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The appointment of Bishops to the See of Malta has always been, at least since Medieval times, an event of great concern to various Sovereign Powers of the Island and the Holy See.

It was a source of problematic issues during the period when Malta was under the Knights of St. John and it turned to be a thorny one under British Rule (1). There were no such difficulties under the French as no Episcopal vacancy occurred during the time of their occupation.

After the Treaty of Paris (1814), when Malta became part of the British Empire, the British considered themselves the lawful heirs — as the actual Sovereign of Malta — of the old right enjoyed by the King of Sicily, to present to the Holy See the candidates to the Maltese Bishopric.

This pretended right of presentation soon developed, under British Rule, into a disputed claim of “approval” which eventually equalled to the right of a “Veto” against any Ecclesiastic who was not acceptable to the Crown (2).

One such person was Padre Antonio M. Buhagiar, a Franciscan Capuchin Friar (3). This specific case, perhaps unique in Maltese Ecclesiastical History, did occur between the years 1884-1888 when the ailing Bishop of Malta, Mgr. Carmelo dei Conti Scicluna, was considered unfit to run the Diocese and the appointment of an Administrator was felt necessary (4).

*Biographical data*

Mgr. A.M. Buhagiar was not born in Malta, but his parents were both Maltese. His father, Joseph Buhagiar hailed from Zebbug (Malta) and his mother, Maria Concetta Attard, from Floriana. They were among those Maltese

1. PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE, LONDON, (P.R.O.) FO/45/621. *Memorandum respecting the appointments of Roman Catholic Bishops in Malta by E. Hertslet* 10th July, 1874.
2. A. ZAMMIT GABARRETTA, *The Presentation Examination and nomination of the Bishops of Malta in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, Malta 1961, pp. 17-22.
3. A.V. LAFERLA, *British Malta*, Malta 1947, Vol. II pp. 83-84.
4. A. BONNICI, *History of the Church in Malta*, Malta 1975, Vol. III pp. 20-21. Mgr. Carmelo Scicluna, Archbishop — Bishop of Malta (1875-88) died at 88 on the 12th July, 1888.



1. BISHOP MGR. ANT. M. BUHAGIAR. Portrait by Lazzaro Pisani at the Capuchin Friary, Floriana. Photo: Carmel H. Psaila.

who migrated to the Ionian Islands (Greece) during the first decades of the 19th century. In fact he was born in Cephalonia on the 19th November, 1846. His baptismal names were Spiridione, Salvatore, Constantino.

At an early age he expressed a strong desire to take up religious life. He came to Malta, where his relatives still lived, and on the 20th December, 1863 he joined the Franciscan Capuchin Order in the Malta Province. He spent his first year — as a novice — at St. Liberata's Friary, Vittoriosa (today Kalkara). One of his brothers became also a Diocesan priest, known as Can. Michael Buhagiar (5).

Endowed as he was, with a bright and intelligent mind, he had excellent results in his philosophical and theological studies. His Provincial Superior, Fr. Giovanni Fedele da Gozo, on account of his very good results at the Bishop's Curia examinations, recommended him to the Minister General to pursue his studies aboard (6). Besides Maltese, Italian and Latin, Mgr. Buhagiar had a good command of the Greek, Hebrew, French and Spanish Languages (7).

Archbishop G. Pace Forno ordained him a priest on the 18th September, 1869 (8).

The Minister General of the Capuchin Order, who happened to be in Malta, because of the Roman upheaval, awarded him, with a "*summa cum Laude*" the Preaching faculty in June 1871.

The same General offered him the chair of Lecturer in Philosophy, but he declined preferring to dedicate himself to Pastoral activities (9).

As a young priest he was, with another Capuchin Friar, the first Chaplain at the newly opened Addolorata Cemetery at Pawla.

Soon, however, he had to leave Malta. On the 2nd May 1872 he sailed towards Tunis, where he was appointed Apostolic Missionary by the Congregation "De Propaganda Fide" at the request of the Capuchin Bishop Mgr. Fedele

5. L. FARRUGIA, *Elogio Funebre di Mons A.M. Buhagiar*, Malta 1892, p. 25 notes 14 and 15.
6. GENERAL ARCHIVES of the Capuchin Order in Rome. G. 83 section 3. Letter dated 8th December, 1869.
7. L. FARRUGIA., *op. cit.*, p. 22.
8. ARCHIEPISCOPAL ARCHIVES, MALTA. *Registrum Ordinandorum ac Privilegiorum Clericorum 1857-1874*, f.61r.
9. L. FARRUGIA. *op. cit.*, p. 25 notes 16 and 18.

