant) from being solemnised during Mass or for the couple to receive a solemn blessing.¹³ These characteristically Irish concerns highlight the outlook and concerns of one of the foremost leaders of the South African Church.

¹⁰ W. E. BROWN, *The Catholic...*

¹¹ ASC F 419, Barni to Rua, 30.12.1896, mc. 3216 C 11 - D 6.

«Lunedì finalmente ho potuto avere un abboccamento con Mons. Leonard, il quale è infermo, in campagna [...]. Dopo aver adempiuto alle dovute etichette Mons. Leonard, il quale sembrava molto sofferente, mi domandò perché non avessi portato con me le macchine ed attrezzi necessari per la fondazione di una stamperia, legatoria e falegnameria».

¹² SCPF NS 97 p. 161, Leonard to S.C., 25.4.1891.

¹³ SCPF NS vol. 97 p. 171ff.

It was this masterful cleric, well connected through the Irish College and the College of Propaganda with officials in Rome who in 1895 and 1896 used all the not inconsiderable influence at his disposal to secure a Salesian foundation in Cape Town. Both Cardinal Stampa, the Cardinal Protector of the Salesians, as well as eminent clergy like Bishop Strombino, Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern Cape and prominent laymen were persuaded to write to encourage a favourable response.¹⁴

3. The proposal

What exactly the bishop was proposing was not all that clear from the letter in both Italian and English which he entrusted to A.Wilmot dated 12 Aug 1895:

«If the Superior General is pleased to accept these conditions and to accede to my desire of beginning the work here in 1896 if possible,
 1. A priest of their congregation will not be absolutely necessary in the beginning although one priest of the Society would be desirable.
 2. There should be a brother capable of directing a small printing press. It will be his work to direct all the business of the Press, not only that but also to educate young scholars in that particular art».¹⁵

Two features about this request seem somewhat strange: firstly, that a priest is not necessary – this suggests that like many Irish bishops, Bishop Leonard was somewhat suspicious of religious orders of pontifical right (clerical religious) who might not be totally under the control of the diocesan bishop. The fact that religious priests could not be assigned to different missions by the local bishop without the Provincial's consent was seen as conferring a very significant level of independence. The Irish Bishops tended to be much more confident in dealing with orders of Brothers and Sisters who, as consecrated lay people, especially those of only diocesan right (e, g, the various branches of the Mercy Sisters) stood little chance against such clerical champions of the ultramontane school. Secondly, the Bishop's first priority was for the printing press and only incidentally it appears for the School of Arts and Trades for Orphans.

A further feature of the letter which is significant is the financial aspect which Bishop Leonard sets out in some detail:

«Now as to the means of support, at present the printing of our Catholic Magazine would probably bring in £200 or thereabouts per annum if the Salesian Brothers could undertake the printing of it. Job printing for the Mission and other parties would probably bring in £100 per annum.
 The male children in our Orphanage could be drafted to the Salesian Brothers as they become old enough to work, and as some of them would class as 'poor whites',

¹⁴ ASC F 419, (I) fondazione the letter of Cardinal Stampa is conserved.

¹⁵ Archives of the Archbishop of Cape Town (ACT) box 25, Bp. Leonard's Letter Book vol. 9, p. 139. Bp. Leonard to Wilmot 12.8.1895.

they would have a claim to get a grant from the education dept of £12 sterling per annum (for say about 12 boys) equals £144 per annum.

Then, if the boys were able to do work for the Mission buildings in the way of repairs this would bring in some small return.

So I think I may safely say that the various sources of income just referred to would amount to at least £440 per annum and probably exceed that within the course of a year or so [...].

To get the government grant for a trade school for poor whites, of course, there should be at least one brother fully qualified to teach the ordinary branches of an English Elementary school and probably some sort of Certificate of Capacity would be required».¹⁶

Some features of these provisions seem extremely hypothetical «the printing of the Catholic Magazine would probably bring in £200 or thereabouts»; the priority the Bishop gave to the work of the Press, rather than to the education of the orphans, «the male children of our Orphanage could be drafted in [...]», should have set warning bells ringing for those undertaking this new educational foundation. The objections of the Salesian Superiors were however, all overridden in Bishop Leonard's letter to Fr Durando of July 8th 1896:

«[...] I could not think of having support guaranteed for the proposed 100 intern boarders, as the Catholic community could never contribute funds for such a large work of charity.

4. We have at present an orphanage with nearly 100 children male, and female, and that is at present as much as the Catholics can support».

He repeated his conditions from his previous letter:

«In my letter of the 12th of August last year [...] I fully explained my views and the support I hoped for and I am still willing to abide by them. They are substantially as follows:

1. that the Institute should begin in a small way and work quietly for three years in the premises I have at my disposal for it.
2. that the increase of support must be derived from the work done in the trades of bookbinding and printing principally, assisted by an allowance from the education department viz. A grant for the support of poor destitute white children. If the conditions required by the Government Education Department can be complied with, the assistance given for the support of the teachers of the various trades mentioned above and for the support of the poor destitute white children is fairly liberal [...].
3. If, therefore, a Carpenter, printer and bookbinder with the Superior and one capable of teaching English would commence the work in the present premises and say with 10 to 12 poor boys of an age to learn one or another of the above trades in October next I shall be willing to guarantee £500 towards increasing the present accommodation in the present premises before the end of the present year in such a manner as may be decided by the local superior [...].

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

4. It may be well to mention that the Catholic population of Cape Town does not exceed 2,500 including children so that the means of support must come from some other source as they are burdened previously with the support of their priests, orphanage and Catholic schools [...].

N.B. the Government will not give any aid at present towards the support of any industrial school for coloured children in Cape Town or the neighbourhood».¹⁷

It should have been clear from the very beginning that the Salesians were going to have a considerable financial struggle to survive and that they could expect little or no help from the diocesan authorities.

Another feature of this correspondence that was to assume considerable social significance for the Salesian was a notable if not unrelated change in the bishop's programme of those who were to be admitted to the trade school. In the earlier letter the bishop allows that

«as some of them would class as "poor whites" they would have a claim to get a grant from the education department [...].»

By the second letter his views are much more hard line:

«N.B. the Government will not give any aid at present towards the support of any industrial school for coloured children in Cape Town or the neighbourhood».¹⁸

The social structure of South African society, based as it was on racial supremacy undoubtedly affected the nature of the intake of pupils from the very beginning. This must be seen as a very significant first step which compromised the Salesian work in Cape Town for the next 50 years.

