

**MGR PROF. ARTURO BONNICI**  
**D.D., H.E.L., B.L.Can., B.A.**

***A COMMEMORATION\****

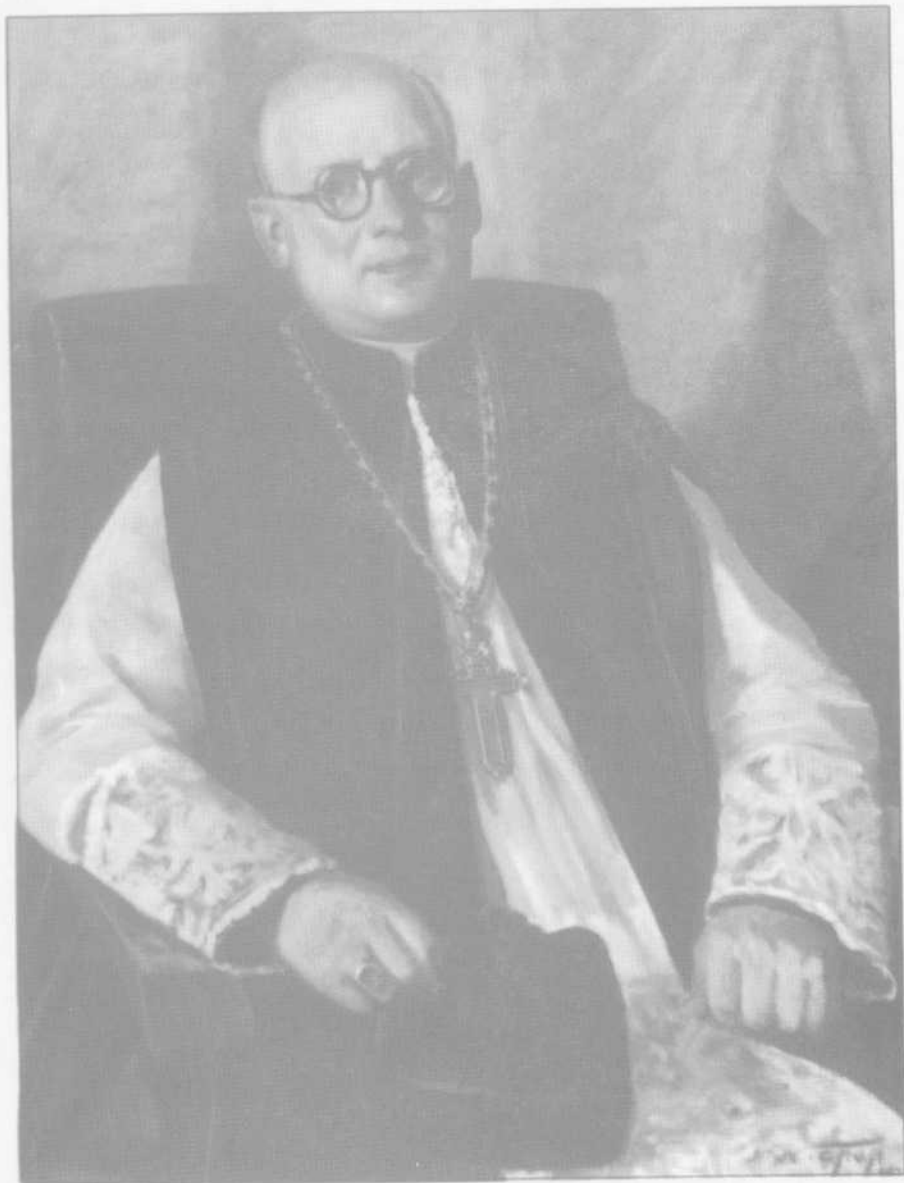
Vincent Borg

The decision reached in 1994 by the Committee of the *Malta Historical Society* to begin commemorating, periodically, a local historian, was indeed a step in the right direction. Historians, at times, are involved in the services of various institutions and movements all keen to render their achievements properly known to future generations. There is nothing wrong in securing the services of expert historians in this regard. However, it often happens that these and even other commitments prevent, many times, historians from finding sufficient time at their disposal to care after their own reality by analysing how this science and its writing – historiography – have developed within their particular milieu. Malta still lags far behind other countries in this respect. All of us are fully aware of this deficiency. I personally have high hopes that these commemorations are a forward-looking venture that eventually may help to bridge the gulf that still exists. They will form valid stepping – stones leading towards the compilation of a history of local historiography.

\* This paper was read during a Commemoration organised by the *Malta Historical Society* on the 1st December 1994 at the Malta Public Library. On this same occasion, a Documentary Exhibition, detailing the life and activities of Mgr Prof. Arturo Bonnici was held in the same premises and opened by H.E. Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici LL.D., B.A., President of the Republic and a commemorative booklet was also published. This booklet includes brief biographical data, a list of exhibits, a bibliography of his writings with an analytical index as well as the last paper written by Mgr Bonnici, that was unpublished, dealing about St John's Conventual Church. This booklet, consisting of 48 pages, is illustrated and its frontispiece, a photo of a portrait of Mgr Bonnici by Willie Apap, is printed in colour.

***Abbreviations***

AAM	: Archiepiscopal Archives, Malta	LB	: <i>Libri Bapizatorum</i> (Baptismal Records)
ACM	: Archives of the Cathedral, Malta	LD	: <i>Libri Defunctorum</i> (Death Records)
AOM	: Archives of the Order, Malta	LS	: <i>Lehen is-Sewwa</i>
ASA	: Archiepiscopal Seminary Archives	MH	: <i>Melita Historica</i>
ASR	: Archivio di Stato, Roma	MNL	: Malta National Library
ASV	: Archivio Segreto Vaticano	MT	: <i>Melita Theologica</i>
ASVR	: Archivio Storico, Vicariato di Roma	PGU	: Pontifical Gregorian University
B & C	: <i>Breves et Constitutiones</i>	PP	: Parish Priest
CCC	: <i>Canonicati Collegiata Cospicua</i>		
CCCC	: <i>Canonicati Chiesa Cattedrale</i>		
CCS	: <i>Canonicati Collegiata Senglea</i>		
CCSP	: <i>Canonicati Collegiata San Paolo, Valletta</i>		



Mgr Prof. Arturo Bonnici  
*Portrait painted by Willie Apap - 1952*

The choice to begin this series of commemorations with a befitting venue to honour the memory of Mgr Prof. Arturo Bonnici was, beyond doubt, a fine gesture manifesting the deep sense of gratitude and high esteem all of us have had and still cherish towards him. It was with great pleasure that I accepted our Committee's invitation to present to-day Mgr Bonnici's commemoration and prepare with others the exhibition accompanying it with all that these involved. Being his immediate successor both at the Faculty of Theology in the Royal University of Malta as well as in his capacity as President of this Society, and moreover one of his former students, I was privileged to know him from close quarters for many years. I hope to do him a good service with this contribution within the time limit at my disposal. As it is envisaged eventually to publish this paper, I shall be most grateful to all present, if they can provide further information that may throw more light on his personality, achievements and contributions, which I shall duly acknowledge.

## EARLY YEARS

Arturo was the second-born child of Vincenzo and Elvira nee' Griscti. He was born at Senglea on the 17th December 1903 and baptised two days afterwards<sup>1</sup>. Two of his ancestors have left their mark on our island's heritage. The 18th century architect Giuseppe Bonnici is still remembered for various architectural achievements among which are the plan for St Publius church at Floriana and that for the Custom House whose ground floor, at least, is definitely ascribed to him. His great grand father, Vincenzo Bonnici, who lived during the 19th century, was a renowned sculptor<sup>2</sup>. After his primary education, Arturo was successful to enter the Lyceum where he always obtained good results and every year was awarded a silver medal<sup>3</sup>.

After Matriculation<sup>4</sup>, in October 1921, he joined the Faculty of Arts of the University reading for the B.A.. As he obtained first placing in the third year of this course, he was awarded a Government Bursary of twenty pounds sterling on graduating Bachelor of Arts in October 1924<sup>5</sup>. During this course, he showed certain interest in writing poetry. So far, this aspect of his literary career has passed

<sup>1</sup> Senglea Parish Archives, *LB XVI*, 430.

<sup>2</sup> Art. Bonnici, "Id-Dwana, l-Arkitett tagħha u Jien", in *LS*, 26th January 1974. Regarding Giuseppe Bonnici, confer: Leonard Mahoney, *A History of Maltese Architecture from Ancient Times up to 1800*, Malta 1988, 265, n. 31; 319; 321; 328, n.48 and R. Mifsud Bonnici, *Dizzjunarju Bio-Bijografiku Nazzjonali*, Malta 1960, 43. Regarding Vincenzo Bonnici confer: R. Mifsud Bonnici, *op. cit.*, 45.

<sup>3</sup> Five of these medals are still in Bonnici's family possession.

<sup>4</sup> The Matriculation Certificate is dated 1st October 1921.

<sup>5</sup> The B.A. Diploma is dated 1st October 1924. The certificate of this Bursary is still extant among Bonnici's papers.

unnoticed. Some of his poems are still extant both in manuscript form as well as in print. Among the former, there is an English translation of Ugo Foscolo's "I Sepolcri". The batch of poems, that have been traced, are written in three languages, namely Maltese, English and Italian. They throw an insight into his cultural background. In fact, they portray a deeply-rooted love for his faith, his home-town and his country<sup>6</sup>.

It is highly probable that the environment provided by his home-town as well as his own family were important factors that had their say in Bonnici's decision to proceed for the priesthood. It used to be said that Archbishop Dom Maurus Caruana, referring to Senglea, used to earmark it as the garden of his diocese. This was, mainly due to the fact that it had been providing a substantial amount of ecclesiastical vocations both to the diocesan as well as to the regular clergy. Moreover, some of those enrolled among the diocesan clergy had given and were, then, still giving excellent service as parish priests<sup>7</sup>. Another group was involved in important sectors within the diocesan level<sup>8</sup>. The greater part, with some exception, remained living within their parish boundaries dedicating their attention towards the promotion of pastoral and liturgical life of their home-town. Indeed, the intensive flourishing and promotion of catholic vitality, particularly the insertion of the Laity in active ecclesial participation at Senglea, then highly noticeable, can easily be ascribed to

<sup>6</sup> Some of these poems were included in the documentary exhibition prepared for this Commemoration.

