THE ISLANDS OF THE BAHAMAS
UPON THESE ROCKS

for Father Michael,
with fraternal best wishes. (Dana, 003)
UPON THESE ROCKS

Catholics in the Bahamas

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FOREWORD

Upon These Rocks is for me a dream come true. Almost from the time I was called to serve as bishop of the Bahamas, it has been my hope to have a history of the people of God in the Bahamas. I have written many times to the abbots of St. John's Abbey to ask that they make it possible for my dear confere and brother priest, Fr. Colman Barry, O.S.B., to be assigned this monumental task.

This has now come about through the kindness of Fr. Abbot Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B., the former St. John's abbot, and of Fr. Abbot John Eidenschink, O.S.B., the present abbot, in permitting Father Colman to resign from the presidency of St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, a post which he has admirably filled for the previous seven years.

Father Colman was given a sabbatical leave so he might write this history. He came to the Bahamas and worked untiringly on a daily schedule writing the manuscript. I know it was for him a labor of love which involved much burning of the midnight oil.

The author of Upon These Rocks is prepared in a wonderful manner both academically and by his rich background in experience as a professor of history and as an author of eight previous books. In the fall, 1972, he became a visiting professor of Church history in the School of Divinity, Yale University. He has since been named dean of the new School of Religious Studies in The Catholic University of America. While here in the Bahamas he marked his twenty-fifth anniversary as a priest of God in the Benedictine order.
Father Colman has a rare gift of enlisting the help of many others, clergy, religious and laity over a period of several years in gathering materials for this work. Not a single person refused to cooperate in helping collect material, prepare the manuscript for the printers, search for photos, record anecdotes and uncover elusive sources in archives in Rome, the Americas and the Bahamas. My own gratitude to Father Colman and to everyone who helped him will continue daily in my grateful Masses and prayers. Thanks to Paula Mitchell, Marie Taylor and Sr. Jane Marion, O.P., who carefully typed the manuscript, and to The Liturgical Press of St. John's Abbey, who again, as we have over the years come to expect, produced a beautiful edition.

A feature of the resources that are found in this history of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas which is especially noteworthy and also serves to give the story authenticity and firsthand flavor are the eighty-three interviews. Father Colman insists this was the work of a team, and we all thank God that this volume was produced before it was too late to assemble materials. It is my plan to preserve these precious interviews and archival materials of the manuscript, many of which could not be used in this work because of space limitations. One hundred years from now they will be here waiting as witnesses for that generation of Christ's followers to reevaluate in terms of their coming experiences on the pilgrimage we all make in our allotted times.

As an avid reader of this manuscript, chapter by chapter, my soul was filled to overflowing with respect and gratitude for our Bahamian pioneers who have brought us to our present opportunities of service by what they endured and sacrificed. Bahamians now and in future generations simply can never forget what has been given to them by so many with so little recognition or return requested.

This vast new or third world diocese of almost one thousand miles, its long history going back to the landfall of Columbus in the Americas, unfolds its distinctive character in this volume. I earnestly hope it will be read widely in the Bahamas and by those legions of friends of the Bahamas in all countries who have come as visitors or residents to these beautiful islands so blessed by God's bounty. They will find here the story of the religious dimension of life in the family islands. The religious dimension has been a very basic and vital part of Bahamian culture as this volume repeatedly details. It must not be forgotten or passed over at this critical juncture in the development of these our people as an emerging nation.

The years after Vatican Council II, with its challenging renewals and resulting conflicts of interest and opinion, have been difficult years for the Catholic Church everywhere including the Bahamas. These same
years have also been a period in my service as bishop of real opportunity and grace. The recent encouraging experience of our first general diocesan assembly and the rich possibilities of the years ahead are upon us. This history, Upon These Rocks, will be an indispensable guidepost as we move together in search of justice, love and peace so that in all things God may be glorified.

✠Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B.
Bishop of Nassau, Bahamas
31 December 1972
UPON THESE ROCKS
SAIL ON

In one of the more interesting nineteenth century accounts of life in the Bahamas, Magistrate Louis Diston Powles stated in 1888:

A prominent West Indian merchant said to me, 'Why do you waste your time writing about the Bahama Islands? We in the West Indies know no more about the Bahamas than we do about an Irish village.'

No doubt he said no more than the truth, for though included in the list of Her Majesty's West Indian possessions, the Bahamas have so little in common with the other islands that I believe a man might spend his life travelling about the rest of the West Indies without ever hearing their name, and I am sure he might pass his days in the Bahamas and have no more idea of the mode of life or condition of the people in the rest of the West Indies than if he had never been beyond the limits of an English county...

In the mother country the Bahamas' name is never heard outside the walls of the Colonial Office, unless it be among the supporters of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel or the Wesleyan and Baptist Missions.

But many an interesting story has been told of an Irish village, and it may be my readers will find interest in my story of this obscure corner of Her Majesty's dominions, which may well be termed 'the outpost of the New World', seeing that it was one of the Bahama Islands that Columbus first sighted.

The Bahamians have an old saying about their Columbian heritage: "It all began here." Certainly much history has passed over these sun-swept islands of the northern Caribbean since that morning of 12 October 1492 when Christopher Columbus made his first landfall in the Americas, the island which he named San Salvador. The great part of the history of South and North America was centered elsewhere than in the Bahamas during succeeding generations. It has often been said that history stopped for a fleeting moment in the Bahamas and then passed them by. However, the Bahamas have consistently been on the coattails of the history of the Americas. A unique aspect of Bahamian history that remains to be told is the development of Catholic religious life in this Atlantic island chain.
Early Spanish geographers divided the Bahamas into three distinct groups: the Bahamas, the Organos and the Islands of the Martyrs. That second and third grouping by the Spaniards included Cuba and the Florida Keys. The history of the Bahamas has in major part been associated with that definite political area in the British colonial system with its seat of government in Nassau on the island of New Providence. A natural geographic delimitation of the area, however, would include the island groups of Turks and Caicos to the southeast.

The Bahamas consist of a group of off-shore islands, cays and rocks forming an archipelago lying between 20° 50' and 27° 25' north latitude and 72° 37' and 80° 32' west longitude. Latitudinally the Bahamas include the Matanilla reef in the north and the island of Inagua in the south, while the longitudinal spread is from Mayaguana and its adjacent rocks and cays on the east to Cay Sal Bank on the west. Bermuda is the nearest land to the northeast, Africa lies at great distance to the east. But to the west and south land is near in the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. The Straits of Florida separate the island of Bimini from the peninsula of the state of Florida in the United States lying only fifty miles to the west. Cuba is separated on the south through the Old Bahama, Santarém and Nicholas Channels by only 50 to 100 miles.

The Bahamas have always been tied by proximity with these neighboring lands of the West Indies and United States. Bahamian political ties have in major part been with the British empire and its cultural associations have been primarily with England far removed by the Atlantic.

Over 760 miles long and 380 miles wide, the Bahamas comprise 661 cays, twenty-nine islands and more than 2,000 rocks visible at low tide. Only thirty of the Bahama islands and cays were permanently settled. The aggregate land surface of the Bahamas group is 5,400 square miles, just slightly more than that of Jamaica, largest island in the British West Indies.

Confusion regarding the name of the Bahama Islands prevailed to modern times. In 1500 Juan de la Cosa, Columbus' pilot on his second voyage to the New World, called the Bahamas "Lucayos" on the first extant chart of the area, a name most likely from the Indian "Yucaya." Joannes Ruysch eight years later called the islands plainly "Caia," but Peter Martyr in 1511 called the Bahamas "Los Lucaios." The Bahama name first appears on the Turin Map of 1523, a spelling of the native "Buhama." Ortelius in his famed world map of 1564 used the word "Bahama" as well as "Lucaia Grande." The English termed the islands "Bahama" and "Ilandes of Lucayo" after John Hawkins' voyage in 1567, and Bahama gradually became Bahamas. However, as late as 1895 the Century Company's atlas in the United States termed the islands "Lucayos.
or Bahama Islands," while Spanish maps to the present still occasionally use Lucayos.²

European and native Indian names have influenced Bahamian nomenclature. Unfortunately, as a first evidence of a long train of colonial usurpations, the native Cigatoo became Eleuthera, Guanima acquired the distinctively unimaginative English name of Cat Island and Samana joined the baneful litany as Long Island. Fortunately, the native names of Bimini and Mayaguana survived the onslaught of the white man's burden. The earliest listing of the islands appeared in Governor George Phenney's 1721 Report in which they are divided into two groups: I. Bahama - Abacoa, Biminees, Berry Islands, Andros Island and Providence; II. Islathera: Royal Island, Harbour Island, Cat Island, Exuma, Long Island, Rum Kay, Watling's Island [San Salvador], Crooked Island, Mayaguana and Inagua. With a few minor changes in spelling and the addition of Acklins, Eleuthera and Grand Bahama Islands, this would be a fairly good listing of the important islands today.³

The Bahama islands are divided nearly through the middle on an east-west axis by the Tropic of Cancer. Because of this location, the islands fall into a climatic zone that makes them tropical and semi-tropical. Washed by the warm Gulf Stream to the west and the Antilles Current to the east, modulated by trade winds from the northeast, there is relatively little difference between the climate of the northern and southern islands.

The tropical climate brings wet and dry seasons. The rainy season yearly occurs between May and November with a total annual rainfall varying from twenty-five to eighty inches. At the capital of Nassau on the island of New Providence the average rainfall for a forty-year period in the nineteenth century was 56.41 inches a year. When the rainfall of the whole Bahama group is averaged, there are two rainy seasons, one in May and June and one from September through November. The average rainfall for all the islands is 33.85 inches, but there exists an extreme variability in rainfall. This is due to the occurrence or absence of hurricanes since the Bahamas lie in the middle of the tracks of the West Indian hurricanes.

The line marking the mean path of hurricanes passes across the eastern edge of the islands during August and along the western edge in September. In October the center of activity recedes eastward to a position just east of the August mean line. Hurricanes which did considerable damage occurred in 1866, 1873, 1888, 1908, 1926, 1929, 1932 and 1965. The two worst hurricanes in this 100 year period were in 1866 and 1929. The hurricane season is confined almost entirely to August, September and October, but occasionally one will come as early as May or as late as January.
Temperature variation in the islands is extremely small. The mean temperature range between the warmest and coldest months is only 13 degrees. Frost is unknown and the average winter temperature is about 70 degrees. Throughout most of the Bahama chain the highest temperatures occur during July, August and September when the temperature seldom falls below 80 degrees, but it rarely climbs above 90 degrees. The yearly relative humidity of the islands averages over 80 percent. This high humidity would be oppressive to human habitation were it not for the almost constant presence of cooling breezes.

There is an abundance of bright sunshine throughout the year. Overcast skies are common but not persistent. Conditions of fog, mist or haze rarely occur in the Bahamas because air and water temperatures are always about the same. The combination of these factors gives the Bahamas a climate that is the greatest asset the islands possess. An environment of perpetual summer in the "Isles of June" gradually over the years attracted tourists and brought in the major source of revenue to the Bahamas in the second half of the twentieth century.

The whole Bahama chain is of low elevation. No mountains exist and the topography is monotonous. Elevations of over 200 feet are unknown and the sameness of elevation from one island to another is marked. But even the minor differences in elevation that do exist proved, as settlements developed, to effect greatly the economic life of each area. The largest of the islands, Andros, is so low-lying that it is inundated over large areas by the sea at high tide. Many lakes on Andros and other islands are flooded by the sea, or if not flooded, are brackish waters having no inlet or outlet.

Not all islands are of the same low elevation. New Providence on its north side rises gently from the sea, giving this section many miles of flat, white, sandy beaches which in time would even receive the superlative name of "Paradise." The southwestern portion of New Providence, however, is more like the French Riviera with sharp, sheer cliffs rising directly from the sea. Under such conditions the erosive action of the sea gradually accentuated the sharpness and prevented the formation of good harbors. But, generally, most low-lying areas are protected by sand bars and keys that provide good harbors much in the same manner that Miami Beach and other Florida coastal bars protect Florida ports.

The Bahamas are composed mostly of minute granules of calcium carbonate precipitated by organisms in the ocean. This formed rock, called oolite, was broken up and blown about by the wind to form what geologists term aeolian limestone. The Bahamas are not coral islands as early settlers often thought, but are composed of wind-blown coral sands. These deposits of oolitic limestone rest on shallow submerged platforms which are divided from the rest of the West Indies and the
North American continent by deep coastal channels such as the Santarém Channel and the Straits of Florida. Students of Bahamian geology suggest that the islands have undergone an uplift of at least 300 feet, followed by a submergence and then more recently by another emergence. The red clay soil abundant at Eleuthera, Abaco and Exuma, known after settlement as “pineapple soil,” appears in small patches on many other islands. It is a deep-sea laterite that appears as direct evidence of the former submergence of these islands.

These islands astride the Tropic of Cancer offer man a pleasant climate, an advantageous location for commerce and even piracy in the past, for tourism in the present and no major surface obstacles to impede movement across each island. These factors might seem sufficient to allow people a reasonable chance to settle and establish a rich insular life such as has been done under similar conditions on many other groups of tropical islands. But the poor soil and sparse vegetation of the Bahamas did not permit development of a permanent, stable, agricultural economy by the waves of native Indians, Europeans or Africans who came or were brought to these shores. Without a solid agricultural base, the Bahamas’ economic life has consistently throughout its history been precarious. To overcome the deficiencies of nature, Bahamians have resorted to other livelihoods. Repeatedly dwellers in these islands have turned to the sea. Life on the sea is a hard life, however, and man continually searches for an easier way to make a living.

The known inhabitants of the Bahamas have been present during a small part of its vast geological history. All have lived from or have been closely associated with the surrounding sea. There are some fragile remains of an aboriginal Siboney people, primitive fishing migrants whose customs and paths remain obscure. Moving from the Yucatan and Florida peninsulas, they island-skipped through Cuba, Haiti and Jamaica, as well as most likely into the Bahamas. Archeological remains in a South Hill cave on Andros indicate at least that the Siboneys temporarily visited the Bahamas. A Bahamian myth that persevered until aerial maps were taken was the rumor of a lingering tribe of primitives in the interior of Andros.

The first definitely known people of the Bahamas were the Lucayan “Indians” discovered by the first Columbian expedition. These Arawaks, relatives of the same people found later in Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Jamaica, are all placed by anthropologists in the Tainan culture period. Descendants of the Arawaks still live in the back country of the Guianas and Venezuela. Columbus erroneously held that these Lucayans had common characteristics with the Guanche peoples of the Canary Islands, the last land to the east that his expedition had seen. A subsequent theory developed from this assumption that the Lucayans had come by canoes
through the Canaries from Africa. However, the characteristics and
customs of the Lucayans more clearly point to their emigration from the
South American mainland across the islands of the Lesser Antilles.

The peaceful Arawaks were pursued by more warlike Caribs, a can­
nibalistic people who raided those they could find, murdering the men
and en-slaving the women. It was a religious tenet of the Caribs that a
courageous warrior would end up in a paradise served by Arawak slaves.
Carib cowards would find, in turn, a hades where they would be en­
slaved to an Arawak master. It is a sad commentary to observe how
European nationals upon their arrival in the New World put into practice
similar pursuits of happiness while professing to be Christians.

In their ingenious and beautifully dug-out canoes, the more gentle
Arawaks pushed northward through the Antilles searching for peace.
These island people abandoned their mainland origins as they moved
through Cuba, Jamaica and into the southern Bahama chain. The Arawaks
reached Haiti at the beginning of the eleventh century during the same
period that Norsemen were exploring Greenland, Labrador, the coast of
New England and perhaps even further inland along the Great Lakes
chain into the interior of the northern continent.

When the Arawaks arrived in the Bahamas they had come to their
last migration point. They, perhaps, would have moved on to the Florida
mainland to escape the pursuing Caribs who had conquered the southern
islands and given their name to posterity in that area. It was at this
point that the Spaniards entered the picture, not to save the Lucayans or
even the Caribs, but to eliminate indiscriminately all of the Caribbean
natives in their passionate search for gold and precious metals.

The story of the voyage of Cristoforo Colombo, son of a Genoese
weaver, under the sponsorship of Ferdinand and Isabella, joint rulers of
Aragon and Castile, is one of the indestructible household stories of
Western civilization. Where is the school drop-out who has not been
told about this major break-through in the exploration of planet earth?
More has been written and analyzed concerning Columbus' discoveries
than any event before the astronauts drew man's hopes and imagination
into outer space. The landing of the Columbian expedition on a Bahamian
island is the first most significant historical event of the islands' con­
tribution to American developments. The political, economic and social
implications of Columbus' journey continue to be developed in competent
depth. Some of the religious implications of that primitive thrust by
Catholic Spain can be developed here.

"Catholic" must be used only as a tentative adjective to explain
Spain's thrust into the New World. Religious history would be better
served generally if the word "Catholic" were used throughout all social
analysis as a limited adjective rather than as an all-embracing noun. To
associate the teachings and ideals of Jesus Christ with all the intentions and practices of so-called professedly Christian nations in their histories leads only to skepticism and rejection of Christianity itself.

Christopher Columbus had a dream. In search of a patron to help him prove that it was possible to sail west in order more quickly to arrive in the Far East, he sought support in Portugal, England and France without avail. When he turned to the newly united national state of Spain, it was a Dominican confessor of Isabella, Prior Juan Perez of the La Rabidá convent, who induced the queen in early 1492 to take a personal interest in the proposed undertaking of the Italian navigator. Isabella in turn influenced her husband Ferdinand, who twice in the previous seven years had rejected Columbus’ plans. Ferdinand was concentrating all his wealth on the final crushing of Moorish power in the Spanish peninsula after a struggle of seven centuries. A royal commission of ecclesiastics had also rejected the scheme of Columbus, basing their arguments upon objections drawn from Seneca and Ptolemy.

The Spanish crown underwrote an expedition of three vessels and liberally consigned the highest office in what was afterwards the West Indies as hereditary in the family of Columbus. The Admiral of the Ocean Sea commanded 120 experienced sailors on three vessels totalling some 400 tons: the flagship Santa Maria and two caravels, the Niña and the Pinta. The officers and crews received the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist from Prior Juan Perez before setting sail from Palos, 3 August 1492, on an expedition that many regarded as foolhardy.

Columbus had realized his life’s ambition. He had brought to reality an idea most likely that of his brother Bartholomew, the cartographer. The intuition of a woman had supplied the necessary means and support. The fifteenth century times were congenial to this undertaking. Portuguese navigators had discovered and explored the west coast of Africa, rounded the Cape of Good Hope and opened the way to India. Other new nation states of Europe were looking for another route to India and the East ever since the Crusades had disrupted traditional overland routes and the Italian city states had charged heavy tolls along the maritime routes. Europe’s wanderlust was further based in the economic possibilities of emerging commerce, high finance, sugar development and production, and especially the potential of colonial labor. Africa had emerged as a rich source of labor which the new Christian, European nation states could enslave, transport, baptize and exploit through their emerging political power and centralization.

Although Columbus’ personal motives were a mixture of courage, fanaticism, superstition and mathematical errors, he carried off the journey with real nautical genius. The Italian geographer, Pablo Toscanelli, had
told him twenty years earlier, "The voyage you wish to undertake is not as difficult as people think; on the contrary, the ship's course is certain."

Columbus held that the earth was round, that favorable winds would bring him to his destination in India and Japan to the east, and that west winds would be found for the return voyage. With the new technological aids of printing, gunpowder and the magnet, he was well-supplied with adequate data and support.

However, Columbus made two fundamental mistakes that led to his discovery of the Bahamas. He held that the earth's circumference was 20,400 miles and that recent explorations had extended the known portions of Asia 45° eastward beyond that shown by Ptolemy. Thus the Bahamas were where Columbus calculated the east coast of Asia to be. He held firmly to this belief through four journeys and explorations of the West Indies and the mainland of Central America.

Columbus was a first-rate sailor. He carefully prepared for the voyage, read all available literature on winds and currents near the European mainland, and kept careful logs. As the expedition left the Canaries, the combination of winds and current pushed the ships inexorably toward the Bahamas. The northeast trade winds blew steadily and surely offering better sailing conditions than had been expected. The southern extremity of these winds reach the northern coast of South America while a middle segment branches off through the Lesser Antilles. Instead of following either of these paths, Columbus headed straight west and found himself on the northern fringes of the trade winds that blow in an inverted arc from Spain toward the Tropic of Cancer in the Bahamas area. Coupled with their winds, the North Equatorial Current flows in the same direction and eventually joins the Antilles Current along the eastern shores of the Bahamas in a northerly direction until it joins the Gulf Current at the northern limits of the Bahama chain.

After thirty-three days of travel the expedition sighted an island just one-fourth of a degree north of the Tropic of Cancer and the farthest east in this part of the Bahama chain. It was called "Guanahani" by the natives and christened San Salvador by the Spaniards who sighted it six miles ahead at 2:00 a.m. on 12 October 1492. The little fleet tacked until daylight and then moved from the southeast corner of this bean-shaped island, almost entirely surrounded by a reef, up its western side until a gap in the reef was sighted. There a landing was made at Long Bay. Columbus, Rodrigo de Escobedo, royal notary, Rodrigo Sanchez and the Pinzon brothers were first ashore "with the banners of the Expedition, on which were depicted a green cross with an F on one arm and an I on the other, and over each his or her crown. And, all having rendered thanks to our Lord kneeling on the ground, embracing it with
tears of joy for the immeasurable mercy of having reached it, the Admiral rose and gave the island the name San Salvador. In the presence of many natives of that land assembled together, (we) took possession of that island in the name of the Catholic Sovereigns with appropriate words and ceremony.”

This scene evoked an old historical observation on the arrival of European colonists in the New World: “First they fell on their knees and then they fell on the aborigines.” The native Lucayans of Guanahani had first fled into the bush at the approach of the “visitors from heaven,” but they were soon brought forward by presents of red caps, glass beads and hawks’ bells. Those gentle inhabitants talked excitedly to the uncomprehending Spaniards. Could they possibly have been saying, “Here goes the neighborhood?” In any case, they were soon trustfully bartering green parrots, skeins of cotton and darts, swimming out to the boats and exhibiting their long canoes.

Christopher Columbus kept a journal of his first voyage, but the original text was unfortunately lost. The Dominican bishop, Bartolemeo de Las Casas, historian of the West Indies, wrote about 1561 a précis of this journal on seventy-six leaves of parchment. This copy was found in the archives of the Spanish duke of Infantado in 1791 and was published by Navarette of Madrid in 1825.

In this copied journal a letter from Columbus to Ferdinand and Isabella contains a superlative first reference to the Lucayans of the Bahamas:

The natives love their neighbors as themselves; their conversation is the sweetest imaginable; their faces always smiling; and so gentle and affectionate are they that I swear to Your Highnesses there is not a better people in the world... They go as naked as when their mothers bore them, and so do the women. They are well made, with very handsome bodies and very good countenances. Their hair is short and coarse almost like the hairs of a horse’s tail. They are the color of the Canarians, neither black nor white. Some paint themselves white, others red, and others of what color they find; some paint their faces, others the whole body, some only round the eyes, others only on the nose. [Bishop Las Casas inserted his own interpretation: Their hair was cut short and square at the nape of the neck. They lived by fishing and were excellent sailors.]

Apparently these natives had decided that the sea would provide them an easier and better living than the Bahamian soil. This was a radical adjustment to their environment for the Arawaks had traditionally been agriculturists before their arrival in the Bahamas. Interestingly, succeeding settlers in the Bahamas consistently made the same adjustment. The Arawaks not only lived from the sea but were also protected by that sea whose distance provided some measure of security. Sea products such as sharpened sea shells and spears tipped with fish bone were used
to acquire food, and a few such relics of these marine implements have been found in the Bahamas.

Other relics seem to indicate that the Bahamian Arawaks were more primitive than most other contemporary native tribes. They lived in crude huts in small miserable villages of a dozen or so dwellings. Each village had a chief who was seemingly independent from other chiefs. There was no class distinction in Arawak social structure which had reached a level barely above the gathering stage. Their only domesticated animal was the parrot, and possibly the dog. They had no standardized medium of exchange except bartering with their neighbors in parrots, tobacco leaves and silk-cotton balls. Because of the infertility of Bahamian soil, their diet consisted primarily of fish and then manioc, maize, arrowroot, peanuts, sweet potatoes, beans and peppers. They practiced a type of fire agriculture or merely harvested wild vegetables and fruits. A comparison of the Arawak civilization with such a high civilization in existence at the same time as that of Mexico’s Mayans would only emphasize more fully the primitiveness of the Arawak.

Estimates of the number of Arawaks in the Bahamas at the time of their discovery by Columbus vary from 40,000 to as low as 1,000 persons. It is impossible to arrive at any certainty in the matter because of the extinction of the Arawaks, a complete absence of even an oral tradition as well as the scanty cultural remnants. Artifacts, as well as the testimony of the Spaniards, seem to indicate, however, that the Arawak Lucayans were permanent dwellers in the full meaning of that term. This conclusion would be questioned by Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., twentieth century missionary in the Bahamas, who travelled throughout the islands perhaps more than any of his contemporaries. He had a hobby of studying Arawakian remains. The nearly complete absence of relics led him to maintain that at the most there were only 700 to a 1000 Arawaks in the Bahamas at one time. Father Bonaventure held that several thousand Arawaks would have had to leave behind more monuments to their civilization than they did. He concluded that the Arawaks were merely visitors or bird hunters who “wore about as much clothes as the tourist of today.”

The Columbian expedition remained at Long Bay for two days and Columbus then explored the island in two small boats:

At daybreak I...went along the island in a north-northeasterly direction in order to see the other side or the eastern part, and also the villages; and soon I saw two or three, and the inhabitants coming to the shore, calling us. They beseeched us to land there, but I was afraid of a reef of rocks which entirely surrounds the island. Within this belt is a harbor of such size, that there would be ample room for all the vessels of Christendom; but the entrance is very narrow...and I discovered a piece of land, resembling an
island, although it is one ...[that] could be cut through within two days, thereby converting it into an island.

One major controversy concerning the discoveries of Columbus and the history of the Bahamas has developed about the identity of the island of his first landfall. Despite the clear identifications of San Salvador by Columbus in this journal [copy]; despite the corroboration by Las Casas in 1522 who stated, "The first land discovered was one of a group of islands which are known as Lucayos. The aforesaid island bears a resemblance to a bean"—different schools of thought developed over the centuries as to the identity of San Salvador. There were firm advocates for Grand Turk, Rum Cay, Samana Cay, Cat Island and Mayaguana as Columbus' landfall. None of these islands met the descriptions of Columbus: a great barrier reef capable of offering protection to a large number of ships, a large lake in the middle, and the shape of a bean. Yet when the prominent German geographer von Humboldt lent his erudition to the advocacy of Cat Island instead of the present San Salvador, the war was on. The majority of nineteenth century maps followed von Humboldt's conclusions and listed Cat Island as San Salvador.

There was a consistent tradition in defense of the original San Salvador by Munoz in 1793, Captain Becher in 1856 and the competent Rudolf Cronau in 1890. The latter worthy labored for years through journeys to the site and research in upholding the San Salvador tradition. Samuel Elliot Morrison in his classic biography of Columbus in 1941 joined in the conclusions of Cronau. The British had not helped the confusion by their nationalistic altering of the name of San Salvador to Watling's Island, surely a cultural set-back from any viewpoint.

The first permanent Catholic missionary in the Bahamas, Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., took an immediate interest in the question upon his arrival in the islands in 1891. He spent endless hours studying the question, visiting the site and even retiring to San Salvador to write a book on the subject which he never completed. But Father Chrysostom did accomplish a major part in solving the question. Schreiner supported the findings of Cronau and corresponded with him extensively. He was also the main instrumental cause in the Bahamian legislature's decision of 1926 to change the name of Watling's Island back to San Salvador and to recognize it officially as the landfall of Columbus. Father Chrysostom wrote journal and newspaper articles on Columbus and San Salvador. He made several trips around San Salvador to study the possible landing places of Columbus. Schreiner concluded that Columbus could not have landed on the eastern reefed shore but on the western shore. He took on such mighty opponents as the Chicago Herald that had erected a monument in 1891 on the eastern shore with its great barrier reef.
He journeyed to the United States to speak on the subject and involved the Knights of Columbus, a national Catholic laymen's fraternal organization, in the cause. The Knights pledged $5,000 a year for five years to Father Chrysostom for development of San Salvador. He placed a Catholic missionary on the island and began development of an agricultural station.

When he died unexpectedly there in 1928 as he was collecting his notes for a biography of Columbus, Father Chrysostom was, at his request, buried on the beautiful shore of Long Bay where he judged Columbus had landed. A large white stone cross stands today on the spot and Mass is periodically offered there in outdoor ceremonies. Here the landfall of Columbus, the grave of the first permanent Catholic missionary in the Bahamas and the beginnings of Christianity in the New World are all commemorated and meditated upon by thousands of interested visitors who continue to be drawn to the spot "where it all began." A permanent Catholic mission continues at present on San Salvador for contemporary residents of that island under the pastoral care of Fr. Nicholas Kremer, O.S.B.

The first Columbian expedition traded with the natives for two days, and on October 14 the fleet sailed for Rum Cay which Columbus called "Santa Maria de la Conception." Like beads on his rosary Columbus listed the islands he visited as he wandered southward: Fernandina (Long Island), Saometo (reduced later to the unbelievable name of Crooked Island), Cabo Hermoso (Fortune Island) and the Islas de Arena (Ragged Islands). He recorded each of these islands in his diary on his way to Cuba which he reached on October 28. The first Europeans were only fifteen days in the Bahamas and Columbus himself never returned to the site of his first landfall.

When Columbus left San Salvador and the other Bahamian islands, he took with him some Lucayans to serve as guides, as hostages and as prime exhibits when the expedition returned to Spain. Columbus told the Spanish sovereigns, "They ought to be good servants and of good skill for I see that they repeat very quickly all that is said to them; and I believe that they would easily be made Christians because it seemed to me that they belonged to no religion. I, please Our Lord, will carry off six of them so that they may learn to speak." Columbus judged the Lucayans to be timid and unwarlike; ignorant of Spanish weapons, 10,000 of them would not stand up before ten Spaniards. He felt that with the small force at his disposal he could overrun all the islands without opposition.

Columbus continued, "They are good to be ordered about, to work and to sow, and do all that may be necessary." Columbus could not decide whether the natives should be kept in captivity in the West Indies
Three separate markers on San Salvador on three different sites point to the landfall of Columbus. Mrs. Ruth Walper erected this cross on the site that she believes Columbus landed.
Riding Rock Beach, San Salvador, landfall of Christopher Columbus, 12 October 1492. The Santa Maria, Pinta, and Niña anchored in this bay for the first time in the Western Hemisphere.

Sailing around a lighthouse, San Salvador.
Coconut trees, San Salvador.

The first Catholic Mission of the Holy Redeemer stands on presumed location of the landfall.
First Mass offered on San Salvador by Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B.; this spot a quarter mile from the mission, is now the site of a cemetery and Fr. Chrysostom’s grave.

Monument on San Salvador marking the spot where the Chicago Herald believes Columbus first set foot upon the soil of the New World. Erected by the Herald in 1891.
or transported to Castile. He decided to take a few back to Castile to teach them Spanish. He deliberately included women in their number, explaining that the Portuguese had been unsuccessful in similar attempts with Guinea Negroes because they had only taken males. The Indians, having their women with them, would perform what they were required to do, while the women could also teach the Spaniards their language.

Columbus was in many ways the last of the medieval crusaders. To him the chief significance of the New World was the opportunity it offered of bringing multitudes into the Catholic faith. He vowed to his Spanish sovereigns that his personal profits from the first voyage would be used to recapture Jerusalem from the Saracens. In a letter to the Pope in February, 1502, he stated his plan to pay for 100,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry to reconquer Jerusalem; he hoped to direct the profits from his final journey to guarding the Holy Sepulchre when it had been recaptured.

Eric Williams, prime minister of Trinidad, has perceptively characterized these letters of Columbus to Ferdinand and Isabella and the Pope as the first imperialist assertion of special non-European treatment of colonial areas. The Spaniards were the first of a long train of European nationals to bring to the West Indies and the New World an economic and social heritage in which slavery and serfdom were constituent elements. The thirteenth century code of Las Siete Partidas was rooted in the ancient Code of Justinian adapted by a Christian Europe recognizing slavery as an integral part of their economy. Men were divided into three categories—freemen, slaves and freedmen. Three types of slaves were acknowledged: prisoners of war as enemies of the Catholic faith, children of slaves, and freedmen who had voluntarily surrendered their freedom.

Columbus had previously sailed to Guinea in the Portuguese merchant marine and acquired a personal experience of the slave trade. His long residence in Portugal and his years in Spain had also given him a familiarity with Negro slavery. In the West Indies he naturally turned his attention to instituting both a slave trade and slavery. Gold, as the Spaniards recognized, did not grow on trees. They needed labor. The discoverer of gold and the introducer of sugar tried also to solve the labor problem. As the years went by, Columbus more and more adopted the view that the real riches of the West Indies lay in their native or Indian population. He saw in the cannibalism of the Caribs a pretext for their enslavement. He described them as "a wild people fit for any work, well proportioned and very intelligent, and who, when they have got rid of their cruel habits to which they have been accustomed, will be better than any other kind of slaves." On his third voyage in 1498, accordingly, he shipped 600 Indians back to Spain. The slave trade in
the Caribbean began in this way as outward and not inward cargo of Indians from the West Indies to Spain rather than of Negroes transported from West Africa to the Caribbean.  

Columbus and his Spanish successors rapidly traversed the West Indies as if they were on a Mediterranean voyage and soon were moving into Central and South America. Within fifty years the entire area had been explored and conquered. The Bahamas were quickly forgotten as the possibilities of wealth and development opened in a much richer Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Mexico or South America. The Bahamas soon became known as the “useless islands” known primarily for their treacherous waterways and abandoned because they offered no on-going supply of precious minerals or stable export balances of trade.

The Bahamas return once more to the stage of the New World before fading into an extended period of quiet which is so characteristic of the history of these idyllic islands. The direct influence of Columbus and his expeditions on the natives was small, but the Spaniards who followed in his wake changed the life of the Arawaks drastically. Upon returning to Spain with roseate stories of the golden treasures the West Indies held, Columbus influenced thousands of other adventurers to come to the New World in search of gold and land.

By 1495 the Spaniards were at open war with the natives who were quickly terrorized by crossbows, knives, artillery, cavalry and dogs trained to hunt them down. They were forced to pay tribute in gold or cotton and many fled to the mountains. Hispaniola’s population was reduced by at least one third as a result of the war and the imposition of the tribute. The Arawaks succumbed by the thousands to disease, starvation, and ill treatment in mines and on plantations. They even chose suicide by eating the juice of the poisonous cassava. Las Casas wrote, “I have found many dead in the road, others gasping under the trees, and others in the pangs of death faintly crying: ‘Hunger! Hunger!’ Many killed themselves in despair, and even mothers overcame the powerful instinct of nature, and destroyed the infants at their breasts, to spare them a life of wretchedness.”

The Pope had enjoined on the Spanish sovereigns the duty of treating Indians kindly and converting them to Catholicism. A royal decree was issued which declared those Indians who accepted Spanish sovereignty and submitted to it without resistance to be subjects of the crown and as such could not be reduced to slavery. The decree left the road open to the enslavement of those who resisted. The legal basis for slavery became the infamous Requisition which a notary read to natives who did not understand Spanish. The few who did were to be treated as freemen and employed for wages. When Columbus was faced with insurgents in his own ranks who demanded grants of land, he allotted
them the land of inhabitants which included their forced labor. In this way the system of repartimientos or encomiendas transplanted Spanish feudalism to the Caribbean.

The Spanish crown was torn between the desire to satisfy the colonials' need for labor and the desire to protect the Indians as far as possible. They agreed to the encomienda system on condition that the Indians were treated as freemen, not servants, and that they be instructed in the Catholic faith. The allocation was, in theory, of a personal character, temporary, revocable and subject to supervision by the authorities. It was, as Eric Williams states, Spain's sixteenth century version of "the white man's burden."

At first labor in the mines and the fields was restricted to a term of six to eight months, but the encomienda soon became permanent as the labor supply was decimated. It was in the colonial's interest to obtain as much as he could from his laborers in the shortest possible time. The king of Spain tried to limit the hours of labor for the Indians, regulated their food and shelter and nominated inspectors. But the inspectors were themselves possessed of encomiendas and the code remained a dead letter.

At this juncture Governor Nicholas de Ovando of Hispaniola obtained permission from King Ferdinand to procure laborers in the Bahamas. In 1509 a fleet was fitted out in Hispaniola and after the lapse of seventeen years the Bahamian natives who Columbus had described as "not a better people in the world" were again visited by the white men bent upon their enslavement. The Lucayans were doomed to complete destruction at the hands of these enterprising sailors, planters and merchants. Since Columbus had treated them kindly, this second visit was gladly welcomed. The Spaniards told them that they had come from the heaven of their ancestors where there was no death nor separations, that their lost friends lived again, waiting only for the arrival of relatives to make their happiness complete. They were told that now was the time to rejoin these relatives. The Spaniards were ready to take the living to the immortal without the dreaded passing through the gates of death. Thousands were deceived and sailed willingly. Those remaining were hunted down until all were captured. The entire archipelago of the Bahamas was explored and depopulated.

As early as 1513 Peter Martyr wrote that "in the waters off the northern coast of Cuba... lie so many islands, great and small, that I scarcely believe what is told of them; although I am kept informed of all the discoveries. Within the twenty years that have elapsed since the Spaniards arrived there, they claim to have explored 406 of these islands, and to have carried off 40,000 inhabitants of both sexes as slaves, to satisfy their unquenchable appetite for gold."
Exact numbers are unknown, but between 1500 and 1520 the entire population of the Bahamas, as many as 20,000 Lucayans, was carried off to slavery in the mines and fields of the major Caribbean islands. Las Casas estimated that 500,000 Lucayans disappeared in this way, but his figures are exaggerated. He reported that “when some pious persons embarked to visit these islands after the ravage of the Spaniards had made in them, they found but eleven people left there.” Peter Martyr also recorded in 1513 that “there remains today a very small number of them, either in the Spanish colonies or in the archipelago itself,” while in the same year Ponce de Leon could only find a single old crone in his travels through the Bahama islands. Spanish writers consistently refer to the islands as being “destitute of inhabitants.”

Conditions on the slave ships pictured by Peter Martyr and Las Casas foreshadowed those described in the nineteenth century by the abolitionists about Negroes. Las Casas stated, “It was related to me for certain that a ship going from Hispaniola to the Island of Lucayos sayl’d thither without any compasse, only by the carkasses that floated up and down the sea.” Peter Martyr with equal imagination told of Lucayans exiled in Hispaniola escaping to the northern mountains “where they might breathe the air wafted from their native country; with extended arms and open mouths they seemed to drink in their native air, and when misery reduced them to exhaustion, they dropped dead upon the ground.” He also told of an ingenious Lucayan who fashioned a dug-out and with two companions set out for the Bahamas, only to be recaptured 200 miles from Hispaniola.

The Lucayans were in great demand as divers in the pearl fisheries of Margarita near Trinidad as well as in the mines and the fields of the major Caribbean area. Las Casas again, “By this fishing trade the Spaniards have destroyed all the people of the Lucay Islands which were the most skillful and experienced in this employment. The reason why one of those Indians was sold for fifty crowns or more, and sometimes for a hundred, was because they were marvellously dexterous at swimming and diving.” The Spaniards severely maltreated the Lucayans at the fisheries. Overworked and underfed, many perished by drowning or were devoured by sea monsters. “Their food is nothing but fish, and the very same that contains the pearl,” wrote the outraged Las Casas. He did not foresee that in the future oysters would be the delight of epicures and conch the favorite dish of latter-day Bahamians. The gentle Lucayans were brutalized by their toil. “Their hair also, which is by nature black, is hereby changed and made of the same color as that of the sea wolves; their bodies are also so besprinkled with the froth of the sea, that they appear rather like monsters than men.”

9
The result of all this de-humanizing in the name of progress is best seen in the estimates of population trends in Hispaniola. In 1492 the population was between 200,000 and 300,000. By 1508 that number was reduced to 60,000; in 1510 it was 46,000; in 1512, 20,000; in 1514, 14,000. In 1548 Governor Oviedo doubted whether 500 Indians of pure stock remained. Eighty years after Columbus had assured his sovereign that “there is no better nor gentler people in the world,” only two of their villages survived. Eric Williams summarizes the whole sad litany succinctly:

They died, but they died with dignity and fortitude, these first colonial rebels against imperialism. The story is told of the Indian chief in Hispaniola, Hatuey, who fled before the invaders to Cuba. Captured in Cuba, he was ordered as an encouragement to the others to be burnt alive. At the stake a Franciscan friar exhorted him to take pity upon his soul, and not expose it to eternal damnation, when he might procure it the happiness of dwelling in Paradise forever. Hatuey inquired whether any Spaniards were in Paradise. The friar assured him that only the good ones were. Hatuey is then supposed to have replied: ‘The best are good for nothing, and I will not go where there is a chance of meeting one of them.’

What was the position of the Catholic Church in regard to the momentous discoveries in the New World? The emergence simultaneously of the nation state with the Protestant religious revolts against Catholic hegemony in northern Europe offered an unexpected opportunity for Catholic expansion at a time of interior European disruption and challenge. The national Catholic sovereign became a symbol of the Church triumphant, releasing anew the crusading zeal bottled up by the failure of the Crusades and the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 just thirty-nine years before Columbus set forth to the New World. Azurara, the Portuguese chronicler of the conquest of Guinea, justified that conquest of 1453 by Portugal on the ground that the African became “as good and true Christians as if they had directly descended, from the beginning of the dispensation of Christ, from those who were first baptized.”

Catholic Portugal had set the stage in Africa for the further Catholic triumph of Spain in the New World. The Roman Catholic Church had successfully been challenged in northern Europe by Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Calvin, Knox and Cranmer, and new Protestant national states had been established. Catholic representatives of the Church’s service to the new nation state were soon evidenced by Ximenes in Spain, Wolsey in England, Richelieu and Mazarin in France. The foundation was quickly laid for both a Catholic and Protestant Christian Church association with the new imperialism. As the nation states moved into colonial enterprises, the vocation of Holy Orders involved not merely serving the Church but also and more equally the national state. From the time of the baptism
of Constantinian Rome throughout Western history, there has developed the same inexorable path culminating in the holocaust of World War II and the imperial adventures of our times. The Romans themselves with characteristic humor say of it all, *Si Christus videret*—if Christ could see it.

The institution of the papacy has remained to a remarkable degree throughout its long history a central symbol and focus of the aspirations, good and bad, of Christendom and its universal or catholic tendencies. However, the voice of the Holy See has been listened to in varying degrees throughout the ages. Portugal, at the beginning of this period of European national expansion and empire building, had requested and received papal sanction for their monopoly in Guinea. All the land discovered south of Cape Bojador was granted to the king of Portugal by a series of papal bulls. Spain signed a treaty with Portugal in 1480 conceding to the Portuguese all islands discovered or to be discovered southward in the region of Guinea. After Columbus completed his successful voyage the apprehension and jealousy of Portugal was soon evident. When a severe storm forced Columbus to land near Lisbon, King John sent for him and strongly expressed the view that Columbus’ voyage had violated the monopoly Portugal had received from the Pope.

It quickly became obvious that some compromise and delimitation of respective claims in the newly discovered territories of Portugal and Spain were necessary if a clash was to be avoided between these first and neighboring imperialist powers. The natural arbiter in this period where two Catholic powers were concerned was the Pope. Conveniently for Spain, the Pope at this time was the historically notorious Spaniard, Alexander VI. He confirmed in the bull *Inter Caetera* of 1493 the annexations of Spain by first confirming the existing rights of Portugal, and then establishing those of Spain by drawing an ingenious and imaginary line from north to south, 100 leagues west of the Azores and the Cape Verde Islands. The Portuguese sphere of influence was declared to be east of this line and Spain’s to the west of the same line. The Spanish government pushed the Pope to issue another bull in September, 1493, in which Spain was accorded full rights to hold such lands as it might discover in the south, west and eastern regions and to India. Columbus’ hope of reaching India by sailing westward thus received papal recognition. The Portuguese government was not satisfied with this line of demarcation, however, and the two powers entered upon direct negotiations which culminated in the Treaty of Tordesillas, 7 June 1494, which fixed the line at 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands and assuring in this way Brazil to the Portuguese. Eric Williams, from his position as prime minister of an emerged nation in the Caribbean, comments on this decision of the European colonials:
Caribbean history, conceived in international rivalry, was reared and nurtured in an environment of power politics. The Pope enjoined his partition on all men and nations as follows: 'Let no person, therefore, presume to infringe, or, with rash boldness, to contravene this page of our commendation, exhortation, requisition, donation, concession, assignation, constitution, deputation, decree, mandate, inhibition, and will. For if any person does, he will incur the indignation of Almighty God and the blessed apostles Peter and Paul.'

The other European nation states, some Catholic and some later Protestant, who had not shared in this papal largesse, did not get the message. Besides, the Pope had no divisions. Francis I of France, in a celebrated protest, observed with Gallic wit, "The sun shines for me as for others. I should very much like to see the clause in Adam's will that excludes me from a share of the world. God has not created these lands for Spaniards only." King Henry VII of England rejected any interpretation of a partition of the entire world between Spain and Portugal. He issued a patent to John Cabot to undertake a voyage of discovery on 5 March 1496, a date that has been named the birthday of the British empire. The vital struggle had begun among European nationals, with all its tragic results, as to who should dominate the colonies and be supreme in the Caribbean.

The same Pope Alexander VI on 25 June 1493 proceeded to issue another bull establishing organized Roman Catholic life in the New World. No clergy accompanied Columbus on his first voyage, but as the admiral prepared for his second journey westward the Spanish monarchs and Rome were deeply concerned that the Church be established in the colonies. Ferdinand wanted a friend of his appointed as the first clergymen in the New World. The Spanish monarch had his way in the matter according to the ancient Spanish traditional rights in clerical appointments.

The Spanish priest Bernardo Buyl was appointed the first vicar apostolic in the New World. There are several variants to his name such as Bernal for Bernardo and Boyl or Boil for the family name. This has caused some historical confusion about this man but nothing compared to his origin and religious background. Much speculation in a large library of interpretations has been the result. The latest historical position in an on-going revision is that Bernardo Buyl was born near Tarragona, Spain, in 1445. He entered the Benedictine abbey of Montserrat and was ordained in 1481. This Benedictine monk became involved with governmental affairs and served King Ferdinand in several capacities, including ambassador to France in 1488. During much of his life as a Benedictine, Buyl or Boyl lived as an anchorite in the garden at Montserrat and not in the monastery. While in France, sometime after 1488, Buyl left the
Benedictines and joined the new Order of Minims, a mendicant Franciscan order founded by St. Francis of Paola in 1435. His change of religious orders gave rise to endless confusion about the identity of the first vicar apostolic.

In October, 1492, Ferdinand gave Buyl permission to establish the Order of Minims in Spain, and in 1493 donated a hermitage in Málaga for the new foundation. However, the king had other plans for Dom-Friar Bernardo and on 25 June 1493 he was named vicar apostolic in the Indies by the Pope. Buyl left Cádiz for America on 25 September 1493 as a member of the second Columbian expedition. He is said to have been accompanied by about a dozen priests but this is not substantiated.

In Española Buyl was soon quarreling with Columbus and the officials over the harsh treatment imposed on both colonists and Indians. The Catalan friar struck the viceroy with interdicts and the viceroy countered by stopping the friar’s rations. The situation became untenable and Buyl left for Spain, arriving there on 3 December 1494. Little is known of the labors of Bernardo Buyl in the Caribbean beyond these official fulminations and censures against excesses. Buyl had also joined a cabal of plotters against Columbus, the Italian, who were jealous of the foreigner and his prerequisites, who reported his strong methods of ruling back to Spain, and insisted that there were insoluble conflicts in the Indies.12

As for the enigmatic Bernardo Buyl, O.S.B.-O.F.M., he too slipped all too quickly into obscurity. A curious fictional account describing the imaginary labors of this pioneer cleric in the West Indies appeared, but that is all. Nothing much came of his assignment in America. But Buyl did not lose the confidence of the king. At the end of the century he spent three years in Rome acting as a special ambassador at times for the king of Spain, at others as the representative of his religious superior, Francis of Paola. Nothing is known about the last years of his life, although he has sometimes been named a bishop of Gerona.13

It is a strange paradox of history that the first vicar apostolic of the West Indies was originally a Benedictine, and that the first permanent missionaries in the Bahama Islands that Columbus first traversed would also be Benedictines. But that was to be four centuries later almost to the year—1493 and 1891. The ensuing long period was one of few and unconnected Catholic contacts with Bahamian developments. Considering the extensive Catholic missionary undertakings in the West Indies, Central and South America, the long period of Catholic eclipse in the Bahamas is all the more unique. Writers about Bahamian events often comment on the late arrival of permanent Catholic missionaries in these islands whose history is so extended.
From the time of the removal of the Lucayans by the Spanish until the colonization of Eleuthera in 1647 there was no record of any visitors to the Bahamas with the exception of Juan Ponce de Leon who spent months during 1513 on an expedition to the Bahamas from Puerto Rico searching for "Bimini" and its supposed miraculous Fountain of Youth.

The native peoples had been exterminated but a new world discovered. It was still not recognized as a new world because men, using faulty astronomical and navigational instruments, insisted these Bahama islands were only extensions of India. Little was done for a generation to correct these misconceptions. Few captains were interested in extending geographical knowledge as their primary goal. Their first aim was to find gold, and if the obtaining of it involved killing off an infidel race, then they were killed off. The pattern was set by the Spaniards for control of the New World by all European powers: possession, conversion, gold if possible and slavery. Not only did the Arawaks suffer this fate, but many other Caribbean tribes were offered up by the Spaniards on the altar of gold. When nearly all were gone, the Africans were brought in by the Spaniards and then by all the other European national colonizers as slaves to replace the aborigines. The followers of Columbus had left their brutal mark on the Bahamas which persists in the consciousness of present-day Bahamians as a part of their legacy which they completely and rightly reject. After the raids of the early 1500's a period of complete desolation fell on these beautiful islands. For over 100 years the Bahamas were ignored by the Whites. Eventually the quarrels and economic needs of the European Whites would make them search for new homelands, and by 1647 they would return to the Bahamas and begin permanent settlements.

One noble Spanish Catholic spoke out fearlessly in defense of the person and rights of the native West Indians who were being exploited and destroyed in Spain's possessions. Eric Williams sensitively explains how the decimation of the Indians is imperishably associated with the efforts of Bartolome de Las Casas to arrest the horror and protect the survivors. Las Casas, scion of an old French family which had been established in Seville from the middle of the thirteenth century, was born in 1474. A graduate of the University of Salamanca in law, he was served for a time in his student days by a little Indian slave boy who his father had brought back from the New World after accompanying Columbus on the second expedition. Las Casas decided to adopt the career par excellence of that period: take Holy Orders and join the Dominican friars. He went to Hispaniola with Governor Ovando in 1502, and ten years later, on the call of the governor of Cuba, migrated to that island. Like his compatriots, clerical and secular, he was given a grant of land, one
of the best, with the Indians that went along with it. A humane ‘trustee,’ he nevertheless employed Indian labor, under the euphemism then in vogue, in agriculture and mining.

But, while preparing his sermon one year for Pentecost, he happened casually on Chapter 34 of Ecclesiastes, in which he read that the offering is stained which makes sacrifices of injustice, that he who offers sacrifice of the goods of the poor is like one who kills a child in the presence of its father. Las Casas was profoundly moved. Convinced of the injustice to the Indians, he determined to renounce his lands and workers, informed the governor of his views, preached passionately against the encomiendas, and became thereafter the “Apostle of the Indies.” In 1516 the Spanish government appointed him “Protector of the Indians,” in the West Indies as well as on the continent. He took his duties seriously, and promptly declared war on the encomienda.

Such was the feeling aroused in the colonies that the emperor, Charles V, conferred with him in Spain in 1519. His speech ranks as one of the finest episodes in Caribbean history. His views, he informed the emperor, were based not on what he had read in histories, but on what, as “one of the oldest immigrants to the Indies,” he had seen with his own eyes—“cruelties more atrocious and unnatural than any recorded of untutored and savage barbarians.” The only reason that, in his view, could be assigned for them was “the greed and thirst for gold of our countrymen.” He assured the emperor that “the spiritual interests of your soul excepted, nothing is of greater importance to your majesty than the finding of a remedy for these evils. For not one of your European kingdoms or all of them together equal in vastness and greatness your transatlantic possessions.” Eschewing all personal rewards or favors, he ended his speech, “Sire, it therefore behooves your majesty that you banish, at the beginning of your reign, that gigantically tyrannical system, which, horrible alike in the sight of God and man, is the ruin of the majority of mankind.”

Later, as a Catholic bishop, Las Casas spoke with more authority. But, with the progress of the discoveries, the dice became more heavily loaded against humanitarianism. In 1537 a papal bull defined and proclaimed that Indians or any other people discovered by Catholics must in no way be deprived of their liberty or possessions and enslaved; if enslaved, their slavery must be considered null and void. Las Casas’ influence was more directly responsible for the New Laws for the good treatment and preservation of the Indians, issued by Charles V on 20 November 1542. These laws represented the fruit of forty years of assiduous labor by Las Casas for an enlightened policy towards the Indians. They enjoined very special care by the courts for the good
treatment and preservation of the Indians, and stated categorically that
the Indians were not to be enslaved on any pretext of war, rebellion,
barter, or for any other cause. All enslaved Indians were to be freed.
For the future the Indians were to carry only such loads as did not en­
danger their lives and health, and such work was under no circumstances
to be forced upon them. No free Indian was to be employed in the pearl
fisheries against his will, and slaves employed therein were to be protected.
If deaths were inevitable, the fisheries must cease, “for, as is reasonable,
we value much more highly the preservation of lives than the profit
which may come to us from the pearls.” Holders of encomiendas found
guilty of ill-treating the Indians were to be deprived of them. Indians
were henceforward to be subjected only to a moderate tribute, while
those in the West Indies were specifically exempted from oppression by
tribute or services “in excess of what is due from Spaniards who reside
in the said islands.”

The New Laws gave rise to such protest in the colonies that the
emperor abrogated them in the following year. The colonials, like Pizarro,
had come to take their gold, not to civilize the aborigines. Defeated,
Las Casas took to historical writing. He wrote an impassioned pamphlet,
Very Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies, in which he charged
that fifteen millions had perished as a result of the cruelty of the Spani­
ards. Published in 1552, at a time when Catholic Spain was widely
hated by the new Protestants as the centre of popish power, the pamphlet
was translated into the chief European languages. During the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries it went through three Italian editions, three
Latin, four English, six French, eight German and eighteen Dutch. But
the pen, mighty as it was, could neither correct nor repair the damage
done by the sword, Williams observes.

It is fashionable to accuse Las Casas of gross exaggeration and to
condemn him for the propagation of an indictment of Spain which failed
to take into account the equally nefarious activities of other nations. It is evident, however, that more concern and support for the equal rights
of humanity are evident in the efforts of the Holy See, the Spanish
crown and ecclesiastical groups than among other contemporary European
nationals. The “Black Legend,” spread against Spain throughout com­
peting Protestant nations, particularly England, dies hard.

Las Casas may have been guilty of exaggerating the horrors. To
his eternal honor he left it to others to be guilty of exaggerating the
advantages. Diatribe though it may be, the Very Brief Account is one
of the noteworthy documents of the doctrine of trusteeship more honored
in the breach than the observance in the history of the Caribbean as well
as of other areas. Las Casas ranks with the eighteenth century English-
man, Thomas Clarkson, and the nineteenth century Frenchman, Victor Schoelcher, in his defense of the rights of man in the Caribbean.

He engaged in a bitter and vigorous battle of the books with the renowned jurist, Juan Gines de Sepulveda, about the nature of the Indians. The Indians, asserted Sepulveda, were "little men," as different from Spaniards as monkeys are from men. The happiest people in the world if only they knew God, was the ringing reply of Las Casas, who added that all the peoples of the world are men. In one of his finest passages he stated, "No nation exists today, nor could exist, no matter how barbarous, fierce or depraved its customs may be, which may not be attracted and converted to all political virtues and to all the humanity of domestic, political, and rational men."

Las Casas refused to sacrifice the welfare of the Indians to the greed of the Spaniards. He consented, however, to sacrifice the well-being of the Negroes to the preservation of the Indians. What he gave to humanity with one hand, he took away with the other. The significance of Spain's Indian policy is that it provided an instruction for Spain's successors in the Caribbean which they were not slow to better. It marked an indelible stamp of degradation on labor in the Caribbean. And it served as the basis for the later, more extensive and more comprehensive treatment of the Negro as Williams develops.

In order to protect the Indians from the excessive labor imposed on them, Las Casas accepted the solution proposed by Dominican monks in an approach to the king in 1511, to the effect that "as the labor of one Negro was more valuable than that of four Indians, every effort should be made to bring to Hispaniola many Negroes from Guinea." The tragic rationalization of Negro slavery and the Negro slave trade had begun.

But the Spanish government turned first, not to the Negro, but to the white man for the solution of the labor problem raised by the disappearance of the Indians. This white emigration to the West Indies was carefully supervised. A few months after the discovery, the sovereigns prohibited emigration without their express permission, under pain of death and confiscation of goods. Columbus' voyage had been financed not by the Spanish government, but by Queen Isabella of Castile, a Spanish feudal principality, which, wedded to Aragon, the principality of King Ferdinand, had brought into being the unitary state of Spain. The coat of arms allowed to Columbus as a part of his aggrandizement after the voyage read, "To Castile and Leon Columbus gave a new world." The New World was thus looked upon as the private preserve of Isabella, and at the beginning only her subjects of Castile were permitted to go there.
Economic realities, however, triumphed over the feudal outlook. The colonies needed labor, if the Spanish sovereigns were to get gold. Four expedients for white labor were available. The first was convict labor. In June, 1497, on the occasion of Columbus' third voyage, a general order was issued to all justices in Spain authorizing the transportation to Hispaniola of criminals, with the exception of heretics, traitors, counterfeitters and sodomites, in commutation of death or prison sentences. This expedient appears not to have been repeated, and there seems to have been no straining of the law in Spain, as there was in seventeenth century England, to make the punishment fit the colonial need of labor.

The second expedient was white slaves. In 1504 permission was given to transport five white slaves, and in 1512 two more, to Puerto Rico. In the latter year white Christian female slaves were sent to the Caribbean to become wives of the colonials, as they were preferable to Indian women. In 1532 twenty Spaniards received licences to take white slaves to the West Indies. Available evidence would seem to indicate that these slaves were generally women, and that the supply, as one would expect, was limited. The white indentured servant, generally male, of British and French colonial policy in the Caribbean had no place in Spanish efforts to cope with the population problem.

The third source of immigrant labor was foreigners. Columbus had recommended to the sovereigns after his first voyage that no foreigners should be admitted into the West Indies, making a reservation that favored Catholics. The Spanish government was inclined to favor the total restriction of all foreigners. But, with the accession of Charles V in 1519, Spain became a part of a heterogeneous empire which included Italians, Flemings and Germans. The emperor's outlook was continental rather than peninsular. In 1526 all his subjects were accorded permission to go to the Indies "since it was reasonable after such vast territories had been discovered that they should be peopled with Christians."

But no large-scale emigration resulted from the imperial decree. Occasional licenses were granted to individual foreigners, but the first substantial immigration of non-Spaniards did not take place before 1565, when the Spanish government authorized the admission into Hispaniola of 150 Portuguese, one third of whom were to be married, with their wives and children. Apart from this, Spanish policy remained exclusive, jealous of possible contamination by non-Catholics, and the wholesale deportation by Cromwell in the seventeenth century of Irish Catholics and Scottish and English political non-conformists had no parallel in Spanish policy.
Convicts, white slaves and foreigners having proved inadequate to the need, the sole alternative of the Spanish government was to relax the barriers against Spaniards other than Castilians and actively to encourage and promote free Spanish emigration. In 1511 the ban on non-Castilians was lifted. In 1518 emigrants were promised a free passage, free grants of land, implements, livestock and plants, maintenance for one year in the New World, and exemption from all taxes and payments, except the tithe to the Church, for twenty years. Premiums were offered for the best husbandry—$200 for the first who produced twelve pounds of silk, $150 for the first who gathered ten pounds of spices, $100 for the first fifteen hundredweight of wood, and $65 for the first hundredweight of hulled rice.

In 1498 Columbus drew a picture of these Spanish emigrants; there is perhaps some exaggeration in it, as a result of the troubles he was then experiencing in Hispaniola. According to him, those who had come as miners, laborers and scullions would not go a furlong from their houses, unless they were born on palanquins. The West Indian colonial society had begun. The Spaniards came to understand that law of colonial society stated centuries later by an English professor, Herman Merivale, that, in countries where slavery existed, or forced native labor was available, no white man was industrious. This was typified by the picture of the Brazilian sugar planter who went out escorted by a slave girl, whose duty it was to light the cigar to put into his mouth, or the Surinam slave owner on his way to church followed by the slave girl with a cushion for him to kneel on. Two years later Columbus wrote more fully:

... in the island of Hispaniola there are few who are not vagabonds, and not one with a wife and children... such an abandoned race, who neither fear God, the king, nor the queen, and are wholly given up to wickedness and violence... there are not five among them all, who would not be ready to collect all they could, and depart at a moment's notice. It would be advisable to have Castilians, and also to know who and what they are; and that the country should be peopled by respectable persons... Now that so much gold is found, there is a difference of opinion whether it is not more profitable to go about robbing, than to go to the mines. They will as readily pay 100 castellanos for a woman as for a farm; and it is now very common to see dealers going prowling about for girls of nine and ten years of age; now, women of all ages are in request.

Another account, about the middle of the sixteenth century, stated that the white laborers who had been brought to Hispaniola were barbers, tailors and other useless people, who soon sold the livestock which the king had given to them, would not work, and populated only hospitals and cemeteries. It reads exactly like accounts of free emigration to the French colonies in the seventeenth century, or to Trinidad in the nineteenth, Williams states.
It is, perhaps, in the light of these strictures that the royal decree of 1528 must be seen, by which every Spaniard in Puerto Rico was ordered to marry within two years on pain of losing his grant of Indians. In the middle of the century, the former rigid supervision of Spanish emigrants was restored. An emigration permit was once more required. One explanation is that this protected the colonies from being overrun by adventurers anxious only to get rich quickly, and not content with food and clothing which every moderately industrious man was assured of. Finally, in 1584, the Spanish government declared that no person would be permitted to go to the West Indies unless he could present authentic information with respect to his morals and good behavior.

White immigration, however, even in the period of mobility, was of little avail as a solution of the labor problem of the Indies. Spanish settlement followed not the flag but gold, and the discovery of or search for gold on the mainland led to a steady depopulation of the islands. Between 1492 and 1511 the Greater Antilles had settlements on every island. The first continental colony was established in 1511 in Darien. Then followed the conquest of Mexico. Thereafter came the long tale of Spanish occupations and annexations: Panama and Costa Rica in 1519; Nicaragua in 1522; Guatemala in 1523; Honduras in 1524; Ecuador in 1525; Peru in 1526; Venezuela and Yucatan in 1527; Florida in 1528. The depopulation of the Antilles, where there was little gold, was inevitable. In 1526 the king decreed that no resident of the Caribbean, whatever his station in life, was to emigrate to the other islands or to the continent, under pain of death and confiscation of property.

But the exodus continued. Before the great emigration Hispaniola had 14,000 Castilians. In 1574 the number was reduced to 500 households. Puerto Rico’s second town was founded in 1510; the third not before 1646. Jamaica in the sixteenth century had only two towns. The conquest of Cuba was begun in 1511. The first town was founded in the next year, the second in 1513, five others in 1514 and 1515. Santiago de Cuba, at one time almost as populous as Hispaniola’s capital, was reduced to thirty households in 1574. In 1620, the total population of Cuba was less than 7,000. The governor of Trinidad in 1593 claimed that he had only seventy Whites to oppose 6,000 Indians.

Spain’s limited population could not possibly supply the demands made on all its extensive colonial possessions, for both gold and sugar. In the search for gold in the Caribbean the Indians had been liquidated; they were still available on the mainland where they had been more numerous. To produce sugar in the Caribbean another reservoir of labor was therefore required.

The Spaniards did not have far to look. The Negro slave trade, in the hands of the Portuguese, was more than half a century old at the
turn of the sixteenth century, and the Spaniards were already accustomed to purchase Negro slaves in the Portuguese slave markets. The Portuguese monopoly of the Guinea trade was a severe handicap to Spain. For this reason, and also because of the constant anxiety to keep the colonies immune from heresy, the Spanish government turned to Negro slaves in Spain who had been converted to Catholicism. The Negro slave trade was initiated by the king on 3 September 1501 in a letter to the governor of Hispaniola, in which he said, "In view of our earnest desire for the conversion of the Indians to our holy Catholic faith, and seeing that, if persons suspect in the faith went there, such conversion might be impeded, we cannot consent to the immigration of Moors, heretics, Jews, re-converts, or persons newly converted to our holy faith, unless they are Negro or other slaves who have been born in the power of Christians who are our subjects and nationals and carry our express permission." The Spanish slave trade thus began as a trade not from West Africa to the West Indies, but from Spain. It thus excluded all non-Christian slaves and Christian slaves born in the power of non-Spaniards.

But there were simply not enough Negro slaves born in the power of Christian Spaniards. Planters and miners in the colonies gave economics priority over religion, and desired a Negro slave trade from Guinea, freed from its religious integument. They regarded the Negroes, as Columbus had regarded the Indians, as having no religion, and, therefore, free from the taint of idolatry or heresy.

What became a torrent in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began as a rivulet in the sixteenth. The slaves were virtually sent out by the king's command, in small numbers. Thus seventeen were sent in 1505 to work in the copper mines of Hispaniola, and a few months later the king promised to send 100. In 1510, an order for fifty slaves was issued. The Negroes, however, died as rapidly as the Indians, to everyone's surprise. "I cannot understand how so many Negroes have died," wrote the king in 1511 to an official in Hispaniola, "take good care of them."

Unlike the mortality of the Indians, however, Negro mortality meant merely obtaining more Negroes. The introductions steadily increased. In 1517 the first asiento, or contract, was arranged for the importation of 4,000 Negroes in eight years into the West Indies. In 1523 the king ordered the provision of another 4,000 into all the Spanish dominions, of which 1,500 went to Hispaniola, 500 to Puerto Rico and 300 each to Cuba and Jamaica. In 1528 Cuba requested a further 700. In the same year a contract was signed with two Germans for the importation of 4,000 slaves into the Caribbean colonies in four years. According to Las Casas, 30,000 were imported into Hispaniola alone by 1540, and
more than 100,000 into all the Spanish dominions. Prices tended to rise so sharply that an attempt was made in 1556 to stabilize them—the tariff for the West Indian islands was 100 ducats per slave. But this decree was revoked five years later. In 1552 slaves were being imported into Hispaniola at the rate of 2,000 a year. In addition to the legal trade, a contraband trade of considerable proportions developed by the end of the sixteenth century.

Thus did Las Casas and the planters come to terms. At daggers drawn over the labor of the Indian, they saw eye to eye on the labor of the Negro. At loggerheads over the Indian question, they were reconciled on the Negro question. Justice to the Indians was purchased at the price of injustice to the Africans. The belligerent and often exaggerating Protector of the Indians became a benevolent promoter of Negro slavery and the slave trade, though he was responsible for the initiation of neither. In 1531, fifteen years after he had been appointed protector, he appealed to the Spanish government for the dispatch of 500 or 600 Negroes to the West Indies, emphasizing that one of the most important reasons for the backwardness of Hispaniola was the failure to accord to all and sundry the freedom to import Negroes.

Las Casas had seen the light on the Indian question, renounced his encomienda, and poured out his frustration in his Very Brief Account. He owned no Negro slaves himself. But he saw the light very late on that issue, never became Protector of the Negroes, and his repentance was a lame acknowledgement of error. “In the old days,” he wrote in his History of the Indies, “before there were any ingenios, we used to think in this island that, if a Negro were not hanged, he would never die, because we had never seen one die of illness, and we were sure that, like oranges they had found their habitat, this island being more natural to them than Guinea. But after they were put to work in the ingenios, on account of the excessive labor they had to endure, and the drinks they take made from cane syrup, death and pestilence were the result, and many of them died.” He admitted that the Spanish purchasers of the slaves were the real cause of the outrages committed in the slave trade in Africa, that the reasons which he had urged against the servitude of the Indians were equally valid against the slavery of the Africans, and apologized for an “indiscretion” committed under the impression that the Negro slaves were justly captured in war.

These were faint damns compared with the thunder of denunciations against oppressors of the Indians. But they represent the first small voice of the abolitionist sentiment. A few of Las Casas’ colleagues developed the theme. In 1587 Tomas Mercado published a book openly opposed to the slave trade, which, he stated, was notoriously founded in deceit,
 robbery and force. Emphasizing the mortality in the middle passage, he added, “One would never end one’s narrative of the treatment meted out to the survivors.” In 1573, Bartolome de Albornoz attacked slavery itself. Facing squarely the conventional argument, originated by the Spaniards and developed by the British, French and the planters of the United States, that the slaves were better off in the West Indies where they were baptized and converted to Catholicism, Albornoz denied that the law of Christ authorized the liberty of the soul at the price of slavery of the body. Such an attack on religion could not be tolerated. The Holy See put the book on the Index and banned further editions, and Albornoz’ abolitionist sentiments were suppressed.

In 1610, the American Jesuit, Alonso de Sandoval, continued the attack. Stressing the fraud and injustice which surrounded the slave trade, he published statements tending to show the uneasy conscience of the slave traders. His ideas were warmly supported by many enlightened teachers in the New World. Thus encouraged, Sandoval proceeded to deplore slavery as a misfortune, and wrote words which were a striking contrast to what was to become the practice of the coming age, “Among human possessions, none is more valuable and beautiful than liberty... All the gold in the world and all the goods of the earth are not a sufficient price for human liberty... God created man free... Slavery is not only exile, but also subjection, hunger, sorrow, nakedness, insult, prison, perpetual persecution, and, in short, is a Pandora’s box of all the evils.”

It was the voice of Cassandra. These abstract sentiments, creditable though they were to those who expressed them, ran counter to the economic necessities of the age. It was more than three centuries after the suppression of Albornoz’ attack on slavery that slavery was abolished in Cuba and so banished from the Caribbean. In the sixteenth century the Negro had been brought to the Caribbean to stay, to perpetuate, wherever he was allowed to do so, his tribal African customs—such as the coumbite and the voodoo of Haiti, the arts of the bush Negro of Surinam, the shango and the susu of Trinidad—to produce a civilization in the Caribbean in which, as Freyre says of Brazil, “It was Europe reigning without governing; it was Africa that governed.” By the middle of the sixteenth century the ethnological change that had taken place in the Caribbean in a mere fifty years—despite the small number of Negroes introduced when compared with the statistics of later periods—was so striking that the Spanish historian, Herrera, in his History of the Indies, was able to write of Hispaniola, “There are so many Negroes in this island, as a result of the sugar factories, that the land seems an effigy or an image of Ethiopia itself.”
NOTES:


2. I am indebted to my friend and undergraduate classmate at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, Dr. C. Wallace Dierickx, who wrote a fascinating first "Historical Geography of the Bahama Islands," as his master's thesis at the University of Florida, in Gainesville, in June, 1952. This study, rich in factual information and creative analysis of the Bahamas, would be a valuable addition to the printed literature of the Bahamian library. I have drawn extensively from this work for background and summary materials.


7. Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 30-32. This general historical study of the Caribbean area is a basic source reference. I have drawn background material from this valuable work in the introductory chapters and quote extensively and with appreciation from Eric Williams.


LAND OF THE PINK PEARL

After the disappearance of the Arawaks from the Bahamas in the early 1500's, no Europeans paid much attention to these islands. Their major attraction, human resources, had been the only object of interest in early colonial times. Occasionally privateers and curious sea captains took shelter in Bahamian harbors and at times landed on some islands. Spain was in supreme command of the seas in the West Indies. The pirates, who later recognized the strategic location of Bahamian islands as hideouts to prey on Spanish shipping, had not yet become a nuisance. It was not until the early seventeenth century when England began to challenge this Spanish maritime supremacy that any government bothered to concern itself officially about the Bahamas.

The intellectual exponent of this phase of inter-imperialist rivalry was an obscure English Protestant clergyman, Richard Hakluyt. He was a man of wide vision and discernment, whose imagination had been fired by accounts of the voyages of discovery, the industrious editing of which has been his chief claim to fame. Hakluyt was, in the deepest sense of the word, an imperialist, who looked upon colonies as a cure for the ills, particularly the economic ills, of the state.

Hakluyt invoked the doctrine of Divine Providence. The English Protestants were predestined to establish a righteous empire in the New World. Using as their yardstick the doctrine of effective occupation rather than mere declarations of sovereignty, the English newcomers directed their attention in the main to three easily accessible regions which Spain had neglected and over which its suzerainty was merely nominal. These areas were the Lesser Antilles, Guiana and North America. In these areas religion and empire combined for national, Protestant England and in the same type of marriage as national, Catholic Spain had earlier effected.

Hakluyt set himself the task of stimulating the English to colonial activity and of bolstering national pride. Delving into old and rare
documents going back to the remote past of Tacitus and the Venerable Bede, he insisted that England had, from the beginning, played an honorable part in trade and discovery. In fact, he argued, England’s exploits were more daring than those of Spain and Portugal. These two nations had the writers of antiquity to guide them, who had guessed at the existence of the New World, and their voyages of discovery had been launched with their own towns and islands to succor them, as for example the Canaries and Azores. England, on the other hand, had turned to the stern and uncouth North Seas, “altogether destitute of such clear lights and inducements,” to lands which, unlike the Spanish and Portuguese voyages, were barred with ice, mist or darkness. Hakluyt conceded that English enterprise had not met “with the like golden success, nor, with such deductions of Colonies, nor attaining of conquests.” This it was necessary to correct.

He wrote in his preface to the famous book he published in 1589, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, “It is high time for us to weigh our anchor, to hoist up our sails, to get clear of these boisterous, frosty and misty seas, and with all speed to direct our course for the middle lightsome, temperate, and warm Atlantic Ocean over which the Spaniards and Portuguese have made so many pleasant, prosperous and golden voyages.” Hakluyt spared neither time nor energy, and subordinated all opportunities for private gain and preferment, in unlocking and disseminating Spain’s secrets. He obtained and translated Spanish documents (“as may any way avail us or annoy them”) describing all the chief rivers, ports, towns, cities and provinces of the West Indies, providing necessary information so that Queen Elizabeth “shall by God’s assistance, in short space, work many great and unlooked for effects, increase her dominions, enrich her coffers, and induce many Pagans to the faith of Christ.”

Hakluyt objectively appraised the possibilities. “The time approacheth and now is, that we of England may share and partake (if we will ourselves) both with the Spaniard and the Portuguese in part of America and other regions as yet undiscovered.” A staunch supporter of Raleigh’s expedition to Virginia in 1584, Hakluyt envisaged that “this western voyage will yield unto us all the commodities of Europe, Africa and Asia, as far as we were wont to travel, and supply the wants of all our decayed trades.” The governor of Virginia assured him that the new colony would produce wines, oils, flax, resins, pitch, frankincense, currants and sugar—whatever England was in the habit of obtaining from Spain, France, Italy and the East.

The influence and personality of Hakluyt played a role not to be minimized in the orientation of British policy. An ardent advocate of
improving navigation, he urged the establishment of a readership in the art of seamanship either at London or at Bristol. He advocated investigation into the causes and cure of tropical diseases. No ivory tower intellectual and propagandist, he was himself a shareholder in many of the colonizing and commercial ventures of the period. By his editing of The Principal Navigations and, above all, by his Discourse of Western Planting, which he wrote in 1584 and presented to Queen Elizabeth, Hakluyt was able before his death in 1616 to exercise more influence over the minds of his countrymen and over the development of the British colonial empire than all his contemporaries combined. Before his time, British policy, like earlier Spanish policy, had not gone beyond concern with gold—taking Spanish gold, as Drake had done, or seeking new mines of gold, as Raleigh sought in Guiana. With Hakluyt imperialism was substituted for buccaneering, agriculture supplanted gold, mercantilism superseded bullionism, Eric Williams perceptively observes.

In this inter-imperialist rivalry the dominant commercial considerations were reinforced by powerful political and religious motives. Spain, lord of the New World monopoly, was the centre of the Counter-Reformation in Europe. Spain’s wealth from the Indies represented the mainstay of Catholic strength in Europe. Spain’s armies and Spanish hegemony in Europe were financed by Spain’s mines and trade in the Caribbean and America. It became, therefore, a matter of vital policy for the Protestant powers to sap Spanish strength and drain Spanish resources by diversionary expeditions over the ocean. Gaspard de Coligny, for example, admiral of France and the leader of the French Protestants, strongly advocated the policy of attacking Spain in the Indies in order to weaken her in Europe. The battlefield of the Wars of Religion was not only Germany but also the Caribbean.

Big business and imperialism associate a country with strange bedfellows. There emerged a de facto Protestant alliance between England and the Netherlands, supported to a considerable extent by Catholic France, against Spain. The struggle, on the part of England with its increasingly parliamentary government and the Netherlands, whose citizens were revolted colonials, had overtones of a “democratic” struggle against absolutism. “Virginia,” said Sir Thomas Dale, its governor, on his return to England in 1616, “being inhabited by His Majesty’s subjects will put such a bit into our ancient enemy’s mouth as will curb his haughtiness of Monarchy.”

But it was to the Caribbean that the European challenge, following Spanish policy, was chiefly directed. Sir Walter Raleigh made several attempts to colonize Guiana. A 100 years later than Columbus, he was as much obsessed with gold as Columbus had been. He longed to discover
"a better Indies for Her Majesty than the King of Spain hath any." This meant gold, for Spanish wealth and strength came not "from the trades of sacks and Seville oranges, nor from aught else that either Spain, Portugal, or any of his other provinces produce; it is his Indian gold that endangereth and disturbeth all the nations of Europe."

This was, no doubt, true. But Raleigh was in essence a conquistador after his time. In his opinion, "Where there is store of gold it is in effect needless to remember other commodities for trade." Guiana, he was convinced, had gold, "a country that hath yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned, nor wrought," and he looked to establishing in London "a Contraction-House of more receipt for Guiana than there is now in Seville for the West Indies." This was the first, but not the last, occasion on which Guiana was considered as offering a solution of the problems posed in the West Indies.

Partly owing to the influence of Hakluyt, England had become too sophisticated to take Raleigh seriously. He was released from prison to make a final attempt to locate the gold of Guiana, in the very year of Hakluyt's death, and, as a result of his failure, he was executed two years later. It was to permanent settlements in the Caribbean that England and the other European nations turned. In an effort to reinforce one of the expeditions to Guiana, the English made their first attempt to settle in the West Indies, in St. Lucia, in 1605. But the settlement failed as a result of the hostility of the Carib Indians. A similar attempt to settle in Grenada four years later failed for the same reason. The Dutch landed on the barren rock of St. Eustatius in 1600, and the Dutch West India Company was established in 1621. In 1623 the English landed in St. Kitts, and in 1625 in Barbados. In the latter year the French also landed in St. Kitts. The two nations decided to partition the island between themselves. In 1624 the British House of Commons considered forming a West India Association regulated and established by Parliament, along the lines of similar companies organized in the past for trade with the Levant, Russia and the East Indies. Sir Benjamin Rudyerd strongly supported the project as the best way "to cut the King of Spain at the root and seek to impeach or supplant him in the West Indies." The struggle over Adam's will was about to enter a new phase. The will itself was to be challenged, Williams says.

What did these nations propose to do with their new Caribbean colonies? The Spaniards had made no bones about their policy. They wanted gold, they wanted sugar, they wanted both reserved to Spain. If they could get both only by enslaving the Amerindians and transporting enslaved Africans, they were prepared to enslave.
The European intellectuals of the day were outraged. The Englishman, Sir Thomas More, in his *Utopia* opposing the substitution of livestock for agriculture which depopulated the English countryside, launched an attack on Spain’s policy. His Utopians held the gold and silver adored by the Spaniards “in reproach and infamy,” using them for making chamber pots, fetters and chains. But his Utopia, where property was held in common, where there were neither rich nor poor, where time was devoted principally to intellectual pursuits, was based on slaves or “bondmen,” as More euphemistically called them.

Las Casas, in his turn, presented a picture of the noble savage and of Hispaniola, the cradle of Spanish imperialism, as the true Elysian fields of the ancients. This was the line followed by the celebrated French essayist, Michel de Montaigne, who condemned the Spaniards for their destruction of Amerindian civilization and turning “the richest and most beautiful part of the world upsidedown for the traffic of pearls and pepper.” Francis Bacon, after Hakluyt, took a more positive approach. In his essay *On Plantations* he set out his ideas of colonization. He envisaged not an economy based on mining, export crops and slavery, but a self-sufficient society of small farmers producing principally food crops. Bacon was particularly hostile to the mining economy and he advocated free trade in respect of colonial produce. Never even mentioning slaves, Bacon proposed the emigration of free artisans such as gardeners, ploughmen, smiths, carpenters, joiners, fishermen, along with a few druggists, surgeons, cooks and bakers.

Europe, however, was not impressed by its intellectuals. “The design in general is to gain an interest in that part of the West Indies in the possession of the Spaniard, for the effecting whereof we shall not tie you up to a method by any particular instructions.” Thus did the Puritan, Oliver Cromwell, Protector of England, launch in 1655 the expedition to the West Indies which he called his “Western Design.” The pattern, however, was not English but European.

The British from their original bases in Barbados and the central portion of St. Kitts, had proceeded to Nevis, Antigua and Montserrat before Cromwell’s acquisition of Jamaica.

From St. Kitts, where they occupied the two extremities, the French moved to Martinique and Guadeloupe, St. Bartholomew and St. Martin which, abandoned by the Spaniards, they partitioned with Holland in the same year. After driving out the Caribs, the French occupied Grenada and laid claim to St. Lucia. In the same year, 1650, France took possession of St. Croix, driving out the Spaniards who had expelled the English, who had in their turn removed the Dutch with whom they had at first shared possession. The Dutch ceded Tobago to France in 1678, and after
many vicissitudes France also secured a part of Guiana, known as Cayenne. By the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, Spain confirmed French occupation of its long established settlement in Hispaniola, "the most beautiful and fertile part of the West Indies and perhaps of the world," which became Saint-Dominique.

The English and French governments, unable to agree as to the disposition of Dominica and St. Vincent, signed a treaty with the Caribs in 1660 by which the latter were left in possession. The Dutch, traders first, last and always, occupied St. Eustatius and Saba. By the Treaty of Breda in 1667 they ceded New Amsterdam (New York) to England in exchange for Surinam. The Danes made their first permanent Caribbean settlement on St. Thomas and a few years later laid claim to St. John.

The race to secure a place in the Caribbean sun was joined by the German state of Brandenburg-Prussia. The elector, Frederick William I, listened readily to proposals of a Dutchman, Benjamin Raule, to set up a Brandenburg company to trade with Guinea and the West Indies. In 1680 a Prussian naval expedition was sent to the Caribbean to prey on Spanish shipping. The expedition suffered from the handicap that Prussia possessed no harbor in the Caribbean, and accomplished no more than the capture of a few small vessels. In 1684 Raule unsuccessfully tried to buy either St. Vincent or St. Croix, but France was the stumbling block. Thereupon he turned to Denmark, and, in the following year, a treaty was signed by the two governments whereby, while St. Thomas remained Danish, the Brandenburgers received a plantation sufficient to employ 200 Negroes, free from taxes for the first three years. Difficulties with the Danes led the Brandenburgers to continue the search for their own territory. They tried to secure Crab Island, which was subject to occasional raids by the Spaniards from Puerto Rico, but the Danes refused to withdraw their claims to it. Negotiations in 1687 to secure Tobago failed owing to Dutch opposition. Eventually, in 1689, Brandenburg took possession of the rocky islet of St. Peter in the Virgin Islands. Upon this rock Prussia sought to build a Caribbean empire. It was ersatz for the vast western design of the Welsers in the preceding century.

One European country was unsuccessful in its bid for a share in Adam's inheritance. That country was Sweden, temporarily raised in the seventeenth century by the military achievements of Gustavus Adolphus in the wars of religion, to the status of a great power. The stimulus to Swedish colonial expansion, as with Brandenburg-Prussia, came from a Dutchman, Willem Usselincx, who had played an important role in the founding of the Dutch West India Company, but who, disgruntled with the results, offered his services first to Denmark and then to Sweden. In 1624 the king of Sweden directed Usselincx to establish a general
company for trade with Asia, Africa and America. Financial difficulties delayed inauguration until 1627 when the company founded a settlement on the banks of the Delaware. In 1647 another company, the Swedish African Company, was organized to establish a trade with Guinea. The entire scheme was a failure. The Dutch looked upon the Swedes as rivals, and both the Delaware settlement and the forts in West Africa fell to the Dutch in a war between the two countries. Sweden had to wait until the following century to obtain a share in the slave trade and a colony in the West Indies, part of the small French island of St. Bartholomew.¹

Sir Robert Heath, attorney general of England, requested in 1629 that King Charles I grant the Bahama islands to Heath in return for his past services to the crown. Heath received territory in America roughly defined as between 31° and 36° north latitude on the continent, together with the Bahama islands and all other islands to the south of them. This grant included what is today most of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and part of Florida, and also included all islands in the Caribbean. Provisions for settlement and for establishing a government were incorporated into the grant in order to make it effective. But Heath was unable to fulfill the conditions of his charter, and before any settlement was made it was forfeited back to the English crown. The granting of the charter did little to influence directly the course of settlement in the Bahamas but was used later as the basis for tenuous English claims to their possession.

The first organized group of British settlers came to the Bahamas in 1647. They did not come directly from mother England, nor from the mainland of North America which already had English colonists. Rather, they came from the British island of Bermuda to the northeast of the Bahamas. Many of the early colonists in Bermuda had expressed dissatisfaction with the government of that colony, especially its concern for religious freedom. Since many of the original Bermudians were Puritans who had fled England in search of religious freedom, some were now ready to leave Bermuda and move to the Bahamas for the same reason. A former governor of Bermuda, Captain William Sayle, was the spokesman for this dissenting group and went to England to plead the cause. Sayle interested some Bristol businessmen in his proposed venture to settle one of the Bahama Islands. The Bristolmen listened to Sayle because he had travelled in the Bahamas, felt they could be successfully colonized, and claimed to have obtained a grant of the islands from Parliament in the previous year, a claim he never proved. The Bristolmen became convinced that a good return might be realized from their investment in agricultural produce from the proposed colony.
Upon returning to Bermuda, with the financial backing of the Bristolmen, Sayle gathered into the group he had brought with him from England about seventy settlers, mostly Puritans, and made final plans for emigrating to the Bahamas. Those settlers named their new settlement “Eleuthera” from the Greek word for freedom eleutheros. On the surface these “Eleutharian Adventurers,” as they came to be called, were going to the Bahamas in search of religious freedom. Actually the reasons were also political, for they had been accused of insurrection against the government in Bermuda and had already been asked to leave Bermuda or be thrown in prison for their independent leanings. In the 1649 words of an early historial of Bermuda:

The Independents conditioned to goe out of the Land (all) but such as would conform. And so divers of them agreed to goe with Capt. Sayle, and had their libertie to goe and dispose of their means and to provide for the voyadge, yet the country would not laye downe arms untill they are gone.²

The colonists had drawn up articles of agreement stating why they were going to settle the Bahamas. The agreement begins:

Articles and Orders, made and agreed upon the 9th Day of July, 1647 and in the three and twentieth Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord Charles, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, etc. by the company of Adventurers for the Plantation of the Islands of Eleuthera, formerly called Bahama in America, and the adjacent Islands to be observed and performed by all and singular Adventurers, to Planters and dwellers upon, and all Resiants at the same Island.³

Then follows the religious reasons for their emigration. No mention is made of the political difficulties the group had experienced in Bermuda.

Having gathered their possessions, the Eleutharian Adventurers sailed in 1647 for the island of Cigatoo in the Bahamas, which they re-named Eleuthera. These first colonists had troubles from the very beginning. Even before their arrival dissension divided the group, and one element under Captain Sayle moved a mile off the main island to the small island of St. George’s Cay, now the town of Spanish Wells. Neither group did well.

No mention is made in any contemporary account about the type of farming engaged in by the Eleutharian Adventurers. It is known that their first concern was to raise enough subsistence food crops to sustain the colony, and that the commercial crops of cotton, cane and citrus fruits were to be planted as a source of outside income for the group. It was from these latter crops that the Bristol businessmen hoped to reap profits on their investment. Many of the colonists, however, had never been farmers. Poor farming practices caused by inexperience and lack of
a cooperative spirit created trouble for both groups. Within a few years they were in such bad straits that the adventurers appealed to other English colonies, such as New England and Jamaica, to aid them lest they would actually starve. The Eleutherian colonists in the initial period of occupancy not only did not raise any appreciable amounts of commercial crops but they failed to till enough land properly to feed even themselves. Their only money revenue seems to have been derived from the export of wood and a few products from the sea.

During this time, England's Charles I had been beheaded, and the royalists in Bermuda had declared Charles II as their king. The independents of Bermuda who refused to recognize Charles II were banished by the Bermuda colony to Eleuthera in the Bahamas, and eventually it became a regular practice to banish political dissidents and even criminals to Eleuthera. This provided additional manpower to replace the colonists who had left Eleuthera. At the same time additional voluntary settlers began to join the original group. Some of these latter came from the New England colonies of Massachusetts Bay and New Plymouth while others came directly from England. The fortunes of the colony improved with these new arrivals who expanded lumbering activities by exporting brasiletto wood to England where it was prized for its high content of red dye. In these early years some of the colonists also implemented their incomes by salvaging wrecked ships that crashed on island reefs. The salvaging of ships and the exporting of brasiletto wood began to be so profitable that by 1658 a trading voyage was organized in England. The members were instructed to get additional recruits from Bermuda and to go to the Bahamas "to cut brasiletto wood, process ambergraisce" and to get "anything from wrecks which shall be there found." To many, however, the hardships of colonization on the poor Bahamian land proved too great and there was a continuous emigration of settlers back to Bermuda, England and New England. Some settlers stayed on, and even today the surnames of many residents on Eleuthera and Spanish Wells indicate that they are descendants of the original colonists.

Although the original articles of incorporation had provided for a popular governor and a council of twelve, there is no indication that any of these provisions were carried out. Captain Sayle himself was never elected to any office, but he and his son claimed and tried to exercise proprietary rights over the whole colony on the basis of his supposed land grant of 1646. After ten years in the Bahamas, Captain Sayle seemed to have been convinced that the colony could not survive without outside financial aid, and in 1657 he returned to Bermuda. There he suggested to the Lord Proprietors of the Carolinas that they ask the English crown for a patent to the Bahamas, and in 1670 this was finally
granted. This grant was given to “Christopher, Duke of Albemarle, William Earl of Craven, John Lord Berkeley, Anthony Lord Ashley, Sir George Carteret, Knight and Baronett, and Sir Peter Colleton, Baronett,” and it comprised:

those islands lying in the degrees of twenty and two, to twenty and seven north latitude... with the fishing of all sorts of fish, whales, sturgeons, and all other royal fishes in the sea, bays, inlets, and rivers within the p‘misses, and the fish therein taken, together with the royalty of the sea upon the coasts within the lymitt aforesaid.

Under this charter the first attempt was made to settle the Bahamas in a manner that would provide peace and safety for the new settlers. In 1671 the Lord Proprietors appointed Captain John Wentworth governor of the Bahamas with instructions to choose a council to propose legislation to govern the new colony effectively. Headquarters for the new government were established on the island of New Providence which was somewhat removed from the troubles of the Eleutherian group but still close enough to govern them conveniently. Settlers soon began to arrive, and by 1672 there were approximately 500 residents settled mainly near what is now the city of Nassau.

Wentworth soon complained that the proprietors had not provided adequate defense from the Spaniards, but nothing was done to remedy the situation. The colony, which now included settlements on both the islands of Eleuthera and New Providence, continued to exist under a succession of governors sent out by the proprietors. Some governors took their positions only in the hopes of quick profits from taxes and duties levied against the new settlers. Others seemed to have made a sincere effort to provide good government. There was a preponderance of corrupt governors over honest ones, however, and many of the early governors were evicted from their office by the colonists themselves or were recalled for neglect of duty. Governor Robert Clarke, second governor under the Proprietors, without authority from his superiors, issued commissions for a fee to privateers preying on Spanish commerce in the Indies. In retaliation, the Spaniards sent out an expedition and on 19 January 1684 captured and plundered Nassau. Not only was this raid a retaliatory measure by the Spaniards; it also culminated their belief that all Englishmen in the Indies were fit material for depredations because they were Protestant trespassers in an area granted to Spain by the Pope.

Under the conditions created by the Spanish raids, trading became hazardous in the Bahamas. No Englishman dared venture near them without a convoy. The Spaniards returned on 15 November 1684 and again plundered New Providence. As a result of two Spanish raids within a year, the colonists sent repeated protests to the Spanish governor general at Havana. His only reply was to send back defiant messages
and to permit the depredations to continue. The Lord Proprietors repeatedly failed the colonists when they sought protection from those raids. When a really strong governor did arrive, the colonists, an independent lot, generally refused to obey him. Finally, in the late 1600's the security of the islands became so precarious that legitimate trading ceased entirely. The small farms of the colonists fell into disuse, and the colonists themselves began to leave New Providence and Eleuthera for safer homes on the North American mainland or back in England. Many of the early governors who did not flee with the colonists were captured and carried off in these raids, and Oldmixon has it that Governor Robert Clarke actually was roasted on a spit by the Spaniards.  

In this first period of permanent settlement the slowness of development was associated first with the attempts to cultivate the poor soils of the islands, and second that the Bahamas lay between British colonization to the north and Spanish control in Florida and the Caribbean. In addition, the small size of the islands, coupled with the flatness of the terrain, made defense difficult, and the islands lay open to attack by the Spaniards. Near the end of this fifty year period of European occupancy of the Bahamas, conditions not only did not permit advancement of the colony, but a period of retrogression began. The settlers, cut off from trading and harried by the Spaniards, were forced to supplement their incomes by other means. Motivated at first by revenge on the Spaniards, many started to raid Spanish ships that could be found in nearby waters. Then, motivated by greed, they continued this activity, not as a sideline, but rather as their profession and sole means of livelihood. By such means, augmented by the Bahamas' strategic location, piracy gained a foothold in the Bahamas. Soon the islands were one of the major pirate strongholds in the Western hemisphere.

The early settlers in the Bahamas, plagued by Spanish raids and crop failures, and divided by internal dissension, found themselves in dire financial shape. Some had reached a state from which there seemed no turning, for they did not have even enough assets to pay their passage on a ship that would take them to better lands. The Bahamas were in a strategic location astride the shipping lanes which the Spaniards used to trade with the Caribbean colonies. In addition, the many rocks, reefs, and shallow banks were great hazards to navigators, and many ships ran aground. From the very beginning, providence had occasionally intervened and provided the colonists with a wrecked ship that would furnish enough necessities, and even luxuries, to tide them along.

As conditions became progressively worse during the first period of settlement, it was natural that these early colonists looked to the misfortunes of ships at sea to provide their wants. Ship salvaging was a
relatively innocent beginning, for even today the rights of salvage of
distressed vessels are well recognized and those who engage in this
activity have acquired a dubious social status. But deterioration of sal­
vaging beyond the legal limits soon changed salvaging to piracy in the
Bahamas.

When Spanish raids on the Bahamas increased between 1670 and
1700 nearly all forms of normal commerce ceased. Much agricultural
activity ceased as well since lack of trade made it pointless to grow
crops for export. Many of the original ship salvagers were without even
that source of supplemental income. With the disruption of commerce,
it was rare that trading ships came into Bahamian waters. In desperation
the colonists appealed to their successive governors for help. The gov­
ernors, sometimes with pseudo-authoritarian approval and sometimes
with only the approval of looking the other way, permitted the colonists
to become privateers against the vessels of the Spanish crown. Pri­
vateering as practiced during the Elizabethan era in the sixteenth century
meant the commissioning by a government of a private armed vessel
to cruise against the commercial and war vessels of an enemy. Soon a
few initial successes in such an occupation enabled the Bahamians to
acquire enough ships and arms so that they no longer needed govern­
mental approbation for their actions. The many harbors, coves, and unin­
habited islands and cays offered the colonists convenient hiding places
where neither British officials nor pursuing Spaniards could find them.
Instead of being commissioned privateers, the colonists became a law
unto themselves. They ignored the crown, and interested themselves in
private gain rather than in the honors the English government tradition­
ally had conferred on prominent privateers.

The Spanish silver fleets from Vera Cruz and Cartagena assembled
at Havana and from Havana sailed to Spain. On the way to Spain the
fleet passed through Bahamian waters. Any straggler was easy prey for
privateers and provided a rich prize in precious metals. The ease of early
looting developed the colonists' cupidity and privateering increased to
an alarming degree. Owing to the lack of governmental supervision,
privateering became piracy, and with piracy came the inevitable anarchy
of an ungovernable people.

The English crown as early as 1672 recognized the need to control
these illegal depredations, but used feeble methods to try to accomplish
control. Governor after governor was sent out with instructions to punish
the pirates, but with no punitive force to effect this end. Time and again
the governors fell in with the pirates, shared their booty, and were event­
ually recalled to London. When a governor did arrive who earnestly
felt he should suppress this traffic, he was dismayed to find that the
Blackbeard's Tower on the Island of New Providence.

The great seal of the Bahamas with the motto Expulsis Piratis, Restituta Commercia — "The pirates having been expelled, commerce is restored."
On such a silk cotton tree, New Providence, Governor Woodes Rogers hanged unrepentant pirates.

The guns below Fort Charlotte, New Providence.

Fort Fincastle, lower left corner, overlooking central Nassau.
Drawing of the Nassau market, first published on 5 January 1856 in the Illustrated London Times.

An old print of Nassau, 1860. Many of the landmarks visible still exist, including Fort Charlotte, from which this scene was sketched. The spot occupied by the tents is now the site of the British Colonial Hotel.
Rawson Square, Nassau, in the 1930's with statue of Queen Victoria, the emancipator. The colonial secretary's office is on the left, the old post office in the center, and the House of Assembly on the right.

Dunmore House, built by Governor Dunmore in 1786, as official residence of governors, now The Priory, Nassau.
majority of the people, who while not being actual pirates themselves, nevertheless, profiting by trade with the pirates, were not in sympathy with his actions. The Bahamians commonly ran this type of governor out of the islands. Some were even captured and imprisoned by the pirates themselves, until they either fled to England or agreed to cooperate with the pirates. Eventually, the Bahamas became a hive of piratical activity. Not only were depredations carried out against Spanish ships, but the pirates’ field was broadened to include the ships of any nation including those of other British colonies.

Such pirate figures as Blackbeard, Anne of the Indies, Mary Read, Morgan, Calico Jack Rackham and their crowd of this era had so demoralized Bahamian administrative functions that government in the legal sense had almost ceased to exist. Between 1703 and 1710 the settlement on New Providence was practically deserted and port defenses left unmanned. Spaniards, in armed convoys, were able to invade the Bahamas and drive away most of the settlers. As soon as the Spaniards retired, however, the pirates, a mobile lot, would return. During the War of the Spanish Succession in 1704 the Spaniards united with the French to raid Nassau. This time the combined forces blew up existing forts, spiked the guns, burned the town and carried away settlers who could not hide out in the interior of the island. Once again, as soon as the Spaniards left, the pirates returned in force.

Threats of reprisals against the pirates by the proprietors and from London did no good. Blackbeard, for example, became so audacious that he built a tower overlooking Nassau harbor to better observe approaching ships, and his tower, in a restored condition, still stands near the city. Such was the pirates’ strength that no one would undertake the job of customs’ officer, a most hazardous occupation. Governors became mere figureheads or pawns of ruling pirates.

When a new governor arrived in 1704 after the combined Spanish-French raid of that year, he found Nassau totally uninhabited. Since none of the deserted dwellings could be made habitable, he pitched a tent for shelter. He fled the island and returned to England on the first available ship. After his departure for a period of eleven years, from 1707 to 1718, there are no records of a governor in the Bahamas.

By 1718 piracy had reached a state where British ships themselves were being attacked. By this insolent act the pirates had overstepped themselves. The British were just beginning to realize that the strategic location of the Bahamas made them outposts suitable for future peace-time trade and as an anchor to consolidate any future aggression by England in the Caribbean. Accordingly, a new governor, Captain Woodes Rogers, was sent out for the express purpose of eliminating the pirates
once and for all. After viewing the situation, Captain Rogers reported to London that the Lord Proprietors had been so negligent in their treatment of the islands that they should be forced to forfeit their rights in favor of the crown. Actually, the Proprietors had been anxious to get rid of the islands. They gladly surrendered control of the civil government to the crown in 1717. Captain Rogers was a fearless man who brought with him an adequate number of troops to back up his authority. He also brought a general royal pardon from King George I for the pirates, if, in return, they would agree to submit to the king's authority. Most of the pirates, estimated to be more than 1,000, accepted the pardon under the mistaken assumption that this was just another deal with a new governor. Many, including the infamous Blackbeard, refused to surrender. Rogers and his men, however, efficiently rounded up many of the unrepentant ones and hanged them on the gallows in old Fort Nassau, which was located where the British Colonial Hotel now stands.

The task confronting Governor Rogers in 1718 was formidable. The fort was still in ruins after the Spanish-French attack of 1704, plantations were neglected, roads were overgrown and practically no trade existed. Although there was continual danger of attacks by Spaniards, who had raided Nassau thirty-four times in fifteen years, the colonists were so unreliable that they could not be counted upon to help defend the colony. Moreover, the problem of pirates at large continued to exist. As many as 2,000 known pirates were still unaccounted for, and there was continual danger that they would repose themselves of New Providence at any time. Within a year Rogers had restored the fort, established a legislative council, formulated a scheme to re-establish the plantations and attracted new settlers by granting tracts of land on condition that they should be cleared and a house erected within three months. The inhabitants, however, had no intentions of working unless they had to, many of the pardoned pirates reverted back to piracy, and Rogers returned to England in disgust.

Governor George Phenney, who replaced Rogers in 1721, reverted, like the pirates to the old type of get-rich-quick pattern. He tore down part of the fort Rogers had built and sold the iron for his own private profit, while his wife picked up additional sums by selling rum and biscuits to the colonists. Phenney became so unpopular that the inhabitants requested his recall and the re-appointment of Rogers.

Rogers began his second term in 1729 and immediately made preparations for the election of a general assembly of twenty-four members who met on 29 September 1729. This first assembly enacted legislation intended to promote the economic development of the colony. It is signif-
significant that Rogers, at this early date, was aware that one of the matters wrong with agriculture in the islands was soil depletion caused by clearing land through burning. The first act passed by the legislature in 1729 stated:

An Act to prevent the destroying by fire any Timber & Trees growing upon these Islands. Whereas it hath been the practice of evil-minded people to set fire, burn and destroy the standing woods to the great detriment and prejudice of these Islands. Now to the end that such practices may be prevented for the future be it enacted...that if any person...shall wilfully or carelessly by any ways or means set fire to any of the standing woods on these islands...and be thereof lawfully convicted...such offender shall forfeit and pay the sum of twenty pounds.9

In the next few years Rogers eliminated the pirate threat, created a reasonably ordered government, and induced many colonists to undertake farming and legitimate commercial activities. He again restored the forts, and, though the menace of Spanish attack had not been removed when he died in 1732 at Nassau, he had increased the islands' chances of repelling such attacks. In appreciation for these anti-piratical acts of Rogers and his successors, the Bahamas eventually adopted as their slogan in 1760 the motto, Expulsis Piratis Restituta Commercia; "The Pirates having been expelled, commerce is restored."

With the transformation brought about by Rogers, there was now a better chance of security for the planters. The improvement of living conditions under a stable government stimulated settlement on New Providence, Eleuthera, and Harbour Islands, the only islands having more than a few settlers up to this time. More fortifications were built under successive governors. With increased security colonists came from the Palatinate in Germany and some even from the North American colonies. The latter were seeking freedom from oppressive religious acts of the New England colonists.10

Illegal piracy, to all intents, was dead, but the cupidity of the inhabitants was not. Some colonists continued the deliberate wrecking of ships which afforded them the fruits of piracy without its risks. Some erected false lights to deceive ships into sailing onto shallow bars and reefs, installed buoys and bells at the wrong places, and gleefully salvaged their unsuspecting prizes. This practice had even continued in varying degrees on the islands until modern times when navigational warnings were installed and placed under government supervision.

In comparison with past periods of Bahamian history, the new era ushered in by Governor Rogers in 1718 was tranquil. The first real developments in trade occurred, the city of Nassau was enlarged, and a stable government effectively curbed unruly inhabitants. Although conditions were relatively stable at home, the Bahamians were soon to feel the dis-
ruptive influences of the American Revolutionary War. This war not only caused another serious raid on Nassau but was also responsible for the largest mass influx of settlers the Bahamas experienced. Those settlers, the American loyalists, were destined to influence the agricultural and commercial life of the islands to such a degree that their descendants were the dominant element in Bahamian life until the Progressive Liberal Party gained government control in 1967.

Following the restoration of internal peace and the strengthening of the colony’s defenses by Governor Rogers, the colonists were able to go about their affairs with a degree of assurance that they could progress without too much interference from either outsiders or internal discordant groups. Capitalizing on this situation, additional colonists arrived to try their hand at making a living from the resources of the Bahamas. By 1731, New Providence, Eleuthera and Harbour Islands had a combined total population of 1,378, of which 925 were white and 453 colored. Of this total, 1,042 lived on New Providence and 336 on Eleuthera and Harbour Islands.

Some of the original colonists and many of the new ones brought with them their African slaves whom they had owned while residing in the British colonies in America or in other British lands. Slaves were brought to the Bahamas as early as 1675. Non-slave holders soon purchased slaves who were being imported from Africa. Based on slave labor, the small subsistence farms of the early settlers began to expand into small-scaled plantations.

Spanish raids, however, were still a potential and unsolved problem. The adequate defense of the islands was necessary before normal economic activities could be conducted. Under Rogers the defenses of New Providence had become strong enough so that when the Spaniards attacked Nassau on 24 February 1719 the attempted invasion failed and the Spaniards had to retire. Failing in their attempts to plunder Nassau, the Spaniards turned to the weaker out islands. Eleuthera was raided a number of times in the early 1700's. In 1723 the Spaniards captured Cat and Exuma Islands to the south and removed the few settlers who were located there. Relics of this invasion can still be seen at Arthurs Town on Cat Island. Five years later, in 1728, the Spaniards, who merely maintained temporary military outposts on these islands, were expelled, and they did not bother the colonists for a number of years. By 1731 colonists had not returned to either Cat or Exuma; and there are no records of any islands being occupied other than New Providence, Eleuthera, and Harbour Islands.

The establishment of political peace in the Bahamas led to a slow but sure improvement in the economic status of the colony. After the
death of Governor Rogers in 1733, the history of the Bahamas for nearly fifty years affords mainly a variety of local disputes under his successors. Those disputes were the type that have almost uniformly disfigured the early annals of most colonial establishments. Land disputes were common and led to much litigation. Petty arguments arising from everyday living were always being taken to court. As Oldmixon wrote in 1741, “The inhabitants were so litigious, that not a Burough in Cornwall could compare with them: which is the more amazing, because they had not much to quarrel for or to spare for the law.”

The decline of piracy and of the Spanish raids led the colonists, still a non-cooperative group, to feel that the Spaniards would never return. As a result, the colonists refused to help maintain and defend the islands as they half-heartedly did in the past. Their energies were devoted instead to their lands or dissipated in rum shops. As a result, the normal defenses of the island fell into disrepair. The English government, still fearful of the Spaniards, sent out a military engineer in 1740 to restore the forts of Nassau who described the situation:

> Upon viewing Fort Nassau, I found it in a very ruinous condition; the barracks, which were built of wood, were ready to tumble down, and there was no other building within the fort; the powder magazine was a house which stood at some distance from it, exposed in such a manner that anybody might set fire to it.

The fort was restored, as had been done repeatedly in the past, but again soon fell into disrepair.

This lethargic and tranquil life of the colonists continued until 1775. To that time trading in non-perishable products such as cotton and lumber slowly had increased, and Nassau began to be a trans-shipment point for rum and slaves on the way to American markets. In 1775, however, the American Revolutionary War began, and in the following year the infant navy of the American colonies, in search of powder supplies, raided Nassau. The Bahamians were completely unprepared for such an attack, and the city fell with only token resistance. The Americans left after holding Nassau only a few days, during which they raided the forts of what little powder and guns they possessed and also contracted over 200 cases of smallpox in an epidemic that had been raging through New Providence.

A much more serious consequence of the American Revolution than the raiding by American ships rose from the Bahamas depending chiefly on America for provisions. For a number of years during the war, the inhabitants were almost reduced to a starving condition. Throughout the war American ships continued to threaten the peace and security of the islands.
During the American Revolution, Spain declared war on England in 1772, and three years later on 8 May 1782 Nassau was again seized by the Spaniards. This, the last Spanish occupation of the Bahamas, lasted for a little more than a year. In June, 1783, Colonel Andrew Deveaux, a South Carolina loyalist, organized a military expedition to free the islands of Spaniards. He sailed from St. Augustine, Florida, and after obtaining recruits from Eleuthera and adjacent islands, landed at Nassau and helped the colonists regain possession of the city. This was an unnecessary procedure, however, for slow communications had failed to notify the colonists or the Spaniards that the Bahamas had been restored to England by the Treaty of Versailles signed on 20 January 1783. England managed at the peace conference to prove that her interests in the islands had begun with the original charter granted to Heath in 1629 and had been continued by colonization up to 1783. The treaty, therefore, contained the clause providing that "His Catholic Majesty shall restore to Great Britain the islands of Providence and the Bahamas without exception in the same condition in which they were conquered by the arms of Spain." Since that date Britain's possession of the Bahamas was not challenged until the contemporary independence movement gained momentum from 1967 to 1973.

The treaty of 1783 had far-reaching consequences for the Bahamas. During and after the American Revolutionary War many of the southern loyalists had moved to East Florida which was still under British control. The 1783 Treaty of Versailles, however, returned the Floridas to Spain and deprived the loyalist refugees of their last mainland retreat. The British government judged it their duty to provide some refuge for the loyalists. In 1784 the House of Commons appropriated £7,850, and in 1786 added a further sum of £6,356 to pay off the claims of the proprietary lords who still held the original grants of the islands under their charter of 1670. In order to settle the loyalists in the Bahamas the British government then offered liberal grants of land on the islands to loyalists who wished to settle there. Encouraged by these land grants, American loyalists began to migrate to the islands in 1784. Prior to this migration, the population of the Bahamas in 1781 consisted of 4,513, of whom 1,867 were Whites and 2,646 slaves. Of this number it is estimated that over half lived in New Providence and the remainder were scattered among Abaco, Exuma, Eleuthera, Harbour, Long, Cat, and Andros islands. The increase in population from 1731 to 1781 was 3,135, an increase of more than 200 percent in fifty years. The proportion of slaves had increased from 33½ percent to 60 percent in this same period, indicating an increased emphasis on plantation agriculture.
The loyalist wave of immigration continued to increase until by 1789 nearly 7,000 additional immigrants, including Whites and Blacks, had arrived in the islands. The influence of such a migration can best be judged by realizing that this nearly trebled the population of the Bahamas. Before this migration between 1781 and 1787 there had been practically equal numbers of Whites and Blacks. The new immigration doubled the white population and trebled the black, the first time Negro slaves outnumbered their white masters. By 1789 there were approximately 11,300 inhabitants in the islands, of which 3,300 were white and 8,000 black. The loyalists came from East Florida, the Carolinas and Georgia. In addition, 1,458 loyalists embarked in 1783 at New York City for the island of Abaco. These figures did not include eight companies of militia sent from New York to the Bahamas in that same year who presumably were stationed there only temporarily.17

The immediate effect of this loyalist immigration was felt politically. Older inhabitants of the colony exhibited unmistakable prejudice towards the new element. This factional feeling was increased when the Americans promptly became the party of opposition to the existing government. They criticized the administration, found fault with the laws and demanded reform and representation in the House of Assembly. By the latter part of 1786 the Americans had become the stronger party and within a few years gained control of the legislature.

The influx of loyalists also had a marked effect upon commercial, agricultural and social conditions of the islands. By 1800 Nassau had a population of 3,000, equal to the whole population of the Bahamas in 1770. Exports and imports of Nassau for the years 1773 and 1774 amounted to only £5,200 and £3,600, respectively. By 1786 and 1787 exports had increased to only £6,800, but imports had jumped to a high figure of £136,360, indicating the new colonists still had little to sell and had to import many needed products. By 1803, however, as many as six ships were in Nassau harbor at one time laden with cotton for London. At the same time it was a growing slave-market city, and among its exports other than cotton were salt, turtles, mahogany, dye wood, and other woods and barks—all products of the plantations, the sea, and the natural vegetation.

Agriculture, even more than commerce, was given a new impetus by the American refugees, including many planters from the South, and their slaves. It did not take these experienced cotton raisers from the Carolinas and Georgia long to clear land and plant crops. These planters felt that the seemingly rich soils and the ideal climate of the Bahamas with their 365 day growing period plus a dry season allowing for harvest would be ideal for cotton raising. Shortly after their arrival, the cotton
gin, which permitted larger cotton acreages than before, was invented. Within fifteen years:

...forty plantations, with between 2,000 and 3,000 acres in cotton fields and 1,000 slaves, had been established on Crooked Island alone, and on Long Island, which was settled at an earlier date, and which had been more extensively improved, there were in 1783 nearly 4,000 acres in cultivation. The combined yield from Long Island and Exuma for one year was estimated at over 600 tons. 18

Most of the planters on these three islands, Crooked, Long, and Exuma, were from Georgia and had brought with them different varieties of cotton seed, including Persian and Anguilla cotton. It was customary to assign not more than four acres of Persian plants to each working slave, while five or six acres was the usual allotment where Anguilla cotton was grown. The best yields were secured from higher lands because of better soils and amounted to one-half to three-fourths of a ton of clean lint for each working slave on some estates, although the average yield was about one-sixth of a ton or less.

As the loyalists came in increasing numbers they settled more and more of the uninhabited islands. By 1788, Andros had twenty-two white families, seven planters, and 132 slaves, while 813 acres of land had been cleared for farming. San Salvador in the same year contained forty white families, sixteen planters, and 458 slaves; and 2,000 acres were under cultivation. Eleuthera and Harbour islands together had 203 white families and 350 slaves while 725 acres were cultivated. Nearly all the cropland of the loyalists was planted to cotton, but cotton was not destined to be permanently successful. Insect pests were the first difficulty with which the planters had to contend, and in 1788, and again in 1794, the chenille bug destroyed two-thirds of the crop of cotton on Crooked Island. The red bug had stained so much of the remaining crop that it was of little or no value.

By 1803, when McKinnen visited Crooked Island he reported, "I beheld some extensive fields originally planted with cotton, but which, from the failure of crops, were now abandoned." 19 The loyalist planters, worried and despondent at what was happening to their crops, organized a committee to determine what was the cause of the cotton crop failure. This committee decided that "injudicious planting, and clearing the land, either by burning the soil [apparently the first anti-burning act passed during Woodes Rogers' time in 1729 was not being enforced], or exhausting it by unremitting tillage, have been considered as fatal as the destructive agency of the insects." 20

Because of these setbacks there was a marked decline in cotton production after 1805 together with a decrease in the value of land and
slaves. Fine estates that had been built were beginning to be abandoned, and their owners moved either to Nassau or left the islands altogether.

During the early loyalist period the number of slaves had steadily increased. In 1786 slaves already outnumbered Whites, and by 1819 there were 11,166 slaves in the islands. Fearful that the slaves might rebel against their numerically inferior masters, stringent laws were passed to protect white owners. The flight of any slave from his master was punishable by whipping, and it was a criminal offense for anyone to harbor a runaway slave. Whipping posts are still extant as reminders of this period of Bahamian history. That slaves ran away, seeking their natural freedom, is evident by the numbers of advertisements in the Nassau papers asking for assistance in finding such runaways. In 1786 the *Bahama Gazette* carried many such ads as:

Run away from the subscriber, on Monday the 3st of July, a Negro Fellow named JOE. Whoever wil apprehend the said runaway, and deliver him to the keeper of the public jail in Nassau, shall receive One Guinea reward. Henry Clinton.

Or, in the same year:

FORTY DOLLARS Reward will be paid to whoever will deliver to the subscriber, or to the Keeper of the Jail, a negro man named Jack, a stout well set fellow 5 feet 7 inches high, has an impediment in his speech, and is marked with small pox. He lately belonged to Mr. John Fox. Lewis Johnston.

The plantation economy that the loyalists had introduced to the Bahamas demanded increasing numbers of slaves and by 1800 Nassau was an important stop for slave ships. A large slave market was set up and McKinnen describes the slaves who were put on the auction block:

I was witness to the sale of a pretty numerous cargo... On the neck of each slave was slung a label specifying the price which the owner demanded ... This cargo was composed, as generally happens, of slaves from different nations, and speaking languages unintelligible to each other. Some apprehensions prevailed, not-withstanding all the expedients which had been used to convince them to the contrary, that they were brought over to be fattened and eaten.

Although the first recorded importation of slaves to the Bahamas was in the late seventeenth century, the slave trade did not reach its height until about 1805, and ended in 1834 when the British emancipated their slaves. The slave population permitted a plantation economy such as the southern American loyalists had on the mainland, and in short order large southern-style mansions were erected on many plantations. Life became somewhat as it had been on the mainland for the planters. An insight into relations between planter and slave on one of these plantations is given in the private diary of a planter:
...Doing nothing today but killing our Christmas meal for the people and sharing it out to them, we killed a hog weighing 120 lbs. and a young heifer weighing 260 lbs. the hog and the half of the beef 130 lbs. served out to the people which came to 4 lbs. of pork and 4 lbs. of beef to each share allowing the children half a share each, and a Bottle of rum to each of the grown hands and a large cup full of sugar to each, and a half to each child, and a handkerchief to all the grown people and to the big boys and girls and a good westcot to each of the men.26

In 1807, the British Parliament enacted a law prohibiting the carrying of slaves in British ships, and this law was the forerunner of a series of acts aimed at the abolishment of slavery in all British lands. The American loyalists, who had been brought up in an atmosphere of slavery, were alarmed at these abolitionist measures. They saw in them a trespassing upon their legitimate property rights, which, if allowed to continue, would destroy the whole plantation economy they had established. The loyalists vigorously opposed all attempts by Britain to interfere with their slave holdings. The Bahamas assembly, starting in 1810, fought bitterly for thirty years to forestall emancipation. Attempts to force the planters to register their slaves were ignored. British reform acts requiring planters to give slaves the right to testify in court, to an education and to self-emancipation were opposed until 1826. In that year the assembly granted a few of the above rights to slaves, but it was still not willing, for example, to include into these acts provision against the flogging of female slaves. Opposition of the majority of the colonists to the abolition of slavery proved useless. In 1833, Parliament abolished slavery in the British empire, but the old slave laws remained in force in the Bahamas until 1 August 1834 when the Bahamian legislature replaced them with a type of apprentice system which amounted to a temporary and continuing slave system. Finally, these too were abolished, and in 1840 the slaves became completely free. The Bahamian apprentice system was, however, far superior to the havoc of the Reconstruction period in the United States after the Civil War.

The abolition of slavery struck the killing blow to the cultivation of cotton in the Bahamas. Previous to emancipation cotton acreage had been declining. With the disappearance of slave labor, it could no longer compete with cotton produced by slave laborers of the United States who were not freed until 1864. Slaves were freed in the Bahamas, and peacefully under Britain's planning, thirty years before they were freed in the United States after the most bloody civil war of the nineteenth century.

In the first quarter of the eighteenth century pineapple raising had been introduced in the Bahamas by a few German emigrants from the Palatinate. Pineapples were now raised by loyalist farmers. After the
abolition of slavery, some farmers turned to pineapple raising with hired labor as a solution to finding a more productive crop to replace cotton. In 1842 the first cargo of pineapples was shipped to England. By 1859 an editorial in the *Bahama Herald* noted that in addition to fifteen shiploads of pineapples sent to England that season from Eleuthera, twenty-four shiploads were shipped to America from San Salvador, Eleuthera, and Abaco. That other types of farming were also tried was evidenced by an ad in the *Bahama Herald* "...offering for sale 60 sheep raised on New Providence." As early as 1786, lumber concerns were advertising their products in the Nassau papers, and a Bahamian firm offered, "For Sale by the Subscribers: Sixty - 2½ inch Abaco Ship Plank from 23 to 25 feet long. Pitch, by the barrel. One hundred and seventy pieces of square Mahogany. Ponton, Leslie, & Co." After emancipation a number of colonists expanded the lumber business which had been carried on ever since the Eleutherians arrived in 1647.

Even tobacco raising and cigar manufacturing was attempted, as evidenced by an 1849 advertisement, "Cigars of Bahama growth and manufacture. These cigars are warranted of the best quality and finest flavor. 1st qualities: $10.00 per 1,000; 2nd qualities: $8.00 per 1,000; and 3rd qualities: $7.50 per 1,000." There are no indications, however, that either cigar raising or manufacturing ever reached great size in the islands since Cuban tobacco was far superior. As early as 1700, the colonists traded in salt, and by 1800 a flourishing salt trade had been established. McKinnen describes the methods of making salt in the islands:

Early in the year, when the power of the sun begins to increase, accompanied with dry weather, the salt everywhere in these natural ponds begins to crystallize and subside in solid cakes. It remains then only to break the crystals, and rake the salt on shore; and by this easy mode a single labourer may rake from forty to sixty bushels of salt in a day. The process, however, is facilitated by making small pans, which as the salt is taken out may be replenished with brine from the pond.

By 1832, advertisements in Nassau papers offered, "Exuma Salt, for sale at 15 cents per bushel." After emancipation some loyalists expanded the salt business to include the island of Inagua which soon became the major salt producing island of the Bahamas. Inagua, the southernmost island of the Bahamas, has a long, dry summer which permits the evaporation of salt during the summer months. Most of the other islands have too much rainfall the year round. High profits were obtained from the salt business, and so many companies were formed that a shortage of managerial workers occurred. By 1849, Bahamian newspapers were carrying ads such as, "Applications will be received by the managing committee of the Inagua Salt Pond Company... from persons practically
acquainted with Salt-work and desirous of being employed in the capacity of Manager and in that of Overseer at Inagua.\textsuperscript{33}

Realizing that the climate was ideal for citrus culture, the colonists planted citrus groves. About 1850 the beginnings of a small citrus trade developed with America and “some thousands of pounds were shipped annually.”\textsuperscript{34} Sponging was also a post-emancipation industry. It illustrates well the colonists’ efforts to discover and develop the islands’ available resources. From 1830 to 1870 sponges became an increasingly important item of commerce. By 1890 it was destined to be the leading export commodity of the Bahamas.

Shortly after the emancipation of the slaves, another serious blow struck the finances of the colony when in 1848, after contention lasting for fifty years, Turks and Caicos islands were removed from the administrative jurisdiction of the Bahamas and given a separate charter permitting these islands their own colonial government. Customs revenue from the profitable salt industry in those islands was lost to the Bahamian treasury, revenues that could have been used for public works or governmental research in the problems of resource use. Further misfortune in the form of five hurricanes between 1850 and 1860 struck the Bahamas damaging many buildings and ruining crops. All these factors, the decline of agriculture following emancipation, loss of salt revenues, and several hurricanes, left the Bahamas in a bad financial depression. By 1860, the recession became so bad that governmental salaries remained unpaid, large numbers were unemployed, and crop failures had reduced much of the Negro population to a starvation level. For a time it seemed as though the colony might not actually survive this period, and emigration became greater than immigration.

Suddenly the location of the islands caused the greatest prosperity the colony had ever known. During the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a blockade of southern ports in April, 1861. England needed cotton for her mills; the Confederacy needed guns and ammunition to wage war. Both could supply each others needs, and Nassau lay between as a convenient trans-shipment point. Because of its location the colony became a beehive of commercial activity and prosperity was dumped into its lap.

The exports of the colony leaped from £157,350 in 1860 to more than £1,000,000 in 1862. By 1864 exports had soared to nearly £5,000,000 and imports exceeded this figure. Only four ships a year had cleared from Nassau before the blockade, now 397 vessels entered Nassau from Confederate ports, and 588 cleared for southern ports during the four year war:

Every one was wild with excitement during these years of the war. The shops were packed to the ceilings, the streets were crowded with bales,
boxes and barrels. Fortunes were made in a few weeks or months. Money was spent and scattered in the most extravagant and lavish manner. The town actually swarmed with Southern refugees, captains and crews of blockade runners. Every available space in our out-of-doors was occupied. Men lay on verandas, walls, docks and floors. Money was plenty, and sailors sometimes landed with $1,500 in specie. Wages were doubled, liquors flowed freely and the common laborer had his champagne and rich food. Not since the days of the buccaneers and pirates had there been such times in the Bahama's, success paid larger premiums than were ever attained by any legitimate business in the world’s commercial history, fully equal to the profits realized from Spanish galleons by the buccaneers.  

Customs revenues from this trade reached new heights, and the Bahamas treasury overflowed with gold. The government soon wiped out its debt of £47,786 and the legislature passed enabling acts for the construction of the Royal Victoria Hotel at a cost of £130,000 so that blockade runners and southern friends would have surroundings befitting their newly earned wealth. At the same time a new prison was built, a cemetery laid out, streets surfaced, and other public works constructed.

Then the bubble burst. The American Civil War ended in 1865 and the Bahamas strategic war-time position was lost. Demand ceased for goods stocked in warehouses. The usurious money lenders, agents of the Confederacy and contact men for English trading firms, no longer came to Nassau. Construction projects started by the government in expectations of continuing large customs revenues were abandoned and the old adverse treasury balance returned. The colony’s deficit became as large as before the war.

The Civil War boom had centered on Nassau. On the other Bahamian islands, or out islands as they are locally termed, their ordinary commerce in agricultural produce with the American mainland was interrupted. In turn, the price of essentials the out islands had to import increased enormously. Large numbers of out islanders migrated to Nassau to profit in blockade running. But the Bay Street Nassau businessmen controlled that commerce, and out islanders had to be content with jobs paying a wage. Wages were high, but living expenses were equally so. After the war these out islanders were left stranded in Nassau. Much of the agricultural progress that had been made in the out islands had been destroyed, and to this day these islands have continued to be subservient to Nassau’s political and commercial control. Only in modern times with the increased importance of tourism, and to a lesser degree agriculture, have the out islands begun to regain their old importance of the loyalist period.

After the Civil War, the Bahamas turned back to the development of their land and sea resources. It was a slow, unspectacular development interspersed with bad times and the World War I boom. During this
period, however, the foundations of the present Bahamian economy were laid, and much human activity of this post-Civil War period is reflected in the way the people of the Bahamas live today.

The first small evidence of flickering Catholic life in the Bahamas, following the Spanish period and during the emergence of English dominance in the islands, came in 1763 when Bishop Richard Challoner (1691-1781), vicar apostolic of the London District, petitioned the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome to make some provision for Roman Catholics in the British West Indies including the Bahamas. When English Catholics were separated from the jurisdiction of Rome and the Anglican Church was formed under King Henry VIII, a Protestant dominance took shape in England and throughout her possessions.

Catholics became a persecuted minority in these areas and lived under the intermittent severity of the penal laws. The life of the Catholic clergy was a hard one in this period. They were disguised as laymen, celebrated Mass secretly wherever obscure, small assemblies could gather without exciting attention. Bishop Challoner spent his life in England in hiding, hurriedly changing his lodging with Catholic protectors to escape Protestant informers anxious to earn the government award of £100 for the conviction of a priest. Finally, this harassment was ended by the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 by which priests were no longer liable to imprisonment for life. This slight concession kindled a fierce blaze of bigotry in an intolerant age and two years later the Gordon Riots broke out. From his hiding place the bishop, now nearly ninety years old, could hear the howls of the mob who were searching for him to drag him through the streets. Challoner never recovered from the shock. Six months later he was seized with paralysis and died two days later.

Challoner, accordingly, could not even operate pastorally in England during his episcopacy. His jurisdiction included ten counties around London, the Channel Islands and the British possessions in America, chiefly Maryland, Pennsylvania and the British West Indian islands. He could not visit the missions beyond seas at all, and even a visitation of the home counties took nearly three years. Challoner appealed for help from Rome but no priest was found who could go to Britain's American possessions. There were small groups of Catholics in the British West Indies, mostly Irish and English-Irish Catholics in diplomatic or military service abroad. They wanted to attend Mass and receive the sacraments. There were also Irish Catholics and Scottish and English political non-conformists, the victims of Oliver Cromwell's wholesale deportation of the seventeenth century. There were also commercial and consular representatives of Spain and Portugal in the British possessions, colonies of Greek merchants, transplanted Cubans and Haitians, and
various other small enclaves of Catholics who would have welcomed, as small minorities in the dominant Protestant culture of the British possessions, at least periodic visits by Catholic priests.

The long silence regarding Catholic activities in the Bahamas, continuously commented on by observers, set in again. After Challoner’s appeal for pastoral help in Britain’s possessions in the eighteenth century, the first nineteenth century reference is on 10 January 1837. The Benedictine Pope Gregory XVI, by the brief *Ex munere pastoralis*, divided the British West Indies into three vicariates apostolic. They were to be the Windward Islands, British Guiana and Jamaica. The latter vicariate apostolic of Jamaica included the "Lucayan or Bahama Islands.” The first vicar apostolic of Jamaica from 1837 to 1855 was Benito Fernandez. The first native priest of Jamaica, Rev. Arthur Guillaume Le Mercier Duquesnay (1808-58), was named coadjutor to Fernandez in 1841 but resigned in 1845 and went to New Orleans, Louisiana, where he became pastor of St. Augustine’s Church. While en route to New Orleans from Kingston, Duquesnay visited Nassau from 19 July to 30 August 1845. He offered Mass and administered the sacraments in a private dwelling. His stay was merely incidental. A Reverend Woodworth is also recorded in the Nassau *Guardian*, local newspaper, as having preached in that city in 1851 on papal aggression, whether for or against it must remain unknown.

Vicar General Benito Fernandez also visited the Bahamas after Duquesnay and reported to the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome that there were about sixty Catholics on New Providence Island. A French priest, Fr. James E. Dupeyron, S.J., then visited Nassau. He had been appointed coadjutor to Fernandez in 1851 and succeeded as vicar apostolic in 1855. He was the first of a long line of Jesuits who have served as mission leaders and pastors in Jamaica down to the present.37

The influence of the vicariate apostolic of Jamaica on the Bahamas during this first half of the nineteenth century is obviously minimal. Since trade, commerce and communication was so vigorous between Nassau and Charleston, South Carolina, during the American Civil War, the Congregation turned now to the established Catholic diocese of Charleston as a possible center to assume religious responsibility for the Bahama mission. Cardinal Alessandro Barnabo (1801-74), prefect of the Congregation, first contacted Bishop John Barry (1799-1859) who had been ordained as second bishop of Savannah, Georgia, on 2 August 1857. A year later, on 14 June 1858, Barnabo wrote to Barry and asked if it would be feasible to transfer the jurisdiction of the Bahamas from Jamaica to Savannah. Barry recommended Charleston as a more logical and effective point of transfer. In an interesting series of letters deposited in the archives of the diocese of Charleston, the Catholic story of the
Bahamas now begins to take shape. The move to place the Bahamas under the spiritual care of the bishop of Charleston is first indicated in a letter of 20 June 1858 from Bishop Barry of Savannah to Bishop Patrick Neison Lynch (1817-82) who had been ordained as ordinary of Charleston three months earlier on 14 March 1858:

I fondly hope that you enjoy good health after having gone thro' your labours of the visitation in your extensive Diocess [sic].

On last Monday I received a letter from Cardinal Barnabo a Roma making some inquiries regarding the transfer of the jurisdiction of the Lucayos Isle (Bahamas) from the Vicariate of Jamaica to this Diocess. I quote in reply that these Islands were much nearer to the Vicariate of Florida than to us — that they were very accessible to Key West, an island belonging to Florida, nearly all Catholic, but that alas the good Vic. Ap. of Flor. had but three or four priests, only one half necessary for his own mission.

I then observed that the port of Charleston had more commerce with these Islands than that of Savannah and consequently that they are more accessible to the good Bishop of Charleston who would probably accept the jurisdiction of them if solicited by his Eminence.

I have taken the liberty to write thus hoping for pardon, at your Lordship's hand should you have deemed it presumptuous of me to have taken such liberty.

I also suggested the propriety, because of the great expense and dangers of visiting and supplying the spiritual wants of the desolate Catholics of the islands, the propriety of raising these islands together with Bermuda 'et omnes insulas in circuiter magno Britannia [sic] subjectas' into a vicariate and of elevating to the dignity of Bishop & Vic. Ap. some good priest, a subject of that Government.

Then I wrote that if the Cardinal did not succeed in adopting any of these arrangements that I tho' most unworthy would give myself up to his will in this matter.

I hope that you make out my scribbling. You know my meaning. Please to write at your convenience.

P.S. Compliments to Dr. C [orcoran] and all your good priests. Please to say nothing of this—i.e. the subject of this letter. J. B.

Cardinal Barnabo heeded the advice of Bishop Barry and asked Bishop Lynch of Charleston to accept the spiritual care of the Bahamas. Bishop Lynch on 1 September 1858 informed Barnabo that he would accept such a charge. On December 11 of the same year the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda wrote to Charleston that Pope Pius IX on 31 October 1858 had transferred the Catholic jurisdiction of the Bahamas from Jamaica to Charleston and continued them under the umbrella of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. Barnabo asked Lynch to conduct a visitation in the Bahamas as soon as possible and give him a report. Lynch then sent the Rev. Timothy Bermingham, priest of the Charleston Diocese, to Nassau to examine the scene.
The following notice that the bishop of Charleston had accepted jurisdiction of the islands appeared in the local diocesan paper, the *United States Catholic Miscellany*, on 30 July 1859:

The Holy Father has been graciously pleased to request the Rt. Rev. Bishop of Charleston to assume provisorial jurisdiction of the Islands above mentioned. Yielding to the solicitations of the Father of the Faithful, Bp. Lynch took upon himself the care of this neglected portion of the vineyard, and dispatched thither, as missionary, Rev. Mr. Bermingham of the Edgefield District. No happier choice could have been made. Rev. Mr. B. was kindly received, not only by the Catholic residents, but by the Protestant Community, and by Her Majesty's representative, the Governor. He found the number of Catholics very few, owing to the long standing want of a priest's ministry. He said Mass and preached more than once at the house of the Spanish Consul. It was quite a treat to the little flock to have the Sacred Mysteries performed amongst them once more; it was also a novel sight for the Protestant Population to behold a British officer, in his scarlet uniform, modestly and piously serving the Mass of an American missionary priest. Father Bermingham's visit, of which we have promised further details, has already effected much good.

The *Miscellany* did not subsequently carry the promised details of Father Bermingham's visit. But from his journal we learn that the visit to Nassau was in conjunction with a begging trip to Cuba. Bermingham reached Nassau on 10 June 1859. He mentioned that he was kindly treated by Governor Charles Bayley, with whom he dined; he also dined with the officers of the army post at the military residence, and likewise spoke of being well received by the people and "even the government press."

Bishop Lynch endeavored to obtain a priest from New York to attend the Bahamas. In a letter to John Hughes, archbishop of New York, from Charleston, 10 January 1860, he asked, "How is Dayman doing? Your Grace may perhaps remember a few words I said about him, last August. Have any new points been developed in his case? How could he be trusted in the Bahama mission. I have no priest in the diocese I can send there." There is no record of Hughes' answer to this query, nor is there any evidence that Lynch appointed Father Dayman to the mission.

Not until 1863 is there any further material in the Charleston diocesan archives relative to the Bahamas. At that time Lynch was in correspondence with the Rev. Jeremiah W. Cummings, pastor of St. Stephen's Church in New York. Father Cummings was quite friendly with Lynch and priests of the diocese of Charleston. In May, 1861, he visited Charleston and preached at the dedications of both St. Joseph's Church and St. Paul's Church. Cummings wrote Lynch on 12 February 1863:

A friend tells me that he will send this letter safely to you and I therefore hasten to send you a line. My friend in Washington was unable
or unwilling to forward the dispatches which you must have received by this time, so it became necessary to apply to Mr. Seward who said that he saw no objection in their being sent on. There is one act of Yankee kindness for which you may be thankful if so inclined.

When you write to me I wish you would explain your views more fully about this Priest you would have sent to the Bahamas. Do you want a visitor or a resident clergyman? What would he have to do, whom would he have to apply to, what extent of faculties would you grant him? Would he be empowered to administer Confirmation? Who is to pay his expenses?

I suppose that a Northern man might safely get there in the Fall. If you will make out instructions and give me faculties I have no objections, should the war continue, to go down there next October or November, should this confounded War last so long, and give a short mission in the different chapels over the Islands. It would be well for you to forward me, as soon as practicable, a letter to the Archbishop of New York asking permission for me to go. I should like very well to escape next Winter at the north, for I am fearful of another attack of rheumatism. I should not like to be idle during my absence and I will with pleasure give all the Catholics a chance of going to the Sacraments, and squaring up their accounts.

As to placing a priest permanently on these islands especially all alone by himself it is a great responsibility but should a fair man be found I will let you know.

Kind regards to Corcoran, Mr. & Mrs. Gibbes & friends. Had young Gibbes landed here I was ready to be a father to him, so was Winterhof.

But Father Cummings did not go to Nassau in 1863. It was rather the Rev. Leon Fillon, pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Charleston, who ran the blockade to the Bahamas. Bishop Lynch paid $300 for this trip of Father Fillon. Being a French national, his foreign citizenship would be a protection if he were captured by the federal navy. After his arrival he wrote to Bishop Lynch from Nassau on the Second Sunday of Lent, 1863:

I have arrived safely here — had a hearty welcome from both Catholics and Protestants — sang High Mass this morning, preached during 25 minutes to a large congregation, the subject very good for all: What does it profit a man & &. Leave in one hour for Havana where I go with Captain Black to buy something for my church with the money collected for me on board vz. $237 and those [sic] received from Mrs. Lafitte, viz. $50 — all in gold or silver. Will return here, and then baptize two children, one of the Spanish Counsel's brother and the other of a lady of Mobile. Met here Mr. Frazier of Canada — became acquainted with 4 english officers, catholics, who come to Mass in full uniform — was sorry not to have time to take diner [sic] with them — will have that pleasure on my return — Plenty elements of good here. I'll tell you when I see you — go to see how things go at my church.

Fillon wrote again from Nassau on 1 April 1863:

As you no doubt think I am in the bottom of the sea, I write you a few words, to inform you that I am still alive and on board the Stone Wall now at anchor in the harbour at Nassau. We ought to be in
that of Charleston for we started from here on the 24th ult. with a very fine weather. But behold on the 25 at 6 o'clock A.M. we were discovered by an American cruiser who chased us for ten hours and drove us back to Nassau, after having fired at us five times. The five shots I witnessed but saw only two balls fall in the water — the last one fell 150 yards from our ship. Thinking that it was going to hail, I like a prudent soldier looked for a safer place — our bravest generals sometimes deemed it proper to fall back. I followed their example. Captain Black has been abusing me and ruined my name at Victoria Hotel. But his talk is all lies. Who would not dodge a little on hearing the whistling of a ball of such frightful dimensions. All indeed dodged more or less. The very Captain Black himself once placed Mr. Maloney our purser in front of him when he saw the projectile take its direction towards him. I wish you had seen all these fellows then run down the steps of the powder box. They ought to be grateful to me who, whilst they were unloading the ship, was quietly and fervently saying my rosary and through that means saved the whole concern....

In 1864, however, Father J. W. Cummings of New York did make the trip to Nassau as the following letters to the bishop of Charleston detail:

New York, 6 January 1864:
Archbishop Hughes gave me leave of absence before his death to visit the Catholics of the Bahama Islands according to your desire, and I purpose to go to Nassau by the Steamer which will leave in the beginning of February. I shall keep an account of my traveling expenses and expect you to pay them to me or my order after the War is over. I would be very glad to receive your instructions before I leave here. Otherwise I will get information on my arrival in Nassau and do as well as I can. Your letter and a proper document from the Administrator here [F. Starrs] will establish the fact that I have faculties to exercise the usual missionary duty in the Islands.

Nassau, 10 February 1864:
I received from you a letter two days ago which found me acting under written authority from our Administrator who testified that you had given me the necessary faculties for the Bahamas. I will take care to send you a record of any marriages or baptisms I may perform. They will be very few I think. F. Fillion did his work thoroughly last year and this year I shall have very little to do beyond saying Mass here and there and hearing some confessions.

I say Mass on Sundays and so all other general work in a large and convenient room at the house of Mr. Maura, the Spanish Consul General, where F. Fillion officiated last year. The people at the Hotel are from New York and old acquaintances and make me very comfortable. I spend my leisure time with the Lafittes who are kindness and amiability personified. So far the Island is a delightful residence and my health is very good. My trouble is chiefly a sort of gouty sore throat. Otherwise I am free from all pains worth mentioning. F. Starrs told me before leaving that Gillmore
was exceedingly anxious to have a visit from a Priest and F. Starrs added
that he would be pleased if I would visit him before my return. He gave
me full faculties both in your name & in his own for the troops should I
call on the General. What do you advise me to do? I do not want to remain
south long, in fact, I would like to be home by Easter—April 27th. Still
if Gillmore would let me go ashore under a white flag to dine with you
and Mr. Gibbes I might agree to go over for a couple of weeks on those
conditions. There is no telling how much good a staunch Union man from
New York might do among you.

I am going to write to my dear and amiable friend Gibbes on 'the
situation' in a day or two. I am writing in a hurry. Please to remember me
most affectionately to him and Mrs. G., to the Legare's, F. Sullivan, Dr.
Corcoran, & Dr. Chazal & lady. Mr. Lafitte will write to you next boat.
So will I.

Nassau, 14 March 1864:

The departure of the Corsica this morning is my last chance to
reach New York by Easter and I am all agog to avail myself of it. I am
certainly improved in health and pleased with my residence here. Every­
body has been very kind and attentive. I received a note from Gen. Gillmore
stating that he would be pleased to see me, but it is now too late for that.
Gillmore is certainly a Catholic and a parishioner of F. Fransioli, St.
Peter's Church, Brooklyn. I know this from Fransioli himself. I notice in
the N.Y. papers that Rev. Mr. Hasson is about to visit the soldiers at
Hilton Head & to administer the Sacraments to the Catholics among them.

I have had no marriages, and only three baptisms, of which one was
that of a white girl from Abaco. The services have been attended more
fully probably than during any former mission owing to the presence here
of so many Southerners. Outsiders also visited us every Sunday behaving
very respectfully. In reference to my expenses I am happy to say that you
owe me nothing. Mrs. Lafitte has taken the set of vestments etc. which
I brought and intends sending them to Charleston. She has given me the
money to pay for them. The Catholic gentlemen at the Hotel headed by
Mr. Lafitte yesterday sent me a purse which will cover all the trip has cost
me or pretty near it. I took up no collections and never spoke of money
to any one, even when they got me to say Mass for them. Still if things
go on as they now do it would be very easy for a resident Priest to build
a church here. The Hotel would assist for the proprietors cannot get the
servants they might easily procure were there a Catholic church in the
place. I must confess I would not like to be the man, for Nassau is an
awful hole to live in all the time.

Please to present my affectionate regards to Mr. & Mrs. Gibbes. I am
sorry to hear of her being unwell. Could she not try a trip to St. Catherines
or Niagara? If she does Winterhoff and I will go to see her.
The following persons were solemnly baptized by the undersigned in
Nassau, N.P. Bahama Islands W.I.
Feb'y 11th 1864
Arthur Leon, born April 19th 1863 of Robert Instant & Eliza Petit his
March 2nd 1864
Feb. 28, 1864
Geraldine Marie Griffin, native of Abaco, 18 years old, baptized sub cond’e. Sp. Julia Esnard.

J. W. Cummings, Nassau N. P., March 14th, 1864

A scrap of paper in the Charleston archives lists six baptisms and marriages attested to by the Rev. Thomas Byrne who was in Nassau in 1865, but the archives disclose nothing further on Father Byrne. There is, however, a note on Byrne in the files of the diocese of Nassau which states:

In The Nassau Guardian, Feb. 11, 1865, we find that Rev. T. Byrnes, who was in delicate health, was spending a short time in the mild climate and while here was conducting the Sunday services.

Baptisms in Nassau, N.P.:
Feb. 13th Isabelle Baxter, convert, a native of Georgia.
March 1st John of Michael Cambell and Mary Colgan. Sponsor Elizabeth Hanbery.
March 2nd Maria del Carmen Ernestina of Ernest Zachisson and Maria del Carmen Valliciano (?)
March 2nd Alice Maud of Fredrick Booth and Margaret Maher (?) Sponsors Thos Bell and Anastatia Bell.

[Signed by] Thos. Byrne

Marriages in Nassau:
Feb. 13, 1865 Charles Ed Richards and Isabelle Baxter.
Witnesses Thos W. Bell and Julia Baxter.

At the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore in October, 1866, Bishop Lynch met personally the Rev. William Hayes Neligan, with whom he had previously corresponded. Father Neligan was attached to the archdiocese of New York, although he was apparently open for work elsewhere. His background would seem to have made him a good choice for the Bahama mission since he was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and had been an ordained minister of the Church of England, having served both in Cashel, Ireland, and Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, England. He had become a Catholic in 1853 and had subsequently been ordained a priest. Lynch, satisfied with him, appointed Neligan vicar general for the Bahamas, and the record of his movements during the next four years is found in the following letters in the Charleston archives to Bishop Lynch:

Nassau, 14 December 1866:
I arrived here by steamer last Saturday after a very rough voyage. All on board suffered more or less from the effects of seasickness, but the
UPON THESE ROCKS

delicious climate soon restored us. I said Mass last Sunday in the house of the American Consul whose wife is a Catholic and baptized her child and churched her. I have secured a place to celebrate Mass in. Mr. Pellacio has given me the use of a large room in his house, and Mr. Morrow, the Spanish Consul takes a deep interest in the matter. I have not been able to ascertain exactly what the number of Catholics are here, as yet. There seems to be a desire to have a church built here especially amongst the Protestant who think that many Catholics would come to sojourn here during the winter had they a place of worship. They are also indignant at the Puseyite practices of the Episcopalians and wish the Genuine article as they call it. No resources would be had here, or would there be means to support a priest. Labour is now high but will soon become cheaper. After these matters I shall be a better judge when I write next.

Mobile, 1 March 1867:

I write to say I came here as I hoped to find you at Mobile, but not doing so I write to submit to you my plans respecting Nassau.

Your draft for 1/40 Sterling amounted 191 dollars in gold which eight weeks board at the Hotel at 3 doll in gold per day nearly consumed. Here Dr. Cummings boarded and I could find no other place. A boarding house at 2 doll. per day refused to take me in as I was a Priest. A sailors house at 1 dol per day I would not go to. There are no private families, all being occupied in repairs after the hurricane, willing to take boarders, but probably it may be had in the house of the American Consul at a future time—who proposes taking a large house if he remains, his wife being a Catholic and Irish. I paid out my own funds 45 dol in gold for my passage from New York to Nassau—my passage here 50 dol in gold—for cash here 10 dol—to convey baggage including boats etc. Of washing and minor expenses I kept no account. So far for funds.

Now as to the prospects of the church. They are most favorable. It is the wish of Governor Rawson (who kindly invited me to dine with him) and the authorities that a church may be built—and they promise their cooperation. Judge Rothery, who was at Cape Verde Islands, says Catholicity alone can influence the negro population in Nassau which numbers 8,000 the white 3,000. The Baptists and Wesleyans only teach them, they say, to howl and to steal. The same ground can be had on reasonable terms that was had 30 years ago, but resold, can be bought reasonably. A stone church to contain from 150 to 200 persons can be built, from inquires I have made, for about 5000 dol in gold. A few rooms and kitchen to cook [in] may be added for about 1000 more. This I am informed will include nearly all. The maintenance of a priest must be secured independent of the Islands. Nothing can be had in Nassau—save a few dol. They pay no fees for Baptisms, by the law of the Colony, and 2s British for marriage. All these particulars I have had from the Spanish Consul who tho a Catholic has a wife and family Protestants. The vice Consul tho Catholic (children Protestants) says he was obliged to do so having no priest to baptize his children. Thus it is with the French also. The consul died last year without a priest. The other Catholics are too poor. A capitation fee may be had from the home government for the soldiers and sailors in the erection of a church.
The Colonial government endows the Episcopalian and Presbyterian ministers. This will cease on the death of the present occupants. The Wesleyans and Baptists are supported by their respective bodies in England. An educated colored man met me on the road, I was the first priest he ever spoke to—he was acquainted with the Church from books he got in Key West. I found him so well instructed I baptized him and he now goes to Key West 600 miles for Confirmation. He had some income and promises me help. I had to baptize him in my bedroom in the Hotel while the guests (Protestants) were at dinner. There on week days I said Mass before daylight. The V. Consul of Spain refusing me the room for this purpose, which he permitted me to use on Sundays in his house.

On the out islands there are few or no Catholics. In Nassau, including troops, they may number 200. Now my proposition is this: a support for a priest may be had, I hear, from the Propagation of the Faith. It should be 1000 dols in gold at least—living is high, 2 dol per day at least. The remainder not enough to clothe him and then his traveling expenses etc. It will cost to go to Confession to Havana, the nearest port, 20 dol in gold, each way by steamer. While waiting to return, 20 dol in gold, for no priest or convent there would ever give a cup of coffee after Mass. I think 6000 dol in gold may be had in this country—call the church St. Salvador and who can refuse for Christopher Columbus.

My days on earth are but few. I am willing to devote them to his work. Should you approve of it I fancy I can collect something amongst my friends in New York. The post is not enviable. No priest with you. My friends in New York wish me to remain there. But to one who has sacrificed home and position and who mother and friends refuse to know or speak to, for becoming a Catholic priest. All this is nothing.

They say in Nassau I am the right man for the place—a convert and a university man has a position there which others would not. So the Governor tells me. Curious. The Dean of the Protestant church when I was the Protestant Vicar of Mellon Mowbray is superintendent of the Sunday School and clerk in a store in the town. He is very friendly but is afraid to come to see me, (He is a Puseyite—has candles on his altar) lest his people might think he would follow me—as I have no doubt many of his people will. The ‘golden’ opportunity was lost in the blockade times. Dr Cummings might have easily established a church here. I regret to say he left a very unfavorable impression behind him in Nassau. One Protestant gentlemen has already offered me the use of his house. All this looks promising. I submit it all to your better judgement and will await your answer here or if you desire can call to see you in Charleston on my way to New York. Asking your prayers and hoping that God and His Blessed Mother may direct us to what is best.

(p.s.) The Arbp of New Orleans has offered to help in any way but I declined until I had your approbation. A collection on Xmas day in Nassau amounted to 5 dol and half.

Nassau, 8 March 1868:

I have been here going on three months and have held service every Sunday in the American house where I am boarding. My congregation is not very numerous. Some of other persuasions attend. Father Gleason of
Brooklyn who has been here for his health during the last month says that considering the small number of Catholics here, not amounting to thirty, it would be most advisable for the present to purchase a house and lot in which a room would be used for a church, which I fear there is not much prospect of much being done here for the faith. Whatever is done it is certain it must be done independent of the Catholics here. But one, Mr. Pallacio [sic], possesses any means. As an instance of his want of liberality I may mention that he has offered to sell me a house for 500 dollars more than he would to any other person. As for support for a priest not much can be had not even what would pay for wine and candles to say Mass. I am considerably out of pocket at present, tho stopping at a sailor’s boarding house. In consequence of the Abp. collecting for his own Cathedral I could not do anything for this poor mission. Some refused to contribute, they had subscribed so lately to the Diocese of Charleston. I propose remaining here until June when I shall go to Philadelphia and Chicago where I am promised collections. Then, should you give me permission, I would proceed to Europe to recommend the state of these destitute islands to the Propagation of the Faith. This, I suggest, as they have done so much for Charleston. It would be well to make this a separate claim.

I have visited some of the out islands. Andros, one of the largest, no Catholics there. And, together with Father Gleason, St. Salvador’s where we said Mass near the reputed place of Columbus’ landing place. We met one coloured woman who said in Cuba she had been a Catholic, but now a Baptist.

The legislature has passed a resolution to withdraw all ecclesiastical grants. It has caused much commotion and the Governor is about to dissolve the legislature. I have forgotten to state that the small sum I collected in Canada [was] only sufficient to pay my expenses up [to] the present time.

St. Anne’s, Brooklyn, 25 November 1868:

The time I usually go to the Bahamas is now drawing nigh. Only one thing prevents my making a long stay there — want of funds. Begging seems now played out. I have been to Philadelphia but could do nothing there. The Bishop would give no permission. Last year I spent 587 dollars of my own. I am keeping the small sum I collected in Canada for a church which cannot be built until means are provided for a resident priest. Otherwise it would be destroyed by the black population, who are now laying waste all they can lay hands on. As soon as I am able to find a ship to Inagua I propose going. As I find the expense of going to Nassau and remaining there even in a sailor’s boarding house, will exceed the small means at my disposal. I have been obliged to spend the summer by going amongst my friends being willing to submit to God’s ways in all things.

New York, 14 November 1870:

On looking over my bankers accounts I find after paying my casual expenses for this year I have not sufficient to pay my expenses to Nassau. Last year it cost me in the neighbourhood of four hundred dollars. This year I am not able for want of funds to go there. Tho able and willing to do so,
I am loathe to ask you for any money knowing the wants of your diocese and the heavy pecuniary obligations under which you labour. How then would [you] advise me to act under the circumstance? There is no possibility of my being able to collect any money either in New York or elsewhere. Shall I defer my visit until next year?

About two months after this last letter of Father Neligan the following report on him reached Bishop Lynch from Archbishop Martin J. Spalding of Baltimore on 27 January 1871:

Though I suppose I shall see you here before long, I drop you a line to acquaint you with a fact which I have just learned which is important you should know. A respectable lady of New York who passed some time lately at Nassau, states to my informant that religion is in a most deplorable condition there; that Dr. Nelligan [sic] the administrator appointed by you, is a public & notorious inebriate; that he was turned out of the hotel in which he had board on this account. If this be so, as I fear it is, the sooner he will be removed the better for religion.

That Bishop Lynch was aware of Father Neligan’s ineptitude and that he wished to have the difficult mission given over to a more responsible person is evidenced by a section of a letter from Fr. Timothy Bermingham, Lynch’s vicar general, written from Charleston on 5 May 1867, in which he said:

I was about to write to you to St. Louis and to send you the enclosed copy of the letter you told me to write to Bishop Lynch of Glasgow, when I hear, thro’ the Sisters in New York of your intended immediate return; and therefore I did not write or send.

I endeavored to put the mission of the Bahama Islands in a comprehensible light to Dr. Lynch of Glasgow, or the Fathers of Ireland should they see my letter thro’ him or you.

If you think I have conveyed what you yourself would say, it would be politic for you to keep this copy of my letter in your trunk so that it will be ready at hand whenever or wherever it might be useful. It was for this object I took and gave you this copy.

A search of the archives failed to disclose this copy of the letter. In an unpublished manuscript of the late Msgr. Henry F. Wolfe, however, a copy of the letter was included. The superscription and formal closing were not given, but it reads as follows:

Some years ago Rome intrusted to Dr Lynch, the jurisdiction of the Bahama Islands, which are about three days sail from Charleston, and which belong to England.

About eight or nine years ago, Dr. Lynch, sent me there, as his representative. I only visited Nassau, the seat of Government, and the largest of all the Islands, only some of which are inhabited.

I was kindly received and well treated: And this was the more remarkable, as the good Priest who visited the place before me, was driven away, by the Protestant Parsons, who assailed Catholicity through him, from the Pulpit and the Press. The Priest was a Frenchman, and sent there by the Bishop of Jamaica, who then held the jurisdiction of the Islands.
On my arrival, I was informed by a friend, that very probably I would be treated the same way: I told my friend, to say from one, to those inclined to do so, that—The Catholic Priests of the United States were not afraid of noise. I was therefore unopposed, and enjoyed perfect peace during my very agreeable time in Nassau.

The people too, owing perhaps to their insular condition, were the most friendly to a stranger, that I ever met; and even such of the Parsons as I encountered, were social and polite.

Then, as now the Catholics were few, I had some baptisms and heard confessions, and gave communions to those prepared; I done [sic] every thing openly, and met with no intermeddling or opposition. The Press, moreover, gave me, the benefit of their Editorial favors.

When leaving, the Press was also liberal in noticing my visit and departure. The Spanish Consul, at whose house I said Mass and preached, together with his son, accompanied me to the steamer, in his own boat—with the Spanish colors flying.

In my report to Doctor Lynch, on my return to Charleston, I suggested to him ‘that the most effectual and speedy way to convert the Bahama Islands,’ would be in my humble opinion, to give up that Mission altogether, to the Irish Vincentian Fathers, who speak the languages of the Islands, and live under the same English government.

Since I left Nassau, a few visits were made there, by transient Priests, without any permanent gain to the Church.

After the recent Plenary Council in Baltimore, Bishop Lynch engaged a certain Priest, not of his own Diocese, to go to the Bahamas, and paid all his expenses liberally.

But now, after a lapse of some months in Nassau, he has returned to the United States, and sent his written report to Bishop Lynch: His evident failure is proved by his own report, which is not likely to find a place in the Annals of the Propagation, as an example of Apostolical zeal and energy for subsequent Missioners.

After reading the report, I renewed my former suggestion to the Bishop—namely that the success of the Mission, and the conversion of the Bahama Islands, would be best effected, by committing both to the well known zeal and energy of the Irish Vincentian Fathers.

Bishop Lynch considered the matter, and being about to leave Charleston for St. Louis, he requested me to write to your Lordship, in his name, entreating your agency and co-operation, in realizing the above object, so important to religion.

Three or four of the Fathers could make a good commencement: They could live cheaply together. They could soon open a school, and the school house would serve as a Chapel, on Sundays, until a church could be built: Two of the Fathers could thus labor in Nassau, while one or two more could attend the Out Missions in the other Islands.

Please, My Lord, in your great charity, to give this subject your consideration: Enquire of the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission in Ireland, what can be done: Add the weight of your own influence of the deliberation of the Fathers: St. Patrick and St. Vincent will assist in heaven. God,—Our Saviour, will bless His own works: He will be mindful of His promise: ‘Other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: Them also I must
Land of the Pink Pearl

bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd..."

There are no other references to the Bahamas in the Charleston archives until the two following letters of Sir John Pope-Hennessy, governor of the Bahamas, addressed to Bishop Lynch on 28 November 1873:

As I believe my little Government of the Bahamas is within Your Lordship's diocese, I venture to draw your attention to the fact that we are present without a Catholic Priest.

In addition to my own family, there are forty or fifty Cubans here and a few other Catholics.

I am sure my wife would heartily welcome a few Sisters, if your Lordship thinks it possible to establish a Convent here.

The climate is very good.

Your letter of the 2nd of February was brought to me by Father Schachte whose visit here was most opportune and fortunate in every respect.

I have had many consultations with him as to the best means of reviving the Church here — all of which he will bring to your notice.

On behalf of my own family & of all the Catholics here, I must thank you most sincerely for sending us so good a Priest & for sending him at such a time.

Hoping to have the pleasure of renewing our acquaintance before very long.

By a bull dated 7 January 1883, Pope Leo XIII named the vicar apostolic of North Carolina, the Rt. Rev. Henry P. Northrop, bishop of Charleston, to succeed Patrick Lynch who had died in February, 1882. While awaiting his installation Northrop made a brief visit to Nassau. To reach it he went first to Cedar Keys in Florida and then by ship to Havana, and from there he took another ship to Nassau. There are no reports in the diocesan archives concerning Northrop's visit, but shortly after his return he petitioned the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith to transfer the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the islands to another diocese. On 25 July 1885, Propaganda requested Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan of New York to accept the mission, and with this change of jurisdiction the Charleston chapter in the history of Catholicism in the Bahama islands was closed.

Following the defeat of the Confederacy in 1865, the diocese of Charleston was in no position to continue even token support of a Catholic mission in the Bahamas. New York priests for the most part had carried the responsibility for Charleston during that period of Bahamian mission jurisdiction. Now, with the Union victorious, and trade lines to the West Indies firmly anchored in New York City, it was logical and natural for Rome to go hunting again for an established diocese to take on the responsibility of Catholic spiritual care for the Bahamas. The archdiocese of New York was the largest in the eastern United
States, was well established and should have some clergy available to do mission work in the Bahamas. Bishop John Moore of St. Augustine, Florida, had presented a memorial on 7 July 1885 to the Prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda in Rome, now Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni (1878-92), recommending that the Bahamas be entrusted to the archdiocese of New York. This memorial was based on a visit to the Bahama islands of the Rev. Daniel J. Quigley, former administrator of the Charleston Diocese.

Cardinal Simeoni acted quickly and on 28 July 1885 the Bahamas joined the archdiocese of New York. The Nassau Guardian reported only infrequent visits of Catholic clergymen to the Bahamas in the twenty years following the end of the Civil War. Neligan returned regularly during the winter season until his death in 1880. Cummings had prematurely died in 1866, and apart from the almost yearly visits of Neligan there were only notices of a Mass offered by the Rev. T. Byrne from Ireland in February, 1865, a visit by Rev. John O. Schachte of the Charleston Diocese from 7 to 23 March 1874, and the visit of Bishop Northrop and party from 10 to 23 February 1883. It was imperative that the malaise following the Civil War in the South not permanently hold back the development of Catholic life in the coastal islands of the Bahamas.

Two fervent Catholic laity, resident in the Bahamas, were the prime instigators of a more permanent Catholic presence on the islands. Surgeon-Major F. G. Ayde-Curran and his wife, Lady Georgiana Ayde-Curran, took the initiative to better Catholic conditions during the late 1880's. This English-Irish Catholic couple, resident in Nassau because the doctor was assigned to medical service for the British troops stationed on New Providence, were impatient that no Catholic church had been constructed during the previous period. They also judged that at least one priest should be resident in Nassau for more than the preternatural winter season, and that more spiritual care should be given to the isolated Catholic colony than the assurance that the Spanish consul, his family and entourage would make their Easter duty.

The Ayde-Currans had decided to return to England. As their passage was through the port of New York, they bravely decided to go directly to the archbishop of New York, then Michael A. Corrigan (1885 - 1902), while they were in the city and present their Bahamian brief. The Ayde-Currans made an appointment with Archbishop Corrigan and begged him to send a resident priest to Nassau. In conference with Corrigan, Ayde-Curran cited a recent example of the faith of Bahamian Catholics. An Irish resident of Nassau had pleaded for a priest to give him the Sacrament of the Last Anointing. At a cost of $900, a boat had
been chartered to bring a priest from South Carolina to minister to
the dying man.

While this conversation was continuing, a priest of the archdiocese,
the Rev. Charles George O'Keefe, arrived at the archbishop's residence
to inform him that his physician had advised O'Keefe to spend a few
months in a warmer climate. Struck by the coincidence, Archbishop
Corrigan brought in the Ayde-Currans to plead their own cause with
O'Keefe. As a result of this remarkable meeting, the Ayde-Currans gave
up their plan to return to England in order to return in triumph to
Nassau with Father O'Keefe as resident pastor.

Archbishop Corrigan realized that the movement was underway to
attach the Bahamas to his archdiocese. A year before the formal ex­
change developed, he gave permission to Father O'Keefe to go to Nassau
and study the scene. O'Keefe reported that a very desirable site for the
badly needed church, discussed for the past fifty years, was available
adjacent to the military hospital in Nassau. Major Ayde-Curran would
be the intermediary for the purchase of this property owned by a
Presbyterian minister, Mr. Dunlop. Subscriptions were taken and lists
published in the local press. When New York formally assumed spir­
itual charge of the Bahamas in 1885, work went forward rapidly on the
building of St. Francis Xavier Church, the first Catholic church in the
Bahamas and later the diocesan cathedral. Neligan had missed a golden
opportunity during the prosperous blockade running years in Nassau
in not constructing a Catholic church.

Father O'Keefe was really the first, for the most part, permanent
Catholic missionary in the Bahamas, the organizer of the first Catholic
parish and the director of construction of St. Francis Xavier Church.
O'Keefe made regular and extended stays in Nassau from 1885 to 1889.
From February to August, 1885, all energy was concentrated on collecting
money, securing title to property, and beginning construction of the neat
little church on the top of the hill at the corner of West and West Hill
Streets. By August 25 the foundations had been placed, the basement
finished and the cornerstone laying was held with appropriate ceremonies
at 6:00 p.m. that evening. Lady Georgiana Ayde-Curran, who had donated
the largest sum toward constructing the church, laid the cornerstone with
a trowel made especially for the occasion by Mr. Demerit, a local jeweler.
The nineteenth century suffragettes and the leaders of the twentieth
century women's liberation movement would have to go far to up-stage
Georgiana Ayde-Curran who must certainly be the only woman to lay
the cornerstone of a Catholic cathedral in western Christendom. At least
the record is there to be challenged as a symbol of full participation by
the female branch of the people of God. The story of Catholicism in
the Bahamas as it develops is repeatedly and refreshingly crossed with unique and creative lay initiative.

It was a gala and unusual event that August evening which attracted wide attention in Nassau. For the Catholics to emerge finally in this British and strongly Protestant orientated colony did not pass unnoticed. The Nassau *Guardian* next day carried a full account of the ceremony and recorded for posterity the names of that doughty little building committee. Unfortunately, it is already too late for any living persons to identify all of their number. They were: Surgeon-Major F. G. Ayden-Curran, president; Senor Enrique Pertez y P, consul for Spain; Senor Jose M. Peres, Mr. Sam Theus Smith, Mr. Wilmore John Henry, Mr. Michael Ryan and Mr. John Scanlon. It was not locally known as yet that a month previously jurisdiction had been transferred from Charleston to New York, as *The Guardian* records that the bishop of Charleston is mentioned in the papers placed in the cornerstone.

The building of St. Francis Xavier Church went forward rather rapidly according to Bahamian time. The Ayden-Currans returned to England, their dream realized, on October 7 and were succeeded by Surgeon-Major and Mrs. William O'Brien. On 1 September 1886 a storm passed over Nassau between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. St. Francis Xavier Church, under construction, was struck by lightning and a native workman, Thomas Mackey, was instantly killed to everyone's consternation. The lightning also damaged the roof, cracked the stone work and splintered the doors. Another workman was stunned. Although some Nassauians who never wanted a Catholic church in their midst did not hesitate to speak of the hand of God striking the Babylon of Rome, the small Catholic enclave pressed forward in their determination to realize their dream. Repairs were made and by November, 1886, the building was roofed and ready for the first Mass. The Rev. J. A. Ryan came from New York for the season and had the privilege of offering the first public service at St. Francis on November 7.

Word went forth that Archbishop Corrigan was coming from New York for the church's dedication and everyone pitched in to prepare for the event. Corrigan and party arrived on 7 February 1887 and took up residence at the Royal Victoria Hotel. On Sunday, February 13, Archbishop Corrigan offered the dedicatory high Mass at 10:00 a.m. and confirmed at 4:00 p.m. The assembled crowd overflowed into the yard and all of Nassau was attuned to the happening. The organ was played by Mrs. Powles, wife of Magistrate L. D. Powles, who would himself make a loud noise shortly afterwards. Monsignor John Doucey, pastor of St. Leo's Church, New York City, was one of the large Corrigan party. Doucey donated the carved altar for the new church of that arch-
Exuma Island, an undeveloped harbor. The main activity on Exuma was subsistence agriculture.

Vegetables were planted between the rocks; the hut is thatched palmetto.
Bringing charcoal to market.
In the 1890's a Professor Straub from Germany, a friend of Fr. Chysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., fashioned in clay an ornamental frieze in the dining room of Bungalow Dunmore in Nassau. The frieze is romantic in character and depicts the native flora and fauna, the Arawak culture, the landing of Columbus, the coming of the missionaries, etc. Photographs by Toogood's of Nassau.
Head of Columbus.

Columbus landing on San Salvador.
diocese’s first mission abroad. The building committee published a public resolution of thanks to Doucey for his generosity. Magistrate Powles commented in passing on the occasion:

...In the month of February (1887) the most Rev. Dr. Corrigan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York, came down to Nassau to consecrate the chapel that had lately been erected. The archbishop became extremely popular in the hotel (Royal Victoria), and entertainments in his honour were arranged almost daily.

The day of the consecration he sang High Mass, assisted by music got up for him by two ladies from the hotel. The excitement on the occasion was tremendous, both in the hotel and out of it; the chapel might have been filled four times over, and the whole yard was filled with an excited throng of darkies trying to look in through the windows. Altogether it was one of the liveliest Sabbaths I ever spent in the Bahamas.78

Corrigan and his New York party departed for Cuba on February 23, Father Ryan left on March 9 and Father O’Keefe came from New York from 20 April to 1 June 1887. Thus the excitement quickly died down and the pattern of broken pastoral visits by New York priests set in again. A new governor, the Canadian Sir Ambrose Shea and wife, arrived on October 31, the second Catholics to be in that position in the Bahamas. His colonial secretary, Captain H. M. Jackson and wife, were also Catholics and the two families remained until 1895. Father O’Keefe returned on November 2 and stayed until May, 1888. The Neligan pattern had set in again. The permanent residents in the Bahamas began to realize that their high hopes for priestly service from New York as an on-going reality were again dashed.

Father O’Keefe’s ministry in the Bahamas was one of migration back and forth between New York and Nassau during the next three years. In the spring, 1889, discouraged by lack of assistants and funds to carry on the work, he asked permission to return to New York. O’Keefe was succeeded by the pastor of St. Joseph’s Church, New York, Rev. Denis P. O’Flynn from 1889-90, and by Rev. B. J. Reilly, pastor of Saugerties, New York, from 1890-91. The little church on West Hill Street was closed during the summer and fall months the pastors were in New York.

It proved difficult for Archbishop Corrigan to find New York priests who would accept a long-term assignment in this British colony where built-up antagonisms and frustration would reward their best efforts. The late nineteenth century facts of life had to be faced in the Bahamas, a part of the north European, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant righteous empire. Irish-American immigrant priests from New York did not find their milieu in the Bahamas, to put it mildly. The dominant cultural group in the Bahamas did not, in turn, find them congenial in their imperial domicile. Irish-Americans had too many bitter memories of Britain’s
obsessive and perennial need to dominate the Irish. They simply could not serve in an English colony without resurrecting the ageless conflict between the Celts and the Britons which persist to the present. It was also evident that missionary work in the Bahamas could not be left to volunteers who might be attracted by the health-giving climate and luxuriant beauty of the "Land of Perpetual June." Those diocesan priests who volunteered for a time soon wearied of the unrelieved poverty, tropical heat, loneliness and unglamourous round of duty that bore little tangible result.

Corrigan began to understand somewhat this confrontation and turned to several religious orders in the Church to relieve him of a mission problem which he was by nature and inclination unwilling to foster. Corrigan was neither mission minded nor primarily concerned with convert making. He accepted what Rome assigned to him with that ready obedience ever in evidence among American Catholic prelates who dominated in the United States following the "Americanism" controversy of the 1880's. Corrigan and his party had won that encounter as far as official Roman Catholic policy was concerned. But it is relevant to speculate what would have developed in the Bahama islands had the archbishop of Baltimore been chosen by Rome after the bishop of the port diocese of Charleston rather than the archbishop of the port archdiocese of New York. Would Cardinal James Gibbons, of the so-called progressive party, have pursued the same policy as Archbishop Corrigan? The Bahamas inherited by adoption, and as always with colonialism, the internal conflicts of other cultures, both American and British.

During the years Corrigan searched for a religious order to take pastoral charge in the Bahamas, two significant developments took place in the islands. One was the courageous and lonely stand taken by a Catholic layman for the cause of social justice among the Bahamian Negroes. The second was the arrival of the New York Sisters of Charity who were to contribute so much in their major role of service to the poor people of God in the Bahamas.

The first incident is a prophetic utterance by Magistrate L. D. Powles who came to the Bahamas in the autumn, 1886, from England as circuit justice among the islands. Magistrate Powles moved among the people administering justice on the scene and claiming he travelled more to the out islands than any of his contemporaries during his tenure in the Bahamas. In two short years he acquired many enemies among the controlling white and mixed white mercantile minority who were continually disturbed at his even-handed decisions to do justice to all. In the celebrated James Lightbourn Case, Magistrate Powles sentenced a white man to a month's imprisonment for striking a colored girl. This had never
been done before in the Bahamas and the whole colony was aroused: the Whites in fear that their colonial dominance was in danger, and the Colored in astonishment and rejoicing before the Lord that they would receive equal treatment under the law.

Lightbourn was released on bail paid by the local Methodist Minister Sumner. Powles soon discovered that he had taken on the Methodist community of which Lightbourn was a member. Powles said, "The Wesleyan Methodists were the wealthiest, the best organized, and perhaps, on the whole, the most influential religious body in the Bahamas." Lightbourn appealed his case to the chief justice who reversed Powles' decision. Sentiment had been angrily aroused by this time against Powles among the Whites, fearful that the colonial status quo was being challenged by this young Englishman who had come among them and endangered their very way of life. Furthermore, he was a Roman Catholic; he and his wife had actively participated in the beginning of the Catholic parish in Nassau. Governor Ambrose Shea, himself also a Catholic, who had been friendly and supported Powles, now encouraged him to resign and return to England both for the islands' peace and Powles' own future career.

Powles made the mistake of following this advice and resigned only to find that by resigning he had forfeited his right to an inquiry into the whole affair by the colonial office. Much as Powles tried upon returning to London to obtain a hearing, he was adamantly refused. It was then that he took up his pen to record the whole incident as well as to comment on the Bahamian scene. The work is unquestionably the most forthright, honest and thoroughly fascinating analysis of nineteenth century Bahamian and British colonial social, economic, political and religious affairs. Powles' book, *The Land of the Pink Pearl*, is a classic example of the power of the pen, especially in the hand of a righteous man who judged himself to be wronged. It is a volume that should be placed on the required reading list of all Bahamian students of their country's origins. The volume should as well be examined carefully by those third world prophets who oversimplify their past with little understanding of the heroic, if isolated, voices raised in their behalf at personal sacrifice equal to any contemporary brother or sister in the crusade for racial justice and equality.

Unfortunately, there are few copies of Powles' book extant. They were bought up and destroyed by shocked and irate white and mixed white-Bahamian ruling circles. The last victory had been won by Powles who had obtained funds from his friends in England to help cover publication costs. It was another example of the British sense of fair play which has sustained that people so distinctly. Sir Ormond Drimmie
Malcolm, chief justice in the Bahamas, himself purchased 500 copies of The Land of the Pink Pearl and burned them. But book burners, whether in the name of the body politic, social or religious, never prevail. Private collectors in the Bahamas have treasured their copies and some public libraries guard them with care. Contemporary reproduction facilities have eliminated the problem of adequate distribution. It is unfortunate that there exists so little contemporary awareness of Powles' message among those vocal agitators for a just and equal society.

For the religious historian Powles' contribution emerges as distinctive on several plateaus and in more than two dimensions. First, Powles' message, coming as it did three years before the heralded social justice encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum, places him in the mainstream of nineteenth century pioneer Catholic social thinkers such as Bishop Emmanuel von Kettler of Mainz and the intrepid Catholic layman Peter Paul Cahensly of Limburg an der Lahn. While not a creative social philosopher, Powles is an authentic professional jurist speaking for humanity and equality among the oppressed in the best Catholic tradition. Second, Powles' testament is a noble nineteenth century witness of that Catholic voice, too often muted and compromised, which had been heard 300 years earlier in the Caribbean through a much more famous writer and defender, Bishop Bartolome de Las Casas. The rights of the colonized Indians had been defended by Las Casas; the rights of the colonized Negroes were now, belatedly but without compromise, defended by an unknown English Catholic layman in the remote Bahamas. Third, Powles' testament meets all the pleas of contemporary Catholics in the third world asking for the development of the people. Leaders are needed who will serve the needs of the people, in the condition and where they are. People must be developed in their own communities by engaged and involved servants. Humanity and justice, not the dole, will bring God to the people. It is striking how Powles meets all of these pleas which continue to echo 100 years after him in the Bahamas and throughout the Caribbean. Contemporary young Bahamians are becoming aware of their history and do not want it repeated. The emerging Caribbean society may become a great leveller and an example to a world torn by racial, national and religious antagonisms. Powles was accused by his enemies in the late 1880's of just such a levelling movement and he was removed from the scene. It is regrettable that Powles' testament is not recognized today in the Bahamas as a brother's defence, regardless of skin-tincture, of our common humanity.