4. The Salesian context

Under Fr Michael Rua who was Rector Major from 1888 till 1910, the Salesians experienced a vast expansion of their work worldwide. When Don Bosco died in 1888, the Salesians numbered 773 confreres in 57 houses working in ten countries. When Don Rua died in 1910 the Salesians numbered about 4000 professed members in 341 houses in 39 countries as far apart as Bolivia, India and China. In Africa itself, the Salesian work was begun in Algeria in 1891, in Tunisia in 1894, and in Egypt in 1896.¹⁹ This expansion involved Don Rua in a vast correspondence encouraging, inspiring and supporting many of the individual Salesians involved and raising the vast amounts of finance necessary to facilitate their work.²⁰ Don Rua invited Don Federico Barni to lead the foundation

¹⁷ ACT: box 25, Bp Leonard to Durando, 28.7.1896; *Ibid.*, Bp Leonard's Letter book vol. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ G. ROCCA, *Dizionario degli Istituti di perfezione*. Vol. VIII. Roma, 1988, p. 1690ff.

²⁰ W. J. DICKSON, *The dynamics...*, p. 132ff.

in Cape Town. He was born in Vignale (AI) on 19.1.1868, entered the Salesian College of Borgo San Martino in 1881 and became a Salesian at San Benigno Canavese, taking perpetual vows in 1885 and was ordained priest in 1891.²¹ He was then sent to Battersea where he helped in the teaching of music. That Barni was something of an optimist is clear from some of the comments recorded above.²² He evidently saw the connection with the Battersea House as the source of the personnel who could lead the expansion of the work for young people right across the populous cities of South Africa. What he had not reckoned with was the redoubtable figure of Bishop John Leonard.

Their first interview, even in the muted version Barni conveyed to Don Rua appears frosty, to say the least. Writing on the 30th Dec 1896 Barni says:

«On Monday, I was finally able to have an interview with Mgr. Leonard, who is ill in the country [...] After the appropriate formalities, Mgr. Leonard, who seemed to be in much pain asked me why I had not brought with me the machinery and the other things necessary for the foundation of the printing press, the bindery and the carpenter's shop? I replied that we did not know that the Orphanage entrusted to the Salesians would be so completely deprived of the basic essentials. His Excellency then replied: "But it seems to me that my letters made it fairly clear: that is, that I should assume the burden of paying the expenses for the journey of 5 Salesians from London to Cape Town"; moreover, that he would give £100 sterling (which in fact he has already sent) for installing the press [...]; £50 for the buying of beds [...] etc and £500 sterling over time for the expansion and improvement of the institute itself. His Excellency calculates that my failure to bring the machinery will hold back our work among this people for six months. The two houses are only fit to accommodate 15 boys».²³

Three months later Fr Barni was much more graphic about the state of the two houses on Buitenkampnt St on their arrival and in a forthright letter to Bishop Leonard highlights the difficulties the Salesians faced:

«Our reception here was a disgrace to a civilised country [...] We were taken to premises that would have put the slums of London to the blush [...] with dirty ne-

²¹ ASC confratelli defuncti.

²² See footnote 2 above.

²³ ASC F 419, Barni to Rua, in the fondo don Rua mc. 3216 C 11 - D 6.

«Lunedì... falegnameria» [v. nota 11].

«Risposi che non sapevamo se l'Orfanotrofio ceduto ai Salesiani fosse di già provvisto delle cose necessarie. Sua Eccellenza allora soggiunse: ma mi pare, che le mie lettere fossero abbastanza chiare; che cioè, io mi assumeva l'onore di pagare le spese di viaggio per 5 Salesiani da Londra a Capetown; di più, che dava, come di fatto ho già mandato, 100 sterline per l'impianto della stamperia, o meglio per concorrere all'impianto di essa; 50 sterline per la compra di letti, mobiglie etc.; e 500 sterline da spendersi col tempo per ampliare e migliorare l'Istituto medesimo.

S. E. fece poi il calcolo che questo far venire dopo le macchine, farà ritardare di sei mesi il nostro lavoro fra questa popolazione [...]. Le due Casette sono capaci di alloggiare soltanto 15 giovani».



glected rooms, a filthy yard and not even a stone whereon to lay our heads. But this was bearable with peace. Yet even this small comfort was denied us, for we were railed at for not coming with a ship fully freighted with machines, beds, pots, kettles and brooms. This throws a dark shadow over that cordial welcome to the shores of South Africa, or the rest of the promises so sadly misinterpreted [...].²⁴

This led to a tart response from Bishop John Rooney, the coadjutor conveying Mgr. Leonard's displeasure:

«In reply to your letter of the 1st inst. His Lordship Dr Leonard desires me to state that from the tone and spirit of your letters he thinks it improbable that harmonious relations can be maintained between this mission and your community. In these circumstances he therefore thinks it best that our relations should cease. A passage will be purchased for you and the other members (4) of your Institute by the Trojan. She is advertised to leave next week, about the 11th».²⁵

By then, however, Barni had already taken in several boys: a boy of ten whose mother had died and who was abandoned by his father and taken in by his protestant uncle and two from the sisters of Nazareth. His idea was to help his three coadjutor confreres to learn English by working with the boys. Bro. Daniele Della Casa,²⁶ the printer, had to do duty as cook, since they had no printing press to work, while Ignazio Rametti had more chance as a carpenter of getting started, there is no specific mention of Carlo Fea, the book binder, in this early correspondence.²⁷

This development highlighted the awful financial situation the community was in. Barni had accepted children and still had no definite means of maintaining himself, the community or the boys. He was concerned that the Bishop by his guile was taking advantage of the Salesians. Not only were they expected to bring the full printing press with them and all the tools and materials necessary for the workshops, they were going to have to pay rent on the property they were using as soon as the first three years had passed. Barni had a cautionary tale to tell Don Rua:

²⁴ ACT box 25, Bp. Leonard's Letter book vol. 9: Barni to Leonard, 1.3.1897.

²⁵ ACT box 25, Bp. Rooney to Barni, 3.3.1897.

²⁶ Coadjutor Daniele Della Casa was born at Genova 14.3.1872 became a novice at S. Benigno, and was professed 9.9.1894 and made his final vows 22.9.1896. He left from Cape Town 8.11.1906.

Coadjutor Ignazio Rametti was born at Giveno, Torino 9.8.1876 was a novice at S. Benigno and made his final vows 22.9.1896 he left from Cape Town 9.2.1903.

