A Language for the Catholic Church in Malta[*]

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Relations amongst religion, the individual, and society

Whilst acknowledging that there are various factors that influence the Maltese character, one must also recognize that religion has been and, to a certain extent, still is, an important protagonist in the construction of the identity of Maltese society and of individuals.

Indeed, religion features strongly in all periods of Maltese history, not only because of the islands' history but especially due to an emphatic need of the population to construct its identity and meaning. For instance, evidence from the post-Arab period, around the dawn of the second millennium, seems to suggest that one of the methods used by the Byzantine monks to re-Christianise the Muslim population was to exploit the islands' Christian past and to construct a Pauline mythology (Buhagiar 2006). The accentuation and reinterpretation of the Christian past, the construction of local and indigenous Christian stories and, most importantly, the closeness of the religious community to the indigenous community were always vital roles of religion, throughout Maltese history, in the construction of identity and understanding of relations amongst individuals and those between the Maltese and their rulers.

However, the nature of the relationship between Christianity and society has been put into question. No one quarrels with the idea that in pre-modern society and, to a considerable extent, in pre-Second World War society, Western states, societies and individuals were greatly influenced by Christian Churches and theology. This non secular state of affairs was also the situation the Maltese experienced until very recently. One cannot establish a clear demarcation line when this situation was no longer true. Indeed, it seems that parts of the population are still influenced by a non secular mentality. However, besides the recent changes which did contribute to change people's mentality, there have also been conscious attempts to secularise Maltese society.

Ambivalent Europeans

The situation of Church hegemony in Malta has been challenged on various occasions during the twentieth century, but the change in the religious beliefs, attitudes and practice is only recent. While it has become almost a cliché to say that Europe has

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steadily become more and more secular (Greeley 2003), the same cannot be said to be also happening in Malta. In Europe an increasing majority has ceased to participate frequently in religious practices or has stopped altogether to pursue their religious beliefs publicly or manifestly. In one respect such a trend was to be expected. According to the standard theories of secularisation, modernity should inexorably be accompanied by a decline of all that is sacred, a decline that is inversely proportional to increased progress, to the spreading of education and to processes involving urbanization and industrialization. However, sociological data in Europe shows that the number of believers is not equivalent to the size of congregations. It is evident that there are fewer Europeans who pursue religion publicly, choosing instead to maintain their faith privately.

Secular society typically relegates religion to the individual's private life. It is summed up in the famous maxim of Frederick II of Prussia that "everyone must find his own salvation", or in Thomas Jefferson's argument that "it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." And yet there is also an ideological element of triumph associated with the idea of a secular society. It came into being in a way which was perceived by those who attended and welcomed its formation and development as a kind of "struggle" which has persisted through the generations.

Historically, of course, the secular state is the result of a collective learning process that can be traced back to the European wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After much bloodshed and violence, that experience of religious conflict gave birth to the insight that freedom of thought, conscience and freedom of religious beief is a basic human right. Freedom of thought embraces both the positive freedom to live according to one's own religious, quasi-religious or non-religious worldview and the negative freedom to be protected from disturbance through the undue influence of the worldviews of others. Indeed, commitment to such freedom has justly become one of the mainstays of liberal democratic social societies. Even if the above, rather potted, historical account may be true, what is of great sociological significance is that those who considered themselves to be protagonists of secularisation increasingly idealized themselves and the process and that idealization became an important element of the process. Such slogans as Voltaire's "*Écrasez l'infâme!*", or Kant's quotation from Horace "*sapere aude*" – chosen by the Prussian philosopher as the maxim of the Enlightenment and translated by him as "Have the courage to use your own intellect" – became iconic expressions of secular society. Sociologically speaking, the most interesting issue is not the fact of progressive decline in religious practice among the European population, but the fact that this decline is interpreted in line with the secularisation paradigm. Once it is interpreted through the lens of a "secularist" self-

understanding, such a decline is seen as “normal” and “progressive”. It is perceived as a quasi-normative condition for being a “modern” and “enlightened” European. It is precisely this “secular” identity shared by academics and by ordinary people in Europe that is sociologically so interesting.