In the contemporary Catholic Church since Vatican Council II, conflicting schools of thought have developed regarding the very nature of the Church as the people of God. One theory focuses on Church hier-
archy and stresses proclamation of the Word of God and the continuing service of the sacraments. Another states that the Church exists wherever there is a struggle for justice and peace for this was the message of Jesus Christ to his followers. The former theory tends to exaggerate the organizational qualities of the Church, while the latter lacks a sense of identity and a commitment that is specifically Christian.

It is quite obvious that Magistrate Powles made his Christian witness as a Catholic at a time when there was no organized, structured or hierarchical Catholic Church in the Bahamas as a supportive system for his prophecy. Would the organized Church have functioned for justice and peace and in support of Powles if it had been present at the time? Or would it have been tied to the dominant colonial masters as happened all too often in the Caribbean? Would an official Catholic body have been any different than some existing Protestant communities whom Powles roasts on the fire of his indignation? These are “ify” questions, the most difficult of all postulates. The organized Catholic Church was not present at the time and cannot be judged in this situation. The Powles story emerges, accordingly, all the more remarkable as a solitary reminder of Christian obligation for a ministry of peace through action and justice, and for reconciliation of man with man and of man with God.

Regrettably and proportionately, all of Magistrate Powles’ commentary cannot be reproduced in this volume. However, a representative part of it begins below. Throughout this first historical study of Catholicism in the Bahamas, the primary documents and firsthand interviews will be extensively quoted as the best methodology at present effective in conveying the salty taste of Catholic witness in the Bahamas. Magistrate Powles courageously says:

The constitution of the colony is a sort of government by Queen, Lords and Commons, without a responsible Ministry. The Governor is assisted by an Executive Council, answering to the Privy Council, appointed by himself. He also appoints the members of the Legislative Council or ‘Upper House,’ whilst the Legislative Assembly or ‘Lower House’ purports to be elected by the people.

This mockery of representation is the greatest farce in the world. The coloured people have the suffrage, subject to a small property qualification, but have no idea how to use it. The elections are by open voting, and bribery, corruption, and intimidation are carried on in the most unblushing manner, under the very noses of the officers presiding over the polling-booths. Nobody took any notice, and as the coloured people have not yet learned the art of political organization, they are powerless to defend themselves. The result is that the House of Assembly is little less than a family gathering of Nassau whites, nearly all of whom are related to each other, either by blood or marriage. Laws are passed simply for the benefit of the family, whilst the coloured people are ground down and oppressed in a manner that is a disgrace to the British flag....
In every one of the principal out-islands there are one or more resident
magistrates or justices. They are paid salaries varying from £30 to £200 a
year, for which they have also to perform the duties of revenue officers.
Formerly, properly qualified magistrates, sent out from England, went
regular circuits round these islands for the administration of justice; but
about thirty years ago the last of these disappeared, and the present system
of resident justices was inaugurated.

Against the decisions of these justices, the majority of whom are devoid
of any special qualifications for their places, there was no appeal except
to the Chief Justice sitting in Nassau. The people are all so poor that
not only was this appeal virtually a dead-letter, but the jurisdiction of the
resident justices being very limited, there were many cases that, for want of
means, could never be brought into a Court of First Instance.

Without giving credit either to one story which charges a magistrate
with causing the death of a woman by ill-treatment, or to another which re­
lates how a magistrate who did not wish to be bothered, adopted the plan
of locking the parties and witnesses all up together till the case was aban­
doned, there is no doubt that acts of tyranny and oppression were daily
committed....

'The bulk of them are just as much slaves as they were fifty years
ago!'

These words were said to me shortly after my arrival in the Bahama,
by a gentleman who had had excellent opportunities of judging of the real
condition of the coloured race, and was well acquainted with it.

I asked him what he meant. He replied, 'I mean that by means of the
truck system the bulk of them are in a condition of bondage for more galling
and far less profitable to the individual than the old slavery of fifty
years ago'.

This was a startling statement, and difficult to believe, for the first im­
pression one gets on landing in the Bahamas is that the coloured people ap­
pear so remarkably contented that there cannot be much the matter with
their condition. Wherever one meets them they seem cheerful and happy.
On all hands too I had heard complaints of their uppishness, laziness, and
general good-for-nothingness. One day I observed to a high official that
the independent assembly was a simple absurdity, and that the little place
ought to be made a Crown colony at once. Said he, 'As a Government offi­
cial I should be very glad to see it made a Crown colony, but it would
never do; the negroes would be as well off as they are in the rest of the
West Indies....

The 'truck system', called by the Americans 'the store order system',
is, as every one knows, the substitution of payment in kind for payment in
cash. It is undeniable that in some cases this system may work well, and I
have myself seen it acted upon with very good results in one of the smaller
islands in the Bahamas, where there are saltponds. For many years the price
of salt has been so low that it has been next to impossible to ship a cargo
at a profit, and most of the salt islands are at present without trade. In this
particular island, when a vessel comes in, the principal salt-owners take
their net, go hauling, and divide the take among the men who carry the
salt on board. In this way they shipped 38,000 bushels of salt at a profit in
less than five months. All the island has benefited, for the weight of fish
given the men far exceeds in value the amount they would have received
had they been paid for their labour in cash. But this is a small island, containing only some three or four hundred inhabitants, where a patriarchal state of things exists.

Very different is the working of the truck system between the Nassau merchant and the unhappy negro, whom, by means of it, he grinds down and oppresses for years and years. The principal industries of the colony are the sponge and turtle fisheries, and the cultivation of pineapples. Through the truck system the benefit derived from these sources by the working man is not only reduced to minimum, but he is virtually kept in bondage to his employer. The sponger and turtler are the greatest sufferers because they are kept under seaman’s articles all the time.

Let us follow the career of one of these unfortunates from its commencement. He applies to the owner of a craft engaged in the sponge or turtle fisheries, generally in the two combined, to go on a fishing voyage. He is not to be paid by wages, but to receive a share of the profits of the take, thus being theoretically in partnership with the owner. At once comes into play the infernal machine, which grinds him down and keeps him a slave for years and years—often for life. His employer invariably keeps, or is in private partnership with some one else who keeps, a store, which exists principally for the purpose of robbing the employe, and is stocked with off-scourings of the American market—rubbish, unsaleable anywhere else. As soon as a man engages he has to sign seaman’s articles, which render him liable to be sent on board his vessel at any time by order of a magistrate. He is then invited, and practically forced, to take an advance upon his anticipated share of profits.

Under the auspices of Governor Blake a Bill was passed in the House of Assembly, in the Session of 1885, limiting these advances to ten shillings; but any merit there was in the Bill was destroyed by an amendment, permitting them to be made ‘in kind or in cash’. Besides, all through the time I was in the Bahamas this law virtually remained a dead-letter, as—I do not hesitate to affirm—has been the case in the colony with every law passed for the benefit of the coloured race, that at all militates against the interests of the native whites.

These advances, I need hardly say, are generally made in kind, consisting of flour, sugar, tobacco, articles of clothing, or some other portion of the rubbish that constitutes the employer’s stock-in-trade. Probably the fisherman does not want the goods, or, at any rate, he wants money more to leave with his family; and in order to get it he sells the goods at about half the price at which they are charged to him. I was about to say half their value, but this would be grossly incorrect, for the goods are usually worth next to nothing, whereas they are charged to the fisherman at a price which would be dear for a first-rate article... 

Preliminaries settled, the fisherman starts on his sponging or turtling voyage, and remains away from six to twelve weeks, when he returns with his cargo of sponges. These he cannot by law take anywhere, except to Nassau, where they have to be sold in the Sponge Exchange by a system of tender.

If ever anything analogous to the Jamaica emerite should cause Great Britain to send a Royal Commission out to inquire into the condition of this unhappy colony, the truth about these sales may come out. Personally, I hold the strongest opinion that they are fraudulent. The seller is a Nassau
merchant, the buyer—usually the agent of a New York firm—is also a Nassau merchant; and that the two agree together and arrange a bogus sale, by means of which they rob the unhappy fisherman, I am convinced. ... 80

Just before my last circuit, Sam Gowan, one of my boys, had been away for five weeks in charge of a sponging schooner. They had brought back 900 strings of sponges called beads. These beads—taking large and small together—averaged, Gowan told me, nine sponges each, or 8,100 in all. He and his crew had not only taken this cargo of sponges, but had cleaned and dried them as well—a very troublesome process. The whole cargo fetched, in the Sponge Exchange, £11 sterling, or less than a halfpenny a sponge all round. Yet many of these sponges would fetch five or six shillings in a shop in London, whilst the smallest would not be likely to fetch less than 6d. Here is a case in point.

Besides, if these sales be not fraudulent, perhaps the Nassau merchant can explain how it happens that on the Florida Coast, under exactly the same conditions as to water and the quality of the sponge, the fishermen can earn twice and three times as much as those who fish in Bahamian waters.

The sale over, the amount realized is declared, and owner and fishermen proceed to share. The fisherman is already liable to the owner for his original advance, and his share of the expense of provisioning the vessel. Nine times out of ten the former makes out that there has been a loss and the fisherman is in debt to him, or, at any rate, that there is nothing to divide... 81

The condition of the labourer in the pine-apple fields, almost the only fruit of the soil that is at present exported to any extent, is only so far better than that of the fisherman in that, as his work has to be done on land and not by sea, he cannot, like his fellow-sufferer, be kept continually under seaman's articles, but, except in one or two places where the people have been roused by a leading spirit, he is kept in a perpetual state of debt through the truck system.

In some cases the pine-apple cultivator is a peasant proprietor, in others he cultivates for the owner of the soil upon share. In both cases the Nassau merchant appears on the scene with his pack of rubbish on his back, and establishes a temporary store. 'Like flowers that bloom in the spring,' he appears with the pine-apple season and disappears with it; save that instead of a flower he is a upas-tree, blasting and withering wherever he sets his accursed foot. Sometimes he appears in the character of owner of the soil, sometimes in that of agent. In the former case he contracts in his own behalf with the captains of the vessels that call for pine-apples; in the latter on behalf of the cultivators. In both cases the coloured peasantry have to suffer, for they are in his hands. He receives cash for the pine-apples from the captains, and pays them with his worthless goods. Where he is an agent he often has a two fold opportunity for robbery, of which he generally—I do not say invariably—avails himself, by accepting a douceur from the captain to persuade his clients to sell at a less price than the captain has come prepared to give.

In one case that happened within my own knowledge, one of these light-fingered gentry accepted—or said he had accepted—bills for the amount due for pine-apples from an American firm, which bills were never met, and several old people died of starvation in consequence. When I
arrived at the settlement in question, the haggard looks of the poor folk told their piteous story far more eloquently than the flood of words in which they poured it out to me. This conduct was absolutely inexcusable, for plenty of vessels call every year for pine-apples, and there is never the slightest necessity to ship a cargo without cash down, and I have little doubt the person in question was bribed to behave as he did.

The cultivator thus gets a low price for his pines, and gets it in goods which, as in the case of the fisherman, are invoiced to him at the price of real good stuff, but are of so poor a quality that they will not go far. The result is that long before the next pine-apple season, he is threatened with starvation, and mortgages his next year's crop to the Nassau merchant in return for an advance, and the relations of master and slave are established.

I am bound in common fairness to add that the native white Bahamian is not alone guilty, for when a black man gets into the position of an employer of labour he is usually quite as bad, but then it is but natural that he should imitate what he has been brought up to look upon as the superior race.

In fact there are very few among the working classes of the Bahamas who know what it is to handle cash at all, except domestic servants and skilled work-people; and we have already seen that in the out-islands even shipbuilders do not always get paid in cash. Still as a general rule these two classes do get it.

Whilst on the subject of slavery, it may be as well to mention a case that, as far as I know, has never been brought to the notice of the British public, but which certainly ought to be known.

About eighteen years ago, one of the Nassau merchants acted as agent for the Dutch government, to hire labourers to go to Surinam on a contract of service analogous to that under which coolies are at present hired in many parts of the West Indies. A number of coloured Bahamians engaged themselves, and were shipped off: Only one has ever returned. He had the courage to put to sea in an open boat, and the luck to meet with a passing vessel which carried him to England, whence he was sent back to Nassau. The tale he tells is sad to the last degree. The men had no sooner landed in Surinam than they were told they were slaves, put in irons, and subjected to all sorts of hardships. Some pined away and died, one poor fellow— who had been a school master at home— cut his throat, unable to endure the shame and degradation of his position. Of the fate of a good many, the survivor can give no information, but I have heard my colleague express the opinion that some of them may be still alive. It is strange that I have forgotten the name of the poor fellow who survived, though I have often seen and talked to him, and he is as well known to everybody in Nassau as the streets of the city. John Stefney is now slightly deranged from the effects of his sufferings, but has lucid intervals, during which he can give an intelligent account of what he knows. To the credit of the people of Nassau be it said, he is kindly treated by everybody, and is commonly spoken of as ‘the poor man who was sold for a slave.’ To the best of my knowledge and belief no communication has ever been received by the friends and relatives of any other individual who started on that ill-fated expedition.
To the best of my belief also, no action has ever been taken by the Imperial Government in this matter. Yet every one of these men was a free-born British subject, as much entitled to the protection of our flag as the first nobleman in the land. Is it even now too late for something to be done for our fellow-subjects who may at this moment be languishing in slavery?

Shortly after my first circuit I had many conversations with Governor Blake upon the condition of the coloured race in the colony, and I am convinced that no man was ever more sincerely anxious to benefit then than he was, at that time.

In many other speeches, besides the one cited by the author of the articles in The Freeman, he pointed out to the people that as long as the Truck system existed, they were in slavery, as every man must be who is in debt.

Considering whom he was addressing, 'slave' and 'slavery' were dangerous words to use.

To the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of those who were emancipated in 1837, these words represent something tangible that they can understand and realize. The rest of the sentence, explaining the sense in which the words were used, would express nothing to their minds. And so it turned out, for if I have had it said to me once, I have had it said fifty times, 'De gubner say we slaves...'.

A case brought to my notice by Professor Brooks of Baltimore I hardly know whether to class under the head of the 'truck system' or to call by an uglier name. The professor being engaged during the winter of 1886-7 in a scientific examination of the sea-water, hired a coloured workman through the agency of a white Nassau merchant. The merchant was to pay the man, who was to receive £1 a week. Subsequently Professor Brooks discovered that the merchant was paying the man 6s. a week and pocketing 14s! The professor immediately paid the man himself, and the merchant threatened him with an action for damages.

The merchant in question belongs to a powerful family, and is connected either by blood or marriage with whatever there is of influence or money in the town of Nassau. Incredible as it must appear, I have little doubt that had he brought an action against Professor Brooks in the Court of Common Pleas, he would have succeeded, as the judge would have been afraid to offend so influential a connection.

And this story leads naturally on to the question whether justice is equally administered between black and white. Of course it will be alleged against me that I am unfairly prejudiced. Of that I am ready to take my chance, but I unhesitatingly assert that evenhanded justice between black and white is all but unknown in the Bahamas. Neither will it ever become a general rule as long as a single judicial office remains in the hands of a native white. How can it be otherwise? All the native whites are connected with each other, and the higher officers are so badly paid that independence is all but an impossibility even where men are actuated by high motives. God forbid that I should deny that in Nassau, as elsewhere, there are many men and women with good instincts, but is not human nature the same all the world over? A man has a miserable salary and no retiring pension; perhaps he has a family to support? He lives in a small place where he is connected with every one of the dominant race, a narrow-minded, over-
bearing clique, who imagine themselves to be a species of untitled aristocracy; a sort of thirty tyrants of Athens; an Oligarchy irresponsible save to itself. All his hopes of any active assistance outside his official salary, of any comfortable social intercourse, of an endurable existence in fact, depend upon his relations with these people! In heaven's name how can he do equal justice unless he be a man cast in an iron mould?

The white natives are very fond of citing the case of the present Colonial Secretary, who thirty years ago suffered severely for doing equal justice between black and white. At that time he was police magistrate, and had to convict and fine his father-in-law for assaulting a black boatman. His father-in-law immediately turned him out of doors, and prosecuted him in every way for the rest of his life. Whilst sympathizing with him to the fullest extent, it must be evident that, after all, he had only kept the oath he took on taking office, a thing every British judge or magistrate is supposed to do as a matter of course. The treatment he received at the hands of his father-in-law only shows what any member of the clique must expect, who dares to oppose the will of the rest, and how much moral courage a man requires to do his duty against such odds.

The above is the only case the native whites ever cite on their side of the question. The cases on the other side are endless; I will instance a few that have happened quite of late years.

Some little time ago a member of the clique was charged before the sitting magistrate with tying a black boy to a tree and beating him nearly to death. The doctor in charge of the asylum heard the child's shrieks, and had he not sent one of the asylum nurses over to interfere, it is extremely probable that the child would have been killed. For this offence the accused was fined 50s., which was thought a very severe punishment. Can any one doubt that if he had been a black man he would either have been sent to prison without the option of a fine or else committed for trial?

Shortly after my arrival an instance occurred which showed me how impossible it was for one of these natives to do justice. My colleague was in charge of the Police Court, and I was standing by talking to him, when a girl named Rosa Poietier came in to apply for a summons against one of the principal men in Nassau and a member of the Executive Council, for assaulting her and turning her out of doors without paying her wages, her offence being that she insisted on wearing a piece of green ribbon, the badge at that time of those who supported Governor Blake. The girl's story may have been true or false, I cannot tell, but at any rate she was entitled to be heard. But my colleague sent her to the Civil Court to bring an action for wages, ignoring the charge of assault altogether! He did not dare do otherwise! Some time ago at Harbour Island, the second place in the Bahamas in importance, five coloured men, named Israel Lowe, John D. Lowe, David Tynes, William Alfred Johnson, and Joseph Whylly, determined to test the right of the authorities of the Methodist Church to prevent a coloured man from entering the chapel by the same door as a white man. With this view they walked quietly in at the white man's door and up the aisle. The service was discontinued until they were turned out, and prosecuted the next day before the resident justice who convicted them of brawling, and fined them 20s. each, with the alternative of imprisonment. And yet the men so treated had contributed both by money and manual labour to the construction of this chapel.
Whilst I was sitting in the Police Court at Nassau in the early part of 1887, a case occurred showing the ideas prevailing in the colony on the subject of equal rights. Mr. George Bosfield, an educated coloured gentleman, was summoned before me for violating an Act of Parliament, compelling houses within the limits of the city, to be built in a certain way. Being possessed of a considerable amount of gumption, Mr. Bosfield filed informations against seventeen leading white men for violation of the Act, whom acting Police Inspector Crawford was compelled to summon. After repeated applications for adjournment, the summonses were withdrawn, and the House of Assembly repealed the Act! How different would the case have been had these seventeen been coloured instead of white!

Not long ago a certain local Attorney was appointed acting magistrate. Some few years before there had been an application to strike this person off the rolls for gross professional misconduct; subsequently, when Acting Inspector of Schools, he had misappropriated public funds, and would no doubt have been prosecuted had he been a coloured man. Being a white man, and related to some of the most influential members of the clique, he was allowed to repay the money in instalments.

In two cases in which white men prosecuted black for larceny, there being no evidence whatever to support a conviction, this person convicted and inflicted a nominal fine to prevent an action being brought against the prosecutor....

About two years ago a white man named Sands hit a black policeman. Sands was undoubtedly mad, and was acquitted on that ground. The way the whites talked of this habitually was, ‘that the man was only a nigger, and it was a pity a few more were not shot’.82

I extract the following from a letter sent me by an intelligent coloured man:

‘The family alliance is too great, its ramifications extend throughout every branch of the Government, Executive, Legislative, Judicial, and Rev- enual. There is no hope for us except through the removal of the present holders of office.

‘For many years the press of the colony has obstinately refused to publish our grievances, and the people are cowed down, afraid to make any public lawful demonstration or stand up for their rights, liberties, and privileges, as they are deterred by the oft-repeated threat of reading the Riot Act, and bayoneting the people by the soldiers. The dominant minority have the ear of the Government at home, and make use of their influence and prestige to crush and oppress us. We have no chance in the Halls of Justice, if our opponent be a member of the clique. In the public service we are superseded by the sons and younger brothers of powerful members of it, and our services, though long and faithful, are ignored.

‘For us as a people, there is no hope, unless the present higher officials—who are either connected with the clique or else in debt to them—are removed, and their places filled by men from England. Unless we get help and aid from Great Britain, our condition will soon become unbearable!’

A member of the New York Yacht Club, who knows the Bahamas thoroughly, once said to me, ‘I was here the day Sands was arrested, and I never shall forget it as long as I live! No one who saw that crowd could doubt there was an undercurrent of race-hatred with which the white Conchs will have to reckon sooner or later.’ There was an American lady
staying at the hotel last winter, who made it her business to get at the bottom of the coloured people's thoughts and feelings. She went out sailing every day with the same boatman, and completely gained his confidence. One day he said to her, 'If it wasn't for the soldiers, we would cut the throats of every white Conch in Nassau.'

I am told that shortly before I left, Jamaica men were going about telling the people the history of the Jamaica outbreak in Governor Eyre's time, and one of them even went the length of saying, 'If you burn down Bay Street, the whites haven't got a saviour among them. In Jamaica they had lots of saviours, but we burnt the town.' This, my informant explains to me, meant that whereas in Jamaica, white and coloured people held property side by side; Bay Street, which is the principal business street in Nassau, belongs entirely to the white merchants.

Would that my pen might have power enough to impress upon the Colonial Office the necessity of being wise in time, and not lightly setting aside a petition for a Royal Commission if it should happen that one is sent in with that object. These people know enough of the history of Jamaica to know that the blacks were oppressed there; that they broke out under Governor Eyre, and that, though Gordon was hung, a Royal Commission was sent out, and the coloured people have been better off ever since.

In fact I am told on all hands that not only in Jamaica, but throughout the West Indies, the coloured people are a great deal too well off, and it is common to say they are unbearable. Whether this be true or false, I have no means of knowing. I do know what their condition is in the Bahama Islands, I know that is it a disgrace to the British flag, and above all I know that I have promised them to do my best to bring their wrongs before the British public.

If the struggle for emancipation fifty years ago was really a struggle for a principle and not merely a struggle to get rid of an ugly-sounding name, if the soil that produced a Granville Sharp, a Wilberforce, and a Clarkson, still bears fruit of a like kind, they ought not to cry to England for assistance in vain. For never was there a time when the maxim that 'a black man has no rights which a white man is bound to respect,' was more firmly believed in or more persistently acted on, than it was in the year of Jubilee in the Bahama Islands.

For this state of things I believe there are two remedies. Let England persuade the United States to take over the country; or failing that, at once turn it into a Crown Colony. In the first case the independent assembly would disappear, and the country would become 'Bahama County,' 'Florida,' or 'South Carolina,' to which state it belonged before the separation from England. It would send one, or at the outside two, deputies to the State legislature, one good Yankee firm would eat up the little Nassau hucksters without stopping to take breath; the interests of the place as a winter sanatorium would be pushed, and the whole condition of things transformed in an incredibly short space of time.

As an Englishman of course I dismiss the idea of annexation to America as not to be entertained, but I cannot shut my eyes to the advantages that would accrue to the country from it, and if a colony is worth keeping under the English flag, England should do her duty by it, and that she certainly does not do in the case of the Bahama Islands.
The coloured people would not sever their connection with this country on any consideration. They associate England, and especially Queen Victoria, with emancipation, and are intensely loyal, because they are a grateful people, though their enemies are for ever proclaiming the contrary. Their faith in the Queen is unbounded, they call her 'The good missus,' and believe firmly that if she only knew their troubles, they would be re­dressed at once.

It is of course not easy to change the constitution of a colony, but it would be very easy for England to promote some of the present holders of office, who are men of ability and really good instincts, and who, in another colony away from the ties of family, would be good and useful servants to the State. Where they are it is next to impossible for them to do their duty.

But in order to fill their places with really good men from England, it will be necessary to increase the salaries sufficiently to make worth the while of men who are worth having to take the places.

A very small modicum of the subsidy of which the country was unfairly deprived in 1880 would be this; at present the salaries in this colony are a disgrace to the Imperial Government.

But in any case, if I have not grossly exaggerated the state of the country, I have made out a case for a Royal Commission which ought to be sent out as soon as possible. In order to be effective it should sit with closed doors and be armed with large powers enabling it to protect all persons giving evidence before it, and to punish severely anything like intimidation and boycotting of witnesses. Neither should it confine its operations to Nassau, but should visit every one of the out-islands and see the state of things for itself.

If this were done, there might be some hope of wiping out this blot on the Imperial escutcheon ...

The opening of the Houses of Assembly is a great day for Nassau, but the ceremony is rather trying to one's sense of humour. One tries to behave with decency and look impressed, but it is very difficult to help laughing.

Even funnier is a meeting of the Lower House, or 'ouse as some of its members call it. Every member is allowed to speak twice on the same matter, and he generally does. The speeches are often remarkable for an amount of unconscious humour that is truly delicious. At one meeting of this august body I heard a member make an ingenuous confession that I think can never have been surpassed outside the walls of the Palace of Truth. He was speaking to a Bill before the House to prohibit the employment of children under the age of twelve in the Sponge Fisheries. After dilating for some time upon the duty of preserving these young lambs from corruption, and saying over and over again that every worldly interest ought to be as nothing in comparison to it, he concluded thus: 'And besides, gentlemen, I do not think this Bill will injure the sponge trade. If I thought it was likely to prove bad for trade, of course I would vote against it.' The honourable member sat down amidst much laughter, to his very great amazement.

The second major development of the early Catholic beginnings in the Bahamas, following the Powles' affair, was the coming of Mother Seton's Sisters of Charity from New York to open their first mission
abroad. In 1889 Archbishop Corrigan had asked Mother Ambrosia Sweeney of the convent of Mt. St. Vincent on the Hudson, New York, to send a community of sisters to Nassau. Corrigan realized after his visit to the Bahamas that the little parish of St. Francis Xavier could not alone supply a Christian presence. Educational, medical and social services would have to be an integral part of the Bahamian apostolate. No group of sisters in the United States at that time had such a wide experience and tradition of care for the poor and needy as the dedicated and competent Sisters of Charity. They were the first native American women religious established by Mother Elizabeth Seton.

Their coming to the Bahamas was the single most important development of Catholicism in the islands to date. The very presence of these women, their selfless devotion to the poor and needy, their love and patience with the children have made a lasting impression on Bahamians of all persuasions. The Mother Seton bonnet and religious garb of these Sisters of Charity became an integral part of the Bahamian scene as they moved among the people with dignity and humility, giving always and asking nothing. It was, indeed, a visitation to behold in the land of the pirates. The people simply fell in love with the sisters, as they repeatedly state. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of their service in the Bahamas, Sir Etienne Dupuch wrote of them in his inimitable editorial style:

In 1887 Archbishop Corrigan of New York made a contract with His Honour Jacob H. Webb whereby he secured property and a residence in West Hill Street for a future Convent, but when the Sisters of Charity from New York arrived the Judge was unable immediately to vacate the property, and so the Sisters rented a temporary dwelling in West Street near St. Francis Xavier’s Church. It faced the former historic residence of the famous Lord Dunmore, colorful Governor of the colonies of New York and Virginia before the American war for independence, and later Governor of these islands.

On November 4, 1889 they opened a free school for poor children in two of the largest rooms in their limited quarters. Fifteen children enrolled. Before the week was out the number had doubled and by the end of the month it became evident that larger quarters must be provided.

In January 1890 the Sisters took possession of their house on West Hill Street and there established St. Francis Xavier’s Academy, a private school which has recently found extensive quarters in ‘Westward Ho’ a gift to the Catholic Mission by a distinguished visitor to the island.

The house in which Lady Sands now lives in West Street is built on the site which was then occupied by the old hall of the Friendly Society. This building was rented to conduct the boys’ classes and an adjacent dilapidated building formerly used as a military convalescent hospital when troops were garrisoned here was rented and repaired for the girls’ classes. The pupils then numbered 250 . . .

Today there are 21 highly qualified Sisters of Charity, all degree women, assisted by 12 local teachers and monitors engaged in teaching
1,410 pupils in the free schools and caring for 53 babies in the Madonna Day Nursery. In addition, four Sisters of Charity and one lay teacher are engaged in teaching private students at the Academy. This work is supported entirely by friends of the mission in the United States. Apart from the Government, no other organization in the Bahamas has attempted to devote this amount of time, care, and money to educating poor people in the islands. This achievement stands to the credit of this silent band of Sisters from a foreign land and today, fifty years later, it is not for The Tribune to say how much this government owes these women for the large contribution they have made to social and spiritual progress in the Colony.

Small crosses in the Catholic cemetery marking the spot where several have made their final resting place bear eloquent testimony to how closely the Sisters of Mount St. Vincent have identified themselves with the life of the islands. Today—no fifty years ago—these Sisters feel that their Mission is among the poor people of the islands and the whole policy, directed from the Mother House in New York, is based on this conviction. A fact not generally known—and a fact that makes their work all the more significant—is that the Sisters of Mount St. Vincent are drawn from the most select social groups in the United States. It is perhaps this fact which accounts for the wholesome social influence they wield over children who come under their care.

In all communities in the world today there is strong division of thought on questions of religion. But all over the world, nevertheless, thoughtful people have learned to be fair and impartial in the presence of a creditable task magnificently performed. It is in this spirit today that The Tribune invites the community to pause for a moment and think of these noble women who have for fifty years moved silently in this community, asking nothing, giving all—giving even their dust to the earth of the island.

From a large group that had volunteered for the Mount’s first foreign mission, Mother Ambrosia had chosen Sr. Dolores Van Rensselaer of that old New York family as superior along with four companions: Sisters Teresa Alacoque Nagle, Casilda Saunders, Mercedes Donovan and Maria Corsini Gallagher. Mother Ambrosia decided to accompany the first five sisters to Nassau. In the party were also Sr. Irene Fitzgibbon of the New York Foundling Hospital, Sr. Teresa Gonzaga Battell, treasurer of the motherhouse and Sr. Maria Dodge, directress of the Academy of Mt. St. Vincent. Two recent graduates of the academy, Jennie Flood and Anna Livingston, accompanied the sisters and remained in Nassau for several months. A third young woman, Margaret Wohlfert, came as the kindergarten teacher.

Fortunately, Sr. Maria Dodge kept a most interesting diary of the whole expedition and preserved the story of this pioneer mission undertaking of an American women’s religious order. As the Ward Line steamer Santiago left New York harbor on 24 October 1889, the Charity sisters found themselves sailing with Sir Ambrose Shea, governor general of
the Bahamas and his wife, both Catholics. In the governor's party were Captain H. M. Jackson, colonial secretary and also a Catholic. Abbot Hilary Pfraengle, O.S.B., of St. Mary's Abbey, Newark, New Jersey, was on board at the request of Archbishop Corrigan to look over the scene in Nassau and decide if that community of Benedictines would take charge of the Bahamas mission. With Abbot Hilary was Fr. Gerard F. Spielmann, O.S.B., monk of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, and an assistant at the newly opened St. Anselm's parish, New York, operated by Benedictines from St. John's. Fr. Denis P. O'Flynn of New York, mentioned above, was also aboard on his way to Nassau for six months. O'Flynn had volunteered his services to make it possible for the sisters to attend Mass and receive the sacraments regularly as St. Francis Xavier Church had been closed since Father O'Keefe departed.

What an invasion of Catholics moved south on the Santiago's four day journey to Nassau. The Bahamas had seen nothing like it since the arrival of Columbus. Sr. Maria Dodge colorfully records the journey, arrival and first beginnings of the Charities in Nassau:

SS. Santiago, Saturday, 26 October 1889, To all at home greeting:

On deck at 9:30 a.m. the Lord Abbot, Father O'Flynn, Mother, Sister Irene, and all our party. Awning overhead, a magnificent sailing vessel in full display of sails just gone by; looks like a white ship and the sails were transparent. The water is so blue! The Governor General is here on deck, also his niece and cousin. Mother bears out the full meaning of the name. She was the first to enter our rooms yesterday morning. Again this morning she woke me up at 5 o'clock, looking as bright as ever. She was the only one to take dinner yesterday. She holds her own and is the best sailor, as I anticipated she would be. Sister Irene is disgusted with the sea. We have the [Anglican] Lord Bishop of Nassau on board. He brags of having shaken hands with the Archbishop of New York. He is 6 ft. 6 inches in his stockings, I am sure. Mother says he is called 'the Jonah' on the line, as he always brings a storm. 'Poor man! it is not his fault,' the stewardess says, apologetically. We did not leave the pier until about 7 p.m. Thursday night, and the delay was attributed to the Lord Bishop.

I have not been seasick. Father O'Flynn made me eat two dishes of hard cheese and it gave me a sick headache. I read all the prayers yesterday afternoon for Mother. The Reverend Fathers, Mother, Sister Teresa Gonzaga, Teresa Alacoque, Casilda, myself, and Maggie took breakfast in a happy frame of mind. The Lord Abbot is a grand sailor. He took five meals yesterday, while at home he has a poor appetite and takes but one. He has his heavy ring which is indulgenced. I would be willing to go the world over with him to lead.

Sister Teresa Gonzaga was in her large armchair when all of a sudden she turned a somersault and landed in the Governor General's arms, who said, 'That was done as cleverly as any sailor could do it'. Poor Sister Mercedes is seasick. I am going to give her my under berth.

A gentleman accosted me this morning with, 'Have I not seen you at Mount St. Vincent?'. Come to find out, he is Sir Ambrose Shea and has visit-
ed the Mount twice with his wife. She is on board and his two little daugh-
ters. He told the Governor General there was no other such Academy in
the wide world as the Mount. Lady Shea was so eloquent about our prac-
tical system of education that I had to run away to hide my confusion. Lady
Shea is now extended in a steamer chair on deck. She has just sent her
niece around with luscious grapes. Sister Teresa Alacoque is eaten up by
the green-eyed monster because Sister Mercedes is getting so much atten-
tion. She says she herself was far sicker on Tuesday last. Anna Livingston
and Maggie are quite bright now.

We have sighted two ships, a brig, and schooner, today. We have
seen two flying fish, big fellows, and now we are looking out for porpoises.
The Lord Abbot saw a procession of them under our ship yesterday.

Sunday, October 27, 3 p.m.:

We have had a sore experience. At 12:30 p.m. Mother entered my
room and said, 'Get up and dress.' I awakened Sister Mercedes but she was
too ill and begged to be left in bed. My Lord Abbot had foretold a storm.
He knew a thing or two; soon after we retired it burst upon us furiously.
A wind contrary to our course sprung upon us. We made very little pro-
gress all night and about 12 o'clock a port hole burst open and the water
rushed in and deluged Mother's room and the one Sister Marie Dolores and
Sister Teresa Alacoque occupied. As Mother knew not where it was coming
from or why it was filling her room she was naturally alarmed. Sister
Irene's room and mine were dry. Mother, Sister Teresa Gonzaga, Sister
Dolores, and Sister Teresa Alacoque were kept in durance vile all day yes-
terday before they could get their shoes dry. They took advantage of the
time to get comfortable. Mother would have been up on deck had the shoes
been dry. She was ordering things for every child under her care all day
and as I was fairly well I was messenger general and was voted the best
sailor in the crowd. You may realize how well I felt when I could not read,
and all day long I said aspirations and a full rosary and that was all. I felt
as if there were no poetry in life. Mother, Sister Casilda, and I were sit-
ting on deck when the gong sounded for dinner, 6 p.m. All refused to go
down, but my Lord Abbot brought an excellent Cuban physician to us who
persuaded Sister Casilda and myself to go. We had a grand dinner.
Maggie came too. We ate very sparingly, just what we were told to take,
and in consequence, Sister Casilda, Maggie, and your humble servant are
in extra trim today. We are all on deck.

Monday, October 28, 8 a.m.:

The Lord Abbot, God bless him! Father O'Flynn, Mother, Sister
Casilda, the two children, and Sister Maria appeared at this hour for break-
fast. All ate sparingly except Sister Maria who took a bowl of chicken broth,
a piece of beefsteak, too tough to manage, and a piece of broiled chicken.
We are now on deck again and Sister Irene has found a baby boy and she
is in Elysium. Sir Ambrose Shea spent three consecutive hours with us on
Saturday afternoon telling us about himself. He gave us an outline of his
eventful life. He is a broad-minded, pious man. He has just appeared with
two beautiful specimens of hemp and is now laying his schemes in full be-
before Mother and the Sisters who were too ill to hear him on Saturday. Sister Mary Rose has told us all about him. He has just given us his specimen of hemp for Mount St. Vincent. Lady Shea's servant or maid, has been to the Mount often and you should hear the poor old soul talk about it. Lord Abbot lent me the *Nassau Almanac* yesterday and truly you would believe Nassau to be a place distinguished on the face of the globe....

Monday, October 28th, 10:40 a.m.:

They tell us that we shall land at 7 p.m. today. Father O'Flynn says, 'Twelve apostles, on the feast of SS. Simon and Jude.' The Lord Abbot would have said Mass yesterday had the ship been well balanced. I think had the Sisters been around he might have celebrated Mass for he remained fasting, but I was the sole representative. Mother and Father O'Flynn are in consultation. Sister Maria and Sister Dolores are talking. Sister Teresa Alacoque is vigorously applied to the Luck Family. Sisters Teresa Gonzaga and Casilda are writing. Maggie is watching for porpoises. Sister Mercedes is extended on a steamer chair. The Lord Abbot is meditating, I guess, at the stern of the vessel all by himself. Anna Livingston has just finished an apple. Here she comes for me to address a letter to Charlie. The Lord Bishop of Nassau is here reading.

Unfortunately, I wished for a storm at sea. Sister Irene is spunky about it. She made a vow in honor of the Blessed Virgin in her fright. Sister Casilda, Sister Mercedes, and Sister Maria were not at all frightened when the worst broke over the deck that memorable night. The Lord Bishop came out on deck early Sunday in knee breeches, short silk gown and short coat. The Lord Abbot was amused and asked me if he did not look for all the world like a Kansas grasshopper, his legs like cases without anything in them! The sea was high and he sprawled around the deck in the most ludicrous manner. Even the pussy-cat seemed amused. Today he is in sober attire. The Abbot says he has scruples, he thinks and knows he is not a real bishop.

A poor man bound for Cuba just asked the Lord Abbot for an English prayer book. The Abbot applied to Mother. Fortunately, I had the *Hour with the Sacred Heart* and Mother gave it to him. He came and had quite a chat with Mother. Sister Teresa Alacoque has seriously attacked Sister Marie Dolores' old-maidish notions. I think she will carry the day.

The captain has just promised to mail our letters in Cuba and says you will receive them on Monday next, November 4th. The children's Retreat will soon be in session, the first which I have not made, but it will have my daily prayers for its success. Not a fear, not a doubt can possess our hearts when we remember the prayers and sacrifices offered for us by the Sisters. Mother says she knows the evil one is greatly exercised, and she will attribute all mishaps to his Satanic Majesty. She brightens up whenever she looks at the water. She sends love to all and begs prayers.

Nassau, 31 Oct. 1889:

We had little hope of being able to write to you again, but my Lord Abbot, who is indefatigable, has found out that a schooner will leave at 8 p.m. this 31st of October for Key West. As likely as not you will get this second letter before the one already sent.
To resume where I discontinued,—At 4 p.m. Monday we all appeared at dinner and at the same hour we were signalled at Nassau. After a grand dinner, in the fashion of the world, but not nearly as good as our fare, we assembled to get ready to disembark. About 5 p.m. we found ourselves just about opposite Nassau harbor but a good mile away on a bee-line. We fired a signal for the tug to come over, after the pilot had been on board only half and hour. Pilot Boat No. 12 had come down the instant we had begun signalling, bringing an elderly gentleman, not an Englishman, to act as pilot. About half a dozen colored 'genmen' came down in the boat. They were fresh from the island and very glad to see us. Tell Sister Mary Paul darkness comes upon us without warning, no twilight. As the colored waiter had it, 'The sun goes out.' Well, the sun went down on us as we were standing watching the tug coming alongside followed by these large ships. Nearly two hundred men came over on the tug and I think nearly every one of that number went back with us. We were crowded, you may be sure. There was scarcely a word spoken. There were lanterns hanging here and there. All of a sudden one of the ships became transformed, as it were. It was the first time I had ever seen the Bengal light and it will be many a long day before I shall forget that beautiful preliminary spectacle.

Picture Mother and Sister Irene seated at the stern of the ship on camp chairs, your humble servant, Sister Casilda standing. There was no room for a seat. All wrapped up in our long shawls for convenience of transportation. The other Sisters are grouped at a little distance, and the Lord Abbot and Maggie near the prow. Father O'Flynn, like a bird on the wing, anxious to fly for our sake. As we approached the harbor we found the park surrounding it lighted up with Japanese lanterns and crowded with people, the colored element predominating. All in holiday attire of the brightest fabrics. It was delightfully cool but oh, it was a difficult thing to descend from the boat on an almost perpendicular plank. I hesitated for an instant, and immediately a stalwart man rushed up and helped me down. Then we were hurried through the crowd, which opened willingly and gracefully, and many were the courtesies we received as we passed along. Some one counted out loud, Mother says, 'One, two, three, four, five, six, Sisters,' and then added, 'Oh, there is a whole family of them coming!'

Several traps or phaetons were in waiting. Mounting them, off our charioteers started, winding ruthlessly through the crowd. There were over fifteen hundred in the park but on no side did we hear remonstrances. Our man drove on, almost running over a large man who turned good-naturedly and pointed our pony's head away. On we went over roads as white as limestone and perfectly hard and smooth, wending our way through groves of almond trees until we drew up before the grand Royal Victoria Hotel which opened wide its magnificent portals to receive the travellers. Quick as thought the place was over-run with cleanly dressed little colored boys and girls, active, graceful, well-behaved, and anxious to serve us. Instantly our bags were conveyed to our rooms, of which we had four of the choicest in the hotel assigned to us, all adjacent and communicating, with porches extending all around and windows down to the floors. To bed we went in the solemn stillness, and the air was delightfully cool. I began to believe the Governor General who assured us that he had never lost a moment's sleep from the boat. We slept like the Seven Sleepers of great repute. Father O'Flynn had told us to rest as long as we pleased, but at 7 a.m. we
rose and went downstairs. I asked if we could have Mass. Father O'Flynn
said, 'Yes, as soon as you are ready.' In solemn procession we set out for
the church, Father O'Flynn and Mother leading on so fast that we were
all left in the rear. On we went for fully one mile, flanked by an array of
colored women and children. At last we found ourselves at the foot of the
altar of St. Francis Xavier's neat little church. Wearing handsome silk
vestments, the Lord Abbot said Mass for the dead. Father O'Flynn's cassock
having gone on to Cuba, he could not say Mass.

After Mass we went to the priest's house nearby, and commanded a
view, the like of which I had never expected to see this side of Paradise. We
did not wonder that a Kansas Lady wished to bottle the exquisite chromatic
colors of the waters. There were gardens with sweet-scented roses of
every hue, a huge tree laden with cocoanuts, almond trees in abundance,
orange trees covered with fruit. Altogether we felt and still feel that we are
in fairyland. Then we walked to the hotel, well exhausted, and waited, oh,
so patiently, for our breakfast, which was served about 9:30 a.m. After
breakfast Mother and I (Sister Irene was tired out) drove down to see the
other house, but the Judge holds possession and will not give it to the
Fathers, so they have hired a little house of four rooms near the church.
It will not be a quarter large enough for us, being built on only a city lot.
We drove then to the first house and sent for Sisters Irene and Marie
Dolores. We dined at the hotel at 5:30 p.m., a Mrs. McLain furnishing
our meals from outside, and a colored waiter bringing them to us on a
large server carried on top of his head. There is fish in abundance and they
know how to cook it. We are in good trim, although we had not had a
square meal until last evening. The waiter at the hotel got up our dinner.
He served soup, fish, and roast beef, rolls, cocoa, cocoa milk, cocoa meat,
and salad, with a variety of fruits. But he failed to convince us that such
grand dinners were as good as our plain ones.

Yesterday, October 29th, Mother and our band assembled in the grand
parlor of the hotel for a Reading. The parlor is on the second floor and the
porches extend across the entire front. The parlor projects and you walk
from porch to porch by going in a straight line through the parlor. This
parlor is large and is finished in black walnut and stained woods. It was
thrown open expressly for us. You might have feared we were completely
demoralized, but no, Wednesday, October 30th, found us taking posses­
sion of our own house. After dinner, Tuesday, our freight was beginning
to arrive, having been conveyed to the dock by schooner. You should have
seen the donkeys and ponies flying up and down. When we got to the house
today the Lord Abbot and a colored man were very busy opening boxes.
Immediately Mother took up her abode in the midst of the unpacking and
soon all the beds were ready, distributed, and set up. Bedding was opened
out, and if Mother had been servant-general, she could not have worked
harder. She was too tired to sleep last night and so was Sister Teresa Gonz­
aga from scrubbing, carpentering, pulling, and hauling. About forty roos­
ters commence crowing in this vicinity about midnight and at intervals
they keep at it until broad daylight. This morning at 5:40 it was dark, at
5:50 it was light, no twilight. Going back to the cocks, Father O'Flynn says
that the Lord Abbot had three perching right by his window. I think the
trio visited Sister Irene last night. She is bearing up well and is interested
in everything. Today the chapel is being arranged. As the unpacking pro-
gresses, Sister Sulpice and Sister Francis Jerome rise in favor constantly. When the biggest box of all was opened, all stood amazed at its contents. The altar had come without the slightest damage.

2:55 p.m. We have just come from dinner, which was to have been at 1:30 p.m. It is easy to fast here. The dinner was served by Father O'Flynn's waiter who was dressed in style sufficient for Delmonico's. First, we had pea soup, then fresh fish, elegantly cooked, boiled cabbage and white potatoes, rolls, sweet bread from Mount St. Vincent, pudding, oranges, and Mount St. Vincent tea.

Mother is tired today but as busy as need be. Sister Irene looks very well. Sister Marie Dolores is bright and interested, Sister Teresa Gonzaga busy searching trunks, Sister Teresa Alacoque as bright and light-hearted as a fairy. She takes notes, quizzes, and seems occupied all the time. The question of the hour is how to put the new-fangled desks together. Father has two active carpenters who seem up to the times, although black. I am afraid he is more attracted to the darkies than to the whites. Sister Casilda is full of her work. Sister Mercedes was so sick on board that this is her first day of work. She will be all the stronger and better for her direful experience.

It is well Sister Miriam did not come, for Mother would have lost her amid the flowers, and such sweet-scented flowers you never heard of. As for Sister Maria, she is so in love with Nassau and its quaint Spanish-looking hamlets that they will find it as difficult to get her on board the ship as it was to get the Governor-General home. For information concerning the same ask Sister Anna Regina and Sister Mary Angelita. By the way, we had the Governor-General on board and some of the honor of the demonstration may have been intended for him, but I think all Nassau knew of our arrival that eventful night.

Mother sends a great deal of love and feels fortified by your prayers. Sister Irene sends love and is overpowered by Mother's preventing care. We are going shopping soon. Sister Teresa Gonzaga and I were down to the 'Lee Store' yesterday. We got three dozen lemons, one box of crackers, five pounds of lump sugar, and ten pounds of ice.

Our black funnel habits and our caps are quite comfortable, not at all as uncomfortable as in summer at home. The afternoons and evenings are cool, the mornings are warm. Anna is in clover. She makes me feel wholly at home. Maggie is very happy. What would we do without young faces...

Some of the Episcopalian ministers are very High Church. They walk through the streets in Roman collars, cassocks, and belts. Poor Father O'Flynn is greatly incensed at their masquerading in this disguise.

In conclusion, allow me to assure you that the Sisters' house of today and the house they entered October 31st, are no more alike than a dark old barracks and a lightsome abode. Anna shows a thoroughly domestic spirit. She is wonderfully at home and has prospects of gay times at the Government house. She was to attend a garden party there yesterday. She hopes to have a riding horse and I am to send her a camera. She likes Nassau.

I must tell you that as soon as it got abroad that the Sisters would buy souvenirs, shells, etc. colored men came with all kinds of shells to sell. They were so persistent, sometimes they would come up the garden steps and up to the upper verandah. The Lord Abbot was very energetic in hunting up delicate shells for us as he did not like to have us pay too much.
When we thought for a while that we could not get sponges in any quantity on account of the duty we bought from the street vendors. Such prices as they would ask, and such small amounts as they would take in! Finally, the Lord Abbot secured over six thousand best sponges for us at a low rate.87

On the following Sunday, in St. Francis Xavier Church, Father O'Flynn formally announced the arrival of the sisters and that they would open a select academy for girls on November 6 as well as a free primary school for all children. The next morning fifteen children appeared at the door. Among them was a family of six children who had stolen away to the nuns' school without their mother's permission. They were among the first converts to be received into the Church, and their mother became a Catholic the following year.88

NOTES:

3. Cf. also a photostat of original Articles in the Nassau Public Library, Island of New Providence, Bahamas.


15. Article V, Preliminary Articles of Peace between England and Spain, Versailles, 1783.


17. William H. Siebert, _The Legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and Bahamas_ (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio University, 1913), p. 21.


22. S. T. Bethell, _op. cit._, p. 84.

23. _The Bahama Gazette_, 28 October 1786.

24. _Ibid._, 2 September 1786.


27. _Bahama Herald_, 25 June 1859.

28. _Ibid._

29. _Bahama Gazette_, 4 November 1786.


32. _The Argus_, Nassau, 23 June 1832.

33. _Nassau Guardian_, 26 February 1849.

34. Peggs, _op. cit._, p. 24.

35. Stark, _op. cit._, pp. 94-95.


37. Gams in his _Series Episcoporum_, p. 169, terms Dupeyron as a coadjutor to Fernandez, while Lamerooge's _Bibliotheque de la Compagnie de Jesus_, III, 293, calls him a prefect apostolic. Gams lists Fernandez, Duquesnay and Dupeyron without any mention of their ordinations as bishops.

An interesting sidelight of American Church history occurred in 1853 in the Bahamas. James Gibbons with his mother was returning that year from Ireland to New Orleans. Their ship, as often happened in Bahaman waters, went aground on a bar close to Grand Bahama Island. The passengers were rescued, taken to Nassau and then went on to New Orleans. James Gibbons (1834-1921) later became the Cardinal Archbishop of Baltimore and one of the leaders of the American hierarchy in the late nineteenth century.

38. Fr. Richard C. Madden, pastor of St. Andrew's Church, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, published a well-edited article on letters relating to the Bahama Catholic mission. Cf. Richard C. Madden, "Letters on Catholicism in the Bahama Islands from the Charleston Archives, 1858-1873," _The Catholic Historical Review_, XLVII (January, 1962), 487-507, which are quoted here. I am indebted also to Fr. Robert Millard, priest of the diocese of Charleston, who made a further search of the diocesan archives for this volume and found additional related materials.

39. Augustin Verot, S.S. (1804-76) was appointed vicar apostolic of Florida on 28 April 1858.
40. James A. Corcoran (1820-89) was appointed in 1868 as the representative of the American hierarchy on the preparatory commission of theologians for the Vatican Council. After his service in Rome he became a professor in St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Philadelphia, were he remained until his death.

41. Alessandro Barnabo to Patrick Lynch, Rome, 11 December 1858.

42. Timothy Bermingham (1797-1872) served in various parishes of the diocese of Charleston and was vicar general from 1867 until his death.

43. Charles John Bayley was governor of the Bahamas from 1857 until December, 1864.

44. Don Juan Maura was the Spanish consul at Nassau for many years.

45. John Hughes (1797-1864) was friendly with Lynch and he had presented Lynch with an episcopal ring at the latter's consecration.

46. In the “Register of the Clergy Laboring in the Archdiocese of New York from Early Missionary Times to 1885,” by Michael Augustine Corrigan, Historical Records and Studies, VI, I (February, 1911), 48, an A. J. Dayman is mentioned simply as having been an assistant at St. John the Evangelist Church, New York, in 1858.

47. Jeremiah W. Cummings (1823-66) could not have visited Nassau in February, 1863. The notes in the diocesan archives of Nassau must be in error when they state that the Nassau Guardian of 6 February 1863, “carried the announcement that Rev. Dr. Cummings of New York will celebrate Mass at the residence of Mr. Maura at half past ten every Sunday until further notice.” The notice would, however, fit 6 February 1864.

48. William H. Seward (1801-72) was President Abraham Lincoln’s secretary of state.

49. Of the many Gibbes in Charleston at this time, the most likely in this context would seem to be James Schoolbred Gibbes (1819-88). He was a successful merchant and had interests in New York; he had twin sons born in 1843, and another son born in 1845.


51. A. A. Alemony to James Moore, Charleston, 12 March 1864. Leon Fillion (1809-65) was a native of Angers, France. His foreign citizenship was used to advantage for the trip to the Bahamas and subsequently during Bishop Lynch’s absence in Rome as commissioner for the Confederacy. Fillion was appointed vicar general of the diocese in the emergency of Federal occupation. He was pastor of St. Joseph’s Church in Charleston, which he no doubt was referring to in the remark about purchases for “my church.” He died of typhoid fever contracted while assisting prisoners of war in the stockade at Florence, South Carolina.

Relative to his running the blockade in returning to Charleston the following item from the Charleston Mercury of 13 April 1863, is of interest:

“The Confederate steamer Stonewall Jackson, Capt. Black, formerly the British steamer Leopard, left Nassau on Wednesday last (April 8) with a cargo consisting of several pieces of artillery, 200 bbls. of salt petre, 40,000 army shoes, and a large assortment of goods bound for this port. On Saturday night about 11 o’clock, off the beach of Long Island (today called the Isle of Palms) a few miles from this bar, she got among a fleet of blockading vessels. The Yankees having discovered the presence of the Stonewall Jackson, then commenced firing at her from nearly every direction. Captain Black finding his vessel surrounded, with no chance of escape, headed her for Long Island Beach, where she was run ashore after a half hour’s chase, during which the enemy kept up a constant discharge of artillery at the ship and penetrated her hull in three or four places. The Stonewall Jackson was burned by Captain Black’s orders, about 4 o’clock on Sunday morning and everything about
Up on these rocks her has been destroyed, except the iron part of the hull. The passengers, officers and crew have reached the city, but have lost many of their personal effects.

"Rev. Leo [sic] Fillion was among the passengers on the Stonewall Jackson from Nassau N.P. Mr. Fillion saved his trunk, but lost sundry other valuable articles."

52. Mrs. Lafitte may have been the wife of John B. Lafitte, a merchant of Charleston and the agent in Nassau of Frasier, Trenholm Company, bankers to the Confederacy. Cf. Frank E. Vandiver, Confederate Blockade Running through Bermuda (Austin, Texas, 1947), pp. 34 and 42. J. B. Lafitte was a director of the Farmers’ & Exchange Bank, Charleston, during 1859-60, and was listed as a director for the Peoples Bank in Charleston for 1860-65. Cf. W. A. Clark, History of the Banking Institutions organized in South Carolina prior to 1860 (Columbia, 1922), pp. 171-73.

53. William Starrs (1807-73), vicar general of the archdiocese of New York under Hughes, died three days before Cummings’ letter to Lynch.

54. Quincy Adams Gillmore (1825-88) was in command of the Tenth Army Corps and the Department of the South until early in 1864 when he transferred to the James River. He had been promoted to the rank of major-general of volunteers shortly before.

55. Timothy Sullivan (1805-65) was chaplain to the sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Charleston.

56. John Philip Chazal, M.D. (1814-93) was the personal physician of Bishop Lynch.

57. Joseph Fransioli (1817-90) was pastor of St. Peter’s Church, Brooklyn, New York.

58. James Hasson (1821-80), a priest of the diocese of Savannah, was not in sympathy with secession and left Georgia at the outset of the war. He served as chaplain to the federal forces about Port Royal, South Carolina. On Hilton Head, in the vicinity of Port Royal, Father Hasson had built a chapel which was later destroyed by a hurricane. After the war Hasson moved to New York and in 1871 was made pastor of St. Augustine’s Church, Ossining, New York.

59. William Hayes Neligan was the author of Rome, Its Churches, Its Charities and Its Schools (New York, 1858). From “The Register of the Clergy Laboring in New York ... 1885,” loc. cit., p. 48, we learn only that he died in 1880. He seems to have become acquainted with Lynch through correspondence in reference to Lieutenant Robert Meade, a nephew of Major-General George G. Meade. He was a prisoner of war in Charleston and Neligan wrote in the name of Meade’s family to thank Lynch for his courtesies to him (New York, 13 November 1863.) Cf. The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade compiled by G. Meade (New York, 1913), 2 vols. In a letter of 19 October 1864, from Meade to his wife, there is a mention of Robert Meade’s being exchanged (II, 235).

60. The American consul at Nassau in 1866 was Thomas Kirkpatrick.

61. Don Cipriano Palacios (1789-1879) was the Spanish vice consul. For names of his family cf. Vere Langford Oliver, The Monumental Inscriptions of the British West Indies (Dorchester, 1927), p. 243.

62. A Puseyite was a member of the Anglican Church who followed the views of Edward Pusey (1800-82), leader of the Oxford Movement.

63. Sir Rawson W. Rawson (1812-99) succeeded Bayley as governor in December, 1864, and held office until 1869.

64. Nassau does not seem to have had a French consul. M. Gustave Renovard would appear to have been the “agent vice-consul” in 1865-66, and he was succeeded in 1867 by Byron Bode. This may indicate that Renovard had died and, perhaps, was the person referred to by Father Neligan.

65. Jean Marie Odin, C.M. (1801-70), was promoted to the see of New Orleans from the diocese of Galveston in February, 1861.
66. The Nassau Guardian reports that Neligan arrived on 7 January 1868. William S. Howell informed a Mrs. Scanlon of New York City on 5 January 1866 that “we have a very good priest at Nassau now; his name is Father Neligan, vicar general of the Bahamas. I procured him a nice place to hold church services in, and him and me are very good friends.”

67. Bartholomew Gleason, pastor of St. Ann’s Church, Brooklyn, New York, resigned his parish in 1875 presumably to return to his native Ireland.

68. The notes from the diocese of Nassau record that Neligan and Gleason said Mass on San Salvador at Columbus Bay “under a sea-grape tree.” Neligan visited Long Bay in April and returned to New York in May. Father Gleason was a Redemptorist priest located at New Berne.

69. James Frederick Wood (1813-83), fifth bishop of Philadelphia, became the first metropolitan of that see in 1875.

70. Inagua is one of the larger islands of the Bahama group.

71. In the files of the diocese of Nassau there is the mention that Neligan arrived in Nassau on 4 January 1870 from New York.

72. Martin J. Spalding (1810-72) was transferred from the diocese of Louisville to Baltimore in 1864.

73. James Lynch, C.M. (1807-97) was one of the founders of the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians) in Ireland. Lynch was coadjutor to John Gray, vicar apostolic of the western district. The hierarchy was not restored in Scotland until 1878. Lynch was made coadjutor of Kildaire and Leighlin in 1869 and succeeded to the see in 1884.

74. Jamaica had no bishop but a prefect apostolic.

75. Sir John Pope-Hennessy (1834-91) was governor of the Bahamas from 25 May 1873 until 22 June 1874. Cf. Dictionary of National Biography, XVI, 139 ff.

76. John Schachte (1840-97), a priest of the diocese of Charleston, was given a medal by Savannah, Georgia, for his heroic service to victims of yellow fever during an epidemic in that city. From the notes in the files of the diocese of Nassau, copying the Nassau Guardian, there was reported the arrival “from Jacksonville, Florida, on May 7 of Rev. John O. Scharte [sic] of Charleston. He said Mass every Sunday at 6:45 a.m. He left Nassau on March 23.”

77. Henry P. Northrop (1842-1916) was accompanied to Nassau by the Very Rev. Daniel J. Quigley, administrator of the diocese of Charleston, and by the Reverends C. P. O’Connor and J. E. Mulholland. They arrived on February 10 and left on February 14, during which time, according to the notes in the file of the diocese of Nassau, the bishop offered daily Mass at the residence of Surgeon-Major F. G. Ayde-Curran.

78. Presbyterian minister, Mr. Dunlop.

79. The entire story of the Lightbourn case is detailed by Powles in his The Land of the Pink Pearl, pp. 305-21.

80. ‘It is but fair to add that Mr. James C. Smith, whose name is mentioned further on, says I am wrong on this point. I retain my opinion nevertheless.’

81. ‘In Sam Gowan’s case the share of each man was twelve shillings. Deduct from this what he owed for his share of provisioning the vessel, and what would the remuneration for his five weeks’ labour represent, even if it had been paid in cash, to say nothing of the daily risk to life and limb?’

82. ‘I had a striking instance one day of the way in which the native Bahamian white looks down upon the coloured race. I was standing in the street in Nassau talking to a young native white, as good-hearted a fellow as ever lived, when a feeble old negress, who was passing, dropped the bundle she was carrying and stooped, evidently with great difficulty, to pick it up. obeying an instinct, which would have been just as strong in him had she been white, however poor and
miserable, I went to her assistance. But she was only a negress, and I shall never forget the look of mingled astonishment and contempt with which he watched me.'

83. 'I do not mean to say that a West Indian Confederation might not be as effectual a remedy as either of the other two. But not a question on which I feel myself competent to form an opinion as yet, and my mind is perfectly open to conviction. But is it not a fact that the curse of isolation has rested so long on this unhappy colony, that it has never yet been included in my scheme of West Indian Confederation? Of two things, however, I am certain. First, that nothing can be worse for it than its present constitution. Secondly, that no scheme will be of any benefit to it that will not eliminate the native white, from any share in the government of the colony for some time at least.'

84. 'It might have been done at the time of the Bank failure in 1885.'


CHAPTER THREE

A BEGINNING IN THE ISLES OF JUNE

While the five Sisters of Charity began their religious apostolate among the people of the Bahamas, Archbishop Corrigan back in New York was trying to find a permanent solution to supplying priestly service on the islands. For almost fifty years a changing stream of priests from Charleston and New York had come and gone in Nassau. No permanent Catholic life developed beyond the opening of St. Francis Xavier Church and irregular periods of service there. Archbishop Corrigan became convinced that his diocesan priests could not supply permanent Catholic spiritual direction to the far-flung mission needs of the islands as effectively as a religious order could.

Corrigan made overtures to the New York Capuchins and the New Orleans Jesuits, but neither group could then supply personnel. The provincial of the New Orleans’ Jesuits, Ignatius O’Shanahan, told Corrigan that the Bahamas appeared to be suited for a Benedictine development since it was widely believed at that time that a mission could be maintained in the Bahamas by cultivating the land. Corrigan first invited Abbot Hilary Pfraengle, O.S.B., St. Mary’s Abbey, in the diocese of Newark, where Corrigan had previously been bishop. Pfraengle was interested and, as has been seen, visited the Bahamas in October, 1889, in company with Mother Ambrosia and the New York Sisters of Charity whom the archbishop had interested in the project. These four sisters, with a dynamic Sr. Marie Dolores Van Rensselaer as superior, had already opened their free school of St. Francis Xavier Academy in Nassau on November 6 in three unpainted and unused wooden cabins which belonged to the Military Hospital, Dunmore House, adjacent to St. Francis Xavier Church.

Abbot Hilary returned to New York with some enthusiasm for the undertaking, thought of going there himself, and made plans on his 1890 trip to Europe to contact European Benedictines, especially in England, with the intention of obtaining volunteers for a Bahama undertaking.
Corrigan and his diocesan advisors wished to retain title to Bahama church property for a three year period until such a mission proved successful, and on this point he and Pfraingle could not reach an agreement. It was then that Abbot Alexius Edelbrock, O.S.B., just resigned as second abbot (1875-89) of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, entered the picture.

A more unique and unexpected set of circumstances could hardly have occurred to bring about the association of the archdiocese of New York with St. John's Abbey and the bringing of Benedictines to the Bahamas. This abbey was the first monastic foundation in the United States from St. Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Pennsylvania. In 1856, ten years after establishing St. Vincent's, Abbot Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., had sent monks to Minnesota where the foundation rapidly flourished. The remarkable physical growth and expansion of St. John's in missionary and educational work in the upper Midwest was due primarily to the leadership of the second abbot, Alexius Edelbrock, O.S.B., who was filled with the pioneer spirit of the American frontier. But his rapid expansionist efforts soon brought him into direct conflict with a group of American Benedictines both at St. John's and in other abbeys who judged that external involvements were endangering the spiritual and interior life of the Collegeville community.

Edelbrock also ran headlong into Archbishop John Ireland (1838-1918) of the province of St. Paul, Minnesota, in which St. John's Abbey was located. Ireland was a vigorous and dynamic leader of the progressive forces in late nineteenth century American Catholicism. He carried on confrontations and movements on several fronts during the last decades of the century, among them a determined drive to Americanize the Catholic immigrant and adapt the Catholic Church to the spirit and challenge of the nineteenth century. Ireland met resistance from several more conservative religious leaders and groups in this campaign. He, accordingly, did not have a marked sympathy for religious priests nor for the German Catholics who refused to abandon their ethnic traditions and language under pressure from the progressives. The resulting "Americanism" controversy has been detailed in several volumes and is well known in American religious history.

The opponents of Abbot Alexius were able to bring about an apostolic visitation of his administration at St. John's and Archbishop Ireland was appointed the visitator. The ultimate results were foreseeable. In the middle of the process Abbot Alexius resigned on 27 November 1889 while in Rome despite the pleas of his friends to defend himself. Edelbrock returned to the United States the following January, 1890, visiting at several Benedictine abbeys on the East Coast and with his
many diocesan clerical friends. Among such friends were several New York priests who were convinced Edelbrock had been sadly wronged. They encouraged Abbot Alexius to allow them to introduce him to Archbishop Corrigan, certainly not a friendly prelate to Archbishop Ireland’s ideas and policies.

It was in this way that Corrigan and Edelbrock met, in the context of the differences over Church polity of that period and in the immediate need of the archbishop to find a permanent solution to Catholic mission work in the Bahamas. Corrigan received Edelbrock most cordially on 27 September 1890, told him he had heard of his Minnesota experiences, and said he would be happy if he would remain in New York. He wanted to appoint him vicar general for the Germans of the archdiocese, allow him to organize a parish for German Catholics, appoint him spiritual director of all religious communities in the archdiocese, and finally turn over the mission in the Bahama islands to his charge. The ex-abbot was overwhelmed by these offers, especially as Archbishop Ireland had so recently asserted that religion had suffered more than writing could tell and was perishing under the Benedictines when he was abbot. Abbot Alexius asked to be excused from again assuming command as a vicar-general for German Catholics or for religious, but Archbishop Corrigan insisted that he should fill some responsible position. Edelbrock then told Corrigan he would like to be an instrument in God’s hand for establishing Benedictines in the archdiocese of New York, and the archbishop replied that he would be most pleased if this came about. On 9 January 1891 the archbishop and his consultors authorized the abbot to begin a parish on the West Side between the Assumption parish on 49th Street and St. Joseph’s parish on 125th Street, and to assume spiritual charge of the Bahama islands.

After several unsuccessful attempts to start at this first location because of undetermined borders, Archbishop Corrigan told Abbot Alexius to go further into the country, to the township of Morrisania, and he was given forty lots as a gift on 160th Street and Boston Avenue. At first the abbot held services in a hall over a tobacco factory, but the pastor of St. Augustine’s parish, Thomas F. Gregg, considered a new parish unnecessary in that area. Then the Rev. John Hughes, pastor of St. Jerome’s Church, gave him a chapel of ease on Concord Ave. and 151st St. which belonged to St. Jerome’s parish. It was 75 by 30 feet and held 300 people. This was the beginning of “the abbot’s parish,” as it was called in New York. He placed it under the patronage of the Benedictine doctor, St. Anselm. The parish was seven miles from downtown New York, entirely out in the country and embraced a mile and a half of territory, including Hunt’s Point.
Abbot Alexius Edelbrock, O.S.B., to Abbot Bernard Locnikar, O.S.B.,
New York, 28 September 1890:

I saw Archbishop Corrigan yesterday. He received me very cordially,
and although I asked for nothing particularly, he said: 'I shall be very glad
if you remain in New York: there is plenty of work here for you. If you
wish you could take charge of the religious communities: you could also,
if you prefer, take charge of a German congregation. I also offer you the
Bahama Islands, i.e. if you could get two Fathers from your successor, to
take charge of these islands; you might be their superior: you could attend
to matters in the Bahama Islands by going there from time to time; you
might fix your permanent abode in New York: I need also a Vicar General
for the Germans of this diocese, and you would be just the man to fill that
place.' I need not say that the Archbishop offered me a good deal more than
I expected. I declined his last kind offer: I begged to be excused from again
assuming command. Yet, he insisted, that if I stay here, I must fill some
responsible position. I told him if I remained in the diocese, I should like
to be an instrument in God's hands of bringing our Order into his diocese.
He replied that he should be much pleased. There is now no reason why
our Order should not require a home here. The only trouble with me is, that
I really don't know what I want. I could start the parish, and that may be
the best. Fathers Kessler and Schwenninger will see the Archbishop some
of these days and suggest to him that a congregation be given to me be­tween
49th St. and 125th St.—the church to be located on about 75th or 80th
St. West. In the whole large district there is no German church, although
the German population there is large. If I begin work there, I am assured by
the other Fathers of their hearty support. Well, for the time being, God
must direct me and dispose as He knows best. There is not much ambition
in me and probably even less strength....

Now about the Bahamas: The Archbishop wanted me to write to you.
He, the Archbishop, asks you to take the place: he wants 2 Fathers at Nas­sauf in the Bahama Islands: these Fathers should be accompanied by one or
two Brothers. The work there is small at present. On Nassau there are only,
I was told, some 30 Catholic families (white) the others (negroes) are either
heathens, or Episcopalians. The heathens are mostly negroes, and are said
to be of a superior race, docile as children. Around Nassau, there are many
islands, all inhabited, and a steamer leaving Nassau plies between these
islands: consequently the Fathers going to Nassau would also have to attend
the different islands. The Archbishop has about 1000 acres of fine land and
some houses down there, connected with the Mission: there is a church etc.
there also. The income there would be small, still more than $1000 annually
has been sent down there by the Archbishop, and in case we took the place,
we could call for support and help, on the Archbishop. Religion is neces-
sary for the place, and the Archbishop is most anxious to have the Ben­
edictines. You will probably remember, that Abbot Hilary looked at the
Islands last year. He was much pleased with them, but failed to agree with
the Archbishop: the Abbot wanted the Deed at once, and the Archbishop
desired to wait 3 years before giving the Deed. I spoke to the Archbishop
about this matter, and he said, he would draw up a contract, securing the
land to our Order, and after the Benedictines had been there some time and
were satisfied with the place, and if they had worked for the Mission, he
would then give the Deed to our Order. This proposition of the Archbishop
seems very fair to me. It gives the Order full elbow-room. Even by
taking the place, the Order could throw it up, if it proved unsatisfactory:
the proposition gives us all the liberty that could be desired, and gives us all
the security that one might want. The climate in the Bahamas is most de­
lightful: it is specially beneficial for consumptives. It would be a sanitarium
for St. John's Abbey: in fact, for the Benedictines of America. I have spoken
to several priests who were down there: they all speak in glowing terms of
the place. Father Flynn of Saugerties, N. Y. went down there for his health,
and although he has a fine congregation at Saugerties, he is today willing to
give it up and go to the Bahamas. In the Bahamas they enjoy perpetual
spring: no cold there, and the heat never oppressive: the sea is lovely, and
corals and shells of every kind in abundance. They raise there all sorts of
vegetables etc. The offer is not a bad one, I think: it might be worth a trial.
It would just be the place for sickly men and for those who can no longer
endure the winter blizzards. Well, please give this matter your prompt at­
tention, as the Archbishop expects an answer. You may either write to him
or to myself.

Abbot Bernard to Abbot Alexius, Collegeville, 1 October 1890:

I received your favor of the 28th ult., today and also that one of the
24th ult., in due time. I must say Rt. Rev. Father Abbot I am delighted at
the news contained in your last. That you were received so kindly by the
Archbishop was of course what I expected. As to different propositions
made to you by the Archbishop, I am satisfied with every one and let you at
liberty to accept any one, but the one regarding the Bahamas. To go there
it would just seem to me to go to another world, and as to missionary work
it would seem to me that we are doing a fair share of it amongst our Indi­
ans. As to the Sanitarium—well a sick person would die before reaching
there, I am afraid. Besides at present we would not be able to spare two
of our Fathers—three of them as I said before, being in the hospital. But I
must say I would be glad, if we could get a place in New York—and that
for various reasons. If there was any possibility for a congregation I would
be for it with my whole soul. I am sure that after a short time, we might get
different Fathers free—as the Bishop [Otto Zardetti of St. Cloud] would
like to have some of our missions as soon as he gets priests of his own for
them, and in New York—how much could be done, if say half a dozen or
so could be there, conduct a monastic life and tend to a large congregation,
especially as it is known that people have a preference for Religious, if
these try to do their duty as such. And besides you have so many induce­
ments and encouragements on the part of your friends among the clergy of
New York....
Abbot Alexius to Abbot Bernard, New York, 10 January 1891:

...The Archbishop had a meeting of his Council yesterday and proposed to place under our charge the Bahama Islands and the new German parish in this city. Both projects met with approbation. I requested the Archbishop to get Rome’s consent for a Benedictine House in New York and he will do so at once. His Grace will give us annually one thousand dollars for the Missions in the Bahamas and told me that he would give me authority to take up a collection in the parishes of this city. Several Fathers had told him that they would allow me a collection; he named Father Edwards and Mooney in particular. There is a parish house and church in the Bahamas and it will not be difficult to conduct that mission with the aid promised. The Archbishop said to me: ‘your parish in this city will be between the Assumption church on 49th street and St. Joseph’s church on 125th on the west side. The sooner you begin work the better. You ought to have a good Father to help you and you need two Fathers for the Islands. One Father can do the work down there at present but he would have no one to go to confession to, etc. It would be desirable if the Fathers for Nassau could leave here on the 30th inst.’

I requested him to give me everything in writing and he will do so. The whole affair or offer is one that pleases me very much and I accepted. Now you have a good view of the situation. What I need is Fathers. You kindly promised me PP. Chrysostom [Schreiner] and Gerard [Spielmann] but who is going to be the 3rd. I certainly need a good assistant here; Father Gregory [Steil] would be very valuable as he understands building, but I suppose he cannot be spared. In Nassau everything is English, therefore one must know the language pretty well. Possibly yourself and Father Chrysostom and Gerard would be able to pick the 3rd Father. See once what can be done. You might suggest some one by your return mail letter. A secondary person in any of the places would hardly be a credit to us and might prove a drawback to the work....

Abbot Bernard to Abbot Alexius, Collegeville, 17 January 1891:

I received your favor of the 10th on Wednesday and I hope you will excuse me for not writing sooner, for am sure you can imagine at least partly the excitement I had to undergo in consequence of your letter. Of course I am glad of your success and I permitted right away Father Chrysostom to lay down his office and join you any time he may choose. I have no successor to his office as yet and of course you know, it will be hard to find the right man. Father Gerard can leave St. John’s as soon as I can fill his place. We are so hard off for priests and professors as you know yourself just as well—better than myself. On that account of course there is no possibility now to send you a third Father. You will have to try to get along with these two Fathers as good as you can. I think there will be no special necessity to hush that affair. I would also like to have a clear understanding between us two regarding that affair, and this from the very beginning. How do you intend to have it—on your own name independently from St. John’s—or is it to come in the name of St. John’s Abbey, as you often told me. If the last is the case, then I must state as I did before in writing and verbally, that I do not consent, not by any means, that the Bahamas be put to our name and such a burden be placed on our Abbey. If you intend
to run it independently on your own name and account, without any risk to St. John's Abbey, then of course you may do so, I will have nothing to say then, and also have no responsibility in that regard. I suppose you will understand that whatever helps St. John's gives or will give you, is more for your own personal regard than for any practical use for the Abbey itself. Hoping that you will not take these remarks amiss—they were written only in view of the better interests of our common home.

Abbot Alexius unquestionably wanted the new enterprise to be under St. John's, and he expected assistance from his abbey since he had been given no pension by the chapter after his resignation and was left to find a place for himself. Abbot Alexius looked upon St. Anselm's parish as a step to establishing a Benedictine monastery in New York just as he had planned previously in West Union and Duluth, Minnesota, and Bismarck, North Dakota. When he began to build the parish buildings at St. Anselm's, they were of the same character and architectural style as his other foundations. Within a year he had purchased twenty lots for $16,744 on Tinton Avenue and 155 Street, a short distance from the original chapel, and begun construction of a four story, thirty-one room rectory. Here was the familiar pattern of broad-visioned planning. This rectory was ready to become a monastic priory at once, and an abbey eventually. His plans for the church were similar. It was to be 171 feet long, 72 feet high, 86 feet wide with a 210 foot steeple, and when completed would be one of the largest churches in the city. This was one structure he did not see through to completion, however. The basement was built and used as the parish church until 1916. An aging but impatient Abbot Alexius was forced to use it to the end of his days.

From the beginning the other abbots of the American Cassinese Congregation of Benedictines looked upon this New York foundation as a future abbey. Bishop Leo Haid of Belmont Abbey, North Carolina, especially pressed Abbot Alexius to begin full monastic community life there and take up command again. It would be, these old friends maintained, the final vindication. But while insisting that this was his aim, and building toward that end, the abbot dissimulated and put off a decision whenever pressed. His bitter past experience with what he considered a community's ingratitude dampened his ardor. Now that he had again built up a thriving establishment, he was loathe to endanger his hard-won peace.

Abbot Alexius asked Abbot Bernard to send him three assistants from St. John's, two for the parish and one for the Bahama islands. Locnikar could only spare two men, but gave them graciously in 1891. They were the resigned abbot's choices, and included Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., vice-president of St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, and Fr. Gerard Spielmann, O.S.B., a professor. It was a
sacrifice for Abbot Bernard to give up the versatile and talented head of the abbey’s school, but Father Chrysostom was anxious to work again with his friend and confidant. He never felt at home under the new administration. The reformers in turn looked upon him with his forceful personality as a source of future difficulties. Father Gerard assisted Abbot Alexius at St. Anselm’s parish, and Fr. Xavier White, O.S.B., professor of English and Abbot Alexius’ unwavering supporter, was also allowed to go to New York as a second assistant in July, 1891. But he was in the parish less than two months when he became ill as he had a malignant cancer of the stomach. He began his homeward journey to St. John’s but could not go on when he reached Buffalo. He was taken to Tonawanda, six miles east of Buffalo, and died in his sister’s home on 26 September 1891.

Meanwhile Abbot Alexius had sent Father Chrysostom to the Bahama islands. Archbishop Corrigan had given Abbot Alexius a New York parish with the stipulation that the Benedictines take over the ecclesiastical charge of the Bahama islands under the spiritual jurisdiction of the archdiocese. Corrigan wanted two priests and two brothers sent there at once. The New York parish was to be a source of income and contact for the work in the islands. The archbishop promised $1,000 a year donation from the archdiocese for the work, and freedom to collect for the Bahama mission in the parishes of New York. But Abbot Bernard and the St. John’s chapter would not even consider the possibility of such an undertaking. For years the community had grown accustomed to the breathtaking projects of their resigned abbot which somehow or other always flourished. But now they had to refer to a map to discover the geography of this latest proposal of Abbot Alexius, who only a short time previously had been under attack for just such moves. Besides there was a new administration at St. John’s. The new abbot was interested in religious and monastic deepening at the abbey itself, not in more active commitments on Caribbean islands 1,800 miles from home.

To Abbot Alexius, as would be expected, the Bahamas offered a new opportunity for the Benedictines to convert another nation. They had helped, as he said, to bring thirty-three nations to Christianity before. The blessing of God would be assured, he continued, if the order would seize the opportunity to work anew for the spread of Christianity and social improvement. To Abbot Bernard it was going to another world, and he told Abbot Alexius he would not submit the project to a chapter scrutiny because it would not receive six votes.

Father Chrysostom went to the Bahama islands because Abbot Alexius’ agreement with Archbishop Corrigan had been made, and Abbot Bernard felt that St. John’s was obliged to assist the resigned abbot in
A Beginning in the Isles of June

every possible way. St. John's Abbey for years, however, had no official association with the Bahamas project. It was a case of nonrecognition in theory and cooperation in practice. Perhaps this was the best procedure. As members of the community were able to visit the Bahamas and slowly come to understand the need and potential of this mission field, the work eventually became an integral part of the abbey's life. Abbot Alexius had broadened the Collegeville community's vision during fourteen previous years and led it from an initial apostolate among German Catholic American immigrants into new efforts in several fields. These included an expanded educational endeavor in an American mold, service to Catholic immigrant peoples of other national origins than German and Indian mission activity. It was a vigorous application of Abbot Boniface Wimmer's new world renewal and vital Benedictine principle that an abbey must be constantly in the process of establishing new daughter abbeys. Now he was lifting St. John's out of its regional origins by establishing a center in the country's largest city. And finally the community was being drawn outside the national boundaries of the United States and presented with the challenge of working with the spiritual and temporal advancement of the Bahamian people, both Negroes and Whites.

During successive interviews of Corrigan with Edelbrock, the archbishop kept pushing for a decision in regard to the Bahamas. Abbot Alexius had taken Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., with him to the archbishop after Schreiner had arrived in New York from Minnesota to be first assistant at the new St. Anselm's parish. Corrigan again asked for a decision about the Bahamas; Edelbrock said he could not make one without Abbot Bernard's authorization. Corrigan asked who would be sent to the Bahamas if the Collegeville abbot agreed. Abbot Alexius then turned to Father Chrysostom and asked, "Would you go there?" "Yes," Father Chrysostom answered, "if I were told to do so." That settled the matter. Abbot Bernard was contacted by letter and within a week returned his approval. Father Chrysostom set his face southward on a Ward Line steamer in late January, 1891, and reached Nassau, Bahamas, on 2 February 1891. The Bahama Mission of the Benedictines of St. John's Abbey in Minnesota had come to life. It continues today, for better or for worse, as this first history is written some eighty years later.

It is difficult to understand how and why Abbot Alexius would give up Father Chrysostom as his New York assistant so quickly after asking him to come from the vice-presidency of St. John's for that purpose. The answer will never be known since there is no full record in the matter. But a safe conjecture from existing correspondence is
permitted. Archbishop Corrigan pressed very hard for a solution to the problem of his New York Catholic mission in the Bahamas. It had been entrusted to him by Rome and not much progress had been realized. Corrigan had invited Abbot Alexius into the New York archdiocese for several reasons among which was his desire to have a Benedictine community assume Catholic spiritual charge in the Bahamas. Abbot Alexius, in his turn, realized this mind of Corrigan. Abbot Alexius became less enthusiastic about potentials in the Bahamas, as ensuing correspondence testifies. Edelbrock, however, understood that he had his New York parish with freedom and peace on the stipulation that he could produce for the Bahamas. So he was willing to offer his good friend and newly obtained assistant to that end. It was just as simple as that. Father Chrysostom was caught in a crossfire of conflicting needs and desires that did not originate in any common purpose, but which coalesced to bring him to the Bahamas. Thus is it repeatedly brought about in the history of the Christian Churches.

Father Chrysostom did not sail to Nassau with any high hopes or knowledge of what faced him in the Bahamas. He went with a prompt obedience that was not always his distinctive virtue but was certainly so on this occasion. He did not know if he would stay, but he went. Events would keep him there, to his great surprise, for the next thirty-seven years. It is thus that God works marvels among His people. No historian can trace the grace of God in events. But certain signposts can be erected along the way which point up the strange and wonderful developments which cannot be explained solely by chance, coincidence, freedom, self-interest or mistake.

The best way to explain exactly what happened and to give a flavor of these events is to quote from existing letters between the participants, although one is tempted to say antagonists for all of their human frailty, as they seem to make progress in spite of themselves. Since these figures are now dead, their correspondence is extensively quoted without comment as a means of awakening a contemporary awareness of the magnitude of the steps they took, despite themselves and their petty concerns, to bring a remarkable Catholic presence to the Bahamas. This is what the value of history is all about despite current, if temporary, barbarian inclinations to be consumed with the all too boring now event. Throughout this volume extensive quotes from contemporary documents and interviews will be advanced as our best possible means of the present dialoguing with the past.

Father Chrysostom sent his first letter thirteen days after his arrival in Nassau. Unfortunately, none of the letters he received can be recorded for he either impulsively destroyed them himself or they were destroyed
after his death. However, Father Chrysostom’s letters sent from Nassau to New York and Minnesota, during his first year there, supply invaluable insights:

Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., to Abbot Bernard Locnikar, O.S.B., Nassau, 15 February 1891:

I make use of the first opportunity to apprise you of my arrival here on this little island, and to tell you how everything here impresses me.... My first impressions accorded with what I had expected to find, and since then everything impresses me more and more favorably. The climate is pleasant beyond description. Up to date we have had such weather as you have on the most pleasant June day in Minn. The thermometer stands at 75-80 degrees and has not varied 10 degrees since I am here. Vegetation is perpetually green, and most fruits and vegetables can be picked from the garden every day in the year. I have been considerably about the island. It contains 85 sq. miles. Nassau is its chief and only city and capital of all the Bahamas. It is about three times the size of St. Cloud and a very neat, clean and quite beautiful city. St. Francis Xavier church stands on an eminence near the centre of the residence portion of the city. It is a neat little stone church, quite well supplied with all that is required for divine service. The congregation is quite small, numbering only 65 to 70 practical Catholics, but the prospects for growth are exceedingly favorable.

There are 7 sisters of Charity here, who conduct the best school on the island. It numbers 150 children (colored), and their influence in creating Catholic feeling and sentiment among the people here is most remarkable. Of the 150 children, only 6 or 8 are Catholics at present, but I am convinced that a heavy percent of them will become devout Catholics. The most remarkable thing here, is the large attendance of Protestants at church. At Mass and Vespers on Sunday, and at Stations, Friday evenings, the church is crowded with them, and quite a number attend week-day Mass with great regularity. The reason for this seems to be the fact that the Anglican churches here are extremely ritualistic, aping Catholics in everything, Mass, Confession, devotions etc. I have no doubt that if the pastor here zealously does his duty, there will be many converts among them.

Sentiment is quite Catholic here. The Governor of the Bahamas, Sir Ambrose Shea, is a devout Catholic, who attends Mass every morning. The Colonial Secretary (Henry Moore Jackson) the son of an Anglican Bishop is also a devout Catholic, and goes to Mass every morning, often serving Mass. From the above you will notice that I am not only favorably impressed with the present, but that I also look very hopefully to the future. So it is. Father Reilly, my predecessor, is still here. He returns to N.Y. in a few weeks. Meanwhile we are keeping house together. An old negress—Lady Jane Gray—is our cook, and a ‘colored gentleman’ (Joseph Hamilton) waits upon us. Living is quite expensive. I miss fresh meat very much, but during Lent I am quite provided for—fresh fish in abundance. I expect Abbot Alexius down with next steamer. He will stop with me for some time, I think, he must stop 2 weeks on account of steamer connection—and will settle matters definitely. It is p.m. and I must preach at Vespers in a few
minutes, hence will close. Mail leaves tomorrow. My health is good. With
love and esteem, and with a request for a daily memento.

Father Chrysostom to The St. Cloud Daily Times, Nassau, 16 March 1891:

The blasts of March presumably howl with you now, and carry icicles
in their wake. Here they spread flowers, ripen the banana, the cassava, the
sweet potato and the pumpkin, and carry mosquitoes and perspiration in
their train. So it was in February, so it is in March, and so it will be the year
round they tell me.

Nassau is a geographic term that people of the Northwest don't lie
awake to think much about. And I don't want to disturb their rest either, by
inflicting geography upon them, but as Postmaster General Smith told me
the other day, 'If you don't want your letters to go to Nassau, Germany,
tell your correspondents that Nassau is the capital of the Bahama Islands
and that Nassau, Bahama Islands, will fetch them all right'....

Wonder what sort of place New Providence is?
The 'Isle of Summer,' the 'Isle of Perpetual Summer,' the 'Isle of
June,' the 'Invalids' Paradise,' the 'Land of the Pink Pearl,' etc., are
poetic synonyms for New Providence. In prose, I'd call it by other
names, for instance, 'The isle of tough beef,' 'The Cay of the Conch,'
'The isle of-pay-for-every-thing-you-put-into-your-mouth-and-don't-you­
forget-the-price-either.'

Poetry and prose don't always harmonize, but here both work in mu­
tual harmony, like upper and lower teeth. For a copper you can feast on a
bouquet of roses as large as a bushel basket, or on tough beef or sweet
potato.

New Providence can best be described by comparing its soil to one of
the St. Cloud stone quarries. For your granite, substitute a soft limestone,
place upon every acre about one wheelbarrow load of soil, and then imagine
the whole densely covered with vegetation, and you have the island.
Strange, not, that trees and shrubbery should grow on bare rock? If this
island, containing 55,000 acres of rock, were in a Minnesota latitude, it could
not produce enough to feed a goat. Being where it is, it can produce enough
to furnish New York City with fresh fruits and vegetables every day the
year round, and enough sisal twine to bind the wheat of Minnesota; and
the adjacent waters yield enough fish, turtle and conch to feed millions;
足够的海绵来吸收萨克河的水，足够的贝壳来铺路。

The island is a veritable 'Green Isle' and the northern tourist is puz­
zled to understand how anything can grow on it at all. The colored man's
crowbar and the climate furnish the key to the puzzle. The problem may
thus be stated:

Given, a colored man, a crowbar, a uniform climate whose extremes
of temperature are less than 40 degrees apart, and three months' time to
change bare rock into a garden that will yield monthly what a Minnesota
garden of equal size will yield annually. It is done thus: The colored man
breaks up portions of the soft rock with a crowbar, scrapes the fragments
into openings and fissures with which the rock is perforated, plants the seed, adds a little water occasionally during the driest season, and leaves the rest to mother nature and to the moisture and oxygen of the atmosphere. The result is a surprise to the Northern. Not so to the native, who seems to think that nature ought to do it all, excepting the gathering of the harvest. That he reserves to himself.

Look at the acreage, above stated, of the island. Of this less than 4,000 acres are under proper cultivation. The rest is practically a wilderness of pine and palm trees. Yet there is no poverty excepting among the whites, some of whom pinch their stomachs to parade style incumbent upon respectability. In that the southern white is the faithful imitator of his northern brethren and sisters.

The colored people—or, to use a local phrase, colored ladies and gentlemen—who furnish about two-thirds of the population, are not pinched by poverty but manage to eke out a happy subsistence and go to ‘meetin’ on Sunday, to display killing styles set in the colors of the chromatic scale. On week days the pickaninnies are often garmented after the fashion of the lily of the field and the bird of the air. The colored people are a happy people indeed, who know well that sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Why should they be otherwise?

I hope that your readers will not infer from this that Nassau and the island harbor a community whose position is below that of northern communities. On the contrary, Nassau society is way up in most things that pertain to intelligent society. We have schools, churches, and clubs that would be a credit to any city of like size.

The reason for the want of utilizing the resources of the island is the want of Northern push and enterprise. The Bahamas sympathize with the Southern States. During the Southern conflict, gold eagles were as plenty here as copper pennies are now. There was a ‘boom.’ The crash came. And the revival is coming.

Northern capital is being invested now and a decade of years will see the island a vast sisal plantation. This plant, from whose leaf the hemp of the binding twine is extracted, was looked upon as a weed up to two years ago, when the present governor, Sir Ambrose Shea, a Newfoundland of extra-ordinary administrative abilities, inaugurated and encouraged the cultivation of sisal for commerce. The industry is rapidly growing and in a few years sisal fibre will be the staple export.

There are corner-lot chances for some enterprising northwestern stock company here. Nearly all the northern men that have thus far invested are Newfoundlanders and Englishmen. Hence hemp raised here is carried to Newfoundland, there manufactured into twine and then transported to the western farmer. By the time it reaches him it will have passed over twice the distance and through thrice the number of hands it ought to pass, whereas the fibre could be carried by water via New Orleans to Minnesota, there turned into twine and rope and delivered at first hands to the consumer....

You think I am enthusiastic for the Bahamas, don’t you? So I am, and if any of my Minnesota friends come down this way—and I hope to be able to welcome many of them here next winter—they, too, will enthuse for the ‘Land of the Pink Pearl.’
Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 24 March 1891:

Your valued favor of March 7, reached me on the 16th inst., but for want of time I could not do more than acknowledge the receipt thereof with last steamer, hence will write more at length now. From date above you will notice that this is written during Holy Week and thus early in the week that it will surely be ready for the mail-boat on Easter Monday. I will be quite busy during the next few days, though I have two priests with me to help out. Both of these—one Father Reilly, my predecessor, and the other a visiting priest from Connecticut—leave for Cuba and thence via Florida to New York next Monday and thereafter I will be alone here, possibly for the whole summer. You seem to think that I have very little to do here. Well, as far as work is concerned I have not too much to do, yet I have enough to keep me occupied. I preach two sermons a week (in Lent three)—and prepare for them—and can profitably spend an hour or two a day in the schools. Before very long I will also organize a class or two for advanced pupils. I have had several requests from prominent men here to open up a select school for boys and will do so as soon as I get settled down, or rather as soon as I am thoroughly familiar with the field. Then I am opening up a vegetable garden, looking after the sisal plantation etc. So you see my 'voluntary exile,' as you style it, is not particularly one of inactivity. I will not write you much of a description this time. From a letter which I sent to St. Cloud Times a week or ten days ago you will learn my views and impressions of some things here. From time to time I will write a descriptive letter to yourself or some of the Fathers at St. John's.

I was about to say 'home' but something in the tone of your last letter made me reflect, and I wrote St. John's. I don't know why either. But then the repeated protest 'The Bahamas must not be saddled on St. John's' has an after-ring to it that for me individually is of greater significance that the protest itself! Why should you look upon the Bahamas as a burden to St. John's? I thought it was considered as a lightening of burden and a throwing over of ballast. For my part, I will certainly never intentionally become a 'burden' to St. John's, and as for the mission, I do not see how that can be a burden on St John's even if St. John's did recognize it as an affiliation. Who is the 'burden,' I or the mission? If I am the burden, why then after carrying me for ten years, St. John's ought to be able to carry me still another ten years or twenty. If the mission is, then it will be a light burden indeed. I had thought of asking for a few things, among others, for a cincture and some articles whose value would not exceed $50—but fearing that my request might be considered impertinence, I do not dare to make the request. The mission here is as important as one half of the missions now belonging to St. John's are, and possibly of more importance than any belonging to St. John's and the day may come when St. John's will be glad that it has an affiliation with the Bahamas.

The Bahamas are indeed far away from St. John's—seven days journey. Sicily was practically farther away from Monte Cassino, and St. John's when first colonized was practically three times as far away from St. Vincent's. Under the conditions that prevailed at St. John's during the last few years the necessity of an affiliation was recognized by everybody there, and now there is a chance for one, but it 'must not be burdened on St. John's!' Dear Father Abbot, allow me a suggestion—come down here next winter, spend
a few months here, and you will bless the Bahamas and me. I am sure you will. I was glad to hear that everything goes on well at the abbey and pray that God may bless you and yours. As to ‘differences of opinion’—well, that does not mean disobedience. Hence let bygones be bygones,—each will hold his own opinions and is entitled to do so. My record at St. John’s needs no apology and I hope it will never need an apology, also here. I am doing what I can and with God’s help I hope to make this a prosperous mission. Almighty God has even thus far deigned to make me the instrument of saving two souls. What he has in store for the mission I know not, but I am confident and enthusiastically hopeful. My love to all enquiring Fathers and confratres. I hope they will make a memento for me in their prayers. If not asking too much, I would be pleased to hear from you occasionally. Praying that God may bless you and your work and begging an occasional memento...  

Father Chrysostom to Archbishop Michael Corrigan, Nassau, 30 March 1891:  
As to the condition of the mission, I have the pleasure of submitting the following: There are about 50 practical Catholics here, children included. The number of apostate Catholics is about 20, of whom I think, some can be reclaimed. These figures are not thoroughly reliable. During the month I will see every Catholic here and will then give your Grace the exact numbers. The mission has lately grown by the acquisition of several Catholic families and the prospects of further increase by immigration are good. Increase from conversion, especially from Anglicanism, is not at all improbable and I look hopefully to good results from this source. The main source of increase however will be the schools. The venerable Sisters are doing most excellent work in the schools and I cannot speak too highly of their work and their spirit of patience and self-sacrifice...  
Next year is the centenary year of the discovery of America. I learn that a squadron representing many nations will gather at San Salvador in October, 1892. Ought not the Catholics of the U.S. do something for the occasion? I propose that they build a monumental chapel there and that your Grace come down to dedicate it October 12, 1892. Secondly, I propose that the clergy of the archdiocese furnish a memorial bell for the church here and that your Grace consecrate it on the same occasion.  
Will your Grace give me permission to take steps in the matter? If so, I will write a circular, submit it to your approval, and then hand it to the Catholic press of the states....  
Abbot Alexius has promised to send down a pump and hose, which I will place in the garden adjoining the church. I started in gardening a few days ago, and hope to be able soon to furnish convent and my own house with vegetables.  

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 14 May 1891:  
Your letter of April 21, reached me on the 6th inst., and I was pleased indeed to hear from you, but sorry, very sorry, to learn what effect my former letter had on you. You took me too seriously. When I wrote that letter I felt more like bantering than writing seriously. I certainly did not
intend to hurt your feelings any more than you intended to wound mine in your letter; hence I entreat you, Father Abbot, to forgive me if I did say anything that bore even the resemblance of disrespect or disregard. Yes, you are right, when you say that I have taken things too 'individually.' Had I not done so, I think I would have saved myself and others many disagreeable things in the past. But then, let the past be the past and, I for one, am anxious to banish the thought of it from the present. That you recommended me frequently to God, gives me great consolation, and I flatter myself with the hope that others of the community do so likewise.

It is not a pleasant thing for a religious to be isolated as I am and when the thought casts me down and makes a gloomy hour for me, I always find some consolation in the thought that spiritually, at least, my brothers in religion are with me and I with them. I am sorry to learn that so many of the Fathers are sick. It must be a great source of worry to you. As for myself, I am in in very good health and am very much pleased with the climate and place. Next Saturday I will receive into the Church two colored persons; one, a woman whose husband is a Catholic; the other, a 14 year old boy who has been a constant attendant at the school here, since the sisters started it two years ago. I have May devotions daily. The Governor and family, the Colonial Secretary and family, and quite a few others are regular attendants at these devotions as well as at daily Mass. I preach every Thursday evening during May. This evening I preach on the Rosary. It is getting to be quite warm here now, but the heat is quite bearable, and I feel very comfortable indeed. Minnesota too is beginning to thaw out by this time. I hear the whistle of the boat that takes this letter to New York.

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 17 August 1891:

Your welcome letter of July 13 was received three weeks ago, and from it I see that you have been covering lots of ground lately. You have been South, North and West; now come East too, or Southeast to see the Baham, Am glad to learn that all is well at St. John's and that (as I learn from Nordstern) the Alumni meeting and the Silver Jubilee celebration were a grand success. So St. John's now has a colony in the far West [St. Martin's Priory, Olympia, Washington]. It ought to have had one there several years ago and it would have saved the abbey lots of trouble during the last few years. I am getting along quite well, considering the heat we have had since the middle of May. We averaged between 80 and 90 degrees in the shade all summer. I stand it well, though I suffered martyrdom from prickly heat during a portion of June and July. Now I am over it and I stand the heat as well as any native and am gaining flesh. I live in a very nice, large house, in fact one of the finest here. It is larger and finer than the St. Cloud parish home, and belongs to the Mission. Am very busy just now, building a school house, frame 37 x 27, putting a gallery into the church and building an addition to the sacristy. School opens about the middle of Sept., and we will have from 150 to 200 (as many as we can accommodate) children. In October I expect to go to New York on a begging expedition....
Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 27 January 1892:

I owe you a letter this many a month, and you are probably disgusted with my inexcusable negligence. Since you heard from me last—in August 1891—your namesday—I believe—I have gone through varied experiences. At one time, just about when your last letter reached here, I was for several days at death's door. Thereafter I was confined to my bed for five weeks and was long recovering from the result of prostration from heat, in consequence of my exposing myself on the hottest summer days for hours to the rays of the sun, while building a school. At the advice of physicians, and to raise money for the mission, I went to New York at the end of October. Both objects of my visit north were fairly well attained. I recovered my health and obtained a satisfactory amount of temporalities. Though my general health is good, I am still, and will be for some time, unable to put any strain on my brain, without subsequent headache and suffering. There you see, I have had a hard time of it. I confess that I often felt terribly discouraged and sick at heart on account of the gloomy outlook both here and in New York. When matters appeared darkest, light was nearest. Abbot Alexius is in possession of a field in New York, the like of which is not easily to be found. In my collecting tour through that city, I got quite well acquainted with conditions of various parishes, and considering all in all, I would consider the Abbot's parish by all odds preferable to many of the other parishes, and, as an opening, preferable to any newly organized parish in the city. I hope and pray that its future will be as prosperous as it is in the prospective.

My own work here has taken a most encouraging turn. Our schools are overcrowded and we have to turn off dozens of applicants every week. God has blessed the Mission with most devoted and zealous Sisters. In consequence, our schools are head and shoulders above any of the Bahama schools: the buildings are much too small, and the prospects for numerous converts are very bright. I write this on the evening of my namesday. And it is the happiest namesday I ever spent. This afternoon I received twelve neophytes into the Church—ten of them blacks. Don't you think that encouraging? By Easter, I think, a much larger number will be ready for baptism. Father Gerard, as you know, was here during a part of the time that I was in New York. I returned here Dec. 21st. A certain Father Duffy, a most exemplary and lovable character, a consumptive, is here with me since November and will stay till May. Two other priests, also consumptively inclined, are with me since last week. One will stay till April, the other leaves for Cuba next Monday Feb. 1st. The Archbishop [Michael Corrigan] and his Secretary are coming down with the next steamer, and will be my guests during at least two weeks. So you see, I will be a much visited man for some time. New York parties have furnished the mission house in grand style and my residence is palatial indeed. Besides my own bedroom, I have 4 big airy and handsomely furnished bedrooms. If I only had a Benedictine Father, a faithful confere with me! It is my constant prayer. Dear Father Abbot I have not heard from Minn. for such a long time, that I have lost track, but not interest, of events there. Remember me kindly, please, to all enquiring conferees....

Father Chrysostom had taught history at St. John's University, and his imagination was quickened by the thought that he was now a mis-
sionary on the very islands first touched by Columbus when he brought Catholicism to the Americas. The three hundredth anniversary of Columbus’ landfall on San Salvador was approaching in October, 1892. From the day Schreiner arrived in the Bahamas, he was filled with plans to observe worthily that anniversary. Abbot Bernard had sent Fr. Paul Rettenmaier, O.S.B., to the Bahamas as a possible assistant to Father Chrysostom. Schreiner chartered a small sailing sloop and made arrangements for a party to visit some of the out islands while at the same time touching the points historically and traditionally associated with Columbus’ voyage. Schreiner described to the Nassau Guardian what then happened:

I chartered the schooner Rebecca, Bethel master, to visit a number of out-islands. The object of my cruise was to become acquainted with my field of missionary labor. Rev. Father Paul, O.S.B., of Minnesota; Rev. M.J. Duffy, of New York; Dr. Sterling, of Sag Harbour, New York, and myself formed the party. We left the dock at Nassau at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 29th, and arrived at Governor’s Harbour, Eleuthera, about 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, March 31st. At 11:30 a.m., April 1st, we left Governor’s Harbour for Port Howe, Cat Island, at which point we arrived at 5:00 p.m., April 2nd. Through the kindness of Postmaster Smith, his mother’s house was placed at our service, and his sister, Mrs. Hart, was truly a hospitable hostess to us. I conducted services and preached at the house of Mrs. Smith on the following morning, Sunday, April 3rd. During the day Mr. Hart escorted us to the spots traditionally connected with Columbus, such as Columbus Point, Cave, etc., as well as to the interior to obtain a view of the lakes so much spoken of. Owing to the fact that both were unwell during the whole voyage, and that it was feared we could not be back to Nassau to meet the New York steamer on Monday next, Father Duffy and Dr. Sterling concluded to go overland to the Bight, and there take the City of Ghent for Nassau on April 5th. How providential this appeared very soon after.

We left Port Howe for Watlings’ Island at 1:00 p.m. Monday, April 4th. Though the sea was quite high both the captain and myself thought it perfectly safe to start, the captain remarking that if we found the sea too high we would return to port at once.

We were steering N.E. when I retired at 8 o’clock, Conception Island having been previously sighted. I did not sleep soundly and in a half sleep heard a grinding and quivering of the vessel and then a harder shock. I jumped out to find that water was ankle deep in the cabin, and realizing the condition we were in called Father Paul to hurry out, and cried for the pump to be worked. The captain standing at the helm and shoving the boom of the mainsail to the windward shouted orders to the crew who were lowering the jib and foresail, and I believed from the position some of the crew were in, they were dropping the anchor. At once realizing that the vessel was rapidly sinking, and seeing the breakers rolling over the reef about a half mile ahead of us in the clear moonlight, I cried out at the top of my voice for God’s sake to drop the anchor and to get ready the life boat. Meanwhile she lurched over so that the water rushed in the hatchway and then instantly settled down, leaving the top of her cabin about four feet under the surface. From the time that she first struck the rock to the time
that she settled to the bottom only about a minute, at the highest two minutes, intervened. The crew got into the boat first and held themselves to the ropes of the foremast.

Father Paul and myself sought safety by climbing the mainmast. While on the mast I caught a floating oar and passed it over to the boat, then stepping on the galley, and with water up to my shoulders, I reached to draw the boat towards me with the one hand, while I held myself to a rope with the other. Thus Father Paul and myself got safely into the boat. Swinging around to the rear of the boat, I noticed, in the clear moonlight, rocks standing like pillars up to near the surface of the water, and concluded therefrom that the vessel could not possibly drift away, and positively insisted that we must remain near her till daylight when the safest place for landing could be found. Fastening a rope to one of the ropes that run from the mast to the end of the boom, we drifted off about 80 to 100 feet from her and anxiously waited for morning.

Oh my God, what a night of terrible suffering and anxiety. Eight men in a mere shell in a bed of sunken rocks, a heavy sea rolling over the adjacent reef and rocking us to and fro, the volley of every heavy wave exposing the hideous surface of the rocks, and eight miles away from land. Five hours of hard work brought us to land. Prayers of gratitude went up to heaven from our trembling hearts, while hot tears of joy trickled from our eyes and dropped on the land upon which at last we stood. I am profoundly grateful to the Almighty for having spared our lives, though all else we had with us was lost. How providential now appeared the timely return from Port Howe, of Father Duffy and Dr. Sterling. Fifty pounds weight more in our small row boat would have sunk her for several times towering waves almost filled the frail craft.

During the night we had hoped that the mail steamer passing northward might sight us or the wrecked vessel, but we fondly nourished the hope only to feel the more bitterly our disappointment. Just before we landed, at 10:00 a.m. Tuesday, we sighted her, but too far off, and going away from us in a north-westerly direction.

Shipwrecked on an uninhabited barren island, how easily said, but what a terrible reality it is. Luckily one of the crew had two matches with him. After drying them in the sun, he succeeded in lighting a fire. Water too, was soon found. Crabs, whelks and an occasional land crawl, [crab] raw or roasted, was our diet. They needed no seasoning. Hunger furnished that. What was to be done? Seek supplies and be prepared to live until we can sight some vessel. None came on the first day. The second day found everybody more weary, drooping and hopeless than the first. Finally at 1 o’clock on Wednesday, 27 hours after we had been on the island, a schooner appeared. What a welcome sight! When I first sighted her coming, she appeared to me a vision. I could not for the moment believe my eyes. We were saved! A good angel brought the schooner Brave, Captain Rahming, within hailing distance. Capt. Rahming welcomed us aboard, and himself, passengers and crew did what they could for our relief. The Brave brought us into Port Howe at 5:30 p.m. Father Paul and myself were given a hearty and sympathetic welcome by Mr. and Mrs. Hart who placed everything conducive to our comfort at our disposal. We left Port Howe in the Brave at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, and a favorable wind brought us back to Nassau almost clothesless, hatless and shoeless at 4:30 p.m. yesterday.
No, I don’t want to be shipwrecked again. If, however, one desires to be able to set a true value upon life, and the things of this world and the next, he can learn it when the ship is sinking.

Sir Etienne Dupuch, in the Nassau Tribune explained the significance of this event for the future:

...In response to a petition from certain residents in Nassau for the establishment of a permanent Catholic Church in Nassau, the Abbot of St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, sent Fr. Chrysostom to Nassau to investigate. Up to that time a Catholic Priest visited Nassau only during the winter tourist season to serve Catholics at the Royal Victoria and old Colonial hotels.

Fr. Chrysostom came. Saw. And sent a report back to the Abbot informing him that this was a Protestant stronghold. He felt that anti-Catholic sentiment was so strong that no Priest could live in this atmosphere.

At that time there was a great deal of dispute over the Landfall of Columbus in the New World. Cat Island was generally accepted as the spot. Today lawyers searching old documents must be careful as, during the early 1800’s, Cat Island was often referred to as San Salvador.

Fr. Chrysostom, a student of the Columbian voyages, did not agree that Cat Island was the correct location. And so he decided that, before returning to the Monastery, he would take charts of the Columbian voyages and trace the course for himself. He chartered the sloop Rebecca for the voyage. One night a plank fell out of the bottom of the sloop and she went to the bottom on banks near Conception Cay.

Fr. Chrysostom and the crew spent the night clinging to the mast of the sunken vessel. It was then that Fr. Chrysostom told God that if his life was spared he would know that this disaster was intended to make him understand that God wanted him to give his life to the Bahamian people.

To make a long story short... Fr. Chrysostom was rescued. And he honoured the promise he made to God. But he was right when he reported to the Abbot that life for a Catholic Priest here would be intolerable.

Among his first members were the de Gregories who had come here from Cuba and Syrian families who were part of the great Lebanese migration to escape persecution by their pagan Turkish masters.

Fr. Chrysostom made Bahamian converts but they were all poor people who needed help and had nothing to contribute to the support of the mission. And this was why it was so important for him to make visits to the U.S. to collect money in order to keep the mission alive. It was a terrible blow when U.S. Consul Doty grounded him here during the war because of propaganda started by his Protestant baiters that he was a German spy. Opponents of the Church lost no opportunity to hound this lonesome man who spent night after night sitting alone on the northern porch of the Priory building looking out on the entrance to Nassau Harbour.

Why Fr. Chrysostom selected me for special training I don’t know because I had been brought up in a strongly anti-Catholic atmosphere. The Catholic Church was one of my pet hates. I regarded Fr. Chrysostom as an agent of the devil. But to make another long story short, we were brought
together as a result of a strange set of circumstances and became devoted friends on our first meeting with results you see all around you today.

As a result of his historic trip in the sloop Rebecca Fr. Chrysostom was satisfied that Watling's Island and not Cat Island was the Landfall of Columbus. After he became my tutor he wrote a series of articles for *The Tribune* which were so convincing that the Legislature passed a Bill adding the words 'San Salvador' to the name of Watling's Island. It was shown in the Bill as Watling's Island (or San Salvador). After that *The Tribune* always referred to it as San Salvador and so the name Watling, who had been a notorious pirate, fell into disuse. It is never heard today.4

During the harrowing hours Father Chrysostom spent in the life boat, he vowed that if his life were spared he would remain in the Bahamas for the rest of his days as a missionary. Schreiner held this vow as sacred, although a religious with solemn vows could not canonically make such a promise. When he returned to Nassau he entered with renewed vigor into his lonely apostolate. Abbot Bernard visited the Bahamas in November, 1892, and stayed during the Christmas season. He brought with him Fr. Rupert Kiefer, O.S.B., who suffered from tuberculosis and left him with Father Chrysostom. The abbot, like thousands of tourists in the years ahead, found the climate at that time of year unsurpassed. The picturesque character of Nassau, the beautiful tropical plant and marine life, but most of all the winning ways of the Bahamians, made the venture attractive. On Christmas day the first solemn high Mass was offered in Nassau with Father Chrysostom as celebrant, Father Rupert, as deacon, Brother Melchior Bahner, O.S.B., as subdeacon and Brother Bartholomew Rebholz, O.S.B., as master of ceremonies. Abbot Bernard preached the sermon and in the afternoon dedicated St. Benedict's Hall, a handsome stone school, 48 by 30 ft., to be used as a free kindergarten. The schools had an attendance of 260 pupils, and St. Francis Xavier Academy enrolled twenty-eight students. The two clerics, Brothers Melchior and Bartholomew, were in the Bahamas for seven months to recover their health.

When Father Chrysostom first arrived in Nassau, he purchased a residence on Queen Street, a neat two-story building of coral limestone, flanked by two noble palm trees standing like guardsmen in front of the house. He would offer board and room here to a visiting priest as a source of income. Three Benedictines came from St. John's Abbey during 1891-93 to assist him, to relieve his loneliness and in response to his repeated pleas for help. Fr. Paul Rettenmaier, O.S.B., a consumptive, stayed for seven weeks from 14 March to 20 May 1892. Father Paul was so shaken after the April shipwreck that he returned to Minnesota and died prematurely of consumption on 25 May 1895 at age thirty-nine. Abbot Bernard sent two clerics, Benedictine divinity students, in August, 1891, to assist Father Chrysostom in teaching, building and repair work while they were in Nassau to improve their health. They were Brothers
Melchior and Bartholomew, both known to Father Chrysostom as students at St. John’s, the former from St. Cloud and the latter from Minneapolis. In a typical Schreiner tactic, Father Chrysostom had Brother Melchior change his name to Austin because he said the Anglicans would take more kindly to that name.

With the help of these two clerics, Father Chrysostom opened a “select school” or academy for white boys in 1891 at the request of several businessmen who pressed him to educate their sons in preparation for advanced study abroad. The three monks divided the teaching load in Latin, English and mathematics among themselves. The school began with a small number of students but never grew. It was a heavy drain on energy and Father Chrysostom soon realized he could not conduct a school while trying to establish the Catholic Church in the Bahamas. The academy was closed in 1893 when the two clerics returned to St. John’s to complete their training for the priesthood. Brother Bartholomew died in Minnesota a year later, 30 March 1894, the first Bahama Benedictine to pass away. The closing of the academy was a good move as such a school’s continuing would have associated the Catholic vicar with segregated education from the very beginning.

Fr. Rupert Kiefer, O.S.B., ordained in 1891, was a consumptive. He stayed until 2 May 1893 when he went to St. Anselm’s parish in New York City to remain until his death on 15 May 1914 at age forty-six. Thus it was apparent in those first years that the assistants Father Chrysostom received were temporary and sickly. This depressed Schreiner and convinced him that he could expect no permanent help from St. John’s. He tried to interest Belgian, German and English Benedictines to come to the Bahama mission but was unsuccessful.

During his administration, Abbot Bernard never made a definite decision about St. John’s support of the Bahama undertaking. He supplied what assistance he could to Father Chrysostom, and even sent two newly ordained priests, Fathers Gabriel Roerig, O.S.B., and Melchior Bahner, O.S.B., to the Bahamas on 4 June 1894. But there was little sympathetic understanding among the majority at the abbey for this missionary endeavor. The summer heat of the islands was believed to be overpowering; the lack of any financial support whatever from the islands themselves made the project insecure. Most significant, however, was a lack of appreciation for the need of foreign missionary work among members of the community. Fr. Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B., professor of dogmatic theology at St. John’s, visited the Bahamas on 25 July 1893 for two months to view the field. Father Alexius was a close friend and classmate of Father Chrysostom. Though he enjoyed the experience, he was unimpressed by the potential of the undertaking. Hoffmann even made the statement that St. John’s should not be in this work because
each nation had the obligation to bring itself to Christianity. Hoffmann’s viewpoint was not exceptional for his times, however, and is repeated anew today by some third world theologians. Among American Catholics in the late nineteenth century there was little if any interest in foreign missions. The problems of assimilating and caring for the waves of Catholic immigrants to the United States occupied ecclesiastical attention. The struggle to organize an apostolate among American Indians and Negroes during these years received little enough support. Finally the nationalistic spirit so rampant in the United States was a real barrier to any form of international effort or support.

The tenacity and determination of Father Chrysostom thus emerge all the more distinctly. He deserves unqualified recognition for first implementing foreign missionary work at St. John’s and developing the opportunity obtained for the community by Abbot Alexius Edelbrock, O.S.B. Fr. Carl Thomas Albury, alumnus of St. John’s, first Bahamian ordained a priest and former pastor of Ladysmith, British Columbia, summed up the impression made by this pioneer American Benedictine on the people of the Bahamas when he said, “Father Chrysostom was the biggest man I have ever known in every sense of the word and nothing can shake my confidence.”

Father Chrysostom was born on 9 December 1859 in Jordan, Minnesota, in the rich farmland of the Minnesota River valley, son of Peter Schreiner and Theresia Ackermann, German immigrants to the United States. His father was a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives from the Seventh District in the Second Minnesota Legislature of December, 1859, to March, 1860. The Schreiners were a typical midwestern pioneer American family in every way. Peter Schreiner had to be as much of an individualist as his son Chrysostom proved himself to be. Peter homesteaded in Minnesota before it became a state in the year before Chrysostom was born. Peter was a hunter and guide who was accepted as a friend among the Indian Chippewa and Sioux tribes of the area. What a familiar ring to the old saying: “like father, like son.” As Peter was accepted among the beleagured and oppressed Indians of the United States, so was Chrysostom, his son, accepted among the poor and colonized Negroes of the Bahamas some thirty years later.

Peter Schreiner guided the first expedition across the Rocky Mountains to the gold fields of California in 1848. Before this overland journey the trip was made by sea around the horn of South America. Father Chrysostom remembers that his earliest childhood companions were American Indians. When the great and last Indian uprising, the Sioux uprising, took place in Minnesota and the Dakotas during the Civil War in 1862, Father Chrysostom never forgot the great excitement as the Indians roamed from town to town burning and killing. Peter Schreiner
was away as guide on an expedition at the time. His family in Jordan, Minnesota, near New Ulm, center of the uprising, was spared because the Schreiners were considered friends of the Indians demanding their legitimate rights from American oppressors. This detail, too, has a similar ring to the life of Father Chrysostom in the Bahamas.

Chrysostom was sent by the Schreiner family to St. John’s University at Collegeville, Minnesota, some 100 miles distant, to study in a Benedictine abbey school, the only German-American center in that area with which they could relate. Chrysostom was born only three years after St. John’s had been established in the Minnesota Indian bush, and he was one of the pioneer students in this institution. Young Schreiner distinguished himself quickly as a good student, finished his classical studies, chose to enter the Benedictine novitiate at St. John’s Abbey, was professed on 24 April 1881 and ordained a priest on 29 June 1884.

Father Chrysostom immediately associated himself with the party supporting the superior in office, Abbot Alexius Edelbrock, O.S.B., and for the next five years was involved in the internal conflict at Collegeville which has been detailed above. Father Chrysostom first taught in the Industrial School for Indians at the abbey. He quickly advanced to the position of vice-president of St. John’s, the administrative head of the school reporting to the abbot of the monastery.

He is remembered by one alumnus, Fr. Louis Traufler, O.S.B., in his memoirs as the one who “put order and system into the school. The college was run on a crude basis before he came into control. He put chairs into the classrooms. Before that the students sat on benches. He placed glasses in the refectory and napkins on the table, even colored napkins for the different feasts of the liturgical year. He was the first to place a Christmas tree in the college for the students.” Each of these Americanizing imprints of Father Chrysostom did not go unnoticed. With the forced departure of Abbot Alexius in 1889, Father Chrysostom chose to follow him to New York City and then to the Bahamas to St. John’s loss and the islands’ gain.

While most of Father Chrysostom’s achievements at first were far from big, he quickly revealed that quality of excellence which distinguished him throughout his lifetime. He saw in the papers that the military hospital of the British West Indies Regiment in Nassau, called Dunmore House and adjoining St. Francis Xavier Church by only a few yards, was to be sold at public auction. This was an historic, and in the Bahama baroque tradition, unique old three-story balconied building, at the top of the hill on West Street overlooking the harbor. He shrewdly placed his bid through a Bahamian Catholic woman in order not to arouse any possible Protestant opposition to a Romish take-over of one of the more historic spots on the island of New Providence. Schreiner
carried the day at that public auction in Nassau of 21 June 1893 with his bid of £830 for the building and grounds of the hospital containing two acres, two rods and eleven and one half poles. On August 21 Father Chrysostom, after it became public knowledge that the Catholic priest had purchased the building and ground, signed a land title with the British Secretary of State for the War Department and obtained title deed for his coup. The house on Queen Street was sold for £700. It was quite an exchange for an additional £130.

In late summer, 1893, Father Chrysostom excitedly moved into this new and unbelievably spacious building which was to become the center of Catholic clerical life in Nassau down to the present time. Father Chrysostom re-named the building “The Priory.” It became the rectory of St. Francis Church, headquarters for all Benedictines working in Nassau and the family islands of the Bahamas, hospice for priest guests who are never wanting in Nassau, and contemporary center for the varied apostolates carried on by the diocese of the Bahamas. It was a stroke of genius on the part of Father Chrysostom to obtain this historic and large building, in the best tradition of Abbot Alexius, at a time when the field of the Catholic apostolate in the Bahamas, income and potential would persuade a more timid man to reject even the thought of acquiring the grounds and building of the military hospital itself. Archbishop Corrigan congratulated him on his foresight, and he and several New York clergy friends of Abbot Alexius and Father Chrysostom donated generously toward repairs and furnishings which were badly needed. St. Francis School had been purchased previously on 10 April 1891 by the New York archdiocese from the war department for £201. This land to the south of St. Francis Xavier Church measured one acre and nineteen and one half poles and was known as the “Convalescent Ground.”

In a nineteenth century age when the acquiring of real estate was a badge of courage for Catholic immigrants in all mission fields, Father Chrysostom was acclaimed in the United States where such procedures were ever the norm of success, and in the Bahamas by the little Catholic enclave that marvelled at their new prominence.

Father Chrysostom, with German-American practicality, moved quickly and with delight to remodel Dunmore House. He divided the large hall on the first floor with a wooden partition about eight feet high, using the larger part toward the west as a study library and reception room and the smaller one as a bedroom. The upper floor was divided into spacious guest rooms. The dining room was in the basement which was all above ground. The cooking was done outside by Lady Jane Gray, in the Bahamian tradition, in a kitchen between the church and Dunmore House. This practice continued for several years until the New York prelates and friends protested about obvious unsanitary conditions in
this arrangement and the kitchen was moved indoors next to the dining room. For Benedictines, who have learned to live out their lives with their kitchens for better or for worse during 1400 years, the demands of New York clerical tastes could only be welcomed.

Father Chrysostom could always prepare a first class table with wines for his guests when he wanted to do so. He was cosmopolitan in season but it took metropolitan tastes to encourage him to establish more acceptable hygienic standards in The Priory’s kitchen. The early Catholic missionaries who remained in the Bahamas after the first wave of consumptive patients were rugged German-Americans from the midwestern plains of the United States. Their German tastes and constitutions fitted them well for missionary work. The influence of New York’s “effete East” among them as guests and benefactors broadened their perspective considerably. 

Archbishop Corrigan, Msgr. Michael J. Lavelle, pastor of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, Bishop Charles E. McDonnell of Brooklyn and a large number of eastern clergy donated to Bahamian Catholic development and visited Nassau in the winter season. Father Chrysostom regularly visited the States, especially in the summer, to collect funds in New York, Brooklyn, and from friends who had visited the Bahamas. He simply could not continue spiritual work in the Bahamas without financial help from the United States. Archbishop Corrigan also made arrangements to obtain funds for the Bahamas from the annual American Catholic collection for Negro and Indian missions. Father Chrysostom began the tradition of financial appeals among American Catholics which was carried forward to much higher plateaus by his successors, Bishops Bernard and Leonard. The New York Sisters of Charity from the very beginning conducted their own development appeals among their alumnae and friends and published a magazine to that end entitled Bahamian Missions. They, in an astonishing and remarkable manner, completely supplied their own material needs from the very beginning. They, in the same way as the early priests, brought to the Bahamas, beyond their life service, a living dowry which became an important part of the development of the people of God on the islands they loved so much.

When Father Chrysostom acquired Dunmore House, the little and unrecognized Catholic community in Nassau found itself in possession of one of the more important buildings on New Providence. The earl of Dunmore, John Murray, was an historical folk figure in Bahamian memory. Coming to the Bahamas in 1787 as governor (1787-96) after his escape from the Virginia colony during the American Revolution, Dunmore was universally hated in the Bahamas as he had been previously as governor in New York and Virginia. At the same time he was a significant architect of forts and buildings in Nassau which have survived
today as monuments cherished by Bahamians and attracting tourists for the present Bahamian major industry. Lord John Murray was traditionally supposed to have built Dunmore House, occupying and leasing it for personal profit to the local government as a governor's residence which it continued to be until the present Government House was built a block away and occupied in January, 1806.

Some present-day historians deny that Dunmore House was the governor's residence because it does not appear on a 1788 map of Nassau. Since Lord Dunmore did not arrive in Nassau until the end of 1787, he could not have the house built in time for a 1788 map.8

It is not the purpose of this volume to enter into controversies of this nature which have all the appearances of English village vendettas levelled against Catholic usurpers of their recent inheritance. Father Chrysostom speaks for himself in the matter in The Tribune Handbook published in 1920 by Gilbert, now deceased, and his brother Sir Etienne Dupuch. Etienne Dupuch, Jr., revived the publication forty years later and re-published this interesting annual under the title: The Bahamas Handbook and Business Men's Guide which continues as the most successful publication of its kind in the colony's history. Father Chrysostom forthrightly writes in his article of 1920 regarding Dunmore and Dunmore House as a legitimate voice to be heard, the purchaser of Dunmore House and as a scholar in his own right, with editorial notes by Sir Etienne Dupuch:

John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, after a short Governorship of the Colony of New York, was transferred to the Colony of Virginia at the end of 1771, and there, by his autocratic manners and methods, contributed more to the grievances of the American colonists against the mother government than any one other man of the period.

In his Life of George Washington, Woodrow Wilson describes Governor Dunmore as a dark and distant man, who seemed to the Virginians to come like a satrap to his province, who brought a soldier with him for secretary and confidential adviser, set up a fixed etiquette to be observed by all who would approach him, spoke abruptly and without courtesy, displayed in all things an arbitrary temper, and took more interest, as it presently appeared, in acquiring tracts of western lands than in conducting the Government of the colony.

On June 8, 1775, Dunmore was a fugitive from Virginia. In December of the same year George Washington said of him: 'I do not think that forcing His Lordship on shipboard is sufficient. Nothing less than depriving him of life or liberty will secure peace to Virginia, as motives of resentment actuate his conduct to a degree equal to the total destruction of the Colony.'

Seeking refuge aboard a British man-o'war in the bay, Dunmore called upon all who were loyal to follow him, and offered freedom to slaves and servants who would enlist for the purpose of reducing the colony to a proper sense of its duty. In his resentment he destroyed Norfolk by fire and ravaged the coast of Virginia.
He was appointed Governor of the Bahamas in 1786 but did not arrive in the colony until toward the end of 1787.

His administration concerned itself chiefly with fortifying New Providence and acquiring property for his own use.

He built Dunmore House, occupied it and leased it to the local government as Governor's Residence and as such it served until the present Government House was completed in January 1806.

[Editor's Note: The 1806 building was destroyed by a hurricane in 1929 and replaced by the present Government House which was built by Capt. John Holmes...]

In March, 1801, Lord Dunmore conveyed the premises, through his attorney, John Stevens, to the local government for the sum of £5,142 sterling and 17 shillings 'of lawful money of the said islands.'

The Right Hon. Earl also acquired by purchase from the government 13 acres and 3 rods comprising the block bounded on the north by West Hill Street, between Blue Hill Road and Hospital Lane. Other properties owned and developed by him are the Hermitage at the east end of New Providence, now owned by Lady Williams-Taylor and the adjacent property known as Stanley. He built the Hermitage and occupied it as a summer residence, and at the same time built himself a summer home at Harbour Island and got the town named Dunmore Town.

[Editor's Note: The Hermitage property extended from Dick's Point to a location east of Stanley. Since this article was written the ownership of the Hermitage... and the small piece of land with it... passed into the hands of the Catholic Church. It was bought by His Eminence Cardinal William O'Connell, Archbishop of Boston, who used it as a winter residence. Some years before his death in 1944 His Eminence bequeathed it to the Catholic Diocese of Nassau and it is now the residence of the Most Rev. Bishop Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., Bishop of Nassau. At the time this article was written by Fr. Chrysostom the original Stanley still stood and was owned and occupied by the family of Charles Higgs. On his death it passed to his eldest son, the Hon. Godfrey Higgs, C.B.E. By then the building was so termite-eaten that Mr. Higgs was obliged to pull it down and replace it with the present Stanley.]

By Crown grant dated February 20, 1790, Dunmore, acquired 170 acres at the East End of Hog Island and under privilege of Loyalist had 250 acres in New Providence and 1,500 acres in Long Island ceded to himself.

[Editor's Note: Hog Island is now known as Paradise Island.]

The space given to Governor Dunmore transgresses the limit of ordinary Handbook space. It is given him, however, in the pages of The Tribune Handbook, because of the outstanding personality of the man and the part he played in the political drama that lost to England its North American colonies and kept afloat the spirit that led to the war of 1812-15.

He was perhaps the most cordially hated King's representative ever to be sent to the American colonies. With a century of peace standing between both the Englishman and American can equally give to the Earl of Dunmore an impartial need of admiration for having been a man who could hold up a proud head while with heavy foot he made footprints in the sands of time...

The Earl of Dunmore's second daughter, Augusta, married at Rome, April 4, 1793, His Royal Highness Augustus Frederick Duke of Sussex,
sixth son of George III. The marriage was declared illegal the following year. The Earl of Dunmore died in England in March 1809, his widow, Lady Charlotte survived him 10 years.

Athol Island and the estates Blair and Stanley in the Eastern District of New Providence perpetuate some of Dunmore’s titles. Dunmore Town on Harbour Island was named for him and Dunmore on Long Island carries his name and Murray Street perpetuates his family name.

While on the subject of historic places in Nassau, I feel I should reprint another short article done for The Handbook by Fr. Chrysostom. It is about Mount Vernon, an estate on the Eastern Road opposite the Hermitage which is now being broken up into a subdivision and sold in lots. If it is true that George Washington visited his brother Lawrence here and decided to give up farming and surveying to take his brother’s place in the army, then some of the most important events affecting this hemisphere took place on opposite sides of the street on the Eastern Road.

MOUNT VERNON

Mount Vernon, an estate four miles out of town on East Bay Street, now owned and occupied by Mr. J. W. Lee, a Canadian, is in local tradition connected with a visit of Lawrence and George Washington. [Editor’s Note: East Bay Street is now known as Eastern Road. This change of name was made many years ago during the period when the late Sir Kenneth Solomon was chairman of the Public Board of Works.]

The tradition that Lawrence lived at Mount Vernon and gave it its name is borne out by the following historic facts found in Woodrow Wilson’s George Washington (Harper and Brothers, New York and London, 1896).

Lawrence Washington, half brother to George, became head of the family after their father’s death. He had been captain of a Royal Virginia Regiment which volunteered for service against the Spaniards in the West Indies and went through the terrible campaign against Cartagena and Fort San Lazaro under Admiral Vernon and General Wentworth.

After he returned to Virginia he was commissioned a Major in the royal colonial militia and appointed adjutant general of his district.

In compliment of the Admiral, whose friend and admirer he had become, he named his country seat in Virginia Mount Vernon.

In the autumn of 1751, Lawrence, in the grip of fatal consumption, was ordered by his physician to the Bahamas for the winter.

George broke off his term of surveying to accompany his brother, whose malady progressed too far for recovery. Shortly after returning to Virginia in the summer of 1752 Lawrence died.

Out of affection for George, he had, before his death, transferred his commission in the army to George, thus changing the whole course of George’s life.

It is logical to assume that Lawrence had come to this conclusion during his sojourn in New Providence and that while there he had named his temporary residence Mount Vernon. Foundations of the former houses can still be seen between Mr. Lee’s present residence and the road.

Two other interesting bits were contributed to The Handbook by Father Chrysostom. Grover Cleveland, President of the U.S., spent some months in Nassau and made many friends here. He came to settle the
affairs of his brother, who was manager of the Royal Victoria Hotel and lost his life in the S.S. *Missouri*, burnt at sea on October 22, 1872. And Ex-President Pierce visited Nassau and was a guest at the Royal Victoria in 1860.9

The first guest in Dunmore House was Father Chrysostom’s classmate and friend from St. John’s, Fr. Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B., who came on July 23 and stayed for two months. The two friends had much to talk about and Father Alexius, an inveterate chronicler, took copious notes on all aspects of Bahamian life. Hoffmann composed nine essays for *The Record*, the university’s newspaper, upon his return to Collegeville. Extracts are included here from this unique and comprehensive first travelogue of a late nineteenth century American Catholic to the Bahamas:

The pilot boat which carried us from the steamer cut her way through the throng of schooners and other craft which were lining the Nassau wharf and stopped at the custom house. On the dock, some five feet above our boat, stood groups of well dressed young negroes, some rather extravagantly trapped out, who extended a helping hand down to us. An upward leap on my part, a firm tug on theirs, and I stood on the dock beside them, waiting for my baggage to follow. There was a number of conveyances standing in the shade, but the cabinmen, the same who were so ready to help us out of the skiff, were not so noisy nor as intrusive as their brethren up North. After giving the custom officer an occasion to convince himself of the legality of my effects and to adorn my valise with a chalk mark by way of approval, I sought out a Jehu, one who was well dressed, had a respectful buggy and—it would be base flattery to waste admiration on the horse—knew where to find my destination.

The place we set out from, in fact, where I had just landed, was the public park of Nassau, a plot of ground not much more than 200 feet square, about spacious enough for a respectable dwelling. There were paths, delightful trees, grassy plots and comfortable benches in it, with a view of the harbor and pleasant breeze to beguile the frequenters of this spot. It is the central park of the community, and when on Monday afternoon at 5 o’clock the Nassau constabulary band performs its best selections, there is a notable gathering of swells, masculine and female, white and colored, whose chief attraction to this locality, I fervently hope (out of defence to their musical capability), were not the concerts. Simple as were the airs, this slight feature shows how little is required to cement sociability in a community.

Out of the park into the white streets of the city. Am I in England, Spain, or Africa? There are palms and colored folks in abundance sufficient to suggest Africa; the stores and warehouses along Bay Street look so English; the high stone walls, narrow streets and dusky Cubans occasionally met with, recall some scene in Spanish America. Such is Nassau in fact, a delightful mixture. The Stars and Stripes waving from the vice-consuls’s office is the only suggestion of the United States. The American element appears prominently during the winter months when numbers come down from the States.

This delightful mixture of the old and new so fascinated me in the first few moments that I cannot distinctly recall the impression. As the
vehicle clattered along Bay Street, I imagined I was the center of a great deal of attention.

On steamer day everybody goes about with his eyes wide open, steps more rapidly; even the methodical little donkeys manifest more spirit on these days. To those accustomed to daily trains, or any frequent connections with the world at large, the bustle and excitement of this city appear exaggerated. When, however, it is considered that a steamer arrives there every fortnight and it requires a month for a reply to a letter to turn in, the islanders will be pardoned....

Street scenes are generally very animated; the clatter of wheels, tinkling of bells, the noisy confabulation of the blacks fill the air. On no day more than on steamer day. Then the whole available population turns out: the merchants run about busily inquiring for the goods they have ordered; negroes press through the throng to secure a few hours’ employment unloading vessels; children skip about noisily; women discourse in high tones of the latest gossip. It is a gay, humming multitude. There is much difference in color of faces, still more in dress. You can notice there the staid and sombre raiment of the common-place man, the dazzling white, crimson-sashed suit of the romantic Southerner, the jaunty costume of the sailor from the Richmond, the dressy uniform of Her Majesty’s policemen, the loud but neat garments of the ladies, the nondescript and often highly ethereal habiliments of the street urchins....

In the matter of houses, the various elements of inhabitants have given the widest possible indulgence to their respective architectural tastes. The business houses, stores, scarcely coincide with our ideas of the style proper to such buildings. The colonial structures pictured in our history of the last century here survive. The stores have no pretentious signs, show windows and magnificent displays, and the interior is dingy, close and ill-arranged, though there are a few exceptions. Merchants make no gaudy display outside the stores, nor do clamorous posters allure the purchasers. By force of circumstances the stock is often found very much deficient.

You wear a pair of goggles. You happen to break the bridge and take the ruins to the jeweler. But he tells you he expects some by next steamer, and you have no alternative but to look north with great yearnings for the steamer.

One thing which strikes the busy reader is the absence of book stores or news depots. There is one book concern which came under my notice, but it contained little beyond religious literature. For the greater part, the stores are forbidding-looking edifices with small entrances and the windows of the upper stories guarded with heavy shutters. Throughout the city there are many shops, where only a few articles are sold, such as indigenous fruits, fresh plucked or canned, confectionery and, occasionally, marine curiosities. The few pence realized serve to keep the poor proprietors above the starvation level.

At street corners or in the shade of wide branched trees near the parades, sit vendors of small articles. Women or children balancing large trays on their heads while they walk, squat almost anywhere and remain quietly for hours on one spot either until some chance buyer takes notice of them or beneficient sleep overtakes them. They sleep on stoops, sidewalks, anywhere, at all hours of the day....
The public buildings of Nassau are not as pretentious as we would expect. They are built for utility and boast very little of style. The Government House (residence of the governor, executive mansion) is approached from George St. and is situated on the hill commanding a good view of the city and harbor. Spacious grounds surround it in all directions. Near the gateway stands a white marble statue of Columbus. The dashing slouch-hat, wide mantle and great boots suggest the American colonist of the seventeenth century rather than a Spaniard.

One hand rests upon a clumsy, cross-hilted sword, such as boys sometimes whittle for soldier play. The statue appears to represent someone else, but the pedestal bears the name of 'Columbus 1492' and the good natured tourist must adjust himself to the idea.

The Government House is a massy building of which little is visible save veranda shutters and a broad roof unrelieved by turret, chimney or ornamentation.

A national flag waves over the residence of every important Government official while he is at home. Countless flags decorate vessels as they enter the harbor. On Church feasts of the higher rank a flag is displayed at the residence of the Established Church ministers. Every other house in the negro towns has a flag-pole from which the national colors are displayed on solemn occasions. Forts Charlotte and Fincastle have an extensive system of flag signals to announce the arrival of steamers, schooners and other craft. At all hours, from sun-rise to sun-set, persons interested watch for signals from the forts. Flags of different colors are used to indicate the direction from which the vessel is coming. Spongers and those acquainted with the exact time at which boats should arrive anxiously look for an intimation from this source. Whenever the barometer falls, signals are hoisted at the light-house.

Fronting on Bay Street is a trio of public buildings, two stories high, tinted a light gray and with white facings, without any attempt at ornamentation if we except a portico in the front of the middle building. The middle building contains the colonial post-office and court rooms, the two buildings which flank it, are occupied by the Bank of Nassau and colonial officers. As there is only a fortnightly mail, it may be imagined how oppressive the duties of the post-office department are. Mail to the out-lying islands is carried by schooners under contract with the government.

And here let me say that modes of transit are very limited. There is no demand for rapid transit and no room for it. There are no railroad lines, no street cars, no omnibuses, for the simple reason that there is no sufficient distance between any two points to justify such luxuries. The majority of the inhabitants have never seen a railroad train; they live and die without ever having looked upon an elevator or a factory. But New Providence does boast of a telegraph line. 'For eighteen years the Bahamas have been seeking for telegraphic connection with the outer world. Acts of the legislature have offered large bounties and many steps have been taken from time to time to secure this end: Imperial aid has been sought and hopes raised only to be shattered. But at last, the object has been accomplished thanks to the enterprise and determination of the most enterprising and indefatigable governor this colony has ever had—Sir Ambrose Shea—and that, too, without the financial assistance of the imperial government to the extent of a single penny.' (Consul McLain's Report, 1892.)
The cable was finally opened Feb. 2, 1892. The western terminus of the cable is at Jupiter's Inlet, Florida, where it was landed under the provisions of a contract between the United States Government and the Bahamas. Its eastern terminus is at the western side of the island. From this end of the cable there is an overhead wire to the telegraph office in the city of Nassau. An ordinary instrument similar to those used on land lines, is employed. Rates to the United States are 35 cents a word. The operator is a young man who at one time held a similar position in one of our Western States.

Twice a week you are agreeably aroused from your languor by the cry of 'Paper!' at an evening hour. Nassau boasts of only one public news medium. As you get it fresh from the press, you eagerly devour the little news there is in it.

A few articles from English magazines, terse telegraphic notes and weather reports, but very scant news, fills its columns. The gossip of the town is below the dignity of the sheet.

I was delighted to find Nassau in possession of a public library. In the rear of the governmental buildings described above, and fronting on the next street is a curious octagonal structure, tower-like and topped with a cupola. At one time it served as a prison. The structure is entirely of stone. As you ascend the winding stair-case you pass a diminutive natural cabinet. The library is on the upper floor in the recesses which resemble the arms of a Maltese cross. The librarian says there are about 8,000 volumes in it. In the centre stands a table with the latest English and American journals and at any hour of the day, while the library is open to the public, there may be encountered diligent readers. Fiction is well represented, though there is no drought in other branches of literature.

Fronting the harbor are two extensive stone buildings with spacious grounds, guarded on the Bay Street side by a massive iron fence. They are the barracks of the constabulary. While English troops were stationed at Nassau, they occupied these buildings and Ft. Charlotte. Since their withdrawal a few years ago, a company of police recruited from the Barbadoes has been installed. They are under the immediate command of the provost marshal and regular British officers, and serve both as a sort of military garrison and civil police. Each barracks has ten rooms and broad stone and iron verandas. The eastern building is occupied by the unmarried members, the western by married members of the force. The men are fairly well disciplined. They have frequent drill. They are dressed in blue trousers with a broad red stripe, white coat and helmet, the officers having gold brocade chevrons and white helmets with gilt peak and safety band. The guns are furnished with broad curved bayonets or sword bayonets. While not on duty the men lounge about the barracks grounds or amuse themselves at games like little children. One we found fast asleep on a rickety old pigeon hole table. As compensation for their service they receive about fifty cents a day and free quarters....

The constabulary are a musical set as their brass band evidences. They have regular practice and the din of their flaring music can be heard over the city about the noon hour when the sun blazes with all its might. Their selections are of a very easy grade as the band is not of long standing. On Mondays they perform in the city park.
This police force is intended to protect the city proper. For the ad-
jacent towns, inhabited only by negroes, a special force recruited from the
ranks of the natives does service. They carry a formidable ‘billy’ on their
beats and in many particulars are like their Northern brethren; but police
duty there is not so irksome a job.

Nassau has no theatre. A few productions were given years ago in the
so-called Vendue house, where during slavery times slaves were sold at
auction. The house stands a monument to the debasing traffic that was car-
rried on within its walls. There is no demand, it seems, for such amusements
as theatres, nor do show-bills disfigure the walls along the thoroughfares.
The tastes of the people are too subdued. You will meet with placards
occasionally, but they are merely official announcements of auction sales.

Westward from Ft. Charlotte there is a race course which apparently
has not been patronized for some time. The track was overgrown with
rank vegetation and only a rickety judge’s stand told of its purpose. The
horse ‘Charley’ who carried us on our numerous drives through the en-
virons of Nassau, became reminiscent here where he had scored a few
victories.

Among the public buildings which are a credit to the colony may be
counted the prison which enjoys a beautiful location and is built of stone
and iron, spacious, high, cleanly, well-equipped. By courtesy of the pro-
vost marshall we were permitted to visit all its departments. Silence and
good order prevails everywhere. Some of the convicts are compelled to work
in the streets in gangs. They are distinguishable by the unique suits, sailor
caps, blouse and pantaloons one half blue and one half white. Like in all
communities, crimes are committed on these islands, mostly the result of
brawls, but larceny is the most common misdemeanor with which the law
has to deal.

The common resort of travelers is the Royal Victoria hotel, which has
received more praise than its architectural beauty deserves. The building
was erected in the sixties at the expense of $100,000 and the gay Southern-
ers were entertained there. Around each story of the building is a broad
veranda, and the structure is crowned by a plain glazed cupola from which
which can be obtained an extensive view of the harbor, city and island. During
the summer months, when I saw it, the hotel was not opened to guests.
It is the scene of great animation during the winter when the tourists are
there.

One who looks at the picturesque island would not imagine that war
could ever enter its precincts.

As you drive along the esplanade westward you encounter the remains
of an open battery on the sea shore. Three heavy pieces of ordnance, and
their carriages, lie about disabled and rusted or rather corroded, for the air
actually devours iron, so much so that a substitute less sensitive to air
has been desired.

On the ridge west of the city are the remains, well preserved, of Ft.
Charlotte. ‘A relic of the days when the subjects of the Catholic Queen
ruled these islands’. Its moat, thick walled magazine, underground barracks
and passages are of novel interest. The fort was built or at least completed
in the last century. At present a frame look-out on its walls serves as a
signal station at which flags are raised to give notice of incoming vessels.
I visited this historic spot with the acting governor, Capt. Jackson, one Sunday afternoon and shall never forget the magnificent view obtained from that point over the sea and island in the glory of a tropical sunset. Immediately back of the city and near the prison is Ft. Fincastle, a curious little structure shaped like the bow of a boat. The voice of its cannon is silent. The fort now serves as a signal station also. On the eastern end of the island are the remains of Ft. Montague, now merely the walls of the battery, however in good state of preservation. Within its walls are a few spiked guns, which in their day served to guard the entrance to Nassau harbor.

I trust I will be pardoned for dwelling at such length on the buildings of Nassau, but they are all so different from anything our eyes behold, so picturesque, so suggestive of the Old World that the interest attaching to them for one who has seen them demands an extensive description in order that the sketch may not lack completeness; and there are many who labor under the impression that these parts of the world are merely the haunt of a neglected; deteriorating race, the descendants of slaves and pirates.

Nor is there a drought of churches, schools, private and charitable institutions in this little community. Several religious denominations are well established on the island and have neat and tolerably well attended churches.

The negro element of the population is highly emotional, be it as a result of innate simplicity or of the passionateness of Southern nations. Their worship—at the denominational chapels—consists largely of Bible reading and song. They have a good ear for music and their songs may be heard at almost any hour of the day or night. In a way, singing seems to be the natural outpouring of their joyous disposition, natural as it is to the singing bird. It is striking, however, that almost all of their songs, be it at home, at work, or at sea, are of a religious character. Tourists are highly amused at the quaint repetitions and meaningless interjections which adorn the songs.

If we call to mind the fact that this is a British colony, we will not be surprised that Anglicanism—the 'Church Catholic'—is the leading form of religion there. No form of Christianity is denied liberty of operation. The Anglicans possess a spacious Cathedral and two or three subordinate churches under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Nassau. Priests and bishop have strong ritualistic proclivities and are distinguished as 'high' or 'low' according to the broader or narrower interpretation they give ecclesiastical canons. The Presbyterians, Wesleyans (Methodists), Baptists and African Episcopal Methodists have chapels. From statistics gathered last year (1893), it appears that there are about eighteen churches and chapels owned by Protestant denominations on the island.

Catholicism has just begun to gain a permanent footing in these parts. Centuries ago it is likely that here, as well as in all other parts of the West Indies, Franciscan missionaries labored for their Spanish countrymen. But during the buccaneering epoch New Providence was little more than a den of robbers and changed masters with the fitful tide of piratical successes. So that there was little call for religion. With the firm establishment of British rule and the calm of peace, the recognized Church of England took root in the shadow of the throne.
Among the population, however, a few Catholics were always to be found, perhaps remnants of Spanish settlers, or immigrants from the Southern States of the American Union. The pastoral care of this straggling herd was administered by an occasional visit of a clergyman from the South, probably from Charleston, S.C. Sources for information on this point are extremely meager. It is said by an old inhabitant that many years previous to the War—the American Civil War—an attempt was made to build a Catholic Church at Sandilands, to the east of Nassau, but that only the foundation was built, and that subsequently St. Anne’s Episcopal church was erected upon the same foundation.

Whenever services were held, it was in private residences or temporary structures. The only Catholic church on the Bahamas is St Francis Xavier’s, W. Hill St. Since the erection of the church, the mission was placed under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Archbishop of New York. The Cuban steamer lines offer better and more frequent opportunities for connection with the continent than the old lines in the South.

The church of St. Francis Xavier is a neat little Gothic structure, the seating capacity of which is scarcely adequate to the growing congregation. The structure is of coral limestone, the whiteness of which almost dazzles as it gleams from the group of tropical trees which surround it. The interior is plain and neat. Services are held every morning. They are exceptionally well attended. Sunday services are well attended and many non-Catholics make it a point to be present at the doctrinal discourse which is delivered in the afternoon. There you may see side by side old and young, the well dressed and scantily clad, the Government official and indigent citizen, regardless of racial or social lines—white, black and colored. I would here say that in the West Indies, ‘colored’ means white with an admixture of black, and is not synonymous with ‘negro’, as we have it.

The great task of the missionary here is to reclaim the children of the true flock. This he is required to do in the face of very peculiar obstacles and it is only the interest in the salvation of souls and expectation of the reward of the faithful servant of the Lord that sustains the courage of those who devote themselves to the mission. A tourist, writing of the condition of missionary work in Jamaica, says, ‘The few priests are overworked and are sad at heart to see the wide field of industry lying about them perforce neglected through lack of priests. Three American fathers (would it had been thirty-three!) arrived while I was there and were more than welcome. The colored race are impressionable, emotional, quick to respond to religious, though not very apt to be stable and in many places do not see a priest from one year’s end to the other’. (Helen Sweeney in The Catholic World, June, 1894).

It is undeniably an arduous task and only one who has actually been in contact with these people and has spent days and nights in close, filthy fishing craft while going to outlying islands to minister to spiritual wants, is in position to describe the discouragements such a life entails....

Since the mission was placed in the hands of the Benedictine Fathers by His Grace, the Archbishop of New York, it has been vastly improved. The rector has secured a permanent and convenient residence, the church has been repaired and decorated, four schools are in operation at Nassau and one at Andros Island. The good work is branching out in all directions.
Still it is a weary task. The Catholic missionary preaches the Gospel to the poor and besides aiming to gain their souls for the kingdom of Heaven, endeavors to improve their temporal condition. In the work of civilization, schools and churches are instrumental. In these quarters Christian charity finds a remunerative field.

In his report on the Mission Work among the Negroes of the Archdiocese of New York, Archbishop Corrigan writes: 'I visited Nassau last month for the purpose of administering the Sacrament of Confirmation. I found our Free Schools to be the best on the Island. They are attended by over 200 children, all of them Negroes and Catholics. Their parents are anxious that these children should have the benefit of a good education, and especially of that training and gentleness which is imparted by devoted religious teachers. The Sisters who conduct the schools are popular with all classes of the community. During my stay at Nassau, I visited the school several times, in company with other clergymen and was a witness to the surprising proficiency of the pupils and was present at an exhibition given by the colored children which was attended by the most distinguished residents of Nassau.... The hope of the future of this mission is in the schools and, therefore, with God's blessing it is proposed this year to erect another building, in order to accommodate the large number of applicants whom we are now obliged to refuse. During the month of November, 1891, a Kindergarten was opened in Nassau. It is already overcrowded. We propose to receive young children in this Kindergarten and then gradually lead them on to the other branches of an ordinary education.... I had the pleasure of confirming 20 children and adults, all of whom, except one, were colored, and all of whom, except this one, were converts. On Holy Saturday Father Chrysostom expects to baptize 20 more neophytes. As the colored Catholics of Nassau are few and poor, it is impossible for them to contribute to the support of the mission, so that for the present it must be carried on as a labor of Christian love and self-sacrifice.'

Speaking of the results of his work during the year 1892, the Rev. Rector writes Nov. 24, '92: 'My mission is making very satisfactory progress. Since January I have had 37 baptisms, mostly converts, and I have a class of 10 or 12 on hand now whose reception I will defer till after the holidays. On Oct. 24 I received a prominent family of eight persons. The father and mother and grown-up children are daily attendants at Mass, as are also the Governor and the Colonial Secretary....'

Something that every visitor wants to see are the sea gardens and I counted the hours until the opportunity to scan the marvels of the deep was given me. It was on August 4th. We engaged a skiff barely capable of holding four persons. A negro was at the oars. The waves caused by the gradual setting in of the tide tossed the frail vessel considerably, but the distance of three miles was covered in good time. The sea-gardens are located between the eastern extremity of Hog Island and Athol Island. It is indeed a revelation to behold the surpassing beauty of the scene on the bottom of the sea. The waters are of crystal clearness and transparency and bottom may be seen at a depth of twenty feet. During perfect calm the gardens may be seen without the aid of any appliances, but when the surface is disturbed a sea-glass, a wooden box with a bottom of window glass, is held some four inches beneath the surface or beyond the action of the waves. If the ancients believed the deep to be inhabited by mermaids they
UPON THESE ROCKS

had their inspiration from these scenes. The bottom is pure white—limestone. Here we behold a forest of curious vegetation.

But for the continual swaying of the skiff we might have spent hours looking upon the novel world beneath. The sun beat down unmercifully and we made for shore at the extremity of Hog Island where, in the shade of a cocoa-nut grove, we attacked the lunch basket, for it was an hour past noon.

It was then suggested that we take a bath. We strolled along the northern shore of the cay until we reached a wide sweep of white beach. The waves lazily lapped the sand and receded to return again in drowsy monotony. Some misgivings loomed up in my mind as to the advisability of such a diversion. Was not this the ocean? And the home of the shark and other fish whose character had been inherited by Black Beard and his ilk? A school of sharks had escorted our steamer for some distance on the downward voyage. Their appearance was rather unprepossessing. Besides my correspondent had once written of the Bahama sharks in this strain: 'Last week I inspected several man-eating sharks that were caught in the harbor. One had within him: one pig, one donkey-leg and hoof; several turtles and fish; one barrel head bearing the legend, 'Pillsbury's Best'; fruit cans, oyster cans, pieces of rope etc.' The recollection of the unsymmetrical and indelicate appetite of this marine citizen caused me to shudder, but I remembered I was not alone, and so timidly and carefully invaded this realm of Neptune for the space of about a half an hour. The water was pleasant. From this experience I can appreciate the propriety of the appellation of 'briny deep' which poets lavish upon the ocean.

For display of natural phenomena give me the South. Our upper section of the northern hemisphere is frozen two-thirds of the year. Death, symbolized by our winter, is ever before our eyes,—although frosts and snow, and cold and ice praise the name of the Lord. Day for day new wonders greet you in the manifestations of life and growth. From the mammoth Ceiba, or silk-cotton tree which is known the world over, to the tiny orchid which clings obstinately to some shrub in the impenetrable thicket, everything reveals the marvelous powers in nature. Terrestrial animals, if we except the hungry dog and toilsome donkey, do not abound here, though they probably do on the larger islands of the West Indies.

Feathered songsters did not appear to have cast their lot with the Nassauese. At the rectory there were two parrots, obstreperous, impudent 'kids' who began screaming and calling for breakfast at the most unconventional hour of four o'clock in the morning at the window of my bed room. The only means of quieting them was to serve the traditional cracker or a slice of banana which they will hold with one claw as with a hand, while they rest upon the other. While they are at meals, they are extremely irritable. They could not speak, or, if they could, they had shrewdly adopted some tongue to which I was a stranger. They required only a brief vocabulary. When they began scolding it was time to look around for crackers unless you preferred to sacrifice your peace of mind for an hour or so.

As the day of departure draws near, I began more definitely to realize how deeply I had become enamored of this little speck of earth. Not to speak of 'society' of which I gained but a few glimpses, there were so many
amiable people clustered upon those rocks that I cannot part without saying a good word of and for them.

Next to the Rev. Rector whose hospitality I enjoyed for the thirty days of my sojourn at Nassau and to whom I am deeply beholden, were the gentle Sisters whose life of sacrifice on this Mission won my admiration. In the midst of toil beneath a burning sun and among the negro children they were constantly cheerful—undeniably the fruit of prayer and mutual encouragement. To all appearances they had forgotten America and the homes they had left there to dwell in voluntary exile. One evening, just as the sun had ‘gone out’—to use insular parlance—some one played the familiar old tune of *Home, Sweet Home* on the convent piano, and I imagine I heard them humming the melody in accord with it. When the music was hushed the song ceased and there was an oppressive silence more eloquent than words.

I have previously mentioned the Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Henry M. Jackson, in connection with my visit to Fort Charlotte. Mr Jackson was a man esteemed by all citizens and was possessed of qualities which challenged universal respect. He was a capable official and during my stay, was the highest executive of the province, the Governor being absent....

The arrival of the Catholic priest, Father Chrysostom in Nassau in the late nineteenth century was, indeed, a happening. Nothing quite like him has been present as a religious presence either before or after his long tenure in the Bahamas. If Father Chrysostom had not become a Benedictine and a priest he most surely would have excelled as a journalist, educator or politician elsewhere during his lifetime. He often said he had printer’s ink in his blood and never passed up an opportunity to publish articles in the Nassau *Guardian* or *Tribune*, in *Der Nordstern*, the St. Cloud *Times*, the New York *Catholic Review*, the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. He was a Tractarian in that nineteenth century tradition of apologetics. Upon his arrival in Nassau he would often find broadsides and attacks on the Catholic Church thrust under his door during the night. He promptly replied in print on such questions of those times as the validity of Anglican orders, papal infallibility or the legitimacy of the Roman Church. It was not an ecumenical age among separated Christians and Father Chrysostom ever responded in kind. He found himself in an alien culture, a part of England’s righteous Protestant empire, and he rejoiced in every encounter that came his way. The little Catholic colony could not have had a more vigorous defender in their beleaguered position at that time.

Father Chrysostom worked late at night and into the morning when all was mostly quiet in Nassau. He read and wrote at first by lantern light. Below The Priory was a street which Father Chrysostom called ‘Damnation Alley’ because of the noise, brawling and wenching that was carried on there. He protested repeatedly but to no avail about these conditions. So he characteristically proceeded to buy up the property...
of these rowdy types and then re-sold the lots to more neighborly folk. The new priest gained much respect in the community by this forthright move.

Schreiner had a commanding presence. He arrived in Nassau when he was thirty-two years old, a vigorous, imposing man, black haired and bearded. He was a professional educator who was widely read in history and literature. He acquired immediately the best private library in Nassau which he lent to anyone interested and constantly quoted from in conversation, homilies and writings. Father Chrysostom subscribed to current periodical literature from England, America and Germany. He continually presented journals to his guests with a “Have you read this article” introduction which became a fond remembrance of all who met him. He longed for intellectual and spiritual companionship. It was a region that had no tradition of the intellectual life. The dominant Protestant clergy feared him personally and were unwilling to associate at that time, unfortunately, with a Roman Catholic priest.

Father Chrysostom remained for the next thirty-seven years a formidable figure in the Bahamas, respected always but feared or loved according to one’s frame of religious reference. It is difficult to imagine a stronger first founder. This man was equally at home at dinner in Government House, talking with businessmen on Bay Street, catechizing and charming Bahamian children, concerning himself with the smallest needs of the Sisters of Charity whom he highly respected and ever strove to help and advance, or delivering with impressive oratory, public lectures before the colony’s quaint social and reading circles. For example, on 27 January 1893 Father Chrysostom, according to the Nassau Guardian of that date, gave “an excellent lecture on ‘Taste’ at the inaugural meeting of the Bahamas Literary Union and Reading Circle, a society of young men whose ambition is to cultivate a taste for literature.” The meeting was honored by the presence of the governor and his lady and the elite of Nassau. This lecture was the first of a series Father Chrysostom delivered on books and reading before that society, whose honorary member he was.

The archbishops of New York beginning with Michael Corrigan, and continuing with Cardinals John Farley (1902-18) and Patrick Hayes (1919-38), had a deep respect and attachment for Father Chrysostom. There are constant references to their admiration for this extraordinary man, their vicar forane in the Bahama Catholic mission, whom they judged to be the superior of any priest in their jurisdiction in personality, mental acumen and dedicated zeal in a poor, unrewarding and lonely apostolate. Father Chrysostom became the personal friend, in turn, of each archbishop of New York, a rare achievement at any time in bishop-priest relations in the United States. The archbishops began to spend winter vacations in Nassau and always stayed with Father Chrysostom in the
far more Spartan quarters of The Priory rather than in the Royal Victoria or Colonial hotels. It was a strange admiration society that developed between the cardinals of New York and the German-American, mid-western, Benedictine missionary and his later associates in England’s distant colony.

Archbishop Corrigan donated to Father Chrysostom a large four-wheel carriage and a smaller carriage along with a retired Spanish race horse which they named “Charlie” as an in-house New York joke for Bishop Charles E. McDonnell of Brooklyn who took this pleasantry in stride as he enjoyed rides about Nassau. When Father Chrysostom went down Bay Street in his four-wheeler with Joseph Hamilton driving Charlie, everyone took notice and his many friends waved and exchanged news as they jogged along. Charlie was an intelligent animal and took candy from all except Joseph and Father Chrysostom when they tried to entice him from The Priory yard to put him to work.

These years of the 1890’s were halcyon in Nassau. Life was slowly paced as one day followed another without major incident. The climate and environment were a preternatural state if any exists on planet Earth. The Bahamians and nature were, for the most part, at one with each other. The drives of western civilization passed them by and were of no concern to the islanders. A current economic depression and the yearly hurricane season, nothing new in the Bahamas, were the main topics of conversation.

Mrs. Leslie Higgs of Nassau, well-known weekly gardening columnist for The Guardian, student of the Charity sisters in Nassau and at Mt. St. Vincent on the Hudson, recalls with fond memories those early days of Bahamian Catholicism. The Marconi Company had sent Mrs. Higgs’ father, Patrick Burns, to manage the laying of the first telephone cable between Nassau and Jupiter, Florida. Father Chrysostom was a close friend of the Burns family and Nellie Burns Higgs records some incidents of the period:

I knew dear Father Chrysostom so well as a child. I was a little afraid of him because he was a big man with great black eye-brows and beard, but very kindly deep down. You were a little afraid of him when you saw him coming, especially if you hadn’t been a good girl for the day. He was one of the finest of men. He had a marvelous brain, almost too much for the Bahamas in those days. There was no one here who could match him. He did much for these islands. He kept at it, or as he kept repeatedly saying ‘inculcate’ from the altar. In time we got religion. I’ve had it ever since and am awfully proud of it. . . .

St. Francis Xavier was the only Catholic church in the Bahamas at that time. It held exactly a hundred people because for my wedding, believe it or not, there were exactly a hundred guests and each pew was filled with six to each pew. The choir was across the back of the church.
It was in Bishop Bernard’s time that the church was improved and increased in size. I remember the two of us laying the tiles to the entrance to the church. It was really quite fantastic. We got down on our knees to lay the small tiles, which as you walk into the cathedral, you glance down and see. I did the stations of the cross, with the help of Fr. Arnold Mondloch, O.S.B. Father Arnold was one of the finest priests of our islands, one of the finest that ever lived. He helped me do the gold leafing which I had never done before. He was very clever with that. I’ve been doing the statues through the years, which I really enjoy. Bishop Bernard called me one day and said that one of the statues had no fingers and no toes. The priests were all at me. It had to be done for Christmas. Would I do it? Of course I did, not very well, but at least it was in place for Christmas....

My father was Patrick Burns who came from Ohio. He was loaned to Nassau by the Marconi Company of America to install the wireless from Nassau to Jupiter. The night previous to the opening, the bally thing wouldn’t work. So mother had us three girls, by this time there were three daughters, praying and praying. The next morning my father got up at 2:00 o’clock and went down to the building and fixed it. He stayed to install it. There are so many amusing stories about the telephone. There’s one about the woman who came in and said, ‘Mr. Burns, would you like some eggs today?’ He said, ‘Just a minute, I’ll ask my wife.’ He called mother in a little box shaped thing which they used in those days. Mother answered and said, ‘Yes, I would like some eggs.’ And the woman said, ‘Mr. Burns, you don’t keep your wife in that little box!’ One of the messages to be sent from one of the women who came in the telegraph office was, ‘Is you dead?’ This went over the air you know....

There definitely was prejudice against Catholics. Not in my childhood, but as I grew older, I’d sense prejudice. That has all disappeared. People realize the great good that the sisters and the priests have done in the Bahamas, especially by their example and by the wonderful work they have done for our children. This is really telling today because Bahamian people are said to be very fine, and I think they are. This influence through teaching by the nuns, the early teaching of the children, has an awful lot to do with it.

Father Chrysostom had quite an impact on the islands, on the people of Nassau, because they all admired him a great deal. They admired his knowledge and he was very free in giving help and advice to many people of the colony. Mother and the three of us went to tea with him every Sunday afternoon. I remember getting all dressed up for tea with him every Sunday afternoon. I remember getting all dressed up for tea with my mother, a Mrs. Green and her daughter Marie, who eventually became a nun. We would go to The Priory, and there we would sit being very particular and fussy. We wouldn’t dare giggle or do anything because Father Chrysostom said he wouldn’t put up with it. Besides my mother would keep looking at me all the time as much as to say, don’t you dare be naughty at tea time. But then we would sneak away and go and climb almost to the top of the bungalow, Dunmore Bungalow, which was then being built. I remember that so well. There was an artist, Professor Straub, whom Father Chrysostom invited to come to Nassau. He was a most delightful old fellow, he and his wife. I’m afraid I was a nuisance to him because I loved art in any form. I was always watching people paint. I would go to the Bungalow to watch and see....
Father Chrysostom had so many beautiful paintings which I admired a great deal. There was one called 'The Sandstorm' which impressed me as a child very much. It was so violent in color. I never sort of grew out of it... The work he did for so many years in the colony was what really got the Church going in Nassau. He worked very hard at it, had a great many friends and they all respected him. Sir Etienne Dupuch was one of his greatest friends in the Bahamas and Father Chrysostom certainly helped him a great deal with his writing. Father Chrysostom was the pioneer who did the most for the Church of the Bahamas.

Towards the end of his life, during the first World War, he became quite depressed. Being German by birth, it had an effect on him and the people in the colony stupidly turned a bit against him. Towards the end of his life he went to San Salvador and lived the rest of his life there. But he would come to Nassau every so often and we were always very glad to see him. He would come to play cards with my father. Altogether he was really a giant of a man. There was no question about that. Everybody sort of looked up to him, except in the declining years of his life. Mentally he lacked stimulus to keep his mind active. None of us could match him in any way, but this had an effect on his later years. He read a great deal. He had a wonderful library. That was one thing he did have. When he left The Priory all that he had was dismantled. Years later I found the picture of 'The Sandstorm' tucked away in The Priory cellar all dusty. And I really did a lot of reminiscing when I saw it. I thought how awful it would be if Father Chrysostom could see one of his choice pictures, you know. There it was discarded.

Mrs. Leslie Higgs expresses the reaction to Catholic beginnings from the white sector of the Bahamian people. A reaction from the Negro Bahamian society of those times is supplied by Irvin W. Bowen, successful contractor and convert of Father Chrysostom. The Bowen family has long been an independent and self-sufficient clan to this day in Nassau. Irvin’s grandfather on his mother’s side was George Alexander McGregor, early resident justice on the island of Inagua. Irvin Bowen stated:

Father Chrysostom wasn’t afraid of anyone despite the fact that ninety percent of the Bahamians at that time were against him. There were three types in the Bahamas: Whites, Mulattoes and Blacks. The Blacks were mostly Yourabas, Masendi and Congos. All of these Bahamians had never seen anything like Father Chrysostom.

I used to miss church services as a youngster and run away to the fort on Sunday. One Sunday I got sick and my uncle said I was punished for missing services. I went to Christ Church (Anglican) but I didn't like the service and left. I then went to St. Francis Xavier for the 11 a.m. Mass. There would only be about twenty-five people in attendance at that time. Among the first congregation were Justina Dean, Mr. Coakley, an American merchant, Beatrice McGregor, Yorick Cleare, the paymaster of public works, Sarah Wright, James and Sarah Watkins, Victoria Huyler, John Finley, the Duncombes and Carl Albury.

Father Chrysostom would speak five minutes on the Gospel of the day and he said more in that time than priests today could say in a week. He spoke on the ten commandments of God which we don’t hear about any
more. I became a Catholic because I was impressed by what I saw and heard at St. Francis Xavier.

The Catholic Church in the Bahamas got started because they helped the people. Crates of clothing were brought in and distributed. This was a real social apostolate. All the Charity sisters did was work for the poor. They would regularly cook a large quantity of soup and anyone could come and have some. They were high society ladies but never at any time made distinctions in their charity. Father Chrysostom often said that the reason Xavier Academy at first took only white students, although the sisters also operated a free school for all Bahamians, was that the Whites paid. There was no money to operate a school otherwise. That was the only reason. Xavier’s was integrated as soon as both colored as well as white paid for private education. There was much talk that the Whites would leave if the Colored came to Xavier’s. A few did withdraw their children, but not many. Integration was brought about early and the Whites returned. But it came only when the Colored could help pay the costs of private education. Fifty percent of the people were poor and this has been forgotten today because of the prosperity which we have had up to now.

Another point that some forget today is that people wanted to get their children into the Catholic schools because they were good schools. More than that, they were the best schools in the Bahamas. People who hated the Catholic Church all of their lives because of things they had been told about Catholics still were proud of having attended Catholic schools. It was a strange thing. I remember when I was doing masonry work, I was a master mason, in the home of Edwin Moseley, brother of Miss Mary Moseley, editor of The Guardian, the center of Protestant, white, establishment life in the Bahamas. Mrs. Edwin Moseley had attended the Sisters of Charity school in Nassau. In that home she had candles and a rosary which she said regularly but she could not possibly have become a Catholic, such was the social pressure at that time. Much of these attitudes have changed today.

When the cardinal archbishop of New York came to Nassau to visit the Catholic mission it was the major event of the year. People would stand on the top of the hill just to get a look at Cardinals Farley or Hayes. And Cardinal O’Connell of Boston’s annual stay at The Hermitage was waited by all, whether they admitted it or not.12

What was the nature and character of the 85 percent Negro population of the Bahamas that Father Chrysostom found himself living with and beginning to serve as a pastor? The Bahamas were blessed with a multi-racial people. Father Chrysostom and the Sisters of Charity from New York, as expatriate, white Americans, understood for the most part the attitudes and life-style of the 15 percent mixed minority of several racial origins. They had to grow in understanding and appreciation of the Negro majority. It was an opportunity to grow in respect for the traditions and outlook of the Bahamian Negro. They were presented with the challenge, as they made their first beginnings in Nassau, to live out the Catholic implications of the Lord’s message and example. The record of commitment in education and social services from the very
Nassau's St. Francis Xavier Church with The Priory in the background, 1891.

Sisters of Charity's Academy and Convent, Nassau.

First picture of Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., with Fr. Bernard J. Reilly of New York and pioneer servers at St. Francis Xavier: left to right, R. M. de Gregory, Monty Halket, Mike Ryan and D. J. de Gregory, March, 1891.
Seining fish, all the family helps when the nets are brought to shore.

Conch shells and fish nets on a dock at Hope Town, Abaco. Conch is the popular seafood in the Bahamas.

A crawfishing boat off Grand Bahama. The water is so clear that crawfish can be scooped up with a net.
Straw weavers of the Bahamas.

The problems of clearing land in the Bahamas: this land has been scarified to give greater tillage depth.

Cheerful after a six mile walk with a heavy load of produce.
Andros Island. The settlements are strung along the coast with a marsh dividing the settlement and the forest.

Spanish Wells on St. George's Cay has the greatest density of population of the Bahamas.
beginning and at every step by these Catholic missionaries is public history. They were a humanizing force in the community. They respected the value and dignity of each person whom they served.

The startling message for its time of the English Catholic layman, Magistrate L. D. Powles, was at hand for the missionaries to read. *The Land of the Pink Pearl* had been published in 1888 just before their arrival, and Father Chrysostom guarded carefully his copy in The Priory’s library. He quoted it constantly and made it required reading for all who worked in the Catholic mission. He tried to obtain more copies of this book which had been so successfully and rapidly rushed into the rare book category by irate controlling interests in the Bahamas accused by Powles of manipulating and holding down the Negro on the islands.

Magistrate Powles gives the most honest and revealing picture of Bahamian Negro social patterns of the period. His testimony is worthy of some extensive quote:

The coloured population lives quite apart from the white, in suburbs of the city, commonly called settlements. The principal of these is Grant’s Town, besides which there are Bain Town, De Lancey Town, the Eastern and Western Settlements, familiarly spoken of as ‘to the East’ard and to the West’ard,’ and others, as Fox Hill and Adelaide. The two latter are at some distance from Nassau, and were originally settled by native Africans rescued from slavers. I believe the last occasion on which a cargo of slaves was rescued by our men-of-war and landed at Nassau was about twenty-five years ago. They were 300 in number, and a great part of them are still alive...

Mr. James C. Smith once asked me to come with him and see what ‘a lazy nigger could do with a bit of coral rock.’ He took me to visit one David Patten, a full-blooded African, who has created a farm of a few acres, on which he successfully cultivates a great variety of things. But then he has been a well-to-do and well-fed man for years, and there is more in this question of feeding the African than appears at first sight. It is all very well to call him lazy, but he is by nature a large eater, and unless he gets a considerable quantity of food he cannot work. The present race are poorly fed, and their condition in this respect is not likely to improve. The casual observer imagines them to be well-to-do, because in the Bahamas the negro can exist, and laugh and sing and dance and appear contented and happy on very little. This is due partly to the genial temperature of the islands, partly to an inordinate power of sleep which he possesses, and which makes up to him for a great deal.

In the slave days the food given to the slaves was no doubt coarse in quality, but they had as much as they could eat, and got it regularly, and no one can compare the darkies born in slavery, or even those born shortly after that time, with the present race, without seeing at once that the latter are physically inferior in every respect. Unfortunately too, whilst the quality is depreciated, the quantity increases in a most unhealthy proportion. It is strange that the great and good men who fought the battle of emancipation could not see that, unless they were prepared to leave it as a sacred charge to their descendants to watch over and protect the coloured
race for fifty years at least, they had better have left them as they were. As it was, they merely abandoned them to the tender mercies of a race, who cared not whether they lived or died, except for what they could get out of them, who began by owing them a grudge for being free at all, and were determined, if they could prevent it, that the emancipated slaves and their descendants should never rise to be anything higher than hewers of wood and drawers of water.

At present there are but few large producers and few people bring more than very small quantities of stuff to market at a time. If one strolls towards Grant's Town in the early morning, one is sure to meet numbers of coloured women with large trays on their heads, but generally nearly empty. Now and then you may meet one with her tray piled high with bananas, oranges, vegetables and other things, all laid neatly out in layers, but such wealth as this is uncommon. More frequently they have just a few bananas or oranges or a couple of cabbages. They are often accompanied by children carrying palmetto thatch on large palmetto leaves, which are also sold in the market, to be separated into fine pieces and made into hats; some of these hats are elaborate and very neatly made, but heavy to wear as compared with our best English straw. The Nassau market is always well supplied with fruits and vegetables, but nearly everything that comes into it is brought piecemeal on the people's heads....

The principal food of the coloured population is Indian corn, grits, and fish. Grits, Nuttall's Dictionary says, are 'the coarse parts of meal, oats coarsely ground, sand or hard sandstone.' The grits sold in Nassau come from the States, and are, as a rule, of the very worst quality, containing probably some of all the three ingredients mentioned in Nuttall's definition. The people boil it and make with it what is called 'hominy,' but very different from the dish known by that name in the United States. Meat, eggs, and milk they rarely know the taste of, for there are only just enough cows to supply the wants of the richer portion of the population, and though they all keep fowls they cannot afford to eat either them or their eggs. Fruits and plantains they get in plenty, but sugar-cane, which their hearts love, is comparatively speaking rare in the island of New Providence, and therefore dear. When they do get meat, it is generally pork, and such pork! A Nassau hog (the word 'pig' is rarely heard) is a kind of cross between a small wild boar and tapir, for he is usually hairy, and the length of his snout is phenomenal. In fact, they seem generally to be running to seed, and have so little flesh on their bones, one might imagine all the food they ate went to increase their weedy and lengthy appearance. The cheapest tea is 4s. a pound, and coffee, though cheaper, is unreasonably dear and execrably bad. 'Now just look ahere, boss,' said a working carpenter, who was in the act of eating his dinner, 'what sort of stuff a man has to eat here'—mouth full of grits which he was rapidly grinding finer. 'Why 'tain't fit for hawgs. You know that yourself, boss; this stuff ain't no more'n fit to feed hawgs. Why, I've been over to New Orleans, and I didn't see nobody eating grits there at all, not a soul! Over there, that some sort of a country to live in, and they frow grits to the hawgs, but they don't eat it theirselves.'

