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MISSION, CIVILISATION AND COERCION IN COLONIAL NATAL. ABBOT FRANTZ PFANNER AND THE AFRICAN “OTHER” IN MARIANNHILL (1882–1909)

It is fitting, in a conference on Christians and the non-Christian “Other”, to present a paper on the African people. In more than one respect, black people were complete “Others” to the Europeans who colonised and evangelised them. There is perhaps a difference, although in degree rather than in nature[1], in the manner in which the Jews and Muslims, who cohabited with Christians for long periods of time in various parts of the world, and the Africans were considered. In the eyes of their conquerors, the latter were not only different but inferior. They were deemed to be so “savage”, so “primitive” that one seriously doubted, at least at the time of the first encounters, that they were human at all.

The first European travellers, traders, missionaries and colonial administrators who had dealings with black people in South Africa found, explains David Chidester in a book entitled *Savage Systems*[2], that they had no religion and therefore no right to land. They would have earned some respect if they had a religion, even false, but they had none. Their strange habits amounted to “superstition”, which, in the categories inherited from scholastic theology that were then in favour, was the antonym of religion. Later on, the missionaries and colonial agents revised their judgment and admitted that the Africans had indeed a religion, but a very primitive one with none of the attributes of the Christian religion. The only way of joining the civilised world, they told their converts, was to abandon all their ancestral customs, including polygamy, circumcision, bride-wealth (*lobola*), traditional dancing and ritual slaughtering of animals.

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[1] As highlighted by Edward Said in his famous essay *Orientalism* (1978), western representations of Oriental culture are also clouded by imperial prejudice.

[2] David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996.

On arriving in South Africa in 1838, Patrick Griffith, the bishop of the newly-erected Catholic vicariate of the Good Hope, found the African people "base and barbarous" and lent credence to the pseudo-anthropological literature of the time which described them as "the connecting link between Beast and man"[3]. After a chance encounter with an African chief called Macomo in the Eastern Cape, however, he realised, as he wrote to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, that the indigenous people were capable of prayer and that their "prolonged cries" were a form of religious music[4]. Griffith was not the only one to be ambiguous about the religion of the African people. During the first century of colonial conquest, the Christian missionaries oscillated between a complete rejection of the African customs and a more selective approach consisting in only excluding the practices and rituals deemed offensive to the Christian religion[5]. Typical of the first attitude is J. C. Warner, a Methodist minister employed as an administrator by the colonial administration. Xhosa belief and practices, he was quoted as saying in an influential *Compendium of Kafir Laws Customs* in 1858, formed "a regular system of superstition which answers all the purposes of any other false religion". To avoid the danger of

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[3] *The Cape Diary of Bishop Raymond Griffith for the Years 1837 to 1839*, ed. J. B. Brain, Mariannhill: Mariannhill Press, 1988, p. 130. On Bishop Griffith and the African people, see Philippe Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa (1577–1830): A Social History*, Leiden: Brill, 1998, pp. 91–99.

[4] "Patrick Griffith to the Central Committees of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Cape Town, January 1840", in: *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi,* 1841, vol. 13, p. 354.

[5] Wallace Mills, "Missionaries, Xhosa clergy and the suppression of traditional customs", in: *Missions and Christianity in South African History*, eds. Henry Bredenkamp and Robert Ross, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995, pp. 151–171.

"building Christianity on the rotten foundation of pagan superstition", this system had to be "denounced and overturned"[6]. The most famous representative of the second attitude was John William Colenso, the first Anglican bishop of Natal in the mid-nineteenth century, who refused to ask his polygamist converts to quit their second and third wives and made considerable effort to understand, by conversing with his indigenous assistants, the worldview and the ways of reasoning of the Zulus[7].

A REMARKABLE EXPANSION

Catholics were latecomers on the missionary scene in South Africa. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a missionary congregation founded in the aftermath of the French Revolution, were only successful in Lesotho. In Natal, where they arrived in the early 1850s, they struggled to make converts[8]. Through well-adapted missionary methods, Franz Pfanner, the founder of the Mariannhill monastery, turned the situation around. In less than ten years, he established a flourishing mission station which provoked the admiration and envy of his Protestant rivals.

There is no shortage of studies on Pfanner's life, spirituality and missionary activities, but most of them are written from an apologetic perspective[9]. Academic work on the early years of Mariannhill is still scarce[10]. In this paper, we will examine Pfanner's relationship to the African people. His attitude to race and culture was unconventional but also fraught with contradictions. He faced the same dilemma as the other missionaries: how to respect people other than yourself when you are convinced of the innate superiority of your culture and religion? Unlike the majority of settlers and a good number of missionaries, Pfanner believed in the fundamental equality of all human beings and he criticised the entrenched racism of colonial society. Yet he was a colonist at heart. His dream, consciously or not, was to transform his African converts into people who would conform, for everything except the colour of their skin, to the European model of life. He does not seem to have reflected on the contradiction inherent in this position.