The history of Malta has allowed little room for the development of such sentiment among the general population or even among intellectuals. In Malta, the general population did not experience the 16th century religious wars, while the introduction and propagation of the reformation were severely restricted by the Knights and the Inquisition. For a long period the enemy was the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim infidels while, during the colonial period, the British were identified as the other and the population were exhorted to pray for their conversion. The enemy was rarely from within. The identification of the poor and the lower classes with the Church, the close associations of the ecclesiastical authorities with the a large section of the political class and well-off elite and the continuous confirmation of the synonymous nature between the Maltese and Catholic identities have made it possible for there being an almost inexistent process of secularisation up until to a few years ago.

However, not even Europe can be defined as a secular society in a strict sense. Recent sociological data show that that Europeans are not indifferent to the religious and spiritual dimensions (Berger 1999, Davie 1999, Greeley 2003, Norris and Inglehart 2004). Similarly such major events as the death of Lady Diana in 1997, the tragedy of 9/11, the tragedy caused by the Tsunami, the death of Paul John Paul II, and the terrorist attacks in London and in Madrid have consistently shown that there are particular instances when the religious and spiritual dimensions come again to the fore.

At present, one could perhaps speak of the unchurching of Europe, and of religious individualization, rather than of secularisation. For it seems that, in so-called secular societies, people have developed a private religion rather than have abandoned religion altogether. Religion has become invisible rather than non-existent. The emphasis has been switched to individualization of belief; the compilation of personal creeds that give meaning to one’s unique existence, according to one’s experiences, interests and aspirations. Hence, in contemporary Europe, religious identity is increasingly a matter of personal choice. Of course, this trend certainly disrupts the traditional forms of involvement in religious groups at the parish and also hampers the transmission of religion through the family environment. Even so, religion continues to exist even as a means of individual identification. However, it informs collective identity to a far lesser degree and often no longer provides the framework for ethical standards in the common life of Europe’s citizens. More than any other peoples, Europeans are moving away from a model which depicts a believer as *receiving* one’s religious identity from the community within which one has grown up, and within which one complies with rules

and practices that regulate religious observance and protect the transmission of belief, towards a pattern which has been described in terms of two biblical images: that of the *pilgrim* (who follows an individual spiritual journey with a number of stages) and that of the *convert* (who chooses the faith to which she belongs) (Hervieu−Léger 2004, as cited by Hervieu−Léger 2006).

These two images appear to be exceedingly appropriate characterizations of the trend towards religious individualization prevalent particularly in Europe. Perhaps the best description of this state of religious individualization in Europe is the expression, coined by the British sociologist Grace Davie: *believing without belonging* (Davie 2000). At the same time, however, large numbers of Europeans even in the most secular countries still identify themselves as "Christian," pointing to an implicit and somewhat diffused Christian cultural identity which –– even from a distance – still governs collective reflexes in terms of identity. In this sense, Danièle Hervieu-Léger too appears to be correct in coming up with the counterpart characterization of the European situation as *belonging without believing* (Hervieu−Léger 2004 as cited by Hervieu−Léger 2006). As she points out very well, "secular" and "Christian" cultural identities are intertwined in complex and mostly tacit modes among most Europeans. Jean-Paul Sartre put it even more strongly when he claimed, in the name of the French people, "We are all Catholic".

The Changing Role of Religion in Contemporary Society

In this scenario, it is interesting to note that, even in what has been described as an "unchurched" Europe, religious traditions and expressions of faith are returning to the public sphere. Private religion is returning strongly and dynamically to public view (Berger 1999). Here we can see, in fact, the face of "post-secular society" – to use the term coined by the German sociologist Klaus Eder. The Professor of Sociology at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, has defined "post-secularism" as the "return of religion to the public sphere" (Bosetti and Eder 2006). He noted the rise of religious messages in the society of communication, resulting in the greater visibility of religious beliefs in public arenas. He expands on this idea in a useful recent interview, claiming that:

> What I want to say is that during the secular era (still predominant in Europe), religion did not disappear, but instead took a form that was invisible at a public level. No one talks about religion, and religious groups don't dare to enter the public sphere because they do not feel legitimate. Secularisation is nothing more than a phenomenon that has hushed up religion: seizure of land, interventions, censorship in schools. Therefore, religion has left the public sphere and entered the private. But this is not to say that it has disappeared. It has simply become invisible. In fact, at a certain point in secularisation, religion became confident enough to re-emerge in the public sphere, not with one voice offered by the institutions, but with as many voices as there are individuals. We can observe this in the amount of activity and religious texts on offer (Bosetti and Eder 2006).