Coadjutor Carlo Fea was born at Torino 23.10.1871 was a novice at S. Benigno, he made his first vows 11.9.1891 and his final vows at Turin 19.11.1896. He left from Cape Town 9.2.1902.

²⁷ ASC F 419, Barni to Rua, 10.2.1897, mc. 3216 E 6/11.

«Ho già accettato tre giovani. Uno di 10 anni orfano di madre, abbandonato dal padre, nelle mani di uno zio protestante. È cresciuto alla carlona. Ho già accettato gli altri due giovani dalle Suore di Nazareth; uno per il falegname Rametti, e l'altro per Della Casa il quale, benché non volentieri, per adesso, si adatta a far da cuoco. Così i nostri tre confratelli Coadiutori essendo in contatto con giovani che parlano inglese impareranno questa lingua più facilmente».

«Permit me to illustrate historically the guile (furbizia) of this bishop. The Sisters of Nazareth who were established here in these two houses in 1882 were moved by the bishop in 1883 to a new house capable of holding 130 children. The house was bought by the Mgr. The Superior General believed for many years that the house had been a free gift to them for their good work; but instead when she tried to take (legal) possession on behalf of the Sisters, the bishop changed his mind [...] The Mother General finished then by buying it and paying the accumulated interest. This is a historical fact, which was told me in minute detail by the Superior here. I assure you the bishops here are very sly».²⁸

A further aspect of this initial crisis was the conflict over the terms of the contract. On Feb 24th 1897, Barni wrote to the bishop setting out his understanding of the conditions on which the Salesians were undertaking their work. The key terms seem to be that in the internal working of the community they were to be free from all unreasonable interference on the part of his Lordship the bishop with freedom to accept or refuse subjects. That a 7 year lease be granted for the present premises starting in 1900 at 5% of its value and that debts contracted by the Salesians due to delay of the settlement terms be not laid to our account.²⁹

²⁸ ASC F 419, Barni to Rua, 10.2.1897, mc. 3216 E 6/11.

«Permetta che illustri storicamente la furbizia di questo Vescovo. Le Suore di Nazareth che si stabilirono qui in queste due Casette nel 1882, furono trasportate nel 1883 da Monsignore Vescovo in un'altra casa, capace di 130 fanciulli. Casa comperata da Monsignore. La Superiora Generale si credeva per molti anni che la Casa fosse stata senz'altro donata dal Vescovo a loro per far del bene; invece quando si trattò di possesso fa parte delle Suore, il Vescovo saltò [...]. La Madre Generale finì poi di comperarla, però cogli interessi accumulati. È un fatto storico e mi fu minutamente raccontato dalla Madre qui delle Suore. [...]. L'assicuro che i Vescovi sono molto furbi».

²⁹ ACT box 25, Barni to Leonard, 24.2.1897.

«Before the Salesians commence their work here I think it absolutely necessary that we understand each other also by written word in order to avoid any future misunderstanding as has been the case at the very outset of this undertaking [...].

Conditional understanding on which the Salesian Institute was begun in Cape Town AD 1897

I. that in the internal government and working of our community in accordance with our constitutions we be free from all unreasonable interference on the part of his Lordship the Bishop;

1. to the acceptance or refusal of contracts
2. the setting of charges for work done
3. the receiving or refusing of subjects
4. the acceptance of vocations for the Salesian Society
5. the altering of premises to suit our convenience
6. the liberty to change our residence if lease stated below be not granted

II. that the premises at present occupied by us be leased to us for a term of seven (7) years. The said lease to begin on Jan 1st 1900 with power to renew the same on expiration of the seven (7) years

III. that the premises be leased at a yearly rent represented by 5% on present value

IV. that we be empowered to buy the said premises if thought desirable on expiration of the lease at price to be determined by present valuation as per town council

The Bishop replied in no uncertain terms refusing to accept any terms except those contained in his letters to the Superior General.³⁰ A few weeks later after an apology from Don Rua for Barni's letter of protest, Bishop Leonard issued his own *Rules for the Admissions of Boys to the Salesian Institute* claiming an almost absolute control over the entry and what fees he was prepared to pay to keep them until the Institute should have been placed under the Colonial Education department.³¹ Not without reason, Barni describes Bishop Leonard as «il superiore e padrone» or *Boss* of our Institute.

What we witness here is the clash of two diverse ecclesiastical cultures, the Irish (once removed), ultramontane, absolutist, and clerical where the Bishop was Lord and Master of all he surveyed and where religious orders were merely dutiful servants of his ecclesiastical will, and a more complex European culture

V. this purchase to exclude all expenditure on additions cleared by funds subscribed by the people in our name

VI. that with the advent of destitute children application be made for government aid

VII. debts contracted by us due to delay of settlement terms be not laid to our account

VIII. meeting of the members of the mission be called to give support for the beginning of our work

IX. free to receive donations from charitable persons

X. further that in case circumstances should lead us into pecuniary difficulties appeal again be made to the people».

³⁰ ACT box 25, Bp Rooney to Barni, 26.2.1897.

³¹ ACT box 25, 13.3.1897.

«13th march 1897

Rules for the admissions of boys into the Salesian Institute Cape Town from 1st April 1897 until the Institute shall have been placed under the Colonial Education Dept.

1. that no boy shall be admitted who is not really destitute and who from his circumstances will be entitled to a grant from the Educational department in the school manual 1895.
2. that the consent of the Bishop or his Coadjutor shall be obtained by the Superior before any boy is admitted.
3. that the first 25 places be reserved for boys from within the jurisdiction of the Bishop.
4. the boys of the Nazareth House Orphanage over 12 years of age are to have precedence over all other applications unless the Bishop or his Coadjutor decide otherwise.
5. that no boy be admitted before his 12th year have been completed or after he has completed his 15th year.
6. that the number of boys received not exceed 20 for this present year.
7. that as soon as the additional workshops and dormitories are completed this number of boys be increased to 50 -25 of whom any be for any place outside the jurisdiction of the bishop provided the Ecclesiastical superior of the district become responsible for the support of each boy received by the annual pension of £12 paid quarterly in advance. £5 entrance fee and travelling expenses at a rate of £1 per hundred miles.
8. [...] accurate accounts of all receipts every 6 months.

Should the preceding conditions be faithfully observed the Bishop will undertake to pay the following sums until the grant can be obtained from the Educational Dept. Cape Town.

a) £5 as entrance fee.

b) £3 per quarter for boys from his jurisdiction.

c) £12.10 per quarter for the superior and each of the 4 brothers at present in Cape Town».

where differing jurisdictions between bishops and regulars coexisted in what might be described as a creative tension.

