



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

A facetious archbishop?

I remember very clearly as I was growing up in the 1980s when the social conditions in Malta were terrible, when all we talked about was politics, when those on the other side of the fence were 'so damn bad', when what mattered was allegiance to the party (and not to the issues) and when tribalism got a new meaning to it.

One thing that sticks in my memory is our anger at the way the Church, personified in the Archbishop, at the time, the laid back and blasé Gużeppi Mercieca, was being criticised for seemingly taking a detached approach to all the issues that were in play. The 'qisu riegħel' description of this man was staple diet in our day-to-day conversations. The annoyance was immense especially when one considers that so many principles were being thrown to the dogs, when civil rights were stained and corruption and lack of governance were there for all to see.

People were terribly angry that the Church was taking the easy way out instead of trying to grind the terror and discontent.

Probably at the time there was the 1960s narrative lingering at the back of the Church's mind. The Church in Malta led by Archbishop Mikiel Gonzi had a history of unconstructive, off-putting and downbeat involvement in politics especially when all was not good and the Church felt that the best way would be to simply draw down the shutters. At the time, the 1960s were the back drop of direct confrontation with the Labour Party and this was propelling civil discontent and restlessness. This situation as a fact caused irreparable damage with people not being allowed to bury their own in holy places, individuals were not authorised to receive the Holy Eucharist and all the rest I need not restate – all of this because

they were followers of one of the parties whose leader did not go down well with the archbishop of the time. It was incredible how the Vatican had allowed this behaviour to go on for so long which was an inexcusable scenario even if we had to take into consideration the cultural and historical context.

In all probability, this is why the Church went tacit in the 1980s (except for the Church Schools debacle and the confiscation of the Blue Sisters from Malta). It is probably the reason why the Church during and after Gużeppi Mercieca's time remained almost completely cut off from the political issues that were brewing, silence prevailed and consequently people were peeved. Whilst I can comprehend the rationale of the Church at the time, I disagree with the strategy. Silence in itself is a political statement. It is telling people to shove it and it is ignoring the plight of so many who suffered and some still do because of the absence of any commentary.

I have always found it incredibly difficult to understand why the Church had to sit on the fence when there was so much she should have been talking about.

Let's be clear on a fact here. The social teaching that guides the Church is very specific in that it does not allow for silence and tameness. The Catholic social teaching, which is the body of doctrine of the Church focuses on matters around social justice. It looks at the impact of our economic decisions, the way our communities are organised and analy-

ses how the state is operating and in whose interest. So the Catholic Church, and if we take the way Jesus Christ spoke and lived, is not about simply asking for divine intervention but is fundamentally focused on its social teaching that ranges from its proclamation of the life and dignity of the human person, to issues around family, community and participation, from matters of rights and responsibilities, to social issues like poverty, vulnerability, dignity of work and the privileges of workers. The Church is also about social solidarity and reacts to environmental concerns. This is all spelled out clearly in its teachings, beliefs and principles.

I've mentioned all of this because it places in perspective the criticism being directed at Archbishop Scicluna. What bothers many is that the archbishop is coming across as finding fault in everything the government is involved in. This is probably not the case but the perception of people is that he takes a dig at the whole lot the current administration decides to engage with. In more ways than one Scicluna is quite right in pointing out the boobos and the differing moral positions. The question is whether he should be doing it in what seems to be an impetuous way, even if he has reminded us on several occasions that these are not official positions of the Church. However, in a highly charged political context Tweeting can become very opinionated and there is little tattle that some in the inner circle are not too keen on

the pastor's comportment.

I would like to make reference to Fr Joe Borg's article on the *Sunday Times of Malta* (7/6/15) because I believe that the questions he asked at the time remain binding:

Did Scicluna overstep his competence? Is he being pastorally negligent? Would it not be better if he just shuts up or confines himself to amboes and pulpits singing the praises of some mega-martyr and pontificating on innumerable ethereal subjects?

Fr Borg answers these questions in this same article by quoting Pope Francis, and his encyclical 'The Joy of the Gospel', and states that, 'Evangelisation would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social.'

My deduction is that the archbishop should remain on the ball and react to what is happening around him, but at the same time keeping in mind the sensitivities to ensure that his well-intentioned musings do not end up being interpreted erroneously. I choose to conclude with a sample of Elexio's 'The Ten Commandments of the Church Twitter Use' which I believe can serve the archbishop well when contemplating his next Twitter jibe; 'Thou shall not be willy-nilly', 'Thou shall not be an egghead', 'Thou shall not use twitter as a boxing ring', 'Thou shall not toot thy own horn' and 'Thou shall not host a takeover.'

(<http://www.elexio.com/blog/the-10-commandments-of-church-twitter-use/>).

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14 September 1982

Hollywood princess dead

Princess Grace of Monaco has died of the injuries she sustained in a car crash near Monte-Carlo yesterday.

The Hollywood actress Grace Kelly, who starred in the Alfred Hitchcock hits *Dial M for Murder* and *Rear Window*, suffered a brain haemorrhage.

A statement issued by the royal palace said she died at 9.30pm after her condition worsened throughout the morning and became irreversible by the afternoon.

It also said the former film star's husband, Monaco's head of state Prince Rainier, and her three children were at her bedside when she died.

The US-born princess' youngest daughter



Stephanie was in the car at the time of the accident, but suffered only light bruising.

Brake failure

The news of her death was unexpected as

previous reports from the palace had indicated that despite broken ribs, leg and collarbone she was in a stable condition.

The Monaco royal family also released an account of yesterday's accident and

said the princess had lost control of the car when the brakes failed.

After leaving the road her 10-year-old Rover tumbled 100ft (30.5m) down a ravine, turning over several times before coming to rest in a garden.

But a witness who was driving behind the two princesses said the car began zigzagging erratically some time before the crash happened.

Two engineers from British Leyland are on their way to Monte Carlo to examine the wreckage.

Princess Grace was given a full royal funeral at the Cathedral of St Nicholas in Monte Carlo.

Her daughter Stephanie, who was later reported to have suffered a serious cervical fracture rather than slight bruising, was too ill to attend.

The Leyland engineers who were sent to the crash scene said the car had been in a perfect state before the accident.

It was later determined the princess had probably suffered a minor stroke which had caused her to lose control of the car.