Besides the wretched food they get, one of the great causes of the physical deterioration of the coloured people in the island of New Providence is the very unhealthy nature of the places in which they are com-
pelled to live. This is due mainly to white selfishness and meanness. After
the slave days, the coloured people were of no further use as chattels, so
one of the means adopted to extort money from them was to make them
pay rent for shanties in the most unhealthy parts of the city, where nobody
else would live. Yet there are waste spaces on the higher ground belonging
to the State, which might be utilized to establish settlements where the
coloured people might live and bring up children who would grow into
healthy men and women.

It is impossible to look towards Grant's Town in the early morning,
at any season of the year, without finding it enveloped in a dense white fog,
showing the unhealthy, swampy nature of the ground. Neither do the
people's habits help matters. They are very fond of air in their own way
and at their own time, but if the slightest drop of rain is falling, or if they
want to sleep, they will shut up every door and window, and stuff up every
hole and cranny. After a night spent in this unwholesome way, they will
get up quite early in the morning, open everything, and go out into the
damp, misty air with scarcely a rag of clothing on, and bare feet. What
wonder if, even in that climate, they become consumptive?

The whole question of the negro settlements is one that should be
looked into by a Royal Commission. The people ought to be settled on the
high ground, and the present negro settlements converted into vast gardens,
for which they are admirably suited, as it is just this unhealthy soil which
is best for cultivation. All the roses in Nassau, except those in one or two
private gardens, come from Grant's Town. There are no flower-shops or
flower-stalls, and one man has a monopoly of the entire rose trade. He does
a roaring business all through the winter, for the Americans are fond of
flowers, and habitually make presents of large bouquets to one another. In
the early part of 1887, a steamer ran regularly between Nassau and
Jacksonville in Florida, and every trip she used to carry away large
quantities of roses from Nassau, laid upon ice to preserve them during the
thirty hours' passage.

Inside these settlements the coloured people lead a life apart, and have
some curious customs and amusements. The Africans still retain their
tribal distinctions, and are divided into Yourabas, Egbas, Ebos, Congos, etc.
Every August some of these tribes elect a queen whose will is law on certain
matters. I doubt if any of them have the least notion who Guy Fawkes was,
or what he did, but they would not omit observing Guy Fawkes' Day on
any consideration. Every 5th of November his effigy is carried in procession
with bands of music and torches, and solemnly hung on a gallows prepared
for that purpose. The darkies are fond of processions, and never miss an
opportunity of getting one up.

About Christmas time they seem to march about day and night with
lanterns and bands of music, and they fire off crackers everywhere. This
is a terrible nuisance, but the custom has the sanction of antiquity, though
no doubt it would have been put down long ago if the white young
gentlemen had not exhibited a taste for the same amusement.

They are very fond of dancing, and I am afraid no amount of
preaching or singing hymns will ever be able to put down the dance-houses,
which are terrible thorns in the side of both magistrate and inspector of
police.
A form of open-air dancing has also a great hold upon them. It is called a 'fire-dance,' and is, no doubt, a relic of savage life. I had heard so much about these fire-dances that I arranged with the sergeant of police to have one got up for my especial benefit, and I went to see it in company with a Russian gentleman who happened to be staying at the hotel. The people formed a circle, and a fire was lighted in their midst. The music consisted of two drums that would not work unless frequently warmed at the fire. The company clapped their hands without ceasing all through the dance, chanting all the while in a sort of dreary monotone two African words 'Oh kindoiah! kindoiah! Mary, come along!' When the dance was about half through, the refrain was suddenly changed to 'Come down, come down,' repeated over and over again in the same dreary monotone. Every now and then a man or a woman, or a couple together would rush into the centre of the circle and dance wildly about.

Mr. Drysdale estimates that all the houses in Grant's Town could be built twice over for about £400. Perhaps his estimate is correct, but there is as much difference between the houses of the richer and poorer inhabitants of these settlements as there is in most other communities. The interior of a well-to-do coloured man's house—David Patten's for instance—is neat and clean, with glass windows and nice white ceilings. There is always as much furniture as he can cram in, and the most showy coloured prints and ornaments he can get hold of are hanging on the wall or dispensed about the room. If you are admitted to view the bedroom, you will be struck at once with the snowy whiteness of the bed-linen, and the remarkable stiffness of the starched pillowcases, bordered all round with lace. From this height the shanties gravitate downwards to those of the poorest, which are little better than collections of boards knocked together and thatched with palmetto-straw, with just a bed, table, and chair, and a few cooking utensils, by way of furniture.

They are fond of pictures, and if they cannot get the gaudy-coloured prints in which their souls delight, they will paste over their walls with anything they can get hold of, cuttings from English and American illustrated papers, or fashions from Myra's or The Young Ladies' Journal. Where they pick them up is a mystery, for such things are not easily obtainable in Nassau.

I saw a good deal of the inner life of the coloured people of Nassau, for—with a view to book-making—I wandered about their settlements, and in and out of their houses at all hours. I was often warned I should lose my character if I was seen so much about these quarters of the city, but, having an object in view, I was obliged to disregard public opinion. The origin of the extraordinary collection of mongrels that inhabit this city and its suburbs and pass for dogs, must ever remain a puzzle. Mr. Drysdale says they are 'the most fearful and wonderful production of nature.' Like the majority of living things in Nassau they are half starved, and spend their nights wandering about the wealthier parts of the city, trying to pick up scraps. Their howlings, and the crowing of the cocks, who invariably commence at 11 p.m., and continue for several hours without ceasing, make night hideous. Some time ago a dog-tax was imposed by the Legislature, but it became so unpopular, and so extremely difficult to collect that it had to be ignominiously abandoned. Wherever you go in the coloured settlements, dogs run out every minute to bark at you, but I never heard of
their biting any one, and they run away if you merely turn round and look at them.

Grant's Town also abounds in grog-shops, licensed and unlicensed, for the licensing laws in the Bahamas are so absurdly stringent that they have defeated their own ends, and the people get drink at all hours without any interference on the part of the police, through the rewards for giving information in these cases are very substantial. And yet there is very little drunkenness among the lower crust. All through the Christmas holidays there was not a single case come into the police-court that arose through drink.

On Sundays and holidays the coloured women usually wear cotton dresses of various shades of blue, rose-pink, and white, the latter predominating. Occasionally you see a coloured lady grandly attired in silk, satin, and velveteen, or even velvet, with a fashionable hat, and probably coloured stockings and tight white boots or shoes. They nearly always wear shady hats, mostly trimmed with white, with some colour introduced, and on the whole their dress is pretty and tasteful, and very suitable to the climate.

They do not usually wear shoes or stockings except on Sundays, high days and holidays, and then their great delight is to pinch their feet into a pair of white boots very much too small for them, which cause them to walk with difficulty. By nature they are noiseless in their movements, but some few of them will put on shoes even on weekdays, and then they generally get hold of a pair of old ones very much too large for them, and always down at heel, in which they shuffle along, making a cloud of dust, and a clatter that you can hear half a mile off. They would be much better and more comfortable without, but of course they must try and emulate the white folks.

The men will save up their scanty earnings to buy a suit of broadcloth and a tall black hat for Sundays, in a climate where nothing is so suitable as a white suit and a straw hat.

Mr. Drysdale observes there is something about the West Indies that is fatal to the tall silk hat, and that he never saw one in the tropics on the head of a native, either in Mexico, Cuba, or the Bahamas, that was not a generation behind the correct shape ....

I had many conversations during these circuits with people of all classes about the state of the country. Everywhere I found a universal concensus of opinion that the only possible chance for them is some radical change that will destroy the present form of Government, either by turning the colony into a Crown colony or otherwise. Scarcely a single one of the out-islands is at present represented in the Assembly by local men, and in nearly every case they return Nassau merchants, whose only interest in them is to make as much as they can out of them. The common formula of the colored people when speaking on this subject is, 'We want to be governed from England like Jamaica'—at least such is my experience. Except from the lips of my friend, Mr. James C. Smith, I do not remember to have heard any allusion to the idea of a West Indian Confederation. Of course they have the suffrage, and the remedy is theoretically in their own hands. This they know and admit freely, but they say that practically they cannot return local men. First, because the people of the out-islands, white and black alike, have been so long ground down under the merciless iron
heel of the Nassau merchants—who act as agents for them in almost every
action of their lives, and who, as far as they can, put every difficulty in the
way of their getting anything without their assistance, that they have lost
all habit of independent action. Organization for mutual defence and support
they have not yet been educated up to. Secondly, because few men in the
out-islands can afford the expense of a session in Nassau even if elected,
and I need hardly add that where the election is by open voting, and most
of the electors are in debt to the Nassau merchants, it is unlikely that,
extcept in isolated cases, any one ever will be elected without their full
approval and consent.

Of course the ballot would do much for them, but where the bulk of
the electors are marksmen, even that would hardly be a complete cure, and
cure or no cure, they will never get it under the present regime. Of race
prejudice in the out-islands, except at Harbour Island, Eleuthera, and Abaco,
I did not see much....

I have alleged that there is an obscure corner of the Empire where,
under nominally free and independent institutions, a people are ground down
and trodden on by a narrow Oligarchy who care not whether they live or
die, so long as they can plunder them, and where, after half a century of
emancipation, something scarcely distinguishable from slavery is still exist­
ent. I have alleged that under the British flag, within twenty years, men
have been sold into actual slavery to Surinam, that men of colour are
denied equal justice before the law when their opponents are white, and
have even been punished as misdemeanants for daring to enter the House
of God by the door reserved for the white man!

The indictment is a serious one. It is either true or false. If true, have
I not made out a case for a Royal Commission? If false, then let that
condemnation fall on me which should be meted out with no unsparing hand
to those who commit themselves to reckless statements.

Perhaps some persons may object against me that after all the colony
is so insignificant and unimportant, that it is unreasonable to expect the
Imperial Government to waste time and money on inquiring into its
condition as long as it remains undisturbed by any active internal
commotion, and cite to me the well-known maxim of my own profession:
De minimis non curat lex? To such I reply, in the language of Mr. Froude,
'If I am asked the question, What use are 'The Bahamas' to us? I decline
to measure it by present or possible future marketable value; I answer
simply that it is part of the dominions of the Queen. If we pinch a finger,
the smart is felt in the brain. If we neglect a wound in the least important
part of our persons, it may poison the system. Unless the blood of an
organized body circulates freely through the extremities, the extremities
mortify and drop off, and the dropping off of any colony of ours will not be
to our honour but our shame. 'The Bahamas' seem but a small thing, but our
larger colonies are observing us, and the world is observing us, and what we
do or fail to do works beyond the limits of its immediate operation. The mode
of management which produces the state of things which I have described
cannot possibly be a right one.... We are obliged to keep these islands,
for it seems that no one will relieve us of them; and if they are to remain
ours, we are bound so to govern them that our name shall be respected
and our sovereignty shall not be a mockery.'
The Catholic Church at first made little progress among the people described by Magistrate Powles above. Father Chrysostom within a short time became a major force in Bahamian consciousness, but he was not quick to undertake a plan of mass conversion. At first he concentrated on offering a good liturgy, educational and social services to all people. The free schools operated by the Sisters of Charity flourished and at once became known as the best educational centers on New Providence. By 1894, 325 students were enrolled in these schools. Conversions were slow but consistent; in 1892 Father Chrysostom had thirty-seven baptisms, almost as many as the total Catholic population when he arrived the previous year. In 1893 there were eighty-two Catholics in Nassau. The first out island mission was opened on Andros Island on February 25 of that same year, and a catechist, James Martin from Brooklyn, was stationed there for five years.

When the newly ordained priests, Fathers Gabriel and Melchior, arrived in June, 1894, Father Gabriel went to this first mission at Andros and built by hand St. Saviour’s Chapel at the Salvador Point settlement. Father Melchior was stationed at Sacred Heart Chapel in eastern Nassau and had a stone church completed there by 1897. In his article in the 1908 edition of *Catholic Encyclopedia* on the Bahamas, Father Chrysostom reported that in 1906 there were one church and two chapels, three Benedictine fathers, nine Sisters of Charity, one academy, three free schools with an attendance of 470 pupils. The total Catholic population was 360.

For thirty years the Bahama mission work was of this nature. Catholic life centered around these three parish centers. Additional mission stations were established, but the lack of priests prohibited permanent advance in new areas. The hope, as Archbishop Corrigan reported, was in the Catholic schools where the great majority of the Negro children were not Catholic. Support had to come from the United States as the Negro Catholics of the Bahamas were few and extremely poor. Hardship and self-sacrifice were the lot of the Benedictine monks and Sisters of Charity. The official colonial governmental set were Anglicans, and there was much prejudice against Catholicism to be overcome among both the ruling white minority and the colored Protestant majority. But the Catholic missionary group of three Benedictines and nine Sisters of Charity did not lose heart, as Father Chrysostom stated in the same article:

The growth of Catholicism in the Bahamas is slow but constant and sure. We are now beginning to have Catholic families, which place the work on a surer basis and make it possible to hold converts. Where there have been isolated conversions from Protestant families, a few have become backsliders owing to the many obstacles placed in the way of practising their religion, but where whole families or a majority of the members of a family have been converted, there is little danger of this occurring.
The reason for the careful and slow development of the Catholic mission was based on a conviction that strong Catholic family life had to be first developed. A sudden or emotional turning to the Lord Jesus was not the way to encourage a permanent Catholic tradition as a way of life. Then there was the temperament and convictions of Archbishop Corrigan to work with in the Bahamas. The New York archbishop was a leader of the conservative and traditionalist forces in the late nineteenth century American Catholic Church. He continued throughout his episcopacy in strong opposition to the liberal, progressive, influences of such Americanizers as Gibbons, Ireland, Keane, O'Connell, the Paulists, Catholic University of America and the Holy Cross fathers at Notre Dame University. Corrigan had been “Romanized” during his seminary training at the North American College in Rome. He took a profoundly conservative view of progress and also entertained grave suspicions about American society. Robert D. Cross says of Corrigan:

A cautious even timid man, Corrigan had been sheltered by his affluent family from acquiring intimate experience with American life that might have altered his stereotyped projections of its basic characteristics... even had his professional disposition been more liberal. Corrigan would necessarily have to shape policy to accord with the traditionalism and conservatism of his immigrant charges. At the same time he was so readily deferred to by the New York Tammany machine that he felt no need to seek working alliances with non-Catholic elements. While courteous and charitable towards those outside the Church, he did not wish his priests to spend a large share of their energies in seeking converts and he forthrightly opposed all suggestions that the Church would modify its teachings or behavior for that purpose.

Father Chrysostom fully understood these attitudes of the metropolitan whose Catholic jurisdiction included the Bahamas. He also understood that he could in no way alienate Archbishop Corrigan or lose his New York ecclesiastical contacts if he were to obtain donations for the infant Bahamian mission. Schreiner was more than conscious that he could not rely on the Minnesota Benedictines for help since he had effectively separated himself at a great distance from the scene of his previous controversies. Accordingly, Father Chrysostom studiously pursued a policy of not making converts to Catholicism or proselytizing among existing Christian denominations. He pastorally cared for the small flock of Catholics on the island while developing Catholic educational centers which were open to all students who applied to these primary schools. These schools would steadily attract their students and parents to Catholicism as time went on. Father Chrysostom was certainly not the classical type of Catholic priest that Protestants traditionally warned against as representative of Rome’s organized plan to bring all ‘heretics and schismatics’ back into the fold.
Etienne Dupuch, close friend and eventual convert to the Catholic Church through the influence of Father Chrysostom, graphically details his own personal confusion at the seeming reticence of Schreiner to receive him into the Church:

‘How and when did I become a Catholic?’ I suppose that this is a natural question that needs to be answered. This is an interesting story in itself...

I suppose I was part of the hatred that had made Father Chrysostom’s life here almost unbearable because I had been reared to believe that Catholics were agents of the devil. Whenever I saw Fr. Chrysostom or nuns on the street I imagined that they had cloven hoofs and tails neatly coiled around in their habits so that they would not show.

On his deathbed I promised my father that I would carry on The Tribune. He had started The Tribune because he felt that the colony needed a really public newspaper. All other papers published up to that time had served the interests of a small clique. The Guardian, for example, was the exclusive mouthpiece of a super-duper social class. To get your name in The Guardian...except in the court news...it seemed almost necessary to go through a blood-letting ceremony. If you bled ‘blue’ you were in. It was a newspaper for the blue-bloods, nothing less.

My father recognized the special needs of the coloured people. ‘You must help coloured people,’ he told me. ‘They won’t understand, they won’t appreciate what you may do for them. But it is your job in life.’

He had suffered the bitter pangs of ingratitude and so he knew whereof he spoke and he didn’t want me to be surprised when I got cut down by people I had helped.

I promised him that I would...although I hated the thought of it. I had seen what he had suffered and felt that all I wanted in life was to be a simple farmer, completely removed from the muddy mainstream of life.

My father had planned to send me to Canada for training but his heart cracked under the strain of trying to publish an independent newspaper and he died at the age of 44. My mother pre-deceased him. She was only 36.

Three years in the army after my father’s death had relieved me of this responsibility. Secretly I hoped I would never have to do this job. My older brother Gilbert had carried on the paper during that period. He was an artist and temperamentally unsuited to the rough and tumble of public conflicts. He was kindness personified, the finest, if the least successful, of our family. We often said of Gilbert that he wouldn’t hurt a fly.

The paper was alive but barely breathing when I came home from the war at the age of 20.

Apart from being a printer I had had no training to equip me for the job of editing a newspaper. The extent of my education was the level offered by the Boys Central School, where my friend Bosfield Johnson was always at the head of the class. While I had a place at the foot, I was considered the dunce of the class.

I knew that if I was to carry on The Tribune and make it a telling force in the colony I had to find a private tutor. I had shown a natural aptitude for writing. That was why my father had selected me to carry on his work. I think he was influenced in this decision by some sort of his old
cronies as a result of a letter I had written to the paper when I was just a little shaver.

My job was to find someone who would teach me. No one was prepared to help, mostly because my father had been considered a rebel by powerful elements in the island. And the people in authority were determined to keep The Tribune down.

By that time I had become a member of Harold Chipman's soccer football team and we were playing against the Scouts, headed by the Rev. Percy Searle, a Methodist Minister who was headmaster of Queen's College. I became friendly with Mr. Searle. He was prepared to help but not in the way I wanted.

'Why do you want to learn to write?' he asked me. 'We'll write the paper for you and you can print it.'

This was exactly what my father wouldn't want. He had been a strict Protestant but he wouldn't want The Tribune to come under sectarian influence.

While on leave in England from my regiment on the western front, I met a granduncle who had left Nassau when my father was a baby in the arms and never returned. He had married a charming French woman. They were childless. He was a man of independent means. He wanted me to come to live with him in England when I got out of the army. The Rev. J. C. Wippel was chaplain to my battalion and I was his batman while we were in Belgium. He had been recalled to Barbados on the death of the headmaster of Codrington College to fill the vacancy. He wanted me to join him at Codrington. He offered me a scholarship with the promise that he would send me on to Durham University in England...with which Codrington was affiliated...after completing the course at Codrington.

I had just about made up my mind that it was physically impossible for me to carry out the promise I had made to my father. I was considering whether I should go to my wealthy uncle in England or to Fr. Wippel at Codrington. I had just about settled on Codrington when Fr. Chrysostom stepped into the picture.

When I came home from the war I found that my younger sister Evelyn was attending Xavier's Academy. I was furious with my family for sending my precious baby sister to a Papist school where I felt certain she would come under the influence of agents of the devil.

Every Friday Fr. Chrysostom visited Xavier's. After one of his visits Evelyn came home with a message for me.

'Fr. Chrysostom,' she said, 'told me he would like to meet my soldier brother.'

'You tell him I say to go to hell,' I exploded.

She didn't tell him what I said because every Friday after that she came home with the same message. And everytime I gave her the same answer.

After awhile the situation started to become embarrassing. My family got after me.

'Go and see the old man,' they urged, 'and get it over with. Do it just for Evelyn's sake. It can't hurt you. It is embarrassing for her.'

I resisted stubbornly for a long time. Finally I agreed to go. I phoned and he gave me an appointment.
When I rang the bell at The Priory a strong Protestant fury was raging in my heart. I was ready for a fight with this Papist devil.

I had never met Fr. Chrysostom. I had only seen him at a distance on the street and so I wasn’t prepared for what happened next.

‘Come in,’ a voice of thunder called from a level above me.

I opened the door and there, standing at the top of the stairway, was a giant of a man, made more formidable in appearance by the elevation at which he stood. I was to learn later that this was the place where he received all his visitors.

He was dressed in black trousers and a white linen coat which I was later to learn was his usual form of dress. A heavy walking stick hung on his arm.

‘Come up,’ he commanded.

By that time I wasn’t too sure that I wanted to tangle with this tremendous man.

When I got nearly to the top of the steps he took the stick from his arm, reached out and hooked it around my neck, and started walking. He led me into a large room.

‘Sit down,’ he ordered, pointing to a large chair. I sat.

By then I was completely terrified by this devil. I decided that I wanted to get out of this place as fast as possible.

He then drew up another big chair in the room and stretched his big frame beside me.

‘Young man,’ he said, and a pleasant smile creased the lines of his face, ‘what do you plan to do with your life?’ His voice was now surprisingly gentle and kindly.

No one at this level of life had ever asked me this question before. Was he really interested?

The small Catholic community here continued to be the target of Protestant hatred and Fr. Chrysostom had very little social contact.

During the winter months, when the hotels were open, many distinguished Catholics vacationed here but during the long summer months he spent the nights alone, sitting on the northern porch of The Priory watching the lights blinking at sea as tiny vessels from the Out Islands crossed and re-crossed the bar at the entrance to Nassau harbour. Except for a Ward Line steamer once a month out of New York only sailing vessels plied in this trade.

When the first world war came in 1914 his enemies here saw this as their opportunity to turn the knife in his back. He was a German-Irish [sic]-American. His practice was to take an evening walk along the Western Esplanade. The wireless station was then located in Fort Charlotte grounds opposite the western end of the Esplanade.

A rumour was started that Fr. Chrysostom was plotting to blow up the wireless station. From that moment he was a marked man.

In order to keep the mission alive...and the free schools functioning...he had to make periodical trips to the U.S. to collect money from friendly parishes that would have him as a guest preacher.

Because of this rumor he was not allowed to travel and the mission was hardly breathing by the time the war ended.
He had been writing articles for The Guardian. Whether Miss Moseley cut him off or he stopped contributing to her paper in disgust I don’t know. But he did stop.

Little did I realize that day he sat me down in the big chair and asked me about my plans for the future that we had one thing in common. We were both outcasts in a hidebound society... he because he was a Roman Catholic, I because I dared to be free in a place where a handful of people controlled all the money and had the power to say whether a man earned bread or not.

After a few minutes I found myself pouring out my heart to this man I was supposed to hate. Instinctively I felt that I had found a powerful friend.

‘Do you really want to learn?’ he asked.

‘I must learn, Father,’ I said, ‘or I will have to leave the colony.’

Boy, that was something. I had called him ‘Father.’ I always swore that I would not call anyone Father except my father in heaven and my natural father on earth. Now I was calling this man Father and it seemed natural for me to do it.

‘Then I will teach you,’ he said, rising from his chair, ‘take your first lecture.’

He paced the floor as he talked to me on general subjects.

‘The colony needs an independent newspaper,’ he said, ‘a paper that is open to everyone, an honest newspaper. If I can help you to build a strong, honest newspaper that will be more important than building a church. From my pulpit I can reach only a few people. In your newspaper you can reach many people. I am not concerned about your religion. That is your business. But if you are honest you will spread the spirit of Catholicism through your newspaper. All I ask is that you promise to be honest and hold the columns in trust for the use of everyone.’

He looked at me and I knew he expected a reply.

‘I promise, Father,’ I said. ‘My father wanted his newspaper to be honest and so that is what I want too.’

‘Right then, come back tomorrow morning,’ he said. ‘In the meantime keep your eyes open. Tomorrow I will want you to tell me something you had seen that interested you. I’m not going to teach you out of books. I’m going to teach you to think.’

When we met the next day I had told him something that had struck me after leaving him.

I don’t remember now what it was but it was a simple thing. He got up, pacing back and forth, and talked a long time about it.

To my great surprise the thing I mentioned had a past. He told me its history. He discussed it in its present form. And then projected it into the future.

He gave me books to read but we had this ‘thinking’ exercise every day. He impressed on me the fact that everything in life... the simplest thing... had a past. If you understood the past and dispassionately related it to the present, you had a good chance of being able to visualize its course down through the future.

‘The people in this town have no capacity for thought,’ he told me one day. ‘They are painfully insular. If you learn to think you’ll always be
A Beginning in the Isles of June

one step ahead of them. You will be able to point the way while they bog

down in their petty lives.'

He never talked religion to me. He never asked me whether I went to

any church or to come to his. I constantly carried news of Protestant

activities in *The Tribune*. He wouldn't allow me to mention a single Catholic

activity.

'No one will ever be able to say that I took advantage of our

friendship,' he said when I asked him why he didn't want Catholic news in

*The Tribune*.

I became interested in the Catholic doctrine on marriage and family.

I asked him about this one day. He told me. And said no more. He changed

the subject.

I was really baffled by this man. I had always been told that if a

Catholic priest ever got his hooks into you there was no escaping.

After awhile he insisted that I stay for lunch with him every day.

During the winter season he would have distinguished visitors at the hotel

join us for lunch. He introduced me to them as his son. He offered no

explanation.

'I want you to get used to meeting important people easily,' he told me.

One day I just felt I had to break down his personal reserve by

thanking him.

'My boy,' he said, 'I owe you far more than you owe me. I am a

priest but I came here with built-in prejudices that I could not overcome.

I just couldn't make myself like colored people. You have taught me how.

You have helped me to overcome one of the big barriers in my Christian

life.'

It was soon after this that he asked me a question that made me

realize how much he really wanted to surmount this barrier.

'My congregation is very small,' he told me one day, 'do you think

there would be some way of me meeting colored people?'

Taking this as a cue I organized a meeting on the Southern Recreation

Grounds. This was before the school buildings were erected on this hilltop.

A small bandstand, where the Police Band gave concerts, was located on

this spot. I arranged for the meeting to be held there.

When I arrived at the grounds with father a large crowd had gathered.

They gasped when they saw me in close relationship with this big man

from the hill. They had always held him in awe, as though he was some­

thing beyond their reach. We mounted the bandstand together and I stood

at his side while he spoke to the crowd.

This was the first time I was to hear him speak. The thoughts flowed

easily and I wasn't surprised that he was known as 'the silver tongued

orator' in parishes from New York to Minnesota.

He told them about his early life. He told them that his father was a

hunter and guide in Minnesota when the Middle-west was still wild

frontier country...that his father had taken the first overland expedition

through the Rockies during the gold rush in California...that the children

of wild Indians were his only companions when he was a child...that he

barely remembered the last massacre of whites by Indians...he was then

a small boy and he remembered the Indians coming excitedly in and out of

their house but they didn't hurt any of them because his father, who was

away on a hunting expedition at the time was loved by the Indians. He
told them how the only light they had in their house was from candles made out of animal fats. He told them some of the experiences in the hard life of a pioneer in a backwoods country.

He got right into their hearts that night. He was no longer the forbidding, unapproachable figure living on a hilltop. He was one of them because...like them...he had lived a simple, unpretentious life...a life harder than anything they had experienced.

By that time Protestants were beginning to worry about my close relationship with this Catholic priest. He wrote articles for *The Tribune* and he vetted everything that I wrote.

For a long time he tore up everything that I wrote. He would then ask me to tell him the story. Then he would dictate how it should be done. Very gradually I began to break through with stories that passed his scrutiny. His enemies knew this and they were afraid that he might be building a powerful Catholic newspaper in the community.

‘He is buying you,’ Bishop Roscoe Shedden of the Anglican Church told me one day.

‘At this price I am for sale to anybody,’ I said.

‘Do you mean that you are not fully committed to him?’ he asked.

‘I am not committed to anyone,’ I told him. ‘Father Chrysostom is helping me and he has asked nothing in return.’

‘If I arrange for Fr. Bennet to take you to his classes would you attend?’ he asked.

‘I certainly would,’ I told him.

Fr. Bennet was the dean of the Cathedral. I didn’t think him a good priest. He spent Saturday nights having a good time at the Colonial Hotel with a lot of gay blades and went straight from a bar stool to the altar in the cathedral but he had a reputation for being an educator and that was all that concerned me.

A few days later Bishop Shedden phoned and told me to go and see Fr. Bennet. I did. He said he would give me a reading course but he could not take me in the classes that he conducted for people of the town. The simple truth was that he didn’t think I was good enough to mix with the people in his classes. I wasn’t offended. I had become hardened to this kind of affront. I thanked him and accepted any help he was prepared to give.

A few days later I was on my way to The Priory to ask Father Chrysostom a question on a matter that confused me. As I turned from Bay into George Street I saw Fr. Bennet coming from the opposite direction. I considered that he was now my friend too and so I decided that I would save myself the many further steps to the Priory. I would ask Fr. Bennet.

‘How dare you stop me in the street!’ he exploded when I approached him. Without even hearing what I had to say, he swept past me and left me standing on the sidewalk.

And I remembered how only a few nights earlier the House of Assembly had sat until 3 o’clock in the morning. I was then attending the meetings as a reporter. A question had arisen in debate that I wanted cleared up before I went to the office. Even without thinking about it, I headed to The Priory. I rang the bell. After a short wait, Mr. Carl Albury,
a white Harbour Islander, who later became the first Bahamian Catholic priest, put his head out of an upstairs window.

'Fr. Chrysostom is sleeping,' he told me. 'You can't disturb him now. You must come back later.'

He seemed nervous that I had dared to come to The Priory at that hour. I was just turning away when I saw Fr. Chrysostom's head framed in another window.

'Is that you, Etienne?' he called.

'Yes, Father,' I said, 'I am sorry, I don't want to disturb you. I'll come back later.'

'Wait,' he told me, 'I'll be right down.'

He came downstairs in his bath robe, made coffee, and we sat and talked until daylight.

I never got near enough to Fr. Bennet to speak to him again and Bishop Shedden didn't suggest any more that I was being 'bought' by Fr. Chrysostom. Fr. Bennet must have told him about my 'impudence' in presuming to stop him on the street!

And so time rolled on.

Fr. Chrysostom was greatly disturbed when, after several years of protecting me from falling into any grave mistake, he found that he had to go to the abbey in Minnesota. He was gone several weeks.

'You're all right now,' he told me when he came back. 'You're on your own. People who didn't know I was away are accusing me of writing articles that you did. You have my style and my strength.'

That was a great compliment because he was a powerful writer.

Up to this time I had never been in a Catholic church. One day I was passing Xavier's and heard organ music and singing coming from the tiny church. The present cathedral is a new building. The only piece of the original church that has been preserved is its eastern wing.

I slipped into the church. A group of sisters were having practice in a small choir loft that stood at the rear of the church. I sat and listened. These women, who I had thought were evil, had the voices of angels.

'Father,' I said one day while I was sitting in the big room and he was at the far end of the room, 'I've been thinking that I might like to become a Catholic.'

He turned around, walked slowly towards me and placed his arm around my shoulder.

'My son,' he said, 'I have prayed that you would come into the Church. This makes me very happy.'

And then he changed the subject. What kind of a priest is this, I thought, that he didn't put his hooks into me?

Shortly after this he retired as head of the Bahamas mission and went to the small parish at San Salvador. He was away a year. Immediately on his return on a visit to Nassau he phoned to invite me to breakfast.

I was frankly disappointed he had not said anything further to me about becoming a Catholic.

'Father,' I said to him in an aggrieved voice while we were having breakfast, 'I spoke with you about becoming a Catholic. Aren't you interested, don't you want me in the Church?'

'Yes, my son,' he said, 'it's the one thing I want most in life. But no one is ever going to be able to say that I dragged you in. I am going back
to San Salvador tomorrow but whenever you are ready I will arrange with Fr. Hildebrand for your instructions and you will be received into the church.'

'I am ready now, Father,' I told him.
And that is how I became a Catholic.
When I married an American woman and again when I became a Catholic my friends told me that this would ruin my career. These are the two best things I have done in my life.

Once again I want to say how sorry I am that my wife never met this remarkable man. They would have had a great deal in common. He was a child of the rugged frontier when Minnesota was the western outpost of the U.S. My wife is made of the stuff that would have taken her in a covered wagon with pioneers who eventually extended that frontier to the Pacific coast.

Before returning to San Salvador Fr. Chrysostom arranged for me to go to St. John's University in Minnesota for a year of special studies.
This was a very fruitful year for me. Something happened during that year that had never happened at the university before. The abbot and some of the most intellectual professors at the university in the field of philosophy and ethics, English, history, psychology and economics used to come to my room and take me for walks with them at night. I learned more on these walks that in the classroom. Wherever I went in Catholic circles in the U.S. I was accepted as Fr. Chrysostom's son and everyone went out of their way to help me....

One night after supper I was going to my room on the third floor in Benet Hall when I passed Fr. Oliver [Kapsner, O.S.B.] on the second floor landing.

'You are from the Bahamas, aren't you, Dupuch?' he called after me.

'Yes, Father,' I said.

'Did you know Fr. Chrysostom?' he asked.

'Yes,' I said. 'Why,' I asked anxiously, sensing that something was wrong.

'He died in his sleep at San Salvador last night,' he said. 'They found him this morning with his blanket pulled up snugly to his neck.'

I recalled that Fr. Chrysostom had told me that his father had died this way from a heart attack.

I went to my room and wrote a tribute to Fr. Chrysostom that was published in the college paper. This made me many friends in the U.S.

A few days before the school year ended a friend of mine asked me what route I would take to go home. I told him I would go to New York and take a boat from there to Nassau.

'What will you do in New York?' he asked.

'I don't know,' I said. 'I'll probably see Cardinal Hayes.'

His eyes opened wide in surprise.

His Eminence Cardinal Patrick Hayes, archbishop of New York, was a frequent visitor to Nassau. He lived in Bungalow Dunmore in The Priory grounds and I met him often. We were friends. I didn't think it was unusual that I would be seeing the cardinal.

News that I was going to see the cardinal spread through the school like wildfire. Priests came to see me. They wanted to know how I could
see the cardinal. And when I treated it casually they informed me that they could not see the cardinal.

I did see the cardinal in New York. His secretary had my address. He phoned me early in the morning after I arrived in New York. He told me that the cardinal wanted to see me but that he had a busy schedule. As soon as he was free he would call me. He told me to wait for the call. The call came after ten o'clock that night. The secretary came for me in his car and drove me to the cardinal's palace where we had a brief but pleasant visit together. This was the cardinal's first break for the day!

About ten years ago I visited Fr. Chrysostom's grave at San Salvador. At his request he was buried on a hilltop facing the harbour where he believed Columbus approached the island on his first voyage of discovery. He was buried in the region where he thought it possible that an Indian held aloft a torch that was sighted from the deck of the Columbus flagship, the Santa Maria.

I was as the island at the invitation of an American chaplain who was stationed at the U.S. Naval Base and Tracking Station that had been established outside Cockburn Town.

This chaplain had heard the story of Fr. Chrysostom. He visited his grave and found that the headstone had been split in half by the roots of a tree. He had a new stone made at their naval headquarters in Puerto Rico and he had asked me to come to the island and give a talk at the installation of the new stone.

It was a small crowd that surrounded me on the hilltop that day. Some local people were there but the crowd was composed mostly of American sailors from the Naval base.

The Navy chaplain, who had the new stone built for Fr. Chrysostom, was a Protestant and so were the sailors who were present for the ceremony.

And I thought...

Four and a half centuries earlier Columbus had discovered a new world when he sailed into the harbour which we viewed from the hilltop where the body of Fr. Chrysostom rests. He was supposed to have brought the Christian faith to the people of this island but history records that he brought only degradation, death and destruction.

That day... centuries later... we had come to this spot to mourn the memory of a great Catholic missionary... and on that spot that day Catholic and Protestant acknowledged that they had a common mission.

The spirit of friendship and tolerance this Catholic priest had shown in his life had conquered... it had surmounted the barriers of hatred and suspicion that had split the church into many parts and weakened the cause of Christ on earth. Now the fabric was being rebuilt as Christians all over the world tried to get into step in the ecumenical movement....

Father Chrysostom was, indeed, a commanding presence. He had a certain tilt of the head and fire in the eyes, a power to rally others, to generate disciples when he needed them. Although a formidable figure, Schreiner at the same time could be gentle and kind. He had inexhaustible patience with promising young people. To the work of the few he considered his equal, he gave all manner of attention, often at the expense of his own productivity. He was a gifted teacher who
possessed a knack of getting to the heart of a case, for unravelling and then piecing together the threads of a problem.

The way in which Father Chrysostom influenced and trained Etienne Dupuch, gives an insight into the nature of the missionary's mind and work. He chose to concentrate on supporting a talented young Bahamian and the paper he edited as the best means of developing all the people of the Bahamas and evolving some Catholic traditions in the colony. It is interesting to note that Magistrate Powles had the same idea four years before Father Chrysostom came to Nassau. This prophetic Catholic Englishman had seen that not more than 5 percent of the poor and black population of twenty-one years and over could read or write. Powles describes what steps he took:

In one of the conversations I had with him early in my career, Governor Blake said to me, 'It is very difficult to do anything practical for them as long as they have no public opinion and no press.'

I do not mean to say that he intended me to take any action on these words, for I do not think he did, but I made up my mind that they should have a press, and with this object I first made acquaintance with Mr. James C. Smith, [James Carmichael Smith later became postmaster of Sierra Leone and author of several books on economics] a light-coloured gentleman of integrity and ability. He represents the western district of the island of New Providence in the House of Assembly, and for years devoted himself with singleness of purpose to the complete emancipation of this race. He had for a long time in his head the idea of starting a paper to be devoted to the interests of the coloured people of the Bahamas. My conversations with him clinched the nail, and the first number of *The Freeman* appeared on the 8th of March, 1887, with the motto, 'For God, and Right, and Queen, and Country.'

The following letter appeared in *The Key of the Gulf*, an American newspaper published at Key West, Florida, on May 14th, 1887:

'Will you allow me, through your columns, to make an appeal to the Native Bahamian residents at Key West to assist me to keep going *The Freeman*, the little sheet published here, which you have already been good enough to notice?

For the first time in the history of the Bahama Islands, an attempt has been made to issue a little sheet—scarcely big enough, indeed, to be called a newspaper—to be devoted solely to the interests of the coloured people.

Our people are fond of Scripture; let me then assure them, this sheet will be like the cloud, not bigger than a man's hand that arose out of the sea, covered the sky, and developed into a mighty tempest!

It must seem strange indeed to you, sir, living in the strong light of day, that it should be difficult to get 400 subscribers at three cents a week each, to keep alive a paper born to so high a destiny! Yet such is the case. Printing is very dear, and we, the little handful of workers who support *The Freeman* are poor men who cannot afford to lose money for three whole years.

'Why three whole years?' you will ask. I will endeavour to explain.
Ever since the Emancipation in 1837, the country has been dominated by a small gang of native whites and so-called whites, whose main object has been, since they could no longer keep the coloured people in slavery, to prevent their ever rising to be anything more than hewers of wood and drawers of water. They look upon them as dogs, and as dogs they treat them, not unkindly as a rule, but with the kindness they show their dogs, neither more nor less.

In order to carry out their ideas of keeping down the coloured people, no effort worthy of the name has been made towards making education general, until quite of late years, and though things are improving rapidly, the standard of education is about 75 per cent below that of the mother-country or of America.

The native whites have been further assisted in their conspiracy by the geographical situation of the country, which is cut off from the rest of the British possessions in the West Indies. Whilst then the rest of the West India Islands have gradually become connected with the mother-country, with America, and with each other, by means of the electric telegraph and fast lines of steam-packets, the Bahama Islands have remained out in the cold, cut off from the rest. They have no telegraph, and their only steam communication is with America and a slow line of steamers that call at Nassau once a month, on their road to and fro between Belize and England.

In the age in which we live, a country without telegraphs or railways and only the occasional sight of a steamboat, must go right out of the race, and that is what we have been doing here. England knows nothing, and the rest of the West India Islands next to nothing about us. America knows us, but has no interest in improving us, and no power to do so if she had.

Meantime the greater portion of the coloured people have vegetated with just enough to eat and drink and a place to sleep in, and the native whites have ruled the roost just as they pleased. Not that the coloured people are contented, they have a strong idea things are not all right, and that they are little better than slaves, but they neither see where the remedy lies nor know how to apply it. What they want are 'lights, not rights.' Rights they have had in plenty for fifty years, but their rights have done them no good since they have no lights to teach them how to utilize those rights. Lights are coming to them in two ways, rapidly from Key West, and more slowly through the schools.

The object of The Freeman is to supply them with a third light, which shall teach them how to use the other two to the best purpose. But they have everything to learn, and first of all they have to learn the value of having an organ of their own.

At present they hardly realize what a newspaper is and still less do they guess what it can do; and to calculate that at the slow rate at which things progress here, it will take three years to teach them the rudiments of this knowledge....

In any other country but this the people would hold mass meetings, and petition the authorities to do justice to the man who has tried to do justice to them. Our people are not wanting in generosity, but they are so behind the world they do not understand these things.
Will not the native Bahamians at Key West help us by sending subscriptions to keep alive *The Freeman*, and help it to grow into the dimensions of a respectable journal? Subscriptions may be sent to Mr. E. J. Flemming, at the office of the *Key of the Gulf*, Key West. The subscription will be at present, for at least one year, 2 dollars per annum for each copy, including postage.

I must not conclude without stating clearly that I, the writer, am alone responsible for sending this letter, and for the sentiments it contains.”

*A Voice From The Bahamas.*

Nassau, N. P., Bahamas, April 21, 1887.

*The Freeman,* unfortunately, did not survive and Father Chrysostom began this time in support of Etienne Dupuch and *The Tribune,* as Sir Etienne has himself described repeatedly and with gratitude in his editorials in the years ahead. It is unequivocally clear in all the contemporary documents that Father Chrysostom did not intend *The Tribune* to be a Catholic voice in the Bahamas. He just was far ahead of his times, as in so many cases, in training a competent layman with enough potential to speak out unmistakably for all people of the Bahamas and for justice, equality and prosperity among all segments of society. As for Sir Etienne Dupuch, even his most bitter critic would never impute to him that he was a voice for anyone except himself. The very motto of *The Tribune,* preserved with pride by that publishing family, is a daily reminder of this reality: *Nullius Addictus Jurare in Verba Magistri*—“Being Bound to Swear to the Dogmas of No Master.” It was and is not the intent of either the Catholic Church in the Bahamas or the editors of *The Tribune* to have any formal association. It was fully the intent of Father Chrysostom to help train a journalist among the people he was serving. In the same way the missionary sisters and priests labored in schools and clinics to help where they could in raising up new generations of native people to serve and lead their people on new plateaus.

Father Chrysostom lived a lonely, aloof and isolated life. He had no need to be loved or to be close to; he was never reluctant to come to terms with his critics and opponents. His was far from an ivory tower existence as he worked as repairman, builder, painter and tight-fisted keeper of accounts. If he limited his contacts in one way, he widened them in another. By keeping the highest professional standards as a priest, by preparing in detail his public speeches and writings, he was all the more actively influential as a churchman. His aim was to present the Catholic Church as it actually was.

Rifts always developed wherever Father Chrysostom was due to his strong personality. Under the surface, jealousies and personal differences developed and multiplied in the Bahamas, New York and Minnesota. These antagonisms dragged on until his death and quieted down only years later. The problem centered on the vicissitudes of Schreiner’s ego
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and the structure of his total personality. He was simply difficult to live with at every turn. His fluid psychological nature, his often violent swings in mood, his tendency to make strides in one direction and then, suddenly, to fall back in another, repeatedly surfaced. His inner conflict was not only a conscious struggle but a bigger battlefield. There was the moral, self-critical part of himself that was responsible for his stern prohibitions and his own sense of guilt at failing to realize the ideals he held up so highly. This super-ego stood trapped in the middle during his whole life and had to find a way to defend itself lest it be overrun by anxiety.

The struggle of an ego is seen in sharp relief in Father Chrysostom’s life. Caught between the strong inclinations of his nature to dominate wherever he was, and the discipline and demands he inflicted upon himself from without, his ego remained intact by seeking for its use a variety of defense mechanisms. He isolated himself against dangers by his lonely withdrawal to the Bahamas as a voluntary repression. He also reacted strongly against any religious superior or confere who did not have his own total vision of the needs to be met immediately, as he saw them, in the spiritual apostolate of the Bahamas. The meaning of his contribution, the intensity of feeling he aroused for and against himself, the realization of his heroism, the grace and tragedy in his life are all there to contemplate. It is best exemplified in the correspondence between Father Chrysostom, Abbot Bernard, his religious superior at St. John’s, and his former religious superior and fading friend, Abbot Alexius in New York. Nothing better expresses the working of God among his creatures, ever themselves, to bring about the establishment of Catholic Christianity in the Bahamas. The following letters between these main participants are quoted as primary testimony to the zeal, vision and misunderstandings that mix in every great human expectation and achievement:

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 8 May 1892:
Father Paul’s departure leaves me alone again for 5 to 6 long months. Before the shipwreck, I would have believed it impossible for me to stay alone another summer: since then, however, I am quite ready to do or suffer anything God may want me to do or suffer for my mission. During those twelve hours of awful suffering and agony, when death was momentarily before me, and when nothing but the direct intervention of Providence could save me from a watery grave, and in that situation realizing vividly the needs of my missionary field, in which there are 60,000 souls in spiritual darkness, I vowed that if God would spare my life and be pleased to use me as an instrument, though an unworthy one, for the conversion of souls to Him, I would devote my life and energies to the conversion of the Bahamas. God accepted the offering and saved
not only my life, but made me an instrument in saving seven others. Hence, my life, strength, and energies now belong to the Bahamas.

This vow was not made to interfere with my vow of obedience, but I trust and pray that my superiors will always respect it. I have gone through awful trials since I am here. I have been at the point of death many a time. For weeks and months the future of my work seemed most discouraging. When it was darkest, light was nearest, and I am truly and fervently grateful to God for having sent me so many bitter trials by way of preparation for the work before me. Strange to say, the shipwreck had physically even a peculiar effect upon me. Last Sept. and Oct., as you know, I was confined to my bed in consequence of a sunstroke, or rather, exhaustion from heat. Such were the effects of my severe illness that up to the hour of the shipwreck, April 4, I daily suffered from acute headache, caused by a rush of blood to the head. I was almost completely incapacitated for mental work and the least physical exertion caused suffering. During the whole winter I slept under 6 woolen blankets (in a normal condition I would have used only one sheet) and kept bottles of hot water at my feet. In spite of these precautions, I nightly awoke at 2 or 3 o'clock with my feet and lower limbs icy cold, while my head was feverishly hot. From the hour of shipwreck I have not had a touch of headache, or the least rush of blood to the head. This may have resulted from the fact that I walked barefooted on the sharp rocks and hot sand of Conception Island and had my feet so lacerated and blistered from sunburn, that they are not healed even now. The finger of God is manifestly in this and He has given me a will, health, strength, and energy for my work, and with His help and grace I mean to use them for His honor and glory.

This brings me to a subject that cannot longer remain unconsidered. Will St. John's Abbey take an interest, an active interest in the Bahama mission or not? I need a co-laborer very soon—which means, within a few months, and a few more in the very near future. The Bahamas present a field for missionary labor peculiarly suited for the Benedictine Order, such as no other place in America has ever offered. What a grand undertaking for St. John’s! Give me a priest of my choice, one who is zealous for the salvation of souls, and is ready to undergo hardships, willingly and without murmuring—that is all I ask St. John’s to do at present. A good cleric would also be a valuable acquisition. If a good priest, adapted for the work, cannot be got from St. John’s, I will have to turn elsewhere for co-laborers. I trust I won’t be forced to this latter alternative, but another priest is needed here imperatively and I must get him, if not from St. John’s, from somewhere else. I may as well add that there are but few of my confreres whom I would consider good men for the mission and these are the hardest to be spared at St. John’s. Whatever sacrifice St. John’s will make for this mission, will never be regretted. A priest who is a burden to St. John’s would certainly be one to the Bahamas, and more still, a scandal.

Please do then let me know at a very early date, whether I can in the future look to St. John’s for assistance or not. A few zealous priests properly qualified is all that is wanted. I don’t need any pecuniary assistance from St. John’s. I can get all the money I want for the mission. The archbishop is enthusiastic for the mission and gives me whatever
I ask for. When he was here, I told him we needed another schoolhouse. He at once forwarded twice the amount asked for. When he heard that I had lost my missionary outfit in the shipwreck, he sent me enough cash to buy dozens. In fact, he is ready to place thousands ($) at my disposal. Dear Father Abbot, I cannot express to you how near to my heart the mission is, and how anxious I am to live to see the day when scores of chapels will be scattered over these islands and the spiritual wants of the people administered to by Benedictine priests. God give it soon! He has miraculously saved me for the work. That looks at least as though He wished to entrust his work to the Benedictines. May they take the hint! Will you do me the favor, dear Father, to say a Mass in honor of the Holy Ghost, to ask Him for enlightenment and guidance, before you act finally in deciding as to whether the Bahamas will be assisted by St. John’s or not? Incidentally let me mention that I would be very glad to have a good cleric here. My plan would be this: keep him here a year to see whether the climate etc. suit. Meanwhile I could assist him in his studies. If after a year it is found that he is adapted to the climate of the Bahamas, I would send him (at expense of friends of the mission) either to England or to Italy to complete his studies.

My health is very good and I am perfectly content with the prospects of a long, lonely and hot summer before me. The archbishop has presented the mission with a horse and carriage, and a drive every day along the beach is as essential to health here in summer as light and air are. I begin in a few days the erection of a new school building 30 x 50 and of stone. We have at present two school-buildings, each 27 x 37. So you see, our school is flourishing. In a few weeks I will take some ten persons, recent converts to their first holy Communion, and at Pentecost I will receive 6 or 8 persons into the church. . . .

P.S.: May 9th. I am very much surprised to see in Hoffmann’s Directory (March number) that Father Paul is placed at Nassau? I wish that better judgment would prevail in future in those who love to hasten into print. It looks like an April-fool joke and necessitates my making several explanations to parties in N.Y. and elsewhere.

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 5 June 1892:

Your favor of 21st ult., from St. Paul was received in due course of mails and while you are very explicit in your statement of the future relationship of St. John’s towards the Bahamas, I am loth to believe that I am to accept it as a final statement in the matter. The sentiments are indeed consistent with what you stated to me orally before I left St. John’s and with what you have written since, and its general trend was therefore not quite unexpected. Simultaneously with your letter I received one from the archbishop in which he says, ‘I have obtained the services of another sister for the mission and I trust and pray that you may be equally successful in obtaining the services of another priest to devote himself to the mission.’ These words made me feel more keenly the apparent hopelessness of looking to St. John’s for assistance and at the same time urge me on to renewed efforts to obtain assistance. Your letter looks discouraging indeed, yet I have so often seen light nearest when darkness was densest, and I have this week since receiving your
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letter on Tuesday last—witnessed such gratifying results in my field of labor that I am not at all discouraged or disheartened. Today Pentecost, I gave first holy Communion to ten children and yesterday I received six converts into the church and reconciled an apostate of 38 years standing to the church. Then, too, I do not see the strength of your argument as you do, and for that reason I should prefer to have the matter brought to the Chapter for a final statement even if ‘it wouldn’t get half a dozen votes in its favor.’

For reasons stated in my last letter, I request to be informed definitely whether the Bahamas can look for assistance to St. John’s or not, secondly whether or not such assistance can be rendered within a year from date or not. If you can settle either of these two questions affirmatively yourself, it will of course not be necessary to bring the matter before the Chapter. ‘I do not feel justified in helping the Bahamas by hurting St. John’s’ is, as I see it, not quite logical. As a capitular of St. John’s I am part of St. John’s. I am here with your permission, therefore my work here is that of St. John’s. If not here with your permission, then I am here at the expense of my vow of obedience. In that case I am anxious to have matters rectified. In the former case the right hand may be hurt by putting its mitten on the left hand, but I cannot see how the body is thereby hurt more. If by St. John’s you mean ‘the monastery’ and what that term implies, then I am certainly with you in saying ‘that the Bahamas should not be helped by hurting St. John’s.’ But I fail to see how sending a man to the Bahamas would hurt the monastery.

In view of the fact that this field is ten times more promising and more in need of laborers than a large number of missions of St. John’s in Minnesota, and of the fact that an unscrupulous Bishop [Otto Zardetti, St. Cloud] is only too anxious to supply those missions with priests of his own choice, I am firmly convinced that instead of ‘hurting St. John’s’ by sending a suitable man here, you will ‘help St. John’s,’ and the generations already born will bless the man whose wisdom and foresight took in the situation in time and acted in the real and permanent interests of St. John’s. I trust you will pardon me this frank speech. If what I say is true, it deserves consideration; if not—well then there exists difference of opinion. If you give the matter another thought I am convinced that you could spare Father Rupert [Kiefer, O.S.B.] for instance, whose physical condition, naturally speaking would be worth 10 years more in the Bahamas than in Minnesota. Father Alexius [Hoffmann, O.S.B.] is another whose lease of life is apparently a very limited one and whom this climate would suit. There are several clerics and at least one novice—Kevenhoerster [brother of the first bishop of the diocese of the Bahamas]—whose ill health will stand in the way of considerable future usefulness at St. John’s. However I may be mistaken in these statements, as I am judging from observations made 16 months ago. I am sure you can see your way clear to send me Fathers Rupert, Alexius, Oswald or Herman if they would like to come, also that you could spare either Kevenhoerster or Aloys Bahner (I don’t remember their names in religion). Meanwhile I will leave the matter in the hands of God. Thus far God has heard, and several times in a most signal manner, the prayers that were said for favors for the Mission, that I am confident that in this difficulty God will soon help. No, I am not offended by what you say in the last paragraph of your letter I am only wondering why you
should have said it. Yes, Father Paul did leave quite suddenly. He did not
tell me a word about it till four days before he left. I was in the hopes all
the time that he would remain here at least till June, when the hot weather
begins, and thus shorten my summer solitude, but it appears that the heat
was too much for him. I have forwarded his letter to him in New York,
where I presume he still is.

Abbot Bernard to Father Chrysostom, Collegeville, 2 July 1892:

Your favor of the 5th inst., came to hand some time ago. I delayed in
answering it, because I was afraid I might be led too far and say too much
as I think the letter rather provoking. When writing you last time I simply
gave you no answer to your inquiry about help from St. John's. I did not
intend to start a controversy with you about the matter. I am sure it would
not be for the best interests of the religious spirit. I have considered matters
before writing to you, why then not accept my statement as final and be
done with it, and be at rest? I therefore wish to say once more, but please
take it as final: I do not say, that in course of time when opportunity pre­
sents itself, I should not send some help to the Bahamas if that Mission
remains under the care of the Order, but I absolutely decline any obligation
or responsibility on the part of St. John's Abbey toward the Bahamas.

Father Paul is here since about a week and from what information I
could get from him I am the more confirmed in my opinion about this mat­
ter. Fr. Paul tells me that an idea is being entertained to make arrange­
ments for an independent House in the East. Good—I will put nothing in the
way of this plan being brought to a consummation—in fact I consider this
the best plan to get a firm footing in the East, especially as I understand
that some Fathers of other Monasteries might join the undertaking, but at
the same time I do not want any obligations and responsibilities put on
St. John's in regard to this affair; what we can do, we will do cheerfully—
but voluntarily. That shall be all I will say about this matter.

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 15 August 1892:

While the contents of your letter of July 2nd did not much surprise
me, they did cause me more pain than any words spoken or written by
you have ever done. It seems that you have always misunderstood me,
my sentiments and my motives, and from the tone of your letter I infer
that you don't care whether you do or not, now or in future, understand
me. Possibly it is worth your while. In a former letter I earnestly requested
assistance and asked for a definite answer as to whether I could expect a
priest from St. John's within a year or two. Your answer was negative and
supported by an argument. The argument appeared weak to me and I took
the liberty to point out, as considerably as I knew how, the fact, and to
make a last urgent appeal for reconsideration. This appeal provokes you to
the extent of considering me unworthy of a line from you, and my remarks
upon the reasons you advanced in support of your new 'final' decision,
you call a 'controversy', that does not tend to the 'best interests of the
religious spirit'—of which I am presumably void. Mutual frankness of
expression and understanding between superior and subject are, to my
mind, largely conducive to the maintenance of the 'religious spirit'. At
least, their opposites, hypocrisy and hypocritical subserviency, are not for 'the best interests of the religious spirit'. This view determines me to write plainly, even at the risk of provoking again. You wish me to take your decision as final. I will, therefore, not reopen the question. I am not then to expect help from St. John’s. I trust God will provide it. Though for 7 months in the year alone and practically 1,000 miles away from the nearest priest, I am not discouraged by your decision, but pray constantly that you may yet modify your final decision, or, at all events, that I may obtain a zealous co-laborer no matter from where. Now, dear Father Abbot, I trust you will not allow this letter to provoke you. What I say, I say to have it off my mind. I have said nothing with even the remotest idea of offending or of hurting feelings. Candor, as well as my respect and esteem for you, do not permit me to say less or other than I say or did say. To speak out my thought plainly, though bluntly—your provocation is due to the fact that ever since the important events of the Spring of 1890 my sentiments towards you have never been understood by you. Our natures seem so different—almost extremes. I write this on the feast of our Blessed Mother. I will reach you on that of one who was her most devoted child and illustrious advocate, your patron Saint. No one will extend to you the customary namesday greetings and good wishes with a warmer heart and more sincerity than I do. I am sure too, that you bear me no ill will and heartily forgive me for writing this provoking letter.

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 29 September 1892:

Your favor of the 29th ult., as also the cingulum sent by Br. Stephan was thankfully received. Both were a good fit. The thought that you ‘experienced more botheration and annoyance from me than from anybody else in the community’ is a source both of comfort and of grief to me: of comfort, in as much as your first year of office must have been a pleasant one, if I was the sharpest thorn in your side; of grief, in as much as I have been a ‘botheration and annoyance’ to my superior at any time. My grief however is mitigated by the knowledge that you had it in your power and were frequently importuned from April 1890 till Jan. 15, 1891, to rid yourself of my bothering and annoying presence. If the hairshirt scratched, it was of voluntary wearing, and therefore highly meritorious. I must confess that my sentiments toward you were of a higher standard than yours towards me. However, every man is what he is, independent of what others happen to think of him. I am profoundly grateful for whatever kindness and good will you have ever shown me, and I trust at least that I will never in the future be less worthy of both than I have been in the past. I am sorry to hear that poor Fr. Bartholomew is coughing away his life. Why not send him to me? If he is not in the last stages yet, his life is good for many years in the Bahamas.

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Alexius, Nassau, 17 October 1892:

Your favor of 8 ult. was received in due time, but our mails have been so annoyingly irregular on account of quarantine regulations at the Cuba end, that I have only one opportunity of sending a reply and that I unluckily missed by an hour. I trust the expressions of my hearty sentiments of good
will and best wishes for another 25 years of pleasant and fruitful sacerdotal life will at this late date prove equally welcome. It must have been a pleasant relief for you to take a few days jaunt to the West and spend your day of Jubilee in the circle of your own family. The thought that there is a possibility of getting Archabbot Andrew [Hintenock, O.S.B., of St. Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Pennsylvania] or some Belgian Benedictine to come here is a great relief to me. I have lost all hope of obtaining assistance from St. John’s. I believe as you say that St. John’s is neither able nor willing to send a man to the Bahamas. Rather many at St. John’s are willing enough to come but Abbot Bernard is not willing that they should come. I have corresponded with him in regard to the matter, and from the tone of his letters I take it, that the only interest he takes either in the Bahamas or in the New York mission, is that they remain as far away from him as possible. I have written to Archabbot Andrew to welcome him here, and am anxiously and hopefully awaiting a reply.

The mission is making very encouraging progress, and on All Saints Day I will have the happiness of receiving a prominent family of eight into the church. I have the new school building very nearly completed. It is a very handsome building for Nassau. The completion of this building will not give me a rest yet, as I am to superintend another building for the sisters’ boarding school. I am very happy to note indications of rapid progress in your mission and I pray that God may spare you to see it grow up into one of the finest parishes in N.Y. My health is very good. The long hot summer is coming to a close at last, and while the thermometer still remains above 78 degrees day and night a steady breeze—trade winds—makes it quite pleasant. If you have any spare intentions, I would be very thankful for them. I am nearly out, or will be by return mail...

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 10 February 1893:

Your letter from New York was received in due time and I ought to have answered it long ago, but you know how procrastinating one becomes here. I will fill the blanks sent and will mail by next steamer. I received the 18 vols. of books you sent and find them very useful. Also the tobacco. Thanks for all these. It must have been quite a change for you to be transplanted within a few days from a Bahama December to a Minnesota January. We were quite a little amused by your description of experiences at sea, and rather cruelly told young McLain about them. It did him good that you got a chance to be able to sympathize with him. I have the house full now, so that one room accommodates Frs. Rupert and Austin. A Franciscan cleric from Albany, N.Y. in about the same condition that Fr. Bartholomew is, came down last Monday. Then there is a Rev. Dr. Robinson of Chicopee, Mass., a personal friend of Archbishop Corrigan, with me since Monday. He is a very charming man and will remain a month. We are 6 in all, and all happy and contented. Fr. Bartholomew is gradually improving, his cough is not quite as severe as it was when you were here, and he has gained three and one half pounds in weight since he came.

We are having loveliest possible weather. The foundation of the building on the Convent lawn is nearly finished. A new Sister came down last steamer to do the work of Sr. Cyrilla, who was and is so sickly. On Jan.
12 we had the free school entertainment. It was considered the best ever given here. We made $60 by it. Since then, the Academy girls also gave an entertainment, which was considered the best entertainment ever given by white children here. I send you herewith a Guardian containing a letter of mine, severely rapping the Anglican Dean, pastor of the Cathedral, over the knuckles. The poor devil never had the courage to reply, and the members of his own parish say of him, that when he made the calumnious statements, he knew that he was lying. The old paralyzed Cuban opposite the Convent, is in a dying condition and he has been expected to drop off any moment during the last two days. He will certainly die today. He is well prepared, having received all the dying sacraments. Edwin Davis, the consumptive black boy who you also visited, died Jan. 19 well prepared. At his funeral the church was packed with the most prominent Blacks here and I had a good chance to place the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, etc., impressively before them, and the result showed that I did considerable good.

Since you left I have baptized 9 persons, and a class of 13 is being prepared for Easter. Before many weeks I will go to Andros Island where the Green family lives. We have 4 pupils in our ‘high school’ and 2 more have requested admission for the post-Easter term. I have not yet heard from Abbot Alexius, and Fr. Gerard writes very briefly. It does not appear that Abbot Alexius was coming down this winter. I don’t understand him and have no idea of what his views are respecting this Mission. Did you find what they are? Your narrative of your interview with the Archbishop in the presence of Abbot Alexius seems to indicate that Abbot Alexius does not know just what to think about the Bahamas. This goes by the Bum and mail closes in a few minutes. All of us desire to be kindly remembered to you and to all enquiring confreres at St. John’s.

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 10 July 1893:

Fr. Austin [Melchior Bahner, O.S.B.] leaves for the North tomorrow. Somehow—he cannot make up his mind to remain here, and I am very sorry to lose him. He has done his work satisfactorily and has in many ways, I think, been benefited by his stay here. His departure leaves me alone again. What worries me most is the Select School started last winter. It had such a nice start and it ought by all means be continued. If I can’t get a priest or cleric to continue it in September, I will endeavor to get a lay teacher somewhere from the North. I stand in a very awkward position now. I don’t know whether I can or not begin in September. I would be pleased to hear from you definitely at an early date whether I can depend upon a man from St. John’s.

You will find Fr. Rupert in N. Y. I presume he is so reticent about his return and his health seems to be in an uncertain condition, that he appears to me very doubtful material for the Bahamas. Calculating on a confrere to be constantly here with me, I opened a mission on Andros Island, the school here and planned a begging trip to the North. All my plans have been crossed and it is unsatisfactory to remain in such uncertainty. Can’t you send me such a man as Fr. Herman, that has zeal, courage and sense? And also a good zealous cleric, if possible—one who can assist in the school and is willing to come to stay. I have bought the Military
Hosp., and live in it since July 3. I hold it in my own name. Sold the Queen St. house....

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 21 September 1893:

Your note of August 29 in which you request me to act through Abbot Alexius, was received a few days ago. I quite agree that it would be the proper thing to arrange affairs with him and work jointly with him in the interests of both missions, if, as you say 'he has the Mission more at heart than I think'. The conduct, however, of Abbot Alexius thus far has demonstrated that he is far from having the welfare of the Bahamas at heart, and this seems the more strange as he knows well that the proper attendance of this Mission was the condition on which the Archbishop [Corrigan] allowed him an opening in N. Y. city. Now from the very first Abbot Alexius seems to make the Bahamas only a pretense for getting a footing in N. Y. and his conduct all along has shown that it was not only seeming pretense. As soon as he had what he thought was a firm hold in N. Y. he plainly wrote me that unless this mission would pay well (and he subsequently hinted that a tribute to his N. Y. mission of $1,000 per year would be expected) I should throw it overboard.

I heed not his proposal as I was and am still absolutely convinced that if the Bahamas were given up, it would be made pretty hard for him in N. Y. by both archbishop and the secular clergy. In October 1891, after I had been left alone for seven months (because Fr. Gerard was 'let out' during the time at Jamaica L.I.) and was in a critical state of health, I begged him for God's sake to send me a priest. He made some flimsy excuse and left me alone in that terrible position between life and death. The memory of such heartless desertion by one's confrere, or superior as I looked upon him then, is not very pleasant to contemplate. And when upon my doctor's urgent advice I went North to regain my health and to beg for the Mission, if health permitted, I was made to feel that I was a burden on him at his house, especially after I had expressed my disapproval of his plans to drop the Mission and protested against the insinuation that I beg money for the Bahamas and then turn over the proceeds to New York. So shabby was the treatment I got from him that after remaining with him a week I was compelled to seek shelter elsewhere.

In justice to Abbot Alexius, however, I must say that during that time I was suffering very much from nervous affection and was exceedingly irritable and easily excitable, and that consequently while his conduct seemed cruel to me, mine may have seemed strange to him. Up to that time our correspondence had been quite regular, but two months after, he wrote to say that he was too busy to continue regular correspondence. I answered that letter and the few others he wrote since. His concern for the Mission and for me was so small ever since I am here, that it seemed a matter of perfect indifference to him whether I was left alone seven months in the year or not, though with very little inconvenience and at no expense to him, he might have sent Fr. Gerard down for a fortnight. So I submit whether that looks as though he had the welfare of the Mission at heart. I know the Abbot's want of tact, his harshness and inconsiderateness, and know him well enough and esteem him highly enough to make
due allowance for them and put up with them. I believe too that he means
well and does not intend to hurt feelings, but his conduct towards inferiors
and equals puts one on a constant penance of heroic acts of patience.

As a religious I don't want to complain, but as a man and a gentleman
(and when I became a religious I did not throw away my manhood) I do
protest against treatment that depends alone on the whim and humor of a
naturally irritable, inconsiderate and hard man. Everybody knows that
these disagreeable traits—and nothing else—set his former subjects against
him; but, strange to say, he does not seem to have learned the lesson, but
from my own observation and from what I have learned through others, I
conclude that he is more whimsical and selfish now than ever. Now I don't
write you this in any complaining mood, but only to explain to you why
my conduct towards him is somewhat changed. I esteem the Abbot highly.
I will readily, and as patiently as I can, bear up with all his disagreeable
humors and tempers, and revolting selfishness, but unless he has radically
changed the views he held when I was last with him in N. Y., the interests
of this mission are not served by placing them in his hands. Just think of
it! After I had appealed to several congregations in N. Y. to aid, for the
love of God and the salvation of souls, in bringing the light of the Gospel
to 60,000 souls sitting in darkness, Abbot Alexius actually suggested that
I should consider the money thus obtained as belonging to me, and to go
to no further trouble about the Bahamas, till the archbishop would open
his coffers and pay handsomely for my work.

You may imagine what a revelation this sentiment was to me,
especially while I was still suffering from the effects of an almost fatal
illness brought on by courageously sticking to my post (which otherwise
I would have deserted) for nine months to enable him to start a Mission in
N. Y. which was given him only on condition that this mission would be
thoroughly attended to. The N. Y. house, as the archbishop put it when
here, is the 'natural headquarters and basis of operation of the Bahama
Mission', and the two ought to work hand in hand. In fact if they do not,
both will be hampered in their work. I am most anxious that an intimate
union exist between them, that St. Anselm be the Motherhouse and this
mission a devoted filial, but believing as I do, and judging him from his
own statement, that the Abbot prefers dollars to souls, I don't feel like
placing the mission for which I have suffered not a little, into his hands
until I have assurance that he is really anxious to do what can be done for
the salvation of souls here.

If my position thus outlined is untenable theologically or otherwise,
I ask you most earnestly, to point it out to me. I have several times risked
my life for the work, and will gladly do so again if necessary. If Abbot
Alexius is willing to make at least an effort at peaceful and harmonious
cooperation and is further willing to render if necessary financial aid, I
will at once submit, turn over to him by will the property (worth about
$20,000) which I now hold in my name, and go on working as faithfully
as I know how to contribute my mite in bringing souls to God. If not, and
if I cannot get aid (I don't mean financial aid) from St. John's, I will have
to look elsewhere and reveal to His Grace [Archbishop Corrigan] the
reasons for my so doing. Trusting that you will understand rightly my
motives in writing in such plain terms, again begging you to correct me
if you find my conclusions untenable, and wishing you continued good health I remain....

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 21 September 1893:

I enclose a letter to you written with the intention of having you forward it to Abbot Alexius without telling him that it was ever intended, by the writer, for his perusal. You will probably think it unnecessarily harsh, but after reading what I will here say to you, you will agree with me, I think, that it will be best to forward it to him, accompanied by a covering letter in which you may make such suggestions as your prudence will inspire. You know Abbot Alexius, his disagreeable selfishness, harshness and impoliteness, well enough to know, that as a superior he will be a woeful failure in N. Y. as he was at St. John's unless he makes an effort to check his disagreeable traits. It will be really a work of charity to call his attention to his failings and to urge kindly but firmly the necessity of correcting such faults as make it almost impossible for anyone to work with him, much more to be his subject.

You can take the sting out of my letter by dwelling upon the fact that at the time I was with him in N. Y. I was just recovering from a severe illness of the brain, was over-sensitive and irritable, and that consequently my impressions were due more to the state of my nervousness than to anything he might have said or done. Then, too, I might have misunderstood him, etc. Then urge him to write me a letter in such a tone that it will open the way to reconciliation and harmonious agreement; that—you are sure that I am most anxious to cooperate with him for the welfare of both missions, that I feel keenly the fact that he has turned me a cold shoulder, and that I bear him no ill will. You might further suggest that I am really anxious to have him visit me during the winter and that you are sure if he wrote me in a friendly tone I would extend him an invitation to come down. (For instance if he made enquiries about the progress of the Mission, etc., I would undoubtedly invite him down to see for himself). By no means, however, let him know that the letter was meant for his perusal, or that I made these suggestions to you, or that you will tell me that you sent him my letter. That would anger him so much that he would never forgive. From what I have said you will readily understand what I mean, and your own prudence will tell you what is best to do. Act then, I beg you, the peacemaker and God will bless you for it.

Now let me touch another point that has grieved me much. The opinion seems to prevail at St. John's that it is so hot here in summer that no white man from the north can stand it. Just who is responsible for that opinion I don't know, but I feel certain that the devil is at the bottom of it. Thus far my own confreres have laid more obstacles in the path of the mission than have the hundred odd preachers of Protestantism here. The fact that I am still alive to write this, and am enjoying better health than ever, and that scores of whites from the north spend their lives here, ought to afford a brilliant refutation of this rampant untruth. True, I was sick the first summer and suffered very much, but that was not in consequence of the heat, but of my exertions and constant exposure to the sun while building the school. Then, too, it seem somewhat strange that it should be too hot for Catholic priests, and religious at that, when there are some
forty Protestant ministers with their families here from the north, some of them having been here 30 to 40 years without going north once in a decade,—all of them enjoying good health, and some of them undergoing greater hardships and more constant deprivation than any Catholic priest will ever be obliged to undergo.

Seems to me the objection is a sadder comment on religious zeal in the OSB than on the heat of our summers. Fr. Paul went north, not because it was too hot for him, but because he had *Wanderlust* and wanted to make a trip to Europe. Fr. Bartholomew was a restive invalid in the last throes of consumption. Fr. Austin went back because he wanted to finish his studies; Fr. Rupert because he had to have his teeth repaired, and could no more make up his mind to return here than he could at St. John’s to get up for Choir. Fr. Alexius is the only one who can speak of heat. He happened to be here at the very hottest time, came with a deranged stomach, was disappointed at not being able to return on time, and thus saw the greatest heat here under the most unfavorable circumstances. Ask him and even he will tell you that it was not hot beyond fairly comfortable endurance. I trust therefore, that the ‘hot’ argument will become obsolete. You are perfectly right in saying that voyaging to and from the Bahamas will put the community to ridicule.

My confreres will always be received with open arms and open house and will be hospitably entertained, but if my thanks will be nothing but expenditure of money collected specifically for the Mission and a ‘cry down’ of the ‘terrible’ heat, I would in future prefer not see anyone placed in the position to thus thank the mission. I mean not to cast reflections on anyone, but you can easily appreciate that it stings a little to have hospitality repaid in such a way. Fr. Alexius got home in time I hear. His visit was a surprise to me as it was a genuine pleasure, and I hope you will let him come down again. Fr. Austin expressed a willingness to return after his ordination. I would be glad to have him.

Our schools opened Sept. 6, with a good attendance in spite of the efforts made by the preachers to prevent it. I rented a house in the eastern part of the city and the sisters have opened a girls school in it. We expected at the outside an attendance of 40 all we thought we could accommodate, but there is a regular attendance of 60—all the room and porch can hold—with many applicants refused for want of room. As soon as I have assistance I will open it for Sunday services. My contemplated begging tour is indefinitely postponed. His Grace [Archbishop Corrigan] wrote me that on account of the hard times in N. Y. I ought to postpone it till I hear from him again. That makes awfully hard times here, especially as I have incurred expenses in view of the money I meant to collect. I took up $200 the other day to pay my current expenses. My health is very good, as is that of all the sisters. My toes, thanks to the *Lebenszwecker* are entirely cured. My newly acquired home is charmingly cool and comfortable. The summer heat is over now and the weather is almost as charming as in winter…..

Father Chrysostom to Abbot Bernard, Nassau, 15 February 1894:

Your favor of Jan. 8th reached me Jan. 22nd and on the same day came Abbot Alexius, Dr. Joerger, and Dr. Sinclair (of Rochester N. Y.).
Abbot Alexius and Dr. Joerger remained with me a fortnight and left on Feb. 6th from Mexico via Cuba. I had a good talk with Abbot Alexius and we came to some sort of an understanding. He promised to manifest some interest in the mission and to endeavor to obtain the services of some old Father who is able to say Mass and willing to remain here summer as well as winter. There is at present not enough work here for an additional young and active priest, that is there is work enough but we have not the means to build up the out island missions. If then I can get some reliable old priest who is in good health and can say Mass here while I make flying trips to the out-islands to build up a little, the needs of the Mission will be satisfied for some time at least. Such a priest need not preach or do any work in particular, but only be able to say Mass on the odd Sundays that I would be absent at Andros.

Father Valentine has written to me about coming, but has indicated that he can not stand the heat, besides I learn that he ails so much that he is constantly in need of special food, special care, etc. For that reason I am not inclined to think that he is the right man. This thing of making winter trips down here for health and then going north with summer is both an expensive luxury for the mission and a positive injury to its reputation. Abbot Alexius seemed well pleased with the progress and the prospects of the mission, and if he were a man of a little more tact he could be of great service in advancing the interests and welfare of the mission. However, though we have come to an understanding regarding a modus vivendi, I am still of the opinion that his views on spreading the Gospel among the heathen and of maintaining it among the Christians are not such as are most conducive to the interests of religion. I think you will understand the idea I wish to convey.

I ask you to keep this part of the letter private. I am very thankful to you for kindly accepting the intentions sent. It is a great help to me. Presuming again upon your kindness I venture to request to have 50 more Intentions satisfied ad intentionem petentis. Last Sunday I was at Andros for services at little St. Saviour's mission. Father Sinclair of Rochester N. Y., who is my guest till next steamer, was with me. He was so pleased with the outlook that he promised an annual donation of $100 for the next 5 years and of $50 thereafter as long as he lives. All here are well. My own health is excellent....

Abbot Alexius to Abbot Bernard, New York, 24 May 1894:

Lately I sent Fr. Gerard to the Bahamas, and requested Fr. Chrysostom to come up. He has been bothering me all along for a man. The archbishop had spoken to me on the subject several times. Fr. Chrysostom carried on a correspondence with about everybody, it would seem, except with me. Fr. Rupert did not want to return and it appears that Fr. Chrysostom didn't think him the proper man. Fr. Valentine had an idea of going down there but Fr. Chrysostom wrote him that he could not stand the climate.

Fr. Valentine is here but I think I would be just as well off and probably a good deal better off if he were not here. His work seems to be over, he is sickly and complaining. Of course, he is welcome here and I suppose will remain as long as the climate suits him. We have many
apostolic men whose apostolic zeal goes as far as the climate, but they draw the line there. In the lives of the old saints I have been looking for that particular trait in vain. Well, we are progressive.

Fr. Chrysostom is leaving for St. John’s this evening—to get a man, and until he has secured this man there will be no peace in the wigwam. Fr. Chrysostom has acted all on his own hook, he only applies to me when in a fix. He took the title to all the property. I think all should be in the archbishop’s name so that responsibility will remain there. I certainly would not take the deeds of that place. We should not bind ourselves in perpetuum to the Bahamas. We need money to run that place, and that money must come from this arch-diocese. If we have the deeds they will leave us alone, we will not get the necessary help. Besides Fr. Chrysostom has not even made a will, so he told me, and should any unforeseen accident happen, there would be a mighty tangle, he has not spoken to me on this subject since his arrival here....

NOTES:

1. The full story of the development of St. John’s Abbey and the controversy surrounding Abbot Alexius Edelbrock, O.S.B., can be found in Colman J. Barry, O.S.B., Worship and Work. St. John’s Abbey and University, 1856-1956 (Collegeville: St. John’s University Press, 1956).

2. The letters included in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, are from the archives of the archdiocese of New York, Dunwoodie, New York; the convent of Mt. St. Vincent on the Hudson, New York; St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota; and the diocese of Nassau, Bahamas.

3. Nassau Guardian and Bahama Islands’ Advocate and Intelligencer, 1 April 1892. Father Paul also wrote an account in German for St. Cloud’s Der Nordstern upon his return to Minnesota.


5. Carl Albury to Virgil Michel, O.S.B., Nassau, 13 March 1927.


7. Conditions came to a head when a New York monsignor in Cardinal Farley’s party staying at The Priory in the winter season of 1904 came upon a chicken pecking away at the dinner being prepared on a block in the outdoor kitchen. It was then that the kitchen was moved indoors adjoining the dining room.


10. The Record, January - November, 1894.

11. Interview with Mrs. Leslie Higgs, Nassau, 10 March 1971.

12. Interview with Irvin W. Bowen, Nassau, 4 May 1972.


For thirty years, 1891-1921, the Catholic mission in the Bahamas held on, as so often happened in those islands, with minimal personnel. Abbot Bernard Locnikar, O.S.B., died prematurely on 7 November 1894 of Bright’s disease at age forty-six after serving as abbot of St. John’s Abbey for only four years. He was succeeded by Abbot Peter Engel, O.S.B., subprior of that monastery, who continued as religious superior for the next twenty-seven years. Abbot Peter was definitely of the Edelbrock tradition and his election was judged to be a vindication of policies Abbot Alexius had advanced. However, his interests were in education and westward toward the state of Washington where the St. John’s community established St. Martin’s Abbey and into Canada where St. Peter’s Abbey was begun in Saskatchewan Province. During his long administration Abbot Peter sent only four priests to assist Father Chrysostom in the Bahama mission.

In his last year Abbot Bernard sent two priests to assist Father Chrysostom, seemingly as a belated recognition of Schreiner’s insistent Macedonian pleas for priestly associates. In June, 1894, two newly ordained priests, Fathers Melchior Bahner and Gabriel Roerig, O.S.B., arrived in Nassau to Father Chrysostom’s “immense gratitude.” Father Melchior, called “Austin” by Father Chrysostom for the English in Nassau, lived at The Priory, Dunmore House, and commuted for seven years by horse and buggy to Sacred Heart Church, the second Catholic parish in Nassau, a plain frame building on East Shirley Street near the Parade Ground. Father Gabriel was sent to Andros Island to begin a remarkable apostolate that continued for the next fifty-six years, the most extended missionary service of any Catholic priest in the Bahamas.

Father Chrysostom had gone to Minnesota for the ordination of Fathers Gabriel and Melchior on April 25 and brought them back with him in triumph to Nassau on June 6. The next morning, after they
celebrated Mass at St. Francis Xavier Church, he put them to work at once, with German practicality, in hewing a staircase out of the limestone rock between the church and The Priory. This stairway is still used today and remains as the first testimony of the new priests' zeal. The two young missionaries also built new windows, doors and house fixtures for The Priory, and then applied their carpentry skill to the construction of Sacred Heart Church.

While the two neophyte priests were making these physical improvements and additions, Father Chrysostom was writing a twenty page pamphlet which he published and distributed to every Protestant pastor and minister in the Bahamas. As a result of the Oxford Movement, then a burning issue in the Anglican Church, a caustic fight between high and low churchmen had burst forth in Nassau and the islands with the Catholic Church used as a background target. Father Chrysostom was tired of finding tracts under The Priory's door in the morning, and so he published *A Word To Tractwriters* answering the old bromides against Roman Catholicism and emphasizing the recent decision of Pope Leo XIII against the validity of Anglican orders. It was certainly not an ecumenical pamphlet, but the age was equally not ecumenical. It was a time when Christian ministers upstaged each other at every turn and to no one's spiritual advance.

Father Chrysostom had wanted from his first year in Nassau to establish a mission on Andros, only forty miles west of New Providence at its closest point, largest of the Bahama chain of islands and 100 miles in length. A large percentage of the island is water-covered with mostly unnavigable creeks. Andros has a long tradition of farming and lumbering as the greater part of the land is covered with forests and most of the settlements are on the eastern coast. In the days of the buccaneers Andros' many creeks provided a haven for pirate vessels. The most primitive villages existed in Andros and the art of African fire dancing was practiced in remote spots on the island.

More than 5,000 of the 6,000 people on Andros were Negroes. Most of the inhabitants were farmers while many of the women later served in domestic positions in the various tourist resorts that developed. The population remained large compared to some of the other Bahamian out islands. But there was a ratio of only four and four-tenths people per square mile because of its size. The Bahamas have never experienced over-population.

Governor William Robinson declared in 1898 that "Andros alone would supply a great portion of the States with fresh vegetables in winter." Agriculture and fishing could always have been the mainstay of most of the Bahama islands but there never was consistent planning and cooperation to bring this about. The story remains the same today.
as it was over a century ago. There still is no agricultural college or training station in the Bahamas. Craton advances his explanation of this phenomenon:

The giant farms in Andros and Abaco have shown that the Bahamas will grow practically anything in any season, given only the irrigation of invested capital and a well-planned distribution system; but at least until 1964 the Agricultural and Marine Products Board was the poorest department in a poor government. A fruitful comparison could be made with Jamaica and Trinidad, where for years the agriculture departments have been best served of all.

The explanation given in some quarters for the lack of support for Out Island agriculture was that the commercial interests dominant in the Legislature were no more willing to foster a flourishing farming economy than they were to support advanced education for Bahamian Negroes. The ‘Bay Street Boys’ were held to be unwilling to subsidize agriculture while rich profits were to be had from importing fruit and vegetables from the United States. The answer to this charge was usually that the Out Island farmer was too lazy, jealous and uncooperative to benefit from what had already been done, let alone what might be done.

This type of charge and counter-charge has been typical of Bahamian polemics in recent years, and to some it has seemed that Bahamians are ready to criticize than to make decisions; more willing to discuss an easier solution than actually to work.

Those first Benedictine missionaries in the Bahamas were unquestionably willing to work. They were totally committed to the German work-ethic and their own traditional Benedictine motto of Ora et Labora. The humble labor they and the Sisters of Charity continued to perform, the pennies they saved, and their total dedication to the people of God stand forth as an ongoing theme in establishing Catholicism in the Bahamas. To pass by this significant dimension or to pass it off as irrelevant would be the most ungrateful of all the superficial ingratiations that some contemporary charlatans attempt to project.

The New York Catholic Review, 22 March 1894, reported on developments in the Bahamas:

Good work is being done in the Bahamas. There are two churches and two schools. One, St. Francis Xavier’s Free school, for colored children, at Nassau, New Providence, is in charge of the Sisters of Charity, and boasts a membership of two hundred and forty-six. The other, which is a part of a frame building that serves the three-fold purpose of church, school room and dwelling, was opened June 1, 1893, with an attendance of fifty-nine pupils, and quite a number of adults have since applied for admission. The mission is in charge of two priests of the Order of St. Benedict. Rev. Chrysostom Schreiner reports as follows: ‘The support of the St. Francis Xavier Mission, at Nassau, requires about $2,500 per annum, and about six hundred dollars will be required to support the new mission at Salvador Point, and to defray the expenses of visiting various settlements on the outlying Islands. The prospects of the mission are very encouraging
at Nassau, and even more so on the outlying Islands. If means can be procured to visit some of these Island settlements and to erect small chapels at the most promising ones, the conversion of the entire settlements to the true faith will undoubtedly be the result in the near future. There are eight or ten such settlements, all black, along the eastern coast of Andros Island. These can be conveniently attended to by one priest, as soon as pecuniary means can be obtained to carry out the work. The Island has a population of about six thousand blacks, and there is but one white preacher (an Anglican) in the whole Island. The colored people are well disposed towards the Church, and now, for various reasons, is the time to work among them with the greatest advantage.'

We here cite from a letter directed by Father Schreiner to Archbishop Corrigan: 'Mr. Martin, who has kindly volunteered to devote himself to the work of a catechist at Andros Island, arrived here on the 21 inst. He seems to be well suited for the work. Next week I shall accompany him to Salvador Point, where I intend to make a beginning of out Island work. A little hut will be constructed for him to live in, and I intend to build a chapel that will also serve in the capacity of school and dwelling as soon as means can be obtained. Mr. Martin will gather the children for instruction, and I shall visit the mission as often as I can leave here. Everything looks so promising, and every day I feel more the necessity of doing all in my power to extend the work to various settlements in the out Islands. Lack of funds is the great drawback, not only to out Island work, but to our work here as well. I know not how to raise money enough to enable me to visit the out Islands. Our appeal to the charity of the North, from this distance, receives but little response, and the amounts received through you are from the Negro and Indian Mission Board, as the allotment for this mission, $750, is so small that, considering the expense of living here, will not even support and clothe one priest. I therefore beg your Grace to urge the Board to make a substantial increase in the allotment this year. Results already attained here, connected with the encouraging hope of a rich harvest of souls here in Nassau, with even brighter prospects on the out Islands, where Protestant opposition is almost nil, warrant me in saying that there is no more encouraging missionary field in all America than here in the Bahamas. Last year thirty-eight persons were received into the Church, and since the beginning of the present year twenty-eight have been received.

I do not know whether the Board has made the distribution for this year or not. If not, I beg your Grace to urge it to consider the needs of this mission. If it has already made the allotment, and has made it as small as it was last year, or the preceding year, I don't really know how I can manage out Island work. Meanwhile Protestants are vigorously pushing their way and unless we work vigorously, they will have possession of the most favorable settlements.'

Father Chrysostom visited Andros the year before Father Gabriel arrived. He went to Cargill Creek on 25 February 1893 and offered Mass at the home of John Greene from Newfoundland who had repeatedly urged him to come. Father Chrysostom also offered Mass at Behring Point while on Andros. The daughter of John Greene later became the first religious vocation from the Bahamas as a Sister of Charity,
but never served in the islands. Greene operated a sisal plantation at Behring Point. Here may be the answer to why the Catholic missionaries moved first to Andros. Bishop Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., often says that the fruit ripens on trees at different times. There is no logical explanation why missions are first started at any place. There is always a call from an individual or group who ask for Catholic service. In response to this call a missionary is sent if possible.

Father Chrysostom helped Greene establish the Marguerite sisal processing plant on Andros. He also purchased the Cargill estate for sisal development from the widow of William Cargill on Andros, but this project never produced the income planned. Governor Sir Ambrose Shea (1887-94), a Catholic, had long conversations with Father Chrysostom about the potential of the *agave rigida sisilana* plant from which sisal rope was made. Governor Shea had high hopes for large-scale production of sisal in the Bahamas. Shea established a government commission and its members visited the Yucatán peninsula in Mexico where sisal was widely cultivated in soil and climatic conditions similar to the Bahamas. The legislature passed laws favorable to hemp production and restricted imports of sisal through duty taxes. An additional favorable asset was that the United States did not levy import duties on hemp. Groups of English investors opened hemp plantations on Andros and San Salvador. It is interesting that one of these British hemp planters was the Rt. Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, secretary of state for the colonies. His son and eventual prime minister of Britain, Neville Chamberlain of later Munich fame, spent several of his early years in the difficult assignment of managing the family plantation on Andros.

A flourishing sisal production was soon underway in the Bahamas; 400 tons were exported by 1899. The Spanish American War, by temporarily cutting off Philippine imports of that fibre, also helped Bahamian exports to the United States. Some 20,000 acres of hemp were under cultivation in 1902. Nearly 1,000 tons were produced and fourteen cleaning mills were in operation.

The sisal boom was soon over as happened repeatedly in Bahamian agricultural and fishing enterprises. American capital shored up the Philippine sisal industry following the war and the world price fell steadily. Bahamian sisal was inferior to the sisal produced in the Pacific islands, India and East Africa. The crude method of beating Bahamian sisal by hand in salt water further reduced its competitive value. Although the sisal industry continued into the 1940’s, it was no longer a major economic support and the old island gloom descended on another high hope.

The first Benedictine missionaries in the Bahamas were all German immigrants or first generation American sons of midwestern German farmers. Nothing was more valuable to these nineteenth century Catholic
ethnics than the acquiring of real estate and the proud adding to their land holdings as quickly as possible. A man was esteemed according to the acres he owned. Catholics in the United States went through the period of acquiring real estate, brick and mortar and constructing imposing buildings. It was the gold star mark of religious advance into the twentieth century. Emigrants from Europe where they had nothing, immigrants in America where they were a minority often rejected and maligned by the majority white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant cultural majority, they struggled to achieve, to produce and to own. The freedom of the New World provided them with this opportunity for the first time and they were deeply grateful.

Father Chrysostom evidenced this tendency at once by his shrewd acquiring of Dunmore House and surrounding property. Throughout his long life he was ever alert to land acquisitions and wrote endlessly about possible farming developments on the out islands. Some of his land investments, such as the United Estates on San Salvador where he had such major dreams, did not materialize. As the Catholic mission developed into a diocese, these farming experiments had to be abandoned.

The investment in the Marguerite Fibre Company on Andros was one of Father Chrysostom's major mistakes. He was reminded of it continually in years to follow by religious superiors and confreres who considered his independent action here as irregular. When Mr. Greene prematurely died of cancer, Father Chrysostom agreed to the pleas of Mrs. Marguerite Greene, now in New York, to try to save what could be obtained from the sisal venture in which they all had invested. He, against his own inclinations, retained George Collins, brother of Marguerite Greene, as manager of the sisal farm. Collins was irresponsible, lazy and an habitual drinker who soon drove the whole enterprise further into debt by low production records and incompetent management. Father Chrysostom refused to pay Collins, forbade him The Priory, and an interminable litigation began between Collins and Father Chrysostom.

Early court records in Nassau are filled with such litigation procedures which appear to be the peculiar parlor game of the Bahamas of that period. Father Gabriel supported Collins and became temporarily alienated from Father Chrysostom in the matter. As a summary of thousands of pages of testimony, endless letters between Nassau, New York and Collegeville where Abbot Peter had been reluctantly dragged into the fray, Father Chrysostom was exonerated by the court of any responsibility to Collins. The experience left deep wounds, however, which never completely healed. The whole affair was an object lesson in the dangers of Bahamian speculation at any time.

When Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B. arrived in the Bahamas in the 1920's he even surpassed Father Chrysostom in real estate dealings,
but with more consistent shrewdness. No one ever quite equalled Hansen in this regard, and he relished, as only a Luxemburg-American could, every minute of his land exploits. Father Bonaventure had an uncanny ability to foresee land potential. He quietly acquired some of the finest property in Nassau and on the out islands for future Catholic centers. In the ancient Benedictine tradition of selecting high ground, Father Bonaventure acquired the high spots in Nassau where today beautiful centers such as St. Joseph parish, St. Martin de Porres convent of Bahamian sisters, St. Bede’s parish and St. Augustine’s monastery now stand. If Father Chrysostom from his height at Dunmore House could see this development, he would have been “immensely pleased, immensely pleased,” as he often said when a good turn was made.

When Father Chrysostom went to Andros in 1893, he took with him a catechist to instruct the island’s few Catholics, hold services and keep a Catholic presence until a priest could arrive. Catechists were employed extensively by all Christian groups in mission lands to prepare a parish and to assist the priest in touching several bases over extended areas. The man Father Chrysostom brought to Andros as catechist, the first of a long and noble Bahamian line of catechists, was certainly a character in his own right. He was James Martin of Brooklyn, whom New York friends of the mission had sent to Father Chrysostom. Schreiner immediately saw that he had an individualist on his hands and took him off to Andros as a first parting of the waters. Martin was a person filled with good will and generous inclination to serve, but he was equally distinguished by his lack of common sense. Father Gabriel, in his typically charitable manner, called him “unique”. James Martin was, as Father Gabriel described:

. . . a lame violinist, teacher and an all around genius except for making money. His solemn entry to Andros Island in 1892 was an event. Stovepipe hat, Prince Albert coat, family umbrella, violin under arm. With him on the boat was his new house. At one p.m. they started putting it up, at six p.m. it was ready for him to move into. However, a few floor boards were not placed as yet, leaving enough opening to hide a demi-john beneath the floor. When Father Chrysostom and Mr. Greene went to visit him the next morning at ten o’clock he was still sound asleep. ‘The best sleep I ever had in my life’, was his comment on awakening. The size of the house was ten by fourteen.

Martin persevered from May, 1893, until 22 September 1898 when Father Chrysostom dismissed him and gave him $60 for his return to New York. On 1 January 1896 Martin had asked to become an Oblate of St. Benedict and received the habit from Father Chrysostom. He was a fabled figure on Andros during those early years of the Catholic mission with monk’s habit and violin to the delight of the people who never had experienced such a visitation.
Father Chrysostom wrote one of his interesting letters to *The Record* on 1 July 1893 detailing the beginnings of the first out island Catholic mission in the Bahamas. It is a valuable document since primary sources on out island missionary work are few and far between:

According to promises made, but not kept, you ought to have heard from me at regular intervals. I have no excuses to offer for my long continued silence, though I have three which, on second thought, I will offer.

First, when one gets to the Bahamas he soon discovers that he must have been born tired;

Second, 'De still calf suck de mos' milk,'

Third, my pen has become 'flustibicated wid de weah ob age done fetch on by disusin.'

So, now I'll chronicle the happenings of a cruise 'wid yoah pumishun, Mr. Editor, Sah.'

For some time past I have been contemplating the founding of a mission at Salvador Point, Andros Island. Andros is about 35 miles from Nassau, and this particular settlement, farther down the coast, is about 60 miles from here. A good Catholic family, Greene by name, lives within two miles of the settlement on a Sisal plantation. Last February I made my first cruise of inspection. The Rev. Dr. H. L. Robinson, of Chicopee, Mass., then a guest at The Priory, accompanied me. We left Nassau Feb. 23, and on the following day at 8 p.m. we were welcomed at Mr. Greene's house. On Saturday, Feb. 25, I said Mass at the same house. This was the first Mass ever said on Andros Island, unless indeed some Spanish priest was there three or four hundred years ago. During the day I visited the settlement and made choice of a site which Mr. Greene was to purchase in the event of my determining to establish a mission there. The large attendance at the Masses celebrated the next (Sunday) morning by Dr. Robinson and myself, determined me in the resolve to establish a mission at Salvador Point. Both of us preached to the sizeable congregation and many were the nods of approval, amens, and 'Massa priest am right for true.'

The following day on our return voyage we sailed northerly along the coast about 45 miles to Mastic Point, where Mr. Neville Chamberlain, son of the great English Liberal Unionist leader, operates a Sisal plantation of thousands of acres. That night we enjoyed the hospitality of Mr. Chamberlain and on Thursday, Feb. 28, we returned to Nassau. This was a sort of preliminary cruise. Since then Mr. Greene has purchased a four acre lot for the mission, and I placed myself in correspondence with an elderly gentleman of Brooklyn who has volunteered his services as a catechist and keeper of the place, as soon as a start could be made. Mr. Martin arrived here on the 2nd of May.

In the back yard of the rectory here I had a frame shanty, 10 x 14 ft., constructed to serve in the Andros Mission in the threefold capacity of chapel, school and dwelling. Mr. Martin, Mr. Greene, myself and this combination structure were aboard the schooner *Struggle* at 10 p.m. May 16th, and Frs. Austin and Bartholomew came to the wharf to see us off. At the hour of sailing neither captain nor crew could be found. Within an hour, however, a sleepy looking fellow who informed us that he was 'Capting Sam Sanders,' put in an appearance and soon after three of the crew straggled along. Nine others who belonged to the sponging crew, or were
to go on the Struggle as passengers, were still missing and 'Capting' Sam informed us that they would not be around till morning, some of them probably not till after two or three days, and that we must wait till they were all in. Mr. Greene who has had varied experience with spongers, promptly told the captain and crew that we had arranged to leave at 10 o'clock and now that we were on board, we would start, men in or not, and ordered the anchor raised. There was scarcely a breeze and we floated down the harbor on the ebbing tide.

As your readers are unfamiliar with the terms sponging vessels, or 'spongers', as here used, I will digress a little to explain these terms. Sponging vessels are small sloops or schooners, rarely larger than 40 feet in length, on which 'spongers', or sponge-fishers go out to the sponging grounds, the largest of which are in the shallow Bahama Banks west of Andros Island. The vessels nearly all belong to Nassau merchants who fit them out with provisions and send them out on a 5 or 6 weeks' expedition, manned with from four to twenty spongers, most of whom are Andros Island people. A sponging vessel starts out from Nassau and its first objective point is some Andros Island settlement at which the spongers happen to live. There they stay till they feel like moving on. Then they sail around to the western side of the island, anchor the vessel, and the spongers armed with long poles to which are fastened hooks, row out in small row boats to fish, or 'hook' the sponges that grow on the bottom. A cargo is thus usually obtained in 4 or 5 weeks. In that time the provisions also generally run short, and the vessel returns, first to the settlement, then to Nassau, where the cargo is sold at auction.

The value of such a cargo is from $100 to $300. One third of this goes to the owner of the vessel. From the remaining two thirds are subtracted the provisions used on the cruise (usually put in by the owner at exorbitant rates), drayage, brokerage etc., and what is left is divided in shares among captain and crew.

On such a sponging vessel, a small schooner, about 35 feet long, manned with a crew of four such spongers, we crossed the bar of the harbor at 12 o'clock that night. The vessel was appropriately named the Struggle. She was a poorly constructed, poorly rigged, and a worse manned Struggle. Her one cabin was about 4 by 5 ft. in size, and about 5 ft. high. Into this were crowded our provisions, our personal baggage—and our three persons as soon as the rain which accompanied us on the whole voyage compelled us to take to this leaky and filthy quarter, well populated with fleas, cockroaches and other vermin.

Even the down-pour of rain could not keep me in 'de cabin', especially when a stiff breeze came up and I heard the sound snoring of three of the crew in the hold and saw the fourth half-asleep at the helm. Mindful of former experience with such a crew I proceeded to arouse the 'Capting' and to inculcate the necessity of watchfulness as long as we were within a mile of rocks and reefs. 'Capting' Sam rubbed his eyes, yawned, assured me that he had sailed these waters 15 years and knew every rock in them, and—went to sleep again.

Crash, crash, on the reef!

And hadn't Mr. Greene, who is an experienced Newfoundland sea captain, instantly taken command, we would probably never have got off again either. The pump was tried and the vessel happily found dry.
After beating dead against the wind the following day till 5 p.m. we
were off the northern end of Andros and just as far from our destination
as we were when we started. At that hour however a squall came up that
brought us a favorable wind and before nightfall we made better headway
than we had made in 18 hours before. We anchored for the night within
the reef at Stanyard Creek. All the next day we cruised along the shore and
at 5 p.m. we threw anchor at the settlement,—not however till after we
had run onto a sand bar, just in sight of the place of our destination.
Running on sandbars within the reef is such an ordinary occurrence to the
sponger that a voyage without striking a sandbar or rubbing against a
boulder is quite the exception. As soon as the seaman here is within the
reef, or in 'white water,' as he calls it (shallow water with a white sand
bottom), he either goes to sleep or sings hymns, and when the craft does
run on a bar he simply continues either performance until the floodtide
carries her off again.

The whole settlement met us at the shore, and when they learned the
object of our visit there was general rejoicing. Capt. Greene had told them
that a white gentleman from New York (that term stands for the whole
North here) had come to live with them and teach their children. This was
an unexpected honor for them and their feelings of joy were signally aug­
mented when the material for the shanty was landed and the 'white gen’I’m'
stepped ashore. A few men at once volunteered to clear the brush of the
building site, and the women to tote the lumber on their heads to the building
place. As night came on we went over to Capt. Greene’s plantation, after
the Baptist Elder, Charles Williams, had given me the assurance that he
would watch the lumber, 'fo' he added 'dese people am all thieves, fo true,
Capting Greene, knows fo true, Fader,' and after Mrs. Mackey, the Angli­
can deacon’s wife, an Amazon of Herculean build, had threatened every
would-be-thief with a look of her eye and a clinch of her fists.

Next morning, Friday, May 19, at 8 o’clock, we began setting up the
shanty. I engaged four men who called themselves carpenters, the aforesaid
Williams being the master builder. Neither had a saw, hammer, chisel, auger
or any other tool, and not one of them was any more able excepting in
strength, to drive a nail in the right place or without splitting the board,
or of sawing off a board without running an inch off the square mark in
six inches, than a seven year old, cross-eyed child is able to do so. Captain
Greene and myself had to point out the spot for every nail to be driven and
direct each board to its proper place. In spite of these little drawbacks, by
six o’clock that evening, to the wonderment of the natives, our house stood
completed, veranda and all, the noblest structure in the whole settlement,
and Mr. Martin took immediate possession.

As some of these statements may seem incredible, I will say a few
words in explanation of this settlement and what I say of it will equally
explain what the conditions of many of the settlements on this island are.

The settlement has about 250 inhabitants, all blacks. They live in
rudely constructed little stone huts, covered with palmetto thatch. Excepting
sweet potatoes, cassava, and other such truck that grows almost wild,
nothing is cultivated. These vegetables, and conch, crabs and fish, caught
for daily supply form the staple diet. When the spongers return from
'Town', small supplies of flour, rice, hominy and tobacco are added as
luxuries. While we were at the settlement, barring our own provisions, I
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don't think there was a shilling's worth of either of these articles in the whole settlement. Yet, everybody is well fed, though always hungry; there is no actual want, everybody seems happy and contented, and when evening comes the sound of song and mouth organ wafts sweetly on the soft and balmy breeze, harmonizing wonderfully with all nature around, even down to the music of the ever present mosquito.

There are no roads, no cattle, no horses, no sheep, few goats but lots of curs of the 'yaller dorg' species.

The natives are religiously inclined. Most of them are Baptists, though they have no resident minister, and no white minister ever visits them. The Anglicans have a small church in a woefully dilapidated condition, and a white preacher visits them twice or thrice a year. A local catechist conducts such service as he is capable of; while the above mentioned master-builder Williams is the accredited local elder for the Baptists. Neither he nor the catechist are able to read intelligently a chapter of the Bible, or a page of any other book, and either of them is easily the peer of the school master, a boy of 18 years who presides over the Anglican school and wields the rod over a lot of youngsters, who come and go as they please and whose progress in the three R's is in keeping with the surroundings. Both these teachers of religion and the master of the rod don't know the difference, I am sure, between Her Majesty the Queen, and Almighty God—both terms being for them 'pow'ful flustifications ob de soul'.

Such in outline is the condition of the settlement. There is therefore room for progress, and lots of it, and the prospects for doing good are very promising. Mr. Martin opened school on June 1st, with an attendance of 59 pupils and the Anglican school has since collapsed.

Leaving Mr. Martin in charge, I engaged a small sponging sloop the following morning to take me back to Nassau, where I arrived the following day, Pentecost, just in time to celebrate Mass at the usual hour.

I intend visiting Andros again some time in July to dedicate St. Saviour's chapel. I dread voyaging in these poorly manned sponging vessels very much but as the government proposes putting on a mail schooner soon, I will have a chance for somewhat better accommodations, though the best are poor enough.

My terrible experience of last year and the nearly fatal experiences in the Struggle have taught me the lesson of watchfulness and the necessity of making an effort at seamanship myself.

I'se done tired writin' and I'se gwine stop sho't, wid de complishments of the season fo'h joyable vaxashun, I says.

Howde, Mr. Editor, Sah.

When Father Gabriel arrived on Andros he set about with his quiet and persistent energy to construct St. Mary Saviour's Church at Behring Point which was blessed on 20 June 1897. Father Gabriel then obtained permission from Abbot Peter to visit his mother in Germany and left on July 1. It was a rewarding journey, one that Father Gabriel could pull off in his unassuming way. First, after visiting the family in Germany, he went to Rome and was granted an audience with Pope Leo XIII, a rather rare happening for a neophyte missionary in a far off and certainly unknown area to the Roman curia.
Father Gabriel told the Pope about the beginnings in the Bahamas and Leo XIII listened with interest and encouragement. The only information Rome had about the Bahamas were the infrequent letters Archbishop Corrigan had sent the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith regarding this missionary charge of his. Unfortunately, no records of this meeting with Leo XIII and the first Catholic missionary to Andros exist for it would be the last consideration of the laconic Gabriel Roerig to record anything about himself. It was a yearly task of the St. John’s abbots to get him even to send a report about his mission. It was in this totally unpretentious and unexpected way that Rome first made even a momentary personal contact with the Bahamas.

Second, Father Gabriel brought back from Germany on 22 November 1897 his young brother Joseph who studied English and worked at the mission on Andros until January 24 of the following year when he went to St. John’s University in Minnesota to study for the priesthood. He would return in June, 1913, as Father Leander, a full-fledged missionary in the Bahamas, and remain serving wherever asked in the islands until his accidental death by drowning at age seventy-one off Bimini on 15 September 1955. While taking his afternoon swim, he was swept off into the dangerous currents. The Roerig brothers, Gabriel and Leander, can never be passed over lightly in the history of Catholicism in the Bahamas despite their distinctive and unassuming desire for anonymity. The Bahamas have never experienced such simple and devoted spiritual service as was given with love and without a single demand by these two priests from Nenterhausen, Nassau, Germany, who just would have had to be apostles in any season wherever the Lord called his own.

The Rev. Dr. Callahan, O.S.B., St. Leo Abbey, St. Leo, Florida, also wrote a small pamphlet during these first years about his visit to Andros on a mission trip. Father Callahan was in the Bahamas on doctor’s orders and Father Chrysostom sent him to Andros to replace Father Gabriel during the latter’s absence in Europe. Callahan catches the spirit of out island mission life despite a rather profuse and romantic style:

Leaving at dawn to go on a Mission trip to Andros Island, the voyage Mass in the silent watch of the early morn, dim lights on the altar, seemed to bring near uncharted shores—the Holy Souls with angel guardians around the altar.

The Angelus Bell was sending its silver tones across the quiet waters of the Harbour from the Priory grounds, as the Shamrock warped away from the wharf and its steadying sail set to the vagrant breeze, for Andros.

As we crossed the Harbour bar, a white cloud of ‘Gullys’, as the sailors call the great gray sea-gull, arose from the Lighthouse reef to circle over the sail and for a few minutes wing their way over our sail, as if to signal ‘bon voyage’. To the soft ‘rock and fetch’ of the sea I finished my ‘Little Hours’ on the foredeck, and the Brother Christopher had given me a light collation of toast and coffee at the Priory, I now had coffee with
the crew, men of Spanish Wells, my first mission effort—Coffee on an Island boat must be drawn 'in the dark',—and what I mean 'black', and 'strong' enough to float a belaying pin—real sailor 'black-strap' from the galley or caboo.

The sea-isles and the sea always claim my tribute of lore and imagery. Iridescent in the golden light of morn, schools of flying fish flick the waves. Black terns ('Egg Birds' in the Bahamas parlance), in dusky plume and white breast, skim the sea in mating pairs; on bridal-tour across the waves they love so well, soon, for a time, a lone rocky cay will be their nesting home.

I look in vain for the little sea-dove of good St. Peter, the Stormy Petrel, which sailor folk aver bring good luck to sails at sea. This little petrel seems to walk on the waters (Matt. XIV 29). His long legs hanging down, his webbed feet seem to pat each wave with a soft tread, as he follows the wake of the boat. Sea birds have a fascination all their own, sailors of the deep, who follow the fisher's calling.

But we sailed on a mission trip, and high noon shadowing towards eve, found the Mail leaving the 'Blue Waters' of the 'Tongue of the Ocean,' to sail across the 'White Water', marking the coral reefs of Andros—Our port of call in turn, Nichols Town, Mastic Point, Staniard Creek—As mystic tropic eve was brooding over sea and isle, I disembarked at Staniard Creek. Evening prayers and devotions at night fall. Mass at dawn. After Mass comes 'Levee' for the curious. 'Open Kitchen' for the hungry. 'Almonry' for the indigent, 'Clinic' for the sick—Between times visits, talks, catechism, little missions—Little time for sea moods and tenses. Then came the little Mission boat, Star of the Sea, dropping anchor off shore, to sail me to Calabash Bay, 'up-shore'. We had to beat up against a head wind. 'Ready about! Let's go! Hard alee!' The shore shelving, the reef not far off shore, all day it was, 'tack and fetch.' Finally late, wind burned and tired, we had to 'Lay to' at Rocky Point, 'two tree mile' from the village run the surf for the beach in the skiff, and with bag and box 'make up so' long shore to the Church.

The sponging fleet is idle here because some disease has destroyed the sponges in the sponging ground off Andros, called 'The Mud.' This, with no yams or cassava for bread, no fruits or food from their little farms for want of rain, has brought lean days to this little village of the sea, as well as to Small Hope, neighboring settlement. So after Mass, a portion of bread and 'hard tack' (ships-biscuit) was given to the children. On visits, into the Medicine Bag along with 'Doctor's' medicine for the sick went tins of Vienna sausage for the infirm and old, and cans of condensed milk for the babies. Among the small children who came 'to see yo' Fadah,' or for a crust of bread, was one little brown miss; after a long effort to find her errand, I at length learned that, 'Zeekie,' a loved 'mother' cat, which had 'found' a baby kitten, had died in the night and left her 'baby'. The only hope of 'baby kittie's' survival was 'Fadah'. 'Fadah' could supply milk for baby kittie, 'foh dat I begs yo suh!' The tot got the milk and carefully memorized instructions 'dat ebry day de milk mus' be boil!' to keep sweet for 'Zeekie's kittie'. Am wondering if the Prophet Ezekial had a cat for a namesake.

Not far from the church one day I saw a group of little ones searching industriously among the potholes and fissures of the coral rock. I walked
over to watch them but they all sat back on their little bunkers, silent, with little fists shut tight. To my repeated inquiries as to the object of their search, finally one little tattered miss, with hanging of head and embarrassment replied, 'Little black crabs, Fadah!' 'Sold'jer crabs, suh!' 'What will you do with them?' 'Roast dem, Fadah!' 'We is hungry, suh.'

'God help us!' How true it is that Our Dear Lord left us the poor—and the little ones. Well, anyhow the bread-box was soon empty. So I needed bread: I had a small bag of brown rice and a box of raisins, getting hold of some yams and cassava root, had the family who cooked, grate them, and make dough. The rice and raisins were cooked together and worked into the dough. The bread was baked in the open oven—it was good bread. At a little ship's chandlery or shop in the village, flour could be had, so these children taught me to take a 'chek' or a 'tuppence' along with 'Doctor's' medicine in my medicine bag for a little flour for a batch of bread. It was hard to get the sick ('with a cough') to keep in the sun and not 'den up', so I put a 'taboo' on the shade....

The Mission day has many joys but most pleasant was the hour of Evening Benediction. The church bell sounds before sunset, then presently we have evening prayers, rosary, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, with a visit and litany of Our Lady's. Soon ruddily gleaming from open rock oven or 'caboo' the cooking fires are ablaze at each palm thatched cabin. Then sounds the twilight bell at Angelus, and from each family group you can hear the Angelus prayers recited. And then from one or another cooking fires children's voices are heard chanting a hymn of Catholic devotion to Mary, Queen of May: the deeper sea chant voices of their elders crooning the air. The eerie voices of the children, the lancing flame on palm tree, the tropic light on land and sea....

Sea isles low,
Fire-flies glow,
Whispering palm and pine tree.

Seems to bring far off Galilee to the village scene. Rosary in hand, as you pace the sea-wall near the coral-rock chapel.... And your village of the sunlit sea at rest, all silence, save the soft cadence of the cedars, the sibilant whisper of the waves as they slither on the sea-shore, or the zephyrs murmuring a Nocturne of the Night. You feel that it sleeps faithful to Him who commanded the waves and the sea. Confident that He, our Eucharistic Lord, will guard them, in the silent watches of the night....

With Fathers Gabriel and Melchior assisting him in the Bahamas, Father Chrysostom now had more time to devote to begging trips north, especially to New York. The generosity of New York Catholics to the Bahamas, from cardinal archbishops through clergy and laity, is a consistent reality continuing to the present. To ignore these on-going gifts or try to associate them with classical forms of colonialism would be a serious misjudgment. The Catholic Church in the Bahamas simply would not have developed to its present dimensions without the personal and financial support given with no other motive than the advancement of God's kingdom.
Father Chrysostom also had more time now to begin “The St. Francis Xavier Parish Record Book” which is a gold mine after 1896 of historical nuggets. Schreiner ever chafed under the restrictions he had to endure of not being able to publish widely and continuously. How he longed to publish! He wrote letters to The Guardian in Nassau; he wrote anonymous articles and tutored Etienne Dupuch of The Tribune; he sent articles to The Catholic Encyclopedia, to the New York Catholic Review and to the St. John’s University newspaper, The Record, while entering monthly reports to the published parish bulletin of St. Anselm’s parish, New York, on developments in the Bahamas. He said in 1913 with resignation, “I am sorry that our monastery or at least our Benedictine Congregation has not an organ to which one could more appropriately send communications than to a mere parish monthly.”

Schreiner composed an extensive article in 1908 on Christopher Columbus and the question of his landfall on San Salvador. The article, of course, was never published. In that period and into the present, American Catholic ecclesiastical structures have faintly recognized scholarship and study, never supported it as in such countries as Germany or France, and continue in too large a proportion to downgrade it with a peasant mentality that is not worthy of their immigrant forbearers’ aspirations. Father Chrysostom seems to be prophetic in sending his article on to Abbot Peter on 18 February 1908, “I am writing this under a tree where I said Mass this morning on the beach where Columbus first landed, October 12, 1492.” Scholarly Catholics in America are still trying to associate their contributions with the establishment of the Church in the New World. It is a struggle which still has to be resolved.

In the “Parish Record Book” Father Chrysostom entered many interesting happenings of those years. He reported that the Spanish consul, Don Pompeio Diaz y Cossio, lodged with him and supplied welcome income. The United States consul, James McLain, was also a friend of Father Chrysostom and often came to dinner at The Priory. Whenever an oceangoing ship came to port, Father Chrysostom was invited aboard for dinner and then reciprocated for the officers during the stop in Nassau. This social contact with Governor Shea and the Government House entourage, the social arbiters of Nassau, with consular representatives, with harbor highlights all helped to establish the Catholic presence among these sectors of Bahamian life.

A first bazaar was held on 22 December 1897 and realized £54 in two evenings. These annual Catholic bazaars on the grounds of St. Francis Xavier parish and later cathedral became a firm tradition. Everyone worked for months preparing items to be sold and raffled. Food was donated, the sisters had all hands on deck for months practicing skits and musicals, children sold tickets in that familiar Catholic practice,
and the business community was ever generous in donations of articles for the games of chance and, of course, bingo. The yearly bazaar was an important source of income. The people worked together for the common end and each year saw an increase in returns. For example, $35,000 was realized in 1972 from this single undertaking. The Bahamian people loved such events and came with their entire families and clans, dressed in their finest, and staying to a late hour. Nellie Burns Higgs tells of one bazaar when the women slaved to prepare the lunch and dinner foods only to find just before they began serving that the ants had overcome the foods before the paying guests arrived, much to the consternation of all involved.

There is a long litany of names of clerical guests at The Priory from America and Europe. Catholic clerics and laity early realized that they were welcome in Nassau and they came in a steady stream that continues to the present. Many contributed generously to the mission and came back year after year. An important dimension of hospitality was established by the pioneer Benedictines that has continued as a unique feature of the Catholics fortunate enough to live in one of the world’s tourist meccas.

Father Chrysostom charged clerical boarders $2 a day, certainly a bargain at any time. Most of the guests were a welcome source of contact for the island missionaries, but Father Chrysostom would note the departure of some with a delightful Gott sei Dank. One of the more colorful priest guests of the first years was Monsignor and Doctor H. L. Robinson, Chicopee, Massachusetts, friend of Archbishop Corrigan, who came every winter season. His arrival was noted by the Nassau community and St. Francis Xavier Church was filled every time he preached. An Anglican convert, he understood how much the Bahamians valued good sermons, and he worked hard in preparing them. American Catholic priests were not universally known for a dedication to high standards in homiletic techniques.

Bahamians enjoyed and wanted long sermons, long services and long hours in church. It was and remains in considerable part a social experience for each parish community. There is an old saying in the Bahamas, “There are not seven sacraments of the Church, but actually nine.” Sermon and hymns are added as vital experiences needed and cherished by the faithful. Monsignor Robinson uniquely responded to this need. He would ascend the pulpit, handkerchief in hand, and proceed into the deep. To a chorus of “Amen, Alleluia, Yes, Say it Father, Sail On,” he would develop his homiletic points while winding the handkerchief around four fingers of an upright hand. At the turning point of the sermon, he slowly unwound the handkerchief to everyone’s delight as he solved the entangling problems under discussion. Each year he came
back to tell the fable of the lion and the ass, and if he did not bring it forth at once people would meet him on the street and ask when he would bring that message to them.

There are so many unrelated items in the "Parish Record Book," interesting but not of major historical value in themselves. For instance, Father Chrysostom sold one of his two buggies donated by Archbishop Corrigan to Joseph E. Dupuch, Etienne's uncle, for £9 on 5 January 1898. Consider the adding of the transepts to St. Francis Xavier Church in January, 1899, and the installation of an acetylene lighting plant at The Priory, with gas lights for St. Francis Church, that same year. On 16 January 1899 the lights were put on for the first time and Father Chrysostom, with his usual touch for the dramatic, opened Dunmore House and church for public inspection. The crowds were lined down the hill to see these first interior gas lights in Nassau, another triumph of German practicality in a British colony, with no visible religious significance except an in-house Catholic satisfaction at scoring a point.

The acetylene lights were ready for the inspection of the new auxiliary bishop of New York, John Farley, who arrived in early February on his first visit to the Bahamas. Farley became archbishop of New York on 15 September 1902 after the death of Archbishop Corrigan on May 5 of that year. Archbishop Farley was named a cardinal, 27 November 1911, and continued as ordinary of New York and the Bahama mission until his death on 17 September 1918.

Bishop Farley came to Nassau with Monsignor Edward McKenna, confirmed eighteen persons on February 10 at St. Francis Xavier, under the new lights, of course, and nineteen at Sacred Heart two days later. Father Chrysostom then had to take his visitors off to San Salvador, his favorite spot in the Bahamas where he was always returning in thought and plans. The party playfully had their picture taken around the Chicago Herald's monument to Columbus placed at the wrong location of the landfall on this sparkling cay. Father Chrysostom said, "The little man [Farley] is quite different and first-rate companionship once he is out from behind that big desk in New York."

Schreiner lectured his guests on what should be done on San Salvador: a church and school established, a farm opened and some training center begun as a memorial to Columbus. Farley promised to open some New York doors for him, and the next year Father Chrysostom was invited to address the New York Knights of Columbus, a branch of the national Catholic laymen's fraternal association which had been successfully established in the States as an ethnic outlet for Catholics who could not join existing secular secret societies such as the Masons or Odd Fellows because Rome had condemned such groups in Europe when they at first were forces seeking the overthrow of existing governments. Such a con-
demnation continued long after these secular fraternals had changed their purposes entirely, and continues in force today as an atavistic vestige of institutions with long histories.

Father Chrysostom addressed a Knights of Columbus banquet at Brighton Beach, New York, and made his pitch to them. The Knights pledged $5,000 a year for five years and Father Chrysostom was on the way with his project of writing a book on Columbus and establishing a permanent memorial on San Salvador. The United Estates property was purchased in 1909, farming and horse raising was begun, but nothing permanent except the parish was established. The Knights became disenchanted and there ensued a lengthy correspondence on this matter.

But, perhaps, the most surprising exploit Father Chrysostom pulled off in this early period was his sudden departure from Nassau for the States during the 100 day Spanish American War in 1898. He simply, just like that, went off to become a chaplain for Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders. He asked no one for permission, always a difficult procedure for him. He left on 27 April 1898 for Miami, Washington and New York, but found no response to his enthusiastic support for this engagement. His father, the frontier guide, would have been proud of him. However, his abandoning of the mission he so courageously advanced, his rushing into a questionable nationalistic war, only points up his mercurial character and impulsive need to express himself in dramatic drives. Father Chrysostom went down to Chickamauga, Tennessee, and asked to be a Catholic chaplain but was refused and told by the commanding officer, after he had served there several weeks, that the United States Army had no commissioned chaplains.

Father Chrysostom, delightfully for all who hold to the protest tradition, then wrote extensive articles in New York and Brooklyn papers denouncing this decision. Schreiner did not prevail and had to leave without setting off for Cuba where he longed to go with the Rough Riders. He then returned to Nassau and continued his apostolate there. His little failure, however, bore fruit in the future as his protests and those of others brought about the establishment of the Military Ordinariate for chaplains to soldiers in World War I. While war cannot be blessed by Christians, it is still a reality that Christians who are involved in nationalistic encounters need spiritual ministrations. Father Chrysostom's impulsive action at this time was a contribution to the eventual establishment of chaplains to the United States armed forces.

Abbot Peter Engel, O.S.B., St. John's Abbey, made his first and only visit to Nassau and Andros from 21 February to 3 March 1899. It was not until four years later that he sent another priest to the Bahamas, Fr. Theodore Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., a consumptive, who was stationed at Sacred Heart Church until his death two years later on 26 February
1905. Father Theodore was the first Benedictine to die in the Bahamas, and his brother, Fr. Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., came to the islands twenty-four years later as prior and eventually first Catholic bishop.

Before this story moves into the twentieth century, the great hurricane of 1 August 1899 must be recorded. Lives lost totalled 226. Father Gabriel had just completed St. Mary’s Church at Behring Point, Andros, before the hurricane came and it stood the fierce onslaught of the elements.

The property of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas during the first twenty years was held in the name of Father Chrysostom or Archbishops M. A. Corrigan and J. M. Farley. This was an irregular procedure both from the position of the archbishop of New York, and from the canonical restriction on a religious owning property. Abbots Bernard and Peter repeatedly protested against this situation, but their refusal to commit St. John’s Abbey to the spiritual care of the Bahamas did not advance a solution to the problem. Father Chrysostom, personally, always insisted he was holding his property against the day that the St. John’s Benedictines might see the light and establish a priory in the Bahamas.

When this eventuality yearly seemed more remote, Father Chrysostom turned to New York and told Cardinal Farley that the title to the property held by Archbishops Corrigan or Farley might under the laws of the colony at any time be made a matter of litigation by heirs or would-be heirs of the archbishops. The result, after lengthy consultation with legal lights in Nassau and the archbishop’s lawyers, was to petition a corporation act in the Bahamas.

Father Chrysostom obtained permission from Archbishop Farley during the year he was made a cardinal for authorization to incorporate the mission in the Bahamas. It would remain, naturally, under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the New York archdiocese but would have a better legal position with local incorporation. On 6 April 1911 Farley told Schreiner that his diocesan consultors had agreed to the introduction of a bill in both houses of the Bahamas legislature for the incorporation of the Roman Catholic vicar forane in the Bahamas with the view of vesting in this corporation the title to the property now owned by the Catholic Church in the Bahamas. Public notice was made of the same on 3 May 1911. The act passed both houses of the legislature, the governor signed the bill and it received royal assent.

Interestingly, Father Chrysostom also petitioned on 6 May 1912 Governor William Grey-Wilson in Council for the rights and privileges of a natural born subject of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and took the oath of allegiance. Father Chrysostom never made this fact public, perhaps because he didn’t want to alienate his many Irish-American friends in the States who could possibly dry up donations. England was certainly not their first love as they remembered centuries
of British persecution of Ireland. Nor would this be a popular move among Americans generally, including his associates, the German-Americans in the Midwest. However, it was a typical example of the foresight of Father Chrysostom and symbolic of his total commitment to work in the colony as part of the political structure of that time.

Father Chrysostom began plans to construct a bungalow on The Priory grounds as a place for guests to stay and as a source of income. The building was a neat one-story stone building adjacent on the west to The Priory and cost $8,000 when completed on 5 December 1910.

Professor Straub, who was brought from Germany, did an interesting frieze around the main room and entry hall which associated Columbus and the Benedictines with native Bahamian history. This touch was typical of Father Chrysostom’s grand style in anything he undertook.

As he wrote to Abbot Peter on 14 April 1909, “I shall do anything possible to advance this Benedictine mission in the far-off Atlantic. The Bahama mission, of which I may say without self-laudation, is one of the most important colored missions in America.” The Bungalow was the first cement structure in Nassau and “the most beautiful house in Nassau,” as Father Chrysostom proudly stated. He had done all of the plumbing work himself and called it the “Nassau Ritz.”

Bungalow Dunmore was designed as a residence for the archbishop of New York and his party when they visited the Bahama mission almost on a yearly schedule. At other times it was rented to families who were friends of Father Chrysostom or who asked to stay at this choice spot on the hill overlooking the harbor. The first residents of this bungalow were the J. D. Hailman family of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who stayed for six months at a cost of $1,200. Schreiner was already receiving a good return on his investment. Admiral and Mrs. Henry W. Grinnell came in 1912, Dr. S. C. Dolley and family the following year, and Robert Collier and family of the New York publishers of Collier’s Weekly, made reservations at Bungalow Dunmore for the winter seasons of 1913-16 at a rate of $1,500 a year. The Colliers were some of the early Americans to acquire a love affair with the Bahamas and they became good friends of the Catholic mission on the islands.

Other interesting guests who resided there were the Walter Fitch family of Eureka, California, who came each winter after 1917 and into the 1920’s. Fitch was a wealthy miner in Eureka, a close friend of Father Chrysostom and a major benefactor of the mission. He also gave generously to Schreiner, sponsored his begging trips to the States and paid his way to California for visits and contacts in the West. Baron Bliss and entourage from Tunis, Africa, stopped by in 1919, and during the off season months Father Chrysostom rented The Bungalow at a rate of $40, with kitchen privileges. These rates appear bargains according
to current Bahamian standards, but for the hard-pressed Catholic mission the income from Bungalow Dunmore was a welcome and far-seeing provision.

Patrick Hayes was named an auxiliary to Cardinal Farley of New York on 3 July 1914, advanced to that see on 10 March 1919, was created a cardinal on 24 March 1924 and continued as archbishop of New York until 4 September 1938. Once Hayes appears on the scene, a permanent and close relationship with the Bahama mission developed. He, more than any New York ordinary, evidenced a personal interest in the spiritual developments on the islands. He had a deep admiration for Father Chrysostom. His associates recall that Hayes seemed to wait for the winter season when he could go to Nassau, stay at Bungalow Dunmore which became known as “The Cardinal’s residence,” and be with his friends the Benedictine missionaries and the Sisters of Charity from New York on whose grounds at Mt. St. Vincent on the Hudson in the Bronx he also had a retreat, the “Castle,” which he often visited during the year.

As the halcyon years before World War I passed in the Bahamas, Catholic growth was gradual but consistent. No major advances were made and no retreats became necessary. The sacraments were administered, the Word of God preached, educational and social services developed. The handful of missionaries were learning to adapt to Bahamian life-styles and to grow in their appreciation and respect for the Negro majority who had become the largest native population of the islands. The Bahamas were no longer “Lucayan,” no longer only a colonial and metropolitan European preserve. The Bahamas were habituated by an 85 percent majority of freed descendants from African slaves who had been transported to the new world and were now beginning to form themselves slowly into an indigenous people. The legitimate aspirations of these people would not begin to be realized until the third quarter of the twentieth century. The Catholic missionaries played a major role in helping these people to come of age in their own right. This formative part of the pilgrimage cannot be forgotten as so often happens in third world rhetoric.

Father Chrysostom admitted to Sir Etienne Dupuch that he did not understand the colored Bahamians, did not actually like them when he first came to the Bahamas and felt superior to them as he began to serve them. He said he grew as he remained in the Bahamas and began to appreciate the depth of their folklore and wisdom, their dignity and gentle humor. Unfortunately, Father Chrysostom left nothing to express in his own words this conversion which all people must experience before the blight of racial superiority is eliminated from man’s consciousness. But Magistrate J. D. Powles, that Catholic Englishman who simply cannot
be ignored by serious students of Bahamian development, does record his impressions of the religious habits among Negro Bahamians three years before Father Chrysostom arrived in Nassau. Powles writes in his unique testament:

They are reverential by nature, and swearing is by no means common among them. Certainly, the name of God is everlasting in their mouths, but it is by way of pious ejaculation rather than as an expletive or even carelessly, that it is used. For instance, if you ask a coloured lady her name she will probably give you the required information, adding 'Praise God,' or 'Bless God,' or 'Thank God.' The name itself will be something short, simple and unpretentious, as 'Daphne Brinhilda Mahala McPherson.' She is sure not to say 'My name is so-and-so,' but 'My name so-and-so.' If the Bahamian negro desires to use the Divine name as an expletive or mere careless ejaculation, he usually does it in the form of 'Oh, my Fader!'

Even when they use the most awful threats they use them in a manner rather solemn than blasphemous. For example, a woman of bad character was once brought before me for threatening the life of another woman of the same sort. The form she adopted was, 'If you do not leave me alone, I will send you to see your Jesus to-night,' and from the evidence I gathered that this expression was not used as a brutal form of blasphemy, but as the solemn enunciation of an intense determination.

Darkies have always been notorious for their fondness for high-sounding names. In America they are very apt to christen their children 'George Washington.' In the Bahamas there are innumerable Prince of Wales's, Prince Albert's and Prince Alfred's. The Duke of Edinburgh once went to Nassau in the days when he was Prince Alfred. There is a man named Tiberius Gracchus, a boy named Thaddeus de Warsaw Toot, and a sergeant Duke of Wellington, and they have now begun christening children 'Randolph Churchill.' It is a common practice to call children after the month or day of the week on which they were born or christened, as 'March,' 'July,' 'Monday,' 'Friday,' &c., Scripture names are very common, so are names descriptive of a class, as 'Evangelist;' and from some of the clergy I heard of parents who wished to have their children christened 'Iniquity,' 'Miserere Lizzy,' and 'Solomon's Porch.' In another part of the West Indies some poor people christened a child 'John Barbadoes and the Windward Islands,' the full signature of the Bishop of Barbadoes.

Among female names I have met with Brinhilda, Clotilda, Cassandra, Savelita, Malvina, Eulalia, Denisia, Daphne, and a host of others, religious, classical, ordinary, and Spanish, but every one of them high sounding. Granville is a common christian name for men, after Granville Sharp, the great pioneer of emancipation. The surnames are all derived from the old planters, and are mostly Scotch, as McDonald, McPherson, McGregor, Finlay, Hepburn, Ferguson....

The Africans rescued from the slave-ships brought with them from Africa the secret making the genuine African thatch. I have been told that either they cannot or will not impart this secret, so that it will become a lost art when they die out. Some of the houses in Grant's Town and one church are roofed with this thatch. Mr. Drysdale calls the latter 'the handsomest roof on the inside that I ever saw, not even excepting one of our own church buildings.' I never saw it myself.
This church belongs to a sect popularly known as 'the Shouters,' but whose proper title, so my orderly, Carey, informed me, was 'The African Methodist Episcopal Church.' I never got as far as the Shouters myself, but it is a favourite amusement among the winter visitors at the hotel to get up parties to go to this Shouter church on a Sunday evening.

Hymn singing is the great feature of their services, and some of their hymns are of the most extraordinary description. The following collection I got partly from my boys whilst sailing on circuit, partly from my cook, Mrs. Malvina Whitehead. The first are called 'anthems' as distinguished from hymns. I have already given Mr. Carey's definition of the two, but as far as I can make out the difference between them consists in that in the case of the anthem the refrain is repeated after every line:

'Hail, King ob de Jews!
Oh, yes, it is Jesus, my Lord!
I come to worship Thee!
Oh, yes, &c.
Look ober yonder what I see!
Oh, yes, &c.
See dem children rise and fall!
Oh, yes, &c.
If de Lord Jesus gib to me!
Oh, yes, &c.
De wings ob an eagle, I fly way!
Oh, yes, &c.

De tallest tree in Paradise!
Oh, yes, &c.
Christian, call it tree ob life!
Oh, yes, &c.
Lot's wife turn to pillar ob salt!
Oh, yes, &c.
Run along Moses, don't get late!
Oh, yes, &c.
Before Lord Jesus, shut de gate,
Oh, yes, &c.'...

The darkies are also great at proverbs. I subjoin a small collection.

'Come see me is noting, come lib wid me someting!'
'Follow fashion break monkey neck!'
'Goat say him hab wool; sheep say him hab hat!'
'Greedy choke puppy!'
'Hab money hab friend!'
'Hog run for him life; dog run for him character!'
'Hungry fowl wake soon.'

This proverb is particularly appropriate to Nassau:
'If you see a fippence you know how dollar made!'
'John Crow nebber make house till rain come!'
'Lizard no plant corn but him hab plenty.'
'Man can't whistle and smoke one time.'
This is a favorite proverb, but I deny its truth:
'Misfortune nebber trow cloud.'
'No eberyting you yerry (hear) good fe talk!'
'No trow away dirty water before you hab clean.'
'Ole firestick no hard fo catch.'
'One tief no like see oder tief carry long bag.'

This proverb reminds me of a story of a negro Methodist who had stolen some goods which were afterwards stolen from him. Next time he went to class-meeting he ejaculated, 'Oh, Lord, de tief am bad, but when tief tief from tief, oh, Lord, him too much proboking!'
'Parson christen him own pickaninny first.'
'Rain neber fall at one man door.'
'Stone at sea bottom no know sun hot.'
'Seven year no 'nough for washy speckle off guinea hen back.'
'Shoe know if stocking hab hole.'
'Sleep hab no massa.'
'Spider and fly no make bargain.'
'When man no done climb hill he should no trow away him stick.'
'John Crow tink him pickaninny white.'
'When man say him no mind, den he mind.'
'When hand full him hab plenty company.'
'You shake man hand, you no shake him heart.'
'Trouble neber blow shell.'

This is an allusion to the custom of using shells as horns to blow through.

'Time longer dan rope.'
'When fowl drinky water him lift up him head and say, 'Tank God,' but man drinky water and no say noting.'
'When eye no see, mout no talk.'
'When man no done grow him neber should cuss long man.'
'Stranger no know whar de deep water'
'Cuss cuss (calling names) no bore hole in skin.'
'Cunning better dan strong.'
'De rope you pulling, no de rope I cutting.'
'Eberry day fishing day, but no eberry day catchy fish.'
'Hot needle burn thread.'
'Big blanket make man sleep late.'
'When cockroach gib dance him no ax fowl.'
'Cockroach neber so drunk he no crossy fowl-yard.'
'Dead hog no fear biling water'...

We spent Saturday, Sunday, and Monday with Mr. Matthews, or Father Matthews as he is called by Church people and Baptist alike (Anglican priest at The Bight, Cat Island). He is a universal favourite, and since his arrival the Church has been very largely recruited. He is doing a great work, and indeed the High Church party of the Church of England is the only body that, up to the present, has made any attempt really to affect the daily lives or to imbue the poorer classes of this colony with anything like practical Christianity. Until the autumn of 1886 the Catholic Church had no place of worship in the Bahamas at all, and other bodies have been content to teach the people to come to church or chapel, hear sermons, and sing hymns leaving them to do much as they pleased outside.

At Cat Island Mr. and Mrs. Matthews have founded a guild which is an untold blessing to the girls. In order to be a member a girl must conduct herself properly, and they value membership so highly that a code of morality hitherto unknown and undreamt of among the coloured people is rapidly coming into being, and likely to become established. No doubt this is greatly due to the presence of an English lady, who lives among them, goes about among them, and makes them feel every day that her heart
beats in unison with theirs, and feels for their welfare without regard to creed or colour.

Let me attempt to describe the sort of place an English clergyman, his wife and two children have to live in to carry on this work. A house larger than, but about on a level with an English labourer’s cottage, containing two rooms and an apology for a study something like a store-closet. No ceiling, merely a partition between the sitting-room and bedroom, that any one could look over by standing on a chair; only a solitary window glazed, and scarcely one of the little comforts that would be found in the poorest home in England. And this not in a savage land, but in a country which has been nominally civilized for one hundred and fifty years, and where but fifty years ago the planters lived as I have described!

About eighteen years ago the Church was disestablished, and its financial position has now become very sad indeed. Mr. Matthew’s predecessor, who belonged to the Establishment, got 250 pounds a year. He only gets 150 pounds, half of which comes from the S.P.G., [Society for the Propagation of the Gospel] and half from the people. In 1886 they were too poor to pay their dues, and he had to go 50 pounds short. All the clergy appointed since the disestablishment are in the same boat. There are but thirteen Anglican clergy all told in the Bahamas, and they have charge of a large number of parishes, which they visit as best they can, (their place being supplied in their absence by catechists, most of whom are coloured) who are licensed to read prayers, preach, baptize, and marry. Wherever I went where there was a Wesleyan minister I found him well housed and well cared for, and all mainly through the action of the Wesleyan Conference in England. The Churchmen in the colony are too poor to support the Church, let their will be as good as it may. What are the rich Church people in England about? Are they a less wealthy body than the Wesleyans?

Apart from every other consideration, it is no sinecure to be rector of a parish sixty miles long by four wide, with seven churches to serve as best you may. Some of his journeys he makes by water, some by horseback. There are still plenty of roads in San Salvador, [Here San Salvador is Cat Island.] though many that existed in the days of slavery are now completely overgrown; but they are not roads in our sense of the word, merely tracks over the coral rock with holes like pitfalls every few yards. A San Salvador horse has something of the goat in his composition, for he goes along these tracks fairly fast and without ever stumbling. On an ordinary high-road he would probably tumble down.

The people here are very superstitious, and what is called ‘Obeahism’ is very common among them. I have never been able to find exactly what the ‘Obeah-men’ are supposed to do, further than that they are a species of African magicians, who, for a trifling consideration, will bewitch your enemies and charm your fields, so that anyone stealing from them will be punished by supernatural agency without the intervention of the policeman or the magistrate... 

A summary of Anglican development in the Bahamas, told by their own historian, C. F. Pascoe, is the best way we have, through the use of primary documents, of appreciating what the Anglican Catholics have done to advance our common Christianity in the Bahamas. Unfortunately,
there are no primary sources available to record the beginnings of the Baptist and Methodist Christian communities in the family islands. In a divided Western Christendom it is essential for all separated brethren to understand the life and growth of their compatriots. A history of single separated Churches can no longer be written in isolation from the whole Christian community. While divisions and misunderstandings still continue, to our disgrace and daily regret, we can no longer face our past alone and apart from our fellow people of God.

Pascoe writes in the bicentennial history of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the famed Anglican foreign missionary organization, of Bahamian beginnings:

In 1731 Governor Rogers of the Bahamas, being then in Carolina for the recovery of his health, informed the Rev. W. Guy, the Missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at St. Andrew's, 'of the extreme want there was of a minister' in the Bahamas, 'which had been without one for some years, and pressed Mr. Guy to go over with him and officiate there some months. Mr. Guy, considering 'the great usefulness and almost the necessity of the thing,' embarked on this 'charitable undertaking' in April 1731, and arrived at Providence on the 12th of that month.

He found a people 'who had lived in want of the administration of all the Divine ordinances several years.' These he endeavoured to supply by holding service 'in a little neat church built of wood,' which had been just finished, and by visiting all the parts of the island. Notwithstanding the great fatigue of travelling, 'on account of the rocks' and 'the heat of the day which is always very great,' he baptized 89 children and 3 adults. In the two other inhabited islands in this Government, about 20 leagues from Providence, he baptized 23 children in Harbour Island and 13 in Islathera (Eleuthera). For each of the (128) baptized he had 'the proper sureties,' and during his two months' stay in the three islands, besides marrying, and visiting the sick, he administered the Blessed Sacrament twice, 'but had but 10 communicants at each time.' The number of families in the island was about 120 in New Providence, 40 in Harbour Island, and 40 in Islathera. The people 'very thankfully received' copies of the Bishop of London's Pastoral Letters for promoting the conversion of the negroes. They all professed themselves of the Church of England, and were 'very desirous of having a minister settled with them,' and Mr. Guy considered that 'as they were in general very poor it would...be a very great charity to send a Missionary to them.'

This representation was followed by a Memorial from the President, Council, and principal inhabitants of New Providence, showing that 'about seven years past' they erected at their own charge 'a commodious church capable of containing upwards of 300 people,' and provided a convenient house for a clergyman of the Church of England and £40 per annum towards his support; but that being insufficient, they 'became destitute of any Divine to officiate amongst them for upwards of five years, till the Rev. Mr. Hooper came over, well-recommended, and...and continued for these twelve months past.' To enable them to maintain him or some other worthy Divine, they solicited assistance.
Immediately on receipt of the first communication (April, 1732) the Society offered £50 per annum as a grant-in-aid, which was now (March, 1733) 'in consideration of the dearness of provisions in Providence' increased to £60, and Mr. Hooper having migrated to Maryland, the Rev. William Smith was in April, 1733 appointed to Providence and the other inhabited islands.

Mr. Smith arrived at Nassau on October 20, 1733. 'At first he had but a thin congregation' in Nassau, but it was soon increased by several families residing 'outside the town' and by 'the soldiers of the garrison, whom the Governor, immediately after his arrival, obliged to come constantly to church.' Governor Fitzwilliam had the church 'put into a tolerable good order,' and 'with a good deal of difficulty and pains, got an Act passed for erecting the Inhabited Islands into one parish and...£50 sterling p. annum...settled on the Minister incumbent thereon.' He failed to obtained an allowance from the Assembly for a school-master, although there was 'no place in his Majesty's American Dominions' where one was more necessary, 'by want of which their youth' grew up 'in such ignorance (even of a Deity) and in such immorality as is most unbecoming.' On this representation the Society at once (1735) provided funds for the opening of a school in Nassau, but there was some delay owing to the difficulty of finding teachers.

The arrival of Captain Hall of Rhode Island in Dec. 1739 with 'a Spanish prize of between £3 and £4,000 value' was sufficient to induce Mr. Mitchel, the then teacher, to quit school and go 'a privateering' with the Captain.

About 1734 Mr. Smith first visited Islathera, a long, narrow Island inhabited by between 30 to 40 families, who were 'generally very ignorant of their duty to God as having never had a Clergyman settled among them.' At Harbour Island he found there 25 families and a large room for service, in which he ministered one Sunday; 'it was very full,' and the people were 'serious and attentive.' Otherwise they could hardly have been with such a Missionary. Governor Fitzwilliam wrote of him in 1735: 'The abilities, life and good behaviour of Mr. Smith...justly entitle him to the favour of all good men among us.' Illness caused him to desire a northern Mission, but a short visit to England in 1736 enabled him to return to New Providence in January, 1737.

The church at Nassau, a building 'in a wooden frame, plastered,' became so ruinous that it was necessary to remove the pulpit and desk to the Town House in 1741—the erection of a new one having been hindered by fear of 'an invasion from the Spaniards'...Whites, Negroes, and Mulattoes were ministered to by Mr. Smith, but the hardships of visiting 'Iluthera' and Harbour Island brought on an illness, and in his last letter, Oct. 26, 1741, after alluding to a fever at Providence 'which had carried off everyone it had seized on,' he concluded: 'The Lord help us for he only knows where it will terminate.' A few days after it pleased God to take 'this diligent and worthy Missionary to himself to receive the reward of his labours.'

His successor, the Rev. N. Hodges, died in 1743 soon after his arrival. During the vacancy caused by these deaths Governor Tinker made his Secretary, Mr. J. Snow, 'read prayers and a sermon every Sunday in the Town House,' and in 1746 sent him to England to be ordained. Besides
officiating ‘as far as a layman could’ Mr. Snow had largely contributed to
the building of a church and to the establishment of a free school for negroes
and whites. Within two years of ordination he also died. In the meantime
the Rev. R. St. John ministered for about a year (1746-47) to a ‘very
ignorant’ people, ‘scarce one in fifty being able to read,’ and baptized over
300 children in the three islands of the Mission.

The next Missionary, the Rev. R. Carter, was privileged to labour 16
years (1749-65) in the Mission, which he represented as being of ‘greater
extent’ and having ‘more pastoral duties to be performed in the several
parts of it than any other under the Society’s care.’ In 1763 he reported
‘all the natives’ of the Bahamas ‘profess themselves of the Church of
England.’ About this time two Mission Schools were established; that at
Nassau was the only school in the island of Providence ‘except Women’s
Schools,’ which were also Church Schools. The Harbour Island School was
built by the people, of whom he wrote in 1764 that they ‘pay a strict regard
to the Lord’s Day, and neither work themselves nor suffer their slaves to
work on it, but allot them another day in every week to work for them­selves.’ A similar rule was observed at Eleuthera, where his parishioners
expressed ‘so strong a desire of improvement that even adults of both
sexes’ submitted ‘to be publicly catechized without reluctance.’ ‘The most
sensible slaves in New Providence’ expressed ‘an earnest desire of being
baptized,’ a desire which he did his best to gratify.

The Rev. G. Tizard carried on the work from 1767 to October 1768,
when he died. Two years later it was reported that many people had been
reformed by means of his widow.

In 1767 the Rev. R. Moss was stationed at Harbour Island, where
a resident clergyman had long been ‘earnestly desired.’ He had at first ‘a
cold reception from the people’s apprehending that they were to contribute
to his support;’ when they found that not to be the case ‘they became fond
of him,’ and ‘all in the island to a man’ attended public worship on Sundays.

Indirectly they must have contributed, for the Bahamas Assembly had
enacted a law dividing ‘Harbour Island and Eleuthera into a distinct parish
named St. John’s,’ and allowing ‘150 pounds current money out of the
Harbour Island taxes towards building a Church in that Island,’ and
settling 50 pounds sterling per annum ‘for salary and house rent for the
Minister.’ While the church was building Mr. Moss performed service
‘under the branches of some Tamarind trees.’ In 1769 he had thirty-eight
communicants, all of whom lived ‘holy lives, unblameable in their con­versation.’

Of Eleuthera he gave this ‘lamentable account’ in 1769; ‘That both
men, women, and children, magistrates not excepted, are profane in their
conversation; even the children learn to curse their own parents as soon
as they can speak plain, and many other sinful habits and heathenish
practices are in use among them.’ One great obstruction to his reforming
these people was the difficulty of visiting them, it being necessary to go
first to Providence, where he might have to wait two or three weeks for a
passage, which ‘consumed too much time.’ It was also difficult to find men
of sufficient education to act as lay agents. The Rev. W. Gordon, who
visited Eleuthera in 1796, found that ‘a Justice of the Peace at Wreck’s
Sound had been accustomed to read prayers and a sermon out of the
Society’s books to the inhabitants.’ He had ‘the most learning in the place,’
yet was in such indifferent circumstances as to desire to be appointed an assistant schoolmaster, not being qualified for the position of head schoolmaster. At Savannah Sound only one man could read, and the greater part could scarcely say the Lord's Prayer, yet they regarded baptism as 'absolutely necessary to salvation'...

Still worse was the state of the white settlers at Long Island, as reported by the Rev. W. Gordon after visiting it from Exuma in 1790. A few poor families from New Providence began a settlement in Long Island in 1773. At the peace in 1782 a few loyal Refugees, presumably from the United States, settled there, and it proving a good island for raising cotton, many others followed, besides some natives of New Providence. In 1790 the population consisted of about 2,000 people—over 1,500 being slaves. The negroes were 'void of all principles of Christian religion owing to their want of instruction.' Most of the original settlers could scarcely read, and having been for many years deprived of Divine worship, they were 'addicted to the vices of a seafaring life...swearing and neglect of religion.' The refugees, though less ignorant, were not more attached to the faith. They resembled 'very much those who may be seen in London.'

Not even two or three of them could be got together to partake of the Holy Communion. The 'gentry' of the place employed their leisure hours 'in reading the works of Mandeville, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau and Hume,' by which some of them 'acquired a great tincture of infidelity.' Mr. Gordon on his visits held service in six parts of the island, and undertook that if a resident Missionary were sent there he would visit those islands which had 'never yet had Christian public worship, viz., Turk's, Caicos, Crooked, Wallin's, Abacos and Andros'....

In consequence of political disputes during Governor Lord Dunmore's administration the Clergy frequently had difficulty in realising the local provision to which they were entitled. Mr. Richards of New Providence reported in 1795 that 'neither he nor any other person who has a salary has received any for above a year past.' About this time Lord Dunmore 'possessed himself of the most ancient burying ground' and a portion of the glebe in Harbour Island, the former of which he desecrated, and it became necessary for the Society to make a representation to the Secretary of State for the restoration of the property. There were other complaints against the Governor. He openly avowed 'that the laws which forbid incestuous marriages in England did not take place in the Colonies' and he ignored a communication from the Bishop of London on the subject. He further countenanced 'one Johnston, a strolling Methodist Preacher from America' who induced the black people at Providence to turn a negro schoolmaster out of his house 'and convert it to a Meeting House for himself,' and obtained from the Governor 'a License to preach and perform other offices.' This man 'used to marry without licence or authority,' but in a short time he was 'put in prison for beating his wife...in a merciless manner...and so all his followers left him. The respectable inhabitants indeed always opposed the progress of Methodism and remonstrated to Lord Dunmore against it'....

The illiberality of the House of Assembly...not only in reducing his salary, but in making laws and afterwards violating them, and the constant apprehension of piratical invaders...compelled Mr. Rose to 'abandon the Bahamas' in 1804. Spanish Picaroons were infesting their coasts and
plundering their vessels, and in apprehension of ‘a visit from the French’ most of the women and children of New Providence were sent away. On one occasion Mr. Rose was ‘obliged to ride the whole night with his musket in his hand and cartouche box on his shoulder.’

By 1807 the number of the S.P.G. Missionaries was reduced to one—the Rev. R. Roberts of New Providence. M. Groombridge died in 1804; Mr. Rose in 1804, and Mr. Jenkins in 1806, removed to Jamaica, and Mr. Richards to England about 1805.

The Clergymen aided by the Society during this period (1836-44) were E. J. Rogers and C. Neale, 1836-44; P. S. Aldrich, 1840; F. T. Todrig, 1841-42; W. Gray, 1844. After that year none of the Bahamas Clergy appear to have been aided by the Society until 1835, when, as a part of the Diocese of Jamaica (founded 1824) the Islands began to participate in the Negro Education Fund. The Colonial Legislature co-operated with the Society, but at the end of eight years the supply of Clergy still remained inadequate.

Of the fourteen parishes or rectories into which the islands were divided, only four were wholly and three partially endowed, and in some of the out-islands there was ‘not a single religious teacher of any class whatever.’

In New Providence the Bishop of Jamaica confirmed nearly 400 persons in 1845. Three years later he held what appears to be the first ordination in that part of his diocese, two priests and two deacons being ordained, and the number of Clergy thus raised to sixteen. The labours of the Missionaries were very arduous, one of them having no less than seven islands under his care. To visit these and to go from one station to another preaching and baptizing the children was ‘something like a shepherd setting his mark upon his sheep and then letting them go in the wilderness.’ In some remote districts the people retained a strong attachment to the Church of England, notwithstanding her long neglect of them. Many natives came forward and offered their services gratuitously as catechists; and in one island an old man of seventy ‘walked fifty miles in order to partake of the holy feast.’

The formation of the Bahamas into a separate see in 1861 was followed by the death of its first Bishop, Dr. Caulfield, within a few months of his consecration. The thirteen years of the episcopate of Bishop Venables (his successor) were, for the most part, years of disendowment, destruction of Church property by hurricane, paralysis of trade, intense poverty, and considerable emigration. Yet the Church progressed. Between 1867-74 forty-five Churches were built or restored.

At the time of Bishop Venables’ appointment the Society’s Missions were all in the out-islands, which were absolutely unable to maintain their own Clergy. ‘I think the Society can hardly have realized the Missionary character of the work done here,’ wrote the Bishop, ‘nor the insufficiency of our local resources for carrying on that work.’ Of the Biminis he said: ‘the inhabitants seem almost the most degraded people that I have yet visited. This perhaps may be accounted for by these two islands being a great rendezvous for wreckers.’

In Providence itself ‘an instance of practical heathenism’ came under his notice. ‘Three men were digging on the solid rock on the south side of the island, and had been engaged in this way for...eight years off and on because an Obeah woman had told them of a treasure hidden there’. ...
In 1868 the Bishop obtained a Church ship, the *Message of Peace.* Writing of the first visit in her, which was to Andros Island, he said: 'I cannot speak too highly of the labours of Mr. Sweeting the coloured catechist of the district. The morality of the people here bears a striking contrast to that of other out-island settlements.' One poor girl who heard of the Bishop's arrival followed him from station to station in order to be confirmed, her confirmation costing her 'a journey of 56 miles, 44 accomplished on foot' over rugged roads with two creeks to ford.

The cyclone of 1866, which overthrew nearly one half of the churches in the diocese, was followed by disestablishment and disendowment in 1869, the immediate effect of which was that in one island alone (Eleuthera) five congregations were for a time without a clergyman. The use of a Church ship was advocated by Archdeacon Trew in 1845 as one method of meeting the lamentable spiritual destitution then existing in the Bahamas. Yet even in the next year a new station was opened there among the coloured people, the first services being held 'in a small hut and in the dark for no candle could be procured.' With the death of Bishop Venables in October, 1876, the episcopal income, hitherto derived from the State, ceased. In the opinion of the physicians the Bishop's 'illness was the result upon a frame not naturally robust, of continuous travel, irregular and often unwholesome food, constant care and unceasing mental labour.' From his death-bed he sent a message to the Society to save the diocese from 'being blotted out of Christendom.' The Society's response was the guarantee of an allowance of £200 per annum, which was continued to his successor until 1881, by which time an endowment of £10,000 had been provided. Towards raising and increasing this fund the Society contributed £1,500 (in 1876-82), and for the permanent maintenance of the Clergy £1,000 (in 1873-88).

Under Bishops Cramer Roberts (1878-85) and E. T. Churton (1886-1900) the diocese has made encouraging progress.

Bishop Churton, 'owing to the diligence and devotion' of his predecessors, found himself from the beginning responsible for the supervision of an extensive Mission-field, in which the strength of the Church consisted in its hold upon the coloured people. But most of the churches were of the rudest description, and there were scarcely any parsonages or lodgings for the Clergy, and only one Mission boat; and so throughout all was on the humblest scale. This did not afflict the Bishop much, as he had come 'prepared to rough it, and to forego stained glass windows and organs.' During the next ten years the frail cabin churches were replaced by more solid buildings, parsonages and lodges for the Clergy when visiting, as well as Mission boats, were provided, many new stations were opened, including a special Mission (organized in 1891) for the neglected sailors, and the accessions to the Church numbered between three and four thousand.

But moral and spiritual training is of more importance than mere numerical increase, and, 'instead of bidding more to the heavenly feast,' it was found necessary for the Clergy to sift well and to reject some of their registered communicants. The firm stand thus made had the effect of checking the evil and deepening the life of the communicants. But in reporting this the Bishop stated that it is vain almost to hope for a moral reformation unless a stop be put to the building of the hovels in which the poor are housed.
At the present time Nassau may still fairly claim to be regarded as a Missionary and not merely as a Colonial diocese. In the city of Nassau there is a considerable white population, and the Church is able to support herself (except in the parishes of St. Mary and St. Anne); but the greater number of the islands are peopled entirely by negroes, who, ‘though nominally Christians, are to a great extent practically heathen.’ There are great difficulties in the work of evangelization, arising (1) from the population being scattered over so wide an area, the distance by sea from one end of the diocese to the other being about 650 miles. The people live in small settlements separated by great distances, some in huts hidden away in the bush, only to be got at by a weary tramp over sharp, honeycombed rock; others in settlements inaccessible except by boat, and then only in certain winds; others are secluded in the recesses of creeks to which the approach is almost blocked by clumps of mangroves. (2) The bulk of the male population is employed on the sea, sponge gathering during nearly the whole year. (3) Government provides schools (undenominational) only in the most populous centres. The Church, with the aid of grants from Bray’s Associates and the Christian Faith Society, does what it can to provide teaching of a very simple and elementary character for the children in the more remote places, but numbers are still out of reach of any school. The people generally are in a state of extreme ignorance, a large proportion being unable to read; witchcraft and other heathen superstitions abound, and immorality is everywhere very prevalent. (4) The missionary clergy have to spend their time travelling from one station to another, and their field of work is so large that it is impossible for them, except at their headquarters, to spend more than a few days at a time at one place. In their absence the services are conducted by native catechists, many of whom are zealous and able to exert a good influence over their stations, yet who are for the most part very illiterate men, and are incapable of teaching anything more than the simplest religious lessons.

In some parts, as at Andros, the largest island in the Bahamas, and the only one possessing freshwater lakes, the Clergy, in addition to their proper work, fill the offices of parish doctor, visitor of the Board schools, justice of the peace, public vaccinator, as well as perform the friendly offices of adjuster of private wrangles, writing letters and wills, and giving advice on many matters, for, except the magistrate, they are the only white persons seen all along the shore.

The evangelization of the sponge gatherers forms the most difficult branch of the Church’s work. There are thousands of these men, drawn from many different islands, whom to find at their proper homes is well-nigh impossible, as for nearly the whole year they are absent on voyages of a few weeks at a time, each lasting long enough to secure a ship’s cargo. The sponges, however, are commonly brought to market at Nassau, and it is then that the sailors’ chaplain may often get a chance of seizing upon and impressing the men who form the crews. Yet it is hard work, both to rescue them from dens of vice to which they are led in their simplicity, and to succeed in teaching them anything at all during visits to town which are so short. Half the baptismal creed will have been gone through when the order comes to sail, and the promising catechumen disappears, to return only after two or three months’ absence with everything lost and forgotten that he had been learning.
Candidates for confirmation are sent to the Bishop generally one at a time. Often they are brought up to his private chapel at an early hour, having been baptized overnight, and then sail later in the same day; it rarely happens that they can remain long enough to make their first Communion. They have a special chapel of their own down by the wharf, and a club underneath. Occasionally the Clergy visit the sponging grounds and spend a Sunday with the spongers, holding Mission services on the beach, attended by from 400 to 500 men and boys at a time.

Prior to the introduction of services for blessing ships and sailors by the Bishop in 1893 there was hardly a sailor in the Bahamas who went to sea without putting on an obeah-string for his protection against malignant evil spirits.

The time has not yet come for the creation of a native ministry, the difficulties in the way of training candidates for Holy Orders being, under present circumstances, insurmountable. The Society's list of Missionaries in the diocese has included only two coloured clergymen. Under existing circumstances the present system of work, which was commenced by Bishop Venables, is the best that can be devised. There are more than ninety Church stations at which services are held, and about 130 lay readers, none of whom are paid anything for their work...

Even with all their love of witchcraft, their riotous wakes and dances, and other enormities, the blacks are still a delightful people, whom to teach and train is as happy an employment as Missionaries could desire. And for the most part the Clergy have quickly learned to love the Bahamas, and become acclimatized in every sense of the word, and year by year they carry on the work of the Church with exemplary devotion and courage under considerable difficulties. In the Turks Island Mission, which is too far away for the Missionary to have the benefit of much support from his brother Clergy and Bishop, the Rev. H. F. Crofton laboured faithfully and patiently for fourteen years (1876-1899), occasionally extending his ministrations to the English residents in the Island of San Domingo. A Missionary of the American Church at Jacksonville, U.S. stated in 1883 that those of his flock who had been brought up in the Church at Nassau were 'the best educated black people' he had ever seen. The Society made a special grant for this work at Puerto Plata in 1877, but it was not used. The services held by Mr. Crofton have been attended by Lutherans, Moravians, and Methodists, as well as Anglicans.

Towards the building of churches destroyed in the Bahamas by the hurricane of August 11 and 12, 1899, the Society voted £500 in 1900.

After a succession of serious illnesses Bishop E. T. Churton was obliged to resign the Bishopric in 1900. His episcopate had been one of singular devotion, and in the last years Bishop Hornby rendered kind help. Happily the vacancy occurred at a time when the Missions were fully manned by an efficient staff of clergy, every post of work being occupied and the prospects being in every way brighter than they were when Bishop Churton entered upon his episcopate in 1886. In place of fourteen clergy, eight of whom were receiving salaries from Government, he left a staff of twenty-two, of whom only three were paid by Government...

Baptists begin in the Bahamas with the arrival of Prince Williams, a freed slave from South Carolina, who left Florida in 1790 with several
other free Negroes and came to Nassau. They were the first Baptists to reach the islands, and a chapel was soon erected and called Bethel Meeting House. In 1801 the Society of Anabaptists was formed, consisting of Prince Williams and other free Negroes. About 1830 the Rev. John Burton came from Jamaica as a representative of the Baptist Missionary Society of England. He assisted Prince Williams at Bethel until Williams left that congregation to establish St. John's Baptist Church in Nassau. Williams was pastor there for the long term of thirty-four years until his death at age 104.

The intervention of succeeding English Baptist missionaries was resented in that Church. Accordingly, the missionary work of Bethel and then Zion (1835), a Nassau Baptist church built later, was left to the English society while that of St. John's remained in the hands of Bahamian Negroes. Due to the missionary labors of these Baptists, their churches throughout the islands grew to over 200 in number at the present time. No more English Baptist missionaries work in the islands. Apart from their affiliation with two American Baptist groups, all members and leaders of the Baptist churches in the Bahamas are Negro Bahamians.

St. John's Baptist Church and affiliated churches associated with the National Baptist Convention, Inc., of Chicago, Illinois. Zion Baptist Mission and sixty-eight associate churches affiliated with the National Baptist Church of Nashville, Tennessee. Five associations among the many Baptist churches in the Bahamas are organized locally under the umbrella of the Bahamas Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention which meets yearly. The remaining independents work as their own units.

The Jordan Memorial School, completed in the late 1940's, is under the auspices of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention, Inc., and has absorbed the Good Will Orphanage and Home for Girls started by a local Baptist woman.

The Baptists claim over 30 percent of the islands' population, have at least 200 pastors on the islands with at least double that number of deacons and lay leaders. The Baptists are thoroughly indigenous in clergy and laity. They have never endured a racial division in their midst for they are almost 100 percent Negro Bahamian. But unity has still escaped them. They have spread widely without organization, are the most numerous of Christians in the Bahamas, but continue to divide into new splinter groups. Dr. Harcourt W. Brown summarized the status of Bahamian Baptists:

It is to be regretted that the standard of leadership has been considerably low, and in recent years many inroads have been made into the circle of Baptists by denominations of more qualified leadership. It is true that the Baptists have made a step forward in sending young men and women
away for training... but these leaders have all chosen Nassau as their field of labor. The Out Islands are forever sending out the Macedonian cry...

The Methodists came early to the Bahamas and labored for the most part zealously in serving all Bahamians. The Methodists were a dissenting group in the Anglican communion, followers of the evangelical message of that great and saintly Christian, John Wesley (1703-91). The Methodists did not originally intend to establish a new Church but a reforming fellowship in Anglicanism. However, misunderstandings and history soon separated the contenders and still another Christian church was born. The Methodists developed a strong tradition of prayer, interior life and a personal salvation always leading into a Christian mission in the world.

The first Methodist in the Bahamas was a Negro, Joseph Paul, who came to Abaco from the Carolinas in the United States. He moved to Nassau in the 1780's and gathered a class of five whom he taught in a parish schoolroom. In 1786 Joseph Paul founded a Wesleyan church in the western district of Nassau. In 1794 the Methodist Episcopal Conference in the West Indies sent a man named Johnson to help Paul's Society and a small wooden chapel was built. Johnson and Paul soon parted company and two more missionaries were sent. Their conduct greatly dishonored the work, one of them having joined with a privateering captain. They, too, were gone by 1796, leaving a disrupted Society; part continuing with Paul and the larger part held together by Anthony Wallace and his wife, free Bahamian Negroes.

These early dissenters were brave men and often suffered open persecution and harassment by the controlling Anglican clerics and dominant political groups in the islands.

Dr. Thomas Coke, Methodist evangelist of the West Indies, pleaded in 1799 for a missionary to be sent to the Bahamas from the Methodist Conference at Manchester. The Rev. William Turton, son of a planter in Barbados, arrived in 1800. Turton had previously established Methodist work in two West Indian islands. In Nassau, Turton held worship and classes outside because no one would rent him a building, so intense was the opposition and persecution against Methodists and those who could possibly lead Negroes astray with ideas of freedom or equality which Christianity must eventually and inevitably bring forth. The Wallace family opened their house to Turton for his preaching and within two years there were 100 Negro members.

In 1803 the first white person was converted and became Turton's wife. Four years later Turton had a chapel established opposite the ruins of Fort Nassau which was destroyed by a hurricane in 1813 and restored in 1821. Two other Methodist pastors joined Turton, the Reverends John
Rutledge and William Dowson, and out island expansion began at Eleuthera, Harbour Island and Abaco. The Methodists evidenced a strong social action concern, as they traditionally do, both among Negroes and poor Whites. The success of the Methodist Church, especially among slaves, was the object of growing jealousy and suspicion on the part of some colony leaders in the House of Assembly and Legislative Council. A bill was suddenly produced in 1816 forbidding religious meetings between sunset and sunrise. This served to sever the slaves from contact with the missionaries as they had to work for their masters during the day. This law was not repealed until six years later. But the cancer of racial and social divisions grew among the Methodists, as Powles attests in his Land of the Pink Pearl. Powles carried a strong anti-Methodist bias in his report on Bahamian life, due in great part to his experiences with establishment Methodist elements who forced him from the colony when he became an active supporter of Negro legal rights.

The Methodist confession grew steadily in the Bahamas and by 1860 numbered 3,090. Following the introduction of High Church and Anglo-Catholic practices in the Anglican Church in 1909, many prominent white families of Nassau joined with the Methodists. By the third quarter of the twentieth century there were around 10,000 Methodists in the islands. Disestablishment and a turn toward liturgical ritual did not harm the Anglican Church in the Bahamas. While they lost some of the "Prayer Book conservatives," they gained steadily among the Negroes. "The Ritualists are gaining ground among the coloured people every day," Powles stated. "This is not to be wondered at, for whether one agrees with them or not, it is undeniable that their faith is seen in their daily lives. They live among the people and with them. There is no thought of a colour-line in their hearts, and the people have learned to love and trust them." No longer associated with slavery and the colonial establishment, blessed with zealous bishops and clergy, the Anglican Church remained the dominant, if not numerical, force in the islands. As the Catholics mission developed, the pull of the ancient Roman liturgy, in its turn, proved to be a strong attraction among the Bahamians.

In 1894 Father Chrysostom wrote, "The prospects of the Catholic Mission are very encouraging at Nassau and even more so on the outlying islands. If means can be procured to visit some of these island settlements and to erect small chapels at the most promising ones, the conversion of the entire settlements to the true faith will undoubtedly be the result in the near future." Unfortunately it would be many years before such action could be taken. Additional missions were established on Andros Island and new ones begun on some other out islands. Although the missionaries made
Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., has a friend on the porch of The Priory; Fort Charolette in the background, 1893.

Sisters of Charity and Father Chrysostom with students of St. Francis Xavier School, 1892.
Sisters of Charity, Nassau, sewing.

Aboard a mail boat to the out islands.
Fr. Gabriel Roerig, O.S.B., before St. Mary’s Church, Behring Point, Andros, which he built, 1898-1900.

Father Gabriel with his sugarcane mill. The wooden building (right) was transferred from The Priory to Behring Point in 1892. Father Gabriel built a coffin for himself and always kept it outside his workshop.
A Catholic family, the Finlays of Finlay, three miles north of Behring Point, Andros.

Two early catechists, James Higgs and Nate Burns, of Andros.

Chief Roger Bain and family helping Fr. Denis Parnell, O.S.B., cook at Man o' War Sound, Andros.
The first Mass at Mangrove Cay was offered in 1915 in the home of the Armaly family.

First rectory at Harbour Estates, Watling's Island (San Salvador), 1922.

Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., sits on the porch of the home where the first Mass was offered on Harbour Island on 17 February 1921.
Aftermath of the 1929 hurricane.

Hatchet Bay Church, Eleuthera.

The first Corpus Christi celebration at St. Benedict's, Harbour Island, 1921.
Father Bonaventure, Father Denis and Fr. Carl Albury, first Bahamian priest, enjoy the beach on Hog (Paradise) Island.

Father Gabriel, in 1950 and his brother Fr. Leander Roerig, O.S.B. Fr. Gabriel served fifty-six years as a missionary in the Bahamas.

The Roerig brothers and a new Catechism class on Andros.
Bishop Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., and party visit Father Chrysostom's grave on San Salvador in 1957. Fr. Francis Fallon, Hoboken, New Jersey; Bishop Edward Fitzgerald, fourth bishop of Winona; Abbot Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B., sixth abbot of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota; Fr. Nicholas Kremer, O.S.B., pastor; Bishop Hagarty; Fr. Arthur Kane, Melville, New York; Bishop John Boardman, auxiliary bishop of Brooklyn; Bishop Martin Stanton, auxiliary bishop of Newark.
remarkable progress considering the difficulties, a great deal was left undone because of the lack of priests.

From 1900 to 1920 only three Roman Catholic priests came to the Bahamas as missionaries, though others went there as convalescents or as temporary replacements, such as Fr. Edmund Basel, O.S.B., who remained only a year in 1907.

Catechists were trained at the missions which had been established on the out islands since the priests could not be there very often. The priests did come when possible, however, and also visited other islands and even established some new missions, though more often such projects had to be deferred until more help should arrive.

These long trips about the coral islands of the Bahamas made in open boats under tropical skies were strange experiences for the missionaries from Minnesota. The islands themselves, mostly coral rock and sand with little soil and less shade, were not at all like the wooded farmlands that had been their homes. The people they had come to convert to Catholicism were far different from any they had previously known. The out islands especially seemed very strange and primitive to them. Father Leander, once wrote, “Getting back to Nassau is like coming home from barbarism to civilization. By this ‘barbarism’ on the out islands, I do not mean that the people are savages, but that they are simple people, unsophisticated, unlettered and superstitious, but also unspoiled. They are friendly and good hearted. The missionary who works among them invariably becomes fond of them.”

The mission history from 1900 to 1920 is chiefly concerned with the evangelization of the out islands and this story is best told by the priests themselves who from time to time wrote short accounts of their mission activities.

There were a number of Catholics scattered about the out islands who sometimes went for many years without attending Mass or receiving the sacraments. In later years when the mission had its own sailboat, it was somewhat less difficult to find some of these people, though even then the distances were so great that some Catholics went for twenty and even thirty years or more without seeing a priest. The only way they could be reached was by trips on chartered vessels. Such trips were expensive and could only occasionally be undertaken such as when a missionary knew that one of these distant parishioners was dying. Father Chrysostom made one such trip in February, 1908, accompanied by Fr. Gregory Gerrer, O.S.B., and Fr. Thomas Loughlan, Woonsocket, Rhode Island. The fifty ton schooner Estrella was chartered for a voyage to Long Island and Watling’s. Excerpts from Father Chrysostom’s log describe the trip:
February 12, 1908:

Chartered schooner (of) 50 tons from W. Pinder for £25. (On) the round trip we (were) to feed ourselves... Charter agreement (was) made by myself, Chrysostom Schreiner....

Raise anchor at 2 p.m. Feb. 12... Sea rough. Wind (from) east. Beat all night. Attempted to anchor at 7 p.m. near Porgy Rocks—but being without anchor shank—anchor would not hold. (Wind) beat all night and at 7 a.m. (we) were in sight of the Highburn Cay Ship Channel. Both jibs half rotten, gave away several times, but at 7 a.m. came down in shreds. Nothing aboard to make repairs—so being without anchor and without jib, Capt. Storr turned back to Nassau where we arrived at 12 o’clock noon, Feb. 13, making the distance 27 miles in 3 hours and 40 minutes.

Saturday, Feb. 15, 1908

At 10 a.m. Frs. Gregory, Loughlan, and myself go aboard off Fort Montague. (At) 10:30 raise anchor and are off in a stiff south breeze... At 7 p.m. drop anchor at Ship Channel about 3/4 mile south of lighthouse. Had usual stew, prepared by chef Bowles. Gerrer and Loughlan recover from the afternoon tossing... At 10 p.m. anchor dragged some, but no danger.

Sunday, Feb. 16

(At) 4 a.m. raise anchor. Wind shifted to the North during last hour. Take course for Hawk’s Nest, Cat Island. 9 a.m. sight south end of Eleuthera distinctly. A blackfish, apparently 20 feet long, accompanied us and sported about the Estrella since 7:30 this morning. Fine stew for breakfast—was greatly enjoyed. ‘The Team’ (Frs. Gerrer and Loughlan) on deck happy and jolly.

3 p.m. Sight Cat Island.

6 p.m. Anchor south of Cat Island... beautiful moonlight.

Monday, Feb. 17

12:30 a.m. Raise anchor and get underway at 12:30 midnight. Wind NNW. 7 a.m. sight Watlings... Drop anchor at Riding Rock 10 a.m.

11 a.m. We were rowed across lakes to lighthouse—it took 3 hours—the heavenly twins, Frs. Gerrer and Loughlan, had great sport missing ducks and bragging about respective ability to shoot. The honors of not hitting were evenly divided.

From lighthouse went to Graham’s Harbor and found it exactly as described by Columbus. Am now absolutely convinced that Watlings is the landfall and the Graham’s Harbor is the harbor to which Columbus rowed.

Got back to Riding Rock at 9:45 p.m. Took supper at house of Mrs. Rolle, sister of my cook, Mrs. Kemp... Great difficulty in getting back to Schooner—as we had great difficulty coming ashore this morning on account of heavy surf, the wind being from the north.

Tuesday, Feb. 18

Came ashore at 8 a.m. Sea still rough and Fr. Loughlan got thorough wetting.