The news that the superiors would dispatch the Printing press from Europe which was posted at the end of March³² and the Bishop's disposition to pay towards the keep of the Institute's pupils until the government grants arrived, coupled with the gradual increase of the number of boys (including it would seem several from the Dominican Sisters school for the deaf), staved off for the moment the complete breakdown of the situation but did not resolve the underlying issues which were only postponed to a later date. Interestingly, even at this early date, the question of working for black (or more correctly coloured) children was being raised. In Nazareth House at this stage there were coloured as well as white orphans but the Bishop had very clear ideas about why it would be impossible for the Salesians to take them:

«I'll tell you then that it is impossible to accept black youngsters because on the one hand, the government will only pay subsidies for the whites and on the other as Mgr says these black youngsters are immoral to a degree, which is hardly conceivable. If we want in time to work for the blacks then we would need a separate house for them».³³

Barni unconsciously reported Mgr. Leonard's prejudices further when he wrote:

«He added that the Blacks are burdened with disgusting and contagious diseases because, the Bishop says, of the way they live. He says this because among the boys and girls of the Orphanage of the Sisters of Nazareth their mortality rate is very high. They take both blacks and whites and they must do so because they live only on public subscription. But we will have time, later, to deal with this question; for now, we have the new Institute exclusively for Whites to put on a solid basis with the help of God».³⁴

³² ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 31.3.1897, mc. 3217 C 12 - D 9.

«La ringrazio di tutto cuore della buona notizia che ci ha mandato, che cioè si provvederanno da costì le macchine per la tipografia, e le altre cose necessarie per i laboratori. [...]. Le Suore Domenicane poi tengono una scuola mista di sordo-muti. La Rev.^{da} Maestra avrebbe 3 giovani in sui 15 anni».

³³ *Ibid.*

«Le dirò poi che sarà impossibile di accettare giovani *negri*, sia perché il Governo darà sussidio per soli Bianchi, e sia anche come dice Monsignore, perché questi Negri sono *immorali* ad un grado quasi inconcepibile! Se vorremo col tempo prenderci cura dei Negri, dovremo avere *Una Casa* apposta per loro».

³⁴ *Ibid.*

«Aggiunga che i Negri, a causa del modo in cui vivono, sono carichi, dice il Vescovo, di malattie schifose e contagiose. Questo spiega perché fra i giovanetti, e giovanette dell'Orfanotrofio delle Suore di Nazareth, la mortalità sia sì numerosa. Esse accettano bianchi e Neri; e devono farlo perché vivono solo della pubblica elemosina. Ma avremo poi tempo a trattare questo soggetto, per ora abbiamo il nuovo Istituto per Bianchi esclusivamente da mettere su solide basi coll'aiuto di Dio».

Sadly the tendency was already established to compromise on what was to become the critical issue in South Africa's modern development. The question of race was left for a much later generation to face when Apartheid had become fixed in the legal system.

5. The educational context

From the Dutch Reformed church tradition in the Cape, the importance of elementary education so that «the bible should be read by all» was an established principle from the beginning, with the consequent appointment of schoolmasters attached to each Church. With the arrival of the British civilian administration in 1835, there was clear pressure to maintain the religious Dutch Reform «status quo» while allowing the development of both Anglican and even Catholic schools.

With the Education Act of 1895 the principle of state subsidy for education was clearly set out, but this was qualified in the multi-denominational situation of the Cape by the idea of non-denominational religious education. In State schools, in principle it was permitted for clergy of different denominations to come into school to offer their children religious education. But if the Church wished to maintain its own schools then it could only receive state subsidy provided the religious education was «non-denominational». Because the Superintendent General of Education in the Cape, Dr Muir, was anxious to encourage all educational efforts given the shortage of schools, Bishop Leonard was able to negotiate a compromise whereby the Catholic Schools in his diocese offered basic Christian bible-based education including worship etc during the school day but specifically doctrinal content outwith those hours. This allowed the Catholic Elementary schools in Cape Town and more significantly the Mission Schools elsewhere to be supported by government subsidy.

The education system developed in the Cape in the late 19th century looked to Scotland for its model. There was a single continuous system of elementary and secondary education starting at Standard I and going all the way to Standard X from which students could proceed to University. Each year, every school had examinations for every student held by an Inspector to see whether they could be promoted to the next standard and the inspectors were free to visit schools unannounced as often as they wished. Ideally the standards started at age 7 but there were two preliminary stages Sub-standard A and sub-standard B, which correspond to our Infant school. The system was focussed on providing primarily a literary and mathematical education. Schools were divided into First, Second and Third class Government schools and similar Mission schools depending on how many of the standards they could provide.

The foundation of the Salesian Institute as a School of Arts and Trades brought into the South African education system something that was common in

Italy but a very new concept in the Cape. In December 1902 at the Institute's Prize Giving, Dr Muir, the Superintendent General of Education in the Colony was reported as making the following interesting comments:

«Dr Muir said that he was struck by the note in the report where the Superior said they viewed education from four different points, viz. Physical, Moral, intellectual, and aesthetic. That was the grand ideal they had to look to and he hoped that it would long continue to be the ideal of this country in the matter of education. There were far too many who looked upon education as merely a matter of books and books alone. If they had only that ideal they should put it to one side, for people were not likely to prosper in after life through it. The superior said that it was their desire to make physical education the mainstay of the institute and he (Dr Muir) thought that it not merely physical training for the body but manual training should form a part of every boy's education. The difference between the ordinary public school and that institution was the word, which applied to the latter, viz. the word "industry". There must always be in a proper system of education a class of schools for a particular class of children who had nothing but work to look forward to in later life. The boys received in that institute often had neither father nor mother and it was greatly to the credit of the Roman Catholic Church that she saw her duty in that respect to provide for the future education of boys of that type. Up to a comparatively recent date in this country they had no such school and when the Education Act was passed no-body dreamt of such a school as that. Probably it was because the population was of such a class as not to require much education. But now with the growth of large towns, the teaching of all industries is necessary. Through careless and thriftless parents, boys of that class were always to be found in crowded towns and the Church stepped forward and made provision for them. He thought it was as much the business of the state as it was of the Church and if the state did not do so it was neglecting one of its duties. After the question had been raised in 1883, a scheme was drawn up whereby it was possible to assist an institute like that. [...] It was filling a gap in our education system, and it was supervised by earnest and devoted men who deserved every assistance [...]» (19th Dec 1902) Report in the Cape Times and Cape Argus.³⁵

Although there were clearly difficulties in introducing a different type of «industrial» education the authorities were far from being unable to appreciate it.