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[6] J. R. Warner, "Notes", in: *A Compendium of Kafir Laws and Customs*, ed. John Maclean, Mount Coke: Wesleyan Mission Press, 1858, pp. 73, 75.

[7] Jeff Guy, *The Heretic: a Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814–1883*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1983; Jeff Guy, "Class, imperialism and literary criticism: William Ngidi, John Colenso and Matthew Arnold", in: *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1997, vol. 23, pp. 213–241.

[8] J. B. Brain, *Catholics in Natal and beyond*, Durban: T. W. Griggs and Co, 1975.

[9] Anton Roos, "Mariannhill zwischen zwei Idealen. Entwicklung Mariannhills von Trappistenkloster zur modernen Missonskongregation 1886–1936", unpublished dissertation, Innsbruck, 1961; English translation by Adelgisa Hermann, *Mariannhill Between Two Ideas: The Inner Development of Mariannhill from a Trappist Monastery Into a Mission Congregation, 1884–1936*, [Mariannhill], 1983; [Timothaeus Kempf], *Unter Christen und Muslims: Ein Vorarlberger Priester und Klostergründer, Wendelin P. Franz Pfanner 1825–1880*, Rome: Congregation of Mariannhill Missionaries, 1981; *Der Herold Gottes in Südafrika*, vol. 1: *Die missglückte Abtei*, Rome: Congregation of

Wendelin Pfanner was born to a family of farmers in Langen near Bregenz in the westernmost part of Austria on 20 September 1825. The value attributed to manual work, which was to characterise his work in Mariannhill in the 1880s and 1890s, was a trait inherited from his childhood. A letter he wrote to his old friend Ludwig Haitinger in 1903 makes it very clear:

> When I was younger, I was not only eager to work, but I worked furiously. Someone who is not used to hard work from childhood […]

Mariannhill Missionaries, 1980; *ibid.*, vol. 2: *Mariannhill ist sein Name*, Remlingen: Mariannhill Mission Press, 1983; *ibid.*, vol. 3: *Abt Franz unter dem Kreuz*, Reimlingen: Mariannhill Mission Press, 1984; *The Dunbrody Episode: The Futile Attempt to Establish the Trappists in the Sundays' River Valley of the Cape Province, South Africa. A Documentation in Three Parts*, ed. Alcuin Weiswurm, Mariannhill: Mariannhill Mission Press, 1975; Adelgisa [Hermann], *100 Years Mariannhill Province: History of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannhill in the Province of Mariannhill*, Mariannhill: Mariannhill Mission Press, 1984; Annette Buschgerd, *For a great Price: The Story of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood*, Reimlingen: Mariannhill Mission Press, 1990; Adalbert Ludwig Balling, *Der Apostel Südafrikas oder Gott schreibt gerade, auch auf krummen Zeilen*, Würzburg: Missionsverlag Mariannhill, 2011.

[10] Marc-André Heim, "Tätigkeit der Mariannhiller Mission unter ihrem Gründer Franz Pfanner bzw. bis zu desser Tod 1882–1909", unpublished Masters dissertation, University of Vienna, 2009; Christoph Ripe, doctoral student in cultural anthropology at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University in the Netherlands, is currently writing a thesis on Mariannhill's photographical production.

> will not know how to get others to work and, still less, how much he may reasonably demand from them […]. I have learned this better than city boys, and I tell you frankly that if my father had not been so strict about hard work, there would be no Mariastern or Mariannhill.[11]

The young Pfanner grew up in a strong Catholic environment. His paternal uncle and godfather was a priest. He joined the diocesan clergy soon after his studies. After serving as vicar in an Austrian parish for ten years and chaplain to nuns in Croatia for three years, he decided to join religious life. Received in the Trappist monastery of Mariawald near Aachen in Germany in 1862, his determination, his work ethic and his integrity soon designated him for leadership positions. In 1869 he founded the Trappist monastery of Mariastern in Bosnia, which, less than ten years later, already numbered a hundred monks. In 1879, as he was about to become the abbot of Mariastern, he caught everybody by surprise, at the General Chapter of the Trappist Congregation of Rancé, by responding positively to the call of James Ricards, the bishop of the Eastern Cape, who wanted to establish a Trappist monastery in his vicariate. The plan did not work out because of the weather conditions in this dry part of the Cape colony as well as the lack of funds. In December 1882 Pfanner and his companions relocated to a farm near Pinetown in the Natal colony and, this time, with more fertile land and better means of communication, the mission station soon developed.

Mariannhill grew at an astonishing speed. By the end of 1883 the first three buildings, a dormitory, a chapter hall and an oratory, as well as a forge, workshops for sewing, carpentry and threshing, had already come off the ground. In 1884 the Trappists opened a college for boys and, the following year, a school for girls. By then there were 203 names in the baptism register. In 1886 the first group of sisters arrived from Germany. Nicknamed the Red Sisters, they later formed the congregation of the Precious Blood Sisters. The same year the first outstation was established in a place called Reichenau with another nine mission stations founded in the following five years. In 1888 the monastery and its outstations counted 150 monks, priests and brothers, not to mention the sisters whose numbers were also expanding. In 1900 Mariannhill owned 96,870 acres (4000 hectares) of land. By 1909, the year of Pfanner's death, out of a total of 27 Catholic mission stations in the Natal colony, 25 had been established by the Trappists. More than half of all Catholic mission stations in the country – 28 out of 49 – were offshoots of Mariannhill[12]. Among the factors explaining this remarkable expansion we can mention: the founder's work ethic, a strong spirituality among the monks, highly successful recruitment drives in Europe, a funding strategy based on an extensive use of media and communication, large availability of land and a school system which emphasised the acquisition of manual skills.