8:30 a.m. I said Mass—my father’s anniversary—under a large Palmetto tree about one-fourth mile south of the magistrate’s residence and on what I believe to be the exact spot of Columbus’ landing. There were
about 30 natives present and I preached to them after Mass. After breakfast called on Magistrate Mr. C. G. Rigby and then walked NW along the rocky beach about one-fourth mile to proto reef . . . The wrecked steamer *Frascate* hangs on the reef about one mile beyond this point.

**Wednesday, Feb. 19**

2:30 a.m. Raised anchor. Wind East. Sailed SWW. Sighted Rum Cay at 5 o’clock. Sighted Conception at 7 o’clock.

8:15 Sight Long Island.

9:30 Cape S. Maria Long Island.

11 a.m. Drop anchor off W. Smith’s (Calabash Bay) Long Island and row in about 2 miles (myself and Fr. Gregory—Fr. Loughlan remaining aboard). Land at mouth of cave in Calabash Bay near Smith’s house and get boy Abraham to guide us to Wilson’s. After 2 hours walk get to Maud Wilson’s house. Poor girl is overjoyed at my coming. During the afternoon I hear her confession and give Extreme Unction. Sleep in the same house. Rise at 4:30 and say Mass at bed side of poor dying girl and give her Holy Communion. O blessed faith that can give such joy and consolation to the dying! I shall pray that God may give me such fervent Christian sentiments in my dying days and the unspeakable joy and appreciation of the dying sacraments. Poor Maud calmly looks death in the face and even asks me to pick out a place for her grave here in the wilderness of Long Island.

**Thursday, Feb. 20**

Said Mass at 5 o’clock as before mentioned. After Mass take cup of tea, and Mr. Henry Adderley rows us around Hog Key to the good ship *Estrella* where we arrived at 10 a.m. I send some provisions ashore with Adderley (uncle of Maud) and at 10:15 we are under sail again for Nassau.

At 7 a.m. on Tuesday, February 25, we arrived back in Nassau ‘after an altogether pleasant voyage.’

Later that same year (1908) Father Chrysostom again set sail for Long Island. This time he went with Captain Joshua Slocum, the first man to circumnavigate the globe single-handed. Slocum sailed from Boston in April, 1895, in the *Spray*, a small nine-ton sloop which he had rebuilt himself from a derelict hulk, and sailed alone around the world returning to Boston in July, 1898. Father Chrysostom boarded Slocum’s famous *Spray* with the intention of visiting the north end of Long Island to investigate the “port” spoken of in Columbus’ log. The wind and the weather, however, proved so unfavorable that they returned to Nassau the following day.

On 10 February 1910 Fr. Gabriel Roerig, O.S.B., wrote to his brother, Father Leander:

*After a trip of eleven days I arrived at Watlings (Landfall of Columbus) January 25 at 5 p.m. On Wednesday, January 26, I heard one confession, said Mass and preached in a building 13 x 31 ft., formerly used as a rum-shop and now our school house, with fifty children in attendance . . . On our way down we stopped for two days at little San Salvador, 1 x 5 miles. Here I also celebrated my 40th birthday on our return. Found only two*
families there. Our next stop we made at Cat Island and Rum Cay, remaining for two days at each place on account of headwind. For fifteen nights I slept on deck of schooner. I arrived in Nassau four days later, January 30, at 12:30 p.m. in time to say Mass. I shall never forget the hardships of this trip and God's merciful protection. Will sail for Andros February 4.

Three years later Father Leander described a trip he made to the out islands:

Landed at Behring Point, Andros, July 29, 1913. Visited mission at Man O’War Sound, August 9. Back at Behring Point. . . . That night I had to bake a host between two flat-irons for Mass early in the morning. . . . When travelling in these small boats one is never sure whether he will reach his destination . . . . Then we sailed to Mastic Point. . . . Before reaching this Point we passed Rat Key, a large high rock, where Father Gabriel nearly lost his life last year in a storm, after tending to a sick man. The captain had given up the boat in despair and Father Gabriel took command of the boat. After giving absolution to the men, he called upon the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and, as if by a miracle, they got clear of this dangerous Key on which so many lives have been lost in storms.

In September, 1916, the first confirmation at Andros Island was administered. Cardinal Farley had obtained permission from Rome for his vicar forane in the Bahamas, Father Chrysostom, to administer for the duration of World War I this sacrament which was ordinarily reserved to bishops. Father Chrysostom wrote an account of his first confirmation tour:

Wednesday, Sept. 20, 1916
I left Nassau at 8 p.m. on Sloop Confidence: engaged by Mr. W J. Armaly, of Mangrove Cay, who accompanied me on the voyage, and arrived at Behring Point at 11 p.m. Sept. 21.

Sunday, Sept. 24
At 11 a.m. after the Mass said by Father Gabriel, I confirmed fifty-seven candidates. At 2 p.m. I sailed to Mangrove Cay on a sloop with Mr. Armaly, whose eldest son he brought to Behring Point for Confirmation. Arrived at Mangrove Cay at 5:30 p.m. Put up at Armaly’s house and said Mass next morning at 7 o’clock in the living room, the family being present. During the day Fr. Gabriel arrived on his own boat the little Hero.

Tuesday, Sept. 26
2 p.m. We returned to Behring Point on Sloop Pearl and arrived at latter point at 6 p.m.

September 29
I said Mass at St. Mary’s, Behring Point, and after Mass sailed to Man O’War Sound, where I confirmed 33 candidates. Got back to Behring Point at 4 p.m.
September 30
Visited the whole settlement of Behring Point.

Sunday, Oct. 1
Said Mass at 7:30 and blessed bell donated by Bernardine Hoppe. After the 11 o’clock Mass said by Fr. Gabriel, I confirmed 8 candidates, 5 males, 3 females.
Total confirmed at Andros Mission: 38 males, 60 females.

That December Father Chrysostom made a second confirmation visit to Andros and confirmed fifteen more candidates for a total of 115 for the year, 1916.

Additional details of this first confirmation on Andros are given in Father Chrysostom’s letter of 18 October 1916 to Abbot Peter:

I returned last Monday from a two weeks trip to Andros Island. On September 24 and October 1, I confirmed 65 at the principal mission and on September 29, 33 were confirmed at Man O’War Station. Many of the men and boys were absent sponge fishing and some whole families were in the field camps, planting corn, sweet potatoes, etc., so I shall have to go back again in Christmas week when most of them will be at their homes. The stray ones I confirm at Nassau when they happen here. There are still 60 to be confirmed. Then there are also a few others scattered among the other islands. I was very much impressed and edified by the work that has been accomplished in the two Andros Missions by Fr. Gabriel. The faithful are real Catholics with a truly Catholic spirit and spirituality. The splendour and pomp under a magnificent cathedral roof has nothing on the impressiveness, dignity and spirituality there appeared under the thatch roof of the hovel in which the holy sacrifice was offered and confirmation received at Man O’War Sound or in the plain stone church at Behring Point.

Knowing, as I do, the trials and hardships, the discomforts and the loneliness that he has lived through, Father Gabriel has the right to chant from innermost heart: Magnificat...quia respexit humilitatem.

Father Gabriel and I looked up several little settlements along the shore to the southward, and we have concluded to extend humbly and unostentatiously in that direction. As at Man O’War Sound, where a chapel-school will be erected as soon as the present school at Behring Point is completed, a temporary chapel-school will be utilized and visited once or twice a month. The Nassau Missions require the presence of two priests, one of whom can help the out-island extension in its organizations, but very soon an additional priest will be required for Andros Island.

During July and August, I suffered from heart failure. Often I thought the day would be my last. I am now recovered and my heart action is quite normal again.

All is well here. Father Gabriel and Leander are in excellent health and are doing well and ask to be remembered.

The coming of Lent and other parish matters, spiritual and temporal, Father Gabriel treats in a letter to Abbot Peter written from Behring Point, Andros, on 8 March 1919:
After two weeks at Nassau I returned in time to give my people a generous dose of ashes. The Anglicans here celebrated Ash Wednesday last week and as they found out their mistake on my return, they celebrated Ash Wednesday again this week. Many of their members came up to get ashes from me. The minister told me that he lost his bearings, as he had not received a calendar for this year. Had 138 Communions between Christmas Day and New Year. During 1918, I had 28 baptisms and 3 marriages.

Fr. Chrysostom has been kind enough to buy a nice, fast, little sailing boat, the Star of the Sea, for me, so that I can get quicker to the outlying missions on Andros. I am happy to say that my people will have enough to eat for the next three months, but they are very short on clothes. Most of the children are naked and cannot come to school. Some of my Catholic women were so short of clothes that they used to come to confession and communion at four in the morning, to avoid being seen by the more fortunate ones.

On April 25 I will be twenty-five years a priest and on June 24, twenty-five years in the Bahamas. How time flies! Please join me on the 25th of April in thanking our good Lord for all He has done for me, His most unworthy servant. I am in the best of health....

The years of World War I, 1914-18, were a difficult time for Father Chrysostom in Nassau. He was no fan of President Woodrow Wilson of the United States or his secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan, and openly stated so. A guest who passed through The Priory innocently asked Father Chrysostom what he thought of President Wilson’s war policies and received the reply, “I consider him to be the incarnation of the Devil himself.” Father Gabriel repeatedly warned his confrere to be more circumspect in his comments, but to no avail. Father Chrysostom was critical of “the high tension of blind patriotism rampant here,” and judged the Anglo-Americans to be spreading propaganda and bias against the Germans. Father Chrysostom was unquestionably a thorough American. He had been accused at St. John’s of being anti-German and too Americanizing in his attitudes and policies as vice president of the university. He was now, in the Bahamas, a loyal member of the colony. He could not, however, in his honest and forthright manner, tolerate nationalistic bias and unjust hysteria against Germany. His German-American immigrant ancestry was a proud and rightful heritage to him.

Schreiner was a cosmopolitan in the true sense that the Bahamas have always welcomed persons of diverse backgrounds. But in time of war the going could be tough.

It was, indeed, a period that depressed him greatly. The American consul at Nassau, the Rev. F. W. Doty, a bigoted Presbyterian minister, was an open enemy of Father Chrysostom. Doty spread false and malicious rumors about the Catholic priest and tried to fan the flames of nationalistic passion against him. Such a procedure was particularly ironic since Father Chrysostom had allowed Doty to occupy The Bungalow
at the bargain rate of $40 a month from March until December, 1914. But the times were ripe for gullible and simplistic “patriots” to strike out against the choice symbol of free expression which was supposed to be a part of the tradition the Anglo-American allies were defending. At the same time Father Chrysostom’s own independent expressions, ever his hallmark, did not endear him to those inclined toward emotional patriotism.

When Father Chrysostom would take his afternoon walk along the West Bay Road, he would be watched carefully by those who had no more to do, and who even looked for some way to smear the Catholic mission which was growing far too strong. Rumors spread throughout Nassau that the priest was going to cut the cable to Jupiter, Florida, and in the grog shops this was a welcome topic of conjecture. Catholic missionaries as late as the 1930’s still heard this canard repeated in Nassau. Father Chrysostom pretty well had to confine his activities to The Priory yard for the duration. His trips to the States to collect donations were also grounded by Doty. Finally Father Chrysostom got tired of this lilliputian charade and took up his pen to expose Doty and his doings in the columns of *The Tribune*. Doty made the mistake of responding to the challenge with wild charges which Father Chrysostom systematically refuted. The *affaire de honneur* did not end there. Schreiner mailed the whole exchange along with his comments to Washington. As a result, Doty was removed and Father Chrysostom was again granted free entry to the United States.

It must be recorded for historical accuracy, however, that Father Chrysostom did, indeed, have opinions on World War I which were not in harmony with party-line or nationalistic views of that period. He was an early internationalist and expressed interesting political judgments in his correspondence which were sound historically and semiprophetical. Excerpts from such opinions Father Chrysostom expressed to Abbot Peter Engel, O.S.B., before total censorship was imposed are subjoined here. This correspondence also affords primary insight into conditions of those years:

1. The appalling war is still on. It will be a matter of at least 3 years, in my opinion. And I don’t believe that the allies are strong enough to whip Germany. My conviction of Germany’s strength is greater now than ever. At the utmost, it will be a draw and both sides will end with exhaustion. I anticipate a German cavalry raid into Russia, which will cut off communications between the Russian Army and its bases of supplies. That will put Russia *hors de combat*—and with Russia out, the allies will soon disintegrate. What worries me more than the outcome of the European war, is the humiliating statesmanship at Washington, which will result in making every belligerent nation a bitter enemy of the U.S. It will not be 5 years before the U.S. will be drawn into conflict with Japan—and every belligerent nation of Europe will be glad to see the U.S. humbled. The only thing
that can save the U.S. from a conflict with Japan, or some European nation, will be an early declaration of war on Mexico followed by a prohibition of all exports under terms of status belli in the U.S. It is the only way to keep the U.S. neutral, save it from all European entanglements, and arouse the people to the need of strengthening its army and navy against aggression by some other nation. It is also the only way to retrieve the mistakes made by that blatherskite Bryan and Wilson’s watchful waiting. If I were president of the U.S. I would within 10 days intervene in Mexico, and make it an excuse to prohibit all export of foodstuff and ammunition and war material from the U.S. Such a policy would quickly end the European war, be the beginning of some solution of the Mexican question, and put the U.S. in a position of honor and respect among the nations (30 April 1914) . . .

2. The three of us are well. The war has one good effect. It makes people more earnest about their religion. So our church attendance is quite regular. Beyond an occasional British cruiser in sight we see nothing of the war. As I am writing this one of England’s fastest and biggest battle cruisers is on the horizon. She went into the tongue of the ocean between here and Andros looking for supply ships of the Karlsruhe, and is off now to hunt up that crafty and splendid German. The English cruiser has a speed of 31 knots. The Karlsruhe has only about 26. So it means ‘Karl’s ruhe look out for yourself.’ Our colony is in financial distress. The sponge industry is dead; sisal has no price—and there is actual starvation at the out-islands—more I believe than in Belgium.

Of course there is only one side to the war here. John Bull is an angel—and the Germans are brutes. To judge from the American Jones, the U.S. seems to have become a British satrapy. Germany has a pretty hard row to hoe, but I think she will be able to hoe it to the end and keep her enemies off her territory. In fact I am inclined to think that she is quite strong enough to whip the lot of them—and accomplish her main object: the destruction of British sea power. The cant and hypocrisy and pharisai­ism of the British, and the American press astound one. No wonder Germany has it in for ‘perfidious Albion.’ Please don’t quote me on the war (16 December 1914) . . .

3. The war is raising cain in finances. Since Dec. the town is darkened, and that with recurring U-boat scares (all silly) and other war talk utterly spoiled the tourist season. Fortunately I had a tenant for The Bungalow for Jan., Feb. and March just past. That gives me $1,500 to start the year with—otherwise things would look mighty gloomy financially. I fear prices are not at their highest yet. I am afraid flour will run to $20 per barrel in June or July and other things in proportion. For us too there are the uncertainties of regular communication with the States. And there is no end to the dire prospect. I fear the entry of the U.S. into the war may not at all hasten peace, particularly if Russia discontinues—which eventually seems not at all impossible now that she is undergoing an astounding political revolution. The World War seems to me a duplication of the Napoleonic wars which lasted some 20 years. Allied wars (excepting the Crimean, which was only a local squabble) have always lasted at least 7 years and there seems to me no compelling signs that this almost universal war should be shorter than a 7 year war—and it may easily be longer. I am not a pessimist, but I am planting my orchard (eaten up the last 12 months
with an insect pest) with pigeon peas, sweet potatoes and like field truck, against hard times and soaring prices (18 April 1917).

4. With Russia between them for commercial exploitation, Germany and Japan will not want peace until they have received a strong foot-hold in Russian trade and commerce. Russian territory larger by a million or two square miles than all South America offers a field of commercial development for the 20th century such as North America was for the 19th and one cannot readily assume that either Germany and Japan are not long-visioned enough to see their opportunities for a trade expansion greater than Germany’s pre-war world trade. There is no doubt in my mind of a tacit understanding between Germany and Japan. The Germans are poor diplomats, but are long headed enough to capture the Russian trade while the Allies are exhausting their resources on a hundred Panama Canals blasting scale at the West front. One of the results of the world war will be that Japan will emerge from it the strongest world power of modern times. There appeared two months ago a Japanese statement that at the peace conference Japan proposes to hold what she has. I haven’t seen a single newspaper comment upon that statement, yet it is the most significant declaration any nation has made regarding the solution of the international muddle. It shows how thoroughly Japan has adopted the methods that have made Western nations world powers: . . . The simple rule, the good old plan, that they should take who have the power, and they should keep who can.

The statement indicated Japan’s policy and at the same time her perfect understanding with Germany to let other nations exhaust themselves into welcoming peace while the Russian melon was being cut by Japan and Germany—which in the light of past history means that peace is far in the future.

We here have had a taste, for nearly 3 years, of what a world war though thousands of miles away, means for interested nations (20 June 1917) . . .

5. Our mails are irregular and so uncertain that it is difficult to wait 3 full weeks for a ship to come or go and at our times we may have two the same day, and none are announced until 24 hours before going and not at all before coming.

Your letter of Nov. 12th happened to make swift time and reached me yesterday. The previous letter came 4 weeks ago. Each contained a check for $100 for Father Gabriel. I know how he will appreciate the generous help. The first amount I forward him some weeks ago; the present will be sent him on this week’s Andros mail.

The generous gifts will be a great help to him in his great need. In the States you are feeling the high prices. Add to New York prices 30 per cent duty and freight ranging from $1.50 to $2 per barrel and you can see that everything landed here must be at least 50 per cent higher than in N.Y. Some things such as butter and bacon we can’t get at all. The ship that came yesterday brought no flour at all, besides the gloomy news that on account of export regulations of the American Food Commission none will be sent in future. By the end of this week the stock now here will be exhausted and then there will be 7 breadless days in the week. It’s already been butterless and baconless for the past seven or eight.

Prospects are very gloomy. There will be no season. The Bungalow will stand vacant this winter in all probability. That will be a loss to the
mission of $1,500. There is no prospect of lower prices for foodstuffs during the war and during the 2 years following the war the prices will go higher on flour and milk and potatoes than at any time during the war. And peace is not in sight. In my opinion the war will last from 3 to 5 years longer (28 November 1917)....

6. There are several public commissions sitting before which I have been asked to give views, testimony and advice. This evening I am slated to appear before the commission of enquiry of what to do with the returning soldier. The President of the commission thinks I have more practical knowledge of industries, farming, etc. than anybody else here, so has asked me to give detailed and exhaustive information on several points. Another commission inquires into venereal diseases and I am slated to give a paper on the relation between our present marriage laws and prostitution, etc. Nassau is generally considered an easy place and a lazy one, but somehow I find that life here is just one damned thing after another (18 March 1918)....

7. As you know from experience of old, I am a tardy correspondent in normal times. My almost total silence for so long a time was owing to the fact that there was in practice both here and at the American end an odious and vigorous censorship. The American Consul (The Reverend F. W. Doty) here is a Presbyterian minister, a most rabbid Ulsterite Orangeman, and anti-Catholic of the unscrupulous Menace sort, who hesitates not to employ the foulest means of gossip and innuendo to attain his ends of making himself big at Washington, and blackguarding Catholics and tainting them with disloyalty. I have exposed him here in the press in his 'Orange' and anti-Knights of Columbus propaganda, and he hesitates at no slander however vile to make it appear that Catholics are enemies of the U.S. and of the allied cause. His methods are those of secret whispering slander. Our names and religion were quite sufficient reasons for him to try to fasten suspicion upon us. You will understand therefore why I have discontinued all but the absolutely necessary business correspondence. Thank God, like most bigots of his sort, he is hanging himself with his own rope. He is at present the most discredited man in Nassau, and everybody hopes that he will be removed very soon.

The last year has been the most trying one of my life—yet it closed with the happiest Christmas I ever spent. Spiritually it has been our most successful year here. The enclosed clipping tells you of the War Memorial Chapel dedicated Christmas Eve. A booklet now in press giving detailed description will be sent you in a few weeks.

Materially we have had great trials. All our citrus trees (and every citrus tree—orange, grapefruit, lemon and lime on the island) are dead and our orchard is a desolate barren. A blue grey fly pest did the destruction. About half of our coconut trees are dead of a disease called bud-rot. We still have thirty bearing trees left, but some of these are also dying. For nearly a year we have been without anything like an adequate supply of fats and flour and meat. Often for weeks the flour was wanting and when we had bread it seemed 66 percent chalk; corn meal, musty and full of weevils, etc. However, things are improving a little. Flour is getting better and cheaper and last week I was fortunate enough to get a rasher of bacon. It was a glorious feast.

Prices throughout were from 75 to 300 percent higher than in N.Y. (24 February 1919)....
8. Your letter of 3rd ult. reminds me of my remissness in correspondence. I have forgotten how to be prompt. During 2 years of censorship I practically gave up writing excepting when business required it. Since last spring I have been busy from early morning till night and I have but rarely had an hour to myself. All the mission buildings sadly in need of repair, new roofs, paint, etc. During the war prices were too high and I did not have the means to do more than just keep ourselves alive. Last March after much representation the New York archdiocesan authorities made an allotment of $2,000 for repairs, etc. I then started in to make certain repairs which I intended to complete by July and then go north and make other repairs in Oct., Nov. and Dec. But alas carpenters and masons are so few that that work which I estimated could be done in 5 weeks has consumed 5 months and I cannot hope to finish up all around by January.

In June I had an applicant for the Bungalow who was to be here in Aug. or Sept.—a Baron Bliss and his entourage—but he has not been able to get here from Tunis, Africa. He sailed however from Marseilles September 10 and is expected to be here within 2 weeks. He has taken The Bungalow for a whole year for $1,750. After putting The Bungalow in shape the hurricane in September blew off some of the roofing (rubberoid) and necessitated partial reshingling. I could get only 2 carpenters and what sort they are you can judge from the fact that they had been 3 full weeks putting on 14,000 shingles. I expect to have it done this week. The best carpenters and masons and thousands of common labourers have been attracted by high wages to Miami. What is left of carpenters and masons was early gobbled up by speculators building large warehouses for 'booze' in which traffic insurance money is being made here. The small cays nearest to Florida are being covered with hotels and liquor storehouses and here two are being built to entertain the expected thirsty ones from the States.

On account of shortage of shipping the Ward Line cannot enter a contract with the Government here for regular S.S. communication in consequence of which the big Hotel people are not yet sure of opening the Colonial and Royal Victoria. All private houses for rent have been taken including—you will be surprised—the rectory. I had a tentative offer for $2,500 for the season which however I rejected in favor of $1,500 from a very dear family, MacManus, of Toledo with whom I stayed a week in 1915. I retain the downstairs office and bedroom and am to be their guest at table. The rectory needed reshingling but as I could not get carpenters to do it properly I had it patched up by out-island carpenters. The whole house needs renovating from roof to foundation, but I shall scarcely be able to do more than inside work besides putting a bathroom on each floor.

You recall the old store house or quarry building (the one-story stone house whose roof came up to the level of the lawn on the hillside forming the northeast corner of the grounds and within 30 yards to the north of the rectory)—well its roof was in ruins and it was up to me to restore it or remove it. I put 2 rooms over the top of the front and it is already bespoken for rent as a painter's studio. The church I shall reshingle during the winter, but the kitchen requires reshingling before my tenants come. You can understand that all this requires my constant superintendence or at least my presence. Both Fr. Leander and myself have our hands full all day long.
But thank God we are both in excellent health. I have not felt better in years.

I was sorry not to be able to go north but the winter here in my own home with the household management on my tenants' shoulders, and without any boarders to look after will give me a very pleasant vacation, particularly as Mr. MacManus is very congenial and a man of splendid education.

I think I sent papers recounting the trouble I had with the Consul (if not let me know). He was fool enough to rush into print and there is where I had him. Two weeks after I had my whack at him his transfer was gazetted. I sent the correspondence and an explanation to Washington and was promptly notified that I am free to enter the U.S. when I please.

Added to my other work I have since March edited the twice-a-week Tribune. It was an insignificant sheet to whom nobody paid any attention. It is now the most influential paper here and is by all pronounced the most interesting paper being published in Nassau. During last week alone it got 60 new subscriptions. I am not known as its editor, but many have suspected me. The owner I think, has been doing some barefaced denying, so the community is very much puzzled as to who does the editing. The work is rather a pleasant diversion, and my training of the owner's younger brother (Etienne Dupuch) to gather the news has been very successful and apart from the editorials, he is getting fairly able to write up most of the other stuff. After a while he will be able to turn out a better paper than the old Guardian (the other and more pretentious paper here). I shall send you a bunch by this mail. The two names as editor and acting editor are merely a bluff. The one has been in England since April and will not return; the other, the artist is in the States and will probably take the 'studio' for the winter. You will probably be interested in the serial 'What is the matter with the Colony' which is mine, and which will be published in book form when completed. I don't want it known for the present that I am the writer, so please keep the information private...

What a relief it is that the war is over—though, as I felt from the beginning, the next ten years or more will be years of war.

Our prices are fierce—duty rates have been raised, freight rates are $2 per barrel as compared with 60 cents before the war. I haven't tasted ham or bacon in 3 years. They are 3/-a pound and of very poorest and toughest quality. Butter is 4/4 per lb. and isn't butter at that. The colony is flooded with British paper currency and is worth on what it is worth in New York, about $4.20. By the way, you ought to invest a few thousand dollars in marks and francs. The mark is down to 4 cents, I believe, and the franc to about 13 cents. In my opinion the mark will be worth 16 to 18 cents in 3 years and will reach par in 5 or 6 years. St. John's ought to invest $10,000 in marks (5 October 1919)...
tried to preserve peace and charity, it is obvious that he was, as he said, "not enthusiastic about the Bahama Mission." Father Chrysostom never let him forget that statement. Abbot Peter was most upset over the charges and counter-charges in the Greene affair on Andros Island which placed him in the middle between his own confreres and Collins. Although Father Chrysostom was exonerated by the court referee's decision of not acting unjustly toward Collins, Abbot Peter was never the same. He was willing, however, to allow Father Chrysostom and the Roerig brothers to stay in the Bahamas because they wanted to and had the spiritual concern of the Bahamas deeply at heart.

On one occasion Abbot Peter, in justifying his *festina lente* policy toward the Bahamas made the mistake of asking Father Gabriel, "How many converts have you made in the Bahamas?" This gave Father Chrysostom the opportunity to wax strong and long on the value of mission work, the lack of tact in asking Father Gabriel such a question since he was enduring more privation than any priest of St. John's. Schreiner also pointedly questioned how many converts were being made in Stearns County, the German-American Catholic community that surrounded the Minnesota abbey. He wanted to know what was being done for the advancement of the kingdom of God in Catholic parishes staffed by Benedictines in entirely Catholic areas of the upper Midwest. Father Chrysostom, ever the debater, also never let the abbot forget that the bishops in that area, particularly the home diocese of St. Cloud, would gladly relieve the abbey of some better parishes which were far more of a demand for manpower than the Bahamas.

Abbot Peter continued to send "homilies on humility" as Father Chrysostom termed them, to the vicar forane in the Bahamas. The abbot also cautioned Father Chrysostom not to place infallibility in his own judgments and not to canonize himself before death. This brought forth in response a classic Schreiner gem on 11 November 1901:

> I read your biography of myself with great interest, and since reading it I have re-read the original of my letter that called it forth. I have nothing to add to, or detract from, what I said therein. You are at liberty to draw your own conclusions from my last letter, and I feel no disposition to offer criticism on the biography of one manifestly desirous of 'canonization before death' beyond venturing the observation that, in the presence of several eloquent and active volunteer Devil's Advocates, I fear the subject of your biography has little chance for canonization either before or after death.

Space does not permit including the details of this running battle. It concerns the history of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas only as a reminder of the great difficulty in the pioneer years of obtaining priests to work in the islands. Diocesan priests would not or could not come to the Bahamas. That even a small contingent of Benedictines did come
and were able to remain is the accomplishment of the period. That a man of Father Chrysostom's extraordinary ability, that the Reerig brothers, Fathers Gabriel and Leander, of such self-sacrificing service, did persevere until better days is a dimension that grows with the years.

The issue was clouded in that St. John's Abbey also had St. Anselm's parish, New York City, in its charge, as well as two parishes in the diocese of Brooklyn. Abbot Peter was constantly pressured to establish an abbey and college in Brooklyn or to advance St. Anselm's to a priory or abbey. The three areas—New York, Brooklyn and the Bahamas—were looked upon in American midwestern Collegeville as parts of "the eastern mission." As Abbot Alexius began to decline in health at St. Anselm's, the problem came to a head. Abbot Peter was by this time not only the St. John's superior but also the elected president of the American Cassinese Congregation of Benedictine abbeys in the United States.

In 1907 Abbot Peter suggested that Father Chrysostom come to St. Anselm's parish to succeed Abbot Alexius and that Father Gabriel take charge of the Bahama mission. Father Chrysostom was willing to consider such a proposal because of his close connections with New York hierarchy and clergy, as well as his former friendship with Abbot Alexius. But, typically, Father Chrysostom made such absolute demands if he assumed the position of administrator of St. Anselm's that Abbot Alexius would not concede to abandoning control of finances. Abbot Peter, ever the man of peace, did not have the heart to remove Abbot Alexius. He turned rather to Fr. Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., vice rector of St. John's University, who was acceptable to Abbot Alexius during his declining years. Father Bernard came to St. Anselm's in 1909, restored peace and order in the parish, won wide confidence in the archdiocese, and began construction of a remarkable church. Father Chrysostom liked Father Bernard and continually praised his work in New York.

It was a blessing for Father Chrysostom that he was not chosen for the New York assignment. In personal contacts he could be extremely harsh and unbending. He had been told by his father, the pioneer scout, that the man in command of the expedition had to be in absolute control. There appears nothing apart from natural inclination, which better explains Schreiner's military command tactics. His command of language and ease of expression also overpowered and left wounds. He found it difficult to live in a community. His talents found a much wider field of good for religion in the Bahamas where he was the king turtle. It was a blessing for the Bahamians that this unique figure remained in their midst for he was able to do far more spiritual work there than in the confines of an abbey or a metropolitan parish. Now Father Chrysostom finally knew that he would spend the remainder of his days in the Bahamas and he was subsequently more at peace with himself and his
destiny. Father Bernard was appointed prior of St. Anselm’s parish and the eastern mission which included the Bahamas. The project of an abbey and college in Brooklyn, despite its potential, was abandoned because of the lack of manpower. Father Chrysostom readily acceded to these changes and he was grateful that the New York situation was now more definite. The finger of God moves in strange ways. It was in this way that Father Bernard would eventually succeed as superior of the Bahama mission and become its first bishop.

In 1920 Abbot Peter, one year before his death, sent Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., to the Bahamas. As Abbot Bernard, his predecessor, had sent Father Gabriel to the Bahamas just before his death, so now Abbot Peter, in a similar move of real insight, sent a missionary who would move the Catholic work forward in the next years more than it had developed to that time.

But before the story unfolds of Bahamian Catholic developments in the first half of the twentieth century, one last look should be taken at the rich documentation of the pioneer period. A collage of representative documents, culled from the numerous archival deposits, is included below. They are a testament to the spirit and dedication of servants of the Lord struggling, each in his own way, to bring Catholic life to His people in the Bahamas:

1. Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., to Abbot-elect Peter Engel, O.S.B., Nassau, 19 December 1894:

   Permit me to extend my sentiments of heartiest congratulation upon your elevation to the Abbatial dignity, and at the same time my warmest sympathy for you in the life of burden that dignity stands for. Honor and onus are twins inseparable. I am heartily glad over the result of the election and, I say it very frankly, that result pleased me more than any other would have done. I trust and pray that your lot may be cast in smoother waters than was that of your predecessors and that the sentiment of peace underlying this holy season may be the happy underlying principle of your whole reign.

   I dare say the acceptance must have been a considerable sacrifice to you. The humbler walks and lesser responsibilities of a professorship, it seems to me, are more congenial than the higher dignity, that places one on a pedestal. In that position an occasional cloud of incense is most advantageously taken in, but the exposure to cold blasts is also more constant and more keen.

   Accept my best wishes for the holy season, accept them for your whole life time, and don’t, I pray, look upon me, as your saintly predecessor did, through a medium of vision that had just a tint of the sentiment ‘Chrysostom is something of a black sheep’ in it.

   We are all well here, all well contented, and form all in all quite a happy family. You have seen the fruits of our Press—‘West St. Press’—Fr. Melchior will send you evidence of his work in the photographic field—
besides we have a garden, a bookstore, a workshop, a horse, cow and calf, turkeys, ducks, chickens, etc. to give us exercise in temporals, when not engaged in spirituals. Frs. Melchior and Gabriel are in the best of health. After Easter I will make a trip to Salvador Point, Andros Island, where we have a little mission.

I wish I could have a long talk with you on the status of this poor, and apparently despised mission. Its present undefined position makes me practically an outcast. I am looking forward confidently for a visit from you next winter. After seeing, you will be able to come to some conclusion. Meanwhile, I request that no definite steps be taken regarding this mission. Abbot Hilary and others have urged the necessity of making the Bahamas independent. For the present that seems to me impracticable for the simple reason that it is not the easiest thing to find three or four who are willing to devote their lives to a mission like this. If I had two or three confreres with me who could make up their minds to devote the rest of their days to the work, I would at once petition to have the Bahamas made an independent Priory. Frs. Gabriel and Melchior seem to like it very much here, but if it is left to themselves, I fear that they might hesitate. In fact, I think they do not know their own minds on the question. Don't you think you can make a visit to the Bahamas next winter?

Though I have not the money I shall go on building and trusting in God, whose work it is. Thus far, He has not forsaken me. Whatever I have thus far done, acquired or built, I have done, acquired or built because, after due deliberation, I came to the conclusion that it was necessary for the progress of His work. That conclusion once reached I go ahead and do and He has always provided the means. Last fall I gave our house a thorough repairing and painting. Father Alexius can tell you how much it needed the latter. During the summer I am giving attention to the premises. I am putting out about 200 orange trees and in 2 or 3 years we will have a splendid orchard. It will cost me very little as the ground is already prepared, and I do the budding myself. Our little Mission seems now a promising establishment that is making slow but certain progress and my heart is in the work more than ever.

2. Father Chrysostom to Abbot Peter, Nassau, 10 June 1909:

I gained a magnificent victory last night. A most odious marriage law was passed last year. I fought it at every stage for a year. I appealed to the Government and begged and pleaded to have it amended so that I could be a marriage officer without sacrificing a conscientious principle. The Government remained haughtily stubborn and the religious prejudice of Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists, was bitterly arrayed against me. The Anglicans were with me but had given themselves away by offering to accept the law provisionally. I had to fight therefore single-handed and alone. When I had exhausted every means of private appeal and was bluntly told that the Government will not accept my amendment and when the members of the legislation told me that the legislature was not sufficiently interested in the matter, I said all right gentlemen, I have pleaded and pleaded and now I shall force the matter. My letter in The Guardian of April 24 forced the discussion and last night my amendment was carried 10 to 6. Thank God.
3. Father Chrysostom to Abbot Peter, Nassau, 27 March 1912:

I have had several visiting priests here and there and is one here now. Fr. Gabriel has been at Andros since December and is doing encouraging work. I think I told you of his receiving 27 into the church on one day during January. In the Watlings Island [San Salvador] Mission we have gone through an experience which comes to every new mission. As I told you, the school there is run by a very sensible and devoted colored girl who passed through our schools here. Well, last fall the usual sectarian attack was made and practically emptied our school of 46 pupils. Base and absolutely groundless charges were made against her moral character. The origin of the attack was this: A black man runs a grocery and general supply shop and charges three and four prices when the ship doesn't come in and the people are in need. My teacher, having on hand a supply for herself, helped out the poor at cost price. The Magistrate did the same.

Thus the enmity of the shopkeeper was aroused and he inevitably spread stories about both and the various denominations furnished willing and magnifying mediums of transmission and trouble. The result was a wildfire for a brief time. It's like lighting a match. The thing burns out very rapidly—and now there will be gradual progress in the mission. I withdrew the teacher; said not a word and now things have worked out themselves. People have not only cooled down but of their own accord have learned to understand what was behind the whole thing. I have sent the teacher back and anticipate no further trouble, at least for a while. It's the history of any new mission. The devil is singularly uninventive, for in every case he uses the self same tactics....

4. Father Chrysostom to Abbot Peter, New York, 9 August 1912:

On my arrival here 2 weeks ago I found your letter of July 16 awaiting me. I found everybody here well and things moving on charmingly at St. Anselm’s in New York. During this week Father Prior Bernard and myself attended a course of lectures on the social question at Fordham University. The lecturers were Rev. Mackel, S. J., Rev. Dr. Ryan of St. Paul and David Goldstein. The Jesuit is able, well informed and thoroughly equipped to handle the question illuminatingly. Dr. Ryan, while well informed on the labor question, has nothing of the Jesuit’s depth or grasp of the subject. I have not yet begun collecting, as the New York clergy, from the Cardinal down, is in the country.

What you tell me of the postponement of Fr. Leander’s ordination is very disappointing, as I had positively calculated on his being ordained during the summer and available for work in the Bahamas before the end of the year....

This everlasting uncertainty and perpetual dilly-dallying in the realms of hesitancy in the presence of urgent work in a large mission field is not only an injustice to the work and a cutting into two the efforts of the workers, but it also puts the Order into the position of being adjudged incompetent of taking care of a mission.

I say this not complainingly or with any feeling of resentment, but in the humiliating consciousness that this everlasting state of indefiniteness
with regard to long promised help has not only deprived the mission of the workers it so much needs, but has also actually handicapped Fr. Gabriel and myself into doing less work than we could have effectively done had we been able to plan ahead with some assurance that plans for active operation could be carried out. In other words, I feel that this continued uncertainty as to much needed and constantly promised assistance, has not only been an injustice to the mission but has also made Fr. Gabriel’s and my labor of years only half as effective as it would otherwise have been. I think I am fairly good at explaining difficulties away, but this time I am at a loss how to explain to the Cardinal [Farley] these oft repeated assurances that another priest will be added to the staff of workers.

The Cardinal is out of the city and will not be back for 2 or 3 weeks. I dread meeting him for it will mean that I will have to give some explanation of why we have not the long promised, much-needed priest in the mission. Heretofore I have used all explanations that my ingenuity could devise. My aptness at explaining and offering plausible excuses is now completely exhausted. Short of a humiliating confession that the Order of St. Benedict is utterly incompetent to undertake and carry on successfully the evangelization of the Bahamas or even to live up to ordinary promises oft repeated of much needed helpers, my ingenuity is at an end. Please, for God’s sake, don’t put it up to me to be obliged to admit to the Cardinal that the Order of St. Benedict—and specifically St. John’s Abbey—can’t keep its promises and make good. I shall have to see the Cardinal within 2 or 3 weeks, so I must earnestly beg you to let me know at once when this long promised co-laborer will be forthcoming.

After my patiently bearing for ten years the humiliation of unfulfilled promises of giving another priest to the work, and after silently swallowing the various excuses that have been given why this most noble of Benedictine missions has been so signaly ignored, I hope you will have enough understanding of human nature, to pardon my plain speech and to read feelings of the heart that give it utterance. . . .

5. Abbot Peter to Father Chrysostom, Collegeville, Minnesota, 19 August 1912:

Your letter received. I waited with my answer till I could send you a definite reply. Frs. Leander and Lambert will be ordained next Saturday and in the course of the week following Fr. Leander will be in New York to go to his home in Germany.

I am disappointed as much as you in not being able to send him on the mission forthwith. When I first wrote to you and promised to send him I was under the impression that he would have completed his studies by the end of June, when my attention was called to the fact that he came under the new regulation of studies prescribed by the Holy See—I applied for dispensation in which I specially stated that we needed him for the missions and also stated that he would have to pass an examination on the whole course prescribed—but Card. Vives y Tuto is very strict and refused the request.

I saw from different responses of the Congregation that they made this matter binding on the consciences of Superiors, and I have enough
to answer for besides operating [sic] it with a formal disobedience to the Holy See. How strict they take this matter is plain from the refusal of my petition to make an exception. I could not therefore unload the responsibility onto your shoulders—I am and remain the responsible person. I may, however, be able to let Fr. Leander go to the Bahamas early next Spring, so he gets gradually accustomed to the warm climate—till then we must wait and place the blame, if there is any, on Card. Vives.

It is certainly no easy matter for me to satisfy all demands—I try to do the best I can with the men at my disposal, and God, I trust, will not demand more of me, though my subjects not knowing actual conditions and looking each at their own peculiar needs, frequently lose patience, and give the abbot a lecture—I am used to it, and, I suppose it does me some good too. I remain with all love and respect.

6. Father Chrysostom to Abbot Peter, New York, 22 August 1912:

I received your letter of Aug. 19 apprising me of Fr. Leander’s ordination to take place on 24th inst., and I am indeed delighted, and shall now look forward with confidence to his coming to the Bahamas early next spring. It was far from my thought to read you a lecture in my last letter. The frank recital of facts as they appeared to me and the expression of my disappointment after years of unfulfilled promises were a cry rather than a lecture. I had been told, reliably so, I believed, that by the end of June past he had finished his course, i.e. seen all his theology and passed in it. On that assumption I suggested the mathematical equivalent of 4 school years of 9 months each to 3 years of 12 months each.

Since writing that suggestion, I am reliably informed that one abbot has used precisely the same reasoning and ordained one of his men and given him faculties. If, however, as you say, he did not complete his course in June, then that reasoning would not justify ordination, and it would seem incomprehensible to me why Rome should be applied to at all for a dispensation whose refusal could be foreseen as inevitable. After appealing to Rome and receiving a formal refusal I can readily see that disregard would now be formal disobedience. What still puzzles me is why Rome was applied to at all, for if Fr. Leander’s studies were completed, it was not necessary; if they were not completed, it was foolish. I say this with due respect to your advisory Canonists.

One should be thankful even for little things, so I am glad that Fr. Leander will be ordained this week.

7. Fr. Leander Roerig, O.S.B., to Abbot Peter, Nassau, 2 September 1913:

I left Nassau July 28th at 3:45 p.m. on the sloop Wild Sion, 19 ft. long. Counting crew and passengers, there were on board sixteen persons, all colored save one. Grown up men and women, boys and girls, and babies composed the sixteen. No room on the boat to be to oneself, but, wherever you be, squat down. At 7 o’clock p.m. we reached the extreme western bay of Isle New Providence on which Nassau is located, which is twelve miles distant. Here we dropped anchor till eleven o’clock that night. When the captain noticed that his guiding star had risen, we took up anchor and unfolded our sails to the breezes. We had been sailing about
ten minutes when we struck a reef. I thought that it would be a wreck, but after a little while our small boat was clear and made straight for the deep ocean. Then the captain, Dan Anderson, brought the foot part of an old wooden bedstead, large enough to hold six persons if they sat close together. I threw my rug over this part of the bedstead, also the two pillows, which belong to the sailing outfit when travelling to the out-isles. Here I lay during the entire night, resting but not sleeping. Lying right below the steering apparatus, I would not again come in contact with the pilot. To give you an idea of the width of the boat,—well, I pretty well covered it from side to side. Again and again I would have my feet and legs washed by the waves, as they fell on the leeward side of the boat.

As I lay there I thought of you in your cozy beds, I thought of how one sudden strong gust of wind could upset the boat and plunge its passengers and crew into a watery grave; for it would hardly be possible to swim to the shore, thirty miles away.

Having gone to confession and recommended myself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Mass on the day of sailing, I was resigned to God's holy will. Here on the open sea we realized what mighty little playthings we are in the hands of our Creator; how dependent we are on Him, and how silly and foolish are those that labor only for money, honor and esteem. The pilot and the different lookouts spent the night singing, while they tended to their work. Again and again I clap to cheer them, as they finished the various sailor and Bible songs.

Today is July 29. At 5 o'clock a.m., we sighted Big Key, a vast coral rock covered with shrubbery, standing guard at the entrance to Andros Channel. In the left entrance there is another key, but smaller; then we passed Sugar Rock, then Man O'War Sound, where three of my mission settlements are situated. Green Key is next passed, where thousands of wild pigeons are to be found. The hunting season for these having opened on July 15, many Nassau sportsmen were there, enjoying themselves. Wood Key is next seen, then Flamingo Point. At the latter place the flamingoes which are now to be found in large flocks on the western shore of Andros, used to brood only a few years ago. Cargyl Creek Settlement is next passed. Here we can still find traces of the splendid work which Chrysostom Green's deceased father must have done here, for the buildings are still standing. We are now 4 miles away from Father Gabriel's mission church at Behring Point. We can see it plainly, for it rests on a hill.

At 8:00 a.m., July 29th, the Wild Scion dropped anchor at Behring Point—a half mile from shore. The people not expecting me, were not at the shore, but not more than five minutes after I was carried ashore and gave the native call of my arrival, the women, children and men came rushing along to greet me and carry my baggage to the mission station.

The sea voyage had worked on my limbs so that I went to bed and rested for eight hours though I had not taken anything to eat since noon the day before. In the evening I visited ten houses, about one-third of the settlement. The next morning, Wednesday, July 30th, I said Mass at 7:30. The church was nearly filled with worshippers. After Mass there was a great hand-shaking—the natives prefer to use the left hand in shaking. After breakfast I inspected Father Gabriel's grounds and was surprised
at the great work which he did during the few years he has been laboring there. The walls of the buildings are two feet thick, of coral stone, nicely hewn and arranged by himself. The ground is mostly a honey-combed rock, often leaving deep holes where the black soil has gathered. In these holes Father Gabriel has his various kinds of fruit trees and flower shrubs.

As I came to the cemetery, 90 ft. by 90½, what a surprise to find it enclosed in a wall, two and a half feet thick and planted entirely with the royal palm in the shape of a cross. At the eastern entrance in the center is a large cedar-wood cross, 15 ft. high. This entrance to the cemetery is similar to the front entrance at St. John's, with larger stone balls than at St. John's, resting on the massive stone posts. The cemetery is perfectly level and covered with good soil which had to be carried there. At the left side, as we enter, we find an open grave, hewn in rock, which has been lying open several years ready to receive the mortal remains of the zealous missionary who has been laboring here so faithfully.

As I walk along with difficulty on my rope-soled shoes, I come to his well, a curiosity worth seeing. It was built by his own hands, is 26 ft. deep, and the water is excellent. Some 15 ft. ahead is a large cave, running under surface for some distance, and leading to another small opening from above. In this cave I saw for the first time stalagmites and stalactites in the process of formation. How pretty! As we leave the cave we pass on to the beautiful path, with flowers and shrubbery on either side. This path leads to Father Gabriel's house and to the large new school which he is now building. I hope Father Abbot will be here to bless it when it is finished. The children at Behring Point, Catholic or non-Catholic attend his school, to receive their primary education.

As we step out of the nearly half finished school, we are on the road that leads from the bay to the entrance of Father Gabriel's church. This road is about 200 yards long and one of the best I have seen on the island. Father built it himself. From the entrance to the church it runs about 100 yards through Father's land and along this part it is very pretty. On both sides are beautiful hedges and trees, especially the beautiful poinciana trees which are about 20 ft. high.

While we are walking along this road, we get to Father's carpenter shop. Here we see something surprising overhead, a coffin which Father made for himself in case he should die here, knowing that the natives cannot build one.

During the week I visited different people of the settlement, Catholic or non-Catholic, it's all the same. From all sides they are calling: 'Good evening, Father,' though it may be early in the morning. How cheerful and happy are the people to have again a priest in their midst. They mostly are children and women. Practically all the men of the Andros are spongers... During my stay at Behring Point, about thirty-five received Holy Communion, among these was the poor leper of whom I have spoken in a previous letter. He was a regular Mass attendant.

Sunday, Aug. 3rd, at Behring Point. I had the altar covered with tropical flowers. At 11 o'clock I had Mass and sermon. The church was so crowded that the aisles and doorways were thronged. In the afternoon I held Sunday school, baptized a child, preached and gave benediction.
During the following week I had several visits from some children of Man O'War Sound. I could not send these home without giving them something to eat, for fear they would die on the long way home.

One morning I received a visit from the chiefs of Man O'War Sound. I never had as eager listeners, as when I spoke to them of the Catholic Church being the only true Church and showed them that the other Churches were human inventions. Their faces betrayed the joy of their hearts, because now their settlements were being brought up in the true faith. During the week after the first Sunday services, I took a pleasure trip to a settlement 4 miles off. Going there it took a half hour—fair wind; coming back it took one hour and a half—head wind, and we had to tack frequently in order to make headway.

Now to the interesting part of my letter. Saturday August 9, Captain Dan Anderson from Man O'War Sound dropped anchor at Behring Point, and about 11 p.m. I was on board of his 16-foot sloop, sailing for Man O'War Sound, 8 miles off, where I was to have services the next day. For this trip I had to take with me everything necessary for living and for services. (Excuse the break. A spider paid me a visit. I put him in my quieting bottle. Won 't Father James smile to hear that I am making use of his bottle!) We reached the sound shortly after twelve. Here Chief Roger Bain carried me ashore. What did I find here to walk on! Rocks so honey-combed that if anyone had broken thousands of bottles and set the broken sharp points up, it would have been about the same sensation to walk over them.

After a mile's walk we reached the rectory, 8 ft. by 8 ft. with a door 4 by 2. I got in all right the first time, but the second time I ran my head with such violence against a cross-piece over the entrance that I nearly landed on my back and for a few seconds could not recall what had struck me. The chiefs had fixed up the house as well as they could. They had white-washed the wall, thatched the leakages of the palmetto-leaf roof and scrubbed the floor. A small table, a chair and two benches completed the furniture which they, no doubt, had brought from far off for the occasion. After my baggage was in, the rectory was filled. Then came the visits of the chiefs bidding me welcome, and next came the children and the ladies. If ever I was looked through it was then. X-rays could hardly have done better. They all found me O.K. and then there was great rejoicing. This was the order from the chiefs: 'Whatever you say, Father, is command for us and will be attended to at once.'

My first command: 'At 5 o'clock p.m., confessions for children, in school.' Immediately Chief Bain gave orders to his young sons, who had just returned from an eight-mile trip to the different settlements announcing my arrival, to hurry to the settlements to announce the time for confession for the young folks. This mission is only three years old. Father Gabriel tends to it once a month, and there is a school, with a colored Catholic native teacher. After taking my meal which Chief Bain's daughter Hariot had cooked (The greatest honor for the daughters of the chiefs is to cook for the blackrobe.), I began to make the rounds among the tribes. Man O'War Sound is divided into three settlements or tribes, each about three miles distant from the other. The school and rectory are at Gays which lies in the centre. On the right of it, three miles away, lies Whites
and on the left, three miles off, is Kelson. After visiting all at Gays, I gave orders for a visit to Kelson. It was nearly 4 o'clock and I had to be back at 5:00 for confession, so it meant put on speed; and this Chief Bain did, for I could hardly keep up with him.

The people at Kelson were so glad to see me that, immediately upon my arrival, they began catching chickens for 'Father's meal.' I was back at the rectory a little after 5 o'clock. After refreshing myself, I took my habit on my arm and went to the school, about a half mile off. Here were about ten children and, after instructing them, I went into the confessional, a palmetto hut, 6 by 10 ft., the largest confessional I have ever heard confession in, with nature's surface as a floor. I heard twenty-nine confessions. On returning to the school, I saw the place filled with children, waiting for me, though I had told them to go home after finishing their penance and thanksgiving prayers. I thought they had all gone home, for there was perfect silence during the hour I heard confession. After a few words to them on Holy Communion, I went home with them. What happy innocent children! It must have been a great happiness for them to be around me. How they jumped and frolicked about me! Before the children departed for their homes I asked them whether they could sing, and immediately they began the beautiful hymn *Jesus, Jesus, come to me.* What a happiness for me to be surrounded by thirty children raising their voices to Jesus to thank Him for sending a priest to feed their hungry souls with the Food of Angels.

When I came to the rectory, the chiefs were waiting for me smoking their peace pipe. Again an hour's conference with them, then I retired for a light repast, upon which followed a visit by Chief Bain which lasted until 11 p.m. I then got ready for a night's rest. Not wishing to lie on the floor, I put the two benches side by side and rested on them, with a pillow under my head. If it were not for the big crabs that walk over the house tops or for the mosquitoes and sandflies, the people could leave their shutters open. A crab always takes a straight line for his path, and if a house is in the way, he walks over it.

At 9 o'clock a.m. I arose from my soft bed after passing a night of good rest. Then came the morning news, two letters written by some of the children, wishing me a good morning, etc. After making a short meditation on the Gospel of the Sunday, I took a ten minutes' walk to the 'Fountain' a large overhanging rock, about 10 by 30 ft. Where this rock and the rock from which we approach meet in a wedge, a spring is formed which rises and falls with the tide and ebb of the ocean. This water is pure, clear, and excellent for drinking. As I went to the school, I noticed that most of the people had arrived a half hour before Mass time. The school has only one room, about 16 by 20 ft., its height being 6 ft. to the roof. After having built my altar on a small table, I had the signal given with the ship's bell for Mass.

So crowded was the house that people nearly surrounded me. Whenever the crowd would rise at different parts of Mass, it was so dark in the house that I could only with difficulty read, for the crowd of people inside and outside kept the light out, as the windows and doors are small and low. When I preached, the people nodded their assent, whenever I finished explaining some truth. After consecration they all sang the hymn *Jesus,*
Jesus, come to me, as a preparation for receiving Holy Communion. It was really touching to hear this mixed choir, composed mostly of heathens—for all the grown-up people are heathens—the sixty voices of innocent children, the soft yet strong voices of the women, and the deep base of the men. I had never heard anything like it.

After Mass I had a pail of St. Charles' evaporated milk prepared for the communicants, for it would be one o'clock before they could get home. In the meantime I baptized a child, packed my goods, took a little refreshment, and had my baggage brought to the bay by free delivery, for the natives consider it an honor to carry the blackrobe's goods. The privilege of carrying the baggage, only the sons and daughters of the chiefs enjoy. The head chief enjoys the distinction of carrying the blackrobe to and from the boat. I found it indeed hard to leave these good people of the wilderness. They had become so attached to me that they wanted to keep me, but it being 3:00 p.m., I had to catch the mail schooner, San Salvador, which was due at Behring Point that afternoon. Two chiefs and about twenty five of their tribes saw me move off in a row-boat to the sloop, Indestructible, which anchored a half mile off.

At 3:30 p.m. we were sailing for Behring Point, myself steering the boat. Just as we were leaving the bay, after a three-mile sail, and were making for the ocean, a heavy squall came along, which gave us a thorough wash for about ten minutes. Captain Anderson told me to go into the small cabin (4 by 4 ft.) of the boat in order not to get wet. I told him I would do nothing of the kind, but would stick to my post at the helm. All my reserve muscle was called into service to keep the boat from turning over. It was so dark while the storm lasted that I could see only about 10 ft. ahead of me. For a time it appeared to me that I would never get to Behring Point, but would find my bed for the long sleep right here.

After the storm had passed, a strong gust of wind came along, and I let two sails have the full benefit of the wind. The Indestructible did make some leaps over the waves as if for a mad rush for life. I never saw a man more surprised than the captain, sitting at the prow tending to the jib sail. He clapped his hands in admiration at the way I had handled the boat in the storm and was now sailing her under full wind. 'Well, well, Father, you are a first class sailor,' he said. At 4:45 I steered her to Behring Point. As we dropped anchor, the mail schooner, San Salvador, had just reached the point also. The sun being quite low and the captain of the mail schooner having orders to drop anchor at sunset, whenever sailing inside the reef, on account of the danger of running onto shoals, I had little difficulty in persuading him to drop anchor for that day and invited him for supper to the house.

It was 12 o'clock that night when the captain left the house, having spent a most pleasant evening with me. That night I had to bake a host between two flat-irons for Mass early in the morning. At 4:35 a.m. I stood at the altar offering up the Holy Sacrifice and recommending myself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for a safe voyage. At 6 a.m. we were sailing for Fresh Creek, a settlement 16 miles off. Here we took in mail, then sailed 8 miles further north for Stanider Creek Settlement where we again took on mail. Then we sailed to Mastic Point, a settlement 20 miles further
Catholic Pioneers in the Bahamas

north, to take in mail. Before reaching this point, we passed Rat Key, a large high rock, where Father Gabriel nearly lost his life last year in a storm, after tending to a sick man. The captain had given up the boat in despair and Father Gabriel took command of the boat. After giving absolution to the men, he called upon the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and, as if by a miracle, they got clear of this dangerous key on which so many lives have been lost in storms. That evening before sunset we reached Nichols-town Settlement, on the extreme north of Andros. I went ashore and received fine treatment. That night I slept on top of the cabin. I rested so well that the rain during the night did not disturb me.

Tuesday, Aug. 12th at 10:30 a.m. we started on our voyage for Nassau, 40 miles off. Having head-wind all the time, it took all of Tuesday night and Wednesday till 5:30 p.m. before we got to Nassau.

Instead of sailing due west, in a straight line for Nassau, we had to tack continually, going about two miles south, then four miles northwest, then six miles southwest, and so on, in order to catch some wind for sailing. We actually had to sail 100 miles or more before we got to Nassau, 40 miles away. It was the most tiresome journey of the whole Andros trip, though there was a little more room to move about in the schooner, it being 40 ft. long. Getting back to Nassau is like coming home from barbarism to civilization.

Such is missionary life in the Bahamas, and often much worse. It has its joys and sorrows, hardships and pleasures. When traveling in these small boats one is never sure whether he will reach his destination. I expect to sail to Andros again by the end of September and may be away for a month or more. On that trip I intend to spend some time gathering specimens for the Museum of Natural History at St. John's . . . .

8. Fr. Gabriel Roerig, O.S.B., to Abbot Peter, Nassau, 15 December 1920:

I thank God with all my heart that He has blessed the Bahama Mission, in sending Fr. Chrysostom back again, well and happy. He looks well indeed and I have never seen him so happy and satisfied over a trip north as this time.

His war malaria seems to have altogether disappeared and he is buoyed up with great hopes for the Mission in the near future. He spoke most enthusiastically of yourself and your noble work at St. John's during your 25 years as its abbot. We are all proud of you, Father Abbot!

I also benefited much from my five months acting as Vicar Forane of the Bahamas, but am glad that the honour and burden rest again on big shoulders. I had hoped to be with my people on Andros for Christmas, but the ocean is so wild that I have given up all hope and shall have to celebrate Christmas in Nassau for the first time in many years and thus stand a chance of getting a Christmas collection at the Sacred Heart; something I have never had on Andros. So even when we poor mortals cannot have our way, the good Lord finds something for us to be grateful for.

Poor Father Leander will get his first taste of a lonely and hungry Christmas on an Out Island among the poorest of the poor this time; but I hope the remembrance of the first Christmas when He, who was
rich, became poor for our sake and received such a warm welcome from poor Mary, His mother, poor St. Joseph and the poor Shepherds, and for the first time felt at home among His own, will fill him with joy and consolation in being among the Lord's own on that day.

Of course, we are going to send him a Christmas box by the first chance, to let him see that his brethren in Nassau have not forgotten him. I was glad to hear that Fathers Bonaventure and Xavier are coming to us. Urge them to come soon and by all means to make up their minds to stay with us. We never had a more opportune time, than now, of doing great work for God and souls, as the Anglican Bishop is working hard for unity among the Protestant Churches here and declared from the pulpit of his Cathedral that the Roman Catholic Church is the most influential Church in the world today and that he is ready to receive from her, whatever she believes, he hasn't got.

Father Leander is going to Watlings after the New Year, to take up his life work on that historic Island.

Come and spend the winter months on Andros with me. I have nice accommodations for you and shall be most happy to have you with me. We are all well and happy in having Fr. Chrysostom with us again.

Wishing you, dear Father Abbot, a merry Christmas with your heart overflowing in a grand Gloria in excelsis Deo, and also a very happy and blessed New Year, I remain with best love. . . .

NOTES:


2. Each year a Benedictine working outside his home abbey sends the abbot an account of his personal receipts and expenditures. Father Gabriel's account for one year is included here as an example of the frugality and dedication of this German-American missionary working at the Catholic mission, Andros Island, for fifty-six years:
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'Personal Account of Gabriel Roerig, O.S.B., of 1926, to Rt. Rev. Abbot Alcuin, O.S.B., Behring Point, Andros Island, Bahamas, January 1st, 1927:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RECEIPTS</th>
<th>EXPENSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stipends</td>
<td>Wages for servants £20. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>Salary for teachers 36. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash from Very Rev.</td>
<td>Wages for capt. of Star of Sea for 47 sailing days 9. 8. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hildebrand for Andros Missions 205. 0. 0.</td>
<td>Rent for two schoolhouses on Andros Island 4. 16. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>226 barrels of lime for Calabash Bay Chapel 50. 18. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>129 barrels of Sand for Calabash Bay Chapel 2. 18. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cash for Fr. Denis for Andros Missions 21. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cash to C. Rahmings for labour, rocks &amp; sand, C. B. Chapel 38. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cash for rocks at Staniard Creek 4. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shingling side of B. Pt. chapel 2. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weeding at B. Pt. 3. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freight on Andros Mailboat 2. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cleaning up after hurricanes 10. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General repairs after hurricanes 10. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charitable loans made to needy 16. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alms to widows &amp; orphans 30. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tobacco 6. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beverage 10. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clothing 12. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stationery 2. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Med. att. &amp; medicine 5. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cash on hand Jan. 1, 1927 20. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£315. 0. 0.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Baptisms on Andros Missions, 1926:

- Infant Baptisms 22
- Adult Baptisms 20
- Total: 42

Marriages on Andros Missions:

- 3 others were celebrated in Nassau

Deaths: 2

The year 1926 was by design of D. Providence, one of terrible destruction and distress for our poor property on the Andros Missions. Three hurricanes passed over the island on July 27, Sept. 17, Oct. 21, destroying 48 out of 58 houses at Behring Pt. Our chapel, school and other buildings were not destroyed,
only on one side of the chapel the shingles were blown off the roof. Thanks to Almighty God our Chapel has stood through 5 hurricanes.

At Calabash Bay our new chapel just finished was destroyed in the first hurricane. Out of 60 houses only 15 remained standing.

At Staniard Creek, where the Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists had imposing churches for 50 years, our little thatched chapel within 300 yards of the ocean is the only one standing today. Over 60 houses and the fine bridge were destroyed. The year 1926 saw the first 3 Sisters of Charity on a visit to Andros and also our Catholic administrator of the Government of the Bahamas, Mr. P. Burns.

Since November two new chapels have been finished, one at Mangrove Cay used for the first time on Christmas, and the other at Calabash Bay.

U.I.O.G.D.'


4. Father Chrysostom listed for Abbot Peter on 22 October 1901 the land purchases he had made in the first ten years of the mission. At this time he was being accused of acting arbitrarily in acquiring property. Schreiner stated:

‘The following gives the date and cost price of property purchased by me since my arrival in the Bahamas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>School grounds and buildings £201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Rectory and grounds 830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Four acres on Andros on which the mission buildings are 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Sacred Heart Grounds 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Cemetery 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>150 acres at Andros 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Small plot adjoining church ground at Andros</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A and B belonging to War Dept. were offered for sale at auction on two weeks’ notice. There was not even time to notify the archbishop. I made the purchases because they were necessary for the Mission.

C. This purchase was made on the spot with money given on the spot for that purpose.

D. This purchase was made at request of Fr. Melchior and upon permission clearly implied in permission to start Sacred Heart Mission.

E. For obvious reasons, this purchase was necessary.

F. Mr. Greene had agreed to buy this Andros land (sisal plantation) from a sick 70 year old woman living alone three miles from nearest neighbor. When Greene went north to die I took this obligation upon myself first as an act of charity, and secondly, because I thought it well for the Order to own some good land on Andros; particularly when surrounding land was (and is) $5 per acre, while I got this for less than $1 per acre.

G. This is a 3 or 4 acre lot irregularly hedging in church at Andros. It was bought at the urgent request of Fr. Gabriel from a dying man who would have otherwise left it to a horde of warring heirs.

None of these purchases were made without at least implied permission—implied in permission of founding these churches. The same is true of buildings that have been erected. And I have yet to learn that any of these transactions have violated our Statutes either in spirit or letter. And if there was a violation, it was your duty to tell me so when you were here 3 years ago at which time nearly all of my financial transactions were past history.’

5. Powles, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-67; 235-38. After being forced out of the Bahamas, L. D. Powles returned to London and entered into private practice at 2 Tanfield Court, Temple. Governor Blake had told him, “I must be made a political martyr of and advised me, as I was a Catholic, to go home and try for an Irish Magistry”
There is no current evidence that Powles again held a judicial post. Admitted to the bar on 10 April 1863, called to the bar on 30 April 1866, Powles lived out his life in London and died on 6 May 1911 at Lowestoft, Suffolk.

The Hon. Eugene A. P. Dupuch and Mr. John H. Steele, Esq., attorneys-at-law, Nassau, Bahamas, generously devoted time and energy in tracing the post-Bahamian career of Powles. They have to-date uncovered the skeleton facts entered here as a small tribute to this social pioneer in the Bahamas.

Eugene Dupuch states in a letter of 27 April 1973:

“Our only remaining question is, What happened to him after embarking on his sojourn in the fearsome jungle of the English Bar? He probably found his wings in tribunals such as the Bow Street Magistrate’s Court and the Marylebone County Court. At some stage he probably filtered into the Old Bailey (criminal) or the cavernous Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand (civil). He never became a judge of any consequence. I think I have memorized all the important names in English case law. He could have become a Q. C. at some stage, but the odds are 10 -1 against it. Although his potential for a contribution to the cause of social justice in the Victorian Age was great, he probably died in the sea of frustration which engulfed so many unheralded and unsung heroes of his generation.

The above conclusions sound Holmesian without some explanation. In England there are two classes of lawyers—barristers and solicitors. Solicitors are members of The Law Society. They deal with the lay clients but they have no right of audience in superior courts. Barristers are members of one of the four Inns of Court—Lincoln’s Inn (which has produced barristers of such disparate faith and talents as St. Thomas More and Eugene Dupuch), the Inner Temple, the Middle Temple and Gray’s Inn. Barristers have only ‘professional clients’ i.e. solicitors. A person who has legal problems goes to a solicitor—he cannot see a barrister. If it is a court matter, the solicitor briefs a barrister. If the client is in a position to pay, the solicitor naturally does not brief a barrister who graduated last month or one who has held a minor judicial post in the Bahamas—he goes to the man who has been winning his cases for the last 20 years. In London, if a barrister has not got a rich father who can support him until he gets enough briefs to buy breakfast, his best bet is to sell insurance or get a job pumping gas at a filling station.

When the Knights Templar were outlawed in England, the Crown confiscated their property in the old city of London—the Great Square Mile—and gave it to the lawyers. Temple Bar, which divides Fleet Street from the Strand, marks the boundary of the city. The result was that the Inner and Middle Temples were included in the grant but the Outer Temple fell in the City of Westminster and ended up in private hands. Tanfield Court, I think, was in the Outer Temple—which was bombed out during World War II. It was an adjunct to the Middle Temple. As barristers are given priority on chambers in their own Inn, Powles was probably a Middle Templar.


Sacred Heart Church and School, Nassau, rebuilt and enlarged after the 1929 hurricane.

St. Joseph’s Church, Nassau, 1931.
St. Anselm's Church and School, Nassau, built by Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., in foreground.

Ss. Peter and Paul Church, Clarence Town, Long Island, designed by Msgr. Jerome Hawes, T.O.S.F., and built by Father Cornelius.

St. Martin de Porres Convent, Nassau.
Our Lady's Church and School, Nassau's largest, built by Father Arnold.

Holy Redeemer Church, Cat Island, 1951.

Church at Dunmore Town, Harbour Island, 1934.
Monsignor Hawes designed, built and lived in his Hermitage on Cat Island.

Clergy and sisters congratulate catechists for out islands after completing summer school in Nassau, 1935.

"Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts."
BERNARD THE BISHOP

The local resources of the Bahamas are highly specialized. Strategic location and tropical climate are their primary assets. Other natural resources have been meager for the soil is poor and lacks minerals or power resources. Of the specialized resources, the location factor has been paramount. Their nearness to the United States has enabled the Bahamians to orient the tourist trade to American customers. Their position has allowed them to serve as a convenient foreign station offering haven to blockade-runners of the American Civil War era and to rum-runners of the prohibition era. Their proximity to the seasonal labor shortage areas of Florida has made it easy for them to export cheaply their human resources to the mainland. In addition, their location in calm tropical waters containing a wide variety of marine resources eventually made them popular centers for yachting and big game fishing during the twentieth century.

Besides these location factors, the mild climate encourages people who seek escape from cold northern winters to come to the islands. Hundreds of miles of beautiful sandy beaches scattered through the islands afford some of the best ocean bathing in the world. For the sailor, fine harbors offer excellent places of anchorage, and adequate navigational aids help guide him through the numerous shoals and reefs surrounding the islands.

To the businessman from abroad the islands offer, besides a strategic location and excellent climate, a tax free financial haven and a great untapped reservoir of human resources. The Bahamians have devoted their efforts, in the main, to fishing, tilling the land and later catering to tourists. But these activities could not continue to absorb the expanding population. Hence, some Bahamians travelled to the American mainland for seasonal employment while financial and industrial interests slowly came to the islands.
Various external factors, such as piracy and the Civil War blockade, abnormally expanded the islands' trade. In modern times, two additional factors have influenced this trade and caused it to soar to unusual heights. One was the passage of the prohibition amendment in the United States. The other was World War II.

At the turn of the century and up to World War I, the export of sponges continued as the main item in the foreign trade of the islands. Some salt was exported and tomato exports were expanding slowly. Foodstuffs, such as meats, dairy products, cereals, and wheat flour, remained the leading imports.

Immediately after World War I, the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, banning the sale of alcoholic beverages, was passed. Because of this act, alcohol-thirsty Americans were forced to seek their liquor elsewhere. Smugglers and rum-runners, willing to supply this thirst, found in the Bahamas an ideal location for conducting their activities. In a short time the islands became one of the liquor-exporting capitals of the world. The value of liquor exports overshadowed and exceeded the combined totals of all other exports, such as sponges, lumber, tomatoes and salt.

The nearness of the Bahamas to the United States mainland provided an ideal location for smugglers and rum-runners. The Biminis are but fifty miles from Florida; Grand Bahama is not much farther; and New Providence, with its large storage facilities, is less than 200 miles from Florida. All three served as good bases for rum-running. Their long jagged coastlines with many inlets, harbors, coves and their numerous adjoining, deserted cays provided excellent sites to load and unload liquor cargoes.

The hectic days reminiscent of the 1860’s blockade returned to Nassau after 1918. Warehouses became jammed with liquors. The merchants of Nassau, acting as intermediaries between the rum-runners and the European distillers, took advantage of the situation. Not only were warehouses filled, but private homes, barns, and even the outdoors, served as storage space. Nassau’s docks were heaped so high with liquors that ships commonly were unable to discharge their cargoes of badly needed foodstuffs.

During the prohibition period a type of piracy returned to the islands. The rum-runners, harassed by United States revenue agents, had the additional discomfort of being raided by fellow rum-runners and by the Bahamians themselves. L. E. W. Forsythe, a government commissioner, tells about an incident when he was located on Grand Bahama and engaged in raiding the rum-runners. In retaliation, the rum-runners planned
a night attack on his residence, but Forsythe, forewarned, had fled to the safety of the brush. Many such incidents turned into minor "battles."

The small, fast boats of the rum-runners were designed to elude the revenue agents and to permit landings at small harbors and coves along the Florida coast. The risks were considerable, for apprehension meant imprisonment, a fine, and confiscation of boat and liquor. But rewards for the successful were also considerable, and many a quick fortune was made during the rum-running days.

As in other boom periods, only a relatively few Bahamians prospered from rum-running. A few rum-runners and liquor merchants of Nassau became rich. The out islanders, however, benefited little. Agriculture, the basis of out island economy was on the decline, and the population exodus from these out islands to a more prosperous Nassau continued.

The emphasis on liquor exports grew through the depression years of 1930-32 when the value of liquor exports amounted to more than £500,000. The second export was sponges, valued at slightly more than £85,000, followed by tomatoes valued at around £50,000. The export value of both sponges and tomatoes declined during these years, a reflection of decreased buying and depressed prices occasioned by the worldwide depression. During this period, foodstuffs continued as the main import of the islands, though their value fell due to low prices.

The repeal of the inviable American prohibition amendment in 1933 ended most of the islands' liquor traffic. During the two decades after repeal, the leading exports alternated between sponges, which ceased to become an important item of trade in 1939 after the close of the sponge beds, and lumber, salt and tomatoes. Since 1942, crawfish has replaced sponges as one of the four leading exports. Recently the leading export has shifted from year to year between tomatoes and lumber.

Imports of the islands have always, except during unusual periods such as blockade-running and prohibition, exceeded exports. All trade, however, has been overshadowed by the tourist and investment industry that gradually bridged the imbalance between imports and exports. Without tourism and investments, the present economy of the islands as now structured would collapse.

The location and climate of the islands plus the old world charm of Nassau, the capital city, have enabled the islanders to attract many tourists since the days of Henry M. Flagler in 1898. Flagler, a leading developer of railroads and hotels in Florida, purchased the Royal Victoria Hotel in that year. The Victoria then served as the southeastern terminus of the tourist traffic Flagler was bringing to Florida. Publicity given by Flagler to the Victoria and the Bahamas made the islands better known to potential tourists from the United States than they had ever been
known before. Flagler may rightfully be called the “father of tourism” in the islands.

With the success of Flagler’s Royal Victoria, another hotel, the largest in the islands, was built. This hotel, the Colonial, burned to the ground in 1922, but was replaced in 1923 by an even larger hotel, the British Colonial, with more than 300 rooms. The construction of this hotel was financed, like the Victoria, with the aid of government funds, for the Bahamian government actively financed hotel building and other tourist ventures for many years.

While these two hotels were proving successful, private interests, without governmental assistance, were also entering the guest-catering field. Many smaller hotels, such as the Fort Montagu, Windsor, Carlton, and Prince George were erected. Tourism, however, grew so fast after World War I that facilities could not keep pace with demand. This growth was simultaneous with Florida’s tourism, while, in turn, Florida’s tourist boom reflected the improved financial condition of northern tourists. Increasing numbers of wealthy tourists came to Florida from the northern states. Many of them took advantage of the nearness of Nassau to fly over for a “foreign” holiday. The fame of the islands spread. Again, the islands had a boom.

Improved transportation facilities also encouraged tourists to come to Nassau. Regular boat and plane service from Miami, New York, Boston, Montreal and London was established. Cruise ships began to stop at Nassau. Golf courses were laid out, streets were surfaced, a publicity department for tourism was set up with branch offices in Miami, New York and Toronto. Prosperity seemed assured and permanent.

Then came the winter season of 1929-30. What happened in the Bahamas was a reflection of what had happened on the stock markets of the world. The tourist trade collapsed, many hotels closed. The British Colonial, largest hotel, shortened its season to only two or three months. The shops of Bay Street in Nassau had more clerks than customers.

As economic conditions abroad somewhat improved in the late 1930’s, tourism slowly revived. Hotels that had been closed for a number of years re-opened. Old mansions became converted to guest houses. Wealthy visitors began to build winter homes in the islands. By 1940, tourism had been revived to such an extent that tourist revenues were the largest in history.

Just when it seemed that economic conditions would remain stable and on a high level, World War II started. At the beginning of the war, the Bahamas’ tourist business actually increased, for the nearness of the islands to the United States encouraged tourists to come who normally would have gone to Europe. As the United States converted to a full
wartime economy by 1942, however, a serious decline in tourist traffic took place. Fortunately, two factors helped to make up the decline in tourist revenues.

First, the British government, recognizing the advantages of the warm climate and clear flying weather of the islands, decided to locate large contingents of air force trainees in Nassau. Huge airfields were constructed on New Providence. The construction of these bases required a large labor force, and, wherever they qualified, Bahamians were hired first. Once the fields were constructed, many workers continued in the service trades catering to the air force personnel. This was a natural transition since many Bahamians had already been trained to work in the service industries of the peacetime tourist industry. Second, wartime labor shortages in the United States led that government to conclude a labor exchange agreement with the Bahamian government. This agreement permitted the recruiting of labor by United States private concerns.

These two factors, the arrival of British armed forces and the recruiting of laborers, maintained the high income level of the Bahamian economy throughout the war. Immediately after the war ended in 1945, the tourist business revived. Today the largest source of revenue to the islands again comes from tourism. More tourists visit the Bahamas each year than all of the other Caribbean islands combined.

Tourist revenues are the economic backbone of the islands. Though the Bahamas, ever since World War I, have imported much more than they have exported, revenues from tourism have provided the means of bridging the gap between imports and exports. The exports of the islands continue to reflect how the islanders utilize their natural resources, for it is products of the forests, soils and seas that the Bahamians export. At the same time, their imports show that their meager resources not only do not provide the islands with the products of an industrial society, but they are utilized so poorly that they do not provide them such agricultural items as tropical fruits and beef, both of which could be grown in the islands. Much of the blame for this rests on the overwhelming emphasis placed on tourism and the island of New Providence to the detriment of other activities and other islands.

The pre-eminence of Nassau and of the island of New Providence in the life of the Bahamas has been long established. Nassau has so dominated the island that the name “New Providence” is seldom heard. To the tourist, Nassau means both a city and an island, and to some, means all the islands. The city also dominates all the rest of the Bahamas. Nassau is the seat of government, the center of tourism, the hub of commerce, and the capital of the sponsored culture there is in the colony. Freeport, Grand Bahama, is rapidly closing this gap, however.
But for a brief period prior to 1670 when the Eleutherian Adventurers had been established on Eleuthera and St. George’s Cay, Nassau always has been the leader. By 1666, a settlement had been made on New Providence and was called “Charles Towne.” Loyalty to the reigning monarch of the time caused the legislature to alter the name of the settlement to Nassau in 1695, after William of Orange and Nassau, with Mary, were called to England in 1689. A report dated 1690 already referred to the “town of Nassau,” although the first recognition of the nomenclature occurred in a letter from the Lord Proprietors to the governor of the Bahamas, 12 April 1695, authorizing him to proceed with the building of the “City of Nassau.” A plan was drawn up for the realignment of the streets of Nassau in 1729. That plan is still the basic pattern of today’s city.

Nassau became so pre-eminent primarily because it has a good harbor; at least, it was a good harbor for ships of the size used when Nassau was settled. Hog Island to the north protected the harbor from the open sea, and there were no dangerous reefs near the harbor to impede navigation. The topography of New Providence at the site of Nassau offered a good chance for the erection of fortifications so necessary before the Spanish threat was finally removed in 1783. Within a few hundred feet of the coast, the land rises abruptly to over 100 feet. On this ridge, forts could be constructed that would protect the city and the harbor. On these heights the two main fortifications of the island were erected: Fort Charlotte and Fort Fincastle. In addition, these hills, composed of limestone, provided suitable building material.

Because other sites in the Bahamas, such as Eleuthera or Cat Island, offer nearly similar advantages for the building of a city, an additional factor, that of location, helped to establish the pre-eminence of Nassau. In the first period of settlement the islands were governed by proprietors from the Carolinas. Sailing from the Carolinas, past the Florida coast, a ship would first sail by Grand Bahama, Andros and the Biminis, before reaching New Providence. But these three islands are flat, have mediocre harbors and Grand Bahama and the Biminis have poor soil. The nearest good site to the Carolinas for a city was Nassau. Hence, Nassau was the home of the early proprietary and British-appointed “royal” governors. Besides all these considerations leading to the establishment of Nassau, it seemed to the first settlers that the soil of New Providence was as good, if not better, than the soil of any of the other islands. Because of this, many of the early plantations in the islands were established on New Providence.

Many of the early reasons for the establishment of Nassau seemed to be no longer valid. The harbor was too shallow for large, modern
steamers until dredging in 1933 established it as a major port. The forts are no longer needed, and the soil is not good. Yet Nassau has continued to grow faster than the rest of the colony. In fact, since 1940 nearly two-thirds of the population of the Bahamas reside in New Providence. This concentration was possible only because of the employment opportunities offered by government, trade and tourism in the city.

Nassau's residents, because of their numerical control in the colonial legislature, have appropriated governmental funds to their advantage, and to the disadvantage of the out islands. These funds have been available to Nassau and its residents for the building of hotels, improvement of harbors, building of roads, and construction of other public works. As Nassau became more urbanized through this building program, the out islands became proportionately more rural. The result was increased immigration to Nassau.

As Nassau dominates the Bahamas, Bay Street dominates Nassau. The House of Assembly, the banks, the steamship offices, the main shops, many of the leading hotels, were on Bay Street before Paradise Island (formerly Hog Island) and Freeport on Grand Bahama Island were developed. On the side streets running just off Bay Street are additional shops, the post office, law courts, library, Government House, and Dunmore House, former home of early governors and now The Priory. Not far from Bay Street are two large lakes, Cunningham and Killarney. The north shore of Cunningham, made a game reserve to protect migratory ducks from the United States and Canada, has been developed as a residential area. Near Lake Cunningham were the two main airports of the islands, Oakes and Windsor fields, and later the new airport on the site of Windsor servicing international jet tourism.

To the west of Bay Street and facing the sea a whole new string of residences, private clubs and hotels developed. Here also golf courses, miles of gleaming white beaches, and newly developed coconut groves sprung up. Nassau expanded in all directions. To the south the suburb of Grant's Town, located below the ridge running through Nassau, was predominantly colored, and becoming filled to overflowing with newly arrived people from the out islands. On the hills to the east and west, where the sea breezes temper the heat of the day, the residential area of Nassau continues to expand, but to the north the sea blocks expansion. Nassau compensates for this by building its downtown office buildings higher than before. With its present population of over 100,000 Nassau is an active, prosperous, energetic city.

But what of the out islands, the step-children, as they have been called, of the Bahamas? With the exception of Eleuthera and a few
privately-owned islands and cays, the out islands remained sadly neglected until present times.

Andros, largest of the islands, with an area of 1,600 square miles had no settlement as large as 3,000 people. Automobile roads did not exist until the 1960's. A few communities strung along the coast, an occasional clearing for farming, and the lumber development in the northern part of the island—that was Andros. Grand Bahama and Abaco were similar to Andros. The inhabitants in those three low-lying, forested and thinly populated islands depend upon lumbering and crawfishing to eke out a living. It was not until the 1950's that Alex Wenner-Gren and Wallace Groves developed Andros and Grand Bahama as tourist resorts.

Eleuthera, Cat Island, and Long Island were somewhat better off than the rest of the out islands since commercial agricultural enterprises employed many of the people. In addition, the straw work industry, concentrated on Long Island, provided another needed source of income. Both activities have been aided by the fairly good highways and harbors on these islands.

The remaining islands in the southern Bahamas practiced subsistence agriculture, raked some salt, and dreamed of the by-gone days of the Loyalist period when San Salvador, Exuma, Rum Cay and Mayaguana were thriving agricultural islands. Neither decent roads nor port facilities existed into the 1960's, few tourists ever visited them, and the government at Nassau, hundreds of miles away, ignored these southern islands whenever public works bills came up for consideration in the House of Assembly.

The depressing picture of the out islands changed in the next few decades. The government decided upon a concerted effort to help this part of the colony. The program called for a concentration of aid in a few carefully selected areas rather than spreading available funds thinly over all the out islands, as was done in the past. The most pressing problem was transportation. Better roads, a satisfactory inter-insular transport system, and improved harbors were badly needed. A step in this direction was made with the development of improved air transportation facilities to most of the out islands. With this first step, the islands received more tourists than at any time in their history. A writer in the Miami Herald became so enthusiastic about the potentials of the out islands that he devoted two columns in December, 1951, to the subject of the "Out Islands of the Bahamas Hold Big Future in Tourism." His thesis was that Nassau, if it were to grow larger, would destroy its present old world charm; therefore, the trend should be toward building up the tourist attractions and accommodations on the out islands.
A few communities in the out islands, such as Governor’s Harbor, Dunmore Town and Spanish Wells could be called towns until Freeport, Grand Bahama, was constructed. The quaintness of these communities is reflected by their narrow streets, native shops, and the accents of their people with their heavy overtones characteristic of the Bahamian people of the out islands. For many people in these isolated communities, life was centered upon religion. The local minister or priest was not only pastor, but doctor, lawyer and economic arbiter as well. The priest, the government commissioner and the school teacher were the only people through whom many of the inhabitants had contact with Nassau and the rest of the outside world. As a result, the economic well-being of the people often depended on the diligence of these three officials.

Some out islands benefited from funds spent by the United States government in erecting naval and air bases. The construction project on Exuma was the result of an agreement signed between the United States and Britain in 1941. The agreement granted permission, on the basis of a ninety-nine-year lease to the United States, to establish military bases on the eastern islands. A new agreement in 1950 brought additional construction; the United States government, for example, established stations for its guided missile program.  

Though the out islands have begun a reawakening, Nassau and New Providence have gone a long way from the days of 1708, when Oldmixon said:

This island is chief of those called the Bahama Islands, and notwithstanding that character is so inconsiderable in itself, that it had been well if it had never been discovered; for all the Advantage the Inhabitants can pretend it is to England or the other Colonies is, that it lies convenient for Wrecks; by which they mean to save such as driven ashore there, and for Ships forced thither by Stress of Weather: And it being some Hundreds of Miles out of any Ship’s regular Course, to or from any of our Colonies and England, it is certain we had never lost any Thing by it had it never been heard of.  

Such a description of New Providence would seem to have destined the island to no great development. But Oldmixon goes on later to admit:

This and the other Bahama Islands were looked upon to be so necessary for the Security of our Trade in the West Indies, that the Parliament of England have not thought it unworthy of their care, as well to have it cleared of Pirates, as to defend it against both Spaniards and French, who find its situation very convenient to annoy or befriend their Commerce.

In these words written in 1708 probably lies the actual clue to why these islands ever interested the British. Their location guaranteed trade. From trade comes profits. And where profits lay, there came the British. The British hopes for the Bahamas were not ill-founded. The Bahamas
were the only British colony in the West Indies that consistently remained solvent year after year into the twentieth century. Their record was unequaled. Other West Indian islands, such as Jamaica and Trinidad, have always felt superior to the Bahamas. This is an insular competition no outsider in control of his faculties would comment upon. It can only be stated that the Bahamians have no need to be ashamed of the record in their later colonial period.

After Abbot Peter Engel, O.S.B., of St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, died on 27 November 1921, ending an administration of twenty-seven years, the abbey’s prior was elected as the fifth abbot on that December 29. He was Fr. Alcuin Henry Deutsch, O.S.B., born in Valla, Hungary, 13 February 1877, who had come with his immigrant parents to St. Paul, Minnesota, studied at St. John’s and the international Benedictine Collegio di Sant’Anselmo, Rome, and returned to St. John’s to teach and administer at the Collegeville university. The new abbot was a forceful personality, formed in the mold of early twentieth century American ecclesiastical leadership figures. Abbot Alcuin possessed an abiding love of the ancient Benedictine heritage in the West, the oldest continuing tradition of organized religious life in that division of Christendom. He viewed himself in the grand style of great abbots. The St. John’s community, with its resources and numbers, supplied him with the opportunity to play the role he envisioned for himself. The development of this abbey in American Catholicism, with its varied missionary, educational, liturgical and social action apostolates, was a backdrop to the expansion of the Bahama mission in the twentieth century.

Abbot Alcuin was mission-minded throughout his administration of twenty-nine years, two years longer than Abbot Peter’s. He judged rightly that St. John’s Abbey had become too large, in fact the largest Benedictine abbey in the world as journalists of that period often stated. The new abbot was determined to establish new monastic foundations from St. John’s as soon as possible. They were begun in Kentucky, Japan, Mexico, Puerto Rico and the Bahamas in the years ahead.

In quick order Abbot Alcuin visited the Bahamas to gain firsthand information. He came in 1923 and again in 1925, spent two months during the winter and visited the out islands. Fr. Denis Parnell, O.S.B., was sent in 1922 to the Bahamas as a missionary, the first in a long line of over fifty Benedictines that Abbot Alcuin would send for varying times to this Catholic mission endeavor. It was a remarkable testament to the dedication of St. John’s Abbey and Abbot Alcuin to bring of age the Catholic mission in the Bahamas. No other St. John’s foundation received such a number of personnel. It is interesting to speculate if
any other religious house sent so many of its members to upbuild religion in another land. The Bahamas received, without any questions asked, a steady stream of Benedictine priests and brothers who came to give themselves to the spiritual and material needs of the people.

The first reality Abbot Alcuin faced was that Abbot Peter had naturally grown old, and had not made major decisions in his last years in office regarding needs of the apostolates conducted by the abbey. The second reality which had to be faced was that Father Chrysostom in Nassau had also grown old and would have to be replaced by a younger man in charge of the Catholic mission. This was a far more monumental encounter and not to be faced lightly. As for Father Chrysostom, there was, as he said himself, snow on the roof but fire in the hearth. He was sixty-three years old and had only six years of life before him. He was at the same time the established religious figure not only in Nassau but throughout the family islands. No one attacked him anymore. He had won that battle and brought acceptance to a Catholic presence in the Bahamas beyond the wildest hopes of the pioneer days. As no one else could have done quite so fully, he had brought the Catholic Church acceptance and respect in a milieu which was pervasively English, Protestant and fundamentalist in religious and social orientation. Now it was time for a changing of the guard. Father Chrysostom, characteristically, supplied the solution himself.

Everyone feared that the “old giant” would resist mightily any moves to ease him out as vicar forane in the Bahamas. Father Chrysostom had, however, anticipated the move and had been “there and back” before it was even contemplated. For six years before the change came he had been telling Abbot Peter of his plans. His letters are filled with details of his final dream. He had acquired first half, three-fourths and then full ownership of 2,640 acres of the best pasture land, along with nine cattle, one bull, forty sheep and hogs, on Watling’s [San Salvador] Island for $1,300 with the promise to care for an elderly Catholic bachelor until he died. It was the old land speculation all over again, except that this time it worked. “I am certain that I could get $30,000 for the property at any time,” he said. Father Chrysostom this time also obtained the enthusiastic consent of Fathers Gabriel and Leander, and placed the title in the name of the Benedictines to give them a more definite status in the Bahamas. He told Abbot Peter that if he did not agree, he would place the title in the legal corporation of the Roman Catholic vicar forane. Abbot Peter did agree as the land could be sold at $4 an acre at any time. There were also twenty-five roofless buildings on the property with sound wells. Father Chrysostom explained his plans as early as 2 April 1918:
I have plans that reach into the future. The land is on the island of Columbus’ first discovery. It is of the best land and capable of pasturing 500 head of cattle. It has a sentimental value on account of its being on San Salvador, but apart from that it is large and fertile enough for 10 to 15 good, paying homesteads. Some day I hope to see a dozen thrifty Catholic families occupying the United Estates and making a decent living from it.

I will take Father Leander with me to Watlings where I will remain for three weeks and leave him there. The mission building on the Landfall of Columbus need some repairs. Watlings is the richest pastorage island in the Bahamas and the United Estates is the best land and location on the island. I have definite plans regarding a mission there. Without any particular effort or additional money put into it, the land itself is worth much more than it has cost me. So under any circumstances the money is well and profitably invested. I have clear titles and there are no legal complications.

To give you an idea of what others think of San Salvador if there is prospect of my plan developing and an O.S.B. being in charge: Edward Lamb (of Minneapolis, brother of the Lamb brothers of Michigan, North Dakota): ‘Buy whatever land adjacent to yours for me and draw on me. Both myself and son will be with you next winter.’ Mr. Sherman, Jamestown, New York, who visited the place with me and has already donated $1,000: ‘Whatever I can save from my business will go to the development of this mission and I want to spend my winters there.’ Another from Springfield, Massachusetts: ‘I have inherited my father’s farm and will sell it ($12,000) and invest in any way you think best in connection with your Salvador Mission, provided you put up some shack, so that I or my partner will have a place to camp in winters….’ Your letter of Aug. 11 followed me in my wanderings to Michigan and Ontario to raise funds which I did successfully. I shall return to Nassau next Thursday or the Monday following. I shall go via Miami where I intend to stir up the Jesuits to give a little more attention to the colored Catholics who have gone there from the Bahamas.

As soon as we get things going at Watlings there will not be the loneliness you anticipate. There will be more frequent direct boat connection and as soon as I have adequate assistance at Nassau, I intend to visit both Andros and Watlings several times a year. Besides, as soon as our buildings are completed, San Salvador will become quite an attraction for visiting priests at least during the winter season. By the end of next year when accommodations will have been completed for them three Sisters of Charity will undertake the school work at San Salvador.

My own health is better than ever, but I am realizing that I am not able to undergo the physical exertions I could ten or fifteen years ago. When I get back home I shall begin digging up the orchard for daily exercise. Exercise is what kept me in good physical condition up to the time of my appendix trouble seven years ago and during the war I was too starved to resume it.

Father Chrysostom suffered from bowel adhesions in the region of the ascending colon and from 1920 on he was prepared to die suddenly, which he did eight years later. ‘I don’t think I shall depart this world
just yet, but I know my weak spot and I realize that there is another
decade for me with careful dieting, the call may come at any time with­
out notice.”

A visitor donated $1,000 to his Watling’s Island plans and he began
approaches to the New York Knights of Columbus [noted in Chapter 4]
to make San Salvador a “Catholic Island.” It was his last dream. It had
always been his first hope. There is a remarkable catalog here of never
forgetting. As death approached he seemed to gravitate to the place
where his charts, maps, diaries and manuscript notes had always led him.

Father Chrysostom asked for another priest in the Bahamas to assist
this development. This was why Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., was
sent so Fathers Leander and later Denis could work on San Salvador
where Father Chrysostom would eventually make his final landfall. He
planned to establish a parish, a residence where eight or ten visitors
could stay for health reasons or to do research on Columbus, a school
with sisters teaching and giving medical and social welfare assistance
to the people, and a farm which would be developed as a model of beef
and produce (coconuts) production. A sick Abbot Peter, tired of extended
confrontations with Father Chrysostom, agreed without enthusiasm on
22 November 1920, a year before his death:

I cannot be enthused about the San Salvador mission and to me it
almost seems asking too much of a priest to go to a place where he is all
alone, and cannot see a confrere for months. If there were only people
there to be converted, but as you say ·the few that are there, are no good,
and a better class has to be imported. I doubt the feasibility of this plan.
If money can do the thing, it seems you have enough of that to make a
start, and I give my consent and blessing to the undertaking which you
have so much at heart. . . .

The last letter of Father Chrysostom to Abbot Peter, 24 October
1921, is as full of plans and pleas for another priest, as full of sharp
words and harsh admonitions as his letters a quarter century earlier had
been. But this time Abbot Peter was too sick to see this final blast
since he had been taken to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota,
where he died on November 27:

I arrived home from Miami last Wednesday (Oct. 19) in splendid
health and to find all well, cheerful and progressing here. I returned via
Florida for a two-fold purpose, to see the Administrator of St. Augustine
and the Pastor of Miami regarding their taking better care of so many of
our coloured Catholics who have taken up residence there. The authorities
have promised to build them a chapel in coloured town at an early date.
The K. of C. hearing of my intention of passing through Miami extended
an invitation to me to be their guest during my stay there and to be the
principal speaker at the Banquet on Columbus Day which was attended
by the high city and county officials and distinguished men, including
W.J. Ryan. My theme was the identification of San Salvador and ideals that gave Columbus the faith and courage to accomplish and the developing of the idea that Catholic ideals inspired the K. of C. in whom the state and Church find the truest and staunchest supporters.

It is very important that Fr. Xavier [Kapsner, O.S.B.] should be here as soon as possible. Now is the opportunity of a generation for getting a wedge in at Harbour Island, a white settlement of about 1,200, 50 miles from here, with weekly steam communication. There is there a split in the Anglican community with a hopeful prospect that the High Church minister himself will come over, and also a split among the Methodists, so that the community is divided into partes quarter with a sort of unexpressed longing for unity in the bosom of old Mother Church. My own conviction as to the necessity and opportunity for immediate action in the matter is completely backed by all my confreres, and accordingly we all most urgently request you to send Fr. Xavier within the next 8 weeks. Quick action is necessary and I may proceed upon short notice at any time to secure the proper site for the opening of a school and church. Three Sisters will open the school and I am waiting for the assurance of Fr. Xavier’s coming to proceed at once. Please do not disappoint us!

My plan for disposal of Fathers is this: Fr. Gabriel at Andros; Fr. Leander at San Salvador; Fr. Bonaventure at Harbour Island; and Fr. Xavier here with me, making it possible for me to visit each of the missions several times a year.

There has sprung up a tremendous wave of sentiment in favour of the Catholic Church in these islands within the last few years and the opportune time has come for energetic Benedictine action which must not be left unsupplied.

At San Salvador an intensive campaign of lay catechists will cover the whole Island and there being no Protestant opposition it is reasonably certain that within a few years the whole island will be 60 percent Catholic. As soon as buildings are available for them, there will be Sisters installed for the superintendence of schools.

The Andros Mission will this year produce 100 adult converts, thanks to the solid foundation laid by Fr. Gabriel. Its demands upon us may be temporarily satisfied by a visiting priest from here for a year or two, but before the expiration of that time Fr. Gabriel must have an assistant to circulate by motor boat among the string of settlements along a 90-mile shore. The call for an additional priest for the Andros Mission will be within a twelve month period....

I have promises of sisterhood cooperation in the work for schools which are perfectly satisfactory because adequate to all my plans. The one important and decisive thing in my mind is that St. John’s must come to a definite decision as to whether it will respond definitely to the immediate urgent demands of this Mission or not ....

I present this appeal most urgently not only as my own but as that of the fathers with me and I am convinced that you will be able, upon consideration, to make the necessary moves without prejudice to any other interests of St. John’s in the North West.

I expect the Archbishop of New York here in February. He will be able to confirm only such candidates as will be able to be present in Nas-
sau at the time, and that will signify less than 50 per cent of the con-
firmandi of the Missions.

In my arrangement with him for the confirmation of Out Island
candidates, I shall arrange facilities of confirmation for the Out Islands and
here the year following to be granted my abbot who will spend 3 or 4
months of 1923 here for the threefold benefit of a thorough visitation of
all his missions here, the confirmation of all candidates on the missions,
and the general good of the mission as well as the personal benefit to be
gained by him for health and viewpoint of his missions here.

This Mission has grown to a magnitude in the eyes of the Church
and the public at large which can no longer be ignored by St. John's as
a mere side issue. The growth and prospect of future accomplishment has
been that of intensely Benedictine effort of Fr. Leander for 8 years, of Fr.
Gabriel for 27 years, and of myself for over 30 years. I don't expect you
to go back on this record, for if you do you will be absolutely off on
Benedictine precedent as I see it. I am almost as long a Benedictine as you
are and in my desire for purely Benedictine glory, I yield to no man. I
stress the urgency of your giving me without question or further explanation
one or two priests to satisfy the immediate demands of this Benedictine
Mission.

There is no time for equivocation or useless explanation. If you cannot
come to definite decision on the point, it will be entirely up to you as to
whether or not St. John’s will be up to the responsibility of sponsoring the
whole Bahamas Mission. In my own mind I am putting up 30 years of
intense Benedictine experience in favour of Benedictine expense and effort.

You have it in your own power to make my 30 years of Benedictine
effort the success that fact justifies it to be, or to make my work a mess
such as your Benedictine incompetence has succeeded in making a failure
of almost everything a decent Benedictine can stand for.

I see my way clear to making the Bahamas Mission a glorious suc-
cess in either of two ways—a glory or a disgrace to the O.S.B. But the
Bahamas Mission is going to be a glory to the Church because of Bene-
dictine achievement completely and disinterestedly given for the last 30
years.

I am putting all this up to you as a most important proposition to St.
John’s and my confidence is that you will see your way to make good.

It does not seem necessary that I should enter into the detail of our
work here beyond what has been outlined. The substance of what can be
said resolves itself into this that the honour and the glory of the Order
is for now and immediately pledged to the proposition of having Fr. Xavier
here before the end of the year because that event is in our calculation of
what is to be done within the next 8 weeks.

Please don't disappoint us in our calculations.
We simply must have Fr. Xavier before the year is up.
I expect an immediate and favourable reply.

I am not at this writing positive as to whether Fr. Leander will go to
visit his mother or not, but in either case it is essential that I should
know at once whether or not Fr. Xavier will be sent us.

Do send him at once and get the proposition definitely settled and
over for both you and me. He is physically fragile, which will give you
every excuse to remove him for health’s sake.
I wish you could without a day's delay assure me that Fr. Xavier is coming.

We are all sanely and gloriously well here for Benedictine work and progress U.I.O.G.D.

After his visitations of the Bahamas, Abbot Alcuin determined to send more Benedictines there and also to relieve Father Chrysostom of active charge of the Catholic mission. He chose Fr. Hildebrand Eickhoff, O.S.B., to succeed Father Chrysostom in Nassau and gave him the title of prior of the Benedictines there. Abbot Alcuin did not want to place more priests on the out islands than was absolutely necessary. He preferred to build up Benedictine community life in Nassau and as a new policy sent financial help directly to the prior and not to the priests individually.

Abbot Alcuin asked Father Chrysostom to resign on 2 February 1924, the thirty-third anniversary of his arrival in the Bahamas. At first he resisted and said Cardinal Hayes could appoint a New York monsignor as vicar forane of the Bahamas. But the old man finally agreed more readily than anyone had expected. He went off rather quietly after two years to San Salvador where he had been preparing his final home in the previous six years. When Abbot Alcuin heard that Cardinal Hayes and his party were about to visit The Priory, he rushed to Nassau to talk with him about relieving Father Chrysostom as superior of the mission. Cardinal Hayes did not at all like this procedure. He was the ordinary of the Bahamas and had to approve the abbot's decision during his vacation. Father Hildebrand describes the event:

When I left St. John's and again by letter after I arrived in Nassau, Abbot Alcuin instructed me to keep him informed, especially about Fr. Chrysostom's intentions of making good or not about that resignation. This I did, when Fr. Chrysostom at different times suggested that it would be unwise for him to relinquish his position. I wrote the abbot and suggested to him that he should go to N. Y. and take up the matter with the cardinal. This the abbot did not want to do. To me this was the only move that would make sense. When the abbot learned that the cardinal was coming to the Bahamas he decided to hurry to Nassau by way of Miami and get there before the cardinal. He wrote to Fr. Bernard in N. Y. to this effect. Soon there arrived in Nassau a cablegram, which I received at the door and brought upstairs to Fr. Chrysostom. He opened it, read it and said, 'Abbot Charles is coming' and handed me the message. After reading it I said, 'This is not Abbot Charles, he spells his name 'Mohr,' not 'Moore,' as this reads.' Fr. Chrysostom looked at the paper again and said, 'O, this here. That is a code we have.'

The day after Abbot Alcuin arrived the cardinal's party came. The meeting was at first not too cordial. Fr. Bernard had been to see the cardinal, as Msgr. Stephen Donahue, the cardinal's secretary, told me. Fr. Bernard had cried, he said, and told the cardinal how Abbot Alcuin had
persecuted him ever since he came near being elected abbot over him, and that Abbot Alcuin didn't like Fr. Chrysostom because he had been for Fr. Bernard at the election. Msgr. Donahue said that he had not known Fr. Bernard before that meeting, but as a result of it had developed a great sympathy for him.

Before the abbot left for home he had a conference with the cardinal, and after he was gone Cardinal Hayes called me and we sat for a long time on the veranda discussing the Bahamas. The cardinal said to me: 'This change should have been made long ago. Father Chrysostom was not responsible for being left here so long all these years. The responsibility for tolerating these conditions rested all the while on the archbishop of New York and the abbot of St. John's. Why did your abbot not come to see me in New York? I would gladly have approved anything he would have asked. To let me come down here and then ask me to oust the man whose guest I am is most unfair and insulting to me.' I told him that I had asked the abbot to go to N.Y. and lay his plans before him, but that the abbot had declined to do so. Then his Eminence said these words: 'I hope that your abbot will remember some day, whether you succeed in your work or fail, that he has imposed on you the hardest and most difficult job he will ever give to any man as long as he is abbot.'

The impression I got was he feared that when difficulties would come, as he said they undoubtedly would, the abbot would not stand by me. Then the cardinal told me that Father Chrysostom was to retain the title of vicar forane, but that his jurisdiction was confined to San Salvador. Then he said 'I hold you responsible for all the Bahamas, except San Salvador.' He again explained that this arrangement was made necessary because the abbot had not handled the matter as he should have done. 'Now when Fr. Chrysostom cries and does not want to give up, I his guest, cannot oust him outright, though the change must be made,' he said. Then he concluded his instructions saying, 'If Fr. Chrysostom remains on San Salvador, and does not interfere with your work on the rest of the islands, leave him alone. If he interferes, or returns to Nassau, let me know and he will cease to be vicar forane even in name. You can depend on me in this assignment. I want to see some progress in the mission.'

He was true as gold to his word. After he returned to N.Y. he wrote me a letter in which he repeated practically everything he had told me in that conference on the veranda. It was different with the abbot. When he got back to St. John's he wrote a letter to Fr. Chrysostom in which he said, 'If Fr. Hildebrand is not nice to you, let me know.' Fr. Chrysostom read the letter and then handed it to me with these words: 'Here read this. I am sorry for you. This is all you can expect from the abbot. You will fare better with the cardinal.'

Several weeks after my arrival in Nassau Father Gabriel came in response to a letter from Fr. Chrysostom. Fr. Gabriel was to go to San Salvador and build a house there, but he had not brought his carpenter's tools. After waiting a couple of weeks for a bad storm to abate he and I finally attempted to make the trip to Andros. It was to be my first experience of an out island. We started early in the morning from the harbor in Nassau and sailed around the south side of New Providence, but by evening we were back in Nassau. The sea was too wild for the little Star of the Sea to make the trip, and we merely circumnavigated the island, which
Chrysostom said he had not succeeded in doing during all his years. I was happy to be back on firm earth again. After waiting for quite some days, we finally left early on Saturday morning, from the West End Bay and we arrived at Behring Point that evening. Both of us offered Mass at Behring Point that Sunday morning. Gabriel expressed his disappointment at my sermon on the kindness and mercy of God. He said that this was not good to preach to the Negro about.

Monday we rested and on Tuesday we made the trip to Mangrove Cay. Wednesday morning we offered Mass there and in the afternoon we returned to Behring Point. On the return trip the sea was already getting rough and by Thursday morning there was no thought of venturing out to sea in the small boat. We were detained for three weeks. Then we took the mail boat, on a Friday I believe. By evening we slept in the little hut of the missionary and offered Mass the next morning. By Saturday night we reached Nicolls Town, toward the north end of Andros Island. When we entered the harbor, through the narrow channel between the land and the reef, a big wave washed right over the boat and drenched all of us. The captain did not want to make the trip back through that passage that evening, so we spent the night in the hull of the boat. It was a rather painful experience. However, the next morning, which was Saturday, I was on deck early and witnessed the sun rise. This was an experience I will not forget, but will always consider ample pay for the bad night I spent lying on the bottom of that rocking boat. We arrived in Nassau at about one o’clock on that Sunday afternoon.

Within a few days Fr. Gabriel left by mail boat for San Salvador. During these following months I did what little work met with the approval of Fr. Chrysostom. Fr. Denis left to take care of the missions on Andros Island. Fr. Chrysostom and I spent most of the day sitting on the veranda and talked. I enjoyed his company, though I would much rather have gone to work. He was a very accomplished conversationalist. It was very easy to see however that he had developed a very decided ‘Cui Bono’ spirit. Many of his converts had moved to N. Y., others to Florida, and there was not much encouragement. He was a voracious reader, especially of the Argosy type of magazine. He had very many books. On one occasion he told me that he was beginning to regret that he had not read even more literature. He had developed a great mastery in the use of English, as many a Bahamian found out to his regret. I have often wished since that I had copied some of his sentences.

Father Chrysostom told me many times that he had not at first loved the Negro. At the time of his shipwreck he made the vow to devote his life to the Bahamas and its missions. He said that he always felt that if he did anything of his own volition to leave, then the boat carrying him would be wrecked and sink. Father Paul, he said, made the same vow but interpreted it as not binding. Father Chrysostom told me repeatedly that he always hoped that the abbot would move him to a N. Y. parish, for which work he considered himself much better qualified than for the missions. He also hoped that if the abbot did nothing the archbishop of N. Y. might give him some position as teacher or administrator in some diocesan school or perhaps the seminary. Perhaps he would have been much better suited for such work. I certainly felt much like agreeing with him in this, but he waited in vain for any such appointments. Also I felt
that if he had been surrounded by a different type of men in his work in the Bahamas his whole life might have been different.

One thing surprised me greatly. He had always been represented as being unusually and unreasonably opposed to anything German at St. John’s, yet his greatest difficulties in the Bahamas developed from his outspoken pro-German sentiments during World War I. I was not at all impressed that he said anything wrong (as Fr. Gabriel maintained he did), but he was imprudent in the way he said things, especially during those hysterical days....

When I visited Fr. Gabriel, during my long detention on account of the storm, he told me much of the happenings on the Bahamas mission. Not much of what he said was complimentary to Fr. Chrysostom. Some of what he said I will never repeat. Fr. Gabriel may have been a saint in his own right, I thought he was, but he never developed beyond the maturity of boyhood. I remember Father Chrysostom telling me that on one occasion Father Gabriel had written very severe complaints to Abbot Peter against Father Chrysostom. When the abbot came to Nassau, Gabriel got down on his knees and asked pardon for ever writing anything of the kind, and insisted that Father Chrysostom had always been a most kind father to him. Apparently Father Gabriel never changed. At times he flattered me very much, and then he did some very childishly stupid things against me, which I try hard not to recall and will not mention in these recollections. Among other things Father Gabriel had complained very bitterly that Father Chrysostom had always treated him as a child. He always had to hand in his bills and Chrysostom then paid them. Gabriel said Chrysostom should have given him the money and let him take care of his own bills.

When I became superior I told him that from now on he should call for money as he needed it and then do his own buying and paying. I sent him all the money he asked for but in the end I received a bill for $1,200 from one of the stores. They had sent the bill to Fr. Gabriel repeatedly, but he ignored it. Neither did he write to me about it. I began to understand what Fr. Chrysostom had tried to caution me about. Fr. Chrysostom noticed that there was some duplicity going on and one day said to me, 'I noticed that you have the same men to deal with that I had to deal with all these years. When under such circumstances the abbot is not with you life becomes impossible. You have my sympathy, I am sorry for you.'

During the early months, when we spent most of our time on the veranda, a certain Joseph Garfunkel and a Catholic lady came to arrange for their marriage. Chrysostom told me that he did not care to bother about it, but that I should take care of it. When Mr. Garfunkel gave me a generous stipend after the marriage, I took it all and gave it to Fr. Chrysostom. He was noble and gave me back half and said, 'This is the first time in the history of the mission that anybody ever gave me the stipend.' I explained that he was the pastor and was entitled to it. He said, 'That may be true, but nobody ever did it before.'

During the winter months I had been kind to an old Syrian, Mr. Amoury, when he was very sick. I brought him Holy Communion more often during those months than he had received it in ten years before that. The family, especially a son who was a doctor in New York and a daughter at home, appreciated my visits. When the old man died they
came to arrange for the funeral. Chrysostom had just returned to Nassau and I suggested to them that they should ask Father Chrysostom to conduct the funeral, which was to be from Sacred Heart Church. They did not want to do so but insisted that I should take the funeral. I begged them to let Chrysostom bury one of his first acquaintances in the Bahamas, and they consented. I spoke to Chrysostom and he agreed to take the funeral. I admit that I was disappointed when Father Chrysostom asked Father Hyacinth to accompany him and did not ask me to go along. Such thoughtless things will happen....

Father Chrysostom may have differed from me in many things and quite naturally he was not enthusiastic about the man who was placed there to oust him, but on the whole I believe he was fair. He knew that the appointment was not my choice. He may have used strong language when aroused by others, or when feelings got the best of him, but I still considered him my friend. When he left for his final trip to San Salvador he embraced me and said, "May God love you and bless you. You have a hard assignment." He knelt down and asked for my blessing. I knelt down and asked for his. Blessing each other we parted....

When Father Gabriel had finished preparing the combination chapel and house at San Salvador for Father Chrysostom, the latter moved to his beloved island and settled down to a quiet and more leisurely pace of life. Contemporary newspaper accounts provide interesting commentary on his exodus to the island. The Record of 17 December 1925, Nassau Tribune of 21 October 1925 and Miami Daily News of 29 November 1926 reported:

Father Chrysostom, O.S.B., the first Benedictine to labor in the Bahama Islands, and for almost thirty-five years resident missionary at Nassau, on New Providence Island, capital of the group, has recently opened up another mission at Watling's Island or San Salvador, to which he will now devote his entire time. The new mission is situated at Riding Rock, Columbus' first landing place in the New World.

According to the Nassau Tribune of October 21, Father Chrysostom has been favored by the Inspector of Schools who, in his report to the Board of Education, proposed that the new school be considered one in accordance with the Grant-in-aid status. Thus the school would be under Father Chrysostom's supervision, and at the same time the board would pay full salary of the teacher.

The same issue of The Tribune says in its leading editorial:

The Very Rev. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., V.F., has been very active during his few weeks stay at Watlings Is., and already results are to be seen, as will be noticed by the article appearing in this issue. We hope no doubt that it will not be very long before his influence for good may be observed in the expenditure of public money, provided by the government for the improvement of that island. There are few men in the Colony who have a wider or more intimate acquaintance with its conditions and needs; a saner or more practical knowledge of how to go about improving them, or a more sympathetic will and energy to co-
operate with the government in making its financial appropriations go as far as possible for the real and permanent good of the Out Islands and making them fit places to live in.

What he has done for religion and education in Nassau, and what has been accomplished under his initiative and direction at Andros, Harbour Is., and Watlings during 34 years residence in the Colony, establishes an enviable record of activity and progressiveness. His voluntary retirement from work in Nassau to identify himself with the development of Watlings was contemplated many years ago when he became satisfied, by years of research, that that island is the San Salvador of Columbus. He has appropriately chosen Riding Rock, the first landing place of Columbus, as his future home; and we feel that his residence there will help the island to its rightful place and prestige as the San Salvador of Columbus, as which it is recognized in the British Admiralty charts and now generally conceded to by all authorities on the subject.

Many friends of the Vicar Forane have already indicated their intentions of visiting the historic spot in the near future. In fact if there were proper communication to and from Watlings, there is no doubt that many winter tourists would visit the island.

In testimony to the high character and ability of Father Chrysostom, The Tribune is peculiarly qualified to speak. To us he has been, in its fullest sense, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s ‘Great Stone Face’ or ‘The Grand Old Man of the Mountain.’

His retirement from responsibilities that have grown too varied and irksome for his years to the quiet of distant and lonely Watlings is much regretted by his host of friends and admirers here and abroad, who feel however that what is Nassau’s loss is Watlings’ gain.

In a feature article entitled “Bahamas Priest Dusts Off Shrine Sacred to America,” the Miami Daily News of 29 November 1926 tells of Father Chrysostom’s work on San Salvador.

That “a gray haired Bahama priest is to be the link between the San Salvador of 1492 and the Watling’s Island of 1925” was the News chief interest. The paper continues:

A bit of land in an unknown sea, verdant patch of the tropics jutting out of the South Atlantic. An island unknown to the world when the three ships dropped anchor off its shores one October morning. An island to be remembered forever in history when that evening came. Such was the San Salvador of Columbus in 1492.

Today there is a charted island on the eastern fringe of the Bahamas group, a stopping point for sponge fleets and small trading vessels.

It is the site of a few scattered native huts. Maps designate it as Watlings Island, just a bit of land in the South Atlantic known only to natives of these islands, unknown by the world that lives outside the scope of the Bahamas. This is the same island Columbus found—the San Salvador of 1925.

Thirty-four years ago, a young priest came to the Bahamas. People here do not remember where he came from, and, in the tropics, curiosity seldom spurs men to the effort to learn about events of 34 years ago, where they are of no more importance than learning where a stranger came from.
So for 34 years, Father Chrysostom has remained in the Bahama Islands. During that period of time, there has been nothing in his life which would interest newspaper readers. A chronicle of 34 years of church services, of faithful rounds, of calls to the sick, of circuit riding this group of islands by boat, cannot supply the thrill that newspapers are supposed to supply.

But now in his last years, Father Chrysostom is doing something which seems of interest for the newspapers, although he probably looks on it as only a part of the quiet program of his life’s work to be followed in the quiet and comparative obscurity of these islands.

After 40 years of research through old volumes and charts during the long evenings of the eternal Bahama summer, he definitely determined that Watlings Island, about 200 miles southwest of Nassau and about 400 miles due southeast of Miami, is actually the San Salvador on which Columbus landed and planted the flag of Queen Isabella.

So now at Riding Rock, Columbus’ landing place on San Salvador, Father Chrysostom has established the home where he will spend the rest of his life.

His plans to bring Watlings Island from its obscurity of the centuries, and dust away its drab present-day disguise as a sponging and fishing point, to reveal the rightful place of the island as one of the most important historic shrines in the world, already are bearing fruit.

It is considered probable here that a government appropriation will be made by the Bahamas colony to aid Father Chrysostom in his plan to awaken the United States to the knowledge that a bit of land exists in the Atlantic only a little way from America which is the richest in historical traditions of any ground on earth.

Father Chrysostom cared for San Salvador’s small but growing community of Catholics, worked on his Columbus manuscript, continued his usual extensive correspondence and was quite happy and content. He was, however, now too old to finish the Columbus manuscript. Father Leander managed the Harbour Estate enterprise, as did Father Denis later, but the undertaking never flourished and had to be abandoned after Father Chrysostom’s death. None of the great expectations he held for San Salvador really materialized except the establishment of the mission on the island which still continues today. The New York Knights of Columbus became disenchanted and for years there was abrasive correspondence about this abortive venture.

Two final letters of Father Chrysostom from his last three years of life on San Salvador are of interest. One letter to Father Bernard in New York testifies that the old warrior was himself to the end. The other to his niece, Sister Chrysostom, O.S.B., reveals the gentleness and greatness of heart he could reveal to those he loved:

Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., to Fr. Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B.,
San Salvador, 12 August 1926:
Ere this you have probably heard much more in detail about the hurricane and its havoc on July 25 & 26 at Nassau and some of the other islands. It struck us on July 25 but did little real damage—first knocked off the trees and one sloop blown out to sea & lost. No lives lost on the island.

It did keep me busy however for 24 hours. I haven't my windows in yet, but the openings are batten up with rough bagging material. From midnight July 24-25 the wind blew a gale and the rain nearly swamped the house, till 7 p.m. July 25. I had to stand by every minute and batten up the temporary shutters as the wind tore them into tatters.

Our mail boat The Brontes was to leave Nassau July 23. Our wireless out of commission since May, and expecting a new generator on the mail boat, had just enough juice left to listen in. Fragmentary news came in that way till the hurricane struck Nassau, when the station there was evidently silenced. A small sloop coming from one of the nearby islands brought all sorts of wild rumors, and we had therefore no information till Aug. 9th when the governor, on one of H.M.S.'s warships called on a tour of inspection of the stricken islands. He brought the news of destruction to life, shipping & property at Nassau, and of what concerned San Salvador most—that The Brontes had left Nassau July 23, that nothing had been heard or seen of her, and that the body of one of her passengers had been washed ashore at Highbourn Cay, about 30 miles this side of New Providence. It is thought that she had some 5 or 6 passengers for here, besides possibly an equal number for Port Howe, Cat Island, and for Rum Cay, the two intermediate ports of call. Month's supply of provisions for Fr. Leander, and probably some building material and furniture for me are consequently lost, and of course the mail bags are lost as well. As most of the shipping was blown out of the Nassau harbour the Government will not be able to send us a boat for some time. I don't think we can get mail off from here for a week or two. That will explain why this is long in reaching you.

The Government has appointed me acting Commissioner during absence on leave of the Commissioner beginning July 14th. I presume St. John's will quote Canon Law against me and be properly horrified at the doings of Fr. C. Well, I think the appointment an honour to Catholics in the Bahamas on the part of the Government and a display of confidence in me personally. As a matter of fact, there is no one else on the island competent to fill the position, so I am doing a favour to the Government as well. A Commissioner is the full representative of Government for his island, and as such is executive, magistrate, post-master, revenue officer, post officer, chairman of the Board of Works, health, education, etc. superintendent of roads etc.

I have rather enjoyed the experience, as within the first month I have had put up to me what rarely is a commissioner's experience in many years. First, there is the wreck which involves handling of complex and difficult problems. She is a 10,000 ton steamer with a valuable cargo bound from England (via Norfolk where she took in coal) to New Zealand. She went on the reef ½ mile N.W. of White Cay, just off Harbour Estate on the early morning of July 8th, with the lighthouse in clear sight 5 miles away and in a calm sea and clear night. The Commissioner who was then still here went out to board the wreck, but was refused to be taken aboard by the captain of the wreck. This was a violation of all the laws, as the
Commissioner is a revenual and health officer, and as such it is his duty to board ships within his territory. This was 3 or 4 days before his going on leave and I naturally did not want such an impasse to become my heritage a few days after, as I persuaded him that he must go aboard and insist on doing his duty as a boarding officer in the care of all ships, wreck or not, and I told him I, as a Justice of the Peace, would go with him to see to it that the captain admit him on board and give him all the information required or have his ship officially seized. This time the captain did not refuse. (I presume that the Commissioner's being a black man and not himself sure of his duty was the reason why the captain thought he could bulldoze him.)

After the Commissioner left and I was in full charge of the office I went out again and placed a constable aboard and sent a radio message in code to the Government from the wrecking tug which had meanwhile arrived from Jamaica. Since then things have worked smoothly and the governor complimented me on the situation he found when visiting here. Every man and boy on the island is at the wreck picking up the thousands of dollars worth of damaged cargo that has been dumped into the sea, or working aboard dumping coal, pianos, etc. overboard.

The wreck is now so fast on the reef that she can never be got off and thousands of tons of cargo is under water in her holds.

The wreck is my first interesting experience. My second is the hurricane followed by extravagant report of damage etc.

Well the experience is very, very, interesting, whereas the red tape involved in making monthly statements, some in triplicate, vouchers, etc. is tedious.

You will be wondering why my windows are not in yet. They were to be here in December or January. The quarantine raised against Florida in January and not lifted till May, stopped all traffic between Fla. & Bahamas. The windows did not reach here till July 10th. The steamer wreck took place on July 8. My carpenter, the only one on the island, like everybody else, could not be kept away from the wreck for $10 a day. I am utilizing a poor substitute now and gradually getting the windows in place, leaving the final finishing till later. I am in really excellent health and as cheerful as ever. I almost forgot. In May, Fr. Hyacinth visited here in the San Salvador which a friend of mine had chartered for the trip. Hyacinth was most favourably impressed with all he found here. A week or two later the Government chartered the San Salvador to send the radio expert here to investigate the broken down dynamo-motor. Fr. Hildebrand came along. He was much impressed with situation here and said Watlings was the biggest thing in the Bahamas. I am however a little doubtful of his sincerity.

A bad tooth made it necessary for me to go to the dentist. I was in Nassau from June 26th to July 4th, and was treated with conventional hospitality neither gushing nor more than lukewarm. The day before leaving into which was concentrated the gathering together of all the shopping I had to do brought me back to the Priory at 10 minutes after six. I went straight to the dining room thinking it suppertime and found the table unset. Thinking supper was later I went up and joined Hyacinth on the veranda saying I am just perfectly exhausted after a day's running around and getting things aboard for tomorrow and then went to the top floor anxious for the supper bell to ring. It did not ring. Excepting an egg
for breakfast I had had nothing to eat or drink during the day and I felt too starved to wait till morning.

I did not know where to turn for food and felt too embarrassed to ask Alice the housekeeper, who habitually kept out of sight (and who, by the way, runs not only the house, but Hildebrand even more abjectly). At 9 p.m. my only recourse was to go to The Candy Kitchen and eat an ice cream. I did not want to go alone, so I asked Hyacinth casually, to come for a walk. I feel like taking an ice cream. He said, 'Well as you see, I have my shoes off and I don't care for ice cream this evening.' Then I said, 'You saw what I ate this morning, since then I have been hustling about Bay Street getting things ready for the boat tomorrow. I came in at 9 minutes after six, found the table unset, talked to you 5 minutes and have been listening for the supper bell ever since. I am starving, can't very well go to a boarding house, but will go to The Candy Kitchen to eat ice cream.' He explained that it being Thursday evening before First Friday, supper had been ordered for 5:45, but that he would tell Hildebrand or the housekeeper and get me something. 'Not on your life,' said I, 'If I have to go begging for something in my own Nassau home, I shall in future stop at the hotel.' Hyacinth, of course, fine fellow that he is, at once understood the situation and we went to the ice cream stand together. I mention this in detail so that you may understand the sort of hospitality that is administered at The Priory.

Incidentally, I may say that it seems to me Hildebrand doesn't dare call his own soul or household his own under the dominance of that selfish woman. Hildebrand is active and progressive for which I praise him. That he is a crude, boasting, vulgarian, is perhaps not his own fault. If Nassau were not a small town where everybody knows the doings of everybody, I would put up at a hotel rather than at The Priory in necessary visits—I hope there will be no necessity in visiting it during the present regime. Excepting paying a visit to Mr. Amoury on his dying bed, I have not made a single private call at the house of any of our people during my visits to Nassau in Feb. & in July. You can guess the situation & why.

In all Hildebrand's activities there seems to be an intentional purpose of ignoring his predecessor and all he did and of belittling Fr. Gabriel, Fr. Leander, Fr. Denis, Fr. Bonaventure and all their works. I have no personal grievance to air in the attitude, but it makes me sad to think that it is a Benedictine who assumes it. Were Hildebrand a secular priest, my protests to the Archbishop on grounds of good to the mission would have been made here. This is the abbot's creation and possibly reads the abbot's mind & policies better than I do. In March (I believe it was) I wrote to Abbot Alcuin telling him about the real estate boom etc. and how the West Beach bath would possibly be sold for $20,000 to $30,000. In May I got a most sharp rebuke from him for daring to alienate personal property, turning over of personal title to Watlings property (Harbour Estate) to title of Vicar Forane, or selling the Bath Beach without consulting him and his chapter, and recounting to me the penalties under Canon Law. Not only that, but that in conscience it was his duty to cite me under Canon Law for alienating the Bathing Beach at Nassau and threatened to proceed against me canonically before the Archbishop for transferring the Harbour Estate from private title to title of Vicar Forane (incorporated).

I calmly replied by reciting the fact that under 3 abbots I had urged a Benedictine Holding Corporation for properties here, and all in vain—and
that under condition of the K. of C. the Watlings Estate should be held by Vicar Forane or Benedictine legal corporation, and besides, that at my age I wanted to divest myself of all personal title to any property. As for going before the Archbishop to lay canonical claim to Harbour Estate, I told him that in such action he was ill advised and that I could not sustain his claim.

As for the Nassau Bathing Beach property, it belonged to the corporation Vicar Forane and that its transfer did not concern him, but was a matter to be settled between the Vicar Forane and the Archbishop. I have not had a reply to my letter.

My impression—I may say, my conviction—is that the cardinal’s absolute demand that I continue as Vicar Forane, is a burr in the little man’s craw.

I have been patient beyond natural endurance with the abbot’s imperious and unworthy selfishness and personal conceit, in the confident hope that time and experience would cure his overweening self conceit.

I am curious to learn what he will say in reply to my most respectful letter of May or early June.

I am sick and tired of the abbot’s imperious self conceit and consciously consider him an obstruction to the Order’s work.

I have no objection to you preserving this my opinion of Abbot Alcuin in your private archives. I have no personal feeling against him and do not write this from personal resentment. I am too near the grave to entertain thoughts of resentment and too old and experienced to entertain the thought that there should not come newer thoughts and newer methods with the newer generation. On the other hand I think I am quite qualified by character, age and experience to render impersonal judgement of character qualified to represent the Order worthily. The idea that the abbot’s will is Holy Rule and Canon Law, and submission to it is religion regardless of the fact that his is not in accord with Holy Rule or Canon Law but patently subversive of the Order or the Welfare of the Church, does not appeal to my sense of loyalty to the Order or to the Church, does not appeal to me particularly when I have written evidence that he descends to deception to gain his personal ends.

Having for 35 years and more given my all of work and devotedness to the Church I feel little inclined to stand up for an abbot of whom I know that he is a slick schemer and unabashed liar.

Strong medicine this—isn’t it?

Don’t get the idea that I am down on the abbot. Credit me however with the prudence of stepping aside for the mere sake of controversy. Personally I have the attitude of serving as a piece of furniture, aye of a spittoon, for my abbot’s use, but God helping me I don’t intend to stand by mute any longer for abbatial self conceit to blackguard my life’s work.

I thought my retirement to this humble spot would prove the assurance to him of total effacement of myself. That my coming here has brought the island into prominence, and in a way given me personal prominence, seems only to have embittered him towards me. I would not care for any merely personal hostility he choose to adopt towards me personally, but when he threatens Canon Law procedure as he did in his May letter (to which I gave explanatory reply) signifying discredit to all my work, and attempts to carry out his threats I shall be ready to meet him in the open
and consider it my duty to show him up as what he is—a trouble instigator
in the mission personnel, a double faced pretender to mission welfare.

This seems strong language, doesn't it? I am not saying what I say
under any stimulus of emotion, but in the calm conviction that Abbot
Alcuin is inimical to mission progress in the Bahamas and that he is playing
the game of duplicity in his professions of endeavoring to do all he can for
the Bahamas mission. I am curious to know what he will say in reply to my
extremely moderate explanatory letter I sent him in May. Perhaps his reply
is lost with the last mailboat The Brontes.

Two days ago a small sloop came in from Nassau. It had left Nassau
only a few days after the hurricane and brought no news excepting a letter
from Hildebrand and Hyacinth in which they told me of storm etc. but no
damage to mission buildings excepting that it blew down St. Gabriel's
Church at Calabash Bay. There is rather a comic side to this 'church'.
Hildebrand I understand did consider talking about it being beneath the
dignity of the priest to do manual labour etc., that the apostles had deacons
for the purpose etc. and that he (Hildebrand) would not have any of his
priests work as masons or carpenters—and the propaganda he was thus
making was particularly aimed at Fr. Gabriel spending a year here putting
up the Mission House and chapel, and to stand in with the younger element
at St. John's who believe in the easy life for the modern, more educated
clergy. He went to Andros himself and made an agreement with a local
would-be colored builder. The church was to have the exact dimensions of
the Behring Point church. I don't know the price paid in money, but the first
advantage the builder took was to build the walls according to inside
dimensions of the Behring Point church whose walls are 2 ft. thick, thus
making it 4 ft. shorter and 4 ft. narrower than the original to be copied. And
the hurricane blew it down. I had warned him that local builders could not
be depended upon to build a solid wall. Between lines of his letter just
received, I read that he has learned a lesson.

Until I looked up in the Catholic Directory for 1926, I did not know
the church was St. Gabriel's Church—nor, until this day did I know there
was a church of St. John Chrysostom at Fresh Creek.

Hildebrand sure is a 'striver'. Thatch covered shacks (some of them
rented) in which Fr. Gabriel has been saying Mass for years, now suddenly
become churches.

Father Chrysostom to Sister Chrysostom, O.S.B., [niece], San Salvador,
Bahamas, 10 December 1925:

My long silence may well have led you to conclude that I had forgotten
you. No, dear, I do not forget my old friends even though I am hopeless
as a letter writer. For the last two years I have been quite ailing. Since
July 16th I am here at Watlings, my future field of labour and I now feel
better than I have in two years. You probably saw Fr. Leander while he was
in Stearns Co. and got descriptions of the island and island life from him.
I think I wrote you telling you that I would resign or had resigned my
position in Nassau and that I had asked to be allowed to spend the remaining
years of my life at the little mission at Riding Rock, the spot where
Columbus first landed. I turned the Nassau work over to Fr. Hildebrand
Feb. 2nd, the 34th anniversary of my arrival in Nassau. The Cardinal was
very loath to accept my resignation and it was only after I pleaded that it had been my most earnest desire for the last 25 to 30 years to be permitted to retire to the poorest and most forsaken mission to spend my declining years, that he reluctantly consented, but he most positively refused to accept my resignation from the Vicar Generalship.

After resigning in Nassau, I visited the other islands I had not visited before and since July 16th I am here at Watlings, temporarily taking the place of Fr. Leander while Fr. Gabriel is finishing the mission house at Riding Rock, my future home, 7 miles away from Fr. Leander's station. The building is now under roof and is being plastered by Fr. Gabriel. It is quite an imposing stone building, 31 feet by 41 ft. On the ground floor will be the chapel, a small office, the dining room and a sacristy. The 2nd floor will have a large living room and library and 3 bedrooms, and an airy attic can be turned into 3 or 4 bedrooms. The grounds in front of the building run down to the beach on which Columbus first landed. A road is now being completed connecting all the settlements of the island, and I am getting a motor truck and will fix it up as a chapel car in which Fr. Leander can regularly give services in all the settlements and with catechists reach all the people. This of course will eventually lead to having a missionary nurse to conduct clinics at the different settlements.

A wireless station will be erected by the Government at Riding Rock within a few months, and we will probably have the settlements linked up with telephone within the next two years. You will be surprised that I should have such a roomy mission house. Well, there was on the property a one storey house—practically a ruin—whose walls were thick and strong, and we added another story to it to serve the purposes I contemplate. There is another important reason. The first that I have discovered conclusive evidence identifying the landfall of Columbus gives the island an historic and sentimental interest which will eventually attract many visitors. Several American yacht owners have already promised to visit here as soon as I am settled down, and excursion boats will be run from Nassau as soon as I say the word come. Watlings lies right in the track of steamers from New York and Europe to the Caribbean Sea and Panama—I can see from 4 to 12 every day passing within a few miles, and undoubtedly some of them carrying tourists on West Indian trips will stop over for a day when they learned that there is someone here to show them the historic spots.

I am in excellent health—yesterday was my 66th birthday—and it looks reasonable that, God willing, I may enjoy a decade or more of usefulness. However, I am unreservedly in God's hands, and whenever He pleases to call I shall be ready. I am not the slightest bit lonely. My library is perfect company, and the settlement of about 50 families is so compact that 10 minutes walk will take me to the last house. That will give me enough missionary activity. Sick calls at a distance will be attended to on horesback or car by Fr. Leander. I begin the work with the youthful enthusiasm of the first years of my priesthood—and I am perfectly contented and very, very happy. Of course I would be very glad to meet my old friends, but I would prefer having them come to me.

On the morning of 3 January 1928 the commissioner at San Salvador did not see any activity in Father Chrysostom's house as he passed it about 10:00 a.m. A light had been on the previous evening until 11:00
p.m. He entered and found the old missionary dead in bed. He had died in the night in his sixty-ninth year with no apparent struggle. The cause of death was never known as Father Leander was called to the scene immediately and Father Chrysostom was buried the same day. This was the custom in the Bahamas as San Salvador is 150 miles from Nassau and an undertaker could not come in time to preserve his body. He was buried on the spot he had chosen at Riding Rock, his remains facing the sea where the Columbus expedition first approached the new world.

Memorial Masses were offered at San Salvador, New York, College-ville and Nassau where Abbot Alcuin delivered the eulogy. The abbot had come at once via train to Miami and boat to San Salvador, having sent a telegram, "Coming to San Salvador; destroy nothing." But it was already too late. Father Leander had destroyed all papers and letters, as he said later, in accordance with Father Chrysostom's instructions. It will never be known if this was the final order that went forth from Caesar Augustus. It remains a strange request from a man who had worked a lifetime delving into Christopher Columbus' records. Rumors persisted that trunks of archival materials did exist or that they had been seen. But Fr. Nicholas Kremer, O.S.B., pastor at San Salvador, says there is nothing there. The same is the case in the diocesan archives at Nassau and the abbey archives in Minnesota. Fortunately, the letters Father Chrysostom wrote have been preserved in great part. Those who knew him did not think Cardinal Hayes exaggerated when he repeatedly in succeeding years called him the "Catholic Apostle of the Bahamas." His was a unique religious presence in the islands. The image of Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., idealized or with warts, has become a permanent part of Bahamian memory.

The Record of St. John's University carried in its 12 January 1928 edition two accounts of Father Chrysostom's death. The first, a news report, written by his friend and classmate, Fr. Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B., is abbreviated here. The second is an editorial by Etienne Dupuch, close friend of Father Chrysostom, who was then studying at St. John's:

From correspondents we learned that Father Chrysostom did not in the least anticipate death. The Commissioner, the government official on San Salvador, was the first to notice that Father Chrysostom failed to make his appearance in the morning of January 3. He then entered his residence and found him in bed as if asleep, but his soul had already departed. The previous night he had prepared some mail for the incoming boat. In one of the letters he mentioned the visits of Father Abbot and the Cardinal. He expressed the hope that the Cardinal might postpone his visit since he had neither a kitchen nor a house-keeper—anyway he would make him feel-at home. He referred, moreover, to several hundred fruit trees he had secured for his and Father Leander's place; then to the crucifix and other articles
friends of Father Bernard had bought for his little chapel; and finally to his excellent health, stating that he felt as well as he did fifteen years ago. Some Sisters, however, who had been on the island recently, say that Father Chrysostom had shown signs of rapidly failing health.

Father Abbot expressed his sorrow for not having been able to see Father Chrysostom before he died. He had hoped to be with him on his name day, January 27. He is now expecting His Eminence Cardinal Hayes to arrive at Nassau on the 28th....

His Eminence Cardinal Hayes was welcomed by the Benedictine fathers on his arrival at Nassau on January 25. According to the New York Catholic News of February 4:

His Eminence and party were greeted at the pier by the Secretary of the Colony in his official capacity, and by the Rev. Father Bonaventure, the prior of the Benedictine Monastery at Nassau. With the prior was his assistant, the Rev. Gabriel Roerig, O.S.B., who had been associated for thirty-four years with Father Chrysostom Schreiner, the recently deceased ‘Apostle of the Bahamas.’ The Rev. Denis Parnell, O.S.B., came from Andros Island to greet His Eminence, and was accompanied by the Rev. Father Arnold Mondloch, O.S.B., at present in charge of one of the missionary churches in Nassau. After the reception at the pier the party was escorted to the Benedictine priory, where they are the guests of Father Bonaventure.

On Monday morning His Eminence celebrated Mass in the chapel of St. Francis Xavier, at Nassau, and on the same day he also confirmed large classes at the church of Our Lady and the church of the Sacred Heart.

Dinner on Sunday, January 29, was the occasion of congratulations to Father Gabriel, who on that day passed the fifty-eighth milestone of his profitable missionary life.

At the confirmation ceremony at St. Francis Xavier’s the Cardinal addressed the assembled natives, and expressed his pleasure at being once again among them. He said he was delighted at the progress the Church has made in the Bahamas as evidenced by the fact that during the past three years there have been over 700 conversions.

His Eminence also paid a tribute to the memory of the Apostle of the Bahamas, the Very Rev. Father Chrysostom, O.S.B., V.F., who for thirty-eight years zealously gave of his talent and energy to the evangelization of the Bahamas.

Early next week the party will set sail for Harbour Island, the Cove, Arthur’s Town, Cat Island and San Salvador, and the Cardinal will confirm those prepared at those places, returning to Nassau next Sunday to pontificate at the dedication of the Church of St. Peter and Paul, Chippingham. Donations to the Father Chrysostom Memorial Fund will be directed to this new church.

Etienne Dupuch, future editor of The Tribune, wrote in the St. John’s Record of 12 January 1928:

It is with deep regret that we learn of the death of the Very Rev. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., V.F., on the island of San Salvador, Bahama Islands, landfall of Columbus, on Tuesday January 3, at the age of 69 years.
Vice-President of St. John’s University, founder-editor-printer of The Record, the official organ of the Institution, publisher of a travelogue after returning from a tour of Europe and the Orient, the future held rich promise for this young man—a giant mentally and physically. But, in the strength and pride of vigorous youth, he contracted bronchial trouble and the doctors informed him that if he were not beyond the frost-line by the next springtime he would be under it. At that time the handful of Faithful Catholics in the Bahamas appealed to the Archbishop of New York to establish a mission in those islands, and such a climate suiting the sick man’s case, he undertook an investigation of the possibilities of building up the faith in that ancient outpost of the British Empire....

He was probably the best living authority on the voyages of the Great Discoverer, and devoted the last years of his life to the compilation of a treatise on the life and voyages of Columbus—a work he unfortunately was not able to complete. Priest, author, artist, scholar, with a thorough knowledge of international law and politics, intimately familiar with medicine and law, and known in many American parishes as ‘the silver-tongued orator’—the sun has set on the mortal activities of one of the ablest men who ever adopted the Bahamas as a home; and with him he has taken an unrivalled understanding of Bahamian psychology and local conditions generally.

That he has been faithful in the discharge of his sacred pledge is evidenced by the fact that this night his body finds a resting place in the near vicinity of the spot on which he was preserved from death for the prosecution of a great work. Tonight he sleeps, lulled by the hand of Death, thousands of miles from the haunts of his early youth; he sleeps thousands of miles from all the ties that bind most closely in life—home, boyhood friends, racial understanding, similarity of tastes, mental outlook and capacity, all that combines to sweeten the aesthetic side of life. Long ago having relinquished his national ties, his very person almost forgotten, his name but a faint memory in the field of his first activity, he lies on the isolated island of San Salvador, candles casting a light on his stilled face, but not revealing to the kindly eyes that gather at his bier, all the sorrow, pain, loneliness, self-sacrifice that has been the sum-total of the last thirty-seven years which he devoted to their service, years occupied in spreading light where otherwise darkness might have prevailed.

The poor simple folk who do him honor at this moment, who shed tears on his grave, can never understand, can never fully appreciate the tremendous soul that has taken wing in response to a higher summons; yet they love him—they love him for what he has meant to them; they love him for himself—for they know him to have been to the very last noble, and generous to a fault. Perhaps he is no saint—of that we are no judge. But this we do know; he was a man among men; he was a good man among men good and bad. And, as a crowning act in his career, it is well that he should sleep on in the field where he has laid foundations so deep and built so well.

Hemmed in and menaced by anti-Catholic prejudice from all sides during the early years of his missionary work, his achievements for the Faith need no written eulogies to distinguish him as a missionary among missionaries; and we can do no better than apply to the results of his genius the tribute the visitor to St. Paul’s Cathedral is bidden to apply to the genius
of Christopher Wren, its architect: ‘*Viator, si monumentum quaeris, circumspice*’—Wayfarer, if you seek a monument, look around you.’

Among the closest friends of Father Chrysostom were the Theodore F. McManus family of Toledo, Ohio, a knight of St. Gregory, fervent Catholic and successful American publisher. Theodore and family visited the Bahamas often, stayed in The Priory and The Bungalow, knew all of the early fathers in the mission and donated to its development. Theodore was the first to write to Abbot Alcuin after Father Chrysostom’s death recommending a memorial to ‘the greatest and closest of my friends.’ McManus suggested that a bust of Schreiner sculptured by Araldo Duchene of New York, be developed into a permanent bronze memorial. Father Chrysostom had converted Duchene’s wife to Catholicism and brought Araldo back to the Church when they were visiting in Nassau. Abbot Alcuin responded to McManus that Father Chrysostom had elements of greatness in him which, together with his long years of courageous and self-sacrificing service in the Bahamas, justified a memorial to him. But Abbot Alcuin preferred that a new parish be established in Nassau in Father Chrysostom’s memory since an additional church was badly needed there. It was a real hardship for the people of Nassau to walk long distances to either St. Francis or Sacred Heart for worship, particularly in the hot seasons.

Donations began coming in for the Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., Memorial Fund and within five months of his death, despite the approaching depression, a total of $1,070 had been reached. A Nassau committee headed the drive. Its members included the Hon. A. C. Burns, Messrs. Vincent McPherson, Yorick Clare, P. H. Burns, Sigied S. Amoury, Dr. Cezair and Carl T. Albury. There are the well-known New York names among the donors: Cardinal Patrick Hayes, Countess Helen Brady, Monsignor Archesi, Sir George McDonald, Archbishop Michael J. Curley of Baltimore, Maryland, and the old Bahamian friends such as Mrs. Leslie Higgs, Miss Barbara Burns, Harcourt Malcolm, C. E. Bethel, Carrie Albury, D. J. de Gregory, J. Garfunkel, H. McKinney, Mrs. Mary Forsyth, W. J. Armaly, B. E. Johnstone, Mrs. J. K. Amoury, William L. Claire, J. P. Sands, H. N. Chipman and A. M. Cunningham. What a crosscurrent of Bahamian history these names represent. What a tribute to the impact of Father Chrysostom upon the islands. He is not forgotten today, some forty years after his death.

SS. Peter and Paul parish was established in Nassau with these donations, and it remains as a living memorial to a tragic-heroic founding figure of Catholicism in the Bahamas. A massive bronze eucharistic tabernacle weighing 500 pounds was also erected in St. Francis Xavier Church on 27 December 1930 in memory of the “Catholic Apostle of
the Bahamas." It was placed on the new marble high altar donated by T. J. A. Johnson of Boston, Massachusetts. The dome of the tabernacle had Byzantine geometric figures and was set with precious stones. The interior was lined with steel, cedar wood and silk moire. Its revolving door had four panels each of which carried symbolic representatives of the Mass and Blessed Sacrament. A metallic ribbon at the base bore an inscription, "In Memory of the Very Rev. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., Vicar Forane, Bahama Islands from 1891 to 1928." Cardinal William O'Connell of Boston spoke on the occasion of the dedication of the altar and tabernacle and delivered a peroration in his grand style on the meaning of it all and Father Chrysostom's achievements. How different this dedication was from the lonely struggles Schreiner lived out atop that West Hill for thirty-six years.

Father Chrysostom's name does not die in the Bahamas despite drastically changing times and new problems. He has entered into the folklore of the islands. This phenomenon would not be particularly pleasing to him. He much preferred living confrontation and encounter. His admirers, however, pay him the ultimate respect of never forgetting. He would have chosen, personally, to find a little more recognition and support during his lonely pioneer, missionary apostolate. But none of Christ's followers has chosen the time or the way. He lives on in the consciousness of many as a unique and stalwart figure in their inheritance.

John McManus, son of Theodore, wrote as late as 2 February 1972:

Father Chrysostom was a giant of a man, or so it seemed to me, with monumentally craggy features, bushy eyebrows, bold nose, and an outthrust chin, over which a large, smelly pipe usually protruded. Stern of visage, he was actually very warm. Knowledgeable in the ways of his children, he was father and task-master to them.

He lived in what was then, and probably still is, known as 'The Priory.' At one time a British Army Hospital, it was a rather vast wooden structure, with porches all 'round, and cavernous, cool first floor areas where cooking, supplies, and mysterious areas hidden behind bolted but slatted doors fired the imagination of a nine year old, I think!

He was Father Schreiner to us, but 'Father Chrys-ös-tom' to his flock, a power to be reckoned with in Nassau right through the legislature, the press (four pages), to say nothing of the Anglican hierarchy who were probably six to his one. He knew the history of the Bahamas better than it was ever written. He could be as eloquent as Daniel Webster, but when he spoke to his children, as they all were to him, he was his most eloquent.

In any case, when Mother and Father built Saint Hugo of the Hills (Bloomfield Hills, Michigan), no one could find a likeness of Saint Hugo of Cluny, our patron saint. So the old man had the statue over the entrance carved in the likeness of Father Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B. So next time you're there take a look at the guy who readily might be the patron saint of the Bahamas. And you know, I don't think Saint Hugo of Cluny would mind a bit to have a fellow Benedictine standing in his place.
The man who succeeded Father Chrysostom as prior of the Benedictines in the Bahamas from 1924 to 1928 was one of whom it was said, "Zeal for your house, O Lord, has eaten me up." Fr. Hildebrand Eickhoff, O.S.B., spent his entire life in the pastoral ministry. After his ordination in 1911, he assisted in North Dakota and Minnesota parishes, served as an army chaplain during the last year of World War I, and was pastor at Garrison, North Dakota, when Abbot Alcuin sent him on the difficult assignment of superior in the Bahamas. Father Hildebrand was in many ways a self-made man. Physically and spiritually robust, he was a veritable bundle of fire and energy moving in several directions at one time. He possessed an alert mind and observant senses which he tirelessly cultivated through wide reading. Father Hildebrand had standing orders for new books from several publishers in England and America and he subscribed to a wide range of current periodical literature.

He was ever the priest, a man of prayer, interested always in the spiritual care of souls and vocations to the priesthood and religious life. His impulsive and blunt manners soon brought reactions from the aristocratic Father Chrysostom and the genteel ladies among the Sisters of Charity in Nassau. He told the sisters there would be evening devotions and religious activities they should participate in. This was against the practice of their religious way of life, he was politely informed. Father Hildebrand then said he would have to find another sisterhood for work in the Bahamas and that he knew Benedictine sisters he could invite. This open challenge to the oldest missionaries in the Bahamas did not go unnoticed. When it was reported to Cardinal Hayes, the protector and special friend of the New York Charities, he was not pleased, to put it mildly. The new superior was soon being labelled "that Eickhoff," but he was not to be deterred in his zeal for pastoral advancement among the Bahamians.

A new era of mission activity opened with Father Hildebrand. Etienne Dupuch described the dynamic, driving force of Father Hildebrand:

How Father Chrysostom founded the Bahama mission is a stirring tale. For years it had been a long, hard and bitter fight against great odds. But before he handed it over to Father Hildebrand he had laid foundations deep and secure.

The arrival of Father Hildebrand in this mission was well timed. Opposition to the Catholic Church was beginning to soften, but Father Chrysostom was so steeped in memories of his hard life here that he was unaware of the new trend. Father Hildebrand was not restrained by any inhibitions. He built new schools and opened new missions in Nassau and the Out Islands.

He enlarged St. Francis Xavier Church which is now the Cathedral of the new Diocese of Nassau. He also built Our Lady's Church in Grant's Town. This is still the largest Catholic church in the Colony... And Father
Fr. Ferdinand Schreifels, O.S.B., sets out on a mission call.

A free ride from Br. Bede Seither, O.S.B.
Benedictine priests and brothers, 1935.

Fathers Arnold Mondloch and Othmar Holmann, O.S.B., with assistants investigating stalactite caves.

Father Arnold exhibits his valuable finds of Arawak artifacts.
First aid and emergency surgery class.

Siesta.

Father Arnold extracting teeth beside his chapel and residence car.
Mr. and Mrs. Cartwright, Protestants, who gave the Church land at Hamilton, Long Island.

Fr. Daniel Bangart, O.S.B., baptizing.

Fathers Leonard Hagarty and Quentin Dittberner, O.S.B., about to depart on their morning rounds in Nassau.
Hildebrand started a trend towards integration in Catholic schools in Nassau. Today they are considered a model of perfect Christian relationship where the races mix and work happily together at the school level.

It was Father Hildebrand who launched the Church on a forward march that has carried it to its present commanding position in the field of religion and education in the Colony.

Over the years there have been several changes in top personnel in the Bahamas Mission, but when the story of the Church in these islands is written, Father Hildebrand must be given front-rank prominence.

On his own and without anyone knowing it, Father Hildebrand wrote memoirs of his tenure in the Bahamas. He deposited them in the archives of St. John’s Abbey, date unknown. This document supplies invaluable background insights for the period of transition between Father Chrysostom and the coming of Bernard, the bishop. Father Hildebrand wrote:

At that time St. Francis Church was opened in time for Mass in the morning and again locked after Mass. Sacred Heart Church had Mass only on Sunday. I understood from Father Chrysostom that in the early days Father Melchior had lived at Sacred Heart for some time because of the difficulty the two had in getting along. Occasionally some Negro would come and ask to be instructed in the faith, but Father Chrysostom always told me not to bother about him, that he only had a fight with his preacher. It was quite evident that, perhaps through so many discouragements, he had developed quite a Cui Bono spirit. On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception nobody, except the Sisters and just a few old people, came to Mass. The same had been true on All Saints Day. When I spoke to Sarah Wright, a good woman who kept house for Father Chrysostom but had not been to Mass herself, she could not understand what I was talking about. Father Chrysostom said, ‘These people do not understand such things, you are not in Stearns County.’ It struck me that the Sisters seemed to feel the same way about it. After Father Chrysostom finally left for San Salvador I had St. Francis Church remain open during the day and when Father Hyacinth (Cismowski, O.S.B.) came we also had daily Mass at Sacred Heart. Father Hyacinth was a generous and gentle priest but sickly. Father Denis (Parnell, O.S.B.) was doing good work in the Bahama Mission. I immediately became convinced, and this conviction grew during the years, that Father Denis was very popular in Nassau.

Before I left for the Bahamas the abbot had instructed me that I must get a boat. In one of our conversations I mentioned this to Father Chrysostom. He agreed that this might be a good idea and took me around the harbor to look at boats, but none could be found. Finally, I found a boat that had been beached in low water and, since the keel was bad, no efforts were made to float her. I bought her. She had at one time been a popular racer in the Nassau harbor. Cardinal Hayes and Mr. McAleenan of Brooklyn had encouraged me to get a boat, in fact Mr. McAleenan had considered sending his yacht down and giving it to the mission. In the end he sent me the money to buy the Ortolan. The Clare boys, Victor and Evelyn, put in a new keel, made a few changes on her deck and installed a gas engine. I made a trip in her along the Andros shore, delivering food
stuffs after the hurricane. I also made a trip to San Salvador and Harbour Island in her.

On one occasion Father Gabriel had come to Nassau and was anxious to get back to Andros before the mail boat left. The Clare boys took him back. The morning was perfect. I gave him the blessing on the wharf before they sailed. On this occasion two Sisters asked to be allowed to make the trip to see Andros Island. Why not, the day seemed perfect and the boat would be back by evening. After the boat arrived at Staniard Creek, Father Gabriel noticed some ominous signs of a coming hurricane and did all he could to hurry them on the trip back to Nassau. He did not want to tell the Sisters what worried him, and they thought he was extremely rude. How could he possibly accommodate these Sisters for a night or possibly days on that mission. The return trip was terrible. Only the protection of God’s blessing and the perfect seamanship of the Clare boys together with the faithful response of the little San Salvador saved their lives. The boys told me that at one time a funnel came so close to them that they thought they were all lost but it missed them. All the while they had to assure the Sisters that ‘there is no danger, this is nothing.’ They landed at the South West Bay and were brought to Nassau by car. This hurricane did much damage in Nassau.

There was a feeling, often expressed, that we should have a larger boat, which could take cargos of building material to the out islands, and possibly transport farm produce from San Salvador if that prospered. It was often difficult to get transportation, and at times charges were prohibitive, as I had learnt with the building of two of the churches on Andros. The hurricane had wrecked several boats in the harbor. I wrote Father Bonaventure to come to Nassau and we would look at one of them and possibly buy it. We looked at the Isosceles, an old Lipton Cup racer. A Mr. Collins had bought her, equipped her with a gas engine, and used her in the bootlegging game, until he got in trouble. After that he had her anchored in the harbor. Father Bonaventure agreed that it would be a splendid idea to buy her, especially since the price asked for her was very reasonable. I bought her and the Clare boys raised her. It was quite a feat. On the day of the raising there was quite an audience gathered at the wharf.

I had to equip her with a set of new sails, which Evelyn Clare sewed. This boat made a trip to San Salvador, Harbor Island, Andros Island and Gregory Town, Eleuthera, where it delivered building materials. At Gregory Town the workmen lived on her while they built the church. It also made a trip to Miami to obtain fertilizer for the tomato growers of Eleuthera. All told, however, this was an expensive venture, because at least two men had to be kept so that the boat was ready to sail when necessary. Since these men could not always be kept busy I later sold her and she served on the mail run between Nassau and San Salvador....

During the first Holy Week I had all the services. On Holy Thursday we had Mass in the morning and Holy Hour in the evening. On Good Friday we had the regular services in the morning and the Tre Ore from noon till three in the afternoon. On Holy Saturday, I remember, a dove came and sat on the ledge of the open window all during the blessing of the Font. On the following Corpus Christi Feast we had an outdoor solemn procession with the Blessed Sacrament. I had an umbrella covered over with white silk, which Modestin Millock held over the Blessed Sacrament during the
procession. There was a great turnout of people who sang all the way during the walking. I believe we had two altars.

There were no evening devotions in Nassau when I arrived. When I suggested to the Sisters that we should have evening devotions on Sundays with Rosary, Sermon and Benediction, I met solid opposition. I was convinced that it was for the best of the Mission and announced at the Masses on Sunday morning that we would commence with devotions that evening. Immediately after Mass, the superior, Sister Regina, came and said that according to their Rule the Sisters could not leave the convent after sundown. I simply answered that it was settled, that devotions would commence that evening, and that it was up to them to explain to those good people why they were not there, that I knew of no way in which I could explain their absence. That settled it. The Sisters attended.

At the Masses on Sundays the Sisters had been doing the singing. They had some good singers and did their best to entertain the tourists. When I mentioned the introduction of congregational singing I met strong opposition. The Negro could not sing, I was told and the Sisters could then not sing solos. I got a layman, George Davis, a splendid musician, to play the organ at St. Francis and later also at Our Lady’s. This introduction of congregational singing in Nassau was one of the most encouraging experiences of my life.

It seems that the Negroes had stayed in the rear of the church during Mass. After I had quite a number of converts a goodly number of colored people began to occupy pews, even toward the front. There was nothing else they could do. Soon a Mr. . . . came to me and said that he did not want any Negro to come into his pew, or to enter it when he was not there, or when he came late. I said, ‘Mr. . . ., if you pay one hundred dollars for a sitting, I will reserve it for you and will explain why I do so. If you pay no more than the colored people you will have no more sitting reserved than they.’ [He] was a little huffy but the matter was settled. Sometimes [he] came late and had to stand because all pews were taken.

At the request of Father Bonaventure I preached an outdoor mission at Harbour Island. The Catholic people gathered at the wharf, sang hymns of the Blessed Virgin, the Veni Creator and others. Some few non-Catholics came into the crowd, but most of them, very many, hid in the shadows of trees and behind buildings. Just what the results were I never learnt. I know of one young lady who went by boat to Nassau on her way to Miami and insisted with Father Bonaventure, who during that week was at Nassau taking my place, that he must baptize her conditionally, which he did. I heard however that once in Florida a marriage possibility with a non-Catholic developed and she returned to the Protestant Church.

The first expansion of mission activities that I undertook was the organizing of the people in what was known as Youngtown, and the building for them of a combination church and school building. There were not over a dozen adult Catholics in that section then. Father Chrysostom was not in favor of this. He said we should concentrate on the out islands and not on Nassau. Later he conceded that it might be well enough to have a school there, but that it should not be accented as a mission. When I commenced looking around for a suitable place where I might erect the necessary building, Walton Young came to me and offered to donate a site. I went with him to the place and asked him to stake out
the lines of the land he intended to donate. He never did drive any stakes but indicated the lines by shrubbery and trees on the place. He gave me a deed. I put up the building, and then a cistern to provide for drinking water, and last a double outhouse which was to serve as a toilet for the boys and girls. The day of the dedication came and Young was in the audience.

Had I known his history I might never have dealt with him at all, anxious though I was to obtain the property. I felt the location was just where I wanted it. Young had gotten into serious trouble shortly before I came to the Bahamas, and escaped by only a narrow margin from being hanged. I learnt all of this only after he had donated the property. So on the day of the dedication I tried very hard not to become involved in trouble, because it now dawned on me that the donating of this property was a scheme through which he hoped to arouse enthusiasm and a lot of favorable talk about his big hearted generosity and thus have people forget the cloud under which he was living. In trying to be cautious I said nothing about the great generosity of Young.

A few days after the dedication Young sent me a note by a messenger, in which he cautioned me of being guilty of transgressing on his property and that I was to rectify the matter at once or take the consequences. I could not figure it out. I had a deed to the property, so the difficulty must be in the boundaries that I followed. The only building that could possibly come into question was the toilet, and that was clearly within the lines he had shown me. Just then Etienne Dupuch drove into the yard. I showed him the note and explained where I figured the difficulty might be. 'Get in my car and we will drive down to his place of business, there simply ask him what the trouble is about, but do not argue with him, because the fellow is wicked, he is showing his wickedness right here,' Etienne said. We drove down and Etienne parked his car opposite the Young Store where he could observe.

All the answer I got to my question was, 'It is your business to find out where the trouble is.' I went back to the car. Etienne had noticed the defiance with which Young answered me and said, 'We will tame that rascal; never let him notice that he made you nervous in the least.' He then drove me over to Adderley's office, the attorney who had acted as government prosecutor in the murder trial of Young. Adderley advised me to tear down the toilet, and then build a new one closer to the other building. I hired a man to take it down. The man had no more than started with the work when Young arrived and told him that if he tore down another block he would have him arrested. Some wicked person, who perhaps did not want the church there, must have been working with Young. The man explained that I had hired him to do this work, but Young replied that in that case both he and I would land in prison, if he continued with the work. The man hurried to tell me all this, and I immediately went back to Adderley. He had advised me in the start never to talk to Young even if he came and begged me to do so. This time Adderley advised me, 'Let him keep the toilet, and build a new one.' That was the last I heard of the trouble. The half torn down toilet was still there when I left the Bahamas.

It was not an easy matter to get this parish started. There was the opposition of Father Chrysostom, but that I did not mind especially after he had gone to San Salvador. There was of course this trouble with Young,
Then when I said the first Mass in that church, dedicated to Our Lady of the Holy Souls, naked wenches came out of the shanties near the church and danced and shrieked outside of the church windows. I asked the few Catholic ladies who then made up the congregation to come every evening to say the Rosary. I will never forget how faithfully they came and the enthusiasm with which they prayed and sang. After one hectic week the trouble was over. Soon the building became too small and then Cuthbert Burns, the Colonial Secretary, offered me a ninety-nine year lease on government lots immediately adjacent to where our building stood. This I accepted and built a second building and connected it with the first one by a roofed over passage, which was also used as a sort of open air school. Converts were many and the parish grew.

Next I tried to get the property known as Polhemus. I wanted to convert it into a school and church. There appeared many difficulties about getting the property, and the matter never materialized, though I still had it in mind when I left. A certain Chipman offered me some property further north and east. Some Catholic people told me it would be much easier for them to get to Mass if there were a church in that direction. Chipman offered to move an entire row of shanties, where Negroes were living, over next to this lot he offered me. He never kept his word. I built Ss. Peter and Paul Church there. Father Bonaventure put the finishing touches to the building after I left.

There was some property on the west side of Nassau that I wanted to obtain. There is a high ridge there not far from the old Parade Grounds. From this elevation I could see The Priory, the lighthouse and the boats entering the harbor. My heart was set on this property. There was evidence of a building having been on the topmost spot at one time, and I was told that these were the ruins of a building that dated from the time of the Spanish occupation of New Providence. Again there was difficulty about getting clear title to the property, and I could do nothing about it before I left. The people were anxious and offered other property, which I did not like as well, and of course had no time to act.

At that time, a Catholic lady living at Sandilands, as they called it, if I remember correctly, offered her property. She had contacted Father Hyacinth. I could not go out to see these people but promised to do so if I returned.

A lady, who lived across the street from The Priory, suggested that she might give an old hotel building near Bay Street to the Mission for an eventual college. I had been entertained in the place one time at a turtle supper, which I remember was delicious. It was only a promise, which I relayed to Father Bonaventure. Evidently it was never received.

Just a few days before I left a man came to me from the Bluff, a promontory which projects into the sea at the end of Cat Island. I was deeply interested in this, because that promontory was deeply impressed on my mind when I passed there on my trips to San Salvador. I had remarked on one of those trips that we should have a mission there. This is the place where Monsignor Jerome Hawes later built his hermitage.

During those three years not only were Our Lady's and Ss. Peter and Paul built in Nassau, but also churches at Calabash Bay, Mangrove Cay, Gregory Town and Fresh Creek were built. The latter I named St. John Chrysostom's, and it pleased Father Chrysostom very much.
It was always in my mind to found a Bahamian Sisterhood, but I had only Father Hyacinth to help me, and I could only hope to start this work later when more help would be available. The administrative work and the two churches was more than enough to keep me busy. At times I fell asleep standing, and I got vomiting spells, especially when I got too tired. My health generally failed and I asked the abbot to relieve me, or at least to let me go to Minnesota to take a rest and see a doctor.

Early in September I left for Miami and St. John's. Father Bonaventure had gone to Minnesota to celebrate the silver jubilee of his ordination and had promised to be back early so that I could go north before the weather got too cold, but he kept on travelling and did not return. So he was not in Nassau when I left. I had Father Hyacinth come over from Harbour Island and take charge of the work in my absence. When Father Bonaventure arrived he sent Hyacinth back to Harbour Island and remained in Nassau himself. Father Hyacinth was a saintly, willing worker, whom I loved and admired very much, but his health was bad and he was never strong.

The abbot had written me that I might come home, rest up and see a doctor, but that then I should return to the Bahamas for another two years. I did not like this, but I agreed to it, with the understanding that I was not to return to the Islands permanently. I had explained that in my mind the time had come when the Bahamas should have a bishop, and that to my mind the most feasible arrangement would be an Abbey Nullius. I explained also that I did not want to be superior when that change came, and neither did I want it to be possible for anyone to say that I was disappointed when I did not become the bishop. I explained that I wanted to get out of the way before the change was made. That the missions should have a superior who could formulate plans and act without always running the risk of having every plan voided by an abbot 2,000 miles away, simply on the suggestion or the complaint of someone else, without even giving a hearing to the local superior who had to take all the blame for things that failed, made no sense to me. During the early summer Father Arnold Mondloch, O.S.B. had come to help in Nassau.

I arrived at St. John's just as the students were coming in for the opening of the scholastic year. On my entering his room the abbot told me that he was busy with the students coming in and did not have time to see me. It seemed peculiar, but I did as he said. The next day I got the use of Father Gerard's Ford coupe and went to St. Cloud to consult Dr. Phil Stangl. As I stepped off the car, near the Institute Building, I met young Hubert Hansen, a nephew of Father Bonaventure. Greeting me he said, 'Now Father Bonaventure is superior in the Bahamas.' I answered, 'Yes, for a month or two,' but he insisted 'No, permanently.' I was surprised at that but was not yet prepared to believe that duplicity had really gone so far, I passed it up as just a misunderstanding.

Father Bonaventure had attended a Mission Society Picnic at New Munich during his visiting. Quite naturally my mother looked him up and inquired about me. Father Bonaventure told her that I was doing nice work, but whether I returned or not, the mission would still go on, because he would still be there. The woman who overheard the remark thought Bonaventure was a funny duck. My mother felt hurt, but I explained to her that Father Bonaventure was a good holy man but a bit peculiar. Sometime later Etienne Dupuch, who was then studying at St. John's,
came to visit me at New Munich, where I was taking care of the work for Father Gerard who was sick. I had baptized Etienne and he was deeply interested in me and my work. He had spoken to the abbot and said to me, ‘Father, somebody played you dirt.’ I did not discuss the matter further. By that time I was becoming convinced that there was something going on that was not very frank, to say the least.

One day in October, 1922, the abbot said to me, ‘You had no right to change any of the men around on the islands,’ I was dumbfounded and answered, ‘I never changed any man on any island.’ The abbot said, ‘You changed Father Bonaventure from Harbour Island to Nassau.’ I answered, ‘I never changed him, nor do I want him in Nassau.’ The abbot insisted that Father Bonaventure had told him I did move him. I explained to the abbot that Father Bonaventure and I had spoken about starting a native Sisterhood, and Father Bonaventure had wanted me to get started with the work immediately. In spite of my explaining that with the two churches, which I had to take care of, and all the administrative work for Nassau and the out islands I could not possibly take on any more work. The only help I had was Father Hyacinth, a saintly and holy man, but weak and sickly, who could do only a limited amount of work. But Father Bonaventure still drove for an immediate start, and so I said, ‘If you were in Nassau, you might take over that work, as it is I am alone, and this work will have to wait until I get more help.’ That is all there was to the move. The abbot did not tell me, however, that he had now moved him to Nassau.

With all of this turning up I could not think of going back to Nassau, and I said, ‘Father Abbot, count me out, I am not going back to the Bahamas. I cannot work there any longer.’ The abbot answered, ‘But whom will I appoint in your place? I may have to appoint Father Bonaventure.’ I answered, ‘Indeed you cannot appoint Father Bonaventure. You must instead appoint someone who can handle Father Bonaventure.’ The abbot said something about possibly sending Father Hugo Tell, O.S.B. I said, ‘If you support Father Hugo as superior, it may work.’

After I was appointed pastor at New Munich, my housekeeper told me that Mary Maus, a cousin of Father Bonaventure, had quoted Father Bonaventure as saying to her, ‘This time I will land the superiorship in the Bahamas.’ At last the cat was out of the bag completely. It all agreed, especially with what his nephew said in St. Cloud to me and with what he himself indicated to my mother at New Munich. Father Bonaventure kept on writing me, inquiring about what was happening, so he could act and make the proper announcements. All I wrote him was that I was not going back, and that the abbot had told me he was sending someone else.

Father Hugo was appointed but lasted only 14 months. During the next summer the abbot came to New Munich and asked me whether I cared to go back to the Bahamas. My answer was that I would go back only under the condition that I was absolutely and strictly commanded to do so. I then told the abbot that there was only one man in the community who will qualify for that position, and that was Father Bernard of St. Anselm’s, New York. I said that he could take care of Father Bonaventure and was the only man in the community who had the contacts and the standing to collect the money which was needed for the operation of the missions. I also figured that he would get such support from the cardinal, in case of any double-crossing, that he need not worry. I was right, because a year
after that Father Bonaventure was again up north and on one occasion told me that Father Bernard would have to get out, that he was impossible and ‘we have already started to oust him.’ I thought to myself, ‘Not this time, boy.’ Perhaps the best thing I did for the missions was that suggestion to appoint Father Bernard the superior. The abbot tried to make excuses why he could not appoint him, but then he did do so. Perhaps Father Bernard would have got the appointment ultimately anyhow, but I did not know that at the time.

Father Bernard and I were never close friends. I had a little difficulty with him when he was chaplain for the students and I had charge of the servers. I tried to follow the manual, which Father Matthew Britt had written for altar boys, very scrupulously and Father Bernard came to the sacristy every day and tried to inject notions of his own, so that I did not know where I was at. Perhaps I spoke harder to him than I should have done. Certainly he remembered it and brought it to the attention of Father Chrysostom. When I spoke against him at the election of the abbot, every word I said was relayed to him, and that finished any friendly relationship between us. That, however, did not prevent me from suggesting him as superior in the Bahamas. This was an entirely different position than that of abbot of St. John’s.

With this suggestion my relationship with the Bahamas ended. I had loved the Negroes and had worked hard for them. I also felt that my work was appreciated among the colored people. A number of those people used to write to me. One of those letters impressed me very deeply when a Bahamian wrote, ‘Father, you are the only white man at whose leaving I ever shed tears.’

The early years of the twentieth century found several Catholic missionaries working for the most part together in the Bahama mission. The impact of Fathers Chrysostom and Hildebrand has been discussed. A contemporary co-laborer of theirs must now be faced for he, perhaps more than any other individual Catholic missionary, set the pace in the second missionary period and brought the Church to its present position. He is Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., who came to the Bahamas in 1920 and remained for the next thirty-four years central to the distinctive Catholic missionary apostolate that developed on the islands.

Fr. Silvan Bromenshenkel, O.S.B., summarizes precisely the character of Father Bonaventure and his work:

A man who had become as much a part of the Bahamian scene as the sunshine itself slipped quietly into eternity on the eve of December 9, 1954. He was the Very Rev. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., Pro-Vicar Apostolic of the Bahama Islands under two bishops, and Administrator of the Vicariate in the interregnum after the death of the first bishop. Father Bonaventure had just completed his 81st year and died exactly five years after the death of Bishop Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B. As our oldest and certainly one of our greatest missionaries his influence on the development of Catholicism in the Bahamas should some day be recorded in a full-length book. Space requires us here to confine ourselves to a few random observations.
If not significant, it is at least symbolic that the circumstances of Father Bonaventure's death were very like those of the legendary Father Chrysostom Schreiner's death, for in physical size and in temperament the two were much alike. Father Bonaventure died alone in his sleep at the old Hermitage in Nassau, as Father Chrysostom had died alone in his sleep on San Salvador Island just a few miles from the landfall of Columbus. Both had come to the Bahamas in very poor health and threatened with an early death. Father Chrysostom lasted from 1891 to 1928, dying at the age of 69; Father Bonaventure came in 1920 and lasted just a third of a century. When the doctor put a stethoscope on him on his 81st birthday, he told him he was good enough to be entered in the Kentucky Derby. There was a bit of hyperbole in that, for Father Bonaventure had suffered a near-fatal heart attack a month earlier, but like as not the impatient patient had warned the medico not to expect payment for a pessimistic verdict.

Father Bonaventure wasn't given to understatement himself. He once said to a young missionary, 'Give me one Catholic with enthusiasm, and I will build a parish around him.' The remark is significant because it brings out two facets of his character which no one who knew him could miss: first, one of his dominant traits was enthusiasm, enthusiasm which no opposition, defeat, or depression could dampen even for an hour; and second, he was never given to taking a dim view of the fruit of his efforts. He would have been the first to admit that the remark was an exaggeration, but it shows how he valued the potentialities of an enthusiastic Catholic, and especially an enthusiastic missionary.

When we try to place ourselves in his position as a Dakota missionary for 16 years between 1905 and 1921, and then as a man in very delicate health pioneering for the faith in the semi-tropics for another 34 years, and consider all the setbacks his energetic nature must have experienced, we begin to look around for something more than a natural explanation for his incurable optimism.

The more than natural explanation was no secret. It was the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was the fact that the Mother of God was called upon to assist him in every decision to found 'yet another' mission, and that from then on she was entrusted with the 'impossibilities' of the future which would have prompted men of a more conservative bent to bide their time. This happened not only once and again but every time he acquired another piece of property with the intention of turning it into a chapel, school, nursery, or convent. He never forgot that when he was an infant Our Lady had miraculously intervened to save his life, that she had preserved him on two other occasions when poor health found him near death, and that she had more than once rescued him from near shipwreck in the early and perilous days of out-island travel. He felt that it was the part of chivalry for him to respond by concentrating on his work and leaving the matter of his health to her. He did much to promote a fitting observance of the Marian Year, and again it is symbolic, if not significant, that he was called to his reward the first day after its close.

It cannot be denied that Father Bonaventure was something of a controversial character, and no sketch of his influence on the Bahama Missions could claim to be objective if it ignored this fact. It was in his nature to be aggressive, sanguine. You might say that he was not only
motivated but driven on in high gear by an overpowering desire to bring
the gospel to everybody, particularly those outside the faith.

To do this in the 20th century he felt that it was not enough to use
only time-tested means. His fertile mind was always restless and full of
ideas for new approaches. Naturally a man like that makes some mistakes.
He himself used to say, ‘Many times I missed the boat completely.’ But
failure or defeat never discouraged or disheartened him; it always made
him more tenacious, more resourceful. In this he took his cue from such
gallant North American pioneers as St. Isaac Jogues and St. Jean de Brebeuf,
and like them sometimes launched new programs which were rather more
sweeping than men of moderate views deemed feasible.

It is to his credit, however, that throughout his long and busy life he
always regarded himself as still a student, still in the learning stage of
missionizing. He never claimed to have all the answers nor the only ones.
He never left off studying Scripture, theology, and canon law; books on
Church history and the lives of the saints were always on his desk, open.
He was a particularly close observer of current events, both ecclesiastical
and secular, and was always eager to study and put into practice the latest
cyclical and decrees from the Holy See. The Holy See honored him in
1942 with the medal Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice.

Whether he sometimes blazed ahead too boldly or too fast, where
conservative missionaries would have staked out smaller claims and planted
in deeper soil—that is for history to decide. One thing is certain: he had
many intimate friends outside the faith who never for a moment doubted
that his aggressiveness in promoting the Catholic belief was entirely free
from any spirit of material aggrandizement, either for himself or for his
Church.

This fact has more significance when we remember that Father
Bonaventure was not a man to whom the art of diplomacy came naturally.
He was not one who impressed you as bubbling over with ‘personality’ the
first time you met him. He himself realized that he was not as sensitive to
the feelings of others as he would like to have been. He could be critical,
very critical—but never hypercritical. Along with his criticism there was
always honest recognition of what a man did well. Undoubtedly one of his
truest marks of greatness was that he never allowed his criticism to descend
to the level of disparaging or cynical remarks about those who worked with
him or for him, even when he found himself in disagreement with them.