<sup>7</sup> The following list gives the names of parish priests from Senglea who held such an office from the last two decades of the 19th Century onwards: Fr Leopoldo Farrugia (1859-1949), PP Żabbar 1886-1918, Archpriest of the Cathedral 1918-1927; Fr Carmelo Azzopardi (1860-1907), PP Qrendi 1886-1887, PP Attard 1887-1903; Fr Francesco Briffa (1862-1908), PP Naxxar 1891-1903, Archpriest of Senglea 1902-1908; Fr Giocchino Grech (1864-1924), PP Hamrun 1896-1897, Archpriest of Vittoriosa 1897-1924; Fr Joseph Adami (1868-1930), PP Ghaxaq 1905-1908, Archpriest of Senglea 1908-1927; Fr Vincent Azzopardi (1870-1948), PP Qormi 1917-1927; Fr Joseph Ciangura (1871-1931), PP Kalkara 1898-1924; Fr Salvatore Galea (1878-1935), P.P. Tarxien 1918-1935; Fr Raffaele Capurro (1879-1966), PP Safi 1909-1919, PP Sliema – Stella Maris 1919-1940; Fr Joseph Bonanno (1882-1942), Archpriest of Senglea 1917-1941; Fr Emmanuele Vella (1884-1917), PP Paola 1914-1917; Fr Salvatore Pavia (1893-1936), PP Luqa 1929-1936.

<sup>8</sup> The following are included in this group, namely : Fr Ignazio Panzavecchia (1855-1925), he was deeply involved till his death in the political development of Malta; Fr Salvatore Gaffiero (1822-1902), after a dedicated pastoral life on a parochial level, he was appointed Vicar General and Auxiliary Bishop to Archbishop Pietro Pace; Fr Joseph Darmanin (1882-1942), Rector of the Seminary in the mid 1920s and afterwards Inspector of Religious Instruction in Government Primary Schools; Fr Emmanuele Galea (1891-1974), Canon at Senglea and Prefect of Studies at the Seminary, then Professor of Canon Law at the University, Secretary at the Archbishop Curia, Vicar General and Auxiliary Bishop of Archbishop Dom Maurus Caruana OSB; Fr Albert Pantalleresco (1891-1962), Head Master of the Lyceum, Dean of the Cathedral Chapter and Rector of the Seminary.

the pastoral activity of the priests then living in that town<sup>9</sup>. Their dedication, helped by Archbishop Caruana and others, led to the crowning of the titular statue of their parish as well as to the elevation of their collegiate church to the title of Minor Basilica<sup>10</sup>. All this happened in 1920 on the eve of Bonnici's joining the Literature Course at the University and could have been providential in nourishing in him the call to the priesthood.

On the completion of the above-mentioned Course, in October 1924, he entered the Seminary at Floriana and joined the Faculty of Theology. His only companion throughout his theological studies within this Faculty, was Charles Manchè<sup>11</sup>. Both donned the cassock on the 4th November 1924, being the liturgical feast of Manchè's namesake, St Charles Borromeo<sup>12</sup>.

The Faculty of Theology at the University was, then passing through difficult times. This situation had been dragging on since the middle of the 19th century itself. The number of its students had always been very limited. On the completion of the 1925-1928 course, the local ecclesiastical authorities took a very wise decision to boost, somehow, this Faculty. From 1703 till 1928, the Seminary provided its own courses in Philosophy and Theology. It was now decided that seminary students were thenceforth to proceed with their Theological studies at the University Faculty as occasional students<sup>13</sup>.

Both Bonnici and Manchè were ordained priests by Archbishop Caruana at St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta on the 22nd September 1928<sup>14</sup>. A few days later, namely, on the 1st October, both graduated Doctors of Divinity and Bachelors of

<sup>9</sup> Some of these priests are the following namely: Fr Paolo Raggio (1852-1928) Fr Serafino Camilleri (1851-1913), Fr Costantino Caligari (1857-1924), Fr Giovanni Ricca (1871-1951), Fr Francesco Zarb (1871-1939), Fr Giovanni De Domenico (1872-1960), Fr Salvatore Adami (1876-1948), Fr Giuseppe Benedetti (1887-1944), Fr Francesco Galea (1894-1947), Fr Victor Gaffiero (1894-1964). Almost all were canons of Senglea's Collegiate Chapter.

<sup>10</sup> A prominent ecclesiastic from Senglea, who promoted these vicissitudes to enhance, thereby, his home-town, was Dom Mauro Inguanez OSB (1887-1955). Confer: Joseph Flask, *Dom Mauro Inguanez OSB*, Malta 1985; Carol Jaccarini, *Dom Mauro Inguanez, Benedictine of Monte Cassino*, Malta 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Fr Charles Manchè (1904-1950), after his ordination to the priesthood in 1928, proceeded to Rome for post-graduate studies in Philosophy. On his return to Malta, he was appointed Prefect of Studies at the Seminary and in 1935 was nominated Parish Priest of Gzira, where he died in harness in 1950.

<sup>12</sup> Art. Bonnici, *Il-Kappillan D. Karlu Manchè*, Malta 1976, 11.

<sup>13</sup> This information has been provided by Mgr Lawrence Spiteri, former Prefect of Studies at the Seminary. The data derived from the Financial Records of the Seminary confirm this information.

<sup>14</sup> Art. Bonnici, *op. cit.*, 10.

Canon Law during Graduation Day at the University<sup>15</sup>. Manchè proceeded to Rome to take up post-graduate studies in Philosophy<sup>16</sup>, while Bonnici began dedicating his priestly life in Malta.

## FIFTY YEARS OF PRIESTHOOD

Analysing the fifty years span of life after his ordination to the priesthood, it has been possible to establish four distinct stages each somehow having a focal point which gathers around it the sequence of developments that evolve throughout them. These however are intimately linked together by one predominant feature, namely, his priesthood. The chronological divisions I have managed to establish are the following:

- 1928-1937: The early years of his priesthood are hall-marked by his dedication to church life and institutions both within parochial circles as well as on a diocesan level.
- 1937-1950: Post-graduate studies abroad, furthering his academic preparation, inserted him within the University Academic Staff and brought with them higher responsibilities in the local church milieu.
- 1950-1970: The foundation of the Malta Historical Society led the way to deeper research in the ecclesiastical history of Malta and in promoting historical research in the island.
- 1970-1978: The use of the media, Bonnici had always appreciated, particularly journalism, acquire considerable prominence concurrently with his dedication in the service of the Church and Education. A most befitting synthesis of his human existence.

I shall now try to present a brief descriptive account of these four chronological subdivisions.

### 1928 – 1937

After the first months of his ordination, Don Arturo was called to offer his services outside his own parish. This happened in a rather unusual way which is nowhere recorded, but he himself, more than once, told me how it happened. His former

<sup>15</sup> This date results from the diplomas of the respective degrees that are still extant.

<sup>16</sup> Fr Manchè, was granted the Government Scholarship having obtained the first placing in the 1925-1928 Academic Course in Theology. He followed a two-years course in Philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome during 1928-1919 and 1929-1930 (PGU Archives, *Catalogi, 1928-1929; 1929-1930, Manchè, Carolus*).

professor of Canon Law, Mgr Emmanuele Vassallo<sup>17</sup>, who was then also Secretary of the Archbishop's Curia, approached him in 1929 extending to him an invitation to enroll himself in the services of the same Curia. Incidentally, Bonnici was, at that time, harbouring plans to take up a teaching career at the Lyceum following the pattern adopted already by some other priests from Senglea itself who were then engaged in State schools. He discussed this matter with his father who, wisely, advised him to abide by the will of his ecclesiastical superiors even if this implied a financial loss. He followed his father's advice<sup>18</sup>. At that time, another priest from Senglea, Canon Emmanuele Galea, was giving excellent service to the Diocese both as Lecturer of Latin Literature at the Major Seminary as well as Prefect of Studies of the same institution<sup>19</sup>. Bonnici's first assignment at the Curia was that of an "Attuario", which involved, to a great extent, merely clerical work.

While still engaged in this office, Bonnici was entrusted with a commitment of considerable importance. In 1928, Archbishop Caruana, realising the strategic situation through which Malta was then passing, decided to embark on a project whereby the local church could have a stronger impact on the Maltese community. This involved the publication of a Catholic paper in Maltese eventually entitled

<sup>17</sup> Mgr Emmanuele Vassallo hailed from Valletta where he was born in 1871. He studied theology at the Gregorian University, while he resided at the Capranica College in Rome and was ordained priest in Rome itself on the 19th May 1894 (ASVR, *Liber Ordinationum ... 1892-1894*, 222). Afterwards he proceeded to study Canon Law at the same Institution, graduating Doctor in this science on the 22nd July 1896 (PGU Archives, *Facultas Juris Canonici -Examina*, 23). On returning to Malta, he was assigned to teach Canon Law at the Major Seminary and in 1908 at the University. In 1910 he was installed Canon of the Cathedral (AAM, *CCCC 4, No 19-20*, 516/1910). Archbishop Dom Maurus Caruana appointed him Secretary at the Curia. He died suddenly on the 24th January 1930 (Porto Salvo Parish Archives, *Morti 1927-1936*, 121).

<sup>18</sup> This detail had been communicated to me by Mgr Bonnici himself.

