

The Beginnings of St Joseph's Scholasticate

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Abstract

In 2018, St Joseph's Scholasticate celebrated 75 years since its foundation in 1943. It is a *House of Formation* for those who are preparing for permanent commitment to the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), as well as those who are preparing for ordination to the Catholic priesthood. St Joseph's Scholasticate was founded in 1943 at Prestbury in Pietermaritzburg by the OMI Natal Province. This study examines how the Oblates of Mary Immaculate established a scholasticate in South Africa and how it developed during its first five years until 1947 while it was situated in Prestbury. It examines why a scholasticate is important in Oblate formation and examines the essential elements of initial Oblate formation in a scholasticate. It also studies the requirements to establish a house of formation in the OMI Congregation and addresses the characteristics of those who become formators of a scholasticate, as well as the criteria by which scholastics are assessed.

Keywords: Catholic Church; priestly formation; indigenous clergy; religious life; Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI); St Joseph's Scholasticate

Introduction: Initial Formation for OMI Missionary Life

Those young men who wish to join the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) have to go through a period of initial formation into Oblate missionary life. Initial formation is a process of socialisation into the community life of the congregation. The initiates have to apply to join the congregation and if accepted, they join an Oblate formation community as a member and live the lifestyle of the community following its programme under the direction of a superior.

This process normally happens in two different houses of formation: the novitiate and the scholasticate. The novitiate lasts for one year. Its purpose is to allow the candidates (novices) to experience the Oblate community life and spirituality. They live in a



Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE/index>
 Volume 45 | Number 1 | 2019 | #4690 | 22 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/4690>
 ISSN 2412-4265 (Online)
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religious community receiving guidance on prayer life and the requirements of community life under the authority of a senior Oblate priest, called the novice master. Upon completion of the novitiate year, those who wish—and are accepted by the community authority—make temporary vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for one year.¹ Thus, they become temporary professed members of the congregation. Those who wish to continue their formation with the goal of ordination to the Catholic priesthood then proceed to the second house of formation, the scholasticate, which follows a similar programme of prayer and community life, with the addition of formal tertiary studies in philosophy (3 years) and theology (4 years) required by the Catholic Church before priestly ordination.

Historical Background of OMI Formation in Southern Africa

The OMI Novitiate for South Africa was established in Germiston in 1935. The first two novices were Wilfred Vogt (Transvaal) and Edward Armstrong (Natal). Of the two, only Wilfred Vogt continued to the priesthood.

Before 1943, there was no Oblate scholasticate in South Africa. Prior to 1935, most of the young men who expressed their desire to join the Oblate congregation as priests were sent either to Ireland or France for their novitiate year, followed by six or seven years of clerical studies. Hence, on the completion of his novitiate year in 1936, Bro. Wilfred Vogt was sent to France to pursue his studies at the Oblate Scholasticate of Notre Dame de Lumières. He was joined in 1938 by three others who had just completed their novitiate at Germiston, namely: Raymond Coates (from Port Elizabeth, who joined the Natal Vicariate); Brian Devitt (Transvaal); and Cyril Hayward (Natal). All of these candidates were white.

Because there was no scholasticate in the Union of South Africa, if a student showed a capacity for specialised study, he would be sent to Rome. This was the case with Denis Hurley and Brian Patrick Holland (both from Natal).² In most cases, those men would be ordained overseas before returning to their home provinces. As one can imagine, the financial implications were crippling as far as local resources were concerned.

The situation was aggravated when World War II broke out. It became very hazardous to send young men overseas with the shipping lanes in the Indian and Atlantic oceans

1 These “Evangelical counsels” have been vowed with some differences in style by those entering religious life since the middle ages (CIC 1983, 654).

2 Denis Hurley is well known for becoming Archbishop of Durban and an anti-apartheid activist. Brian Patrick Holland OMI was a co-student of Denis Hurley, though junior to him by one year in age and two years in ordination. They remained very close friends until Fr. Holland’s premature death in Durban on 4 October 1964 at the age of 48. He was a staff member at St Josephs for many years and was also involved in the Ecumenical movement.

heavily patrolled by German U-boats. It became increasingly clear that provision should be made for the establishment of a scholasticate for South Africans.

However, in southern Africa the Oblates in Basutoland (now called Lesotho) already had a novitiate as well as a scholasticate and a seminary (St Augustine) established in 1924 (Roman Catholic Church 2012, 17). Those South Africans who had completed the novitiate could go there. Two white Oblates from the Transvaal, Gerard Coleman (Bio81A) and John (Jack) O'Brien (Bio318A), who had completed their novitiate in Germiston in 1939, were sent to Basutoland for their philosophical and theological studies from 1940. In the following year, they were joined by the first black Oblates from Natal, Dominic Khumalo (Bio12A) and Jerome Mavundla (Bio259), who completed their novitiate year at Inchanga under the guidance of Fr. Howard St George, novice master.

The consequence of these events was that if the Oblates in South Africa wanted to send their scholastics to Roma in Basutoland, then a building would have to be erected to house them, and the expenses would be shared by the Transvaal and Natal Vicariates (provinces). However, according to the minutes of the Natal Oblate Vicarial Council meeting, there was some disagreement between the two vicariates about the manner of financing (Minutes August 18, 1942). This difficulty was eventually ironed out between the two provinces in the decision not to build a study house for South African students in Basutoland, but rather to build a scholasticate in South Africa.

Planning for a New Oblate Scholasticate in South Africa

Fr. Louis Peron, Vicar of Missions (Provincial) for the Transvaal, visited Roma in Basutoland early in 1942, presumably to visit the two scholastics from the Transvaal, Brothers Gerard Coleman and John O'Brien. As a result of his visit, a combined meeting of the two OMI Vicarial Councils (Natal and Transvaal) was organised at Congella on 18 September 1942 to discuss the question of the scholasticate.