In spite of his somewhat brusque manner—which mellowed much in
later years—there was in him that unmistakable trait of big-heartedness
which prompted his most characteristic greeting, ‘What can I do for you?’
and which later caused him to become known to old-timers of every
denomination as the ‘grand old man.’ He began his work in the Bahamas
at a time when there were still very few Catholics, thus finding himself in
the delicate position of a priest surrounded almost entirely by unbelievers.
A man of his sanguine temperament, but of lesser stature, might easily
have found himself ostracized in such surroundings, and it is in these
situations that he proved himself a man of sound Christian prudence and
a born leader. Sermons inveighing against the evils of false worship
and erroneous beliefs may have their time and place, but they avail little
when you have no congregation to listen to them.
Father Bonaventure had the important and not too common gift of seeing the good and truth, no matter how small, in all religious denominations. Without making the slightest compromise on principle or belief, he sought out the remnants of the truth which non-Catholics had succeeded in preserving from the heritage of their Catholic ancestors or from the natural law, and set to work planting the seed of the true faith in whatever good soil he found.

Nothing marked him more clearly as a missionary and a leader than the fact that he had a mind that was flexible enough to recognize good faith even in non-Catholic clergymen who opposed him, and a heart that was Christlike enough to sympathize with the aspirations and anxieties of all, believers and unbelievers. He gave up smoking many years ago, not so much on principle, as (following St. Paul) in deference to the feelings of some of his non-Catholic friends.

It is a fact that not a few of his personal friends were men of various denominations who were or are prominent in the business and political life of the Colony. By them he was regarded as a spiritual leader who was genuinely interested in common problems. They knew him as a trusted collaborator, a man who proved to them that Catholics shared the anxieties and hopes of non-Catholics and were anxious to work together with all men of integrity in building a better Bahamian community. Just five days before he died, when he was already physically very weak, he took a long motor trip with one of the prominent businessmen of the Colony to look over a new development and to make tentative plans for a future chapel.

The Bishop Bernard Memorial School, built from funds collected by a committee headed by a non-Catholic and composed largely of non-Catholics, is actually a memorial to Father Bonaventure too (the drive was launched at his instigation), and it is only one of many testimonials to prove that Catholic social and educational endeavors in the Bahamas are recognized as being for the benefit of non-Catholics too.

But probably the most lasting memorial left by Father Bonaventure, speaking on the natural level, is the memory of his unmitigated optimism—unmitigated by what must have been thousands of at least apparent failures and setbacks, unmitigated by bitter opposition and seemingly bitter defeat time and again.

That is why he could walk into the midst of opposition day after day, battering it down, or rather melting it away, by his massive and persistent presence. It was this contagious enthusiasm for his cause which made you respect him even when you couldn’t agree with him. It was also the reason why many clergymen of other denominations, though they found him always a man of uncompromising loyalty to the one true Church, could and did number him among their personal friends.

It can be said of Father Bonaventure that for Catholics and non-Catholics alike he represented a living example of militant Christianity. Whenever the history of the Church in the Bahamas is written, it will have to list him with the great Benedictine pioneers: Father Chrysostom Schreiner, Father Gabriel Roerig, and Bishop Bernard Kevenhoerster.

Father Chrysostom always insisted that prejudice against Catholicism in the Bahamas would never be removed until a Catholic mission was established on Harbour Island. A number of the leading Bahamians in
Nassau had come from Harbour Island. With the arrival of Father Bonaventure, an opportunity was finally at hand to begin organized Catholic life on Harbour Island.

A more opportune person could not be found than Father Bonaventure to undertake this difficult assignment. Throughout his long apostolate in the Bahamas, he followed the tradition Father Hildebrand had begun in advancing the work of the Catholic mission. He was ever the missionary; he was conscious daily of converting the people of the Bahamas. Father Bonaventure often said that Benedictine missionaries in the Bahamas who had been in United States parishes still had the idea that they were there when actually they were serving Bahamians. Father Bonaventure insisted that a priest had to go day by day among the people, talk with everyone along the way and strive to make oneself liked. There was no place for dictatorial tactics.

Father Bonaventure was, perhaps, the most authentic missionary of all the Benedictines in the Bahamas. He was rawboned and roughhewn, unsophisticated, difficult to live with, but a fearless and untiring pathfinder in Bahamian missiology. Father Bonaventure ever considered himself the most suitable candidate for superior of the Catholic mission in the Bahamas and worked toward that end in his own ways. He was totally convinced that he was the more worthy person. He caused much trouble for Fathers Hildebrand and Hugo in their interim tenures before the advent of Father Bernard as prior and prefect apostolic. Father Bernard did not trust Father Bonaventure at first but soon grew to rely on his judgment and expertise. As the years went on it was Father Bonaventure who inspired the prefect and later first bishop to take the timid steps he did in the Bahamas. Father Bonaventure simply could not have been the first prior or bishop of the Bahamas. He was a symbolic figure in the islands of aggressive Catholic action, apologetic encounters on the hour and defender of the true faith as he saw it. He was respected on all sides for his firm convictions. But he would hardly have been a representative leader of an emerging Christian community that had a minority image to be developed and brought to full maturity by prudent pastors such as Bishops Bernard and Leonard.

It was a blessing for Father Bonaventure himself that he was not named the presiding officer during those years. He was free to pursue his missionary inclinations on the out islands in the 1920’s and 1930’s; and in Nassau in the 1940’s and 1950’s. Father Bonaventure grew accustomed to his role as eminence grise and continued to inspire young missionaries with his spirit and drive which never faded. His memoirs, fortunately taken in 1952 during his last visit to St. John’s Abbey, reveal
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his special spiritual gift to the Bahamas. Father Bonaventure details his part of the beginnings on Harbour Island, Eleuthera and in New Providence:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. That is so I do not tell any lies. There were so few converts at first because, as Father Gabriel told me, both Archbishops Corrigan and Farley told Father Chrysostom that he was to care for the Whites and those who came to him, not for the Colored. That was the New York tradition, and it was not a mission age. The bishops and priests were not mission conscious. That consciousness came only in the last ten or fifteen years. At St. John’s there was no mission consciousness either. Fr. Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B., considered a good man by all, told me, ‘Each nation must come to Christianity by itself. There should be no foreign assistance. St. John’s shouldn’t be in the Bahamas.’

Abbot Bernard was elected abbot of St. John’s because he could keep peace between the factions. He was not involved in the quarrel over Abbot Alexius. I am convinced Abbot Alexius was maligned. Abbot Bernard made a trip to the Bahamas, but he didn’t like the setup and felt the same as Abbot Hilary had before him. In Havana they even doubted that Abbot Bernard was a priest. The vicar general there asked him to say the preliminary prayers before he would allow him to offer Mass. Abbot Bernard couldn’t and so he wasn’t allowed to offer Mass. Neither could you nor I remember the prayers in the confusion. When he returned to St. John’s he made the fathers memorize those prayers.

Abbot Bernard didn’t help the Bahamas much at all and died early. Abbot Bernard felt that the cyclone at St. John’s was the hand of God on the community for the previous quarrel over Abbot Alexius.

Abbot Peter did not help the Bahamas much either during his administration. He told Father Chrysostom and his assistants to send their Mass intentions to St. John’s and to keep the stipends in the Bahamas. St. John’s would offer the intentions and they could keep the stipends and get other ones from the East. That was generous and a help. He lent $18,000 to Father Chrysostom for financing his buildings and ventures in land. Later Abbot Alcuin asked me for that money. I told him he would never get it. It went to chapter and St. John’s voted to forget the remainder of the loan of which we had paid $8,000. St. John’s should have done that for the Bahamas.

Father Chrysostom was strong-willed and very brilliant. I had great respect for him. He told me not to come back as a student at St. John’s when he was vice president of the school. When Abbot Peter asked me to go to the Bahamas in 1920 I told him this. He said, ‘Men change; age mellows them. You will do me a great favor if you go.’ And so I did out of obedience.

Father Chrysostom was not liked by the ruling class in the Bahamas. He was considered to be a Roman intruder. They pushed tracts under his door at night all of which he answered, perhaps a bit too strongly. That was the way he was. Once he gave a powerful speech in the park that was two and a half hours long on a proposed education bill pending in the legislature. People told me that they had never heard anything like it. He was highly respected for his intelligence and courage. He had more brains in his little finger than did anyone else. He taught mathematics to the son of a minister named Burrows so he could meet the entrance requirements
for Yale University. Years later in New York this man stated that he owed all he was to Father Chrysostom. This colored man was not a Catholic.

I was a missionary as a young priest in North Dakota with twenty-six missions on the Missouri slope. That was a very important period which had much effect on my future. I built twenty-four churches and visited them every month. People say it was an impossibility, but I did it and was happy. I was a sick man who was supposed to live only three months. I was fifteen years in North Dakota. I was an ignoramus. Look up my record and you will find I did not know anything. I worked continually and never got tired.

The homesteaders were German-Russians, Lutherans, Protestants and some sprinkling of Catholics, who were building the Sioux Line railroad. I had cards printed telling the day and the hour of Masses and encouraging them to get others to attend. In travelling on the train you meet travelling men, Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, etc. We would get together until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. and they would ask questions. This was not the monastic schedule, but it was necessary. They had never met a priest before. Those fellows as far as religion was concerned were also ignoramuses, even the preachers. They got so they were glad to see me come as it was the first time they could talk to a priest without being criticized. Later I received a letters from one man who said that he was received into the Church. That is where I gained experience with Protestants.

In 1918 I went to Brazil for a year. I could have stayed but when I saw the conditions there I did not want to stay. Everything there goes to the pastor, all collections, etc. I prayed that 100 Protestants ministers would come so they would get some sense.

I volunteered to go with the doctors visiting people with the fever. In March I caught the fever and was six months in the hospital. They did not think they would get me through. Later I was sent to New York for good medical care.

In January, 1919, I went to the Bahamas. I felt homesick as I did when I came to North Dakota. It was hard. Father Bernard came for a visit from New York. We went to Hog Island, which is today Paradise Beach. It cost 25¢ to go over, but I did not fancy it so much. Some wanted to be Catholic.

I knew Father Bernard at St. John's and most of us thought he was tyrannical in class. Maybe so. At least he was not loved by the students, particularly in our class. He got so tired of Alcuin Deutsch, Raymond Basel, and me that he did not know what to do. Once when Alcuin was sitting in front of me and Father Bernard was giving a great explanation on grammar and said, 'Now we will take the preposition 'if.' I poked Henry Deutsch (Alcuin) and said, 'Since when is 'if' a preposition?' He noticed and immediately said, 'You two always have something to do.' Things of that sort always happened.

After Father Bernard went back to New York from Nassau, I did as I pleased. I started some catechism classes and a couple dozen men came for instructions. In starting out I had no plans. Father Chrysostom had got some sisters from Mt. St. Vincent on the Hudson to come to San Salvador. He had bought some land and he soon acquired some more. He had misgivings and did not want the land to go to the New York archdiocese if a diocesan superior were appointed as his successor. He wanted St. John's to have it but that could not be done as a foreign corporation can never own...
land in San Salvador. But he was incorporated as a Bahamian, Corporation Sole, Vicar Forane. Whoever was his successor would get it. Father Leander was the manager.

They had about 100 or 200 men working at $1.00 a day. The people did not have much. He started a store where they could buy shoes, food, etc. Brother Bede came from St. John's to help, but in two or three months the money was gone. When the next Knights of Columbus payment came that went just as quickly. It was not rightly controlled. He ordered 2,000 coconuts to be planted and that cost money. The old walls had to be rebuilt to keep cattle in. He had the idea that there was money in cattle, but there were no transportation facilities. Even if the stock was well fed they had to be a couple of weeks on the boat to Nassau and there would be nothing left when they got there. The money was always gone.

When Father Chrysostom went to New York to collect money, I was alone in Nassau for four months and worked on making converts.

Father Gabriel wanted to leave for Germany to see his mother, so I went to Andros until November. I spoke to everyone, they seemed friendly enough and many wanted to talk about religion. I must have received about twenty into the Church before I left. There was a Syrian family there and we had Mass in their house at times.

After Father Chrysostom came back from New York, he expected me back from Andros. When we set sail we could not move one way or the other. We had only gone ten or fifteen miles when the wind dropped, so we waited. Then the current carried us a little bit off. The next day the wind came up just a little. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, we drifted and did not have much food. But that did not bother me because I was used to going without food. So I gave the others on board some prunes. We were out there until Thursday afternoon at 2:00 when we saw at a distance of three or four miles what we thought were waves. We thought the wind was coming but nothing came. One of the men climbed up the spar and said they were grampus (a huge fish resembling a whale). They spout water up in the air like whales. They came nearer and nearer and we tried to keep out of their way. They were always in pairs, their backs out of the water. I counted eighty of those giants. They are usually seen only in pairs of two or so. This was most unusual.

On Friday I was saying my breviary when the breeze came up. The old captain blamed the compass because he did not know where to go. The shallow water is called 'white' because of the coral below, but the deep sea is dark. The old colored fellows have an instinct and they said they knew where we were. So we started out and I crawled in and slept. Early in the morning I woke and shaved as best I could with a safety razor and they said we were southwest of New Providence going south. It might take us until the afternoon to get there. He said there was a road close which went right to Nassau and he asked me if I would want to walk it. They put me ashore and I walked in the six miles to St. Francis Xavier Church. The Sisters of Charity who had just come from New York were there fixing up the church. Father Chrysostom was so glad to see me that he hugged me.

Next I opened a mission at Fresh Creek and stayed with a Baptist. Then I went to Staniard Creek for a short time and Father Anthony went to Andros.
How did I get to Harbour Island? This gives the character of Father Chrysostom. He wanted the sisters to go to San Salvador. He got them under false pretext and then shunted them over to Harbour Island. They could not go to San Salvador because they had no place to live and no transportation. I knew something was in the air. He ordered a nice big meal; he didn't miss a thing. It didn't mean much to me though because I did not drink coffee, wine, beer, ate no meat, a little fish was all, and no butter—see how crazy I was? He had a nice steak, wine, etc. He also wore a new suit of clothes as if he were entertaining the governor.

When everything was finished the cook cleared the table and then I knew something was coming. He said, 'Father Bon-ah-venture.' I said, 'Speak, my Lord.' And then he said, 'Will you do me the favor of going to Harbour Island and opening a Catholic mission there and break the backbone of Protestantism in the islands? We have no chance of getting along in Nassau unless the backbone is broken.' I said, 'I should go and do all that? What do you expect? Where is Harbour Island? Who and what is there?' He said, 'Harbour Island is the Boston of the Bahamas.' Harbour Island is the first place settled by white people. Harbour Island is where the schools are and where the people are.' At one time there were probably 8,000 people; in my time about 800 or 900. It was really true that the Methodists were supreme there, but I did not know it because I was too new. This was in the fall, 1921.

I said I would not go because I had to go home and would take it up with Father Abbot. Well, before he had come to the Bahamas, a girl came from Harbour Island, some schoolmarm by the name of Marion Johnson. She was the catechist and sacristan of the Anglican church on Harbour Island. The Anglican mission congregated in her home. She read Catholic papers such as the Catholic Universe from London, the Catholic Times, the London Tablet and Catholic books. She had scruples about her baptism as she had been baptized by the Methodists although her folks were Anglican. She thought she should be baptized again and her folks laughed at her. She could not see it that way so she took the next mail boat to Nassau to see Father Chrysostom about being baptized. Father Chrysostom said, 'If you want to be baptized you have to live a Catholic life. How can you live as a Catholic on an island where there is no Catholic priest?' This was the year before I came. He told her to go back and he did not baptize her. He called the sisters and asked them to take her for the night. Then he gave her material on Anglican orders, etc. The sisters talked to her and she went to the chapel and prayed. She could not make up her mind.

On Friday, as she was going down the hill to the boat, she realized she was making a mistake and came back to the sisters. The sisters went with her to the chapel and she said, 'I am ready to be baptized.' Sister asked her if she knew what she meant; she said she did. Then she went to Father Chrysostom. He gave her some more literature to read and baptized her that evening. The next morning she received Communion. Then she went back home and did not say anything to anyone. She never went back to the Anglican Church and they called her godless. She was living with a Hattie Thompson but never talked to her about what she had done because Hattie was a Methodist. But like women are, when Marion was gone to school, Hattie would look at her books. She read them and asked questions. Then Hattie got Roman fever, too. Marion brought her to Nassau.
where she was baptized and her parents disowned her. They are still there today and prepare the meals for the priests.

I went to Harbour Island in 1922. I did not know how to proceed when I got there. Father Chrysostom brought the sisters and then went home to Nassau. We had the rosary every evening the first month. We bought a house which is still a part of the church. Things were going along all right. Then the Methodists got the jitters. Father Chrysostom had told them that the whole island had to become Roman Catholic. He told them that he was going to send a man who would fix them. ‘You Methodists will find out what will happen to you, etc.’ When I came the Methodist minister sent out an SOS cable to Hope Town. There was a Goodman Roberts, a native of Harbour Island, but he had turned to the Holderite sect. If you belong to that church you only have to believe you are saved. You are free from all sin. He told them to send the best preachers they had because the Roman Catholics were invading the island and threatening to turn all of the people Catholic.

After a fortnight the boat brought evangelists to preach against me. I had services for about two hours every evening in the old store that Father Chrysostom had bought for $500. I had repaired it and put it in shape. The Methodist minister knew all the weak-kneed ones so he ordered hundreds of Protestant Truth Society Tracts from London. They advertised £10,000 reward for any Catholic who could prove from Scripture that Peter was not married, £1,000 that we should pray to Mary, £1,000 that man can forgive sins, etc. There was a sympathetic old fellow, an Anglican, who called me in and showed me the stuff. I asked if I could have it. He said no, that he had to give it back. But I asked for it and told him to tell them that it was taken. So I published on the bulletin boards near the church that the Protestant Truth Society would like to have information and I would be happy to give information that would be useful for them. Come and see if I win the prize.

I divided each point up into two parts and covered the catechism pretty well. And did I have crowds! That’s where I made the converts; over 200 in five years. Cardinal Hayes came to Harbour Island that first year and confirmed the two girls, Marion and Hattie. The Protestants announced that the Pope had come. Cardinal Hayes took me out walking. He said it was not an easy job; if I had two or three converts a year I should not think I had failed. He thought I would lose courage, but I never did.

Only later did I learn the value of my not eating or drinking much and not smoking. They wanted some pretext to get me off the island. They came to me and would ask, ‘How do you like our island?’ I told them how nice it was—weather, climate, flowers, people. Others asked the same. They would say that the people say awful things about me. I would say they must be the exception because all the people I meet are awfully nice. Another one would ask how do you feel. I would say I never felt better in my life. They could not get me mad at anything. No matter what they said I always used the same approach. That was the secret of my mission work.

I experimented with the methods of the new liturgical movement on Harbour Island. I had begun the Missa Recitata as early as 1912 in North Dakota and I brought it to the Bahamas. Abbot Alcuin said nothing against it but he thought it couldn’t be used generally. But I told him it could be
done. We had it about two years in Garrison, North Dakota, when Bishop Vincent Wehrle, O.S.B., a pious man, made his annual visit to the Indian reservation. We did not discuss the Missa Recitata, but in the sacristy I told him about our use of it. I told him the sisters would answer if he was loud. He was insulted when I handed him a card to read the prayers. I said, 'All right.' I knew that he would be ditched. So he went into the church for Mass. When the people answered he forgot the Judica. He began it again 'Judica me . . .' and couldn't remember. I knew this would happen because prayers are harder to remember when you say them slower and publicly. So I handed him the card. After Mass he said it was the greatest experience he ever had, and that he would stay another morning for Mass.

The people in Harbour Island were Protestant converts. From the very beginning we had them learn the Gloria and Credo by reciting them slowly. The people liked this. It was a means of conversion.

We went to New York for the Eucharistic Congress and stayed at St. Anselm's parish. Fathers Maurus, Richard, Alfred, Xavier, Anthony, Louis, I and maybe one or two others were at dinner once when the Missa Recitata came up. Father Bernard was very prudent and listened to what the others said. I thought I knew what he was thinking. The others did not think it would work out. They had the laugh on me for another cause. Father Xavier was hebdomadarian and they laughed at him because of his Roman pronunciation of the Latin—'Jube Domine benedicere.' Father Maurus with all his wisdom wanted to prove they were wrong. He said, 'All you fellows know how to do is Brrrrrrrrrrrrrr.' They laughed and laughed. Father Alfred said he thought it would work out wonderfully. I got up from my place and shook hands with him. I said, 'You are the only one who agrees with me. I want to establish it in every parish.'

Charlie Bularzik, who is Father Rembert now, was with me at the time. I trained him for the priesthood. It was said at that table that you couldn't do with the colored people what you could do with the white. 'Oh yes you can,' I said, 'they're just as smart. They just have to say their prayers slower.' The trouble was with the priest and not with the people.

Father Bernard knew that I favored the Missa Recitata and he did not say anything about it. Father Arnold made a great improvement when he came to the Bahamas. He introduced the practice of having a leader say the prayers with the people in English while the priest would offer Mass at the altar in Latin. Prior Bernard did not do it in New York before he came to the Bahamas; he said it could not be done. I had it in Nassau before Father Bernard came. The sisters were there during the summer and instead of summer school I gave them books in which I had typed the Latin pronunciation to start the people out on the Missa Recitata. Those who could not read got it by sound. We tried it Sunday after Sunday. We began with the Gloria and got that down. Before very long we participated in the whole Mass. We used Fr. Cuthbert Goeb's Offeramus to get it going. Some tourists from the Bronx happened to come to Sacred Heart Church. It was the experience of their life. The children and people were answering in English through the entire Mass. The sisters gave some books to the visitors and they prolonged their visit. They called Father Bernard and said that the experience they had was wonderful. Never in their life had they heard anything like that. He wrote me a letter and told me to introduce this in all the parishes that I had in the Bahamas.
Sr. Marie de Lourdes Walsh tells the story well of the arrival of the Sisters of Charity on Harbour Island in 1922. The conversion of the Albury family, the vocations of Carl and Carrie Albury, the faith of Marian Johnson and Hattie Thompson, the two cornerstones of the new Catholic Church on Harbour Island, are also recorded here. These first Catholic laity of 'Briland,' as Harbour Island is called by Bahamians, evidence the distinctive and deep faith of the out islanders. As the Church was developed in these years from New Providence to Andros, Harbour Island, San Salvador, Eleuthera, Bimini and Long Island, a dimension was added to Bahamian Catholicism that is its most faithful and beautiful expression. Sister Marie de Lourdes writes of Harbour Island beginnings:

A manuscript left in the archives of Mount St. Vincent by Sister Mary Regina Lynch indicates that the community's second mission in the Bahama Islands was very nearly established on San Salvador, the island beloved by Father Chrysostom as the landfall of Columbus. The intrepid missionary envisioned, as a matter of fact, a mission station and parish school on each of the out-islands which he listed in an article on the Bahamas written in 1906 for the Catholic Encyclopedia, published that year. Curiously he omitted from the list Harbour Island on which, in preference to San Salvador, and even to Andros, the largest and most heavily populated of the out-islands, he would in 1922 establish a parish with a resident priest, a church, a convent, an academy and a parish school.

Harbour Island, unbelievably, competed at one time with Nassau for the position of Capital of the Bahamas. Its population was almost three thousand; its harbour often saw from twenty to twenty-five three-masted schooners lying at anchor to carry adjacent Eleuthera's pineapple crop to the eastern seaboard of the United States. The population began to dwindle after Nassau was chosen as the capital, and the more progressive Harbour Islanders migrated to the larger city.12

The amazing story of the Harbour Island mission begins with the conversion of sixteen-year-old Carrie Albury, whose mother was one of the leading members of the Methodist congregation in Dunmore Town. Carrie was invited by an aunt who lived in Key West to spend a year with her in order to take a business course at an academy conducted by the Sisters of the Holy Name in that city. On a first Friday the other students attended Benediction in the convent chapel. Since Carrie would not join them, her teacher provided her with an assignment in typing to occupy her time. As she began her work, she could hear her classmates singing a Benediction hymn. In spite of her inborn prejudice, Carrie was suddenly overcome by a sense of the Presence of God. Against her will, she had received the gift of faith.

Recalled home by her indignant mother, Carrie remained true to her convictions during four years in which she had no contact with a Catholic. Her fidelity won the conversion of her brother Carl, who later entered the priesthood, and of a friend, who became a religious. When the Albury family moved to Nassau, Carrie and her brother were received into the Catholic Church. A few years later Carl Albury began his studies for the Priesthood and Carrie entered the Sisters of Service in Canada....
Dismissing his plans for San Salvador, Father Chrysostom asked Mother Vincentia for three Sister of Charity for Harbour Island. On February 6, 1921, he sailed for 'Briland,' as the natives called it, to look over the possibilities of opening a mission. The following morning he offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the first time on the island in Marian and Hattie's home. Assisting at the Mass also were Carrie Albury and Connie Clare of Nassau, and a Mr. Frank Sherman, a Catholic visitor from Jamestown, New York, who was a generous benefactor of the Benedictine mission.

In November Father Chrysostom purchased four pieces of property for a church, rectory, convent and school. Local prejudice made it difficult to buy a home for the Sisters. He finally secured a battered shell of a house, already a century old, according to ancients of the island, but conveniently near the church and school. The church was still under construction and the convent was being reconditioned when the Sisters arrived on January 28, 1922. Sister Mary Giovanni Murphy, Sister Maria Agatha Sissler and Sister Catherine Miriam Snee were all new to missionary life. They were accompanied by Sister Mary Regina Lynch, Assistant Mother at this time, and Sister Maria Rose O'Neill, superior of the boys' asylum at Kingsbridge until its closing just four days before she sailed for Nassau.

Since the convent was not ready, Marian [Johnson] and Hattie [Thompson] received into their home the five Sisters of Charity and with them the inestimable privilege of having the Blessed Sacrament reserved in their home for six months. In preparation for the first Mass on the following morning, the Sisters worked until a late hour fashioning an antependium that would cover the crude wooden frame of the altar. Incense for Benediction they had brought from Nassau, but the censor was created that night by punching holes in a polished tomato can, suspended from wire chains. Mass was offered every weekday morning in their parlor, while from the porch curious eyes peered through the open windows at the unfamiliar ritual.

St. Vincent's Academy opened on February 2 in a combined school-chapel building. The sixteen pupils who presented themselves had been gathered together by Marian Johnson before the Sisters arrived. The following morning, the first Friday of February, Mass was offered for the first time in this building as it would be in future on Sundays. Weekday Mass continued to be offered in the temporary convent and later in the actual convent.

With the opening of the school, evening devotions were introduced. The academy children were at this date all non-Catholic, since the parishioners still numbered only two. With amazing alacrity the children pushed desks and tables to the walls and made of the room some semblance of a church. In the morning, school was set up again in time for class. The Sisters moved into their permanent home on the eve of the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul.

Life was even more primitive in St. Vincent's Convent than in St. Francis Xavier's, Nassau. The Sisters ate meat, usually mutton, in preference to goat. They collected rain water in large tubs and heated it on the kerosene stove. A few pieces of furniture came from the boys' asylum at Kingsbridge, but they were obliged to carry their three chairs from the chapel to the refectory and, at night, to their bedrooms....
When in 1931 Father Hyacinth became ill, Father Leander Roerig, O.S.B. came to Harbour Island to fill in temporarily. He remained for twenty-three years. As described by Sister Joseph Mercedes Kerins, Superior of the Harbour Island mission from 1951 until 1954:

Father Leander had grown reserved and silent among his own parishioners when he was not disarmed by the shy openness of the very young. A naturally hospitable and congenial man, he looked to his 'up shore missions' on Eleuthera for a respite from the gracious suspiciousness and smiling hostility of the 'Brilanders.'

Father Leander traveled regularly to four widely scattered mission stations on Eleuthera. Even in his late sixties he trekked ten or fifteen miles on footpaths that skirted jagged cliffs above the sea. He thought nothing of answering sick calls at night, traveling by boat and on foot through a wilderness illuminated by the amazingly near, incandescent stars of the tropics.

The Sisters paid dearly for Father Leander's missionary zeal, for his absences from Harbour Island totaled as many as 175 days a year. On Sunday mornings the Sisters took turns conducting services. They led the prayers, 'raised the hymns,' as Bahamians say, and read from a book of homiletics the sermon assigned for the day. They baptized those in danger of death and conducted the internment services for the dead.

When Mother Mary Josephine spent a Mass-less weekend on Harbour Island in 1949, she appealed to Bishop Bernard to send a priest from Nassau to substitute for Father Leander. The scarcity of priests made it difficult to make this provision. It was several years before the days without Mass and Holy Communion had dwindled to ten or twelve in the course of a year.

In the early years the Sisters met antagonism at every turn. They had only to step out of the convent to have the passerby cross to the other side of the street to avoid meeting them. In the words of Father John H. McGoeys, S.F.M.:

In Harbour Island the Sisters met bigotry more excessive than that of Nassau in the first days after their arrival there. They persevered, and won the people by their charity and long-suffering to the extent that, largely through their efforts, the island was more than 25 percent Catholic within thirty years. No one can discount the early work of Father Chrysostom, or the tenacious evangelizing of Father Bonaventure. But it is a fact that the island was won by the daily efforts of the Sisters of Charity in the classrooms of St. Benedict's School. Even today two-thirds of the students are non-Catholics, and although they are not often won for the Church, bigotry is all but a thing of the past.

Even in comparison with Nassau, Harbour Island is unique among the mission houses of Mount St. Vincent... Three Sisters of Charity by their own volition live, for three years at a stretch, dependent upon a sporadic mail service for contact with relatives, members of their community and other friends. But they know everyone on the island, and they walk—or bicycle—through its sunny streets with the familiarity of old friends.

The islanders accept these smiling, tender-hearted women as casually as they accept the incredible beauty of their turquoise sea. Beneath this apparently casual acceptance lies a century of religious antagonism that in some cases no amount of kindness can reach. For the reconciliation of a
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single soul with God, the missionaries will offer self-denial and prayer for months and years with uncalculating prodigality.

Out of a total population of approximately 1,000 there are currently about 240 Catholics on Harbour Island, some of whom are consistently faithful to their obligations, others only occasionally so. With Sister Maria Generosa McConnell, superior and principal, Sister Regina Francis Maher, and Sister Regina Michael Lowe constituting the staff, St. Benedict’s School had in 1959 an enrollment of 178 pupils, of whom more than half were non-Catholic. In January of 1960 Sister Maria Generosa was obliged to give up her missionary work because of illness. She was succeeded as superior and principal by Sister Regina Francis, whose eleven years of labor in Harbour Island had been apostolic in character and in scope.

In addition to constant contact with the poor of Harbour Island, the Sisters do catechetical work on the adjacent island of Eleuthera whenever opportunity offers. Here Fathers Craig Strang and Paul Pendergast of the Scarborough Foreign Missionary Society have twelve mission chapels. At Hatchet Bay and Gregory Town, settlements that have been built up by an American dairy products concern and at Alice Town and Governor’s Harbour, the Sisters remain for several days at a time, walking eight or ten miles at a stretch to visit more primitive sections with regional novel names: The Bluff, The Current and the Upper and Lower Bogue.

A typical week-end program begins with the ringing of the church bell to announce the arrival of the Sisters. The entire settlement congregates around the small house which has been prepared for the visitors who find it difficult to convince the natives that they need a few moments to set up their household and say their community prayers. Then a long and strenuous afternoon and evening begin. Religious instruction and choir practice for Mass the following morning break the ice. Until their departure on Sunday the Sisters give every free moment to the islanders, catechising, counseling, visiting the sick in their homes, teaching the charity of Christ by their own radiant example.

Father Bonaventure, and after him Father Leander, soon moved to the “upshore missions” on Eleuthera Island just north of Harbour Island. Eleuthera was that beautiful island inhabited in the seventeenth century by the abortive Puritan colonists from Bermuda who settled the rich farmland, rolling countryside and good fishing developments. The majority of the inhabitants in the twentieth century, apart from the Whites of Spanish Wells, were of African descent, free and freed Negro Bahamians. Louis Thompson, a member of the well-known Thompson-Johnson family of Eleuthera, commentator at parish liturgical celebrations, recalled the history of the coming of Catholicism to that island on a large piece of cardboard in prose reminiscent of New Testament simplicity and grace of faith:

Saint Gregory’s Church was born in Gregory Town, August of 1926. Father Bonaventure, O.S.B., of happy memories was her founder. Father Bonaventure, accompanied by James Roberts, her first catechist, were brought here by Constable Rupert C. Wood. They stayed with Mr. Wood and family from Harbour Island. The first Mass was said in Constable
Wood's house which was on the south side of the present church. Father Bonaventure later bought the house and land where the church now stands.

The next morning Father Bonaventure and James Roberts came walking out to the public park where the school kids were playing before school. He began giving out holy pictures to the children. He then told them he would be having catechism class this evening and every evening for all who wish to come; and later in the night he will have a service in the park and all were very welcome to come. He went from house to house every night talking with the people. When he went back to Harbour Island, James Roberts continued the catechism class and the service. He gathered a good crowd of kids who were very faithful to the classes. In a few months' time he was ready for the first baptism. He rented a two-story house owned by a man named Joe Annies. James Roberts lived upstairs and downstairs was the church. The house was on the western side of Edgar Cartwright's house. This newborn church had many enemies and at nighttime the church had to be closed during the service. Bad people threw stones at the house. Like Saint Paul she was stoned but she came out victorious. The church was then built of wood, 25 x 50, on the same spot as the present church. It was dedicated and given the name, Saint Gregory's Church. The town received its name after a famous governor, named Mr. John Gregory. The church was named after one of the four Latin Doctors of the Church, Saint Gregory the Great who lived from 540 to 604. Cardinal Hayes of New York confirmed the first converts. In spite of the torture from the enemy the crowd daily increased. We all gave him a big hand. Father Bonaventure was a valiant man.

After the first confirmation Father Bonaventure was replaced with Father Hyacinth (Cismowski) O.S.B., who was sickly and had to go. Father Philip (Bahner) O.S.B., came and the climate disagreed with him and he went. Father Eloi (Justou) O.S.B., came and built a boat to go from Gregory Town to Cotton Hole back and forth for the mission. It was called the Flying Cloud and was captained by Mr. Alphonso Johnson. After many months Father Eloi went and Father Leander (Roerig) O.S.B., came, and for twenty-six years the last week in the month he was here from Harbour Island.

In 1933 the hurricane blew the wooden church down and it was rebuilt by Father Leander. Bishop Bernard (Kevenhoerster) O.S.B., was the first Catholic Bishop of the Bahamas. Every two years he visited his flock in Gregory Town. In 1949 Bishop Bernard died and Bishop Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., was consecrated bishop. He sent Father Leander to Bimini. We were sad to say he was drowned and never was found. Mr. Alphonso Johnson was the next catechist and after some years he resigned. In 1934 Mr. Samuel L. Thompson was made the catechist and was since the same. They both worked under Father Leander. During Father Leander's last year he introduced Father Craig Strang of the Canadian Foreign Mission Society, and for the past seventeen years these priests carry on the work. Father Paul Pendergast, S.F.M., laboured some of the time. Last but not least of the same order is our parish priest, Father Charles Cummins, who took over and is among the greatest.

During the years of Father Leander's administration the 25 x 50 wooden church got cluttered and a small addition was made to add six more benches. Finally, in January of 1963 the new Saint Gregory's was begun.
The credit of the new church goes to Father John H. McGoey, S.F.M., who provided the most of the money that was needed. May God grant him life eternal is our prayer. The church was dedicated December 15, 1963, at two o’clock by the Most Reverend Bishop Hagarty, O.S.B. There were representatives to the dedication as far as Rock Sound to Harbour Island. The priest and sisters from Rock Sound and Harbour Island also were in attendance. Saint Gregory’s Church is the oldest Catholic church on Eleuthera. She is next to Harbour Island who had in February celebrated her Golden Jubilee. In 1970 our Parish Council was formed and in the fall its officers and members were installed to their office.

The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a mustard seed which a man took to sow in his field which is indeed the smallest of all seeds. When it is grown up it becomes a tree greater than all herbs and birds of the air come to dwell in its branches (Matthew, 13-32).

Father Bonaventure in 1926 made converts among others of Zachaeus Thompson (died 28 November 1941) and his wife Selvania Johnson Thompson (died 30 April 1967). Zachaeus Thompson had twenty children, ten by his first wife and, after her death, ten by his second wife. Zachaeus was a hard-working farmer on Eleuthera, a giant of a man who weighed 400 pounds, “elephant weight,” as the family fondly recalls. Zachaeus never owned land of his own but worked by share, returning one-fourth of the produce to the owner. He only owned the land on which his house stood. Zachaeus’ grandfather, Jeffrey Scabilla, was a Spaniard who had come to Eleuthera and married a Negress at Sweeting Place; Zachaeus’ wife also was a Negress.

During his last three years before he died at age sixty-six, Zachaeus was sick. During that time he gave an “object lesson” to his sons. He told them to bring him a stick each day when they returned home from work. The first day he broke one stick easily across his knee, then tied four sticks together and said, “Here, you are big, strong men; break these sticks over your knees.” None of the sons could do it and Zachaeus went on to say, “You see, there is strength in numbers. Always stay and work together and no one will ever be able to hold you down.”

This was his legacy to his family, Louis Thompson stated in an interview on 30 April 1972. The brothers, Samuel, Emmanuel, Louis and George have remained as partners in several enterprises on Eleuthera in land, retail, services and a tourist resort. The families participate in these enterprises and all are provided for as they need. It is a remarkable example of what can be accomplished through cooperation of a tribal clan. Of the sons, Emmanuel is the president of the parish council of St. Gregory’s parish, Samuel has been catechist and choir director for nearly forty years, Louis is commentator and lay leader of the liturgical services, and George was a member of Parliament in the Bahamas, one of the three representatives from Eleuthera. One daughter is Sister
Margaret, O.S.B., superior of the St. Martin’s community of Bahamian sisters at Hunter, Grand Bahama, and the other daughters are mothers of fine families. It is a classical example of Christian family cooperation, and the Thompsons of Eleuthera take pride in their tradition.

Zachaeus was a Methodist who also attended the Adventist and Anglican services; Selvania was an Anglican. When Father Bonaventure began in 1926 to move among the people of Gregory Town, Eleuthera, in his inimitable way, he asked questions of the children about their families. George Thompson, then only six years old, but already with “plenty tongue” as the family now josh, told Father Bonaventure all about his father and mother and brothers and sisters. Father Bonaventure wrote it down in his little black book which he always carried. That evening the Anglican catechist came to Zachaeus and told him he had heard he was going to become a Catholic since the Roman Catholic priest had written his name in his book. When George got home that evening he received a sound whipping from his father for giving information to the priest. Zachaeus had no intention of becoming a Catholic until the persecution of the little Catholic congregation began with the throwing of stones at the poor little building and enmity heaped upon the priest and catechist. Zachaeus and Selvania and their entire family then became Catholics. Louis Thompson concluded, “The first big enemies in the long run became friends. Father Bonaventure was no jellyfish. That was a man. The enemies were afraid of him when he opened his mouth.”

Zachaeus went to Charleston, South Carolina, in the hard times of 1918 to find work and took out American citizenship papers. But he and his family persevered on Eleuthera because, as Louis said so characteristically, “We love Eleuthera. We stayed here in our homeland to live and to praise the Lord.”

And praise the Lord they do. One has to attend a Sunday or daily Mass at Gregory Town to appreciate the fervor and volume of participation in St. Gregory’s parish. There is nothing quite like it. Louis stands at the ambo giving commentary and leading the congregation in song and responses; Sam is at the rear of the beautiful church leading the choir. The shingles of the church roof rattle, especially when the two congregations from the Bogue and Alice Town join the mother parish for major parochial events such as confirmation. The bishop is welcomed at the outskirts of Gregory Town and escorted to St. Gregory’s by the men of the parish and the town band. The aspirations of the German Catholic liturgical and community movements of the nineteenth century, the pastoral participation efforts of the American Benedictines, the missionary zeal and efficiency of the Canadian Foreign Mission fathers all combine at Gregory Town. They meet there the ancient tribal clan and family
traditions of the people of Eleuthera to produce an authentic and dignified manifestation of the Christian faith which is unequalled even in the splendor of a cathedral in Rome, Cologne, Toronto or New York.

Fr. Denis Parnell, O.S.B., was sent in 1922 by Abbot Alcuin to the Bahamas where he served for thirteen years before returning to Minnesota to work among the Chippewa Indians. Father Denis was an energetic and dedicated priest throughout his entire life among Bahamians and Chippewas. In the Bahamas he worked in Nassau, on Andros and San Salvador. He was the first to extend a Catholic presence to Long Island which he visited from his San Salvador mission in Riding Rock. Long Island was the second landing place of Columbus. Henry Taylor, a school teacher on the island, had been taking instruction by correspondence from Father Denis and was baptized at St. Francis Xavier in 1924. After three months eight other men were baptized at Long Island. Father Denis opened three mission stations on the island. On his last visit to the southern station Father Denis preached for four hours on the Church.

When Fr. Arnold Mondloch, O.S.B., came to the Bahamas in 1928 he became the first resident priest on Long Island and he opened three more missions. Father Arnold was a forceful man who had been a popular prefect at St. John's University before the abbot sent him to the Bahamas as he would send so many in the years ahead. It became a by-word among the clerics and junior priests at St. John's, "Will you be sent to the Bahamas?" Abbot Alcuin asked all of them along the line, "If I send you to the Bahamas, will you go?" In this way he was striving year after year to instill a consciousness of missionary work among the young members of that community, and to tie the Bahama mission firmly to the community's apostolate. It was the beginning of a new age for clerical support of Bahamian Catholicism. Father Arnold built five churches on Long Island, encouraged farming enterprises, carried on his own research into Arawak history of the islands and found several valuable Arawak remains and artifacts in caves. Father Arnold was beloved among the people of the Bahamas and his early death in 1944 was a real loss that was keenly felt.

Brothers Bede Seither and Joseph Tlusty, O.S.B., were sent from St. John's in 1923 to assist in construction and maintenance. The fathers and brothers labored daily in the early years to build up the physical plants. They had to learn to be jack-of-all-trades because they never had enough money for the basic essentials. They worked with the people as laborers and were respected and loved for their humility and service. It was the ancient Benedictine principle—Ora et Labora—brought to the Bahamas and the Bahamians responded with open hearts as Romans, Angles, Franks, Huns, Goths and Americans had done before them. The
Bahamas inherited a rich tradition of simple Christian community life. It would be enriched as the years went on by this admixture of the oldest Christian community experience with indigenous life patterns. It was not always an easy process of adaptation to the Bahamian life-style and the assimilation is still going on.

The years of the 1920's saw the opening of several new missions. One of them, at Mangrove Cay, Andros Island, begun in April, 1920, was a new experience for the missionaries because many people of this community were still non-Christian in religion. Yet, when Father Gabriel visited this new mission on 10 April 1921, just a year after its founding, he “baptized 50 persons who also received Holy Communion.”

A second mission was founded on Watling's Island (San Salvador) and in 1922 another was begun on Harbour Island. On 2 February 1922, the thirty-first anniversary of Father Chrysostom's arrival in the Bahamas, the new chapel on Harbour Island was dedicated and the school was formally opened with an enrollment of twenty-two pupils under the care of three Sisters of Charity, who had arrived on January 28. Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., assumed charge of this new mission on Harbour Island on 18 February 1922, and several months later, on 3 May 1922, the first four converts were baptized.

Meanwhile from the new San Salvador mission Father Leander wrote, in a letter dated 13 April 1922:

Once a month a sailboat puts me in touch with civilization. From eight to ten days it takes the boat to make the run from Nassau to Watlings.

With present convenience for sailing to Nassau to see a confrere, once a year is the best that can be expected, because the voyages are full of danger and hardships and consume a whole month. On my last voyage to Nassau in November, a gale overtook us in the evening and tussled with the sailboat for twelve hours. Every moment seemed to be a life and death struggle. An auxiliary motor boat owned by the mission would be a great boon to attend to the scattered missions and a civilized convenience to meet a fellow priest at shorter intervals.

My first spiritual harvest here, forty souls, was taken in on the feast of St. Joseph, the result of one year's planting and cultivating. But, Deus incrementum dat. To God belongs all honor and praise for such a successful year. My young flock cheerfully submitted to a full year's training before boarding St. Peter's Bark.

Our daily school work begins at nine o'clock with holy Mass. Though most of the children have a four to six-mile walk to school, they are seldom late, and since reception day many come fasting to enable them to receive our dear Lord....

On the feast of St. Benedict I opened a school twelve miles to the southeast and at the first lecture there on the Catholic Church I had an overcrowded meeting. The people living to the southwest have sent me word that they too would come and begin catechetical work. After Mass and Benediction on Sundays at the main mission, instruction is given at a
settlement ten miles to the south and I return the same day. All my over­
land travelling is on horseback, and soon a second horse will be needed to
attend to the scattered sheep within and without the fold. At times
instruction is given the people under a shady tree, on the public road, in one
of the meeting houses, or from horseback.

Since my arrival on Watlings fourteen months ago, my home is a
thatched hut dating from slavery days. A shingle roof, I trust, will shelter
me by July. The walls of the new two-storey convent are completed and,
please God, the roof-work will be well under way when these lines reach
you. Two Baptist ministers helped in building the walls. A re-roofed old
mansion of slavery days serves for my present church and school. I am
praying the good Lord to send the Sisters in time for the opening of the
school year in September. My two catechists are doing excellent work. The
prospects for the Catholicization of Watling’s are good indeed.

My Missal is old, but is still serving its daily task. An English Missal
would come in very handy, for the Epistles and Gospels of the daily Mass
are read to the people. My only set of vestments needs mending badly. To
the good Catholic ladies of St. Cloud I am indebted through Father
Bonaventure for altar cloths and second-hand clothing for myself and my
poor people.

A plain chant High Mass will be sung by my forty-voice choir on
Easter. At times I find it rather embarrassing to be choir leader, not too sure
of the notes, and no musical instrument to fall back on for correction, and
yet the children take me for a wonder in singing.

From Harbour Island Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., wrote on 5 April
1922 as follows:

During Lent, in this new mission on Harbour Island, we had Stations
Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings, then a sermon. A goodly crowd
was present. I also took occasion to make a public novena in honor of St.
Joseph and called upon his powerful patronage in behalf of the Church.
Tomorrow (May 3), I will receive my first harvest into the Church—four
in number—and I have six more under instructions. Today I received a
request from a trustee of the Methodist church to give him and his wife
an early reception. His daughter and his son are to follow his example. I
think St. Joseph is doing his work splendidly.

My boys already serve at Benediction and after a few days I will have
them serve in full ministerial raiment at the altar.

The Most Reverend Archbishop of New York was here and paid a
short visit to this town. He was charmed with its quaintness and isolation.
Two of my flock he confirmed.

There was much mission activity in the islands during these years.
More priests arrived, Abbot Alcuin paid visits, additional sisters came
to teach in the new schools that were opened, but the need for more
missions continued. The people at Fresh Creek and Long Bay Cays, both
on Andros, requested that missions be opened there. Settlements in
Eleuthera, Long Island, Cat Island, Inagua and Acklins Island also made
the same plea.
The following, mostly excerpts from mission reports, describe some of the mission activity in the twenties:

**1922**

On the feast of Saint Bonaventure Father Chrysostom blessed the new convent at the Blessed Sacrament Mission at Harbour Island where Father Bonaventure is in charge.

On Andros Island... more than 75 converts were baptized in a few months.

At Watlings, Father Leander has a convent practically completed, and next January we hope to have a flourishing school under the direction of Sisters of Charity from New York.

**1923**

On January 24, the Right Reverend Abbot Alcuin, O.S.B., left for the Bahamas. Ven. Brother Seither, O.S.B., went with him. Brother Bede will go to Watlings Island to help Father Leander.

Rt. Rev. Abbot Alcuin arrived at Nassau, February 5... It is Father Abbot’s intention to visit all the missions and mission stations on the islands, despite the inconveniences of traveling in small sailing craft.


A letter from Father Chrysostom to Dr. Ayde-Curran written from St. Francis Xavier rectory in Nassau on 15 February 1924, includes some statistics which give us a picture of the status of the Church in the Bahamas at the beginning of that year:

We have 8 Sisters of Charity in Nassau, 3 of whom teach in St. Francis Xavier School, 2 in Sacred Heart and 3 in the Academy of St. Francis Xavier.

On Andros we have a permanent mission with a resident priest and 4 stations attended monthly.

At Watlings (San Salvador) there is a resident priest, assisted by 2 catechists.

Harbour Island—resident priest and 3 Sisters.

Catholic population over 1,000.

**1925**

Andros Island has five missions in Behring Point, Staniard Creek, Man-o'-War Sound, Good Hope and Mangrove Cay. Father Gabriel and Brother Joseph Tlusty recently built a chapel at the mission station of Staniard Creek.

Father Abbot left January 27 for the Bahama Islands.

Cardinal Hayes arrived. Confirmed at Nassau, Harbour Island and Staniard Creek.

Father Chrysostom will retire to Watlings Island and be superior of the Mission there. Father Hildebrand (who went to the Bahamas in November, 1924) became pastor of the two churches at Nassau, with the title of Prior. He will be superior over the rest of the Bahama Mission.

Father Hyacinth Cismowski, O.S.B., now in the Bahamas at Sacred Heart Parish in Nassau.
Father Denis Parnell, O.S.B., who had gone to the Islands in 1922, is attending Mangrove Cay Mission and other missions on Andros.

New Mission at Calabash Bay. A little chapel being erected there with money sent by Cardinal Hayes. The people at Fresh Creek and Long Bay Cays, both on Andros, have requested that missions be opened there.

When Father Bonaventure first went to Harbour Island (18 February 1922) there were only two Catholics on the Island; about 75 there now...

In 1925, the Hon. Joseph McAleenan of Brooklyn, New York, presented the mission with a motor and sailboat. A letter from Father Hildebrand telling of this gift indicates how greatly mission activity was hampered by transportation difficulties:

There are Catholic people scattered on many of the out-islands. Without the aid of such a boat it has been thus far impossible to attend them. During the last Easter season, two Catholic ladies came to Nassau from Deadman's Cay on a voyage that took them seven days, and then they had to wait a month before they could get a boat to return home. They had waited seven years for this opportunity to receive the sacraments.

One party came in recently who had not been able to see a priest in 25 years, and another called who had been deprived of the sacraments for 32 years.

When Father Leander arrived on Watlings Island five years ago there was not one Catholic among the 500 population. Now there are 60, plus 120, including 90 children, who are taking instructions. Father Leander is assisted by two lay catechists and Brother Bede.

1926

Father Hyacinth made his first trip to Andros. Father Gabriel back at Andros after an absence of almost a year and a half on San Salvador spent in construction of a chapel and residence at which Father Chrysostom now lives at Riding Rock. While Father Gabriel was gone, Father Denis was at Andros.

1926 was a hurricane year in the Bahamas. The islands were struck by violent hurricanes, one in July, another in September, and a great amount of damage was done.

The July hurricane was described by the Nassau Tribune of 27 July 1926 as the “most destructive since the terrible one of 1866.” A letter from Father Hyacinth, based largely on the Tribune account, tells of the storm and the damage done:

Its diameter is reported to have been 200 miles and the velocity of the wind 90 to 120 miles per hour. Sixty men drowned on New Providence. Forty-eight vessels swept from their moorings in the harbor and out to sea. One hundred other boats wrecked and sunk. The villages of Adelaide and Gambier were blown away. There is not a tree on the island which was not uprooted or broken. Hundreds of homes were blown down and seven churches and several schools wrecked. The out-islands, having no wireless (New Providence was warned from Washington, D.C.) suffered worse. Andros Island has seventy sponging vessels missing. This means that three hundred fathers and supporters of families are gone. The newly
built chapel at the village of Calabash Bay (Andros) was blown down. Yam and pigeon pea fields were destroyed; the banana crops, coconut groves, and breadfruit and pear trees—all are gone.

The second hurricane struck on September 17. A letter three days later from Father Gabriel to Father Hildebrand describes the damage done on Andros:

Only six houses are standing at Small Hope; and only eight are left at Calabash Bay. At Staniard Creek the chapel is still standing. The people took refuge in it during the storm. During the gale I was at Small Hope. I had to flee out of three houses. At Behring Point one church suffered some damage to the roof. At Mangrove Cay about 150 houses are down. Our little house and chapel are standing and are being used as a shelter by the people. The Star of the Sea (an 18 foot sailboat) is wrecked.

Although the hurricanes had done great damage, the year closed on a hopeful note with the dedication in November of the Church of Our Lady of the Holy Souls. Our Lady’s, in Grants Town, Nassau, is the largest Catholic church in the Bahamas.

1927

The mission at Dunmore, Harbour Island, founded by Father Bonaventure, celebrated on January 29 its fifth anniversary. In those five years 114 have been baptized, 40 confirmed and over 26,000 Holy Communions received. Holy Hour is held weekly, the First Friday is observed and the League of the Sacred Heart established. Since the founding of the Dunmore mission three others have been established during 1926. The mission at Cove, on a nearby island, was organized on June 7; one at Gregory Town on Harbour Island in August; the third, also on Harbour Island on November 14.

On May 3, the first Solemn High Mass was sung at Harbour Island commemorating the fifth anniversary of the reception into the Church of the first four converts. Father Bonaventure, celebrant, was assisted by Father Leopold Probst, O.S.B., of St. Vincent Archabbey, who has been helping out in the Bahamas since the beginning of February, and by Father Hyacinth, O.S.B.16

In January and February, 1928, Abbot Alcuin visited the Bahamas and Etienne Dupuch interviewed him in The Record, 8 March 1928 on his return:

...Abbot Alcuin spoke enthusiastically about Nassau. He said that another large hotel and a number of new villas have been recently erected on the island, but his taste preferred the fine old Colonial-type houses, dating back a century or more, with their spacious verandas, mysterious high walls, and profusion of flowers, suggestive of the fine old English civilization of the pre-Victorian period, tempered with much of the atmosphere that makes Latin civilizations so pleasant to the traveller who has a sense of beauty and refinement. But the Abbot remained only a few days in Nassau, and there he left the comforts of modern civilization behind him. He visited all the missions on Andros Island, Cat Island, San Salvador, 
Eleuthera, and Harbour Island, which he called a pretty town, travelling in small native crafts. At one time he sailed with sheep, cows, goats, tomato crates and bundles of sisal fibre for twelve days; at another he was perched on the top of a tomato cargo for eight hours. The Abbot moved among these poverty-stricken districts and primitive people, living in thatched-roofed huts, and taking the meals ‘as the cook served them.’ Incidentally, these natives are ill-fed, poorly clad, and the skin on the soles of their feet is so thick that they travel with comfort over the razor-edged honey-combed coral rock that cuts through leather soled shoes.

On one of his trips to Andros he was the guest of His Eminence Cardinal Hayes in the palatial yacht Warrior, placed at the disposal of His Eminence by Sir George MacDonald. Commenting on this phase of his experience the Abbot said,

Looking back on the boats on which I made my other visits to the Out Islands I must say I am happy not to have made them all on this very comfortable yacht. There was some advantage in roughing it, not to mention the better insight I got into local conditions and the contact the poorer boats gave me with the natives, whose hospitality and manners are in striking contrast to their pitiable conditions. Although the Cardinal could not confirm all who were candidates for the Sacrament, because most of the men of Andros were away on sponging cruises, he nevertheless confirmed about seven hundred in the various islands. His Eminence was immensely pleased with the progress of the mission in the last three years, and all his party were greatly impressed by the devotion of the people. Before the Cardinal’s party left on a cruise through the West Indian water, His Eminence blessed the fourth chapel in Nassau, dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, this bringing the total number of chapels in the Bahamas mission to sixteen, presided over by seven priests from St. John’s.

The following year was another hurricane year. The storm which struck the Islands on 25 September 1929 did considerable damage. Nearly half the roof of The Priory at St. Francis Xavier Church, Nassau, was blown off, nearly 500 houses were destroyed or damaged. Father Leander’s church on Andros was completely demolished and his school badly damaged. The estimated hurricane damage to mission properties was about $25,000.

Father Hildebrand, characteristically, sent forth the first general mission letter of appeal from the Bahama mission on 8 September 1925. Previously, all donors had been contacted on a personal basis. Now Father Hildebrand felt that a mailing list should be established and the first letter he wrote expresses the needs as felt at that time:

You are acquainted with the great missionary movement which is going on throughout the world; but did you know that for the past thirty-five years Benedictine priests from St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, and Sisters of Charity from Mount St. Vincent on the Hudson, New York, have been conducting a Mission among the natives of the Bahama Islands?
The inhabitants of this group of 27 larger islands are for the most part dependent on sponging and sisal raising for their livelihood. Neither of these industries are productive of great financial returns, and as a result the people are mostly very poor. I have never met such poverty anywhere as there exists here. The natives are at heart a deeply religious people, and results show that they make very splendid Catholics. It is because of the great possibilities of this mission field and the extreme poverty of these people that I am sending this letter to our friends. I had not intended to make an appeal, but, realizing the hardships, difficulties, and discouragements under which the priests, my fellow-laborers, must work, I consider it my duty to bring the condition of these missions to your attention.

Among the oldest of the out-island Missions is Behring Point, Andros Island. Here Father Gabriel Roerig put in many years of hard labor. The entire church establishment—church, parsonage, school and kitchen—is the result of the work of his hands. Some years ago a noted novelist and writer of magazine articles visited Behring Point and made Father Gabriel known under the name of ‘The Hermit of Andros.’ Nobody can understand what hardships, labors, mortifications, and periods of silence and monotony this great priest has passed through in that lonesome spot, unless he has spent some time there himself. It was the good fortune or the bad fortune, whichever you may wish to call it, of the author of these lines to have been windbound there for three weeks last fall, until the only provisions left were a few pigeon peas, a bit of rice, and just a few pounds of flour. The mosquito, the sandfly, and especially the flea were our constant companions. Ever since that visit, I can well understand the words of the good missionary, ‘If it were not for the human souls, I should not even want my picture to hang on any wall on this island.’ Since this trip, I can but seldom think of this Bahamas out-island missionary without having to repress the tears that come to my eyes. I know of absolutely nothing that compares in hardship with it. Only lately a recent convert to the faith visited Behring Point and on returning said, ‘I am proud to be a Catholic, because a Church that can make an educated man undergo such hardships as these for the salvation of souls must be of God.’ During the present month, a Catholic medical missionary from China visited the Bahamas, and after seeing conditions here said, ‘China knows no hardships and poverty that can compare with what you have on these islands.’

Man-o'-War Sound was the second of the Andros missions opened also by Father Gabriel. Soon after opening the mission he converted the Protestant catechist and then the whole settlement.

Mangrove Cay was started only recently. It is a very promising mission but must have financial support if it is to have anything like success. Father Denis Parnell is at present attending this and other missions on Andros Island. The privations and hardships which he must often undergo are nothing short of the heroic. You have a chance to help him by building a little church in this poor mission.

In the city of Nassau, there are two chapels, or churches, as you may choose to call them. The older of these churches is dedicated to St. Francis Xavier, the great Apostle of India; the other is dedicated to the Sacred Heart. Father Hyacinth Cismowski, who arrived from Minnesota last July, is devoting his time principally to the upbuilding of this latter parish. Both these congregations are made up chiefly of colored people. Not all of these
are as poor as their brethren on the out-islands but very few of them have more than the necessaries of life. In spite of their poverty, they are doing quite well in supporting the Church so much so that if the Church in Nassau had only itself to look out for, we would not be forced to beg from friends up North. Since, however, these poor parishes must divide their little income with the out-island missions, it is impossible to care for either properly. Due to this fact, the present buildings in Nassau, especially the schools, are in urgent need of repairs, and it is simply impossible to plan on extending our mission activities.

In order to spread faith properly, several more chapels should be built in Nassau. Although the thermometer seldom falls below 60 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, and during a large part of the year is constantly around 85 degrees, this means actually a temperature of 95 to 120 degrees and even more in the sun. Under these circumstances it is impossible for these people to walk long distances to church. In order to make it possible for them to become acquainted with the Catholic Church and to practice their religion, we must have little chapels in the more densely populated sections. Every priest is prepared to say two Masses every Sunday and to have services twice, or even three times every day, providing there are chapels where these services can be conducted. The present financial condition of the Mission makes it not only impossible to build these additional chapels, but it is not even possible to take proper care of the two little churches which we now have. It is our intention, as soon as we can find a sufficient number of friends to help us, to build a chapel to ‘The Little Flower of Jesus.’

The Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul are conducting three schools in Nassau and two schools on Harbour Island. We need not tell you of the immense amount of good that these sisters are doing in the class-room and in their visits to the government hospital, to the leper colony, and to the homes of the sick and the poor. Everywhere they must provide with some little alms, usually in the form of food, medicine, clothing and other necessaries.

Due to the zealous care which the priests and the Sisters of Charity have given to the colony of lepers just referred to, all of these poor unfortunate have joined the Catholic Church. They cannot provide for themselves. The government hospital, indeed, provides the necessaries. It is, however, very hard for these sufferers who are rotting away, just waiting for death, to have only the necessaries and none of the comforts of life. We try our best to give them at least a little from our Charity Fund, which is taxed so heavily from all sides. Perhaps you have never had a chance to give even the smallest comfort to a leper. Will you pass up this opportunity?

There is need for many more schools and for an extension of these works of charity. Several settlements on Andros Island, as well as some on Watlings, Eleuthera, Inagua, and Acklings Islands have asked us repeatedly to open Sisters’ schools; but it is the same old story over again—lack of funds. Indeed, we believe that there is not another mission field in the world more promising than the Bahamas; neither is there any field which is poorer or in greater need of financial assistance. The people are willing to help, but they have nothing.

Until very recently the only boat at the disposal of the Mission was a little sailing vessel measuring 16 ft. long in all. The little Star of the Sea, as she is called, has passed over many a rough sea...
Abbot Alcuin did not have much success in finding a permanent superior for the Bahama mission during the five years following Father Chrysostom's retirement. Schreiner's first two successors did not have the staying power of that stalwart. Father Hildebrand withdrew after three years to the more congenial environment for him of German-American parishes in the mid-western United States. Fr. Hugo Tell, O.S.B., was then appointed superior in late 1927 and he lasted for fourteen months. He reluctantly came and gladly left. Father Hugo told a parishioner of St. Francis Xavier with German directness, "The people don't like me and I don't like them, so I'm leaving." He, too, longed for the green pastures of Stearns County, Minnesota.

Abbot Alcuin then turned to Fr. Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., prior and pastor of St. Anselm's Church in New York City. The abbot had been advised for years to appoint Father Bernard to head the Catholic mission in the Bahamas. Abbot Alcuin had found it impossible to bring himself to do this until forced by necessity into a move that had been obvious since Father Chrysostom's retirement. In a complicated background relationship that extended over many years, these two Benedictine brethren of the same monastery were simply not compatible persons. Nor would they be so in the future. Fr. Louis Traufler, O.S.B., contemporary of the two men and assistant to Father Bernard at St. Anselm's parish explains:

There were differences between Fathers Alcuin and Bernard from the very beginning. Father Alcuin expected to become abbot and was prepared for it. After being elected he rose and gave a speech in which he announced his motto right away. Father Bernard was disappointed he was not chosen for I was the first to return to New York after the election and the housekeepers told me Father Bernard had been over in church all forenoon during the election.... That antagonism never died and Abbot Alcuin was afraid of Father Bernard who was a natural streber. Even in his student days, he was older than we were; Bernard was always busy when time came for election of officers in societies. He always enjoyed electioneering and using tactics. Father Bernard was a better diplomat than Abbot Alcuin and bested him each time. He used every friend of Cardinal Hayes to promote himself and his ambitions. Father Bernard urged his opinions and his willingness to help Cardinal Hayes solve problems. Fathers Bernard and Alcuin were two men of the same ambition but Father Bernard was the more finished diplomat.17

During Father Bernard's successful and popular pastorate at St. Anselm's, a parish church had been built and beautifully decorated by European Benedictines in the Beuronese style of art. Father Bernard was a close friend of Cardinal Patrick Hayes, archbishop of New York, and the Bahama islands were still under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of New York. Through the years the New York archbishops had been instrumental in obtaining a grant for the Bahamas from the Board of Catholic
Indians and Colored People. Cardinal Hayes had, along with St. John's, given yearly subsidies to the missionaries in the Bahamas and assisted in building churches, schools and clinics.

Before his departure for the Bahamas in 1929, Father Bernard was given the title of vicar forane by Cardinal Hayes, and negotiations were begun for the erection of the Bahamas as a prefecture apostolic. On 21 March 1929 the apostolic delegation in Washington, D.C., received bulls from Rome's Consistorial Congregation for the erection of the Bahamas as a prefecture apostolic under the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. When he was informed that the prefecture he desired had been established, Cardinal Hayes highly recommended Father Bernard to Archbishop Pietro Fumasoni-Biondi, apostolic delegate to the United States:

It has occurred to me that I should let your Excellency know what a very able, apostolic, saintly man Father Bernard is. He has been in New York some twenty years, and is revered and, I might say, beloved of our clergy and the people who know him.

I do not know what the mind of the Abbot may be; but, should Father Bernard's name come up for consideration with regard to appointment to the prefecture, let me assure your Excellency no one more worthy could be presented.\(^13\)

The mind of Abbot Alcuin was, unquestionably, along definitely different lines. Since the Catholic missionary personnel of the Bahamas was Benedictine, he as abbot felt that the ecclesiastical and religious superior should be the same person. He desired that an abbatia nullius, an abbey with ordinary jurisdiction, be established in the Bahamas with the abbot-ordinary being named a titular bishop. The St. Ottilien Benedictines of Bavaria, Germany, had proceeded along these lines in their African missions, and the abbot wanted a similar arrangement in the Bahamas. Abbot Alcuin journeyed to Rome to explain his position to Guglielmo Cardinal von Rossum, prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, and in the meantime the bull establishing a prefecture in the Bahamas was held up for three years. Cardinal Hayes, Father Bernard and the missionaries in the Bahamas at that time felt that the prefecture, which Rome had already authorized, would be more desirable. In this way the Bahamas could advance through gradual steps to the state of a diocese. The prefect, by being named a bishop, could more easily make the indispensable mission collections in the dioceses of the United States. A bishop would lend more prestige to the Bahamian Church, they maintained, especially since the Anglicans in this British colony had a bishop stationed in Nassau.

While this impasse continued Abbot Alcuin next suggested that the Dominicans take charge of the Bahamas, and a representative of the Order of Preachers came to Nassau to examine conditions. The Domin-
icans were ready and willing to come. But all the Benedictines in the Bahamas wanted to stay at the mission, and they told Abbot Alcuin so forcibly when he visited them at The Priory to obtain their reactions. Abbot Alcuin presented the question of retaining the Bahamas to the St. John’s chapter after the close of the second retreat on 22 August 1930 and a large majority favored retaining the Bahamian mission. Abbot Alcuin then informed Rome that St. John’s would continue the Bahamas mission work, but that he desired the establishment of an abbey nullius there. Cardinal Hayes was in close correspondence with Father Bernard at the same time, and the former apostolic delegate to the United States, Archbishop Pietro Fumasoni-Biondi, was now a cardinal and acting as secretary of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. On 9 June 1931 it was announced from Rome that Father Bernard, with the title of right reverend monsignor, was named first prefect apostolic of the newly erected prefecture of the Bahamas.

Cardinal Hayes journeyed to Nassau to install his good friend on 7 February 1932 in the presence of Cardinal William O’Connell of Boston who along with Hayes continued to spend winter vacations in the Bahamas.

There was no unnecessary public or private brotherhood between the archbishops of Boston and New York at this time. Cardinal O’Connell was aristocratic and monumental in life-style; Cardinal Hayes was simple and kind, “the cardinal of charity,” as he was known by thousands. Since Cardinal O’Connell was a visitor at his Hermitage in Nassau, he refused to participate in the ceremony in any way in the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of New York except to be present before withdrawing to East Bay Street. After the Mass, Father Bernard, characteristically, asked the master of ceremonies to approach the throne of Boston and ask O’Connell if he would say a few words. Cardinal O’Connell immediately rose, withdrew a prepared text, and delivered a magnificent tribute to the Bahamas and the importance of this day in its Catholic history. O’Connell loved the Bahamas and was a great favorite of the people when he came each winter. But he was so tied to the emerging ethnic struggle of the Irish living in the WASP culture of New England in the nineteenth century that he could seldom unbend. As he said, “I am, as a cardinal, as much a prince as any prince of the realm.” It was a different age but strikingly similar to today’s strident racial and ethnic affirmations that fortunately preserve diversity in our cultures.

The Record of 18 February 1932 recorded the event:

On Sunday, February 7, Msgr. Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., superior of the Benedictine Missionaries of St. John’s Abbey in the Bahamas, was solemnly installed as the first Prefect Apostolic of the Bahamas by his Eminence Patrick Cardinal Hayes, Archbishop of New York, under the jurisdiction of whose diocese the Islands had been since 1885 and from
which they were detached last May when the Holy See made the Islands a distinct ecclesiastical unit under the direction of the Congregation of the Propaganda.

The ceremony which took place on the grounds of the Benedictine Priory in Nassau included a solemn open-air pontifical High Mass which the newly installed Prefect Apostolic celebrated, assisted by the Very Rev. Prior Richard, O.S.B. of St. Benedict's Church, New York, as deacon, and Very Rev. Prior Alphonse, O.S.B., of St. Anselm's parish New York as subdeacon. His Eminence, William Cardinal O'Connell, Archbishop of Boston, presided and gave the Papal blessing at the conclusion of the Mass. Most Rev. Joseph F. Busch of St. Cloud, Minnesota, from whose diocese Benedictine missionaries were first sent to the Bahamas in January, 1891, also occupied one of the thrones in the sanctuary. Other Monsignori and the Benedictine Fathers of the Islands were present in the sanctuary. Right Reverend Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B., of St. John's was unavoidably detained from being present at the ceremony.

Among the distinguished laity who were in attendance were Sir Bede Edmund Clifford, C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., newly appointed Catholic governor of the Bahamas, as well as a number of distinguished members of the local government.

The newly installed prefect apostolic was born in Alten-Essen, Borussia, Germany, on November 1, 1869. In his early youth his parents emigrated to the United States, and he spent his boyhood in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His father, who is now more than ninety years of age, still resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota. John, which was Msgr. Bernard's baptismal name, received his early education at St. Joseph parochial school in that city. In January, 1887, he entered St. John's University, where he made some preliminary studies and entered the Benedictine novitiate, receiving Bernard as his religious name. He pronounced his simple vows on July 25, 1892. For a number of years he was assistant to the master of novices. On June 24, 1896, he received Holy Orders.

After his ordination Fr. Bernard served the University in many capacities. He taught, was the students' chaplain for six years, moderator of the Alexian Literary Society, and rector of the Seminary from 1901 until 1907. In that year he was appointed administrator of St. Anselm's Church in New York City. Upon the death of Rt. Rev. Alexius Edelbrock in May of the following year he was made pastor. During his long pastorate at St. Anselm's he provided for the construction of the present school and church, the latter of which was consecrated in November, 1929.

Late in 1929 he was sent to the Bahama Islands where he became Vicar Forane and superior of the Benedictine Fathers in charge of the local Missions. He held this office until his appointment as Prefect Apostolic by the Holy See last May.

Fr. Bernard's installation recalls to the elder members of St. John's Abbey that his younger brother, Rev. Theodore Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., was a missionary in the Bahamas for a short time and that he died at Nassau on February 26, 1905.

Moreover, this event revived memories of the pioneer work of the first Benedictine missionary in the Bahamas, Very Rev. Chrysostom Schreiner, whom the people know as the Apostle of the Bahamas, and who spent thirty-seven years in mission work in the Islands. His death occurred

Monsignor Bernard and the Bahama Benedictines.

Bishop Bernard installed in Nassau with Cardinal Hayes, Marquis George McDonald, Cardinal O'Connell, Governor Sir Bede and Lady Clifford, February, 1934.
Bishop Bernard with his people of God at the annual bazaar.

Docking at Harbour Island with Bishop Bernard and Fr. Quentin Dittberner, O.S.B., 1934.

A baptism class of 1935 from ages 11 to 70 years.
Bishop Bernard arrives at Eleuthera for a visitation.

With his friend Cardinal Hayes on The Priory grounds, March, 1933.

Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B., St. John's Abbey, visits Bishop Bernard and the Benedictine community in the Bahamas during February, 1936. Also present was Abbot Vincent Taylor, O.S.B., of Belmont Abbey, Belmont, North Carolina, third from left.
Bernard the Bishop

on January 3, 1928 on the Isle of San Salvador, where his remains repose to this day. Many eloquent tributes were paid to his memory by speakers during the installation celebration.

Although the Bahamas are now a distinct ecclesiastical unit they will continue, as they have been for the past forty years, under the care of the Benedictines of St. John’s Abbey. At present there are eight fathers and one lay-brother engaged in mission work. As Prefect Apostolic, Msgr. Bernard has the jurisdiction of a bishop and is entitled to wear the episcopal insignia.

Cardinal Hayes has paid the following tribute to him, ‘The Holy See through his Excellency the Apostolic Delegate to the United States has honored me with the designation of delegate to install the first Prefect Apostolic of the Bahamas, the Rev. Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., who for many years as pastor of St. Anselm’s, Bronx, endeared himself to New York by his priestly and pastoral zeal. We are confident that under this wise and devoted shepherd the faith will prosper and flourish.’

The very next day Cardinal Hayes informed the apostolic delegate in Washington that he was convinced it was important that Monsignor Bernard should have the episcopal character as soon as possible. On November 24 of the following year Monsignor Bernard was elevated to the rank of vicar apostolic, and Hayes happily consecrated him in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York, December 21. Archbishop John Gregory Murray of St. Paul, Bishop Joseph Busch of St. Cloud and Abbot Alcuin came from Minnesota for the occasion. Abbot Alcuin informed his friend, Abbot Martin Vaeth, O.S.B., St. Benedict’s Abbey, Atchison, Kansas, that he had first learned of the appointment of Bishop Bernard in the newspaper. From 1933 to 1949 Bishop Bernard advanced Catholicism in the Bahamas through his personal kindness and interest in the poor and needy, through the new parish schools he built, as well as through his marked success in collecting funds in the United States each year for the mission. He appointed Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., as his provicar, and the two missionaries worked together in building up the Church. When Bishop Bernard first came to the islands, there were 3,200 Catholics among a population of 55,000. Father Bonaventure had wanted more active convent work among the Bahamians, and the establishment of a Bahamian sisterhood on the islands. With the support of Bishop Bernard major steps could now be taken in this direction. Abbot Alcuin continued to send more missionaries from St. John’s so that a steadily increasing number of stations could be established on more of the out islands. The Sisters of Charity greatly expanded their educational work. By 1943 Catholics had more than doubled in numbers to 7,122. In the 1954 government census this figure had risen to 13,054 Catholics in a total population of 83,060. In an eleven year period Catholics had increased by 86 percent, and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith informed
Father Bonaventure that this record was one of the best in the entire mission field of the Church.

Father Bernard was sixty years old when he came to the Bahamas and sixty-four when he became the first bishop in 1933. He served in that capacity for sixteen more years until his death in 1949 at age eighty. These statistics are often forgotten in remembering the work and advances made during Bishop Bernard’s administration. He came to the Bahamas when most men have made plans to retire. Plagued by poor health, weak spells, digestive and eye trouble, he year after year manifested a perseverance and dogged spirit that was an inspiration to all who came in contact with him.

Funds for the maintenance and development of the Catholic mission had to be obtained from the outside during these years because the Catholic people were poor and could not in their beginnings be self-sufficient. Bishop Bernard had to find $50,000 yearly to make ends meet on “The Rocks” or the “Southern Front” as he called the Bahama mission. His voluminous letters, travel schedules and records of collections testify to the zeal of this gentle older pioneer who brought the Catholic Church in the Bahamas toward its contemporary position.

Generally the American bishops, pastors and diocesan directors of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith were cooperative and helpful to “the bishop with the tin cup” as he called himself. He worked out of New York into Hartford, Boston, Newark, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Chicago and Minnesota. In later years Fr. Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., was a major help to him in collecting tours, and several Benedictines from St. John’s covered assignments in Minnesota and Wisconsin for him.

One of the bitterest experiences Bishop Bernard had, which he never forgot, was at a well-known church in New York City. He began preaching at Masses at 2:00 a.m. and carried on through twenty Masses. Afterwards the pastor presented him with a check for $500. The bishop was certain the collections had totalled at least $5,000 for the Bahamas. But when he protested the pastor said, “Take it or leave it.”

At first he was able to collect only $10,000 a year, but he built this gift program to the $50,000 plateau by the end of his administration. A distinctive and long-lived source of income, fondly called “The Bridge,” came from the Friends of the Bahama Missions organized in 1934 in New York City. A dedicated group of Catholic ladies sponsored a yearly card party and reception, now a luncheon, in October or November at the Statler Hilton Hotel and later at Mayer’s Parkway Restaurant. Individuals, firms, clergy and any persons interested in the Bahamas were invited. The first year $500 was realized for Bishop Bernard, a sum that grew to $6,000 a year. Since 1934 over $125,000 has been realized from
this durable source of support. Bishops Bernard and Leonard never missed these occasions if at all possible, and Bishop Stephen Donahue, auxiliary of New York and perennial friend of the Bahamas, was also a yearly guest and ever generous donor. The four ladies who originated this fund raising event are still living: Anna B. McGinness, Kathryn Pratt, Anita Ewald Kliegel and Mary Draddy. Mrs. Hugh F. Kerins, Sr., serves as present chairwoman.

Anna McGinness moved to the Bahamas in 1950 and helped manage the Carlton House, a Nassau hotel, commuting each year to New York for two months to prepare for The Bridge. In 1958 she became a full­ fledged lay missionary in the Bahamas and directed her talents to handling accounting and other financial work in the Catholic chancery while living in an apartment on The Priory grounds. Anna McGinness is one of the first permanent lay missionaries in the Bahamas whose numbers increased with the years. They supplied a rich dimension of the people of God to the development of Bahamian Catholicism.

But Bishop Bernard could also become most discouraged and had periods of depression brought on by problems and difficulties. For example, on 6 December 1931, after an exhausting collecting tour, Monsignor Bernard wrote Abbot Alcuin:

St. Nicolaus—and oh what a fine day—here in Nassau! What a difference of my place and work a week ago! Here I was finished at 10 o’clock and an ideal Nassau early winter day—so calm—restful and peaceful—flowers and green—in all that one exclaims, ‘How good is God in spite of the times.’ Last Sunday I had to preach nine times starting at 6 and finishing at 12:30—a raw, disagreeable N.Y.C. day and everybody seeming sad and dejected and I had been sick, very sick, to my stomach for ten days—don’t know how I stood up—but the fear of losing that collection held me up till I struggled into the train. I received $500 for the mission then and yesterday the pastor sent another $300 (they had not counted the money when I left). I could not eat solid food until after I reached here. I feared to delay leaving N.Y.C. for several reasons. Guess it was more nervous condition than anything else. Came on the Sir Charles Orr—little boat—but a steady little ship. Found everybody cheerful and everything in good order. The Fathers certainly worked well.

Abbot Alcuin tried to cheer him up in his reply the next day:

I hope your stomach is again in good condition and the blue spell which had come on you before leaving New York has entirely vanished. May God give you strength and courage not to succumb to such spells. When things look dark, lift up your heart to Him and trust in Him: Deus meus, in te confido, non erubescam. It is faith, hope and charity that count and nothing else without them. But there is not enough of the former three virtues and too much of the latter ‘nothing else’. God help us.

The bishop tended to worry and wrote endlessly on minute details concerning personnel or moves to be made. He was timid and needed
to be pushed forward which Father Bonaventure was always on hand to do. Bishop Bernard ever feared what Cardinal Hayes would say or think, what kind of image the Bahama Church was giving in New York, what dire results would follow from plunges into projects without funds or friends to back up such undertakings. He simply felt “at sea” and alone. All of his life had been spent collecting money for buildings, first in New York and then in the Bahamas. He had to pay bills for over fifty years as a priest, find support for confreres who too often took for granted “where the money comes for their expensive medications and needed vacation trips,” as the bishop said.

Bishop Bernard begged Abbot Alcuin for years to ask the St. John’s chapter to allocate a yearly monetary donation to the Bahamas. He wanted $10,000 a year but Abbot Alcuin kept telling him the chapter would never vote such an appropriation. Abbot Alcuin was also president of the American Cassinese Congregation of Benedictines, as Abbot Peter had been, and much involved during these years in sustaining other Benedictine monasteries such as St. Gregory’s in Oklahoma, Assumption in Richardton, North Dakota, and Holy Cross in Colorado. Buildings were badly needed for college expansion in Collegeville, and they had to be delayed as St. John’s gave heavily to the support of other Benedictine houses which were in danger of going under during the depression.

On 3 November 1931 Monsignor Bernard wrote Abbot Alcuin in a most discouraged mood after being informed he would not receive another priest for the Bahamas and no monetary stipend could be expected at that time:

> Your last letter was a hard blow. I wonder if Saint John’s men realize what this begging business and its hardships mean? If they would—I am sure they would vote at once to give their confreres a living such as they enjoy. A man cannot stand this begging and collecting very long and if he could he would not get the places in which to collect. With all the goodness and generosity of the people it is impossible to collect enough to live on and to defray the other expenses of the Mission—not to mention the new buildings which are very necessary. I had hoped and prayed for a favorable answer from you so that I could tell the Cardinal what St. John’s is doing and induce him to continue his donations. This way, I feel like a man who is told to dig a hole without a shovel wherewith to dig.

Three days later Abbot Alcuin replied:

> You took my last letter too tragically. I did not say that the chapter would give nothing to the Bahama Mission. I merely indicated that I did not think it an opportune time to ask. As a matter of fact, we could do nothing now unless we were to borrow the money. It has been coming in slowly and we have had some heavy bills to meet. It will be impossible to do anything until after the middle of January. But I have no doubt that the Mission will get what I told you I have in mind. You remember the old German saying, ‘Wo die Not am groesten, da ist Gott am naechsten.’
On 1 February 1932 Abbot Alcuin asked and received from the St. John’s chapter an annual allocation of $5,000 for the Bahama Prefecture. It was half of what Bishop Bernard wanted but what the abbot always said he would request. This annual subsidy continues to the present time, a generous gift from St. John’s for forty years. This was over and above the fact that St. John’s never asked any salary payments for its monks who served in the Bahamas from the beginning to the present.

Bishop Bernard, who was always so careful, made one faux pas which embarrassed him deeply and which he never forgot. The Catholic Church of St. Robert was built at High Rocks in South Andros during the early 1930’s. After this church was constructed it was learned that the property on which it had been constructed belonged to the Anglican Church. Bishop Bernard apologized to Bishop Spence Burton of the Anglican Church, said he thought the property deeds had been checked and offered to purchase the property. The whole affair hit the Bahamian press and there was much comment as always happens in matters political and religious. The Anglicans would not sell the property but graciously permitted the Catholics to use the church on their property without rent. This incident could have become a pre-ecumenical event but the times and the mentality were quite different. Apologies and gracious recognition of a mistake were all that was forthcoming in an age of competing Christian Churches.

Abbot Alcuin also continued to send young priests to the Bahamas in an increasing number. Fr. Patrick Joseph Freeman, O.S.B., cousin of the future Bishop Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., came in 1928; Fr. Marcel Leisen, O.S.B., came in 1929 and stayed for two years. Abbot Alcuin sent Fr. Eloi Justou, O.S.B., in 1929 from Sacred Heart Abbey, Oklahoma, which he was administering. Father Eloi stayed three years but was often sick and hospitalized; likewise Fr. Philip Bahner, O.S.B., younger brother of the deceased Fr. Melchior Austin Bahner, O.S.B., came for a year from St. John’s but never adjusted to the Bahama environment. Fr. Albert Heuring, O.S.B., came from St. Paul in that same year, 1931, and assisted for a time before returning to New York.

The first new Benedictine who found stability in the Bahamas during these early years of Bishop Bernard’s administration was Fr. Ambrose Wittman, O.S.B., who came in 1931 and served faithfully, despite precarious health until 1958. Father Ambrose was widely loved and respected for his priestly virtue, “a saint” the people still say, and used his musical talents to advance cultural projects among the people. Fr. Daniel Bangart, O.S.B., came in 1932 and served faithfully on Andros Island until his death in 1948. Fr. Othmar Hohmann, O.S.B., came in 1932 and stayed five years working enthusiastically among the people and staging dramatic
productions which are still remembered. He contributed several photographs to this volume as he was an early photographic buff. Fr. Quentin Dittberner, O.S.B., came as a young priest in 1933 and stayed until 1940; he returned again from 1958 to 1962 to work untiringly but was forced to leave because of recurring bouts with tuberculosis. Fr. Cornelius Osendorf, O.S.B., came in 1934 and after a remarkable missionary career on the out islands, and as vicar general of the diocese in Nassau, is still working on Grand Bahama Island at the present.

In 1936 Fr. Raymond Layton, O.S.B., Holy Cross Abbey, Colorado, worked zealously for two years; Fr. Frederic Frey, O.S.B., of St. John’s came in the same year and remained until his death in 1963 while establishing St. Augustine’s Monastery and distinguishing himself in pastoral and educational undertakings. In 1936 Fr. Marcian Peters, O.S.B., and in 1937 Fr. Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B. were sent by Abbot Alcuin to the Bahamas. Both are still working there today, thirty-six years later, the former in a continuing and zealous pastoral apostolate, and the latter as current bishop of the Bahamas.

Also in 1937 Fathers Anthony Ronellenfitsch, and Herbert Buerschinger, O.S.B., worked on Andros and San Salvador respectively. That same year two diocesan priests, Fathers E. F. Callahan of St. Augustine, Florida, and Charles Blesch of New York began work in the Bahamas. Father Blesch stayed until 1943 and was widely respected among the people for his missionary work among the poorest of the poor.

While this litany of Bahamian Catholic missionaries in the early twentieth century may sound impersonal or remote to distant readers, these names are very much alive among the Catholic people of the islands. Their mere listing here is small enough tribute to their struggles and sacrifices in the formative years of Bishop Bernard’s stewardship. Without them to support the veterans such as Fathers Gabriel, Leander, Bonaventure and Arnold, the progress that is evident today would not have emerged. These are the names that have already moved into the religious folklore of the islands and their deeds are told and retold with pride and affection whenever the people of God gather today and begin to recall their heritage.

Fortunately, several of these Bahama missionaries gave interviews about their experiences and reactions during those decades through World War II. Selections are given here as the most authentic testimony to beginnings which bore fruit:

1. Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., 1920-54, Missionary and Pro-Vicar of the Bahamas:
   
   Bishop Bernard and I had many ideals and many were shattered. Mission work was not popular in the 1920’s and 30’s, but there were never
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serious disappointments. I came to make Nassau Catholic. Of course, I thought I could use a scoop shovel to put them in especially when I saw the Anglican Church imitating the Catholic in everything, even having the procession of the Blessed Sacrament. When Bishop Bernard came he said the same. He asked me to place him in all the strategic positions so he could be of use. He wanted to be chaplain for the lepers, prison, hospitals, and wanted to be my assistant at St. Francis Xavier. He took the Masses, the Sunday sermons and gave instructions. He taught the convert classes of sixty or eighty members. He did a good job. The people objected that he kept them too long a time. He thought it should be six months. I told him in six years you cannot tell some of them any more than in six days. Also it’s important to strike while the iron is hot; there is danger in procrastination. If you instruct them and then leave them alone, they will fall away, but if you bring them in and they know they are not finished and you tell them that you have to continue giving them instructions, then you will keep contact with them. By and by he saw that and did not object to it. Some converts he instructed for a couple of years. If someone misses catechism he should not drop them. Just like missing choir; the abbot would not kick one out for missing choir once in a while.

Father Bernard had only me to talk with when he first came. The first year he wanted me to run things and he would observe. Father Bernard went to work and said he wanted to know every aspect of everything there. I was pastor at St. Francis, but he preached there and gave instructions. He made a terrific impression. He won the favor of the children. Even old Clifford, the governor, enjoyed him. He had never gone to church before but now he started going. He liked the way Bernard handled the kids. He called him ‘monsignor.’ Father Bernard took Communion two times a week to the sick, and when he saw the poverty he wanted only to help them and send aid. He would go if anybody was sick and hear confessions just like anyone else. He said he wanted to get acquainted with the people. For two years he was chaplain of the prison. Then he visited the lepers every week. With all these little jobs he was not idle.

The others did not do this, e.g. Father Hugo did not believe in this. Father Bernard took a great interest in athletics, wanted to get programs organized and did. At one time, one of the fathers did not hurry to go on a sick call and Father Bernard gave strict orders that one should go immediately on sick calls. That was the only time I saw him severe. He made us keep a record of sick calls so everyone would know what had been done. I had never thought of it, but he did. I do not know if it is kept up yet, but the sick are pretty well taken care of and no one was remiss in his duty.

When he visited the sick and found someone injured or dead, he would call on the family, even the non-Catholics. He suggested that and I thought it was good. We made good friends who helped us thereafter. He was only in the Bahamas six months of the year and I had to jump in and take his place when he was gone collecting money.

Father Hildebrand asked where we should build a convent. He thought of building where the monastery is now. Mrs. Catherine Satterlee, from Ireland originally, had relatives in Philadelphia. Her first husband was a Smith from Virginia, one of the old families of Baileys, Roosevelts, etc. He became a Catholic. He was a sportsman too. The two came to Nassau and paid $15,000 for a place by the sea. His mother was pretty well fixed and
he had a trust fund for his wife. The property also became hers when he died. Father Hildebrand talked to her about the Bahamian sisters. He suggested that she convey the property to the vicar forane. She did not specify that the property should be used for the sisters because it was in the white district which was not so good. He told her if she turned this property over to the Roman Catholic vicar forane he could assure her that it would be used for the sisters. So she gave it to the vicar forane. When Father Hugo became vicar he did not bother much about it. She had a great love for the Bahamian sisters and the project grew and grew.

After I returned to Nassau I was at St. Francis Xavier. Fr. Hildebrand was gone; I became administrator and Father Hugo became vicar forane. Father Bernard came in December, 1929, and he called me ‘Father Bona-venture, the Factotum.’ Nothing happened about the sisters for some time, not until Father Bernard became bishop.

In 1935, although I had worked hard two or three years to get some money to build a native community, I had not succeeded. Mrs. John McGovern of New York did not respond so very eagerly. She forgot about it. Even Cardinal O’Connell of Boston looked to the horizon when I asked him; he didn’t say anything and I didn’t say any more. So later I asked the bishop about it. We went to the Montague Hotel for lunch with Mrs. John McGovern. We went out on the piazza and she brought up the question of money. ‘Father, what can we do for you this time?’ I told her the matter that we talked of two years ago was still in waiting, namely, the building of a Bahamian convent for the Sisters of Charity. There were about 18 or 20 sisters there. They really needed it as they were packed like sardines. If a sister was sick, the priest had to go up to the sickroom and that was not very nice. We were talking about remodeling the whole place and had an estimate from Mr. Lothian of $1,000 in costs. But she said that she would not give a dollar for any remodeling because it would only be botch work. So I said she could build a new convent. ‘How much would it cost?’ she asked. I did not know. I asked the bishop and he could not say either. I said, ‘If you give us a week’s time we will get Mr. Lothian to look over the matter and give us an estimate of what it could be done for.’

Lothian drew at least two or three plans. The first plan was a building about $60,000, but even the bishop said it was not adequate though rather exorbitant; it was not necessary and too luxurious. There was another one for $40,000 and one for $35,000. She wanted to have a bath and shower for each sister. We dissuaded her because sisters did not use showers and the expenses would run terrifically high. She wanted to have a chapel outside of the house because she did not believe that a chapel should be in the convent building. We had just built a new chapel but she said it had to go. So we estimated $30,000 for the convent and $5,000 for the chapel. I received a check on 10 February 1935 for this amount from Mrs. McGovern. When she gave the check she pretended that she didn’t care for Bishop Bernard, so I asked her if he could be present. When Bishop Bernard and I came in, I said, ‘Your Lady.’ I always called her ‘My Lady’ and people called her ‘My sweetheart.’ She was in her seventies already. We did not know how much she had in the bank. The cardinal knew that John McGovern had been in jail. She made the check out to the prefect apostolic of the Bahamas and dated it 10 February 1939. When Bernard showed me the check for $35,000, I said, ‘We better go to church and thank God.’
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Then suddenly the bishop called over to me. I came over and turned on the light. He said, 'My eyes are getting so poor that I can't see very well. Is this check right? Is that date '35 or '39?' I didn't notice it but he did. It was 1939. I thought she was playing a trick on us. I don't think Bernard slept well that night but it didn't bother me. The next day I said, 'What shall we do with this check?' We thought that the bank might refuse it. I asked one of my cronies at the bank, 'What is this date?' He said, '1939. We cannot change that.'

She was still at the hotel. I called to see if I could see her. It was 11:00 a.m. and she came down. I thanked her for the check and asked her to change the date and initial it for the correction. She got red. I told her we could not build unless we had the money. We promised never to build until we had the money so as to have no debt. Even today we have no debts. Bishop Bernard agreed with me on this policy. I suppose she had divers feelings that I thought I was trying to get the better of her. She said, 'Let me have the check. Come back tomorrow.' But I said, 'No. I can wait. I have friends here and can wait.' She wrote a new check and it took about twenty minutes before she came down. 'If this is not correct, you will not get anything,' she said. It was perfect and good. She made a mistake but just would not admit it. Some months later she was at Fordham University in New York where she heard Father Robert Gannon, the president, make a plea for the sisters and she wanted to see him about it. She came the next day and asked for the president of Fordham. No one else would do because she wanted to see the president. They said he was resting. He came down. Whether they told him who it was, I don't know. She didn't give her name. She contributed $100,000 and said if he had not come down he would not have got it. You had to be able to handle this old lady.

At this time the establishment of the Bahamian sisters was coming to a head. This was between 1933 and 1936. At Ss. Peter and Paul's we had enough room for only 60 or 70 pupils but we had about 140 children. On Sunday grown people came a mile to that church. They did not go to St. Francis because they didn't want to as they had no decent clothes. I suggested that they go to Bain Town where most of the people came from. I couldn't get any location or find a place large enough for a school and church. The prices were exorbitant and I couldn't get the title. So I put an ad in the paper that we were looking for a place to build a school. Lo and behold! Mr. Newton offered us land right in town. Bishop Bernard was timid and thought what the people would say if we had something like that right in town. He was always looking for approbation. I said we were looking for land for the Bahamian sisters. I said they could use it for a school because the school was so small. This was St. Joseph's. I bought this for £900. It was in the heart of Nassau. It was called the Polhemus House and the sisters are there now. We fixed it up very nice.

Father Hildebrand wished to establish a Bahamian sisterhood. He had six colored girls in mind who were also pleased with the idea but his multitudinous occupations, lack of means and personnel did not allow him to begin. Father Hildebrand and I looked over the island to find a suitable place for the native convent. I had received the gift of a cottage and land four miles from The Priory on Eastern Road from Mrs. Catherine Satterlee whose husband had just died: $15,000 by conveyance for the benefit of the native sisters. But by this time the six candidates had disappeared. Others
had turned up. Father Hugo came but he was cold to this project. Prior Bernard came but he was lukewarm. He had no money and was too timid; he had not yet the courage to undertake this gigantic task. We bought the Polhemus estate of fifty acres for St. Joseph's Church for $8,500 after Cardinal Hayes encouraged Bernard.

We used the Polhemus House two years as a school and moved from SS. Peter and Paul, Chippingham, there. Then St. Joseph School was built and Polhemus became free. In the meantime I gathered six other girls and gave them spiritual instruction in religion. Then I had Sisters Clotilde and Immaculata take over the class. They prepared them sufficiently. I was taken sick and went to St. Vincent’s Hospital in New York. Sister Josephine Rosaire was appointed and accepted by Bishop Bernard to be director of the incipient community under the patronage of Blessed Martin de Porres. In 1936 we had three postulants. They became novices and later made their vows for one year. The following year we had two postulants and the following year one. At present we have twelve sisters, one novice and one postulant. Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi encouraged us greatly. We are still under probation and must have two sisters from a well established community as superior and novice mistress. Sr. Josephine Rosaire became sick and Sister Agatha of the Sisters of Charity from Mt. St. Vincent took over until 1951.

We built a larger convent in addition to the first one. Mrs. Nana Adderley, grandmother of Sister Maria, became a Catholic in 1934 at Fox Hill. She grew to be a most fervent member. She transferred all of her inherited and disputed titles of land to the prefect apostolic. I handled this. I manipulated the various parcels and traded them off until I had on the Eastern Road three acres which I sold for £5000. This in part paid for the new convent at Polhemus. Nana Adderley said, ‘I lost much real estate through crooks and litigation and Father Bonaventure has helped me to save that which I have. I see the Catholics are doing so much for the colored folks. I will gladly have him have it and he can use it for schools, convents, or churches.’ Thus I acquired sixty acres or so in one patch and other parcels on the island.

Sister Agatha and four other Sisters of Charity wished to join the Bahamian sisters. This was resented by the motherhouse and she was threatened to be removed and no other sister would be sent to Polhemus from Mt. St. Vincent. It took the utmost diplomacy on my part to induce Bishop Bernard to take the step for the establishment of the Bahamian sisters. He was always procrastinating even with the candidates till they fell on the wayside.

When Cardinal Hayes and Bishop Busch came for the installation of Bishop Bernard, the latter gave us $1,000 for the Bahamian sisters. Bishop Busch got the money from a Mr. Towel whom the bishop had married. After the first Mrs. Towel died, the bishop married Mr. Towel for the second time. The Towels came to Nassau and stayed at Father Leander’s. When he talked about the Bahamas he gave him the $1,000. Mr. Towel willed Bishop Busch $2,000 so that he could travel. Last year he gave me $10,000 for the Bahamas, and we directed that money to building for the Bahamian sisters.

We did not get Bahamian clergy as quickly as Bahamian sisters. Go to St. Joseph, Minnesota, for instance, and get priesthood candidates from
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those Catholic white people. Do you get them? No you don’t. Fr. Alexander Korte, O.S.B., of St. Maur’s Priory, South Union, Kentucky, was down for a retreat and immediately announced that he had six colored candidates and he wondered why we did not. But he did not keep them because they were not ready yet.

Also a certain Christopher Foster from Honduras was sent by Bishop Murphy, S. J., who asked Bishop Bernard if he had use for a young man, well qualified, who had been in Rome, had minor orders, was in the Propaganda College and desired to become a religious brother and work in the missions. Why did he not keep him? That was the first question we asked. Bishop Murphy said the Jesuits would not take him. The people in Nassau thought that because he started working in school here and trained the boys and taught Latin (he gave a program in Latin for Abbot Alcuin), he was worthy of being inducted. So he was inducted as we were not against him. Why did Rome not advance him and send him back to British Honduras? We thought the Jesuits had put one over on us, but the abbot said he should be made an oblate. He was not keen about it but had never refused him. I was his caretaker. He knew every cardinal and he had his picture taken with the Pope. They made much ado over him because he was colored. He had been in the Holy Land and spoke very glibly of these things. Now he wrote to Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, cardinal prefect of Propaganda Fide, that he would ask Bishop Bernard to advance him to sub-deaconate, diaconate and priesthood in the course of time. He received a letter back. The substance of the letter was this, ‘My dear Mr. Foster, I have received your letter and I am happy to know that you are in the Bahamas with my friend Bishop Bernard, a really holy and saintly man, and that you should strive to fulfill becoming a good religious brother of the Benedictine order. As far as advancing to higher orders you know well enough why you were sent home and no further orders were given you.’

That gave us thought that something was behind it all that we were never told. So Bishop Bernard asked Bishop Murphy what was it that was against Foster. He wrote that Rome never told him anything about it. The fact is that Propaganda never treated him right about subjects there, he said. Could we advance a man under those conditions? We were accused of not having let him go on, but those who accused us did not know the facts.

I felt that you have to have more Catholic families before you can get native vocations. It is only by exception we have those that we have so far. Bishop Bernard was very cautious and timid. He always was concerned about what Cardinal Hayes would say concerning the colored clergy and others. He did not want to do anything that would put a mark against the Benedictine priory, or the Church or his position. He made very few mistakes because of that but we always had to wait. It was five years before we got the sisters. Cardinal Hayes finally said it was all right to begin with the sisters.

We had nothing to start with. St. Augustine’s really started without the bishop’s permission. We needed common schools. When they started, St. Augustine’s had only 13 or 14 boys. The fever came for higher education just about that time but we were not ready because we did not have money. St. John’s would not give us money. We had hardly enough then to meet expenses, board, etc. and could not build. We asked the old benefactors for help in beginning secondary education for the Colored. We had no help at
all. We would get a little here and there for a chapel, an altar, etc., but not for secondary education.

Cardinal Hayes, as usual, when he came here each winter, at 3:00 p.m. went to St. Francis Xavier Cathedral to say vespers and meditate. He was always about 45 minutes in church in the afternoon. Once during Lent in the sisters' chapel, a little colored fellow barefooted, came up to the railing, prayed for a while and left. Then some others did the same. He admired them and said to himself, 'What the fathers are doing here is wonderful. We paid money for the mission here all these years to advance the Colored. The colored people come to New York and everybody gives them the cold shoulder. They move into our parishes and people hate it and the priests even more. We have St. Charles Borromeo parish in Harlem. Only about 100 Whites are left because the Colored are all around and we do not do anything for them.' He said he felt so guilty and ashamed. It began here in Nassau by this little boy coming to the altar. Many others would have said he was irreverent, but the cardinal did not say that. The boy was familiar with God and talked to Him. The cardinal prayed when he got back to New York in his private oratory that God would help him to do the right thing. Some time later in New York, a priest-nephew of Bishop Thomas F. Cusack, came and told the cardinal, 'I have been preaching missions and am not unsuccessful. I meant it when I spoke that God created man, that we are all children of God, that he loves the black as much as the white, and that heaven is as much for the black as the white. I have come to the conclusion that it is of no use for me to preach if I do not practice what I say. Thus, I come to you to ask that you give me a colored parish so I can show the people what I have been preaching.'

You can imagine how the cardinal felt. [Father Bonaventure burst into tears.] He could not answer him. He told him to go home and pray a while, think the matter over. The cardinal realized that his prayers were heard and he went to his oratory and said, 'Thank God! My prayers are answered.' He called the archdiocesan consultors and told them what happened. They all voted to send him to St. Charles Borromeo and they guaranteed him $20,000 a year if he could not make it. The cardinal said to him, 'Try to collect as much as you can from the people.' The high school was closed and they did not know when they would open it. But they got the Sisters of Charity to open the school and in a large scale they followed our example. The father came back in two days like the cardinal asked him to do and he asked for an assistant. They went to work and visited all the apartments in Harlem around the parish and helped them. The sisters took a census just like we did in the Bahamas. They filled the parish by and by. All that came from Nassau. The cardinal repeated this many times.21

2. Fr. Quentin Arnold Dittberner, O.S.B., 1933-40; 1958-62:

There was a great deal of physical expansion from 1933-40, in the period of 'B & B,' Bishop Bernard and Father Bonaventure. St. Joseph's Church was built in 1934 through a generous donation of $2,500 from Bishop Busch of St. Cloud. Before that people went (from that district) to SS. Peter and Paul in Chippingham, and the children went to school at Polhemus, now the convent of the Bahamian sisters.
During this period, Father Bonaventure started a mission in Fox Hill, renting a hall. Later, a church was built, almost an exact replica of St. Joseph’s Church. Also, a school was built in conjunction with the church. That meant that the Sisters of Charity supplied one more mission (Fox Hill), called St. Anselm’s.

Our Lady’s Church had just been finished when I came. It is the largest church in the Bahamas, built by Fr. Arnold Mondloch, O.S.B. If I’m not mistaken, Bishop Bernard never quite approved of the size of that church. But Father Arnold had vision. He sensed that that part of the city would grow, which it did. Besides, Father Arnold from about 1929-33 had as many as 200 baptisms a year. The golden age of the largest number of Bahamian converts was from 1929-33. St. Francis Xavier’s Church was also enlarged during 1933-40.

Bishop Bernard, though an able man and zealous missionary, must be said to have reaped the fruit of Father Hildebrand’s work. He was responsible for the very constructive notion that it was not sufficient just to have St. Francis Xavier and Sacred Heart, the only missions when he came. His idea was that the churches must be built where the people are. So he built Ss. Peter and Paul, Chippingham; he built Our Lady’s in Youngtown. Prior Hildebrand also started the notion of having church services on Sunday evening (besides Sunday morning). The Catholics were mostly converts, many of them accustomed to going to church on Sunday evening.

Bishop Bernard never quite appreciated the work of Prior Hildebrand. He would refer to him as ‘that Eickhoff’. Father Hildebrand was by far the most influential man in the Bahamas until the arrival of Bishop Leonard Hagarty. Bishop Bernard did good work, very zealous, but was not as close to the people as Father Hildebrand. Perhaps Father Hildebrand was too rough or unrefined for Bishop Bernard, I don’t know. But Bishop Bernard, refined as he was, saw the value, so it seems, of being unrefined; or perhaps, I should say, he wanted to be a real man. He would sometimes chew tobacco and spit on the floor.

Bernard became a bishop shortly before Christmas, 1933, as vicar apostolic of the Bahamas. It could not be made a diocese as yet. But the Anglicans had their bishop downtown, and their cathedral. Now the Catholics had their own bishop and St. Francis became a cathedral. This added much to the prestige of the Church in the Bahamas. Bishop Bernard capitalized on this prestige. He did not move much among the people, but he was a fine speaker. He did speak on special occasions, and then he did extraordinarily well. He tried to be present on important occasions, like the Christmas programs, which were given just before Christmas in the various churches. Also, every time he returned from his collection tour from the United States in December, he gave every Catholic child in school a loaf of bread (which meant some 500 loaves, at the time). This he supervised himself, dressed in his episcopal robes, going from school to school.

During 1933-40, the staff of missionaries increased somewhat. Father Cornelius arrived in 1934 and Father Marcian in 1936 and Father Leonard in 1937. But the one I thought was a promising and able missionary left in 1934 or so. That was Fr. Othmar Hohmann, O.S.B., a very able man. He possessed so much ability and aplomb that he could well have succeeded
Bishop Bernard. But there were things he didn’t like, and he asked Abbot Alcuin to let him return to the States.

The most influential personality during all this time was Fr. Arnold Mondloch, O.S.B. He had arrived several years before I did. He was a rough and ready man whom the people loved (he had a heart of gold) and also feared and respected. The only pulpit in the Bahamas Catholic Church was in Our Lady’s. From this raised structure, he pleaded lovingly with his people in his own homely style, simple and direct. But he sometimes, when the people needed it, fulminated, thundered, rebuked with all the power at his command. His people loved him so much that he could afford to scold them and take them to task. Outside of Father Hildebrand, nobody in the Church of the Bahamas was as powerful a personality as Fr. Arnold. This is my opinion. Perhaps Bishop Leonard Hagarty surpasses them as an all-around personality.

Yet, Bishop Bernard stands out in my period from 1933-40 in more ways than one. For seven years, I ate at the table the bishop presided over. He had a way of drawing out his men, drawing out the best from them. At the same time, he shared with us his own experiences, and especially his pastoral experiences while he was pastor at St. Anselm’s for twenty years. Sometimes we would chafe a bit because he would bring in St. Anselm’s so often. We regarded this reference to how things went on at St. Anselm’s as not quite relevant to the Bahamas. But in the end, we valued his wisdom and very much of it was applicable to us personally and in our missionary work. In fact, I can say that my first seven years as a priest were greatly influenced by those seven years, golden years in my life.

I came in June, 1933, directly from ordination. In fact, having arrived within a month after ordination, the oils were not dry on my hands as yet, and so the bishop invited me to give my first blessing individually to the people at St. Francis Church at the Sunday evening service.

Bishop Bernard found out before I came that I was a musician and had me start a bugle, fife, and drum corps. There were many occasions for which we played, e.g. when Cardinal Hayes arrived for his annual vacation. After two years the bishop persuaded me to organize the Boy Scout movement. I did this kind of work for five years. I had scout groups in five parishes—all three groupings in St. Francis, i.e. Cubs, Scouts, and Rovers, and Cubs and Scouts in all other parishes. My work was to keep the leaders going, and many an evening I would speed on my motorcycle to two or three different meetings besides giving convert instructions at Our Lady’s Church. Later, in 1936, from the bugle, fife, and drum corps, I started a band. It consisted of five members at the start. In two years, it had expanded to twenty-five members. At first we played for processions (e.g. the May procession); then it got to be a concert band. We gave about one concert a year. This group exists to this day, and I am proud to say that it represents the best cultural influence of the Church in the Bahamas. Before I left for Bimini in 1960, I placed it in charge of a layman, Roderic Simms. He is doing an excellent job. Now, with the junior group, it comprises some seventy members.

I was in charge of the scouts for five years. The bugle, fife and drum corps increased during that time to about forty members. It was the best trained group in town. And whenever the Catholic scouts went marching through the streets of Nassau led by the bugle, fife and drum corps, they
attracted a lot of attention. The Catholic, was the name signifying the finest such group in town. There were other scout groups with their own bugle corps. Whether the scouting activity in the Catholic Church was successful is a controversial issue. But it kept the boys off the streets and kept them interested. Anyone who didn't attend Mass on Sunday was forbidden to march. One time one of the older boys, a bugler, was not present for Mass. Someone told me he went to the interior of the island to shoot ducks. It so happened that shortly after that, the scouts had a march scheduled. The one mentioned above called me to ask as to when this march was to take place. I told him he was not to march. You can go and shoot ducks, I said to him. He knew what I meant.

Because the quality of our bugle, fife, and drum corps, attracted much attention, through it the Church gained a certain amount of prestige. The Church needed that at this time. Before 1933, we didn't even have a bishop. The Baptists had forty churches in the city. The Anglicans were very strong with five influential churches plus a cathedral, and here the Catholics were struggling along with only Sacred Heart and St. Francis and a few straggling churches on the outer fringes of the city. It was true that these churches of ours had schools staffed with sisters. This also contributed to the Church's prestige. But the Catholic bugle, fife and drum corps put the prestige of the Church on the highways and byways, and invited all to the wedding feast, as it were. This is something I am still very proud of.

I was assistant at SS. Peter and Paul, now St. Joseph's, to Father Bonaventure until 1935. When Fr. Arnold was transferred to Long Island, I was appointed pastor at Our Lady's and remained as such until 1939, when I resigned as pastor to become Fr. Charles Blesch’s assistant at Our Lady’s. But, healthwise it was already too late. I had to leave the next year, due to tuberculosis. I did the best I could at Our Lady’s during those four years I was pastor (1935-39). But I had so much scouting work that I couldn’t give the parish my attention properly. Still, I had about thirty-five converts every year. One year I had forty-three adult baptisms. It was after my time that two new wings were added to the school and the rectory was built.

I was up and down with tuberculosis for the next eighteen years, spending seven years in different sanitariums. Finally, after having part of one lung removed in 1957, I recovered completely, i.e. as much as a tuberculosis patient can recover. In gratitude for restoration to health, I volunteered to return to the Bahamas. The first two years I spent mostly preparing and giving conferences to several groups of sisters who had, meantime, in addition to the Sisters of Charity, arrived in the Bahamas, and also to the Bahamian sisters at Polhemus whose convent was established in 1938. In the fall of 1960 I was appointed missionary to Bimini and Cat Cay. While there, I collected enough money from resident tourists of Cat Cay and others to build a new school, sisters’ house, and rectory. The buildings were actually put up under the direction of Fr. George Wolf, O.S.B. I was forced to leave in 1962 on account of illness.

When I returned in 1958, I noted how things had changed between 1940 and 1958. In 1933, people were poor and undernourished because the tourist business lasted only two months of the year. Otherwise the people lived off whatever they could gather on their little farms outside of the city. This included sweet potatoes, cassava, bananas, sugarcane (just ‘cane’ to them). Besides this, there were coconuts, sapodillas, oranges, grapefruit.
With the poverty of the people there existed a simplicity. They had tumble-down shacks for homes, but most managed to have a Sunday dress or Sunday suit. The squalor was not as great as would first meet the eye. They were not filthy: you could eat off the floor.

Their houses were neat though very simply furnished. One day a man came to Father Arnold to ask him if he could have a box. What do you want it for? The man said, 'To sit on. I have no chair in the house.' The people were poor, but they had faith and trust in God and appreciated all we tried to do for them. Moral conditions of these people were far from ideal. Family life was sketchy. It was hardly newsworthy to have in the same family different fathers and different mothers represented. And among the young unmarried, there was quite a bit of promiscuity. Virginity was almost unknown. The people had great respect for their priests and sisters. It was a joy to work for them because they would listen to you and gradually you would see change for the better.

But, when I came back in 1958, what changes! The tourist business was now a year-round thing. There was now at least one person in each home who was working and getting good wages, and all year-round. People lived in better houses, dressed better, many of them had cars. And what is more, the moral condition of the people had changed. The boys and girls I had in school now had families of their own and by far the majority of them had solid Christian families, many of them eight to ten children. 33

3. Fr. Cornelius Osendorf, O.S.B. 1934—:

I was born in Richmond, Minnesota, in 1901 and lived on a farm. There were seven in our family. The oldest brother died in infancy and I am the oldest living in the family. I had intentions of going to high school. I finished grade school in 1914, but at that time my mother was sick. My grandfather was ailing so it was impossible for me to go to school. I forgot about it. In the summer of 1919 my aunt, Sister Annetta, a nun at St. Benedict's Convent, tried to talk me into going to school. Finally, to get rid of her, I agreed to go. Then it was a question of where to go, and I wanted to go to the St. Cloud Business College. But she was horrified. Oh, no, I had to go to St. John's. I remember very well telling her that I wouldn't last two weeks with those priests. But she said I should go try it out. I got a catalog and read the rules. And the rules read, you couldn't smoke until you were eighteen, unless with parental premission. I was over eighteen at that time, but the thing that really horrified me was that it said chewing tobacco was absolutely out. I couldn't see how people could be that foolish. But at any rate I tried it. I landed there on 2 November 1919. I got in only because Fr. Charles Cannon, O.S.B., the rector, was a close friend of my uncle, Fr. Ansgar Osendorf, O.S.B. St. John's was filled, but he said I should come and they would find a place for me.

So I got there, and well, it was pretty nice. I remembered this rule in the book about chewing tobacco, which wasn't observed too much. The great basketball player, Bart Rooney, had brown streaks inside of his mouth. He was chewing tobacco and never stopped it. I remember when the upper-classmen initiated me. They got me in a room the elite athletes had in the old gym. One of the things that they made me do was chew tobacco. I said, 'Well, sure. That was no problem.' I got through that all right.
But I had to go through eighth grade again because I never passed the eighth grade in Richmond. I went to eighth grade in 1919-20. One day Father Cannon, the rector, met me in the corridor and said, 'Haven't you ever thought of being a priest?' As a matter of fact I did when I was thirteen years old, but I just answered, 'No.' He turned around and walked off and so did I. I forgot about it, but when I got home this thought kept coming back about being a priest. That summer I made up my mind to go back and sign up for the priesthood, and that's just what I did. But what really made me like it all was football and basketball. I played on the high school and college football team. In fact, I played two years with 'Johnny Blood' (John McNally).

I was nineteen years old when I went to high school and I never worked too hard at my studies. I applied for the novitiate and got in, after four years of high school and two years of college. I was twenty-six when I entered the novitiate. There were nine who made profession. At that time the problem was the Bahamas. Abbot Alcuin brought this up to us when we made simple profession. He said, 'Are you willing to go to the Bahamas?' I being a bit older, that didn't bother me too much. I said, 'I have six years ahead of me so that's lots of opportunity for me to decide when the time comes, having worked around and faced problems.' When solemn vows came up the abbot asked me again, 'Are you willing to go to the Bahamas?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'You say yes now, but when the time comes then you'll kick.' I said, 'I don't think so.'

I was ordained in 1933; I was 32 years old. I thought surely I was going to get sent to the Bahamas, but Father Quentin, who was sickly, was sent. I was appointed to St. Joseph's parish in North Minneapolis for a year. When I came home for retreat, the abbot called me in and took me into his back private room. I thought, well, gee, what have I done? He asked me a few questions about retreat. What are you going to tell an abbot? You'll tell him that it's nice and good, you know, whether you believe it or not. So he said, 'I'm going to give you an opportunity to put it into practice. I'm sending you to the Bahamas.' That sounded pretty definite to me. I liked it in Minneapolis so I thought a few moments and I said to myself, 'If I say no, he'll probably move me from North Minneapolis.' I didn't mind travelling a bit, so I made up my mind and said, 'Yes.' I could see the Bahamas, be gracious accepting it, and if I didn't like it I could always get out. So I agreed and he beamed and said, 'There's another thing I want you to do.' And I thought, now what's that? He said, 'I want you to go to New York and take a medical mission course at St. Vincent's Hospital.' Well, I'd never heard of anything like that. But mentioning New York, that was the year that the Yankees and the Detroit Tigers were fighting it out—I thought, gee, I'll see some good ball games. So I went to New York and I took the medical course, but I also saw plenty of ball games. When I left I asked the abbot, 'Just when do I have to appear in the Bahamas?' He said after I got through with my course I could gradually get there. And that word 'gradually' was the key word, you know. The course was over about August 3. We had graduation, and we had our pictures in the New York News and it made the Catholic papers of the country. There were about eight priests and a number of nuns. I remember the patient we practiced on. We set and put a splint
on the fellow. He was a Capuchin and he later on became bishop of Bluefields, Nicaragua. He's dead now.

When the graduation was over, I said to myself, 'Well, there's no definite time set and I want to see some more ball games.' So I decided to work it this way—I'll go to the clinic in the morning to get practical work. I had it all figured out, what I was going to tell the bishop. In the afternoon I went to the ball games. Then along about August 11 Bishop Bernard comes to New York and said, 'Oh, we've been looking for you down there. We need you.' I said, 'Well, now, my Lord, you get all this course work, a lot of theory, lots of big words. I need something now to get practical work.' And I gave him a lot of things that I did, you know. The bishop very graciously agreed to it, even though he didn't believe it. On August 19 I left New York. I remember that very well. And on 24 August 1934 I landed in the Bahamas. I went by train to Miami, stopped at Belmont Abbey for a day or two, and came down to the Bahamas and I've been there since. I came by plane from Miami. At that time the clippers flew twice a week from Dinner Key, Miami.

Fathers Bonaventure and Quentin met me. It took a little time docking; they landed in the ocean and the tide was against them, so they had to pull the plane in. We got to The Priory with Father Bonaventure and his famous old Ford car, 1301. I thought he was going to take every pole and wall down, but we got there.

At that time there were Fathers Bonaventure, Arnold, Othmar, Ambrose and Quentin at The Priory. I landed on a Friday and on Sunday morning Father Bonaventure, who was vicar general or pro-prefect at that time, took me to St. Joseph's Church and we had Mass. On the way out I asked him what he was going to have—low or high Mass. He said I could sing high Mass. So I got all dressed—there was only a big open room, no sacristy—and went up to the altar. I knelt down, they had the holy water there, and I was waiting for the organ. So this little boy, Teddy Richardson, who today is still choir director at St. Joseph's, said, 'Begin Father; begin Father.' I was waiting for the organ but he said again, 'Begin Father.' So I intoned the Aspergus, and they just about blew me out of the church with their singing. Everybody joined in. From that day on I liked the way they participated.

Then I went to the out islands, to Long Island. Father Arnold was there before me. I was assigned not only Long Island—at that time there were only four missions—but also San Salvador. I made at least two visits a year to Inagua another 200 miles away where I had services for the Catholics for fourteen years.

On Long Island two of the churches were finished completely; the third one wasn't completed. The fourth one was still on Times Square in Clarence Town. The headquarters was downstairs, a small place, and I lived upstairs. Father Arnold had built those first three. I looked through the things that Father Arnold had, all the medical instruments and books. I recalled what I had studied at St. Vincent's Hospital and I thought I'd better look through them and refresh my memory. I remember especially the dental anaesthetic book.

Little did I think that I would get a case so soon. I was there only a few days and a fellow, Nin Williamson, one of the local gentry who liked to imbibe, came. He had a few under the belt and he was not feeling much
pain. He said, 'Father, can you pull teeth?' I said, 'Yes sir.' I had never pulled a tooth in my life. So he came upstairs and sat down. I looked at the tooth, an upper molar. I wasn't too sure about the anaesthesia, whether it was posterior or anterior in dental language. So I pulled the book out and looked at it. And he said, 'Are you sure you can pull teeth?' 'Oh yes, sir, I can pull anything,' I told him. In a few minutes I had it. I got the novocaine in and gave him a good shot. I didn't know enough to test him, but I thought I'd wait long enough until it really worked. Ordinarily you just jam it into the gums or the jaw, and all right. I waited good and long. The tooth was loose and I thought it was going to come easy, but as I found out, there can be trouble. I got the tooth all right and fixed him up. He went back to the local bar and my reputation was made. After that I was flooded with dental work. Little by little they came with all kinds of other ills. This was in 1941.

In 1942 I had my first delivery. One afternoon in May, 1942, the neighbors came and said, 'Father, Mrs. Mathilda Pratt is having a baby and you'd better come. She just can't have that baby. There's trouble. Bring your books and everything.' So I packed my books in my bag. It was only a short distance. She had a lot of children, but she hadn't had any for six years. It wasn't too much trouble; I delivered it and I baptized the boy Vincent. He was instructed, made his first Communion, went through school there and three years ago on July 19 I married him in Nassau. That was written up in the Bahamas Handbook in 1969.

On the out islands it was the accepted thing that you stayed for years. You couldn't find people who would come. And we have that problem today. You won't find many people such as Father Gabriel who was on Andros for 55 years. When I went to Long Island, Father Gabriel was on Andros. Harbour Island had Father Leander, San Salvador didn't have anybody. Father Herbert had been there before me, but he left and there was no one there. Those were the only out islands we had at that time. That's a far cry from what it is today when we are in all the out islands.

Clarence Town was my headquarters on Long Island. That's what they call my cathedral. Msgr. Jerome Hawes, the hermit of Cat Island, designed it. He had built the Anglican church there on the other hill. I built that church in 1946.

There was a settlement between Taits and Clarence Town called Dunmore, which had nothing. That was the first place where I got in. I started going there and I got in really through a sick woman who had a bad abscess on the breast. I lanced it. There was hardly a person there who could read or write. It is probably the poorest settlement I have ever seen. I used to go there every day; it's seven miles from Clarence Town, and I dressed and fixed up that abscess. Then the people talked about a church and a school. So I started instructing, and they were probably the biggest crowd I baptized at one time in that settlement—thirty-five people. We had a little bit of a house, 10 by 12. We had church there and the people would be inside and standing at the windows. For Communion they would come in one door, receive Communion, and go out the other door.

Then in 1943 I built the church with local help, all donated labor. It was the war years and it was fortunate that I had bought out an old contractor in Nassau. For about £100 I got over three boatloads of material shipped to Long Island. That gave us the material. Bishop Bernard said he
would give us 100 bags of cement, but that's all. So I built the church and in the spring, 1944, Abbot Bertram, O.S.B. of St. Anselm's Abbey, Manchester, stayed for a whole month with me. He had the first confirmation in that church. The floor wasn't even in the whole church. The main church had a floor, but the sanctuary was just crushed rock. He had to sit on a chair and the legs went into the crushed rock. He gave a fiery sermon and it went over big.

He left then by sailboat for Nassau. Now that's a really interesting sidelight, concerning Abbot Bertram. He came on the mail boat which was nothing much. He wanted to have the experience of going on a sailboat, but he didn't quite have the courage. So I said, 'Why don't you take the boat from Clarence Town?' They go around from the south side, that's where they load. I'll pick you up and it will be a couple of days before they sail anyway.' 'Why a couple of days?' 'Well, it takes time,' I said. So I picked him up and it took a week. Right across the canal from us there was a man who said, 'Isn't that the captain of the boat?' I said 'Yes,' and he replied, 'What's he doing there?' 'Well, that's his sweetheart. In the States they would say his concubine.' So the abbot said, 'If I go on that boat it'll probably cramp his style.' I said, 'Oh, they don't mind that.' So he went on the boat and they were at sea six or seven days. He'd see them pumping out the bilge every once in a while with a hand pump. Pretty soon he started getting the idea that the boat was leaking. He started asking questions like, 'You haven't got any lifeboats. What do you do if the boat sinks?' 'Oh, it won't sink.' 'But you're pumping out water.' 'Oh, that's always the case in a wooden boat.' And he said, 'In case it would get filled with water, what would you do?' 'Oh, we'd just trust in God.' Well, that didn't give him much consolation. When he got back to New Hampshire he never forgot that.

There's another interesting experience. One day I was walking to the commissioner's office on Long Island and he was with me. There was a man on horseback, and there were a couple of girls about fifty feet ahead of us. The man on horseback was from the North and he said, 'Father, you are just the man I wanted to see.' I said, 'Well, what's wrong.' He said, 'I want you to come see my boy.' I said, 'What's wrong with him?' He said, 'Oh, there's something wrong with his fizzler.' I said, 'What!' And he repeated it. I said what again and he said, 'Well you know, you know.' So I said, 'O.K., I'd go.' The boy had run up against a drum and had ruptured something and everything had gone into the outer edema, the outer skin. I saw that and said, 'The only thing to do is to puncture it and draw it off.' When I went to Manchester in 1946 Abbot Bertram picked me up in Boston at the South Street station and took me to St. Anselm's Abbey. We had supper and went to the recreation room. He introduced me to the community. He gave a long speech about me and he said, 'I want you to know he's an expert on fizzlers!'

Those were my best years from 1941 to 1954. They were really good. I liked it. From four missions I developed it to nine missions. Dunmore was the first church built in 1943. I started the church in Clarence Town, in 1944— that was the big church that Monsignor Hawes planned. I got him to draw the plans. When I came to Minnesota for vacation in 1944, I took the plans along. My uncle, Father Ansgar, was pastor at Ss. Peter and Paul's Church in Richmond. I showed him the plans and they estimated it would
cost $70,000 to $80,000 to build a building like that. I said I could build it for $5,000. So he said, 'If you can build it for $5,000 we will furnish the money?' I said, 'All right, I would build it for that amount.' He kept sending money and one of the means he had was that he used to make Mass wine. One year he made Mass wine and the grapes weren't too ripe. The wine, so he said at least, was too sour for altar wine. So he announced in the pulpit that anybody who would give $3 or more to the missions in the Bahamas would get a bottle of wine. And oh! the wine went like hotcakes. It was good wine but it was probably a little bit strong. So the money kept coming, and I built the church for below $5,000, including the property and everything.

While we were building it I wanted to get into the Deadman's Cay area, a stronghold of Protestantism. To crack that would really mean something. If I'd get in there, then we would have it made. You couldn't buy property or anything there. They just wouldn't sell to the Church. So I bought property through an Andrew Reif in Nassau, a Hungarian who had a shop in Nassau. I told him, 'You buy that property and when you have it you turn it over to us and we'll pay you for it.' When it got around that we owned the property, oh, the people were really upset. They said, 'No damn Roman is going to get into this place.' So I waited about a year and a half before I went there, because I had to finish off the main church at Clarence Town.

Finally, I went there in the beginning of September, 1948. I started repairing, but there was so much bigotry there I couldn't get anybody to work for me. I couldn't even get a woman to cook for me. So I just worked and I cooked. After I was there three weeks, on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, September 29, I was on the roof shingling, and a woman came running down the road saying, 'Father, come down. My sister is having a baby and we don't know what's wrong.' So I came down and it was a lucky thing it was close by. It was only a block away, with homes here and there. I rushed there and everybody in the area was there. They thought that she was going to die. It's what you call a transverse delivery. The arm was out, but the head was here and the feet were there. The house was packed with women and I had to tell them to get out in a hurry.

I told the husband to pick two midwives and I told the one whom I thought probably was most likely, or at least the most mouthy one in the crowd, to put the arm back and get in there and get your fingers in the mouth of the child. Then we'll turn it, and deliver it. They screamed bloody murder, 'You can't do that. You're going to kill the woman.' I said, 'Get out of here; we haven't time to fool.' I had at the most ten minutes at that time to deliver it. I went to work, dirty as I was. I didn't have time to wash my hands. I got the arm back, but I couldn't get my fingers in the mouth because the head was up too far. So I got its feet. I swung it around, got everything, head down nicely. When it came to the head, the dilation had stopped already, but we finally got a little rotation and bingo, we slipped it out. That was it. Then the doors were open and within a year and a half we had over fifty Catholics there. That was the key to the door—there's no question about it.

I repaired that building and we made a church of it. The next step was to get property at Buckley's, which was between Deadman's Cay and Clarence Town. We got Buckley's. That is all part of one area, Deadman's
Cay. When we got the property I built a church in 1952. When I was finished with Buckley's the last year and a half I was there, we went north to the Bight. But Pinder's Hill was beyond that. That's where I said Mass in the house of Manny and Catherine Knowles for over seventeen years. I went there once a month. I'd go there on a Friday night and Saturday morning we'd have Mass. We got property there and they wanted a church because people don't want to go to private houses, family enmities and all. I favor house Masses in certain circumstances, but not just for the sake of house Masses. For instance, if you have certain language groups or something, like we have here, yes. I agree with that.

Beyond that, Salt Pond was the next place. A girl from Hamilton, one of the first missions we had, was married to a man from Salt Pond. We had a Catholic marriage; he was Anglican and she was Catholic. They agreed that I could come there whenever I wanted to offer Mass in the house. I went there and offered Mass once. The whole settlement went up in arms against me. Oh no, they couldn't have any Roman come in there. They even had her buffafoed on the thing. And I said, 'All right. I am coming there.' She said, 'No, no. It's just no use.' I said, 'I am coming here and I'm saying Mass on the street. I'm going to stop on the King's Highway and no one can stop me there. I'll say Mass on the back of a truck.' I did that. Then the husband forbade her to go out of the house to attend. So I told her, 'All right, O.K. You stay and stand in the door of the house and attend Mass. When it comes time for Communion, you rush out and I'll give you Communion. Or if you have to go to confession I'll stop Mass and hear your confession, and then give you Communion.' That's the way we broke it. The husband took the first child to the Anglican church for baptism. I said that was all right, we'll remedy that. When you go to your field, take the baby along and I'll just baptize it conditionally on the street. That's what I did. That's how we got started there. We have no church but the whole atmosphere has changed now, you know. They are quite ready to have a Catholic priest come and have services.

I left Long Island not because I wanted to, but Father Bonaventure died on 9 December 1954, and Bishop Leonard called me and appointed me vicar general, a job that I didn't want. I think it was probably the hardest thing in my life that I had to do when I left Long Island. He appointed me in 1954 and in 1955 I came in to Nassau. From 1955 on I was in Nassau.

The reward of it all was that in 1955 I was honored by the queen and received the O.B.E. [Order of the British Empire]. But that was given mainly because of social work. It was really the non-Catholics in Nassau—the matron of the hospital and the Bahamian Red Cross representatives who visited Long Island. I took them around. I was the doctor and the matron was the nurse. I had the drugs at the time. Bishop Leonard brought a supply of drugs from Brooklyn. I must have had a couple of thousand sulphurdiazine tablets. I said to the matron, 'Here, give that out,' because she knew more than I did. The people called me the doctor and she was the nurse. She reported all of this back to Nassau. William Murphy was then governor of the Bahamas.

Then Sir Robert Neville came and it gives you an insight of how the British work. When they go back, when there's a new appointment, everything is reported to the colonial office. One day when Sir Robert Neville was here the bishop asked me, 'Have you met the governor?' I said, 'No,
I'd never seen him.' 'Well he knows you.' I thought, well how does he know me? Then that spring about a year later the notice came that (all that secret stuff, you know) I was to be honored with the O.B.E. A couple months before that I'd been asked by the representative of the island whether I would accept an M.B.E. [Member of the British Empire]. I said, 'No, I couldn't; I'm an American.' And we argued and finally he said, 'If it's possible for you to get it, will you accept it?' I said, 'Sure—it's an honor for the Church.'

When the honor came it was an O.B.E. Later on I found out that the Anglican Bishop Knowles of Antigua, who is retired in Nassau now, had received the O.B.E. So the governor said, 'We can't have the Catholic priest lower than the Anglican' and he changed it from the M.B.E. to the O.B.E. That's how I got the O.B.E. When I was invested in November, 1955, the Patrick Air Force commander and many other persons attended the ceremony. When the colonial secretary read the citation, I was standing in front of the governor. The secretary enumerated the various things I had done for the people. The women, all there in formal evening gowns in the ballroom of Governor's House, laughed when he mentioned I was doctor and midwife and carpenter and mason, mechanic and everything else.

No one worked harder for the missions than Bishop Bernard, and it was not a question of working for himself, as he was often accused. He was working for the Church. Abbot Alcuin wasn't at all in favor of him. For a man in his sixties to come to the Bahamas from a New York parish, it was almost impossible for him to adjust. The food, the heat and everything was against him. At first he and Bonaventure didn't agree, because the bishop was used to New York ways. But it didn't take Bishop Bernard long to realize that Father Bonaventure knew what was going on and that he had the welfare of the mission at heart. Father Bonaventure was the power behind the throne. As Bishop Bernard was starting all these missions he would worry, 'Oh, how will we finance them and staff them!' He was always afraid. Father Bonaventure would say, 'Go in there. Get that.' And Bishop Bernard even went so far as to say, 'You're worse than the young fellows.' But he let him go ahead.

In Bishop Bernard's time we spread out. The schools grew and the missions grew, everything. We went into Cat Island, Bimini, Grand Bahama; in Andros, we spread from a couple of missions to twelve. We had a priest at Harbour Island. He let Father Leander go into Eleuthera to Gregory Town and Hatchet Bay. In San Salvador we had only Riding Rock with the catechist Joe Albury. There we started the United Estates missions. On Long Island I got permission to spread out in my time to nine missions. Father Bonaventure said, 'That's the place to go.' That's how it went.

Father Gabriel said, 'Once we got a prefect apostolic, then the mission prospered and grew.' In a few years he became bishop and before he had been bishop ten years, he was made vicar apostolic.

Father Arnold built Our Lady's Church in Nassau in 1931 and 1932. The end part on Deveaux Street, the low part, was the first church. Then they planned a church on the other end, on Young Street. There was space between the two churches. While they were building it, Father Arnold got the idea to connect the two buildings. The whole building only cost $7,000 at that time. But Father Arnold worked on it day and night. He knew the workmen and he got concessions from contractors. That's how it came to
be as big as it is. You couldn't buy those timbers today for the roof for $10,000. Father Arnold did a big job there and then he was moved to Long Island as the first resident pastor in 1935. Father Denis had visited there from San Salvador and he baptized people on Long Island. That started it. Then Father Arnold was appointed pastor of Long Island where he gradually built up the churches.

During the war years they figured that the Bahamas would starve. The duke of Windsor was governor then and he started an economic committee, of which he was chairman, for greater production on the islands. They were to tour the islands and when they came to Long Island they had a meeting in the school and they all gave big talks. To be courteous and polite, they asked Father Arnold to get up and talk. He got up and began to speak about his strongpoint, local production. His speech knocked them all dead, and Father Arnold's method of speaking was not strictly orthodox. He would tell them in no uncertain terms. When he got finished, T.A. Thompson and Murphy, the manager of the Montagu Hotel, at the time, and various other prominent businessmen, shook hands with him and said, 'Father, you could do more good alone than all of us put together. You go with us and you give the talks and you organize these things. We have confidence in you.' So that developed. But the Anglican minister there couldn't see that for anything. The schoolteacher at Clarence Town, R.N. Sawyer, was the secretary. When Father Arnold would announce meetings or the secretary would announce meetings, the Anglican minister would have church services so that the people couldn't come. He said publicly, in the hearing of the Methodist schoolteacher, 'Well, if we let them go to those meetings, they'll all go to the Romans.' So the meetings were a flop. Father Arnold talked to the secretary and he said, 'Listen. You better protect yourself. You're the secretary and if these people don't come, they'll blame you.' So the secretary reported in to Nassau.

Father Arnold died prematurely of overwork. He did all the church work and the economic work. He got an abscess on his right hand. As it bothered him when pulling teeth, he pulled teeth with his left hand. It got so bad that he took the mailboat to Nassau. When he got to Nassau he saw a doctor and things got better. He said he felt it would be better and he went back to Long Island and started with the same work. Then he died on November 13. About a week before he got sick, he took two girls to the North End who were hired by him to teach the people pressure cooking. We had pressure cookers which we let out and these girls were to teach the people to use them. By 'up north' I mean at Simms. They were there a day or two when Father Arnold said, 'Come on, pack up, we're going home.' They said they thought he was going to leave them there for a week. He said, 'No, if I leave you, you won't be able to get back.' (He had a premonition or something.) So they started out for home and on the way they stopped and talked to people. When they got to where the girls lived at Hamilton, they went to their houses. He said, 'Oh, I'll stay here in this old house.' It rained heavy and he got soaking wet.

That morning he was already in a coma and yet he drove home those eight miles. He went home, stayed in the house, and the catechist came around every once in a while. Saturday night he told the catechist he would be there for Mass. When he got home for the first day or two, he tried to say Mass and kids were there. He was standing in the sacristy holding his
head and he said, 'Just a minute. Just wait a little bit, I'll say Mass.' They
waited and they came back again and he said, 'You better go home.' He
went to the house and he went to bed again. On Saturday the catechist
came up and said, 'Now what about Sunday.' Father told him he would be
there for Mass at 7:00 a.m. 'and then you take me to Hamilton on the old
Model T truck.' On Sunday morning there was no Father Arnold. He just
couldn't make it. In the afternoon the people from Hamilton walked in
eight miles to see him and he didn't know anybody. One of the girls who
worked for him, cooking, cabled Nassau, 'Send a plane and a doctor to pick
up Father Arnold.' On Monday they were able to get a plane—that's a
strange thing, you know, that they were able to get a plane and get him
in. He was in a coma all the while. They put him in The Bungalow in a
corner room. He was in there and nobody thought he was too bad, but the
Charity sister who was the nurse said, 'Look out. That man is sick.' Father
Brendan anointed him and he died within twelve hours after that of a
cerebral hemorrhage. He was only fifty-two years old. He was a tremendous
man. The duke sent his representative to the funeral at the cathedral.

In 1940 when we opened up Hunter's, Father Leonard was on Long
Island. We told him, 'It's good if you know something about medicine so
you can help the people.' He went to the nurse, the Charity sister at our
Nassau clinic, and asked for medicine. She gave him medicine and then
he'd write down what it was for. If it was tablets, he stuck the paper into
the bottle; if it was liquid he pasted it on. Finally, when they came to the
last item, sister said, 'Here's something we can't use in Nassau. We have
doctors here, but it might come in handy for you.' He asked what it was.
Sister said, 'It's medicine if somebody suffers from retention.' He didn't
know what retention meant. 'You can give them that and it might help.'

One day a man came to the church. It was the day when President
Roosevelt was on the cruiser in the water off Grand Bahama signing the
first lend-lease agreement. Father Leonard, who was there, was going to
go out with a dinghy, just go up close and say hello from the water. But
this man came and said, 'Father, you know my wife just can't pass water. I
want you to come.' He said, 'Oh, I've got just the stuff.' So they walked
through the bush for some five miles and when they got there he gave this
medicine to the woman. He and the husband were sitting on a rock under
a tree, smoking and talking. She was groaning worse by the minute; nothing
was happening. It's always the case when the stricture is so great, when it's
gone so long. Not even dynamite could work! Finally, the wheels began to
turn and Father Leonard said we have to do something. He said, 'Have you
got a washtub? Let's get the washtub and put that at the side of the bed.
Then fill two buckets of water. You go in first and hold the bucket up high
and pour it slowly in the tub.' But the man misunderstood it, and he poured
the bucket of water on the wife. And the floodgates were opened! I've
told that many times.

The first year I was on Long Island in 1941 I was at the North End
where we said Mass in a house and I would be gone from Friday night until
Sunday evening. When I came there this fellow, Gibson, was really going
crazy, screaming, you know. I got out the book right away, my Christopher's
Minor Surgery. It said not even a medical attendant was supposed to do it.
But there was no one there so I said, 'I'm the doctor.' I looked through all
the instruments Father Arnold had left. I looked for a urethral catheter,
but there was none there. There were plenty of rectal catheters, so I grabbed one of them that I thought was the smallest. I got vaseline and olive oil and boy, I just worked—get it in, get it in. Everything went all right. He didn’t feel anything because he was going crazy from pain. Finally, when it got down, when it got in the bladder, just before the bend there, I had to use real force to get it in. So I just pushed it through and I got a huge blood clot out of it. Then the flood was on and the man is alive today. The same thing happened with another man; I’ve told this story many times, too.

In 1942 I was called to the South End to Timothy Darville; the neighbors came and got me. He was very handicapped and he didn’t want anything to do with the priest. He had gangrene on the foot, as he had stuck himself with a piece of wood. But they said to come down and see him and if he wouldn’t let me in then I’d know that I tried at least. I came there and he was quite willing to have me help him. When I looked at the foot I said, ‘Goodness, he’s probably going to lose the foot anyway, but I said take the toes off.’ I had him sitting against the wall on the floor. The door was right there, and I had a couple of fellows with me. So I took off the toes. The only thing he felt was when I cut off the tendon. All the while I was doing it and cleaning him up afterwards I just figured that he was going to lose the foot anyway, the way that was spread. While I was doing that I looked out of the door. When the people have a lot of fish, they store them by salting them and hanging them on the washline to dry. There was a piece of fish on the line and big flies or maggots were around. Just like that the thought came, maggots. I had heard that as a kid from my grandfather, who talked about how they used maggots in the German army. That thought came back, and I said, ‘Bring me that piece of fish.’ I put the maggots in there and they cleaned it out and everything was wonderful.

Now the interesting part of the story is coming. That was in 1942. Twelve years later in 1954 the same man wanted to become a Catholic. I started instructing him. Then I found out that the woman he had lived with for forty years wasn’t his wife. They had never been married. I started instructing him and I said, ‘Tim, you know I can’t baptize you this way; why don’t you get Rebecca to take instructions.’ Sure, sure, he had no objections. I instructed them and they were ready. I told them I would baptize the two of them and then marry them. I didn’t say anything about the marriage; I thought maybe they didn’t want that. But they spread the word around.

I baptized them first one afternoon, then we had the marriage ceremony right after. They were up at the altar and I said, ‘Timothy Darville, will you take Rebecca Johnson for your lawful wife?’ ‘Yes sir, Father, I sure does.’ The children were there and the grandchildren, and the great-grandchildren and the great, great-grandchildren were on their way. The front pews were filled with people. I finished the ceremony and I gave them the blessing, ‘May you see your children’s children to the fourth generation.’ I kind of had to bite my lips so I wouldn’t laugh. But everybody in church was beaming. It was tremendous. When I got finished, Tim puts his arm around Rebecca and he says, ‘Come on, you’re mine now,’ in a booming voice. Everybody laughed. I said, ‘Just a minute, Tim.’ When everybody stopped laughing I said, ‘Tim, did it take you forty years to realize she should be yours?’ And he looks me in the eye and said, ‘Father, you can’t be too careful about
these women nowadays.' And that was it. They went outside and all were congratulating them like they were a bunch of teenagers. They had a wedding celebration that night and everybody got drunk. It was terrific. The Holy Ghost works in different ways and things come out as He wills.

I pulled teeth for the Anglican minister and I cured the Anglican minister's wife. She had piles and I cured her. The best thing here is to sit in salt water. That's the best cure on the beat—just sit in salt water, unless it's gone too far. Then they have to be operated on. This work with the people was a goldmine for the Church. Today they have doctors all over the island for the most part. But in my day sometimes a doctor came only once in two or three years.

The day that President Roosevelt died, a young fellow about twelve or thirteen came riding a horse around Times Square at the bend right near my house. The horse slipped and fell; the boy had a compound fracture on the shin. I was there in the yard so they ran over and told me. The boy was lying there and I said, 'Leave him lie until I come.' We got him inside, upstairs, because I lived upstairs, and we had him on the floor there and got everything ready. I shot him full of novocain. What I was afraid of was the infection. I got the bone and everything set and together. Then I took cotton wadding and put that all the way up the leg; then I went to get my plaster. I found that I had only one small can of plaster, a plaster bandage for making plaster casts. I looked out of the door into the yard. All my building material was there, and I saw the big sieve that I had for sieving sand, one-fourth inch mesh. I took my tinner snips and cut six-inch strips. And I put extra heavy layers of wadding around the leg and then I tied it all on with a string. When I got all the way up the leg, then I took the little plaster I had and I put that in and it became a reinforced cast. The big trouble was to get it off. Oh, I had trouble afterwards. So the doctor did come by some five or six weeks later. I immediately said, 'Fitzmaurice, I want you to go with me. I want you to look at this fellow. I set his leg, a compound fracture.' He asked me some questions and we want over. As soon as we got there, the first thing the doctor looked at was if the feet were parallel. I watched that, because I got him on the floor and saw to it that they were parallel. He said, 'Don't worry. Anytime you get a case, you take care of it. You don't have to worry about calling a doctor or letting me know.' I had morphine and everything. I never signed for anything. They said, 'We know you.' And that was all.

I never operated. I had to cut, amputate fingers, toes, something like that. I never did any surgery. Well, I opened up one guy for appendix and got him into Nassau. The only reason I did it was because the boat was there. Otherwise I wouldn't. I opened him, filled it with sulpha powder, clamped it shut, and then I went with him to Nassau. Then they performed the operation at the hospital. He is alive. 24

4. Fr. Marcian Peters, O.S.B., 1937—:

It was a tremendous shock to me to have to leave Minnesota for the Bahamas because I was homesick. At the end of June 1936, I went to New York City for a first aid course at St. Vincent's. Fr. Frederic Frey, O.S.B., and I took that course. At the end of August, Father Frederic and I were supposed to come to Nassau. He developed an infection in his thumb
and was hospitalized about eighteen days. I landed here in Nassau 30 August 1936. And I will never forget that morning. We took the Munargo from Miami overnight to Nassau. This particular ship was sunk during World War II when it was converted into a troopship. And there was Father Bonaventure waiting on the dock. In those days when a boat came in hundreds of people came down to the dock. Father Bonaventure would not even wait for the officials to come up the gangplank. He came up first and in the presence of a couple hundred guests on the boat, but also the people down on the dock, gave me a huge Roman kiss, the first I ever received in public. And I was an embarrassed little boy. I'll never forget that.

I was an assistant at St. Francis for one year and pastor for three years. In 1940 I took over St. Anselm's for two years, and then from 1942 to 1951 at Our Lady's, from 1951 to 1966 at St. Joseph's. In the fall, 1966, I started building my present parish of Holy Family.

We had a very solid core of Catholics and yet we were looked down upon very much. As far as religion was concerned there was quite a bit of anti-Catholicism exhibited in so many ways. We were just not accepted for the best, and our schools were looked down upon and as being second class or third class. We didn't start school until 9:30 a.m. and we stopped at 1:30 p.m. The public school started at 9:00 a.m. and stopped at 3:00 p.m. So I think we brought a lot of comment upon ourselves. We had the American system of education. We started our school year in September while the public school started in January. Eventually we began in January and then the government turned to September so we went back to September. It was a hard life in many ways because we were not accepted. To be called a Catholic was a derogatory thing, to be perfectly frank. And there were many well meaning people very interested in the Church who never had the courage to make that final step. If they did they were ostracized many times by their own families and also by their friends. That's the general idea of the relationship we had with Protestants.

This attitude slowly changed when St. Francis Xavier Academy began to have a higher standard of education. And St. Augustine's College was organized in 1946. That brought great prestige to the Catholic Church. Graduates, young men who had gone away to study, came back and showed that they were good men and received responsible positions. Slowly the prejudices were broken down. It was still there, but nothing like it was. It was particularly strong on the part of the Anglicans because of our refusing to accept them as true priests. The Anglicans really came into their own in the Bahamas, I would say, at the time of the American Revolution. The Tories, the monarchical group, came over here in great numbers, a tremendous influx of Anglicans from Virginia and other colonies on the eastern seaboard. There were very few Protestants who would ever call you 'Father'. It was always 'Sir' or 'Mister' or something. And of course the only thing you could do, and which I did, was just to ignore it. I wouldn't pay any attention.

Prejudice broke down through our educational system, through our help among the poor, through our medical programs and our sports activities. We had nothing of a public nature that people could look up to. Once we started a sports club, a large percentage of the Catholics flocked there because they had something to cheer for, something to be proud of, especially since the boys did so well in sports. This helped break down prejudice.
Its beginning was fairly accidental. Back in 1946 they resumed cricket after World War II because during the war they couldn’t get equipment. I used to watch the games—I was at Our Lady’s at the time. I knew nothing about it, and being interested in sports I naturally wanted to know what was going on. I asked this one or that one ‘What are they doing now?’ or ‘What are they doing here?’ One day a group of men said, ‘It looks like Father’s going to start a team.’ And just like that the thought came to mind, ‘Why not?’ So I saw two good cricket players whom I knew very well, playing for other teams and I asked them if they wouldn’t mind being a nucleus of a new club and from that we started out. We got to be very successful. We branched from cricket to basketball, track, soccer, baseball, softball and the various sports.

Another thing in breaking down the prejudice and one of the great assets of Bahamian life was the goodwill and the kindness of Bishop Bernard, a very methodical man. He came here fully realizing what is demanded of a pastor and he wanted to make a go of this particular work in the Bahamas. He put his heart and soul into it. He was very solicitous about the poor and close to the people. He was a close friend of Cardinal Hayes. I have a suspicion that they were looking for a future superior and Cardinal Hayes had something to do with it because they were very close. Cardinal Hayes used to live on The Priory grounds in The Bungalow whenever he came for his winter vacation.

Bishop Bernard had a wonderful way of treating people. I think one of the greatest inroads he made into Methodism was when he became a friend of Sir George Roberts who was Methodism personified, one of the great men of the islands, politically, socially and religiously. It was Sir George who used to have his Methodist carolers come a couple days before Christmas to The Priory yard and sing carols for Bishop Bernard, which was the most unheard of thing in those days. It was just unbelievable. All these things just slowly but surely broke down the prejudice.

The education work at St. Augustine’s College with Father Frederic was a tremendous influence. He was accepted by all heads of the other denominational and public schools. He was a strict taskmaster, as was Father Bonaventure. The saying in the Bahamas was that Father Bonaventure was like a bull let loose in a china shop. They were stern and yet I never regret their sternness because I feel that we were all young and inexperienced priests when we came here. We came into a completely different environment than we were used to. There wasn’t that looking up to a collar like you would expect at Cold Spring or any other central Minnesota town. We were, in the eyes of many, just another person, dressed differently, that’s about all. And there were many pitfalls we had to be on our guard about. Any night life was out of the question. We always had to be in by 9:00 p.m. unless we had special permission. Even if we went to any social affair, we had to get special permission—unless it was a sick call we had to get permission to visit a home.

We had a bottle of beer for our first 4th of July, and we had a little glass of liquor on the feast of St. Stephen, a gift of Bishop Stephen Donahue of New York. That’s the sum total of any liquor we had those days. I think I saw possibly two movies my first five or six years here. And they were both of a religious kind like Father Flanagan’s Boys Town. Our social life centered around our parochial work—social events among the young or
parishioners. In The Priory you’d play tiddly-winks in order to pass the evening. You’d sit there perhaps eating an apple with a glass of water to pass the time. That was our social life. We had none to be perfectly frank those first years.

Bishop Bernard often said, ‘Give the people good service as far as your church services are concerned.’ He personally checked how we were preaching. He would give advice on how to preach because he was a tremendous preacher. He could just get those tear glands going in a minute’s time if he wanted to. Secondly, he said, ‘Remember your greatest apostolate is with the people.’ I think all of us in those years realized that.

Every year we had a mission and every home in our district, whether Catholic or not, had to be covered, and a leaflet passed out, people greeted, even though just a few eventually got so they accepted us. Only a few, however, would refuse to accept it. To be sincere in your services in church and be with the people, give them service in every possible way, I think, was the secret of our working with the people. The people knew that and they looked forward to meeting us. The priest became everything to them. He was a mason, carpenter, lawyer, marriage counsellor; he was a leader of everything with which he associated. The people had very little to do in those days. The parish was the center of activity. The Sisters of Charity were the only sisters here then. They were just perfection personified, the way they were with the people—not only in school, but when school was out they went walking in twos visiting the homes. They helped the poor tremendously. This was part of our apostolate and part of our breaking down the prejudice of bringing people to Christ.

The Anglicans were, I would say, to a great extent withdrawn. They had a grammar school here—that was long before my time—but it closed. The Anglican sisters left, and later on when I was here they came back, but they left again, because they couldn’t make it go. The Anglicans always catered to the higher or middle class. We were always looked upon as the Church of the poor. There was a minister here last week from New York with Roy West. They were looking over the new church that we built at Holy Family. I saw them out in the yard. I joined them and they asked me, ‘What type of parishioners do you have?’ I said, ‘If you go out this way you’re going to have a middle class parishioner, but over this way you have essentially the poor.’ I said I would never want to have a parish where there are no poor, because the poor give solidity to a parish. They are the ones whose prayers mean so much because they realize what the church means to them.

The Methodists were the most generous and least opposed to us, I would say. Reverend Makepeace was at Wesley Methodist and eventually became superintendent in the district of the Bahamas. He and I were very close, not that we would visit each other in the home, but whenever we met we had a nice conversation. When he went away the first time, with the intention of staying, I met him on the street one day and he said, ‘Father, I want to tell you this. I have appreciated your friendship all these years.’ That meant a lot to me. It was a complete eye-opener to me. But there was more of an openness on their part. The Anglicans were more stuffy, high class and detached. For example, I went out to Clifford Park one day to a special program they had and I had a place reserved for me. There were
three Anglican ministers at the one end and I took the first chair because
I came at the other end. One of the Anglican ministers turned towards me
and said, 'Well, why don't you join us over here, or are you afraid of the
ghosts?' That was always the kind of sassy, brazen attitude many of them
had. That has changed to a great extent. But one of the younger Anglican
ministers told Pastor Jones of the Lutheran Church just about a year ago,
he saw no reason why the Lutheran Church wants to start there. 'We have
enough churches here already.' That was a most unkind thing to say. They
still consider themselves in a certain sense as the established Church,
although they were disestablished in 1870, I think it was. They still consider
themselves to have a certain public nature, such as when the queen was
here, everything was in the Anglican churches.

At the time of World War II there was a religious service each day at
the library from 11:45 a.m. to noon to pray for peace and victory. One day
the Baptists would have it, and the next day the Methodists, and the next
day the Anglicans. Of course when the Catholics would have it there were
tremendous crowds and just a handful of people came for the other groups.
The Anglican dean came up to Bishop Bernard and asked that he withdraw
from that service. He asked why. It eventually turned out that pressure
was put on him by some big shots in town who were very anti-Catholic. So
he said, 'O.K., we'll withdraw on condition that you make a formal state-
ment that you asked us to withdraw.' That shows you the attitude that was
there.

The Baptists numerically were the strongest. Then I think the Anglicans
were next, and then us.

Bishop Bernard made himself very available to the people. He and
Father Bonaventure lived very strictly. Both men had a tremendous in-
fluence on the local people. Their charity was one of the greatest assets we
had. They gave the colored people education. That was going to ruin
them, and hurt the Whites, so many of the Whites said. Even to this
day you hear it said occasionally that a lot of the trouble that is here
now is because we gave the Colored education. They were kept down
before. A limited number were going to Government High, about 100. It
was the opening of St. Augustine's and taking away the bars of dis-
crimination at St. Francis Xavier Academy that opened the floodgates of
educating the Colored. The academy was the first integrated school on the
island. We lost some Whites, but the bishop immediately, to make up for
it, gave scholarships to some of the Colored since not too many could afford
to pay. Slowly but surely, prejudice was broken down there and at St.
Augustine's. Another big thing was that Father Bonaventure and Bishop
Bernard started the Bahamian sisters back in 1938. That gave a status to
the colored people and made the people realize that we were interested in
them. It gave them a chance to live their religious life.

The American missionaries are expatriates now and it's definitely
known that we are expatriates. And maybe it's time we get out of here.
But they accepted us before wholeheartedly. We never heard in those days
the idea of expatriates. Anything like that was out of the question. They
accepted us and took us as we were. We were very close to the people.
There wasn't that antagonism or that feeling that you are an outsider. They
accepted us wholeheartedly.\textsuperscript{25}
5. Fr. Nicholas Kremer, O.S.B. (1939—) pastor, and Mr. Joseph Albury (1930—) catechist, on San Salvador:

Joseph Albury:

When Father Chrysostom came here we didn't have a church. The first time he offered Mass on San Salvador in 1894 was where we now have the cemetery, by a place we call Bamboo Point, just about a half a mile from Cockburn Town, the main settlement. I understand he said Mass there under a palm tree. In later years when Fr. Denis Parnell, O.S.B., built a cemetery, he erected a cross on that same spot where the palm tree was. Father Chrysostom said that was the first Mass offered where Columbus had landed. That cemetery is still there and we have a cross to mark the place where the first Mass was celebrated by Father Chrysostom.

Father Gabriel came after Father Chrysostom, just on a visit. Afterwards they bought a place where the old school is. Father Gabriel was there for a short while and he erected a trailer setup for the school children. Father Chrysostom had one Anita Smith at the time, teaching there. My mother used to go to that school. In those days women of seventeen and eighteen years still went to school because school had just started on the island. Father Chrysostom had sent us Anita Smith here to teach in the Catholic school. She came in 1912 and she was the semi-godmother. Father Leander came in 1921 as the first resident priest and stayed ten years. He started the mission in Berres section. In Cockburn Town my brother, George, was the first baby to be baptized here.

And we had Nathaniel Lereux, Elizabeth Williams, John Ferguson, and afterwards his daughter and their children. That went on for a while until finally more people came. At the time Father Leander was stationed at Harbour Yard, six miles from Cockburn Town. I used to come up every Sunday morning and ride his horse out to have Mass and instruction. When he came here he took over the Harbour Estate. On this estate they had cattle and other animals. He started to improve the pastures. He had people working, cutting the pasture down, enlarging it and making fences. He continued raising the cattle. He had a commissary also at Harbour Estate where the workers could spend some of their money. He would pay them and they'd buy food, clothing and things like that. That went on for, I would say, approximately two years. It wasn't paying, so he was told to get rid of the cattle. It was almost impossible in those days. We didn't have any service like we have now, just a regular sailing boat and sometimes we'd make a trip once a month. They only could take maybe at the most three, four or five cows at a time into Nassau. So it took a long time to take all the cows with that. The cattle were there until Father Denis came in 1931, and he finally got rid of them.

When Father Leander started this business in Harbour Yard, with the commissary and everything, everybody used to congregate there. All the young people went Catholic you see, and he had a church built there on the old slave estate. The people and all the children from Victoria Hill and United Estates used to come into the harbour from both sides. United Estates was on that side and Victoria Hill was on this side, coming in. After the business closed down, a Baptist minister realized that the church would be closed soon because they just had the older people. So the people pulled the children back into the Baptist Church. Father Leander, after Father
Chrysostom came there, was stationed at Cockburn Town. Father Leander was also at Harbour Yard as a stand-by for Father Chrysostom who was advanced in age. He used to come down and help Father Chrysostom in Cockburn Town.

After Father Chrysostom died, Father Leander moved down to Cockburn Town and there were no more missions at Harbour Estate because everybody scattered to their homes. The Catholics started all over in Cockburn Town. There was also a church at United Estates. The priest at Cockburn Town, Father Leander, used to go from there to United Estates. Fr. Denis came in 1931 and he was quite a getter. He got a lot of people from other Churches even the old people from the Anglican and the Baptist Churches, so much so that he closed the Baptist church practically in Cockburn Town. It is all but closed now because they only have a few people left, two or three. Most of them died in the Catholic Church because they were elderly people. He even took some of the ministers. Timothy Wheelen, a Baptist minister came over to the Catholics. When he died he was buried in the Catholic cemetery.

Father Leander was quite a jockey. In those days the only transportation was by horseback. I used to go up every Friday evening to Harbour Yard and bring down his Mass kit so that on Sunday morning when he came to Cockburn Town he'd be free. It was just he alone on the horse, and oh, he was quite a rider. I heard a story about him. He had a narrow escape up at Harbour Yard. He had a number of horses there and he had a large strain with the Arabian stallion. He went swimming one moonlight night with five or six horses and a colt. They got tangled somehow while they were swimming out to the White Cays, which is about at least twelve miles. He was so exhausted. But finally, the old horse named Peanut turned back to shore. That's how his life was saved. He was in a pretty poor shape when he got back to shore. He was so tangled in this rope with these horses. But he went by the sea, too. He drowned at Bimini while swimming in 1955.

Br. Bede Seither, O.S.B., was there also and they built up that place. They rebuilt one of those old two-story slave structures and lived in it. They had it very nice there. Oh, they used to work very hard. Of course they were young.

His brother, Father Gabriel, was there too and he was a professional mason. He was great at building. He built the church at Cockburn Town, which is still used today. Father Gabriel left in early 1926, and Father Chrysostom completed it. Father Chrysostom could have lived in it, but all the shutters were not up. I remember Father Chrysostom had bags tacked to some of the windows when he first came to keep the wind and mosquitoes out. The ground floor of that building is the church right now. The second floor is the living quarters. They have a church something like that in Andros. The walls of limestone and cement are very thick. The bottoms are three feet. It will hold there for a while.

The catechist before me was a schoolteacher for the government—what we called a grant-in-aid teacher in those days. After Miss Arnold came from the States as a teacher, all the children left his school and came to the Catholic school so he had to close up. Father Chrysostom was there at the time with Father Gabriel. He didn't have anything to do so he hung around and hung around until finally he did errands for Father Chrysostom and
waited for places to carpenter. When Father Chrysostom died he was still there with him. His name was George Hamilton, but he's also dead now. He used to have a boat and he was a catechist for the Anglican church at Belmont. But he was one of those looking for a livelihood. After he lost his job, he moved in with the Catholics. But before that he was against the Catholic religion. He used to teach against it and preach against it. There was another teacher, Anna Eidenschink, sister of Fr. Elmer Eidenschink, O.S.B., of Cold Spring, Minnesota. She taught for a couple of years in a building still standing near the beach.

I began as a catechist in 1929 and continue today. I have trained quite a few. I even buried quite a few when there was no priest. For a long spell we didn't have any priests. Before Father Nicholas came they were so busy building in Long Island they couldn't spend much time over here. I used to work along with Father Denis. That's where I learned most of my trade. Father Denis was quite a carpenter, mason, plumber and everything. He could do almost anything, make shoes, all kinds of saddle business. He was quite a horseman, too.

Most of the people I trained migrated to Nassau looking for a livelihood. They got a job, built homes and just forgot the islands. Because the lack of employment forces them to, especially after the military bases closed, people more recently moved to the Grand Bahamas and some moved to and stayed in Nassau. Everybody's hoping that something will start up here. There's some talk that some big undertaking will take place in the very near future—construction work, stuff like that. A lot of people are preparing to go back home to live if they could get something to do.

There are about 800 people on San Salvador, of whom 300 are Catholics, maybe a little more. So many went to Nassau. I meet them on Bay Street and talk with them.

Fr. Herbert Buerschinger, O.S.B., followed Father Denis. He was an old priest and was there until 1940. Then came Fathers Arnold and Cornelius. Father Arnold spent quite a time here especially when he was building a church at United Estates. But he was busy between San Salvador and Long Island because he was building a couple of churches in Long Island, forty miles away.

In 1941 we had a hurricane on San Salvador. I had quite an experience. The radio station where I worked was right in the mission. The wind was blowing from the northwest and the door is on the western side of this little building. The wind came so fast that I couldn't get in, so I had to jump through a window from the southern side of the building. The wind pushed the whole wall—at that time we had a very high wall, about seven or eight feet—way down to the edge of the sea. I managed to grab on some brush as I went around. A little more and I would have been blown into the sea. Then I went home. My oldest child, Mary, was just a baby then. The joker was my wife, Mabel. She told me to go—she had some diapers hanging on the line running to a chicken coop from the house. So I went to get these things, and as I was going to the coop, the coop was going for me. And that coop vanished and I haven't seen it from that moment. It just disappeared in the wind. I came back and I said, 'Mabel, do you see what happened out the road there? The house was out there and I looked and I saw the whole roof of the house come way off.' Everything was shattered. I could see people's clothes hanging on the walls. Another few
seconds and the whole house, the whole wall structure was gone. Just like that. Boy, that was something. It blew from one direction, then it went off and it started from the opposite direction. It was something.

**Father Nicholas:**

I came to San Salvador on 11 October 1942. It was the 450th anniversary of the landing of Columbus. I have been here until January, 1951, and then I was called to Nassau. The bishop had me help in Nassau with his work, especially pontifical ceremonies and so on. I thought I was out of all that when I came to the Bahamas from St. John’s where I had done the same thing, but it only got deeper. Then I volunteered for the out islands in 1954. In 1955 the bishop sent me to Cat Island. I was there for a year and a half and he wanted me to go back to San Salvador. Fr. Gall Fell, O.S.B., was there right after me, until I returned. Fr. Charles Cummins, S.F.M., went to Cat Island after me. I got back just about three days before the Saturday night hurricane struck. I was in that myself. I've been here ever since that time. The church stood through it all. In fact, it seems that the commissioner's office roof blew over the top of my house. It landed against a wall in the commissioner's yard.

**Joseph Albury:**

We have another catechist on San Salvador, Edmund Hunt, over at United Estates. He came back here from Nassau during Father Denis' time to be the catechist and he has been here ever since. We have Holy Cross Church there at United Estates. Mr. Albert Lothian was architect for that church, built by Father Arnold in 1938.

**Father Nicholas:**

When I'm not there, Mr. Hunt has Sunday school at Holy Cross Church in United Estates. And I have what we call Sunday school—the kids call it instruction—on Mondays and Tuesdays because when the bases started there was so much activity on Sunday afternoon. They are so much distracted there is no use having Sunday school if we can't have the children around. They play softball, and there is quite a crowd around here with the bases—the tracking station, the Air Force, and also the General Electric plant in another section. There must have been about 300 people at the base, along with the Seabees. But that is closed down now. The Air Force employed over eighty men, but now maybe about fifteen or twenty. So many moved away into Nassau, homes are closed, boarded up. Some moved with whole families. Many plan to come back. We still have the Coast Guard. I think that's permanent with about fifteen men stationed there.

In regard to farming on San Salvador—the people go out and cut bush and spread it out systematically so that it will burn very well. After a few days the dried palm branches are dried up and they then put them on fire, especially on a windy day. They say it gives potash and also, I suppose, it kills a lot of bugs. They have to plow it up after that. There's an old custom. They used to get a stick about four feet with the end off to plant corn. They could do that so accurately—just dig a hole, walk along, and plant just like that. They also farm pigeon peas, beans of various types, vegetables. I bought some vegetables for them today downtown. There are
four main vegetables: onion, beet, cabbage and tomato. People are nice and bring me some that they have left. I told one lady, ‘There are two cabbage seeds here. Put these two extra in there for me.’ Later on she told me, ‘Father, of those you gave, those two did not sprout.’ Oh, they like to have their fun, you know. Jake Jones sells beef, which we have occasionally. Every week or so somebody kills something, maybe sheep or maybe pig. There aren’t really any poor people in the sense of destitution, but formerly there were more. Since the government pays the people an old age pension, that relieved the situation a lot. Father Denis gave the people part of the field to help some of the poor people.

The people share onions with the priest, send a certain amount of the crop, like one-third, to help the people, those that needed help most. They bring one-tenth, some people call that tithing. You’d be surprised at the soil here. It’s so rocky you’d think you couldn’t raise a thing. But you’d also be surprised what they can raise. There’s a lot of soil below the rocks. I think the rocks are good in a sense. It keeps the moisture in the soil. I did some digging in the soil myself, bringing up rock behind my house. I was surprised how much soil there was below it. If you have the rainfall you can grow almost anything. But these couple years past we have had very little rainfall. It isn’t near what we are accustomed to.

We always had sisal before the 1940’s. They sent sisal to the market: bound bales, soaked in water, and shipped to Nassau. There they repack it, sort it, put it in 100 pound bales and ship it to the States or to the East. We lost the market for that to the Philippines.

The people also make new lime. They pile up wood, maybe to a height of three feet, get rock and put it on top and also add shells or limestone. It is very good lime, very sharp. They make a large hole two to three feet in diameter. They pile it all around, and then put rock about four inches. They usually put a one-third height of rock so you have that much wood up from the ground, and one-third rock on it, and more wood on top of that. They build it right up the height you want with the hole in the middle. Then they’d throw in some old dried palm leaves, and use kerosene and set it on fire so it would burn. After a few weeks you would have a clean white lime.

The Church or religion really means something to the people. It has caught on. They are religious people with deep faith. They take part in the services and can they sing! Different tourists remark about that—they like the singing. They join in at both churches. Now the commissioner, who is a Catholic, helps along too. We always have the liturgy in English. We had an old version of the Kyrie, Lord Have Mercy, atoned to the Missa De Angelis. Fr. Bartholomew Sayles, O.S.B., brought out the proper notations. I thought it would be easier teaching that. But it was harder than Latin was years ago. I drilled with that. The people are used to the Latin version; in fact, they still prefer the Latin.

There is dropping off among the young. Many come to Nassau to be married and the young remain in Nassau. This is the problem on the out islands. We have only the old and the children. The young and middle-aged gravitate to Nassau for employment.26

Other catechists besides Joseph Albury who served long terms include Edmund Hunt also of San Salvador. Both men have daughters who
are members of St. Martin’s Convent, Sisters Cecilia Albury and Agatha Hunt, O.S.B. The Thompson family at Gregory Town, Eleuthera, have been mentioned, especially the long service since 1934 of Samuel Thompson as catechist. On Andros after Br. James Martin, faithful catechists assisted Father Gabriel such as Cornelius Whynns at Staniard Creek, Courtney Rahming and Sam Coakley at Calabash Bay, Harriet Lundy at Long Bay Cay, Raphael Whynns at Behring Point and Alfred Burrows and George Johnson at Little Creek. Victor Cleare on Harbour Island, Nedley Martinborough at Taits Estate and Rosalie Cartwright and Joseph Darville at Hamilton all served long and generously. These catechists were trained, had natural ability and carried the burden on the scene of caring for the people until the priest arrived. They acted as deacons before the permanent diaconate was established at Vatican Council II. Those named here are not selective but representative of the long line of catechists who served in the Bahamas. The Catholic Church could not have expanded the way it did without the devotion and dedication of these men and women of God.

Fr. Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., editor of Worship, the American liturgical monthly, visited the Bahamas in the winter of 1958. He was deeply impressed with the level of community participation that had been achieved in the Catholic parishes by the missionaries. He wrote:

What is really making my first visit to the Bahamas a happy experience is the growing discovery of what our missionary Fathers from St. John’s have accomplished over the years. France has its Abbe Michonneau, etc.; but the Bahamas have their Father Bonaventure, and others, who have performed no less striking pastoral wonders, and began doing so twenty years earlier. Someone, someday, and may it be soon, must write the story. If adequately reported, it will probably advance the ‘participation’ aspect of the liturgical apostolate more effectively than half-a-dozen years of Worship propaganda.

For instance: the people in Nassau, as well as in the out islands, do not know what a silent Mass is. (If they would witness one, they would very likely suspect it of being Protestant). Every Mass is either a dialogue Mass (Latin) with English hymns, or a congregationally sung high Mass. And how they sing. And pray.

The vicariate has its own hymn book, now in a second and enlarged edition (text only). It contains 215 hymns, English and Latin. I asked my server the other day, age twelve, whether he knows them all. ‘Yes, Fadder.’ Thinking he was boasting, I tried him on about twenty first lines. He immediately began singing each. I couldn’t stump him.

Learning the Mass prayers, and the Mass of the Angels is an integral part of convert instruction. On Grand Bahama island, the congregation, all converts, many of them illiterate, knew Mass VIII thoroughly before a chapel was available.

The other evening, during Benediction, I wasn’t dressed clerically, and so stayed outside a side entrance. A youngster, 7 or 8 years old, joined me, and together we joined the singing of the people inside. Then I discovered
that he's a little Baptist, though attending the Catholic school. But he knew
the Latin words, and had a good general idea of what they meant—and
loved our Lord in the tabernacle!

It is particularly impressive (and it happens regularly) when the whole
congregation burst into improvised harmony in four—and six and more
parts.

When in the out islands, a mission has no priest for one or more
Sundays, the catechist will lead the congregation in prayer, reading the
Scriptures, and singing the Ordinary parts of the Mass. Even if only one or
several people are present for Mass, they matter-of-factly join in the Kyrie,
Gloria, etc., and say aloud some of the Offertory and Communion prayers;
several dozen people, and you will have hymns too, without or with organ.

What I have experienced here, however, and have heard about, is
what many of us have been dreaming of and praying for these many years.
The fact that it has been accomplished under drawbacks of poverty and
illiteracy makes the story all the more bright.

Msgr. Charles W. Blesch, pastor-emeritus of St. Joseph's Church in
Harlem, New York, spent seven years from 1937-43 and again in 1946
as a volunteer missionary in the Bahamas. Father Blesch was the first
diocesan priest to work for an extended period of time in the islands.
He recorded some of his experiences during that period:

Long before ordination missionary work appealed to me. I could not
see myself learning Chinese, or some African or Indian tribal language. But
I still was seeking a mission field where this would not be necessary.

The Church of St. Charles Borromeo in New York City used to have
large classes of colored converts. Because of the numbers, other priests
were invited to help baptize. I was one of these.

Frequently a bishop would preside, or a visiting Church dignitary. On
this night Bishop Wade of the Solomon Islands did the honors. I learned
that a sort of English is spoken in these islands. This seriously awakened
my interest.

So I approached Cardinal Hayes for permission to volunteer to work
there for several years. His reply was a decided 'No—It's too far away—
extreme hot climate, etc.'

However he said if I were interested, he would consent to my working
in the Bahama Islands—English is spoken there. That had been his field of
responsibility, and he knew they needed priests there. 'In fact, the new
bishop from there is in New York City now at St. Vincent's Hospital,' he
said. 'See him. If he wishes your services you may stay as long as you
wish—without loss of seniority.'

So off I went to see Bishop Bernard—of the Benedictine Order—a
wonderful person. He was not really sick; but it was his custom to spend
several days in a hospital for a checkup and rest to prepare physically for
his annual begging program. This is quite a strain for an old man near 80
years—as in some large parishes he would have to speak at a dozen
Masses.

He was very pleased with my offer. He agreed to have me stay as
long as I wished. Later he told me to go to the hospital clinic, where many
missionaries went, to learn how to meet the health problems often found on
the missions. He also told me to pray, and study up on the various non-
Catholic denominations operating in the islands. For almost a year every
week my free day was spent in the out patient department observing and
studying.

Finally, on October 30, 1937, I sailed on the S.S. Munago of the
Munson Line. We had a bad start; were supposed to sail at noon—but the
crew suddenly went on strike, which lasted several hours. We hit a very
stormy sea—the guard rails were set up—the piano in the lounge slid right
across the deck. The wind was so strong we could not land at Nassau, but
had to steam around to the lee of the island.

Since the bishop, priests and brother were known by their first names,
I decided to do the same, especially since my family name would be difficult
for the people to pronounce. So I was known as ‘Fodder Charles.’

They are very devout. Everyone says the Latin prayers out loud both
in answer to the priest with the altar boy, and with the priest, like the
Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei. When the children come into the church
in a body it sounds strange to hear the ‘slush’ and thump of bare feet on
the wooden floor.

All week I’ve been going from house to house ‘home preaching,’ trying
to interest the people in church. One woman said she had seen me the night
before. As I did not remember her, I asked her ‘where,’ for I was home all
that night. She said she saw me in a vision—‘Oh yes sir, Fodder, I seed
you in a vision, jus as you is I seed you—a big nose, nice face; you came
to the door, jus as you come now—only you was a bishop.’

During the war public prayer services were held on the library green,
asking God’s help for Great Britain. I was the first to speak, representing
the Catholic Church. The reaction was just another evidence of the under­
lying religious prejudice of some, e.g. our Bishop Bernard, who gave the
blessing, was accused of praying for the Germans when he prayed for ‘our
boys.’ (Most of the fathers here have German names, but were all born
in America, and some of their parents before them.) I was said, by a
white woman of high standing, to be an ‘American Jew’ I guess on account
of my big nose—the bishop was supposed to be masquerading under an
assumed name, ‘Bernard,’ not Kevenhoerster (his family name). One of the
fathers was said to have a brother in the German army, etc. etc.—all so
narrowminded . . .