Suter, Vicar Apostolic of Tunis. His particular mission field was among the Maltese settlers at Sfax. There he spent 12 years (10) and there he remained even after his consecration as Titular Bishop of Ruspe and Auxiliary to the Bishop of Carthage Charles Cardinal Lavignerie (11).

Parish Registers are still extant in Sfax bearing his signatures. The last one is dated 31st October, 1884 which runs as follows: "Fr. Antonius Maria Buhagiar, Episcopus Ruspensis, Auxiliarius Carthaginensis, olim Missiunarius et Curatus Sfax" (12).

As already stated, because of the old age and the infirmities of bishop Scicluna, the situation of the Diocese of Malta was not at its best in the 1880's.

#### *A Successor to Mgr. C. Scicluna*

Pope Leo XIII was well "au currant" of the politico-situation in Malta and of the need for certain reforms in the Church, but he wished to appoint a person who was not involved in local political intrigues.

As early as the 6th December, 1882, the Governor of Malta, Sir Arthur Borton wrote to the Rt. Hon. Earl of Kimberley that he was informed that His Grace had applied for a Coadjutor, adding that: "it is very desirable that before the nomination of the Coadjutor is publicly made, the Governor of Malta should be in a position to state his views to His Holiness with regard to his eligibility". Borton sent a similar note to the Holy See (13).

A second warning was given when the Archbishop withdraw a Circular Letter, which he had already issued, against the spreading among the people of the idea that "the study of the English Language desired by the Governor is a means for protestantizing the inhabitants".

The Governor, in his Confidential Despatch of April 24th 1884 to the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Derby, attributed this step backwards of the Bishop to his unfitness on account of his old age and physical weakness, and showed reasons of fear that the action taken by the Bishop (in withdrawing the circular) might

10. *Idem*, pp 10-11; *Eco di S. Francesco*, XXI (1885), pp. 154-56.
11. P.R. RITZLER — P.P. SEFRIN, *Hierarchia Catholica Medii et Recentis Aevii*, vol VIII, Patavii 1979, pp. 378, 489.
12. PAROCHIAL ARCHIVES, SFAX (TUNISIA). *Liber mortuorum*, 24th November, 1874 n. 304 and *Liber Baptizatorum*, pp. 89-90.
13. THE PALACE ARCHIVES, VALLETTA: *Confidential Despatches* vol 3, p. 410. see also reply to Governor dated 23rd December 1882 in PRO. CO/158/263.

be regarded as evidence that His Grace now believed that there was some truth in the "protestantization calumny". Continuing on the same topic he felt it his duty "to point out the urgent necessity which exists for an early appointment of an efficient administrator of the Diocese of Malta". He concluded his Despatch: "I have no hesitation in saying that the only Maltese Ecclesiastic who is at all fitted to fill it [the post of administrator] is Mgr. Pietro Pace, the present Bishop of Gozo" (14).

But, having given serious thought to the fact that the circular's withdrawal was open to some inferences which might be used by the anti-English party, Lord Derby, decided to take no action at that stage. Obviously, Lord Derby was expecting the views of Sir Lintorn Simmons, who was succeeding shortly Sir Arthur Borton as Governor of Malta (15).

Sir L. Simmons did not take long before he expressed his opinion in a Despatch dated 30th August, 1884. He too, stressing the need of enquiring into the manner by which the Church was governed and its affairs administered, suggested a Commission or a Nuncio to be appointed by the Pope, unless "an able and firm man ... as well as one of great tact and good judgement ... and to whom every support might be given by Her Majesty's Government" was sent in Malta. Here again, Simmons, following the footsteps of his predecessor, indicated as a possible successor the Bishop of Gozo Pietro Pace "who has shown great capacity in his Diocese... supporting Educational Institutions and in other ways promoting the cause of good Government" and he goes on saying: "but in a small community where all are more or less connected by family ties and great jealousies exist, it would be almost impossible to find a successor who could shake himself altogether free from local influences ... and as a consequence the improvement in the position might be more than superficial" (16).

