

# THE KNIGHTS' STATE (1530 - 1798): 008

## A REGULAR REGIME

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### Introduction

The universal Roman Catholic Church is organized on a hierarchic base. The lay-people are at the bottom, next in line are the clergy with their superiors, while the Pope with 'his' Roman Curia is at the top. There exist two types of clergy: the secular or diocesan clergy, which is organized on a territorial base, and the regular clergy, consisting of the friars and priests of the various religious orders. (1)

So far most studies in connection with the Catholic Church of Malta were mainly centered on the role of the secular priests and tend to neglect the impact of the regular clergy. (2) This is even more remarkable as there are more regulars than secular priests. (3)

Recently Mart Bax, in his studies of the Catholic Regime in Southern Dutch Society, has developed a model in which he shows how the dual organizational structure of a territorial diocesan clergy and a non-territorial regular clergy gives the local Catholic Church its own internal dynamics. (4) Bax's publications have served as an eye-opener to the present author, who became convinced that the picture he has so far presented of the Maltese Church is one-sided and needs some correction. This is the subject of the present paper

\* The present paper is a partial report of my research into political and religious leadership in Malta, carried out since 1973 with support from the Netherlands organization for the advancement of pure research (Z.W.O.) and the Free University of Amsterdam where I hold the post of senior research fellow/lecturer in the Department of Social Anthropology. Research was based on field work and the study of written sources. I am grateful to Mart Bax, Mario Buhagiar, Donald Harrison Smith, John Parr, Matthew Schoffeleers, the group 'Religious Regimes' of the Department of Social Anthropology of the Free University, Amsterdam, the 'Study Group Europe' and the participants in the two conferences and the congress where I presented a Dutch and an English draft (Koster, 1983ab) of which the first, revised part is published here, for their constructive comments. Extensive use has been made of Koster, 1981, chapter 1.

1. The female religious orders have been neglected in this paper for the sake of convenience. I hope to deal with them in a future publication.
2. Boissevain, 1965, 1969; Koster, 1980, 1981 and 1983c.
3. Clews, 1983, p.124.
4. Bax, 1982 and 1983ab.

in which the historical development of the relations between the regular and the secular clergy in Malta will be treated until the arrival of the French. Several questions will be asked like: How was a regular regime established in Malta? How could it maintain itself for such a long time? What were the conditions under which this regular regime had to give way? Unfortunately the Maltese material contains quite a few gaps. Its arrangement and our conclusions will thus be of a preliminary character.

### The Order of St. John

At the request of the Pope, the Emperor Charles V in 1530 ceded the Maltese Islands to the Sovereign and Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem, though they remained under the suzerainty of the King of Sicily. The origin of the Order is to be found among the attendants of a hospital in Jerusalem who just before the Crusaders formed a band of dedicated men of rank nursing sick pilgrims and, later, joined hands in the defense of the Christians in the Holy Land. They constituted themselves into a Military Order with religious overtones, as witness their rules, which, *inter alia*, required of the knightly members the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

Charles V's permission for the Order to establish itself in Malta as its new headquarters was a clever move. The Knights had just once again reaffirmed their reputation as redoubtable fighters during the siege of Rhodes. The Emperor's decision, shortly after the Turkish Sultan Soliman II's military expansion in Europe was halted when he failed to conquer Vienna, was probably the best effort to close the entrance to the western part of the Mediterranean to the advancing Turks and thus protecting Sicily and Spain from them. The Order was to transform Malta into a Christian bulwark against the Turkish Muslim danger. It became a strong military base, which was furiously attacked by the Turks during the "Great Siege" of 1565.

During the period of the Knights, Malta became a State which like none other bore the stamp of nobility, as the chief grades of the Order were open to noblemen only. As the members of the Order were celibates, and as members of the Maltese noble families were much to their chagrin excluded from its membership, new members had to be continuously provided by the cream of the Catholic families from Europe. This way of recruiting new members was rather beneficial for the Order's finances as the new Knights often arrived with a generous advance from their inheritance. Furthermore commanderies were kept in many countries, whose wealthy estates provided the Order with a steady source of income.