<sup>19</sup> Can. Emmanuele Galea, born at Senglea in 1891, studied at the University of Malta where he graduated Bachelor in Literature, in Canon Law and Doctor in Divinity, was ordained priest on the 18th December 1915 (AAM, *Ordinationum 11*, 7). After the end of the Great War, he proceeded to Rome where he studied Canon Law at the Gregorian University from 1920, residing at the Beda College which was, then, housed in the English College itself. He graduated Doctor in Canon Law in June 1921 (PGU Archives, *Facultas Juris Canonici Examina*, 218). From 1922 till 1931, he was Prefect of Studies at the Seminary and lectured on Latin Literature at the Major Seminary. He had been Canon Theologian at the Senglea Collegiate Church since 1916 (AAM, *CCCS 1906-1928*, Nos 11 & 16). In February 1930, Archbishop Caruana appointed him Secretary at the Curia (AAM, *Caruana, Corrispondenza -Privati 1930*, No. 12). On the 1st July of that year, he was chosen Professor of Canon Law at the University (*Blue Book 1931*, 12/13). In May 1932, he was installed Canon Theologian of the Cathedral Chapter (AAM, *CCCC 1930-1949*, No. 9). In 1941, on the retirement of Mgr Paolo Galea, he was nominated Vicar General and on the 9th June 1942, during the war, His Holiness Pope Pius XII appointed him Auxiliary Bishop to Archbishop Caruana. He retained the office of Vicar General till his death which occurred on the 21st August 1974 (Żejtun Parish Archives, *LD XVIII*, 103).

*Lehen is-Sewwa*. Its first editor was Mgr Enrico Bonnici<sup>20</sup>. Two years afterwards, he had to relinquish this office on being appointed Rector of the Seminary. Don Arturo was assigned as his successor. He joined the staff of this paper on the 3rd January 1931 and remained in office for almost three years, namely, till the 28th November 1933. Those were indeed extremely difficult years following immediately the Religious-Political turmoil and the suspension of the 1921 Constitution followed by the Language Question. However, while he was at the helm of this Catholic paper, he managed to keep high the ideals for which it had been launched. But, as the hot issues mentioned before began to lull down, it seemed that this same paper was on the verge of losing its importance. In these circumstances, the local ecclesiastical authorities decided that it should keep abreast with the times at all costs. In order to promote its importance still further, Archbishop Caruana thought it fit to involve the Catholic Laity in its management. At this stage, the Malta Catholic Action was left in charge of this paper with Dr Herbert Ganado as its editor<sup>21</sup>. While still busily engaged on the parish level, particularly, in caring after the needs of children frequenting the Candlora oratory, the year 1932 brought with it further involvements to Don Arturo both within the parochial as well as within the diocesan milieu. Following the death of Mgr Emmanuele Vassallo, the two vacancies that thereby ensued. Namely, the Professorship of Canon Law at the University and the office of Secretary at the Curia, were entrusted to the care of Canon Emmanuele Galea. Moreover the latter was appointed Monsignor Canon of the Cathedral Chapter. These promotions had their say on Bonnici's life. He was appointed Assistant Secretary helping Mgr Galea in his new assignment at the Curia. Moreover, he was installed Galea's successor as Canon Theologian of the

<sup>20</sup> Mgr Enrico Bonnici (1891-1961) was born at Floriana and studied at the University where he graduated Bachelor of Canon Law and Doctor in Divinity. He was ordained to the priesthood on the 18th December 19'5 (AAM, *Ordinationum* 11, 7.). He had already, since 1913, been installed Canon Treasurer of the Senglea Collegiate Chapter (AAM, *CCS 1895-1906*, 292r-294v ss). On the 15th September 1917, he was installed Parish Priest at Paola (AAM, *Parroci XII*, Paola) where he set the ball rolling for the building of a new large parish church. He remained here till January 1922, when he was promoted Parish Priest of Rabat (AAM, *Parroci XIV*, Rabat). He left Rabat in August 1929 on being assigned a canonry at the Cathedral Church (AAM, *CCCC 1920-1929*, No. 31). A year before, he was left in charge of the editorship of the newly founded Catholic paper *Lehen is-Sewwa*, which he retained till 1931 as Archbishop Caruana had appointed him Rector of the Seminary (ASA, *Ms 1B*, 85-135). In 1937, he left the Seminary to give his service to the Curia as Chancellor (Muscat, *General Guide 1939-1940*, 144). He was also left in charge of St Joseph's Home at Santa Venera. He died at Balzan on the 5th August 1961 (ACM, *Brevis Biographia*, 39v, No. 163).

<sup>21</sup> *LS*, 2nd September 1979, pp 4 & 13; Herbert Ganado, *Rajt Malta Tinbidel*, Vol. II, Malta 1974, 24-25.



Senglea Collegiate Chapter<sup>22</sup>. He retained this canony only for two years as in 1934, in virtue of Papal Letters, he was promoted to the dignity of “Primicerius” within the same Collegiate Chapter<sup>23</sup>. He held, thereby, the highest office of this same institution. This involvement in both the diocesan and parochial level must have caused him awkward circumstances resulting from the convocation of the Inter-Regional Council convened in 1935<sup>24</sup>. He himself was one of the signatories of the records detailing the enactments and decrees of this Council<sup>25</sup>. From the following year, together with his duties as Assistant Secretary, he was concurrently assigned the office of Agent Chancellor of the same Curia. He retained these two conjoint offices till 1937, when Mgr Enrico Bonnici was appointed Chancellor.

Apart from this involvement in diocesan life, Don Arturo from the very first years of his priesthood, devoted particular attention to an important aspect of his priestly vocation, namely, preaching. As far back as 1930, he joined the “Piccola Missione” dedicated primarily to the spiritual care of the younger generations through periodical missions in different parishes of the Diocese. As years went by, he acquired wide popularity as a preacher. This was mainly due to his clear exposition of the topics that formed the back-bone of his sermons as well as to his rhetorical qualities that attracted the attention of many. To-day, I can attest that his success in this regard, which he maintained throughout his life, lay elsewhere. He took patient care in the preparation of his homilies, sermons and panegyrics. This is clearly evident from his papers that are still available. A considerable number of copy-books, covering at least till 1945, are dedicated to the writing of sermon notes as well as to fully written homilies. One of the items included in the Documentary Exhibition presents an index of sermon plans and homily notes forming the contents of the above-mentioned copy-books. Reading his first contribution to *Lucerna*, published in January 1937, under the signature “C.A.B.”, entitled “Predicazione Sacra”, it becomes all too evident that its contents give a direct portrayal of his own personal approach to preaching. He tried to instill in others what he actually had been already practising<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> AAM, *CCS 1927-1936*, No. 8, 198-212. On the 14th June 1932, he sat for the examination required before the conferment of a Theologian’s prebend. He was, moreover, exempted by a Papal rescript dated 30th June of that year, from the requirement of a degree in Sacred Scripture normally prescribed from candidates to such a canony by Canon Law and was duly installed in it on the 22nd of the following month.

<sup>23</sup> AAM, *CCS cit.*, No. 36, 11. This dignity was bestowed on Bonnici through Apostolic Letters dated 26th July 1934 and he was installed in it on the 6th August 1934.

<sup>24</sup> Regarding the situation prevailing at Senglea, as an aftermath of this Synod’s enactments, consult: Alex. Bonnici, *Senglea*, Vol. III, Malta 1991, 231-250.

<sup>25</sup> *Concilium Regionale Melitense*, Malta 1936, 67, Bonnici signed in his official capacity as Primus Notarius of the Council.

<sup>26</sup> *Lucerna 1*, 8 (August 1937), 157-158.

1937-1950

The year 1937 features as an important turning-point in Bonnici's life. As an outcome of lengthy discussions between the Local Government and the Holy See, specifying how the contents of the Apostolic Constitutions "Scientiarum Dominus" issued under the signature of Pope Pius XI on the 24th May 1931 and its subsequent "Adnotationes" dated 12th June of that same year, regarding studies and degrees granted by Catholic Faculties, were to be implemented the Faculty of Theology of our University, some modifications to the Rules and Statutes of the University were duly enacted. These were published in the Government Gazette on the 29th September 1936 and 15th January 1937. One of the more important results of these transactions was that, thenceforth, the teaching of Ecclesiastical History, Patrology, Liturgy, Christian Archeology and Biblical Greek was introduced in the Curriculum of Studies of the Faculty of Theology<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, two new chairs were established within the same Faculty to cater for the greater part of these new subjects. At that stage, some members of the Academic Staff of the Faculty were inclined to choose the best two students of the Theology Course which was to end during the Academic Year 1936-1937 and train them abroad to specialise in these new branches. However, the Authorities of the University thought otherwise. It is a pity that the Minute-Book and the records of the General Council of the University as well as those of the Faculty of Theology covering this period are nowhere to be found. They could shed light on this situation and its follow-up. *The Report on the Working of the University for the period 1st October 1936 to 30th September 1937*<sup>28</sup> states that the Governor, after consultation with the Bodies concerned, in accordance with Ordinance No. X of 1935 and with Article 27 of the University Statutes, appointed Can. John Theuma Relf<sup>29</sup>, Professor of Patrology, Liturgy and Christian Archaeology and Can. Arturo Bonnici, Professor of Church History. This appointment must have been made before June 1937, as its announcement appeared in that month's issue of *Lucerna*<sup>30</sup>. Bonnici's letter of appointment has not, so far, been traced. He used

<sup>27</sup> Regarding these reforms, confer: *Lucerna I, No 2*, (February 1937), 80.

<sup>28</sup> This volume is available at the University Library.

<sup>29</sup> Can. Prof. John Theuma Relf (1910-1941), born at Senglea, studied at the University where he graduated Bachelor in Arts and Canon Law as well as Doctor in Divinity. He was ordained priest on the 29th July 1939 (AAM, *Ordinationum 11*, 102). As a University student, he was Co-Founder of the *Lega Universitaria Cattolica Maltese*. On obtaining first place in the Academic Course at the University, he was granted the Government Scholarship whereby he took up post-graduate studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in October 1934 where he graduated Licentiate in Biblical Studies on the 4th July 1936 (Archives Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, *Schede Studenti*, Theuma Relf, Joannes). He was deemed fully qualified for his assignment at the University in 1937 but it had a short duration as he died at Senglea on the 16th January 1941 (*Lucerna V, 2* (1941), 44).