The Register of Marks for the pupils at the Salesian Institute is extant and appears to cover the whole period 1896-1928. However, it appears that there is some duplication among the early records and their entry dates do not appear to be consecutive. One might therefore conclude that this register was copied from earlier records and may not be comprehensive or all that accurate. What can be gathered from the names in the register is that there was a gradual expansion of numbers in the first five years rising from 2 students who were examined in 1898 to the thirty-two who were examined in 1902 with a fall back to sixteen in 1903.³⁶

³⁵ SDB Cape Town (CT) Archives: Institute House chronicle includes this newspaper cutting.

³⁶ SDB CT Archives: Salesian Institute, Cape Town, Marks Register 1906-1928.

According to Bishop Leonard's Rules, the first 25 boys were supposed to be drafted from Nazareth House, Cape Town, to the Salesian Institute. In the early years the Salesians also seem to have accepted children from other sources as Fr Barni suggested including the other Nazareth House orphanages elsewhere in South Africa and the Dominican Sisters school for the deaf in Cape Town. Fr Barni wrote to Fr Durando on May 5th 1897:

«I have accepted a young black boy from the sisters of Nazareth for the kitchen. Because he is black he cannot learn the trades which we have and also because the Bishop will not pay the stipend which he pays for the other boys who are white. For now only 6 of the 11 youngsters whom we have are able to occupy themselves during the day in some useful manual labour, the others have a little school. Now there is a question: It seems that the Rev Sister, Headmistress of the Deaf and Dumb Catholics of this city has three fifteen year old boys she wants me to accept as soon as possible. Our trade masters object for the following reasons:

- a) the difficulty of teaching a trade to a deaf and dumb child in the English language.
- b) the difficulty of keeping order in a workshop where there are deaf and dumb pupils.
- c) Neither at Turin or San Pier d'Arena, nor in any other house of the congregation do they accept them.

Therefore this is apparently contrary to the scope of our work?».³⁷

In fact there were by 1909, 11 deaf pupils being paid for by the government subsidy according to Fr Tozzi.³⁸

6. The pupils' social background

The Register of Children vol.1 at Nazareth House Cape Town gives some details as to where the children come from, Christian name, date of birth, parents names, profession of father, date of admission and dismissal and person recommending the child, and any remarks e.g. father died, both parents dead, father a

³⁷ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 5.5.1897, mc. 3217 D 10 - E 5.

«Ho poi preso dalle Suore di Nazareth un giovane *nero* per la cucina. Perché *nero* non potrebbe apprendere nessun dei mestieri che vi saranno, e così il Vescovo non pagherebbe la pensione per questo giovane, che pagò per gli altri giovani *bianchi*. Per adesso, soltanto 6 degli 11 giovani ch'abbiamo, possono occuparsi durante la giornata in qualche utile lavoro manuale; per gli altri si fa un po' di scuola. [...] Ora poi c'è una questione. Si tratta che la Rev. Suora, Maestra dei Sordo-Muti, Cattolici di questa Città, avrebbe *tre* giovani in sui quindici anni, che vorrebbe chi io accettassi appena avremo posto.

I nostri Capi d'Arte obbietano all'accettazione di questi tre Sordo-Muti basati un queste ragioni:

- a) difficoltà d'insegnare un mestiere a sordo-muti nella lingua Inglese.
- b) difficoltà di mantenere ordine nei laboratori, ove vi sono anche sordo-muti.
- c) non si accettano sordo-muti, né a Torino, né a San Pier d'Arena né in altra Casa della Congregazione.

Questo quindi è apparentemente contrario al nostro scopo».

³⁸ ASC F 419, Istituto Salesiano al Capo di Buona Speranza, 1909, mc. 3224 A 7/10.

Catholic, which would explain to some extent the children being accepted in the Orphanage.

If we take the names that correspond as a guide we can see that the boys at the Institute were from destitute or broken families. In fact, in order to receive Government subsidy a child had to have two certificates signed, one by a magistrate and one by a clergyman, to show they were destitute. (See the terms of the Education Regulations 1895, Cape Colony).

Unfortunately the Sister's register at this date does not give any clear details of where the boys went to on their leaving the Sisters care.

In the early years there is clearly some movement of the boys from Nazareth house to the Salesian Institute. Since education was neither free nor compulsory, a secondary education lasting 4 or 5 years was a very considerable investment. Even though the technical education offered was not very prestigious nonetheless it was a considerable step up for destitute children with no home or prospects. Hence it is not altogether surprising that not all the boys from Nazareth House did come to the Institute.

One of the most significant of the arrivals of the early years was Victor Clitheroe who was born according to the Nazareth house register in India in August 1895, though the Salesian story is that he was born at sea. In the Salesian register he was born in 1896. His father was a circus man and appears to have been unable to look after his children with his constantly moving lifestyle. Victor was admitted twice to Nazareth house and left in 1909. He appears first at the Institute in 9.5.1911 where he stayed all his life becoming a Salesian coadjutor and working there all his days.

Boys tended to enter the Institute at 12 and spent four to five years there. The training consisted of main elementary school subjects: English, Afrikaans, Maths and RE and then workshop skills in printing, or book binding, or carpentry, or shoemaking or tailoring.

What is clear from the Nazareth House Cape Town Disposal Book dating from 1936 is that by that time nearly all the boys from Nazareth house went either to the Institute or to the later foundation the Salesian Farm School at Lansdowne, outside Cape Town.

7. State Statistics

In the Cape Colony Education Reports to Parliament from 1898-1905 the results of the students in the annual government Inspector's exam were published. In these years the numbers of pupils from the Institute taking the exams increased and the numbers passing overall rose to about 2/3 presented. Further the scope of the school extended as far as Standard VII.

From 1906 the reduction of the level of detail in the government statistics makes it impossible to accurately distinguish the results of the Institutes students

from others in a similar category of school. However under the statistics for Industrial schools we now have the official statistics of the numbers of pupils undertaking a particular trade. These statistics show a steady growth of the number of pupils in the years up to 1921 and the relative strength of the various trades.