To draw a better attendance at Holy Name meetings at Our Lady’s
I had boxing bouts—it tripled the number present.

One of the men ‘invited’ me to box (I found out later he used to be
a fighter). I was advised on the side not to box him, but I had one glove
already on, so I could not gracefully withdraw. I overheard him say to his
friend, ‘He won’t have Mass tomorrow.’ Well, I did have Mass the next
day as usual. But I think he has a pretty sore face, for my left hand seemed
always to be landing there. The decision was ten points to his five—and
he was declared besides to have fouled me. I have no marks or ill effects
from the bout, but I think I have won a greater respect and esteem from
the men . . .

While talking to a Protestant woman in the maternity ward, I learned
her baby was not well—I asked her if she wished him to be baptized. When
she said yes I did. About five minutes after I left the hospital the baby died.
Now, on follow up, mother and father wish to become Catholics . . .
Some of these folks are most edifying. One elderly lady, a cripple, comes to Mass every Sunday in a hired carriage—on Sodality Sunday she hires the carriage to take her to the afternoon meeting....

We were about to present our Christmas play by the little ones of our school. All the characters were on time except the child portraying Mary. I waited as long as I dared. Then I drove to the child’s home. The mother had just finished the costume. I sat her (the child, not the mother) across my motorcycle and sped almost a fourth of a mile back to school. We presented quite a sight with the white veils and dress streaming in the breeze....

Every year some priests of the New York Apostolate Band would come down to Nassau for vacation. But it really was a working vacation. They gave a mission here. Wide publication was given in each parish. We handed out ‘throw aways’ and house to house visits were made by priests and sisters.

In my visits I went into a big barroom, got the interest of the customers by performing a few tricks on the bar and invited them to the mission, promising them some more, outside church, if they attended. One fellow wanted to know if I had studied ‘Obeah’ (a form of spiritism and curse). A Baptist minister announced our mission to his congregation.

The afternoon of the opening at Our Lady’s Church we had a parade, the band playing in front of the society members, Fr. John Kenny and myself sitting on the back seat of an open car (like the parades held in New York City up Broadway for visiting heroes) invited all to come. That night one of the men from the bar was sitting off the aisle in church. He fell asleep and landed on the floor of the middle aisle....

When I first offered Mass at the leper colony my attention was attracted to a man who was wheeled in by a fellow guest. I learned he could not use his legs, nor his hands, nor arms; had to be fed by another; at Communion time I just dropped the Sacred Host into his upturned open mouth (he had no control of his jaws) like a mother bird feeding her young. He received Communion every time the priest celebrated Holy Mass. He had to close his mouth by turning his head to one side and so pushing the jaw closed by his shoulder.

His background interested me. He was one of the oldest patients, having been transferred from the old discontinued leprosarium attached to the Nassau General Hospital on the hill. This building was isolated a good distance from all others. A high wall surrounded it. Like so many stone walls in the Bahamas, the top of it was embedded with hundreds of pieces of broken glass to keep intruders out and the patients in.

Well, this patient had asked Father Chrysostom to bring him Holy Communion on the First Friday. The appointed time arrived, but father had not yet come. More time elapsed and still no priest. Late that night the door bell rang at The Priory. Father Chrysostom answered it. There stood the patient, his hands bleeding and his clothes torn by the rough glass chips as he scaled the high wall surrounding his enclosure. Father was deeply grieved that he had forgotten to go as promised. It was Willie’s ninth First Friday Communion and he did not want to miss it. He scaled the wall in his weakened condition, walked about a mile and said, ‘Father, I’m still fasting. Please give me my ninth First Friday Communion.’
This was the living saint I had the privilege to prepare for death. Before anointing his eyes I asked his attending companion to remove the sun glasses he always wore. I had wondered why. I learned then the reason why—there were no eyes—just plain white balls...

Grand Bahama: Patients began to come in with e.g. a burned arm, poisoned by eating barracuda and rock fish, kids with worms, fish bone pierced foot, colds, constipation—for which they ask for 'operative medicine'), cuts, pains, toothache, rash, earache, sore eyes or throat, indigestion. Some people walked as far as 20 miles from West End, now a famous resort area. One child was brought to me with difficulty in breathing. I palpated the nose and found it very hard. I took my dental forceps and extracted a small bolt which the boy had stuffed up his nose...

It all seems so strange; here all are Protestants, yet all yearning and learning to be Catholic, with a deep interest. We walked nine miles along the beach—no roads—baptizing those old folks confined to their homes, but already instructed. Later while bringing Holy Communion to them I had to cross some shallow water, so I took off my shoes and socks and waded—my first Communion call with bare feet.

One hears Catholic hymns and prayers everywhere, of their own accord—in the fields, on their boats, in their homes—they recite the rosary aloud—the Mass prayers in English and Latin with the priest at Mass, sing high Mass and know more about things Catholic than most Whites up north—yet they are Protestants...

My most hectic day was Sunday 11/10/40—reception day for converts. A woman who walked about four miles came to the house and I finished her instructions while I was still shaving. Mass was at 8:00 a.m.—after Mass I received four converts privately. While I was getting breakfast ready, a girl brought her baby to have her boil dressed (I drained about a cup of pus). Then the timekeeper of the new canning factory at West End came at 10 minutes before my second (for Protestants) service. As he had to get back on time I drew his two aching teeth, thus delaying the 11 a.m. service more than a half hour. When I returned to the house to prepare for baptisms, three more patients came. While stealing a bite to eat I instructed an old catechumen. Reception was scheduled for 2:30 p.m.—twenty-one new members were received—finished about 5:00 p.m.—two more tooth extractions—another fellow instructed—services at 7:00 p.m.—back at the house about 8:30 p.m. at my office (I fell asleep over it). I had preached four times that same day—at Mass, at the Protestant 11 a.m. service—at reception of converts and at night—all different sermons. These people will take all they can get—they love to listen....

Stafford Creek, Andros: I am the first Catholic priest ever to stop there; everybody was most friendly and well disposed I had arranged with one of the men to stay at his house. His wife and family were quite surprised when we ‘busted in’ around 7:30 p.m. I slept in the parents’ bed, fixed with clean linen over straw. Next a.m. it rained, after which the wife called in all the neighbors for my Mass. About forty people swarmed all about the house, as I vested before them, ex-
plaining as I went along. I had instructed the little girl, about fourteen, to read the English prayers of the Mass from Father Stedman's missal (which she did with my coaching during Mass).

After Mass I gave more instructions and asked for and gave answer to their questions. They all seemed pleased, and could not get enough, especially when I brought out the lies they had been taught against the Catholic Church.

After 'doctoring' and preaching some more, I arranged for a boat to take me to Mastic Point. I was told it was eight to ten miles away, and with the wind favorable, as it was, it should take about three hours.

So at the appointed time—2:00 p.m.—the boat came—only a small dinghy—about twelve feet long—with sail. As there is no dock there and it was low tide I had to walk barefooted about half a mile out to where she lay. It was an agonizing walk, as many mangrove trees had grown on the 'beach' and had burned on low tide down to the roots, leaving small stumps about one inch high every few inches you walked. Some folks helped me tote my things out, and soon we were underway. We had to sail out quite a distance to reach deep water.

I sat on top of a fish well amidships, but when we got out farther and the water got rough and came in, I had to abandon my seat, as the water inside splashed up and wet me. We had to bail out water constantly. When I sat on the gunwales (the upper side where the oar locks are on a row boat), it balanced the boat better, and we could make better time (but got wet) by sailing closer to the wind (more wind could hit the sail). I remained barefooted with trouser legs rolled up, as the boat leaked and we shipped lots of water. We were now both sitting on the weather (wind) side, the waves breaking over the gunwales soaking me.

As time slipped by I began to ask how much longer it would take. Well the wind had shifted to the north, making a head wind; so we had to tack (shift the angle of the sail to ride 'zigzag'.) So my man changed his opinion about the time. We should have been there about 5:00 p.m. He now thought we would 'reach' about sundown—it was only around yonder point. But the sea got rougher and we had to tack so much, he later felt we might surely get there before dark. Once a heavy gust of wind wrenched the tiller from his hand, and our port side completely submerged—more bailing.

As the sun sank my feet, seat, in fact my whole wet body began to feel chilly. Fortunately the skipper had an overcoat. This he had me put on (he was astern and I was taking all the water on me—to keep proper balance—and protecting him at the tiller).

After we had rounded the point previously indicated, the skipper realized he had made a mistake—it was another point, now dimly visible about ten miles away. I began to get anxious,—'You're sure no coral heads, or reefs or shoals along here? We can't see them in the dark'—'No sir, Fodder. This shore am clear of those.' About an hour later we struck something, but no damage, thank God. I suggested we put into shore, and spend the night on a cay. But he assured me we would surely get to our destination before the folks went to bed. The thought of sleeping in wet clothing, unprotected from wind and rain, sand flies and mosquitoes helped me to decide to continue in the dark. All we could see now was an indistinct black line I knew to be the shore. So on we went. Presently the skipper
Bernard the Bishop

lifted up the belly of the sail and announced, 'There's the dock.' I don't know when I was so glad to put my feet on dry land.

A half-mile walk brought us to Father Gabriel's house and church, about 8:30 p.m. Instead of two or three hours it took over six—instead of eight miles it was over twenty (I later discovered). One man later, upon learning I made this trip, remarked, 'And you wasn't coward!' (meaning afraid). Well I surely did pray! Next day I saw Father's radio—a 'Zenith'—which had as a trade mark the zigzag lines of lightning or electric spark. I remarked, 'I can't look at that radio without being reminded of all the tacking we had done.'

The night of our arrival I was naturally dead tired. But I was awakened from sleep by feeling something crawling on my leg. Frightened, I kicked the cover off and also kicked out a rat with a bang against the covered drinking water pail. In four nights we caught five rats. Needless to say, I got little sleep, listening to them playing in the next room and coming also into mine, expecting them to climb in bed again. I almost suspected Father Gabriel had been feeding them; he was so kind to all.

Passing through the section where the school is, I noticed on the door of the only shop an announcement put up by order of the teacher, to the effect, 'Father Charles, doctor and physician, will pull teeth and treat sickness on the north side. He will also be glad to accept new members in the Catholic Church.' I tried to get this paper announcement, but failed. I had nothing to do with such a sign.

The return trip to Nassau was a rough one—over 100 people crowded on a ship about sixty feet over all. When I went down to the dining quarters to escape the cold wind, the steward was setting the table. I made to leave (the crew eats first). They said, 'No, Father, stay—you're one of the crew.' This made me feel good, because these were the same fellows who 'gave me the run around' as I erroneously thought, when I wanted some pork rind for shark bait on a Sunday.27

Bishop Bernard ran a tight ship during his administration which was centered at The Priory in Nassau. Priests engaged in pastoral work on New Providence took their meals and lived there. They commuted to and from their parish and chaplain work in convents, the hospital and the leper colony on bicycle and later motorcycle. Autos were an infrequent luxury and on the out islands boats and horses were grateful aids on long treks formerly made by foot over rocky paths where there were no roads.

Meals at The Priory were sparse but adequate. A monastic schedule was observed as strictly as possible. Abbot Alcuin far away in Minnesota was always reminding the Bahama Benedictines that they were members of a religious community doing missionary work. It never quite worked out because of the environment and distances to be covered, but a valiant effort was made. On the out islands a missionary had to live alone and did so with daily privation. Father Cornelius recalls that he was so exhausted after a day's work constructing the church at Clarence Town, Long Island, that he would collapse across his bed and not awake to eat the dinner brought in a tin container by the faithful wife of the catechist.
Father Gabriel lived alone for fifty-five years on Andros Island, certainly a record in any missionary chronologist, and survived on the simplest fare that was brought to him by his devoted people. They were men of iron constitutions, those early missionaries in the Bahamas, and today their story is as remote as horse power is to the jet generation which has come with tourism to the Bahamas.

Bishop Bernard insisted on prayers before meals, a reading from The Rule of St. Benedict, silence and reading at table except on major feasts and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the cathedral after meals. In the evening curfew was strictly enforced and all had to be back at The Priory by 10:00 p.m. Beverages were never served except on one or two major feasts of the year, and then it was a bottle of beer in the German tradition of Bavaria, not of Rhineland wines. The fathers would gather each evening on the north porch of The Priory's second floor to talk about current issues before retiring. This was a communal gathering which persisted through the years. But hostile neighbors would listen each time they opened the refrigerator to take a glass of cold water and record for the credulous, "The priests exploded another champagne bottle," each time the refrigerator door closed. Such attitudes have disappeared entirely from the Bahamas but they were very much present in those days and a force to be reckoned with.

Three missionaries of this second period of Bahama Catholicism received the order and badge of the British empire as recognition by the government of their work among the people. Most fittingly the senior missionary, Father Gabriel, received the O.B.E. in 1935 on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the accession of King George V of England. Governor Sir Bede Clifford conferred the decoration on this simplest and most gallant of Christ's priests. Father Cornelius also was named an officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 1955 in recognition for his work on the out islands, and Father Frederic received his O.B.E. in 1962 for his contribution to educational development in the Bahamas.

During those quiet years before World War II each winter season usually saw the arrival in Nassau of the cardinal-archbishops of New York and Boston. The whole community was alerted to their separate comings and enjoyed their presence. Cardinal Hayes often came on the ocean-going yacht of the Marquis George McDonald. He and his party always stayed at Bungalow Dunmore in The Priory yard, ate with the community and participated in all current activities including confirmation tours to the out islands. With Cardinal William O'Connell of Boston it was quite another story. He arrived by steamer—'Gangplank Bill' as he was called—at Prince George wharf and coldly disembarked as the Catholic
Bernard the Bishop

band played and the assembled school children waved a friendly welcome. Bishop Bernard would approach his presence to extend greetings as the fathers stood in a line to receive him. O'Connell brushed them all off with a reminder to Bishop Bernard, "Keep the monks away," as he rode off in solitary splendor to The Hermitage for his pre-Holy Week sojourn of six weeks in the sun. No one ever intruded on his splendid isolation there.

O'Connell, with genuine ethnic instinct, for $11,000 had obtained at a bargain from Harold George Christie The Hermitage with its seven and a half acres and 350 feet of ocean frontage. It was prime real estate on a height fronting the sea on East Bay Street. The house was reputed to be the oldest in Nassau, constructed by the infamous Lord Dunmore as a summer retreat during his governorship. O'Connell brought with him Monsignors Jeremiah F. Minihan and Michael J. Splaine. At 4:00 p.m. each afternoon after a siesta, O'Connell would walk east, with the two monsignors following respectfully behind, stop to pick a rose for his coat in the garden of Mrs. Leslie Higgs and return to The Hermitage. When he went downtown he always talked with the shopkeepers and was known among them. As for the Catholic life of the Bahamas, he remained ever aloof unless formally invited to participate in an event. He made a few donations across the years but nothing of significance until Fr. Charles E. Coughlin, famed radio priest of the 1930's in the United States, attacked him for spending winters in the Bahamas in the midst of a depression among the people. O'Connell then donated The Hermitage to the vicariate and never returned. The Hermitage was used variously as a school by Xavier College, as a residence for the fathers and brothers while St. Augustine's Monastery was being constructed, and then as the residence of the second bishop of the Bahamas after 1950. It has been a valuable center for housing visiting episcopal and clerical friends of the Bahamas over the years.

After Monsignor Bernard was consecrated titular bishop of Camuliana and prefect apostolic of the Bahamas he designated St. Francis Xavier Church as the pro-cathedral. Fr. Othmar Hohmann, O.S.B., was installed by Bishop Bernard as first pastor. During his three year administration Father Othmar brought remarkable zeal for souls and enthusiasm to his assignment. The number of parishioners trebled and the school population doubled during these three years. People still talk about Father Othmar's parish visitations and care for the young and the sick.

Bishop Bernard and Father Othmar extended the nave of St. Francis, doubling its size, and two attractive towers were added in 1933-34. The classroom space was trebled at St. Francis Xavier School by the large addition of St. Benedict Hall which was paid for by Cardinal Hayes.
Fathers Frederic Frey and Marcian Peters, O.S.B., were the first full-time assistants at St. Francis Xavier. Father Marcian then became pastor from 1937 to 1940 with Fr. Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., as his assistant. Father Marcian introduced the first hymnal for use at low Masses and vigorously pursued a program of active participation in the liturgy. He also was strongly interested in sports and dramatics. Father Frederic succeeded Father Marcian as pastor of the pro-cathedral from 1940 to 1945 and had as his assistant Fr. Brendan Forsyth, O.S.B., who had come to the Bahamas after his ordination in 1940. When Father Leonard became pastor in 1945, Father Brendan continued as his assistant for two years and then was pastor himself from 1947 to 1956. During this period between the death of Bishop Bernard and the advent of the new bishop, Father Brendan established new standards of pastoral effectiveness, taste and general excellence at the pro-cathedral. He was assisted during this period by Fathers Kevin McCann, Prosper Meyer, Herman Wind, and Gall Fell, O.S.B., and Fr. Arthur Chapman, first diocesan priest of the diocese of Nassau.

As Abbot Alcuin continued sending more fathers and brothers to the Bahamas he was anxious to establish a permanent monastery where traditional Benedictine community life could be carried out, including public praying of the Divine Office of the Church. In 1946, this aim was achieved with the establishment of St. Augustine of Canterbury Monastery in Fox Hill. St. Augustine's at first was a dependent priory of St. John's with Fr. Frederic Frey, O.S.B., as prior. Prior Frederic had for years been encouraging the opening of a first-class boys' school to train Bahamians in pre-university and pre-professional programs. In this way clerical and lay leaders could be trained for future work in the Bahamas. This was accomplished with the beginning during the same year of St. Augustine's College, a preparatory school for ninety-three boys adjoining the monastery. This school quickly established its reputation in the annual Cambridge examinations. Msgr. Jerome Hawes, the renowned English priest-architect, drew the unique plans for the monastery and school buildings which he, and the monks erected in great part by themselves and with the help of friends.

As Abbot Alcuin and Bishop Bernard began to realize in the late 1940's that their careers were drawing to a close, the subject of an abbey nullius in the Bahamas was renewed. The abbot requested the bishop in 1947 to join him again in a request to Propaganda for an abbey nullius. But Bishop Bernard felt that the Bahamas were still in a missionary condition which limited the possibilities of Bahamian vocations in sufficient numbers to sustain an independent Bahamian abbey, as he told Abbot Alcuin on 4 August 1948:
Fr. Arnold Mondloch, O.S.B., welcomes the duke of Windsor, former King Edward VIII of Britain, as governor of the Bahamas in 1940.
Fr. Herman Wind, O.S.B., and people on steps of Ss. Peter and Paul Church, Clarence Town, Long Island.

Mrs. Frances Clarke, a part of a long and distinguished line of lay teachers in the islands' Catholic schools.
Father Cornelius, awarded the Order of the British Empire, with Father Bonaventure, Governor Sir Robert Neville, and A.D.C. Bryon Moody.

A happy day — the parish of St. Anselm's, Fox Hill, opens. Bishop Bernard, Charles Edgecomb, Julia Sturrup, Christina Adderley, Father Bonaventure, Mrs. Bagger, and Fr. Frederic Frey, O.S.B.
Patriarch Uriah Knowles Sims of Long Island.

Cardinal Hayes bids good-bye to Bishop Bernard as the cardinal leaves the Bahamas for the last time, 9 March 1938.

Last photo of Father Gabriel, with his friends on Andros.

Last photo of Bishop Bernard before St. Francis Xavier Cathedral, Nassau.

The funeral of Bishop Bernard on The Priory grounds.
Our 10,000 Catholics are surrounded by a decided, strong and active Protestant culture on all sides, and we cannot expect to have many vocations to the religious life, nor the priesthood. This condition is apt to last for the next forty or fifty years. I want to assure you of my generous goodwill in this old discussion and also my desire to work with you hand in hand, both for the spiritual welfare of our little community as well as for the advance and study of the mission work. God has been more than liberally good to us, and while we thank Him for His gracious goodness, we want to assure you that we are willing to cooperate most heartily and to help follow your leadership to further progress.

Bishop Bernard’s health was fragile the last two years of his life. He told Abbot Alcuin on 19 July 1947, “Yes, God has pointed His finger at me and the indications are serious enough to make one thoughtful and prepared. It is my duty to get ready to go to heaven. I was really sorry I could not be at dear old St. John’s for the celebration of your jubilee celebration as a Benedictine on July 11. There is a lonely feeling around my aching heart. God must be my comfort.” Abbot Alcuin replied, “Both of us must realize that we are no longer young men and that our capacity for work is now limited. That is difficult to do after a life of activity, but possibly we can give mutual good example.”

The doctors in Nassau told Bishop Bernard to slow down and rest, but the idle hours were hard for him. Mornings were difficult and he often could not offer Mass and had to stay in bed after receiving Holy Communion. In the afternoons he moved around, visiting parishes or encouraging builders of the new St. Augustine’s Monastery and College, as well as the additions to St. Martin’s Convent of Bahamian sisters. He was interested in the smallest details and spoke with everyone he met along the way. In the evenings he wrote letters in a good longhand despite his failing eyesight and weak condition. He had a series of cerebral hemorrhages which affected his memory, as well as pleurisy, heart failure and general deterioration of his organic functions.

Sir Etienne Dupuch summarizes the contribution of Bishop Bernard as well as personal recollections of his last illness:

Fr. Bernard was the perfect choice for this mission in a British colony. A man of culture, endowed with a natural charm...and saintly by nature...he built a great structure on the foundation laid by Fr. Chrysostom...

One of the finest stories of Bishop Bernard’s public relations was that on one occasion the late Sir George Roberts, President of the Legislative Council came with a group of choristers from the Methodist Church to sing Christmas carols for the Bishop who was then in his final illness.

The old Bishop struggled out of bed and came to the upstairs window of The Priory where he invited Sir George to come upstairs to him.

At the top of the stairway Sir George knelt and received the thanks and blessing of the Bishop. Sir George later told me that this was one of the finest moments of his life.
‘I felt I was in the presence of a saint,’ he said. And from that night Sir George was to become a very warm and trusted friend of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas. When Sir George died two years ago the Methodist Church lost one of its most ardent members and the Catholic Church lost one of its warmest and most valued friends.

Because of the common link with Fr. Chrysostom the Bishop and I were to become close friends. I was his confidant.

We had one big argument. Catholic schools were not being successful in getting passes in English examinations and I told him that if Catholic children were required to attend Catholic schools it was the duty of the Church to give them a form of education that would fit them for life in a British community. To press my point I removed my children from Xavier’s College and sent them to Queen’s College.

It wasn’t that the teachers at Xavier’s were not good. They were the best. Over 30 years ago the late Mr. Wilton Albury, Inspector of Schools...then the top post in the Board of Education system...organized a summer school for Out Island teachers and recruited volunteer teachers from the Secondary Schools in Nassau. That was his first contact with the Sisters of Charity. He later told me that they were the best teachers in the colony.

But they taught American methods and this did not fit children for English examinations.

Bishop Bernard decided to send Fr. Leonard to Oxford University for postgraduate work. It was his intention to appoint him Director of Education for Catholic schools on his return to the colony. But just at that time World War II came and the plan fell through. The Bishop then made other arrangements to bring Xavier’s in line with English methods and he also established St. Augustine’s College. Then I sent my children back to Xavier’s and later to St. Augustine’s.

Bishop Bernard had his eye on young Fr. Leonard. He finally decided that he should be his successor.

In his final illness I was with him often. I usually went to the 8:30 a.m. Mass. If I skipped that Mass and attended the 11 o’clock Mass instead the old man had messengers out looking for me. It had become a ritual...every Sunday morning after Mass I had to go to his bedroom and sit on a stool at his feet while he reclined in a lounge chair.

During this period he was anxious to resign as Bishop to make place for Fr. Leonard. He wanted to make sure by fixing this up before he died. But the correspondence with Rome dragged on.

And then the old man suffered a severe blow. Fr. Leonard was stricken with a bone infection that was believed to be incurable and this put a temporary end to his hopes. But then...there was a miraculous cure and the old man was happy again.

By the time the end came all his family had died. On his last birthday before his death he had a couple come from New York. He gave a small party in Bungalow Dunmore. Apart from this couple my wife and I were the only ones there. He was in good spirits, and we had a gay time. He then told me that when he died these were the only two people outside of Nassau he wanted me to inform. We were the only close friends he had left in the world besides his priests. And when he was dying...a short time afterwards
...my wife and I were the only ones with him besides his priests. He asked for us to be with him.

I remember the occasion when he celebrated his fiftieth anniversary in the priesthood. In his sermon he told how one of his sisters had written to ask him what he wanted for a present. He wrote back to tell her that he did not need anything. ‘Oh happy man!’ she wrote on receiving his letter.

It was this happy man who selected the present Bishop of the Diocese of Nassau and it is this Bishop who has become the instrument through which the dream of San Salvador of Fr. Chrysostom over a half century ago may now be realized.

For myself... I feel that I have been specially blessed to have had so many saintly men for close friends for so many years of my life.28

Bishop Bernard died peacefully in his room at The Priory on the eve of 9 December 1949. He had celebrated his eightieth birthday on November 1, had completed fifty-seven years as a Benedictine monk, fifty-three years as a priest, and sixteen years as a bishop.

The bishop had suffered several bad strokes during his last years but had always rallied his spirits anew, even when left partially paralyzed for days. However, the last attack on December 5 left him very weak, and by the afternoon of the 9th it was evident to the many devoted callers that the bishop was dying. The fathers and brothers from the monastery were called to The Priory. Prayers for the dying were recited and all in turn gave the bishop their blessing. Although in great agony he was conscious and did his utmost to join in the prayers.

Later in the evening, as Lauds were ending at the monastery, the bishop died. The monastery bell together with those at all the parishes tolled the tidings as the choir sang the Subvenite, the Church’s prayer for the departed.

It was the end of a long and fruitful life. During Bishop Bernard’s twenty years as Catholic shepherd of the Bahamas, the number of Catholics grew by leaps and bounds. The deep love with which all the faithful always spoke of their spiritual leader was proof that he bore that Benedictine Pax with him wherever he went.

His worn cassock and the severe simplicity of his living quarters on the second floor of The Priory showed that he ever retained the humble heart of a monk, remembering the injunction of the Holy Rule, “To hold one’s self aloof from worldly ways.” He was “a great priest who in his days pleased God and was found just.”

The parishes and missions founded under Bishop Bernard were:

- On New Providence (Nassau): St. Joseph’s, St. Anselm’s (Fox Hill), St. Bede’s, St. Thomas More
- On Andros: St. Gertrude’s (Kemps Bay), Sacred Heart (Little Creek), St. Mary’s (Mastic Point)
On Long Island: Ss. Peter and Paul (Clarence Town), Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (Hamilton), Immaculate Conception (Mortimers), Holy Trinity (Taits), Assumption (Dunmore), Temporary chapel (Deadman’s Cay)

On Cat Island: Our Lady of Mt. Sion (Port Howe), Holy Redeemer (Freetown), St. John (Bain Town), St. Francis of Assisi (Old Bight), St. Michael the Archangel (Devil’s Point), Temporary Chapel (at Knowles)—destroyed by hurricane in 1941

On Grand Bahama: Missions at Hunter and West End.

One mission each on the islands of Eleuthera, Bimini and Cat Cay.

In reviewing the work of Bishop Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., in the Bahamas, his labor in the promotion of the education of youth is worthy of note. During the twenty years as superior of the Catholic Church in the colony, he was much concerned about the care and education of youth both in the classroom and out of it, without distinction of race, color or creed. To him the proper training of youth was of prime importance, and he did all in his power to promote it.

During those twenty years four new Catholic grammar schools were opened in Nassau and ten on the out islands, namely, on Andros, Bimini, and Long Island. In secondary education St. Augustine’s College in Nassau was opened as a high school for boys in 1945. During this period the enrollment in the Catholic schools rose from less than 1,000 to 2,497.

To accompany this increase of grammar schools and pupils, the number of teaching sisters from Mt. St. Vincent on the Hudson, New York, was increased from ten to twenty-one; five sisters of the new Convent of Blessed Martin de Porres, Nassau, were added to the teaching staff; the number of lay teachers was increased by almost forty. The staff at St. Augustine’s in 1949 numbered nine priests.

There were twenty-seven Sunday schools begun during those twenty years. Likewise outstanding was the educational work accomplished in the Madonna Day Nursery, Nassau, by the Sisters of Charity, with a daily average attendance of forty pre-school children.

The care of youth outside the classroom was fostered through the many youth organizations instituted under Bishop Bernard. The following list of such organizations will give some idea of his efforts for youth: the athletic clubs together with their athletic fields and clubrooms in most of the Nassau parishes, the Catholic Band, St. Benedict’s Choral Club, Glee Club, the Fifth Bahama Boy Scout Troop, the Girl Guide Troops, the former larger fife and drum corps, the several dramatic clubs, the former St. Anselm’s Harmonica Group, the many summer study clubs and sewing clubs. All of these did distinct service to youth in the colony.

Without a doubt the bishop’s greatest single contribution to education in the colony was the founding of the Convent of Blessed Martin
de Porres and of St. Augustine’s Monastery. In the former a Bahamian teaching sisterhood was established and already five of its sisters were taking a full-time active part in educating youth. In St. Augustine’s Monastery it was hoped that local young men would soon seek admission and assist in carrying on the work of Benedictine education in the colony.

It was the bishop’s love and ever watchful interest in the youth of the islands that endeared him in the hearts of his people. To him the colony expressed its sincerest gratitude. The thousands who came to pay their respects to Bishop Bernard as his body lay in state in Bungalow Dunmore on The Priory grounds evidenced the genuine veneration in which he was held by all Bahamians, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

The remains were moved to St. Francis Xavier Church on December 12, the day before the funeral. At 7:30 that evening the community gathered there to recite Vespers of the dead. After Vespers they joined with the faithful in praying the rosary.

Next morning, December 13, Matins and Lauds for the dead began at 9:00. At 10:00 the pallbearers carried the body to the outdoor basketball court in The Priory yard where a temporary altar had been set up. A field Mass was the only means of accommodating the thousands of mourners.

Abbot Francis Sadlier, O.S.B., St. Leo’s Abbey in Florida, celebrated the pontifical requiem Mass, and Father Bonaventure, pro-vicar, acted as assistant priest. Fathers Leander and Ferdinand were deacons of honor, Fr. Columban Kremer, O.S.B., from St. Anselm’s parish in New York was deacon, and Father Prosper was subdeacon. The masters of ceremonies were Father Nicholas and Mr. Roy Barnett.

Following the Mass the five absolutions prescribed for a deceased bishop were performed by the celebrant, the assistant priest and Fathers Frederic, Leander and Marcian. Msgr. John Hawes was present in the sanctuary.

The funeral homily was given by Fr. John Kenney, spiritual director at St. Joseph’s Seminary, Dunwoodie, New York, who came as personal representative of Cardinal Francis Spellman. St. Augustine’s College students attended in a body, each carrying one or more wreaths of flowers. After the final absolution the ministers, confreres and throngs of faithful marched the half mile to the cemetery, staying with the remains of their _pastor bonus_ until the last shovel of dirt filled the grave.

Unfortunately Bishop Stephen J. Donahue, auxiliary bishop of New York, and a very dear friend of Bishop Bernard, was unable to attend the funeral. He was in Nassau however, to pontificate for the customary Mass on the thirtieth day, known as the “month’s mind.”

29
Chad Smith, a Bahamian educated at Cambridge, England, and a New York businessman, wrote in *Interracial Review* a final tribute to Bishop Bernard:

Everyone in the Bahamas loved him. All ill feelings against the Catholics have been removed and at his death in 1949, his funeral was the largest in the history of the Bahamas. The government turned out in full strength and every Protestant group was represented. The whole Island was grief-stricken. The people called him ‘The Black Bishop with a white skin.’ This is certainly the greatest tribute that could be paid to him.\(^{30}\)

NOTES:

7. Sir Etienne Dupuch on 31 March 1958 established two high school and one university scholarships for Bahamian students in honor of his father, Leon E. H. Dupuch, founder and first editor of the Nassau *Tribune*, and in honor of Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, O.S.B., Roman Catholic Apostle of the Bahamas, “who was the best friend the editor ever had.”

Perhaps Father Bonaventure’s most prestigious convert to Catholicism was Rev. G. Malbert Russell, a Methodist minister. Rev. Russell, who now lives in Florida, walked away from his pulpit at Wesley Church, Grant’s Town, to be received into the Church by Father Bonaventure.

13. Marian Johnson and Hattie Thompson were always proud to show visitors their parlor which was the first Catholic chapel on Harbour Island.


19. Father Bernard wrote Abbot Alcuin on 25 January 1932 regarding his absence from the installation ceremony in Nassau, "Of course, I realize your position as far as your coming is concerned and I'll have to be satisfied. Though I must say—in spite of what may be whispered about it by others—I would have liked to have seen you here at least for the celebration. I hope you will be able to make a big generous allowance for the Bahama Mission so that the work may be continued." Abbot Alcuin responded on February 1 that he could not afford the time to come and listed all of his commitments, "In view of this you should not find it difficult to excuse my absence." But it was difficult on the scene in Nassau to answer the repeated question, "Where is the Abbot?"


22. *The Record* reported of Father Arnold on 29 October 1929: "On account of the added distress brought to the Bahamas' poor by the deflation of the value of the pound sterling, Father Arnold, O.S.B., has stepped into the limelight in the missions with his proposal to give the needy a chance to till available wasteland in order to exist."

"According to the Nassau Tribune, 'For some time now he has been quietly encouraging, helping people to plant their own gardens, but he feels at this time this is not enough. He maintains that the people of Bahamas are not naturally wicked or lazy. They are willing, ready to work, but they have to be shown, to be led every inch of the way, and he now intends to help as much as possible anyone whom he can, regardless of religious affiliations.'"

"Father Arnold happens to be the first person to propose any sort of scheme to relieve the existing conditions in the Islands. The section in which his parish is located is in the most stricken area."

23. Interview with Fr. Quentin Arnold Dittberner, O.S.B., Collegeville, Minnesota, 10 August 1971.


Island of New Providence
CHAPTER SIX

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL ACTION

by

Sr. Claire Lynch, O.S.B.

In describing the educational system of a country, one must resist the temptation to compare institutions of an earlier period with those of the present. This is particularly true of the Bahamas which in less than fifty years evolved from a simple economy geared to seafaring traditions to an economy that brought the islands closer to the outside world than ever before. Two world wars and Prohibition, but especially tourism and foreign investments since 1964, improved living standards considerably and consequently had a major influence on education in the Bahamas.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, education was primarily the responsibility of private and religious authorities such as the Anglican and Methodist missionaries. Although a few government schools existed in the early 1800’s, the real beginning was not until 1835 when the British government granted £25,000 for colonial education. With the governor as president, a board of education was established and local commissions appointed. The board for many years was the center of religious disputes which divided the colony. In 1847 the board included three members of the assembly and two appointed by the governor. It increased to seven in 1961 and all members were appointed by the governor for a one year term. Since 1964, when the Bahamas became internally self-rulled, the minister of education has complete responsibility. The place of religion in the curriculum is reflected in Bahamian legislation as early as 1889 which states, “The school day in every maintained school shall begin with collective worship on the part of all pupils in attendance at the school and religious instruction shall be given in every maintained school but parents may request in writing that pupils may be excused from attending worship.”
The small impact of education on the Negroes for the first 100 years of emancipation is, according to Craton, "the worst indictment of the governing classes in the Bahamas during that period." This same writer, however, sees other causes than "a calculated policy of the dominant whites to keep the Negroes ignorant." Analyzing factors such as "apathy, poverty and the squabbles between the various Churches as to who should control, or even share in the education of the general population" presents a truer picture. Also, until recently the primary causes for the deplorable educational system in the Bahamas was a lack of money to build and equip schools and to hire qualified teachers. Conditions in the out islands were worse than in New Providence. In 1847, on one island only one in twenty could read and write. The schoolmaster opened a school in a hut 18 by 21 feet leased from the Wesleyans into which eighty-five children were crammed. There were no school supplies, the roof leaked, but neither the Wesleyans nor the board of education could afford repairs. As late as 1961 a journalist described a primary school where 250 children were taught in a leaky building fifty feet square with a dearth of books and materials. Though pupil enrollment increased from 17,000 to 47,000 between 1950 and 1968, the number of schools only increased from 144 to 184. A colonial sponsored report of an "Investigation in Education in the Bahamas in 1958" by Harold Houghton recommended a reopening of the teacher training college in order to remedy "a situation so desperate" in the faculty.

The "monitor system" in which the more advanced pupils instructed those in the grade below them, prevailed because the government did not think it had money to employ qualified teachers. After 1926 the government hired teachers from England on three year contracts. Various plans encouraged Bahamians to enter the field. In 1931 a school leaving certificate was granted to those intending to be "pupil teachers." An examination evidenced a student's qualification after ten years of schooling. Evening and summer classes gave these teachers a general education as well as methodology.

The story of the teacher training institutes is colored with petty local political factions which resulted in a training school which was established in 1891 closing two years later. In 1950 an institute called Oakes Field Training Center opened, but it closed seven years later. In 1961 the Bahamas Teachers College was opened to prepare teachers for the primary schools in a two or three year program. After eleven years of schooling, a pupil could thus be certified to teach in elementary schools. In the Bahamian system, an experienced teacher is paid her salary while attending the Bahamas Teachers College, provided she return to the government
schools upon completing her course for an equal number of years. This has helped greatly to upgrade the teaching profession.³

Lack of money for education cannot adequately explain why only a small percentage of Bahamians received an elementary education. There was an understandable apathy in children who saw no need for an education in a way of life which did not demand formal education, coupled with a curriculum which had little motivation for learning. The curriculum was virtually a carbon copy of the British "elitist" system. Although the basic literary program for the primary school is presumably that of the "3 R's," it is inevitably biased toward preparing children to take tests, generally at age eleven, for entrance to a secondary school. Since many children came from a poverty culture environment and have been taught by unqualified teachers in overcrowded classrooms, less than one third of the primary school students ever sit for the Common Entrance Test and even fewer pass it.

Recently the government made provision to educate those who failed this test. In 1962, legislation established non-selective schools known as "secondary modern" for more than 75 percent of the pupils. But the curriculum of these schools, like that of the primary, is often academic centered for one to earn a Bahamas Junior Certificate. Students usually take this examination at age fourteen, after eight years of formal education, but the average age is sixteen. There is little provision for education beyond the B.J.C.⁴ Since 1962 the compulsory school age is from five to fourteen, and pupils showing little interest in school are asked to leave at age fourteen because of the crowded schools. Government High School, established for a highly select group in 1925, was to provide a nucleus of future teachers, but the lure of higher salaries in the political and economic world has brought few candidates from Government High to education. Its curriculum is likewise geared to an external examination, namely, the General Certificate of Education from London University.

Opportunities for vocational training in the Bahamas are provided in Nassau Technical College, founded in 1962, and Nassau Technical Center, established in 1969.⁵ These institutions combined in 1971. Some educators feel that this institution does not serve the needs of the Bahamian since the curriculum is based on special skills orientated toward British industries not relevant to the Bahamas.

Indicative of the Bahamian youths' desire for further education is that 2,000 students enrolled in evening classes in the secondary schools in 1970-71. Since 1960 syllabi have been prepared for the subjects with emphasis on social and natural sciences. Teachers' qualifications, as well as their salaries, have been upgraded, and the schools now use modern approaches such as team teaching and employing specialists in reading
and guidance. Grade equivalency is becoming standardized. An increase in the number of Bahamians studying abroad also indicates the desire for further education.  

The Catholic schools in the Bahamas have features of the general educational system such as external examinations and terminology—such as the British “form” for grade, “speech day” for graduation, “head­master” for principal, and “college” for senior high school. This latter term also implies a fee paying institution rather than a free or ministry school. The British put much emphasis on chronological age and students attend classes from age five to fourteen. Normally at age eleven students take the common entrance examination and those who score high are awarded government scholarships in the ministry schools. Since 1966 Catholic students have been eligible. Students enroll in a six year secondary course from Forms I through VI. Qualified students in Forms IV or V who have followed a specific syllabus take the Cambridge Examinations (G.C.E.) at either the ordinary or advanced level and may then qualify for British universities.

Catholic schools in the Bahamas are a mixture of British, American, and West Indian procedures. Most of the teachers are American; in 1971, for example, twenty-two of fifty-five teachers in one school were from the United States. Catholics in the United States and Canada have donated much equipment and books to these Bahamian schools. Some teachers feel that until the Bahamians write their own texts, American books are more suitable than the British, particularly for the lower grades. Furthermore, since more graduates enter American universities each year, a secondary curriculum geared to American schools is desirable. Students preparing for the G.C.E. know English well, but students at other levels frequently have trouble with formal English, but many educators feel that the Bahamian dialect of the home and playground should be preserved as part of the culture.

In 1889 five Sisters of Charity from Mt. St. Vincent’s in New York came to Nassau, as has been discussed earlier, and founded the first Catholic school in the Bahamas. For seventy years they were the only women’s religious community in the islands. Seven of the eight elementary schools in Nassau in 1971 were started by these sisters who had a clear vision of their missionary role, namely, to bring their students to a knowledge of God.

The privations of the sisters in these early years are recorded in their frequent letters to New York. They had no fresh meat, milk or vegetables, and most of the canned goods came from their motherhouse on boats that arrived about every three months. The sisters caught rainwater and
cooled it in the ground for drinking or heated it on kerosene stoves for washing. Running water and electricity did not exist until 1930.

In the early years classes dismissed at 1:30 p.m., and the sisters spent several afternoons a week visiting homes and bringing flour, grits and clothes to the needy. Incidents of Sr. Frances Clare Tyson's twenty-four years in Nassau are recalled by her contemporary, Sr. Marie Clotilde Young. She tells about the two children coming to the convent at 3:00 a.m. one morning and asking the sisters to come to their sick mother:

Accompanied by the children, Sister Frances Clare and I carrying a lantern, medical supplies and a tin of soup, walked through the bush for three hours to a hut where we found a woman lying in rags, with a foot infection, a small child standing beside her. Every day for some weeks, Sister Frances Clare made the six-hour round trip to care for this mother. Likewise we made weekly visits to the Leper Colony, the Woman's Prison and the Nassau Infirmary.7

Many sisters who worked among the Bahamians emphasize the supernatural attitudes and the faith and trust of the poor who seemed to live constantly in union with God. They never complained against God for their lot and the invariable answer of the poor old crippled man to “How are you today?” was “Tank God for life, maam, Tank God for life.”8

Sr. Mary Magdalen Doyle describes the primitive conditions of a typical school:

The day following my arrival I was assigned to teach a hundred some children of St. Francis School in a large hall. They seemed to be all ages, all sizes, all grades, as indeed was the furniture of these rooms. There were cast off desks half eaten by the dreaded bore, a few rickety benches, low chairs, soap boxes, not even one set of readers, some broken slates and pencils.9

St. Francis Xavier parish held its school in St. Benedict’s Hall, constructed in 1892, the first school the sisters opened; it moved to the Bernard Memorial Building of seven classrooms, a library, and office in 1950.10

In the summer, 1893, the sisters began a sewing class in the well populated “out east” area which is now Sacred Heart parish. Twenty-five girls and women showed up on July 4, the first day. Sister Agnes Jerome then opened the school in September in a small rented house which soon was full. In the fall, 1895, a mission chapel was built on Shirley Street and was used as a school during the week. In 1897 the parish built a stone structure, and rolling partitions created classrooms in transepts off the church. Increasing enrollment later demanded that classes meet in six huts on the grounds.11

St. Francis and Sacred Heart were the only parish schools in Nassau for thirty years. Children walked five or more miles from Grants Town
and Bain Town to school. Classes did not begin until 10:00 a.m. as often the children would sell fruit or vegetables before school. Our Lady’s Church, a combination school and church, was built in 1926 in Grants Town. In 1950 a new three room school became part of the compound and five more rooms were added in 1954. Sisters Carmita Maria Pieri and Mary Rosella McGohey were the first teachers at this school.\textsuperscript{12}

Sisters Angela Rosaire Jaegers and Maria Elizabeth Donovan in 1932 established the fourth parish school of St. Joseph in Bain Town at the Polhemus home. The chairman of the board of the Nassau schools speaking at the dedication stressed the appreciation of the civic community for the Catholic schools (Nassau \textit{Tribune} 12 September 1932):

In this school, as in all other schools under the control of the Benedictine fathers, religious instruction of a denominational character is not compulsory; that is to say any child reared in any kind of faith will be welcome within its doors, and no attempt made to impose upon him or her the religion which the founders and workers in this institution themselves profess and practice. That the quality of the instruction will be of the best, I am amply satisfied from my former knowledge and observation. It is now nearly half a century since the good Sisters of Charity engaged themselves in the work of education here. But not only have they carried on this uphill work and I doubt not—oftentimes disappointing work, with quiet confidence and courage; resolute in the performance of their duties and imbued with the spirit of humility and sacrifice; they have freely extended their labors farther afield to infant welfare, consolation of those in sorrow, care of the poor, sick and dying without distinction of race or religion. Into hands such as these may we not safely commend the instruction of children whose parents are willing to entrust them.

In 1937 a five classroom school replaced the Polhemus building, and in 1959 the increased enrollment demanded that another four classrooms and a tennis court be added. The church also was enlarged. The Bahamian sisters took charge of the school in 1962.\textsuperscript{13}

In 1933 St. Anselm’s in the remote neglected area of Fox Hill—the “Congo of New Providence”—was started by Sisters Marita Anna Fox and Veronica Mary McAghan. They wrote:

We arrived August 28, 1933. The following day we went to Fox Hill, where we were heartily welcomed by Father Bonaventure Hansen, the catechist, James Roberts, and a group of future pupils and prospective Catholics. Father Bonaventure announced at Sunday Mass that school would open on Monday and that boys and girls of all ages were welcome.

We sisters arrived on Monday equipped with paper, pencils and lunch. An iron wheel was struck with a hammer upon our arrival. Our registration consisted of us trying to get names first only; e.g. Mizpath, Gladstone, Livingstone. When we asked for the last name, there was no response. We found out later that they use the term title for surname. When we tried to find out where they lived, we were told ‘Down so—by the big cotton tree,’ or ‘Up so—by the sapadilla tree.’
The children, aged from four to sixteen, we first grouped according to age, later according to ability; the older ones I took into the rented hall. For several days Sister Marita Anna taught the younger ones under a big cotton tree. After about two weeks, Father Bonaventure hired a room in an empty house called the Annex. Father arranged to have movable pieces of wood added to the backs of the benches, in the old hall, which we used as desks. One of the first things we got started was a sewing class after school, so that the children would be properly clothed. Our friends in New York supplied us with blue denim for boys’ pants and plaid material for dresses for the girls. This class drew a large gathering of women.

Fr. Frederic Frey, O.S.B., headmaster of St. Augustine’s College, taught the St. Anselm students crafts on Friday afternoons. He taught gardening, industrial arts, and the canning and preserving of fruits and vegetables.

Before Christmas the sisters prepared food, clothing, and medicine and distributed this personally to the poor. Tourists were so touched with the sisters’ work that they donated generously. In 1953 the school had an outdoor play at Christmas and a benefactor sent a doll or toy for each child.

St. Anselm’s became well-known for its dramatic productions. Benson’s Upper Room, a Lenten production, was the first of its kind in Nassau. The Bahamian boys used their ingenuity in finding a suitable beard for Judas. The sisters’ attempt to dye some yarn wasn’t successful, but one morning a boy appeared with a tuft of curly black hair and a bald spot atop his head. Someone had cut off enough hair for Judas’ beard.

Religious ceremonies were celebrations reported Sisters Marita Anna and Veronica Mary:

For First Holy Communion, we sisters did all we could to make the event memorable for the children by not only preparing their souls, but also seeing that their bodies should be decked with clothes worthy of the occasion. Since the children had nothing, and our cupboards had only a few white dresses, we searched the house for old sheets and the children’s mothers converted this material into stiffly starched suits. We needed shoes and stockings, so we prayed to St. Joseph. A lady tourist appeared a week before the First Communion Day and gave a donation for white tennis shoes. We were two pairs short, and then one of the Academy girls who had returned from England brought us two pairs. A box of old clothes which Bishop Bernard brought us contained four beautiful white linen suits for the boys.

In opening the eighth parish school in Nassau, a similar pattern was followed, namely, Catechism instruction by a catechist or a sister during the summer would then follow by the parents and the children requesting that the sisters teach them every day. Two or three sisters were assigned to a school, and young girls called “monitors” would assist them in classrooms of fifty or sixty students.
Much instruction was by rote as there were not enough texts for each child. Children in the lower grades used slates. Teachers were recruited from graduates of Xavier Academy. Monitors were supposed to work with an experienced teacher, but often they had complete responsibility for a class. Many at first received no salary and when they were paid they averaged £4 a month. The Sisters of Charity taught the monitors after school, on Saturdays and during the summer.

Mrs. Romalia Albury, a mother of five who has taught for forty-six years, reflects the dedication of these young girls to their pupils:

I think I was born a teacher because I always loved to teach. At the age of thirteen, I began as a monitor in the ministry school at Harbour Island. I have many pleasant memories of the pupils I taught, for instance the day Fr. Brendan Forsyth, O.S.B., came into my room at Thomas More with a boy in each hand saying, 'Mrs. Albury, these boys aren't getting along in their school; if you can't do anything for them, they are finished.' These boys finished Thomas More, and went on to Aquinas and have often told me how much they appreciate what I did for them. On January 6, 1966, for my forty-two years of teaching, Bishop Leonard presented me and seventy-eight others with a diploma of appreciation. In 1966, I was given a year off to go to Bahamas Teachers College to become certified.

Since the parish schools were free schools until 1958, the sisters and the schools were supported largely by donations from the United States and Canada. Letters of thanks from the missionary sisters to their superiors indicate that the Bahamian mission deeply concerned the entire community. To lessen the loneliness of separation from their motherhouse, the superior sent frequent letters and gifts of "green pictures" to each sister on feast days. The sisters anxiously awaited the boats that brought mail every three months. The arrival and departure of guests from the North was an exciting occasion. Priests, sisters and children went to the harbor or to the school grounds to welcome them and sing God Save the Queen. Often the mother superior or the bishop would declare a holiday when visiting a school and the children then would present a program for the guests. On one occasion when the pupils recited a poem about doughnuts, and the reverend mother learned that the children had never had a doughnut, she left money to buy some.

Bishop Bernard was very interested in sports, and each parish school had some sports activity. The basketball court on The Priory grounds was open to the public each night. The sports program was one principal factor in breaking down religious prejudice. With the formation of the St. Bernard's Sports Club in 1946, Catholic schools were in the limelight.

Besides sports, the St. Benedict's Choral Group organized by Fr. Ambrose Wittman, O.S.B., was another contribution to the Bahamians' recreational life. Leon Knowles, a member of this group, recalls:
Father Ambrose was the only one who took an interest in us young fellows. We couldn't understand how a person would work so hard for no personal gain, and only for us, as did Father Ambrose. I guess he just had a big heart. There were about thirty-five of us, men and women, and many non-Catholics like myself. We had two or three performances a year in St. Benedict's Hall. We charged two shillings admission and used this money for charity. The program generally had some classical numbers. Everything was learned by rote since we could not read notes. We practiced three times a week; Father wouldn't let us be in the performances if we missed too many practices, and, of course, we wanted to show off on stage. For many years we sang half an hour every Sunday at the British Colonial.

Father Ambrose knew us all by name, and he was so patient with us when we were trifling about. I am sure that any Bahamian who has made it in music got his start in Father Ambrose's choral group. At the Mass offered at the Sacred Heart Church in February, 1972, when we heard of father's death, we sang When the Saints Come Marching In—the way Father Ambrose told us we would recognize him when we get to heaven.

The annual bazaar held on The Priory's grounds in February during the height of the tourist season raised money to operate the schools and was a festival day for young and old. Mrs. Nellie Higgs, in charge of the supper room for twenty-eight years, describes this gala affair:

The bazaar was always officially opened by the governor or some member of the government who stood on the porch of the tearoom in the Madonna Clinic building. The ladies vied with each other for the privilege of pouring as here the celebrities gathered. Girl Guides escorted the governor's wife from one booth to another.

All the parishes and the children worked together to make the bazaar a success. In 1948 we netted about $5,000. In one of the last years I worked in the supper room, we served over 1,000. All the food was donated, much from the hotels. Each child in school brought a potato and some mothers made the potato salad. For several weeks prior to the bazaar, the sisters went up and down Bay Street seeking donations for the booths. The girls from Xavier Academy sold the supper tickets.

Three weeks after the Sisters of Charity arrived in Nassau in 1889, they opened the free school of St. Francis Xavier in a rented building. In 1890, when the sisters moved into a house on West Hill that Archbishop Corrigan of New York secured for them, they opened Xavier Academy. About forty years later they moved into a building known as "Westward Ho" on Bay Street.

Mrs. Nellie Higgs said:

We Bahamians have the reputation of being a gentle people and for this we are indebted to those cultured women from New York. We had a well-rounded education without the strain or tension of measuring up to or 'sitting for external examinations.' For eighty years Xavier Academy has had a reputation scholastically and socially. Sometimes only a third of the students were Catholics and many of the children of the British and American officials were enrolled. A great emphasis was put on acquiring social graces. One of our great joys at that time was to accompany the
headmistress on a shopping tour since sisters in those days always had a companion.

But it was more than a finishing school; we were prepared academically for further education. Xavier gave me a love of learning and convinced me of my obligation to be always civic minded. After finishing Xavier I went to New York to train as a nurse and after several years of service here in the Bahamas, I gave twenty-five years of voluntary service to the Dundas Civic Center.

Because Xavier was a private school charging tuition and because of the prevailing discrimination against the Blacks, it was an all white school for many years. The sisters did not like this, but they knew they could not make it a free school, and few Blacks at this time could afford the tuition. The first Black admitted to Xavier, Mrs. Jackie Curry Malcom, explains how this happened:

I was attending a government school, Western Secondary, in 1944. Sr. Clare Marie Dowling asked my mother to enroll me in Xavier Academy since my family could afford the tuition. I didn’t want to leave my friends at the government school, and I was afraid that I wouldn’t be accepted by the white girls. Two other black girls entered with me. The sisters must have prepared them for our coming because with very few exceptions, such as not sitting with me on the bus, everyone treated me nicely. When we moved back to the convent at West Street, about twelve more black pupils came.

In 1931 the academy moved to Bay Street near Fort Charlotte. During World War II, the government requisitioned the building as a civil defense center, and the academy moved to The Hermitage on the northeast shore of the island. Mrs. Lynn Pyfrom Holowesko, a student at this school, describes the place:

About eighty-nine of us, taught by four sisters and two lay teachers, lived together as one happy family in spite of the makeshift classrooms, desks and equipment. At noon it was my aim to be the first to reach Pearl, the Bahamian woman who sold us peanut brown sugar cakes. During recess we fished with a spool of thread on a pin or explored the dungeons on the coast. We grew so fond of the sisters as they treated us as individuals.

Xavier at this time could have compared with the best schools in the United States. I skipped a grade and when I went to a high school in the United States, I enrolled as a sophomore instead of a freshman. I not only made it respectably in high school but also in college.

Sr. Jean Miriam Donachie of the Xavier staff comments on the buildings:

The two-story frame building we occupied for twenty years was a very homey though crowded place. Each fall we moved desks up and down the stairs to accommodate the pupils. When the government gave us back the building, they left us their barracks which became our assembly room. It was with a ‘tug of the heart’ that we saw our home demolished in 1955
and moved into the new building of twelve classrooms, kindergarten, science laboratory, library and an auditorium which seats 500. The building has been valued at $1,000,000, but the actual cost was about $300,000, and for this we have Fr. George Wolf, O.S.B., to thank.

Father George tells about his part in the building program:

I was very happy in 1952 to have Bishop Leonard ask me to supervise the construction of a new St. Francis Xavier Academy because it was a good school.

God must have been smiling on this venture because so many wonderful things happened to make it move along smoothly. First, Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., who had a remarkable nose for real estate, obtained a 99 year lease for £1 a year on a very valuable piece of land from the war department of the British government. Then, Mr. R.V. McCann, from Minneapolis, Minnesota, who designed St. Mary's Hall at St. Augustine's Monastery, took a personal interest in forming the plans, without charge, for the new Xavier College. Of course, our greatest piece of fortune was having Mr. Thomas Dean as contractor. He used the time of his men and the materials well; there was no waste. Many nights he and his men poured cement until midnight.

Construction at that time in Nassau was not mechanized so all cement was handed up in buckets or pushed in wheelbarrows. One day we happened to quiet radio station ZNS for an hour. No one had warned us that the cable from the studio to the radio towers passed through the grounds of Xavier College. When a bulldozer was leveling the ground, it cut that cable and made everyone wonder what was wrong with his radio or the station. The Xavier College buildings are beautiful and its quality of education is such that I have never regretted one moment of time I used to help it along.

At the building's dedication on 5 February 1956, The Guardian said in a front-page story:

There were over 2,000 attending the ceremony, Archbishops, Priests, Sisters, members of the Bahamian Legislature, a large number of American, Canadian and British visitors. The buildings were solemnly declared open by His Excellency, the Governor, Earl of Ranfurly, who was accompanied by the Countess of Ranfurly and their daughter, Lady Caroline, a pupil of the College.

Sister Jean has many pleasant memories of her eleven years at the academy. Sister regrets that the order withdrew from the academy in 1971:

There is an apostolate of working with the poor, but I am convinced there is also the apostolate of working with other Christian denominations. I vividly recall non-Catholic parents literally sitting on the edge of the chair when coming to register their child. Gradually the fear and suspicion of sisters broke down and they became very friendly and generous in helping us.

Bishop Leonard came every Friday to give religious instruction. Though the academy always charged fees, it was a pittance. The wealthier could have paid more, but we kept it down so as not to break the backs of the poor who were struggling to send their children to us.
Sometimes Xavier is accused of being a school of snobbery, but this is unfounded. I have found that in my thirty years that all teachers taught the pupils good manners which included personal grooming and care of personal and school property. Thus, Xavier students have often been singled out in groups as being very well behaved.

Xavier’s enrollment grew and in 1965 the school merged with St. Augustine’s College. After the Sisters of Charity withdrew from the school in 1971, Mrs. Jacqueline Barnett Bethel, a Bahamian, became headmistress of Xavier’s lower form. She reports:

When I returned to Xavier in 1971 as headmistress, it was the same fine school I graduated from in 1957, but it seemed strange not to see the Sisters of Charity. We have an enrollment of 438—113 are non-Bahamians and 90 percent of these are non-Catholics. The fees are $270 a year. We have a long waiting list. We have no color barrier here. If the pupils after leaving Xavier ‘take on’ the prejudice and intolerance of adults, they did not have these attitudes while they were here.

The obituary notice of Bishop Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., stated that his greatest contribution to education in the Bahamas was the founding of St. Augustine’s Monastery and the community of Bahamian sisters known as the Congregation of Blessed Martin de Porres. The founding of the congregation was a long cherished hope of the bishop’s pro-vicar, Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B. An announcement in June, 1929, from St. Francis Xavier Church informed the Bahamian girls that they would have an opportunity to enter religious life, but the congregation was not established until eight years later. During these years Fr. Bonaventure and Sr. Marie Clotilde Young encouraged and instructed any girl who showed an interest in religious life.

In September, 1936, Father Bonaventure asked Sr. Maria Agatha Sissler, headmistress of St. Francis Xavier, to give weekly instructions to three girls, Winifred Claridge, Avis Symonette and Lazaretta Rahming. Sister also helped the girls procure the clothing they needed for their postulancy. The novitiate was established at the Polhemus estate in Bain Town. Cardinal Hayes donated money to erect a new school for St. Joseph’s parish and Cardinal O’Connell provided the money to renovate the former school as a novitiate. Bishop Joseph Busch of St. Cloud earlier had given money to purchase the estate.

Sr. Josephine Rosaire Rea, dean of Mt. St. Vincent’s in New York until her assignment as superior of this new foundation, welcomed the candidates on the feast of St. Therese, 3 October 1937. Then, on October 11, Father Bonaventure, the community’s moderator, placed it under the patronage of Blessed Martin de Porres, blessed the chapel, and offered Mass.

The chapel was filled to capacity for the reception ceremony on 16 July 1938. Father Bonaventure celebrated the Mass and seven Benedictine
priests and twelve Sisters of Charity were present. Winifred Claridge received the name, Sister Mary Elizabeth, Lazaretta Rahming became Sister Maria, and Avis Symonette received the name, Sister Marie Teresa. In September, 1938, Effie Rolle from Andros Island and Ann DeLancy Harvey from Nassau were accepted as postulants. In April, 1939, Sister Josephine returned to New York and Sr. Anacleta Jennings took her place.

The postulancy extended for six months and the novitiate for two years. In July, 1939, the first three novices professed temporary vows and Effie Rolle became Sister Agnes and Ann DeLancy Harvey became Sister Roselle. That August Sister Marie Agatha was appointed the community’s superior. She recalls those years:

From September, 1936, to September, 1937, I gave weekly instructions to Winifred Claridge, Avis Symonette and Lazaretta Rahming who wished to become religious. During the summer, 1937, we met at St. Francis School three times a week. After the instruction, we spent about two hours sewing in preparation for their entrance in October. Sister Josephine Rosaire had given Bishop Bernard the constitution of the Sisters of Service of Canada. As their work was very different from the work of the sisters in the Bahamas, I wrote a new constitution combining that of the Sisters of Service and that of the Sisters of Charity. Our constitution was based on what St. Vincent gave to the Daughters of Charity, and some considered it severe. I never found it so, and I do not think that the Sisters of Blessed Martin thought so. As far as I could judge they lived it carefully and cheerfully. For the twelve years I lived with them, we were a happy, religious community. Shortly before the constitution was sent to Rome, Father Bonaventure criticized about four of the articles as to wording.

In the summer, 1942, the constitution was sent to Rome, and a year later it was returned for some corrections. The final copies were sent to Rome in the summer, 1944, and each sister received a copy. The scope or activity of the congregation as stated in the constitution was twofold:

1) The Sisters of Blessed Martin de Porres compose a religious community which has for its object the sanctification of its members by the observance of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience according to these constitutions.

2) The secondary purpose is the spiritual and temporal welfare of their fellowmen especially at home, Nassau, N.P. and in the out island field of the Bahama Islands, or in other places at the discretion of the Ordinary.

For a year after I took over, Sister Anacleta and Sr. Mary Reine Kelly who taught at St. Joseph’s School lived with us. As there was no room for new postulants, they lived at the convent of St. Francis. We were sorry to lose them and they were sorry to go. We always continued to think of them as part of our little community. In those twelve years I taught them for at least one hour every evening, sometimes in groups, but more often individually according to the ability of each. The subjects included: mathematics, English, English history, Latin and music—particularly sight reading. When they could sing in three parts from notes, Bishop Bernard asked one of the Benedictine fathers to teach them Gregorian chant. For three years before
Sister Teresa and Sister Maria left for Iowa, we spent at least four hours every day preparing for the Cambridge Examinations. Every Saturday for about a year Fr. Magnus Wenninger, O.S.B., from the monastery helped us in trigonometry.

In January, 1949, I suggested to Father Bonaventure that a mistress of novices be appointed. The bishop agreed and Sr. Teresa Symonette was appointed and on 13 February 1949 she received the bishop's blessing. The first general chapter of the community was held on 18 February 1949. Fr. Bonaventure presided over the election of two councilors. Sr. Elizabeth Claridge was elected first councilor and Sr. Maria Rahming, the second councilor. The record of the chapter was recorded in a separate book which Fr. Bonaventure and Sr. Maria Agatha Sissler signed.

Several of the sisters had taught in Nassau and the out islands before they entered St. Martin's. In January, 1941, the community was called upon to teach in several parish schools in Nassau. The sisters did not receive salaries nor did we receive any remuneration for making altar breads. We worked hard and I spent plenty of money sent to me for my personal use from Mt. St. Vincent to make the chickens a success, but it gave us really no profit. The priests at the monastery were always very helpful. They raised more vegetables than they needed. We processed a great deal of them and they shared them with us. In the matter of support, I followed a plan which Sr. Josephine Rosarie used. In a special book, we kept a detailed account of the expenses of the month. At the end of the month I sent the bishop a general account, and he sent a check to cover it.

One may wonder why the superiors of Mt. St. Vincent did not assume financial responsibility for the new community. When our sisters came to Nassau, there was an academy in the convent and one school at St. Francis. The small revenue from the academy could not support the sisters so the archbishop of New York permitted us to collect once a year in our schools for the sisters in the Bahamas. In 1922, when I went to the Bahamas with two other sisters to open a mission in Harbour Island, there were eight sisters in Nassau; we made it eleven. By 1936 our sisters took care of five schools, an academy and a day nursery in Nassau and a school in Harbour Island. The Mount supported all these sisters. You can understand why they could not undertake anything more. They agreed to give a sister for ten years to train the members of the new community, and we stayed for fourteen years. In 1962 when the community was established twenty-five years, I visited Nassau. That year was very troubled as you know. That winter Mother Loretto Bernard visited the mission and the Sisters of Blessed Martin asked her to send me for the summer. The convent was much the same as when I left. While I was there in 1962, Mother Henrita came to Nassau. The sisters spoke very highly of her kind and wise way of dealing with them in that trying situation.

When the Bahamian congregation of sisters was founded, Bishop Bernard and the reverend mother of St. Vincent's agreed that a Sister of Charity would be in charge for ten years. Sister Agatha had been their director since 1939. In 1951 she returned to New York and Sr. Elizabeth Claridge, from the first class to enter the Bahamian community, was appointed superior by Bishop Leonard. The bishop wrote to Mother Mary Berchmans:
I have explained to the Blessed Martin Sisters that two Benedictine Sisters from St. Joseph, Minnesota, will come and live with them for three years to assist in forming them so that they can manage their own affairs after that time. The Apostolic Delegate advised me to do this. It was a great blow to them to have Sister Agatha leave.

On 24 May 1951 the chapter of the Sisters of St. Benedict in Minnesota answered the bishop’s request and Mother Richarda Peters, O.S.B., sent Sisters Alfreda Zierdan and Margaret Rose Kamp, O.S.B., to Nassau that August. Sister Alfreda’s first letter to St. Benedict’s and her memoirs describe her first year at St. Martin’s:

...There are eight professed Sisters here, one novice and two candidates. The Sisters’ names are Elizabeth, Agnes, Veronica, Gertrude, Rosella, Margaret, Catherine and Barbara. The novice is Sister Bernard and the postulants are Maria and Eva. Eva is even newer than we. She arrived from Jamaica on the feast of the Assumption. We are with good Sisters. They are happy and holy and most kind to us in every way. The two Sisters who visited us the week before we left are a good sample of what these are like. Their newly built convent makes one feel as though transported into the Middle Ages. Every room has vaulted ceiling and walls about two feet thick. The outside walls are even thicker. It is built of the coral stone quarried right here on the hill. It must have taken hundreds of tons of cement to hold all the rough stones together. No hurricane can do harm to this structure. Naturally there is space enough, to accommodate a community three times as large and I hope they will soon have many new vocations.

In one way I expected to find conditions much more primitive, and on the other I could hardly have imagined the poverty of the natives who are our neighbors. The streets are very narrow and the poor shacks are close together and right on the street with no garden and hardly any kind of a yard.... There is cold water in the house. Their well water tastes good. Sometimes I feared the well would go dry, because the water would barely drip from the faucet. They explained that is only periodical, just the effect of the tide or rather the ebb. The government has special faucets all over the city where all the poor people have to fetch the water they use. Some have to go several blocks. Private wells had to be closed several years ago on account of a typhoid epidemic. As we were coming down on the plane over the island, the first thing that struck me were the numerous windmills that seemed to be stuck right into the dense vegetation. There is nothing like a Minnesota farm here...

Sister Margaret Rose, a nurse, helped the sisters care for the sick. For several weeks she cared for Monsignor Hawes who was recuperating at The Bungalow. Sister Alfreda was to help the sisters in spiritual formation but not to make Benedictines of them. Seemingly the Blessed Martin sisters, and especially the superior, Sister Elizabeth, did not clearly understand her role. Until April, 1952, Sister Alfreda only met with the sisters on Saturdays for liturgy and occasionally helped the teachers with their schoolwork. The Blessed Martin sisters were determined to retain all the religious practices which Sister Agatha had taught them; therefore,
some of them feared Sister Alfreda’s influence. In April the bishop informed Sister Elizabeth that Sister Alfreda was to give the novices two classes weekly. That July Sister Alfreda returned to Minnesota because of poor health.

Father Bonaventure, and after his death Fr. Frederic, instructed the novices twice a week and the professed sisters weekly. The community attended classes taught by the Sisters of Charity throughout the year at St. Francis and at Xavier Academy. Thanks to Bishop Leonard’s efforts, the Franciscan sisters of Mt. St. Clare Junior College in Clinton, Iowa, gave free tuition and board and room to the Blessed Martin sisters for many years.

The sisters taught at all the Nassau parish schools, and they received complete charge of St. Joseph’s School in 1962. The first mission outside Nassau was to Cat Island, and on 23 October 1956 Bishop Leonard blessed the three sisters that left for this assignment. Five years later the sisters went to Bimini where benefactors had agreed to build a school and convent.

The constitution’s provision for electing a mother superior was never followed since the apostolic delegate had advised Bishop Leonard to appoint the superior. Sister Elizabeth’s one year term (1951-52) was followed by Sister Maria’s five year term (1952-57) and then Sister Agnes’s five year term (1957-62).

That spring the apostolic delegate advised Bishop Leonard to have the community affiliate with a religious community of pontifical status. Thus, on 25 April 1962 Bishop Leonard, Abbot Francis Sadlier, O.S.B., and Father Brendan, met with Mother Agnes and twenty-one other professed sisters and the temporary professed sisters and novices to discuss Rome’s wishes about the convent joining another community. Of the twenty-eight voting, all but one sister favored joining a well-established community. The bishop interviewed each sister privately. He felt that the sisters wished to join St. Benedict’s Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota, although he told them that it was still a possibility that St. Benedict’s would not agree to this.

Bishop Leonard then asked Mother Henrita Osendorf, O.S.B., of St. Benedict’s to consider the project. In June, 1962, the council agreed to accept the Bahamian community and on July 21 a 386 affirmative vote of the chapter followed. The details of the amalgamation were planned by Fr. John Eidenschink, O.S.B., canonist at St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota. Four Blessed Martin sisters were to teach in Minnesota schools in exchange for four Benedictines to teach in the Bahamas. The six novices and postulants came to Minnesota for their novitiate. Rome permitted an abbreviated novitiate of three months after which each sister could
leave or take vows as a Benedictine. The diocese of Nassau would con­
tinue to support the community.

Mother Henrita and Sr. Mary Patrick Murray, O.S.B., sub-prioress, came to Nassau in August, 1962, and met the sisters individually and in a group three times to explain the preliminary plans for the amalgama­
tion. Sr. Harvette Hockert, O.S.B., was put in charge of St. Martin’s for one year. She comments:

Twelve sisters lived at St. Martin’s Convent, eight Bahamian sisters and we four from St. Benedict’s. We followed the daily schedule of the Bahamian sisters except that we said the Benedictine prayers, the Divine Office in English (which was prior to the change to the vernacular for the community), the customary Our Fathers, and the other prayers of that time.

I began having house meetings using the Holy Rule for discussion. I sensed very quickly that this disturbed members and upon informing Mother Henrita she advised that we drop the study.

I discovered that a few sisters were quite disturbed about the amalgama­
tion. My loyalty had to be with the bishop and Father Cornelius as they were doing what Rome wished. But I sympathized deeply with the sisters and suffered for them, but I couldn’t let them know it. The sudden news that the sisters must decide by the end of May was crushing not only to the few who were opposed but to almost all the others as well. The two sisters in Nassau who were not joining us never told their plans to the others because they did not wish to influence anyone. When I broke the news (at their request) that the two were leaving St. Martin’s, there really was consternation.

In March, 1963, Mother Henrita asked the Blessed Martin sisters who wished to join the Minnesota community to inform her that May. This surprised some of the sisters who wished that they would have more time to decide. Mother Henrita then explained that she had chosen May as the date in order “to reduce the period of uncertainty and to spare you anxiety. You will be free to extend the time before vows or to choose another way of life.” Meanwhile, Sisters Elizabeth and Teresa asked Bishop Hagarty for a letter of recommendation to the Sisters of Charity in New York, and Sister Gertude applied to Mt. St. Clare in Iowa. The bishop assured the sisters that he would try to get them into another community if the New York or Clinton convents did not accept them.

Seven professed sisters made an abbreviated novitiate under Sr. Brian Spain, O.S.B., and the other sisters made their short novitiate under Sr. Aloysius Weber, O.S.B., in Nassau in June, 1963. Sister Aloysius tells about this novitiate:

We tried to live the Benedictine life as well as possible by having meals, prayers and recreation together and by observing the times of silence that our community in Minnesota then practiced. The sisters had as little contact with outsiders as possible during this time. We had class each morning and afternoon during the week, studying Marmion’s Christ,
the Ideal of the Monk, the Holy Rule, Our Declarations and Customs, and Benedictine history.

On 2 September 1963 Bishop Leonard presided at the profession ceremony at St. Joseph's Church in which the Bahamian sisters officially joined the Minnesota community of Benedictines. Mother Henrita and Sister Alfreda, as well as many priests and sisters from Nassau, witnessed the merging of the two groups of sisters. The day before five sisters pronounced perpetual vows and three sisters temporary vows in St. Joseph, Minnesota, before Msgr. Peter Lorsung, vicar general of the diocese of St. Cloud. At the Nassau ceremony, Bishop Leonard said (Nassau Tribune 3 September 1963):

This is truly an historic occasion. Two communities of vastly different backgrounds are amalgamating when the world about us is divided and torn apart by strife. It will be a source of great blessing to the two communities and much good will come of this union to the Church and to the people of the Bahamas.

Sr. Mary Patricia Russell was appointed superior of St. Martin's Convent in the summer, 1967. Considerable improvements in the physical plant occurred during the next five years, including an addition for boarders from the out islands who attended high schools in Nassau. Seven boarders lived at the convent in 1968 and thirty-two in 1971. The girls were bussed to St. Augustine's, Aquinas and to some government schools. In 1970 the "Leonard Hostel" was built close to the convent.

Mother Henrita had informed Bishop Hagarty that St. Benedict's would not assume financial responsibility for the community. In April, 1968, the government salaries to the sisters increased to $100 per month. The diocese contributed $400 a month to subsidize the community, but occasionally Sister Mary Patricia needed to request more money from the diocese. Thus, the bishop proposed that such additional funds be paid by the diocese but dispersed from the motherhouse so that the sisters would feel more a part of the Minnesota community.

In November, 1968, Sister Mary Patricia asked Mother Henrita to subsidize the convent with $200 or $300 a month as their monthly income of $2,000 did not meet all expenses. From $2,000 to $3,000 was also needed to renovate the convent. The council at St. Benedict's authorized the subsidy dependent on Mother Henrita's study of the situation. The sisters also investigated the transfer of St. Martin's property from the diocese of Nassau to the Blessed Martin sisters as a site for an eventual independent priory.

During 1970 and 1971 Sr. Dorine Kapsner, O.S.B., taught private music lessons at St. Martin's Convent and Sr. Benora Gaida, O.S.B., began working in Nassau's Hardeker Clinic. In the summer, 1970, Sr. Maedene Russell, O.S.B., was appointed superintendent of the diocesan
Catholic schools. Also, different sisters directed by Sr. Eunice Antony, O.S.B., held catechism classes in Nassau.

Sr. Agnes Rolle of the St. Martin sisters died of a heart attack in Minnesota on 1 July 1970. After a funeral Mass in the chapel at St. Benedict’s, Mother Henrita, Sr. Conchessa Keegan, O.S.B. and Sr. Mary Patricia accompanied the body to Nassau for burial. All the Benedictine sisters in the Bahamas attended the funeral.

Although the Benedictines of St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota established many elementary schools in the Bahamas, it was not until 1945 that they opened the first Benedictine secondary school, St. Augustine’s College. Fr. Magnus Wenniger, O.S.B. tells this story:

On 4 January 1945, after a careful screening, thirty-five boys of the ninety-seven who took the examination, were admitted to a two-story building called “The Niche” on The Priory’s grounds on Heathfield Street. I remember Fr. Frederic’s announcement, “It will be the aim of the school to equip its students with the knowledge required to comply with the recognized educational standards of British and American universities and colleges. At the same time special emphasis will be given to the development of a thoroughly Christian character.” Classes in a strictly academic program of Forms I, II, III, adding a form each year up to V, were taught by four Benedictine priests who lived at The Priory during these first years.

Father Frederic wanted St. Augustine’s to be a community institution; the school was not limited to Catholics nor was it a training college for candidates to the clergy. Entrance was determined by examination, the selection was not based on race, religion or economic status.

For many years St. Augustine’s strictly followed the traditional English grammar school system in five forms with English language and literature, foreign languages, fine arts, mathematics, religion and history as required subjects. Since 1968 students are placed in classes according to ability and most of them take college preparatory courses. But, as the Bahamian economy improved and more ministry schools were constructed, St. Augustine’s felt it should offer a more comprehensive program in order to attract students. “St. Augustine’s should be a comprehensive school, academic and commercial but not manual arts, a school in which fewer students would have to leave for academic reasons” said Headmaster Fr. Burton Bloms, O.S.B., in 1966.

From its beginning St. Augustine’s was concerned about educating boys of exceptional ability who were financially unable to attend the school. In 1964 St. Augustine’s offered scholarships to one third of its students. In 1966, Father Burton, with the assistance of Mr. Si Amoury, chairman of the lay board, obtained from the ministry a promise of a number of scholarships for St. Augustine’s “with no strings attached” on the basis of the Common Entrance Examinations. Students from New Providence received tuition and those from the out islands received room,
board and tuition. That September seven of twenty-four boarders had government scholarships, three paid full tuition and eleven paid nominal fees.\(^\text{31}\)

As enrollments of both St. Augustine's and Xavier College were increasing, a need to expand the buildings of both institutions was imminent by 1965. Thus, the schools decided to merge and by spring, 1967, had completed this venture. That September St. Augustine's became co-institutional for the lower forms and co-educational for the two upper forms under the joint administration of the Sisters of Charity and the Benedictine monks with Sr. Edith Martin as assistant headmistress and Fr. Bonaventure Dean, O.S.B., as headmaster. The next year the entire school was co-educational. The physical plant at St. Augustine's was expanded to meet the enrollment increase from 420 students in 1966 to 870 in 1967.

During 1970, the year of St. Augustine's silver jubilee, a committee planned the jubilee celebration and considered fund raising projects for further expansion of the school. A banquet at the Sheraton British Colonial, a walkathon by 300 students that netted $1,200, and an appreciation night that honored teachers who had given years of service to St. Augustine's took place that year. Dr. Doris Johnson, minister of tourism, spoke at the appreciation night and Father Magnus was one of the honored teachers.

Sr. Regina Murphy, assistant headmistress of St. Augustine's in 1971, feels that the school has always had a creative approach to meet student needs and a truly dedicated staff. For example, in 1968 Fr. Theophile Brown, O.S.B., later headmaster, organized a study abroad program for St. Augustine students. He describes the project:

As chairman of the foreign language department I introduced a summer study program under the auspices of the American Institute for St. Augustine's and the rest of the high schools in the Bahamas. During the summer many Bahamian high school students enrolled in carefully planned six-week study programs at well-known universities in Europe, Africa and the Orient to study the language, civilization and culture of the countries visited. Over the years more than 175 students have taken part in the program.

In March, 1968, a testing program indicated that many students read more than three grades below their grade level based on the accepted norms of English speaking countries. All students entering St. Augustine's in 1969 took reading tests, and a remedial reading program was begun and all students in Form I took two hours of reading weekly. That June tests showed that the average reading level had risen two or three grades. In January, 1971, Sr. Barbara Doyle set up a reading laboratory. That
Fr. Cornelius Osendorf, O.S.B., sharing fruit with his leper friends.

Alms distributed daily at The Priory since 1891.

Sisters of Charity in a clinic.
Day care centers.

Daily shower.

Sacristy training.
At the sisters' graves, 1 November 1934.

First Communion breakfast.

Father Cornelius with Mr. Lothian and construction crew making communion railings. Mr. Thomas Dean at extreme right.


The Niche on The Priory grounds where St. Augustine’s College began, 1945-46.
Father Ephraem attempts agriculture at St. Augustine’s Monastery at Fox Hill.
Mrs. Romalia Albury, a teacher for 46 years, in her classroom at St. Thomas More School.

Summer school for teachers and catechists, 1936.

First graduation of Catholic High, Grand Bahama, at the Freeport Holiday Inn, 1969.
summer a classroom was remodeled specifically for developmental reading classes and equipped with $10,000 worth of instructional material.

In 1971 the school began an open classroom format of instruction for its lower Form I students. Mrs. Leslie Johnson describes this innovation:

One hundred and sixty students in flexible groups of fifteen or twenty work in an open classroom about 120 feet long with movable partitions. Eight staff members move from one group to another during a forty minute period. The approach is both remedial and developmental.

Not until sixty-seven years after the Sisters of Charity came to the Bahamas did a second group of religious women, the Dominican sisters from Adrian, Michigan, come to the islands. They conducted a teacher training school called Aquinas College for the Bahamian sisters. Sisters Jean Patricia McGowan, Mary Aidan Brennan, Ann Carmel Decker, Jean Kevin Aufterheid, and Marie Peter Hafey arrived in Nassau in December, 1956. The diocese provided them a two-story building, the former Hibiscus Inn on Montrose Avenue, as a home. The bar room became the living room and two rooms were added, one to serve as a chapel. Here the sisters taught classes from January, 1957, to January, 1959, when the diocese added an eight classroom structure.

For the first six months the Bahamian sisters took courses to prepare them for future study. In the summer, 1957, lay teachers from New Providence and the out islands began to enroll in this school. The summer enrollment averaged fifty until 1966 when it dropped considerably and consequently the teacher training school was discontinued. As the Bahamas Teachers College opened in 1961 and as teachers gradually met certification requirements, namely two years beyond high school, the school was not needed. Aquinas had never charged tuition as it was financed by friends in Nassau and the United States.

Aquinas College in 1958 also offered evening classes in English, mathematics and business to adults who were preparing to pass the B.J.C. and R.S.A. (London’s Royal Society of Arts) examinations and then enter the business world. In 1963 the enrollment reached 555, but by 1967 it dropped to 175 and the program was discontinued that summer. The business oriented curriculum of the day school continued, and under the administration of Sr. Alma Marie Messing a new wing of seven rooms was built between 1963 and 1965 and the enrollment increased from 150 in 1958 to 450 in 1969 as the school expanded its curriculum, added extra-curricular activities, and college preparatory subjects such as higher mathematics, science and Spanish. Students either took a general education course or prepared themselves for the B.J.C. or G.C.E. examinations or for college entrance examinations. The fees increased from $75 in 1968 to $225, plus laboratory fees, in 1971.
In 1968 Aquinas accepted sixth grade students who passed the Common Entrance Examination; thus, the school followed the government school system. Aquinas also gave its own examination to the applicants. In 1971, Aquinas accepted 110 of the 600 sixth graders who took the examination. The school also considered beginning a seventh grade.

Aquinas in 1970-1971 introduced an American remedial reading program called Redak. The social studies curriculum included units on “Life and Institutions in the Bahamas” to follow the trend toward Bahamianization. Home Economics developed from a sewing class to include units in family budgeting and finance.

About 50 to 60 percent of the Aquinas students are Catholic, but all students attend religion classes twice a week. The lower grades emphasize Scripture study and the upper grades stress the Christian in the world today. The school year opens with Mass in the Garfunkel Auditorium, and throughout the year individual classes celebrate Mass together. Students visit the leper colony and retirement homes as class projects. Also, since 1970 pastors from the Nassau area have come to Aquinas one hour each week to meet with their respective students.

Aquinas student organizations serve as an outlet for the creative expression of Bahamian drama, music and literature. The first yearbook, The Torch, appeared in 1970 and was dedicated to Sr. Clarita Marie Young, principal from 1965 to 1970. Since 1962 audiences have highly praised the school’s musicals such as H.M.S. Pinafore and Oliver. The Aquinas Christmas Oratorio is a well established tradition, and since 1960 Aquinas has entered the annual Bahamas Music Festival which was organized in 1958 “to foster good music among peoples of all ages in these islands.”

Since 1965, when Sr. Clarita Marie Young arranged an open house for parents, a “parents’ night” in which Aquinas students present a program for the parents and then the staff, parents, and students meet for short classes and conferences has become an annual affair. Since 1971 the school has had a guidance department of four counselors; the counselors have at least two interviews annually with each student and each spring the counselors direct each student into the course of study for which he is best qualified. A career night begun in 1966 also helps students gain firsthand information about career planning. Twenty percent of the Aquinas graduates in 1971 enrolled in colleges and 90 percent of this number chose American colleges.

Among the desirable British cultural traits in the Bahamas is respect for law and the representatives of the law. Respect for elders and a neighborly concern for order in the community prevails and obligates that children be corrected when necessary. Corporal punishment in the
schools, though permitted, is rare on the secondary level as the parents generally cooperate with the school. Rules for conduct at Aquinas College are considered character builders. In 1967 a student council was formed and in 1971 the school hosted a student government day.

"Love and concern of the teacher for the pupil, is the strongest motivating force for the student," says Mr. Andrew Curry, principal since 1970. "The voluntary presence of students at the school after 3:00 p.m. on school days working on school projects gives evidence of genuine interest in the school. Their painting of the building in the summer, 1971, and their constant personal interest in the appearance of the school indicates a fine school spirit."

St. Vincent's School on Grand Bahama was started by laymen in the settlements of Hunter, Lewis Yard and Pinder's Point and Mack Town, about five miles from Freeport. Fr. Clement Burns, O.S.B., opened the school in 1957 and Violet Russell was the teacher and Cynthia and Virgil Russell, Ruth McIntosh, Mary Lang and Mrs. Lewis assisted her as monitors. About 100 children gathered in three groups in an old church hall. The school charged no fees. Father Clement obtained books from England and improvised desks and classroom furniture.

A year later Sisters Veronica Burrows, Rosella Harvey and Teresa Symonette, Blessed Martin sisters from Nassau, opened school with seventy-one pupils. In 1965 another classroom building was built. In 1968-1969 three sisters and seven laymen taught 258 pupils, practically all Catholic. Most St. Vincent's pupils continue school after the eighth grade and attend Catholic High, Freeport High, or secondary schools in Nassau.

St. Vincent's is one of the few schools that the diocese does not subsidize. The school has always charged a nominal fee, and in 1971 this fee was $30 a year. In 1969 St. Vincent's, as well as other diocesan schools, received government aid. The ability of St. Vincent's to balance its books is due largely to its parent-teacher association which raises funds and also determines school policy.

Grand Bahama Island before 1955 was undeveloped. In that year Wallace Groves, an American financier-industrialist created "Fantastic Freeport." The Bahamian government signed the Hawksbill Creek Agreement which provided that 50,000 acres of unused crown land be developed into an international free port and an industrial area. Investors received a guarantee against direct taxation until the year 2000 and freedom from income, capital gains, real estate and personal property taxes and exemption from customs and excise taxes until the year 2054. Only personal goods are subject to custom duties. A corporation known as the Port
Authority soon licensed over 400 firms. Mr. Groves in 1972 commented on the Hawksbill’s provisions for education:

One of the original provisions of the Hawksbill Creek Agreement was that the Grand Bahamas Port Authority would provide schools in the Freeport area, but this particular provision was later amended. But the Port Authority has and will continue to have concern for the schools in Freeport and on Grand Bahama. The Authority first built a school which grew and eventually became St. Paul’s Methodist School; then another school was built and expanded and this became Mary, Star of the Sea School with its 800 pupils. The Authority in 1966 initially provided an eight room unit which was the first unit of Grand Bahama Catholic High School; later in 1969 and 1970 the Authority donated additional facilities and a classroom unit. The educational requirements of this community are well in hand. Mary Star and Grand Bahama Catholic High School are making a wonderful contribution to this community.

Mr. Groves realized that Catholics in Freeport wished a Catholic school. He contacted Bishop Hagarty who in turn asked Mother Mary Leona of Mt. St. Clare in Iowa to consider sending sisters to teach in the school. Mr. Groves agreed to build and equip the school, but he did not agree to operate it. Thus, Sr. Mary Eleanor Dunning, as headmistress, and Sisters Mary Francis Burke and Mary Jeanine Bradford, as teachers, arrived on 23 August 1960 and opened a school of twenty-nine pupils in September in a small house on Amusden Lane. Mr. Groves suggested that the school be named “Mary Star of the Sea.”

That first year classes met in cramped quarters, but by November, 1971, the school moved into a four classroom unit on the corner of East Beach and East Sunrise Highway. The growing Freeport community, however, demanded that four more classrooms and a convent be added in 1962 and three more classrooms in 1963. Four units in all have been added to the original school. The enrollment of twenty-nine in 1960 climbed to 800 and thirty teachers by 1971.

In 1964 Sr. Mary Alice Gantley succeeded Sr. Mary Magdalen Mitch, who had been appointed headmistress the previous year. Sister Mary Alice comments on the school’s development:

We have a full academic program from kindergarten through eighth grade with Spanish, French and typewriting in the upper grades. The music department has made significant contribution to the pupil’s education and to the community. In addition to several concerts each year in Freeport, the choral group has performed in Nassau and Florida. Our library is open to the public, and we have been helped greatly by the Women’s Catholic Club.

Our student body is certainly cosmopolitan as it has representatives from a dozen or more countries. Likewise, our faculty is comprised of two other American religious communities and the laymen are from many countries. Reports from our students who have entered other schools confirm that they received a well-rounded education. We have always tried
to assist the needy by giving scholarships to children who cannot afford the $300 tuition. Mr. Groves will be remembered at Mary Star, not only as a financial genius but also as a genius whose foresight encompassed the intellectual growth and needs of Freeport's future.

The success of Mary Star, an elementary school, convinced many parents that a Catholic secondary school on Grand Bahama was desirable since few could afford to send their children to Nassau or the United States for high school. The people hoped that religious communities of men and women could staff separate schools for boys and girls. With this as a possibility and with Mr. Groves' encouragement, the eighth graders at Mary Star were taught ninth grade subjects in 1965-66. Bishop Leonard and Father Brendan, the pastor, contacted Mr. Groves and he responded favorably that June 13:

With the rapid growth of Grand Bahama Island I consider a high school for the whole of Grand Bahama Island perhaps the most constructive undertaking that we could participate in and one that would be the most needed and appreciated by the people. Although I first felt that the high school should be co-educational, Mr. Gonsalves strongly feels otherwise and for the general good it should be for boys only (hence could be run by the brothers), and after carefully thinking it over I agree it would be better for boys only. You can furnish and staff the school as it grows and the enrollment this fall may not be too great so you can start on a smaller scale (but enrollment will be bound to gradually increase and for that reason I would not like to start with just three classrooms as discussed with Father Brendan but to have a complete, first-class school.) Perhaps an appropriate name would be 'Grand Bahama High School.'

Personally, I have always felt Mary Star of the Sea School should not accept students beyond the eighth grade but did not wish to say anything as I never wish to interfere in the policy of the Church. I feel that Sister Mary Alice is an excellent administrator, but if the grades go from kindergarten to the tenth grade it is bound to be become overcrowded and its standing deteriorate.

I have discussed the donation of the cost of building the school (but not equipping it) with Mr. Gonsalves and he can get the funds donated from Bahamas Amusements. The Port Authority will, of course, clear and donate the land (but with only a minimum of landscaping and other improvements.) Frankly, our available funds and budget are quite tight but you may consider the above as definite.

You mentioned housing staff—we could go as far as contributing one four-bedroom house (which would be in close walking distance). . . .

In response to a request for teaching brothers, the Marianists of Dayton, Ohio, replied that they could not staff a boys' school in the Bahamas. Bishop Leonard then asked Mother Henrita of St. Benedict's Convent to send a sister for the fall, 1966, term. The chapter agreed to this request, but St. Benedict's could not assume financial responsibility for this school. Sr. Jeremia Januschka, O.S.B., came to Grand Bahama that summer.
In July, 1966, Father Brendan and a group of lay teachers from Mary Star met to discuss policies for the new school. They agreed that the tenth grade should only have an academic program while the ninth grade should plan an academic as well as a non-academic curriculum. Students would be admitted on the basis of an entrance exam and the tuition would be $75 a term.

That September all the ninth graders who remained on the island from Mary Star registered for the new high school; the school enrolled seventy-five ninth and tenth graders. Sister Jeremia was headmistress, Fr. Paul Keohane, O.S.B., spiritual advisor, and Mr. William Halligan, Mrs. Eleanor Smith and Mrs. Ellen Truman were teachers. Mary Star donated its ninth grade books as well as $8,196.51 to purchase books and furniture.

Bishop Leonard, Father Brendan, and representatives of other Churches and the government attended the dedication of Catholic High on 16 October 1966. Dr. Amado Antoni was master of ceremonies and Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Groves and Mr. and Mrs. Keith Gonsalves were among the honored guests.

Sister Jeremia describes Catholic High’s first days:

I arrived on 18 August 1966 and when I saw only the framework of the building up at that time it did not seem possible that we would open school September 5. To my surprise we opened September 12. We started with about twice as many students as we expected so we were short textbooks. Mail service was not the best so our book orders did not come until January. One big day was the day the desks arrived. We had been using folding chairs from Mary Star with kneelers on the back. That was a glorious day. The students helped carry out the folding chairs, scrub the floors, unwrap the new desks, and move them into the classrooms. Because of the financial situation it was difficult to get all the basic necessities. The school was to be run by tuition only which is almost an impossibility when beginning a school. Also good teachers were hard to come by.

The next fall about 100 students registered, and Sisters Aloysius Weber and Francene Froncak, O.S.B., joined Catholic High’s staff. That term friction among the lay teachers caused some disciplinary problems; thus, at a meeting in January, 1968, of the bishop, Father Brendan, and the three sisters at Catholic High, Fr. Owen Hudson, O.S.B., pastor of St. Vincent’s Church, was appointed administrator, Sister Jeremia remained as headmistress, and Mr. Andrew Halsey, a lay missionary, was appointed treasurer and business manager.

As the income from fees and other sources did not meet expenditures, particularly the cost of equipping the science laboratories, the diocese granted the school $6,000. The future of Catholic High, however, was questionable. The administrators proposed that winter that Mary Star
parish assume control of the school, or that it become a catechetical center, or that it be given to the government and the sisters be hired as teachers.

Mr. Gonsalves wrote in March, 1968 to Bishop Leonard and indicated that neither he nor Mr. Groves approved of these plans:

Whilst I fully understand the position of the Diocese with regard to the high school in Freeport and can appreciate that the educational demands on the Diocese are more than its ability to meet, I am not entirely convinced that for the Freeport Parish to take over the Catholic High School is the perfect solution.

As I understand the position, $50,000 is urgently needed to extend the school. You would like this Parish to provide that $50,000. I am quite convinced that such action would meet extremely strong opposition from the congregation.

For the Diocese to close the high school and operate it merely for religious instructions, Mr. Groves felt strongly that this was not within the terms of his agreement with the Diocese when he donated the high school and that it would be operated and would continue to operate as a high school. The possibility that Mary Star Parish might be required to take over the high school greatly alarmed him as he felt that for the Diocese to throw this burden on the Parish would mean that the Catholics here would never build a proper church on the land he had donated for that purpose.

A further matter arose from our conversations. Under its agreement with Government, the Port Authority is about to commence construction of a high school in the Port Area for operation by the Government. It is the plan to construct this high school in an area adjacent to the present primary school in Hawksbill and very close to the Catholic High School. Mr. Groves suggested that if the Diocese were unable to operate the Catholic High School and were willing to surrender this building to the Government, he would ask Government to accept the present High School with such additional classrooms, auditorium, etc. as are required in the proposed building, as the site of the new Government High School. If Government agrees then Mr. Groves would propose to ask the Diocese to surrender the High School to him and he would make a donation to the Parish, on the understanding that the funds would be spent in this Parish, of say, $40,000 which would represent a portion of the cost of the present High School building.

Catholic High did continue as a diocesan school. Br. John Darby, S.M., diocesan superintendent of schools, proposed that in 1968-69 the tuition for the 160 students be $240 and that the school try to add a Franciscan and several Benedictine priests to the staff. In June, 1968, Father Owen resigned as administrator, Sister Jeremia returned to Minnesota, and Sr. Claire Lynch, O.S.B., of St. Paul’s Priory in St. Paul, Minnesota, became the next headmistress, a position she held until June, 1971.

At a faculty orientation week each September, local educators, businessmen and civic leaders presented their views on the type of education they felt Catholic High should provide. Mr. Roy d’Augustin spoke on Catholic High’s opportunity to influence the community:
I would like to talk to you today about your obligations to the particular type of student you have here in Grand Bahama. What are these obligations? (1) To prepare them for further education either in the United States, Canada, Europe or in the Bahamas. (2) To prepare them for the business world here in the Bahamas. You must get to the root of everything in the four years you have a captive audience. You must be concerned about the moral standards. We here in Grand Bahama, have the reputation of having men come here 'to make the fast buck' and then leave. Not only are the men so engrossed in business, but I have never lived in a community where there were so many working mothers. As a boy I remember my mother saying to me, 'Don’t bother Dad, he has had a busy day at the office.' Now it is, 'Don’t bother Mommy; she has had a bad day.' I ask you to whom will the child go if he can't speak to Dad because he is tired nor to Mommy because she is tired. I am going to warn you, the Grand Bahamians are coming to you; they have nowhere else to go. Mothers or Dads haven't had time to explain to a teenager what is expected of him. The Church tries, but she has only one hour a week. I don’t have to tell you, the responsibility is all yours.

Sr. Marie Brang, O.S.B., joined Catholic High’s staff in September, 1968. She comments:

Our international student body has more school spirit than ever since we can boast of a football team called the 'Vagabonds.' On October 27 Grand Bahama Island made history when the first American style football game was played in the Bahamas. Almost 1000 people witnessed the game between the Freeport 'Yellow Birds' and the Vagabonds.

Our small school has a football, basketball, net ball and drill teams and tennis and sailing clubs. We are especially happy about our chorus that Mr. Napoleon Reed from Miami directs.

Another first for Catholic High was the first Home and School Association meeting on November 7. Also our faculty and that of St. Vincent's attended the fifth annual institute of the diocese of Nassau held in Nassau. Still another first is the library started under the guidance of Sister Francene.

Sister Claire as headmistress tried to motivate the Catholic High students through publishing an honor roll and gaining scholarships. Eventually about 50 percent of each graduating class continued their education and 95 percent of this number enrolled in American or Canadian schools.

The parents and community responded well to requests such as the use of hotel public rooms for graduation ceremonies, fashion shows, concerts and especially career night speakers. The Kiwanis formed the Key Club in 1969 at Catholic High. The president of the Lucayan Kiwanis, Bill King, said:

I was convinced of the great benefits that would come to these high school students, particularly the Bahamians, by membership in the Key Club. Each week businessmen met with the boys and informed them of vital facts in the business world. Likewise each week two boys came to the
Kiwanis luncheon and heard speakers and met the members. A very successful Walkathon was sponsored in conjunction with Freeport High School. We made $1,325 for scholarships.

The annual "Bahama Week" gave both expatriates and Bahamians a better understanding of the Bahamian culture. The English classes produced a booklet about Bahamian history and customs. Social studies students worked on geography projects and the biology classes displayed the plant and animal life of the islands. The government and the tourist bureau supplied literature and speakers.

Sister Francene describes her experience of teaching science at Catholic High:

Mr. Andrew Halsey almost single-handed set up my science laboratory which was rather well equipped. We added a few more microscopes when funds allowed. All year long we had the chance to study bird life and marine waters. An ornithologist, Dr. Paul Fluck, built a nature center here which our students could visit.

To supplement the tuition income, committees of parents sponsored money-making projects for Catholic High. Mrs. Eileen DeGregory describes this work:

One of the ways we parents made money for the school was fashion shows. Not only did we make money, but the shows developed a good community spirit. The girls received lessons in poise, were introduced to a more sophisticated line of clothes and met the business people. Boys even did some modeling which was something unheard of for boys of that age here in Freeport. The business people of the community were most generous. One year we cleared $1,371.

Christian Family Living was one of the most valuable courses introduced to the seniors at Catholic High. Martha Waterstradt and Eileen Bohl, who helped arrange the course in 1968-69, said:

The course was coeducational because Sister Claire felt that the boys and girls could best meet the course objectives—correct sense of values, realistic view of family life, achieving family unity—if they learned together. We met one afternoon a week and covered topics such as sex education, venereal disease, drugs, alcoholism, finance, home nursing, baby care, nutrition, grooming, and the spiritual side of marriage. The speakers were doctors, nurses, priests, Kiwanians, Alcoholics Anonymous members, and former Head Start parent education supervisors.

As Grand Bahama Catholic High School is located on the edge of Freeport, Bahamians living in Hawksbill, Mack Town, Lewis Yard, Hunter, Pinder's Point, Eight Mile Rock, Sea Grape and other settlements could attend the school. From 1968 to 1971 the ratio of Bahamian over expatriate students increased as many expatriates left the island and the improving Bahamian economy made it possible for more Bahamian families to pay the tuition that increased to $325 in 1970-71.
Although there is racism on the island, Catholic High fostered genuine integration as seen in extra-curriculars and class officer elections. Mr. Garnett Levarity, a distinguished Bahamian leader, considered this subject in his speech during Bahamian week in May, 1971:

Catholic priests and sisters not only brought Christianity to the Bahamas, but they brought the Whites and Blacks together, where we live in peace and harmony.... We Bahamians by nature have a deep sense of faith in the providence of God and a love for our fellowman. We show this in times of crisis, we are like soldiers all marching to a goal, but we must also demonstrate our belief in God in times of prosperity by showing genuine love and friendship for all people regardless of color or creed.

The story of the principalship of Catholic High School reflects the emerging Bahamian nationalism as well as some confusion in lines of authority and communication in the diocesan school board. Sister Claire knew that when Mother Henrita asked her to be Catholic High’s headmistress in 1968 that a Bahamian would eventually fill the position.

Mother Henrita wrote Sister Claire on 27 February 1970:

The way it looks now is that I should appoint a Bahamian in your place next year as headmistress. You were so good about taking on the principalship at the time it was in such a bad way and we needed a competent person to take it in hand that it hurts me to have to come to this decision now that it is going so well. What is more, you have done and are doing such a fine job of getting that school on its feet that I dread to take the risk of having someone less experienced take over. I have gone over these points in trying to come to a decision. As you perhaps surmise it is the Bahamian situation that has brought me to this. The strong spirit of nationalism which characterizes the political situation in the Bahamas is becoming more and more evident....

On 31 April 1970 Mother Henrita wrote that she had changed her mind. In a letter of 4 May 1970, Bishop Leonard wrote Sister Claire:

I had to release to the Catholic Board of Education (including Brother Darby) the fact that you would not be remaining at Grand Bahama Catholic High and I already had received word from Mother Henrita by phone a few weeks ago that she was to release the information in a few days. The Board of Education and the Superintendent were very much saddened by the news I can assure you and do still have hopes that Mother Henrita might relent and leave you there at G.B.C.H. for another year to ‘break in’ the newcomer. We will just have to leave it to God, I suppose.

On April 30, Mother Henrita wrote Sister Claire:

I have, however, thanks be to God, reached a decision and it is not what I had earlier thought I would come to. Do you still feel willing to stay on for the coming year as administrator? I would be very happy and pleased if you would.

Sister Claire agreed and in September, 1970, continued as headmistress of Catholic High for another year. Mother Henrita appointed Sr. Marie
Agatha Hunt, a Bahamian sister, to be an “understudy in administration” to Sister Claire, and the following fall Sister Marie Agatha became headmistress.

The Port Authority contributed additional land to Catholic High in 1968 and 1969 as well as $45,000 in 1970 to construct a library and classroom wing for 250 students. Despite the building program and faculty salary increases, Catholic High balanced its books in June, 1971.

In 1956, on Cat Island, 140 miles from Nassau, three Blessed Martin sisters established their second out island school, but the mission closed in 1968 because of financial difficulties. The sisters established their third out island mission on Bimini, a narrow island of eight square miles known as the “Shrine of Game Fishermen.” A lay teacher, Mrs. John Levarity, was among the lay people who actually started the school and its first teacher. Her daughter, Mrs. Levarity Fernander, recalls:

In 1943 my mother began a kindergarten with twelve pupils in a house near our home. She wanted to prepare these children to enter a government school at the end of the year. As there were not enough government schools for all the children, the parents of the twelve children persuaded my mother to continue on with the succeeding grades. For eighteen years mother taught the children without a salary, but about one-third of the children paid fees. About 200 were enrolled in 1961. I began teaching in 1944.

My mother continually begged Bishop Leonard to send sisters to Bimini before she died. When the three sisters came in 1961, she said, ‘I can say like Simeon, ‘Lord dismiss your servant.’ Now I can die because the bishop has sent us three Marys.’ My mother died 24 September 1961—two weeks after the sisters came.

On 18 August 1961 Sisters Cecilia Albury, Mary Anne Russell and Mary Clare Rolle arrived in Bimini. They lived in the Fernander home until the convent was ready. The church and a house served as the school whose enrollment went from eighty to 103 students the first weeks. Holy Name School continued with a kindergarten and eight grades until June, 1969. As the students took the Common Entrance Examination in the sixth grade, the seventh and eighth grades discontinued that fall. In 1972 three sisters and four Jamaican lay teachers taught 156 students, about one-fourth Catholic.

Three Sisters of Charity, Sisters Mary Giovanni Murphy, Maria Agatha Sissler and Catherine Miriam Snee, established the first mission school, St. Vincent’s Academy, on Harbour Island, on 2 February 1922. Sixteen students each paid 30s a year tuition. That same year the St. Benedict’s parish school opened. In 1924, thirty-one white pupils attended the academy and the parish school enrolled forty-five Blacks. About twenty years later the two schools merged.

Fr. John McGoey, a Scarboro father, describes the antagonism the sisters experienced in their early years on Harbour Island:
The sisters met bigotry more excessive than they received in their first
days in Nassau. They persevered and won the people by their charity and
long-suffering to the extent that largely through their work the island
was more than 25 percent Catholic within thirty years. No one can dis­
count the early work of Father Chrysostom, or the tenacious evangelizing
of Father Bonaventure. But it is a fact that the island was won by the
daily efforts of the Sisters of Charity in the classrooms of St. Benedict's
School. Even today two-thirds of the students are non-Catholics, and
although they are not often won for the Church, bigotry is all but a thing
of the past.

The Sisters of Charity worked on Harbour Island until 1972.

Lay teachers directed St. Anne's School at Rock Island in South
Eleuthera for several years before sisters arrived. In Thompson's Shop,
which was used as a church on Sunday, two local girls taught from 1957
to 1960. Fr. Paul Pendergast, a Scarboro priest, became the pastor in
1958 and built a school with lumber donated from a missile base. This
building also served as a church until the present church was built in 1957.

Sr. Mary Lucia Fitzpatrick, a Grey Sister of the Immaculate Con­
ception from Pembroke, Ontario, in 1972 described the sisters' work in
the last twelve years:

Sr. Mary Genevieve Andircheck, superior, Sr. St. Angela Lynch, head­
mistress, Sr. St. George Shapiro and I opened a school on 15 September
1960 for fifty-three pupils in kindergarten and Grades 1 and 2. The
following year an additional room was built for another grade, and each
year a succeeding grade was added up to Grade 6. In 1965 a three class­
room building was erected. Until 1970, when we received government aid,
our motherhouse in Canada supported the mission, averaging about $6,000
a year. The church and the school have been supported by donors from the
United States and Canada and annual parish bazaars which some years
realized about £500.

At Marsh Harbour on Abaco Island, St. Francis de Sales School existed
for four years before the Dominican sisters from Caldwell, New Jersey,
arrived in August, 1969. Sisters Marie Therese Gleeson, Joyce Murphy,
Mary Daugherty and Mary Ann Leonard joined Fr. Liam Crowley and
Fr. Jeremiah Casey, Sacred Heart fathers and four lay teachers in teaching
kindergarten and three grades to seventy-five youngsters. Before the
Owens Illinois Glass Company left the island in 1970, it donated seven
frame buildings to the parish.

Sr. Patricia Crowley, the headmistress in 1972, described the sisters' work:

When the sisters came in 1969, the people had little contact with
Catholics, but today there is fine rapport. Evening classes four nights a
week for about fifty adults, mostly non-Catholics, has helped make the
sisters and the school better known. We teach catechism in several nearby
settlements such as Dundas Town and Murphy Town. Every two weeks
two sisters go to Crossing Rock, a settlement about fifty miles away, where
they gather about forty non-Catholic children in the government school or in a private home to teach the Bible. The joy these children express as they run out to the car to greet the sisters, convinces us that we are needed here.

Five of the eight parish elementary schools in Nassau in 1971 were built in the first sixty years of Catholic education in the Bahamas. Since 1950 St. Thomas More, St. Bede’s and St. Cecilia’s have been built. In January, 1972, Bishop Hagarty stressed the importance the Church in the Bahamas places on education:

We have been interested in schools more than any other phase of our missionary work. This has been accomplished through great sacrifices by the sisters and their motherhouses in the United States and Canada. It has paid off and the Church is solidly planted in the second and third generation Catholics. These people are as well instructed as in any similar place in the world. It has been our policy to teach the Catholic religion to all the pupils while at the same time respecting the religious beliefs of all the children and their parents.

St. Thomas More School opened in 1952. Sisters Laura Doyle and Anne Regina Maguire, Sisters of Charity, taught in a small building which served as the church and is still used for first grade. Sisters Julia Whelan and Teresita Regina Austin and three lay teachers began school for seventy-eight pupils when the combination church and school was built. The Scarboro fathers helped support this parish.

The Dominican sisters from Adrian, Michigan, replaced the Sisters of Charity at St. Thomas More in 1959. By 1965 the enrollment had increased to 470, but since 1970 the enrollment has been limited to 350 in order to maintain a pupil teacher ratio of one to thirty.

Mr. Donald Sands, an Assembly of God man, sends his son to St. Thomas More. Commenting on this choice of school, Mr. Sands said:

My mother probably had the same reason I have. My mother sent me to a Catholic school because she felt that I would get a better education. The sisters spent many an hour after school teaching me privately.

The sisters gave me many a pair of pants, and many a day I came to school hungry and was given lunch. I was one in a family of nine. My father earned $4.25 a day and I could not have gone to school without help.

By 1971, St. Thomas More had a reading specialist and two ungraded rooms. Fourteen of its graduates that year received secondary school scholarships and twenty-five of their classmates entered high school and paid the tuition. Also in 1971 the faculty of two sisters and nine lay teachers were fully certified.

Miss Prudence Evans, Miss Lottie Wilson, Mrs. Mora Sands and a Miss Culman for some years taught the first three grades at St. Bede’s School on Sutton Street. In 1958 the Blessed Martin sisters, with Sr. Elizabeth Claridge as headmistress, came to the school. Sr. Catherine
Johnson, Mrs. Charlow, and Misses Morris Magyar, L. Dumette and D. Carrol formed the faculty. A large hall which could be partitioned into four classrooms was built in 1958. Three years later under Sr. Teresa Symonette as headmistress, Grades 5 and 6 were added. In 1969 another classroom building and a church and rectory were finished and the following year the parish built another classroom building. In 1971 Sr. Anne Thompson, O.S.B., was headmistress and the school enrolled 170 pupils. The seventeen graduates that spring entered secondary schools in the fall.

St. Cecilia's was the last parish school established in Nassau. The school evolved from catechetical classes organized by two Sisters of Charity, Sisters Constance Mary Hottenroth and Ann Regina Maguire. The school opened in 1956 and Sr. Mary Ancilla Egan, superior of St. Francis Xavier Convent, temporarily was headmistress. Three years later the Sisters of St. Joseph from North Bay, Ontario, replaced the Sisters of Charity at the school. Sisters Ellen Foley, Theresa Verdun, Suzanne Roy and Ruth Potvin, and a Miss Bethel and a Miss Green formed the faculty that taught 130 students in Grades 1-4 in 1959. The enrollment increased to 254 students in six grades by 1971. The motherhouse contributed $1,200 a month to St. Cecilia's and friends in Canada donated most of the equipment and books.

The steady increase of Catholic schools in the Bahamas for eighty-three years is a story of sacrifice by sisters and lay teachers from the Bahamas, the United States and Canada. For the first sixty-seven years the Sisters of Charity administered the schools. In 1892 Nassau had one parish school of 200 students of which eighty-two were Catholic; Nassau's population was 47,565. In 1954, fifteen Sisters of Charity and six Blessed Martin sisters taught 2,493 pupils in seven schools. In 1971, twenty-two sisters from four religious communities and 116 lay teachers taught in eight parish schools.

In 1958, Bishop Hagarty appointed Fr. Brendan Forsyth, O.S.B., the first superintendent of schools of the Nassau Diocese. Then, in 1965, Br. John Darby, S.M., became the first full-time superintendent. He comments on his eight years in this work:

In 1964 Bishop Leonard invited the Marianists of New York to open a trade school for boys on New Providence. The provincial council authorized the provincial and his assistant to study the possibilities. As I was the assistant, I made several visits to schools in Nassau and the out islands and reported that the more urgent need appeared to be in administration rather than to open another school. Conditions ranged from mediocre to less than mediocre schools. Certified lay teachers were a rare luxury; 60 percent of the teachers were lay teachers and more than 90 percent of them were uncertified. Teachers' salaries were more nominal than real; the
The curriculum was disorganized and the textbooks were outdated as much as a generation. Finally, classes were hopelessly overcrowded.

To encourage implementation of my suggestion for a more formalized administration for the Catholic schools, I volunteered as a supervisor. Through periodic visitations I developed regular meetings of the headmistresses that eventually led to the first teachers’ institute in January, 1965. Following a six week visitation of various schools in England in the fall, 1964, I was appointed the full-time diocesan superintendent of schools in January, 1965. I held that post until July, 1972, except from October, 1969, to March, 1970, when Fr. Bernard Stueve, S.M., replaced me.

To ‘improve a little’ each month and thus move steadily towards the goal of quality performance at all levels, I directed the following projects:

1) Curriculum syllabus: Through committees of headmistresses and teachers the syllabus was completely revised, and it has been kept up to date.

2) Administration: Headmistresses were the immediate advisors to the superintendent and met with him eight times per year. This executive committee drew up policies, reviewed school regulations, set the calendar, etc.

3) Handbook for administrators and teachers: subcommittees headed by members of the executive committee wrote this handbook which helped considerably to unify the work of administrators and teachers.

4) Conferences and institutes: All teachers in Nassau were required to attend each of the four conferences. All teachers in the system were required to attend the annual two day institute in Nassau. Included on the program were leading educators from the United States or Canada and officers of the ministry of education in Nassau.

5) Teachers: One of my principal aims was to upgrade the teaching profession. To this end I inaugurated a teacher appreciation program in 1966. At the school level the headmistress directed the individual classes to do something very special for their teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week. At the parish level the pastor offered a Sunday Mass for the teachers who were present in a reserved section, and he spoke on the vocation of the teacher. At the diocesan level a public tribute was paid to all teachers in a program on 6 January 1966 in Xavier Auditorium. The governor, the premier and other officials and guests witnessed Bishop Hagarty present an Appreciation Certificate to seventy-nine teachers who had taught ten years or more.

6) Teachers College: The Bahamas Teachers College accepted five of our teachers in September, 1965. Each year thereafter teachers have qualified for the college’s program. To this end I inaugurated evening classes and five week summer sessions for teachers who wished to meet the college’s entrance requirements. This program ran from 1965 to 1970. More recently our teachers are qualifying for graduate university study in the United States. The firm policy of hiring only qualified teachers inaugurated in 1965 seems to be paying dividends. Once this grant money was given to the Catholic system, the bishop immediately approved a regular salary scale for teachers and also sanctioned the centralization of payment of all
teachers' salaries from the superintendent's office. Negotiations for the grant had been in progress for years before the cabinet and the government finally approved it. The article in the Education Act under 'Exempt Schools' was the embarrassing obstacle to any rational approach to a solution. Yet, the grant was allowed even before the solution was found. Eventually the Catholic sector withdrew from the exempt status and the problem dissipated almost immediately. The grant evolved along the following lines:

a) January, 1966. Grant was based on the following rates:
   - $6 per child enrolled in school
   - $288 per certified teacher
   - $486 per graduate teacher
   (Grant to Nassau schools only)

b) January, 1967. Rates adjusted to:
   - $60 per child enrolled in school
   - $600 per certified teacher
   - $800 per graduate teacher
   (Grant to Nassau schools only)

c) January, 1969. Rates adjusted to:
   - 65 percent of a teacher's salary based on the government's salary scale. All Catholic schools receive grants except the two schools in Freeport. Conditions: 75 percent of each staff to be fully certified; the government to have two appointees on the Catholic school board; the government to approve any increase in school fees. The superintendent applies for the grant three times a year. Each application includes the complete resume of each teacher's credentials, experience and current status.

7) Salaries: The grant program has allowed the Catholic school system to pay teachers a salary equivalent to teachers in the ministry schools. This is a far cry from the $50 many teachers received in 1965. Sisters now receive $3,000 per year. In 1965 they did not receive any salary. In September, 1970, the Catholic board of education agreed on the following salary scale: Untrained teachers—$2,500 the first year; five yearly increments; maximum salary of $3,900. Trained teachers—$4,100 for those with five B.J.C. terms and two years of successful teacher training; $6,200 for those having an honors degree of a British university or a master's degree of an American university; increments for years of experience up to $9,800.

8) Handbook for lay missionaries: I wrote this book and published it in 1966 in order to define the aims and purposes of the lay missionary program in the Bahamas. The generous young ladies who served in our schools were all graduate teachers. Their presence and service made it possible for the Catholic schools to have the required number of certified teachers on each staff necessary to meet government conditions for the grant.

9) Aid from Canada and the United States: Prior to 1965 Fr. John McGoe, S.F.M., and the Scarboro fathers were instrumental in obtaining used school desks from Toronto government schools at no cost. Each school received a shipment of desks to replace our ancient school seating. More recently the Overseas Book Center, Toronto, shipped several thousand new textbooks to the Catholic
schools. Individual schools in the diocese are engaged in a ‘Twinning Program’ with Toronto schools; this exchange was inaugurated in 1971. The United States Navy ‘Project Handclasp’ contributed six tons of new science textbooks and sports equipment to the Catholic schools in 1971.

The urgent need for lay people to become involved in the apostolic work of the Church brought the diocesan school board into existence. The board’s first chairman, William P. Holowesko, explains its functions and accomplishments:

In May, 1969, Brother Darby, chairman of an ad hoc educational advisory committee for the Catholic schools, submitted a report to Bishop Hagarty. As a result of this report, representatives from various parish councils met and elected members of the first Bahamas Catholic board of education from a slate of candidates submitted from the priests’ senate, sisters, schools, parish councils, etc. Those elected were: Fr. Preston Moss, Sr. Maedene Russell, Messrs. Arthur Barnett, Harold Longley, James Thompson, John Farmer, William Holowesko, Bishop Hagarty, ex officio; and Brother Darby, the superintendent.

Brother Darby conceived that the board be a policy-making body that met quarterly. He wanted one established central authority from which all Catholic schools could be directed. The director was to be the superintendent. I do not believe that Brother Darby or the bishop believed that the board of education would evolve in the manner that it did. First it constituted itself in relation to the bishop and Brother Darby and defined its responsibility. I consider it significant that the board was established as a policy-making board subject to the approval of the ordinary, who was a voting member, rather than just an advisory board to the bishop. It is also significant that the superintendent became an employee of the board and the board’s executive officer with the job of implementing the board’s policies. It is fortunate that the bishop participates fully in debates and voting. His attendance record is one of the best. Both the bishop and Brother Darby felt that the board would be useful in dealing with the government especially in soliciting financial assistance. The bishop also wished the board to be a fund raising vehicle.

I was elected the board’s first chairman. I held the post for two years and then indicated that I wished to resign and spend my last year as a member of the board. I originally accepted a three year term (three members, three years; three, four years; and two, five years—in order to stagger the membership with each member serving three years.

The board’s function is to develop a broad policy to bring effectively Catholic education to the people in the Bahamas and to establish and define goals.

Since the Sisters of Charity came to the Bahamas, they have taught and cared for the poor. On 4 May 1927 Sr. Mary Regina Lynch opened the Madonna Day Nursery in a small building on The Priory’s grounds in Nassau. Twice that first year the nursery closed because of contagious diseases. In September, 1928, Sr. Mary Carmelina Gueranger took over the nursery and opened a pre-natal clinic. Sister returned to New York
12 years later because of poor health and Sr. Marian Thomas Hallahan took charge.

Because of the lack of doctors, the sisters in the clinic treated many cases that normally only doctors would care for. A nurse from the government hospital visited the nursing center weekly and examined the school children. About seventy-five small children received breakfast and lunch each day at the nursery. Paid assistants helped the staff, but the sisters, doctors, and nurses volunteered their services. The children who could paid £40 for the ten month term. Annual costs came to £410 for food and £240 for wages. As no sisters could staff the center from 1946 to 1953, it closed during those years.

Sr. Mary Angelus Joyce came from New York in 1953 and organized pre-natal clinics to counteract a clinic opened in the most crowded area of Nassau by a Planned Parenthood group from the United States. The latter clinic operated only a few months because of the people's indifference. On 11 October 1953, the feast of Our Lady's Maternity, Bishop Hagarty dedicated the Infant of Prague Clinic which was established in the reconditioned building of the Madonna Day Nursery. Then, on 11 February 1954, the Marian Clinic, held on the grounds of Our Lady's Church in Nassau, was dedicated. As on 4 January 1955, Bishop Hagarty blessed a third pre-natal clinic in Fox Hill. Dr. Camille Gordon, then of the Princess Margaret Hospital staff, volunteered one afternoon a week at each clinic.

Bishop Hagarty commented on the work of the clinic staffs:

One of the greatest charitable works the Catholic Church has performed in the Bahamas is that of the clinics. How much closer to the people are these sisters and lay nurses who visit the homes and work in the clinics than are we priests or even the sisters in the classroom. These nurses probably get the real feelings or 'the pulse of the people' since the people much more readily confide in them than in us.

In 1957, Nassau was fortunate in having Dr. Maria Bachem join the work in the three clinics. Dr. Bachem, a missionary doctor of the German Catholic Institute, received her training at the University of Wurzburg, Germany. She worked in Minnesota and Alabama for some years before moving to the Bahamas. In 1962 Dr. Bachem began health education classes for elementary and secondary students. The Nassau Heart Foundation recognized the doctor's service to the community by presenting her the first Golden Heart Award in 1968.

On 6 January 1965 the Guy Cooper Dental Clinic on Young Street opened. Dr. Jackson Burnside, a Bahamian dentist, comes to the clinic on Wednesday afternoons and cares for the school children.

Sisters Mary de Lourdes Brady and Jude Celeste Shea of the Nursing Sisters of the Sick Poor of Brooklyn, New York, came to Nassau on
19 September 1960 at the invitation of Bishop Hagarty. Three years later the bishop asked the sisters to administer the three clinics.

The expenses of the clinics were long met by the diocese and by donations. Three Bahamians received regular salaries and Dr. Bachem received a small stipend and lodging. At present the clinics employ five salaried Bahamians and four volunteers. Dr. Bachem still works for only a small stipend. The clinic meets its salaries and other expenses by charging $.30 per patient and a small charge for medicine and services according to the patient’s means. Patients receive X-ray and other laboratory treatment at the government hospital. The clinics aim not only to care for the physical needs but also to teach nutrition and hygiene. “Our Christian mission,” says Dr. Bachem, “is to make the love of Christ visible in the community by our special concern for the poor, for the poor must be served . . . as Christ is served.”

The story of the beginning of the Hardecker Clinic at Our Lady’s parish in Nassau, a long cherished dream of Dr. Fred Burke, professor of pediatrics at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., is told by Dr. Julie Wershing, resident physician in this unique center:

In January, 1963, I met my former professor of pediatrics, Dr. Fred Burke. He told me about his most recent activity—starting a children’s clinic in the Bahama Islands. It was a very interesting story.

Ever since the Burkes had honeymooned in Nassau some years before and had seen the marked need for pediatric care in the Bahamas, his dream had been to establish a children’s clinic to satisfy this need. Through his many contacts and friends, his hard work and even harder selling, others who admired Dr. Burke shared this dream. Eventually, with funds from the Angelus Foundation, headed by Mr. Aaron Frosch of New York, the building was becoming a reality. It was to be named the Agnes Hardecker Children’s Clinic and Laboratory in honor of Miss Hardecker of New York. Through many talks with Bishop Leonard and Father Cornelius, Dr. Burke established that the Nursing Sisters of the Sick Poor of Brooklyn, under the auspices of the bishop, would administer the clinic. Dr. Burke would initially attempt to raise funds through donations and research grants to help maintain the clinic. The diocese would provide for the sisters, lay missionaries and students who staffed the clinic and help out financially if private funds could not cover costs. It was hoped that the clinic eventually would become self-supporting.

Dr. Burke envisaged this clinic as a small unit, gradually building up over a ten year period as the community accepted it to encompass eventually a population of some 500 families. The clinic would not only care for sick children but also gradually introduce the concept of ‘well baby care’ and preventive medicine through informal instructive talks with parents, older siblings and the children themselves. The clinic would also demonstrate the more practical aspects of hygiene (e.g. care of skin, nails, ears and mouth), and the control of disease symptoms (e.g. methods of treating fever, cough, lacerations, diarrhea) in order to prevent more serious disease complications from developing. The clinic would also function as a research facility to
provide practical experience to students and residents regarding subtropical medicine, and at the same time help to elevate the local standard of medicine through constant university contact.

Dr. Burke offered me the position of running the clinic. At first I refused because I was reasonably settled in Denver. Finally, after several months of persuasion, I agreed to take a year's leave of absence and start the clinic in Nassau.

I can still recall excerpts from Dr. Burke's letters of description, some very true, some very misleading; my quarters were to be a 'cottage one block from the sea.' (In reality, four rooms in a rather utilitarian twelve room cement two-story building erected in 1907 and located a block from the harbor and business district.) The clinic would be 'a modern air-conditioned building.' (Very true, but incomplete; it was a nicely designed modern cement building with central air conditioning, brightly painted, with lovely built-in laboratory counters, but no other furniture or equipment.) The clinic would be located on the grounds of 'Our Lady's Church and School.' (True, this is in the heart of the highly populated Bahamian district.) 'The people would be hard to get to know initially, but a pleasure to work with.' (In reality, they are very friendly, generous, open people who are indeed a real joy to know and work with.) I could find 'a young man interested in the clinic and train him as a lab technician.' (Father Brendan sent me one of his 'Bahamian boys,' Frank Clarke, and while I trained Frank in the microscope and medical terminology, Frank taught me to speak and understand the Bahamian dialect, the art of 'bush medicine', and the common superstitions.) I would find it 'a challenging and at times frustrating but always highly profitable experience.' (And that's all pure truth!)

I arrived in Nassau in August, 1963. The clinic had been completed in June and dedicated by Bishop Leonard. Sister Mary Celeste was appointed administrator. Sister Mary Noel, our nurse, and Rosemary Payeur, a lay missionary from Ann Arbor, Michigan, our receptionist and assistant, arrived in September. Monica Davis, a Bahamian nurse, also volunteered to help us.

The clinic officially opened on 2 September 1963. We saw seven patients that day, starting at 9:00 a.m. and finishing at 7:30 p.m. Gradually, however, as everyone became more adept at their jobs and we meshed together as a team, our efficiency increased five-fold. Our initial patients were first graders at Our Lady's School next door. We reasoned that school physicals could provide a sound approach to well child care, which could then be extended to care of sick and well older and younger siblings in the family and eventually to the usual well baby care and yearly checkups. Also, by concentrating each year on the first grade classes, within eight years we would have the entire school and their families under care.

Fortunately, although in some ways unfortunately, we and our services were welcomed with marked friendliness by the people. Within two years we had to double the clinic's size and staff in order to handle the patient load. Our reputation for care also spread to other districts, and patients from all over the island and even the out islands sought our assistance.

Throughout the years we have studied several drugs and vaccines and have helped promote the development of an antiamoebicide, an antihelminthic drug, a pediatric oral-nasal decongestant, a measles vaccine and
a rubella vaccine. The latter involved testing 4,000 children initially, with a continuing follow-up of 200 to 400 of the children over the years. This was our largest study. Whatever the size, however, these studies also helped us keep abreast of the latest medical developments, and it helped the clinic considerably financially.

Our student teaching program is becoming more active. From a single student in 1964 on a six week elective period, we now have seven students from Georgetown University each year, for six weeks.

Today the clinic cares for over 8,000 patients. We have established good rapport between patients and staff. Many children now come unaccompanied by adults and yet unafraid. Our parents now show a more rational attitude towards illness and disease and ask more questions. Our teaching technique has now progressed from the individual 'Why your child got sick, and what-to-do' talks, to openly discussing a child's condition and inviting comments from other parents present in the waiting room.

A parents' club was formed in 1971 to assist the clinic, especially financially. The club probably would have begun years ago if the staff had taken part in its organization. We felt, however, that such an organization should be built up solely by concerned parents; they should run it and the pride in its accomplishments should accrue solely to these devoted parents.

The clinic staff in 1972 consists of Sr. Joan Woodford, who became our administrator four years ago; Frank Clarke, our lab tech from the clinic's beginning; Mrs. Erma Hart, our receptionist for the past six years; nurse Myrtle Hanna who joined us three and a half years ago; Sr. Benora Gaida, O.S.B., who is back for her second year in the lab; Martha Werner, our present lay missionary nurse; the senior med student and myself.

Bishop Hagarty and Mr. Wallace Groves wished to have sisters staff a hospital on Grand Bahama. In the summer, 1962, Mother Mary Leona of Clinton, Iowa, expressed interest in the Franciscan sisters staffing a hospital and the Grand Bahama Clinic which opened in 1961. In February, 1963, Sisters Mary Raphael, Lois Ann, and Mary Regina arrived in Freeport. After two and a half years, due to some misunderstanding, Mother Leona withdrew the sisters on 12 October 1965. The sisters continued to work in a community health program. Sister Mary Raphael recalls:

During the two and a half years we were there, we felt that the Bahamians and the expatriates greatly appreciated our work. In November, 1965, the Franciscan sisters set up a new community health program which was personally sponsored by Mr. Groves. The new service was directed primarily toward pre-natal and post-natal care in eastern Grand Bahama. Under the approval and cooperation of Doctors Richter and Clement, school children and adults received instruction in practical first aid. The sisters cooperated with the St. John's Ambulance Corp in an instruction program that Dr. Amado Antoni supervised.

We established a vital link in the poorer settlements by providing frequent and regular visits, offering basic medical care and home nursing and follow-up care for the chronic sick in the larger settlements, particularly Eight Mile Rock and Sea Grape. In settlements to the east, we had
an established routine. As the people accepted us completely, this meant a considerable relief to the doctors and a great savings to the patients. As the people trusted us, they accepted education from us.29

The sisters regularly visited Hunter, Lewis Yard, Hawksbill and High Rock settlements and they presented health lectures in the schools one or two days a week. By 1971 most of the settlements had government medical centers, but Sister Mary de Lourdes visited High Rock and the clinic at St. Leonard’s Church weekly. From 1969 to 1972 the sisters visited about seventy-five patients each month.

NOTES:

1. Doris Johnson, Ph.D., Guide for the Establishment of an Advisory Council (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilm, 1962), p. 179. The monitor system was discontinued in England in 1840, but in 1971 uncertified assistant teachers still worked in many Bahamian schools. In 1952, there were 240 monitors or pupil teachers; the number decreased to 172 in 1960. In 1971, teachers were classified as certified or uncertified, the former implying certification from the Bahamas Teachers College or a foreign university. Johnson, op. cit., p. 180.

2. In 1864 there were 1,570 pupils and the total amount paid for salaries that year was £1,920. The 1889 Annual Report of Education states that 10s, 2½d, was the cost per pupil; in the 1959 Report it had risen to £30:10. The revenue to the colony that year was £6,456, £794:192 of which £630,313:3.4 was allocated to education. The Annual Report of Bahama Board of Education, 1959, p. 4.

3. As late as 1962 only 48 percent of the headmasters in New Providence and 33 percent of the teachers were certified. On the out islands statistics show only 4 percent certified. The reluctance of teachers to go to the out islands is one factor which results in the great contrasts in these islands and the number of educational opportunities there. The Annual Report of the Board of Education 1962, p. 21.

4. The Bahama Junior Certificate Examinations, prepared by a local committee began in 1955. They cover subjects pursued by a pupil in the ninth and tenth grades. Admission into the Bahamas Teachers College and also into the political and economic world is often determined by the number of B.J.C. passes. Some educators are keenly aware of the inadequacy of these tests.

5. Lady Dundas in 1939 was responsible for establishing a vocational school known as the Dundas Civic Center. For over twenty-five years, with an annual government grant of $1,000 for nurses and other volunteer help, for a nominal student fee hundreds of young people were trained for domestic work, particularly for hotel employment. In 1970 this training center was incorporated with the Claudius Walker Technical College.
6. The term “ministry schools” has replaced “board of education schools” in 1964. Bahamians studying abroad:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bulletin of Education</th>
<th>Statistical Abstract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proximity to the United States as well as a readiness to accept Bahamians into colleges explains that 209 of the 283 students studying abroad in 1969 are in American colleges.

7. Sister Frances Clare was called the “undertaker sister” because she often prepared the women’s bodies for burial. Sisters coming from the North could be expected to have their white nightgowns requisitioned for burial gowns.


9. Ibid.

10. St. Francis School, the first started by the Sisters of Charity in 1892, has always had two or three sisters and an average of ten lay teachers. From a free school in 1892, the tuition has gradually increased to $10 a year in 1971. The enrollment has averaged 390. In 1971, 90 percent of the 333 students were Catholic. An addition to the first section of St. Benedict’s Hall was made possible by a generous donation from Cardinal Hayes of New York. From 1941 to 1954, a senior class, corresponding to the ninth grade in the United States, was held in one of the original frame buildings. In 1971 this building was the first grade. In 1965, a Montessori school began in another of the original buildings. In 1971 the enrollment in this school for the two sessions was fifty-four. That year St. Francis began preparing the students for the B.J.C.

11. The second parish school was begun and staffed by the Sisters of Charity for sixty-nine years. The Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception from Pembroke, Ontario, who had started a school on Rock Sound, Eleuthera, in 1960, took their place in 1964. The motherhouse in Canada supported these sisters for the first two years with about $170 a month for each sister.

12. Our Lady’s School has always been the largest parish school in Nassau, having as high as 700 students. In 1971, the enrollment was about 500 (about 10 percent non-Catholic). Three sisters and seven lay teachers formed the staff. The enrollment in the two highest grades in 1959 was 126, whereas in 1949 there were only six. This indicates the trend of the Bahamians to stay in school longer than age fourteen when they may legally leave school. The tuition in this school has increased to $45 in 1971.


14. The sisters usually returned to New York every three years for further education or medical care. Frequently they spent these months collecting funds for their missions. The various convents sent packages to Mt. St. Vincent’s. On one occasion the truck made three trips to the harbor with 400 cartons of clothes and school supplies.

15. This generosity of the reverend mother at St. Vincent’s towards the Bahama missions is seen again and again. On 12 March 1958 Bishop Leonard thanked her for $1,000 she sent him for the poor. On February 3, she sent the bishop $500 to help pay for the basketball court at Xavier Academy. One of the regular sources of aid from the North was the League of Divine Providence formed in the schools in which the Sisters of Charity taught. Members shared in spiritual benefits and were kept informed of the missionary life in the Bahamas.

16. Fr. George Wolf, O.S.B., was procurator of all Catholic buildings in the diocese from 1950 to 1960. All financial affairs were centralized in the chancery until 1958.
17. "Since the Constitution of the Blessed Martin's Congregation said that admission of postulants belongs to the Mother, I (Sister Maria Agatha) followed this rule. I refused admission to about ten on the basis of poor health and what I thought were signs of no vocation. It seems to me incredible that there are no records in the convent at Nassau. What could have happened to those I left I cannot imagine. The original copy, I wrote in a book selected for that purpose. Before leaving, I made a copy for myself and after my return to New York, I made a copy for St. Vincent's. I also left a separate book containing the record of the first General Chapter." Letter of 26 April 1972.

18. There were ten professed sisters at the convent; Sister Elizabeth, superior; Sister Gertrude, novice mistress; Sister Catherine, cook; Sister Rosella, teacher at St. Joseph's School; Sisters Agnes and Veronica at Our Lady's, Sisters Margaret and Barbara at St. Francis, Sister Bernard was a novice and Sisters Maria and Teresa attended Mt. St. Clare Junior College, Clinton, Iowa.

19. Blessed Martin sisters at the time of the amalgamation with St. Benedict's Convent in 1963 were:

**Perpetual vows in Nassau, Sept. 1963**

- (1941) Sr. Mary Rosella Harvey
- (1942) Sr. Miriam Veronica Burrows
- (1949) Sr. Margaret Thompson
- (1951) Sr. Marie Catherine Johnson
- (1953) Sr. Marie Bernard Coakley
- (1954) Sr. Mary Bernadette Powell
- (1955) Sr. Maria Agatha Hunter
- (1955) Sr. Maria Joseph Albury (Ena)
- (1956) Sr. Maria Patricia Russell
- (1956) Sr. Mary Anne Russell
- (1957) Sr. Rosemarie Pratt

**Temporary vows in Nassau**

- (1958) Sr. John Dean (Beverly)
- (1958) Sr. Clare Rolle
- (1963) Sr. Mary Caroline Cartwright

**Perpetual vows at St. Benedict's, Sept. '63**

- (1939) Sr. Maria Rahming
- (1941) Sr. Marie Agnes Rolle
- (1955) Sr. Marie Joan Dean (Carmelina)
- (1955) Sr. Cecilia Albury (Lucy)
- (1963) Sr. Maria Goretti Burrows (Lucy)
- (1957) Sr. Mary Bonaventure Russell (Maedene)

**Temporary vows at St. Benedict's**

- (1960) Sr. Mary Benedict Pratt
- (1963) Sr. Jacinta Noely
- (1963) Sr. Mary Lucy Telman (Pauline)

**Novices vows at St. Benedict's, July 1964**

- (1964) Sr. Kevin Marie Rolle (Patricia)
- (1964) Sr. Mary Josephine Albury

25 (including two novices) in September, 1963.

20. Finances of St. Martin's Convent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Income for</th>
<th>Amt. sent Bahamas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963-64</td>
<td>$50.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-65</td>
<td>$556.57</td>
<td>1,237.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>269.78</td>
<td>1,033.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-67</td>
<td>2,634.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967-68</td>
<td>974.00</td>
<td>3,373.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968-69</td>
<td>5,428.00</td>
<td>9,819.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969-70</td>
<td>4,048.00</td>
<td>7,182.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>110.00</td>
<td>4,197.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Income for includes mission donations through Sister Wibora's office and other sources. The amounts listed for 1968-69-70 contain the subsidy from the diocese of Nassau to the motherhouse for the Bahama missions. St. Benedict's Convent furnished the remainder of the money listed under Amt. sent. The above figures do not include the money spent since 1960 for the education of the sisters in the States. This includes not only those who attended St. Benedict's, but also other American schools.

Sr. Wibora Muehlenbein, O.S.B., director of St. Benedict's Mission Magazine, has done much to help the Bahamian missions, e.g., in 1963, 2,100 pounds of school supplies and household goods made up one shipment. The sisters on various American missions saved coupons for the Bahama missions.
21. Members of the lay board of advisors: Sir Etienne Dupuch, Si Amoury, William Holoweski, Orfilio Pelaez. All agreed that Father Burton was a dedicated educator and an excellent promoter. He maintained a good relationship with the civic community. In 1964, knowing the needs of professional experts in the business world, he solicited their aid. They offered advice concerning the general welfare of the school, academic standards, faculty qualifications and curriculum. They did a major job helping to finance the expansion program. Mr. Amoury solicited firms in the United States and Great Britain. He was responsible for the $25,000 donation from Rand. Orfilio Pelaez persuaded the Bacardi Company to donate $10,000 annually on a five-year period. A bazaar in 1966 cleared $18,000.

A brochure circulated in May, 1971, gave a financial picture of the physical expansion of St. Augustine’s since 1964.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Sports building</td>
<td>$35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Administration, library, and four classroom units</td>
<td>$290,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Swimming pool and three classroom units</td>
<td>$215,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Science, commercial and fine arts units and cafeteria</td>
<td>$305,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of this total St. Augustine’s assumed 46 percent of the amount and St. John’s about 21 percent. In February, 1967, St. John’s cancelled the $180,000 debt of St. Augustine’s.

The terms of the merger of St. Augustine and Xavier were:

I. ‘His Lordship will give donations of $8,000 for the year 1968 and 1969. For the following three years 1970, 1971, and 1972, his Lordship hopes to give $10,000.

II. Sisters of Charity:
1. Will provide (6) qualified Sister-teachers. (This will be done as long as it is humanly possible according to the Superiors of the Sisters of Charity.)
2. Will provide their own transportation to and from the school.
3. Will name one of the Sisters as deputy-headmistress to maintain the spirit of Xavier’s College.
4. Will be offered lunch at Saint Augustine’s.

III. Saint Augustine’s:
1. Will supervise and direct the construction of the three classroom units for His Lordship.
2. Will equip the classrooms and procure the necessary furniture.
3. Will maintain the buildings and properly landscape the surroundings.
4. Will pay the Sisters $2,500 each per year.
5. Will administer and direct the new Saint Augustine’s Xavier’s unit.
6. Will have the ownership of the buildings and grounds.
7. In so far as may be necessary or desirable, Sisters should be sought of other communities to supplement or increase the number of Sisters of Charity.

When the schools merged, Sister Edith was offered $2,500 per sister each year or $15,000 per year for the twelve sisters paid in twelve monthly installments of $1,250 each. The convent’s account and $250 monthly was placed in a new school account. As the sisters no longer operated their own school, they had no access to funds for transportation and no means of raising them. Neither could they expect the convent to provide these expenses; hence, the Sisters of Charity account replaced the Xavier College account.

22. The tax exemption advantages have lured millions of dollars of new investments. Although tourism is the basis of the economy, there are three major industries, Bahama Cement (U.S. Steel), an oil refinery (Standard Oil), and Syntex, (a chemical plant for pharmaceuticals). In 1963 8,230 people lived on Grand Bahama; in 1966, 38,000.
23. John Levarity held Anglican services in his Bimini home for many years. When Fr. Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B. (later Bishop Leonard) visited Mr. Levarity when he was in the hospital, he expressed a desire to become a Catholic. Father Leonard then instructed him and his family mostly by correspondence. The Catholic church was built on Levarity land. At the first Mass in Bimini on 21 January 1941, three of the Levarity girls were married.

24. Interview on 24 January 1972 with Bishop Kenneth Turner, a Scarboro priest expelled from China in 1952 who has been a missionary in the Bahamas since 1955.

25. Cost Per Child for 1969-70 Based on Total Operating Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Fee per year</th>
<th>Cost per child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady's</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>$9.00</td>
<td>$59.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Heart</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>64.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Anselm's</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>51.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Bede's</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>49.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cecilia's</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>52.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Francis</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>63.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph's</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>62.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Thomas More</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>45.00</td>
<td>68.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier Lower School</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>245.00</td>
<td>162.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cost per child is for parish school/diocese over and above government grants received. This table is on file in the Catholic superintendent's office in Nassau.

The diocesan parish schools in 1971-1972 enrolled 5,233 students—3,483 on New Providence and 1,750 in the out islands. 169 lay teachers taught in these schools—116 in Nassau and 53 in the out islands. 50 sisters, 28 in New Providence and 22 in the out islands, taught in the schools. 90 percent of the sisters teaching on New Providence and 96 percent of those in the out islands were certified teachers. 10 teachers in 1971-72 attended the Bahamas Teachers College.

GROWTH OF SCHOOLS IN THE BAHAMAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sisters</th>
<th>Lay teachers</th>
<th>Parochial schools</th>
<th>Parochial students</th>
<th>Catholic population</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Catholic percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>2,056</td>
<td>47,925</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>3,203</td>
<td>53,735</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>4,695</td>
<td>52,031</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>6,270</td>
<td>59,821</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>9,445</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2,436</td>
<td>11,845</td>
<td>1,770</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3,230</td>
<td>14,011</td>
<td>1,770</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1954 there were 2,493 pupils under twelve Sisters of Charity, six Blessed Martin sisters and fifty-seven lay teachers in Nassau, not including St. Francis Xavier Academy, St. Augustine's Monastery and the out island schools.

ENROLLMENT IN PARISH SCHOOLS - JUNE, 1954

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Catholic Senior High on The Priory's grounds</th>
<th>Blessed Martin Sisters</th>
<th>Lay Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Our Lady's</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>1950 &amp; 1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sacred Heart</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>1952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Anselm's</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Bede's</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Francis Xavier</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Joseph's</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Thomas More</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ss. Peter and Paul</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Sisters of Charity supervised the teaching. Some postulants from St. Martin's taught here. This school was transferred to St. Joseph's School in 1932.
26. This clinic replaced the Marian Clinic. In September, 1972, Mr. Robert Cooper of New Jersey, donated it in memory of his brother.

27. The Huntington Hartford Company from New Jersey was developing Paradise Island. Dr. Burke was a friend of their public relations man. The company donated heavily to the clinic in return for the honor of naming it after Agnes Hardecker, the personal secretary of Huntington Hartford.

28. For three years Dr. Julie Wershing was an instructor in preventive medicine at the Denver Colorado Medical School.

29. Mr. Wallace Groves promised $3,000 a year for the three sisters and provided them a car and a convent on Skipton Street. The sisters moved to Mary Star Convent in April, 1967.

Much of the primary source material about the Catholic schools in the Bahamas Sr. Claire Lynch, O.S.B., obtained from the archives of the diocese of Nassau, St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota, and Mt. St. Vincent's Convent in New York. A copy of the interviews are filed in these archives.
During the interregnum between Bishop Bernard’s death and the appointment of his successor, from 9 December 1949 until 25 June 1950, there was much speculation about who the next bishop would be. Bishop Bernard had made his mind very clear in several communications to Rome before his death. He had consulted with his advisors, both clerical and lay, in the matter. The consensus of those involved and on the scene was that the second bishop of the Bahamas must be a priest who had worked on the family islands, knew the people, understood the problems, was adept at collecting funds to develop the Church and was acceptable to a wide range of diverse groups in a pluralistic Bahamian society.

The nine months it took before the appointment was announced indicated clearly that other forces were at work trying to influence the decision of Rome. Among these, of course, was Abbot Alcuin of St. John’s Abbey who always wanted an abbot-bishop appointed in the Bahamas. He had held up the promulgation of a prefecture for three years before it was established in 1931. Now, despite his own rapidly declining health, the abbot whose abbey had supplied priests to the Bahamas for the last sixty years, tried one last time to have the ecclesiastical and religious superior be the same person.

Recommendations to the Pope regarding a new bishop in a mission territory are made by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. Cardinal Pietro Fumasoni-Biondi, prefect of this congregation, had previously been apostolic delegate in the United States and understood well the on-going conflict of interest in the Bahamas. He asked Father Bonaventure, pro-vicar, who later stated:

‘That abbot, what does he want?’ Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi asked me. I replied, ‘That we should say the whole Divine Office.’ ‘Well,’ the cardinal replied, ‘heaven is no further away from St. John’s than from the Bahamas.’ The Romans did not take to Abbot Alcuin so readily. He had a way of ex-
pressing himself that offended. That is not only my opinion. I have heard others say so, even the cardinal’s successor as apostolic delegate to the United States, Archbishop Amleto Cicognani. Abbot Alcuin’s idea was to have an *abbatia nullius*, an abbey with territorial jurisdiction, in the Bahamas the same as the Bavarian Ottillien Benedictines had in Africa. He at first wanted this with himself as abbot-bishop. I saw the letter he wrote to Cardinal Van Raussen, prefect of Propaganda, in 1929. He said there was an Anglican bishop in the Bahamas; therefore, the Catholic mission should have a higher officer than a vicar forane. A prefecture apostolic was not adequate to meet the exigencies because a bishop was needed. The number of Catholics in the Bahamas did not warrant to his mind creating a bishop. An *abbatia nullius* would be the most appropriate solution. The abbot of St. John’s could be appointed *abbas nullius* in the Bahamas, have office there and come there in season—winter time—when the weather is nice, go to the islands, confirm and do the necessary work. A vicar general could report to him when he was not there and keep him informed. He felt that the abbot of St. John’s should be the abbot-bishop of the Bahamas since he would supply the means and the men required for the mission.

Later, in 1949, when Bishop Bernard died, he returned to the same theme and wanted an abbot-bishop whom he would recommend from St. Augustine’s Monastery which was to be advanced to the status of an abbey immediately. That was his idea from the beginning to the end. He died with it. Cardinal Hayes in 1929 had in mind the regular procedure of making the Bahamas a prefecture that would develop into a diocese, and he won out. Bishop Bernard wanted the same twenty years later, and he won out.

During the 1940’s, Abbot Alcuin unceasingly pressed upon Bishop Bernard the necessity of coming to a decision according to his terms about the future of the Bahamas. Bishop Bernard diplomatically, as always, feigned off any final decision. He was in turn sick, could not read the letters because of his failing sight, did not fully understand, wanted another meeting and so forth. To read this voluminous correspondence between two men who never agreed but respected each other and remained in a tenuous bond of charity throughout it all is a testament to the working of the Spirit in the Body of Christ. Bishop Bernard was working for time because he knew that he had the ear of Rome and of Cardinal Hayes before the latter died on 4 September 1938.

It is equally remarkable that Abbot Alcuin continued to send personnel in such quantity to the Bahamas during the same period. The Holy See had stated that no decision about establishing an independent Benedictine priory or abbey in the Bahamas could be made until after World War II. Undoubtedly, Bishop Bernard instigated this decision. Abbot Alcuin and Fr. Frederic Frey, O.S.B., then went ahead undaunted to establish St. Augustine’s College, a high school for Bahamian boys with the full intention of establishing St. Augustine’s Monastery in connection with it as soon as possible. As late as 26 August 1944, Bishop Bernard told Abbot Alcuin, “Father Frederic did not tell me anything
definite about starting a school in the Fall, nor has he written anything about it." Bishop Bernard was often sick, in hospitals across the United States, trying to collect for the mission with the help of Father Leonard, subject to constant dizzy spells, weak and yet warning Abbot Alcuin, "The officials of the Holy See are necessarily sensitive to going contrary to their statements." Abbot Alcuin replied on 10 November 1944, "Our Abbey can hardly be expected to continue sending an increasing number of men. I think it is up to the Vicar Apostolic to secure the men elsewhere or to train such right within the Vicariate."

Here Abbot Alcuin had a valid point. Bishop Bernard wanted a diocese in the Bahamas but did little to develop such a possibility. He relied solely on a supply of personnel from St. John's Abbey. It was a strange ambivalence. He wanted and did not want a Benedictine presence in the Bahamas in its full expression, i.e. a monastic regimen. Perhaps his long pastoral experience influenced his judgment in this matter. Benedictines in England had gone through the same experience during that long period when monks had lived outside their monasteries serving the needs of disparate people. But Abbot Alcuin, ever the monk, warned him, "The Vicar Apostolic of the Bahamas ought gradually to provide secular priests for the outlying islands, not that it will not be hard for them, but that they are not by vocation looking for community life as Benedictines do." Abbot Alcuin never favored placing Benedictines alone on out islands.

The whole controversy in the Bahamas was an ancient one that occurred repeatedly in history. The story of Reformation English Catholicism is relevant. Monks in active missionary or parochial work could not carry out a full monastic schedule and meet their parochial responsibilities. There were two demands that were incompatible. Benedictines, the oldest religious community in the Western Church, were, indeed, the major missionaries of Europe. St. Benedict has been proclaimed the patron of European Christianity. Benedictines live by vocation in Christian community, with exceptions to the rule, given only in recognition of need. Pastoral work is done by Benedictines ideally out of community life, not apart from it.

Bishop Bernard was right in recommending a successor to himself who would in time move the Catholic presence beyond a Benedictine enclave to a full diocese. Benedictines come, make their missionary contribution, and either establish a permanent monastery or leave. Abbot Alcuin wrongly thought that a permanent abbey with local personnel could supply spiritually to a widespread group of islands in the Atlantic. An indigenous Bahamian clergy and religious body would only meet the needs. This possibility was not in the immediate future, however.
Father Bonaventure continued:

Abbot Alcuin did not give up his idea about making us an *abbatia nullius*. We were all asked our opinion. The bishop wrote his opinion before he died; I was asked and wrote my opinion. Later a questionnaire was sent and I answered that. What Abbot Alcuin thought was going through did not go through. He also sent us a petition to sign. I did not sign it. I do not know what the others did. He was angry and took me over the coals. I waited a time for him to cool off. I believe about two months later I wrote and answered his charge that I did not send the same reply to him that I sent Rome. I told him that my first allegiance was to the Holy See, to the Holy Roman Church. When I was asked by Rome in confidence, I felt obliged to answer in obedience. There were several detailed questionnaires which Rome sent me and which I answered conscientiously. After that the abbot was more polite for the remainder of his life.

To have two heads, an abbot and a bishop, or to have what he wanted, an *abbatia nullius*, would have hamstrung us, and Rome knew that. They have had plenty of experience. He wanted us to take the laws and regulations that the Ottilien Benedictines had. Our conditions are so different in the Bahamas from Africa and I think none of the fathers wanted it.

I had always told him that we were willing and glad to have the Divine Office in part—to say Vespers and Compline and little hours. He said, 'The whole office or none at all.' I said we have a better spirit and observance here than they have in many places: at St. Anselm's in New York, at St. Boniface in Minneapolis, etc. We had a good spirit. Never have I had a better life than in the Bahamas with our fathers and brothers. We had no trouble with anybody.3

The impasse was resolved on 25 June 1950 when Rome chose Fr. Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., as second bishop of the Bahamas. Father Leonard was then in the States collecting for the Catholic mission. Archbishop Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, the apostolic delegate, was trying to contact him, since the letter that had been sent to him regarding his appointment never reached him. He was finally located at St. Anselm's Abbey, Manchester, New Hampshire, and went to the delegation in Washington, D.C., to receive the news. There was many a laugh about this chain of events in the future.

Father Leonard had served in the Bahamas for thirteen years before being named its second bishop. He had been chaplain, assistant pastor and pastor in Nassau; he had helped Bishop Bernard on collecting tours for several years as the bishop's health declined. He was forty-one years old, the youngest bishop in the Antilles area, and loved by the people of the Bahamas who knew him as the smiling young priest who sped around Nassau on his little English motorcycle making his daily rounds. He was also know as "No-Hands Hagarty" among the locals since he claimed the distinction of going from the Montagu Hotel to The Priory on his motorcycle without once steering the vehicle.
Preparations began for the consecration of the new bishop. Archbishop Cicognani had offered to perform the ceremony in Nassau as a recognition of the growth that had taken place in the Catholic community. While plans were being formulated, Fr. Gabriel Roerig, O.S.B., veteran missionary in the Bahamas, died on 30 August 1950, the sixtieth anniversary to the day of his profession as a Benedictine. He was eighty-one years old and had served in the Bahamas, mostly on Andros Island, for fifty-six years, a record that will be hard to break in any age. He had come to the Bahamas as a young priest and pioneered with Father Chrysostom. He became a legend in his time as he humbly and faithfully, year after year worked among the people, built churches, rectories, convents and schools whenever called upon without any questions asked. He lived to see the second bishop appointed and rejoiced in that development. He had been brought back to The Priory in 1950 because of his weakened condition and the necessity of giving him medical and nursing care which he had never had in his lonely apostolate. He lay in bed on the second floor of The Priory facing west toward Andros where he longed to return. He pleaded with those who tried to care for him, "If you would just let me go back to Behring Point. I'm not strong enough to do anything anymore but I could sit in church and the people and the children—oh, the children—could come to me, and I could instruct them. I wouldn't be any trouble, and I never have eaten much. I won't be a bother to anyone." He gently went away to the Lord on August 30 and his little, withered body lay in St. Francis Xavier Cathedral before his many friends accompanied the remains to the new St. Augustine's Monastery cemetery for the first burial there. It was said of him:

This jubilarian could qualify as a 'worker-priest' in the truest sense, for while he preached the Gospel in his characteristically unassuming but effective way, he spent his spare hours teaching his flock the use of tools and the worth of manual labor.

Father Gabriel was a true Benedictine; his program of life was summed up in St. Benedict's Ora et Labora (Pray and Work); his reward was the Benedictine Pax, the tranquil peace which his own soul knew and radiated, and which caused his flock to look to him as a sure spiritual guide.

His breviary, the Bible, the Gospel catechism, and the Holy Rule were frequently in his hand; so was the hammer, the saw, the chisel, the trowel, and the measuring tape. Having fortified himself each day with prayer, divine reading, and meditation, he went forth by boat or afoot, visiting the widely scattered settlements of Andros Island, catechizing, baptizing, absolving, anointing, at the same time shaping the raw materials of the Island into churches, rectories, and schools. Strangers were always welcome in his house, children flocked around him, the sick awaited his healing visits.

Perhaps the virtue which characterized Father Gabriel most was his simplicity, founded on his utterly dedication to the task assigned him in the Lord's vineyard. No monk loved the companionship of community life
more, and yet no monk of St. John’s Abbey has ever lived the isolated life of an island missionary for so many years. All except the first two years of his 56 year stay in the Bahamas was spent as a lone missionary on an out island; he became in every way one of his people, with no intention of ever seeking a more comfortable existence than the poorest of his poor.

His piety and toil earned for him the notice of the famous author, Richard Le Gallienne, who in *Pieces of Eight*, saluted the priest he saw praying with saw and hammer in his hands, as one who exemplified the Benedictine motto *Ora et Labora*.

Our venerable confrere’s last days were brightened by the Apostolic Blessing of His Holiness Pope Pius XII, imparted to him shortly before his death.  

Bishop Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., was consecrated in Our Lady’s Church, the largest Catholic church in Nassau, on 19 October 1950. It was the first ordination of a Catholic bishop in the Bahamas. The *Bahama Benedictine* records this event:

While the city of Miami was digging itself out of the debris left in the wake of a severe hurricane, the 31,000 inhabitants of Nassau (200 miles southeast) were welcoming the special representative of our Holy Father the Pope. The Most Rev. Amleto Cicognani, D.D., Apostolic Delegate to the United States, had been delayed for one day due to the storm, but much to our relief, plane service was resumed and His Grace arrived just in time for the canonical reception prepared for him on the eve of October 18.

Long before 9 a.m. the following morning, October 19, Our Lady’s Church was filled to overflowing, and representatives of the local radio station ZNS were setting up equipment in preparation for a three-hour broadcast of the solemn ceremonies of the consecration of Father Leonard as bishop. In the presence of two archbishops, three bishops, four abbots, and a host of monsignori and priests, and amid all the splendor of the Roman liturgy, Father Leonard became the Most Rev. Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., D.D., Titular Bishop of Arba and Vicar Apostolic of the Bahamas.


Civil authorities in attendance included His Excellency the Acting Governor, the Hon. F. A. Evans, and Mrs. Evans, and many of the officials in various departments of the Government.

We can give no better resume of the significance of the memorable day of October 19, 1950, than to quote at random from the address given by His Grace the Apostolic Delegate at the testimonial dinner following the solemn ceremonies:

‘In the midst of these hundreds of islands, in the smiling city of Nassau in New Providence, only 180 miles from San Salvador where Columbus made his first landing in the New World, there took place this morning
for the first time the consecration of a bishop. How gratifying an event this is we can gather from the jubilation of the people and the whole-hearted participation of the authorities.

'It is a canonical form and prescription that bishops be consecrated at Rome, either by the Sovereign Pontiff himself, or by a dignity delegated by him. Naturally in the vast majority of episcopal consecrations authorization is obtained to hold the consecration extra Urbem. In the present instance no other place outside of Rome itself could be more appropriate than here in the ecclesiastical unit of the Bahamas, where such great progress has been made. Indeed the Most Rev. Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., is the Ordinary of the Bahamas, lawfully succeeding his predecessor, Bishop John Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., who opened the series of Vicars Apostolic in these Islands.

'But we prefer to look to the future and consider this consecration as a milestone in the glorious march of the Bahamas Mission... It is indeed a high honor for a Vicariate Apostolic after so brief a time to be able to present statistics such as these: about 50 churches and chapels, numerous schools with 2,400 pupils, and over 11,000 Catholics...'"

As the recession left the sanctuary, and archbishops, bishops, and monsignori all in their brilliant robes moved down the aisle, a thousand eager eyes sought out one face, that of their newly consecrated shepherd.

For three hours they had watched with rapt attention the most solemn and impressive religious ceremony ever performed in their colony, the consecration of a bishop. Even if their new Vicar Apostolic had been a man totally strange to them, they would have welcomed him with the greatest respect and gratitude, as the lawfully appointed successor to beloved Bishop Bernard. But the man they were looking for now was not a dignitary from another land graciously given them as a leader; they were looking for the friendly face of the young priest with the inviting smile, whom grownups had known as Father Leonard and children had known simply as 'Foddah'. It was thirteen years previous that this young missionary was first seen riding about the city on a little English motorcycle, and everyone asked who this priest was whose happy expression was so contagious.

Now he was moving down the aisle, not as a simple priest, but in mitre and full episcopal robes, giving his blessing to the flock for which he had just accepted full responsibility. Never did a congregation sing the Te Deum with greater feeling or better reason.

Father Leonard was now His Lordship, the Most Rev. Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., D.D., Titular Bishop of Arba and Vicar Apostolic of the Bahamas.

It was typical of him to have foregone the honor of being consecrated in one of the splendid cathedrals of his homeland in order to give that honor to his own flock. To them it was the first gracious gesture on the part of their already beloved prelate—and they were grateful."

The Holy See announced the resignation of Abbot Alcuin on exactly the same date as Bishop Leonard's consecration. This coincidence was not known until later when dates were compared. Abbot Alcuin was seventy-three years old and in declining health. It was the beginning of a new period for both St. John's and the Bahamas. The prior, Fr. Baldwin
Dworschak, O.S.B., was elected sixth abbot of St. John’s on 28 December 1950. It was a different relationship between Bishop Leonard and Abbot Baldwin than between Bishop Bernard and Abbot Alcuin. None of the old tensions existed or were fostered by those involved. Abbot Baldwin only wanted to advance St. Augustine’s Monastery to independent status as a Benedictine priory within the diocese of the Bahamas. Bishop Leonard was interested in developing his jurisdiction into a full diocese with and beyond the past presence of the Benedictines there.

It was here that the most distinctive contribution of the new bishop was soon evidenced. As a missionary for thirteen years, he had seen how tied to St. John’s Abbey the whole Catholic development in the Bahamas had been. He began at once to broaden the personnel in the Bahamas so the islands would not depend entirely on one religious house. Bishop Leonard brought into being a full Catholic diocese in the Bahamas. St. John’s Abbey did not oppose these moves and rejoiced in them as that religious house had no desire to carry the exclusive responsibility of developing a missionary diocese which it was not capable of doing.

Bishop Paul Leonard explains in his own words his background, hopes and first beginnings as ordinary. This personal memoir is quoted extensively as a primary document giving the mentality and characteristics of the second bishop who developed the Catholic mission into a full diocese. It is also an interesting commentary on American Catholicism from 1910 to 1950, a firsthand witness to the ethnic aspirations and struggles of mid-western Irish-American families and parish life. It expresses graphically what an Irish-American young man had to go through to become a missionary priest during the depression years and the experiences he brought to the people he was to serve:

They tell me I was born in a blizzard on 20 March 1909 in the farm home of Bert Hagarty and Lucy Belle O’Connell Hagarty. The doctor apparently had been out that night before, had sized up the situation and decided that I would not put in my appearance for some time. But even at that early age I was unpredictable. Sometime in the middle of the night I gave evidence that I wanted to come out into the world and be born, so they tried to get the doctor back. But he was stuck in a snowbank and my Dad had to do the honors of delivering me. He tells me that I was born with a ‘caul’ which means with a membrane. With the Irish this is sort of a silver spoon. I was always glad my Dad was around to help out on these matters or I probably wouldn’t be here today.

I was number two in the family. Joe was two years older than I. We were a family of ten children, two died in infancy. Although I was only in high school at the time, my parents asked me to baptize the children each successive time since the priest could not be had. I baptized both of them before they died and went to heaven. So I’ve had two intercessors in heaven all my life.

The Hermitage, Nassau, built by Lord Dunmore, was the winter home of Cardinal O'Connell, a school and a retreat center. Currently it is the home of the Catholic bishop of Nassau.
Clare Booth Luce meets Bishop Hagarty in Nassau.

Bishop Stephen Donahue, New York, and Bishop Hagarty with Knights Commander of St. Gregory: Si Amoury, Sir Cyrus Davis, Sir Etienne Dupuch and Samuel Johnson.
Confirmation at Holy Cross Church, United Estates, San Salvador.

Antilles Conference of Bishops meeting in Jamaica.
Dedication of Mary Star of the Sea Auditorium, Freeport, Grand Bahama.
Election of Fr. Bonaventure Dean, O.S.B., as prior of St. Augustine’s Monastery. Bishop Hagarty and Abbot Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B., with members of the community.

My Dad’s father was James Hagarty and his mother was Levina Ryan Hagarty. He had been born in the farm home where I was born. His name was Bert (J.H.J.) Hagarty. He was a farmer although he had attended State Teachers College in Cedar Falls, Iowa, and used to teach in the rural schools in the winter when there was not much farming to do. He really appreciated education very much. He was determined, even though he was poor, that his children would have as good an education as possible. I was very grateful to be able to attend school. For the first seven years I attended a one room school house about one mile from the Hagarty home. During the winter Dad often would take us with sled, or cutter, or sometimes on horseback so that we would very seldom miss school. It was drilled into us to get an education.

We lived on the family farm and Tony Hagarty, my uncle, lived on an adjoining part of that farm. I had two spinster aunts, Anne and Elizabeth Hagarty, still living in Greene, Iowa, who have taught about fifty years each, and they owned another part. It was a 270 acre piece of land. My Dad had ninety acres, my Uncle Tony had ninety acres, and Anne and Elizabeth had ninety acres. So we would farm all of ours that was tillable, and then rent from my aunts to farm part of their ninety acres.

He was a good farmer and worked very hard. I'm sure he could have been much more successful with his education if he were not farming, but he was as honest as the day is long. He was often in debt trying to feed and support his family. During the depression of the 1930's he had a mortgage on the place and actually lost the farm to the bank. He continued to rent for a few years before he and mother moved into Greene about two or three blocks from the church.

I always felt if he had expended the effort in some other field he would have been much more successful. But he gave us a good living, and we always had enough to eat even though it was sometimes hard sledding. He was a very religious man, and my mother, also, was a very religious woman. While we didn’t get to Mass sometimes in winter when there were snowbanks, or in the spring when the bottom would go out of the Iowa roads, we had a custom in our family, and I suppose he took it from his family, that the exact hour that Mass would be celebrated in the church, say at 9:00 or 10:00 a.m., we would all gather around on our knees. He was a little before his time in that he would read the translation of the readings and canon of the Mass so that we were uniting our intentions with the Mass being offered in the parish church.

When I was still in school out in the country, we came into town about one day a week, Saturday afternoon, for instruction for first Holy Communion. I really did very well, apparently, in the instruction. At that time we had as pastor a Fr. Jim Sheehy who baptized me. He was so pleased that I managed to do so well in my religious instructions that he preached the sermon this particular Sunday on how well I had done.

My brother, Joe, had been quite helpful in the instruction. In his sermon he talked about little Paul Hagarty who had done so well in his instructions and said, ‘And who was it that instructed him? It wasn’t his father; it wasn’t his mother; it was his brother, Joe, who had made his own first Holy Communion when he was knee high to a grasshopper.’ Coming out of the church that morning one of the cousins who was quite a wag, Hannah Nettleton, said to my mother, ‘You needn’t hold your head so
high! It wasn't you that instructed him. But I always remembered that we did do very well in our instructions, and a lot of it did come from our parents.

My mother's family were O'Connells. She had been born in Bremer County which adjoins Butler County to the east. She was born on a farm near the mission church of St. Bridget's, a rural part of the county called Pinhook, near Sumner, Iowa. They were a large family. Mother was one of two girls and she had a number of brothers. Their mother became ill while they were still rather young. My mother had to be a mother to the family and take care of her father. He died about three years after she married my Dad, and until then she looked after her father, hence she didn't get too far in school. She went to grade school but not high school. She had beautiful handwriting and was also excellent in spelling. Often in the winter we would have spelling bees and she would practically always win. While she didn't have much formal education, she had a lot of education where it counts. Most of us went to a public grade school that had eight grades in one room, with classes every fifteen minutes. These really were wonderful places to learn. By the time you got to the eighth grade you had pretty well mastered, by listening to the others, all that was taught. This probably wouldn't be advocated by present educational methods, but it was effective.

I saw the hardships of farming and the uncertainties of crops. We would see Dad raise a fine crop and then have to sell the grain immediately to pay off debts and grocery bills. We were really quite poor and it was a rather hard existence. I suppose his great desire for us to have an education encouraged us to want to grow up and to leave the farm. Of the five brothers, not a single one of us farms today.

We were very glad that we had a Catholic high school eight miles away in the town of Greene, taught by the Franciscan sisters from Clinton, Iowa. Sacred Heart Academy included grades one through twelve. There never were more than 150 or 200 students in the school; it was a very good school and I was privileged to attend eighth grade and four years of high school there. Our two spinster aunts helped us because they had a home in Greene. We would live with them from Sunday night until Friday afternoon and come back to our farm home each weekend. This gave us the advantage of not having to drive back and forth each day although in good spring and fall weather we very often did in horse and buggy.

Mother sent food along with us, whatever was in the garden such as corn, and that would make up in part for the board and room we received. My uncle's family would do the same things, so there was a group of cousins sort of living together. My two aunts taught school in the countryside and would come back in the evening. We really had a community there and it was very nice. We really enjoyed it. I don't know just when my thoughts began to develop towards being a priest, but I do attribute quite a bit of it to my Dad's uncle, a Jesuit, Fr. Patrick Hagarty, who had taught at Campion and Marquette, and to his great delight was assigned a parish in Pueblo, Colorado. He was only there about a year when he got pneumonia, died and was buried there. My Dad also had a sister who became a nun, Sister Mary Colombiere. She was a Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Dubuque, Iowa. She taught a good many
years in Chicago, Cedar Rapids and in different missions in the Midwest. She was a good, holy nun and used to visit the farm every year. My Uncle Henry, the Jesuit, would also come maybe once a year. So this was always in my mind, and then this Aunt Mary, the sister, would send Catholic magazines. I used to read these, especially the *Sacred Heart Messenger*. It had many stories about vocations, and I gradually got the idea that I would like to be a priest and even had the idea that I would like to be a Jesuit, which I suppose is natural enough. In 1926 I graduated from high school and began to look for a college. I wrote to Campion College at Prairie Du Chien, but that very year Campion had moved their college to Marquette, which seemed to be millions of miles away to me out on that farm in Butler County. Then with the help of my pastor, Fr. Michael J. Hogan, and the Sisters of St. Francis, we got in touch with Loras College in Dubuque.

I had had a railroad accident during my high school career. One evening, riding in a new Ford touring car with one of the boys I went to school with, we pulled up in front of a passenger train coming into town, and completely wrecked the car. It was just a miracle that we both escaped. I had two bones broken in one leg, and almost slipped through and would have been ground to mincemeat. I was making acts of contrition all during the incident and was conscious all the time. That was right in Greene and the Rock Island Railroad admitted that it was in the wrong as it had a line of freight cars blocking the approach so you couldn't see until you were right on the track upon which the train was coming. So they gave us something like $300 or $400. I used this money for my first year in college. I have to admit it was a hard way of working your way through college. But anyway my years in college were very happy. I boarded the first year and the last year. Two years in between there I was what they called 'day-dogging' or working off campus. We used to work in hotel dining rooms as waiters and doing dishes, three hours a day for meals. I shoveled walks, fired furnaces, worked Saturdays in the J.C. Penney Company and in general really worked. With a little bit of help from Loras College, then known as Columbia College, when I finished college in 1930 I owed the college only $700. At graduation we were supposed to sign up for the seminary or whatever we wanted to do. During those four years in college we had Jesuits almost entirely as retreatmasters. So my thoughts of continuing on as a Jesuit were pretty strong at that time.

The total number in the college at that time was between 300 and 350. Our class was about fifty. In the course of working there, I sometimes would put on tea dances in the afternoon. Sometimes we’d take orders for shoe repairing, cleaning and pressing. There was quite a bit of enterprise going on throughout the years. These I found later to be very beneficial although it is a rather hard way to go through school. I wrote to the Jesuits in Florisant, Missouri, and applied. I received a favorable reply from their provincial that I had been accepted. I had mentioned, however, that I owed the college $700. And the Jesuits added, ‘However, you must first liquidate the $700 before you come to the Jesuits.’ This was quite a setback because it was 1930, the beginning of the depression, and there was no work or money around.

I had at Loras studied a good bit of science. I had majored in economics, but I had studied science, particularly under Professor Heitkamp.
He was a very good geologist and meteorologist and I had taken a number of his courses. During this time a civil service examination for junior meteorologists in the U.S. Government was announced. My Dad was always great for encouraging us to take these exams. I worked part-time during vacations in the local post office in Greene so I took this meteorology examination there and passed it. I don't know if it was with flying colors or not, but at least I got through. I got an offer from Uncle Sam about a position open in Modena, Utah, for a junior meteorologist. Modena is a town of about 200 people on the Union Pacific, almost on the extreme southwest corner of Utah, only six miles from the Nevada line to the west and about sixty miles from Arizona to the south. It was a God-forsaken place, I'll tell you that! Of these 200, at least one third were Mexican people who worked on the section. It really was a Mormon stronghold, Mormon people all over. The Wasatch range extended through there, only fifty miles away was Cedar Breaks and Zion National Park, and we were not too far from the Grand Canyon in Arizona. I went out there and accepted this job. I went with my roommate and good friend in college, Eddie Logan from Doherty, Iowa, only about twelve miles from my home. This was in March, 1931. I had worked on the farm, husked corn, and had an office job at the John Deere Tractor Co. in Waterloo, Iowa. The manager at that company told me that if I could get any other job I should do so because he knew that they would close down in about four months. I appreciated this and kept the news to myself, but I did resign, got out of there, and took this job.

Eddie Logan and I set out in March, hitchhiking, going west from Iowa to Modena, Utah. It was some ride, I must say! Before we left our own state, at Council Bluffs, Iowa, a man picked us up. He was sitting in the front seat and we in the back. He had the habit of turning around to visit while he was driving which made us nervous. We were coming up a long incline, he was going at a rapid rate, and a long truck was ahead of us. He decided to go around this truck on a hillside, which is certainly not advisable. Just as he got alongside the truck, here comes a low-slung European car over the top of the hill, going about seventy miles an hour. He evidently tried to put the brakes on but there was no sign of brakes, none whatever. With good dexterity, I thought, he twisted the wheel, took to the ditch on the left side, and went down into the ditch. Everything seemed to be fine, except that the other car did the same thing and flipped into the same ditch. So we had a head-on collision right in that ditch. And the truck had the road to itself. It was amazing how we came out of that!—both cars were absolute wrecks! We got out, the police came to take information. Eddie Logan was a little wiser in the ways of the world than I was. He gave false names for both of us because once we got out to Utah we didn't want to get called back to Iowa for any court case. Eddie had his hand and head cut from the ceiling of the car.

We grabbed a passing motorist who took us in to Omaha, Nebraska, to a doctor. Then three hours later we were hitching west of Omaha. A man picked us up in front of Boys Town. He had a brand new radio in his car and he had to get way down to dial it, and couldn't see the road at all. The cars were coming and I kept grabbing the wheel to pull the car back on the road. We were very glad to say good-bye to him. Then came another car. This man was going to the northwest part of the United States. He took us all the way to Ogden, Utah. We were with him almost two
days; he was a wonderful man and we got along fine. I recall we had driven about 600 miles that day we got into Ogden. We went in to eat and I got ill and fainted away which is sort of an affliction I had for a while. Thank God, I got rid of that. In fact, even after I came to St. John’s I would faint in the choir stalls once in a while. Anyway, I went outside, and fainted in the street and I have never been treated more kindly than I was by the people who came along there, who could easily have thought that I was some drunk. They went in and got Logan and we went back to our hotel.