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[11] Letter of Franz Pfanner to Ludwig Haitinger, Emaus, 1903-03-21, in: *Mariannhill Monastery Archives*, Abbot Franz Pfanner Papers, Box 10, Document 10006.

Conversion and Civilisation

Pfanner was a prolific writer. To recruit vocations and attract funding, he wrote, mostly in German, numerous articles in the newsletters and magazines published in Mariannhill with a printing press imported from Europe for that purpose[13]. He also contributed to local newspapers with a view to establishing Mariannhill's reputation in the settlers' community. This paper makes use of these sources. Three types of documents are examined: the articles published during 1884, the year of the monastery's first outreach programme, those concerning the recruitment and training of the first Zulu priests at the end of the same decade and a collection of articles published in the local media concerning the so-called Native Question in 1893 and 1894.

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[12] Joseph Dahm, *Mariannhill, seine innere Entwicklung, sowie seine Bedeutung für die katholische Missions und Kulturgeschichte Südafikas: 1. Zeitabsnitt: von der Gründung Mariannhills (1882) bis zur Trennung vom Trappistenorden (1909)*, Mariannhill: Mariannhiller Missionsdruckerei, 1950, p. 149; Marcel Dischl, *Transkei for Christ: A History of the Catholic Church in the Transkeian Territories*, [Umtata], 1982, p. 96.

[13] *Fliegende Blätter aus Dunbrody* (1880–1882); *Fliegende Blätter aus Mariannhill* (1883); *Der Trappist unter den Kaffern* (1884); *Vergissmeinnicht* (1885–1915); *St Joseph's Blätter* (1885–1895); *Der Mariannhiller MissionsKalender* (1889–1911).

In 1884, to reflect the growing emphasis on missionary work, the monastery's newsletter took the name *Der Trappist unter der Kaffern* (The Trappist among the Kaffirs) before changing it a year later to *Vergissmeinnicht* (Do not forget me), possibly to avoid the negative connotation of the word "Kaffir". In the first issue, which appeared on 16 April 1884, Pfanner outlined his vision for the monastery's school. Three principles, he explained, were to guide the Trappists' educational project: gratuity of education, priority to the poor and the orphan and equality of all races and religions. On the last point, his views were particularly outspoken:

> We do not discriminate according to colour or religion. All boys accepted in our institution receive board, lodging and education irrespective of their being pagan, Muslim, Protestant or Catholic, white or coloured, English, Dutch, German, Italian, Indian or black. All sleep in the same room, eat at the same table, receive the same food and sit on the same school benches. Only the black boys who return to their kraal every day sit on special benches as a way of controlling their body odour.[14]

Pfanner did not try to mix children from established settler families and the offspring of neighbouring kraals. The white boys who received hospitality in the monastery's boarding school were all orphans. At first they felt the mixing of races outrageous. They insulted the black children and threw stones at them. To change their attitude their teachers put them on a diet of bread and water. This was a reflection, Pfanner noted, of a society which treated "black people as half humans" and thought they could be "herded like cattle"[15].

Six months later the superior of the monastery triumphantly declared the experience a success. In fact, there is no evidence that it lasted very long, probably because white orphans ceased to be referred to Mariannhill by the colonial authorities. It was sufficient, however, for Pfanner to express the conviction that racism was the result of prejudice and that a better school system could eradicate it:

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[14] *Der Trappist unter den Kaffern*, vol. 1 (1884-04-16); see [Kemf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, p. 107.

[15] *Ibid.*

> It is well known that dogs and cats can live together when they are mixed early enough. Why should we not bring up together white and black children? We made a first start and we can already say that it works. None of the prophecies that were made has been accomplished. … Not a single white child ran away at the arrival of black children. None has done any harm to them, and even laid a hand against them. The warm and peaceful atmosphere reigning between white and black boys is particularly noticeable when they play together.[16]

Pfanner's vision of race relations is exposed in another issue of *Der Trappist unter den Kaffern*. The whites must give up their pride, he wrote, and the blacks their heathenism. Some white settlers were already occupying land next to Mariannhill. He was prepared to exchange a few hectares for a white village to be built nearby with the understanding that land would be let to black people on the monastery's property and that soon a black village would be established. The two races would live next to each other, although not together. Mariannhill, he announced, should be the place where "blacks and whites come together and give each other the hand of brotherhood"[17].

