

# PASTORAL PLANNING IN MALTA

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Pastoral planning has been going on, in some form or other, in Malta, ever since the Church embarked on its mission to our Islands. During this century it became more rational. Cana, the Social Action Movement, and a number of diocesan commissions cultivated the fields entrusted to their care in a systematic and forward looking manner. Their sectorial endeavours were complemented by a holistic approach to church activity in view of concerted pastoral action..

The emergence of this type of pastoral planning can be reconstructed by reviewing the documents of the 1966, 1976 and 1985 Plans. The three documents touched most of the sectors of pastoral activity in the Archdiocese. Indeed, the 1966 document was commissioned for the whole Maltese province. The ten year intervals which marked the appearance of the documents witnessed to a steady, even if slow, evolution of the concept of comprehensive planning in Malta.

A scrutiny of the common points of the three Plans and of the specificity of each throws light on the nature of that evolution. A closer look at their respective theologies, at their objectives, and at their strategies helps clarify the process of planning for the “pastoral d’ensemble” of our people.

## *Three Documents*

### *The 1966 Document*

Comprehensive pastoral planning in Malta became public on Pentecost Day of 1966, when Archbishop Gonzi in a homily relayed over the national network, announced that he had initiated a systematic process “to implement the recommendations of the Vatican Council in Malta”. Later during the year, the details of his initiative were circulated in a fifty page document which revealed a fully fledged plan. In the words of the overview included in the document:

“The scope of the Pastoral Plan is to activate the conclusions of the Second Vatican Council in Malta by building the body of the Baptized into a community of life with the Father, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, through the

visible mediation of the Church. The Plan approaches the challenge by distributing the work involved into eighty projects, each targeted at a particular dimension of the life of the People of God, and proposing a series of initiatives for Clergy, Religious and Laity. The Plan revolves around four general projects and provides the four, highly linked, programmes of specific projects. The *survey* programme leads to the *reflection* programme, while the *formation* programme passes on the recommendations of the *reflection* stage to the People of God, thus paving the way for the changes demanded by the *organisation* projects. All projects are coordinated and steered to converge on the objectives of the Plan by the *Pastoral Council*, by the *Interdiocesan Council*, by a system of *central funding* and by a *common time table*.<sup>1</sup>

### *The 1976 Document*

Ten years later, Archbishop Gonzi, in a Lenten pastoral letter, announced that he had approved a second attempt at comprehensive planning. The fifteen page document that described it was published, with the Lenten letter and with the Maltese translation of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.<sup>2</sup> It invited Clergy, Religious and Laity to join in a common effort to clarify

“where we have to set our sights in order to achieve salvation, the way to get there, the resources needed for the journey, the stages of that journey and the signs of progress.”<sup>3</sup>

### *The 1985 Document*

In 1985, Archbishop Mercieca signed a decree that authorized a Plan for the period 1986-91. The twenty one sections of its hundred and eighteen pages, revealed its broad scope and ranged from catechesis, liturgy and *diakonia* to all categories of pastoral workers and to all forms of situations:

“I: Preparing the Plan, II: Theology, III: Objectives, IV: Heralding the Word, V: Catechesis, VI: Education, VII: The Media, VIII: Liturgical life, IX: Charitable work, X: Emigration and tourism, XI: Presbyters, XII: Consecrated

1. Pastoral Research Services, *L-Ewwel Abbozz tal-Pjan Pastorali tal-Provincja Maltija*, (Valletta 1966) ii.
2. Segreteria Pastoral, *Evanġelizzazzjoni*, (Valletta 1976) 82-96.
3. *Ibid.*, 83.

life, XIII: Vocations, XIV: The Laity, XV: Culture, XVI: Work, XVII: The family, XVIII: material resources, XIX: The Tribunal, XX: Diocesan structures, XXI: The Parishes.”<sup>4</sup>

### *The Theologies behind the Plans*

The 1966 and 1985 documents stressed the horizontal dimensions of the life of the People of God by anchoring their conclusions to a Theology inspired by the mediation of the Church in the story of salvation. The 1976 Plan accentuated the vertical dimension by developing a theology of the gratuitous nature of that salvation.