After carefully listening to V. Rev Fr. Peron (Transvaal Provincial Superior) who has recently had the opportunity of visiting Roma and interviewing the authorities there; after having also taken into cognisance the terms of the proposed contract prepared by the authorities in Basutoland, it was unanimously decided to establish the scholasticate outside of Basutoland. (Minutes September 18, 1942)

The deal seemed not to look good for the South African provinces. A clear consequence of this decision was the marshalling of resources to finance the project of a new scholasticate in South Africa and the identification of stakeholders who might contribute to its realisation

Human and Financial Resources and the Issue of Oblate Sharing

At this time there were five Oblate entities that could be approached to support the project: 1) the two Ecclesiastical Vicariates; 2) the Apostolic Vicariate of Natal; 3) the Apostolic Vicariate of Transvaal; 4) the two Oblate Religious Vicariates in Natal and Transvaal; and 5) the Oblate General Administration in Rome.³ The main motivation of each was clearly to increase the supply of Oblate priests to maintain their organisations and mission.

Contribution of the Vicar Apostolic Bishop Delalle OMI

The first issue was the venue, and the Vicar Apostolic of Natal had a place available. The Natal Vicarial bursar, Fr. De Gersigny, spoke to Bishop Delalle OMI who offered to let his property in Prestbury Pietermaritzburg for the proposed scholasticate. This matter was discussed at the special meeting of the two provinces and “the meeting unanimously agreed to accept the offer of Prestbury, at Pietermaritzburg, subject, of course, to the consent of the Rt. Rev Bishop Delalle OMI” (Minutes September 18, 1942). At the following meeting it was reported that the Bishop’s consent had been given and that the property (at Prestbury) would be available from 1 January. Fr. De Gersigny was instructed to furnish the house with all that would be necessary for 12 persons (Minutes October 21, 1942). Subsequently it was reported that “at the request of the Rev Fr. N. de Gersigny, the Bishop has been pleased to reduce the monthly rental of Prestbury from £20 to £15” (Minutes December 15, 1942).

Financial Contributions from Natal and Transvaal

The matter of financial contributions from the two provinces was settled on 15 December when Fr. Peron of the Transvaal Provincial suggested in a letter dated 14 November 1942, that the Natal Vicariate alone should be responsible financially for the running of the new scholasticate. The Transvaal Province agreed to pay £60 per scholastic brother per annum. This proposal was unanimously agreed (Minutes December 15, 1942).

3 “When a vicariate was confided to a religious institute two structures were set up: the ecclesial structure and the religious structure. Each of these had to have its own area of responsibility and indeed its own financial structure. The ecclesial structure comprised everything to do with the establishment of the church in that area and was the responsibility of the vicar apostolic. The religious structure comprised everything to do with the religious life of the members of the institute including their residence, their sustenance and their spiritual exercises as laid down by their particular rule” (Bate 2000, 167). The religious structure changed its name to a province when it formally separated itself from the Ecclesiastical structure. This was done to allow the religious congregation to send members to other vicariates and dioceses as part of its missionary outreach.

Contribution of the General Administration

The Natal council asked the Vicar of Missions, Fr. Kerautret “to write to the Very Rev Fr. Desnoyers, Assistant General, of the Oblates in Rome, requesting that an amount of £3 be deducted per Father, per annum, from the *Viaticum* due to the General Administration and handed over to the Vicariate of Missions as a grant from the General Administration towards the new Scholasticate”⁴ (Minutes December 15, 1942). This was subsequently agreed.

Contributions of Staff by Natal and Transvaal Provinces

The Transvaal Province promised one of their members as a lecturer and the Natal Council approved the nomination of Father Holland as professor of philosophy as soon as he came back from Rome (Minutes October 21, 1942). Eventually the new staff member from the Transvaal Province was identified as Fr. Nolan. Subsequently the moderator of the new scholasticate, Fr. Viillard, was appointed (Minutes December 15, 1942).

Final Preparations for the new formation house

The *Codex Historicus* (CH) of 1943 reports:

Early then in 1943 Father Nolan, who was to be bursar of the establishment, began putting the house in order. With substantial help from Rev. Father Noel de Gersigny OMI, furniture was moved in. With the help of Bro. Paul Goudot OMI, the walls were plastered, the floors stained and general repairs carried out. The Augustinian Sisters from the Sanatorium lent a willing hand, and provided curtains and other linen, and a bed. A native cook was engaged. By the beginning of March, 1943, the house was ready to be opened as the Oblate Scholasticate, St Joseph’s Hermitage, Prestbury. (CH 1943, 4–5)

Opening of St Joseph’s Scholasticate

The official opening was on 11 March 1943, during which the house was blessed by Bishop Henry Delalle OMI. Rev Fr. Holland had arrived safely in Durban and attended the opening. He gave a first-hand account of the official opening in these words written in the *Codex Historicus*:

The solemn Blessing and Opening took place on Thursday, March 11th 1943. It was presided over by His Lordship Bishop Henry Delalle OMI. Many Fathers were present, including the Vicar of Missions, Fr. Kerautret, Dr Sormany, the Staff Fathers, Fr. Tual, Fr. Gannon, Fr. Burke, Fr. St George, Fr. Conter, Fr. Daub (all OMI). The Augustinian

4 “*Viaticum*”: a rather strange Latin term, usually designated for Holy Communion to the dying. Here it is used to denote a sort of tax, which is paid to the OMI General Administration in Rome by the local Oblate Province, based on the number of Oblates in the province. The purpose of this tax was to help the General Administration in its work of universal evangelisation.

