

## Books

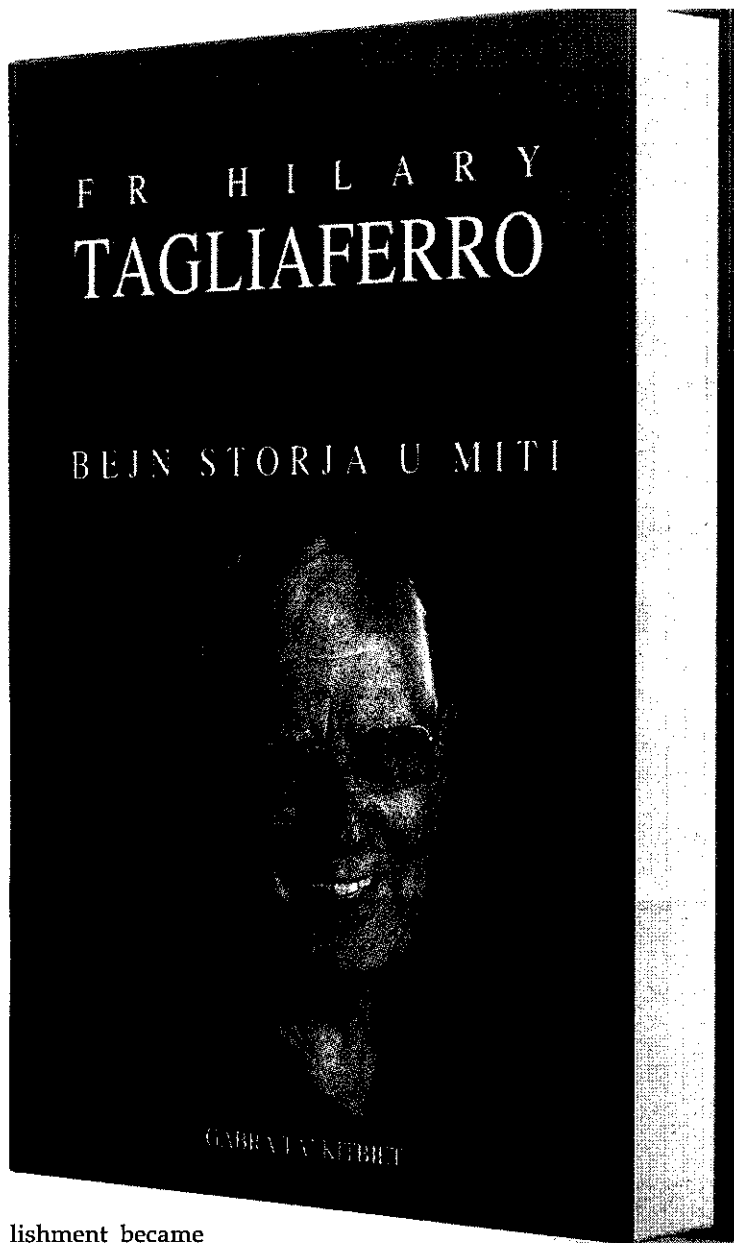
# Fr Hilary Tagliaferro and his formula for authentic happiness

■ Dr Simon Mercieca

It is apt to start the review of the book *Fr Hilary Tagliaferro, Bejn Storja u Miti*, edited by Sergio Grech with the article written by the Provincial of the Augustinian Fathers, Fr Ray Francalanza. For those who may not be aware, Fr Hilary is a member of this religious community. In his paper, Fr Francalanza recounts the three facets that have made Fr Hilary great. These are sports, music and spirituality.

The articles in this book focus mainly on the first element. Sports comes out very strongly in many of the articles published, starting from the interview with President Emeritus George Abela. Dr Abela states that Fr Hilary was instrumental in mending an internal fight about football created by the former Socialist Minister Lorry Sant. Dr Abela states that Lorry Sant kicked out Fr Hilary from the Marsa Sports Ground. Fr Hilary had started at the time what was known as a Saturday morning school for all children to learn sports. This was not the only fight instigated by Lorry Sant. Henry Calleja in his contribution explains why Lorry Sant created a competing Football Association to the MFA. The MFA president appears to have been a Nationalist supporter. After 1971, politics began to feature heavily in every aspect of life in Malta, including sports. The radicals within Labour were seeking to attack any good initiative, including those coming from individuals like Fr Hilary who were tagged as "red".

Sports is again the subject of an article by both Lino Bugeja and Carmel Baldacchino. Bugeja focuses on his recollections when both were involved in coaching Hibs, in particular when Hibs faced Manchester United in England in 1966. Carmel Baldacchino goes into the background of the overall social situation in Paola and Tarxien in the 1950s and 1960s and discusses Fr Hilary's contribution to the youngsters of this area. He wanted to offer them a space where to play. Back then the Augustinian Friars came up with the brilliant idea to create an Oratory - a name which reflected the original oratory that was founded in the area by the Bormla-born priest Gwann Mamo. This Oratory however, for some reason or other, went bankrupt. In this period, an oratory meant a chamber for prayer. Some of this Oratory's religious articles were sold by auction and can still be seen in churches in Paola. The Oratory building was subsequently used as a Fascist school - Umberto Primo - and after the war, the entire complex was bought by the Augustinians and on the initiative of Fr Gulju Bonnici, this estab-



lishment became

a centre for youths in the area.