The only other industrial school offering to teach printing was the Lovedale Institute maintained by the United Free Church of Scotland for coloured pupils, about 800 miles north of Cape Town. It was founded in 1843 as a Mission school which would aim at preparing natives both for the Ministry and for useful and practical work in the mission, hence the printers trained could help with the Lovedale Press. But as well as the elementary school there was a trade school where candidates could be apprenticed for five years to learn printing, carpentry, shoe making and wagon building and a theological college where students studied philosophy and theology in preparation for ordination as ministers in Church.³⁹

In 1882 in the Eastern Cape, near Uitenhage, at an estate called Dunbrody, the Jesuits of the English Province took over an agricultural colony where the Marianhill Trappists had originally tried to found a monastery in 1879. They soon founded industrial schools for the children of the native African families who settled on the land. According to a letter from Senator Wilmot published in the Jesuit *Letters and Notices* in 1891,⁴⁰ after the elementary school work each day the boys were taught carpentry, building, leather craft and metalwork and horticulture by the Jesuit brothers. The girls in their school were taught needlecraft and domestic subjects. The agricultural colony became famous for its wine and brandy and the schools received government inspections and grants from 1891.⁴¹ Its existence seems to give the lie to Bishop Leonard's claims about the impossibility of obtaining a government grant for running a trade school for black children.

Technical education of the sort that was being offered at the Institute issued a challenge to at least two significant groups in the Cape. The Trade Unions with their traditional system of apprenticeship, which a youngster could not commence till he left school especially in the highly skilled printing trade, were not willing to take into consideration the workshop training the youngsters had received at the Institute. According to the House Chronicle one of the first two boys qualified at the Institute soon left the printing trade and the other found himself working in a hat shop.⁴²

Fr Tozzi later tried to remedy this in 1911 by persuading

³⁹ *Lovedale Bible College centenary publication*. Lovedale Press, 1943.

⁴⁰ *Letters and Notices vol. 1891-2*. Jesuit Press, Roehampton 1892, p. 479ff.

⁴¹ *Letters and Notices vol. XLVII*. Jesuit press, Roehampton 1932, p. 277ff.

⁴² SDB CT House Chronicle 24.2.1905.

«Much is done to settle our old boys out to work but much difficulty is met through bad times and the opposition from Union members so that L. Hardy gave up printing and accepted work at Jagger and W. Harry in a millinery shop».

«the chamber of commerce in conjunction with the masters of the various trades to control the trade teaching of our boys and award the certificates».⁴³

The problem was a perennial one.

In the Cape, as Bishop's Leonard's attitude shows, there was considerable prejudice. But, in particular, certain skilled trades were reserved to particular racial groups. Whites dominated the skilled trades, the Malays traditionally the building trade, brick laying and masonry. Hence an Institute offering to teach black children skilled trades was likely to raise considerable objections, particularly from whites who were close to the bottom of the economic pile (i.e. poor whites). The social function of the Institute, as we shall see, was clearly interpreted as a way of protecting the «poor whites» from the great mass of the unskilled (mostly coloured or black) labourers. The educational achievements of the Institute were not insignificant because the Salesians were seen to be offering what the Select Report on Education in 1907 was asking for:

«Your committee strongly recommends the development of agriculture and technical instruction in the ordinary public schools and the extension of such instruction through industrial schools and continuation schools and classes in both urban and rural districts where practical».⁴⁴

Perhaps the best indication of the social impact of the educational work of the Salesians in these early years comes from the annual Education Report to Parliament in 1920 in the section on industrial schools:

«For the poor white children a great and noble work is being done by the existing industrial schools for boys and girls [...] From the list handed to me, 13 are distinguished as industrial institutions, of these 4 have been established by the Dutch Reform Church, and have in attendance 317 pupils, 7 for girls. One institution for boys was established by the Roman Catholic Church and one by the Administration. In these 13 schools there are no less and 706 pupils. The boys receive day school instruction up to standard VI or even VII and learn the following trades: wagon making, cabinet making, shoemaking, tailoring etc.

Because the grants to industrial schools are not so large as those given to boarding houses for indigent scholars and because as a result of the late European war the prices of materials, food and clothing have risen abnormally high almost everyone of these schools notwithstanding wise economy in every department is more or less burdened with debt. That this is an undesirable state of affairs no one will deny who knows that the industrial schools are the best solution to the poor white problem.

And more good could be done by these schools could the Church, by following the example of the Anglican and Roman Catholic denominations appoint as Rectors or as staff of these schools some younger ministers who have a love for that work and who have been trained for that purpose».⁴⁵

⁴³ ASC F 419, printed material Curriculum 18.12.1911.

⁴⁴ Cape of Good Hope Select Committee Report on Education 1907.

⁴⁵ Cape Education Report 1920 p. 52ff. Industrial schools.

Since this report was written by an inspector who was also minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, it clearly says a good deal for the social and religious impact of the Institute on this particular field of education.

8. The financial crisis of 1901

The first news of the approaching bankruptcy of the Institute reached Turin in a letter to Fr Durando in February 1901. Fr Barni described how having looked at all the accounts books he found that the Institute was in a terrible financial state, being indebted to the tune of not less than £2,000 sterling. Local debts were also very great and nearly £500 in debt to the Oratory in Turin – none of which he could pay. Several factors seem to have accentuated the difficulty of his situation.

«This extremely long war which is still not finished has paralysed commerce and we suffer much in our offerings. I have found that some of the workshops, for instance shoemaking, do not make any money: they just lose it. The cash and the books have been neglected perhaps because Fr Giltenan has too much to do [...] The bishop is not a man who wants to help us out in a public way, so we must do everything ourselves».⁴⁶

In the Superior Chapter, Don Rua suggested that Fr Barni must make economies himself because in part it came from poor book keeping.⁴⁷

The unresolved problem of a secure financial basis for the foundation had not been improved by the growing numbers of boys (42) and the eight Salesians in residence and the already outstanding debts as well as the Bishop's demand for the rent of £120 p.a. Another important factor was the Boer War, which had pushed up prices and led to an overall loss of confidence and in turn to higher interest rates. Already in May 1900 Fr Barni had reported on the war and reflected the hopes of the British for a quick victory:

«The war, which has already gone on for six months, is coming to an end. General Roberts the Commander in chief with his army of 250,000 soldiers will ultimately be victorious, and if everything goes on like this the hostilities will soon be finished and the peace signed on solid terms. Peace will mean that to say that the English

⁴⁶ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 6.2.1901, mc. 3220 B 2/6.