Then Simmons suggested an English Cardinal or Bishop as head of the Commission pointing out that "it would be most beneficial as tending to allay an opposition if there were an enlightened Bishop here who would express an opinion that English was no more prejudicial to the interests of the Church than Italian or any other modern Language, but that under the existing circumstances of the union of this Island with Great Britain and the vast expenditure of the British money going on, it would be conducive to the material interests of the Islanders to know English and thus be able to seek work

14. THE PALACE ARCHIVES, VALLETTA. *Confidential Despatches*, vol. 4 (no pagination).

15. PRO, CO/153/263/7073. Minute signed by E.W. Springfield dated 5.5.1884.

16. THE PALACE ARCHIVES, VALLETTA. *Despatches*, Vol. 4 (no pagination).

Meanwhile Cardinal Lavigerie consecrated Fr. Ant. M. Buhagiar Titular Bishop of Ruspe and his Auxiliary on the 12th August, 1884 at Tunis (22). Buhagiar was then only 38.

On January 12 1885 Mr. G. Errington was informed of the Pope's intention to send Buhagiar to Malta and was requested to inform the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the circumstances in which the selection of Buhagiar was made "as the Pope desired in this matter not to act without informing and consulting Her Majesty's Government" (23).

Consequently on the 9th February, 1885 Mr. G. Errington was able to convey to the Cardinal Secretary of State the information that Her Majesty's Government concurred with Buhagiar's appointment as Administrator Apostolic of Malta.

It appeared from Mr. G. Errington's letter that the appointment of Buhagiar as Administrator, was made without prejudice to the question of succession, which remained open and was to be decided according to his success as administrator and to the circumstances when the see of Malta became vacant (24).

Sir L. Simmons, Governor of Malta, who was all out in favour of Bishop P. Pace of Gozo, did not leave a stone unturned to avoid the implementation of what the Pope desired. In fact in his Despatch of the 16th January, 1885, to the Secretary of State while admitting that Buhagiar "appears highly intelligent man and so far as I am informed has been very successful in his administration among the Maltese in Tunis" and that "he professed himself in conversation with me very strongly as having British propensities and stated his conviction that it was in the interest of the Church in this Island as well as of the material prosperity of the people that Malta should remain under British rule", airs his antagonism accusing Buhagiar of having "French proclivities" adding that "having been throughout his early life a Capuchin Friar in this city is neither from his education or conviction likely to be a man with sufficient knowledge of the world to control the church of this Island in the condition it is". But he gives a totally different picture of Bishop Pace, describing him as "the only other Maltese Bishop who may be regarded as a Candidate for the See of Malta ... who appears to be highly educated and very earnest Ecclesiastic ... and in every way likely to carry weight with the clergy and people ... I should be glad therefore that the future appointment should be conferred on Bishop Pace from whom I feel confident the ad-

22. L. FARRUGIA, *Elogio Funebre*, p. 26 note 30.

23. PRO. *l.c.*, Errington to Simmons.

24. PRO. CO/158/272/1960. Minute signed by Ed. Wingfield on the 3/2/1885.

directly under those who are desirous of obtaining their services and have the means for remunerating them" (17).

But soon Simmons shall be all out in favour of Pace again.

For a second time, Lord Derby, after consultations with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, came to the conclusion not to make any representations as to the situation of the Church in Malta (18). He had already done so on receiving the Governor's Despatch of the 24th April, 1884. In a sense, the views of Simmons coincided with those of the Pope, who was convinced, as G. Errington, British Charge d'Affairs in Rome had to write to Simmons on the 21st January, 1885 in reply to a letter of Mr. Hely Hutchinson, Principal Secretary to the Governor, "that it would be hopeless to entrust the work of pacifying the dissensions and party animosities to anyone connected with those parties as every priest necessarily is who resides in the Island" (19).

So, Leo XIII knowing that Cardinal Lavigerie was in constant touch with the Maltese in Tunis and also in Malta, asked him whether he knew of "some able and active clergyman [in Tunis] who might be employed to set things right".

The Cardinal mentioned Father Antonio M. Buhagiar as a man of high administrative qualities. But he made it clear that if Buhagiar was promoted to be bishop this should be entirely at the Pope's request and not from any desire of the Cardinal or/and without any intention of employing him as a Bishop at Tunis (20).

In June 1884 Fr. Buhagiar was summoned to Rome where he favourably impressed both the Pope and Cardinal Iacobini, Secretary of State. The latter had no doubt that he was the right man for the work. Iacobini was of the opinion that, "in the very complicated condition of the Maltese affairs, the appointment of an Administrator, though offering many difficulties is absolutely necessary, and that all things considered Buhagiar is not only the best man available for the work, but is likely to carry it out successfully."