Then next day we started hitchhiking south toward Salt Lake. It was poor going. We walked and walked and walked. Finally, we got south of Salt Lake about fifteen miles, and there was no hope, everybody was passing us by. So we inquired and only about a mile away was the Union Pacific railroad which would go right to Modena. We found out that they would stop if someone wanted to get off. In three hours the train came along. We were dead tired and we told the porter to be sure to wake us up because we would get to Modena in the middle of the night. We were asleep, riding along when the porter came and said, ‘Time to get up, time to get up.’ The train was grinding to a halt and we grabbed our bags and got out. The train gave a whistle, went around the bend, and on through the mountains. It was pitch black and we were on a board platform. We could see the telegrapher’s light and went over to the office, only to find that we had passed Modena about seventy-five miles back and were in the little town of Caliente, Nevada. The telegrapher, a very nice man from someplace in the East let us sleep on the office floor until the next morning. Sometime next day we somehow got a train back to Modena, and landed there, strangely enough, on St. Patrick’s Day, 1931.

It was all new to us, and we began batching it in this little town. I was there with two other men who were meteorologists, one in charge and the other two of us his assistants. Our duties among other things was to send up balloons and take observations to find the direction and speed of the winds for the airways which was quite new at that time. We had to take these at 4:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. In order to see them at that hour of the morning, we would tie a Japanese lantern to the bottom of the balloon. It was inflated with a certain amount of helium which was explosive and could blow up as I found out. This would sometimes carry this lantern across the horizon and back again. Every minute it would buzz and we would take a reading. Then with a slide rule we would work this up, so that knowing the speed of the ascent (how far it went up every minute) we would also have one angle so we could work this out to tell exactly to 360° which way and how fast the wind was blowing. Then after we got the message we put it in code and took it to the telegrapher who would send it to Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, etc. This would be the pilots’ guide. It was really something at times to get up in the morning; the afternoon one wasn’t so bad. Sometimes we might be to a dance in a neighboring town and not be getting as much sleep as we should, so we’d sleep over. Each time this happened we had to write a letter of excuse to the bureau in Washington. I remember one time the boss said he would show us how to get up. His wife was gone so he said I should sleep in the other bedroom and he would get me up. But the both of us slept over and he had to write that time. In general, we did very well and found it interesting.
Upon These Rocks

Mentioning dancing, the very first night we got there, there was a dance in another little town. What we didn’t realize was that this dance was held in a hall that was used as a Mormon church. The people were mostly Mormon and were very interested in newcomers. After the first dance they had a custom of walking around with their partner; they didn’t just stand and talk, but walked in a circle and talked. Logan lit a cigarette which of all things was a disaster. The Mormons certainly hate tea, coffee, cigarettes, liquor, any of that. In no time at all the constable had him under arrest, and was leading him off to jail. I then had to be his lawyer. I talked the man into letting him off and into my good custody, and assured him that we meant no slight.

Those were really quite some months but all the time we were not getting to Mass. I wrote to Bishop John Mitty at that time the newly appointed bishop of Salt Lake City, Utah. He had come from New York and knew our Father Bernard very well. I asked where I could go to Mass? He wrote back to explain that the nearest Catholic priest was 200 miles away. He said he would try to get a priest at Cedar Breaks, which was about seventy-five miles away, and would let us know. He was never able to do that. We heard a priest was there one day so we took the day off and went there but it was the wrong Sunday.

However, in Caliente, Nevada, we struck up an acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Fred Wright. They ran a bakery in Caliente, which was a wide-open town, red light district and all. It had a little Catholic church but no priest. The priest would come maybe three times a year. Just during that time, the summer, 1931, Utah and Nevada were divided and Nevada became a diocese. Bishop Gorman whom I later knew pretty well, was the first bishop of Reno. This meant that priests from all over this area were coming to this affair. One priest had written to the Wrights to say that he was going to spend such and such a night at Caliente. He’d have Mass the next morning. They then wired us and we took two days off. We looked up the priest, got to confession, next morning were at Mass, and he asked Logan and me to serve Mass. I had only served one Mass in my life and knew nothing about it! I remember when it came time to carry the book, father told Logan to carry the book around and Logan carried it into the sacristy. I knew that wasn’t right and the good father didn’t appreciate that too much. Anyway we got to Mass and Communion and that was the only time we did in those nine months.

I was getting a little worried about my vocation. I had a cousin in St. Anselm’s parish, New York, a Benedictine, Fr. Patrick Joseph Freeman. Father Pat Joe was very interested in fostering my vocation. He knew that I had applied to the Jesuits. But he said that insofar as it wasn’t possible until I got this money paid, how would it be if I would apply to some diocese to be a diocesan priest. Then after being a diocesan priest, if I still wanted to be a Jesuit, it could possibly be arranged. He sent me the names of three bishops, one in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, one in Fargo, North Dakota, and one in Crookston, Minnesota. I wrote each a letter and told them the situation. Only one answered, Bishop O’Reilly of Fargo, and he said he would like to, but he hadn’t the money; things were real tough.

Then Father Patrick Joseph wrote and said why not apply to his home abbey of St. John’s in Collegeville, Minnesota, to see about being a Ben-
edictine. The only thing I knew about being a Benedictine was that I had seen Father Patrick Joseph once, and I really didn't know anything about the monastic life at all. I wasn't too keen about this and said no. Then he said, 'I'll pay your way to Collegeville to see the abbot; look around and make up your mind.' I felt I would be obliged to him if I did so I put it off. But then I thought maybe this was my chance. I didn't tell him this, but I wrote on my own to Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B. At this time Eddie Logan wanted to come too so I wrote for the both of us. I got a letter back from Abbot Alcuin who said, 'Will you please write me a letter and tell me just why you want to be a Benedictine.' Well, I levelled with him and he must have gotten quite a kick out of the indirect way I was applying to become a Benedictine. But he wrote back and said, 'Your motives are not the highest. However, I think we can do something with them. If you two come in and stay for the first year, and are admitted for first vows, and then if you stay for the period of three years and are admitted to solemn vows, St. John's Abbey will pay the $700 you owe to Loras College.' That sounded pretty reasonable to me. Of course I had to get the permission of Archbishop Beckman of Dubuque to enter the novitiate at St. John's. I wrote to Archbishop Beckman and got no answer.

Things were getting a little urgent with fall coming on. I took a half vacation and another half without pay, and Eddie and I started hitchhiking again. We got to Salt Lake City; I'll never forget the Cathedral of the Madeleine, where we went to Mass. Down the street, of course, is the Mormon Temple, with the Angel Moroni and all. Over the door of the main entrance of the Catholic cathedral is this text from St. Paul, 'If an angel from heaven preach a doctrine contrary to mine, etc.' They didn't have much ecumenical spirit at that time. It didn't take two guesses to tell which angel they were talking about. We finally got to Ogden, Utah, and decided this hitchhiking was for the birds and we would take a freight train.

There we were out in a yard with about 100 hobos, all ages, all different kinds, but really overall kindly. They knew darn well we were a bunch of punks. My brother, Leo, two years younger that I, was with us—Eddie, Leo and myself. It was a cold and windy October night. A good samaritan, (The hobos told us he did it every night.) came out with a big basket of sandwiches and an enormous pot of coffee and paper cups. All the men gathered around and he gave them free ham sandwiches. This was 1931, and they didn't have a dime; neither did we although I had a little money tucked away in a sock. We enjoyed our dinner and talked with the hobos. They gave us little tips, like if you ever grab a freight car, grab the front not the back, because if you do it will swing you in between and break your hold, and you'll go right down. Grab it in the front of the car where the ladder is. Swing, if you hit the car that's all right, but if it breaks your hold at least it will throw you clear. Also, most of the cars were refrigerator cars that had at each end a slot that goes clear down the width of the car, dimensions maybe about three feet by the width of the car. In this area were gas stoves which were sometimes filled with gas. If you went down there, you were a goner. They taught us to scratch a match and drop it down; the gas is not flammable, but if the match still stays burning . . . o.k.; if it doesn't burn don't go in that one. These were all very good tips to know.
There we were eating our meal and all of a sudden somebody said, "She's going east!" Around the bend came this enormous freight train with two big engines pulling it and another one a little further on pushing it, going about twenty miles an hour as it was coming by us. Everyone dropped his sandwich and coffee and grabbed to get a ladder. So did we. The men were guiding us. But the train was moving. We climbed up on top and by this time the train was getting toward the edge of town and really going. We had to find some place but it was sleeting, raining, and there was an inch of ice. We finally did get down into a reefer. While we had this end of the car, another three boys were in one at the other end. We had candy bars and cigarettes; they had some bread. So they would come over and make exchanges with us on a very friendly basis.

This went on all through the night. We came to a stop in Cheyenne, Wyoming. There was snow about a foot thick by this time. This kept on and as we went further east it turned into sleet. In Grand Island, Nebraska they took on supplies so we went into a store for some supplies and waited for our train to take off again. Up came another train going east, so we grabbed it. We got on top, Logan and I, and hung onto the ice on top of the boardwalk, but no Leo! I yelled for him and he was hanging onto the side, and I guess afraid to come up. So we pulled him up and I took command, and said, 'You're going to hang on here, and not look for any reefers at all. Right here, no walking around, even if you freeze to death.' We had no mittens or anything and the train was going alongside the Lincoln Highway about sixty miles per hour. We could see the automobiles going through snow and ice. Trains keep to the left instead of the right, and when meeting another freight, 'Whoosh!' the train sways back and forth. If you've never said your prayers, you would say them then. This went on for a whole hour.

We stopped at Columbus and got off to look around. It was raining and sleeting and we didn't want to remain on top anymore. We ran into about fifteen young people who had a whole boxcar so we got in with them and were welcomed aboard. They had a banjo and a mouth organ and were having a wonderful time singing songs, and we rode right on into Omaha. It was still rainy, miserable weather so we got off and into a streetcar that took us to Council Bluffs, Iowa. It was dark and we went down to the railroad yards again to find a train going east and climbed aboard and closed the door. Next morning after much rumbling and traveling we climbed out about 8:00 a.m. at Boone, in central Iowa. We went over to the local greasy spoon to order some breakfast and there was a train crew. I was sitting next to the engineer, and he says, 'Where're you going?' I said we were trying to get to Cedar Rapids so we could go north to home. He said, 'See that train over there? That's my train. I'm going to pull out in about ten minutes. The third car, where the door is closed, isn't locked. I'll pull her out easy, if you go over there, grab that door, walk alongside, climb in and we're off. I'll let you off at Cedar Rapids.' Everything was going fine and we were walking alongside when all of a sudden a policeman with shiny pants and leggings had a gun on us. 'All right. All right.' But he was kind enough just to throw us out of the yard. We were a little bit discouraged at this point; we waved to the engineer, 'So long, old boy!' So we decided at first to hitchhike from Boone to Ames close by, but it was fall and there were not many cars moving. So we rented a room, got
washed up, put on fresh clothes and went home on a bus. Then I had to go to Dubuque to get permission from the archbishop.

Logan and I went to see him and we told him we were coming, but we waited three days. But we were persistent, and time was running out. Finally we got in to see him. I was the spokesman. I explained to him that the abbot of St. John’s said he would take us under such conditions. Well, he said my record was not that good. I told him really that was not the point at issue, that we had been accepted by the Benedictines, and they would take us if he granted us the exeat. He said, ‘You may be good enough for the Benedictines.’ Golly, he was in a surly mood. Anyway, then comes the cruncher. He said, ‘They’re surely not taking any chances on the money end of it. They want you to be there four years before they pay any money!’ I said, ‘Just between us, I think you are going to get your money quicker this way than if you wait for me to go out and earn it.’ Well, he wouldn’t say yes and he wouldn’t say no. I went back to my home in Greene and it got so that it was the day before my vacation time was about up and I had to go back when I received a letter from Abbot Alcuin. He had heard from Archbishop Beckman giving us his o.k. He said to come on November 2.

We really had determination to go through with it. I guess our coming to St. John’s is a kind of a history. We got to St. Cloud on Halloween night, again hitchhiked all the way. While there we ran out of money. We went to St. Mary’s Church to confession and Communion on November 1, a holyday. I told Logan we had about $6.67 plus our bus fare to St. John’s so we’d better go in on November 1. We were told to come November 2 but I was sure it wouldn’t make that much difference. When we got to Collegeville, ten miles out of St. Cloud, the monks with their cowls up were just coming back from the cemetery. Logan says, ‘Do you think we ought to leave?’ I said, ‘Look, I’ve come all the way from Utah. I’ve given up my job. I’m going to stick here.’ After they all went in, Logan and I went in to see Abbot Alcuin. We never heard about kissing rings or anything so we just went right in. I guess he was getting a kick out of us. Fr. Roger Schoenbechler, O.S.B., the novice master, took one look at us and hiked upstairs and said to the other novices, ‘Now be good to them because they are as green as grass!’

Inside of a few hours we had habits on. Brother Anselm had us put on the habit without the capuche, and we went marching along leading the community into the choir. As juniors, I’m leading one line and Logan is leading the other. We had no idea where we were going or what would happen. We got into church and this was the day that they all put their cowls up. Logan and I didn’t realize it, but we didn’t have cowls. So I took the scapular and put it over my head. They said Abbot Alcuin just about passed out; he just about folded up. And then we went to the meal. It was a first class feast so the community had wine but we didn’t know what it was. I thought it was pitchers of nectar. Logan was across the table from me. Everyone of the monks had eyes on the new yaps to see how they were doing. A brother with a beard pointed to the brown looking stuff, to say, ‘Help yourself.’ So Logan pours out a glass for himself and a glass for me. He took a shot of it, blinked his eyes, leaned over to me and said, ‘Golly, I came in here to get away from this.’
I remember after the meal we all started marching again to the lower chapel for prayers after meals, everybody reciting Psalm 50. We had no idea at all what was going on. The only one that I knew was Fr. Blaise Shumacher, O.S.B., because he had gone to school in Dubuque. Because we had come four months late to the novitiate, they started us out with a two day retreat under Father William, the oldest monk in the community. I know he gave us eight talks and at least four were on hell. About the second day Logan decided that this was not for him. He went to the abbot and told him that this was not for him and that the only reason he came was that he felt Hagarty should be here and he didn’t think he’d make it unless he’d bring him in. They persuaded Logan to stay at least another day when I would be receiving my capuche and my name. The morning after the first Mass, we were to be received at the abbot’s Mass, Father Arno beckoned us to come out. He hadn’t been told that Logan was not going forward. Logan kept shaking his head, ‘No!’ and father kept beckoning him to come on. I think Logan thought they were still trying to get the robes on him so he beckoned to me and I came out.

I got the name of Leonard. That day Logan left. We, the novices, were out laying some walls and Abbot Alcuin came around and to his credit he asked me to take a walk with him. He spent two or three hours walking around Lake Sagatagan talking to me because he knew darn well that at that particular juncture I probably was pretty low. From that time on everything went beautifully. My mother, who was pretty wise, told me that in writing, my letters would be examined. She said she did want to know how things were going so that if each time I wrote I would put a cross on the envelope, she would know that everything was all right. If the cross was not there, she’d know things were not all right and she would’ve probably started looking for me. But the cross was always there.

My stay at St. John’s was nothing outstanding. Father Roger was our novice master and we respected him very highly both as a priest and as a teacher. He was very interested in us and anxious to help us. I believe he succeeded that year in getting across to the novices a great love and veneration for the Benedictine order. He had visited many Benedictine abbeys when he studied in Europe and he could make the accounts of his visits there come to life. We looked forward to the history of the order as well as to the study of the spiritual life. We had very nice days together as novices working outside and studying, and we had a very nice socius in Fr. Nicholas Kremer, O.S.B., whom we now have in the Bahamas; he was very kind and thoughtful in every way. One time he caught me talking in the dormitory, and he gave me as a penance to memorize the sequence Lauda Sion. Later he called me in and asked if I had managed to memorize it and he said, ‘Have you forgotten some of it?’ I said, ‘I suppose I have.’ and he replied, ‘Well, having forgotten some of it, indicates that you did learn it.’ He never did try me out on the Lauda Sion. However, when I was appointed his bishop, he sent me a cable from San Salvador: LAUDA SION, Salvatorum, Lauda Ducem et Pastorum.

The days, weeks, and months went by rapidly and while I’d hear from my folks regularly I never got to visit them during the novitiate, of course. At the end of my period of simple vows I did get a holiday of a week in Iowa, and it was nice to see the folks and everyone else. In those days travelling was not one of the Hagartys’ strong points, and even though I
was only 200 miles from home, the only time they did get to St. John’s Abbey was the day that I was ordained and I believe that would go for the entire family. I remember my whole family came and it was a wonderful day. After the ordination we were on the lawn and Abbot Alcuin said to my mother, ‘Mrs. Hagarty, suppose I send Father Leonard to China?’ As a matter of fact, I had volunteered for China a few months before when the abbot asked for volunteers. My mother turned to him and said, ‘I gave him to you a few years ago. He’s still yours.’ He always sort of liked that answer, and so did I.

During the time I studied for the priesthood, I was also connected for three years at least, after novitiate, with the biology department under Fr. James Hansen, O.S.B. Just being with Father James was an experience. We’d catch butterflies and have different classes, and I’d help in some college lab classes. I taught biology at St. John’s Preparatory School for two years and also moderated The Prep World, the school paper. The last year before my ordination and one year as a priest, I was a prefect in the prep school and taught there. Then it was decided that I should study economics. Actually, I had majored in economics at Loras College, and so I began taking courses in economics and education in St. John’s University.

I recall that about this time a plea was made by Fr. Celestine Kapsner, O.S.B., that he would like to have me on the St. John’s Mission Band, and that I should go to the Catholic University of America to take homiletics.

But in the summer, 1937, I was in Brainerd, Minnesota, helping out with Father Hogan. Father Hogan was really a character. During the course of the summer we took a census of a twenty-five mile radius around Brainerd in the lake country, and we had experiences. He was fearless. I remember at one place a farmer chased us off with an axe. But it was great pastoral experience and I enjoyed it very much.

On August 1 in Brainerd I got a telephone call from Abbot Alcuin who said, ‘Come home. You are going to the Bahamas.’ I hadn’t volunteered for the Bahamas. He said later that when he told me this on the phone he could hear me gasp, but I deny that because I was really quite pleased.

I arrived in the Bahamas on 3 September 1937 and was immediately stationed at the cathedral for three years with chaplaincies to the leper colony, Goodwill Orphanage and the general hospital. This was in addition to the work we had at the cathedral. Fr. Marcian Peters, O.S.B., was with me at the cathedral, and part of the time Fr. Frederic Frey, O.S.B. They were very happy and busy days. During the war years Bishop Bernard had me work entirely with the troops. We had a good number of military people here, for example, something like 5,000 of the Royal Air Force. They were training in both two and four engine bombers. We really had a United Nations here: Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Irish, English and Americans. We had the American Navy and Air Force here also, all of which kept us much on the go. By and large I think that we were able to do a good bit of God’s work for the boys who were here.

At this time Bishop Bernard began to bring me with him to preach mission appeals sometimes during the summer for a couple of months, as he was getting older. We were very good friends. He was exacting but also fair and a good superior. In his later days he was almost helpless. One time in Miami he was almost like a little child, and I had to get him in the hotel, washed up and ready to go, and he felt so embarrassed. He had so many
good friends in the Bahamas, Protestant and Catholic, who thought the world of him. He was a good, honest and zealous churchman. He had people, even some of his confreres, who didn’t particularly like him, who felt that he was probably a little too suave, a little too smooth, maybe lacking in sincerity.

He was very insistent about the decorum of the priests, their attire, their hours. He was living, of course, at a time when this could be applied rather rigorously if someone were, supposedly, smoking in the streets, or not wearing proper attire, or any excessive use of an alcoholic beverage, or anything of this sort. He had a great heart; he was not unkind, but he was strict and was highly respected for it by most. He had some difficulties with some of his confreres earlier in New York at the time that some of them came back to St. John’s from Brooklyn. There was wrangling there and Father Bernard who stayed on at St. Anselm’s was accused of seeking himself more than the Church. This I certainly would emphatically deny. He had an ease, elegance and appeal that would lend itself to a person thinking that maybe he wasn’t so sincere. But I am sure that he was doing it not for Father Bernard but for the Church. This accounts for the great number of his friends.

He was running on a shoestring financially here as bishop. He once told me that $50,000 would pay all the yearly expenses, including building a few classrooms, a small chapel or something on the side. He would go to the States and preach about the Bahamas. He had a hard job, particularly in his later years. He really took a lot of guff from people as he went knocking on doors to see if he could preach here or there. Each time he got someplace, or somebody took him in, he felt very happy, grateful and thanked God. He’d come back and have just enough money to keep going. He had to economize very much. We had motorcycles and bicycles; we didn’t have cars for each priest or anything of that sort and probably we were getting along just as well. They were very happy days on motorcycles.

In the daily administration of the diocese Bishop Bernard leaned very heavily on Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., and they worked together very well. They respected and loved each other, and I never remember ever seeing them disagreeing vehemently with each other. Father Bonaventure was more progressive. He wanted to open missions and to spread the missions to islands that we hadn’t touched. Bishop Bernard, of course, realizing the cost and being a little more cautious by nature, held back, but once he saw his way clear he gave the green light. This is how a number of missions were opened. I had the first Mass on Grand Bahama Island in 1941. I met a man from Bimini who was in the hospital and instructed him, partly there and partly by mail. He went back and had the Church founded before any of us priests were able to get out there.

When Bishop Bernard came, there was a mission on San Salvador and a mission on Harbour Island with a few stops between there and Eleuthera Island. There were just the beginnings of a mission on Long Island, and one operated on Andros for many years through the work of Father Gabriel. This was about all the out island missions. In Nassau only St. Francis Xavier and Sacred Heart Parish were established. But during Bishop Bernard’s time, the mission on Grand Bahama was opened by Father Bonaventure and me, and we opened the one on Bimini, and then on Cat Island.
Monsignor Hawes, Father Nicholas and Father Herman were there from time to time. Then after the Scarboro fathers came, in my time, they took over Harbour Island, Eleuthera and Cat Island. The mission on Long Island was expanded a great deal, this under the leadership of Fathers Arnold and Cornelius particularly. Inagua was visited two or three times a year and the mission on Eleuthera was expanded somewhat, but this was mostly after the Canadian Scarboro fathers came.

There was bad blood during Bishop Bernard’s time in that a feeling of animosity on the part of both Abbot Alcuin and Bishop Bernard existed. The question of an abbot-bishop was very much at issue even at the time of my appointment. While I never knew how Abbot Alcuin felt in regard to this, I don’t think that I was his first choice. He had evidently sent in a terna of names. Whether my name was on that or not, I don’t know. However, he did seem to be genuinely happy when I was appointed although I think he had hoped that it would result at this time in an abbatisa nullius.

Bishop Bernard was older when he came, but he was nimble of mind. It must have been quite a change for him, quite a shock. He was in New York, had wonderful friends in the priesthood and among the laity. He was a very good friend of Cardinal Hayes and was his confessor. But to come to ‘The Rocks,’ as he always referred to the Bahamas, was I’m sure a shock to him, but it didn’t daunt him. He gave it all he could. He left a great part of his heart in New York. Whenever anyone would come from St. Anselm’s parish, the warm welcome they received when they would see their dear Father Prior, showed that he still loved New York, and very much held it in reverence and with fond memories. But he had a job to do here and he did it. His love for New York didn’t hamper his love for the Bahamas.

One of Bishop Bernard’s strong points was that he could meet people, influence them, win them. There was a warmth about him and a genuine concern about the other person whom he met or talked to. I knew Cardinal Hayes myself through his coming here. He was a charming man himself, and I suppose in many ways he could see in Bernard some of the qualities that he had himself. They called him affectionately the ‘Cardinal of Charities.’ I wasn’t around New York at the time, but I’m sure it was Cardinal Hayes who nominated Father Bernard as bishop of the Bahamas.

We’ve always heard the story about the day he was installed here as prefect apostolic. Cardinals O’Connell and Hayes were here and Cardinal O’Connell had been asked to give the sermon. He had flatly refused. Father Arnold had arranged the sanctuary outside in The Priory’s yard, and Bishop Stephen Donahue, then Fr. Stephen Donahue, was master of ceremonies. Apparently Boston and New York had been on the outs at that time so they asked Cardinal Hayes to give the sermon, and he proceeded to do so. Cardinal O’Connell was sitting on the throne on the other side. Then Monsignor Bernard said to Father Donahue, ‘Would you please go over to His Eminence, Cardinal O’Connell, and ask him if he would say just a few words.’ He went over, bowed, and made the request and Cardinal O’Connell got up and gave a smashing sermon, which he must have prepared. He wanted to be asked. Then there was great festivity, sunshine and peace was actually made as far as we can tell between Boston and New York that day.
Cardinal O'Connell helped the lepers. He built them a number of houses, laid the concrete walk, and such things. Whenever we had any hurricanes, with damage on the out islands, Cardinal Hayes would always send us $5,000.

Cardinal O'Connell would be here about six weeks. He wanted to be alone, to rest, he didn't want the monks to come to talk or chat with him. But he'd have Monsignors Splaine and Minihan with him. You'd see them in the evening. There wasn't much traffic. Here would come His Eminence, and then like a flock of geese in flight, some five or six steps back on each side, flanking him, would be the two monsignors. They'd walk back and forth, taking their constitutional. Cardinal O'Connell was well liked by the people. He was a great man for walking along the sidewalk, stopping in, chatting with people, and really it was amazing to us how well he was received by the shopkeepers and everyone he would meet. He would wear a white suit sometimes, but at least they were not wearing cassocks. We never got out to The Hermitage when he was here.

Cardinal Hayes would be at The Bungalow. Of course, that was sort of open house and we would think nothing of coming and sitting on the bench with him, and he'd chat about what we were doing. He was very interested in everything we did. They were just two different types of people. He, too, would stay about six weeks, but during that time he would probably do some confirmations on one or other of the islands. The Marquis McDonald would come with him on his yacht. They still talk about it on Andros Island. It was so big that they couldn't get it inside the reef and they had to come in in dinghies. He confirmed on all the different stops.

Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., had as much influence on me as any priest here. He was progressive and never discouraged. I found him dead in bed at The Hermitage, only a few minutes gone. Only shortly before I had asked him, 'Father Bonaventure, if you had the opportunity just before you died, what thoughts would you like to have in your mind?' He thought a minute and said, 'I'd like to thank God for the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and then I'd like to say, Oh Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.' That was pretty much his philosophy.

Bishop Bernard was a very devout man, and many times we'd laugh at ceremonies, such as Holy Week while he was still giving directions in German. Father Marcian and I would whisper to each other across the sanctuary and he'd say in German, Ja. Oftentimes he would give directions to his master of ceremonies in little German phrases, with the idea that people around wouldn't know what was said.

While I was stationed at St. Francis and living at The Priory, we had one Mass at 7:00 a.m. at the cathedral. Father Marcian or I would take it. On his days I would go to my missions or chaplaincies, maybe go out to the government hospital where we'd have Mass and bring Communion to the sick. One of my duties was to visit the hospital every day. I was really averaging something like 200 baptisms or more each year, and the hospital was not nearly as large as it is now. There are many more hundreds being baptized each year. Then it was back to The Priory for breakfast, probably some sick calls or we might go out visiting on our motorcycles. We always got together for meals at The Priory with Bishop Bernard presiding and with Father Bonaventure at his right, the others in progression away.
from the bishop. We would discuss many things during the meals of current interest regarding the mission. Bishop Bernard would never quite get cornered to the extent that we asked him permission to do things. We knew that mealtime was not the time to ask permissions. He was very interested and there was light chatter, jokes would be told, so that there was a real unity. This was particularly true when the out island fathers and brothers would come in such as Fathers Daniel, Gabriel, Leander, Cornelius or Arnold. When they came we found time to sit down and visit with them because many of them hadn't had much opportunity to do any visiting. We'd get a lot of stories.

Father Gabriel was full of stories. He told us one story about a whale that had been washed up dead on the shore at Andros. The people cut him open and found the top of a Pillsbury flour carton. Father Gabriel wrote to Pillsbury Mills in Minneapolis to tell them that they ought to ship him some flour for his poor people. They did, as a matter of fact. He liked to tell the story about the time at Behring Point he was building a church. Father Gabriel was quite a mason and handy with a trowel. They were hauling stones, putting them in pails, and his workmen would carry them to him. It was kind of slow work. Father Bernard, then at St. Anselm's in New York, with the help of some of his parishioners, sent him a wheelbarrow. Father Gabriel gave the man who was hauling the rocks directions how to operate the wheelbarrow. He began working again happily but no rocks were coming, no wheelbarrow was in sight. He went looking for the man and met the man with the wheelbarrow filled with rocks on his head coming through the bush. This Bishop Bernard told many times when he was preaching.

Then Father Gabriel would also tell the story about a hurricane which devastated Abaco. There was no food, no water, and they were in desperate straits. So the people of Nassau got together and outfitted a boat with food. They sent several barrels of salt pork, rice, clothing, etc. They made the captain sign for it because they didn't want to have any of this cargo lost. As they started out with this food, the captain was very conscious that he'd have to give an account of every bit of the food. They weren't very far from the Nassau harbor when an enormous shark surfaced, and kept following them. I think it was the food that kept him going along just like a submarine behind them. The men were very frightened because all that fish had to do was bump into them to tip them over and they would be goners. But it stayed right there, and as they got near shore, finally, they could see the people on the dock waiting for them to come in with the food. The men were frightened to even put down the little dinghy because this shark was going around in circles and looked very hungry. The men tried to get the captain to open up a barrel of the pork and feed this thing and maybe he'd go away. No, he had to be responsible for this food, he couldn't. So the men said, 'Let's take the pork and dump it on the deck and throw the barrel at him.' So they threw the barrel and this big shark just 'gulped' and it was gone; and they threw the top. Then they persuaded the captain that he was going to get them. He had to throw pork to the shark. Then the fish pulled away and shortly after that they noticed him floating, belly up, and dead. They got busy getting the cargo ashore. When the thing washed up ashore and they cut open the shark, lo, and behold, there was the barrel, neatly packaged with each piece of the pork which had been thrown, and the
cover also. So the captain delivered that, too. I’m quite sure it never happened, but we would laugh. He would twinkle his eyes and we’d get a big bang out of him. Those are some of the things which we would talk about on third floor, ‘The Roost,’ as we called it. There was a wonderful spirit.

Bishop Bernard was an excellent preacher although Father Bonaventure was really the man who kept up through study and reading much more than Bishop Bernard. The bishop could talk to the children and make the Gospel passages really come to life. He would tell them about the short man Zaccheus coming into Jericho, climbing up the tree. ‘Hey, what are you doing up there?’ The kids would really come alive. Where he really excelled, of course, was talking for money. He could really bring tears to their eyes. He told them of the needs he had. He was the ‘Father of the Bahamas,’ and a father can’t go home without something in his pocket. One time in Brooklyn he talked about the lepers, and a newspaperman present took pictures of him preaching and then had headlines in the paper next day, ‘Bahamas’ Bishop Preaches for Starving Lepers in The Bahamas.’ He had to write a letter of apology to the government in order to come back. The people were really incensed because they were trying to build up the tourist trade. He told them he would never preach about the lepers again.

He would be completely exhausted after a begging talk and would come into the rectory after preaching and soon would fall asleep. He would have someone tipped off to call him, but he could completely relax. His drink was hot milk which he took often and found a great deal of nourishment in it. His eyesight was pretty bad, so many times I would help him up the pulpit steps. He’d preach and then I’d come up and get him. That was quite effective and he was keenly aware of that, boo. Poor old man, feeling his way around. He could fall very easily because he could miss a step. I was really edified the way he could sway them. I could never follow his style because he was more for tear-jerking. My way has been more keeping them happy and telling them a joke or two. But he was always very careful to thank the bishop of the place, to thank the pastor and to make note of the priest who was offering the Mass. He was really very good in matters of thankfulness and graciousness. During his last years I was deputed to do the preaching; Father Bonaventure acted as administrator and everything was going on as usual. The priests were doing their work and the missions were expanding.

About May, 1950, I was preaching in Cincinnati, Ohio when Archbishop McNicholas, O.P. died. At the luncheon I met an archbishop who will remain unnamed. I knew him very well and he said to me, ‘Well, now, when you get to be the bishop of the Bahamas, you give me an invitation, won’t you?’ And I said, ‘I think you will have quite a little while to wait for that.’ He said, ‘Mark my word!’ I really didn’t think that I was ever being considered. We had a meeting to draw up a term of three names. Abbot Alcuin came and presided. Fr. John Eidenschink, O.S.B., was here with him. At one time during the meeting they asked me to step out because they wanted to discuss me. But they also wanted to discuss Fathers Frederic, Bonaventure and others so I didn’t really think that I was being seriously considered. I was in New York preaching and I got a letter from Father Bonaventure on June 30. He wrote that a letter came to me from the apostolic delegation in Washington, D.C. He said, ‘I started to open it but felt that probably it was personal. I didn’t read it, but I hope it has good news for you.’
Father Bonaventure said he put stamps on it, dropped it in the box and it would be coming along. I thought they wanted my opinion about an abbey nullius in the Bahamas. The letter didn't come and didn't come; as a matter of fact I never did receive it. I can't understand. I had to leave New York for New England where I was to preach that particular Sunday in Connecticut. From there I went to St. Anselm's Abbey in New Hampshire to celebrate the feast of St. Benedict with them. I got to New Hampshire on Sunday night, July 10. Father Paul, now dead, gave me a letter from the delegation. I opened it up and Archbishop Cicognani said, 'We have been trying to contact you on business for the missions of the Bahamas. Would you please, as soon as you can, come to the delegation in Washington.' It gave the telephone number and address of the delegation and added, 'Please do not tell anyone that you are going to Washington.' So I was in a jam because there I was at the monastery and I was to preach at the neighboring town of Concord the next Sunday, and they all knew it. For me to just get there and leave, I just didn't know quite how to handle that one. I got away after the pontifical Mass that Monday, and I went downtown to the railroad station and put in a call to the delegation. I got Msgr. Joseph McShea and I said, 'This is Father Leonard.' He said, 'Oh, you are Father Hagarty?' I said, 'Yes, Your Excellency.' He said, 'I wrote you a letter. Did you get my letter?' I said I got one in New Hampshire but I didn't get the other one, but I know about it. He said, 'You don't know why I sent for you?' I said, 'No, I don't know why.' He said, 'The Holy Father wants you to be the bishop of the Bahamas!' I remember saying to him, 'I think I would have the right to talk to my religious superior about this matter, wouldn't I?' He said, 'yes, if you were in Collegeville, surely.' I said, 'What about the abbot?' He said if I were in Collegeville, surely. So I said, 'What about the telephone?' He said, 'Oh, no! No telephone.' 'Well,' I said, 'if that's the way it is; if the Holy See wants me to be the bishop, I'll be the bishop.' He said, 'Excuse me. I have to send a message to Rome. They can't understand. Two weeks have gone by and nobody answers.'

When he came back he sat down and began to talk. He said, 'You can have anybody you want to do the consecration.' I guess the Holy Spirit was working because I said, 'I don't suppose it would be possible to get the apostolic delegate down there, would it?' He said, 'Yes, I think I could. I think I could,' and he turned over his appointment book and he had already written it down in his book! It was a good thing I asked him to do so. He was very kind, he came down here through a hurricane and had to stay at Barry College in Miami overnight. It was a real storm but it missed us. Many of our guests had to stay in Miami until it passed by, and it was two days later that we had the consecration here, October 19. It wasn't delayed,
but it was very sultry the day of the consecration. Monsignor McShea was wiping the brow of Cicognani with a big towel. I don’t think he had ever perspired that much. It was terribly hot and moist but it was a great day!

After I had seen Archbishop Cicognani and knew that I couldn’t tell anyone about it, I then returned to New Hampshire and preached at St. John’s Church in Concord. I then went to Long Beach, New York, my headquarters, and would love to have told Fr. John Cass, a good friend and a second cousin of mine, a very remarkable man. They had told me in the delegation they would let me know when it would be announced. It would be in the press and come out at midnight. I got a telephone call from Washington that it would be released at midnight, July 22, St. Mary Magdalen’s feast. I was a little bit nervous, you know, biting fingernails about it, and I was sure saying my prayers because I was running a little scared by this time. I knew something about the Bahamas and something about what I was going to have to face up to. So Saturday morning came around. I hopped out of bed and went out to pick up the papers. I figured I would see this for sure, before I said anything. So I picked up the New York Times, not a thing. The release came out at midnight, but they didn’t run it since it probably wouldn’t have been of news value to a good many of them. Then I was in a dilemma, had it been released or hadn’t it? Can I speak to anybody about this or not?

I went off again to the railroad station in Long Beach and called the delegation and asked one of the monsignors if he knew anything about this and he said yes. I asked if it had been released and said just a minute he would check. He came back and said, ‘She went out at midnight. She’s all yours! Do anything you want now!’ So I came back and told Father Cass first. He was really grand, said he knew it all the time! I then called Abbot Alcuin who was in St. Joseph’s Hospital in St. Paul as he hadn’t been feeling too well. I told him that it had been released, and he said, ‘Are you sure it’s released? Are you sure?’ And I said yes that I had just gotten word from the delegation. So he congratulated me and everything was fine. I said I would be in touch with him. Then I decided I would call my Mother and Dad in Iowa. I called Mother and I told her that I was going to be the bishop of the Bahamas. To my great surprise, she said, ‘Yes, we saw it in the paper last night!’ Now this I can’t to this day quite understand. This was in the Charles City, Iowa, paper at 6:00 p.m. Friday night, whereas it was not released from the delegation until midnight. They must have sent out some kind of a press release and said ‘hold’, but in Iowa they forgot the ‘hold.’ Had they called me from Iowa to congratulate me that Saturday night, I would have had to deny knowing anything about it because it wasn’t out yet. She assured me of her prayers and her love and I think she was genuinely happy about it, and my Dad, too. I told him that I would shortly see them.

Those were busy days. That particular Saturday I was preaching in Staten Island, in St. Mark’s, a big church, and the word was out. There were telegrams, cables, coming in to me there. Before I arrived at St. Mark’s there was quite a pile of these, and the good pastor, Monsignor Fox, welcomed me with a brass band. Father Bonaventure telegraphed and there was one from Bishop Joseph Busch who asked me if I would please come to St. Cloud and be consecrated at the St. Cloud Cathedral. At Collegeville, I understand, they rang the bells at St. John’s Abbey when it was
announced. Within a day I went downtown to see Cardinal Spellman. He offered to have me consecrated in St. Patrick's Cathedral since the Bahamas were once an ecclesiastical part of New York. I told him the delegate had decided this for me.

I relied very heavily on Bishop Stephen Donahue who was in New York, particularly as to what I was to get in the way of clothing, seal, coat of arms and all. I didn't have much money, and Bishop Donahue was very generous about those things. The Dubuque Archdiocese bought me my first robes, a gift of Archbishop Rohlman. That was quite an outlay of money right there, probably in those days about $300 to $400, much more than that now. I remember coming back here at the end of August as I still had preaching to do. It had been settled that we would have the consecration on October 19 so I had a little time to move around. I finished my preaching, stopped at the delegation on the way down, and picked up an apostolic blessing for Father Gabriel who was dying. When I got here he was still alive. I chatted with him, he congratulated me, and I gave him the blessing from the Holy Father. He died within a day or two after that.

Somebody said to Father Bonaventure about my appointment, 'Well, Leonard, he's all right, but he's so young.' I was only forty-one years old. Father Bonaventure said, 'Yes, but he'll get over that.' These were busy times getting ready for the consecration and Father Bonaventure was very pleased, I could see that, as was Father Cornelius and all of them. They sort of took it in stride.

Msgr. John Cass, cousin of the new bishop and pastor of St. Ignatius the Martyr Church, Long Island, was a steadfast and generous friend of the Church in the Bahamas. It was in the Long Island rectory that Bishop Leonard received public confirmation of his appointment as successor to Bishop Bernard, and it was in The Hermitage, with Bishop Leonard holding his head, that Monsignor Cass died in 1969. During the years, John Cass assisted the work in the Bahamas in any way he could. His genial and creative personality also supplied many happy conversations and musical interludes for guests at The Hermitage.

Shortly after Bishop Leonard began his administration, Monsignor Cass prepared a short manuscript history and analysis of "Bahama Islands or Lucayos," for the new bishop. This archival deposit in Nassau (1956) includes summary material from the colonial secretary's reports, Development Board information, newspaper and manuscript collections in the Nassau Public Library, and references to such Bahamian sources as Catesby, Northcroft, Stark, Oldmixon, Bruce, Harcourt, Wright, Bell, Rigg and Moseley. Monsignor Cass had a deep love for the Bahamas and summarized the material in these sources. His distinctive contribution was a comparative study of the Bahamian census figures of 1943 and 1953 which he computed island by island as well as by major Christian denomination. These charts, subjoined here, evidence the rapid growth of Catholics in the Bahamas during that decade:
Bahama Islands | Area Sq. miles | Population Census 1953 | Catholics Census 1953
--- | --- | --- | ---
Abaco and Cays | 776 | 3,407 | 62
Acklins | 120 | 1,275 |
Andros | 1,600 | 7,136 | 1,054
Berry Islands | 14 | 327 | 4
Bimini & Cat Cay | 8½ | 1,325 | 189
Cat Island | 160 | 3,201 | 212
Crooked Island | 76 | 836 | 2
Eleuthera | 164 | 6,070 | 349
Exuma & Cays | 100 | 2,919 | 4
Grand Bahama | 430 | 4,095 | 397
Harbour Island | 1½ | 840 | 230
Inagua | 560 | 999 | 15
Long Cay | 8 | 83 | 1
Long Island | 130 | 3,755 | 583
Mayaguana | 96 | 615 | 15
New Providence (Nassau) | 58 | 45,865 | 9,770
Ragged Island | 5 | 320 | 3
Rum Cay | 39 | 133 |
San Salvador | 60 | 694 | 156
Spanish Wells | ½ | 686 | 8
**TOTALS** | **4,403½** | **84,581** | **13,054**

Racially, the population is divided roughly 80 per cent African Negro descent, 10 per cent colored or mixed, and 10 per cent white. When slavery was abolished Aug. 1, 1834, ten thousand slaves were freed, their owners receiving £12-14-4 per head. The majority therefore, of the inhabitants, are descendants of these slaves. Of the whites, many derive from the Loyalists who fled the American Colonies during the Revolution; some few are from England and Canada, and there are 1,800 Americans living at present in the Bahamas.

The following table illustrates the proportional increase or decrease of the four major religious denominations in the Colony from 1943 to 1953:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1953</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>27.04</td>
<td>27.85</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>33.65</td>
<td>32.61</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>11.42</td>
<td>9.87</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>10.34</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total Catholic population of the Bahamas as of June 30, 1956, was 14,011.7

A chronology could now be given of the developments of Catholic life in the Bahamas during the twenty some years from 1950 to 1973. Such a procedure has usually been in order. However, these facts are available in the yearly editions of *The Catholic Directory* and need not be repeated here. The annual reports from the diocese of Nassau to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith could also be summarized.
They could be collected in any term paper or master's thesis. The history of the Church has too often been written in this way. We have available here the added dimension of personal taped interviews of the participants who supply a dimension which was not available to former historians. Bishop Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., first gives his own open and humble interpretation of the events which brought the Catholic Church into the present time since his ordination as bishop of the Bahamas:

It was a comforting thought to know that I had Father Bonaventure as my pro-vicar apostolic. I had appointed him the day of my consecration, and it seemed to be a rather popular choice. He told me that it would be a cross, and don’t feel that you can run a diocese without it. I thought about this the day after my ordination as bishop because I found out that one of my good fathers had gone off the deep end and got more than intoxicated. As a matter of fact there were two as I recall, practically as part of the celebration. I attributed it to the joy with which they welcomed their new shepherd, but it was a sort of an awakening that not all was going to be easy. I determined not to make any great changes and to strive to continue on much as Bishop Bernard had led and indicated in his time. If there were any overriding program, it was to strive as best we could to become self-supporting, which seemed a long way off, and still for that matter, seems a long way off. Second, we wanted to make our major contribution through education. This had been very close to Father Bonaventure’s and to Bishop Bernard’s hearts. I knew that our income would never meet our needs, not at all. I could see each year as we enlarged, as schools were put on the out islands, that we had to go out and get this money. There was always the thought, ‘Are we paying our teachers sufficient to really have good standards in our education?’

The fact that I was away a good deal collecting money, I’m sure, was not too pleasing to a good number, not only to priests and religious, but to the people. Looking back I can see that it would have been far better had I been here in the Bahamas. Many things would come up. I had good men, Fathers Bonaventure, Cornelius, and Brendan. I never had any worries about the mission being in bad hands, or had any hesitancy in letting them have the freedom they needed to act in the times when I would not be here. I honestly don’t believe that the mission suffered very much as a result. There were those who said I should not go up and preach, I should not go up and beg, I should not refer to this as a mission—this is rather an appalling term, a mission. Well, my definition of a mission is, is it under the Propagation of the Faith or isn’t it? We definitely are and still are, and we will be for some time. At any rate, they were not very consistent. The ones who would say, ‘You shouldn’t go out and beg,’ are the very ones who would come to me and beg. I don’t know if they thought I was manufacturing it or what, but the only opportunity I had of getting money was to beg from tourists and to go out and preach mission appeals, which Bishop Bernard had done before. There was no tax on the parishes; it would have been taxying something that I would have to reimburse.

We set up a system whereby the diocese was the banker. The parishes would request a subsidy every three months. Father Bonaventure and I worked it out, whereby every three months, whether a parish was self-supporting or not, it would fill in what it had received, what the collections
were, how much was received from the diocese and other sources and what would be required in the next three months. We are really operating under the same system even now although more and more parishes are becoming self-supporting. What really caught up with us is the teachers' salaries. It came to the point where we were going to have either inferior mission schools in the worst sense, or we would have to pay salaries so we could get and hold good teachers. Furthermore, we would have to train them in specialized programs which are very expensive. The last ten years, for example, the training of personnel has been tremendous. We are worried about what will happen.

We were very fortunate in getting Father Brendan as our school superintendent. He was chancellor at the time, rector of the cathedral, etc., which didn't really give him too much time to be in education. Then we were very fortunate in getting Br. John Darby, a Marianist. His superiors allowed him to come here from Dayton, Ohio, in 1965. I asked for him and they were very happy to let him come. I'm sure that they did it in order to spread Catholic education in this part of the world, not only in the Bahamas, but also in our Antilles Conference in the greater Caribbean area. He did a tremendous job. He has not only pulled the mission up by the bootstraps, but he arranged for government aid. He also arranged that about a dozen or fewer of our best teachers be placed each year in the teachers training college in Oakes Field run by the ministry of education. While we pay them full salaries, they are being trained for a year or two years to meet standard requirements. So we are bettering ourselves constantly. More recently there is a new rule that 75 per cent of our teachers must be accredited or degreed. They keep us on our toes this way. This is a great help to us, too, to constantly train our best teachers.

I talked to the Marianist superior general in Rome during the Council and we got to know each other fairly well. Br. John Darby was in a rather nice position, in that his own blood brother, Fr. James Darby was a Marianist, and after Brother John was here his brother became the provincial, his own provincial superior. The provincial felt very much in keeping with the goals that we were setting, and they backed us up by sending three brothers during the summer to conduct a school of four weeks duration for our teachers, and they still do. This has been a great help. Brother John decided to study for the priesthood and I ordained him in 1972.

We now have four or five different orders of religious men. We have a center here in Nassau for the Scarboro Foreign Mission Society of Canada. It's a parish rectory, but a big one. Bishop Turner was the pastor who helped to build it and we put up the money for it. This is the center of all their activities in Cat Island, Eleuthera Island, Harbour Island, and the parish of St. Thomas More in Nassau. They are the Maryknolls of Canada and came here about 1954. There were some eyebrows raised then, too. There was sort of a feeling of 'possessiveness,' which is nonsense. Then we have the Josephite fathers from Baltimore. Two of them are on Long Island, and we hope to have another one before long. They have a regional superior, the same way as the Scarboro fathers have. We have four Sacred Heart fathers. Two are on the island of Abaco, and two have charge of St. Joseph's parish in Nassau, their headquarters for the men in the out islands.

The Scarboro Foreign Mission Society has a rule that they do not take native vocations. They argue that their work is to assist the local diocese,
and to work for the people, not to take away from it, but to work for them to join the local diocese. They consider themselves to be diocesan priests, under the Propagation of the Faith, and work only in territories under the Propagation. This is their policy; if somebody came and applied to them, they would not take them. I don't believe this is true in regard to the Josephites, nor is it true in regard to the Sacred Heart fathers, but they haven't as a matter of fact had any vocations so far. They haven't been here as long as the Scarboro fathers.

We have one Jesuit, Father Pearson, on Bimini, but I don't think I really ever set out to bring them here. Actually it is also a question of whether you can support them. Each time we bring in a new order, we have more bills. Even to this day we are subsidizing much of the work that is being done by the Scarboro fathers and the Josephites, and certainly any capital expenditure that the Sacred Heart fathers incur. So you have to cut your cloth according to the price. This has always been a consideration: Can we do it? Father Bonaventure probably had this influence on me, but we know that we couldn't go into debt like any ordinary diocese because we never know when conditions in the United States would cut off our source of income—no tourists, war or such. This all had to be considered so we would borrow maybe $25,000 with permission from Rome. But in 1970 it became necessary, if we were going to keep our schools, to raise our teachers' salaries. Even with the help that we get from the Bahamas government, we still have a very hard time to make things go. There are at least three parishes right here in Nassau who do not provide sufficiently towards teachers' salaries. This means that it devolves on the diocese.

It was much easier when I first started out than I have it now. It gets tougher each year, and the work gets harder. I suppose that's the cross that Father Bonaventure said would be here. It must be twenty times harder now because prices are going up and the cost of living here is extremely high.

Why didn't the average Bahamian give to the Church as he should, or, perhaps, could have? Some of them now say, 'You spoiled us. You did everything for us.' Now there is a hard decision. Bishop Bernard had it; I had it. There were people who would be deprived of Catholic education. We knew at that time, to a large extent, that they simply did not have the money. I realize that if we didn't train them to support the Church, we would be failing them. That's true. Priests on out islands where they were very poor, have always encouraged the people to take up a collection, even if they have to give it back. This was Father Bonaventure's thesis, too. Take up your collection, but maybe you are going to have to give it to them in charity and alms. But at least train them so that when they do get it, they will give it.

I was told by one of our Bahamian priests, 'If you'd only let us know. If you'd only open up to the people of the Bahamas what the situation is. They think you are made of money. They think you have all kinds of money. All you have to do is call up some friends of yours or write a letter, and immediately it comes.' This was true, probably in many instances it was true. I published a statement of our income and expenses, showing the diocese of Nassau is now over a $1,000,000 a year operation, but showing that we were running behind in money. As Cardinal Dearden said, 'I can't remember anything that I did that met with less interest, or had less effect
on anybody, than when I published a financial statement of the archdiocese of Detroit! I think there is more to it than just that we’ve spoiled the people. We would actually have deprived them of a church or a school if they couldn’t pay. If you follow this out to the end, you are just going to sit here and wait until the money grows somewhere. Father Bonaventure was very wise in this, and he often said, ‘Even if you have to go in debt a little, if you can have this generation receive some education and advance, which is probably going to be paid for by the next generation, it’s still valid, rather than just to turn off because you haven’t got the money in hand because they won’t be giving it.’

You just can’t help, as a mission policy, if you sit and wait. I know many times we build a church, put it up, and the people would help where they could. They’d carry sand and that sort of thing. They were interested, keenly interested, but really they weren’t paying for it. I suppose in a way they did feel kind of badly that they weren’t paying for it. But we both knew they couldn’t pay for it. Now when we have churches and schools some new theorists claim that they don’t feel it is their church. I suppose there is some of that feeling, but in general I don’t think it has really harmed things. We had a long meeting here in regard to the Resurrection Church that Father Silvan just built, whether we should take money from the Extension Society which had offered us $15,000 towards building it. Many of the fathers said, ‘No, you take that and the people get the idea that they will be ‘rice-Christs’.’ There was still plenty for them to do; it was a new parish, so we went through with it. And I think the fathers pretty well came around to agreeing on this point.

The Anglicans and the Baptists have a tougher policy in regard to money. One often hears, ‘You have to pay your membership dues, or you won’t be buried from the Church.’ They won’t administer the sacrament to you if you die. Well, I don’t know about that. That is pretty harsh. But I do know that each of these island churches collects more money than ours do. Everything being equal, they are trained more to give to their Church than Catholics are. We’ve had the traditional big bazaar, we are thinking of having a raffle six months from the bazaar, something of that sort. Our people in many ways don’t mind giving to bazaars or raffles. I realize that is not the best way, but you have to take them as they are.

There are two different policies in regard to expanding missions. One policy says, ‘Go slowly. Prepare the people and they will be able to be missionaries themselves.’ The other says, ‘Spread it thin and go from one island to another, one mission to another, without giving them full instruction.’ There is a great deal to be said for both views, but I have always strongly felt the sacraments are for men. There are, for example, not many people on Mayaguana, perhaps a few hundred, but they are not being exposed to the Catholic Church except when they come to Nassau or go to a Catholic school. Take Ragged Island; I have never even set foot on that island. We don’t even have a regular mail service between here and there. I know that the Methodist Church and the Anglican Church are fairly strong there. But my policy has been even if you have few men, if your resources are limited, try to extend as far as you can the basic teachings of the Catholic Church so that at least people have the opportunity to say yes or no rather than to take certain places and stick right there and develop them as centers. Life is going by too fast. There are people being born,
growing up, getting married, getting sick and dying, and never having a chance to get close to the Church. I figure that I am the bishop of all the people of the Bahamas, not just the Catholics. Thank God most of them are Christians. I'm sure that by their lives some of them would shame many of us. But still the message and the teaching of the Catholic Church should be made available to them as best one can.

Fr. Martin Schirber, O.S.B., chairman of the economics department at St. John's University, was here in 1962. He felt that some way or other we ought to strive to develop a Christian culture here and socialize our charitable action. Our charitable program is still somewhat hit and miss although we practically cover all the bases. We have clinics, we have sisters helping with the poor, we have the young peoples' clinics, and the well baby clinics, a laboratory, a maternity clinic, and general clinics. These have been going and prospering and we are reaching thousands of people. But somehow or other, maybe in the rat race of supporting this mission and trying to build it up, maybe we haven't built a Christian culture as we should have. I have always felt that I would like to do more of this. I think that we are covering some aspects of this dimension, but we didn't have the personnel, we didn't have the money, so what could we do.

I recall one instance in 1954 at Adrian, Michigan. The great Mother Gerald [Barry] and I were talking. I said, 'Would you please send me three or four sisters to teach in one of our grade schools?' She said 'No. No.' I kept my peace, and she said she would send sisters to teach in one of the high schools for us. She actually did that, and that is how we got Aquinas College established in 1967. The Dominican sisters also took over the parish school at St. Thomas More. Our Sisters of St. Francis from Clinton, Iowa, came through Mother Leona. When she was elected reverend mother, I noted that she happened to have taught me in high school in Greene. So they sent six sisters, three to nurse and three to teach. I asked for them, absolutely, but not by letter; I went to my former teacher. When she retired as the superior, she came to Grand Bahama to assist at Mary Star of the Sea parish school.

In many instances at the beginning these communities supported their own sisters. We did not pay them a salary. We gave them a place to live, which was a considerable amount because we had to build convents. For years I would go to Archbishop Molloy in Brooklyn regarding the Nursing Sisters of the Sick Poor, and he would say, 'I'm very sure mother would be very interested in this. I will have you see Msgr. Joe Smith. He's the man who looks after the sisters.' And Smith would be the hatchet man and say, 'Sorry, we can't let them go.' Well, when he died and Bishop McEntegart became bishop of Brooklyn I went to him. He said he had been reading a little canon law, and said, 'These are diocesan sisters. If I let you have them, and if you want to start another foundation with them on a different island or another part of the island, I couldn't stop you. I know that the sisters are all praying to come down, but would it be possible to enter into an agreement whereby you would promise that you would not open another foundation with the sisters without my consent where my sisters are concerned.' I said, 'Bishop, you know and I know that I can't do that. If canon law says this is the way it is, then this is the way it is.' He laughed. I said, 'I'll tell you this, I certainly will not start a foundation without letting you know.'
He said that was all right and, bang!, like this I had them. They have been tremendous! We had six of them, all nurses, going from house to house and caring for our clinics and schools in Nassau. They live right in Nassau, and they operate four clinics. They work in our schools and do house to house nursing. They follow up the priest, who notifies them who is sick or who needs care. If I ever get despondent or get discouraged, and I don't very often, I try to get out on visits with these sisters to the sick. You would have no idea of the joy, the sunshine, those nuns bring to the sick. Now more recently we got Dominicans from Caldwell, New Jersey. That also was just out of the blue. The Sacred Heart fathers who are working on Abaco really tipped me off and I got in touch with the mother superior, saw her in New York, talked with her and her council, and they decided to come.

We have a lay institute with us, the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, from Three Rivers, Quebec. They are a remarkable group. They have something like 1,500 members, in fifteen years of existence, and they are in something like twenty-six countries. They dress as lay people, consider themselves lay people, and take simple vows each year. The four of them here are tremendous. Two are on Long Island as catechists, as fine a pair of catechists as I've ever seen—up and down the missions of Long Island, driving a truck, getting people together, gathering the children after public school classes let out. They are not operating a Catholic school as such, but they are really catechetical. They are called 'Miss.' Two are in Nassau and most of the time one helps Anna McGinness as my bookkeeper, but one day each week she does catechetical work. The other one does catechetical work here in Nassau, and I have hopes that we can get some more of these wonderful women.

I have a suspicion that the existing orders of nuns in the active apostolate are really reverting into lay institutes. Whether they realize this or not, that's about what's happening. The lay institute people are very happy in what they're doing, going about their work, and nobody is criticizing them.

We have a group of Mercy sisters from Portland, Maine, who are also really wonderful sisters. They came four years ago. It's amazing how Providence entered into this. They had a monsignor, their chaplain, from the motherhouse in Portland, who came here and stayed with us, and also stayed in Freeport with Father Brendan. He saw the work we were doing, loved it and he thought these Sisters of Mercy who had no foreign mission, probably should have. So he went back and talked to them about it. Then one sister, Mother Edwina, the assistant superior, began to write to me about this. She asked where we might use some sisters. So I listed immediately about three different places. Then after correspondence back and forth for several months, sister wrote to say they would have an election of a reverend mother shortly so she would discontinue this correspondence until a new mother was elected.

Well, they had the election. I noticed from the news release that Mother Denis Schwartz had been elected. I didn't know her, of course, but I thought it would be nice if I wrote her a little note of good wishes, telling her that we'd pray for her, and then just call her attention to my correspondence with Mother Edwina and she'd probably catch up with it. We hoped she could proceed from there. Anyway, she is there a new mother, young and very good. She decides that she has to go over and see the
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local bishop to present herself. Bishop Gerety has her come in and they talk over many things that are of mutual interest to the sisters and the diocese. Finally out of the blue he said, 'Mother, I think you sisters ought to have a foreign mission.' Now what bishop would say that? He said, 'Where should we have this mission?' And mother said, 'I have a faint recollection of Mother Edwina writing to someone in Nassau.' And he said, 'Bishop Hagarty?' She said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Well, he is my very good friend. I think that would be wonderful. Why don’t you resume the correspondence with Bishop Hagarty and see what you can do.'

She went back to the motherhouse determined to get in touch with me and see if they couldn’t make an establishment down here. You won’t believe it, but when she got back, on her desk was my letter wishing her well. She hadn’t even seen the letter. The good Lord had something to do with it! She said, ‘That’s a sign from heaven, that’s all there is to it.’ They were gung-ho and she sent me four of the finest sisters in the community, one nurse and three catechists. And then to top it off, Bishop Gerety picks up the entire tab. But she insisted she would pay for the support of her nuns. They are doing a wonderful job, your heart would melt to see the way our people are receiving them on Andros. They are not sophisticated, they are not proud, and these sisters are right down there with the people.

We also have the Sisters of St. Joseph of North Bay, Ontario. Archbishop, later Cardinal Panico, the former apostolic delegate to Canada, helped us to get them. He was in the western provinces of Canada where he caught laryngitis, and he hadn’t had a vacation for something like ten years. Somebody sold him on coming to the Bahamas, and there was correspondence whether he could come down and stay with us. He spent about a month with us and it did him a world of good. He entered into it, and we had such a wonderful time. In the course of our talks I told him how I was looking for nuns and he thought maybe he could help. He said, ‘We have some sisters at North Bay and they have no foreign mission. I’ll speak to them about it.’ He did and they sent us six of their fine sisters in 1958; three went to St. Anselm’s in Fox Hill, and three are at St. Cecilia’s.

We have nuns from another part of Canada, from Pembroke, Ontario, the Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. These came here particularly at the behest of the Scarboro Foreign Mission Society, who were on Eleuthera Island, and wanted nuns to help in the missions of South Eleuthera. They sent four sisters to South Eleuthera and then after a period of time, they sent four other sisters to our Sacred Heart parish in Nassau. The past few years they have had to narrow it down so there are only three sisters now at Eleuthera, but they are getting another one, I believe, this year. And there are only three at Sacred Heart now. They are a wonderful teaching group and one sister is a nurse on Eleuthera. We have been very happy to have them.

Our senior group of sisters, the sisters of Mt. St. Vincent on the Hudson, probably would stand out as some of the greatest missionaries these islands have ever seen. Their mission work has been confined to Nassau and to Harbour Island. At Harbour Island they have conducted a school for the last forty-nine years. I am sorry to say that they must withdraw their sisters from Harbour Island this year as well as another sister who has been teaching in Xavier College. In the early days, they were all alone and have always endeared themselves to the people. Also we have the Sacred
Heart fathers from Fairhaven, Massachusetts, who are sometimes called
the Picpus fathers. They are the same group that Damien the Leper belonged
to. Two of them are now on the island of Abaco and two are here in
Nassau, working in St. Joseph's parish. They are a tremendous help to us.

I mentioned the two Josephite fathers from Baltimore, who are working
on Long Island. We applied to them for help and I think they saw the
handwriting on the wall that probably within a few years there may not
be Negro parishes as such. So this represented quite a shift of policy on
the part of the Josephite order to come here. In our initial talk with them
we had to point out that we're not just working with the Colored. We are
working with Bahamians, both white and colored. They have done a
beautiful job, and the missions of Long Island are really growing and
prospering. Priests come here, ad experimentum, and a number of them have
been incarnadated into our diocese. We had a very fine Trappist father from
England, Fr. Celsus Flynn, from the monastery of Ss. Peter and Paul in
Sherwood Forest. He spent about six years with us and then his superiors
told him either to return to the monastery or become a diocesan priest. He
went back to his monastery and is there today, and is a very good monk.
Whether they talk in sign language or out loud, I don't know. But he did
convince a fellow monk, Fr. Bruno Walker, that this was a wonderful place
to work in the missions. And so Father Bruno asked his abbot if he could
come. When Father Bruno was asked to make a choice, he elected to work
ad experimentum and put in three more years. We were pleased with him,
and still are, and he is now a member of our diocese.

We have a few others who came, some have stayed, some have been
here only a short time. Like someone said, 'You can't win them all.' You
do the best you can. But this presents problems, too. When you bring
in someone from the outside, there is a tendency on the part of some
of our priests and sisters to sort of resent them. I don't think this is
very widespread, and they do see the absolute necessity of bringing in
extra help. We are still looking around for someone who might want to cast
his or her lot with us for a few years or for good. We have a very fine
Carmelite father, Fr. James Meldrum, a member of the priests' senate. He
was the superior in Youngstown, Ohio, and had been a missionary in
Manila. He still wanted to be a missionary and felt that he had a few good
years to give to the missions. He got permission from his superior to come
here and he has really been doing a tremendous job, living in Inagua, which
is only forty miles off the east end of Cuba and sixty-five miles north of
Haiti. He lives where there are probably no more than 300 people in the
village, possibly 100 Catholics. About each week or ten days of the month
he flies to Turks and Caicos Islands, which Rome gave us to look after in
addition to the Bahamas, which makes the total length of our mission here
900 miles with 3,000 islands. He takes care of Turks and Caicos, besides
Inagua, and thrives on it. I certainly wouldn't feel adverse if he wanted to
become a member of the diocese and stay on. I know that he is happy
with us, and apparently the superior is willing to let him stay as long as he
wants. Other than that we have a Jesuit father on Bimini. And we have a
Servite, Fr. Dan Cernaukas, on Exuma, who is doing a very good job.

It is a great help to us to fill in the parish and out island assignments
although it is not wise to send a man to an out island right away. He has
to get the feel of it here in Nassau and have a chance to talk to the priests.
I have always been attached to the idea of having a team, that would perhaps be mobile and go from island to island where we didn’t even have a mission started. This would be tremendous. There are many islands where we have never had a Catholic priest such as Ragged Island, Mayaguana and Fortune Island. They are part of the diocese, but we haven’t been able to get to them. In general, we can say that we have been really blessed with religious men and women and our lay institute, who have come from different parts of the world to help us and have remained, and by and large have been very happy with us. I would also add that the dioceses of the Antilles Episcopal Conference in general have fewer religious groups and members working in their dioceses. We have come a long way from the pioneer work of Father Chrysostom.

I am proud that the Benedictines have been a part of the development all along the way and are still with us. I have hopes of getting another team, two or three of them, to work on the outer islands. Actually, that’s the way our Lord sent them out, two by two. Father Bonaventure always used to say that two men could go into a village, a settlement on an out island. One would see things that the other didn’t; one would be attracted to this and the other to that, and some people would be attracted to one and not to the other. If they could work as a team, with true charity between them, this couldn’t help but speak more loudly than any sermon they could give. Maybe we’ve made a mistake and maybe we haven’t. There’s still time to put this team missionary activity to work.

I don’t know of any definite example. Our Anglicans here have one or two instances, but generally they have a single person going around like a circuit rider. I did a good bit of that myself when I first came here. Bishop Bernard would send me out as a sort of troubleshooter. When some priest had been away or hadn’t been in to Nassau for two or three months, since they had to come in sailing boats, I would go out to some of them, like our old Father Daniel. He was so happy to see me that he cried, just the fact that someone would come out to see him. This is really bad when somebody is out there on an island alone. I try to insist that our priests come in every month and now with transportation becoming much better, it isn’t too hard. Most of them can do that. We make a few exceptions, of course. We have a get-together of all the priests about four times a year. We try to have them come for a day of relaxation, a get-together and free for all. Sometimes there is more heat than light and sometimes more light than heat, I suppose you could say. But it’s very good and I sometimes come out of them proud of my humility if I managed to keep my big mouth shut. It does the fathers good, and I’m sure much good does come out of it although I know it worries some of the older men. But many of them are beginning to see that you just can’t have it all one way and they come to understand each other a lot better.

When I became bishop we were on Bimini, Long Island, Harbour Island, Eleuthera and Grand Bahama. We visited Inagua maybe three times a year. We were also on San Salvador and Cat Island. During the years of my episcopacy in many instances we more firmly established where we were and developed more churches on these islands. We established a church on Abaco, we enlarged the operation on Long Island, we built a church and
have a resident priest on Inagua. We began to missionize Turks and Caicos Islands. Where we had one, two, three, four small missions on Eleuthera, we now have seven. On Andros where generally we had one or two priests, we now have four, and we have four nuns.

I suppose the largest increase is in the parishes in Nassau. Over 100,000 people live in Nassau and there are only 180,000 people in the entire Bahamas. We now have ten churches and two high schools in Nassau. We had three, but we combined St. Augustine’s with Xavier College. We have established Aquinas College for boys and girls, about 500 of them, run by the Dominican sisters. This school now is a diocesan school, with a lay headmaster, Mr. Andrew Curry, who is doing a splendid job and was chairman of our diocesan assembly in 1972. Take the number of students, in our grade schools for example. When I became bishop in 1950, we had something like 2,000 students. We now have over 6,000. We have a new high school on Grand Bahama, where we also have five parishes and two grade schools. We probably have here and on Grand Bahama about 1,800 boys and girls in high school, whereas about the time I became bishop there were 250 to 300 at the most. So God has been very good to us.

We have four clinics now in Nassau, and we have clinics on Grand Bahama and on Andros. In our medical apostolate, we developed a program whereby the medical students of Georgetown University in Washington rotate. Every month or six weeks we have a new medical student here who gets credit for his work at Georgetown. It is a great help to us, and I’m sure they are getting good experience from their work here in the semi-tropics. We also rotate doctors from Georgetown. We have a number of dentists coming from the States. One dentist comes from Kimberly, Wisconsin, every spring for a two week vacation, paying his entire way.

We’ve had a number of on-going projects with drug companies. They have a product that is to be tested, but they would like to test it in the situation we have here. So our nurses, doctors and clinics are at their disposal, and then they’ll give us a fee such as $5,000 to help our clinics. Every now and then we’ll have mass vaccinations such as for the girls in the grade schools—rubella, measles, etc. Some company will provide the vaccine, and this will be good for many years. In some ways our grade school students are receiving better medical attention than they would in many larger cities. For this we have to thank Georgetown University and Dr. Fred Burke, their head of pediatrics. He has had an interest in this for the last twenty-five years. We have two medical doctors working with us full time. Dr. Maria Bachem, a lay missioner from Germany has been with us fourteen years, and Dr. Julie Wershing from the States. Both do excellent work. The people love them. I don’t know what we would do without them.

We’ve had lay missionaries for the last twelve years, and with a few exceptions even before that. We had primarily nurses and teachers. One man was here until recently and had stayed about six years. He had three daughters who are nuns and his wife was dead. He was a very fine electrician and had his own income. We’ve had catechists come and teach catechism. But it’s not all gravy; you feel in a way that you are saving a good bit of money. But when you pay their way down and back, and give them food, lodging, doctors’ bills, transportation here, it costs a lot.

Then of course there’s the responsibility. They are wonderful, highly motivated, doing great work, but they have a lot of leisure time, too. And
we're not running a kindergarten or anything of that sort. Many of these people are not mature enough to really know how to spend their leisure. They can get into all kinds of difficulties. We have been really blessed. I try to make it a policy to interview each one before I finalize the deal. There is a good bit of correspondence before we say that we are interested in them or that we'll take them. I go out of my way to find them, to meet them somewhere, to interview them in terminals, railroad stations, in their own homes. But once in a blue moon you might get someone whom you wish you hadn't. I can only think of one whom I would say that I wish I hadn't signed up. But she solved the difficulty by resigning and leaving. We didn't urge her to stay. We've had a very high type of boy and girl. They are quite conscious that while they are not bound by vows, they are the Church in the eyes of the people.

We've particularly been blessed with our nurses, and we get a large number of them from Minnesota. We have had nurses from Little Falls, St. Cloud and the Twin Cities. These girls are giving up, financially speaking, quite a bit. They work a year or two in conditions where they really come upon poverty. As you move around you usually don't see too much poverty, but there are pockets of it. These are the places where the sisters and girls, these nurses, work every day. They work not only in the clinics but they give hygiene and sex education to our upper grade school students and they nurse the sick in their homes. Some give instructions while they're actually nursing. We've been blessed also with teachers. We hardly ever consider taking anybody unless he has a degree, as we need so many degreed teachers in our schools, or else we lose government aid. But the government's immigration policy is making it a little more difficult to bring in these lay missionaries. They still know that they must bring in teachers and nurses. But we would have a real difficult time to bring in stenographers or something of that sort. It would be almost next to impossible. If we are short on the numbers and long on the type of person we accept, it really pays off in the long run. Recently we had a visit from one of our girls from around St. Cloud, a farm girl. She met this boy who was here from Canada as a lay missionary. They are very happily married; he's in Canada teaching and she's working as a nurse. She was really one of our finest nurses, and here those two met and are now very happy. We have had a number who have met their husbands or their wives here.

We have two nurses, two catechists, and one teacher here in the grade school. We have had, until this year, laboratory technologists and that's what Sr. Benora Gaida, O.S.B., from St. Benedict's Convent did so well for us. She worked in a clinic laboratory. We only have about five at the present time, and I think next year we may have six. In the past we have had over twenty, counting those on the out islands. One time we lost two of our lay missionary girls who were out sailing in a boat with some boys. They really should never have been out sailing in bad weather; the boat capsized and two of the girls lost their lives. One was from Winona and the other was from Breckenridge. They were wonderful girls, lovely girls; one was a teacher and the other a nurse.

We have a catechetical team or CCD team operating here in Nassau. It is not only for teaching CCD but also for teaching catechism in our parochial schools. For some reason or other people shy off from teaching religion these days. They feel somewhat frightened, particularly because
of the credibility gap, the age gap, etc. We do have four very good catechists. They will move into some parochial school on certain days of the week and teach the religion classes. In some instances we have had Protestants teaching the religion classes to our children in Catholic schools. I'm sure they were good Protestants, but I know they were ill equipped to teach the students the Catholic religion. So this has helped us a good bit and this team is teaching religion in four of our parishes. I notice that some of our priests are finding it difficult to go into the classroom and teach the children, to keep their attention. We'd like to remedy it if we can.

Two interesting personalities were in the Bahamas as missionaries during these years. One was Msgr. John Hawes, T.O.S.F., the famed hermit of Cat Island, also known as "Fra Jerome." The second was Fr. Prosper Meyer, O.S.B., first Negro priest member of St. John's Abbey, who came to the Bahamas in 1947 and became a legend among the people during his loving work with them which was abruptly ended by his early death.

Fra Jerome had long been known internationally as a leading church architect. His sketches of St. Augustine's Monastery and College formed part of Peter Anson's *Church Architecture*; he has been featured in the *Liturgical Arts Quarterly*, *Collier's*, and the *Catholic Digest*. The *Collier's* feature in July, 1950, brought him a flood of correspondence which both embarrassed and amused him. He answered very little of it, but he used to tell with many chuckles how one Canadian correspondent, misinterpreting the phrase "simple Franciscan" which no feature writer ever omitted, wrote him an earnest letter trying to sell him a gold mine in the Dominion. Another man, an American, asked permission to build his own hermitage next to Fra Jerome's; he was positive he had a vocation to be a hermit, but he feared he would be lonely if he tried it alone.

Fra Jerome's work in the Bahamas was actually only the last phase of a long missionary life. He was born near London, 7 September 1876, and began his adult life as a qualified architect. He was at the time an Anglican, and later felt called to the ministry. He began his work as an Anglican priest in 1902 in England. Shortly after he was a novice at Caldey Abbey, before that community's conversion to Catholicism, but he did not feel called to the community life and came to the Bahamas as an Anglican missionary in 1908. He spent two years in the Bahamas as an Anglican and planned and built five Anglican churches on Long Island.

He was received into the Catholic Church in 1911 at the Franciscan friary at Graymoor, New York. He went to Canada for a year to work as a layman, then went to Rome to enter the Beda English College, where he was ordained a Catholic priest on Easter Sunday, 1915. He was incardinated into the diocese of Geraldton, West Australia, where he labored as a missionary and diocesan architect for a quarter of a century.
Pope Pius XI appointed him a domestic prelate after which he was known formally as Msgr. John Hawes. His people on Cat Island, however, knew him only as “Fra Jerome,” his name as a Franciscan tertiary.

In 1939 Fra Jerome sought and received permission from the Holy See to retire to the Bahamas to end his days as a hermit. He arrived early in 1940 and went to Cat Island, where he built Mt. Alvernia, his hermitage on the height. However, he was not there long before the people of the island prevailed upon him to do apostolic work among them. He was probably the “most prevailed upon” hermit that ever lived, for he spent his “retirement” in untiring work as a priest, architect, mason, mortar mixer and stone carrier. It was typical of him that he could not resist, even in his old age, the constant requests made upon his unusual talents.

Fra Jerome, pioneer missionary and architect for St. Augustine’s Monastery and College, died in St. Francis Hospital, Miami Beach, 26 June 1956, at age seventy-nine. He had been living at St. Augustine’s for a year as he had suffered a broken hip in a fall in his room on April 20.

At that time he was taken by plane to Miami for an operation and he was considered to be making a fair recovery. However, on June 23 a phone call came that Fra Jerome had taken a sudden turn for the worse and was sinking rapidly. Next morning Fr. Prior Frederic flew to Miami. As he walked into the sick room, he was greeted by one of Fra Jerome’s familiar broad smiles. Had he enough strength left, he would undoubtedly have made one of his characteristic witty remarks about the incongruity of a hermit dying in such horribly unprimitive surroundings as Miami Beach, Florida. As usual, he was eager to go home—but by now he knew it would be to eternity. He lingered on quietly and peacefully for almost two days, and was conscious until a few hours before his death.

His body was shipped by boat to Nassau and on June 29 Bishop Leonard celebrated the solemn pontifical requiem Mass in St. Francis Xavier Cathedral. After the funeral Mass, Fathers Cornelius, Adelard and Alto accompanied the body by plane to Cat Island, where it was interred in the cave which Fra Jerome himself had dug out at his now famous hermitage of Mt. Alvernia.

When Fr. Prosper Meyer, O.S.B., died unexpectedly on 17 March 1961, a great wave of shock and sorrow passed through the Bahamas. He was only forty-nine years old and had spent his entire priestly life of thirteen years in the Bahamas. The people were so proud of their first Negro priest and never questioned whether he was an expatriate or a Bahamian. That distinction came in the late 1960’s when the question of independence and emerging nationhood became dominant. Father Prosper had a most engaging and folksy approach to every encounter.
His deep humility and faith were immediately evident to all who met him. This first American Negro Benedictine made a deep impression wherever he moved. He had struggled so hard to become a priest, another whole story in itself that cannot be told here. As a pioneer Negro priest he endured humiliation and unjust discrimination that are beyond the fantasies of current firebrands.

Only one incident might express what Father Prosper endured. When his classmates at St. John’s noticed that he did not have adequate personal apparel, they questioned him about this need. Without rancor and in complete simplicity he replied that his account in the abbey tailor shop was under the surveillance of certain German-American racist types in the community who were trying to see if he were a freeloader or an excessive spender so this could be reported in chapter. This situation was remedied immediately after Abbot Alcuin was informed. To his eternal credit, Abbot Alcuin not only encouraged the admittance of Negroes to the St. John’s community on an equal and full basis, but year after year fostered this apostolate too long neglected by religious communities of men and women in the United States. This was but another evidence of the vision of that abbot and community who pioneered on so many fronts long before it became an “in-thing” among liberal Catholics to advocate social causes such as racial justice for Negroes.

Father Prosper was ever grateful that he could become a priest. He knew that he was a showcase personality in clerical ranks and never wasted a moment in striving to serve any person he met in the Bahamas. He asked nothing and gave his all to Bahamians and Haitians along the way. It was really only when he was gone that the dimension of his service was realized. Father Silvan, his classmate and close friend, summarized best what Father Prosper meant to the Bahamas. They dialogued and argued across the years in Nassau in a relationship which stands forth as one of the better elements of the clerical culture. Father Silvan affectionately wrote:

On March 17—the Friday preceding Passion Sunday—our Fr. Prosper was suddenly called to his eternal home after having worked in the Bahamas for thirteen years. The news of his death was a shock to all the Catholics in this colony and to many non-Catholics as well.

For some time he had not been feeling well, but had nevertheless continued with his daily routine. At the suggestion of Sister Angelus, the trained nurse at the local convent of Sisters of Charity, Bishop Leonard asked him to go to St. Francis’ Hospital in Florida for a check-up. The doctors there agreed with those here: it was a case of polycythemia, overproduction of blood corpuscles. After several weeks of treatment his condition improved, and the doctors expected him to return to his work in Nassau in a few days. On the evening of March 17, however, Fr. Prosper felt sick, made his way down to the emergency room, and collapsed on
Coming of Age in the Sun

arriving there. The hospital chaplain hurried to him and administered the sacrament of the Last Anointing before he died.

Burial took place at St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota, to which the Benedictines stationed in the Bahamas belong. Abbot Baldwin officiated at the Pontifical Requiem and priest-classmates of Fr. Prosper assisted in the sanctuary and at the cemetery. Also present was Bishop Leonard. He had visited Fr. Prosper in the hospital the day before his death, and lunched with him.

Fr. Prosper was only 49 years old. He became a professed monk at St. John’s in 1942 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1947. At that time he was the only colored Benedictine priest in the States; now there are twenty other colored men in the community, and others in other monasteries. After his ordination he was assigned to the Bahamas, and here he worked the rest of his life.

His sudden disappearance from our midst was too unexpected to seem really true, even when our tolling of the passing-bell on the morning of March 18, before the first of a series of public and private Masses offered for him, announced his death. It meant the death of a young priest who had been on our teaching staff for several years before transferring to exclusively parochial work; the death of one whose sunny disposition had made him a most welcome sight whenever he managed to come back for a visit.

When collecting Fr. Prosper’s personal effects at the rectory in town, Fr. Frederic found on the desk a manuscript, in Fr. Prosper’s fine, almost spidery, handwriting, of a sermon that he had apparently been composing or preparing to use. We made use of it for table-reading here at the monastery, and it was like hearing him speak to us from beyond the grave. The words of our dead confrere came with an impact far more impressive than he could have anticipated. A few random quotes will describe his theme:

‘Death comes as a thief in the night. . . . What good is there in attaching ourselves to what is passing? . . . Remember, man, that thou art dust’. . . . Tomorrow may not come; only the present moment is ours. . . . If I am not ready today, will I be ready tomorrow? . . . Pray for the many who die every day; it will make our own death sweeter. . . . For a good Christian, death is the passage to eternal life, the taking possession of inexhaustible riches, for he will rejoice in the home of his loving Father for evermore.’

Occasionally one hears it said that many priests die unexpectedly. The observation is supported by Bahamian statistics: in the last 17 years six priests of our comparatively small group have been suddenly called from this world: Fr. Arnold (’44), Fr. Daniel (’48), Fr. Eugene (’53), Fr. Bonaventure (’54), Fr. Leander (’55), and now Fr. Prosper. Going back some years earlier, there was also Fr. Chrysostom’s sudden death in 1928. It would seem that Fr. Prosper’s sermon, quoted above, is something that priests have added reason for assimilating personally.

In his pastoral work Fr. Prosper was considered a zealous prowler for souls. His associates say that no degree of weariness could hold him back when there was a chance of gaining access to a man’s heart and mind.

While teaching at St. Augustine’s he was also assisting at St. Francis Xavier’s, and there he first became interested in the Haitians living on this island. In 1954 he was appointed pastor of St. Thomas More’s, and later
became pastor of St. Bede’s, another new parish. In 1958 he was given a
six-month scholarship at the Institute of Languages in Port-au-Prince,
Haiti, and after his return to Nassau he worked for a time at Mastic Point
and neighboring missions on Andros. Then the growing number of Haitians
in Nassau led the bishop to recall him and give him the full-time assignment
of tending to these immigrants.

The Haitians in the Bahamas, who speak French or Creole, valued
the ministrations of their devoted shepherd despite the fact that he often
found it necessary to ‘lace into them’ for their behavior. Usually his sermons
developed into strong denunciations, but the people understood that the
‘heavy words’ he hurled at them came from his zeal for their welfare.
Among his practical moves on their behalf was the organizing of classes in
English, speech and writing. The Haitian government showed its appreciation
of the work Fr. Prosper was doing for their nationals by making him a
Knight of the National Order of Honour and Merit in 1957.

He understood the Haitians; he was acquainted with the conditions and
the customs of their homeland; he knew and sympathized with their
troubles. His disappearance from the scene has created a vacancy that no
other person at present in the Bahamas can fill.

One of the things that will ever be associated with the memory of Fr.
Prosper is his fabulous string of anecdotes. Usually they were human
interest stories taken from his own experience. With extraordinary fluency
he would dramatize incidents and dialogs and, with a cartoonist's deft
strokes, would draw delightful pictures with no apparent effort.

He was quick to spot the ludicrous in the commonplace, and it all
became grist for his mill. His completely relaxed way of speaking, as he
joined incident to incident and dialog to dialog, was often as captivating as
the stories themselves.

Like much of Mark Twain's humor, the individual anecdote was
usually not noteworthy by itself, but in the context, woven into Father’s
narrative with others of its kind, it helped build up a tone, an atmosphere,
that was sometimes too hilarious for words. Yet always there was noticeable,
beneath his candid-camera picturings of human nature and its many absurdities,
a very real love of his fellow men.

Now that it is too late we regret not having tried to make some tape-
recordings of this talented raconteur. And some of us must admit that even
while praying, ‘May he and all the faithful departed rest in peace,’ our
thoughts wander to our confrere's possible story-telling feats in the halls
of heaven. There, certainly, where ‘the endless ages run,’ his sempiternal
tales will not seem long.

Fr. Herman Wind, O.S.B., missionary on Andros Island, recorded in
an interview his experiences there and on other out islands as a sailing
circuit priest. His witness is a contemporary account of Bahamian out
island Catholicism, interesting to compare with earlier accounts in previous
chapters of the pioneer priests in that apostolate. The demands and
dedication are strikingly similar despite the changed times. Father Herman’s
testimony is presented here not as an exclusive account but as repre-
sentative of the work of all those remarkable priests, sisters, catechists
and laity who have built up the Church island by island in the Bahamas.
One is caught up with thoughts of the expatriate apostles such as Paul and Barnabas and their first Christian churches on the islands and along the coastline of another sea twenty centuries earlier. In many ways the faith of the people of God in the communities of the out islands that was brought into being, nourished and developed by these people who asked nothing and gave all is a living testament to the mystery of the Spirit working in every age. To visit the churches of the out islands, to meet and talk with the people there, to participate in their liturgies, to receive their hospitality which is contagious throughout the whole settlement whenever a priest arrives, is an experience of a living faith which is steadfast and joyful before the Lord. There is something ageless about the faith of the Christians on the Bahama out islands. One has the deep impression that the faith of these people could be that of the first centuries of Christendom. After one out island delegate spoke in parables at the first diocesan assembly in 1972, an observer remarked, "I have never heard anything like it. His is a Christian voice from the first century."

Three missionaries of this period recall in interviews their impressions of developments in the Bahamas. Father Herman explains some of the work among these "saints" on the out islands as the Apostle Paul would call them. Fr. Gall Fell, O.S.B., records his work among the military personnel on the out islands during this same period. During World War II and following it, large contingents of British, Canadian and American military were in training and later maintaining permanent installations in the Bahama chain which were ideally situated for air, naval, submarine and rocket operations. Fr. Brendan Forsyth, O.S.B., leader in several pastoral, educational and administrative apostolates, gives a firsthand account of the solid progress of these years.

1. Fr. Herman Wind, O.S.B.:

I came down to these islands twenty-six years ago. I stayed in Nassau the first three years. I first had charge of the prison and the hospital, the old Bahamas General Hospital in those days, and the lepers. My first year I was at St. Joseph's with Fr. Ferdinand Schreifels, O.S.B. The second year I was at Our Lady's Church with Fr. Marcian Peters, O.S.B. Most of the young priests made their rounds with these older pastors. In 1947 Father Bonaventure sent me to the out islands. He thought he'd see if I would like out island work. He sent me to the same mission, Mangrove Cay, that I'm at now some twenty-three years later.

Andros is 100 miles long. We have northern missions and southern missions. The northern missions go from Behring Point, which is the most southerly of the northern missions, up to Fresh Creek, about twenty miles. From Fresh Creek it extends to Mastic Point, a distance of some sixty miles. I'm actually about fifteen miles south of Behring Point, but there's also fifteen miles of water between us. So I never see the priest there. I normally meet him in Nassau if I'm going to meet him. I went there in 1947 and took over from Mangrove Cay the three missions as well as the southern
missions. Father Daniel had been in charge but his hands had cracked, apparently from some seaweed he had touched and he couldn't even close them. The poor man couldn't open a tin can of food or anything. He couldn't function anymore and had to leave. I was there between Fathers Daniel and Alto and went through these missions from Mangrove Cay to South Andros.

In those days travel was by local boat. If one went from one settlement to another, he'd have to bide his time and wait two weeks or else use his own boat. Every two weeks the local boat would come from Nassau. I went first to Little Creek which was the most southerly of the six missions, Kemps Bay and High Rock. I'd stay at one mission two weeks, and then would move to another mission. The distance between missions was vast and there were no roads. One walked along the seashore at low tide. Part of the time you could go along the shore, but at high tide you couldn't get by, there'd be rocks in the way, sometimes you'd have to cut into the bush. Settlements were about ten miles apart, roughly speaking. I spent some six to eight weeks in a locale.

I remember distinctly as I worked my way back to Mangrove Cay an experience I will not forget. I had a terrible case of dysentery for ten days and there was no medical assistance on the islands. It was the drinking water. The open well at the rectory is under the porch floor. The well is still there but the porch has since been closed in and the well covered. But in those days people would come with unsanitary buckets and dip out of the well. There was no way to get to Nassau. The only boat available was a local sailboat. With this case of dysentery, I left early on a sunny calm morning. We got to Nassau just by nightfall. I didn't know what would happen. It gets kind of embarrassing sometimes with inadequate toilet facilities.

Recently, in 1968, we opened a church at Moxey Town on Mangrove Cay, Andros, which never had a church. When I was there in 1947 there were some twenty-seven Catholic families; there are now about 150 Catholics. When I returned in 1965, as there had been no church, a lot of these people had fallen away, or moved or married away from the place. So we had very few original Catholics left with lots of children not baptized. I opened the church and have baptized 40 to 50 children. The number of adults have been coming back gradually, too. Catholics had to walk from Little Harbour to Pinder's Settlement, a distance of about two miles or a four-mile round trip, and this was quite a task for old people and little tots.

I spent that glorious first summer of 1947 at Andros. Then I came back to Nassau, and, of course, Fr. Bonaventure Hansen queried, 'Well, how did you enjoy it?' And I innocently said that I enjoyed it very much. Maybe that was my mistake or God's plan because I have been on the out islands practically ever since. From then on I started taking over the out island circuit covering 600 miles of water which meant Grand Bahama, Bimini, Inagua, and in 1948 I started the church at Devil's Point, Cat Island. So I had four islands. I would be at Cat Island, say, for two weeks and then catch a boat and come back to Nassau. Then I had Grand Bahama which is approximately 150 miles north of Nassau. There was no inter-island transportation so one had to come back to Nassau each trip by mail boat. There was no plane service and the mail boats left every comfort to be desired. One seldom got a room to himself. Most boats carried government mail and were motor vessels. These boats had two or three bunks in a room,
possibly four rooms. First class passage meant that one had a bunk, which was nothing more than a board with a very thin mattress thrown over it, seldom a pillow. Local people carted in all of their belongings so they wouldn’t have to pay freight. Many times the rooms were so hot that I merely sat on the deck. I remember our rugged, island-toughened missionary, Father Gabriel, always had a little private camp chair. He carried that along and stayed on the deck of the boat. He said it was a lot cooler, and it was. Many times inside a room, the smell of diesel oil, vomit, and other human elements made sleeping impossible. I preferred staying on deck. But then on deck one sat between cases of soda, fruits, empty tins, cans and ‘creatures,’ as the Bahamians called them—goats and sheep. I remember one trip particularly sitting in these circumstances while talking to a Bahamian. A billy goat was tied up a short distance from me. And I was kind of eyeing the fellow and I guess he was kind of eyeing me, too. I took my eye off him momentarily; all of a sudden he decided to take off and banged me in the side of the leg. Oh, did that hurt. These creatures have hard heads.

They tell the story of Fr. Charles Blesch traveling on the Grand Bahama mail boat with a big bull on deck. The freight hatch was open. So he goes up to the bull and says, ‘Moo-oo-o!’ And the bull takes one leap and settles in the hatch. He was definitely stuck there. The crew couldn’t get him in and they couldn’t pull him out. He was, it seemed, a permanent fixture. Eventually, I don’t know how, but the crew worked for many hours and finally lifted that ton weight out. So we travelled with all of these creatures and had very little private space. Many times the crew would butcher a sheep or a goat right in front of you. They’d wash it off, and you’d have the goat for dinner. Or they’d catch some fish. I remember on one trip particularly sitting in these circumstances while talking to a Bahamian. A billy goat was tied up a short distance from me. And I was kind of eyeing the fellow and I guess he was kind of eyeing me, too. I took my eye off him momentarily; all of a sudden he decided to take off and banged me in the side of the leg. Oh, did that hurt. These creatures have hard heads.

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For three years I had this circuit: Grand Bahama, two weeks; two weeks at Bimini, back to Nassau. Then two weeks to Inagua. Although Inagua is slightly under 400 miles from Nassau, it took three full days by mail boat to get there. The Castle Island Passage which was bypassed was always a rough thoroughfare. The waves were unbelievable 100 feet long mountains. Many times one would get so seasick he would be cascading (vomiting), and be sweating and also running to the back room. After he did it for a while he almost got used to it. Father Gabriel used to say that the first twenty-five years are the toughest. Most times the sea would be rough. On another trip I was out with Fr. Nicholas Kremer, O.S.B. He had the San Salvador circuit. We were the only two on the boat who ate anything. Everyone else was seasick, including the crew.

For three years I had this circuit of four islands. I say four islands because in 1948 Father Bonaventure asked me to go to Devil’s Point, Cat Island. He said there was a community of some eighty Baptists who were interested in the Church. And a forty-five year old man, Charles Rolle, who was catechist at Bain Town and a responsible person, lived at this small fifty person settlement which was some ten miles from Devil’s Point. This Baptist settlement went to Charlie and asked him to intercede with the bishop to come out personally or send someone. They had asked for quite a number of years and eventually the bishop sent me. And incidentally,
that's where the name of that film comes from, *Devil's Point*, the one Fr. Gordon Mycue made about the young priest working in the missions. It actually covers the entire Bahamas mission as they were in 1950. Historically, it's a pretty good film.

I began this Devil's Point mission at the invitation of Charles Rolle. I went there 1 November 1948 and stayed until Christmas. We had instructions every morning, afternoon and evening for eighty children. At Christmas time they knew the Latin Mass. They could answer all the prayers. The kids could recite the catechism very well. After two months I baptized some eighty children. Instead of dividing it into two or three days, I did it all on one afternoon. I had to have a sheet of paper and every time I'd perform one liturgical function, I'd have to check off each person's name. The little kids were running back and forth, and going out to the outhouse. It was a Herculean task. A priest shouldn't really do it alone, or shouldn't attempt it in one day. But I was young and energetic; we got through the ceremony.

From that time on I had Bimini, Grand Bahama, Inagua and now Devil's Point added to it. In 1948 I went to Monsignor Hawes, the hermit. He needed help and these Devil's Point people wanted Fra Jerome to baptize them. But he had gone to Cat Island to retire and the distance was seventeen walking miles from 'The Bight' where he had his headquarters, on top of Mt. Alvernia. The U.S. Navy surveyed this and judged it to be 175 feet in height, the highest point in the Bahamas. Cat Island had five Catholic missions. Fra Jerome lived at the hermitage and I was supposed to take care of the settlements themselves. We lived about a mile apart. On Sundays he would offer Mass at The Bight settlement and I would have Mass at one of the other four, either Devil's Point, Bain Town, Port Howe, Old Bight or New Bight.

As a result of Monsignor Hawes' fame, many had the impression that he was a millionaire, and he got many begging letters. A lot of them were from seminarians and other people who thought they had worthwhile causes. But the only thing Fra Jerome really got out of all this was that some non-denominational group sent him two barrels of clothing, 200 pounds. I remember these barrels very well because Fra Jerome said, 'Well now, Father Herman, I want nothing to do with these barrels because I'm retired. You take care of them.' In the meantime I went to Devil's Point and through the other four settlements over the weekend, and I told the people in the settlements, 'You do a little work in the churchyard and clean up the surroundings. I just happen to have some clothing and I'll divide it up among the various settlements.' But when I came back to The Bight Monday morning, I looked for the barrels and I asked a boy, 'Where are the barrels?' 'Oh,' he said, 'One barrel is down the road there, and one barrel is up here someplace.' I said, 'What?' Fra Jerome had decided to go into the barrels and take out a few small pieces of clothing to give to someone for whom he wanted to do something personal. When he went in there the people literally charged in, and he couldn't control them. He finally said, 'Just help yourself.' They just grabbed handfuls of clothing and even took the barrels. Not even a sock was left. All those people along the shore who needed the clothing very badly, and to whom I had promised something, received nil. This caused quite a commotion for a while.

I was at Cat Island until 1952. The bishop decided to put up the Bishop Bernard Memorial Building at St. Francis School in Nassau. Father Cornelius who was a builder was called in to construct the building. But
Father Cornelius said he wouldn't go in unless I would replace him at Long Island during the interim. The bishop asked me to take over Long Island. I was there from January until the end of November, practically for a year. I remember coming to Long Island. Father Cornelius had trucks, generators, he did medical work, pulled teeth. And I knew nothing of these physical props. I knew the front end from the back end of a car. I hadn't done any medical work. I hadn't pulled any teeth. When I came I had two days with Father Cornelius during which he instructed me in these multiple departments. But he did have good manuals, mechanical books, medical books and books demonstrating the pulling of teeth. He had his shelf full of these books. Many times I would say, 'Now what should I study; should it be mechanical work or should it be pulling of teeth, should it be medical work? What about the Bible?' What was more important at the moment, I did. Father Cornelius said, 'Now you must never tell people you don't know. You go right ahead and just have courage and go right in!' Of course, with medical work one had to be careful. If I didn't know, I would just give patients aspirin or something harmless and tell them to come back the next day. After various confrontations with recurrent diseases one learned to pick out certain symptoms, certain ailments were quite predominant, and it wasn't too difficult. I got into the swing of pulling teeth and this mechanical work. I was never an expert mechanic and I wouldn't say I'm an expert in any field today either, but I've been carrying on ever since.

I went back to Cat Island at the end of 1952. And, of course, now I went back as a full-fledged doctor, tooth extractor and mechanic, you know. The first car I had was an old Model A Ford that was almost falling apart. I remember I incurred the bishop's wrath a little bit on that occasion, too, because on these out islands communications with Nassau were very poor. Once in a while you'd have to make a decision instantaneously. If you put it off, by the time you wrote in and got a letter back it would be too late. Someone was going to sell this car. I think it was £75 in those days, around $200. I said, O.K., I would buy it immediately because I knew if I waited I wouldn't have the opportunity. I bought the car which served me very well, but the bishop was a little annoyed that I didn't first get permission. But I told him, 'Well, my Lord, you know how things are. You have to make a sudden decision at times and maybe it's a Model A Ford now, but next time it might be a Chevy or something. You can't always wait.' Everything was smoothed off and it was all right. This car was a tremendous help. Roads were very poor, and the old Model A really helped in the out island situation. The bishop came confirming on a certain occasion. We took him confirming with the Model A. Everyone said something would shake loose. I'd have to get out and regulate the motor frequently. The bishop said he swore that I went out there and talked to the thing to get it going again. But it served.

I stayed on Cat Island for three more years. James Campbell was commissioner at the time. This medical work was of tremendous value to the people. When Father Cornelius was made pro-vicar in 1955, the logical man to go to Long Island he figured was Father Herman because he had been there for one year. I remember when I left Cat Island. There were something like 2,000 petitions that were sent to the bishop asking that I stay. They were signed by school teachers, commissioners; the bishop had a whole drawer of signatures. I suppose it was primarily due to medical
work because a lot of these were not Catholics. We did medical work for everyone. We never asked, 'What is your religion?' Apparently at least, the people appreciated the philanthropic work.

In 1955 I went to Long Island, spent five years there and continued the same type of spiritual and physical work. Now I was a veteran. People knew me from 1952. I was performing a helpful work and an enjoyable one. No doubt this was very fatiguing at times. In those days the roads were very rough. We had Mortimers, Taits, Dunmore and Clarence Town settlements and Hamilton, Deadman's Cay, Buckley, and The Bight. Once a month we said Mass at Salt Pond in the middle of the road on back of the truck. Actually there was only one Catholic there, but a number of the non-Catholics would come to Mass. We brought along Catholics we had picked up at their settlements. We operated a ton Chevy stake body truck. I have a similar one at Mangrove Cay now... a ton Ford stake body truck, used not just for picking up people, but frequently their produce—corn, peas. These vehicles were a tremendous help. I spent that five years doing spiritual and physical work. And at the same time, besides Long Island, I had Inagua again. Inagua seemed to be attached to Long Island at this time because it was a half way point between Nassau. It was close to 400 miles from Nassau, but about 180 miles from Long Island. The mail boat would stop in at Clarence Town and from Clarence Town it would continue on to Inagua. It would do the same thing every other week. Thus if one went to Inagua he had to stay for two weeks.

On one occasion I went to Inagua, and the mail boat let me off. It then started back and as it got out about five hours it hit the Castle Island Passage, a very rough ninety miles. Together with rough weather some of the planking broke loose and the boat slowly but surely began to sink. I still had some of my freight on it. The people themselves got into small dinghies. As they retell the incident numerous sharks swam back and forth between the boats just waiting for someone to put his foot or hand into the water. In the meantime, the boat's telegraphic officer had sent a distress signal to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. This wasn't too far off from Inagua, some fifty miles. A destroyer was sent from Guantanamo Bay. When the destroyer arrived little could be done to save the boat. The mother ship had gone down, the bow sticking up out of the water. The destroyer blew up the Wissagua and it sank forever. Some of my freight, one big box of candles which were very precious in those days, went down to a watery grave. The people were all saved; I might have been in that boat, too. None of these boats have insurance. I have lost various things. Just this year I lost a couple tanks of acetylene and oxygen. They were not my tanks; I had to rent them for $160.

I have always advocated that Inagua have a little church. It wouldn't have to be much, just a small place, because whenever I went there I had to look for a place to offer Mass. Most of the time some old dilapidated shack. Inagua years ago was an old stevedoring town. When there was a lot of stevedoring done on boats between North and South America, these would stop in and pick up crewmen. When stevedoring stopped, Inagua became a ghost town with hundreds of dilapidated buildings. I lived in these shacks and offered Mass there, too. No electricity was available and buildings were unkempt. We did have several pieces of property, including the Doctor Gordon property which the good people had willed to the Church. But the building itself was dilapidated. I stayed there some-
times, and held Mass in this building. But we never had our own place so that we might say, 'This is the Catholic church.' I always fought for a small building. But some of the fathers said, 'No, unless you build a big church, don't build anything. You must impress the people.' It's ridiculous; you could always add on to a small structure in later years. Now there is a Catholic church on the island. Fr. James Meldrum built one last year, finally after some twenty-five years. The point was that if you'd had a church, you'd have had a group of people together. You might have had a catechist just to keep things together until the priest came back, which usually was every three months. That was the same when I had the Grand Bahama and Bimini run at the same time.

I enjoyed those five years on Long Island very much and I think I learned a lot about building and the physical aspects of mission life which I would say is almost 80 percent of mission work anyway. The spiritual work isn't that much, it's the physical work. There you serve not just Catholics, but Baptist ministers, their wives, children, etc. The Anglican ministers came for medical work or pulling of teeth. People brought pots, pans, sewing machines, and radios to be mended or fixed. Even now I don't know how many radios I get constantly. I don't say that I'm a radio technician, but in many cases it would be corrosion on the wires, or a wire loose, or the batteries worn or corroded. Most of these people have no mind for mechanical work at all. Nine times out of ten it would be a simple thing. If people would send these things to Nassau, many times they would never get them back again or they would be there for months, and then they would get a big bill for a small job. So I'm constantly flooded with radios, sewing machines, pots and pans. I also have an acetylene torch to weld parts especially on my trucks. There's never a dull day on the islands. You never know what one day to the other will bring. You might say you'll do this or that tomorrow, but you never get a chance.

From 1955 to 1960 I was in Long Island. I then came into Nassau. I was pastor at St. Francis for one year and then at Sacred Heart for one year. Then I went back to the bush again. Since I had been at Long Island, the bishop figured I could get the Josephite fathers started, which I did in 1962. I spent about a half a year with them, then I went to Northern Andros for about three years. From 1965 until now, which is six years, I've been at Mangrove Cay, Southern Andros. It was really pleasant to get back to Mangrove Cay after having been away from this settlement for so many years. I remember back in 1947 baptizing a couple of little children. When I went back again in 1965 these children were 21 years old.

At Mangrove Cay we had two settlements, two churches: Pinder's and Victoria Point. In 1947 there were twenty-seven Catholic families and 150 people approximately. When I came back there in 1965 since there was no church we had lost a number of people to the Baptists. I decided therefore that the first thing I would do would be offer Mass in the yard of Prince Jolly, under his coconut trees. For three years this went on. We had to be careful, too, when we set up our altar so we wouldn't get hit by falling coconuts. Bishop Leonard confirmed under the trees, too. Then in 1967 we built a nice little church here at Little Harbour. The bishop said, 'Well, o.k., I'll give you $3,000. Can you build a church?' With $3,000 one can hardly build an outhouse. But I drew my own plans, which I always do, and I directed the work. I'm not so efficient at carpentry work, but I love to do cement work or plastering, actually we call it 'tabbing,'
tabby work. Usually we use boards two feet high, eight feet long. You put them up eight inches apart. Then you bind the boards with either a strip of wood in between or with wire. You pour in concrete and take native stone, limestone, and force it in. It's maybe stone as big as your hand or twice the size of one's hand and you force that into the liquid cement. If you do it carefully, you have a nice, smooth wall that doesn't need plaster. In 1967 we tabbied this church which would hold about 120 adults. It wasn't a luxurious edifice, but it was ample for our needs.

In the meantime the bishop had promised me that if any further sisters would offer to work in the Bahamas, they would come to Andros. Father Brendan happened to know a Monsignor Begin of Portland, Maine. When this monsignor visited Father Brendan at Grand Bahama, Father just mentioned that we could use sisters. Monsignor Begin said, 'We have some sisters in Portland and I think they are interested.' So he went back to Portland and talked to the Sisters of Mercy and Mother Denis was interested. She and a Mother Edwina came down and visited Bishop Leonard, who then sent them to my settlement of Mangrove Cay, Andros. Mother Denis and Mother Edwina, who is eighty years old now, were looking for a headquarters for four sisters on Andros but they didn't know where on Andros. They came to Mangrove Cay first. This was rather tricky and low-down on my part. I had been at Northern Andros so I knew the territory. I explained that actually headquarters there would be rather difficult because at Fresh Creek where the priest lived, and where normally headquarters should be, there were few Catholics. The Catholics were actually twenty miles away at Cargill Creek and Behring Point and the roads were bad. It would take almost two hours and a half to get to these settlements. The situation wasn't too good. Whereas in Mangrove Cay between Pinder's Settlement and where I built this new church at Little Harbor, there were some 200 children. There were lots of grandchildren. I say grandchildren because the grandparents are there, but the young people are either in Nassau or at Grand Bahama working, either going to school or looking for work. They leave their children, who would be the grandchildren, at these settlements. We have something like 200 grandchildren, in age from one or two months to usually about fourteen or fifteen. Then the young people leave.

So the sisters had a fertile group of people to work with. They are marvelous with kids anyway. But what really clinched their staying was that I was to take them by a thirteen foot motorboat to my southern missions. There are three missions in the southern part of the southern missions of Andros. Half way over the motor gave out. Fortunately we weren't too far from shore. No matter what we did the motor began to vibrate. We had no choice but to go ashore. I was able to 'scull' in. With sculling you take a pole and just push yourself to shore. I was able to get to Victoria Point which is our last mission on Mangrove Cay. It's about five miles from Pinder's Settlement. Walking through the settlement we met a lot of the people. These were mostly not Catholic, but were extremely friendly. These people are lovely people. Mother says to this day that that's what made them decide. They chose to make their headquarters at Mangrove Cay, and we began looking for a place. I'd always thought that the proper place for the sisters would be right in the same churchyard at Pinder's where I have headquarters. I would be on one side of the church and they on the other. One day my brother, Joe Wind, was visiting me. We looked around. After
I had finished the church at Little Harbor in 1967, he said, ‘You know, this would be a lovely spot for a convent.’ That idea just struck me like a blow. It was a grand suggestion because it’s two miles away from where I am. We’re close enough and still we’re far enough apart. What a tremendous influence the sisters would have on this particular settlement. When Mother Denis and Sister Edwina came I suggested this spot. They fell in love with it immediately. It was nothing but a barren rock, but it was an elevated spot. It’s about a fifteen foot elevation overlooking the sea, a beautiful view. The convent was built, paid for by the diocese of Portland, Maine, and also the center, which we built the following year. The latter is about 150 feet long. It’s in an ‘L’ shape and contains a useful auditorium. One sister is a registered nurse. They have two guest rooms and a garage. The people had never seen a lovely auditorium. We use it regularly for programs which the people enjoy, especially Christmas and Easter programs where they can all enact a part. Even the adults get into these programs or give recitations. As they say, everyone wants to get up and give his little piece. We have dances, and occasionally movies. It is used for public functions, even weddings; a great boon to the Church.

The sisters don’t actually do formal teaching. Here they say ‘Week-a-day’ classes, no every day classes. They teach them for an hour after school, but not just religion; one sister is an artist. In the evening they have sewing classes for adults. We have several men in the classes; we have a Baptist minister who wants to be a tailor. They have a glee club and one sister has a pre-school class with about twenty-five tots. She swears that these kids are terrific, they’re brilliant. She has taught in the States for a number of years. When she compares them with the children there, she says they are certainly not on a lower level. They do beautiful work. It’s amazing what these four year olds can do. The sisters also do social work and visit homes throughout the island. They have made a tremendous advance in goodwill among the non-Catholics here. The four sisters were a godsend to the place.

Most of my time has been spent on the out islands. I haven’t been in Nassau very often. I get to Nassau approximately once a month. With plane service you can get in once a month, but when it was boat service I wouldn’t get in for three or four months. Under Bishop Leonard I think the missions certainly have prospered in the sense that he’s brought in an awful lot of helpers. He has a tremendous personality and he’s a fine person. Whenever he would go to the States or to England, he would meet priests and invite them here; he was not afraid to expand. Bishop Bernard would always be afraid and say, ‘How are we going to support these missions? What are we going to do? How are we going to keep these things going?’ But Bishop Leonard wouldn’t do that. He felt the Lord would provide somehow or other. He would go right ahead, right into it.

I wish I were a prophet and could prophesy the future. We are certainly going through troubled times as everyone else is, but I suspect things will clear up. I don’t know the future of religious vocations; it looks rather bleak at the moment. But I suppose the Lord has his own way. The Holy Spirit is still alive in the Church.

I have one permanent deacon at Little Creek Settlement. It just happens that at this particular settlement I have also a very good catechist, Alfred Burrows, who has been catechist for some twenty-five years. He would...
never become a deacon. So my problem would be that I have both of these men in the same settlement. If George Johnson becomes a permanent deacon, what am I going to do? I won't be able to use him in this settlement. I would still have to have Mr. Burrows as head catechist because he's a major influence. Actually the catechist baptizes, preaches, and holds services on Sunday. He takes the place of the priest and he could distribute Communion. So he's almost doing the work of a deacon right now. He doesn't have the title, but he is doing that work. I could use George Johnson and send him to some other settlements, but then the transportation problem arises. Some financial aid for him would be necessary as he must travel some ten or fifteen miles every Sunday to take care of some of these churches.

We have another problem on some islands. The people would like someone from their own settlement as deacon. They don't like having one of their people only be a catechist. It would be a problem. I could see where deacons would be of wonderful use in Nassau. It would probably be a bigger help than where I am because actually if I don't get to my southern missions for a month, well, the Blessed Sacrament isn't there either. So he couldn't distribute Communion.

We'll have to make some adjustments. As far as the sacraments are concerned we have catechists in our three southern churches. A woman, Advilda Dean, is a catechist at Kemps Bay, and Harriet Lundy is catechist at High Rock. These people are able to carry on. Mr. Burrows is a very good catechist, but even if he is a lay deacon, he still can't offer Mass. I suppose he could distribute Communion, but then it would be a problem to reserve the Blessed Sacrament. I have Mass once a month.

I think the Church will expand in the future, especially in the out missions. I've been trying to get a priest for the southern missions. With a priest there, we could really do something for the people. With Mass once a month you can't really have good Catholics. If we had sufficient priests, or I suppose if we had good deacons who could travel, I'm sure the Church would expand. The Baptists can expand as they do because they're local people. It doesn't take much training on their part. Our problem has been that some of our catechists were not too brilliant. There is plenty of room for expansion. There are a lot of settlements where we don't have churches and these people are interested in the Church. I have contact with these people especially by pulling teeth and medical work right now, but many are interested in the Church and there is room for expansion. We lose a lot of young people, the teenagers—fourteen, fifteen and up. They come to Nassau either for school or to work. With a diaconate program here, we can probably reach a lot of these youngsters whom we couldn't reach otherwise. Many Catholics in Nassau have come from the islands. If you look at some of our baptismal registers, I've got four books filled with names, you'll see they are all gone. Fathers Gabriel and Daniel had lots of baptisms but most of these people are in town now. I still think the Church will expand; we still have baptisms. I suppose at times we probably did proselytize too much. Now with better relations with non-Catholics, some of us are afraid to take any members from these Churches. So in that sense maybe it's stagnant for the moment. I don't know what might happen.
2. Fr. Gall Fell, O.S.B.:

Hats off to the U.S. Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard as I came to know them in the Bahama islands during the 1950's. At that time I was a missioner on San Salvador making occasional trips by mail boat and native sailboat to other missions. I continued missionary work when I was made auxiliary chaplain for the USAF, USN and Coast Guard.

The some 600 inhabitants of San Salvador were descendants of former slaves brought from Africa. There was not much of a road and no landing field for planes up to that time.

One day in the mission rectory I heard a plane. Tempted to run outside and look, I sat down. Had I not seen plenty of planes before coming to the island? However, the sound of this one remained steady and without change for minutes. When I did go outside, the strange looking air machine was standing in mid-air right over the rectory. It was the first helicopter I had ever seen. This was the beginning of the end of San Salvador's quiet days. The people had moved along leisurely doing whatever little work there was, quite unconcerned about a noisy world far away. I had been on the isle one year before the great changes came. It remains in my memory the most peaceful time in my life.

Not long after that helicopter made its appearance, military ships came and unloaded men and materials. Temporary camps, first for the USAF and USN and later also for the Coast Guard, were established; docks were constructed; huge earth-moving machinery levelled a landing strip for planes; navy ships came to make maps of the ocean bottom of the Bahamas and beyond.

One day, the commander of the air base came to the rectory asking me to be their chaplain. After this was arranged and agreed upon, my new assignment carried me to Eleuthera, Grand Bahama, Mayaguana and Turks as far as the Caicos Islands where similar bases or just cable huts were established.

Twenty years in the priesthood at that time, I had served as assistant pastor, hospital chaplain, chaplain for sisters. This was new work for me without training and experience in that field. The commander of the base said to me one day, 'Put out your chest, you have power as a chaplain and we are with you.' Apparently he felt I needed a boost.

I made out a service schedule for seven larger bases and a few smaller ones spread over a distance of about 600 miles from Grand Bahama to Turks and Caicos Islands. The one on eastern Grand Bahama is some 135 miles east of West Palm Beach and those in Grand Turk and Caicos 100 miles north of the island of Hispaniola. Transportation was mostly by military plane, aboard warships or helicopters. The latter were used for transportation from large vessels to the islands. One of them took me from Grand Turk to the Caicos Islands, a distance of twenty-five miles over the open ocean. This was a first for USN helicopters at that time. Turks and Caicos Islands are situated about 500 miles ESE of New Providence. In the 1950's the two groups of Turks and Caicos Islands belonged to Great Britain. The commissioner, an Englishman, resided in Turks Island with a district commissioner under him at Cockburn Harbour, main village in the Caicos group. There was poverty on Grand Turk when I made my first trip there. Ten thousand tons of salt were stacked up in long swaths about eight to ten feet high, but no ships came to market it. A number of
buildings indicated that there had been wealth in the isle when the salt business was still flourishing. The conditions on the Caicos Islands were primitive. The good people there did not know the difference with the exception of some seamen. The inhabitants had adapted themselves, making a scant living from the sea and the soil.

A military plane took me from San Salvador to Turks Island. After about a two hour flight of nearly 300 miles our plane sat down on the newly built airstrip. I crawled out of my Mae West jacket which each passenger wore in case of a forced sitting down in the ocean. My neck felt relief. A lieutenant was waiting for me by the plane as the big doors of the C47 swung open. 'Here is the jeep, Father,' he said, 'Step in and I will take you to the camp.' A room in the BOQ was ready for me. The commander and officers expressed their appreciation at my coming. I thought back to western informal but cordial hospitality I had enjoyed in Montana twenty years earlier where I did student mission work. The people there and these people on Turks Island meant it, frank and straightforward. I felt at home.

The officer in charge made out a service schedule with me for the five days of my first stay. The one town, Grand Turk on Grand Turk, was about a mile from the air base. There I found the same friendly attitude among the people. I went into the business district to get acquainted. Several owners of these nearly empty places invited me to come and see them again. Most of these people were members of the Church of England. I found a few Catholics among the working class without work. They had not seen a priest for many years. After returning to the base I mentioned this to the commanding lieutenant colonel, a non-Catholic brother and friend. He offered me his own quarters whenever I would have services for them. How happy the people were to attend Mass once more and to receive the sacraments. On later visits I gave them that opportunity on several occasions.

I cannot praise enough our American armed forces in the Bahama islands. They cooperated with me as a missioner and as their auxiliary chaplain. Their planes, shops, jeeps and helicopters were at my disposal. On one flight to the air base on Grand Turk Island I found that there was a group of isles west northwest of Grand Turk, isolated and forgotten. I made up my mind to visit them as a missioner.

Sometime later on San Salvador, where I was stationed, the base commander said, 'We will take you there.' Soon a plane was ready to take me 220 miles due southeast to Bottle Creek, North Caicos, which had at that time about 2,000 inhabitants. Our seaplane sat down along the north shore of the island. I loosened the straps on the sides and in front of my Mae West jacket and pulled the heavy thing over my head. A small rubber boat was unstrapped from the ceiling of the plane and a motor was attached to it. One of the men got me ashore. When I stepped ashore, a crowd of islanders surrounded me. I told them who I was. I was the first Catholic priest on the island, they said. These descendants of freed slaves brought from Africa by Europeans were not natives really. American Indians lived here and on all the Bahamas when Columbus landed there. These people had come by sailboat to work the fields. One of them carried my little suitcase to the boat and I became friends with them.

Wind and sail carried us to Bottle Creek a few miles south. These people were also most friendly. I thought of the hospitality I had found on other islands. Their doors were open to me and I felt at home. One man
took me to his home. But where to spend the night? 'I will sleep on the floor here with my suitcase as a pillow.' I said. 'No,' replied the head of the house, 'That is not good.' After some conversation he took me to the teacher’s home. I did not hear the conversation between the two. We went another mile to the home of the nurse. She would have a good place for me, I was told. Her husband was some fifteen miles away, working in the fields. She had another lady with her. She showed me a little house she and her husband owned besides the one they lived in. The house was clean, small, but large enough for one occupant. I accepted the hospitality and moved in. I spent one week there which I will ever remember.

God provides. This middle-aged couple were a godsend for the people. She took care of the sick and the orphans. He helped the latter to get started on their own. They had adopted some thirty orphans over a number of years. She fed and clad them and he taught them how to raise coconuts or whatever else was necessary for a living. They also learned to raise and process sisal. This fiber plant brought them the little cash they earned with hard work.

I celebrated Mass for them in a large new school they themselves had built. Since this was the first time they had Mass on their island, I explained the Mass to them and gave them the good news of salvation. While visiting their homes, they asked me many questions about the Catholic religion. One day, a delegation of men invited me to a hill at the edge of town where they had cleared the brush to build a house for me, if I would stay with them. My heart went out to these people, but I did not have my own choice. There were other duties awaiting.

3. Fr. Brendan Forsyth, O.S.B.:

When I arrived in Nassau in August, 1940, I found the town gaily decorated. I was quite dismayed when I discovered it was for the duke and duchess of Windsor who arrived the same day. Good Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., as was his custom, met the amphibious PAA flight and took me in tow. Father Bonaventure was a very warmhearted, understanding and wise man who took special interest in the newly arrived priests.

I was first stationed at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral as a curate. Bishop Bernard returned from a begging tour in the States, and I was assigned to take over instruction classes. He ran a ‘tight ship.’ Every church in Nassau had instruction classes Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights, and a holy hour on Thursday night, Sunday School at 3:00 p.m., followed by benediction, and evening services every Sunday evening. Bishop Bernard left nothing to chance. Not infrequently, in the middle of your instruction class you would see his head poke in the window, ‘Just checking to see if you are on the ball.’

Bahamian parents in general were not particularly interested in education at that time. It was a matter of indifference whether their children got to school or not. Lucky the headmistress who had even half of her rollcall present by 10:00 a.m. The children came from the poorest of the poor families.

It was a common thing for a child to come to school having had only ‘tea,’ sometimes bush leaves boiled in water. Rare was the child who had lunch. The only real meal was peas and rice at night. The children were all barefoot during the weekday. If they were fortunate to have shoes, these
were saved for Sunday. Not infrequently, cinnamon rolls were given to the children at noon in our schools. A grand Sister of Charity, Sister Carmelina, presided over the infant nursery and clinic. Here the tiny ones were fed at least twice a day.

Father Bonaventure had started the dialogue Mass many years before and all our parishes used a little booklet published at St. John's Liturgical Press called *Offeramus*, edited by Abbot Cuthbert Goeb, O.S.B. The *Mass of the Angels* was known by heart in Nassau as well as on the out islands. Father Bonaventure and Bishop Bernard believed in meeting what they called their 'Protestant competition' head-on. No Bahamian Christian would go to church unless there was hymn singing and participation. Our Bahamian Catholics were proud of their ability to sing the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* in an unknown language.

Father Frederic was an excellent pastor at St. Francis Cathedral, genuinely giving himself completely to the service of the people. We visited the hospital daily and spent at least two or three hours visiting the homes 'over the hill.' We complained about Father Bonaventure's open policy regarding baptism. For example, once a year the non-Catholic children in the nursery clinic were brought over to the church and baptized. Mind you, the parents had been consulted. But in those days, the parents would have said yes to almost anything so long as the Church looked after the children. Years later, I was to become very grateful that I was ordained at a time in the history of the Church when no one in authority ever dreamt of asking me where I wanted to go, what I wanted to do, or what I thought. My thoughts were kept for the recreation room where we would complain with our confreres. Years later I was to realise that Father Bonaventure's method was not only apostolic but practical, and some of our very best Catholic laymen got their start as Catholics under his policy of open baptism.

I was deeply impressed by one incident. The sisters were preparing a first Communion class, and about one-third of the class were not Catholic. My job was to contact the parents. If the parents were Catholic but just negligent about baptism and very often living a connubial life without benefit of the sacraments, then we would baptize the child. I returned to sister with a list of ten to be baptized and six to be told that they must wait until they were older. Sister said, 'Father, I will tell all the children except Leonard. You will have to tell him because I just don't have the heart.' I answered, 'Send him to me.'

The little boy came out, clothed in just two scraps of clothing and long bare legs and a great bright smile. 'Leonard, I know you want to make your first Holy Communion, but, you see, your mother isn't Catholic, none of your brothers or sisters are Catholic so I can't really baptize you. You see, I am responsible to God for children I baptize, and you are just a little fellow so we'll put it off until you are twelve or thirteen and know your own mind better.' 'Fada, you mean I can't receive Jesus?' And a couple of tears began trickling over his cheeks. My heart melted. 'Well, Leonard, I'll tell you what I'll do just for you. Since I know Jesus wants to come to you because you love Him so much I'll make a special deal. If you come to instruction class at 7:30 every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evening for six months, I will baptize you.' I thought I was getting myself off the hook because what kid would ever do that? A bright smile appeared on his face and he said, 'Thanks, Fada, I'll be there.'
Sure enough, the months went by and Leonard never missed. His bright, alert mind easily excelled the adults who came to instructions after a long day’s work and who were a bit tired. One night it was cold (about 60°). Class started, and Leonard wasn’t there. I breathed a sigh of relief because I didn’t really feel I should baptize him. Halfway through the class, Leonard came in wearing his mother’s coat dragging on the ground. He sat down, threw the coat off, and alertly began answering questions. I found out later that his mother had told him he couldn’t come because he didn’t have a coat, so he asked her if he could wear hers. She said yes, never dreaming that he would take her up on it. But Leonard was determined to become a Catholic. At the appointed time, I did baptize him with all kinds of threats of what would happen to him if he weren’t faithful. To go to Mass on Sunday at any of the other churches without shoes was entirely inconceivable. But Leonard never missed a day, Sunday or weekday, even though he was completely unshod. This little lad became a daily communicant and still is today at age forty. Not only did he attend, as did so many of the others, daily Mass, but he always would be found at church at the evening services. We were a praying people, and the rosary was recited every evening in church before the other services.

The Bahamians are an absolutely charming people. Politeness, gentleness and consideration were inculcated in the family. If I wanted my forty to fifty altar boys to straighten up and behave, all I had to say was, ‘You want people to think we ain’t got no manners?’ A little boy would come in after Mass and say over and over, ‘I goin’, Fada. I goin’, Fada.’ Father Frederic explained to me that what he was really doing was asking permission to leave.

The British influence of courtesy was most noticeable. You never referred to anyone by his Christian name in public. He was always referred to as ‘Mr.’ or ‘Miss.’ It was delightful hearing people hail each other in the street, ‘How you do?’ and the cheerful answer, ‘Awright.’ It was Fr. John Cass who pointed out to me that Bahamians ended their sentences with an upward cadence which gave their conversation an unusually cheerful lilt. They were and are deeply religious, with an ever abiding awareness of the presence of God. Very few Bahamians would ever say, ‘I’ll see you tomorrow,’ without adding ‘God spare life.’ A sort of practical morality was worked out; for example, the distinction between necessary and unnecessary lies. A necessary lie is one you tell to get yourself or somebody else out of trouble. I’m afraid that being under oath didn’t matter all that much because God would surely understand.

It has often been said that in the Bahamas couples live together in illicit unions without any awareness of doing anything wrong. I disagree completely. There was a deep awareness that it was wrong; it’s just that the Bahamian was most honest about acknowledging such a relationship. Illegitimacy was rife. Easily 75 percent of the children baptized in those days were born out of wedlock. Many got the impression that illegitimacy left no stigma, but, again, I disagree. The difference, again, was there was a more honest approach regarding who was ‘inside’ and who was ‘outside’ the blanket. The sins against nature were unheard of. It would simply never occur to any Bahamian to solve a problem by resorting to abortion. There is a deep love for children, and no child, even if his parents are dead, is without a home. The poor look after their own. I remember one old lady named Harriet whom I always had to check each month to find
out where she was living so I could bring Communion to her the next morning. She would live in one house until she became irritated with the people in that house, and then would move to another home and find a little corner where she could sleep, always on the floor. It was characteristic in those days for a little shack, 20 x 20, to house as many as ten people.

In spite of the lack of sanitary facilities, the Bahamians are an amazing­ly clean people. Children would be assigned to sweep the dirt in front of the house before going to school. Of course, there were many blatant exceptions to this rule. The Bahamians have a special penchant for clothes. They appear at Mass on Sunday in the most attractive attire, so attractive that you wonder where on earth they keep it at home since there seemed to be no closet space. For a people who are too poor for the most part to own their own property, clothing became a status symbol. They save and buy the most expensive material and then have the local tailors, who are excellent, make them suits or dresses. Seldom would you hear a child cry in church, even if a three year old were being looked after by his five year old sister.

From the very beginning, the Sisters of Charity and the Benedictines aimed toward an indigenous clergy. Sister Agatha drilled many hours after school to make it possible for Arthur Barnett to receive a scholarship to Government High. I later helped to get him to St. John’s University. In 1937, Father Bonaventure established the Sisters of Blessed Martin de Porres. Sister Josephine Rosaire, Sister Agatha and the Charity sisters cooperated with Father Bonaventure in trying to get this new community on its feet. Because the Sisters of Charity were a diocesan group, it was said that it was not possible for them to incorporate the Bahamian found­ation. So, for a long time our Bahamian community was independent, with the bishop as the major superior. A decretum laudis was obtained from Rome. Their rule was a hodgepodge of Benedictinism with the customs of the Sisters of Charity. This very naturally happened because the Charity sisters knew only their own rule. It seems ironic at this point that our Bahamian Catholics were wondering when ‘our Sisters’ were going to become sisters, because at that time they were wearing a sort of nurse’s attire. Happy was the day when our Bahamian sisters appeared in the long grey skirts with cape and traditional coif and veil. It’s ironic, because today what sister wants to be caught dead dressed that way.

When St. Augustine’s Monastery and College started, their main purpose was to provide education for possible future vocations to the priesthood and religious life. In the meantime, I was able to obtain scholar­ships at St. John’s University in Minnesota and St. Benedict’s College in Kansas for several of our Bahamian young men. At least four or five leading citizens today are ex-novices or ex-seminarians.

I myself received into the Church Arthur Chapman and arranged that he go to the Beda in Rome. What a happy day it was when our first diocesan priest was ordained at St. Francis Cathedral. I also received into the Church young Charles Coakley, and it was even a happier day when he came back to be ordained as our first colored Bahamian diocesan priest. From my parish also came Fathers Boswell Davis, Bonaventure Dean, and Leander Thompson, O.S.B. Perhaps it was my sin of pride in them that brought about the later tragedies. Particularly joyful was the ordination of Fr. Preston Moss, diocesan Bahamian, whom I had instructed and received into the Church while he was still a student at St. John’s Anglican High School in Nassau.
I know it has been said that our Bahamian priests were not allowed to advance. This is completely untrue. Fr. Coakley was sent to St. Louis University to get a master's degree in social work with the intention that he would come back and head such a department in the Bahamas. He was made vice chancellor when I was chancellor of the diocese. He was my assistant at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral, and the plan was that he should not only become pastor of the cathedral but also chancellor. That he never achieved these goals was due to circumstances not in the control of diocesan officials.

Fr. Bonaventure became the first prior of the independent St. Augustine's Monastery. If at some time some of the younger Bahamian priests chaffed under the rod of discipline, it was precisely the same sort of discipline that myself and all the priests received when we were that young. It's the same sort of direction that anyone new in any profession, I would think, would expect and want. I suppose it's typical of the young to think that they know everything. At least I for one am glad that I was protected from my own stupidity, even though as I look back on it now, I realise I thought I knew everything and was God's gift to the people. I am grateful that those in charge curbed my enthusiasm.

The convent of Bahamian sisters ultimately became independent. It became obvious to all that the community was too young and without tradition to go it alone. Most worrying of all, it was becoming racially segregated, as there were no white candidates. As chancellor, I assisted the bishop in efforts to interest the Dominicans, then the Franciscans, to incorporate our local community with their community. Ultimately, the Benedictines of St. Joseph, Minnesota, under the leadership of Mother Henrita Osendorf, O.S.B., came to our aid, and amalgamation was achieved. Immediately, many of our local sisters were sent to school in Minnesota, and several white Benedictine sisters came to the Bahamas. History indicates a most sincere effort by all concerned to develop a Bahamian clergy and religious.

I do know that it was the bishop's plan to make Fr. Bonaventure his vicar general; he even circularized the whole diocese—priests, religious, and lay advisors—toward this end, with the obvious intention that Fr. Bonaventure would become the first Bahamian bishop. Had Father Coakley not sought laicization, he also would have been a candidate for the bishopric. 'What more can I do that I have not done,' might be applied.

Whether it was the fault of the training at St. John's Seminary in Collegeville, or whether it was just a sign of the times, it was absurd that a young man such as Fr. Prosper Burrows, O.S.B., should, within a year of ordination, undertake to reform the Church. Certainly no one of us older priests would have dared even suggest such a thing.

It is easy enough today for people to forget the problems of the priest. In 1940, although the Anglican Church had been disestablished, it was in effect the established Church. With the war on, all Bahamians became loyal British subjects, and rightly so. The Church of England became a vehicle for the expression of this loyalty. Because some of our priests were of German-American background, on at least two occasions Anglican ministers questioned their loyalty to the allied cause.

It was almost a pattern that on the out islands the local commissioner was also the Anglican catechist. Since the commissioner was 'king, judge, and government,' he had it in his power, and he did not fail to use it, to
make it abundantly clear that if someone wanted work on the road, it would help a lot if he were a member of the Church of England. In small isolated communities, this power became an iron grip against which our priests and Catholics had to struggle. With improved communications and transportation, this situation has changed drastically. But it was a real obstacle up to fifteen years ago.

St. Francis Xavier Academy provided a very good grade and high school education. These students were almost exclusively white for the simple reason that at that time Bahamians could not afford private school fees and most certainly were not particularly interested in anything more than a sixth grade education. Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., insisted on colored children being admitted as soon as they were even remotely qualified. It must be remembered that parochial schools charged no fees, or, if they did, never collected them. During this period the illusion 'the Catholic Church is rich' became widespread.

In the beginning, the Church's largess in the field of education and outright donations in kind and money was taken for granted. But as time has gone on, the average Bahamian knows full well that the Catholic Church fought to give them education when even the government didn't and very often in spite of the government. Whenever the Church wanted to buy property for a school, the price of that property suddenly became prohibitive. St. Augustine's Monastery exists today only because Father Bonaventure was a shrewd real estate operator. Father Bonaventure discovered that the property was owned by some Bahamians living in Miami. He flew to Miami, clinched the deal, bought and paid for the entire tract of land where St. Augustine's is now located. It was done so quickly that there was no time for anyone in Nassau to stop the deal, as they most certainly would and could have done.

Within the past ten or fifteen years the Bahamian has suddenly got the message that an education is important and necessary. Parents now see that their children not only go to school, but get there on time. Twenty years ago it would have been absolutely impossible to introduce uniforms into any school. Today parents are happy to cooperate and have even begun to pay school fees.

I must say a word about Aquinas College. Bishop Leonard, whose record as an apostolic administrator is well-known, was determined that since Xavier College and St. Augustine's insisted on standards that made it impossible for the majority to enter these schools, another school should be founded to take care of 'late starters' and some of those not so qualified. He appealed to the Dominicans of Adrian, Michigan, and Mother Gerald Barry answered his appeal. The bishop was able to get property, formerly a nightclub, for the convent and school. Sister Jean Patricia, O.P., a dauntless, capable pioneer, arrived, much to the envy of the Sisters of Charity. Against all sorts of discouragement, Sister Jean started Aquinas College on a shoestring, providing not only academic subjects, but also typing and stenography. In my opinion, this school has filled a most important function for the community and for the Church. Bishop Leonard is truly a miracle man when it comes to scrounging money at a time when there is very little.

Andrew Curry, now headmaster at Aquinas College, was another vocation from my parish who went to St. John's Seminary to study for the diocesan priesthood. Within one month of ordination he was dismissed from that seminary as 'lacking priestly qualities.' I don't think Andrew
feels bitter about that but I must confess I do. Andrew has proven himself a loyal son of the Church. Sister Jean Patricia saw his potential and immediately hired him ten or twelve years ago, and the rest of Andrew's story is well-known. Andrew is doing an absolutely marvelous job as headmaster in administering Aquinas College. In the words of one of his staff, Basil Christie, 'Aquinas College is the kind of a school I love to teach in. Our headmaster treats teachers and students as human beings with warm sympathy, yet with strict discipline. It is a school with a heart.' Andrew has continued as organist and choir director at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral. Years ago when I started the choir at St. Francis, Andrew was so tiny that someone else had to pump the organ for him while he played. He has perfect pitch and unusual musical ability. He has sacrificed many hours in the service of our cathedral. How he does it, I'll never know, but he has found the time to head the steering committee for the first general assembly of the diocese—a most demanding task. Furthermore, he occupied the chair for all the assembly meetings, and did it with outstanding ability, patience, kindness and charity. His wife must be a saint because she sacrifices him so generously for the Church.

As I approached my silver jubilee year, I discovered that lots of 'side jobs' had become mammoth. I was rector of the cathedral, chancellor and officials of the dioceses, (I had been sent away for two years of study at the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., 1956 to 1958, for a canon law degree. I was superintendent of schools, in charge of the leper colony, in charge of the radio apostolate which I had started at the request of Bishop Leonard, and director of information. I knew that this couldn't continue indefinitely, so it was no great surprise to me when the bishop called to ask if I would go to Freeport, Grand Bahama. I discovered later, however, that my absolutely uncanny ability to earn the dislike and jealousy of many, helped to spark this move to get me out of Nassau. However this may be, it was a very happy move for me personally, although not an easy one, since twenty-five years of calling Nassau home and its people my people made the wrench extremely difficult.

My first serious job in Freeport was to supervise the removal of the Franciscan sisters as staff from the local hospital. It was a most embarrassing, difficult task, details of which must be recorded elsewhere. The port authorities had provided Mary Star of the Sea School with facilities which today number twenty-three classrooms, a convent and hall which we used as a church. I cannot be too high in my praise of Sister Mary Alice, O.S.F., superior and headmistress of the convent and school for her administrative ability in handling 700 school children, representing at least thirty-eight different national and racial backgrounds, handling the parents of such a diverse group, and staff hiring from England, Ireland, Scotland, Canada and the United States. But more than this, it has meant so much to me to have been always sure of her loyal affection, cooperation and friendship. I simply could not have endured without her, and I tremble for the day when someone else tries to fill her shoes. It will be a hard day for the pastor, too.

The expatriate population provided the majority of the parishioners seven years ago and they were rather a selfish group. Because they knew that Mr. Rand (now deceased) had donated $50,000 for a new church at Mary Star, they felt that the church should be started immediately, I assured them that such was not to be the case. They had come here and found a
good Catholic school and adequate church hall at absolutely no expense to themselves. Before they would get a church, they would have to show their love of God and the Church. This our parish has done by providing $40,000 toward building St. Agnes Church, rectory and clinic at Seagrape on land donated by Mrs. Georgette Groves. They have supplied the $35,000 required to establish St. Leonard’s Mission at High Rock, thirty-five miles east. Mary Star parish includes seventy-five miles out to the eastern end of the island. In addition, the parish has been most generous to every worthy cause and has made monthly contributions to the bishop’s school fund. The splendid lay advisory committee helped provide the expertise and financial acumen required to buy our rectory annex, a duplex about 400 yards from the rectory proper, for the unbelievably low price of $45,000 furnished. Mrs. Pauline Skipwith provided the money whereby the tiny rectory was doubled in size. The building still provides the parish office and living quarters for the pastor.

The same committee astounded the pastor when it announced to him that something in the neighborhood of $275,000 was in the bank earmarked by donors for a future church. Much criticism has been levelled against our parish with Judas’s question, ‘Why this waste? Should not this have been sold and the money given to the poor?’ Two-thirds of the sum of $400,000 ultimately required was donated by Protestant donors for the one specific purpose—not the Catholic Church, but for a new church building for Freeport. All of this money was donated specifically from second collections, bazaars, etc. for a new church. It is a great tribute to the people of the parish and of Freeport that Mary Star of the Sea Church stands today.

The annual reports from the vicariate of the Bahamas to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith evidenced a steady growth and development. Census figures revealed that Catholics had increased by 86 percent in a ten year period, 1944 to 1954. By 1960 they were 20,000 in number. The rapid development of parochial and educational centers, diversification of personnel beyond the Benedictine base among priests and religious, the extension of social and medical services all indicated the progress. Cardinal Pietro Fumasoni-Biondi, prefect of Propaganda, always had a personal interest in the Bahamas going back to his term as apostolic delegate to the United States. When Bishop Leonard made his ad limina visit and report to Propaganda in 1959, the cardinal told him that because of this progress the consultors of Propaganda had decided to recommend to Pope John XXIII to establish a diocese in the Bahamas.

The Catholic mission in the Bahamas had at first a vicar forane as appointed from the archdiocese of New York. Then a prefect apostolic and successively a vicar apostolic with the title of bishop had developed. Each of these titles for the superior of the mission represented a maturing process. While both Bishops Bernard and Leonard were ordained bishops, the diocese itself had not been established. Bishop Leonard responded to Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi that the Bahamas was not ready as yet to be
self-sufficient as a diocese. The cardinal smiled and said, “If self-support were the criteria over half of the now existing dioceses could not qualify.” The progress and potential for the future were the bases for the decision to establish a diocese, the traditional local community of the people of God with their own bishop in communion with the Pope and other bishops who held that communion.

On the evening of 11 December 1960 the vicariate of the Bahamas became a diocese and Bishop Paul Leonard was installed as its first ordinary. Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi, apostolic delegate to the United States, officiated on the occasion which brought many old friends of the Bahamas to Nassau. Vagnozzi commended the clergy, religious and laity on the apostolic work done in the Bahamas during the past generations. In a somewhat quizzical vein he turned to Bishop Leonard and referred to the bishop’s position as being rather unusual because, as was stated in the document from Rome which the chancellor, Father Brendan, had just read to the congregation, the new diocese was still under the care and guidance of the Benedictines. Bishop Leonard, in turn, gave the credit to the priests, religious and laity who had labored so hard in the past seventy years to build the Lord’s house. Especially, he stated, the lives of the Catholic people were the real testimony to the faith that had been planted and matured.

It was an interesting codicil of the document from the Pope that the Benedictines still had the care and guidance of the new diocese. It was, undoubtedly, an effort on the part of Propaganda to insure continued personnel and material support from St. John’s Abbey as well as not to break off all relations of the past. St. John’s did continue to send $5,000 annually, did contribute $222,000 to the building of St. Augustine’s Monastery and College, did send priests and brothers to work in the Bahamas. Fr. André Brissett, O.S.B., for example, came in the early 1960’s and worked for ten years in Bimini and Andros Islands. But in the future a diocesan clergy was more and more fostered by Bishop Leonard.

As had happened so often, the Benedictines came to an area, developed Christian life among the people and tried by every means to build up an indigenous community for its own future. Bishop Leonard was acting in an ancient tradition in working for a broadly based Catholic life in the new diocese. Archbishop Leo Binz of Dubuque, Iowa, in his dinner address on that occasion, sketched a picture of two streams, the history of St. Benedict’s monasteries from the sixth century and that of the Dubuque Archdiocese where Bishop Paul Leonard’s home town of Greene, Iowa, was located. Binz stated that the two streams converged in the Bahamas. That evening all gratefully recalled the diverse traditions that had converged on the Bahamas to make those family islands the
locus of multiple influences enriching the diverse peoples who lived in this beautiful and peaceful area.

Fr. Arthur Chapman, an Anglican convert of Father Brendan in 1949 who had been in the RAF in the Bahamas, was the first diocesan priest of the Bahamas, ordained during the Easter vigil service in St. Francis Xavier Cathedral in 1955. Others such as Fathers Thomas Lavelle from New York, Peter LeVierge from England, John Prinzing from Minnesota, Ben Collins from Michigan, Patrick Holmes from Long Island, New York, and Joseph Perna from San Francisco followed in the 1960's. At St. Augustine's Monastery the efforts of Prior Frederic and the Benedictines who established that institution from the 1940's to the 1960's began to bear fruit with the ordination of the first Bahamian priest, Fr. Charles Coakley by Bishop Leonard on 24 June 1960.

Fr. Magnus Wenninger, O.S.B., veteran member of St. Augustine's Monastery, explains the development of that institution from its beginnings in 1947:

The history of St. Augustine's Monastery is so closely intertwined with that of St. Augustine's College that it is impossible to distinguish the two especially at the beginning. Obviously all the teachers were Benedictines and so the story of the school and of the monastery begin together.

St. Augustine's School, as it was then called, opened its doors to its first students on 4 January 1945. The building was a small two-story house known as 'The Niche' and located in The Priory's yard. There were only 35 boys chosen from 97 applicants who had come to St. Benedict's Hall in December, 1944, to take entrance examinations. This same careful screening of applicants for admission has remained the established policy to this day. Besides the headmaster, Father Frederic, there were three other teachers, Fathers Hubert Dahlheimer and Alto Butkowski, O.S.B., and Br. Barnabas McClatchy, O.S.B. The course of studies was limited to an academic program for Forms I, II, III. In his announcement published in the press the headmaster stated, 'It will be the aim of the school to equip its students with the knowledge required to comply with the recognized educational standards of British and American universities and colleges. At the same time, special emphasis will be given to the development of a thoroughly Christian character.'

In 1946 plans were already taking shape for the transfer of the school to its location on Fox Hill. Building operations began 8 April 1946. The site was blessed by Bishop Bernard on 12 April 1946, and on July 11 of the same year the cornerstone was blessed and laid by Bishop Stephen A. Donahue, auxiliary bishop of New York. On 13 January 1947 the first classes were conducted in the new building which then became officially known as St. Augustine's College. The enrollment was 50 boys. Abbot Alcuin came from Minnesota on 12 March 1947, and solemnly blessed and dedicated both the school and the monastery buildings, the latter not quite ready for occupancy at that time.

I arrived in the Bahamas 31 August 1946. My ordination as a priest took place on 2 September 1945. Abbot Alcuin already then had appointed me to teach in the new school. But I was sent first to the University of
Building the new St. Augustine's second addition of college buildings.

The school was dedicated in April, 1966, by Abbot Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B., Governor Sir Ralph Grey, Bishop Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., Mr. Si Amoury, chairman of the board of lay advisors, Mrs. Amoury, Mr. A. Grieg, ministry of education, Honorable Godfrey Kelly, minister of education.
Father Frederic had a dream.

Fr. Theophile Brown, O.S.B., headmaster of St. Augustine's, Mrs. Leslie Johnson, coordinator; Sister Regina, deputy headmistress.
Ottawa in Canada for studies to obtain a British degree. I completed the requirements for the master of arts in philosophy in June, 1946. So when I arrived in Nassau I lived first at The Priory and taught the fall term of 1946 in The Niche. The teaching staff by then had already been augmented and there were some changes in personnel. Father Alto was appointed to the missions on Andros Island and Brother Barnabas had left. Fr. Ephraem Kaufman, O.S.B., arrived from St. John's Abbey in April, 1946. Fr. Elias Achatz, O.S.B., and I came from Minnesota together, so he was on the teaching staff for the fall term in 1946.

In January, 1947, Father Frederic and the school staff, composed of Fathers Hubert, Elias, Ephraem and myself, began to live at The Hermitage, which at that time was not yet the bishop's residence. The monastery building was not yet ready for occupancy. 13 January 1947, is still vivid in my memory—how the four of us travelled the thirteen turns on Johnson Road from The Hermitage to the Fox Hill site. We had an army surplus Chevrolet car, while Father Frederic had already gone ahead on his Norman motorcycle. Actually the new school was not really ready for occupancy either, but we were determined to occupy it. There was no electricity, no telephone, no running water and no doors or windows. Gas lamps provided light for supervised study from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m., and on cold, windy or stormy days we simply dismissed classes. By August, 1947, the monastery building was 'ready' in much the same sense as the school was in January, except that we did have doors and windows. Again the occasion of our moving from The Hermitage to the monastery, 7 August 1947, is vivid in my memory, especially the darkness and the silence of that first night in the new monastery.

Prior Frederic guided the new community in the recognized pattern of monastic observance. This was his aim in establishing the monastery. The full liturgy of divine worship was daily celebrated beginning with Lauds and Prime in the morning after the 5:00 a.m. Angelus bell. Then came the community or conventual Mass followed by private Masses before 7:00 a.m. breakfast. The chapel was then in what Fra Jerome, the hermit of Cat Island, designed to be the monastic chapter room on the second floor above the main entrance. The community assembled again before lunch at 12:00 noon for the little hours. Vespers came before supper at 6:00 p.m. and Matins with Compline at 7:30 p.m. after evening recreation. Work on the site of the future monastic church was begun in the summer, 1949. The crypt chapel was completed in 1951, at which time the chapter room became a dormitory for postulants and junior brothers. The monastic church to this day has never been completed. The chapel still is the focal point of community worship while the chapter room is indeed for community meetings as well as recreation.

Over the years the horarium has seen some changes, but it was and still is the policy of St. Augustine's Monastery as a community to render to God due worship in common. Duties involving outside activities, whether in school or otherwise in parochial and social services, often did and still do prevent some members from community prayer. But the community as a whole takes the responsibility upon itself to maintain this authentic form of witness to the priority of the spiritual in our lives. External forms can change and have changed over the years, just as changes have come to the Catholic Church at large. But basically the community can never abandon its life of communal worship without ceasing to exist. Gregorian chant at
Mass and Vespers was frequently sung in the early days, especially on great feasts. The crypt chapel was blessed by the prior, Father Frederic, on 29 June 1951, and dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A shrine of Our Lady of Fatima stands on the hillside just outside the chapel. This shrine was dedicated 15 May 1949, by Bishop Bernard, feeble as he was at the time, in the presence of about 500 people who came in spite of a drizzling rain. In June, 1951, people from all over Nassau turned out to welcome the Pilgrim Statue on its arrival at Oakes Field Airport. A procession featuring six floats drew a crowd numbering thousands. A few days later a torchlight procession accompanied the statue from St. Anselm's Church in Fox Hill to the newly completed crypt chapel of the monastery. Devotion to the Mother of God is also evidenced in the dedication of St. Mary's Hall, when the cornerstone was laid 8 December 1953.

One of the express purposes that Father Frederic had in mind in establishing St. Augustine's Monastery and College was to foster vocations to the religious life and the priesthood among young Bahamian people. How this came to realization is a story that can be told only in statistics, but the deeper aspects necessarily must remain as profoundly hidden as the personal choice and interior attraction that drew those who responded. The first brother candidate entered the monastery on 29 April 1951. I vividly recall how the community sang a *Te Deum* in thanksgiving after the Saturday evening rosary and benediction that we had in those years. This weekly devotion was expressly held to pray for vocations. Another candidate came a week later, but neither lasted out that summer. It was 6 January, that the first investiture of a brother candidate took place. John Hall began his year of novitiate as Brother Alcuin. On March 23 John Humes was invested as Brother Bede. Then on November 16 Jonathan Baker became Brother Cuthbert. These brothers along with two others from Minnesota who were also candidates were engaged almost exclusively in farm work. They had their own oratory in the sacristy near the entrance to the crypt chapel where they prayed their short breviary in English while the fathers prayed in Latin. But the community Mass was celebrated together. None of these three first Bahamian brothers completed his year of novitiate. The first Bahamian brother to pronounce his triennial vows was Br. David (Anthony) Mather, O.S.B., from Harbour Island, 2 June 1954. He was shortly thereafter joined by Br. Edmund (Stanley) Walters, O.S.B., from Jamaica. Both brothers left after completing their triennial vows. Br. Gregory (Harcourt) Taylor, O.S.B., became the first Bahamian brother to pronounce perpetual vows, 17 September 1960. He was followed by Br. Henry (Raymond) Neeley, O.S.B. Brothers Ignatius (Paul) Dean and Joseph (Lyle) Darville, O.S.B., also made perpetual vows but left in 1969 with proper dispensation. Br. Luke (Felix) Taylor, O.S.B., is also now a member of the community in temporary vows, but with him the flow of Bahamian vocations to the brotherhood has ceased.

Vocations to the priesthood among Bahamian Benedictines came to fruition in the person of Fr. Boswell (Ambrose) Davis, O.S.B. He was ordained by Bishop Leonard at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral on 24 June 1960. Fr. Alvin (Roy) Fong Ben, O.S.B., came originally from Jamaica, and after teaching a year at St. Augustine’s (1952-53), completed his studies for the priesthood in Minnesota. He was soon joined by other Bahamian clerical candidates all of whom were trained at St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota, Fathers Leander (Maxwell) Thompson, Bonaventure (John) Dean,
Cletus (Wendel) Edgecombe and Prosper (Leslie) Burrows, O.S.B., Others studied for a while but then decided not to continue. But with the ordination of Father Prosper, the flow of Bahamian vocations to the priesthood has now ceased.

The history of the past always suggests thoughts about the future, but of course the future remains inscrutable. One of the greatest problems facing the community today is to attract young Bahamians to come forward to dedicate their lives now as others have in the past. Have the times so changed that religious life has no future in the Bahamas? I believe there is a future.

Although Father Frederic was primarily an educator, he considered agricultural pursuits well within the province of monastic activities. In this area, however, he delegated the overall planning and implementation of this venture to Fr. Ephraem Kaufman, O.S.B. A vegetable garden had already been chopped out of the hard stony ground at the foot of the monastery hill by Br. Anselm Schlosser, O.S.B., during the summer, 1946. Brother Anselm was already a well known figure at The Priory where he lived with the other Benedictine missionaries from his arrival in 1934 until he moved to the monastery in 1947. He then became the gardener and continued his faithful work until his death on 23 November 1952, having given to all of us here an example of the Benedictine motto: Pray and Work.

Along with the garden project Father Ephraem procured a herd of milk goats. Six thoroughbred French Alpines arrived from Texas in May, 1948. A goat shelter was completed adjoining the garden and a tin shed was set up to house feed and equipment. By 1951 Father Ephraem was marketing goats’ milk locally. Br. Benedict Nordick, O.S.B., arrived from Minnesota to take charge of the work. In December, 1951, a goat barn was built on a ridge beyond the garden. However, after a few years it became apparent that the goat farm was difficult to maintain although the final decision to sell the herd was not reached until 1958.

In 1955 Father Ephraem obtained help from generous benefactors to build and equip a cold storage plant for frozen foods and vegetables. The refrigeration plant began operating 19 March 1955. Br. Charles Kirchner, O.S.B., took charge of the gardening and landscaping after the death of Brother Anselm, and under his direction the vegetable garden was greatly enlarged. It was Father Ephraem’s belief that the monastery could never hope to become self-supporting financially on the school alone, but that agricultural undertakings were very much needed. So in 1957 an extensive clearing was made for a citrus orchard. Wells were drilled and an electric power line was installed for pumps to provide irrigation. By 1959 a new road was cut from the school sports field past the goat barn which had now become a cow barn. This road skirted the ridge on its south side and continued all the way to the southeastern corner of the monastery property line. A large area was then ripped by bulldozers to provide pasture land for cows and beginnings of an avocado orchard. The rock by-product of this land was sold as fill or road topping. At this time Father Ephraem introduced certified citrus stock from Florida and had a well drilling rig dig holes for soil and the trees were planted. In May, 1959, a farm tractor was purchased along with required attachments. In December, 1960, a farm equipment building was completed and in March, 1961, bulldozers dug pit wells for drainage purposes and for irrigation in the area west and south of
the garden. Brother Charles returned to St. John’s in 1961 and Br. Urban Pieper, O.S.B., assumed his duties. Meanwhile Father Ephraem also introduced other merchandising ventures: the production of ice cream, monastery bread and honey.

Father Ephraem was also interested in flowering bushes and trees. He had planned to set out various kinds of trees along the entire south boundary of the monastery property as well as along the boundary west of the sports field. But 1963 marked the end of Father Frederic’s term as prior and under the new prior, Father Silvan, the community decided to concentrate all its efforts on the college and to give up the agricultural ventures. Father Ephraem then returned to St John’s Abbey in May, 1964, after eighteen years of devoted service to the prosperity of St. Augustine’s Monastery. He will long be remembered in the Bahamas not merely for his interest in agriculture and its relation to monastic life, but perhaps even more as a very well liked and successful history teacher and the spiritual director of many residents.

The gradual installation of utilities over the years may be of some interest. Electric power from our own generator provided lights for the school and monastery for the first time on 23 April 1948. The first telephone was installed and ready for use on 24 August 1950. Electrical power from the Bahamas Electric Corporation came for the first time on 8 March 1951. Our own generator was then retained for emergencies. Three telephone extension lines, all in the monastery, went into use on 26 January 1953. The school at that time had no telephone, and in fact never did during Father Frederic’s term as headmaster. Finally, it was not until March, 1961, that street lights appeared on Bernard Road, the road past the entrance to the monastery and college.

St. Augustine’s College held its first Speech Day exercises [graduation] on the evening of 18 February 1949, at St. Benedict’s Hall in The Priory’s yard. On March 21 of that year official notice came from England that all three candidates in the first graduating class had successfully passed the required subjects for the Cambridge School Certificate at the examinations given locally in December, 1948. They were Joseph Adderley, Charles Coakley and Wenzel Lightbourne. The school also was recognized by Cambridge University as qualified to receive the award of Certificate A for its successful candidates. The school program in those days was a rigorous one, as it had been from the beginning.

Once the crypt chapel was completed, students could attend daily Mass at 8:00 a.m. Classes began at 9:00 a.m. and continued until noon. Then there was a two and a half hour break during which students went home for lunch. Classes resumed at 2:30 p.m. and continued until 5:00 p.m. Then one hour was devoted to sports—cricket, basketball, softball, volleyball—directed by Father Elias. Supervised study for an hour and a half kept the students on campus until 8:00 p.m. Most students travelled back and forth from home to school by bicycle, but the school also had its own school bus built on the chassis of a Ford truck. Mr. Gene Roberts was the driver, assisted sometimes by Fathers Elias and Ephraem or even by Father Frederic himself. It went out of use in 1952. It is now often said that the school schedule of those early days at St. Augustine’s was equivalent to having a boarding school horarium in connection with a day school setup—the school day lasted from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
In 1949, the second graduating class saw two students successfully pass the school certificate examinations. They were Tex Lunn and James Thompson. And so it continued, year after year, small classes with very nearly 100 percent successful results. Father Frederic's aims were slowly but surely realized.

In the summer, 1952, ground was broken for the auditorium building and its sub-floors. Excavations on the hillside west of the existing school building were done entirely by setting off small dynamite charges, then by pick and shovel work. Father Frederic directed the project, members of the community worked along with hired help. I in particular enjoyed this form of physical exercise and I became known as a prodigious worker. The work lasted a full year. Often I spent my Saturday afternoons working alone loading the dump truck, enjoying the quiet peaceful surroundings, thankful for the privilege of helping literally in laying new foundations for St. Augustine's. In July, 1953, the first concrete was poured for the foundations of this new building and on December 8 the cornerstone was laid by Bishop Leonard and the building was designated as St. Mary's Hall. In January, 1954, the roof beams were hoisted into place and on March 5 of that year the Speech Day program was held for the first time at St. Augustine's College in the new hall, as yet unfinished since the facade was still to be done.

On 6 January 1955, the new school year opened with 95 students enrolled. St. Mary's Hall was used for general assembly and studyhall. New desks were installed for this purpose. Some renovation of existing classroom space changed the arrangement of the older classroom wing. A school cafeteria was opened on the second sub-floor below St. Mary's Hall. The school library was also moved into the first sub-floor, adjoining a mathematics lab on one side and a biology lab on the other. During the summer, 1955, the hall was given a terrazzo tile floor, the interior completed, the hillside landscaped, a retaining wall and parking lot laid out and a flagpole was placed in front of the hall.

Meanwhile Xavier College was also expanding. On 1 August 1954, Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., blessed the new site directly behind the old St. Francis Xavier Academy. When Xavier College was ready the academy building was torn down. The new building was solemnly dedicated and blessed by Samuel Cardinal Stritch of Chicago on 5 February 1956. Xavier College features later in the history of St. Augustine's College.

During the years that Father Frederic was headmaster, he made special efforts to provide the school with a first-rate sports field and athletic facilities. Already in the summer, 1948, the original clearing at the bottom of the hill to the south of the school was further extended, two basketball courts were surfaced with blacktop and a cricket pitch was laid out. By March, 1956, a quarter-mile track was laid out, the first of its kind on the island. Here also I have vivid recollections of the many hours of work I myself put in on the sports field and track, cutting the bush, chopping the rock, hauling the fill, raking and smoothing the surface. With the completion of the track, the retaining walls around the basketball area were constructed. The crowning result of all this activity was manifestly evident when the Headmaster's Annual Sports Meet was held for the first time at St. Augustine's Sports Field on 15 June 1956. The event proved to be a great success, as St. Augustine's captured prize honors in competition with
other high schools in Nassau. Over the years St. Augustine’s has captured many trophies and has always been a keen rival for leadership in sports.

St. Mary’s Hall was given an artistic touch by the mosaic concrete plaque placed over the entrance and by the addition of a large mural painted on the back wall behind the stage. This work as well as the mosaic concrete pieces in the lower corridor of the monastery building were done by John Harri of New York during the spring and summer, 1958, while he was a guest of the monastery. St. Mary’s Hall was at the time the largest auditorium on the island. The first stage play was a student performance of Shakespeare’s Macbeth under the direction of Father Elias on 9 May 1958. Lighting and costumes were very effective. This was followed by a talent show and the proceeds were used to purchase a new piano. Fr. Bartholomew Sayles, O.S.B., who joined the staff in September, 1957, had already organized a chorus.

St. Augustine’s held its first fair on 14 May 1959. The proceeds were to aid school scholarships and teachers’ salaries. Mr. Lou Adderley, an old scholar of St. Augustine’s, was the first layman to join the teaching staff. A new piano arrived for the school auditorium on 28 December 1959, and Father Bartholomew gave a piano recital that evening.

Expansion of the sports field area was again resumed in December, 1959, with more clearing west and south of the track. In February, 1961, a thatch-covered spectators’ stand was constructed and fencing installed. The sports meet that March was again a great success, even more so because of the improvements on the field.

At this time I spent four summers at Columbia Teachers College in New York to fulfill the requirements for a master of arts degree in teaching mathematics. By 1961 I had a fully equipped mathematics laboratory and I began to pursue my special interest in the theory and construction of polyhedron models. In 1966, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics accepted a booklet I had written on this topic for publication. A more detailed book on the same topic has been published by Cambridge University Press in 1970.

9 February 1962 saw the opening of a natural history museum housed in the biology laboratory. This project was under the direction of Mr. Robert Hanlon, graduate of St. John’s University, a very dynamic science teacher at St. Augustine’s from 1957 until his untimely death on 26 December, 1964. Mr. Hanlon took a keen interest in many scientific projects and in the civic community at large. He was given a special scouting award for meritorious conduct in aiding a student after a serious accident.

Father Frederic’s work and his influence on the growth and development of both the school and monastery cannot be given here in the detail they deserve. It must be said, however, that his influence and guidance were felt not only in the institution he headed but more widely in the whole educational world of the Bahamas. His services in the cause of education in the Bahamas received official recognition when on 12 April 1962, he received from the governor the medal and title of an Honorary Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (the O.B.E.). Father Frederic was not destined to live long in the light of this new glory. By the summer, 1963, his health had considerably deteriorated, but he continued to remain active. On 4 September 1963, Fr. Silvan Bromenshenkel, O.S.B., was appointed prior, but Father Frederic continued as headmaster. By October, however, his health was so broken that he went
to Minnesota for hospitalization. There he died on Christmas Day, 1963. Fr. Burton Bloms, O.S.B., was appointed to succeed him as headmaster.

With the death of Father Frederic closes what may be called the first chapter in the history of St. Augustine’s Monastery and College. A history of the Church in the Bahamas will never be complete unless it includes a detailed account of his accomplishments. Father Frederic was first and foremost an educator. By temperament and preference he believed that the primary apostolate of St. Augustine’s should be to train Bahamian leaders, with special emphasis on fostering a Bahamian priesthood and brotherhood. It is he who gave St. Augustine’s College such a definite orientation toward excellence in education that the future of the college as a school for leadership was clearly set. His spirit must live on.

To close this section I can do no more than name the other Benedictine priests who served on the teaching staff over the years: Ambrose Wittmann, O.S.B., 1948-58; Emmanuel Kelsch, O.S.B., 1948-57; Edmund Hall, O.S.B., 1948-52; Prosper Meyer, O.S.B., 1948-50; Casimir Mulloy, O.S.B., 1949-51 (St. Anselm’s Abbey, Manchester, New Hampshire); Blase Schumaker, O.S.B., 1951-54; Camillus Talafous, O.S.B., 1952-55; Aidan McCall, O.S.B., 1954-57; Peregrin Berres, O.S.B., 1957-63.

The three year period from 1964 to 1967 under Father Silvan as prior and Father Burton as headmaster saw remarkably rapid growth and expansion of the school. Already in January, 1964, the policy of accepting boarding school students was being discussed and plans were laid to open a boarding school for out island students in September that year. This meant building new classrooms. The community engaged Ross Hammond as architect and a comprehensive school complex was projected and the architect’s proposals became the subject of community discussion. The area east of the sports field and south of what used to be the garden was finally chosen as the site for a new set of classroom buildings. At the Speech Day program in June, 1964, Father Burton announced the building program, which called first for the completion of the sports building whose foundations had already been prepared by Father Frederic before his death. This sports building was then eventually dedicated to his memory. Next a library and administration building were proposed and three classroom buildings each with four classrooms. In September, 1964, the ground was cleared for the site. However, things moved slowly at first. A bit of uncertainty about the magnitude of the new venture caused some delay.

Abbot Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B., of St. John’s Abbey continued to keep the same keen interest in the welfare of the Bahamas that his predecessor Abbot Alcuin had shown. Even before he became abbot in 1950, he had already made several visits to Nassau and knew the situation firsthand. Early in 1965 the community came to a firm decision about the future development of St. Augustine’s. It was proposed that we expand the school and that the monastery should work toward achieving the status of an independent priory. This decision came on 26 January 1965 at a community meeting at which Abbot Baldwin was present.

By September, 1965, the first three classroom units were ready. The original school building on top of the hill was converted into guest rooms on the ground floor with dormitory space for boarding students on the second floor. A new wing was also added to the existing monastery building to provide space for a larger kitchen and monastic refectory. The first meal was served in the new monastic refectory on 7 March 1966.
Work began on a fourth classroom building and a swimming pool in front of the sports building during the summer, 1966. However it was on 19 April 1966 that the new school complex was solemnly blessed and dedicated in the presence of the governor of the Bahamas, Bishop Leonard, Abbot Baldwin and numerous friends and benefactors.

The next major decision that faced the community was that of merging Xavier College and St. Augustine’s into one combined high school. The question of independent status for the monastery came to a head at the same time. These two questions occupied the attention of the community early in 1967. Again the magnitude of this venture caused some hesitation. However, on March 16 a ground breaking ceremony heralded the successful completion of deliberations. The building of three more classroom units proceeded that summer. Meanwhile Abbot Baldwin received word from Rome that his petition requesting independent status for the monastery had been granted, as of 3 June 1967. The abbot arrived in Nassau to preside at the election of the first conventual prior. The election took place on June 21, and the choice of the community fell upon Fr. Bonaventure Dean, O.S.B. The new prior also once more assumed the position of headmaster. The presentation of the new prior and headmaster took place in a public ceremony on the school grounds September 15, when it was also announced that the combined St. Augustine’s and Xavier should henceforth be known simply as St. Augustine’s College.

The community then decided upon negotiating a loan from the Chase Manhattan Bank in Nassau to finance further building projects still sorely needed for the school. Two more classroom units were projected, one to house a larger staff room and to contain the fine arts, commercial and music classrooms. The second was designed for the science department. Finally a college cafeteria was planned. All these buildings were under construction in 1968 and they were blessed and dedicated on 6 January 1969. On March 21, the college cafeteria served meals for the first time. Finally, the roadway in front of the cafeteria and out to Prince Charles Highway to the south was opened and ready by April 2.

The school enrollment had now reached the imposing figure of just over 1,000 boys and girls, under the care of fifty teachers, obviously mostly laymen and women, from a variety of backgrounds, from Jamaica, England, United States, Canada and the Bahamas as well.

A levelling off point has been reached. The greatest need of the school at the present time is to consolidate its gains and to deepen its spirit to conform in every way to the excellence now achieved in the physical plant. This is the work that now lies before St. Augustine’s Monastery and College as it enters its second quarter century.11

Fr. Emmanuel Kelsch, O.S.B., and Fr. Silvan Bromenshenkel, O.S.B., add their impressions of life at St. Augustine’s Monastery during its formative years. Both priests were stationed there at the time and Father Silvan served as prior from 1964 to 1968:

1. Father Emmanuel:

In the Bahamas I never encountered what some have chosen today to designate as an identity crisis among religious and priests. Remarkably, everyone I met there, superiors, fellow priests, brothers and oblates, im-
pressed me with their quiet, steadfast dedication. In fact, their commitment
was an unending source of inspiration to me. It bolstered my morale, it
nourished pride in my being a Benedictine, it made obedience an ineffable
joy. It was my privilege to work twelve years in that vineyard of the Lord
at St. Augustine’s Monastery, perched as a beacon of divine light atop Fox
Hill, a mile from the native Sandilands Village, where Blacks whose
ancestors the Spaniards and English shanghaied into slavery chiefly from
the Gold Coast of West Africa, now live for the most part still in modest
small frame homes.

To illustrate the first impression of quiet, steadfast commitment the
lives of confreres made upon me whom I met in the archipelago of the
Bahamas, I recall here the original scene of my missionary apostolate
pivoting around St. Augustine’s Monastery and College.

As would naturally be expected, since the monks assigned to St.
Augustine’s were all capitulars of their mother abbey, St. John’s, College­
ville, Minnesota, itself a daughter of the ancient abbey of Metten on the
Danube in lower Bavaria, they were, with but two exceptions, of German
extraction.

There were eleven of us, eight fathers and three brothers, and there
was work a plenty for everyone, what with a monastery to care for, a
college to staff, and parishes on the island of New Providence in which to
assist, chiefly over weekends.

In stature, one of the smallest, though in dedication and accomplish­
ment a towering giant, Prior Frederic, was our religious superior, headmaster
of St. Augustine’s College, superintendent of grounds and maintenance of
the buildings, counsellor to the bishop, chaplain of Blessed Martin de Porres’
convent, brother master. I could go on, but from this you can see that
Father Prior had a good reason to do what he did: pack a valise, so that at
any moment he could pick it up and go anywhere, often on business trips
to the United States, sometimes to relieve priests in out island missions over
weekends, but mainly, I suspect, to enable him to cultivate a more relaxed
manner, ready as he then was for any emergency.

Assisting Father Prior was Fr. Ephraem, who was in effect our pro­
curator, but, for some reason, Father Prior declined to call him that, a fact
that irked Father Ephraem but may well have contributed to his humility.

Father Ephraem, a Jewish convert, who had an M.A. in government,
came to St. John’s from New York where he had worked for a time in the
retail clothing business. After his ordination in 1945, Abbot Alcuin, assigned
Father Ephraem to St. Augustine’s Monastery, confident that his scholastic
background, business experience, and native Jewish perspicacity, coupled
with his religious zeal, would enable him to make the contribution that he
subsequently did to St. Augustine’s in its formative years.

From the outset St. Augustine’s College, aimed to prepare its students
to pass the Cambridge Certificate Examination. No one worked harder than
Father Ephraem to groom students for these grueling tests, which covered
well the basic challenges inherent in secondary education—English, history,
mathematics, geography, and Scripture, to name the principal subjects. A
‘pass’ was tantamount to a senior’s graduation from St. Augustine’s College.

Once or twice a week Father Ephraem drove into Nassau proper, and
made the boring rounds of commercial calls to purchase supplies for the
monastery and college, always alert as diplomatically as he could to insinuate
a bargain, to save here and spend less there. Then, Father Ephraem regu-
larly drove the bus on weekday mornings to pick up students attending St. Augustine's College who had neither a free ride nor a bicycle to cycle to school and in the evening, home again after the 7:00 p.m. study hour.

Sunday mornings, together with us fathers assigned by Father Prior to assist at parishes in New Providence, Father Ephraem would go to one of them, in the early years to Sacred Heart, to help out Fr. George Wolf, O.S.B., who was then in charge of that parish. That was not all. In addition to his preparing for twenty-four to twenty-eight hours of teaching per week, Father Ephraem also took his regular turn at prefecting either during the day or in the evening or both. How he ever managed to prepare properly for his classes, prayerfully to outline his weekly homilies, and to keep his cool always remained somewhat of a mystery to me. But one thing was perfectly obvious. He was a stable, well balanced, dedicated monk, priest, educator, businessman, prefect and bus driver. If there was one thing that Father Ephraem never suffered from it was an identity crisis.

Next to Prior Frederic on the second floor of our monastic wing, in a cell no different from his, say 15 x 15 feet, lived one of the most jovial, pleasant men I have ever met, Fr. Prosper Meyer, O.S.B.

Father Prosper lived at St. Augustine's Monastery, but he actually was the assistant to Fr. Marcian Peters, O.S.B., who was in charge of Our Lady's Church in Youngtown, a suburb of Nassau.

Although Father Prosper's sight was not exactly 20-20, from Our Lady's Church he motorcycled slowly into Nassau each morning and evening on his British Small Arms machine. Indeed, sometimes he made the trip three or more times a day.

Virtually all the parishioners were Negroes. Father Prosper was a Negro, but his color was sufficiently light to discourage some Nassauveans from calling him a Negro. He enjoyed telling us that. Father Prosper was one of those rare observers who mastered the storytelling art early in life. Nothing escaped him, and what he noticed he could describe whimsically. We looked forward to his joining us in our noon or evening recreation get­togethers in the one unoccupied cell at the eastern end of the second floor on the monastic wing. His eyes sparkling, lips drawn above his buckteeth, smiling, his arms and hands gesturing, Father Prosper would launch into one of his tales, and his hearty chuckling was infectious.

'I was slowly driving out of The Priory yard after lunch today,' he recalled, 'and as I paused at the blind entrance to check the traffic, I saw this black man across the street, sitting in the sun on a stoop.' 'Hi, Man,' I called out to him. 'Whaddayadoin?' 'I'm working,' he called back. 'Doing what?' I shouted. 'Killin' time,' he answered, roaring with laughter. And we split our sides, too. Father Prosper was a great preacher, and he believed in salting his remarks with judicious Scriptural allusions.

In another respect, however, Father Prosper made a sacrifice that few fully appreciated. He was an assistant to Father Marican at Our Lady's Church in Nassau, but normally assistants at missions in Nassau resided at The Priory. Although Benedictines first arrived in the Bahamas from St. John's in 1891, it was not until the mid 1950's that priests in charge of any mission in Nassau began to live in a rectory adjacent to their churches. Instead they resided at The Priory, whence they either walked or motor­cyclcd to their mission. It is only within the last twenty years that anyone had a car.
Abbot Alcuin, Bishop Bernard and Father Prior arrived at the consensus that at least one of the fathers living at St. Augustine's Monastery and College ought to be a Negro. Otherwise we might well be accused of being racists, and our work in the Bahamas would suffer immeasurably. A Negro living in the monastery and teaching occasionally, as Father Prosper did, would allay those fears and sow the seed for what the Church fondly desires in foreign mission, an indigenous clergy.

But think of the added burden it placed upon the frail shoulders of Father Prosper. If he had been suffering from an identity crisis, the additional burden that entailed his working in the largest mission in the Bahamas, numbering 600 to 700 families, would have inevitably crushed his spirit. But, Father Prosper was a humble, generous soul, an exemplary monk, a dedicated priest, one who literally spent his energies for souls.

I could go on, mentioning other fathers, whose _horarium_, from morning till night exhausted their strength, but to do so would needlessly belabor the obvious. Instead, let's turn our attention to the brothers whom I encountered in the Bahamas. There were three Benedictine brothers from St. John's: Charles Kirchner, Benedict Nordick and Anthony Lucking, O.S.B. In those early years Brother Anthony was still an oblate-brother, although subsequently, after he later returned to St. John's, he became a brother. Brother Charles was our gardener, but he was also interested in bees. To mention either of these loves is to summon before one's eyes a panorama of outside activities. In the archipelago of the Bahamas in the wet season, particularly during July, August, and September, the sub-tropical sun gets burning, if not actually blazingly hot. Gardening while one is drenched with sweat surely could tax one's zeal.

The apiary Brother Charles cultivated, supplied us with all the table honey we could savor, and besides, Father Ephraem managed to sell some in Nassau. Brother Charles was a quiet, retiring man, who knew what he was about at all times. In later years, after he had returned to St. John's to take over its garden, he did not change any. Although he suffered from impaired vision (He has lived with one good eye, a glass eye concealing the loss of the other.), Brother Charles has never been heard to complain about his handicap. Indeed, he is the most 'handicapable' man I have met. The secret: a deep faith, lively hope, undemonstrative love.

Assisting Brother Charles in the garden was Br. Benedict Nordick, O.S.B., a hardy, ruddy-faced Nordic, no pun intended. Brother Benedict was a jack-of-all-trades, handy with tools, resource man to solve all problems, a solid, stable and zealous soul. No indeed, no identity crisis there.

An unobtrusive soul was Br. Anthony Lucking, O.S.B., who, in addition to custodial work in the monastery, had charge of our chickens, a messy job that was productive. He was never dismayed.