The 1966 document appealed directly to *Lumen Gentium*. It sought to respond to the concept of a church called to be the privileged *locus* of the communion of the Baptized among themselves and with God. It strove to free the energies of the faithful and to help them step up their efforts to achieve this communion.

The 1976 document referred explicitly to the existence of a plan of salvation and sought to prompt the Baptized to raise the level of their faith in it and thus to let it work more effectively on them. It tried to free God’s own energies in view of a new Pentecost.

The 1985 document was squarely built on the ecclesiology of Vatican II. It insisted on the duty of the Church to bring unity to the diversity of the activities of the faithful. It privileged organization as particularly helpful in bringing about this unity. It tried to find the right mix of structures to free and channel the energies of the faithful towards an effective response to God’s plans for the diocese.

While the 1976 document seemed to be more interested in the individual dimension of this response, the 1985 plan privileged its collective dimension:

“Quite often, our times have generated situations of humiliation and mortification for the Church and for its members. Poverty of the spirit leads the Maltese Church to accept as signs of the times these humiliations and mortifications and to become capable of offering to society that humble service that the Lord wills it to give. A Church that is truly humble seeks the realities of God - as the Lord clearly desires it to seek and as the Second Vatican Council taught it to do. In it, each member, in communion with the Pope and with the Bishops, feels co-responsible for the common good. Poverty of the

4. Arcidjoċesi ta’ Malta, *Pjan Pastorali*, (Floriana 1985)

spirit, humility, participation must appear in all and everywhere in the Church.”<sup>5</sup>

These and other implications let the theology behind Maltese pastoral planning appear in sharper focus in the declared objectives of the three plans.

### *The Objectives of the three Plans*

#### *The 1966 Objectives*

The 1966 Plan derived its main objective straight from its theology of a mediating Church, describing it as that of all of us joining

“a communion of life, with the Father and among ourselves, in Christ, by the power of the Spirit, through the visible mediation of the Church... that mediation is realized when we build a community of Faith, Worship and Love.”<sup>6</sup>

From this overall objective, it drew its three specific goals and assigned its priorities. The first was

“The proclamation of the **Good News**, by word and by witness to a Gospel life, so that every Maltese may achieve a personal and conscious commitment to Christ and, consequently, to the Father, through the gift of the Spirit and thus may join fellow Maltese in a community of faith to accomplish his/her mission with Christ the Prophet. It is this that builds the strength of the community of faith.”<sup>7</sup>

The second goal was to

“edge the People of God towards a higher level of communion through a life of worship of God and of holiness in Christ, by the gift of the Holy Spirit and through a **liturgical cult** that is integrally celebrated by the Church through the active participation of the People of God, who thus enact their mission with Christ as Priest. In this way the community of cult grows and prospers.”<sup>8</sup>

The third goal was described as that of moving

5. Ibid., 18:3.13 and 3,14.

6. Pastoral Research Services, *L-Ewwel Abbozz*, 20 p 6.

7. Ibid., 21, p 5.

“the People of God in Malta towards a higher level of communion of life of love in Christ by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, through a relationship of life among all members of the People of God in these islands and through an insertion of this People as **leaven** in building a world that reflects God’s will. In this way the People of God in Malta accomplish their mission of becoming one with Christ the King and thus express and enhance the community of charity.”<sup>9</sup>

The document based its priorities on the consultations held during the preparation of the plan. These

“had shown that first priority be assigned to the third objective, and the second to the first objective, because they had revealed that the most acutely felt pastoral need was that of strengthening the community of charity.”<sup>10</sup>

### *The 1976 Objectives*

The three goals of the 1966 Plan pointed at Maltese Catholics - first as a body and then as individuals.

They were stated in terms of building the community of faith, worship and charity. They reflected the traditional understanding of pastoral care as structured for the three functions of preaching, sanctifying and building community. They also followed the then current trend of the Catholic church to approach the faithful *en bloc* rather than, like most Protestant Churches, to care for them on a one by one basis.

