

An Evaluation of the Episcopate of Archbishop Mauro Caruana through his Pastoral Letters (1915-1943)

“Mgr Caruana was a religious, and a religious must seek perfection. Was he a true religious? Yes, beyond all doubt. Elevated to the episcopal dignity and arrayed in episcopal robes, he never set aside the religious spirit.”¹ Mgr Galea, one of his closest collaborators, so defined him in the funerary oration he gave in his honour. To his contemporaries, however, the Benedictine spirit praised by Galea, was often a source of frustration. Proud of their Italian spirit, the majority of the local clergy always remained suspicious of the pro-British bishop, an outsider the colonial power had imposed upon them.² During his lifetime, he was to face a good share of controversy. Yet he devotedly led the local Church for 28 years through turbulent times, as Europe went from the grips of one Great War to a second. After his demise, he was largely forgotten,

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¹ Emmanuel Galea, *Funerary Oration*, ACM Fondo Galea No.2 No. 47.

² Cfr “Nota del Card. Rampolla, Segretario di Stato, al Generale Simmons (20 marzo 1890); Risposta del Generale Simmons (26 marzo 1890),” in *Enchiridion dei Concordati. due secoli di storia dei rapporti Chiesa-Stato* (Bologna: EDB, 2003), 1009-1017; Cfr AA.EE.SS., *Inghilterra IV, 1930-1944*, Pos. 230, fol. 50r.: Prot: 462/36: Vaticano, 11 Febbraio 1936: Pacelli a Rossi: “Mi permetto di far rilevare che trattandosi di un Coadiutore con successione occorre che la Santa Sede, in base alle convenzione del 26 Marzo 1890, prima di procedere alla nomina ufficiale ne dia avviso preventivo al Governo Inglese per assicurarsi di incontrarne il gradimento.”

neglected in the silence of his tomb, his merits largely ignored in keeping with a historiographical tradition often unwilling to go beyond the polemical. Our people remember only his successor, Mgr Michael Gonzi. Although Gonzi was not among Caruana's proposed candidates when the latter insisted on having an auxiliary or coadjutor to assist him, the Holy See ultimately chose Gonzi,³ a decision Caruana accepted, and was ready to sustain.⁴ Studies on Caruana have, so far, remained limited, the few exceptions usually linked to the politico-religious question, the first of a number that were to mark the contemporary history of the Church in twentieth century Malta. The apologetics have broken this silence, such as the sketches published by Michael Galea.⁵ However, a serious biography of this bishop, who led the Church at a formative moment of our nation, remains lacking. We here propose a reading of this figure through a brief study of his pastoral letters, conscious that given the specific theological aims of such a tool, it can only permit, at best, a partial reading of the historical reality.

To his own surprise and that of the local clergy, Caruana found himself bishop of the Church in Malta - a strongly ultramontane Church, proud of its apostolic tradition, conscious of its authoritative role, and indeed its responsibility, in safeguarding the catholic identity of the Maltese people. In a British island

³ Cfr AA.EE.SS., *Inghilterra IV*, 1930-1944, Pos. 230, fasc. 74, fol.38r: Appunto senza data: prot: 3783/32: "1. Mons. Robinson, Padre Carta, Mons. Gonzi sono completamente d'accordo nel ritenere che mons. Caruana è troppo debole di salute e di carattere e che sarebbe opportunissimo sostituirlo. 2. In archivio esistono informazioni (già a suo tempo comunicate alla Concistoriale) secondo le quali risulterebbe che il candidato di Mons. Caruana per l'ufficio di ausiliare, cioè mons. Galea, suo vicario generale, non è davvero la persona adatta a rimediare la situazione religiosa di Malta che ha bisogno di non poche cure ed iniziative. 3: Tutti gli informatori fanno grandi lodi di Mons. Gonzi, il quale è attivo, colto, prudente, zelante. Padre Carta ritiene che sarebbe molto opportuno trasferire Mons. Gonzi a Malta e non sarebbe difficile trovare un altro candidato per la piccola diocesi di Gozo. Dai documenti che sono nel nostro archivio si deduce che Mons. Gonzi durante il periodo della così detta questione maltese, si è portato veramente bene." Paolo Galea was the vicar general of the diocese of Malta.