Sisters attended and several of the laity, including Lady St George, Mrs Hurley, Mr and Mrs Power and Mr Leslie Smith. His Lordship blessed the different quarters of the house, then preached a rousing sermon on vocations, and gave Benediction. The Augustinian Sisters catered for the dinner that followed. (CH 1943, 6–7)

At the opening, a letter was read from the Assistant General of the Oblates in Rome with good wishes that the scholasticate in the Natal Vicariate become permanent.

The main building consisted of a chapel and sacristy, a refectory, kitchen, scullery, two storerooms and six other rooms. The sanitary block was joined to the house by a covered way. At the head of the entrance drive was another house, which the Marist Brothers had used for dormitories but which was largely uninhabitable owing to damp. It was still suitable for recreation rooms. Attached to the rear of this were the native quarters and sheds. Finally, there was a single-room building in the rear that could serve as a study-hall. (CH 1942, 2–3)

The first students admitted to Prestbury were Bros Kevin Cawte and Hugh Marshall who had completed their novitiate in 1942, but were unable to proceed overseas, and Bros Karl Struve and Geoffrey de Gersigny who had just completed their novitiate in February 1943.

Fr. Holland arrived at Prestbury on 15 April. In his absence between 8 March and 15 April, Fr. Denis Hurley stepped in by teaching philosophy at Prestbury. Fr. Holland remained on the staff of St Joseph's Scholasticate for the next 17 years.

Original Community

On 25 January 1943, the Provincial Council minutes record that the personnel (of the new scholasticate) was confirmed as: Rev Fr. G. Viallard OMI, Director of Residence and Moderator; Rev Fr. P. Holland OMI; and Rev Fr. W. Nolan OMI, professors of philosophy and Holy Scripture respectively. The scholastic year opened on 1 March and classes began on 8 March (CH 1943, 5). Brother Paul Goudot OMI also joined the community as its carpenter and general handyman. Rev Fr. Hurley and three more scholastics, Bros Hugh Marshall, Kevin Cawte and Karl Struve, arrived on Friday, 5 March (CH 1943, 5).

Continuing the Missionary Mandate to Train Local Clergy in Mission Territories

St Augustine Seminary in Lesotho (1924) and St Joseph's Scholasticate in Prestbury (1943) were both Oblate responses to the urgent mission to train local clergy in mission territories. This missionary mandate was emphasised by the Catholic Church in the twentieth century in four encyclicals. The first two of these are of particular signification as they predate the foundation of St Joseph's and clearly had an impact on the leadership of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa.

Maximum Illud, published in 1919, states this mandate as follows:

14. There is one final, and very important, point for anyone who has charge of a mission. He must make it his special concern to secure and train local candidates for the sacred ministry. In this policy lies the greatest hope of the new churches. For the local priest, one with his people by birth, by nature, by his sympathies and his aspirations, is remarkably effective in appealing to their mentality and thus attracting them to the Faith.

Only a few years later, in 1926, Pope Pius XI strongly emphasised the same call in *Rerum Ecclesia*:

19. Before everything else, We call your attention to the importance of building up a native clergy. If you do not work with all your might to attain this purpose, We assert that not only will your apostolate be crippled, but it will become an obstacle and an impediment to the establishment and organization of the church in those countries.

In 1951 the same call was repeated in *Evangelii Praecones* (EP) by Pope Pius XI.

The Formation Process at St Josephs

Socialisation into Values: Vocation and Lifestyle

The purpose of initial formation in Oblate life is to socialise the candidates into the values, practices, essential elements and lifestyle of OMI religious life. Firstly, Oblate life is a vocation based on a calling from God: “The call of Jesus Christ, heard within the church through people’s need for salvation draws us together as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Christ thus invites us to follow him and share in his mission through word and work” (CCR 1982, 1). The formation process must help the new members to discern this vocation and learn to articulate it in their life. Secondly, the formation process creates a lifestyle into which the candidates are socialised through the rhythms and mechanisms of daily life.

Socialisation through Mechanisms and Rhythms: Spiritual Life

The formation process has to provide mechanisms to help the scholastics in this regard. This occurs primarily through community retreats and spiritual direction. Each scholastic is required to choose a spiritual director from among the formators in the community to help them in this regard and to meet with them once a month. The spiritual life into which scholastics are inducted through spiritual direction and practical spiritual living helps the scholastics to mature and develop as men of God. This is a socialisation process but also a psychological one, as scholastics get to know themselves and the requirements of an authentic life. So, through formation, scholastics become mature Oblates. You cannot give what you do not have.

Socialisation through Mechanisms and Rhythms: Liturgical Life

Secondly, the liturgical rhythm defines the scholasticate as a praying community which prays the liturgical prayer of the church. Prayers were normally prayed in community or sometimes in private. The official daily prayers of the church were prayed in

Prestbury as defined in terms of specific hours of the day in the church's Liturgy of the Hours.⁵

Socialisation through Mechanisms and Rhythms: Community Life

Thirdly, Oblate life is a life in community from initiation to retirement. The suitability of members to live in community is an essential criterion for Oblate formation. Constitution 1 of the congregation clarifies this as follows: "We come together in apostolic communities of priests and brothers united to God by the vows of religion" (CCRR 1982, 1).

Socialisation through Mechanisms and Rhythms: Academic Life

The study programme contains two components. The first is the rhythm of the various lectures and the second is the rhythm of the dedicated study times when the scholastics develop their knowledge of the studies taught.

The Regulation

These rhythms and mechanism of daily life were articulated in the community *Regulation* and time-tabled (see table 1). These elements define the rhythm and lifestyle of a formation community into which scholastics were socialised through the values of Oblate community life with a missionary goal as expressed in the words of St Eugene De Mazenod, the founder: "Among yourselves charity charity charity and zeal for souls" (De Mazenod 2016).