This visibility increases with increased media mobilization and the awakening of new religious movements. Eder claims that the idea of a secular Europe is entirely up for discussion: religious believers are demanding a stronger and more pervasive presence, although the religious phenomenon they are presenting is a less organized one, and they are often understood as upholding fewer bonds of belonging.

The term "post-secular" is being used repeatedly and increasingly by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his more recent works. In his celebrated dialogue with then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which took place in Munich under the title "The Pre-Political Moral Foundations of a Free State," on the 19th January 2004, the German self-described political liberal philosopher appropriated and underlined the term "post-secular society" to call for a process of reciprocal understanding between religious and non-religious citizens:

> The expression "post-secular" does more than give public recognition to religious fellowships in view of the functional contribution they make to the reproduction of motivations and attitudes that are societally desirable. The public awareness of a post-secular society also reflects a normative insight that has consequences for the political dealings of unbelieving citizens with believing citizens. In the post-secular society, there is an increasing consensus that certain phases of the "modernization of the public consciousness" involve the assimilation and the reflexive transformation of both religious and secular mentalities. If both sides agree to understand the secularisation of society as a complementary learning process, then they will also have cognitive reasons to take seriously each others' contributions to controversial subjects in public debate (Habermas and Ratinger 2006, 46-47).

Habermas concludes that liberal democracies must leave space for religious expression and religious forms of life:

> The neutrality of the state authority on questions of world views guarantees the same ethical freedom to every citizen. This is incompatible with the political universalization of a secularist world view. When secularized citizens act in their role as citizens of the state, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth. Nor must they refuse their believing fellow citizens the right to make contributions in a religious language to public debates. Indeed, a liberal political culture can expect that the secularized citizens play their part in the endeavours to translate relevant contributions from the religious language to the public as a whole (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, 51-52).

In short, Habermas is proposing no less than a "revised concept of citizenship"(Habermas 2006, 14) that restores freedom of religious thought and reasoning to the public square and also enjoins that secular reasoning proceeds with an eye open to the duties of respect, listening, and reciprocity expected of all citizens.

It is interesting that back in the eighties Habermas was dismissive of religious tradition as the best secular tradition. He upheld the disenchantment and disempowering of the sacred domain within society as being a clear gain for humanity (Habermas 1987, 77). On the contrary, he is now arguing for a *post-secular*, democratic, public sphere in which participants in discussion would be receptive to the presumed rational content of arguments whether they be religious or non-religious. This attitude of openness is required of citizens who espouse post-metaphysical thinking, as well as of religious citizens: secularly minded citizens are required to adopt a self-reflexive attitude towards the limits of secular reason and strive to be open to the possible cognitive substance of religious reasons; religiously minded citizens are required to acknowledge the secular nature of the democratic constitutional state and to accept the validity of liberal democratic principles such as equality and liberty (Habermas 2006).

Habermas wants to avoid imposing intolerable psychological burdens on citizens and calls for a democratic public sphere in which religious and non-religious contributions would be granted an equal hearing in discussions:

> The liberal state must not transform the requisite *institutional* separation of the religion and politics into an undue *mental* and *psychological* burden for those of its citizens who follow a faith. ... [Citizens should not have to] split their identity into a public and private part the moment they participate in public discourses. They should therefore be allowed to express and justify their convictions in a religious language if they cannot find secular 'translations' for them…
>
> [However], the truth content of religious contributions can enter into the institutionalized practice of deliberation and decision-making only if the necessary translation already occurs in the … political public sphere itself.
>
> This requirement of translation is even a cooperative task in which the non-religious citizens must likewise participate, if their religious fellow citizens are not to be encumbered with an asymmetrical burden. Whereas citizens of faith may make public contributions in their own religious language only subject to the proviso that these get translated, the secular citizens must open their minds to the possible truth content of those presentations and even enter into dialogues from which religious reasons then might well emerge in the transformed guise of generally accessible arguments. (Habermas 2006, 9-10, 11-12)