The British Consul in Tunis, Mr. T. Reade, expressed himself in terms highly favourable to Fr. Buhagiar as well (21).

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, *Despatches from Secretary of State to the Governor*, (1882-1889), 3rd January, 1885.

19. PRO, CO/158/272/1961 attached to Despatch of 28/1/85.

20. PRO, *l.c.*, Errington to Simmons 21st January, 1885.

21. PRO. *Ibid.*



ministrator of this Government, whoever he may be, will receive every reasonable assistance and support" (25).

Few days later, exactly on the 21st January, 1885 Sir L. Simmons, renewed his objections with the Secretary of State: "It is evident therefore that the opponents of Government regard Bishop Buhagiar's appointment with great favour as being in opposition to the views of the Imperial Government and it is well known that Dr Mizzi, the member for Gozo, is opposed to Bishop Pace on account of his having discouraged recent political agitation in Gozo ... I am further informed that the nomination of a Capuchin Monk to so high an Ecclesiastical office as that contemplated will be extremely unpopular with the higher ranks of the secular clergy, which comprises some of the most intelligent and well educated men in Malta. For these reasons ... I am very decidedly of the opinion that Bishop Buhagiar's appointment should not be acceded to. He will always be regarded a nominee of Cardinal Lavigerie and as a friend of France ... considering the position and importance of the Island, I need scarcely advert of the inadvisability of allowing a person to hold the high and influential office of Bishop of Malta who will always be believed to have strong French sympathies" (26).

In his manouvers to eliminate Buhagiar from the See of Malta, Simmons suggested that the British Government, should make use of the pretended "Veto": "Should the authorities at Rome on learning that the British Government, which have a right of veto on the appointment of a Bishop, is adverse to the nomination of Mgr. Buhagiar propose to appoint him administrator, *sine iure successionis*, I submit that such a proposal should not be acceded to. I learn that the Superior clergy are unanimous in condemning the selection of Mgr. Buhagiar on the ground of his want of Education and knowledge of the world. His appointment is welcomed by the political agitators and the Capuchins. Apart from the political aspect of the position there is an opinion abroad amongst eminent and well informed Roman Catholics, a considerable portion of the revenues of this See will find their way in Tunis" (27).

These apprehensions were not shared by the Colonial Office in London and the reactions to the points raised by the Governor were in favour of Buhagiar: "The statement in the last paragraph is remarkable. What portion

25. PRO. CO/158/272/1319.

26. PRO. CO/158/272/1403.

27. PRO. CO/158/272/1493. Despatch from Governor to Secretary of State dated 22nd January, 1885. As a matter of fact the British Government did not exercise the so called right of "Veto" but they threatened to do so, unless the Pope acceded to their wish.

of the Revenues — which are admitted on all sides to be unadequate to support the horde of Maltese clergy in a position above that of common labourers can be sent to Tunis is more than one can tell. Mr Hely-Hutchinson can have us faith in the statement and it is only a further instance of the want of education and knowledge of the world which characterizes even the Superior clergy of Malta. If the reports which the Governor has repeatedly sent us of the ignorance of the Maltese clergy are true, these gentlemen will hardly be able to discover any deficiencies of Bishop Buhagiar" (28).

What the Colonial office were rather keeping an eye on, was Dr F. Mizzi, who was embarrassing Her Majesty's Government by siding Buhagiar against Pace, taking care that the British Government "shall get the discredit of having tried to secure the appointment of their own nominee whatever is done" (29).

Consequently, on the 5th February, 1885, Lord Derby wrote to Simmons: "Her Majesty's Government have very carefully considered those objections, and the arguments which you have adduced in support of your views, but they do not find in them sufficient reason for opposing the appointment of Bishop Buhagiar. They do not share your apprehensions that from having been recommended by a French Cardinal he will be under French influence or act otherwise than as a loyal British subject ... steps have therefore been taken to intimate to the Pope that no objection will be made to Bishop Buhagiar's appointment, and I have to request your approval in such a manner as may be necessary for its validity under Ordinance 1 of 1838." "... there is no such clear evidence of Bishop Buhagiar's actual or probable unsuitableness for the post as would justify Her Majesty's Government in interfering with the selection which has been made. The right so to interfere is one which it is undesirable ... and the accounts which I have received of Bishop Buhagiar lead me to entertain the hope that it may be possible to secure his effective cooperation in British interests" (30). This was a straight forward reply to the Governor's Despatch of the 28th January, 1885, stating: "According to the Laws of Malta, the temporalities of the Bishopric cannot be vested in an administrator, appointed by the Pope, unless the Governor approves of the appointment ... In the event therefore of His Holiness appointing as Administrator a person who does not meet the approval of Her Majesty's Government, that appointment would not be valid nor could he legally take possession of the temporalities ..." (31).

