

Dun Salv Grima (1909-1990)

The first Maltese priest at the Scots College

The earliest connection we know of between the island of Malta and the Pontifical Scots College in Rome dates back to 1928. Eighteen year-old Salvatore Grima from Zejtun, a village close to the south-eastern coast of Malta, was then seeking admission to the College. In a letter (dated 13th October 1928) to Mgr William Clapperton, Rector of the Scots College, Grima stated that the College

"was warmly recommended to me by Dr Curmi who is a dear friend to a former Rector of your College, the present Archbishop of Glasgow and by the Archbishop of Malta, who is much pleased to send me to your College..."¹

The then Archbishop of Malta, Mgr Mauro Caruana, naturally had his own reasons for encouraging Grima to receive his priestly formation at the Scots College. The first reason was Caruana's preference to have Grima in an English-speaking College. Yet, a more solid reason was Caruana's earlier deep-rooted connection with Scotland. Before being nominated to the Maltese See in 1915, Caruana had been a Benedictine monk at Fort Augustus in Invernesshire for over twenty years. This explains why Caruana had been well acquainted with the Roman Catholic

¹ Correspondence Grima - Clapperton (13/10/28) : Pontifical Scots College Archives (hereafter referred to as PSCA) 43/360. It is not perfectly clear to whom Grima is referring when he mentions Dr Curmi. It could well be Dr Giovanni Curmi, a Maltese man of letters who was well versed in the Italian language. The Archbishop of Glasgow who is mentioned in the letter is Mgr Donald Mackintosh (1877-1943; Rector, Scots College Rome, 1913-1922; Archbishop of Glasgow, 1922-1943).

Church in Scotland, and why he knew some of the members of the Scottish hierarchy.

Archbishop Caruana personally recommended Grima to Mgr Clapperton who eventually accepted him. Since Grima had initially received a negative reply due to the lack of room at the Scots College, he was overjoyed by Mgr Clapperton's latest decision. In fact, writing directly to Clapperton, Grima states:

"I was very much pleased when the above mentioned Archbishop [Caruana] received from you a positive answer about your accepting me in your College, for which I thank you heartily"¹



Young Dun Salv Grima at the Villa

¹ Correspondence Grima - Clapperton (7/11/28): PSCA 43/361.

Grima arrived in Rome some days later. According to the records at the Scots College, Grima entered the College on the 12th of November 1928.¹

Salvatore Grima was born on the 11th of December 1909 at Zejtun, the youngest of seven children. His father, a stevedore at the Grand Harbour shipyard in Malta, died in July 1916, when Salvatore was not yet seven. When he was fifteen, he was accepted as an apprentice at the mentioned shipyard. After two years there, the time came for him to disclose his long-nurtured priestly vocation to his family. It was suggested that he receive his training for the priesthood at one of the national colleges in Rome.

This brings us back to the Scots College, then, at Via delle Quattro Fontane in central Rome. Grima seems to have fitted in very well at the Scots College. We know this from a letter sent by Mgr Clapperton to Archbishop Caruana. After Grima's first academic year in Rome (1928-1929), the Rector could make the following observations about him:

"...his conduct is also very good: he keeps discipline very well and is of a pious and serious disposition. His health is all that can be desired and he has had no illness during this year. He mixes with the students and finds himself at home with them, and I think he is quite happy here. Altogether, he is a very satisfactory and promising student."²

Like the other students at the Scots College, Grima attended lectures at the Gregorian University. Other Maltese were soon to follow Grima at the Scots College, especially in

¹ Cfr. PSCA Doc. R10: *Nomina Alumnorum 1820-1939* (Collegio Scozzese di Roma) 140.