In contrast to the 1966 Plan, but in line with its theology, the 1976 Plan formulated its objectives on strictly individual and personal terms. Their overarching purpose was that

“each Maltese, several times in life, be given the opportunity to enjoy the experience of salvation through the experience of faith in Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

Each of the three objectives selected a specific dimension of salvation and offered it to a specific category of individuals:

8. Ibid., 22, p 5.

9. Ibid., 23, p 6.

10. Ibid., 24, p 6.

“To respond to the signs of God’s Plan for Malta we aim, together, at a *Salvation for Adults, a Promise for Young People, a Love for Children.*”<sup>12</sup>

Personal salvation stood at the the heart of each objective. It was not meant, however, to be pursued on purely individual terms. An essential aspect of salvation was belonging to that communion of persons which is the Body of Christ:

“These objectives are expected to draw us closer to a situation where all activity will be directed to build the Church as a communion of persons with Christ, in the Holy Spirit. This communion of persons in Christ is the heart of the Church”.<sup>13</sup>

Still, the first purpose of the objectives was to make possible, for each individual, a personal appropriation of the one salvation of Christ:

“the aim of pastoral work is to bring to our midst an experience of such a Church, an experience that would allow each of us to feel and enjoy that communion.”<sup>14</sup>

The point inspired the whole strategy of the 1976 Plan.

### ***The 1985 Objectives***

The 1985 Plan developed objectives to constitute a veritable self image of the Maltese Church of the eighties. They were targeted at the emergence of a Church

- “i) in a stance of ongoing conversion, of true witness to Christ among men and women, to his spirit of poverty, to his humble service to people; of his work for people to promote, with courage, truth, justice and freedom, of becoming a sign and an instrument of reconciliation and unity; a community in which each member is and feels co-responsible for the mission to the world entrusted to it;

11. *Evanġelizzazzjoni*, 7 p 85.

12. *Ibid.*, 4 p 84.

13. *Ibid.*, 5, p 84.

14. *Ibid.*, 5, p 84.

- ii) in a state of ongoing formation that involves all its members: priests, religious and laity and that leads them to achieve personal holiness and to fulfil their mission;
- iii) strengthened by its liturgical life, especially by its Eucharist and its Sacrament of Reconciliation;
- iv) with coordinated human and institutional resources geared to the accomplishment of its mission, according to the charisms showered on it by God.

In this way, the Church, strengthened within, will be in a position to accomplish its evangelization mission in Maltese society and in its relationships with the world, with authentic holiness before God, with more credibility before people, with good use of its resources.”<sup>15</sup>

The last objective reflected a concern with resources, and with their good management through the right institutions. Other aspects of planning were taken care of by the comprehensive statement that linked the four objectives:

“the fundamental objectives (of the Plan) are based on the development of the great potential that the Archdiocese commands and simultaneously, the solution of its no less serious problems.”<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Strategies of the Three Plans***

#### *The 1966 Strategy*

“The Maltese Church draws closer to these goals in the measure that it mobilizes available pastoral forces. This is the heart of the Pastoral Plan. With it, in fact, the People of God commits itself to the same goals by designing a chain of projects, each of which is intended to become a link to draw it closer to them.”<sup>17</sup>

Each project, consequently, shows what the People of God intends to do in a defined sector to move closer to the objectives. The ensemble of the projects, then,

15. *Pjan Pastorali*, 4.3, p 24.

16. *Ibid.*, 4, p 84.

17. *L-Ewwel Abbozz*, n. 25.

linked together by the Pastoral Plan traces the journey of this People towards what it desires and wills. In this way each project becomes another “stone” in the building of the Conciliar Church in Malta:

“The Malta Pastoral Plan envisages four programmes of projects: a) *Survey* or situation reports and trend reports for specific pastoral sectors; b) *Study* or assessment and formulation of recommendations and policies for specific pastoral sectors; c) *Formation* or the training of persons who would implement the recommendations and policies of the Plan and d) *Organization* or change in existing structures and the creation of new ones to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations and policies of the plan. The four programmes of projects are linked. Surveys provide study projects with hard information about the pastoral situation in a defined sector. Studies compare it with the mind of the Council and with available resources and no help attitudes to decide what could be done. At this point, the formation projects take over to prepare for what has to be done. Finally changes are initiated and the necessary steps taken through the organization projects. Each project, then, represents a specific aspect of the mobilization of our pastoral resources. In this way, it shows what the four categories of pastoral human resources - namely Clergy, Religious, organized Laity and Faithful - can contribute. It shows how these categories act through institutions. It also shows which pastoral material resources, like properties, funds and investments can be expected to contribute.”<sup>18</sup>