5 The community prays Morning Prayer and meditation from 5.45 to 6.30, followed by Mass at 6.30. Sext and None were prayed at 12.00. Vespers and Compline were prayed at 2.50 pm and night prayers at 8.45. Traditional hours are matins (office of readings), lauds (Morning Prayer), and vespers (Evening prayer). The minor hours include prime, tierce, sext, nones, and compline (night prayer). At this time all of these were part of the programme in the scholasticate.

Table 1: Community Regulation Time-table and Liturgy of the Hours

REGULATION	
Ordinary days	
05.15	Rising
05.45	Morning prayers and mediation
06.30	Mass Thanksgiving, dormitories
07.30	Breakfast and Recreation
08.15–09.10	First Class
09.15–10.10	Second Class
10.10	Tea and Recreation
10.30	Third Class
11.25	Free time
12.00	Sext and None, Particular Examen
12.30	Dinner and Recreation,
02.30	Vespers, Compline, Study
04.00	Tea and Recreation
04.30	Study
05.30	Spiritual Reading
06.00	Oraison, Benediction or stations
06.30	Supper and Recreation
07.45	Study
08.45	Night prayers; Preparation of meditation
9.20	Lights out Rosary Visits and Scripture in private

Content of Lectures

In addition to the Regulation, we have the following memory of lectures from Hurley (1993) who in 1945 was named as Director and Moderator of the Oblates at the scholasticate, in place of Rev Fr. Viillard who was ill at the time. He recalled the study programme at Prestbury which “consisted of five classes of logic per week, three of cosmology (Aristotelian) three of scripture, two of church history, one of the history of philosophy, one of liturgy, one of (note the name!) sacred eloquence and one of plain chant. Who taught the plain chant I cannot remember. It certainly was not me!” (Hurley 1993, 14) Clearly, at the beginning, the studies were in philosophy although the philosophy programme also had introductory courses in liturgy, church history and scripture. Only after two years of philosophy, did students begin to study theology with courses in scripture, dogmatic and moral theology.

Criteria for Formation: The Question of Leadership

The formation process also depends on the vision of the Oblate authorities who have decided to establish the scholasticate and choose the personnel to run it. The Provincial Superior is the principal authority for the scholasticate.

Assessment Mechanisms

In the Catholic Church, assessments of institutions and communities are normally carried out by means of a canonical visitation by a church authority responsible for them. After interviewing each member, he makes a formal report and shares it with his council and the community.

The first visitation of St Josephs was in November 1943 by V. Rev Fr. Joseph Kerautret, the Provincial Superior. In his report, he says: “I was pleased with the spirit in which it was carried out and I desire to thank you for the frank confidence you manifested” (Kerautret 1943). He continues: “We know that our congregation takes special care of our Houses of Studies and particularly our scholasticates ... The reason is quite obvious, the scholasticate being the house where our future Oblates and priests receive their training. This training must be a very serious one.” He then refers to Pope Pius XI, who visited the members of the OMI General chapter in 1938, when “during his discourse on several occasions he insisted on ‘quality, quality, quality’ in reference to houses of study.” Then Kerautret (1943) addresses the scholastics directly, saying: “Indeed today, under the present trying circumstances, we need good religious and saintly zealous priests.”⁶ Finally in an encouraging way he says: “I see you have been showing good will during this first year of your scholasticate. The results of the first term exams were good ... I also congratulate you in your spirit of piety and your regularity in discharging your spiritual exercises.”

For Kerautret, the purpose of the scholasticate is “spiritual and intellectual training.” The goal is regularity in the spiritual exercises, piety and knowledge of the faith leading to the goal of “Good religious and saintly priests” (Kerautret 1943).

Criteria for Formators as Leaders of the Formation Process

In the 1928 OMI Constitutions and Rules in force at the time of the Prestbury scholasticate, one of the most important works of the Oblates was “the training of ecclesiastics in seminaries” (CR 1928, 48). This section provides a number of criteria from the rules for such formators:

- Such members ought to be distinguished for their keen intelligence, sound sense and ripe discernment and still more for true and solid piety. (CR 1928, 50)

6 Trying circumstances—a reference to World War II.

- Let it be considered too whether they are able to explain lucidly what they have learned laboriously, whether they are edifying in their lives and lovers of religious observance. (CR 1928, 51)
- Their chief care will be to fill the mind of the seminarists with life-giving doctrine to kindle in their hearts a love of the duties of the priestly state. (CR 1928, 57)

Denis Hurley (2006) saw the process of personal formation as a scholastic, as the basis of preparation for being a formator. You have to go through it yourself before you can socialise others into the process. The principal requirement is an Oblate who lives and witnesses his life through his ministry and is able to evangelise the poor, is interested in their future and has lived through an authentic formation programme himself. Hurley gives an interesting personal experience of this process in his own life as a scholastic.

I consider myself fortunate in that toward the end of my stay in Rome I became aware of the revival of the teaching of St Paul on the church as the body of Christ. Gradually conviction grew of the presence of Christ in the church and each member of it. His presence increasingly became a basic element of my spiritual life. A dramatic moment in this development occurred when my superior in Rome asked me one day how I was getting on. I replied positively enough but mentioned that there were times of discouragement, which I think, emanated from some hesitation about the religious vow of chastity and priestly celibacy. In his response, he emphasised the need to recognise the presence of Christ in one's life. At that psychological moment, the words he spoke had an explosive significance for me. Later in my priestly life and as a young bishop the sense of Christ's presence grew continually. My spiritual teaching as the superior of St Joseph's scholasticate at Prestbury was largely inspired by this conviction and I remember preaching a retreat to the Holy Family sisters in Maris Stella in Durban based almost entirely on the doctrine of the body of Christ as developed by St Paul. (Hurley 2006, 44)

Early Formation History of St Joseph's Scholasticate

First Exam Results

The 1944 exams are the first recorded in the St Joseph's archives (St Joseph's 1978). The philosophy courses were oral, critics, metaphysics, history of philosophy, ethics and logic. Student marks ranged from 4 to 10 (out of 10), with most students scoring over 8. The theology programme included dogma, moral, canon law, church history, sacred scripture and canon law.