28. PRO CO/158/272/1493 minute dated 27/1/85

29. PRO CO/158/272/1403 minute dated 21-1-1885

30. PRO CO/158/272/1493.

31. PRO CO/158/272/1961

Mr. G. Errington, British Chargè d'Affaires in Rome, considered Buhagiar a suitable man for the post. In a letter to Granville he says: "The Malta affair will, I think, turn out well. I am most favourably impressed by Mgr. Buhagiar. He is a man of energy and shrewdness with a considerable determination and yet prudence. There is not a shadow of foundation for the fear that he has French sympathies, on the contrary, in fact I think there can be no doubt that he will be a far more useful man than even the Governor's candidate Mgr. Pace (32).

At this stage the question of Buhagiar's appointment as Administrator Apostolic was resolved with the blessings of Rome and London but not of Malta.

Buhagiar arrived in Malta on the 23rd April 1885 on HMS "Helicon" from Syracuse and on the 29th April 1885 he issued his first letter to the Clergy and people of Malta from the Capuchin Friary of Floriana.

#### *The price of a compromise*

The Governor, however, was not convinced of Buhagiar's loyalty and fitness. During the following three years he made his level best to depict Buhagiar's administration as producing all the elements of a Church-state confrontation.

On more than one occasion he tried to belittle and even to blacken Buhagiar's reputation with the British Government in London. Simmons accused Buhagiar of being supported by priests who had shown dissatisfaction towards the Government; of publishing a new Newspaper "*La Voce di Malta*", where, in its first issue, the Irish Catholic patriot Parnell was praised for his legal struggle for the rights and freedom of Ireland and its Church; of manoeuvring to bring the Government schools under his Control (33) and of insisting to give his permission to the Magistrates before they could prosecute members of the clergy in civil courts.

To make matters worst, Cardinal Lavigerie visited Buhagiar on his way to Rome in July 1886. Such a visit could only stir up more doubts in Simmons's mind against Buhagiar.

32. PRO FO/800/239 f. 133 r-v.

33. This accusation was absolutely untrue: the Bishop only wanted to meet the teachers and children during his Pastoral Visitation

34. PRO FO/45/621 Simmons to Granville, 27th July, 1886.

These and other clashes between the Governor Sir L. Simmons and the Bishop Mgr A.M. Buhagiar, seem to have had the character of a rather personal antagonism which perhaps originated out of the Governor's dislikings for Buhagiar's "Common manners" and for the latter's popularity amongst the "uneducated masses" (34).

Bishop Buhagiar was very much on alert against any attempt of protestant propaganda in Malta. In July 1866, when a branch of the Primrose League was founded in Malta, he immediately, on account that it was not a Catholic Association, prohibited Maltese Catholics from subscribing to it (35). The English Bishop of Nottingham, Mgr. Bagshawe considered the League objectionable for Catholics as well because of its religious ambiguity, even though it promoted Imperial interests. The "*Malta Standard*" of the 21st and "*Il Resorgimento*" of the 25th July, 1887, were very critical to the Bishop's Pastoral which considered the League as having religious and not political aims (36).

Similar measures were also taken by Bishop Buhagiar against local papers for spreading doctrines against Catholic Faith and morals (37).

Evidently these actions were looked upon unfavourably by all those who did not see eye to eye with Mgr. Buhagiar's administration.

In fact, Sir L. Simmons was not single handed in his endeavours to remove Buhagiar from Malta and to promote Bishop Pace of Gozo instead.

It was a well known fact that some prominent members of the Diocesan clergy were not happy to see this Capuchin Friar at the helm of the church in Malta (38).