² Correspondence Clapperton - Caruana (16/8/29): PSCA 44/143. [Rough copy of letter]

the years preceding the War. The list includes Michael Azzopardi, Vincenzo Azzopardi, George Zammit, Arthur Bonnici, John Theuma Relf and Joseph Lupi. Besides Mgr Clapperton, Grima's superiors at the Scots College in this period included: the Vice-Rectors Fr David Paterson (1923-1930), Fr Francis Magauran (1930-1933) and Fr John Sheridan (1933-1938). The Spiritual Directors of the College were Dom Placid Turner O.S.B. (1932-1933), Fr. John Coogan (1933-1934) and Fr Thomas Gillon (1934-1940). Grima was greatly influenced by his spiritual director, Fr Welsby S.J., who was assistant to the general of the Society of Jesus, and who also happened to be one of the advisers on administration of the Scots College at this time.¹

Salvatore Grima was ordained a priest on the 23rd of December 1933 at the chapel of the Benedictine cloistered nuns at Mdina, the old capital city of Malta. He celebrated his first solemn High Mass at his home parish church in Zejtun, on the 31st of December 1933. After his ordination, Dun Salv returned to the Scots College and proceeded with his studies at the Gregorian University.

From 1934 to 1936 we know that his main endeavour was the research entailed in the writing of his doctoral thesis. The title of his thesis was *De doctrina iustificationis iuxta Wesley* (On the doctrine of Justification according to Wesley); his director was Fr. Fabregas. The thesis was successfully defended in 1936. An elderly Maltese priest, Mgr Joseph Lupi -who came to the Scots College as a post-graduate priest in 1937, one year after Grima had returned to Malta - recalls that during his research Grima found it useful and helpful to consult the minister of the Methodist Church in Rome.

¹ Cfr AA.VV., *The Scots College, Rome* (Sands & Co.; London-Edinburgh 1930) 88.

After Grima returned to Malta, he was appointed professor of Philosophy at the Royal University of Malta, a post he occupied from 1939 to 1949. During this period, he was the first spiritual director of the University Students' Catholic Guild. In 1949, Dun Salv decide to give up teaching in order to dedicate himself more fully to a life of service among his brother priests.



The Home for the Clergy

The Archbishop of Malta, Mgr Sir Mikiel Gonzi, appointed him Vice-Rector of the Archiepiscopal Seminary, and later, its Spiritual Director. But Grima's name remains intimately linked with the institution he founded -*id-Dar tal-Kleru* (the Home for the Clergy) at Birkirkara. In this endeavour Grima found not only the Archbishop's indefatigable and wholehearted support, but also the priceless

aid offered by his own brothers who were deeply and successfully engaged in the local construction industry. After eleven long years, the Home for the Clergy was completed. The institution - called *Christus Sacerdos* - was inaugurated on the 8th of May 1964.

Mgr Grima was not in favour of entrusting the running of the Home to a congregation of nuns. His dream was the foundation of a female secular institute whose specific charism would be to pray for the sanctification of priests and for vocations. This institute had a silent beginning. Over a period of six years from 1958, Grima held regular monthly meetings; these meetings served to gather a small group of women who were to embrace his ideals.

When the Home for the Clergy was about to be inaugurated, the time was ripe for the first members of the institute to move into the Home and embark upon their new mission. In accordance with Grima's wishes, the association was called *il-Qaddejja tac-Cenaklu* (servants of the Cenacle). This pious association was officially approved by the present Archbishop of Malta, Mgr Guzeppi Mercieca, by a decree dated the 15th of August 1983. Up to this day, the *Qaddejja tac-Cenaklu* have continued the noble mission of helping "all priests, especially the elderly and the sick who take up residence at the Home for the Priests."¹ Another of the founder's aims was that the Home be utilised for spiritual retreats and gatherings for priests.

The name of Mgr Salv Grima is also synonymous with the Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration he started in July 1940 in the chapel dedicated to the Holy Spirit at Zejtun. Another

¹ *Direttorju Ekklesjastiku 1994 : Arcidjocesi ta' Malta, Djocesi ta' Ghawdex* (Media Centre; Malta 1994) 288

initiative which owes its origin to Grima is a monthly Eucharistic Adoration, with the aim of praying for the sanctification of the clergy. The first of this long series of adorations was held twenty five years ago, on the 11th of October 1969.

Dun Salv Grima died on the 27th of January 1990. His figure remains a shining example of wholehearted service and generosity towards his brother priests. The aim of this article was to trace a journey - a journey not only from Malta to the Scots College in Rome and back again - but a journey within the heart and mind of a holy priest. It is a journey which is constantly marked by the following sentiments in a man's dialogue with God: "I tasted you, and now hunger and thirst for you; you touched me, and I have burned for your peace."¹

Hector M. Scerri

¹ St Augustine, *Confessions* X, XXVII, 38.