«Abbiamo nientemeno che più di lire sterline 2.000 cioè oltre 50.000 franchi di debito. Debiti locali anche molto forti. Coll'Oratorio abbiamo oltre 13.000 franchi di debito, e mi si domanda almeno un acconto: ma non posso assolutamente mandare nulla. Questa lunghissima guerra, non ancora finita, ha paralizzato il commercio; e noi ne soffriamo anche molto nelle offerte. Ho trovato che qualche laboratorio es. gr. quello dei calzolaii, non solo non mi paga, ma non mi rende niente, ma vi ci perdo sopra. [...]. Gl'incassi, i libri furono neglimentati forse perché Don Giltinan aveva troppo da fare [...]. Il Vescovo non è uomo che voglia aiutarci in modo pubblico; bisogna che facciamo tutto da noi».

⁴⁷ ASC D 869, Verbalì vol. I, p. 188.

will have also the two Boer Republics, i.e. Orange Free State and the Transvaal: which is to say that all of South Africa up to the Zambesi will be English».⁴⁸

By March Barni reports 15 cases of bubonic plague in Cape Town and the impossibility of asking for alms.⁴⁹

On 1st June Barni wrote to inform the Bishop of the situation and was asked for a complete account of assets and debts and advised Barni to call a meeting of the creditors. The meeting was held on 26th July and the resolutions passed were very sympathetic to Barni's position and seemed determined to demand the Bishop's intervention.

Barni's letter to *Durando* includes a printed copy of the

«Resolution passed at the meeting of the Creditors held at the SALESIAN INSTITUTE 26th July 1901.

that his Lordship the Catholic Bishop of Cape Town, most Rev. Dr. Leonard is the one responsible for the actual liability of the Salesian Institute, this having been established after the direct call of his Lordship.

that everyone of the said firms have always been under the impression that at the back of this charitable institution were the RC Bishop and the RC community; otherwise they would not have extended their credit to the present amounts.

they further deeply sympathise with the superior of the Institute, the Rev. Fr. Barni and with the good work and would wish to help in every possible way but cannot condone the debts.

Moreover and finally all are of the opinion that the present amount £1864.11s.0d representing the liabilities of the Salesian Institute could be collected in no time from among the Catholic and non Catholic population here and that therefore there is no necessity whatever for the closing of such a beneficent Institution which obviously cannot be carried on without constant charitable support».⁵⁰

This outcome did not please Bishop Leonard who denied all responsibility.⁵¹ By August 10th the Bishop was receiving letters demanding payment from the creditors. He strongly suggested to Barni that in his judgement the Salesian Institute was insolvent and that the Salesians should be prepared to give him transfer

⁴⁸ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 16.5.1900, mc. 3219 C 3/6.

«La guerra quà che dura già da sette mesi, è per volgere al termine. Il Generale Roberts, comandante – in capo, col suo esercito di 250.000 va, ultimamente, di vittoria in vittoria; e se tutto continua così le ostilità saranno presto finite, e la pace firmata su solidi trattati. Pace vorrà dire che gli Inglesi avranno anche le due Repubbliche Boere, cioè: Orange Free State, e il Transvaal; cosicché tutto il Sud Africa fino allo Zambesi sarà Inglese».

⁴⁹ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 27.3.1901, mc. 3220 C 11 - D 1.

⁵⁰ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 31.7.1901, mc. 3221 A 2/4.

⁵¹ ACT box 25, Leonard to Barni, 30.7.1901.

«I hereby acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 26th and also a copy of the resolution of your creditors meeting of the same date

In reply I wish to state that I cannot admit any responsibility either on my part or that of my flock for the debt contracted by you or by any priest under my jurisdiction without any authority first being obtained...Instead of shifting the responsibility of your debts onto others it would have been more business like of your Creditors to inquire carefully into your liabilities and the assets you have to meet them...copy each of your creditors».

and legal ownership of all assets, provided he could settle or compound with the creditors.⁵² In reply Barni suggested that the Salesians were willing to continue to work for him provided the Bishop was willing to give a thousand pounds to clear the debts and allow them to organise a Bazaar to raise the rest and pay £50 a month for the continued maintenance of the Institute.⁵³ On the 13th the Bishop replied:

«I cannot for one moment entertain your request that I should hand you £1000 (one thousand pounds) to meet your creditors and also that I should mandate you £50 per month to maintain the Institute. It is impossible for this Mission to undertake such a responsibility. In the circumstances I see nothing for it but to suspend negotiations and proceed to the closing of the Institute».⁵⁴

Barni replied by return: *I am sorry for your decision and I am only waiting for events*.⁵⁵

Two factors seemed to have modified these decisions. Firstly there was the financial calculation. In the Salesian Institute's file in the Archdiocesan Archives at Cape Town, in Bishop Leonard's hand is a document entitled «Memo of Expenditure re Salesian Institute J. Leonard 18/8/01». It notes actual expenditure from 1896 to June 1900 as £3462.19s.3d. With the value of the premises at £3000, in the outlay £7,142.19s.3d. Evidently the investment already made was considerable and largely non-recoverable.⁵⁶

On August 21st Fr Barni wrote to Turin saying that tomorrow he would have to present himself before the Supreme Court to be sued for a debt of £100 he could not pay. Though he had never experienced so much trouble in all his life, he could say that he still hoped that it might be a providential means of winning the cause. He noted further that through the newspapers and from other sources the Catholics had come to hear that a poor priest had to appear before the judges for having incurred debts on behalf of poor youngsters and were ashamed and were helping us.⁵⁷

Second thoughts about finance or the force of public opinion seem to have produced a change of tack: «As you will see», Barni wrote to Durando,

«His Lordship the Bishop has offered our creditors half payment in order to receive a final receipt for the whole debt. Financially this is a good idea but morally one wonders».⁵⁸

Another factor may have been that the publicity seems to have led other clergy to offer new and different settings for the work, both in Johannesburg and

⁵² ACT box 25, Leonard to Barni, 10.8.1901.

⁵³ ACT, Salesian Institute file Barni to Dr Leonard, 12.8.1901.

⁵⁴ ACT box 25, Leonard to Barni, 13.8.1901.

⁵⁵ ACT box 25, Barni to Leonard, 13.8.1901.

⁵⁶ ACT Salesian Institute file 18/8/01.

⁵⁷ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 21.8.1901, mc. 3221 A 10 - B 1.

⁵⁸ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 3.9.1901, mc. 3221 B 3/4.