The confrontation of objectives with resources must also be seen in a time dimension. Things do not happen all at once and so each project would indicate when it can be implemented and how long it will take to activate.

“The surveys would touch the following categories of people: children, students, teachers, young people, farmers, fishermen, workers, parents, managers, professionists, media operators, people in need, tourists and emigrants(41). They would also cover thirteen sectors of the national context: Family, youth, education, culture, work, agriculture, management, politics, poverty, emigration, tourism, leisure, local communities. As it moves in the world, the Church would respect the autonomy of human values and structures. It hopes to serve, not to dominate. Consequently, all traces of clericalism - for example in politics and in the economy of the country(21)... The Pastoral Plan does not only aim to mobilize pastoral forces but also to coordinate

18. Ibid., 27-28



them so that their particular objectives converge on the general objective of the building of Concilian Church into a community of life (167)... This will happen when the projects which together mobilize present and latent pastoral forces in Malta, meet at some point.”<sup>19</sup>

### *The 1976 Strategy*

The strategy of the 1976 Plan was based on empowering of people: rather than on strengthening of structures:

“Such situations will not happen just by issuing new rules and providing modern tools. They are life situations. Life can only happen through people. Among the Maltese people, there are about 5,000 ready to do something to help create these situations. They already work on them and we can consider them as *pastoral workers* (*operaturi pastorali*). Pastoral planning sees in them how we can achieve our objectives and so insert ourselves more firmly in God’s Plans for Malta.”<sup>20</sup>

It then proposed two lines of action, by, with, on and for people:

“The first line of action seeks to place them in a *state of ongoing formation* and thus transform them into “objects” of pastoral work. In this state, they would be evangelized, catechized and constantly invited to conversion to Christ. Ongoing formation, in fact, includes initiation and training in prayer, the Cross, hearing of the Word of God, discipleship and apostleship skills. For example, Priests would listen to homilies before they preach theirs, receive the Sacraments before they administer them. In this way, pastoral workers would experience the effect of pastoral work within them before they deliver it to others.

The second line of action leads pastoral work to a *state of mission* by orienting them towards the three objectives of the Plan and making them “subjects” of the pastoral endeavour. The same pastoral formation prepares those who receive it for mission among Adults, Young People and Children. There is no “before” and “after”: Christ sent his disciples to herald the Kingdom while he was still training them. Because their very mission pushes them back towards the formation state. This

19. Ibid., 21-167.

20. *Evanġelizzazzjoni*, p 87.

tension brings new life into the Church - making it both a formative and a missionary community.

This pastoral strategy will be applied by highlighting aspects that open to the spirit of the three objectives. In this way ongoing formation would stress first, the biblical catechesis of pastoral workers, because this is built on the story of salvation (objectives 1 and 2). It would offer pastoral groups seminars linked with the same objectives in order to enable them to form themselves in the very process of forming others: Among the topics of such seminars there would be, first, *communal discernment*, the use of the Bible in pastoral work, the administration of the sacrament according to the new rules, the Sunday precept, the care of the sick, the use of the 'media', socio-economic commitment, family life, education, work, consecrated life, the Catechumenate and small groups.

In view of an integral experience, more stress will be laid on human development, in such a way as to empower the ecclesial community to propose, inspire and criticise the human development as it is occurring among the Maltese people, to fulfil all the requirements of our own educational, social and media services (schools, children's homes, old people's homes, hospices and other services).