A Scholastic's Experience of the First Years

Fr. Kevin Cawte (1993, 15), who was one of the first group of scholastics at Prestbury, relates his experience of the beginnings as follows:

I was one of four student guinea pigs. We had no tradition but only what our lecturers and Superior had received in their own formation in seminaries with large numbers. The old rules applied. We were not allowed out to visit a dentist or doctor without a companion, a policy we never had in our novitiate formation. Our lectures in philosophy were in Latin and although we had done matric Latin, at first we did not understand anything. At first, I remember Fr. Hurley talking about “*simii*” in his lecture and it was only afterwards when I looked it up that I found he was using the monkeys jumping around in the trees outside as examples!

We had one small row of books in a bookcase. In those days, the Oblates had very little money. Our exercise was quoits or walks in the plantation. Often you had to ask yourself, “what am I doing here?” At the end of the year, two students left and we were joined by a couple more in 1944. Fr. Hurley was appointed superior that year. Everything improved greatly that year especially the food ... Fr. Hurley trained us in voice formation and speaking among the trees. He was very good at it. (Cawte 1993, 15)

New Superior: Fr. Denis Eugene Hurley OMI

In February 1944, three more scholastics completed their novitiate and joined the community at Prestbury. They were Bros Robert de Sylva, C. Lansdowne and Charles Murray, as well as Colin Gale who, for health reasons, had not made his novitiate, but went straight to Prestbury to see if his health would stand up to the studies. It is unfortunate that Bros Marshall, Lansdowne, Murray and Gale all left within a year or two due to ill-health. Of Bro. Lansdowne, the *Codex Historicus* has this to say:

Bro. Lansdowne, to the regret of all, decided that it was God’s will that he should withdraw. The memory of his sweet and humble character will remain long with us. After serving many years in the ministry of the Congregational Church, he became a Catholic and after a while went to the Noviciate at Germiston. Doctors did not think he would be strong enough to do the long studies. But nevertheless, he tried. After his noviciate, he went to Basutoland where he did not seem to improve in health as much as had been expected. Then the studies at Prestbury did not help matters. So he decided not to renew his vows. (CH 1945, 31–32)

Future of the Scholasticate: Possible Move

Halfway through 1944, an extraordinary meeting took place at Congella to decide on the future of the scholasticate. It was attended by the two Vicars of Missions, Frs Joseph Kerautret (Natal) and Louis Peron (Transvaal). Patrick Whelan, René Le Voguer, Jerome Marien, Denis Howard St George, and Denis Hurley were also present. It was becoming obvious that Prestbury would not be able to house more students the following year, if both philosophers and theologians were to remain there. Prestbury was just too small to house the anticipated growth in numbers of scholastics. Fr. Kerautret made two suggestions. The first was to transfer the scholasticate to Germiston where the novitiate was, and the second was to send those studying theology to Basutoland. However, Fr. Peron stated that the “Fathers of Basutoland were not keen

on a permanent scholasticate for Europeans [whites] in Basutoland” (Minutes July 31, 1944). The meeting finally decided to have the scholasticate at Germiston, and the novitiate at Prestbury (Minutes July 31, 1944). However, on 5 December 1944 the decision was made to leave the scholasticate at Prestbury during 1945 (Minutes December 5, 1944).

Additional Staff, Scholastics and Staff Member

It was noted that Fr. Wilfred Vogt had received his obedience for the scholasticate, and that Bishop David O’Leary OMI of Johannesburg expressed his desire for Fr. Nolan to return to the Transvaal Vicariate.⁷ Bros Gerard Coleman and John O’Brien, who had done most of their studies in Basutoland, joined the Prestbury community to complete their last two years of theology. On 1 March, two new members arrived who had just completed their novitiate and made their first vows: Bros Hugh Dalton and Remigius Scheuber.

1945 and 1946: Two Years of Consolidation and Future Vision

At the council meeting of 17 April 1945, it was noted that Bishop O’Leary had agreed to loan Father Devitt OMI to the Scholasticate Prestbury as a professor for an indefinite period. At the same council meeting it was stated that it was time for the Oblates to have a permanent institution of learning in South Africa. This was proposed by Fr. Hurley and supported by Frs St George, Marien, L’Hote and Le Voguer. The significance of this is the positive judgment regarding the effectiveness of St Joseph’s Scholasticate in its short existence as a sustainable model of Oblate religious formation. At the end of this year, the first two priests, Coleman and O’Brien, would be ordained priest followed by Mavundla, Cawte and Struve in subsequent years. Ten years later, by 1955, this number rose to 30 South African Oblates completing their scholasticate at St Joseph’s, testifying to the veracity of the prophetic proposal of permanence of the scholasticate proposed in the 1945 minutes, that St Joseph’s Scholasticate would be fully established and the goal of training Oblate priests and brothers accomplished.

Another important vision at this time came from the Vicar of Missions, Fr. Joseph Kerautret OMI, who emphasised “that our Scholastics must be trained especially with a love for the Native Missions” (Minutes April 17, 1945). He himself had a great love for the Zulu people, and served for the greater part of his life in Zulu-speaking missions, particularly in the notorious Cato Manor township of Durban. His interjection at the above meeting was, in fact, never overlooked, and this missionary outlook—including language preparation and missionary insertion into Zulu and other African missions—

7 As a matter of interest, Bishop David O’Leary OMI was the Vicar Apostolic [Bishop] of the Transvaal from 8 September 1925 to his retirement on 8 December 1950. He died on August 12, 1958. According to the *Codex Historicus*, he was the first South African Oblate vocation to the priesthood. He studied in Liege, Belgium, from 1905 onwards. 1911 saw the next batch of South African vocations; while the third group was in 1924 (CH 1943, 48).

became one of the outstanding features of St Joseph's Scholasticate from then on.

