

A Maltese Monk in Scotland

A century ago, the Benedictine community at the abbey of Fort Augustus in Scotland included a Maltese monk, Dom Mauro Caruana. At the same time, he also exercised an active pastoral role which characterised most of the three decades he spent on Scottish soil.

Aloysius (Luigi) Charles Caruana was born at Floriana, Malta, on November 16, 1867, the youngest of the three children of Henry Caruana and Elizabeth Bonavia, who died when Aloysius was only fourteen months old. His brothers were Effie Caruana of the London County and Bank of Westminster and Colonel Alfred J. Caruana, Judge Advocate General in the Indian Army. He was educated at Gozo Seminary, then under the direction of the Jesuits, and later, at St Ignatius College, situated at St Julian's, Malta. This College was also run by the Jesuit fathers.

Aloysius continued to nurture his religious vocation while proceeding with his studies at the recently established Benedictine Abbey of Fort Augustus, where he was "captain of the school"¹. He joined the Benedictines of Fort Augustus on March 21, 1884. He received the Benedictine habit on September 21, 1884 from the prior of the said abbey, Dom Jerome Vaughan. He was given the religious name of Maurus, after St Maurus, a Benedictine abbot from Messina in Sicily.

He made his simple profession on November 11, 1885, and his solemn profession on November 13, 1888, in the presence of the abbot, Dom Leo Linse. Dom Mauro was ordained priest in the abbey on March 14, 1891, by Mgr Hugh MacDonald C.S.S.R, Bishop of Aberdeen from 1890 to his early death in 1898. Soon after his ordination, Mauro's superiors decided to send him to Rome. He studied Canon Law at the Benedictine College of San Anselmo on the Aventine.

¹ GALEA Michael, "Mons. Dom Mawru Caruana (1867)", *Lehenis-Sewwa* (24.8.1991) 8.



Dom Maurus Caruana O.S.B. in 1891, the year of his Priestly ordination. He is seen wearing the Benedictine Hood, akin to that in use at Beuron Abbey, Germany. The Abbey at Fort Augustus was not yet part of the English Benedictine Congregation.

After his return to Scotland, Dom Mauro taught Philosophy, Theology and Latin literature at the Abbey of Fort Augustus. He was appointed rector of the clerics, and counsellor and secretary of the monastery chapter. It is known that he even learnt Gaelic. He was the priest "in charge of the mission" at Fort Augustus, exercising the role of parish priest from 1901 to 1905, and again, from 1912 to 1914². During these periods the monks at Fort Augustus also served St Scholastica's Priory, founded in 1892, as well as Ardachie (St Margaret) and Glenmoriston³.

Like his fellow Benedictines, he was often requested to preach in different parts of Scotland. He was very active in this ministry, and it is known that "he preached many missions in Scotland; and was much in request for preaching in Italian."⁴ He was particularly active among Italian emigrants who had settled in Glasgow and in

² The years when Dom Maurus was "in charge of the mission" can be calculated from the data given in *The Catholic Directory for the Clergy and Laity of Scotland for the years 1891-1915*.

³ Cfr *The Catholic Directory for the Clergy and Laity of Scotland* (1902) 137.

⁴ S.B., "Necrologium: Most Rev. Maurus Caruana, Archbishop-Bishop of Rhodes and Malta", *Benedictine Almanac* (1945) 11. [Hereafter this text will be referred to as "Necrologium".]

Edinburgh. In 1908, he preached a series of Lenten sermons at Westminster Cathedral.

In 1905, Caruana was chosen to be the Secretary of Archbishop Ambrose Agius O.S.B., a fellow Maltese Benedictine who had been appointed Apostolic Delegate in the Philippines⁵. Caruana's mission in the Far East came to an abrupt end because of the death of Archbishop Agius, a year and a half later. He then returned to Fort Augustus, where he resumed his former duties with great fervour and zeal. His superiors were aware of his talent at music. As a result, he was appointed Abbey choirmaster in 1912. It is said that

"under his direction the rendering of plain chant [in the Abbey] reached a high standard; he was frequently in request in various Scottish parishes for teaching plain chant."⁶

Dom Mauro was later entrusted with the foundation of a Benedictine monastery in Brazil. In fact, it was during a brief stop in Malta to visit his relatives, that the Brazil-bound Caruana received a telegram from Rome, where he was instructed: "Don't move." Another telegram then ordered him: "Proceed to Rome."⁷ Much to his surprise, Caruana learned that he had been appointed Bishop of Malta. This was officially announced on January 22, 1915, the feast day of St Publius, whom tradition reveres as the first bishop of Malta.