What we have here is a trade-off. Blacks deserved to be well treated, Pfanner advocated, but in exchange they were expected to adapt to the colonial order. The plan had two implications. The first was that the black people had to abandon "heathenism" and embrace "civilisation". They had to embrace the European way of life, Christianity included. The second requirement, which struck a chord with many colonists, was that they were to develop good work habits. Pfanner, a hard-working man himself, was adamant that the alleged "laziness" of the Natives had to be combated with great vigour. Work, for him, was key to progress. "Without work," he declared, "we are only half humans"[18].

With great attention to details Pfanner outlined in the monastery's newsletter the changes he expected from his converts. In all they were to conform to the way of life of the colonists. They were to build houses "on the European model" (*nach Europäischer style*) with doors, windows, chairs and tables and they were expected to sleep in beds. Their diet had to include bread, vegetables and lamb and they had to eat with spoons. Great emphasis was placed on clothing. "Without clothes," he insisted, "there is no decency, no morality, no culture, no civilisation. If people walk around naked, they will never give up polygamy."[19] Traditional dances, seen as a source of immorality, slaughtering of animals and physical fights were to be avoided. The perfect convert was a man with one wife, tenant of a house he had built or renovated himself, skilled in some trade and a hard worker. Together the converts were to form villages similar to but distinct from the residential areas for whites. Segregation, one must note, was implicit in this scheme.

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[16] *Der Trappist unter den Kaffern*, vol. 4 (1884-10-26); see [Kemf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, pp. 123–124.

[17] *Der Trappist unter den Kaffern*, vol. 3 (1884-08-26); see [Kemf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, p. 113.

[18] *De Trappist unter den Kaffern*, vol. 2 (1884-07-09); see [Kemf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, p. 117.

This programme, however, was to be applied with flexibility. For the celebration of the first baptisms the Trappists authorised music and the slaughtering of animals. Was this fitting for monks? Jesus, Pfanner responded when criticised by some of his fellow monks, had provided food to the people sitting to hear his preaching. People had come from far to attend the baptisms at Mariannhill[20].

African Teachers and Priests

At the centre of Pfanner's scheme for the upliftment of black people was vocational training. With proper skills in farming, carpentry, construction and other trades, they would find their place in colonial society. As long as they accepted the European model of life, they would be treated fairly and without discrimination. The same principle guided the abbot of Mariannhill in pastoral matters. Long before others did he see the need to train African pastoral workers. He was the first Catholic missionary – the Protestants had been ordaining black ministers in South

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[19] *Ibid.*; see [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, p. 118.

[20] *Mariannhill Kalender* for 1890, p. 65; see [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, p. 163.

Africa since the mid-1850s[21] – to recommend African men for priestly training. In a landmark sermon on the opening of an outstation's chapel in 1889, he predicted the moment when local people would replace the missionaries:

> We have built this chapel for you, and we provide a priest for you. But a real church will have to be built by you and, what is more, you will have to provide your own priest, and a black priest for that matter.[22]

Other missionaries, the French Oblates of Mary Immaculate for example, considered that a long period of time would be necessary before black converts would be ready for ordination[23]. Pfanner had no such hesitation. As early as 1884, he recruited a recently-converted Mosotho saddler as a teacher for the Trappist school. When, in 1887, a fifteen-year-old boy by the name of Kece Mnganga, who had been baptised two years before[24] and was studying at the Latin school of Mariannhill, expressed the desire to be a priest, he sent him to Rome in the company of David Bryant, the future anthropologist, by then a Trappist novice, to complete his secondary education and study for the priesthood[25].

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[21] The first black minister in South Africa, Rev Tiyo Soga, was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in 1856; see *The Making of an Indigenous Clergy in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1995.

[22] *St Josefsblättchen aus Marianhill*, vol. 5–4 (24 September 1889).

[23] See Jerome Skhakhane, "The Beginnngs of Indigenous Clergy in the Catholic Church in Lesotho", in: *The Making of an Indigenous Clergy*, ed. Philippe Denis, p. 115–122; on the history of black priests in South Africa, see George Mukuka, *The Other Side of the Story: The silent experience of the black clergy in the Catholic Church in South Africa (1898–1976)*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008.

[24] [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, p. 437. Mnganga was baptised on 8 February 1885 and received his first communion in 1887.

[25] Mariannhill Chronicle, 1882–1895, p. 50 in South Africa, Mariannhill Monastery Archives; on Edward Mnganga, see Vitalis Fux, "Der erste Priester aus dem Stamme der Zulus", in: *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1945, vol. 63, pp. 235–238; Thomas Respondek, "Die Erziehung von Eingeborenen zum Priestertum in der Mariannhill Mission", in: *Zeitschrift fur Missionwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 1950, no. 34, pp. 47–49; George Mukuka, "The experiences of the first indigenous Catholic priest in South Africa: Fr Edward Müller Kece Mnganga 1872–1945", in: *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae,* 2005, vol. 31/2, pp. 77–103; George Mukuka, *The Other Side*

Mnganga was born at Umhlatuzana in the outskirts of Durban in 1872 or 1873. His father, Jamkofi Shozi, seems to have been the chief of a tribe which suffered dispossession as a result of the arrival of the Trappists in the area[26]. According to Francis Schimlek, a later missionary, he consented to having his son educated by the Trappists but refused to join the church[27]. At his baptism Mnganga was named Edward Müller after his godfather[28]. He was ordained in 1898 in Rome after completing a doctorate in theology and philosophy[29]. Described as very intelligent by a woman who later worked for him[30], he came back from Rome with a good knowledge of Latin, English, Italian, German and Greek[31].