Besides gardening, teaching, sweeping floors and all such janitorial tasks, preparing homilies and de-termining books in the library, one of my expeditions as librarian, to mention some of such countless challenges to one's zeal, there was the grace-enriched daily _horarium_: Awake, 5:15 a.m.; Divine Office, 5:30 a.m.; Masses at individual side altars designed and executed in fresh cement by Monsignor Hawes in the crypt chapel after we had moved out of our original chapel, where we used to offer daily Mass at separate tables in the corridor; breakfast around 7:00 o'clock; toilet,
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constitutional, preparation for classes; student Mass at 8:30 a.m.; classes till noon; luncheon, for the community, Sext before, None after; siesta? Classes resume at 1:00 p.m. and continue till 4:00 p.m.; recreation till 6:00 p.m.; supper for the community after Vespers and Compline at 5:30 p.m.; recreation after supper till 7:30 p.m.; anticipated Matins; retiring: reading, studying, class preparation, showering. Identity crisis?

God help us if we did not, in the words St. Benedict wrote in the prologue to his Holy Rule, continuously:

'Beg of Him by most earnest prayer, that He perfect whatever good we began, in order that he who now had been pleased to count us in the number of his children, need never be grieved at our evil deeds. For we ought at all times so to serve Him with the good things which He has given us, that He may not, like an angry father, disinherit his children, nor, like a dread lord, enraged at our evil deeds, hand us over to everlasting punishment as most wicked servants, who would not follow Him to glory.'

2. Father Silvan:

After my ordination I volunteered for the new foundation which St. John's established that summer (1947) in Puerto Rico. Fr. Basil Stegmann, O.S.B., was the superior. He suggested I join him, and I was eager for missionary work so I volunteered. The next thing I knew, I saw on the bulletin board at the abbey that Abbot Alcuin had appointed Fr. Prosper Meyer, O.S.B., and myself to the Bahamas. As was typical of Abbot Alcuin, he used to appoint you to the things you didn't ask for, but I was glad because I didn't have to learn Spanish. I liked the challenge of a new country, of meeting new people, and doing things my own way, I'm afraid, which I felt I could do in the missions. I was born on a farm near Sauk Centre, Minnesota, and was one of nine children. We were all brought up to be self-reliant. I wanted to check my ability, I suppose, to see if I could produce something on my own. I wanted to be a good member of St. John's. I wanted to make whatever contribution I could make, but not apart from the community effort. I just had the spirit of adventure. One of the great experiences of my life was that I came along with Father Prosper. We arrived in Nassau on the same plane one day in July, 1947. Father Prosper remarked when we landed that this was the most God-forsaken place he had ever seen. But Father Prosper developed into being one of the truly great missionaries of the Bahamas. Had he lived longer I'm sure that the Church in the Bahamas would have reflected more of his influence.

He was a black man. Second, he was a great individualist who had worked and done everything for himself. He had never had any handouts; he had an uphill battle all the way. He didn't believe in fooling around. He said exactly what he thought. He could not be fooled and nobody tried to fool him. He was a man who was steeped in Scripture and in the tradition of the Church. He was a loyal Catholic and a loyal member of St. John's. He wanted to bring his own faith to the people of the Bahamas. We were known as sparring partners at table and many other places, but I had great admiration for him. I remember one time after we had had quite a battle, and I wanted to placate him, I asked him, jokingly, what I should say at his funeral in case he would die before I would. He was still a bit angry and he said that what I would say then 'would make no more difference than it does now.'
When he died all the people in the Bahamas were acutely aware that they had lost a great man. His ability didn’t always show in the seminary because he never had the opportunity to be himself as he did when he came among his own people. We white people do not understand black culture. We have to live with it a long time, and even then we don’t understand the emotional prejudice that builds up over generations when a race is held down. We have to keep this in mind now, when the black government is in control in the Bahamas. There is an understandable emotional reaction against white people. We feel the same as they felt for generations; this is our first experience in being discriminated against, perhaps. In a way it’s good for us; we need to have such experiences to mature and to understand black thinking. I believe that a man with Father Prosper’s natural maturity and common sense is the type of leadership that black people need now to survive. Now the mature part of the white population over the world wants to see the black apostolate succeed. We know that it has to succeed. We want to see it grow to a stage of maturity where Blacks can understand that not everybody is black, that it would be foolish to duplicate the stupidity of white racism.

In the Bahamas, where the revolution is taking place, culturally and politically, without blood being shed, it is a great maturing experience for Blacks and Whites to see that they have to work together. My own experiences with black-white relationships were tied up very closely with Father Prosper, and we sort of matured together even though we had personality clashes. I felt immediately as part of our vocation, as part of the task of the Benedictines from St. John’s in the Bahamas, that we had to establish a Bahamian clergy and hierarchy. If there were going to be a religious community, it would eventually have to have a Bahamian superior. But I am also beginning to believe that we have to graduate from the idea that everybody who is an apostle to Whites has to be white, and everybody who is an apostle to Blacks has to be black. The world is becoming more cosmopolitan. Black people who are in positions of influence, authority and have experience are realizing they need white people, too. Many black Bahamians say, ‘We don’t care whether our bishop is black or white. We want him to be a true Christian, an apostle who won’t give in to politics.’

There is the question of whether religion should be mixed into politics; I believe that religion has to be a part of politics. But when you get politics mixed in religion, then you’re in trouble. Religion has to be Christian, first and last. The danger for the Church has always been that the politicians of various countries will take the Church and wrap it around themselves like a mantle, thus using the prestige of the Church to further their own. Church becomes subservient to state. This is one of the dangers in any black country when it becomes independent and self-governing. The Church has often, in centuries gone, become a tool of the state at the expense of true doctrine, at the expense of true Christian faith. We hear people saying there has to be black dogma and spirituality; there has to be black religious life. This is nonsense in my opinion. We are not Bahamians first, we are not Americans first, we are Christians first. If you say you are a Bahamian first and a Christian second, and I say I am an American first and a Christian second, immediately we are fighting because we’re fighting between Americans and Bahamians. If we both say we are Christians first and Bahamians second, Americans second, British second, then we have a common ground of Christianity and we can progress. The minute we talk about
being black first and white first, we are in trouble. We’re fighting; we’re not Christian. I believe the world is now graduating from the idea that you have to be black for Blacks and white for Whites.

We must never allow politics to try to manipulate the practices and the policies of the Church. Whether that politics is black or white, whether it’s German or French or Dutch, it’s bad. Then you begin to have what you had in the old Gallican Church, where French nationalism was trying to get the upper hand. One of the refreshing things in the Church now is that we are becoming one world. We are not any longer worried so much about black and white, British and American or Bahamian and American. We are worried now about being Christians first.

In my first nine years in the Bahamas, I taught at St. Augustine’s. In those days we taught almost any subject that was offered; it was a matter of dealing with the basics because many of our boys really needed some very elementary training. We were assigned not so much to a certain department, such as history or literature, but we were assigned a certain ‘form.’ We might teach all or most of the subjects in that form. My first teaching assignments were in Latin, mathematics, and English, and later on also in religion.

In Nassau if you speak of ‘The Priory,’ you think of the priory in town, which is a rectory not a priory. That’s why St. Augustine’s retains the name ‘monastery.’ We lived for a month at The Hermitage which is now the bishop’s residence until St. Augustine’s Monastery was built and during the summer, 1947, we moved to Fox Hill. That first fall we never had to empty the waste baskets because there was no glass in the windows and it was a very windy site. The wind would take the baskets out of the room, down the corridor, and right out the opening in the corridor and empty them in the bush. All you had to do was pick up the empty baskets. We taught in the din of air hammers while the rest of the buildings were being built, but we got used to that. For a while we used kerosene pressure lamps. We didn’t have any lights at first, and we carried water in buckets. But soon Father Frederic, a member of the Frey family that owned Central Supply Company in Minneapolis, supplied most of the plumbing fixtures. In fact the Frey family were great benefactors of St. Augustine’s. During Father Frederic’s nineteen years as prior, the Frey family must have donated many thousands of dollars’ worth of equipment to the place.

Father Frederic was prior, Father Ambrose was sub-prior, and Fathers Elias, Magnus, Ephraem, and Hubert were there. Father Prosper taught at St. Augustine’s and at the same time assisted at Our Lady’s Church. He was a part-time teacher for about the first five years, after which he became a full time pastoral man. We had a number of confreres who came for some years such as Fathers Emmanuel Kelsch and Gerald McMahon, O.S.B. I always remember Father Hubert because he used to go down to the athletic field every single day for about two hours of weeding. Br. Anselm Schlisser, O.S.B., who had been in the Bahamas for many years, a respected and solid man, was gardener. Br. Benedict Nordick, O.S.B., was there for a number of years and did a great amount of work as engineer, plumber and electrician. Brother Benedict could do most anything mechanical. We had Brothers Charles and Urban for quite a few years. They were tremendous gardeners and landscape artists.

I can remember that about every other Saturday we used to dress chickens for the market. This was in the early days when we had various
projects to support ourselves, mainly with the enthusiasm of Fathers Frederic and Ephraem. Father Ephraem was a great man for planning ways to make and collect money and he worked very hard. Although we kidded him a lot, he was a tremendous man for getting things. The saying was that he could go uptown and come back with a caterpillar tractor which he had got from some friend. He’d visit the office of Sir Roland Symonette, and Sir Roland would send out a tractor to clear land for a couple of days. A tremendous amount of development at St. Augustine’s took place under the direction of Fathers Ephraem and Frederic. They were good at getting people to donate and help along. They were good public relations men. They made a lot of friends for the community, a lot of friends who were impressed when they saw everybody working hard. There was no evidence of money being wasted anywhere. No one seemed to be spending money on himself. When people came during Vespers they found the monks in chapel. When they went there for Matins, they found the monks together saying Matins. When they went there for Mass, the monks were offering Mass. For many visitors, it was like an oasis in the desert. Nassau is a tourist community. With a tourist community you have a rather loose philosophy of life; everybody gets the idea, not only tourists but also the people who live here are on holiday. St. Augustine’s was a prophetic sign, a sign and a witness of Christian stability. This is what I think put St. Augustine’s on the map in the early days.

In the beginning most of the cost ($22,000) for the materials came from St. John’s, as it usually did in our foundations. In 1946, when the buildings were started, there was not a lot of money. With Fr. Frederic and Tom Dean, for many years our builder, labor costs were held down and some labor was volunteered. We used to have businessmen from Nassau help build in the evenings. One of them was Sir Cyrus Davis, the father of Father Boswell. Another was Si Amoury, also a papal knight. Amoury is one of the early Catholic names in the country. There were others who used to pop out after work at 5:00 p.m. I can still recall them building the crypt for the chapel. They came out and hauled stones, dug trenches and put in forms. $22,000, along with volunteer work, cheap labor at that time, and materials purchased at bargain costs in the States, went a long way. Years later, when we got serious about becoming independent, we approached St. John’s for a loan of $280,000 to make the school large enough so that it would be a source of income. St. John’s made that loan interest free and wrote it off entirely a year later, when the Holy See approved our independence in 1967. The abbey gave us this dowry of $280,000, another example of the interest St. John’s has taken in the Bahamas.

Generally speaking, the bishop and the diocese were very interested in having a good Catholic high school. I don’t believe they saw the meaning of a religious community the way Father Frederic and Abbot Alcuin saw it. But they did not oppose it in any way. The first application that St. Augustine’s made to become an independent priory was in December, 1949, when Bishop Bernard died.

Bishop Leonard is a man of great energy with his own ideas. With him the whole idea of an abbey nullius was shelved. From then on we began thinking of the development of a normal diocese, with a diocesan clergy. Most everyone doubted that it would even be good for us to have an abbot in the same small city as the bishop. I know that Father Frederic was not
enthusiastic about an abbey nullius. He never really pushed the idea even of an independent priory. He was conservative by nature and felt that we should not go too fast. He was interested in the monastic life and didn't think we had to be independent to be a good monastery. It was really only Abbot Alcuin and perhaps some few others who were thinking of an abbey nullius. Nor was even an independent priory thought of very seriously.

When I was the prior this came to a head. I saw the school growing very fast, and I realized that the community was not growing with it. What we were going to come up against was a great big school not controlled by the community as there wouldn't be enough members. I felt we should become independent as soon as we could so that those who belonged to the community would control the pace, the growth of the school, rather than, say, those who might not be here five years from now. I think that the only hesitancy that Bishop Leonard had was that a sort of polarization between the members of St. Augustine's, at least those who lived there, and the rest of the diocese had developed. He was not happy about that, and he wasn't sure that he wanted to freeze that position at this time. But there were other factors, other influences at work, and Abbot Baldwin wanted it badly. Bishop Leonard did not prevent it. He could have prevented it, but he didn't. He accepted our opinion, gave his consent, but I don't think he was especially enthusiastic about it, nor were some of the older Benedictines.

Did independence come too early for St. Augustine's? If the question is asked merely with the intention of finding a scapegoat for the wholesale departure of priests and brothers after independence, it is not worthy of an answer. Nor can it ever be answered from that point of view, for that would mean entering into the consciences of men and judging them, an exercise wholly unworthy of a Christian.

But if the question is asked sincerely, with the intention of charting more wisely the future course of other religious communities, it is worthy of some attention. I first signed up for St. Augustine's twenty-two years ago, when Abbot Alcuin, a churchman of great vision and dedicated to Bahamianization in the best sense of that term, saw the need of establishing an indigenous religious community in the Bahamas that could stand on its own feet and not be forever dependent on a floating membership. By 1967, when we actually did at least become a conventual priory under Abbot Baldwin's leadership, certainly a sufficient number of priests and brothers, both Bahamian and non-Bahamian, indicated that they would cast their lot with the community for life. No one could have foreseen at that time that we and the whole Catholic community of the Bahamas were in for the shattering experience of seeing the departure of so many priests and brothers, Bahamian and non-Bahamian, in the short space of four and one-half years.

To ask, 'How did it happen?' is to ask someone to sit in judgement on the consciences of other men. I believe, however, that it would have happened no matter who the prior had been, whether a Bahamian, a non-Bahamian or the Archangel Michael. This much I am quite sure of: had the superior during those critical years been an expatriate, it would have been next to impossible to convince the people at large that the whole trouble did not lie with the superior's failure to understand Bahamians. As it is, we can safely forget about this all too popular pastime of looking for a scapegoat and get on with the more serious business of searching for a
life-style that makes sense not only because it’s Bahamian but because it’s Christian. The ideal would certainly be to have a Bahamian as prior, but there are higher priorities.

The Bahamians are still with us, as was evidenced this year when we set about setting up a new board of governors for the college. Not one of the people who were asked (all but one are Bahamians) refused, although all of them are busy leaders in the commonwealth. While there may be those who seem quite willing to accept the role of funeral directors for St. Augustine’s, there are many more who are not joining in the dirges but are determined to work harder than ever to strengthen the monastery.

I joined St. John’s because it had so many various openings. It had missions in foreign countries. I suppose I wouldn’t have joined St. John’s if there hadn’t been any other possibility except staying in the monastery full time. I don’t feel that I have ever been called to live in the monastery full time. Maybe I shouldn’t have joined a monastery, but as I saw St. John’s, it was a community that had a wide enough field of activity to take in the type of people who could work outside.

All the years that I spent teaching at St. Augustine’s Monastery, I did it out of obedience. I was always praying for the day when I would be able to do pastoral work that I like. I’m most happy to be in the Bahamas and after twenty-four years with the Bahamian people, I feel it would be very difficult for me to leave. I would not leave the Bahamas unless I had to. As far as common sense and a real sense of faith goes, I find the Bahamian people most delightful to work with. They know their shortcomings, they know our shortcomings, they psyche us out very easily. They know we have prejudices, and they are quite willing to live with that. I think if we’re willing to live with their ways and their struggles, it’s a great place to do missionary work. I’m a little doubtful sometimes as to whether it’s wise to have so many expatriate priests here. I’ve often been criticized for making such statements, but I’m highly doubtful that just bringing in priests from other countries builds up the Church. I think unless a priest is able to think with the people, move with the people, to appreciate their culture, to really enjoy them and I repeat that: to really enjoy the Bahamian people, I doubt that it’s wise to bring in everybody who applies. Bringing in too many expatriates can hold back the work of the Church.

I think the community life at St. Augustine’s Monastery was what turned the young men on. That’s my personal opinion. What turned the young ladies to join St. Martin’s was largely the influence of certain pastors. Some pastors have a knack for encouraging young people. But at St. Augustine’s, I believe it was our community spirit, and that for the first time some of our young men began to see the possibilities of scholarship, and of the academic community being open to the thoughts of other cultures. They were taken up into this atmosphere and they wanted to be a part of it. Community life attracted them, whereas they would not have been attracted otherwise, and their zeal would not have been activated.

The driving force behind the expansion of St. Augustine’s College was Fr. Burton Bloms, O.S.B., who came to the Bahamas in 1963 and stayed for three years. He developed the school from an enrollment of 174 to 1,000, began the amalgamation with Xavier College, broadened the curriculum to include general studies, supervised the building of an
impressive physical plant, obtained lay support through a board of directors and personal contacts with interested Bahamians who were able to give financial assistance for the expansion on all fronts. It was a daring venture which Fathers Chrysostom, Frederic and Bishop Bernard would have judged a fantasy. But Father Burton’s track record over the past twenty-five years as headmaster of high schools attached to Benedictine foundations from St. John’s Abbey in Mexico City, Puerto Rico and the Bahamas can only be described as away and running. His influence at each stop along the way was terminal and abrasive; but this priest-educator in Central America and the Caribbean in contemporary times achieved much for the advancement of third world nationals. He was not a theoretician or pathfinder, but an on-the-scene enabler.

Prior Silvan had asked Abbot Baldwin to send Father Burton to St. Augustine’s to take charge of the educational apostolate in 1963. The prior wanted to be sure that St. Augustine’s College would be well established before he pressed for independent status for the monastery. Later, after the college was established, the prior and the headmaster had a separation of the waters and Father Burton returned to Puerto Rico. In 1969 St. John’s Abbey was requested by the board and concerned parents to assume responsibility for administration and teaching of religion at Benilde High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which was faced with closing. The monastic chapter accepted this responsibility and Father Burton was placed in charge. He energetically developed this undertaking for two years before becoming pastor of St. Anselm’s parish in New York City in 1972.

In an interview, Father Burton and Fr. Peregrin Berres, O.S.B., teacher at St. Augustine’s College, 1957-65, discuss some of the problems that faced the college during their years in Nassau as well as their interpretation of events:

Father Burton:

I had just come back from being director of the San Antonio School in Puerto Rico in 1963 and, according to Abbot Baldwin, I was supposed to go to South America to start a new foundation. When the abbot called and said Prior Silvan wanted me to be headmaster of St. Augustine’s College, I was caught by surprise. I had no desire at all to go to the Bahamas. I suggested that he get someone else who knew the English tradition and let me continue in Latin America countries. But he thought that I should go and that was that. The abbot told me to go to Minneapolis and see Father Frederic who was dying and ask him about his educational ideas. I went to see Father Frederic who was very sick. But he had written all kinds of notes because the abbot apparently had told him that I would speak with him. He told me about his plans for making it a bigger school and said the big problem was that the bishop wanted the school to be diocesan. Father Frederic thought that would be a mistake. He thought it had to be a bigger school and he had ideas about studyhalls and things like that.
Father Peregrin:

Father Frederic was trying to establish a school to train an elite Catholic, not a general education for numbers of Catholics, but for a very select few who would become leaders in Nassau and able to really establish Catholicism. That is why he chose capable students through strict entrance examinations. The first fellows that came through were typical of what he was looking for: Charles Coakley, Louis Adderley and John Dean. He recognized that home conditions were such that they weren’t able to study, so he had a studyhall for them. They studied until 8:00 p.m. every night and would come to school at 8:00 a.m. They had their lunch and athletic program, and every night from 6:30 to 8:00 we had study. Then they’d go home and a lot of them would carry books home because they had acquired so much of a taste for study that they would keep studying.

Father Silvan came from a good Stearns County farm family. He kept insisting in chapter that we would not build unless we had the money. The goals he had were good. He was trying to build a monastic community there. He also wanted to get Father Burton to be headmaster of the school and develop it.

Father Burton:

When I arrived we started to have many community meetings. We decided we would continue with the school and have an overall building plan as St. John’s had. We decided to drop evening study periods because the students were too tired from what I could see. Father Frederic would go downtown and talk to prospective students. I said, ‘No, if students want to come to school here, we want them to apply here.’ We made the parents and students come to the school. That was good because they saw the school. Then we raised our tuition, and that’s when the bishop and Father Cornelius said that the place would go completely down because if we charged too much the people would go away, but the opposite happened. We doubled tuition and doubled enrollment the following year. When I got there enrollment was 176, and the following year we had over 400 students.

The students came from the public schools. We went to all the public and Catholic elementary schools and talked to the headmasters. All of them were very cooperative. We lowered some standards because we could tell that even though we said we were college preparatory, the students were not. That was the revolutionary change made at St. Augustine’s. We became more realistic about the type of students we had.

Father Peregrin:

The students were still drawn from Nassau with the addition of boarders from the out islands. We still had about the same population representation, about 70 per cent black and 30 per cent white. But it was a bigger enrollment with a wider variety of classes.

Father Burton:

We changed from a certain stereotype for a general certificate of education. The biggest crisis now came. Once we had established that the school could be run, then Father Abbot came here and a big vote was taken as to whether we should continue or not. It was my contention that we should not continue as a community in charge of the school. We should place the school in the charge of the Christian Brothers or some other
teaching group and make it strictly a diocesan school under the bishop. St. Augustine’s Monastery should then be permitted to keep some missions which some fathers wanted to do. When a vote was taken on that motion, the vote was very decisive, about eighteen to eight, if I remember correctly. We would phase out the school from our control over five years, but keep the missions. This would give the bishop an opportunity to make arrangements with, say, the Marianist Brothers. There was a real possibility of it being done. Then after five years or so we would be out of the school.

Father Peregrin:

The abbot met the bishop at the airport. The bishop was on his way to Eleuthera, and they had a short conversation. The abbot said, ‘I’ve come down to close the monastery.’ The bishop wasn’t at the meeting we had. Fathers Cornelius and Brendan were the most forthright. The difference of opinion had been with Father Frederic who had established the monastery. Father Cornelius felt that the Benedictine mission was in the parishes, the mission itself. This was a culmination of everything that Father Cornelius had been saying all the time. They stated, ‘We said this never should have been started; this is the obvious thing and it proves we were right all along.’ The community was really baffled. It was the strangest discussion, inasmuch as it was open, it was different from what we had been used to. The outcome of it was that the obvious facts were pretty clear. St. Augustine’s would have to close.

Father Burton:

The Catholic diocese was too small to have two heads. The way I envisioned St. Augustine’s to grow, up to 1,000-1,100 students, and therefore have a monastery corresponding to that, I just thought it would be nonsensical to have a bishop and a prior. I thought the place would be too small for that. Second, and more importantly, I thought and still do that there would not be any candidates. The place is too small to get candidates for a monastery and for a diocese. The big thing is for the diocese to continue, not the monastery. So therefore we should make every effort to have the diocese continue, and we should try to go some other place to have the monastery.

Father Peregrin:

Father Frederic’s hopes were that when a bishop would be appointed he would be an abbot nullius. Instead of having two heads, you’d have one man as the head.

Father Burton:

The bishop came back from Eleuthera on a Monday after the vote had been taken the previous Thursday. On that day Fathers Bonaventure, Boswell and Leander got excited. They said the Bahamians joined up because they wanted to be in a monastery, therefore, how come this development?

Father Peregrin:

They joined for the Bahamas, not monasticism in Jamaica or someplace else.

Father Burton:

They had a talk with the abbot that afternoon and Abbot Baldwin and Prior Silvan had supper with Bishop Leonard at The Hermitage that
evening. These Bahamians also had a chance to see the bishop before the supper. Then at that supper it was decided to reverse the whole thing because neither the bishop nor the abbot wanted to report the dissolution of St. Augustine’s Monastery to Rome. When I came home that night Prior Silvan called me in and said, ‘Everything’s changed.’ The abbot asked me to work out a plan for the fathers who were in the mission, money arrangements for the school and all that. The abbot was very happy that everything was settled and that all of a sudden the whole thing was reversed.

Next morning, Abbot Baldwin called me in and he said, ‘Well, everything’s changed.’ I said, ‘It can’t be.’ He said, ‘Yes, we are just going to have to trust the bishop.’ I said, ‘Well, do you want us to go ahead with the plans?’ We already had some plans drawn for the whole complex of a new school. He said, ‘Yes, go ahead with it. We’ll support you from St. John’s.’ So that night we had our meeting with the bishop present. That meeting was very, very hot, because some members of the community insisted upon some very straightforward questions. The bishop said, ‘I guess I’m the one who asked the question whether we would have a diocesan school, or whether we would have a school like St. John’s where we could operate, not against diocesan policies, but cooperate with them, but not under them.’ Then he gave his explanation and said we could work together. After he finished he was told that he was just talking in circles. That’s when Father Abbot really blew up and said he didn’t want to have any more comments of that type, that we must trust the bishop, and that’s the way it would be. As far as I was concerned, that was about the way it was going to be. From then on we went out to build our new academic buildings.

Another big step forward came after we got the buildings going; we started a boarding school for students from the out islands. Then we were able to obtain government aid. These things helped make St. Augustine’s financially possible. To me it was a matter of going to cocktail parties and cornering the minister of education. At several parties we’d get in a corner, and I’d try to explain to him why it was so good for them to help these people on the out islands. I also talked with Sir Stafford Sands several times. Also Sir Etienne Dupuch, in The Tribune, began to write about the lack of help for the out islands. The votes supporting the white party in power actually were from the out islands. Therefore, I thought it was good politics to support the out islands so that they would be able to support them and keep them in power. The ruling party agreed. The first year we had eighteen students and we had people in Nassau who would support them even though we couldn’t get government aid. But we kept on pushing and finally they gave help about midyear in the form of eighteen scholarships of $700 or $660, which was very substantial at that time for us. The next year we went up to about sixty and it has increased to ninety now. We re-did the upper monastery for that purpose.

The following year, 1966, the different private schools got together. We petitioned the minister of education to give scholarships to the people in town. That also was granted and helped a lot to keep us going. The private high schools were Queen’s College, St. Andrew’s, St. John’s St. Augustine’s and Xavier College. The only public high school was Government High. We started broadening the curriculum, making it more than only a preparatory school, a full high school. Queen’s College and St. Augustine’s were really promoters of that development of comprehensive
The idea caught on very quickly, and now the government has built new high schools. They were kind of pushed into it. Before we got government help, lay people helped us start to build. The Bacardi Company gave us $60,000. Wallace Groves in Grand Bahama donated $25,000, mostly for the boarding school. Several other people also gave us substantial funds. Then we had a fair which turned out very well; we took in $22,000 the first time. The governor came and it was a grandiose affair. People cooperated very much.

In 1966 the Sisters of Charity at Xavier College wanted to enlarge their high school for girls. They were going to buy a piece of property on Interfield Road. One morning Father Silvan and I were standing outside looking at our property and I said, 'I just cannot see why the sisters have to build a whole new separate facility when it would be much wiser to pull the facilities together at one place. We have a library now, we're building laboratories, we have a swimming pool, we have sports facilities. Why not invite them to come and put their building up here?' He was immediately enthusiastic about it, and he said let's go ahead and do it. We talked to the sisters first of all and they thought it was a good idea. We talked to the bishop and he thought it might be a good idea. The next steps were that I'd start working, and to see just how much money I could get. The bishop was the first donor and he promised $125,000. The Charity sisters thought they could supply five or six sisters. That was the situation when I left and went to Puerto Rico. For a while I was supposed to help out at both places, the Bahamas and Puerto Rico. Father Silvan put Father Bonaventure in charge as headmaster. If I wanted to be head of development and promotional work, why that was fine. So I decided to leave.

Another important thing we did was to establish a lay board of directors. This helped very much and really moved us forward. They brought considerable money and created much goodwill. The chairman was Si Amoury who worked a lot with Father Frederic in the early days. Then there was James Murphy, Wesley Gleason (who is now living in Venezuela), and the man who really helped the most was Orfilio Pelaez, the treasurer of the Bacardi Co. He was a very close friend, and really was interested in Catholic education. He had been expatriated from Cuba when Castro took over.

We first built a swimming pool outdoors near the school. It was the first swimming pool for the Colored because the other pools in Nassau at the time all belonged to clubs that the colored people could not join. Now some other schools have also built swimming pools.

Father Peregrin:
I think the forward thrust of St. Augustine's was sports. Academically we were well established. Then we built a track and field which was such an influence. Sports became a popular thing, a tremendous diversion. Government High also has a track now. Ours was the only track then and all events were held at St. Augustine's. The first year I got there I remember it was really something great. On the big field day, everybody in town was there, thousands were present.

Father Burton:
It would be really a loss to the islands if St. Augustine's would go. It was the first private school as well as Xavier College that took in
colored students on the high school level. The only desire Father Bonaven­
ture (Dean) ever expressed was to keep the school going. He didn't care
about anything else. He wanted to keep that school because it was for the
cultural good of the islands. He felt that was something that the Bahamians
should dedicate themselves to. The college could have continued without
the monastery. It should have been a diocesan college from the beginning.

In March, 1966, the board of directors of St. Augustine's College met
with the bishop. Some members were very uptight since the new party, the
PLP, had come into power. There was quite a bit of discussion as to how
they would support us, or whether they would still continue to subsidize
us. We had a meeting with the new government officials and they had
promised that they would definitely continue to help us and that we were,
they felt, doing a good job for the Bahamas. Therefore there would be no
problem at all. The bishop and some board members were very much
concerned that we would not concede certain rights and privileges that we
had as a private and a Catholic school. However, I did not feel that was the
case. At this meeting the board decided that a Catholic school should be
for proselytizing and for making Catholics, and not primarily for academics
with religion definitely a part but not necessarily the only part of the
school. That's when we parted ways. There were certain board members,
particularly Si Amoury and Jim Murphy, who were being brainwashed by
the bishop and also by Fr. Arthur Chapman, who definitely had been
working on Jim Murphy for a long time. Jim Murphy also had become
quite upset that we built the swimming pool because he felt that it was
unnecessary for the island. So there was quite a bit of disagreement even
on that point.

At that point I felt I had been lost already because Father Silvan had
taken me out of the headmaster's job without any recourse of any sort. I
recall at that time I also ran out of the Bahamas. Fathers Bonaventure and
Boswell and the others who were there had got the money for me, and I
had gone to the bishop to find out what he thought I should do. He just
didn't know what to say. He just didn't think it was right, and since I was
named by the abbot as the headmaster, they thought I should go and see
him. I thought the abbot would be somewhat angry with me. However, he
was very nice about it. I think he rather understood what was happening at
the time. He just said, well, that's fine, and so I went to Puerto Rico.

While I was in Puerto Rico, Father Silvan pushed for independence
of St. Augustine's Monastery. Father Bonaventure then called me in Puerto
Rico, and said that I had better rush back to the Bahamas because Father
Silvan was trying to force them to become independent. I came back, but
I didn't want to because it was time to elect a new prior in Puerto Rico and
I wanted to be there for that. But Father Bonaventure just thought that I
had to come to St. Augustine's for this business. I returned and as far as I
was concerned the Bahamians had said that they wanted to have status as
an independent priory and they just proceeded from that. I felt that
that was where the historic mistake was made; it was contrary to the wishes
of the community to continue a monastery there when it was practically
impossible, I believe, to keep it going. However, it was done.

They voted for it because of the alternatives. It might be interesting to
get the questionnaire that was given to the members of the community. I
never had a chance to fill it out, but it was something like: 'Do you favor
independence or don't you favor independence.' The most normal thing
would be to say you favor independence because these men wanted to get a start. So the question was not to break time. I'm sure if the question were put that way, they would have said, 'No.' They felt they were forced into it because they answered 'yes' to the first question: 'Do you want independence?' And they all certainly wanted independence.\textsuperscript{13}

Bishop Leonard had to travel over 900 miles, a longer distance than New York from Chicago, to be with the people of his diocese. When Rome attached the islands of Turks and Caicos to the diocese in 1969, an additional travel schedule had to be arranged. Certainly the Catholic bishop of Nassau had to be one of the most traveling of bishops. If he were not meeting engagements along the chain of the Bahamian islands, he was in the States, Canada or Europe ever working to bring in additional support for the rapidly expanding spiritual apostolates. People continually stated that Bishop Leonard never refused a request to come to any Bahamian island. He would confirm at any time, in any place as an encouragement to his people to feel more as one with their bishop. His energy seemed to be boundless and his enthusiasm contagious. One non-Catholic doctor told this writer, "I could spot that laugh of his a block away. He's the best therapy we have in the Bahamas." Another prominent lay woman said, "Bishop Leonard is the most popular person in the Bahamas. I have never met anyone who doesn't like him. His geniality and charity have advanced the Catholic Church in the consciousness of the people more than any other factor of our lifetime."

These encomiums do not exclude by any means the judgments that were brought against the bishop by ever-ready critics among the Catholic body following Vatican Council II. He was accused of being away too long from his diocese in search of funds. His critics never explained where such money could be found elsewhere to support their own expensive pursuits. He was too reactionary to the liberals and too permissive to the conservatives. He did not respond enough to the aspirations of those with a special cause to advance. He tried to keep all decisions channeled through his office. He could not delegate responsibility. He thought he was the Church in the Bahamas, etc. Such was the life of a Catholic bishop in the third quarter of the twentieth century as the Church went through a renewal process which no other Christian Church quite so fully encountered. As one Catholic priest said succinctly, "We've certainly had our share of humility. No one can accuse us of triumphalism anymore. But we've come out of it integral and authentic for the most part." Bishop Leonard was able to bounce with the punches in this critical period, most likely due to his wide experiences before becoming a priest.

One experience is added here as an example of the missionary encounters which the bishop and priests in the Bahamas met without fanfare
as they made their rounds. In January, 1958, the Bahama Benedictine recorded:

In January our Bishop Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B., accompanied by Fr. George Wolf, O.S.B., left for the island of Andros, planning to visit the eleven main stations and to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation at most of them. A trick of the weather, however, threw overboard his well-laid plans and the preparations of the faithful at the various settlements.

It began at Little Creek, our southernmost mission on Andros. Here the bishop confirmed, and preached to those who had assembled despite the all-day rain. On the following morning it was decided to have Fr. George make an early start toward Mangrove Cay in the slower mission boat, Star of the Sea, while the bishop and Fr. Alto Butkowski, O.S.B., who shepherds the southern half on Andros, visited Kemps Bay and High Rock. It was thought that Fr. George would be alone for only a few hours, and then the others would overtake him in the little speedboat, whereupon the bishop could transfer to the Star for the rest of the trip.

While the bishop was offering Mass at High Rock, it happened. A freakish storm, termed by some 'a baby hurricane,' descended with a rush. Luckily, Fr. George had already made his way through the channel-opening in the barrier reef before the storm broke; but he still had to contend with a wind which came in gusts up to 60 m.p.h. When he saw that he was being carried toward a rocky shelf, and realized he was unable to avoid it, he decided to turn his vessel into the wind and drop anchor. The anchor lodged well, but the Star repeatedly struck against coral heads. He made for shore in the dinghy—it is propelled by an outboard motor—to get help to bring the Star to safe anchorage. The waves threw him onto the ledge, and the dinghy capsized; to refloat it he had to drag it, barefoot as he was, across the ledge and over hundreds of sea urchins. (Sea urchins—'sea-eggs' is the local name—are spherical marine animals that reach the size of an orange and are covered with sharp spines that easily puncture the skin.) Some men fortunately noticed Fr. George's predicament, helped him ashore, and made their way back to the Star, where they stayed through the day and night, continually bailing out the water that seeped into the damaged vessel. When the sea moderated the next day they managed to ease the boat off and run it up a sandy beach.

Meanwhile, the bishop and Fr. Alto were at High Rock, not certain what move to make. All the people advised against going out. But Fr. Alto was anxious to overtake Fr. George and help him sail the Star, and the bishop decided to go along despite the anguished protests from all sides, for Fr. Alto is an experienced mariner. (It is remarkable, by the way, how this Minnesota Benedictine who grew up far from the sea—central Minnesota is about as far as an American can be, perhaps!—has acquired all the native sailor's skill in threading the reefs, understanding the tidal currents, etc.) Having made their decision, the bishop and Fr. Alto tried to set out, only to have the propeller-pin sheer off against a rock as they were getting started. That settled the question: everyone would now have to stay put. While Fr. Alto was disappointed, the local folks were all smiles, for 'the good God is good; He stopped our bishop and our priest from drowning themselves!'

For the four days that the weather kept them at High Rock, they took their meals in one of the homes in the settlement. (The menu? The staple
Bahamian dish of pigeon peas and rice, every day.) At night they slept in the church; the bishop on a makeshift cot, Fr. Alto on a bench. The nights were chilly, for the 'nor'wester' kept a'blowing, and Fr. Alto wrapped himself in an old cope because of the draughts coming up between the planks in the church-bench. (To him who would frown at such unliturgical use of a vestment let it be whispered that the cope is historically descended from the garment designed to serve this very purpose of giving protection against the weather.)

On the fifth day the wind abated, the bishop walked six miles to Driggs Hill—along a path sometimes rocky, sometimes deep in sand—went by ferry-rowboat across the mile-and-a-half bight to Bastian Point, held a service at the Church of St. Boniface, then had another walk of seven miles along a haphazard footpath. This kind of exercise can be quite exhausting for anyone not accustomed to it, and if he has never had blistered feet before, that lack in experience will also be remedied....

The bishop took it all in stride, despite the fact that he was able to visit only five of the stations. Fr. George, with his bruised legs and punctured feet, presented quite a picture on arrival in Nassau, and was limping about in stocking feet for a few days. Thereafter he was as good as new again and returned to his parish work at Sacred Heart where Fr. Malachy Murphy, O.S.B., had substituted for him in the interval.

Ten days after this episode we learned that Fr. Alto—seaman, mechanic, and shipwright to boot—had completely overhauled the motor (an urgent job because of the corrosive effects of salt water) and had already begun putting a new keel to the Star.

One distinctive feature of Catholic life in the Bahamas in the 1950's and into the 1960's was the work of lay missionaries. Bishop Leonard encouraged this development according to current theories of missiology at that time. Better established churches were to help mission churches by sending personnel and material assistance. The Vatican advanced this thesis strongly and a wave of help poured forth into South America and the Caribbean from North America, Canadian and European churches. It worked for a time and those who came were highly motivated and zealous helpers. These women and men engaged primarily in education, nursing and administration.

Some names representative of the whole body of lay missionaries are included here. Doctors Maria Bachem and Julie Wershing in clinic work have already been mentioned, as has Anna McGinness, secretary in the chancery office. Robert Hanlon, biology teacher at St. Augustine's before his early death, and Roger Ludwig, sports director at the same school, are representative of the large number of St. John's University students who came to the Bahamas. Graduates from the neighboring College of St. Benedict also came in large numbers as did nurses from the St. Cloud Hospital, operated by the same Sisters of St. Benedict. Veronica Behnen, Rosemary Thurmes, Marilyn Fisher, Eileen Torborg and Margaret Ward were all "Bennies" in the Bahamas. Nurses and graduates
of Catholic colleges from Iowa, New York and Pennsylvania came to serve. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Cimonetti of Long Beach, New York, contributed their services, he as a teacher at Aquinas College and she as a nurse. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Lees from California both were teachers, she at Xavier and he at St. Augustine's; Kateri Concannon of Rhode Island, taught at Xavier College, Margaret Collins, M.A., of Philadelphia, a specialist with retarded children, worked in the Catholic school system.

After Vatican II and the emergence of third world theologies of liberation, humanity and development, another attitude emerged among many Catholics in the areas formerly assisted by lay missionaries and papal volunteers. Such latter day manifestations of neo-colonialism as lay missionaries were not wanted anymore by emerging peoples, the new theory went. What was needed now was a development of Bahamian laity to fill the needs of full participation in the life of the Church. As Bahamians acquired higher education in greater numbers, such a development was both feasible and practical. Accordingly, in the 1970's the program of lay volunteers from abroad was gradually phased out, although not completely since the Bahamian delegates, in the first diocesan assembly of June, 1972, voted to retain lay volunteers in the islands as their dedication and contribution was widely praised.

In the years following Vatican II (1962-65), there were constant waves of ideas abroad in the Catholic Church regarding liturgical life, theological and Scriptural issues, reform of structure, renewal of catechesis, developing theories of ministry and a new theology of liberation, humanity and development of peoples. There was ample evidence of the creativity of this period, but it is far too soon to evaluate what will endure. It was clear, however, that the defensive mentality in Roman Catholicism resulting from the Reformation and the Council of Trent was laid to rest. A new openness, development and personal freedom replaced former more legal approaches to organized religious life among Catholics. The turmoil of renewal brought forth strong elements of the status quo mentality who did battle on all fronts with the avant-garde reformers. Pope John XXIII and the Vatican Council had indeed opened a few windows, but sentinels were ever ready to close those nearest them.

In the long history of the Church there are recurring periods of creativity as well as stagnant holding patterns. So many Catholics knew little or nothing about the real history of their past and what tradition meant in its full expression. At the same time there were bolsheviks abroad in the Church tearing down what they misconceived from their own subjective stance. Progress went in search of a handmaid and seldom found one. The historical and literary methodologies so fruitfully used in Scriptural and theological disciplines had yet to be fully employed in
historical studies. When that plateau is reached a new self-awareness in
the Church will move the people of God forward in reconciling man with
man and man with God. That is the major challenge of the contemporary
period and the surface of the problem has scarcely been touched.

There were casualties during this period as men and women took
sides in their search for renewal of the Catholic body. It was an inter­
national phenomenon although accelerated in some nations and groups
of people. Optional celibacy for the clergy and no birth control for the
laity were raging journalistic issues. Pope Paul VI and the Synod of
Bishops opted to retain celibacy as the norm for Roman Catholic clergy
and religious, and the ban on birth control was reiterated by Paul VI for
Catholic couples. Many persons turned their backs on the institutional
Church as a result of these decisions. But in the long pull questions such
as the proper role and function of authority, a system of accountability
and down the ladder of Church stewardship, new life-styles and a respect
for scholarly findings were major cries that remained to be met. Service,
not paternalism, was the expression of the age. The challenge was how
a religious ministry could enable, support, develop and humanize in
today's world.

In the Bahamas the waves of the times were felt. No sooner had St.
Augustine's become an independent priory with a Bahamian prior, Fr.
Bonaventure Dean, O.S.B., than the Bahamians began to resign from the
active ministry. Fr. Charles Coakley, diocesan Bahamian, was the first
to resign and he was followed by six Benedictines at St. Augustine's
Monastery. Several of the Bahamian sisters of St. Martin's Convent also
chose to return to the lay state. It was a traumatic and bitter experience
for the Bahamian Catholics who still have not recovered from the shock.
The most common expression was one of deep hurt at being let down by
those who had been given so much to lead their people forward to an
indigenous Bahamian Church. As priests, brothers and sisters chose a
married life in their new professional careers of teaching, social or govern­
mental service, this fact did not go unnoticed. The theological, philos­
ophical and environmental dimensions were equally if not more the real
issues at stake. It must be carefully remembered also that not only
Bahamian priests and religious changed their vocations during these years
of crises. Three American religious priests serving in the diocese also
became laicized at this time: Fathers Aaron Kraft and Frederic Fleischer,
O.S.B., and Michael McCaul, S.S.J. Several sisters from different con­
gregations in the Bahamas besides the community of St. Martin de Porres
as well chose to return to lay life.

It is important to see that the current defections from the priesthood
and religious life are not restricted in time or place. They are a con­
temporary phenomenon that is worldwide and whose causes run deep in a period of renewal. Whatever position one opts for, an historical remembrance of such periods in the Church’s long history as the Arian crisis, the Trinitarian conflicts, the ignorance and primitive motives of the tenth century, the Reformation period, the cataclysm of the French Revolution or the Modernist controversy in the nineteenth century—all bear ample witness to repeated casualties along the way in the body ecclesiastical.

Bishop Bernard had consistently held to the position that Bahamian vocations would be slow in coming until a solid Catholic family life was established in the islands. This caveat would not seem to apply in regard to these first Bahamians who chose to return to the lay state since they came from the finest and most respected Catholic families of the islands. While everyone on the scene has his own theories and scapegoats in the troubling phenomenon, it is just simply too soon to evaluate this development as yet. It certainly is not the time to pass judgment on anyone involved. Reconciling charity is the only path forward. Another start will have to be made, hard as it may be to do so. In the meantime Fr. Preston Moss, diocesan priest, Brothers Henry and Luke and some thirty Bahamian sisters continue by their example to encourage a stable future.

Fr. Preston Moss, chancellor of the diocese of Nassau, and a native Bahamian diocesan priest, recalls his Anglican background, his conversion and his reactions in coming to maturity as a Catholic in the Bahamas. Father Moss supplies invaluable insights here to the deep faith, gratitude and strong aspirations of a Bahamian mentality on the threshold of nationhood:

I broached the question with Father Brendan of becoming a priest rather suddenly one day in 1956 after being received into the Church. I was an Anglican and had been under instruction for almost three years because I was so problematic. I was sixteen at the time. Father Brendan asked me to see Father Elias who was teaching in St. Augustine’s College. He thought that I should get acclimated to the Church for at least a year. I went to St. Augustine’s in the fall of 1956 to 1957. I had already completed high school as an Anglican. I was sent to St. John’s University, Minnesota, in the fall of 1957, and stayed until 1965. I went home in May, 1965, and was ordained on 4 June 1965. From then until December, 1970, when I became ill, I was stationed at St. Joseph’s Church in Nassau, first as the assistant, and then I was appointed pastor in my fifth year.

The thing which singularly impresses me about our Bahamian people is their receptivity to learn. I don’t think we have many vested interests against the Church’s changing. As we prepared the congregation they were receptive to growth. There was a deep kind of simplicity and I was overwhelmed by the acceptance of myself, the way that they let me grow as a young priest. It was fortunate to be stationed with some very unusual men of different temperaments. I was stationed with Father Marcian, who was thirty years my senior. And then there was Bishop Kenneth Turner, thirty-five years my senior, of the Scarboro fathers. To me this was a most
invaluable experience. I was with a man with whom I shared the deepest regard. We lived very closely, almost like father and son. When I was once ill, he would not let anyone come near the door. I saw him coming with the tray as well as his deep concern. This helped to stabilize me a lot as a priest. He trusted me and he could delegate responsibility to me. I felt that I was respected in such a deep way. There was a very deep affection between us. He allowed me in his humility to grow.

Then I was stationed with another man who furthered this growth, Father Silvan. To me that was another marvelous living experience, to be able to work with the people, with men with whom I felt this growing responsibility and their enthusiasm. Then I was appointed pastor, apparently on Father Silvan’s recommendation. Father Elias consented to be my associate. Coming as he did from the cathedral where he had been rector I found this very humbling. The men who initially led me, spiritually that is, guided me after being received into the Church. I am terribly grateful for the patience and fatherly solicitude of Father Brendan which I do not think I could too much praise for his fidelity in helping me all the way through. The greatest thing which I found at St. Joseph’s besides the simplicity of the people was the eagerness of the young people to learn, to be able to work, to try to create some awareness of their responsibility. The people were willing to gradually become involved more and more in the life of the Church and in their own lives.

We Bahamians experience ourselves as a majority. We have a different sense of belonging, we are not fighting for a presence in our society. Second, we may aspire to any level in our society if we have the opportunity and ability. More than these two realities is the additional factor of the sense of dignity which is implanted in us by our older people. Even if one wore pants that were patched and had no shoes, one cleaned oneself, one walked erect, had a sense of his nobility and was taught to bear this nobility with humility in a way in which the older people had a sense of greatness, that they were somebody. They taught this to us. We were to have manners and respect for others because they were people.

There is also the consideration of the way in which we were colonized and the decent way in which slavery ended in the Bahamas. There was not the tension and resentment over the legislation. Freedom came to us thirty years earlier than it did in the United States. In 1831 the crown declared that slavery was illegal, but the men who bought the slaves at the time it was legal were reimbursed. Also the people were prepared for freedom a year from the time of the legislation. This produced, first, a lack of resentment; second, people were prepared to grow. Our presence today evidences this. Third, as there was so much intermarriage, it was accepted and many of our forefathers kept their slave names instead of creating a whole new kind of nomenclature. We have several islands almost completely inhabited by a few family names such as those on Long Island or Eleuthera. Although there have been problems, by and large there has been a commingling in the deepest sense of the people. Even below our prejudices and difficulties which we know exist historically and in the hearts of people, there is a tendency not to be suspicious, to want to accept people as they come. It goes back to our self-dignity, maybe our princeliness which was kept from our forefathers. It goes back to the sense of bearing that the poverty or one’s state in life did not alter and maybe partly to the religious heritage and the
nobility of English culture of which we felt a part. We don't feel that we have to defend our existence or prove ourselves.

As non-Catholics, we always feared Roman Catholicism because we learned historically that whenever the Church moved in it always took over. We had fears, which were almost like myths, of what the Pope did. There was some kind of magical power behind the Church which we feared. But I think that it indicated a deeper thing about the Church, and that is its power to imbed itself in the people. We were first impressed, I personally was impressed, and I heard my family quite often speak of it. The Catholic Church in the Bahamas was immediately and almost across the board recognized as being a Church for the poor. Many of us criticized it saying that the Catholics were just trying to get numbers, by milk, cheese and a sixpence or so from the vicar general. But there was a growing admiration for them because schools were provided, the sick were looked after, those who were downtrodden were visited in their homes. You cannot fail to be impressed with this. Perhaps the singular and foremost quality of the Catholic Church's presence in the Bahamas is the socializing and lifting up of the people, helping their basic education and health as well as identification with the poor. This sense for the poor is still evident in the old fathers.

Unfortunately, we do not enjoy as much respect for spreading the Gospel. I am not so sure how deep that is. The Church has been imbedded in some way with numbers. One difficulty I find is that I'm not sure that the Church passed on to later generations the meaning of the mission, of being oriented toward the culture. Even though we spoke British English, we were a different culture. One of the great things about the Catholic Church is that it raises to the height of consciousness the cultural heritage of a people. It brings its message through their cultural heritage. We have a notion of the trans-cultural, a transcendental notion. In this sense I am of the honest opinion that we Catholics did not come with the notion to someday work ourselves out of a job as missionaries, rather we wanted to implant the Church and keep it going.

There is a particular problem here when we look at the Bahamian Church. It became more and more evident to me when our government changed in 1966 from a white minority government to a black majority. I heard enough myself to indicate that maybe our understanding of the Church's deepest aim for presence in a culture was not understood. There seemed to have been hurt or suspicion as many of us were coming up as young priests. I don't know, there is at once, the desire to help people, but almost to keep them in a position of being helped. The Church should bring to, raise up, and help a people determine themselves, become responsible in their own land—governmentally, socially, religiously. I suppose that in this sense we have not fulfilled our stewardship, that of trying to raise the level of responsibility of the men and women within the Church, to listen to the culture, to listen to the people, not to give answers beforehand, to have an unjealous heart. I know it's very difficult for all of us, but we cannot be afraid to risk working with patterns within the culture.

Some of these things were done by some fathers. For instance, I have always found very agreeable the genius within worship of the Benedictine fathers and their coming to the Bahamas. This was a blessing. I won't be prejudiced against any other group, but that the early fathers, such as Father Bonaventure said that people had to sing, that was a blessing. I
think the Church would have dropped dead spiritually if it hadn't used this part of our culture. It worked with something that was natural even though the fathers came from their tradition where the people were not singing or actively participating as a whole. It is a Bahamian response of the people always to be active and alive. Now, unfortunately, we did not take their active response as a desire to be included in and wanting to be placed on all levels.

I myself have experienced this difficulty. I will not attribute it to conscious bad will. I will say it is a different understanding of the Church, her traditions, her role, and almost for some of our men, a difficulty in seeing and understanding this. But the Church will have a future in the Bahamas if we can somehow risk trying to inspire the young to take part in it. We must offer constructive and not debilitating criticism, to pass the torch without reluctance whether it's within organizations, within the parish, within the life of the Church. The responsibility to include the people is the greatest sign of the missionaries fulfilling their lives. I know, personally, that our people will always be grateful whether they are Catholic or non-Catholic for the presence of the Church. The strength is there. Many people look for moral leadership in the Catholic Church even though unofficially the Anglican Church is the official Church. We are imitated in many ways, but unfortunately this has not been articulated as much as it should be.

We need a strong calling out to the people as we grow into a nation. This is a ticklish point. It is clear that we will be an independent nation. The Church has one of three ways to approach such a situation. Either she will change willingly beforehand, as did Jamaica and Trinidad, or she will change with problems arising as in Puerto Rico in the late 50's and early 60's, or the Church will simply suffer almost to the point of dying out as she suffered in some eastern countries. I would hate that to happen to us now because I have vested interests in the Catholic Church and I believe that the Church has much to offer the Bahamas. But there is almost an insensitivity and inability to sense what is going on in the hearts of the people and their national aspirations. There is an inability to listen and I fear that this might mean the nullifying of our work, which I do not think it involves at all. The Gospel and what the Church offers brings the people to a real heightened level of existence. It is not contrary to the culture at all. I don't use the word 'paternalism' because it makes people uncomfortable and erects a screen. This was in the periphery of my mind, but I would rather describe the reality, rather than let a word send up a smokescreen.

Being a British colony, and now a member of the British commonwealth, our history is somewhat associated with the Anglican Church, the monarchy and the government. This tradition has been passed on within the colonies. In the Bahamas, with the change of government, we see a gradual de-emphasis of this tradition. For example, the chaplains of the House of Assembly now will not be only Anglicans, but there will be a recognized pluralism. There are still services held in Christ Cathedral with the governor. But when a prime minister has not specified any one particular Church, he goes to official services where he is invited. There is a move towards a real recognition of pluralism. The Catholic Church was visibly with the poor people as were the Baptists and Pentecostals, whereas the Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians, but by far the Anglicans, were the leaders of the colony.
The Anglican Church has again reasserted its leadership in a new way with the advancement of Bishop Michael Eldon, a native Bahamian, from auxiliary to ordinary of the Anglican diocese of Nassau and the Bahamas. Bishop Markham is a man who recognized his own call to plant the Church. It is so evident that the Anglican Church in the Bahamas is now a couple men better than half native which he didn't meet in his eight years here. I think that he could attract more Bahamians both from the educational levels of their people and the possibility in the Anglican communion of a married clergy. All except two of the Anglican clergy here are married, and it is very interesting, too, that they choose the one confirmed celibate as their bishop. They have a good, alive worship but I would not play down our own Church in this area. Our working with the possibilities of Vatican II has helped us. We have a real opportunity. Just so the Church does not seem to assert more and more its leadership. I am not so sure that there is an appeal in that to the young. The Anglicans seem more motivated to get ahead, and they seem more articulate. Again this can be understood in that economically and educationally and everything else they are better established, although we are gaining fast. We have many, many outstanding men in government, such as Arthur Foulkes, Leon McKinney, the late Donald Davis, who helped raise the level of education, Sir Cyrus Davis, his brother, Dr. Gilbert Davis, another brother, and Winston Davis, senior administrator at the hospital. Also we have men such as Harold Longley, one of the managers of the Royal Bank of Canada, and Arthur Barnett in the department of education.

If we were to look consciously and see where our men are, if we can gather men and imbue them more and more because they are gifted, they will feel a real closeness and investment in the life of the Church. They like to feel proud of the Church and its future. We owe a great debt of gratitude to St. John's for even getting us started in higher education. A lot of our men came back and began to throw themselves into work. Andrew Curry, headmaster of Aquinas College, is a man of much energy, enthusiasm and abilities. He has with him now Basil Christie, trained at St. John's, as a guidance counsellor. Sr. Maedene Russell, O.S.B., diocesan superintendent of schools, has captivated many of the young. Our present bishop and Father Bonaventure brought her whole community in as a group and we have received some gifted people from Harbour Island. Her sister is the superior of St. Martin's Convent, Sr. Patricia Russell, O.S.B. Maxwell Thompson has done a marvelous job as magistrate and now is registrar of the Supreme Court of the Bahamas. He was in the parish where I was, a humble man. His son James, alumnus of St. Augustine's and St. John's University, is a well-known lawyer, prominent among the poor and prominent with the Haitians. I think that James, in a genuine spirit of not wanting to be publicized, has helped them when it was not a popular thing even among the poor to help the exiles. His brother is the former Fr. Leander Thompson, O.S.B. Charles Coakley has contributed his talents to the Church in Freeport, Grand Bahama, after resigning from the priestlyhood. His sister, Telzina, is now secretary to the Royal Commission, a gifted woman.

If we consciously brought these people together in different groups and at different times, the influence of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas would be like a virus. There are cells scattered throughout its life in pockets if you will, but like a virus it could work through the whole system and
influence the Church to feel more deeply but with decisive leadership and move away from the fundamentalism which cripples us. We live in the Bible belt, that is from Kentucky on down through the West Indies with its emphasis on the literal translation or literal meaning of Scripture. There is a reverence for the Word of God that is taken in such a way as to harm the Christian faith. There is religiosity which can sometimes border on hypocrisy. There is sometimes an intolerance and a lack of understanding of the kind of involvement a Christian has to have both not only to the Church but to society. There is a fundamentalism that separates between belief and action. Because of scholarship within the Church, because of the Bible in worship, in missiology, in the whole understanding of the Church's relationship to, not against, the world, we could talk to the world and relate to it in a distinctive way. The dialogic existence we have and our mutuality cannot but draw us into a wider and a larger context to bring this to our Bahamian men and women who have the ability to understand and to translate. We could create some sort of marriage where the Church can be a humbling but good influence.

We Bahamians have much going for us because we are a multi-racial society. The Church here, too, can bring a wider dimension to the Bahamas. The people are religiously oriented. I will not go so deep as to say we are Christian, that we have the two hallmarks of love thy God, love thy neighbor, a viable Christianity. I think we have the tendency to be Christians, we are open to it, particularly the young. The point that we must reckon with more and more is that our census indicates that 41 percent of our population is under fourteen. This shows that almost 60 percent are under twenty-five which means that our country of less than 200,000 is in a formative and impressionable stage. No matter what our failures have been in the past, because of the impressionability of the young, we can still regroup ourselves constructively and be an influence. One of my criticisms of our emphasis has been an Oedipus complex of building buildings over building people. Buildings can come, I am not going to decry the necessity for bringing people together. But that building emphasis has more often meant the solidifying of the sense that we are there. It is more important that we are friends of the Church in our hearts and our lives. Whatever institutions need to come as a result of its presence in us will naturally come. I don't think that the converse is true.

We have been negligent, too, in influencing the government which reflects the faith of the people. They are men and women who honestly have many faults. They have become more colonial than they realize; they are neo-colonialists. They learned from their forefathers well. But I think they could be influenced. They are not anti-Christian.

I really don't understand what happened at St. Augustine's to our Bahamians. Whatever I would say would be in part conjecture, certainly it would not in any way be definitive. I would say first, Father Bonaventure had two major jobs. I think it has to be looked at honestly and objectively from a historical point of view. St. Augustine's as a monastery and a high school underwent two major turnovers at the same time, and both of these primary responsibilities were put on the shoulders of one man only four years ordained. Being headmaster of the school at the time Xavier College for girls amalgamated with St. Augustine's was a major job. This had its attendant problems from the first. The monks did not have experience teaching with women, and the women with the men, so there had to be an
adjustment. There was at the same time an adjustment of the students, the boys with the girls, the girls with the boys, a working out of the co-educational, co-institutional program. The school tripled in number within a year through taking on a new school and an incoming class. So St. Augustine’s became a little town overnight of 1,050 students. This had its problems as faculty increased from twenty to at least fifty to meet the size of the student body, the facilities, the new grouping. That in itself would have been problematic, and I think Father Bonaventure did a remarkable job. His principle of using two deputies, a woman and a man worked. He obviously was articulate in educational principles.

At the same time St. Augustine’s became an independent priory. Father Bonaventure was chosen as its conventual prior of religious men who needed consciously or unconsciously to be grouped together into a cohesive bond in order to give them that kind of internal resource of belonging, of being able to work more creatively, to begin to forge themselves together as a monastery or as a community. This whole regrouping needed a concerted presence to try to draw the resources from within their personalities. There was a difference in age and a difference of background in the new Bahamian Benedictines. There was a kind of forging, but the energy necessary to draw the group together was not there because of the other responsibility in the school. This resulted in a lot of splintering and trying to find resources within their own personalities. Beyond this I cannot judge. I was very disappointed that I only heard criticisms from downtown, that is, from us, the clergy. In the main there was no effort made consciously to try to keep us together. The monastery was looked upon, and I heard this at meetings, as an opposition, always something to war against. It was an unhealthy attitude, instead of saying, ‘Look, we exist in the minds of the people and really and truly in the deepest Christian sense we exist as one unit; we must show the people how God works.’ And no one recognized that there could be diversity, that these were young men, these were Bahamians, the majority of them. It was important for the very future of the Church but that was not understood. Criticisms mounted. I am not going to justify the indiscretions, or whatever style of life developed at St. Augustine’s. This speaks for itself. I would only say that perhaps many things would not have taken on the proportions they did if there were the encouragement of brotherhood. We sometimes become far more noble with the benefit of encouragement than could even be expected or anticipated.

Our people are in many ways pained, deeply pained at all the leaving of the Bahamian priests and religious. When I became sick in December, 1970, some reactors thought that I was leaving, that I was just fed up. This is more an indication of their deep anxiety and tension because they love the Church and they look so much to us and for us. We say to them, ‘Yes, we are coming alive.’ In the deeper sense they see in us their hope, who they are, and I cannot help but think that is correct in many ways. There is a deep tearing inside, but at every turn they try to encourage and inspire us.

In the 1950’s and 1960’s the Church in the Bahamas had to meet the unexpected challenge of a new wave of immigrants who began entering, mostly illegally, into the peaceful waters of the Bahama islands. Arawaks, Loyalists, Eleutherian Adventurers, freed Negroes had previously sought
out the Bahamas as a refuge from wars, persecution and discrimination. The twentieth century refugees were the poor people of Haiti who fled from the dictatorship of "Papa Doc" Duvalier's notorious regime and the rampant poverty of that country. No Caribbean people has suffered more in contemporary times than the Haitians from oppression, insecurity and lack of opportunity to develop.

During the southern nights boats carrying Haitians would slip through Bahamian waterways and drop by the hundreds the poorest of the poor near island coastal reefs. These refugees were fleeing in hope of finding a new life and an opportunity to earn a living wage. Their numbers mounted rapidly in these two decades until 15,000 Haitians were moving in and out of the Bahamas in search of a livelihood. The Bahamian government, in the midst of an economic boom, needed a labor force to do basic work that Bahamians were refusing to do as they catered to the growing and more profitable tourist market. The Haitian government, while denouncing the development and fearful of invasion plots organized abroad, was relieved of a rural problem which they were unable or unwilling to meet. Periodic raids and deportation procedures were carried out by Bahamian authorities, often as pro forma gestures. As long as a Haitian man or woman had a work sponsor, he stood a fair chance of staying in the Bahamas at least for a time. The Haitians in the Bahamas were extremely mobile, moving back and forth to their native land, or trying to move on to the United States or Canada wherever possible.

The influx of this large ethnic group of French speaking Catholics presented a real problem to the Bahamian Church. By background and training neither the clergy, religious or laity were prepared to cope with this new dimension present on all sides. Expatriates and Bahamians alike were unprepared to function institutionally or to minister effectively for these new fellow Christians in their midst. Too often there was no desire whatsoever even to recognize the presence of the Haitians as it disturbed comfortable patterns of action. The Haitians were generally unwanted and unwelcome, a disturbing intrusion on the Bahamians' fixation with their own insular pursuits and perennially enjoyable identity crises. Latter day immigrants are always resented in every nation by the descendants of earlier immigrants who prefer to recall their own exploitation or contemplate previous injustices heaped upon their own peoples.

Bishop Paul Leonard, aware of what was developing in his diocese, tried to meet the crying spiritual needs of the Haitian wetbacks in the Bahamas. He appointed Fr. Prosper Meyer, O.S.B., as the first minister to their needs. Father Prosper labored quietly in this lonely apostolate during the last years of his life and was the first priest to come to these desperate people. After Father Prosper's untimely death in March, 1961,
the bishop of Les Cayes in Haiti sent Fr. Guy Sansaricq during that same year to work among the Haitians. He carried on an active apostolate until 1968 when he was forced to leave the Bahamas after a picture was sent to Duvalier of him among Haitians on a Bahamian cay purportedly preparing an invasion of Haiti. This was, of course, pure fabrication but Father Guy had to leave and was sent to Rome for studies. He returned from there to New York where he continued working among his people in exile in that city.

Fr. Remy David, O.S.B., was ordained in the Bahamas on 13 June 1968 after completing his studies at St. John’s University. He had left Haiti in 1960 to become a Benedictine priest and was now ready to work in this apostolate where he continued to 1973. Bishop Leonard also brought in a team of Montfort fathers and Holy Ghost fathers and sisters to work with the Haitians in the Bahamas.

Bishop Leonard, Fathers Guy and Remy record their impression of the beginnings of this twentieth century service to displaced persons. The value of tape recordings and interviews with persons involved stands forth in these accounts. If such techniques were available in the nineteenth century, a much more accurate account of immigrant and ethnic struggle would be available. A more complete and authentic history of the interrelation of peoples could be advanced. There is nothing that history suffers from more than the pandemic appropriations of self-appointed judges for a peoples’ development. Those involved were never heard. In this case, at least, the voices are authentic and original. No interpreter dilutes the message:

Bishop Paul Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B.:

If one knows anything about Haiti he couldn’t help but commiserate with me in the recent apostolate to Haitians in the Bahamas. Haiti is probably the worst part of the Caribbean in terms of standard of living and jobs. To this day the head of a Haitian family would probably earn $70 to $75 a year. A baby born in Haiti today has about 50 percent chance of living one year. They have what they call ‘boogie men’ or special police who must be terrible individuals. They can come in, take you out of your bed, and your family never sees you again. You can understand why they want to get out of there. Their life is really rough. They plot to come to the Bahamas. Some boat captain will charge them $200 which is an absolute fortune. They have to mortgage their farm, sell everything they have just for the trip here. They are dumped offshore during the night and try to make their way to shore in darkness. In a number of instances dead bodies have floated here the next morning. The chances are likely that once they get here, and having no papers of entry, they will be rounded up by the police and put in prison, many of them in groups of twelve or fifteen in a cell that’s meant for two or three at the most. The conditions are very bad, you wouldn’t believe it. As soon as they can be loaded onto boats, they are
shipped back to Haiti. There they are back in Haiti, minus their $200 and without a chance to work.

It is true over the years that a good many Haitians have obtained jobs here, and the Bahamian government is trying to evolve some method of solving this problem with the Haitian government. Many Haitians stay out in the bush just like animals. We have one church, which we call the 'Cathedral of the Wilderness,' where Father Remy is in charge. I go out and have Mass for them and they are like little children. I preach in English and Father Remy gives a running translation in Creole. They do have a great deal to contribute to the culture here. While they are poor and are regarded scornfully by a good many Bahamians, they have a culture that goes back a lot further than the Bahamian culture. They are better workers, particularly in garden work and farming. They'll take any kind of job because they are so desperate for work. And to their credit, one man might have a job, and he might have five men that stay in his hut. They're not working, but he's not kicking. He buys food for them as long as his money holds out. I've never seen any people better in sending money to their people back home because they know how bad off they are and how much they need it.

We must have some 15,000 Haitians in the Bahamas right now. We are getting more help for Father Remy. We have two Monfort fathers now, one a Frenchman and one a Dutchman, who have worked many years in Haiti, and they know many of these men personally and have a real love for them and a great zeal. We now have also Brother Emmanuel, a Monfort brother, who is Haitian and was in Brooklyn learning English. By 1972, two Daughters of Wisdom, the counterparts of the Monfort fathers, came, and they are nationals. It's a problem in evangelizing and looking after the Haitians. I really believe that they are being better looked after, better cared for in the Bahamas than they were in Haiti. Many missionaries in Haiti have been run out; priest power there is very scarce.

In general the Haitians are pretty well instructed and have an opportunity to practice their faith here. A problem that is coming more to the attention of our priests is that at this juncture a Haitian National Church could form within the Bahamian Church. I don't think anyone in his right mind would want that. There is certainly work that they have to do. The corporal works of mercy need to be performed every day. I feel that it is certainly our duty as missionaries to aid these people away from home. They don't know the Language, are hounded in many respects so that you can't help but love them and try to help them. But that they want to remain here away from their homes, I don't believe so. Sometimes the Bahamians, at least at first, would hire a Haitian to work for them. Then when it was time to pay him they would say, 'Want me to call the police?' Then he would be out his wages. I will say that now the Bahamian is beginning to accept them better. Probably the Haitian has more brains than the Bahamians, many of them. Maybe they are fearful that they would take over. We do have two or three little schools, trying to teach them English. Some of our lay missionaries instruct them in catechism as well as English. I don't fear that the tail is going to start wagging the dog. I think that somebody has panicked a bit and felt that we were going to have a national Church on our hands. Well, the people in Haiti are convinced that there will be about four times as many Haitians in the area in a few years than there are now. This could be a great help to us, but it could also be a problem. You have to look at it with an open mind. But we hope.
Our priest senate recommended that we have a meeting of priests who are interested and who work with Haitians to meet with our priests who work primarily with Bahamians. If they will be honest and express themselves we can probably work out some way of doing the best for the Haitians without developing a national Church. The Haitians are coming to the Bahamas in the greatest numbers. The Montfort fathers had taken a census in Haiti, asking questions such as, 'Were you ever in the Bahamas? Did you like it in the Bahamas? Would you like to go back to the Bahamas?' Everyone and his brother would give a leg to go to the Bahamas. They think it's heaven. And I'm sure the idea in Haiti is that you can pick up gold bars in Bahamian streets. Compared to the conditions in Haiti, you can see why. Many of them would say, 'Well, I got to get my son to college.' He comes here, works like a dog and is treated like a dog, many times. I would say that once this Montford team begins functioning, much good will develop. They will work with the priests. When it comes to the Haitians, they would work alone somewhat. It could be dangerous, if they would pull the Haitians away from their parish where they could associate with Bahamians and assist at the same Masses.

I have talked to the superior of the Montfort fathers in charge of the work. He sees the danger, and is quite willing to have his team work with the priests who would have charge of parishes. So we will try to avoid parishes that would be national.

The Haitians and those who work with them are rather silent and secret. I suppose in a certain sense like the Irish, who in the days of their miseries, found that if anybody talked they got themselves in a peck of trouble. It is amazing how this attitude develops. If you are in a country, say like Haiti, living under a person like Duvalier, you don't talk much. You don't even generally use his name. This could be a carry over, or it could be a personality trait.

In Eleuthera we saw a good many Haitians on a recent trip. There must be at least fifty or a hundred Haitian people there, and they come to Mass. In fact, the Saturday night Mass at Rock Sound had mostly Haitians. So Father Kelly of the Scarboro fathers read the lessons in both English and French as he didn't know Creole. In Grand Bahama a visiting Boston priest preached in French when he learned that Haitians were present. We are caught between making worship understandable to the Haitians and keeping the liturgy understood in the parish. Many of them have come here just recently and know little English. We have to minister to them. Whether we establish a Haitian parish as such immediately, or whether for the time being have Haitian services, a number of things on both sides must be considered.

I don't really believe we would want national parishes, certainly not over the long haul. But maybe of necessity we may have them for a few years.

Fr. Guy Sansaricq:

Almost 1,000 kilometers separate Nassau from the north coast of Haiti. This distance has often been crossed during the last 100 years by Haitian sailors in sloops and longboats in search of a market for the primitive agricultural produce of La Tortue and the Northwest. The rocky soil of the Bahamas is poor. The fruits from Haiti (mangoes, fig bananas, green
bananas and melons) and other food (malanga, ignamo, various kinds of peas) enjoy a great popularity at Nassau because of their high quality. However, this traffic has more and more declined. The long crossing of a stormy ocean makes the passage arduous and expensive, and the profits were small and precarious. These commercial contacts have never amounted to much, and the Haitians who through this commerce gained a foothold in the Bahamas were less than fifty in number.

With the second half of the 1930's, these occasional commercial relations began to grow and to change their nature because of two factors, both working in the same direction. On the one hand, the misery and terror reigning in Haiti under the savage regime of Francois Duvalier made emigration attractive. On the other hand, the adoption of a whole series of new political measures in the Bahamas released a rapid and considerable economic expansion. One glance at the Bahamian picture will tell the story.

Around 1955 the objectives of the Bahamian government could be reduced to these four points:

1. To make the Bahamas a high class center of tourism; to provide beaches and marinas no less attractive than those of Miami; to build luxury hotels and casinos comparable to those of Las Vegas.

2. To establish in the Bahamas a tax haven. New laws enabled foreign companies to establish their headquarters in the Bahamas without paying one cent of taxes. Example: fuel oil imported from Venezuela sold in the Bahamas, less than 100 kilometers from Miami, at a lower price than in the States. Many American cargo ships make a heavy profit by filling their tanks in the Bahamas and at no loss to the Bahamas.

3. To offer retired elderly American couples, who want to get away from the rigors of winter, the possibility to buy or rent residences and bungalows on terms much more attractive than at Miami Beach.

4. To offer exemption from all taxes to foreign industries who would establish plants, and, of course, tap the readily available manpower that is cheaper than in the United States.

Since 1957 this new policy began to show results. The building of hotels and residences, the opening of new sites, the development of a road system, the subsequent investment by many American families, attracted by these exceptional conditions, caused a considerable demand for manpower. Bahamian unemployment was rapidly absorbed. In fact, a certain shortage of manpower was felt. The crews of the little boat from La Tortue did not believe their eyes when they saw employment as common workers or gardeners offered weekly salaries of $30 to $40. They jumped aboard, engaged in new jobs and alerted their parents and friends in Haiti.

In the wake of this development the great tide of emigration from Haiti to the Bahamas began. Pressed by poverty at home, the Haitians arrived in total anarchy, outside all legal channels. At the first, the pitiful and miserable appearance of these beggars for work provoked pity. Besides, the Bahamian and American employers rather preferred these timid and readily consenting immigrants to native Bahamians who demanded more in wages and working conditions. Little by little Bahamians began to resent the considerable extent of this silent invasion and became alerted to too many threats to their own society. How many Haitians succeeded in getting to the Bahamas, how many gained a permanent foothold? No statistics are available. Nevertheless, a careful study of the problem permit these proposed figures:
From 1958 to 1971 the Haitian population of the Bahamas has essentially remained floating. At no time has the number exceeded 11,000, a figure perhaps attained in 1964-65. During these years, the number of new arrivals exceeded the number of deportees and voluntary returns to Haiti. Since 1966 the Haitian colony began to decrease and today may number approximately 5,000. Yet, during these last thirteen years more than 40,000 Haitians have passed through the Bahamas, but the majority had to return to Haiti, willingly or by force. Some two or three thousand could enter the United States. Many Haitians, apprehended by Bahamian immigration police as they attempted illegal entry, have known of the Bahamas only the notorious Fox Hill Prison where they were detained for some weeks, awaiting deportation.

Those Haitians questioned about the reasons for their move often reply in an unexpected and rather pathetic manner. Some say that at Nassau there is at least the hope to find work. In Haiti, they add with tears in their eyes, there is even no such hope. Others drop from their drained lips some such words, 'I want to live; don’t you understand that at home, life is impossible?' And their eyes, shining from an emaciated face, make us guess the profound tragedy of their troubled existence. The women say with sobs, 'It is our children who have forced us to leave; there is no ocean we would not cross to give them food to eat.' These women awaiting deportation sometimes scream as if they were mad. Others act as if they would rather jump into the sea on the way back and become the spoil of sharks than return to conditions from which they have fled. The frank witness of these men and their wives allows us to measure the unfathomable depth of the distress of the Haitian people. Their living conditions have become so desperate that a new belief has taken root in their minds: only emigration means salvation.

People of all ages debark at Nassau, children of ten to twelve years and old people of seventy; 75 percent of the immigrants are between age twenty and thirty-five, and again 75 percent of them are male. Almost all come from La Tortue, from the villages and fields of northwestern Haiti, from the Cape, from the Borgne. A minority comes from Port-au-Prince and the Gonâves.

At least 90 percent of the Haitian women are completely illiterate, the men to a lesser degree but probably still 60 percent. Those who supposedly know how to read can barely sign their name or laboriously decipher a French text which they do not understand. Those who really can read and understand a French text most likely do not total more than 15 percent; and fewer still are those who succeed in overcoming the traps of written English.

In an attempt to stem this solid influx, the Bahamian government has designed a system of measures aiming first at definitely preventing the landing of small clandestine crafts and then at expelling illegal immigrants. Over the years these measures were applied with more or less intensity and result. The Bahamian police began a surveillance of the coastline of the island of New Providence. Most of the Haitian captains learned how to double their tracks and evaded the vigilance of the inexperienced coast guard. Only occasionally was a captain caught and these rare mishaps did not seem to have any effect.

Tired of this hopeless warfare, the government resorted to a different procedure. Police trucks began to cruise in town and to question all suspects
who seemed to be Haitian. Those who could not produce a permit of residence in due form, and that means 90 percent, were arrested on the spot. Their deportation to Haiti in groups of about 100 followed. These arrests sometimes took the form of veritable raids, with whole quarters of the town cornered off, houses searched, and an incessant hunt for Haitians staged, quite worthy of the days and methods of Hitler.

Until 1964, Haitians with official residence permits were indeed rare. The Haitians living in the islands for five or more years were exposed to deportation as readily as any newcomer. This caused a state of widespread panic among the Haitian population whose members lived in constant fear of being suddenly arrested and forced back to Haiti.

In 1965 the Bahamian government realized the usefulness of Haitian manpower for an expanding economy. The government was exposed to the pressure of a multitude of Bahamian and foreign employers continuously vexed by the deportation of their Haitian work force. Besides, at that time business in the Bahamas took a turn for the better and more than 70 percent of the immigrants managed to avoid trouble. Then the immigration office decided to grant a sort of amnesty of six months during which it would issue work permits to all illegal Haitian immigrants who could find a sponsor.

This policy of a half-opened door had the result of regularizing the status of 5,000 Haitians in 1965. However, conditions under which these permits were issued were not exactly attractive. An immigrant Haitian remained bound to his job and sponsor. The expiration of his job necessarily involved the expiration of his legal status. There was no end of abuse to which he was exposed. Any change of employment caused a complicated legal procedure of which the revocation of the former permit was the only certain result. In principle, the permit was valid for one year and was renewable, but it could also be revoked by a simple decision of the immigration department.

Luckily this situation did not last forever. The measures of 1965 marked a sort of victory for the Haitians. The Haitian worker, by his tenacity and discipline, had gained, or rather had conquered, a sort of official recognition, however modest. A new climate was in the ascendency. A majority of Haitian laborers, free from the excruciating threat of insecurity, began to take its place in social life. These Haitians now bought modern furniture, refrigerators, radios and even automobiles. Some considered marriage. Eventually they could walk the streets in their leisure, go to movies, meet for relaxation, go to church, all without fear of the police. The essential conditions for the opening up of normal social life were within reach.

If the Haitians enjoyed the happy social effect of these measures, they were not always so warmly received by certain Bahamian classes. Arrests still continued but were directed exclusively against illegal groups without permits. Since 1960 relatively few new permits have been issued. But the laboring classes resented Haitian competition in the yards and construction while some of the educated classes feared that Haitian immigration would eventually overwhelm native Bahamians in number and culture. They thought that to admit so liberally the burden of too many illiterate immigrants, superficially tainted by a second-rate Latin culture, would mean cultural suicide. Besides, the presence of the Haitians created a multitude of other problems.
First, the disproportion between the number of new arrivals and jobs available was ridiculous. If for a certain period with few arrivals the majority of Haitians succeeded in finding work, that was the exception. More often, the concentration of a large number of unemployed with their feverish eyes caused unrest among the police. Also the Bahamians of the lower social strata complained to their labor unions about the bad effect this great number of hands could have on wages and unemployment.

In addition, there was the problem of housing, especially during the first years of immigration, up to 1964. These 8-10,000 uninvited newcomers all arrived within two or three years and had to be satisfied with the most dilapidated hovels. They would take no interest in cleaning, maintaining or remodelling their huts, often up to 10 persons lived in a room of 3 x 4 meters. Abominable clashes sometimes occurred between tenants and landlords who wanted to impose rents in proportion to heads. These poor housing conditions contributed to giving the Haitians a reputation for unsociability from which they have now barely escaped. Also the problem of Haitian women fast became a source of disappointment. These unfortunate creatures arrived with the same eagerness for work as did the men, but there was no work. The jobs of waitresses in hotels and restaurants were strictly reserved for Bahamians. Simply by persistently knocking on doors a minority of Haitian women got minor jobs as laundresses. In a small country where washing machines are still rare a strong woman willing to rub, wash, wring and press a basket full of dirty clothes could earn $4-$5 a day. Others staying home, took care of food and laundry for brothers, cousins, friends and boy friends, thus earning perhaps $20 a week. Most of them, however, let themselves be lured by other attractions. Powdered and made up like dolls, with abundant wigs, they pounded the sidewalks outside cafes and nightclubs. The trade paid. The more alert made their $200 to $300 a week. The local press could well launch an attack to run them down, accusing them of spreading venereal disease and imperiling the stability of the home. It was labor lost. Nothing could stop them.

Besides, these unfortunate women could well defend their cause when they were given the chance to speak up. They explained that their way was for themselves and their families the only means of survival, that it was necessity which drove them to this shame, and that it was not their fault if there were no place for them in business or industry. It is only too true that many moral problems arise less from a distorted conscience than from the anarchy of certain economic and social systems which condemn some human beings to social death.

One has to step down into the lowest layer of society and there meet the victims of this misery in order to realize the tragic and immeasurable debris rampant in these masses of humanity. And the principal perpetrators causing this state of affairs are none other than blind, perverse and irresponsible political leaders.

The problem of health proved no less difficult. Nassau's General Hospital, whose services are free, was literally taken by storm by Haitian patients who sometimes amounted to more than 25 percent of the occupancy. In 1965 the Bahamian government claimed to have spent $200,000 for the lavish medical care of the Haitians. All this, of course, did not provoke much sympathy. With such growth in population, public services would inevitably become overtaxed. Since 1964 almost one third of the patients of the government sanatorium are Haitians. Pre-natal care
accounted for the vast majority of cases treated. Most of these women were, at the time of disembarkation, in their 20's and 30's. Invariably within the next two years they bore a child. The Maternity Hospital soon felt the demographic pressure. The ministry of education had to calculate how many schools would be needed within ten years for all these children of immigrants. Since 1967 the medical practice of tying off the fallopian tube, administered by the hospital with the consent of the persons involved, has greatly diminished the birthrate.

The last problem which should be mentioned is that of prison and deportation. Since 1963 about 2,000 Haitians have been arrested, put into prison and deported to Haiti each year. Arrested in the streets, at work, or in their houses, they were taken to Fox Hill Prison in Nassau to await deportation to Haiti in a big motorboat of the Bahamian merchant marine. Almost every six weeks some 150 to 200 men are sent back to their native country. Although the prisoners are appropriately fed, their excessive number far exceeds the normal capacity of the prison, a huge stone structure erected shortly before the Haitian invasion began. Sometimes thirty or forty Haitians have to be kept in the rooms provided for toilet facilities, measuring 6 meters square. A rough linen cover protects them at night from the harshness of a cold cement floor.

The fear of deportation which haunts these men is beyond description. Fear distorts the faces of others that they will have to confront the loan shark of their home village who advanced them the money for their trip. All of them fear in their thoughts the corporal punishment to which they most likely will be exposed on their arrival from the hands of Duvalier's police. One man claims to have sold his last cow, his last plot of ground, his one and only sewing machine, his house, given up all his means of support to invest all this in a hopeless trip. If the men can still sometimes control themselves, the women literally lose their heads. Their desperate cries tear the air and leave the prison authorities completely bewildered. Day after day, these poor people act like the shipwrecked. No one who has not experienced in his own flesh biting hunger and thirst, cold and fear, who does not know of this continual but still ever strange brush with despair and death, can understand their distress.

The Haitians of the Bahamas represent a floating population. Hardly a month passes without newcomers arriving and old residents leaving, without moving from one island to the other into the interior of the Bahamas or to the United States. With this shifting population how is it possible to mold such a community into a stable organism? As soon as a leader makes his influence felt, he is already drawn into the strains of life and carried away by some popular movement. This fact must have its repercussions on all forms of collective activity, education and social life. The situation never gets beyond a first stage, beyond always beginning again from nothing, always starting from scratch in the face of a perpetually changing society.

These conditions maintain in the community a deep sense of insecurity which is psychologically depressing and little apt to foster social life. But in spite of all these handicaps the Haitian people show amazing signs of vitality. Even the most illiterate arrivals learn rapidly to handle English. If their boss is well meaning and if the job holds the promise of some permanence, they soon become integrated, and, in spite of it all, feel at ease. Most of them work by themselves or in small groups of two or three in
modest enterprises. Their working relations depend mainly on their personal contact with the employer in relation to whom they are of themselves helpless. Any action to fight for their common interest is extremely difficult to take. Nevertheless, in a dozen or more of the larger businesses, there are groups of 50, 100, 300 Haitian workmen. And with impressive energy and determination they have sometimes succeeded in the fight to better their labor conditions.

Likewise, invasions of Haiti have been planned and launched. Many men and women have dedicated their money, young men their future and even their lives to liberate their country from the absurd and anachronistic yoke of Duvalier. All these attempts have failed because of the scarcity of means, tools and clandestine and uncertain elements involved in such undertakings. The intervention of the Bahamian government, all too anxious to maintain good relations with the enigmatic Duvalier, prematurely stopped more than one coup. Several times such groups were imprisoned in the Bahamas and then deported to foreign lands on account of their militant anti-Duvalierism.

The bishop of the Bahamas and the priests in charge of the Haitians try to obtain from the Bahamian government the least brutal solution of the problem. Their efforts were quite successful, especially regarding the policy of the half-open door in 1965, the regularization of the official status of Haitian women recently married to bona fide immigrants, arbitration in labor disputes, and the recognition of political asylum requiring a special status.

The Church has attempted to help the greatest possible number of Haitians to regularize their legal status within the framework of Bahamian laws. At least 20 percent of those who obtained their first permits in 1965 were handled by the office of a priest for precise information, completing forms or writing applications. The Church also undertook to help in, and often to fund, the necessary steps for legal entry into the United States. Cooperation of the Catholic Relief Services in New York was requested and obtained. The tragic situation of the Haitians was brought to the attention of the High Commission for Refugees of the United Nations.

In addition to normal pastoral care, biblical studies, prayer meetings and the administration of the sacraments, the Church engaged in many other activities. The priest and his office became the post office for almost everybody. He also undertook a sort of banking service for the painfully accumulated savings of the illiterate laborers who mistrusted the banks. A ready means for sending checks to Haiti, at least 100 a week, was provided. The priest registered births and his office served as a waiting room for dispensary and hospital. Patients unable to tell their medical history in English were assisted by translations.

Finally, the Church offered a service extremely costly in every sense of the word: the reception of a very considerable number of new arrivals who came to the office in quest of clothing and money for rent, food and moving. This same sort of assistance was also extended to prisoners, men and women, ready for deportation. In addition to moral support, the bare essentials, such as shoes, shirts, trousers, dresses and pocket money often was supplied.

In weighing all these facts, the future of the Haitians in the Bahamas is anything but assured. Their future has to be considered in relation to two
basic facts: the continuing prosperity of the Bahamas and the future influx of illegal emigrants from Haiti.

Unfortunately, the flood of refugees continues to flow into the Bahamas, and on the other hand, Bahamian prosperity is on the decline. Less than fifty Haitians were able to acquire Bahamian citizenship. Less than 1,000 hold a permit of permanent residence. Only the few belonging to these two categories can reasonably consider their integration into the Bahamas as definite.

Haitian immigration to the Bahamas opens another window on the tragedy of a people in desperate struggle for survival. One day a British nurse in the Nassau hospital said, 'I have never seen such a forsaken people.' This phenomenon of immigration permits a view on the profoundly human repercussions in all strata of society, of the cynical and wasteful terrorism of the Haitian regime, and proves the irrationality of an economic system which benefits 10 percent of the people at the expense of an overwhelming national majority. It is high time to discard the myth the Haitian people are accustomed to. In truth, the Haitians, reduced and pushed to the last extremity, are standing at bay. They want to progress and they are by no means unwilling to accept change or to adapt to a foreign society. The system of permits which now governs the Bahamian immigration policy keeps them on the leash under a tight hand and shackles all initiative. The insecurity of their political and economic situation forces them to hoard their savings unproductively, instead, as they would wish, of investing them for productive purposes. This people has been crushed by the unbearable conditions imposed upon them, but for the little chance they have, they demonstrate striking signs of vitality.

Fr. Remy David, O.S.B.:

I made two previous trips to the Bahamas before I actually took over the job of working with the Haitians in 1968. In the summer, 1965, I visited Nassau for the first time. I met a young diocesan priest, Fr. Guy Sansaricq who was ordained in 1960 and came to Nassau in 1961. He was very well equipped for this job as he made his start in Canada. Because of his command of English and Creole, he was chosen by the bishop of Les Cayes, Haiti, to care for the Haitians in the Bahamas after the death of Fr. Prosper Meyer, O.S.B. He did a very good job not only as a minister of the sacraments but also in caring for the social needs of the people, trying to relate himself to the immigration authorities, the hospital and prison. These difficulties were numerous; they were in social work, namely, finding places for them to live, to work, helping to pay rent, getting the children into school. This kind of work really drew my attention as it was not only speaking the Word, but really taking care of the whole person. Because of the presence of community, I felt that it was a good place to work.

At this time, I was not completely involved as I found it difficult to readjust to Creole. Since I left Haiti in 1960, I had not spoken Creole. When I returned in 1966 the work was the same except there was one more thing added: many of the Haitians did not have work permits, and in many cases could not read or write, could not go to the bank and make a draft or buy a check or do anything with the banking system. It was impossible for them to convert their money into United States currency. Because of these problems and because he felt that it was a chance to contact more people,
Father Guy established a quasi-bank for them. The people could come every day except Sunday to deposit or withdraw money. Another service that Father offered was registering the births of Haitian children. As the Haitians do not speak English and the Bahamians do not speak or understand Creole, it was necessary that Father Guy register the births.

When I arrived in 1965 I put a little order in the baptism books and other office work. I took care of the prisoners, did the necessary shopping for clothing and other articles which they needed during their stay in prison. Actually during the summer of 1965 and 1966 I was a handyman. I arrived on 10 June 1968, was ordained on June 13, and then entered fully into the job without any preparation except during my summers in Nassau as a cleric.

First, I visited the out islands with Father Guy. We went to Grand Bahama, Eleuthera, Andros, Bimini and Abaco. Many Haitians are on each island, but the bulk of them are on Grand Bahama. About 1,000 Haitians live in Freeport and other settlements in Grand Bahama. Freeport is almost the corner of Miami for the kind of development that has been taking place there in the last ten years. The Haitians are spread throughout the city and it is very difficult to meet all of them. You meet a good number in Hawksbill, Hunter, Finder’s Point and West End because they are mostly in little groups in the yard by 4:30 p.m. In Freeport it is more difficult to find them as I didn’t know the streets very well. The greater number of Haitians, about 2,000, live in Nassau, mostly in a section called Carmichael Road. This section was mostly bush but now it is beginning to build up.

I will never forget an experience that I had in 1965 when I first arrived. It was the fifth anniversary of Father Guy’s ordination and people were having a fiesta for him. The fiesta had just started when we heard a group of people at a distance calling for Father Guy because someone was wounded. Everything stopped and we all went into the woods, it was really deep darkness, to see what the trouble was. We were with a man who had a flashlight in front of us, and as we walked he told us to watch the one who had no cover; it really was like going through a jungle. We arrived to find a man bathed in blood; it was the first time that I had ever seen such a thing. It was 10:00 p.m. and because it was so far from town, it was hard to find an ambulance. This experience I will never forget. The man lived but the other man in the fight was caught and sent back to Haiti; unfortunately, he died before he reached there.

In 1968 the administration of our banking system was going well. This brought about a good relationship between the priests in Haiti, Father Guy and the chancery in the Bahamas because the people trusted them better than the bankers and anyone else in administration. All of the checks were sent to the priests in Haiti and they delivered them to the people. It was a good way for the Church in the Bahamas to keep in contact with people in Haiti. With the interest from the deposits we were able to care for the prisoners, those in need of shoes and clothing, pay rent for those who couldn’t afford it, help those who weren’t working and also care for some of the poor in Haiti.

Also, what is very important, was our liaison with the Bahamian government. There was a good relationship between Father Guy and the UBP Government (United Bahamian Party). The UBP recognized the Haitian consul to be a very crooked man so they did not deal with him. Any time a report was needed on the Haitian situation, it was always
Father Guy who made the report to the UBP government. He handed it to the secretary of the government and some of the advice was listened to.

My work has continued along the same lines as Father Guy with few innovations. We do have evening school for the Haitians in which we teach French and English. We continue to take care of birth certificates, problems with immigration and deportation, those who are in prison and the hospital. I made a little innovation in liturgical celebrations. Because of his many obligations, Father Guy could not pay much attention to the liturgy. Our liturgy is mostly in French but we now also use Creole. We want some relationship with the development of the liturgy in Haiti. In Haiti the liturgy is either in Creole or French, but in Nassau it is in Creole. Now that books and Vatican Council II documents are translated in Creole along with many new songs, our music is mostly native. By doing this, we try to make them feel at home, at least in their worship.

In Nassau we have three Masses; at St. Bede's in the eastern section we have Mass at 11:15 a.m. The Haitians who come to this Mass are from Sacred Heart and St. Anselm's parishes. We pick them up for the liturgy and return home with them at about 12:15 or 12:30 p.m. In the afternoon, at Our Lady's Church, our largest church, we have the heart of the Haitian liturgy. At 2:00 p.m. we have a Bible class in which we try to explain the Scripture readings for the day. At this time also we distribute the mail, another service we render the people. Mass is then celebrated at 4:00 p.m. At 7:30 p.m., we go out to Carmichael Road to a small one room church; only Creole is spoken here.

I am in contact with about 5,000 Haitians, but this is not constant. I try to visit Grand Bahama each month for about four days spending a day at each settlement. One day for each place is difficult as you really can't do a good job just passing one or two minutes in each place. They are happy to see you, but you do not have time to solve their problems.

The Haitians now in the Bahamas will not spend their lives here. Perhaps if Bahamians received them more wholeheartedly they might stay. We have to distinguish between those Bahamians who are educated and those who are not. Those who have been to school recognize the Haitians for what they are, but the others think that they are just a low class of people who do not deserve any consideration. In some ways they have reason because most of the Haitians are not really the upper class of Haitian society. They are people who have never gone to school, saw the priest only once a year, or people who never went to town. When they come to Nassau, they try their best but they do not show really the ideal Haitian people. With the shortage of work due to the current Bahamian economic recession, many of them have returned to Haiti. For them it is better to live in poverty at home and have what you call self-respect, than to live in riches outside and have no self-respect. This is the way the Haitians consider their lives. Like the Jews of the past, all doors seem to be closed for the Haitian nation. The Cubans are well received, without any papers, at any time in the United States, but for the Haitians it is really difficult to get the necessary papers or to meet the necessary conditions. But they try.

After World War II and during the succeeding quarter century a major economic boom took place in the Bahamas. The government pursued a highly sophisticated policy of developing tourist trade in the islands
as a twelve month industry that eventually brought in over a million
visitors a year. The Bahamas had a twenty year start on Caribbean
islands to the south due to the foresight and imagination of Sir Stafford
Sands, first as chairman of the development board and later as minister
of tourism, and the United Bahamian Party then in control of the govern­
ment. The closing of Cuba to tourists by Castro’s Communist govern­
ment was equally a cause of this phenomenon. The standard of living rose
rapidly and there was no unemployment. Tourism grew to account for
70 percent of the Bahamian gross national product, earned 55 percent of
the government’s total revenue, was the principal earner of foreign ex­
change, and employed directly or indirectly two-thirds of the total labor
force, approximately 46,000 Bahamians. Tourism was responsible for
bringing to the Bahamas one of the largest per capita incomes in the
Caribbean and Central American area.

Along with tourism the Bahamas cultivated banking and investment
as a tax haven for foreign companies. A favorable tax environment soon
brought the Bahamas the title of the “Zurich of the Caribbean.” Real
estate development and the construction of “second home” projects at­
tracted older and affluent foreigners to the isles of perpetual June. It was
a drastic change from the plantation and fishing village economy of the
past with their periodic recessions or episodes of blockade and rum­
running. It was a new and cosmopolitan Bahamas, a sun-filled and glam­
orous preternatural front of hotels, casinos, beautiful sandy beaches,
international yacht and sailing regattas, condominiums, golf courses,
package vacations and charter flights.

Paradise Island was developed on the former Hog Island in Nassau
Bay. International financiers such as Huntington Hartford, Axel Wenner­
Gren, Sir Harry Oakes and Wallace Groves took an active interest in the
development of New Providence and later Grand Bahama where the
emergence of Freeport was one of the capitalistic wonders of the times.
This influx of capital, investment and job opportunities brought wages
to the rapidly growing Bahamian population that they had never previously
enjoyed. At the same time the moral tone of life definitely retrogressed
due to a tourist milieu which became pervasive. The Churches, including
the Catholic bishop, opposed the introduction of casino gambling in the
Bahamas, but it was pushed through by Sir Stafford Sands and company
without any consideration except capital gains and astronomical legal
fees. This eventually, after an investigation by a royal commission, brought
about the political downfall in 1967 of the United Bahamian Party. At
least by law the Bahamian people and resident expatriates were excluded
from frequenting the gambling tables. Thoughtful people worried about
the introduction of the Mafia into the Bahamas and they had reason to
be concerned. Winston Churchill, after a visit to the Bahamas was asked by a New York reporter for his impressions. He replied, "The pirates are still there."

The Bahamian intellectuals and those concerned with a cultural development of the people did not like the country becoming a mass supplier of waiters, bellhops, chefs and maintenance men. Yet there was no other large industry as a source of basic employment. The emerging Bahamian nationalists also questioned the wisdom of allowing foreign investors to control tourism. Living prices rose for Bahamians as there were no local centers to produce food and other necessities all of which continued to be imported. Thus, while employment and wages were high, living costs consumed the greater part of an inflated income.

During this time the Progressive Liberal Party, representing the aspirations and ambitions of the 85 percent Negro population of the Bahamas, was mounting a stronger campaign year by year against the entrenched United Bahamian Party. While prosperity and plenty had come to the Bahamas, there was a strong minority of privileged who became classical targets for accusations of corruption, exhorbitant retainer fees and misuse of power. The PLP also inveighed for fifteen years as the opposition party against civil injustice, ancient wrongs and racial malpractice. Discrimination in public facilities and hiring practices were slowly broken down through the leadership of Etienne and Eugene Dupuch in the columns of The Tribune and in the House of Assembly. Others who advanced the process of change toward a society of equal opportunity and employment for all Bahamians were Clarence Bain, Milton H. Taylor, Milo Butler, Sr., Sam White and Charles Rhodriguez.

The PLP party won a surprising victory in the elections of 1967 and named a new prime minister in the person of Lynden O. Pindling, a Bahamian lawyer. The rule of the "Bay Street Boys" had been overthrown and a party of the people with a populist platform controlled local government. Sir Stafford Sands withdrew immediately to Spain, never returned to the Bahamas, and died in voluntary exile in London in 1972. It was an electrifying government changeover for the Bahamian people. For the first time in their long history they had a majority party that promised to represent their interests. One educated Bahamian stated, "The evening that the PLP won cars were honking, bells were ringing, there was dancing and jubilation throughout the island. I, for the first time, fully realized that I was a Bahamian. I was not an appendage of England or the United States or all the types of colonial and metropolitan manipulation which had been our heritage."

The PLP government from 1968 to 1973 emphasized education as the primary budget measure and made real progress in advancing secondary
education among the growing number of young Bahamians. Sixty percent of the population was under age twenty-five. The new government officials were for the most part products of mission schools at home and scholarship opportunities abroad. They valued education highly as a primary means of elevating their people, and it was advanced during their tenure in office more than it had been in any previous administration. The business community, in control of previous Bahamian administrations, had not valued education as the essential ingredient of the colony. It was ever so with colonial governments; education was fostered only on the primary level as a method of holding people down.

Another policy of the PLP government which did not achieve immediate results was its "Bahamianization" program. In an effort to encourage businesses to train Bahamians for key positions of responsibility and authority, the government inaugurated a restrictive immigration policy against expatriates by refusing them work permits in the family islands. While the Hotels Encouragement Act permitted industry to employ up to a 25 percent expatriate staff, in Nassau and Freeport the expatriate proportion was 19 percent in 1968, and down to 5 percent in 1972. Bahamians were not trained or ready as yet to take over all responsible positions in finance and commercial enterprises but the government pushed to this end relentlessly. Tensions were generated by this policy. While the government desired to attract the tourist and foreign investor, it became more and more difficult for a foreign investor to manage his investment in the Bahamas. This paradox of conflicting interests brought an unfavorable reaction from the foreign press especially in England, Canada and the United States. Press comment about the Bahamas from abroad became increasingly unfavorable and the economy suffered a recession in the early 1970's. A large number of educated young people could not find employment. An open campaign against the Freeport investors was pursued by the PLP government and stringent threats were made to "bend or break" or to reduce it to a "fishing village" economy. All of the well-known stops were pulled as the PLP government moved toward nationhood and self-determination for the people of the Bahamas.

The empire of England collapsed as a result of the bloodbaths in the European civil wars between England and Germany in 1914 and 1939. England and her allies had ostensibly won World Wars I and II, but the aftermath left Britain a second rate power economically. Britain could no longer cope with a worldwide empire. One by one she willingly shed her former colonies, trying at all times to embrace them in a commonwealth association with herself. But both England and Germany had eliminated themselves as major powers from the world stage as a result of their repeated encounters. The United States, Russia and China had
now emerged as world powers for better or for worse. England was left to pick up the pieces of, perhaps, the best of all governances that planet earth has seen. Colonialism was as dead as any old horse could be. It was as easy for former colonies to move toward nationhood as for a child to take its first step. Britain was solidly behind them all the way. It took some time for rabid nationalists to realize that Mother England had been there before them. One governor after another in the Bahamas kept saying the British government believed “that the way to train people is to give them responsibility; that the people have the right to choose and, if they so wish, to change their government and fully participate in it.” It was often a charade to watch Britain and her former colonials tumbling over each other in a surge for independence and nationhood that would have left the nineteenth century English wrapped in cold sheets. One can only be permitted the question: could the same statement be issued by a British official in Northern Ireland where England cannot seem to forget her compulsion over four centuries to dominate the Irish people?

The PLP government chose 19 September 1972 for a general election. The opposition party, called the Free National Movement, was composed of a group of breakaway dissident PLP members and former UBP supporters. The issue was independence for the Bahamas in 1973 which had been chosen by the PLP as a campaign issue and heralded across the family islands. No one was against independence and nationhood for the Bahamas. The question was should it come under the umbrella of the PLP party or later when economic stability had been soundly restored.

The Catholic Church took no position in this political debate; it had not participated previously in political encounters either. The Church was present in the Bahamas to serve all the people and to help in their development wherever possible. Bishop Leonard issued a strong statement encouraging all people to participate in the debate and to exercise their voting obligations.

When the returns were in the PLP under the leadership of Prime Minister Pindling won a landslide victory by capturing 29 of the 38 seats in the Bahamian Parliament. A clear mandate had been given to proceed with steps to make the Bahamas an independent nation. Since 1967 the islands had been given control of most of their own internal affairs. Britain had continued to handle foreign affairs while at the same time giving every indication that her majesty’s government supported independence for the colony. Mr. Pindling set 10 July 1973 as the target date for establishing the new republic with commonwealth status. Constitutional talks were held in London during early December, 1972. Both
the government and the opposition agreed substantially on the type of constitution and its interpretation for an independent Bahamas. There were generally positive signs of cooperation in this common venture. The process of independence was a major challenge for the Bahamians. They moved peacefully and constructively toward that important goal so long awaited in the archipelago.

One of the more important and hopeful frontiers which began to flourish in the Bahamas after Vatican II was the ecumenical apostolate. It was certainly badly needed and long overdue there as elsewhere in a sadly divided Christendom. The Bahamas had been a classical arena for that typical Christian infighting over legitimacy which had disfigured the Body of Christ for so long. It was a British colony with dominant English cultural patterns dependent on American tourists and capital. The Anglican Church dominated religious life with a strong undercurrent of Methodist and Baptist fundamentalism emanating across the sea from the southern United States Bible belt. There was a strong anti-Catholic heritage which, as has been mentioned previously, made itself felt at every step in the beginnings of the Church in the Bahamas. Catholics were not slow to respond in kind to their detractors. They mounted an active apostolate of conversion to that true Church which they were convinced was the Roman Catholic Church. It was highly successful and brought many converts into the Church. As one Bahamian Catholic lady told her pastor succinctly, “I come to our Catholic Church for the real sacrament and the dogma; I go over the hill to the Jumpers for the sweetness.”

Much energy was wasted in the Bahamas between Anglican and Catholic clergy over the muted question of the validity of Anglican orders. This is far from a closed issue. The late nineteenth century decision of Rome will have to be reviewed in the light of new historical evidence that has emerged, as well as deeper theological insights into faith and order developments. Anglican-Catholic dialogues since Vatican II on the Eucharist, as well as reconciling gestures by Rome and Canterbury, have moved the whole position of the two Churches into a new and promising posture. The Orthodox, Anglican and Catholic communions have within a few years established a basic fraternal relation which has not been enjoyed for 400 years in the West and 900 years in the East. For the first time in centuries it is possible at least to hope for Christian unity, the last prayer of the common Lord.

It is not the primary task of an historian to beat dead horses. So much could be written about Anglican and Catholic clashes in the Bahamas, their body counts, conversions, upstagings and advances at the expense of each other. The remarkable phenomenon apparent today in
the Bahamas is that the Anglicans remained so tolerant and receptive, for
the most part, to communion with their separated Catholic brethren, and
that the Catholics have come so far in such a short time from their defen­sive apologetic to an awareness of the full meaning of the theological
concepts of “types of churches” and “the people of God.”

Through the instrumentality of the Bahamas Christian Council, an
interfaith steering body, Catholics have also moved in closer cooperation
with Methodist, Baptist and fundamentalist bodies. Public goodwill was
evidenced in the late 1960’s and into the 1970’s through this organization,
although much of the fellowship was superficial. There was really not
much in common between the mainline Christian Churches and the funda­mentalist branches. However, a tenuous beginning was made. The real
and hopeful advance was made between Anglicans and Catholics during
this time. Their roots and origins were similar. Their separation was
primarily an historical and political manifestation of the emerging nation­hood of mother Britain in the sixteenth century. It had nothing to do
with the Bahamian people. As happened so often with colonialism, the
conflicts of European societies of another age were dragged across the
Atlantic and dropped on American and Caribbean soils.

Garnett Levarity of Freeport stated on 12 February 1972:

We have outgrown specific religious denominations. At a recent
ecumenical worship service of Baptists, Church of God, Anglicans, Catho­lics, etc., when the ministers prayed together, it was the first time I wit­nessed the outpouring of the Spirit of God. I felt the presence of God as I
have never felt in my Anglican Church. All denominations seem to be in
agreement on basic creeds. It is this ‘United Christian Front’ that the
world is looking for today. Your life brings me closer to Christ than your
doctrine. Any leader who does not know God is no leader. People guide
us by their lives.

If there was one chorus this writer heard loud and clear from the
Bahamian people it was, “We had nothing to do with all of that religious
fighting they tell us about. We didn’t start it and we don’t want to
continue it. We want to worship and love the Lord and our fellowman
in one Church. We just don’t believe there’s that much difference.” In
that one statement can be found the essence of the third world’s rejection
of metropolitan and European-American hangups with their past, be it
religious, as in this case, or political, social or cultural baggage.

There is an important reality to face here. The history of Christen­dom has been written too often in terms of Europe and America, the
power structures of previous centuries. More studies have been made of
remote and defunct European monasteries than of any third world Church
in Africa, Asia, South America or the islands adjoining these continents.
Bishop Hagarty delivering the formal call to the first diocesan assembly of the Bahamas, June, 1972. At left, his Lordship, Anglican Bishop Michael Eldon of Nassau and the Bahamas.

Fr. Preston Moss, present chancellor, concelebrates Mass during the diocesan assembly.
Clergy processing from Mass during the assembly.

Fr. Andrew Jahn, S.S.C.C., pastor of St. Francis de Sales Church, Marsh Harbour, Abaco.
On the floor of the assembly.

Prime Minister Lynden O. Pindling of the Bahamas at a Catholic University of America reception for him, 3 March 1973, with Vice-presidents Msgr. John Murphy and Dr. C. Joseph Nuesse.
Mary Star of the Sea Church, Freeport, Grand Bahama.
The dictum of Hilaire Belloc still holds sway in too many minds, "Europe is the Church." That such an oversimplification could still continue subconsciously in a global era speaks volumes for the challenges to organized religion today.

There was so much going for the Anglicans and Catholics in the Bahamas if those two ships had not for so many years continued to pass silently in the night. The Catholic missionaries in the Bahamas were Benedictines, the same religious body that had brought Christianity to England. It has often been observed that if Britain had not broken from Rome, the Church in England today would be Benedictine in substance and Anglican in form. The cathedrals of England are in the countryside since they were built adjoining Benedictine monasteries. The notables of Britain are buried in Westminster Abbey. It was Augustine, the Benedictine, patron of St. Augustine's Monastery in the Bahamas, who brought Christianity to Britain so "the Angles could be angels" as the Benedictine Pope Gregory I hoped. So much history of separated Christian brethren met in the Bahamas. But for years a hardnosed apologetic kept their common heritage from emerging. An element of German-American prejudice against John Bull among the Benedictines who worked in the islands was certainly evident. A bias against American Catholic clergy of German extraction was equally pronounced across the years among English types in the Anglican communion who found such an intrusion on their preserve almost too much to bear.

The remarkable entrance on the Bahamian scene of his Lordship, Bishop Bernard Markham, as Anglican bishop of Nassau and the Bahamas for nine years (1963-72), brought about the contemporary breakthrough in Anglo-Catholic relations more than any other factor. This genial, kind and ever charitable Englishman effected during his tenure in office more changes than any of his eleven predecessors. He quietly but forcibly advanced a Bahamian as his auxiliary, Bishop Michael Eldon, who succeeded him in June, 1972, a first in the islands. Both he and Bishop Eldon are celibates, but he advanced a Bahamian married clergy of some twenty priests in the Anglican communion. He became a close friend of Bishop Paul Leonard. These two bishops, English and Irish-American, gave an example of Christian brotherhood which was unknown in the islands before their time.

Fr. Joseph Perna, Catholic diocesan priest, took up an office in Bishop Markham's chancery and the beginnings of ecumenical activity had arrived in the Bahamas. Father Perna, a late priestly vocation, was particularly interested in ecumenical work. Through his energetic encouragement a series of ecumenical activities were inaugurated in the Bahamas which no other diocese, to this writer's knowledge, has yet
achieved. On Ash Wednesday of each year the bishops and faithful of the two dioceses, Anglican and Catholic, gather in alternate cathedrals for an impressive ceremony of common Christian repentance before the Lord. Massed choirs sing, Scripture is read, especially the Gospel by three priests in the sanctuary. After the ashes are blessed, each bishop gives the other the Lenten ashes and they then jointly distribute them to their people who participate in this testimony of our common sins before the Lord.

On Palm Sunday afternoon an even more unique ecumenical event is enacted. Representatives from the parishes of all Christian denominations in Nassau march as groups with bands and palms and banners into Rawson Square on Bay Street from all parts of the city. There they sing, listen to the Gospel of St. Mark read by professional interpreters, and pray with representatives of the various Christian denominations. The “whole thing” was carried by ZNS to all the family islands. There is no diocese in the Americas or Europe that has such a public manifestation at the beginning of Holy Week of the Christian faith in the risen Lord.

In 1972, as the professional readers were telling Mark’s account of Peter’s betrayal of the Lord while the cock crowed thrice, the flagship Queen Elizabeth II pulled into Nassau Harbor with ships’ horns announcing her arrival. As the tourists poured off that ship into Rawson Square, they were astounded at what met their eyes. There was a multitude of people in front of the well-known statue of Queen Victoria who had brought independence to the former slaves of the empire. Beneath her statue was a large contemporary banner with the message, “Jesus is Lord.” One English lady, who had just disembarked, said, “I say, is this real? I can’t believe it. I’ve never seen anything like it in my life,” as tears ran down her cheeks. Her husband was, meanwhile, running around with a camera taking pictures as the Bahamians belted out, as only Bahamians can sing, Samuel Wesley’s The Church’s One Foundation is Jesus Christ Her Lord. If this event could have been videotaped, other Christian communions across the world could see a coming together of a Christian community which is prophetic. It is, however, presently abortive as the organized Churches cannot seem in our times to take the second step due to their institutional fears. It is a pioneer period in the ecumenical apostolate throughout Christendom. The Bahamas could supply some roadmarks to those seriously engaged in solving the tragic separation of Christian bodies in our time.

Bishop Markham spoke out strongly on this point. It will take decades to see the realization of his dreams. On Ash Wednesday, 20 January 1972, he courageously stated in St. Francis Xavier Cathedral,
shortly before his voluntary retirement in favor of a native Bahamian and his return to England where he humbly serves as a parish rector:

Very little real ecumenical progress has actually been made in the Bahamas. The movement is stillborn as yet. There is no real cooperation in the vital things which affect life such as drugs and alcholism. There is a notable absence of adolescents here this evening.

The unity of Christians is a compelling must because it was the last desire of Jesus on the eve of his passion. Unity is also a theological reflection of the mystery of the Trinity. The most divisive force on our Bahamian islands is the Christian religion. We have perpetuated a ridiculous tribalism, inflated census figures, concern for our own image, hidden indifference, mutual mistrust, inability to pray for each other, and even a mutual hostility in our own sects.

Our present duty is an hourly obligation to meet each other openly and sincerely. We have a deep lack of theology and social consciousness in the Bahamas. We have forgotten that divisions are caused by sin, mostly pride. There will be no unity where there is no life in Christ through prayer. We must at once begin continual penitence and charity toward each other, faithfulness in prayer, an ever loving presence toward each other in Christ.

Both Bishops Markham and Hagarty commented in interviews on the ecumenical dimension of the Christian apostolate in the Bahamas. Their honest statements are the most refreshing and encouraging development toward that full Christian life still lacking in the Bahamas and to a far greater degree in the Americas and Europe. How many of their brother bishops are ready even to face the problems as they do here:

Bishop Bernard Markham:

One of the real problems is that almost all Christians of the Bahamas have been bred on a kind of religion which was brought in to them. They have been loaded with the miseries of sixteenth century Reformation history when really it would have been a good thing if they could have been spared that. All these divisions are so frightful. But the dreadful thing is that instead of the divisions getting less, they are getting more so really, except in regard to Anglicans and Catholics and possibly the Methodists. Almost every month there is a new church building put up in the Bahamas. The idea of the Church as the Body of Christ is almost nonexistent. The trouble is that religion here seems to center around personalities. I recently heard of a Church which was itself the fourth breakaway from another Church. The minister there has proved to be unsatisfactory to some of the people so he’s hiving-off and there you’re going to go to another Church. We have this sort of dividing and subdividing.

One of the things which I’ve rejoiced with since I came here nine years ago is there has been a growing together of ourselves, the Anglicans and the Roman Catholic Church. It began even before Vatican II in a way because of my friendship with Bishop Hagarty. Bishop Hagarty is a man I admire tremendously. He has had a great difficulty in acclimatizing himself to the new look and the Vatican II decrees because there’s no doubt about it, the Roman Catholic Church in the Bahamas in its early days was very
conscious of being the true Church, we’ll say, and determined to make proselytes. When I came it was still quite definite that the relationship between the two Churches was anything but good. But quite frankly I have found almost without exception just the opposite. The first priest I met was the vicar general, Fr. Cornelius Osendorf, O.S.B., whom I met at a tea at the home of Senator Etienne Dupuch, the editor and papal knight. We got along very well because I asked one or two leading questions. I said, ‘Father, what do you do when a priest on the out islands is getting a bit off center, you know?’ ‘We bring them in and give them a tidying up period in Nassau.’ You see, it is the sort of pastoral situation that we all share. I will say there’s been a tremendous drawing together.

Oddly enough, my relationships with the American priests in your Church have been much better than that with the English priests. In some extraordinary way some of the English priests have brought over their sort of Marian persecution attitude of England. Everybody was persecuted at that time, and of course in England things are different now. We’ve had Archbishop Ramsey here in the Bahamas, followed by Cardinal Heenan. The amazing thing was the meeting we had when the archbishop of Canterbury was here. Many of your clergy came and we met for a morning of recollection. Here was something we could meet on, we were all together in the spiritual life.

My real strong feeling on the Church in the Bahamas is that it suffers from a terrible superficiality. There is very little depth in it at all. We’ve got to watch very carefully that we don’t develop our tremendous activity in the very same way. Some Christian ministers are definitely overcommitted politically. A good deal is tolerated in the private lives of some ministers of the various bodies which we should normally not tolerate. Baptist ministers combine being ministers and doing other jobs. We Anglican have a rule that priests mustn’t engage in trade and that kind of thing. But in the out islands the Baptist ministers often have a trade or business and consequently you don’t get that sort of spirituality and the right sense of reserve. Things which we use like confession are almost nonexistent in many of the Churches.

One of the greatest problems is for the clergy of your Church, to adapt your spiritual life, partly because of the heat and partly because of the sort of jobs that have to be done. There has been a very great tradition here that the priest is everything to the people, e.g., Father Cornelius pulling teeth on the out islands. A very interesting thing is that the Bahamian people regard one of the priest’s jobs is filling out immigration forms, and that kind of thing. Where we have got together has been on the spiritual level. That’s why I value so much the religious life in the Bahamas. I have found that in talking to the sisters of St. Martin de Porres Convent and the Aquinas College sisters we’ve been exactly on the same wave length. They’ve invited me to their place; they’ve been here to tea. I’ve been invited to their concerts. But I do want to stress this superficiality. Quite frankly, I almost despair of it. Consequently, trivialities which are of very minor importance get stressed.

I’m amazed, really, the way that the Roman Catholic Church and the ideas of Vatican II have come through so quickly, both liturgically and ecumenically. I’ve done a good bit of rethinking about this. I’m not sure myself that the bringing together of great power structures is what is
needed; I don't believe that. We can't rewrite history and there are certain emphases which can't be ignored. The next step will have to be in some relation to intercommunion.

So many of the problems, both in your Church and ours, are that we've failed to distinguish between status and function. A priesthood is not a status, it's a function to serve the Church. One of the things which I have wrestled with in my own mind—but I can't see the answer—is that we are a sacramental Church; we regard all the sacraments as necessary to salvation. And yet by insisting on very careful selection and sacramental ordination, we deprive so many of our scattered people from the sacraments. If I read history right, in the early Church a local Christian leader would be given permission to preside at the Eucharist in the local church. I don't know what the solution is. You can't have temporary ordination. But if there is to be this sort of development, we've got to think of another way of doing it. Now, Catholics, for example, are not getting Bahamian ordinands. We are. We have five in training now; others will be coming forward. People say to me, 'Well, of course the difference is that the Roman Catholic Church insists on celibacy and we don't.' I'm not altogether sure that's true, really. We allow both, according to our teaching. We had a Jesuit talk to us some time ago. He said, 'The crisis is not entirely due to celibacy, but it's sort of a crisis of identity.' So many of your clergy appear almost to be machines, sacramental machines, turning out the sacraments and cease to be persons. In the English Church, rightly or wrongly, we have sort of never let go of this personality, but it works in different ways. Sometimes you find a church where the priest has been popular, did very good work. He was followed by a less effective priest so the congregation has gone down. This sort of separates the sheep from the goats.

Among the great things that Vatican II has done, it has made the priest feel that he is a real person. I value that. I think the other thing is that we've been delivered from the bondage of the law. I welcome such things as the easing of the fast before Communion, and all the other things. In my younger days we used to worry about saying things correctly, if you cleaned your teeth, being careful not to swallow anything before Communion and that kind of rot. It had nothing to do with the Gospel. One of the great things is this sort of growing together in faith, and realizing what are really the important things. There's one question here that occurs to me. Do you regard faith and orders indivisible, or can you sort of absolutely, 100 percent, be committed to the faith and yet be rather more pliable in the matter of order? Do you create two kinds of ministers eventually in the Roman Church or possibly move out to the Eastern Church where either a priest is married or he's in a monastery.

I was always brought up to believe that the priesthood conferred an indelible character on a person. Now let's work this out. Can you have orders without the Church? There are certain people called the Episcopi vagantes, people who run about and get some kind of technically correct order through some strange line. Quite frankly, I've begun to doubt whether you can have real orders without being members of the Body. I heard of an extraordinary case in Chicago of a barber who claimed to be an archbishop. Some kind of hands had been laid on him. That's nonsensical. The Church is a corporate body. People cannot have orders against the Church, rather than within the Church. It's not New Testament, really, is it? We've got to think again about that.
There was a theory some years ago, that all of us were in schism, you know. It's your teaching that the Roman Catholic Church is the only true Church. The Orthodox Church believes the same. Now we regard ourselves as part of the Church, a real branch, although the branch theory is not very well accepted among our theologians. It's rather a question of sacramental grace and unity in Christ which matters more. The Orthodox seem to be able to get around all these problems because they don't define so much. They've got a greater conception of eternity. Their bishop comes here every year and goes into my chapel and sings there with one of his priests. He gave me a beautiful icon which I treasure very much. It may be the Orthodox Church can teach us a lot because they don't define so much. They've got a greater conception of eternity. Their bishop comes here every year and goes into my chapel and sings there with one of his priests. He gave me a beautiful icon which I treasure very much. It may be the Orthodox Church can teach us a lot because they don't define so much. I remember going into the vestry and seeing a Sunday school picture. It showed a large heart and on the heart were seven taps for the seven sacraments. Looking back, it's absolutely abhorrent. We accepted it in the old days. But now we've got to get beyond that and realize that grace isn't an 'it.' Grace is another person entering into you and taking possession of you. That's where we've got to start.

I was made a bishop when I was fifty-five, and I had always assumed that confirmation was the fulfillment of holy baptism. I'm not sure that we were clear about that if I read my history right. The Eastern Church still gives Holy Communion to infants and confirms them in infancy. Now we've separated confirmation from baptism and talked about a special gift of the Holy Spirit in addition to receiving the Holy Spirit at baptism. The theories got a bit mixed up actually. We can get a bit clearer by saying that in the sacraments we don't receive a thing but a person; Jesus comes and enters into ourselves. All this dichotomy about us having bodies is a bad thing as well. I would talk about the person and as a person you can't have a soul without a body, really, can you? This is where we've got to do a lot of thinking. The essential things are still there but the other edges are blurred. We've got to accept what Fr. Mark Gibbard of the Cowley fathers in talking about this said, 'If we're really going to make any progress in the ecumenical venture, we must take risks and accept anomalies.' We've never taken baptism seriously. If you are baptized then you are a Christian, no matter where you have been baptized. It has been said that when Christians get together they usually are right in what they affirm, and usually wrong in what they deny.

Fr. Bonaventure Dean, O.S.B., said when I talked to him, 'I find myself more in sympathy with people in other denominations who are of a renewed look, more open, than I do with many of my own people.' I think that's true.

We know in the old divisions, in our own churches of High and Low and what not, they were all being terribly conscious. All our liturgies up to now have been sort of revisions of a revision. We've got new liturgies, called Series Two. Our 1662 Prayer Book was a product of the era. It was medievalism; this argument of sacrifice of the Eucharist and that kind of medieval stuff. Now we've gone beyond that. The shades of Trent are receding slightly. Cranmer wrote beautiful English.

I'll tell you an amusing thing. I met the papal nuncio, went to his concelebrated Mass, and sat in the front row. When the kiss of peace came an acolyte turned around and gave me the kiss of peace. I turned
Commitment is very important in religious life. I've thought about this a great deal. Marriage is a commitment, and it's for life. Is a religious vow a commitment for life? One could go farther and say that the marriage vow is a natural vow; it comes from the beginning of creation, whereas the vow of religion is a supernatural vow. Can it be as binding as a natural vow?

I read a good bit of existentialist philosophy which says that you don't live 'authentically,' to use the jargon, unless you have committed yourself. Every Christian has committed himself to Christ, or should have. Then there's one question, the will of God? When you take your religious vows you are convinced that's the will of God for you. But suppose you think later that the will of God may be different for you. We've had a case which shattered many of us. The warden at one of our theological colleges was in religious vows in England and then proceeded to marry an ex-nun. You are a bit bamboozled about this; people wonder what this is really all about. It brings one to a state of doubt about the whole question of religious commitment.

The religious life is an authentic Christian experience, although I know a lot of religious are beginning to doubt, or have doubted. If you take away the life of religion, you must do a bit of excising in the New Testament. That's really the point, and it brings up the whole matter of what is happening with so many people who are moving away and dropping out. It is not really just a question of vows, it's a question of faith. Some people want to feel that they've got everything tabulated, settled, and then they've no more to worry about. But human nature is not like that. One of the weaknesses has been that quite a number of people join religion for a false sense of security. Now the only security is Christ.

They remain children for life. That was really one of our problems here in the Bahamas. The priest is a father-figure. What 'Father says', went. But it is not going so much now. This rigid Church hierarchy and that kind of thing is on one side, and this rather loose Protestantism is on the other. We seem to have nothing in between. The loose Protestantism, unfortunately in my mind, is built up on verbal inerrancy of the Bible. At a meeting of the Bahamas Christian Council, they discussed a problem of the Bahamas in regard to Christian faith. Most of the argument concerned whether people should believe in Genesis literally. Many ministers thought that to believe in evolution was tantamount to denying the Son of God afresh. That is one of our biggest stumbling blocks here. Protestantism in the Bahamas is very fundamentalist.

I was tackled in Cat Island the other week by a rather rude man who was sort of an evangelist. He said, 'Are you the man they call the Lord bishop of Nassau and the Bahamas?' I said I was the bishop of the Bahamas. Obviously he wanted to fight, you see. So I thought, I'll give him the byword. I said, 'Well, I'm accepted in the Beloved, and that satisfies me. Good-bye.' I didn't feel that I wanted to have a silly argument. But these are absurd people, really. That is a real problem. Many of the young people have been brought up this way and now they are realizing that this Protestant fundamentalism does not tie in with the other things they learn. They are going through a great deal of stress and strain. I think we are
going to lose the young people of the Bahamas unless we can deal with this situation. It's 'Churchianity' rather than Christianity.

I suppose in a way the old way was good. The Church covered every part of life. Life on some of the out islands can be rather brutish. There is also a strange ambivalence, an ambiguity about the lives of people who are very proud of being a part of a Church. They will come up to you, but they'll live with a woman who is not their wife and get drunk every week. In some extraordinary way, I'm not sure that the people in the Bahamas are associating the Church with love, real love. Being a member of the Church is sort of a symbol of having arrived, rather than being Christian in their lives. There are certain strata of society. It would be difficult for those who are climbing socially to commit themselves in many of our churches. Being an Anglican is connected with colonialism here, you know. There are three hills in Nassau. One is Government Hill; one is Bishop's Hill (People don't talk about Anglican Hill; it's always Bishop's Hill.), and then there's Crazy Hill, where the mental hospital was. The three hills, you see, not the seven hills.

At one time, the Anglican bishop had prerogative of mercy in death sentences, and it was always assumed that the Anglican Church went along with the government because it was English. It was for many years socially respectable to be an Anglican. Then there came this extraordinary thing about 1860 and 1870, when a lot of Anglicans left the Church as they said it was developing in a very Catholic way. They found the Methodist Church around the corner and went across to Trinity Methodist. But I'm told that the real thing was that the Anglican Church was getting so many black people. Trinity Methodist has always been a refuge for white Bahamians. It still is, I think. On the whole, the two Churches which have really been integrated in regard to color and race have been the Roman Catholic Church and our own Anglican Church. The Baptists are almost entirely black. The Scots Kirk, well, we needn't take them too seriously, because I remember talking to a previous minister who said, 'Our Church has no mission at all. We've been here all these years. We never make any converts. We've never extended.' Actually there is another church in Freeport now.

The latest thing which I find difficult to understand is the invasion of the Lutherans into Nassau. There are no Lutherans in Nassau but they've started a church on Interfield Road. Now they are putting leaflets under the door inviting people to the Lutheran church. I think it adds to our confusion. We need fewer churches in Nassau. Let's take a very interesting point, which is a very serious point. When we have these joint ecumenical gatherings the Church leaders are invited. Bishop Hagarty represents the Roman Catholics. I represent the Anglicans. Edwin Taylor represents the Methodists. But you can't have about eight Baptists because they are all seperated. Then there's the Assembly of God, and other people. Why bring in another body? I never met a Lutheran in Nassau and I'm in my ninth year here. Why add to the babel of Christian denominations?

If you take a census of the Bahamas, there are 39,000 registered Anglicans out of a population of 180,000. The Roman Catholics number I'd say 30,000, and Baptists about 45,000. You have more 'adherents,' to use your word, in New Providence than we have, but we've got more in the out islands, if you're going to count numbers. In a way the Bahamas have been brought up on the English parochial system. Anybody who lives
in England is in a parish, and can claim the right to be married in the parish church according to the law of the land. We’re not talking about marriage now. But here, as far as we’re concerned, everybody belongs to a parish. I go to Cat Island. Everybody living in Cat Island is in our parish of St. Savior’s.

This brings up an interesting point in regards to the old timers here. I remember in 1965 I was told on the highest authority that Bishop Hagarty wanted to build churches on Turks and Caicos Islands, which are not part of the Bahamas. It’s a separate country. I had a clerical secretary then who sometimes was more voluble than wise. He took upon himself to write to Bishop Hagarty because he had been our man in Turks and Caicos, you see. He also took on Etienne Dupuch in the Daily Tribune, which was a great mistake. Twice Etienne said ‘the Anglican Church is the child of Henry VIII—lust, you see. Dupuch had forgotten the bull Regnans in Excelsis and things like that. He also forgot of course that Mary Tudor came between Henry VIII and Elizabeth.

Bishop Hagarty was very kind about it and said, ‘Well, this is an order from the Pope that I must establish missions in Turks and Caicos Islands.’ A church has been built in Inagua because there are some American personnel at the salt company. I know Father James, the Roman priest there, who was a Carmelite superior. We travelled from Grand Turk to Nassau and talked the whole time; he’s very good company. He said, ‘I didn’t see the point of building churches in Grand Turk. There are plenty of churches. Can’t something be done whereby we have a sort of economy and use your churches?’ Well, an interesting thing, I said to Bishop Hagarty, ‘If you want to offer Mass in any of our churches, it would be the greatest pleasure.’ He’s accepted that.

Bishop Leonard is changing a great deal. He came to the Bahamas in the middle of all this sort of narrowness, you know. I admire him because he’s had a tremendously difficult time, really. And he had a big time with himself, you know what I mean? He had to battle with his own sort of tradition. Here’s a case in point. We had lunch together; Fr. Joseph Perna, Dean Weatherhead and Father Finger were also there, and we discussed this ecumenical ashing service for Ash Wednesday. Father Perna made the point that according to Vatican II the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Anglicans is rather special. I said I would agree to this. I should be happy about it if it is made quite clear that Vatican II does say this. The interesting thing is that everybody agreed. This was sent out as a news release which pointed out that this is one thing where Anglicans and Roman Catholics do things together, according to Vatican II. Father Perna went himself to the press offices and said, ‘I want this put in as it is, not a thing to be left out.’ The article, however, was printed in a garbled fashion with no reference to Vatican II.

I had hoped we could have sort of an ecumenical retreat at the monastery. But that fell down in some way. Father Prinzing was supposed to do that, but at last word it fell down. Anyhow, we’ve got so much to be thankful for. I wish we could do something with regard to our youth groups. I’d like to see ourselves joining up there. We’ve got a strong group called AYPA and it’s quite large. I’m going to urge them to join up with the Catholic youth groups.

Church building by the way is a Bahamian trait. Bahamians like building churches. The largest Christian edifice is not St. Francis Xavier’s,
not Christ Cathedral, it is the Church of God's cathedral. We have Baptist cathedrals here also. It's much easier to get people to come to build a church than to come to worship. Getting them to church is a problem, but getting them to build a church is wonderful.

Bishop Leonard Hagarty, O.S.B.:

The ecumenical changes that have taken place throughout the world have been reflected very much here, and particularly since Vatican II has urged us to an ecumenical viewpoint and life-style. I believe that we have taken on the ecumenical spirit surprisingly well in the Bahamas. In the not too distant past there were really very hard feelings and often times name calling, and certainly not a feeling of brotherhood. Now for the most part we seem to have surmounted a good part of this background. There are some exceptions still. The fundamentalists, the evangelicals, have always been a little bit difficult. I'm thinking particularly about the Baptists who don't really trust Catholics, and sometimes probably with reason. But they seem to drag their feet regarding ecumenical affairs. Our relations with our Anglican brethren have been closer than with any other group and this is the way it ought to be. It was even expressed in Vatican II; there is more of a closeness between the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic than with other Christian bodies.

Bishop Markham and I really got along very splendidly since he came to the Bahamas. We have worked together in a good many things; I recall particularly the Bahamas Mental Health Association in which we've been quite active. I'm a council member of it myself. He has good judgment in many things. On his out island trips he will make it a point to visit our out island priests, go to the rectory and talk with them. It means a great deal to a priest that a clergyman would visit him, and particularly one not of his own persuasion. I've told him many times how much I appreciate this. One time I told him that our brethren, the Greek Orthodox, wanted to build a new church, and we offered the Greek priest the use of our cathedral while they build their church. They haven't started building yet, but I think they will accept. Then I heard that Bishop Markham had said in a meeting of Anglican clergy that he sort of resented our planning to build a church in Turks and Caicos. We have no church building there at the moment. He was opposed to 'back to back churches.' But I had an opportunity later to point out to him that Rome had assigned this territory to the diocese. We don't have too many numbers there, I suppose maybe 100 souls in all. A good many of them are 'birds of passage' as they work there or are assigned there. But I also pointed out to him that as we go there, we are not trying to win over his members into our communion. If any Anglicans were to come to us and say they wanted to be instructed in the Catholic faith, we certainly would instruct them. Sometimes when you apply ecumenism to missionary attitude and spirit, a good many missionaries don't read this as the Church intends them to read it. There is a sort of a feeling that anyone who belongs to any Christian body is all right and he's not to be bothered. He is probably going to get to heaven on his goodwill. We believe this, but we have an obligation as missionaries to preach the word of God, and to preach it in its entirety and truth. Anything devious, such as a 'rice-Christian' spirit of enticing people through means that are unworthy of the Gospel,
must be condemned. But when you go into a place and preach the word of God as you understand and see it, pointing out the teachings of the Catholic Church, which they have not fully received, this is not proselytizing in a bad sense. It is carrying out the command of Christ to teach all nations.

We have a number of instances where we use the same chapels or the same churches that were provided, say, by a hotel or by an organization. But on Turks and Caicos, it seems to me that these people have manifested a great desire to have their own church. It doesn't need to be pretentious, or deluxe, but it must be something that they can call their own and worship God in. I would have a rather hard time at this juncture to refuse them that right. We've only had them for a matter of a year or two in our diocese; they haven't come along the road to ecumenism as we have here in the Bahamas, especially in Nassau. What you actually do I'm not sure. But at present the Anglican bishop has offered us the use of any of his churches on Grand Turk Island, in South Caicos and any of the Caicos Islands, and I'm going to take him up on it.

There are at present 180,000 Bahamians in total. With the Haitians, we have approximately 40,000 Catholics. They are coming and going so it is very hard to get them counted exactly. The Anglicans have about the same number. While I've never heard the number of Baptists, actually they are more than we are because there are many different groups of Baptists, and further, groups of different persuasions, that you'd almost think that you were in an entirely different Church. But they do come under the generic term of Baptist.

A great many people are nominally Catholics, or nominally Anglicans and probably in many instances there is not too much conviction. I do know that we now have third and fourth generation Catholics. Some of them I would place, as far as holiness in life is concerned, with people you would meet in any large Christian center. Some of the sick you meet in their homes, their spirit in uniting their sufferings with Christ, and accepting them, praying for others and praying for the Church is noble. You can't just generalize. In many instances Christianity probably hasn't taken root, but this is rapidly changing. There is becoming more of a line of demarcation of good solid Christians and those who have sluffed it off and are no longer interested. There has been quite a leakage, generally among the teenage set. This is not peculiar to the Bahamas. I'm not discouraged about it.

We have been cooperating somewhat with other Christian youth organizations. We are at the moment fairly blessed with our Bahamian youth. We haven't had gang wars or an excessive use of pot and drugs. Our Antilles Council of Bishops wishes to have a youth council each year. We would like to do this together with other Christians of other Churches in the Caribbean. If we just get the youth together, let them talk and listen to them, let them know that they are important, and that we are interested in what they have to offer, this is constructive. Youth are very sensitive at this time; they want to be heard. It would be a shame if we don't help these students and bring them closer to God.

To attempt to enumerate people who have contributed to the development of the Church in the Bahamas is hazardous. "So many doors have been knocked on, so many letters written," Bishop Leonard says, "it would
be an injustice and rank ingratitude to forget what was given. In all cases they just gave and gave and never asked anything in return. There is no evidence of colonialism or a desire to dominate in the donations to the Church here. The Bahamians have been the gainers from this remarkable charity. Some Bahamian voices have recently stated that too much was given to the Catholic community in the Bahamas and that the people were not trained and encouraged to do more for themselves. It is a simple fact that the Bahamian Catholics were for the most part not able to contribute to what has been developed. In the future, hopefully, they will be more self-sufficient. We should never forget in prayer and thanksgiving the thousands of friends who helped bring us to our present existence."

The donations have been mentioned in earlier chapters of the archdiocese of New York, the Sisters of Charity of Mt. St. Vincent on the Hudson and of St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota. The Sisters of Charity always supported themselves; the Benedictines of St. John’s always donated their salaries, meager enough, to the mission when they were members of that abbey. Bishop Stephen J. Donahue of New York remained through the years a most remarkable supporter of each need as it arose. Bishops John J. Boardman of Brooklyn and George L. Leech of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, were also perennial friends of the Bahamas. The archdioceses of Hartford, Chicago, Dubuque, St. Paul, Cincinnati and the dioceses of Brooklyn, Portland in Maine, Des Moines and St. Cloud were ever open to mission appeals from the Bahamas. Even to single out these dioceses in no way detracts from the generous hospitality of the whole tier of Northeast and Midwest dioceses and religious communities helping in annual appeals for funds. Archbishops Henry P. Rohlman and Leo Binz of Dubuque, and Cardinal Samuel Stritch and Bishop William O’Brien of Chicago, join the memorable ranks of Archbishop Corrigan, Cardinals Farley and Hayes of New York and O’Connell of Boston, Abbots Alcuin and Baldwin of St. John’s Abbey, who will never be forgotten in the Bahamas. Individual priests of New York, Chicago and St. John’s Abbey have yearly preached mission sermons for the Bahamas whenever requested. Particularly generous have been Monsignors Arthur Terlecke of Chicago and Owen J. Rowan of Minneapolis whose contributions will not be adequately recorded in this volume because it is their wish to remain anonymous during their lifetimes.

The Chicago based American Board of Home Missions and Extension Society, through the instrumentality of Cardinals Stritch, Meyer and Cody, directed annual grants toward the construction of churches in Nassau and the out islands, even though the Bahamas were not part of the continental United States. The Knights of Columbus purchased 2,000 acres on San Salvador of which 400 were lost in a legal suit due to a challenge of titles
by the government. Other lands donated were the eight acres of The Herm­
itage at New Bight on Cat Island by Msgr. John Hawes to the diocese of
Nassau, later donated to St. Augustine’s Monastery; five acres on Robin­
son Road by Mrs. Florence Pyfrom and family for Holy Family parish;
six acres in Gambier, New Providence by Msgr. John Cass; fourteen acres
on Abaco near Treasure Cay by Andrew Rief, a Hungarian painter and
shopkeeper, which came to be valued at $250,000; fifty-one acres south of
St. Augustine’s Monastery by Mrs. Christina Adderley who also donated
generously to St. Anselm’s Parish. Christina Adderley was a former
Baptist school teacher who used to listen to Fr. Bonaventure Han­
sen, O.S.B., preaching as she passed in front of the new St. Anselm’s
Church. One day she went inside and stayed. Mr. and Mrs. William
Holowesko also assisted financially in obtaining property for St. Anselm’s
parish. A former Baptist minister, Josiah Rahming, donated land in Fox
Hill and East Bay; his daughter, Maria, was among the first to join St.
Martin’s Convent of Bahamian sisters.

Catherine Ryan Satterlee, New York, gave property on Eastern Road
in Nassau on 14 July 1928 which grew in value over the years. She,
too, had become acquainted with Fr. Bonaventure at Harbour Island and
respected the work the Church was doing for the poor in the Bahamas.
The Hermitage and its accompanying valuable seven and a half acres were
given to the diocese in 1940 by Cardinal William O’Connell of Boston. He
had acquired it in 1930 from Sir Harold George Christie. The Hermitage
is now the residence of the bishop of Nassau, but it has been used for other
purposes including the wartime Xavier College and as a temporary
residence of the Benedictines preparing to move into St. Augustine’s Mon­
astery. Thus, Father Frederic asked Bishop Bernard for something from
the O’Connell donation. Bishop Bernard gave St. Augustine’s Monastery
$120,000 and 100 acres of land; Bishop Leonard also later gave St. Aug­
ustine’s College $135,000 for its building program.

Joseph Garfunkel, Bahamian furniture dealer, has been across the
years one of the most generous and consistent donors. Father Hildebrand
witnessed his first marriage. After the death of his first wife, an Irish
Catholic, Father Brendan witnessed his second marriage in The Herm­
itage chapel. Joseph Garfunkel helped start St. Thomas More parish
through donations of land for it and its present kindergarten. He then
gave an entire block of city land and built St. Cecilia’s parish com­
plete with church. He further donated the Garfunkel Auditorium at
Aquinas College as well as helping financially to obtain the land on which
the college itself is constructed. Joseph Garfunkel’s gifts are a path­
finding testament to Bahamian contribution toward their own develop­
ment.
Other individual lay supporters who must also be mentioned are Mr. and Mrs. Robert Cooper of New Jersey; Mr. and Mrs. Ray White, Grosse Point, Michigan; Mr. Robert S. Brown of Clearwater, Florida, who donated $50,000 in property because he judged the educational work of the Catholics the most important undertaking in the Bahamas; Mr. and Mrs. William Scilacci, furniture dealer in San Jose, California; Dr. John Relfe of San Francisco was the first Georgetown University medical graduate to work in the Nassau Catholic clinic; and Dr. and Mrs. Frederick G. Burke, Georgetown University, the real spirits behind the coordinated help received in the Bahamas from Georgetown medical students, graduates and staff members who donate services.

Dr. and Mrs. Robert Burns of Kimberly, Wisconsin, take their annual vacation in Nassau while he donates his time filling and extracting teeth in the clinic. All of these volunteers supplement the ongoing and silent contributions of Drs. Maria Bachem and Julie Wershing in the clinics; Anna McGinness, Mrs. Tish Lothian, Marguerite Lambert, O.M.M.I., and Mrs. Leroy Mitchell in the chancery office; and the long line of young lay volunteers who come for a period of service in the parishes, schools and offices following graduation from college.

The Daniel Bacardi family of Nassau and the internationally known Bacardi rum manufacturing firm, upon their arrival in Nassau after the Cuban revolution, were generous donors to St. Augustine’s College and to the diocese of Nassau. The Nassau plant manager, Orfilio Pelaez, was especially active in supporting this educational venture. Other mercantile families of the age, who wish to remain anonymous, were supplying developmental capital for the emergence of the Bahamian Catholic people to social maturity.

Last, but certainly not least, is Bernard Melhado, mahogany dealer from Belize, British Honduras, who came to the Bahamas in retirement, died and was buried in Nassau in 1950. He and his wife were exemplary Christians who carefully planned to donate more than $500,000 for the expansion and development of the Church in the Bahamas as their final testament before the Lord. The Melhados built churches, helped St. Augustine’s Monastery, and in general were the major supporters of the expansion of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas during the last fifteen years. Bishop Leonard was blessed after his ordination as second bishop to have in hand $250,000 for the building of Xavier’s College from the Melhados. After Melhado funds had been distributed to meet mission needs, a sum of $100,000 was also available to be invested by the diocese as security against future contingencies.

This investment was certainly an “amazing grace” as the Church began to apply in the Bahamas the directives of Vatican Council II and move into the 1970’s. Bishop Leonard found himself not only confronted...
with theological, liturgical and administrative proposals for renewal in Catholicism. He was also confronted with annual current operational deficits. For the first time in the unfolding of Church life in the Bahamas, deficits began to mount in educational centers which had previously been established as the main apostolic thrust. Inflation, rising costs imbalanced by revenue, faculty salary increments, and the declining ratio of religious to lay teachers all combined to present serious operational problems.

The tensions and polarization between groups advocating renewal and reform in the Bahamian Church over against the more conservative status quo representatives also presented ongoing problems. An emerging Bahamian consciousness and self-awareness brought deeply held differences of opinion to the surface between younger clergy and religious over against the older missionaries. Meetings of the priests and religious often became staging areas for public confrontations and countercharges between conflicting groups. In the Bahamas there is a strong tradition of a free press. As a result the confrontations between those advocating new life-styles and support systems in the Catholic Church received frequent and extensive press coverage. The Catholic Church, to say the least, did not suffer from lack of journalistic attention. Questions of authority and accountability were freely and repeatedly reported and analyzed, but not always objectively, in articles and columns. Those Bahamians whose background and bias inclined them to rejoice in these manifestations of cracks in the Catholic monolith had adequate opportunity to lick their chops. Others, both within and outside the Church, saw real signs of life and dynamic development in these internal tensions over theological, liturgical, scriptural, ecumenical and procedural questions. There was, unquestionably, an opportunity for institutional humility. No one, at least, was protesting against institutional triumphalism as so many busied themselves in vocalizing the gamut of reform proposals.

However, Bishop Hagarty wished the whole status of the diocese of Nassau to be discussed in a more orderly and open forum where all members of the diocese from all the out islands would be represented and given full opportunity to discuss their own concerns. Vatican II had encouraged the holding of such synods or assemblies of dioceses and national conferences. A few have been held in dioceses, provinces and nations to date, but the practice has not been universal by any means. Such new approaches take time to germinate in such an ancient and widespread international institution as the Catholic Church.

A happy opportunity presented itself to the diocese of Nassau when the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, based in Washington, D.C., was looking for just such an opportunity to organize an assembly. Bishop Leonard asked the CARA staff to direct a synodal assembly of
the diocese of Nassau. The Raskob Foundation of Wilmington, Delaware, agreed to support such an undertaking with a $15,000 grant. Plans were made to employ team research methods in a guided self-study and examinations of the areas of concern in the diocese. It was the first such assembly of a diocese in the Antilles Conference of Bishops. Fr. Robert Howes, priest of the diocese of Manchester, with a background in urban planning, was named director of the preparatory steps toward the assembly. He was later joined by Fathers Whitney Evans of the Duluth Diocese and John Gilbert of the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese. Robert and Donna Burke of St. Paul served as consultants for the self-study.

For a year before the assembly met, intensive research and committee activity took place. A central steering committee oversaw the entire operation. Its members were: Fathers Alvin Fong Ben, O.S.B., Preston A. Moss, Gerard McKernan, S.F.M., Patrick Holmes; Sisters Annie Thompson and Maedene Russel, O.S.B., Regina Murphy; Mr. Andrew Curry (chairman), Mrs. Constance Joseph, Miss Ruth Bowe, Messrs. Peter Rahming, Keith Duncombe and Harold Longley.

The General Assembly of the Diocese of Nassau opened with a consecrated Mass in the cathedral on the evening of 5 June 1972. Delegates from parishes and religious groups of all the family islands where Catholic churches exist were present as well as representatives of the other Christian Churches in the Bahamas. The liturgy on this occasion, as daily throughout the week’s assembly, was carefully planned and creatively executed. Unlike so many conferences of ecclesiastics and laity in the more pragmatic and utilitarian Western nations, worship was an integral and primary part of this gathering. It was daily genuinely desired and beautifully carried out; it was not an appendage. The third world loves meaningful public prayer, as this event witnessed. Perhaps in this dimension might be found one of the first dynamic contributions these people of God can bring to older Churches which despite over a century of liturgical renewal, still stage too many rubrical travesties which continue to empty the churches.

It was also an historic moment in the history of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas. For the first time in the generations which extend far beyond any of their existing political or social organizations in these extensive Caribbean islands, representatives of the Catholic Church came together to worship and work in meeting their current problems. As the saying goes, “from Abaco to Inagua, yes, and to Turks and Caicos,” they were present. They were as diverse in their thinking and orientation as their four century history. It was as if the primitive Church encountered the jet experimenters of Vatican II. In between were representatives of Trent, Vatican I, nineteenth century romanticists, colonialists and tradi-
tionalists, moderates and liberals. They all had an opportunity to speak, and speak they did. As a result, from this assembly came for the first time in the years after Vatican II a cohesive dedication to their common problems.

Bishop Hagarty gave a formal call to the assembly during the opening Mass. In this carefully prepared statement which was widely communicated he said:

"Unless the Lord built the house, they labor in vain who built it." These words of the psalmist seem fitting at this momentous time in the history of the Catholic Church in these beautiful islands. If you forget everything else I say here tonight, please remember that I beg you to storm heaven with your prayers, to pray to God, in thanksgiving, adoration, petition and love. The Church needs your prayers. The Church needs the prayers of you, our priests, who are here in such great numbers, for which I am most grateful, the majority of whom are concelebrating with me at this Holy Mass. It is the priests in their Divine Office, Holy Masses, who will lend the weight of their prayers to this great cause. The priests, together with their brother priest, the bishop, form the presbyterium of this diocese. The bishop is told to love, to listen to his priests, to counsel with them, and they should hear, respect and advise the bishop. We ask our sisters and brothers, consecrated as they are to Almighty God, to pray fervently for the graces we need in these times. To our devout and loyal members of the laity, of all age brackets and conditions of life, we beg you to remember the Church, daily in your prayers. The infirmed and the aged, whose prayers are certainly so pleasing to God, to those of middle age, youth, children whom our Lord loved so much, these we ask, particularly our families in family prayer that they may know 'Where two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'

I stand before you tonight, as your bishop and shepherd, as we open this assembly, confident, humble, grateful. Together, we are making history tonight and this week. Never, in the almost 100 years of the Catholic Church in these islands, has there been such a representative gathering of the people of God to come and assist their bishop in the ruling, governing, guiding of this great diocese. We especially honor and welcome our guests; we welcome our delegates and representatives who come from our family islands and from Turks and Caicos and the representatives from each distant part of the diocese. We have come together as a culmination of several months devoted to self-study. We have looked at ourselves openly, with charity and yet eagerly. The purpose of our assembly is that we might be more closely united in Christ. The purpose of our assembly is that we seek direction so we may more clearly see the way God wants us to walk. In our studies we have seen many things we can be proud of, we have seen other things that need to be assessed, that need to be corrected. Together this is what we want to do. We have to rethink our special goals and objectives that we may, as the Body of Christ, love God and our fellowman. In the course of our studies there were many hours, much midnight oil was burned, much sacrifice was made. We have come upon a number of areas of concern, and we are studying grassroots problems. Everyone is to be heard, in so far as possible, and that is the purpose of our meetings this week.
One of the areas of concern is education—our Catholic schools, religious instruction and adult education. The record of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas in the field of education is something that we take very deep pride in. For some eighty-three years Catholic schools have flourished in these islands. Tonight we look back with gratitude to those spiritual giants who preceded us and who made it possible for our school system of today. We think of the Benedictine fathers and brothers of St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, who came here in 1891. In more recent years we think of our own diocesan clergy and the many religious orders of men and women who have made possible the growth and excellence of our Catholic schools. During the course of those years we have had many hundreds of teachers, most of them Bahamians themselves, who at great sacrifice served with the priests, brothers and sisters thousands upon thousands of children without respect to race or creed. This is no idle boast. This we have a right to be proud of and grateful to Almighty God for.

But you and I know that changes must come and new challenges arise. We ask ourselves, what is the role of the Catholic Church in the field of education in these challenging times, in this developing nation? Certainly, we are here to uphold and support the God-given rights of our mothers and fathers to make a choice of the school they desire in accordance with their beliefs, for their God-given children. We are here to assist and help in so far as we are able our government in its grave responsibility in providing a suitable education for the children of these islands. We are grateful to our government for the aid they have been giving us in these later years. We pray God their generosity, situations prevailing, may make it possible that they can be even more generous than they are at the present time. It is our desire to keep our schools open, even to extend them if possible, particularly our high schools. But we must assess these desires in the light of practical considerations, in the light of what we can do and what we cannot do. If we cannot or will not support our schools, then certainly some must close and the system must be curtailed. We want our children in our schools, whether Catholic or not, to be good citizens of the commonwealth and to be good citizens of the world hereafter. We want them to have a complete education.

We will be considering the problems of our youth and we will be discussing these problems with our youth. We will be seeking their answers. We will be talking because we want them very much. Today in most countries it seems that the greater proportion of the population is of the elder variety. Not so in the Bahamas. The greater preponderance of the population of these islands is the young. We see signs of vitality in these youth who want to serve their country and Church to the best of their ability. We must show our faith in them.

I must tell you of something that happened to me less than a month ago. I was at St. Gregory’s College in Shawnee, Oklahoma, to give the baccalaureate address. In this Benedictine school we now have twenty-seven Bahamian boys and girls, largely from St. Augustine’s and Aquinas Colleges, but a number of them from other colleges and high schools of the Bahamas. I talked to many of them. There were five of them in the graduating class—one of them, Richard Johnson, graduated *cum laude*. From the president down, they told me that our youths were a great asset to St. Gregory’s College in the activity they showed, the civic-mindedness they evidenced, in the government of the school, in their studies, in the culture
that they brought. I think you can know how proud I was. Many of them
told me they were motivated by the fact that they were thinking of the
boys and girls back in the Bahamas who would be wanting to go there themselves. That you should be proud of. I would say to our parents, encourage your children, love and guide them; and to you youth, reverence and respect your elders, seek their help. In this way that generation gap won't be much of a hurdle. I'd like to call on our priests and religious, brothers and sisters, to continue to give good example to our young people by your sincerity, by your great desire to serve God faithfully, and in this way to narrow that credibility gap, that our youth may see something to be sought and striven for in our priests and religious.

Our vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life will be very
much discussed this week. All over the world, especially in the western
part of the world—I could almost say, especially in the Bahamas—the
lack of vocations today is a very grave situation. In Holland, for example,
the great Christian country, there is not a single seminary open at the
moment. In usual years they ordained about 400 priests a year; this year
they will ordain four. I point this out because this shortage is not only in
the Bahamas. We, by our prayers, lives, example, interest, can do much
to bring these vocations, where they certainly must be, in the hearts of
our youth, who are fearless in their love of God. As most of you know, we
now have three seminarians who are completing their first and second
years in the seminary. Thank God they are doing well. I commend them
to your prayers. You also know that we have four candidates to the per­
manent diaconate. In regard to vocations, I should tell you something that
happened to me only a week ago. I had a group of our fine Catholics,
religious, lay and one of our deacon candidates, who had voluntarily formed
themselves into a committee whose prime purpose is to work for vocations.
Three of these are Sisters of St. Benedict from our St. Martin's Convent.
There are six laymen and laywomen and one deacon candidate. They offered
to help with the work of vocations with Fr. Preston Moss, our director of
youth and vocations. They pointed out that since we are so hurt and needing
so much help in this area, that they want, particularly as Bahamians, to
assist, preserve, find and strengthen vocations to the priesthood and the
religious life.

In regard to our priests, brothers and sisters who have left the priest­
hood and their religious vows, it was a deep sorrow for every one of us.
But I say most emphatically tonight, there is not a single one of us who
can stand in judgement over any one of them. God himself is the judge.
We can love them, and we do, we can be grateful to them, and we are. We
ask God to bless them, to reward them for what good they have done for
the Church in the Bahamas. We also ask that He may send others to take
their place. We pray them God's peace and happiness. I have a strong
feeling they are praying for us tonight and this week. As your bishop and
before Almighty God I would like to say that I have done all that I could
to advance good, qualified, capable Bahamians to positions of leadership
in the Church and I shall continue. Pope Paul frequently urges every bis­
hop that each local church must advance its own sons and daughters, natives
of the local church, to positions of leadership in the Church. Clearly this
must be done in the Bahama islands. We rejoice with Bishop Eldon and the
members of the Anglican communion in his recent ordination as bishop, and
the fact that the Anglicans and our brother Christians in the other faiths
have so many fine Bahamians working for their Churches and for our Bahamian people. It's a great source of joy to us, and we humbly ask your prayers that God may bless us fruitfully, with vocations, for the harvest indeed is ripe but the laborers are few. You, with us, will pray the Lord of the harvest that He will send laborers, good laborers, into the field.

We will be touching on the field of lay leaders. Bahamians must accept positions of responsibility. They must be given the opportunity to accept positions of responsibility in the Church at this time. In the past, our priests and religious, have largely come from other lands, principally, the United States and Canada. To these who came, who have served God and the people of the Bahamas so faithfully, and still are, we owe a debt of gratitude that we here in the Bahamas never could repay. In fact, we could simply not get along without them. If there's any doubt in their minds, are they needed, are they appreciated—they are indeed, God love them. Their numbers, however, are lessening, and like all of us, they're getting a little older. This truly has been said to be and is the age of the liturgy and the age of the laity. The laity must be invited, urged and begged to step up and take their places. I've always taken great pride in the fact that our Bahamians, whether in the choir or in the liturgy or in any other matter, have been ahead of many Catholic churches in other countries. The action they bring, the participation they evidence, the work they do in their church, schools and charities is exemplary.

Another rather painful subject is that of funding. I think each of you knows that the diocese of Nassau is hurting, is in a serious position in regard to finance. Each year our operating expenses come to almost a $1,000,000. One half of this is generated and raised here in the Bahama islands. The other half must, of necessity, either come from the outside or from the sale of properties or, to our sorrow, must be borrowed from our parishes and from banks. We now owe in the neighborhood of $150,000. The way things are going, each year we step further into debt. I mention this because we need your prayers. But I also mention it because I'm sure you can see with me that we cannot continue as we are. We must generate new money and large amounts of it. This will be discussed this week, you may be sure, and I hope and pray that plans will be formulated as to how we can help raise the support of the Church mainly from our people in the Bahamas. If we come forth with a plan, you, the people, will be helping us loyally and generously, as you have in the past.

Two things the Church must not, at all costs, fall into in this age of our developing nation; one is excessive nationalism, the second is racism. We must work together to obtain God's blessings, as His sons and daughters, side by side in the Church in the Bahamas. Our Haitian community is a point that we could well consider. Many of them have suffered much in their native land. They are here working among us; they hope some day to return to Haiti. In the meantime I want to assure them, and I would invite every one of you to show them, that we love them, that they are a very important part of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas. The Catholic Church that we love is one, holy, catholic and apostolic; the Catholic Church is all things to all men, she is at home in all nations, with every culture, every race, she adopts all things as her own. Never must she allow nationalism, sectionalism or racism to erode or tarnish her mark of universality and catholicity.
This week, my dear friends, we will sit down and reason together, in the faith of God, in the brotherhood of Christ, with vision so necessary in the Church today. We'll probably agree on a great number of things. There are probably a number of things that we won't agree on. We may see things differently, from a different perspective. There is no Catholic in the islands today who would like to take control of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas. Each of us knows that the Catholic Church is not a democracy, yet she must use democratic processes wherever she can. While I, as your bishop, need your help, support and love, the final responsibility for the diocese rests on me. I am most conscious of that responsibility. Let us listen carefully to one another, free ourselves of that deafness which will not allow us to hear our brothers and sisters. Let us submit our views to each other and respect differing views that may be offered. Let us go forward in confidence, in love of one another, in the strength of God.

After that the bishop evidenced remarkable episcopal restraint in speaking throughout the general sessions. There was ever present a freedom and openness which was universally acclaimed. Andrew Curry, chairman of the steering committee and headmaster of Aquinas College, gained the admiration of all by his prudent and gracious chairing of the general sessions. The delegates sat through lengthy and steamy sessions of a Bahamian June as all working papers and committee reports were debated. How many persons of previous chapters in this volume come to mind? What would they have thought about it all? Their own testimony is already recorded. Their present day descendants have more than done well by them and their dedication. The Church they labored to establish would appear to continue and develop as the resolutions of this first general assembly were enacted. The assembly voted and declared:

Education:

1. A. The Diocesan Board of Education:
   The overall policy making body of the diocese in all phases of education.
   That representation on the Diocesan Board of Education be comprised from regional sections of New Providence and the family islands.

B. Superintendent of Education:
   One who is primarily responsible for the implementation of the board's policies and in overall charge of education.

C. Assistant Superintendent of Religious Education.

D. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Planning and Teacher Supervision, if required. Under the portfolio will fall the family islands.

E. The establishment of a pilot study for the duration of two years in at least two parishes of local school boards.

2. To develop uniform budgeting, accounting and reporting systems for all schools by the fall, 1973.

4. To establish the practice of educational planning in all areas of the Church's educational apostolate as a diocesan policy by September, 1973.

5. That an annual budget be set up for the operation of Catholic education.

Personnel:

1. That a systematic program of continuing education be established which would include retreats, days of recollection, study days and workshops as well as courses in catechetics, Scripture, etc. That this program could also serve as the deacons' training program and that there be a definite budget for this program.

2. That the standing committee now formed and an official committee of the diocese be appointed to investigate and make recommendations pertaining to Bahamian vocations.

3. That a personnel board recommending new personnel establish an orientation program for new personnel coming to work in our diocese and a reorientation program for those already working in our diocese.

4. That an overall diocesan pastoral plan be drawn up.

5. That a diocesan newsletter be established to further communications among the different groups in the diocese.

6. That the bishop assign more priests to work in the deacon program.

7. That the Bahamian religious community and clergy be given a scholarship to help subsidize their education and be encouraged to assume leadership roles in the diocese.

Finance:

1. That a permanent Diocesan Finance Committee be established.

Lay Leadership:

1. That the Liturgical Commission, in conjunction with other knowledgeable persons (laity, clergy and religious), immediately commence preparation of other or additional forms of worship and a revivification of old forms of worship.

2. That these alternate forms of worship be used and followed as strictly as possible in representative designated parishes in New Providence and the family islands where pastors and laity from other parishes would have the opportunity of visiting and evaluating congregational participation, etc.

3. That a trial period last for six months from October, 1972, to Low Sunday, 1973, and that thereafter the Liturgical Commission evaluate this new liturgy and make any necessary alterations in time for a report to our assembly in 1973.

4. That the Liturgical Commission in conjunction with choirmasters and other knowledgeable people determine what hymnals are to be used in the diocese and that tapes or recordings be made for the family islands where there are few choirmasters.

5. That during the fall, 1972, a three day seminar be held explaining the concept of and authority for lay leadership. Clergy, religious, parish councils and diocesan collegial bodies should be encouraged to attend.
6. That a series of sermons (four is the suggested maximum) be delivered in churches throughout the diocese on the value of the layman and his service to the diocese; these sermons should culminate in the above seminar.

7. That a pastoral letter be circulated on the subject of lay leadership.

8. That a team be selected to ‘work up’ the seminar, sermons and letters and also to be available for assistance to individual parishes if and when requested.

9. That two evening sessions be planned every three months as a follow-up to ensure that programs are being implemented and that the various bodies remain conscious of their responsibilities.

10. That the above mentioned team prepare a model for the Bahamian parish including but not limited to suggested areas of responsibility, planning and the like.

11. That the laity derive this right and duty to participate in the apostolate of the Church from their union with Christ, their head, through baptism, and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through confirmation.

Youth:

1. That the youth be allowed a more active participation in the planning of the liturgy.

2. That pastors be encouraged to make Scripture lessons at youth Masses more applicable to today’s world.

3. That the music at youth Masses be lively, with meaningful lyrics yet with reverence.

4. That new forms of expressions such as periods of reflection and spontaneous prayers be introduced into the liturgy.

5. That all parish councils have a youth representative so that they can be part of the decision making body of the parish.

6. That the official vocations’ committee, if such exists, be made known so those with an affinity to the diocesan priesthood or to religious life may be directed or become affiliated with the group he or she desires to dedicate themselves to, and that a vocational center be established.

7. That the hierarchy of the Church in the Bahamas seek an exception to the existing twelfth century law of celibacy, that such be voluntary if this is realized as a real obstacle to vocations.

Diocesan Pastoral Council:

1. That the Diocesan Pastoral Council be set up in accord with the principles set out in the Vatican Council (decree on the bishop’s pastoral office in the Church) and other relevant documents.

2. That the Diocesan Pastoral Council should be elected no later than September, 1972.

3. That an executive committee of the Diocesan Pastoral Council be elected from the council, with membership as follows: ex officio—bishop, vicar general, chancellor, president of the priests’ senate, chairman of D.P.C., elected from D.P.C. membership—one sister, five laymen or laywomen.

4. That the plenary Diocesan Pastoral Council hold two meetings during the fall, 1972; one in September to organize itself and
receive from the bishop formally a copy of assembly recommendations as approved. The executive committee should be discussed and such a committee should be elected. The second meeting, in November, should discuss collegiality with other diocesan bodies and review its organization and future and instruct its executive committee to represent the Diocesan Pastoral Council until the next plenary meeting in the spring, 1973, and that thereafter the council should meet at least once per quarter.

5. That the executive committee will meet at least once every six weeks and will prepare the agenda for the general assembly in 1973.

6. That the Diocesan Pastoral Council consider the advisability of arranging the preparation and publication of a handbook which attempts to define and describe the structures, purposes and duties of the various institutions and organizations within the Catholic Church in the Bahamas.

Open Forum:

1. That the people of God in the Bahamas record their indebtedness and thanks to the lay apostles who have contributed so much to the development of our Church.

2. That the education program for the development of lay apostles be continued through the recruitment of Bahamians.

3. That this assembly urges his lordship, the bishop, to convene assemblies of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas annually.

4. That this assembly records its sincere gratitude to his lordship, the bishop, for convening this historic meeting and encouraging its openness and frank exchange of views.

The general assembly was a major assistance to Bishop Leonard, beleaguered on every side by the problems of a contemporary diocesan administrator. Now he had diocesan-wide support to establish a committee to assist him in economic administration. Now structures and procedures were established by official representatives of the whole diocese to meet the daily problems which a bishop formerly had to face alone. Now the first formal fund raising drive among Catholics in the community was authorized by the assembly, organized by Community Counselling Services and headed by Fr. Patrick Holmes, Mr. A. Leon McKinney and a central committee. The drive was aimed at meeting the current operating deficit of the diocese and funding future development.

The assembly was the culmination in the Bahamas of the hopes and aspirations of Vatican II. But the assembly was at the same time the beginning of a challenging age that is before all Bahamian Christians in the years ahead.

Sir Kenneth Clark has stated, “The great achievement of the Catholic Church lay in harmonizing, humanizing and civilizing the deepest impulses of ordinary people.” This was certainly the case in the Bahamas. This history is but the first, hopefully, of a succession of interpretations of
religious life in the Bahamas. As a visiting historian, this author came, interviewed, travelled in the family islands, tried to listen and learn, and was received warmly on all sides. There will be lacunae in this volume as well as better interpretations that could have been made. There is no final word here. A trained Bahamian religious historian will do far better in the future.

Several valuable primary documents, however, are preserved here for the future along with some finite and fallible interpretations. There has been no desire to impose colonial viewpoints along the way. This study has been as open as is humanly possible at this time to a rich inheritance of a people of God. The Bahamian cloak of Benjamin has been an inspiring, emerging and amazing grace. To the Bahamian people one can only say gratefully, "On, Sail On."

NOTES:

1. During the interregnum in 1950, Father Bonaventure, as administrator of the vicariate, directed a public subscription for funds to erect a memorial to Bishop Bernard. This memorial took the form of a new parish school for St. Francis Pro-Cathedral. Eight new classrooms were provided and St. Benedict's Hall became the headquarters of the Priory Recreational Center. A basketball court with electric lights for night games had been provided during Father Frederic's pastorate. A priory basketball series was bringing thousands of young Bahamians into the school grounds for sports activities.

2. Interview with Fr. Bonaventure Hansen, O.S.B., St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, 19 June 1952.

3. Ibid., 21 June 1952.


5. Ibid., pp. 18, 20. After the ordination of the new bishop, the Catholic school children of St. Anselm's parish in Nassau where Bishop Leonard had been pastor wrote a calypso hymn, "Bishop Leonard is crowned," which Msgr. John Cass, cousin
of Bishop Leonard, issued in sheet music form. The lyrics are characteristic of the "anthem" style of Bahamian sacred music tradition:

Bishop Leonard Is Crowned

You coronation, I coronation,
Bishop Leonard is crowned,
You coronation, I coronation,
Bishop Leonard is crowned.

He’s crowned, he’s crowned, he’s crowned forevermore.
He’s crowned in Our Lady’s Catholic Church.
Bishop Leonard is crowned.

From nine o’clock to twelve o’clock
Bishop Leonard is crowned,
He did not eat a single scrap,
Bishop Leonard is crowned.
He’s crowned, he’s crowned, etc.

Father Frederic, he was a witness,
Bishop Leonard is crowned,
Father Frederic, he was a witness,
Bishop Leonard is crowned.
He’s crowned, he’s crowned, etc.

No more Father, he’s our Bishop,
Bishop Leonard is crowned,
No more Father, he’s our Bishop,
Bishop Leonard is crowned.
He’s crowned, he’s crowned, etc.

May God grant you peace and health,
For endless years to come,
May God grant you peace and health,
For endless years to come,
He’s crowned, he’s crowned, etc.

Stay crowned, stay crowned,
Stay crowned forevermore.
May God grant our prayer today,
Bishop Leonard is crowned.
He’s crowned, he’s crowned, etc.


7. Cf. Peter Anson, The Hermit of Cat Island (New York: Kennedy, 1957) for an interesting account of the life of Monsignor Hawes by his English friend who quotes extensively from Fra Jerome’s wry twits and humors which were his trademark. Commonweal, 81, 18 (17 October 1952), 362-65, in a review entitled "Lover of Life," calls this biography "a life fantastic to read about, so spread out and yet so concentrated . . . and more significantly, a symbol of the search for sanctity."

From the many extremely clever and sensitive letters that Monsignor Hawes wrote, usually with a pen sketch attached which have become collectors' items, one letter is included below as an example of the humility, acumen and delightful sense of humor of the Hermit of Cat Island. Monsignor Hawes wrote to Bishop Bernard from Mt. Alvernia Hermitage, The Bight, Cat Island on 2 September 1948:

My dear Lord Bishop,

Thank you for your letter. I am very glad to hear that Father Bonaventure is back and quite well again. It is not at all 'Cheerio' here. I wrote two mails ago (the beginning of last month) asking for some medicines, cotton, wool, etc. When the return mail arrived back here (Aug. 17) there was no letter for me as to whether the vessel would have anything for me, so to make sure, while the vessel unloaded I waited on the wharf after sunset, in the rain and the dark, two and a half hours until the last trip ashore of the dinghy, when the crew said there was nothing more to come ashore! I also am in need of Altar Wine, and expected to receive it along with the medicines on the Mail's arrival this Tuesday August 31st. But again, nothing from the Priory, and no word of explanation, also no Red, Green, and Black Mass Vestments. I have received no message from Father Nicholas, San Salvador.

It is a great pleasure to see him, and especially for us both to have the consolation of going to confession, but apart from that it is no help to me; because I can do the Sunday services here at the Bight, but what is needed is a priest to visit Port Howe.
Having a visitor is very nice, but it only entails more work and worry on me (when I don't feel up to it). In the ordinary course I have no servant, but to keep a guest comfortable I find a woman to cook and make the bed and tidy up the house and I have to supervise things and see that she doesn't run out of necessary stores, etc. Instead of any commensurable increase I receive a diminished remittance from England while labour and groceries cost twice as much as they did before.

When I asked you in February if you could spare a priest for a Lenten visit here I wanted someone who could visit (as Fr. Alban did the previous year) the three Southern mission Churches; which I was incapable of doing. It's of no assistance to me unless a priest comes along bringing a motorcycle or a bicycle; or a bicycle might be kept here permanently, for use on such visits.

Since February 1940 I had visited Port Howe regularly (at least 4 times a year) - either sailing (32 miles - 64 return) round Devil's Point; or in bad sea weather walking, by road 16 miles and 4 more on to Baintown; which meant an all round hike of 40 miles on foot. Brother William McWeeney walked it once with me; when you see him next, ask him if he remembers it? Only once all the years did I have the good luck to get a lift (one way only) in Commissioner Dean's bone-shaker jeep. I haven't the strength to do it any longer; the last occasion I walked the 7 miles to the Old Bight, only. I had twice to lay down flat on my back on the side of the road. So, regretfully I cannot be responsible anymore for those three missions—Old Bight—Port Howe—Baintown. The people indeed are small in number but there are a number of children for Sunday school and the three catechists are loyal and faithful workers. The two years I was supervising the buildings in Nassau, they were deserted but for one visit by Father Alban. Father Alban got through to Port Howe on an ordinary bicycle.

This June when I came to Nassau for the retreat, Father Bonaventure mentioned that he thought there was a spare bicycle I could have for use if it would be of help. Well, with a bicycle I could manage visiting the Old Bight and I would have a good try to see if I could get to Port Howe, you cycle in one of the two road ruts but with continual getting off and on at bad places or rocks every two or three hundred yards. For me it would have to be a lady's bicycle—because now I can't throw my leg over the top straight bar of a man's—without getting a sudden cramp in my leg. In the cellar at the Priory there was an old lady's bicycle with thick balloon tyres, that would have just done me fine—it wanted new inner tubes and some repair to the gear wheel; Father Nicholas said he knew a man who could repair this latter easily. I kept on asking him to take the bicycle down town in the station wagon—but he said two of the other Fathers blocked the project, arguing that too much money had already been wasted on those old bicycles. Just before I left I asked Fr. Nicholas again to mind and bring the bicycle along with him on the next mail-boat.

It's no use a priest coming here if there's no bicycle. You can't expect them to walk like I used to—I wouldn't like to see anyone else try it—it's too far and wearisome. If there was a bicycle left here I could use it to help me get to the Old Bight, and then whenever another priest comes he could use it, to get to Port Howe, otherwise it's just no good coming to Cat Island.

The old lady's looking bike would be much the best because if a new one was sent, the school-master, the wireless operator, the constable and everybody else (women too) would come along to borrow it and I am too weak minded now to say NO! It would soon get damaged and out of use. The only protection would be for the Very Rev. Pro-Vicar to issue a red-sealing-waxed declaration that it is against Canon Law for the Pastor to lend a canonically erected ecclesiastical bicycle!
I find the mile and a half walk over the rocks through the bush from the Hermitage to the Church to be rather much for me sometimes. The other week it was exceptionally hot on the Monday morning and when I got up the hill my heart was pumping furiously. I could eat no breakfast or dinner—only drink coffee and Enos fruit salt and squeezed limes. But as long as God spares my life I would wish to say with St. Martin: Domine, si adhuc populo tuo sum necessarius, non recuso laborem; and normally I can get down every week and to Freetown for the Sunday Mass and other services. But if I'm no longer able to do the walk I am not going to live down (by the Church) in Freetown. It is all right for a young priest but with my age and nervous condition I simply cannot stand the noise and distractions. The Public Well and Corn Mill is on the turn of the road only a hundred yards away and all day long from dawn to dark there's a mob of people and children there, singing, yelling and squabbling (that's where the boy was killed last year). Lads gallop their horses down the street, and drunks returning from Swain's barrooms after dark reel along singing 'Nearer My God to Thee'. Dogs yelp and sheep and goats do their best to show they've got lungs too.

I've rejoiced to rough things all my life and to rub shoulders amongst the people but now I want a little rest and quiet. Also people call to give you a look-in continually, they stay a long time talking about nothing and anxious to tell tales and lies about their neighbors or to borrow a dollar off you.

8. Hagarty, op. cit.
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