Alfons Maria Galea (1861 – 1941)

Fr Hermann Duncan

Alfons Maria Galea was born in Valletta on 23 April 1861 to Peter Paul and Maria Carmela Galea. Alfons Maria was the youngest among his six siblings. He was better known as Sur Fons, and was a philanthropist, a senator, and a Maltese author.

His early education took place in his own home at his parent’s house, taught by the teacher and writer Annibale Freca, who worked as a clerk for his father for some years. When Alfons Maria turned eight, he was sent to the Jesuits in Gozo where he studied for eight years, and then moved on to the Jesuit College in Marseille in France.

At the age of nineteen, when his father retired, he took over the business as a fabrics dealer where he worked for 75 years between the years 1881 until 1896. At the age of thirty two, he got married to Elizabeth Asphar who hailed from an Indian family and who also had a similar business of textiles and precious stones. They had five children, one of whom became a sister. Three years after his marriage, he decided to close the business as he felt that this was not his true calling and began to distribute much of his property and wealth to charitable institutes. Among the institutes he helped were the Salesians of Don Bosco to whom he gave land so that they could build the Salesian Institute in Sielma, where he moved when he got married. The building was inaugurated in 1904 and served as a recreation centre for young children where they could learn doctrine. Similar centres were also built in Zejtun, Mosta, Cospicua and Gozo.

In 1939 he set up the St Elizabeth Institute of Franciscan Sisters in Sielma to cater for young girls, to have a place where they could learn. In addition he also provided financial assistance to the Blue Sisters Hospital and the Good Shepherd Convent in Balzan. Sur Fons contributed greatly to the missions and in 1996 was appointed treasurer of the Mission Committee. To help people become more aware of poverty around the world, and to enable them to offer their contributions, he began publishing a monthly magazine with records of the ‘Propaganda Fide’.

For many years, Sur Fons was the President of the Anglo Maltese Bank, and later became the treasurer of the Bishop’s Curia and the Poor Clare’s nuns (Klarissi) whose monastery is situated in Saint Julian’s.

Alfons Maria Galea worked tirelessly to aid workers, the poor and the weak by making his voice heard on institutions of charity. He was promoted to Chevalier of St Gregory in 1913 and in 1920 he became a secret ‘server’ to the Pope. Between 1921 and 1927, he was a Maltese senator. Sadly in 1941 at the age of 80, he passed to Eternal rest in the ‘Propaganda Fide’

Alfons Maria Galea was a prolific writer. Among his publications we find the following:

- La Chiesa e la Scienza - Torino 1894
- Thal Tygiet Matri - 1925
- Tajjin in Gwja mill - Biegunja u Tajjam il-tal - Appostoli 1934

Alfons Maria Galea and an old Maltese coin commemorating him