<sup>30</sup> *Lucerna I, 6* (June 1937), 119.

to tell me that he was very reluctant to apply for this post as he was well informed that various individuals of certain prominence were interested in it. As the University Records mentioned before are unavailable, it is highly difficult to ascertain their names. However, he received encouraging words from Mgr Prof. Emmanuele Galea and these induced him to forward his application to this University post. On his appointment, one serious problem ensued. He still lacked the necessary academic preparation to teach this field of specialisation. This problem had an easy solution. The Pontifical Gregorian University at Rome, with Papal approval, in 1934 established within it a Faculty of Church History to cater specifically for the training of those who would be entrusted with the teaching of this science as an outcome of the Papal Constitution already mentioned. Canon Prof. Bonnici proceeded to Rome and enrolled as a student of this Faculty<sup>31</sup>. He left Malta together with Fr Joseph Lupi, who had been granted the Government Scholarship for the Academic Course in Theology that ended in 1937, and both resided at the Scots' College, while studying at the Gregorian<sup>32</sup>.

The establishment of a Chair in Church History in 1937, at the Royal University of Malta, was a step forward leading towards a better appreciation of the historical sciences within this Institution. Till then, these were almost non-existent. The only exception was, mainly, within the Faculty of Laws, where, since 1870, there was a Lecturer in the History of Legislation in England and Malta. Moreover, from 1901 onwards, the Professor of English also had the assignment to lecture on History to his students<sup>33</sup>. The elder generation amongst us still remembers the pitiful performance that the Professor of English delivered in this regard, at least, from the 1930s onwards. Ecclesiastical Legislation earmarked, at this stage, the importance of History within higher studies and may have paved the way for its introduction within the Faculty of Arts in the 1960s<sup>34</sup>.

It is highly opportune to note here that, in 1937, Church History was actually re-introduced within the Faculty of Theology. The re-organisation of its studies enacted by Grand Master Pinto de Fonseca in 1771, included its teaching for the first time in the curriculum of studies proposed on that occasion. Pinto's intervention then presents a highly liberal approach<sup>35</sup>. Till then, no other institution of higher

<sup>31</sup> PGU Archives, *Catalogi 1939*.

<sup>32</sup> Pontifical Scots College Archives, Rome, *Nomina Alumnorum 1820-1939*, 164.

<sup>33</sup> *The Royal University of Malta Calendar for the Academic Year 1953-1954*, pp 38 & 47.

<sup>34</sup> Fr Andrew Vella OP was appointed Acting-Lecturer in History in the Faculty of Arts in 1962, almost ten years after the death of Professor Owen J. Fogarty, former professor of English and History.

<sup>35</sup> Arthur Bonnici, "The Programme of Studies in the Faculty of Theology enforced by the Magisterial Chirograph of 1771" in *M.L. I*, 3(1948), 38-43; Vincenzo Laurenza, *Il Primo Rettore e i Primi Statuti dell'Università di Malta*, Malta 1934, 35-38.

learning functioning in Malta had provided such a cultural service. The study of History on the continent, under the impact of Illuminism, was gaining ground in various countries. Malta seems to have got involved in this movement. Pinto's intervention in this regard preceded similar enactments elsewhere outside Malta. Thus the Archigymnasium of the Sapienza in Rome still had to wait for another thirteen years to require the study of Ecclesiastical History as an essential requisite from candidates to the Doctorate of Theology<sup>36</sup>. It is a pity that its teaching had a short life in Malta due to Grand Master Ximenes' financial restrictions curtailing the development of the University<sup>37</sup>. It is however to be noted that its teaching within the University was revived sometime about 1820 and was included in the Curriculum of Studies of the Collegio Teologico at this Institution. Its lecturer was Fr Serafino Marmarà<sup>38</sup>, an expert in Hebrew and a close friend of Hookham Frere<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, Bishop Mattei, when the Holy See insisted that Ecclesiastical History had to be obligatory in the Course of Theology followed at the Major Seminary in Malta, he clearly stated that in his days, this subject was being taught at the University and those wishing to pursue these studies could avail themselves of this opportunity already available in the island<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> The first enactment in this regard at this University is dated 8th June 1784 where it was clearly specified that candidates for the Doctorate in Theology had to present to the Rector of this Institution a certificate attesting that they had studied Church History: "... richiedendosi inoltre lo studio almeno di un'anno nella Storia Romana per i Concorrenti Legali, e per i Teologi altrettanto nella Storia Ecclesiastica" (ASR, *Fondo Università* 99, 102v). The Rules of this University, published on the 21st April 1788, clarified still further this requirement stating: "Per il Dottorato in Teologia dovranno frequentarsi per un triennio le due Cattedre di S. Teologia, con unirti per un'anno quello dei Luoghi Teologici, e per gli altri due una delle altre tre Cattedre delle Classi delle Materie Sacre: ovvero dovranno frequentarsi per un triennio le tre Cattedre sudette della S. Scrittura, della Morale e della Storia Ecclesiastica" (*Ibid.*, 618r).

<sup>37</sup> Andrew P. Vella, *The University of Malta*, Malta 1969, 45-51.

<sup>38</sup> Fr Serafino Marmarà (1788-1871), from Valletta, was ordained priest on the 23rd May 1812 (AAM, *Ordinationum 1808-1827*, 35v). In 1817, he was appointed Professor of Grammar at the University (*Malta Blue Book 1821*, 127-128). In 1839, he was assigned a teaching post of Hebrew at the Lyceum (*Malta Blue Book 1851*, 182), which he retained till retiring age from Government service in 1856 (*Malta Blue Book 1861*, 132-233). In 1858, Bishop Gaetano Pace Forno, in the reform of studies he had carried out at the Seminary, introduced also Hebrew and Marmara' was assigned its teaching (ASA, *Ms. 16*, p.n.n.). He died at Floriana on the 7th November 1871 (Floriana Parish Archives, *LD II*, 48).

<sup>39</sup> Regarding Marmara's teaching at the *Collegio Teologico* of the University consult University Archives, *Ms 5, Theologia 1833, (Attendance Register)*, p.n.n., passim. His friendship with Frere results from Paul Cassar, "John Hookham Frere in Malta (1821-1846) – A Link with our Social and Cultural Past" in *MH IX*, 1(1984), 54.

<sup>40</sup> ASV, Congregatio Concilii, *Visitationes ad Limina, Meliten. II*, p.n.n.

The Holy See continued to harp on the insistence that the Seminary should provide itself with similar lectures and in 1826<sup>41</sup>, Don Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi<sup>42</sup> was given this assignment. It has been impossible, so far, to determine how long he retained this appointment<sup>43</sup>. A few years later, however, its teaching reappears once more for a span of some twelve years, namely from 1846 till 1859<sup>44</sup>. Strangely enough, the extensive reforms introduced by Bishop Pace Forno in the studies of the Major Seminary which now included, among other subjects, Sacred Scripture, Hebrew and Sacred Eloquence, as detailed in a Circular Letter dated 22nd July 1859, made no reference to the teaching of Church History<sup>45</sup>. After a lapse of twenty five years, namely in 1883, the Seminary Records attest that payment was once more defrayed for the maintenance of a lecturer in this essential aid to theological

<sup>41</sup> In the 1820 *Ad Limina Report*, dated 28th November, Bishop Mattei stated that he had been unable, till then, to introduce the Chairs of Church History and Liturgy at the Seminary as had been requested from him. This was all due to financial problems. On this same occasion, he clearly stated that Church History was included in the curriculum of studies followed at the University (ASV, Congregatio Concilii, *Visitat. Ad Limina, Meliten II*, p.n.n.). In its answer to this Report, the Sacred Congregation of the Council, on the 23rd February 1823, acknowledged, for the time being, the impossibility of implementing this venture. Bishop Mattei, however, did not leave this matter dormant. In a similar *Ad Limina Report* for the year 1826, he stated that he had been successful to meet the recommendation of the said Congregation having finally established the Chair of Church History at his Seminary (*Ibid.*).

<sup>42</sup> Can. Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi (1796-1879), from Cospicua, studied at the University graduating Doctor both in Divinity as well as in Laws (AAM, *Collazione Benefici 1849-1860*, 606r-608r; *B & C* (1827), 173). Ordained priest on the 23rd December 1820 (AAM, *Ordinationum 1808-1827*, 100r), in the late 1820s, he was receiving some backing to be promoted Bishop of Malta (G. Cassar Pullicino, "The Priest who declined a Bishopric" in *MH* 8, 3(1982), 213-233). Though appointed Archpriest of Żebbug, he was never however, installed in this office (AAM, *B & C* 44, 329). He made a name for himself in Maltese Literature as a prolific writer, particularly, of popular religious poetry. In 1857, he was appointed canon in the Collegiate Church of his home-town (AAM, *CC 1851-1897*, 84r-86v), while in 1861, he was Professor of Canon Law at the Seminary (AAM, *Corrispondenza* 70, 198r). He was installed Canon of the Cathedral on the 15th June 1868 (AAM, *CCCC 1864-1872*, No. 11) and died on the 23rd October 1879 (Cospicua Parish Archives, *LD XII*, 312r).

<sup>43</sup> AAM, *B & C* 41, 173. It is highly probable that Mifsud Tommasi's lectures had a short life.. In July 1817 and throughout 1828, he was involved in various voyages in Italy (MNL, *Ms* 622, 35r-36v, 37r-53v).

<sup>44</sup> A newly-ordained priest from Żebbug, Fr Joseph Callus was entrusted with its teaching during two consecutive academic years, namely, 1846-1847 and 1847-1848 (ASA, *Ms* 13, 1, 2/1948; 21/1848). His successor was Fr Girolamo Chetcuti who, concurrently, lectured in Dogmatic Theology while he was also Rector of the Seminary itself (ASA, *Ms* 17, 2/1848; 20, 21/1848; 14, 15/1850; 2, 9/1851; 18, 20/1852). In 1853, Fr Tommaso Chetcuti, his brother, was entrusted with the teaching load previously sustained by Fr Giuseppe and dedicated himself to it till 1859 (ASA, *Ms* 13, 12, 13/1853; 34, 36/1854; 66/1855; 66/1855; 12, 13/1856; 37/1857; 13/1858; 2/1859).