Mgr. Paul Pullicino, amongst others, who was proposed by Bishop Scicluna as his Coadjutor in March 1885, although Mgr. Scicluna later proposed Mgr. Pace of Gozo, declared himself openly against the appointment of Buhagiar. In May 1885, about one month after the arrival of Mgr. Buhagiar, Mgr. Pullicino was in Rome. He did not hesitate to expose his views unfavourably in the meeting he had with Cardinal Czaki, with Cardinal Parocchi, Vicar of Rome and with his old friend Mgr. Luigi Macchi.

35. *Pastoral Letter* dated 6th July, 1887.

36. "*La Voce di Malta*", 30th July, 1887, p.1; PRO CO/158/283/1466, Simmons to Holland, 20th July, 1887 and minute of the 27/7/1887.

37. *Pastoral Letters* dated: 27th January, 1886 and 17th March, 1887.

38. *The Daily Malta Chronicle*, 5th August, 1924, p. 3.

Mgr. Pullicino moreover was very much against the address which the Provost of the Birkirkara Collegiate, Don Crocifisso Pisani was presenting to the Pope as an expression of gratitude for sending Bishop Buhagiar to Malta. "Il Capitolo avea ricusato di prendervi parte," wrote (39). This refusal provoked a written reply in the form of an open letter: "*Lettera in risposta ai censori dell'Indirizzo di Ringraziamento a S.S. Leone XIII*" signed by Can. Prep. Don Crocifisso Pisani and Sac. Don Giovanni Bonnici and dated 27 Giugno 1885.

Asked by Cardinal Czaski: "Perche tale ripugnanza contro Buhagiar?" Pullicino replied: "primo, perche credesi questa scelta fatta sotto una influenza straniera [cioe la Francia]" (as if the British support was not another foreign influence in favour of Pace) "e poi perche l'individuo non pare che possa avere quelle qualità personali, per cui possa bene sostenere la propria posizione in faccia a tutte le classi, massime di protestanti che sono nell'Isola".

Pullicino was also upset because of Buhagiar's age, "Ha meno quarant'anni", while he was 73, and continued: "non si conosce in Malta. Non è quasi ne anco Maltese. Passo il suo piu bel tempo in Sfax in Barberia. In quella regione non poteva essersi egli formato da poter sostenere bene la sua posizione in faccia alla classe colta di Malta e della classe Inglesi, che sono nell'isola". "Era strano che si andasse a cavare per Vescovo di Malta, un religioso da Barberia ... ove d'ordinario non occorrono ecclesiastici, che sono il fiore di Malta. Lavigerie se è interessato" explained Pullicino to Cardinal Czaski, "per proporre e far accettare al Pontefice una sua creatura, un religioso Capuccino di poca entità, quale apparisce Mgr. Buhagiar. Il Capitolo della Cattedrale, i Sacerdoti piu rispettabili, il laicato piu distinto hanno accolto molto male tale nomina ... ne si è guardata con piacere la presenza, come Amministratore, di un religioso di minima entità ... il quale per mostrare popolarità, si è fatto circondare di preti malcontenti e di molta plebaglia" (40).

On his part Pullicino recommended Mgr. Pietro Pace, Canon J. Caruana and Canon A. Mifsud.

Yet, Leo XIII through Cardinal M. Rampolla, who in 1887 succeeded Jacobini as Secretary of State, suggested as a possible independent candidate for Malta, another Capuchin, namely, Mgr. Ignatius Persico, who had just completed an important Mission in Ireland. This choice could not be accepted, because Persico was an Italian from the Province of Naples (41).

39. UNIVERSITY OF MALTA LIBRARY, Ms. 93 vol. II f. 118 r.

40. UNIVERSITY OF MALTA LIBRARY, Ms. 93 Vol. I f. 43 r-v. Note the similarity between Sir L. Simmons and Mgr. P. Pullicino in their remarks on Mgr. Buhagiar.

41. PRO FO/45/621, Memorandum by Lord G. Strickland dated 28th November, 1888.

The Duke of Norfolk was requested as well to "put a spoke in Buhagiar's wheel" which he did during his Mission in Rome on the occasion of Leo XIII's Episcopal Silver Jubilee (42).

Lord G. Strickland was seriously involved in securing the nomination of Mgr. P. Pace and the transfer of Mgr. Buhagiar from Malta.