The Knights were grouped according to their nationality, into eight *lingues* (tongues). The Grand Master, the head of the Order, was *de facto* Head of State, for although the Kings of Sicily were the official overlords of the Knights the Order was autonomous and governed Malta as it believed to be right. The Order proclaimed the laws for the islands and dealt with the administration of justice. This is not to say that the Kings of Sicily did not try to have a say in Maltese affairs. We will see below how they did.

As a result of the unceasing building-activities of the Knights, which led to the erection of palaces, fortifications and churches, Malta was changed from a "barren rock" into a treasure-house of fine baroque art and architecture. The local population lived on subsistence-farming, fishing, and the cultivation of cotton. Besides, there was also employment in connection with the Order's building-activities and ship-construction as also the opportunities for sailors and soldiers. The Order had made Malta rich and it was not only the Knights themselves who stood to gain, but certain groups of the population as well because many profited from the jobs and patronage yielded by the Knights. On the other hand military service, and sometimes statute labour and heavy taxation prevented the Knights from becoming popular with the Maltese. The ancient nobility bore two grudges against the Order: the denying entry to their sons and the awarding of noble titles to their clients-'upstarts'. (5)

The Order was comparatively small as regards membership. Consequently, the Knights formed only a minor, though distinct, part of the population. (6) Government may be characterized as oligarchic: a small class of imported noblemen determined most developments in the islands. All sectors of the population were strictly separated from the ruling class of foreign nobles. Thus assimilation was impossible.

It would not have been possible for the Knights to keep Malta if they had lacked cohesion. Their small numbers, compared to the local population, made them vulnerable to conspiracies of the Maltese or attacks from abroad. But the Order was a coherent unity because of the threats of Islam, its very *raison d'être*. It is common knowledge that the presence, imagined or real, of a mutual enemy stimulates coherence. It is clear that the Turks fulfilled such a role for the Knights of Malta. The Turks also provided the local Catholic population with a reason to accept the rule of this foreign oligarchic clique: it protected them against the "horrible" Moslems.

5. Schermerhorn, 1929, pp.39-40, 272.

6. In 1631 there were 1755 Knights and 148 Chaplains and 155 Servants-at-Arms (Vatican, Barb. Lat. 5036 as quoted by Schermerhorn, 1929, p. 195).

### The Diocesan Clergy and the Order

It appears that the diocesan organization was not in mint condition upon the arrival of the Knights. During the late Middle Ages the Bishops were often absentees who left the actual administration of their diocese to Vicars General. It seems that the Maltese See, which was suffragan to the Metropolitan See of Palermo, was considered as an outpost of Sicily and often given to 'Italian' clergymen who sought promotion as soon as possible. The beneficiary system was already prevalent and the more lucrative benefices were mainly given to foreigners. Although a rudimentary diocesan apparatus, consisting of 12 parishes, was in existence, pastoral care was mainly centered in the two urban nuclei (Mdina/Rabat and Birgu). There was no seminary and most local clerics were quasi illiterate and poor, but some got bursaries to study abroad. Some were living in concubinage. (7)

The cession of Malta to a religious Order in a period in which secular and religious power were still not clearly distinguished from each other was to have important repercussions for the future of the islands.

The ties between the Knights and the Diocesan Church were very complicated and interwoven, especially as the Order itself as a religious body formed part of the universal Church and was subject to the Pope; the Grand Masters were Princes of the Church. One of them, Verdala, was even created a Cardinal. The Order, which was called "The Religion" in Malta, had its own clergy under the Grand Prior and was completely independent of the diocesan Church. On the other hand the Order sought to dominate the diocesan Church as it was required that the Bishop belong to the Order. He was selected for presentation to the Pope by the King of Sicily from among three religious members of the Order, one of them had to be a subject of the Spanish Crown, nominated by the Grand Master. (8)

The Bishop thus owed his candidacy for the Bishopric to the Grand Master, but his nomination to the King of Sicily, often his national Sovereign. The Grand Master was always keen on his independence from the King, who would like to have a finger in the Maltese pie and therefore the latter was often likely to nominate his own subject for the Bishopric. In this delicate situation often rivalry occurred between the Bishop and the Grand Master and consequently the Bishops tried to strengthen their own position, while the Grand Masters zealously did their utmost to prevent this, as it would undermine

7. Cf. Wettinger, 1977.

8. Cf. Zammit Gabarretta, 1961.

their own power. Mutual trespassing occurred quite often. The fact that the Bishop did not have any jurisdiction over the members and not even the clergy of the Order was certainly to his disadvantage. It even provided for rivalry to his position within the ecclesiastical sphere.