This line of thought was echoed by none other than then-Cardinal Ratzinger in his debate with Habermas. Indeed, one of the main points made by the German Cardinal – now Pope Benedict XVI – was that our Western civilization appears to be divided into the sphere of reason and science and that of religion. He warns that both spheres cannot pretend to be insulated from each other. On the one hand, the rational and scientific *Weltanschauung* is not only ethically challenged but actually produces many of the ethical dangers of contemporary life. It is not an exaggeration to speak of a "hubris of reason" and it makes sense therefore, that secular rationalism should listen to guidance

from religious values. On the other hand, religion – like rationality – has not yet been able to establish a set of principles acceptable on a universal level and indeed has been seen to produce "false universalisms, thereby leading to intolerance and acts of terrorism" (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, 64). It too needs to acknowledge its need for the critical and cleansing guardianship of reason. In order that religion and reason might be purified of their respective pathologies they both call for one another:

> Religion must continually allow itself to be purified and structured by reason … there exist pathologies in religion that are extremely dangerous and that make it necessary to see the divine light of reason as a "controlling organ". … [R]eason too must be warned to keep within its proper limits, and it must learn a willingness to listen to the great religious traditions of mankind. If it cuts itself completely adrift and rejects this willingness to learn, this relatedness, reason becomes destructive … Accordingly, I would speak of a necessary relatedness between reason and faith and between reason and religion, which are called to purify and help one another. They need each other and they must acknowledge this mutual need. (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, 77-78).

Ratzinger is in broad agreement with Habermas about post-secular society, about the need for a willingness to listen and learn from each other, and about the requirement of self-limitation and humility necessary on all sides.

The Maltese Case

In many ways, the relationships among religion, society and individuals in Malta are different from those in most countries in Europe. One cannot argue that Malta is a secular society even though a sizable part of the population relates and operates through a secular mentality, and the majority of the population experiences reality in both secular and non secular terms.

In 1999, the European Values Survey revealed that 74.7% claimed to be religious persons while, the mean on a ten point Likert-scale item on the importance of God in one's life was 9.15 (EVS/WVS 2006). The Social Values, Science and Technology survey demonstrated that, when compared to their European counterparts, Maltese have the highest belief in God (95%), the lowest non-believing group (2%), and lowest group of believers in a life force or spirit (3%) (European Commission 2007b). The 2005 Mass attendance census showed that on a given day in November, 52.6% of the Maltese population attended Sunday Mass (DISCERN 2006), which figure indicates a steady decline in mass-attendance over the past thirty years. Even so, mass-attendance remains high by European standards.

An overview of the historical, political and sociological data suggests that the main motor that brought about change in the attitudes and relationships, was the

economy. People adjusted their lifestyles to respond to the new context leading to a situation where

> the lifestyles of successful business people, in a free market economy… become status symbols which other people seek to appropriate in order to enhance their rank in society (Tonna 1995, 67)

Such changes inevitably lead to a consumerist mentality. People were not only consuming basic needs but also other needs suggested by the new culture. Tonna points out that "people were actually buying and selling symbols" (Tonna 1995, 73).

This liberalisation process brought a variety of adjustments to lifestyles, amongst which an adjustment to an individualistic mentality leading to a "Here and Now" mentality. With the market's continued expansion, more new values were adopted by Maltese. The improved economy brought with it the idea that one should not only satisfy the group's or the family's basic needs but that it could also meet and immediately satisfy the desires of the individual. The ideal of the economy became that of serving the personally useful now, thus introducing more individualistic traits (Tonna 1997). These new traits were reflected in all sectors of life.