Although Lord Strickland declared that his connection with Buhagiar began and ended when he conveyed to Pope Leo XIII the message that the British Government were prepared to exercise the "Veto" against Bishop Buhagiar, if he were to succeed Scicluna (43), documentary evidence shows much more than that. Writing from the Constitutional Club, Northumberland Avenue, London on the 12th July, 1888 to Lord Salisbury, Count G. Strickland says: "I have just heard by Telegram of the death of the Archbishop of Malta; and with reference to the interview with which you honoured me on the subject, I beg to submit to you that every effort should now be made to support the transfer to Malta of Mgr. Pace, Bishop of the adjacent Island of Gozo..."

"There is however good reason to hope that the Pope could be persuaded to follow altogether the wishes of your Government with reference to his nomination if the reasons and arguments were now submitted to him. I have to return to Malta almost immediately and it would be but slight inconvenience to return to by Rome (sic) instead of by sea, if you think the opportunity should be made use of. In any case valuable information might be gathered, and it would not be difficult to ascertain the names of any third parties" (44).

Count Strickland had even written to Mgr. Buhagiar in view of gaining his support in his political intrigues, but Buhagiar through his Secretary, replied that he wanted to maintain an absolute neutrality: "finche non si toccano gli interessi della Religione, ritenendo di poter in tal guisa, per quanto è da se procurar meglio il benessere del paese" (45).

Far from just conveying the message of the British Government to the Holy See, Count Strickland wanted also to prevent Mgr. Buhagiar from landing in Malta again when he (Buhagiar) went to Rome to present his resignation to the Pope (46).

42. SALISBURY PAPERS, Hertfordshire, U.K. A/66/6 minute by Barrington to J. Kennedy dated 23rd November, 1887.
43. *The Daily Malta Chronicle*, 5th August, 1924, p. 3-4.
44. SALISBURY PAPERS, Hertfordshire, U.K. A/68/19.
45. ARCHIEPISCOPAL ARCHIVES, Florianana, Secretaria-Buhagiar (Rescritti e Corrispondenze) 1888. (loose papers).
46. SALISBURY PAPERS, Hertfordshire U.K. A/66/34, J. Kennedy to E. Barrington, 28th November, 1888.

Evidently Leo XIII was caught in a pincers: either appointing Buhagiar as Successor of Scicluna with all the logical consequences of a straightforward "Veto" or transferring Pace from Gozo to the See of Malta at the expense of Buhagiar. The latter hypothesis prevailed.

Malta, because of its strategic position and of the importance of its defence, necessitated co-operation between church and state as an essential element of British Colonial policy.

Bishop Buhagiar was very unfortunate in having to administer the church in Malta at a time when, on one hand political relations between France and England in the Mediterranean were very tense and on the other any move by the local Government to introduce English Language in the Social and cultural life of the Island was considered as an attempt to protestantize the population. Obviously certain attempts in this direction were used by politicians to their own advantage (47).

Buhagiar found himself in a very awkward position, yet he did not take sides. "L'accusa che io abbia tenuta un'attitudine ostile al Governo" he wrote to Lavigerie in June 1887, "è una nera e spudorata menzogna, perche io non ho tenuto nessuna politica, contentandomi solamente a fare il Vescovo e non l'uomo di stato o l'agitatore politico. Io mi sono attenuto alla piu stretta neutralità, nell'agitazione politica in cui versa il paesa fin dal 1880" (48).

The suspicion against Buhagiar's loyalty was due to the fact that he had no obligations to the British Government for his promotion but to Cardinal Lavigerie who was considered as promoter of French Imperial interests (49).

Yet in fairness it must be said, that Cardinal Lavigerie, like many other Catholic Bishops, in all his diplomatic manoeuvres, was ultimately seeking the spiritual welfare of the People of God.

Men like Ferry and Gambetta concurred sufficiently to subsidize Catholic instruction in Mediterranean countries, even as they eliminated religion from the schools of France. It was perhaps Lavigerie's diplomatic ability that made Gambetta say "L'anticlericalisme n'est pas un article d'esportation".

47. H. FRENDO, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese experience*, Malta 1974, p. 22ss.

48. *La Sede del Papa*, 4 Gennaio, 1902 pp.2-3, Letter of Mgr. Buhagiar to Lavigerie dated approx. 24th June, 1887.

