

THE TRAPPIST MISSIONS: KWAZULU-NATAL'S FORGOTTEN TREASURE

by HUGH BLAND

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THE TRAPPIST missions developed by Abbot Wendelin Francis Pfanner between 1880 and 1908 are captured beautifully in this book by author Hugh Bland who has a heritage site (www.kznprco.za) showcasing his original images taken over a period of eight years. A prolific collection of images has been curated by the author while another website showcases his travel images of Africa (www.thetravelingcamera.co.za). This well-researched book illustrates the fascinating history of Pfanner and presents the reader with various perspectives on the architectural heritage of the 22 Trappist missions and provides a brief history of the founder of the Mariannhill monastery.

Pfanner disagreed with his order in Europe as he wanted to be able to train and educate local people; and in order to do so had to contravene the vow of silence and speak to people. The Vatican created a new order, the Congregation of Mariannhill Missionaries, so that he could be separated from the original order. Pfanner dedicated his life to others, lived simply and frugally, and is an inspiration to many even to this day. The Vatican has received an application for his beatification. His focus in life every day was to pray and work and he was personally responsible for many buildings as his order believed in the value of physical labour. The monastic motto of 'Ora et Labora', meaning to work and pray, was strictly adhered to by Pfanner. He was able to work with others such

as the Sisters of the Precious Blood to assist communities around the mission stations and provide much-needed spiritual guidance. Together as missionaries they left a valuable legacy of social upliftment for rural communities and many projects were completed by them.

Each mission has a school and three have hospitals. The artistic detail and craftsmanship can be seen at each mission station, in the buildings, the churches and murals that adorn the chapel walls. The book has a map placing all the mission stations. A timeline of the Trappist missions is provided as well as biographies of Pfanner and Brother Nivard Streicher. This book appealed to me due to its sheer aesthetics and the interesting details about the Trappists.

Pfanner moved to a farm near Lourdes mission after his troubles with the Vatican and unwarranted expulsion, but soon left there to establish a mission at Skimpers Nek Mountain which he called Emaus. He died on 24 May 1909 and his body was taken to Mariannhill monastery where he was buried; but prior to burial his heart was taken out and buried in the grounds of Emaus. He must have been loved by both communities and highly respected for them to have done such a thing. At Emaus he walked up a hill every day and created the Stations of the Cross to contemplate on this walk, so it seems fitting that his heart is buried there.

The author as a photographer captures the mood of places perfectly with

excellent lighting and clear crisp images. Visiting the missions at different times of the day and in different seasons ensured that they, the chapels, art and architecture are preserved for posterity in these images. This is very important as not all of them have been restored to their former glory and this book is a very welcome addition to the canon of literature that exists about the Trappist missions.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in photography, ar-

chitecture, heritage, history and art. It will certainly add value to the existing knowledge base that has been produced about the Trappists and Pfanner. I do hope he is remembered for a long time as his legacy is one that is worth remembering and the author should be congratulated on producing a book of such high-quality images that we can refer to again and again as they are so beautiful.

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