Tonna (1997) concluded that the changes in the life of the individual meant changes in the life of the family and community life in Malta. Studies in the mid-nineties showed the family as being very important in the lives of Maltese who, when compared with other European countries, claimed the highest level of satisfaction with their home-life (Abela 1994). Abela (1994) concluded that although, in Malta, there is not as yet an alleged situation of individualistic mentality in the family,

> the western European trend towards greater individualisation of family values, manifest in lower birth rates and higher divorce rates, is making its way gradually amongst certain professionals... People are more tolerant of individualized and liberal life-styles in society at large, though they often tend to emphasize more conventional life-styles for themselves. (38)

A year later Tabone (1995) reported that 30% of the Maltese families experience problems which "might be disturbing family solidarity and stability" (124). However, up till then only 1.8% were divorced or separated and that only a small minority showed a consistent rejection of family values. New concepts and models of family were entering the Maltese culture. Tonna (1997) noted that the Maltese family was changing its identity. According to him, people were afraid "that they could stretch their capacity for family life to a breaking point" (76). This has brought about a growing concern for the security and capability of self-preservation of families. According to Tonna, the post-modern thrust is helping people to search for new ways of experiencing family life. This

resulted in an increasing tendency to consider family members as individuals rather than as a group.

Whilst society was introducing and developing an individualistic ethic, the Church was concerned with its institutional relationship with society and with consolidating its structures. The number of agreements concerning Catholic Schools, marriage legislation, and the teaching of Religion in Schools between the Republic of Malta and the Holy See might have given the impression that the Catholic Church's place in society was protected. It is plausible to assume that an institutionally oriented discourse might have contributed to widening of the gap between society and the Church. Similarly, in these past years, the Church rarely contributed to the definition of a national identity which was high on the agenda on various occasions, this notwithstanding the fact that the Church did have the language and the resources not only to contribute to the discussion but to propose new modes of constructing Maltese identity.

At the Crossroads

The ambivalence shown by recent data seems to suggest that Maltese society is at a turning point. For instance, while there has been a significant decline in birth rate of 19.1% over an 8 year period, (NSO 2004) the number of births outside marriage (which are mainly teenage pregnancies) increased from 4.6% to 20.1% in just a decade (NSO 2007). These figures are in total contrast with the rate of change registered in other European countries, (Eurostat 2007). This certainly implies a change in the composition of the family and values. While the Maltese seem to be consistent in the importance they give to the family, with family, work, and religion ranking most important in the 1991 and 1999 and 2006 (EVS/WVS 2006, European Commission 2007a), there are evident signs of change. Whilst the statistics deduced from the latest Census show that the number of separations is just 4.8%, when one analyses this data one finds that the highest percentage of marriage breakdowns is in the 30-39 age bracket with 7.2% (NSO 2007b).

Similarly, from an economic point of view, while the Maltese have increased their disposable income, they have also started to borrow more money. Over a nine-year period, loans increased by 241.9%. It is interesting that the fastest growing rate in borrowing was related to consumer loans and not to home loans with an increase of 393.5% in the former and 205.9% in the latter (NSO 2004).

Data at hand seems to point to the existence of a communitarian-individualistic divide with no clear borders. Indeed many Maltese seem to experience a fragmented lifestyle. In an analysis of the results emerging from recent Eurobarometer and European Values Survey, Abela concluded that there seem to be competing Maltese identities. On the one hand, an inherited national identity which is related to people's attachment to the

Church and religion and, on the other, a growing identity which is driven by individualised and secular values (Abela 2006).

Undoubtedly, religion in Malta remains very much in the public sphere. Religious believers certainly manifest a strong and pervasive presence in Maltese society, although they appear to uphold fewer bonds of believing Church teaching and engaging in religious practices than hitherto. Notwithstanding this increasingly post-secular face, it appears that religion remains central in the construction of the Maltese identity even if the religious phenomenon is less homogeneous. It is in this increasingly post-secular society that the Church is called to live and proclaim its message. And it is precisely in this scenario that the Church – like the rest of society – must manifest a willingness to listen and learn from others, and show self-limitation and humility. In addition, in this ever more post-secular milieu the Church is called upon to make its message – particularly its social message – clear in secular (or rational terms). Pope Benedict XVI expressed these features extremely well in his first encyclical:

> Faith by its specific nature is an encounter with the living God…But it is also a purifying force for reason itself. From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly. This is where Catholic social doctrine has its place: it has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just. The Church's social teaching argue on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being. It recognizes that it is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life.… Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the Church's immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically. (*Deus Caritas Est* 28)

A Way Forward

In a contemporary society where there is evidence of both secular and post-secular trends, one can hypothesize that the direction in which Maltese society will move – whether towards a secular or towards a post-secular scenario – is also up to the local Catholic Church. If it is perceived as insisting excessively on securing its institutional position in society and using its conventional language in society, this could hasten the secularisation process in Malta. The way forward appears to be a definition of the Church's own identity and its relationship with society and, at the same time, an exercise,

of a humble, yet clear, transmission of values and ideas that are readily understandable in secular terms even if they are different from secular ideas and values.

The use of reference to the past, the creation of local mythologies and legends and the identification of the religious community with the population are three general categorisations that definitely played a major role in the relations between Church, individuals and society during the non secular age (see Appendix). Thus, in the late medieval period, the Church used the past and constructed myths, such as the legendary miraculous intervention of St. Paul who appeared riding a horse brandishing a sword against the Moors that attacked Mdina in 1429, and throughout the17th century till very recently, the Church used the etymology of place-names and the popular veneration of Byzantine saints as a proof of uninterrupted and loyal presence of a Maltese Christian community on the islands.

The present situation is indeed a complex one, but this does not preclude the Church from using the past, delving deeper in local myths/legends, highlighting new stories and outlining the deep relationship between the Christian community and the Maltese community. What is needed is a development of a contextualized theology that highlights the work of the Word of God in history and everyday life, including politics, economy, language and values. An emphasis on divine intervention in history, a rediscovery of Maltese Christian every-day life heroes, such as Alfons Maria Galea, and an outlining of the contribution of the Catholic Community to the identity, politics and economy of the society seems vital. In clarifying its own preferred ecclesial model and in strengthening its own identity the Church not only makes an important *ad intra* exercise but is contributing to national identity and *social imaginary*, that is "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others . . . and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor 2004, 23).

Concurrently, the Church needs to identify those issues that are at the heart of Maltese society. Rather than responding to current issues, the Church needs to contribute, through reflection and dialogue, to matters that are the root causes of the symptoms we observe around us. As Paul VI (1967) claimed, the distinct contribution of the community of believers lies in its expertise in human realities due to its long experience in human affairs.

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Appendix

Examples from history
of the relationship between the Church and Maltese society

Historical Period	Use of the Past	Creation of local Mythology/legends	Vicinity to the population
Medieval Period	i. Use of Catacombs	i. The introduction of the legend about Paul's stay in Malta; ii. the miraculous interventions by St. Agatha and St. Paul to save the Civitas (Mdina) from Muslim incursions	i. leaving the main *Civitas* and moving near the sparse rural populations; ii. establishment of parishes
Period of the Knights	i. Emphasis on the Pauline traditions with the construction and embellishment of Churches on places connected with St. Paul's stay in Malta; ii. use of Byzantine medieval rock-hewn chapels for the propagation of cults	i. Development and propagation of the Pauline myth; ii. the various myths related to the 1565 Great Siege of Malta; iii. reconstruction of the Norman liberation of Christians in medieval times.	i. Establishment of an identity at local village level through parish and patron saints; ii. contribution to the development of social and political life the parish (through, for instance, festas and confraternities)
French Rule		i. The lachrymating effigy of St. Paul at Rabat.	i. The leadership role of the clergy in the revolts against the French; ii. the mediating role of Bishop Labini
British rule	i. Emphasis on St. Paul's conversion of the islands; ii. emphasis on the heroic Christian character of the Maltese, especially during the 1565 Great Siege	i. Emphasis and reconstruction of the Norman conquest of the islands and liberation of Christians; ii. the advancement of the hypothesis of the continuous existence of the Church in Malta	i. The mediating role of the ecclesiastical authorities with the British rulers; ii. the establishment of philanthropic institutions by religious or trusted to religious

(Agius 1991, Buhagiar 2006, 2007, Cassar 2004, Farrugia Randon and Farrugia Randon 2000)

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