AA.EE.SS., *Inghilterra IV*, 1930-1944, Pos. 230, fasc. 74, fol. 48r: Prot. 225/31: Roma, 5 febbraio 1936: Rossi a Pacelli: "Questa S. Congregazione, anche ulteriormente considerata la cosa, sarebbe pure dello stesso parere, e pensa che, nel caso, si potrebbe rivolgere l'attenzione su la persona di S.E. Mons. Michele Gonzi, attuale Vescovo di Gozo."

⁴ Cfr AA.EE.SS., *Inghilterra IV*, 1930-1944, Pos. 230, fasc. 74, fol. 84r: Prot: 225/31: Roma, 4 dicembre 1936, Lettera del Card. Rossi al Card. Eugenio Pacelli: "Mi pregio poi aggiungere che lo stesso Ecc.mo Mons. Caruana, venuto recentemente nella Segreteria di questa S. congregazione, ha espresso il desiderio di avere per Coadiutore il suddetto Mons. Gonzi ed ha confermato che l'attuale Governatore inglese di Malta sarebbe ben disposto verso di lui."

⁵ Cfr Michael Galea, *Mons. Dom Mawru Caruana (1867-1943)*. "Fl-ewwel centinarju ta' l-ordinazzjoni tieghu," *Lehen is-Sewwa* 24.8.1991-2.11.1991.

colony, it was a truly nationalistic institution, aware of its patriotic calling, an island held by a non-Catholic power. However, the Church in Malta was increasingly finding itself in the midst of a society not immune to the winds of change: remnants of a militant liberalism and laicism, emerging communism, and rampant nationalism that were sweeping the continent.

In his 28 years of episcopate, Caruana addressed 89 pastoral letters to his Metropolitan chapter, clergy, and people. He published one with Giovanni M. Camilleri and nine with Michael Gonzi as Bishop of Gozo. He wrote his last pastoral letter with Gonzi, who by then was his Coadjutor.

Thus, we propose two questions to assess Caruana's pastoral vision:

1. What model of the Church emerges from these pastoral letters? How did the Church specifically respond to challenges ("ad intra" and "ad extra") presented by the evolving socio-political milieu of the time?
2. How does the figure of Caruana emerge through his pastoral letters?

A quick glance at these pastoral letters is enough to show the wide variety of issues they cover. It is only for the sake of simplicity that we here propose to consider them under two broad perspectives, to answer these questions. Nevertheless, the two areas remain closely knit, for the bishop is always addressing the one and same flock. In both cases, the aim of these pastoral letters was both formative and disciplinary.

The first are those addressing issues that we may define as "ad intra":

- i. Pastoral letters expounding doctrine or addressing specific moral issues usually motivated by particular events in the life of the Church, such as feast days or specific liturgical seasons as, for example, Lent.
- ii. Those addressing issues pertaining to discipline or custom (such as the proclamation of a Pastoral Visit), matters related to clerical life, or those about liturgical practice.
- iii. Those motivated by important moments in the life of the Church, such as the nomination of a bishop to his diocese, the celebration of a Jubilee, or the visit of an important relic.

The second category may be defined "ad extra," due to the nature of the issues treated and not due to the audience addressed, since this coincides with most of the population, in an island where Catholics constituted the very vast majority.

Under this second category, we shall consider those letters dealing with political situations, either because they are motivated by events of particular importance in the island's political life, or because they address specific problems in Church-State relations.

In his first pastoral letter, the newly appointed Caruana introduced himself to his diocese, expressing his surprise at his nomination as bishop of Malta during

his stop in Malta on his way to Brazil. While voicing his sadness at having to leave the monastic family and way of life, he expressed his joy at serving the people of the country where he had first come to know Christ. The people in Malta were thus neither completely unknown to him, nor was he to them. He praised the Pauline origins of the Church in Malta and the purity of faith it had preserved. He based his pastoral letter precisely on this theme. The purity and integrity of this faith found a double expression: in the beliefs and in the fruits of faith. Referring to the Great War ravaging Europe at that time, a war between Christian brothers, he arrived to the climax with an exhortation for that greatest fruit of faith: charity. He concluded this first pastoral letter with the consecration of his pastoral mission and the whole diocese to Mary – a consecration that enveloped his episcopal ministry completely, as noted by Mgr Galea in his funerary oration.⁶ In fact, in his very last pastoral letter, issued together with Bishop Gonzi at the end of the Second World War, Caruana again consecrated the whole diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