Many contributors recount the fact that during the 1960s, this Oratory became a centre for those who at the time had been kicked out from the mainstream religious organisations because their parents bought *Il-Helsien*, a newspaper banned by the Church. Those who read *Il-Helsien* were automatically interdicted meaning that priests could not administer to them the Christian sacraments, including confession. Regardless, Fr Hilary continued administering the sacrament of reconciliation to all, irrespective of his or her political creed. This and his family background earned him the notoriety of being pro-Labour.

Fr Hilary's contribution to sports journalism was mentioned in a number of write-ups. Piju Spiteri occupied the position of editor of *Il-Haddiem*. Fr Hilary served as sports editor of this newspaper. Before joining this newspaper, Fr Hilary was the sports journalist of *Lehen is-Sewwa*. From *Il-Haddiem*, Fr Hilary moved to the newspaper *Il-Hajja*.

Charles Buttigieg recounts the history behind *Il-Hajja*, giving us an insight of the backstabbing and the prima-donna personalities that started to dominate the management of this newspaper in the early

1970s. This led Fr Hilary to leave the newspaper. In my opinion, it was at this time that the seeds were planted for the local Church to lose its strong voice in the media. When one remembers that the Church was the precursor of the printed word in Malta, this is an eye-opener for any organisation that past glories are not strong enough to guarantee a brilliant future.

Manwel Scerri owes his career in sports journalism to Fr Hilary, while the veteran sports journalist, Henry Calleja has learned a lot from Fr Hilary. Charles Flores speaks about his experiences and early encounters with Fr Hilary again through the world of sports. The same holds for Charles Camenzuli. Camenzuli recounts Fr Hilary's contribution to the creation of *Ghaqda Kittieba Sports*. This association was founded by Fr Hilary and the latter was instrumental for this association to be affiliated to the world Association of Sports Journalists (AIPS).

Our football nurseries are also Fr Hilary's brainchild. Joe Cassar reveals Fr Hilary's contribution to the setting up of a Youth FA. David Carabott is one of the players who owes his career to Fr Hilary. Fr Hilary discovered him and gave him

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the opportunity to excel in football. Pippo Psaila too gives an interesting overview of Fr Hilary's past works and endeavours in the field of football.

Then we have the second aspect, that of spirituality. Perhaps this is the least discussed,

it is something extremely personal but comes out directly and indirectly in many papers.

Instead, many of the authors associate Fr Hilary's spirituality with his various initiatives for the wellbeing of others. As noted by Bugeja and Camenzuli, among others, there was a pastoral dimension to how Fr Hilary approached football. George Grima takes the opportunity to discuss Fr Hilary's work in sports within the modern concepts of pastoral theology. Grima explains that pastoral work can take different forms and recounts a personal experience, when he travelled to Palermo with Fr Hilary and members from the Institute of Public Policy at the University of Malta. The aim of the mission was to meet Padre Sorge whose political institute in Palermo was making a name in the Italian media back then. This meeting led to the introduction of a new course at the University of Malta.

John Grech and his wife Anne Grech, as well as Peter Calamatta are among those who discuss Fr Hilary's pastoral work. They are particularly touched by the way Fr Hilary delivers his sermons. Even here, a personal touch comes through which shows that to be human. In at least two separate contributions, there are stories about two particular sermons given by Fr Hilary during a funerary rite. He mis-

takes the identity of the deceased with someone who is still alive. In one occasion, as in the film *Four marriages and a Funeral*, the player in question stood up during the sermon and told Fr Hilary that he was still alive and kicking.

In the opinion of many, starting with that of Charles Miceli, Fr Hilary's activity in favour of the poor and the disadvantaged persons, in particular drug addicts, is very important. But the story that has personally touched me most is related to drugs. John Busuttil, a veteran sports journalist shares his personal experience, of a father whose son is saved by Fr Hilary. John's son became a drug addict. It was thanks to Fr Hilary that his son quit such a horrible vice and today is the proud father of a family.

These friendships were instrumental for Fr Hilary to start a number of interesting projects, such as the Millennium chapel and WOW, Wishing Others Well. The activity at the Millennium Chapel is also covered in the interview that Joe Cassar had with Ronnie Micallef. As an official of the MFA, Micallef had the opportunity to work closely with Fr Hilary and this gave him the advantage to know a number of anecdotes, a number of which have a funny ending, which he shares with the readers of this book.

Some anecdotes about Fr Hilary's early life are to be found in the part written by Monsignor Lawrence Gatt, who happens to be Fr Hilary second cousin. In their younger days, both attended private lessons at one of the best teachers in Tarxien, who was Fr Hilary's aunt, the mythical Miss Gatt.

Music is the third element and it was discussed by Noel D'Anastas. It is also mentioned fleetingly by some of the above authors. D'Anastas built his analysis on interviews with Fr Hilary from which we learn that Fr Hilary likes to listen to the organ. Surprisingly, it seems that Hilary has reservations about guitar music in churches. This is an issue of personal taste and his preference for the organ does not impinge in any way on the preferences of others to have guitars played during Mass. Moreover, through this article, D'Anastas gives us the musical preferences of the youths of Paola and Tarxien in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

Fr Hilary's background in Paola and Tarxien, together with his genealogy, was the subject of my paper and his public activity in sports was analysed through the Foucaultian concept of bio-politics.

The book concludes with a number of interesting appendices featuring interviews with Fr Hilary and some interesting writings about his life.