<sup>45</sup> Vincent Borg, *The Seminary of Malta and the Ecclesiastical Benefices of the Maltese Islands*, Malta 1965, 33-34.

studies<sup>46</sup>. This lecturer was Fr Ruggiero Calleja<sup>47</sup> who retained this commitment till 1887<sup>48</sup>. His successor was Fr Vincenzo Caruana Gatto<sup>49</sup> who in 1900 was still involved in its teaching<sup>50</sup>. Subsequently, Fr Carmelo Psaila, our National Poet, was left in charge of this same assignment from 1905 till 1920<sup>51</sup>. Apart from Church History, Dun Karm also taught Christian Archaeology from 1908 onwards. He seems to have been the first one to lecture on this science in Malta<sup>52</sup>. In a report on the re-organisation of studies at the Major Seminary, presented by Fr Enrico Dandria in February 1920, who was then Prefect of Studies there, Church History is included together with Scripture and Canon Law as secondary subjects while Moral and Dogmatic Theology were considered as primary subjects<sup>53</sup> and it

<sup>46</sup> ASA, *Ms 16*, p.n.n.

<sup>47</sup> Can. Ruggiero Calleja (1857-1926), born at Valletta, studied at the Seminary and was ordained priest on the 17th December 1881 (AAM, *Ordinationum 1*, 27r). In 1888, he was appointed teacher of English at the Minor Seminary then housed at St Calcedonius', Floriana (ASA, *Ms. 1*, p.n.n.). Bishop Buhagiar recommended him to the Holy See to confer on him the Doctorate in Sacred Theology (AAM, *Corrispondenza 113*, 68r, 70r-73v). After 1889, this degree appeared with his name. On the 11th May 1898, he was installed Canon at St Paul's Collegiate Church in Valletta (ASA, *CCSP 1894-1905*, 61r-66v). He died at Valletta on the 3rd April 1926 (St Paul's Parish Archives, Valletta, *LD XXII*, 65).

<sup>48</sup> In 1887, Fr Calleja himself stated that, by then, he had been teaching Church History at the Seminary for four years (AAM, *Corrispondenza 113*, 68r, 70r-v).

<sup>49</sup> Mgr Vincenzo Caruana Gatto (1852-1926), a relative of Bishop F.S. Caruana, born at Valletta, studied at the University where he graduated Doctor in Divinity. He was ordained priest on the 26th May 1877 (AAM, *Ordinationum 1*, 9r). In 1894, he was nominated Canon-Coadjutor at the Cathedral Church (AAM, *CCCC 3*, No. 9). From 1900 onwards, he wrote and published various works on aspects of local history. For a Bibliography in this regard confer: R. Mifsud Bonnici, *Dizzjunarju Bio-Bijografiku*, 113. On the 18th January 1912, he was installed Archdeacon of the Cathedral (ASA, *CCCC 5*, No. 5). He died at Valletta on the 18th February 1926 (Porto Salvo Parish Archives, *LD 1917-1926*, 584).

<sup>50</sup> ASA, *Ms 16*, 10. Caruana Gatto refrained from receiving any remuneration for his lectures.

<sup>51</sup> There is hardly any need to insert here any biographical note on Dun Karm, our National Poet. In a letter written in 1920, it is clearly specified that Mgr Psaila had been teaching Church History and Christian Archaeology at the Major Seminary since 1905 (AAM, *Caruana Corrispondenza 1920 - Privati*, 126). His salary in 1905 was ten pounds a year (ASA, *Ms 14*, 40, 672).

<sup>52</sup> ASA, *Ms 14*, 319, 383. In the academic years 1909-1910 and 1910-1911, Dun Karm taught solely Church History (*Ibid.*, 442, 521), while during the following two academic years he taught both these two sciences as well as Italian (*Ibid.*, 521, 603, 672). Two copy-books, written by cleric Michele Balzan, give the contents of Dun Karm's lectures on Church History delivered to 4th year Theology students in 1915-1916 (ASA, *Box-File 32*, "Lezioni di Storia Ecclesiastica - Tesi I-XIII dettate dal Prof. Carmelo Psaila"). The lecture-notes on Christian Archaeology compiled by Mgr Psaila are still extant. They had been given by Dun Karm himself to Mr Toni Cortis who kindly gave their photo-copy to the Cathedral Archives. The last academic year he lectured on Christian Archaeology was 1918-1919 (ASA, *Ms 3*, 17v-18r), the next two academic years were exclusively dedicated to Church History (*Ibid.*, 20v-21r, 21v). The academic year 1920-1921 marked the end of his teaching career at the Major Seminary.

<sup>53</sup> ASA, *Ms 3*, 19v, 20r.

continued to maintain this status till 1928 when, as stated before, the local Ecclesiastical Authorities suppressed the course in Theology at the Seminary transferring its students to the Faculty of Theology at the University<sup>54</sup>. To conclude this short digression which brought to the limelight, for the first time, the development of the teaching of these branches of theological studies prior to 1937, it is all too evident that while after roughly 1830 Church History had been dropped from the curriculum of studies followed at the Faculty of Theology, its teaching was, to a great extent, maintained at the Major Seminary till 1928.

All attention will now, once more, be focused on Bonnici's contribution in this regard. In July 1939, he obtained the Licentiate in Ecclesiastical History from the Gregorian University and returned definitely to Malta<sup>55</sup>. The following October he started lecturing at the University. He was by then a fully qualified historian having gained a thorough knowledge both of his main subject as well as its subsidiary sciences of considerable importance, namely, Historical Methodology, Palaeography, Diplomatics, Christian Archaeology, Archivistics amongst others. It is at this stage that his interest in history, as was to be expected, began to manifest itself. While he was still studying in Rome, in July and December 1938, he published two short contributions in *Lucerna*. The first appeared under a somewhat camouflaged signature, namely "c.a.b."<sup>56</sup>. The second one throws more light on the identification of its author as it was signed "can.a.b."<sup>57</sup>. Both dealt with aspects of early ecclesiastical history. Another two short articles covering the same period appeared in the same journal during his first teaching year in Malta, namely 1939-1940<sup>58</sup>. It is highly probable that he had originally planned a series of articles for this review, but in 1940 the Editor of *Lehen is-Sewwa* invited him to write for his paper similar articles of a more general character. Bonnici accepted and the first of this series appeared on the 24th May 1940, on the eve of the break of hostilities of World War Two. This involvement may explain why he relinquished writing in *Lucerna* which, eventually ceased publication during the war. His contributions to *Lehen is-Sewwa* continued to appear till 1942, notwithstanding that owing to paper shortage, it had reduced its size to smaller dimensions<sup>59</sup>. While engaged in the preparation of these

<sup>54</sup> After Mgr Psaila's departure, the teaching of Church History at the Major Seminary was resumed during the academic year 1923-1924 with Fr Giorgio Scerri OFM as its lecturer. He lectured also on Christian Archaeology (ASA, *Ms 1A*, and *Ms 1B*, p.n.n.).

<sup>55</sup> The Diploma of this Licentiate, still extant at Bonnici's residence, is dated 3rd July 1939.

<sup>56</sup> "Un punto luminoso nel magistero infallibile del Sommo Pontefice nel Sec. V" in *Lucerna II*, 7 (July 1938), 151-152.

<sup>57</sup> "Il celibato dei chierici nei primi secoli della chiesa" in *Lucerna II*, 12 (December 1938), 257-259.

<sup>58</sup> "Appunti di Storia Ecclesiastica – Ambiente nel quale nacque il Cristianesimo" in *Lucerna III*, 12 (December 1939), 1-3; "Appunti di Storia Ecclesiastica – L'Eresie dal punto di vista storico" in *Lucerna IV*, 3 (March 1940), 61-62.

<sup>59</sup> The last one in this series appeared in *LS* on the 7th July 1942.

articles in 1941, the *Għaqda tal-Qari Tajjeb* published a short account of Church History prepared by Bonnici<sup>60</sup>. Later, he also managed to present in book-form part of the articles that had appeared in *Leĥen is-Sewwa*, and entitled it *Storja tal-Knisja, Vol. I*. The same publishers undertook its editing in 1945<sup>61</sup>.

During the war, Bonnici, together with his mother and others had to leave Senglea and found refuge at the residence of the Parish Priest in Rabat, where he stayed throughout the war years. The Archbishop's Curia, as well as the Faculty of Theology, were housed within the premises of St Joseph's Home at Santa Venera. Incidentally, *Leĥen is-Sewwa* had had always its quarters in that same building. This place became Bonnici's second home during those difficult years.

His mother died at Rabat in 1942<sup>62</sup>. On that occasion, Mgr Emmanuele Galea called on him to offer his condolences. By that time, Mgr Galea had been promoted Vicar General of the Diocese and Auxiliary Bishop to Archbishop Dom Maurus Caruana. On that occasion, Bishop Galea informed Bonnici that the Archbishop had decided to bestow on him the office of Secretary at the Curia since this was vacant as an outcome of his promotion to Vicar General. It was indeed a most befitting appointment as he had been carrying out the duties of Assistant Secretary for almost ten years. Moreover, his academic qualifications in the historical sciences were a great asset in the performance of the responsibilities annexed to this office<sup>63</sup>.

More than a year before his mother's death, the ravages of war claimed among their victims one of Bonnici's closest friends, namely, Canon Prof. John Theuma Relf, who was killed, together with his sisters, on the 11th January 1941, at Senglea during the air attacks on H.M.S. Illustrious. As a result of this sad incident, the subjects annexed to the Chair assigned to him at the University in 1937 were re-distributed and Christian Archaeology, in 1943, was incorporated with the Chair of Church History<sup>64</sup>.

Following the end of the war, Malta was faced by various crucial problems, including particularly, its material and social reconstruction. The former involved the rebuilding of vast devastated areas surrounding, mainly, the harbours and the air-fields while the latter had to cater for the welfare of the workers in a changing economy of the island as well as its constitutional and political development. The

<sup>60</sup> *Storja tal-Knisja*, Malta 1941, pp. 32.