The antagonism between the Order and the Diocesan Church was shown clearly in the fact that the Knights objected against the Bishop and his Curia settling in Valletta, the new capital built by the Order in 1566. (9) The Knights considered Valletta under the sole jurisdiction of the Grand Master, considering the city also a convent. The reaction of the Knights was hostile when in 1628 Bishop Cagliares decided to build a palace on his family property in Valletta and he was not allowed to keep the prisons in the capital.

A controversy between the Grand Master and the Bishop led to the Apostolic Visitation of Mgr. Pietro Duzzina in 1574. Although this visitation was made at the request of the Grand Master and presented by the Bishop, it would lead to the streamlining of the organization of the Diocesan Church, thus strengthening its position *vis à vis* the Order.

The Apostolic Visitor was sent to the islands to report on the ecclesiastical situation prevailing at the time and to implement the decrees of the Council of Trent (1542—1563) which, among many other things, strengthened the position of the regular clergy of the universal Church with the help of the now even more powerful, reorganized Inquisition and the Order of the Jesuits, established in 1534. (10)

Mgr. Duzzina recommended the founding of new parishes, the teaching of Catechism and the establishment of a Seminary. The Church presently started to create many new parishes in Malta and Gozo, until a total of 35 was reached in 1681, after which no more parishes were founded for over 150 years. A Seminary was not, however, instituted until 1703 because no members of the secular clergy were altruistic enough to devote some part of their benefices for this specific purpose. (11) A few Collegiate Chapters were created, and catechism-classes started.

The fact that the Bishop was a member of the Order could have led to the encapsulation of the Diocesan Church and secular clergy within the Order, but this never happened as both parties proved to have different interests,

9. Cassar-Pullicino, 1966.

10. Cf. Koster, 1981, p.21.

11. Bonnici, 1968, pp.99/100; Cf. Borg, 1965; Cassar-Pullicino, 1951, 1956.

though the Bishop often had to accede to interference from the Order into his affairs. One of these measures, the reorganization of the Diocesan Church, would, however gradually, be the start of its bureaucratization and put at the disposal of the Bishop an apparatus of secular Church dignitaries, Canons, parish priests and other members of the local clergy. In this respect it is significant to note that the traditional Candlemas ceremony originated under the Knights. Each year on 2 February all parish priests presented the Grand Master of the Order of St. John a blessed candle as a token of respect for the biggest authority of the islands. As there was no local Government in Malta we may assume that the Knights used the parish priest for the implementation of their measures at the local level. But the development of a clerical bureaucracy might become a potential danger to the Order. A gradually expanding Maltese secular clergy's first and foremost loyalty would be to the local Diocesan Church and not to the Knights.

### **Grand Master, Bishop and Inquisitor: The Intricacies of a Power-balance**

Order-Diocese relations became even more complicated in 1574 when the Bishop, at the request of the Grand Master, was no longer accepted as the Head of the Maltese Tribunal of the Inquisition and the above-mentioned Mgr. Duzzina was sent to Malta as the first Inquisitor.

The tribunal of the Inquisition had the task to discover, combat and punish heresies against the Catholic Faith. As the Inquisitor had the power to decide what were heresies and what were not he was a powerful person in the island. No wonder the Grand Master did not want the powers to be vested in the Bishop. On the other hand, the Inquisitor was not a member of the Order and therewith perhaps even more potentially dangerous to the Knights than the Bishop. The Pope, the official superior of the Order, now had an extra grip on the Maltese situation.