“Ad intra”

i. Doctrine and Morals

This category considers the customary pastoral letters tied to particular seasons in the liturgical calendar: those in preparation for Lent, a lesser number for Pentecost, the Epiphany, particular Marian feasts, and about two for Christmas. In these pastoral letters, Caruana addressed the particular needs of his community, by presenting a virtue to be nourished, or a vice to be rooted out. He followed a tri-partite scheme: a presentation of the virtue or vice, a scriptural consideration, and particular applications. The Lenten pastoral letter always ended with specific guidelines for days of fasting and abstinence, and works of piety.⁷

The pastoral letter for Pentecost in 1920 is particularly significant. It is of a moral nature with strong political overtones, typical of the intransigent mentality of the era: the Spirit of God is opposed to the spirit of the world – a spirit that seeks to alienate the poor through moral dangers such as theatrical shows, dances and profane literature instead of inspiring charity. Caruana calls upon the Maltese to defend the rights of God and His Church, aware of the particular political circumstances that the island was going through and the growth of an ever clearer political and national consciousness.

⁶ Cfr Emmanuele Galea, *Funerary Oration*, in ACM, Fondo Galea, 2, 47.

⁷ Cfr 23 February 1916 etc.

The intransigent mentality that permeates these letters is not surprising, for such was the rhetoric of the era. Frequently, Caruana returned to an exposition of the virtue of faith.⁸ He often condemned attacks on faith by the evils ravaging contemporary society, especially through the circulation of what were considered morally unacceptable books and dangerous newspapers imported from abroad, modern dances, indecent attire (referring to a particular incident when a ballerina appeared dressed as a nun with a crucifix in hand, during a show by foreign gymnasts). With great rhetoric, the bishop cries, “E questo ripetiamo in Malta, nella Cattolica Malta! Ma se Malta è Cattolica, se i Maltesi sono Cattolici! Se l’individuo, la famiglia, la società si vantano di essere Cattolici, tutti, tutti dobbiamo essere mossi da un sol pensiero, da un sol desiderio, la conversione ed il trionfo della Religione, tutti devono unirsi in santa lega [...]”⁹ Such pastoral letters reflect the Church’s conception of itself at the time, in line with Pius XI’s vision of a militant Church, a totalitarian Church, under the guidance of Christ the King.

Of major concern was the circulation of the “cattiva stampa”¹⁰ that propagated anti-clerical sentiments, protestant ideas, and the spread of communist and socialist ideas. In the late twenties, as Russian Bolshevism embarked on its anti-papal campaign, communism became the greatest demon to exorcise from society. In a letter specifically dedicated to the subject, Caruana defined communism by using Pius XI’s words: “Il primo e più grande pericolo è certamente il comunismo in tutte le sue forme e gradazioni, pericolo grande, totale e pericolo universale.”¹¹ Caruana invited the faithful to join in a holy crusade against this enemy. Clearly, the infiltration of socialist ideas in Malta¹² spread class hatred and hatred against the Church. The Church was accused of using charitable institutions to keep the alienated flock under its control. In this regard, these pastoral letters also testify to Caruana’s social concerns, such as that announcing the establishment of the “Comitati Parrocchiali Pro Pauperibus.”¹³

Only suitable formation could counteract the spread of these evils. Caruana understood that a Christian education was first to be imparted at home. From

⁸ Cfr 3 February 1923, 11 February 1942, 24 February 1943.

⁹ 10 February 1925.

¹⁰ 21 November 1922.

¹¹ 2 February 1937.

¹² Cfr 2 February 1927.

¹³ 23 December 1931, Cfr also the Pastoral letter published on 13 October 1934, on Missions day instituted by Pius XI, in which Caruana instructs the faithful on their duties towards Catholic missions, for this was not simply another occasion for collecting funds, as insinuated by some.

the very first year of his episcopate, and on a number of subsequent occasions, Caruana dedicates pastoral letters to the subject of the family, for whom the model was the Holy Family of Nazareth.¹⁴ He returned to this subject on the 2 February 1928, condemning bad press, immodest fashion, and socialist ideas propagating class-hatred, which in the name of progress and false social love, were destroying the individual, family and society. He then spoke of the parents' duty in giving a Christian education to their children, as the best way to root out these vices. He appealed to preachers to include a special sermon about this during the Lenten exercises. The need for a better catechetical formation¹⁵ was also clear in Caruana's mind.