At the same meeting the Council officially and unanimously agreed on Prestbury being the place for the permanent scholasticate and that the province would take on the whole responsibility. Consequently the status of the scholasticate was formalised as a "*domus non formata*"⁸ and community appointments were made: Father Hurley was appointed Moderator and Director; Father Holland was appointed first Assessor; Father Vogt was appointed second Assessor; and Father Devitt was appointed "Econome" (bursar or treasurer) (Minutes April 17, 1945).

Proposing a Central Training Place for Catholic Theological Studies in South Africa

In the same meeting of the Provincial council, Fr. Hurley who was attending made the suggestion of establishing a central training place for theological studies in South Africa, in such a way that there would be an institute of studies with hostels for seculars (diocesan students) and those from religious institutes. This suggestion by Father Hurley was unanimously rejected by the Council. Although the members of the Council had agreed to the permanence of St Joseph's Scholasticate, they were not yet ready to admit diocesan and other religious students in great numbers. Hence, they did not support Fr. Hurley's proposal. They obviously wished to concentrate firstly on putting an Oblate scholasticate on a firm foundation before welcoming other religious or diocesan students. The questions of finance, staff and accommodation were still uppermost among the problems faced by the nascent scholasticate. Nevertheless, the scholasticate did take in a small number of diocesan students almost from its inception, as we shall see below. This led inevitably to the limited admittance of religious students of other congregations and orders.

However, the idea did not go away and on 12 September 1945, the Council members were notified of a letter received from Rev Father McCann⁹ in connection with the establishment of a central Ecclesiastical College for South Africa. Already the seeds were being sown for a common educational establishment for future priests in South Africa. This item was to crop up several times in succeeding years.

First Ordinations to the Priesthood from St Joseph's

December 1945 marked the occasion of the first priests to be ordained from St Joseph's Scholasticate. On 21 December 1945 Gerard Coleman OMI and John O'Brien OMI, both from the Transvaal, were ordained by Bishop David O'Leary OMI of Johannesburg

8 This canonical term could be loosely translated as a religious community, which does not yet satisfy the conditions laid down in Canon Law to be an established religious house. It is for this reason that Hurley was appointed Moderator and not Superior, which would be the case in the former.

9 Owen McCann was to become Archbishop of Cape Town, and South Africa's first Cardinal.

in the Pro-Cathedral in Kerk Street.

Hurley as Moderator of St Joseph's Scholasticate

There is no doubt that for a short time the central figure at Prestbury was Fr. Denis Eugene Hurley OMI, the Moderator of the Scholasticate from 1944 to 1946. He was greatly loved and respected by the students and staff. Part of the curriculum was the game of soccer every Sunday afternoon and on special feast days. Fr. Hurley enjoyed this weekly game of soccer with the students, and was not averse to a bit of rough and tumble, and even to some rough handling on the part of the students. When he was appointed Bishop, he received a parcel from one of his past pupils, Fr. Gerry Coleman OMI of the Transvaal, containing a pair of purple soccer shorts!

Debating Society

While at Prestbury, Fr. Hurley also played an active part in the activities of the city of Pietermaritzburg. He and Fr. Holland became members of the Pietermaritzburg "Parliament" (debating society), where Hurley was the "Member for Howick."¹⁰ He proposed that a debating society be formed at the scholasticate to meet every fortnight on a Wednesday evening. The suggestion, based on the model of the Pietermaritzburg parliament, was eagerly adopted by all and, with the Fr. Moderator as speaker, a government and an opposition were elected. The first prime minister was Bro. Lansdowne and the first leader of the opposition was Bro. De Sylva. These were given two supporters each and the rest sat in the cross-benches. Each one was addressed or referred to as would be done in a real parliament, i.e. either by the title of his office or by his constituency. The subjects debated were of social or religious interest. The prime minister's neatly worded and witty speeches were a model and an encouragement to the others (CH 1945, n.p.).

On one occasion some young scholars from Voortrekker High School took part in a debate, and one young lady began her speech in Afrikaans. One of the members of "Parliament" objected, and demanded that she speak in English. Fr. Hurley immediately stood up and defended the young lady's right to speak in her mother tongue. However, the student continued her speech in English, just to show the "honourable member" that she was quite capable of speaking in English. But she never forgot that intervention on the part of Fr. Hurley, and many, many years later she wrote to Archbishop Hurley, reminding him of that incident. Both she and her husband, who was a *Dominee* in the Dutch Reformed Church, became firm friends of the Archbishop.

10 "Outside the university the intellectual life of Maritzburg was served by the City Parliament, a sort of debating society on parliamentary lines, organised by such devotees as Mr Newsom, the city Valuator. The motions up for discussion were advertised in the Natal Witness, and the Parliament met weekly above Christie's and later above Perks's tea-rooms. The sessions were well supported; there was much enthusiasm, for instance, over a comparatively unknown young speaker—Denis Hurley" (Bizley 1987, 40).

New Subjects Added to Curriculum

The second term opened with the establishment of a chair of sociology, Catholic action and actualities by Fr. Moderator, to consist of one class a week for all the students. It was confided to the care of Fr. Holland. Fr. Devitt took over canon law and Fr. Vogt began teaching cosmology (CH 1945, n.p.).