The Inquisitor was, like the Grand Master and the Bishop, not a Maltese national. His office often was the stepping-stone to higher dignity within the Church. (12) He was an influential person because he could distribute certain offices to the so-called *famigliare*. He could also distribute letters-patent to those who placed themselves under his protection. *Famigliare* and patentees came, with their families, under the immediate protection of the Holy See and their law-suits fell under the jurisdiction of the Tribunal of the Inquisition in Malta. They enjoyed several privileges and exceptions from civil obliga-

12. 26 out of 37 former Inquisitors from 1634 to 1797 became Cardinals, two even Popes (Bonnici, 1968, p.89).

tions as taxes and military service. The Inquisitors were keen to increase the number of their 'subjects' in order to enhance their power; especially the local nobility profited from the privileges and prestige connected with the Inquisition. (13)

Still more numerous were those who placed themselves under the Bishop's protection and asked him for a first tonsure. Even as 'married clerics' they were exempt from taxation, military service and guard-duties and enjoyed several concessions. They fell within the competence of the Episcopal Tribunal, with the right of appeal to the Metropolitan of Palermo and finally to the Holy See. Many wealthy Maltese, among them nobles, grabbed this opportunity. (14) Furthermore the Diocesan Church also served as an attractive means for a career to the nobility, which was not allowed into the higher ranks of the Order. We may assume that the attitude of the nobility towards the Knights might have sometimes inspired their superiors, the Bishop and the Inquisitor, against the Order.

Conflicts in which Grand Master, Bishop and Inquisitor were involved were legion:

When a printing press was started in Malta the Grand Master reserved the censorship for himself and the Inquisitor and when the Bishop protested that he had been excluded, the Holy Office excluded the Grand Master as well. (15)

Another Inquisitor even tried, without success, to prevent the election of Grand Master de Redin. (16)

In 1579 the Bishop was refused permission to enter the Santo Spirito Hospital, which came under the jurisdiction of the Grand Master as the care of sick never ceased to rank as the first duty of each individual Knight. The Bishop claimed he had the right of visitation, granted by the Council of Trent. When the Bishop excommunicated the administrators of the Hospital, the petty squabble degenerated in a dispute between

13. According to Montalto, 1980, the nobility profited from the Inquisition and not from the Order or the Diocesan Church. His book, however, gives the impression that the Diocesan Church too gave the nobility various opportunities, while the Inquisition in the 17th century persecuted quite a few nobles (and Knights) as heretics pp.197. 207).

14. Bonnici, 1968, pp.12-13; Montalto, 1979, p.158-161.

15. Andrew Vella, 1964, p.30.

16. *Ibid.*, p.30.

him and the Grand Master which got to the stage that bloodshed became imminent. It was not until 1586 that the Holy See could settle the conflict. (17)

Ecclesiastical asylum applied even to ordinary culprits as soon as they entered one of the many churches, chapels, oratories, cemeteries and other buildings in the hands of the secular clergy; this did not fail to put an additional strain on the relations between the Diocesan Church and the Knights, who made up the highest authority. (18)

Sometimes there was cooperation between the contenders as in 1673 when a revolt of the rural population, instigated by the secular clergy and the Bishop, was brought to a quick end as the Bishop got second thoughts on the matter and informed the Inquisitor who in turn informed the Grand Master. (19) While each prelate tried to increase his personal power, both the Inquisitor (a future Pope) and the Bishop, after all a Knight, realized that they had nothing to gain by an overthrow of the Order and so finally supported the *status quo*.

From what has been stated above the reader should realize the dual character of the power of the Knights and its implications. On the one hand they were relatively independent civil Overlords of Malta, bound with only nominal ties to the King of Sicily. On the other hand they were a religious order tied to the Pope and his Roman curia. The struggle between the Pope and 'civil' rulers thus had in Malta its specific result on the local balances of power.

The Bishop and the Inquisitor could, especially in case of coalitions between them, become dangerous for the Knights as they might be able to mobilize the King of Sicily or/and the Pope against the Order, but as long as the Turks were a threat in the Mediterranean an overthrow of the Order itself was not likely to receive their support. This finally was an asset to the Order.