<sup>61</sup> *Storja tal-Knisja, Vol. I*, Malta 1945, pp. 192.

<sup>62</sup> Elvira Bonnici died at Rabat on the 12th July 1942 (Rabat Parish Archives, *LD VI*, 124).

<sup>63</sup> These details had been given to me by Mgr Bonnici himself.

<sup>64</sup> *The Royal University of Malta Calendar 1953-1954*, 36. There is here a mistake as, originally, Can Theuma Relf was assigned to teach Christian Archaeology together with Patrology and Liturgy.



demographic growth of the population, which was indeed another serious problem involving various aspects, was partially solved through extensive emigration particularly to Australia. The acute reality of these serious difficulties did not hinder a revival of interest in cultural life which had been totally obliterated during the war years. Till then, the only Institution, outside the University, which offered a venue for a cultural revival was, almost exclusively, the British Institute at Valletta. Immediately after the war, the Church in Malta decided to embark on a great project in this regard, thereby also commemorating the Maltese war victims. This project involved the building of the Catholic Institute at Floriana. In 1946, Prof. Bonnici was nominated by Archbishop Gonzi, President of the Committee in charge of its building. Its aim was the promotion of Catholic culture in all its ramifications. Within the precincts of the University, this revival in cultural activities was remarkably present. A new lease of life was given to various bodies that had almost ceased to exist during the war, while new societies saw daylight catering for the interests of different Faculties. This revival at the University was, to a great extent, due to the vitality and active participation of the student-body backed, at times, by members of the academic staff. From 1944 onwards, these societies began to publish their own reviews attaining a relatively high standard<sup>65</sup>. These new circumstances prevailing at the University involved also Prof. Bonnici. In fact, it is at this stage that a new approach is noticeable in his writings entailing more original research with particular reference to the local scene. This is all too manifest in his contributions to *Melita Theologica* as well as in other publications<sup>66</sup>.

From the last years of the 1940s, students of the Faculty of Theology started seeking his assistance as a tutor in preparing their dissertation for the Licentiate or for their Doctoral thesis itself. The number of candidates who, since the implementation of the “Deus Scientiarum Dominus” Constitution in 1937 in Malta have been successful to fulfill its requirements for the Doctorate in Divinity, is indeed very limited, nine in all. Four of these have had Prof. Bonnici as their tutor. This was another feather in his cap as a member of the University’s academic staff<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> Apart from Societies that had already been in existence within the University before the start of World War II, new ones were set in motion immediately afterwards. The following managed also to begin publishing their reviews during the 1940s, namely: The University Students Law Society’s review, entitled *Law Journal*, was published for the first time in 1944; The Royal University Theological Association’s review *Melita Theologica* started its publication in 1947; during that same year, The Virgil Society’s review *Classical Journal* saw daylight; while the Malta Medical Association’s review *Chest Piece* followed in 1948.

<sup>66</sup> Confer: The Malta Historical Society, *Mgr Prof. Arturo Bonnici – Commemoration*, Malta 1994, 22.

<sup>67</sup> These four are Rev. Fr Philip Callus B.A. D.D., Rev. Fr Anthony Borg D.D., the late Rev. Can. Anthony Zammit Gabaretta B.A., D.D. and the author of this paper.

The Ecclesiastical Authorities were fully conscious of his dedication both to church life as well as to his academic milieu. As a gesture of gratitude for this involvement, Archbishop Michael Gonzi appointed him Canon Co-Adjutor of the Cathedral Chapter in 1947, nineteen years after his ordination to the priesthood<sup>68</sup>. Concurrently with this appointment, he was assigned a new pastoral commitment which required a good amount of his time, namely the Directorship of the *Istituto Maltese di Educazione Cattolica* at St James church in Valletta. He retained this post till 1960<sup>69</sup>.

### 1950-1970

In 1950, although deeply immersed in various pastoral, academic and administrative duties, he decided to embark on a new project which later, in 1971, he termed “as the boldest venture” of his life<sup>70</sup>. In two contributions published in *Lehen is-Sewwa* on the 14th and 18th January 1950<sup>71</sup>, he deplored the sad situation prevailing in Malta regarding scientific interest in the history of our island-home. He appealed for a sound revival of this interest hoping that thereby our people could appreciate more fully the achievements of our forefathers. To attain this end, there was a sore need for a better preservation of all sources that are still extant. Scholars would thus be enabled and encouraged to delve deeply in research projects and publish eventually the results thereby obtained for a better knowledge of our national identity. He outlined a programme how this could be implemented notwithstanding the serious obstacles and difficulties that those involved in it would have to face. These two articles had the desired effect. In Bonnici’s own words: “Prominent people of the island, such as Prof. Joseph Manchè, then Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the University, Sir Arturo Mercieca, ex-President of the Court of Appeal, Dr Enrico Mizzi, the Nationalist leader, and several doctors, lawyers, priests and scholars sent me letters of encouragement. I never dreamt my article would have had such a repercussion” and the revival followed!<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> He was appointed Co-Adjutor to Mgr Can. Enrico Bonnici in virtue of Apostolic Letters dated 1st July 1947 and was installed in this assignment on the following 11th September (AAM, *CCCC 1947-1962*, No. 4). On the death of Mgr Canon Penitentiary Andrea Fenech, Mgr Bonnici was installed in this canonry on the 25th May 1953 (*Ibid.*, No. 19), while in the 1st April of the following year he passed to the canonry of “San Giacomo” to which he had opted (*Ibid.*, No. 22).

<sup>69</sup> Information given by Mgr Bonnici himself.

<sup>70</sup> *MH V*, 4(1971), 346.

<sup>71</sup> “Ghall-Ġieħ ta’ Malta” and “Ghall-Ġieħ ta’ Malta. Nidhlu ghax-xoghol iebes”.

<sup>72</sup> Malta Historical Society, *Minutes’ Book of General Meetings*, p.n.n., General Meeting held on the 29th January 1971.

It is to be duly admitted that since centuries past there has been a growing interest in the writing and promulgation of what constitutes the gradual unfolding of past vicissitudes that gave the Maltese islands their cultural existence in its various ramifications. This is due to the dedicated work of individuals or groups of persons who, endowed with a deep perspective of human values, have analysed and are still doing this process, to bring to the limelight man's contribution to its development which actually forms the core of history. This endeavour, influenced undoubtedly by concepts regarding historiography prevailing at different times and places, can be traced back in Malta, at least, till the 17th century with the publication of Gio. Francesco Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta*<sup>73</sup>, followed, subsequently, by others during the 17th, 18 and 19th centuries<sup>74</sup>. During the second half of the 19th century, a group of persons, mainly Englishmen residing in Malta decided in 1866 to establish a Society for a better appreciation of Malta's history. Its life seems to have been a short one, not exceeding four years at the utmost<sup>75</sup>. During the last decade of the same century, a fellow Maltese who had been educated abroad, namely Mgr Alfredo Mifsud<sup>76</sup>, after his appointment as Librarian and particularly from 1907

<sup>73</sup> Fra Gio. Francesco Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta, Isola nel Mare Siciliano, con le sue Antichità, ed Altre Notitie, Libri Quattro*, Malta 1647, pp 574 + Index.

<sup>74</sup> Among the more prominent Maltese historians, born till the middle of the 19th century, the following retain an outstanding place, namely: Count Gio. Antonio Ciantar (1696-1778), Can. Gio. Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis (1712-1770), Ignazio Saverio Mifsud (1722- ), Fr Pelagius OFM Cap. (1709-1781), Fr Onorato Bres (1753-1818), Can. Fortunato Panzavecchia (1797-1850), Gio. Antonio Vassallo (1817-1868), Annetto Caruana (1830-1905) and Achille Ferris (1838-1907).

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Cassar Pullicino, "Society of Archeology, History and Natural Sciences 1866-1868" in *MH I*, 2(1953), 122-124.

<sup>76</sup> Mgr Alfredo Mifsud (1866-1920), nephew of Mgr Michael Angelo Mifsud, born at Valletta, proceeded to Rome to finish his secondary education at the Seminario Romano in 1881 and remained there till July 1887 where he was still studying Theology. In 1886, he graduated there Bachelor in Theology (Archives Seminario Romano, *Alumni 1824-1912*, No. 994; Pontif. Univ. Lateranense, *Teologia e Legge 1848-1914, 1856-1877, 299*). In 1887 he was admitted to the *Accademia dei Nobili Ecclesiastici* in Rome and continued to pursue his studies at the *Seminario Romano* graduating Doctor in Theology in 1889 (Pont. Univ. Lateranense., *op. cit.*, 314) and Doctor in Both Laws in 1892 (Pont. Univ. Lateranense, *Legge 1878-1913*, 128). He was ordained priest in Rome on the 30th December 1888 (ASVR, *Libro delle Ordinazioni* 49, 241). On returning to Malta, he was immediately installed Canon of the Cathedral on the 21st April 1892 at twenty six years of age (AAM, *CCCC* 2, No. 7). The following year, on the 17th February 1893 he was elected the Clergy's Representative in the Council of Government and retained this post till November 1896 (*Lucerna II* (1938), 172). While he formed part of the Council of Government, two serious issues were tabled, namely the Question of Mixed Marriages in Malta and that of Pious Legacies. His attitude here did not receive the approval of the local ecclesiastical authorities (AAM, *Pace-Corrispondenza 1893*, 131; *1893-1894*, 53/1893; *1896*, 45, 84 etc.). He retired from political life and the Government appointed him Librarian on the 23rd March 1897 (*Malta Blue Book 1904-1905*, H 106). On the 15th June 1905, he was appointed Knight of Magisterial Grace of the Sovereign Order of St John (Muscat, *General Guide 1912*, 237). At this stage in his life, Mgr Mifsud began to dedicate his attention to historical research. His first publication in this regard, *Origine della Sovranità Inglese su Malta*, was published in 1907. Thenceforth, till his death, which

onwards began publishing important historical works. After an appeal launched in 1908, *The Malta Historical and Scientific Society* was founded and from the following year began giving excellent service, mainly, through the publication of its scientific journal *Archivum Melitense*, issued for the first time in 1910. It continued to be published till 1940, having by then completed nine volumes. The tenth one dragged till 1949 and ceased publication with its sixth number. By then, this Society had died a natural death. Some time after the foundation of this Society, another one was established with Ġuże Muscat Azzopardi as its President. The inauguration of this new society, named *Società Storica Maltese*, took place at the Aula Magna of the University on the 10th March 1917<sup>77</sup>. The aim of this Society was to give lectures preferably in Maltese and to publish its own journal. It has been impossible, so far, to establish whether this aim had been achieved.