Mgr Caruana was ordained bishop in the Basilica of S. Maria in Trastevere, in Rome, on February 10, the day when Malta commemorates St Paul's shipwreck on its shores (cfr Acts 28,1ff). The principal consecrating bishop was none other than Cardinal Raphaël Merry del Val (1865-

⁵ Cfr ZAMMIT Winston, "Mgr Maurus Caruana", *Heritage* 22 (May 1979) [[Portrait Gallery].

⁶ "Necrologium", 11

⁷ Cfr GALEA, *ibid.*

1930), who had been Secretary of State during Pope Pius X's pontificate (1903-1914)⁸. The two co-consecrating bishops were Mgr Algernon Charles Stanley, titular bishop of Emmaus⁹ and Mgr John McIntyre, titular bishop of Lamo and Rector of the Venerable English College in Rome (1914-1917). The choir during the ordination ceremony was composed of the students of the Pontifical Scots College in Rome. (I was very happy to discover that the predecessors of the students of this college had taken such an active part in the ordination of a bishop of Malta, precisely eighty years ago.)



Solemn Profession, 1888

The congregation included Bishop Caruana's father, Henry; Sir Henry Howard who was the British Minister to the Holy See; Padre Azimari representing the Abbot of Monte Cassino; Mgr Donald Mackintosh, Rector of the Scots College, Rome (1913-1922); as well as several bishops

⁸ Merry del Val became Cardinal Protector of the Scots College in 1928.

⁹ With reference to Bishop Stanley, Michael E. Williams states that "Cardinal Vaughan appointed him as his auxiliary in Westminster in 1902, but on the Vaughan [June 19, 1903], Stanley returned to Rome, [where he had first settled in 1893, and] where he spent the last of his life, dying there in 1928." (The Venerable English College Rome. A History 1579-1979 [Associated Catholic Publications; London 1979] 168, note 7).

and the superior generals of a number of religious orders. Fra Galeazzo von Thun und Hohenstein, Grand Master of the Order of St John was unavoidably absent for the ordination. At the end of the ceremony, on the Grand Master's behalf, Cardinal Merry del Val decorated Archbishop Caruana with the Grand Cross of the Order of Malta. Before leaving for Malta, he was received in audience by Pope Benedict XV, who gave him a precious pectoral cross as a gift¹⁰. In 1918, King George V created Archbishop Caruana a Knight of the British Empire (KBE).

He nurtured a deep desire to revisit the beloved monastery where he had spent so many years of his life. The opportunity came in 1921 when he spent his summer holidays at Fort Augustus. During his stay, the Benedictines

"had the great pleasure of hearing his fine tenor voice again, when he pontificated on several occasions, and consecrated the new altar in the Blessed Sacrament chapel."¹¹

Mgr Caruana's long episcopate which lasted twenty-eight years (1915-1943) was marked by events of long-lasting relevance to the island of Malta. These events include deep political and social changes which exerted a remarkable influence on other spheres of life in the difficult years between the Wars. It was his deep respect for the Scottish hierarchy and the strong links he had forged during the earlier years of his priestly ministry and religious life in Scotland which led him to send a number of his own seminarians and post-graduate priests to the Scots College

¹⁰ Cfr. GALEA Michael, "Dom Mawra Caruana mahtur l-sqofta' Malta", *Lehenis-Sewwa* (31.8.1991) 7.

¹¹ "Necrologium" 11.

in Rome¹².

Dom Mauro Caruana was a disciplined man with a refined character ... an able administrator who set standards ... a gentle shepherd with a clear vision ... His life of wholehearted service can be summed up in his episcopal motto, "fortis et ardens".

Hector M. Scerri

¹² This is the list of students which Archbishop Caruana sent to the Scots College between 1928 and 1939: Salvatore Grima (1928-1936), Vincenzo Azzopardi (1930-1936), George Zammit (1931-1933), Michael Azzopardi (1931-1935), John Theuma (1934-1936), Emmanuel Gaudi (1935-1937), Arthur Bonnici (1937-1939) and Joseph Lupi (1937-1939). (Cfr Nomina Almunor (1820-1939) [Collegio Scozzese di Roma] 140-165.