Durban.⁵⁹ However, one of the creditors and by no means the greatest of them tried to break ranks and get a separate judicial award, which led to the others getting an order sequestrating the whole property. It was at the beginning of November that Barni wrote to Turin to say that it was his and the Bishop's idea to set up a committee chosen by him of three Catholics who would guide us in financial matters. This Management Committee received judicial appointment, having given the necessary security, to become «Curator Bonis».⁶⁰ Their report continues:

«Our first duty as Curators was to obtain the creditor's consent to a compromise of 10/- in the £ as guaranteed by Your Lordship. The deed of compromise having been signed we obtained the release of the Institute and ultimately with the assistance of the sum of £600 advanced by your Lordship paid out the sum of £972 to creditors and obtained their acquittances. We may mention that from some of the creditors notable Mr Arderne and Co., Mossop and Garland, and Liberman and Buiriski, we received every consideration, the Cas. Coy and the Messers. Nanucci Ltd would not file their claims against the Institute neither would they accept the compromise so that special thanks of the Institute is due to those firms».⁶¹

As the report points out from a business point of view the enterprise was bound to fail given the fact that for 18 months the Institute was not in a position to earn anything, while the expenses were incurred which were continually growing larger as the number of inmates increased. It pointed out the need for more professional book keeping procedures and was happy to agree that it looked as if it could become self-supporting.

The Report concluded:

«At the time we obtained the creditors' consent to the compromise we felt we should be acting in accordance with your Lordship's wishes by acknowledging to the creditors the Institute's moral obligation to pay the remaining 10/- in the £ at the earliest opportunity. The Rev Director of the Institute feels this obligation most keenly and is straining every effort to meet it as early as possible, to the detriment of the usefulness of the Institute. In order to get rid of this burden and to rehabilitate the Institute we humbly ask your Lordship's permission to make an individual appeal to the members of the congregation for the sum of £ 600 still required. We may say we have spoken privately to a few gentlemen who have quite agreed with our scheme and have already subscribed the sum of £200 towards the amount required».⁶²

It also paid tribute to Fr Barni's kindness and co-operation in what was a delicate situation Fr Barni's point of view was that the committee had material matters well in hand; they were deputed for this by the Court; they did things se-

⁵⁹ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 25.9.1901, mc. 3221 C 1/2.

⁶⁰ ACT Salesian Institute file Report of the Board of Management of the Salesian Institute 31.3.1903.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

riously; he had been appointed as Treasurer and thus opened a new bank account; every day all the money even the smallest amounts had to come to him and he was responsible and had to deposit it in the bank. No payment was to be made except with the consent (i.e. the signature on the cheque) of at least one of the three gentlemen.⁶³

We can conclude that this bankruptcy crisis was a result of the unresolved problems associated with the initial foundation of the Institute. The clash of cultures and expectations led to an ultimately unsustainable financial situation, one that Fr Barni had clearly recognised as such from the beginning. The Bishop finally had to accept at least partial responsibility for the situation and interestingly, it was Fr Barni who seemed to gain the sympathy and respect of both his creditors and his Board of Managers.

The Superior Council however, decided that a change of Superior was required and sent Fr Aeneas Tozzi to replace Fr Barni in 1903. Don Rua described Fr Tozzi as young in years but old in wisdom. He was to spend the next 22 years of his life in South Africa and his success in moving the Institute from the restricted accommodation at Buitenkant St to Somerset Rd and building the fine new Institute building starting in 1910 and even opening the noviciate and farm school at Lansdowne cannot take away from the achievements of Fr Barni in surviving the storm.

Tozzi certainly did not make any great change of direction in the work at the Cape. Any hopes that the Salesians might extend their work to the black or coloured communities never materialised till after the Second World War. The fear of bankruptcy seemed to hang over Fr Tozzi's administration like a black cloud making him overanxious about raising the necessary money. He continued and built on the friendships that Fr Barni had made, using powerful lay Catholic influence in the Cape Parliament to gain the use of the old Catholic cemetery on Somerset Rd for the new Institute. Fr Barni's dreams of an expansion of the work to all the populous cities of South Africa and of large scale work for the coloured or black population never materialised until after the Vatican Council with the opening of new work in Swaziland, Lesotho and on the Cape Flats. Perhaps the long dead hand of Bishop John Leonard still held sway determining the direction of Salesian development clearly within the Catholic minority mind set. His conflict with Fr Barni over the Salesian foundation must surely be seen as the determining event for the development of the Salesian work in South Africa in the early years.

Incidentally as a postscript it is clear that other religious suffered from similar treatment. Perhaps the difference was that they were prepared to move out of Cape Town and attempt to work elsewhere. That Bishop Leonard was a tough taskmaster where money was concerned can be incidentally seen from a letter

⁶³ ASC F 419, Barni to Durando, 2.12.1901, mc. 3221 D 11 - E 2.

he wrote to the superior of the Marist Brothers school on August 20th 1901 demanding payment of the annual £75 specified by the contract and the back payments due the previous year in which the Brothers had only paid £25. If the payments were not made he threatened to charge them 5% interest.⁶⁴

Fr Tozzi's genius was in careful and tidy administration, and the printed sources we have are largely due to his hard work. The surviving registers and House Chronicle all date from his period as Rector. He used the band, which incidentally Barni (the ex-music teacher) had established as a major tool for gaining public notice and sympathy. He further cultivated the Italian community starting a lending library, a club and co-operators group all aimed at both encouraging their religious practice and their financial support. His monument must remain the Institute's beautiful building but he was no more successful than Fr Barni had been in building a contented Salesian community or encouraging vocations to join and stay. All three-coadjutor brothers who came to South Africa with such high hopes in 1896 had left the society by 1906.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that from the outset the Salesian work in the Cape was hampered by an extremely divided racial and social context on the verge of civil war. The Catholic Church saw itself as an unwelcome minority struggling to survive in a predominantly Protestant society and feared anything that might destabilise the status quo. Any attempt to reach out to the black or coloured population could not be tolerated.

With regard to the Salesian Foundation itself, both the initial misunderstandings over equipment, and the financial restrictions imposed by the bishop as well as the outbreak of the Boer War all led to a traumatic financial collapse which marked the collective psyche of the Salesian community in Cape Town for the next 50 years.

The clear result in terms of its social impact was that the Salesian work remained restricted to providing a technical education for «poor whites» at the Salesian Institute in Cape Town. No attempt to reach out to the coloured or black population through other characteristic works of the Congregation such as oratories, schools or Missions properly so called, either in or outside Cape Town was ever made till after the Second World War despite several invitations to do so.

⁶⁴ ACT box 25, Leonard to Bro. Joseph, 20.8.1901.