The 1930s witnessed in Italy an increasing interest in Malta's history due, mainly, to the political situation then prevailing. In 1929 a review, entitled *Archivio Storico di Malta* saw daylight and eventually the *Deputazione per la Storia di Malta* made it its own. Notwithstanding certain political bias, a fair amount of studies on Maltese history appeared in this review, which however ceased publication during World War II. Its last number was issued in 1942<sup>78</sup>.

Thus, by 1950, all interest in historical research had come to a standstill. These particular circumstances spurred Mgr Bonnici to take the initiative detailed in his two *Lehen is-Sewwa* articles which, as explained previously, brought home the desired response. Moreover, Bonnici's own personality must have also had a decisive impact paving the way for that response. His academic post at the University, his links with the ecclesiastical authorities of the island, the friendly relations he managed to establish and maintain with a considerable number of people, his constant dedication to the duties entrusted to his care, his savoir faire in dealing with all categories of persons, his kindness and gentlemanly behaviour, his sense of gratitude towards all who collaborated with him in different projects – qualities that endeared him both to his students as well as to all who knew him –

occurred on the 20th December 1920 at his residence in Mdina (Mdina Parish Archives, *LD XI*, 156r), he wrote an extensive amount of papers and articles dealing with various topics of historical interest meriting thereby a prominent place in the history of Maltese Historiography. During his life-time, he brought to Malta the Sisters of St Dorothy and, on his death, bequeathed to them his own house at Mdina.

<sup>77</sup> Albert Ganado, "Foreword" in Malta Historical Society, *Mgr Prof. Arturo Bonnici – Commemoration*, 7.

<sup>78</sup> The *Archivio Storico di Malta* consists of thirteen volumes. Volumes I to VI, published between 1929 and 1935, form its first series. In 1935, another series started to be published and includes volumes VII to XIII.

made him a perfect gentleman whom everyone admired. His human qualities coupled with his academic background moulded the personality that was needed at that time. The particular circumstances that before 1950 had almost sounded the death-knell to historical studies found in him the right person to come to the rescue.

On the 1st April of that same year, he published another article in the same paper elaborating still further what was needed to promote whatever was essential to enhance and enshrine the history of these islands, insisting that a great amount could be had from what had already been achieved elsewhere in this regard<sup>79</sup>.

In the meantime, a first preliminary meeting was held at the Library of the University and a provisional Committee was set up to draw a draft Statute for the new Society to be known as *The Malta Historical Society*. An attempt to revive the previous *Malta Historical and Scientific Society* failed to obtain the consensus of those present. After the completion of the necessary spade work, a second meeting was convened in the same premises on the 12th April, during which the draft Statute was discussed and approved and on that day our Society came into existence. Subsequently, on the 26th of the same month, during a General Meeting, held also at the University, Mgr Prof. Bonnici, the Founder, was unanimously elected President of the Society. Year in year out, till his demise, he was every year elected by acclamation to this post<sup>80</sup>.

Immediately after these meetings, and once the Committee had been duly constituted, particular attention was given to certain requisites included in the Statute, chief among these was the highly desired publication of a review. In less than two years' time, the first issue of *Melita Historica* was out with Mr Joseph Cassar Pullicino as its editor. This publication, which by now, is in its forty second year of existence, has never interrupted its yearly commitment. Its contents have been providing constant original contributions shedding new light for the better knowledge and appreciation of the historical development of the Maltese Islands involving both local and foreign scholars.

*Melita Historica* seems to have been the spring-board whereby Bonnici embarked on a deepening of his interest in certain areas of local ecclesiastical history. His research, at this stage, presents a wider horizon although his specialization centres around a definite chronological period, namely, the early years of British Rule in Malta with particular reference to its impact on church life in the island. His earliest

<sup>79</sup> Arturo Bonnici, "Ghall-Ġieħ ta' Malta – Nitghallmu minn haddiehor" in *LS*, 1st April 1950

<sup>80</sup> Malta Historical Society, *Minutes' Book of the General Meetings*, p.n.n., Meeting held on the 26th April 1950 and passim.

contribution in this regard, published in 1954, analysed the appointment of Bishop F.X. Caruana to the See of Malta<sup>81</sup>. His scientific contributions till 1973, all manifest the keen attention he dedicated in scrutinising various aspects of the first decades of the 19th century. He managed to write thirteen papers dealing with this period<sup>82</sup>.

Although the first decades of British Rule of Malta attracted his attraction, it did in no way exclude other interests involving both general ecclesiastical history as well as other topics. Chief amongst the latter were those related to the Order of St John. In 1955, he published a booklet entitled *L-Ordni ta' San Ġwann*<sup>83</sup>. This publication, together with an unpublished work on the Statutes of the same Institution<sup>84</sup>, form the core of a Special Course he delivered to a group of Theology Students during the Academic Year 1954-1955. Incidentally, in 1954, he was appointed a member of the Archives Advisory Committee which planned a major project regarding the Order itself, namely, the systematic cataloguing of the Archives of the Order still preserved in our National Library. This project is still in progress to-day and a number of Catalogues dealing with various sections of these archives have already been published. His participation in the above-mentioned Archives Advisory Committee may have been providential to deepen his approach to the Order's history. These factors and his passionate love and disinterested attachment to the Conventual Church of St John – he was in fact the Cathedral Chapter's deputy for this church for a considerable number of years till his death – merited him the title of Conventual Chaplain “ad honorem” of the Sovereign Military Order of St John conferred on him by the Grand Master in 1963<sup>85</sup>. It is also to be borne in mind that his last public oration dealt, incidentally, with St John's. He read this paper during Academic Celebrations held there on the 20th June 1978, marking the 4th centenary of its consecration. This paper, probably owing to his death a few months afterwards, had been left unpublished. However, it was included in the Commemorative Booklet distributed on the occasion of the commemoration during which this paper was read<sup>86</sup>.

Concurrently with these scientific activities, he kept alive a deep interest in communicating with the people through the Media then available, mainly, the

<sup>81</sup> Arturo Bonnici, “Reasons for the delay in the appointment of Bishop Francesco Saverio Caruana” in *MHI*, 3(1954), 156-163.

<sup>82</sup> Vincent Borg, “Bibliography and Analytical Index of Writings by Mgr Professor Arturo Bonnici 1943-1978” in Malta Historical Society, *Mgr Prof. Arturo Bonnici – Commemoration*, 21-39, Nos 21, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 37, 47, 52, 58, 59, 141.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 24.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 294.

<sup>85</sup> The Magisterial Bull granting this honour is dated Rome, 26th January 1963.

<sup>86</sup> Confer the Commemorative Publication quoted in Note 82, pp 41-48.

“Rediffusion” – the cable radio then in use in the Maltese islands. His contributions in this regard, particularly in the programme entitled “Academically Speaking”, were duly appreciated by academics as well as by the common man in the street. The way how he managed to explain in clear terminology many an awkward subject may provide the clue for the success of his interventions in these transmissions. When Television was introduced in Malta, he immediately perceived the importance of this Medium and wrote three articles in *Lehen is-Sewwa* in April and May 1962<sup>87</sup>, evaluating the possibilities of availing oneself of this new means of communication to foster interest in the local milieu and history.

When he was reaching the age of retirement from lecturing at the University, which actually followed in 1965, he started harbouring a plan to re-edit Achille Ferris’, *Storia Ecclesiastica di Malta*<sup>88</sup>. This work, beyond doubt, provides an invaluable wide range of data, but its presentation is below the criteria required by modern standard of historical scholarship. On second thoughts, however, Mgr Bonnici arrived at a different solution. He decided to embark on a totally new enterprise, namely, a thoroughly new account of local ecclesiastical history. He started working on it immediately after the Pauline Centenary Celebrations – in which he himself was deeply involved particularly in the exhibition held on that occasion at the Catholic Institute. His attention from 1960 onwards was centred in the materialisation of this enterprise. This may explain why throughout a period of five years, from 1962 till 1967, he managed to contribute only two papers of original research<sup>89</sup>. The first volume of his *History of the Church in Malta* was published in 1967 followed by the second one in 1968, while the third volume required another seven years to see daylight and was published in 1975<sup>90</sup>. This scholarly textbook marks Bonnici’s major publication.

In undertaking this impressive task, his primary aim was to present a synthesis based, mainly, on the results of research that had, till then, been duly accomplished, even if still unpublished. He meant to be concise and accurate as far as it was possible. His work did not mean to be just a mere record of factual chronological sequences of events but the gradual unfolding of various developments and their impact on the local ecclesial milieu. To a great extent, he adopted what one may term as a thematic approach to history.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos 39, 41 and 42.

<sup>88</sup> Achille Ferris, *Storia Ecclesiastica di Malta*, Malta 1877, pp 465. Bonnici held Ferris in high esteem. He made wide use of his publications in many articles published in *LS* from 1970 onwards and admitted this dependence on Ferris in one of these writings (Confer Note 82, No. 257).

<sup>89</sup> Confer Note 82, Nos 47 and 52.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos 55, 56 and 194.

The main attention is focused on the church institutions and their insertion in civil life, particularly where State and Church relationships are involved. Due attention is also given to the contribution of the base-roots that exert exceeding influence both on the internal as well as the external evolvement of every institution, including, beyond doubt, the Church itself. This, I think, is the philosophy underlying Bonnici's *History of the Local Church*. The main problem he had to face, on various occasions, was the lack of source material and monographic studies that are highly essential in the compilation of a systematic approach such as the one tackled by Bonnici. At times, he made his own certain traditional historical assertions that no longer hold ground<sup>91</sup>. Notwithstanding these slight inaccuracies, he has been successful in providing Malta with an updated documented history of the local church, far better than the one that was till then still consulted though hardly available.