Pfanner's plan was to receive Mnganga as a monk in Mariannhill. The Zulu priest would have been an asset for the missionary work of the monastery. However, he was advised by his former professor of canon law, the bishop of Brixen, that the priests sent for studies at the College of Propaganda Fide in Rome were at the disposal of the local bishop. As abbot of a monastery in a missionary territory, he could not accept local candidates for the priesthood[32]. This is the reason why Mnganga did not

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of the Story, pp. 46–67; Philippe Denis, "Race, politics and religion: the first Catholic mission in Zululand (1895–1907)", in: *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 2010, vol. 36/1, pp. 90–92.

[26] For the history of the Shozi family, I rely on an unpublished paper presented by Eva Riedke (University of Siegen) presented at the conference "Land divided: land and South African society in 2013 in comparative perspective", Cape Town, 2013-03-23 – 2013-03-27, unter the title "Limited Power through Land: Strengthening Different Bases of Legitimacy and Authority in the Face of growing Land Disputes".

[27] Francis Schimlek, *Mariannhill. A study in Bantu life and missionary effort*, Mariannhill: Mariannhill Mission Press, 1953, p. 70.

[28] [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, p. 267.

[29] *Mariannhiller Kalendar*, for 1896, vol. 46–45, see [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, p. 439.

[30] Malukati Mncadi, interview conducted by George Mukuka in September 1994 in Mariathal, quoted in: George Mukuka, *The Other Side of the Story*, p. 56.

[31] Izindaba Zabantu, *Society of the Missionaries of Mariannhill*, 1928-09-07, quoted in: George Mukuka, *The Other Side of the Story*, p. 50.

[32] Bishop Simon Epus to Frantz Pfanner, Brixen, 1888-10-30, quoted in: [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 2, p. 268.

become a Trappist in Mariannhill and joined instead the diocesan clergy. His first posting was in Ebuhleni, a mission station of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Zululand, as an assistant to David Bryant[33].

An incident aboard a ship taking Bryant and Mnganga to Europe in late 1887 gave Pfanner the opportunity of reasserting his views on race relations. A passenger insisted that the Zulu boy left the dinner table before sitting down. Bryant having refused to comply, the other passengers moved to another table. Pfanner only heard of the incident when Bryant came back from Rome a couple of years later. He launched a scathing attack against the white colonists' racism in *Vergissmeinnicht*. How can they behave in such a manner, he asked, and pretend to be Christians?

> How arrogant the Christians from South Africa! When you have nothing to be proud about, you show your skin. And those people speak so well of the true Christian love. If they cannot suffer black people, why, I wonder, did they come to civilise and even Christianise the African nation? How can you civilise and Christianise people for whom you feel disgust and hatred?

Pfanner did not question in any way the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise. What he condemned was the hypocrisy of the white settlers who claimed to advance the cause of civilisation and Christianity but behaved in a manner that was neither civilised nor Christian. Their attitude, he complained, ruined the entire project:

> When shall we bring to an end in South Africa this deep-seated and radically perverse prejudice? If we do not do this, we may well educate the black people, but we shall not convert them. As long as the African will hear from the mouth of the white man that to be human one has to be white, he will never be able to adopt his religion, since becoming a white man is impossible.[34]

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[33] Philippe Denis, "Race, politics and religion", p. 90.

[34] [Frantz Pfanner], "Anbegreiflich", in: *Vergissmeinnicht*, vol. 5–7 (April 1889), p. 26. See: [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, t. 2, p. 437.

The "Native Question"

Because of a conflict with the authorities of his Order on the interpretation of the Trappist rule, Pfanner was suspended in October 1892 and he resigned as an abbot a few months later. He spent the rest of his life as a recluse in Emaus, a small mission station on the western border of the Natal colony. He was assigned to silence for some time but, once his resignation was accepted, he resumed his habit of communicating on various topics through letters, articles in newspapers and memoirs.

In November 1893, while still in Lourdes, a mission station at some distance from Mariannhill, he sent a paper on the "Native Question" to the *Natal Witness*, the Pietermaritzburg-based daily, which published it in four instalments[35]. In a slightly different format, the same material was also published in the *Natal Advertiser*[36]. An offprint of the *Natal Witness* article was printed, with a run of 1,000 copies, in Mariannhill the following year[37].