The arrival of the Inquisitor and the formation of a secular clerical hierarchy created increasing chains of interdependence between the Knights and the diocesan Church and consequently curtailed the scope or elbow-room for each of the rivals. This did not mean the situation improved for those sectors of the population that had to seek their protection against their injustice or

17. Cassar, 1964, p.29.

18. Callus, 1961, pp.8-10.

19. Hoppen, 1979, pp.148-149.



exploitation from another foreign Knight, the Bishop or a foreign prelate, the Inquisitor, whose interests were after all the same as those of the Knights. In this oligarchic situation the expanding local clergy might have acted as brokers between the population and their foreign Overlords, but I have no sources available to prove this.

### **The (rest of the) regular clergy and the Order**

It is peculiar that not one of the many sources relating the antagonism between the Order, the secular clergy and the Inquisition refers to the role of the other religious orders, with the exception of the Jesuits. (20) And yet the era of the Order was one of great prosperity for the various religious orders.

While the diocesan organization was rather rudimentary upon the Knights' arrival this cannot be said about the religious. Various monasteries were already flourishing and it is significant that when Bonnici discussed the "learned clergy" of the Middle Ages, he only mentions regular priests. Luttrell too shows admiration for the high standards of their churches and their treasures of art. (21) The orders had settled down in or near the two urban centres. The ties of the religious with the population appear from their involvement in education and instruction in the hospitals and from their control of so-called *fratellanzi*. (22) They were not independent, but mostly belonged to Sicilian provinces of their respective orders and were lead by 'Italian' superiors. Thus Malta may be seen as a colonizing area of the Italian religious orders before the arrival of the Knights, though most members were Maltese.

Those orders already present in 1530 expanded during the reign of the Knights, while many others settled in Malta during this period. Contemplative orders, however, were not successful in recruiting local members and gradually died out.

The orders were engaged in education, the Dominicans and Jesuits even excelled. (23) Many religious were great scholars, some were even appointed to a bishopric abroad. (24) An indication of ties with the population is the

20. Bonnici, 1968; Andrew Vella, 1964; Laferla, 1972; Luke, 1970.

21. Bonnici, 1967, p.93; Luttrell, 1975, pp.63-64.

22. Bonnici, 1967, pp.127-129; Andrew Vella, 1964, p.899.

23. Their schools were allowed to confer academic degrees (Borg, 1982, p.244).

24. Bonnici, 1968, pp.103-105.

fact that in the well-known Capuchin cemetery of Floriana not only friars and fathers, but also members of well-to-do families were buried. (25)

Not many members of the nobility joined a religious order. The vow of poverty was obviously not attractive to them; the diocesan Church offered better perspectives for a career. Those nobles who wanted to become religious joined, as elsewhere in Europe, the Jesuits. The nobility, however, generously contributed to the various religious orders.

As before the arrival of the Knights, the religious were not autonomous, but belonged to an 'Italian' (read Sicilian) province of their respective orders. Only the Capuchins, who were held in great esteem by the Knights, gained local autonomy in 1740. (26)

Generally the Knights were benevolent towards the other religious orders, with exception of the Jesuits. The religious profited from the wealth accumulated by the Knights. (27) I think the benevolent attitude of the Knights towards the other religious orders can be understood as the regular clergy was less challenging to the Order than the secular clergy and the Inquisition. They were separate orders each with their own motherhouse in Italy, so it would have been extremely difficult, probably impossible, to unite them against the Knights. Malta being an island and relatively isolated in those days made it hardly probable for the superiors of the orders to interfere profoundly in any other business than the domestic affairs of their respective convents. Together with the Knights, who were in charge of the main hospital and were active in charity, the religious monopolized the so-called 'quartary sector' and were active in the pastorate in the urban centres of the island. The religious were allowed to settle in Valletta and so they did in large numbers. (28) The oldest parish in Valletta was even allocated to the Dominicans (by the Dominican Pope Pius V), but this would be the only 'regular' parish in the era of the Order. Although the convents and monasteries also enjoyed *privilegium fori*, ecclesiastical asylum, and freedom of military service and taxes these privileges could not be so easily abused as in the case of the diocesan clergy. "Married friars" were not tolerated and the religious were supposed to live in poverty. As it 'paid' less to join a religious order than become a secular priest it can hardly be said that the orders could undermine the supremacy of the Knights with respect to taxation and instituted violence. Therefore they had a totally