The first result and condition of the ongoing formation process would be the mission. This would reach the Maltese people in the environment where they live, through the parishes, the places of worship, especially where new 'estates' have been or are being built and... through special apostolates for which an "ad hoc" formation would be necessary. Feedback between the experiences and the reflections of pastoral operators will be ensured... during seminars and new pastoral lines of pastoral action drawn for the different environments."<sup>21</sup>

### *The 1985 Strategy*

The strategy of the 1985 Plan is based on a realistic assessment of the concrete situation of the Maltese people during the eighties:

"The signs of the times are clear enough for the Maltese Church to read as calls for action...

The faith of the Maltese people is short of that sound doctrine that strengthens and makes them, as the people of God, ever more aware of the great realities

21. Ibid., n 12 and 13.

already present in them and of those that they must aspire to as well as of that kind of teaching that allows them to live their faith fully in their daily lives, both in public and in private. It is also short of that deep sacramental life. Their external manifestation of faith needs the power that comes from the sacraments, a power that engages people in witness and work. The Maltese Church must give more witness to poverty of the spirit, to humble service of the brethren, to reconciliation with God and with other men and women."<sup>22</sup>

It identifies the points where action has to be initiated:

"The organization of the Maltese Church, although considerable, needs a sense of direction; it lacks coordination, its structures and the personnel who man them are short of communication. The mobilization of its structures must mean and must appear to mean that the Church is all the People of God and each one of its members. Each of these is and must feel part of it."<sup>23</sup>

### *Outcomes of the Three Plans*

The theologies, objectives and strategies of the three Plans were put to the test by the events that followed their drawing. The 1966 Plan never went beyond its first draft. It was discussed by the Pastoral Council during 1967 and its Hope section (106 to 166) was eventually approved. It was criticized by the Catholic press, mostly on the grounds that planning would end by strangling creativity. Coordination was understood as an imposition from above on the autonomy of the various commissions and movements by the new authority that an approved Plan would enjoy.

The 1976 Plan did get to the official approval and was directly promulgated by Archbishop Gonzi on the 18th January of 1976. In line with its thrust to involve individual Church members, personal commitments to it were solicited from the grassroots and the Pastoral Secretariat began to enlist the 5000 pastoral workers who would inject into it life and momentum. With the resignation of Archbishop Gonzi and the succession of Archbishop Mercieca, new pastoral policies came into effect and the Pastoral Secretariat itself was folded and, with it, the Plan which had become its main responsibility.

22. *Pjan Pastoral*, n 4.1 pp 23-24.

23. *Ibid.*, n 4.1, B ii, p 23.

The 1985 Plan met a different fate. It was drafted, discussed, re-drafted, approved, promulgated and activated by a new Pastoral Secretariat. By 1991 most of the structures it had envisaged were in place.

The 1966 and 1976 Plans were not a total loss. They had the effect of convincing the ecclesial community that comprehensive pastoral planning had become a must. While the first reactions to the 1966 Plan could be summed up in the statement “we do not need it”, subsequent developments inspired a general demand that was exactly the opposite. During those years, Malta had already embarked on its second development plan and people could already see that planning could change the course of history. Above all they enriched the discussion of and consequently clarified the theology, objectives and strategies of comprehensive pastoral planning.

### *Theology*

It is significant that the notion of failure, so central to the theology of salvation was fully incorporated and, indeed, given a central place in the *theology* of the 1976 Plan. In its introduction, this Plan makes explicit reference to the current sense of failure in the local ecclesial application of the failure of the Cross and of the concept of Salvation as God’s gratuitous and loving response to our inability to cope. Its opening statement was significant:

“During these last months we have gone through much bitterness and sadness. Consequently, we experienced new life when our Pastors invited us to share among ourselves and with them our ideas and hopes, through the consultation organized by the Pastoral Secretariat in May 1975. As soon as we began to see its first results, we felt that, right in our bitterness and sadness, God was inviting us to become part of his Plan of Salvation, as he so often had done with our fathers, before and after the birth of Christ, his Son. We felt that our problems were so new and serious, so old and complex, that we lacked the ability to resolve and conquer them. We felt the need to invoke a Saviour, as our fathers had done when they were exiled and besieged.”<sup>24</sup>

This recognition of failure also surfaced in the theology of the 1985 Plan:

“Our times often place the Church and its members in situations of humiliation and mortification. Poverty of the spirit will help the Maltese Church accept

24. *L-Evanġelizzazzjoni*, p 82.

as signs of the times this humiliation and this mortification and will enable it to offer society the humble service that the Lord expects.”<sup>25</sup>

### *Objectives*

The *objectives* of the three Plans differed in their orientation. The first addressed tasks, the second people, the third structures. The 1966 Plan went into great detail to specify the work that had to be done and practically translated the objectives into so many projects. The 1976 Plan formulated its objectives in terms of specific categories of people - adults, young people and children - and proposed a system of self help through which each category could become the protagonist of its own education and of its own evangelization. The 1985 Plan took the diocesan structures as the main subject of the planning and renewal process.

While the 1976 document sought to begin with the grass roots of the Church, the 1985 Plan opted to start with the central institutions of the church. The 1966 Plan lay somewhere in between, because the projects it envisaged were intended to be the responsibility of pastoral workers. Only their coordination was assigned to the higher echelons of diocesan government.

### *Strategies*

In terms of the *strategies* adopted to achieve the set objectives, the 1976 Plan was, again, the closest to the people. It pointed to “about 5,000 persons ready to lend a hand in creating the situations” of life envisaged by its objectives and, indeed, inspired a campaign to enlist and train them. Its strategy was to deploy them with adults, young people and children, after forming and missioning them.

The strategy of the 1985 Plan could be termed “a conversion of diocesan institutions”. It sought all “organic response” to the challenge represented by its objectives through an institutionalization of the coordination of diocesan structures. These had also been the target of the 1966 Plan, but with a major difference: rather than seeking to change or “convert” them, it had sought to mobilize and harness them to implement its projects. It did, however, envisage new diocesan structures to coordinate its projects.

25. *Pjan Pastoral*, n. 3.13.

### *The Next Move*

By 1991, all major items on the agenda of the 1985 Plan had been implemented. The last of its projects was activated with the creation of a new research centre for the diocese. The Pastoral Secretariat immediately began to prepare the next Plan and, in 1993, published a working paper - *Lejn Knisja Adulta* - to initiate a discussion of its spirit and content. The paper noted that the main contribution of the 1985 Plan to the life of the ecclesial community had been to develop its structures. To reach these people, however, the new Plan would have to offer an inspired and an inspiring vision of what the Church, or, indeed, these same people, *quā* People of God, were all about. Planning had to begin with a theology. When it was brought to bear on current trends that theology would help formulate the right objectives as well as the strategy of the Plan.

The vicissitudes of comprehensive pastoral planning in Malta over three decades could be usefully scrutinized for signs of the kind of theology that this next Plan would need. Would it be a theology of the Church, as was the case with both the 1966 and the 1985 Plans, or of Salvation, as was the case of the 1976 Plan, or of a combination of both?

A close reading of the signs of our times could provide the answer. Current events often turn out to be a *locus theologicus*, which means they could be the best indicators of the theology we need and seek. It might also happen that our search for the *semina Verbi* in history would turn out to be inspired by a theology of the World. In that case the next Plan would derive its objectives and the strategy to achieve them from a vision of a *Church-in-the-World* rather than from one of a *Church-for-the-World*. The nuance is not a theological subtlety. In a Church-in-the-World vision, it would be the World that would call the agenda of the Church. After all, the Church is on a mission to this World.

That agenda can be read in the signs of our times in Malta. The 1966 Plan had not developed the theme of discernment on these signs. It had taken the Vatican II Council as the clearest sign of its times and worked on it. The 1976 Plan, in its introductory statement, had sought to scrutinize the sign of the felt need of the local community to be saved from the pressures and weaknesses documented by the consultations of its preparations had inspired of the seventies. The 1993 Plan made an explicit reference to the signs of the times and pleaded for a constant reading of their message.

That reading is as imperative today as it was then. It responds to the appeal

launched by John Paul II in *Pastores dabo vobis* n. 10, in which he proposed a model for Gospel discernment. Such discernment would ensure the right tracks for the preparation of next Pastoral Plan.

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