"I am busy with the Native Question, as the British call the Kaffir question (*Kaffernfrage*)," he wrote to his Austrian friend Berchtold Hütisau three months after his arrival in Emaus. "Thousands of articles have appeared in South African newspapers."[38] Pfanner claimed to be making an original contribution to the debate in two ways. The first was that, unlike most authors who remained at the theoretical level, he made essentially practical suggestions. It was not the "what" that mattered, he explained, but the "how". After twelve years in Mariannhill, he spoke as a man of experience. Secondly, his proposals aimed at "improving" the condition of the black people, an intention he assured, not without some exaggeration, the other writers did not have[39].

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[35] Frantz Pfanner, "The Native Question", in: *Natal Witness*, November 8 and December 1893, no. 15, 23, 28

[36] *Natal Advertiser*, November 1893, no. 16, 24, 29.

[37] Frantz Pfanner, *The Native Question*, Pinetown: Printing Establishment Mariannhill, 1894, p. 27. By July 1894, the pamphlet was still in press, see letter of Frantz Pfanner to Msgr Berthtold Hütisau, Emaus, 25 July 1984, in South Africa, Mariannhill Monastery Archives, Abbot Franz Pfanner Papers, Box 6, Document 06010. On the number of copies see letter of Nivard Streicher to Abbot Amandus Schölzig, 19 April 1894, *Ibid.,* Box 32, Document 32014.

[38] Letter of Frantz Pfanner to Berchtold Hütisau, 1894-07-15, in: [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 3, p. 28.

The "question", of which the black people were the object, had agitated white society since the middle of the nineteenth century. Its ultimate "solution" would be the apartheid regime, instituted in 1948. Another milestone was the Land Act of 1913 which resolved, in a forceful way, the vexed question of the occupation of the land. The "question" that opinion-makers, colonial officers and missionaries wanted to resolve was how to contain the black population, which kept growing, what part of the land blacks should be allowed to occupy and how to make use of their labour force in the mines and on the farms, where there was always a need for cheap labour. The "Native Question" was about control and power. With rare exceptions, black voices were never heard. The African people were spoken about but not listened to. The "Native Question" was, in Adam Ashforth's words, "the intellectual domain in which the knowledge, strategies, policies and justifications necessary to maintenance of domination were fashioned"[40].

Various commissions made recommendations to the government on the "Native Question". The most influential was the South African Native Affairs Commission (SANAC), which sat between 1903 and 1905. Seen as natural mediators between the African people, with whom they were in close contact through their ministry, and the settler society, the missionaries made a significant contribution to the work of the Commission. Their role was to speak on behalf of the black people who, being uncivilised, were not considered able to speak in their own right[41]. But the missionaries did not wait for the SANAC to contribute to the national debate on the "Native Question". Pfanner's articles in the *Natal Witness* must be seen in that light.

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[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Adam Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 1.

[41] On the role of missionaries in SANAC, see Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse*, pp. 26–29; Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, chap. 7.

Two "hostile and opposing armies", Pfanner wrote in his paper on the Native Question, were "contending for the possession of the political field": those who, in the image of the "Boers", wanted to "destroy" the black people and the philanthropists who treated them with too much benevolence. A middle ground had to be found between those two positions.

Among the "Boers" and their likes who showed no respect for black culture, Pfanner would have counted Francis William Reitz, the president of the Orange Free State, who had suggested, in a much debated article two years earlier, that "civilized South Africa" had to get rid of the tribal system, abolish chieftainship, break up all locations, suppress by law all pagan rites and discourage polygamy. The African locations had to be "broken up" to ensure that no black people remained idle. Their only occupation should be to work for white people. President Reitz made no effort to disguise his supremacist views:

> The Kaffir, as an individual, may be "a man" and (unter due reservations) "a brother", but as a member of a tribe, and the subject of a fat and arrogant chieftain, he can never be such. He is divided by an impassable barrier from the laws and customs of civilized humanity, and there is no room for him in his tribal conditions in our European system of political economy.[42]

Pfanner rejected with equal vigour the other position which, in the way he understood it, was to "flatter and spoil" the African through a "system" which would make of him "a profound hypocrite and a moral pest to society". Such was, he contended, the view held by the "people of Downing Street" and "mistaken pietists at home". It was, one may say, the liberal position, which very few colonists supported in Natal. Since the early 1870s, unter pressure from philanthropists and the Aborigines Protection Society, the British government had declared that it would not grant the Natal colony self-government until it could be satisfied that in such an event the interests of the African people would be effectively protected. In 1893, the year of Pfanner's paper, it eventually granted responsible government to the Natal colony with no conditions attached. This long delay provoked bitterness among the settlers, who resented being told how to treat the African population[43]. The Austrian monk echoed this sentiment in his paper.

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[42] President Reitz, "The Native Question", in: *Cape Illustrated Magazine*, November 1891, reproduced in: "Native policy: the Reitz-Shepstone correspondence on 1891–1892", in: *Natalia*, 1972, vol. 2, p. 11.