Oblate Periodical

During October 1945, Fr. Hurley Superior received a suggestion from Fr. Le Voguer about sending a general newsletter to those who are interested in the scholasticate. Fr. Superior set the ball rolling among the brothers and then called a general meeting to discuss the foundation of such a newsletter. It was decided that they would start with 16 pages of Gestetner-copied pages. Bro. De Sylva proposed a programme of “contents” and was given a chance to carry out his plan by being elected first editor—and he put all his heart into this duty (CH 1945, 40). Bros Kevin Cawte and Hugh Dalton were elected to assist him. After some discussion it was decided to call the little paper *CARITAS* (CH 1945, 40).

This little review, later elevated to a typeset print on 22 November 1946—much to the joy of the editor and scholastics—became very popular among its readers, especially the members of the Missionary Associates of Mary Immaculate (MAMI), but unfortunately did not survive the test of time.¹¹ The “Mission Herald,” which was sponsored by the MAMI, followed it for a while, but it too ended after a couple of years.

Italian Prisoners-of-War

In February of 1944, Fr. Hurley obtained from the Prisoner-of-War (POW) Camp, Pietermaritzburg, the services of two Italians, Piero Vilani and Carlo Montanelli. Both came to live at the scholasticate. The former was a carpenter by trade and undertook to do garden work and to stain the new altar. Later he was to make new desks for the study hall. Carlo Montanelli (who could speak English) became the cook. Later a third Italian, Franco Perego, a mechanic by profession, helped Piero in the grounds (CH 1944, 18). Pietermaritzburg had two very large POW camps; one at Hayfields and the other in the vicinity of Cleland. The POWs built a chapel at the Cleland camp, which was blessed by the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Bernard Gijlswijk OP on the feast of St Joseph, 19 March 1944. That chapel still stands there today, and is in the care of the Italian government. The scholasticate staff has over the years been very helpful in celebrating Mass in the chapel for the Italian community of Pietermaritzburg. The three POWs at Prestbury became part and parcel of the community. They got along very well with the priests and scholastics, and joined in the soccer games on a Sunday with great gusto. At

11 Missionary Associates of Mary Immaculate is an organisation of lay people who associate themselves with the work of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It was formally established in 1920 by the then Superior General Archbishop Dontenwill.

the end of the war, they returned to their home country. Soon afterwards, Franco Perego returned to South Africa with his wife and family, and remained in Durban permanently.

A Turning Point in 1946: Multiracialism at the Scholasticate

The meeting of 6 February 1946 marks a turning point in the history of St Joseph's Scholasticate and the training of future Oblates. Before the establishment of St Joseph's, indigenous (black) vocations to the Oblate congregation and priesthood were sent to Basutoland for their scholastic studies. Brothers Jerome Mavundla and Dominic Khumalo were by this time reaching the end of their clerical studies and getting ready for ordination.¹² It was decided to move Jerome Mavundla to Prestbury for health reasons, and so he was the first black scholastic to join St Joseph's Scholasticate.

The racial question was to become serious after 1948 with the coming into power of the National party and its apartheid policy. The racial issue would have to be addressed by Oblate policy. There were clear divisions on this matter among Oblates. By then the Scholasticate had moved to Cleland, which was quickly declared an interracial scholasticate by the Natal Province; a position that was approved by OMI General Administration but created conflict with the apartheid policy and some Oblates.

Additional Accommodation Required: Possible Transfer

At a meeting of 15 May 1946, it was decided to do something about more accommodation for the scholastics of the following year. The Vicars of Missions of the Transvaal and Kimberley were to be notified that the Natal Vicariate would be responsible for a permanent scholasticate. However, at the next session of the Council in August, the members were presented with two proposals: 1) erect an additional building on a property which did not belong to the Oblates but to the Bishop at an estimated cost of £2000; or 2) transfer the scholasticate to Germiston and the novitiate to Prestbury, both as a temporary measure. The Council voted for the second proposal, with one exception, Fr. St George, who preferred the first suggestion. Fr. Le Voguer then requested that, before the councillors signed the minutes, the reasons for adoption of the second proposal be recorded, viz that the Bishop would not be willing to promise to compensate the Oblates for the new additions, should the Oblates leave Prestbury.

12 Frs Jerome Mavundla and Dominic Khumalo were the first indigenous black Oblate priests of the Natal Province. They were ordained together in Emmanuel Cathedral, Durban, on 3 July 1946. Both then qualified as teachers at St Francis College, Mariannhill, and became principals of Inchanga High School and Primary School respectively. Although they taught in the school during the week, they both took on pastoral work over weekends and helped to build up several outstations in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, which later became centres of Catholic activity. Fr. Mavundla never forgot his teaching abilities, and in his later years opened a secretarial school at St Mary's, Pietermaritzburg, to prepare young African ladies to become office secretaries. Fr. Khumalo later became the first Episcopal Vicar and later the first Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Durban. Fr. Mavundla died on 16 December 1987, and Bishop Khumalo on 27 April 2006.

Four days later (16 August 1946) a special meeting was called, because a new proposition had arisen. Bishop Delalle, on hearing that the Vicarial Council had decided to transfer the scholasticate to Germiston, requested that the decision be reversed, as he was now anxious to sign an agreement with the Vicariate of Natal to the effect that: 1) the Oblates would be offered the first refusal or option for the purchase of the property; and 2) that the Vicariate Apostolic (diocese) would compensate the Oblates for any new building they erected on the property, should they leave Prestbury. So the decision to move to Germiston was reversed, and it was agreed that an architect be approached in order to draw up general plans for the definite layout of the future scholasticate (Minutes August 16, 1946).