25. Azzopardi, 1982a, pp.846-847.

26. Charles Vella, 1963, p.218.

27. Bonnici, 1968, pp.120-122.

28. Fiorini, 1966.

different position from the Diocesan Church and the Inquisitor. So far I am not aware of conflicts between the Order and the other religious, which seems obvious. A further study of the sources, however, is necessary. An exception to the rule were the Jesuits.

The Jesuits have a special place among the regular clergy. Their presence in Malta was forced by the Pope in 1593; they served as an instrument to implement the measures of the Council of Trent and came to the island in spite of strong opposition. Unfortunately we are not told who opposed the arrival of the Jesuits, (29) but we may assume it was the Order. The fact that a seminary was still lacking may have been one of the reasons for the Jesuits to settle in Malta, as they were ordered to start a school. The Bishop was ordered to help them, also financially. Therefore he may not have been too happy with their arrival. The Jesuit school taught theology and philosophy and gained the status of *Academia* in 1727, so that it could confer academic degrees. However, in 1768 the Grand Master, expelled the Jesuits following the example of other sovereigns in Europe, in spite of protests by the Bishop, the Cathedral Chapter and the Inquisitor. Their (wealthy) possessions were confiscated and the *Academia* was transferred into a university, with papal permission. This gives an indication of the changing power-balances in favour of the Order both within Malta and also as far as the Holy See was concerned.

### **Regular and Secular under the Knights**

I don't know of any sources relating to the relations between the various religious orders and hardly anything about the relationship regular-secular. Bonnici just mentions a favourable attitude of some Bishops towards some religious orders, even inviting a few orders to settle in Malta. (30) Although Bonnici was a Monsignor and certainly writing with a "priests's perspective" (31), it would have been very difficult for him to cover up great rivalry between secular and regular with the cloak of charity.

The prosperity of the religious orders during the Knights may be seen as a function of the rivalry between the secular clergy and the Order of St. John. The fact that the religious were on good terms with the Order does not automatically have to imply that they were a threat to the secular clergy, though they were certainly used by the Knights to balance the increasing bureaucracy of the Diocesan Church. Both groups took pastoral care of the

29. *Ibid.*, p.42.

30. *Ibid.*, pp.38-44.

31. Cf. Bax, 1982, p.22.

Maltese population, the seculars in the rural, the regulars in the urban areas. Especially in Valletta the latter lived close to the Knights, but probably they were better tolerated than the diocesan clergy under their suspect Bishops. Therefore, in the case of a possible broker's role for the clergy (cf. p. 308) this part might have been more easily performed by the religious, than by the diocesan clergy. In this context we need not be surprised that the regular clergy wisely abstained in the case of two rebellions of the Maltese against the Knights. (32)

### Temporary Expansion, followed by Decline and Eclipse of the Knights' State

In the 18th century the power and consequently the threat of the Turks declined and the international situation did not provide for another direct risk to the Knights in Malta. The attitude of the Knights now became more relaxed, their internal rivalry increased and, gradually, the Order was reduced to insignificance as a maritime power. The Knights now made light of their vows of poverty and chastity, while increased taxes stimulated the growing dissatisfaction of the Maltese with their Overlords. (33)

In the meantime the process of state formation for Malta had led, as elsewhere in Europe, to the concentration of power in the hands of the Head of State, who became more of an autocratic ruler, tending to become as absolute as King Louis XIV of France. This was not only to the detriment of his fellow Knights and the population, but also to that of his contender, the Bishop. The Grand Master could also profit from the decline of power of the Papacy and the time and energy consuming dynastic and domestic affairs of the Kings of Sicily. Thus the Knights became increasingly more independent upon the King of Sicily, which must have negatively influenced the position of the Bishop. When there was a conflict with the Grand Master the latter often arranged for the Bishop to be summoned to Rome by the Pope. (34)

The Papacy's diminished influence in Malta meant that the Inquisitor's position was on the decline. It also gave the Grand Master the chance to expel the Jesuits in 1768 and limit ecclesiastical immunity and *privilegium fori*.