Pfanner probably felt some sympathy for the views of Theophilus Shepstone, the former Natal secretary for native affairs, who had rebuked Reitz's stance on the African people in the local newspapers. Emphasising that the latter were the "aboriginal inhabitants and owners of the land", Shepstone stopped short of calling the Free State president a proponent of slavery. The western values Reitz claimed to uphold, he argued, should incite him to treat the black people with justice[44]. Yet, unlike his former friend John William Colenso, the bishop of Natal, from whom he was now estranged, Shepstone considered the black people an "inferior race" which "civilised government" was entitled to "control", as he wrote in *Natal Advertiser* in response to his local critics[45]. Pfanner did not believe that the black people were an "inferior race" but he thought, like Shepstone and unlike Reitz, that they should live in locations with a certain degree of autonomy.

Of all the systems of "Native management" proposed as a solution to the "Native Question" in the early 1890s, the closest to Pfanner's views was the one experimented in Glen Grey, an area east of Queenstown in the Cape colony which is known today as Lady Frere. Following the recommendations of a commission which travelled to 54 places and heard 622 witnesses during a period of 15 months, the Parliament of the Cape colony adopted a train of measures on land occupation called the Glen Grey Act in 1894. The instigator was Cecil Rhodes, the prime minister of the colony, and it received the support of the Afrikaner Bond[46]. The similarity between Pfanner's plan and the work of the Commission was highlighted in an article published in the *Natal Witness* in May 1893[47]. The Glen Grey Commission recommended the establishment of African locations in which indigenous people would receive, unter certain conditions, a piece of land on which they would build a house in exchange for their work on agricultural land. District and General Councils, on which representatives of the residents would sit, would see to the developments of the locations. Only the first born in each family would be allowed to inherit the family‘s property, a measure intended to force the other children to seek work elsewhere so as to be able to pay the "labour tax" imposed on all African people in the district. This clause was heavily criticised by the Cape liberals who accused Rhodes of instituting forced labour to please his political allies of the Afrikaner Bond[48].

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[43] Enock Gasa, "The Native Question in Natal, 1880–1893: An Inquiry with Reference to the Struggle for Constitutional Reform in the Colony", unpublished master thesis, Pretoria, University of South Africa, 1974.

[44] Theophilus Shepstone, "The Native Question", in: *Natal Mercury*, 1882-01-19, reproduced in: "Native policy: the Reitz-Shepstone correspondence on 1891–1892", in: *Natalia*, 1972, vol. 2, pp. 14–20.

[45] *Natal Advertiser*, 1882-02-09, reproduced in: "Sir Theophilus Shepstone and his Local Critics", in: *Natalia*, 2010, no. 3, p. 19.

Pfanner's "Village System"

The founder of Mariannhill's 1893 paper built on the comments made in the Mariannhill newsletters a few years earlier. Divided into 72 articles, it took the form of a comprehensive plan for villages where the African people would reside and work unter the authority of the colonial government. "I hope," he wrote in the preamble of the document, "my motive will be considered pure in championing the cause of the down-trodden Kafir."[49] He refused to accept that the Africans should be

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[46] On the Glen Grey Act, see R. J. Thompson, B. M. Nicholls, "The Glen Grey Act: Forgotten dimensions of an old theme", in: *South African Journal of Economic History*, 1993, no. 8/2, pp. 58–70.

[47] Natal Witness, 1893-05-29, quoted in: *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1894, no. 10, pp. 54–55. See [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 3, p. 79.

[48] Thompson and Nicholls, "The Glen Grey Act"; see also: Richard Rose-Innes, *The Glen Grey Act and the Native Question*, Lovedale: Mission Press, 1903, reprinted 1936.

[49] Pfanner, *The Native Question* p. 1.

"destroyed and annihilated". On the contrary, he went on, "they yearn and long for the higher life to which they are called." But for this they had to be "civilized and elevated through discipline and labour". They should be "taught and compelled to abstain and sustain"[50].

Pfanner took pride in being a practical man. He felt, as he wrote to Berchtold Hütisau, that the other reform proposals, those submitted in Parliament and in the media, did not take sufficiently into account the daily aspects of the problem:

> In this brochure I make 72 proposals and deal with the black man from head to feet through his entire life (work, village system, education, marriage, polygamy), including voting rights and village constitution, in short the entire black man.[51]

In Pfanner's system, the African people lived in "locations" and "communities". A big location could be subdivided into several communities (art. 1). The communities formed "villages", which were distinguished from the rest of the environment by a fence or a ditch (art. 2). The heads of families – or "burghers" as he called them – received a site for houses and a plot of arable land, the allocation of the plots being done by lot (art. 6). Three of four acres of land (12,000 to 16,000 square meters) were deemed to be sufficient for a family (art. 5). The people who worked hard and cultivated well their first plot received as many plots as they could cultivate (art. 13). The sites were big enough for the erection of five houses or huts (art. 24). The occupation of the houses was permanent (art. 33) but title deeds were only given after ten years of residence, once proof had been presented that the occupants were good workers (art. 54).