At the September 1946 meeting, it was unanimously decided to make the scholasticate at Prestbury a “*domus formata*,” seeing that it now met all the required canonical conditions and Fr. Hurley could be appointed Superior.¹³

Changes after 1946

Secular (Diocesan) Students Accepted

Since the General Administration had approved the permanence of the scholasticate at Pietermaritzburg, it was decided in November to look into the possibility of the acquisition of a new site. At the same time, the Provincial Council took a major decision, which would affect the nature of St Joseph’s Scholasticate for the future. It accepted to receive two young men destined for the secular (diocesan) clergy, one belonging to the Vicariate of the Transvaal, and the other to the Prefecture of Lydenburg. There is some confusion here. The two diocesan students admitted in 1947 were Colin Collins and Denis Bourhill. Colin Collins was not from Johannesburg, but from King Williamstown. He arrived at Prestbury during Easter, and then did the four years of theology at St Joseph’s Scholasticate. On 24 September 1950, he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Hugh Boyle in King Williamstown (CH 1950, 3–4). After ordination, he served for some years as General Secretary to the South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference. The second student, from Lydenburg Prefecture, was Denis Bourhill, who arrived at Prestbury to begin the new scholastic year in February 1947. After ordination, he served as a diocesan priest for some years in the Prefecture. Later he joined the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (MFSCJ), and served as novice master for that congregation.

In the late 1960s, however, as other religious orders and congregations began getting vocations in greater numbers, St Joseph’s would open its doors wider until it would become the favoured institution of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors for the

13 This is a canonical term, which could be loosely translated as “a formal religious house”; in general, the residence of any religious institute of men or women. It is a formal or established religious house (*domus formata*) if at least six professed religious dwell in it. In the case of a clerical institute, four of the six must be priests.

training of its religious students. This led to these congregations building their own residences nearby so that their students would receive their academic training at St Joseph's, while receiving their religious formation in their own houses. In 1990, St Joseph's Theological Institute was established as an academic institution, separate from St Joseph's Scholasticate, which remained as the Oblate house of formation. Hence, Fr. Hurley's vision, expressed in 1945, became a reality some 45 years later.

Later there were two other diocesan students who studied at St Joseph's, after it moved to Cleland. The *Codex Historicus* in 1951 notes that "Two Theologians returned to the world, namely Eddie Higgins and Francis Dillon" (CH 1951, 11). Edward Higgins had at first tried the Paulist Fathers in the USA, but then decided to join the Diocese of Johannesburg as a diocesan priest. He arrived at Cleland in February 1950, in his third year of theology. He did not persevere to the priesthood, but became well known in the academic world as Professor Edward Higgins of Rhodes University. Francis Dillon hailed from the Free State. But in the first year of theology he decided to "return to the world," back to his family farm. All four diocesan students fitted very well into, and got on very well with the Oblate community, and were well liked by their fellow students at St Josephs.

A New Vicar Apostolic of Natal: Denis Eugene Hurley OMI

The new year (1947) was the harbinger of great news for the Vicariate of Natal, but not so good for St Joseph's Scholasticate, because it was to lose its Superior and a valued member of the staff. On 12 December 1946, Fr. Hurley was named Vicar Apostolic of Natal in succession to Bishop Henry Delalle. Fr. Hurley's appointment as the new Vicar Apostolic (Bishop) created a vacancy on the already struggling staff of St Joseph's at Prestbury. A letter from the Vicar General of the OMI Congregation in Rome authorised the Vicar of Missions to request Fr. Patrick Whelan, provincial of the Transvaal, to release Rev Fr. John (Jack) O'Brien as a professor for Prestbury. He was subsequently appointed to Prestbury on 21 January 1947. Fr. Wilfred Vogt was appointed acting Superior of St Joseph's, with Fr. Pat Holland as first assistant, and Fr. Brian Devitt as second assistant.

A New Superior

Unfortunately, Fr. Vogt fell seriously ill, and in April, Fr. Holland was appointed vice-Superior during the prolonged absence of Fr. Vogt. The Council now had to decide on a future Superior for the scholasticate as it seemed that Fr. Vogt would not be able to

take on this responsibility in the future. The name of Fr. Maurice Lener was put forward as the best candidate for the task.¹⁴

Decision on a new site

By 1947, Prestbury was becoming too small for the increase in vocations to the Oblates and in April 1947, Fr. Bob de Sylva OMI heard of a property of 34 acres at Cleland, which could be purchased at a very reasonable price. This was to become the second home of St Joseph's Scholasticate.

Conclusion

From its beginning in 1942 to 1947 when the scholasticate was to move to a bigger site to accommodate more scholastics and staff, the Oblates had responded well to the challenge of establishing a functioning scholasticate which achieved the goals the province had established in its meetings during 1942 and 1943. Facilities were developed to ensure the requirements of prayer life, study, community life studies and involvement with the people of Pietermaritzburg. A few had professed their final vows as Oblates and others had been ordained priests. At the time when the Natal and Transvaal Provinces decided to begin a scholasticate, both provinces were struggling to survive financially. Their income was barely enough to cover their expenses. The fact that they decided to open a scholasticate was without doubt a tremendous act of faith in the providence of God, and there is ample evidence to show that the good Lord rewarded this trust in him. From a very humble and poor beginning, St Joseph's grew over the years, but not without growing pains and hardships. The lack of financing and a spirit of poverty, which reigned over the life at Prestbury, continued for many years, through Cleland to Cedara.

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14 Fr. Maurice Lener OMI was still overseas at the time. At the outbreak of World War II, Fr. Lener and several other French priests serving in Natal were recalled by the French government to serve in the French armed forces. When France capitulated, Fr. Lener managed to escape captivity and joined the Free French Forces. He served as a chaplain to the Free French and American Navies and travelled from west to east on troopships. He was decorated several times and finally received the Legion of Honour from the French government. He was due to return to Natal by the end of June, after recuperating from a very severe heart attack. He arrived on 30 July and was duly installed as Superior of St Joseph's Scholasticate the next day. He never quite recovered his health. After a long and active life in the ministry, he finished his days at Oakford Priory as chaplain to the Dominican Sisters. He died on 1 July 1992 and was buried in the Oakford cemetery.

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