32. Cf. Koster, 1981, pp.24,26.

33. *Ibid.*, p.27.

34. Bishop Mancini died in Rome and Bishop Pellerano was forced to resign (Bonuicci, 1968, pp.15,17).

We must not fail to see that the Order's position profited from the international situation. As it was relatively easy for the Knights to consolidate and even expand their position they neglected to invest in their own strength in order to be ready for a new challenge. And that would prove to be their Achilles heel.

In 1780 the Order was confronted by a stronger Pope and a definitely established King of Naples and Sicily. Thus as a first sign of the Order's decline the Grand Master was forced by the Pope, at the instigation of his own Curia and the court in Naples, to accept the Calabrian Father Labini as Bishop into the Order. Bishop Labini was personally given by the Pope instructions for Church 'reforms' in Malta, which meant that he had to curtail some ecclesiastical privileges of the Order, and so he did. (35)

The conferment of the Titular Archbishopric of Rhodes on Mgr. Labini, who originally was not a member of the Order, can easily be seen as a move of the Holy See to enhance the prestige and position of the Bishopric *vis à vis* the Knights.

The French Revolution (1789) would sound the death-knell of the Order. In 1792 the French Republican Government deprived it of its privileges and confiscated its property. (36) These measures were subsequently taken in other countries conquered by Napoleon Bonaparte in his efforts to create a European Empire and so the Knights lost most of their income.

Now the internal cohesion of the Order, or what was left of it, also collapsed, mainly because the overwhelming majority of the Knights were French. They could not be counted upon when in 1798 Napoleon, on his way to Egypt, landed in Malta. Some Knights and Maltese committed treason and the Order was barely in a position to offer resistance. (37) The Knights surrendered and were forced to leave Malta within a few days.

## Discussion

The prolonged government of the Order, which was both a military and a religious body, had shaped the whole of the Malta body politic into a thoroughly Catholic community where the opinion of the Pope, though often influenced by the Grand Master, counted heavily. This Catholic stamp did not fail to

35. Galea, 1976. pp.19-22.

36. *Ibid.*, p.23.

37. *Ibid.*, pp.24-29.

impress itself upon the minds of the Maltese, especially the lower classes, who had become heavily imbued with it.

During the reign of the Order Malta appears to have been a kind of theocracy, with three competing parts of the Church, one of which monopolized the State as well. It might be interesting to look for analogies in the Islamic world and develop a model of a theocracy divided in itself. (38) The fourth part of the Church, the 'normal' religious orders, could prosper as a function of the rivalry between the other three parts. They may have acted as pawns in the game for power between the other rivals, though I have no sources available to prove this.

It is commonly held that the regular and secular clergy are always potential competitors. They jointly monopolize the sacraments and try to use them to tie a large number of clients to themselves. (39) One would have expected this competition to take place, especially in a small place like Malta where it seems difficult to give each other a wide berth. During the Knights rule there was, however, no general competition between regular and secular but specific competition between the diocesan clergy and one particular order, that happened to be in government as well. Furthermore there was competition between two religious orders (the Knights and the Jesuits), between the secular clergy and religious order (the Jesuits) and between the diocesan clergy, the religious order in government and a foreign prelate (the Inquisitor). I think that, with the exception of the 'natural' rivalries between the secular clergy and the Jesuits and the secular clergy and the Inquisition all other specific forms of competition can only be explained by referring to the specific kind of the Knights State.

While in other parts of Europe the Popes used to send religious in order to check a powerful diocesan clergy, in Malta he needed the Diocesan clergy and the Jesuits and the Inquisition (Dominicans) to check a powerful religious and military order. This order could also protect its fellow religious from being expelled or curtailed by a hostile civil government as happened elsewhere in Europe in this era. Thus they could flourish and expand throughout the whole period, which can certainly be called a regular regime.

38. The studies of David Apter might be useful in this respect.

39. Bax, 1982, p.22.

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