Residents were encouraged to build houses in stone or red bricks with large verandas for the rain (art. 52). The houses and the plots were numbered, with the same number allocated to the houses and plots of the respective family (art. 47). The owners had the responsibility to fence, drain, plough, sow and maintain their plot. Grain, beans, potatoes or any other vegetables would be grown with a maximum of five per cent of the surface to be used for *amabele* (sorghum), the plant used to make beer (art. 10). Unlike plough land, grazing land was owned communally. Cows, oxen, pigs, calves and other animals were kept in general paddocks fenced with stones or wires outside the village (art. 30). No one had the right to graze the plough land without special permission (art. 16).

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[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

[51] Letter of Frantz Pfanner to Berchtold Hütisau, 1894-07-25, in [Kempf], *Der Herold Gottes*, vol. 3, p. 28.

The villages were unter the responsibility of a Steward or Administrator who reported to the Resident Magistrate (art. 3-4). His main function was to supervise the surveying of the land and the allocation of houses and plots to the residents. A committee of two or three residents helped him in this task (part. 56). He also gave advice to the residents and taught the necessary skills to farm the land, build roads and maintain their properties (art. 60). He had the responsibility of arbitrating and judging minor disputes, the bigger ones being referred to the Resident Magistrate (art. 9). An Inspector General was appointed over all the communities and Stewards (art. 57).

The village comprised schools, market squares, chapels and cemeteries (art. 34-35). Streets were laid out according to the topographical situation, either straight or curved (art. 7). Provision was made for the housing of missionaries (art. 36) and policemen (art. 37). A piece of plough land was reserved to each school in order for the children to be initiated to manual labour (art. 38). A special house was built for the infected in case of epidemics (art. 41). Wherever possible, industrial work was favoured. The development of water power through waterfalls was encouraged. Factories such as cornmills, bonemills, grindmills, butter-factories, woolwashing factories, jam and preserve factories, starch factories, breweries were to be established with the support of the colonial government (art. 58).

Pfanner's perspective was developmental. He believed in education and training and envisaged that, given the right opportunities, the indigenous people would be able to improve their condition. The last part of his plan contained detailed proposals for the establishment of industrial and agricultural schools (art. 64-71). In many ways, he was remarkably flexible, considering his conservative Catholic background.

He thus made provision for polygamous marriages (art. 24) and he anticipated that there would be missionaries from different confessions (art. 36).

On the other hand, unter the guise of experience, Pfanner openly displayed racial prejudices. He described the African people as "lazy" (art. 9) and "idle" (art. 13), especially the young. "The Natives," he wrote, "are but grown up children." (art. 21) Left alone, they indulged, according to him, in "excessive drinking" (art. 12).

Convinced as he was of the "dignity of labour" (art. 9), he recommended the use of coercion to incite the village residents to cultivate their plots, build communal roads and make drains (art. 9-10). The recalcitrant received fines (art. 12) and, if they were young enough, they lost their "licence to marry" (art. 20). In Pfanner's seventy-two recommendations, phrases such as "compelled to", "forced to", "allowed to", "forbidden" abound. He was adamant that forcing black people to work in the village was the right thing to do:

> My contention is that until the Government compel the Kafir, especially the young men, to work, the reformation of them is impossible; because the present young men will be the fathers of the next generation, and what can we expect from them? But you must compel him to work his own lot of ground to become a fieldworker, a peasant; it is no use for him to work on the railway extension, or in the goldmines, or to enter domestic service in a kitchen or a dining room or nursery. By working at home he will become attached to the soil, to his house and village, and will settle down and be fixed.[52]

CONCLUSION

One cannot help thinking, when reading Pfanner's paper on the "Native Question", that his ideal was to transform his African converts into Austrian farmers. The "African villages" he proposed as a model to the government of Natal were not very different, after all, from those of his country of birth. The size of the plots, the configuration of the villages, the material of the houses, the choice of the seeds, the food to put on the table and even the spoon to eat it: all had to be modelled on the European way of life. Pfanner believed in the equality of all races and condemned the racist attitudes of the Natal settlers. He recommended that indigenous people should receive title deeds for the houses put at their disposal by the government. But for him, respecting the African people was to inculcate in them the values and the way of life he considered to be the best. If he tolerated some of the African customs, it was not, as with Theophilus Shepstone, because he appreciated them but because he felt it was too early to remove them. The key to progress, in his opinion, was manual labour.

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[52] Frantz Pfanner, *The Native Question*, p. 14 (art. 61).

Pfanner may have been a benevolent missionary but he was also an adept of disciplinary methods. Considering the gap separating the African and the European cultures, he came to the conclusion that a certain degree of coercion was necessary to lead the black people, against their own will, on the road to civilisation. It is not surprising that the contemporaries saw a similarity between his seventy-two proposals and the recommendations of the Glen Grey Commission: both plans recognised the need for black people to own or at least to occupy a piece of land individually and both advocated some form of forced labour. Pfanner was an enlightened man but he was, first and foremost, a colonist. He did not want to see or could not see that his emphasis on manual labour fitted perfectly the needs of the Natal colony. While stressing that black people had to be treated with respect, he had no objection, like the majority of his contemporaries, to a model of town planning based on the idea of separate development.