Through his lead and with the establishment of *The Malta Historical Society* great strides have been made, but more intensive work has to be tackled so that our island may compare well with other civilised countries both in Europe as well as elsewhere. It is true that with the inclusion of a Department of History within the Faculty of Arts at the University a valid step forward had been achieved. Moreover, to-day Malta can boast of having a group of scientifically prepared historians few of whom, however, are fully dedicated to their profession. Some of these, at least, should be financially provided for, enabling them thereby to dedicate their time exclusively to History and its ancillary sciences for a deeper scientific knowledge of our country's identity. In the 1960s, I proposed to the then Minister of Education the importance of setting up an *Institute of Historical Research* similar to those already in existence in various European countries. Although he appreciated highly the proposal, he held that the time was not yet ripe for such an undertaking since the island had other priorities of more importance to deal with. Since then more than thirty years have elapsed. I think, it is now high time to set our heads together and

<sup>91</sup> He continued to maintain that a number of parishes had been established in Malta in 1436. In 1966, I personally explained to him why that conclusion was no longer valid since the 1436 document, to which it was linked, was nothing else but a Rollo or list of ecclesiastical benefices existing then in Malta that were subject to the "Decime" of the Papal Exchequer and had to be given to the "Collectores" who came periodically to farm this taxation. This document includes twelve parishes among these benefices without any reference whatsoever to their foundation. At the utmost, this document is an important historical source attesting that by 1436, a number of parishes had already been in existence in Malta. On starting my lecturing career at the University in 1965, I explained all this to my students. Subsequently, Dr Anthony Luttrell confirmed my position with his contribution regarding the parish of Birkirkara which was already functioning as such in 1402 (Anthony Luttrell, "The Cappella of Birkirkara: 1402" in *MH VIII*, 2(1981), 156-160). Both in Vol. I of his *History* (p. 70) as well as in an article in *LS* published on the 20th August 1977, his position remained unaltered (Confer Note 82, No. 264).



try to implement such a plan which, I am sure, will constitute a more vigorous step leading to new horizons. Such an Institute will mark a definite orientation in the right direction already traced by Mgr Bonnici in founding *The Malta Historical Society* and subsequently with the interest shown by the University in establishing the Department of History within it.

#### 1970-1978

The last eight years of Mgr Bonnici's life were brimful with his active insertion both within the ecclesial community as well as with his constant participation to cultural life in Malta. He continued to perform his duties as secretary at the Curia until the canonical installation of Archbishop Joseph Mercieca in the Metropolitan See of Malta. Immediately after that occasion, namely, on the 16th December 1976, Archbishop Mercieca appointed him Vicar General of the Diocese<sup>92</sup>. This appointment was a source of great pleasure for Mgr Bonnici after so many years of dedicated service to the local church both at the Curia as well as elsewhere. He was then seventy-four years old, almost two thirds of his life-span had been hallmarked by his attachment to various responsibilities entrusted to his care by his superiors.

The 1970s brought out, once more, perhaps even in a more prominent perspective than before, an aspect of his life that had enticed him during the early years of his priesthood and, to some extent, remained with him for ever afterwards – Journalism. As stated before, he managed to maintain interest in the various media of communication, being fully aware of their importance in present-day life. At this late stage in his life, he decided to intensify still further his contribution to journalism. He joined forces with his successor in the editing of *Lehen is-Sewwa*, namely, Dr Herbert Ganado. The latter had been already contributing a series of articles to the said paper which proved to be highly appreciated by the reading public. His pen-name is, by now, well known: “Inhobb Nitkellem Maghkom”. Mgr Bonnici was extremely impressed by Ganado's style and approach and decided to follow suit. The main difference between the two was that the latter directed his attention to present to the general public a vast panorama of topics whereby past achievements of our ancestors could be validly and adequately appreciated. On many occasions, moreover, he inserted his own personal observations and autobiographical insights which rendered his style highly acceptable to the readers. This series of articles began to appear in *Lehen is-Sewwa* on the 13th January 1970. The last one was published almost four months before his death, namely, on the 12th May 1978. These articles were a normal fortnightly feature of this paper. A survey of their contents gave forth a major classification of their subject matter in seven

<sup>92</sup> AAM, *Atti Civili* 1973-1977, 61r.

distinct categories. These are: Folk Traditions, Devotional Life, Local Civil and Ecclesiastical History, Sites and Buildings of historical importance, Biographical Accounts of various personalities, Important Institutions and finally the Order of St John. A perusal of their titles and the Analytical Index annexed to Bonnici's Bibliography may throw more light in this regard<sup>93</sup>.

Although deeply immersed in boosting up *Lehen is-Sewwa* through these articles, he also managed to find time to provide further original research. Concurrently, he was preparing and editing the third volume of the *History of the Church in Malta* which was printed in 1975, while, at the request of the *Christus Rex Society*, he compiled a descriptive short account of Don Carlo Manchè's life, his former fellow companion at the University of Malta<sup>94</sup>.

The last stage of his literary activity is suddenly earmarked by an unpredictable involvement in pastures new, which no one would have expected at his age. This enterprise clearly manifests the innermost values that had always been present throughout his life – his intimate love of the Christian community. The last service he was planning to provide was nothing else but a practical help enabling everyone to understand the language used by the Church in its daily life and in communicating its message to each and every individual. In fact, he had decided to name this work *Ilsien il-Knisja* as it aimed to explain the terms in frequent use in various branches of the theological sciences, namely, Dogmatic and Moral Theology, Canon Law, Patrology, Liturgy, Ascetics as well as short biographical accounts of important persons mentioned in Holy Scripture and in Church History. This concise encyclopedia meant to familiarise ordinary man in church life and culture. However, he never managed to send this work to the printer. He had started working on it sometime about 1972. He even had planned to publish, at a later stage, a supplement giving more information on Saints, Popes, Doctors of the Church and other important aspects which he would have missed to include in the previous work. Attempts to publish *Ilsien il-Knisja* have, so far, failed to arrive at any conclusion. It is to be hoped that this last work of Mgr Bonnici may some day be also included among his publications.

After his appointment as Vicar General, Mgr Bonnici was constantly worried about something which he inadvertently missed to provide on that occasion. For a gentleman of his calibre, this meant a lot. He was looking forward to the fiftieth anniversary since his ordination to the priesthood on which occasion he meant to hold a befitting gathering for the Curia personnel whom he missed to compliment

<sup>93</sup> The Bibliography mentioned in Note 82 gives a complete list of the *LS* articles on pages 25 to 33.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 221.

on the occasion of the above-mentioned appointment. But God willed otherwise. By the 28th September 1978 – the day of the long-awaited anniversary – his health had seriously deteriorated. I concelebrated mass with him in his study. It was his last eucharistic celebration! He was deeply moved on that occasion. Soon after the mass, he had a courtesy visit from Archbishop Merceica and Archbishop Emeritus Gonzi as well as some Curia Officials. A visit which he greatly appreciated. Among his papers, there is still a box filled with letters sent to him on this occasion attesting the high regard in which he was held by all those who knew him, particularly fellow priests, some of whom were his former students. Almost a month afterwards, the end of his human existence arrived which he accepted with full serenity notwithstanding the pain that he had to endure. Christian fortitude sustained him till the end which arrived during the early hours of the 21st October 1978<sup>95</sup>. Clergy and people showed him their highest respects at the funeral held in his beloved St John's Co-Cathedral and all hoped that the Almighty had already bestowed on this beloved servant of his Church and Country the merited reward.

It was indeed a great pleasure to learn that a good amount of the tools that had helped him promote his priestly and academic life – his books – passed over, as he determined in his last-will, to the institution that has the mission of promoting the same ideals that formed the backbone of his existence to future generations, namely, the Seminary.

Mgr Bonnici – as I see him – presents an important synthesis portraying in a vivid manner a pattern of life of extreme importance, wherever a priest is involved. He has been successful to keep intertwined and interwoven together the priestly and academic vocations manifesting clearly that these can safely proceed together without any fear whatsoever of detracting each other's importance as both help mankind in aiming at higher ideals in the daily vicissitudes of human experience.

To end, I quote the words of an Englishman who was in Malta in 1953, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Lehen is-Sewwa* – Mr Douglas Hyde, who, during his short stay in the island, met Mgr Bonnici on various occasions. I was recently informed that he left an excellent description of our former President, referring to him as the “Smiling Priest”. This is indeed a most befitting portrayal and tribute to the man we are commemorating to-day. All who knew him can attest how much he merited that description not only at that stage but all throughout his life. May that smile, the beacon of the innermost Christian and academic values that enhanced and gave validity to his life, continue to enlighten our horizons.

<sup>95</sup> Msida Parish Archives, *LD VIII*, 99r, No. 13255.

**A DOM MAURO INGUANEZ O. S. B.**

**Celebrandosi un festino ad onor suo  
NEL CIRCOLO GIOVANILE "DOMUS PIO X."**

Su, cantiamo un inno pio  
A chi grato si mostrò  
Verso l' almo suol natio,  
Che fanciullo tanto amò.  
Già l' Invitta Città le opere  
Generose tue stimò;  
Ed il suo benefattore  
In Te, Mauro, ravvisò.

Là, sul monte di Cassino,  
Al gran Dio rivolto il cor  
E la mente nel divino  
Libro assorta del Signor,  
Tu pensavi a la tua Senglea  
Con dolcezza e con amor,  
E bramavi coronarla  
Di più verdi lauri ancor.

Verso noi propizia Roma  
Già mostrossi in altri dì,  
Quando a cingersi la chioma  
De la Vergine assenti.  
Al tuo zelo entusiastico  
Il suo ardor pur essa unì,  
E di nuovi onori e glorie  
Questa terra rivestì.

CHCO. ARTURO BONNICI

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*The young poet.*