49. H. FRENDO, *o.c.*, p. 47.

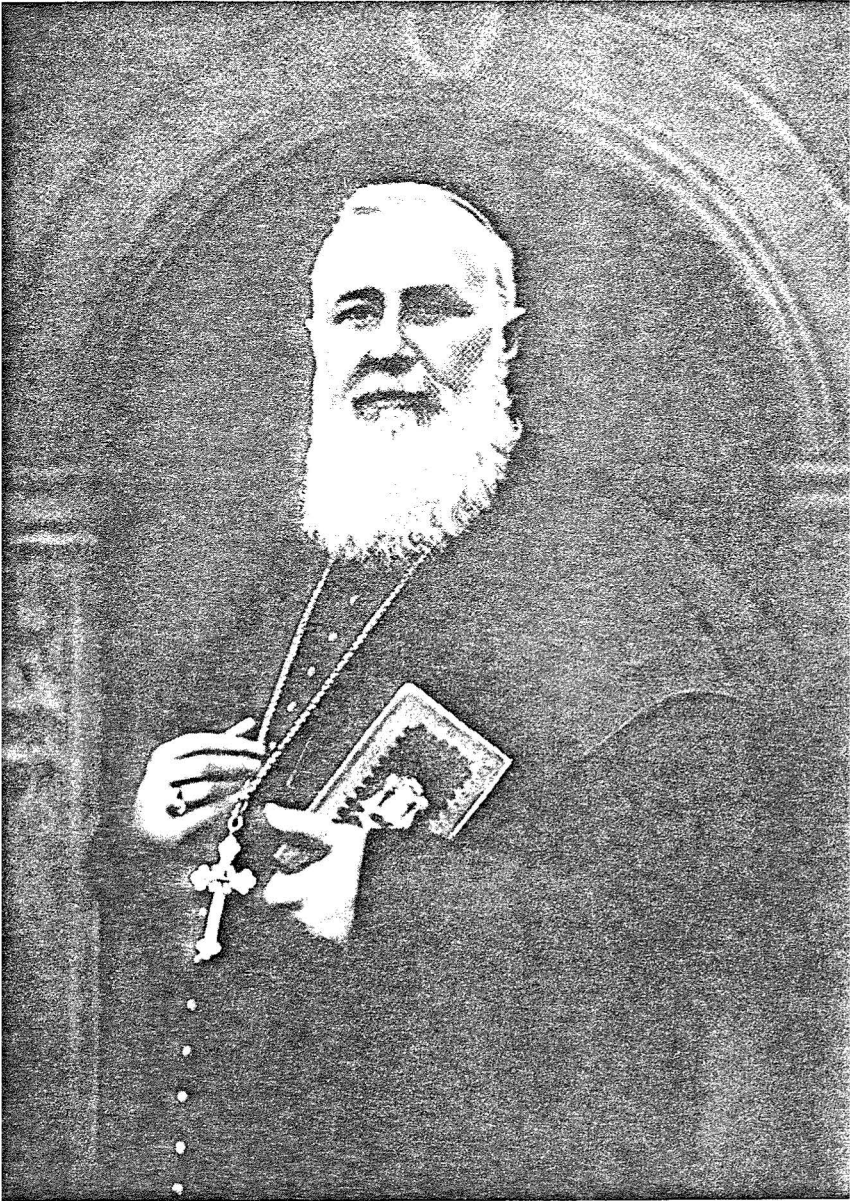
Lavigerie personified the relationship, which kept the overseas tie between church and state from collapsing while domestic bonds were systematically broken. "He was an indispensable mediator in domestic problems between the Government and the Vatican, yet in negotiations for his African programme he was his own man, bargaining for the support of both. In this diplomatic triangle of France, Rome and his missionary Apostolate, he usually obtained part of what he wanted — from France on the basis of serving imperialist interests, from the Holy See because of the advantages which his leadership and fund-raising ability offered to the apostolate. This occasionally involved playing Paris and Rome against each other, *indicating the cord which it is necessary to touch, according to my knowledge of men*" (50).

Lavigerie's ability to organize diplomatic pressure was an important factor in his success. But he failed in Buhagiar.

Mgr. A.M. Buhagiar was then promoted Apostolic Delegate and Extraordinary Envoy of the Holy See in San Domingo, Haiti and Venezuela. He died in San Domingo few months after his arrival on the 10th August, 1891 aged 45.

50. J.D. O'DONNELL, *Cardinal C. Lavigerie: The politics of getting a Red Hat*, in *The Catholic Historical Review*, 63(1979) p. 185ss.





His Eminence Cardinal Lavigerie (1825-1892),  
Founder of the White Fathers.