Caruana also took concrete steps to counteract the influence of bad press and offset the threat of this island losing its faith. In the pastoral letter of the 15 August 1928, he announced that by a decree dated 17 July he had established the "Giunta diocesana per la buona stampa" responsible for publishing the newspaper *Lehen is-Sewwa*. As the local Church was facing an open struggle with certain politicians, this newspaper could spread the truth to defend religion. In a special reference to the attacks against his Vicar general, Caruana, once again, lamented the dissemination of socialist ideas in Malta and that these ideas fomented class-hatred and disdain towards the clergy.

Another challenge was the availability of the new technologies of the time and specifically, certain cinemas which he denounced as "una scuola di corruzione."¹⁶ Other forms of recreation, such as certain theatrical shows and dances, were promulgating immorality, and propagating a spirit of religious indifference, especially as regards the sanctification of Sundays and feast days.¹⁷

Refuge was to be found in Mary. Significantly, his last pastoral letter, issued, as noted above, with Gonzi as Coadjutor, on the 10 November 1943, is dedicated to Marian devotion. The Bishops order the consecration of the diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as they augur not only material, but also spiritual progress after the war. Such consecrations were not only an integral part of popular piety, (Caruana himself had asked for the consecration of families to the Sacred Heart of Jesus),¹⁸ but also an effective instrument in ascertaining the primacy of religion in the face of the threat posed by an ever-growing militant secularism.

¹⁴ Cfr 28 December 1915.

¹⁵ Cfr 21 February 1936.

¹⁶ 27 February 1935.

¹⁷ Cfr 9 February 1934.

¹⁸ Cfr 9 June 1917.

ii. Discipline or Customs

The pastoral letter dedicated to liturgical music,¹⁹ is of particular importance and considered as one of Caruana's very best, not only because of its originality, but also because of his expertise in this area. Previously, Caruana had acted as choirmaster at his abbey. He enjoyed great fame in Scotland where he assisted in the formation of choirs throughout this country.²⁰ Such a pastoral letter, written nearly within a year of his appointment, stands as testimony to his courage and willingness to reform the Church entrusted to his care - certainly no easy task when one considers that here he touched one of the cornerstones of the ever-sensitive traditions of the Maltese "festa." Such a bold move would be highly polemical today. It certainly did nothing to endear him to his fold a hundred years ago. In principle, what Caruana desired was nothing revolutionary in itself - nothing other than the implementation of that reform desired by Pius X in *Tra le Sollecitudini*,²¹ thirteen years before. This reform proved difficult in the face of the cacophony of theatrical music that the Maltese were so proud of, and indeed regarded as an essential part of their parochial identity.

With his desire for reform, Caruana emerged as a progressive bishop during the first years of his episcopal ministry. As expected, the early years proved intensive in this regard. These pastoral letters provide only a partial picture, as he announced other measures through circular letters. Changes in various aspects included administrative reform, particularly legislation ordering the setting up of a new office within the Diocesan Curia regulating mass (legacies),²² and

¹⁹ Cfr 12 March 1916.

²⁰ Cfr Michael Galea, *Lehen is-Sewwa*, 24.8.1991:8.

²¹ Cfr Pius X, Motu proprio *Ta le Sollecitudini*, 22 November 1903, 5-6: "The Church has always recognized and favored the progress of the arts, admitting to the service of religion everything good and beautiful discovered by genius in the course of ages - always, however, with due regard to the liturgical laws. Consequently, modern music is also admitted to the Church, since it, too, furnishes compositions of such excellence, sobriety and gravity, that they are worthy of the liturgical functions. Still, since modern music has risen mainly to serve profane uses, greater care must be taken that modern-style musical compositions admitted in the Church may contain nothing profane, be free from reminiscences of motifs adopted in the theatres, and be not fashioned even in their external forms after the manner of profane pieces. Among the different kinds of modern music, that which appears less suitable for accompanying the functions of public worship is the theatrical style, which was in the greatest vogue, especially in Italy, during the last century. This of its very nature is diametrically opposed to Gregorian chant and classic polyphony, and therefore to the most important law of all good sacred music. Besides the intrinsic structure, the rhythm and what is known as the conventionalism of this style adapt themselves but badly to the requirements of true liturgical music."

²² Cfr 10 March 1918.

later the reform of a diocesan tax.²³ New published regulations regarded mass stipends. Such measures showed that he was truly concerned about the priests' well-being, as for example when he ordered the increase for mass stipends to "due scellini."²⁴ Other areas of reform concerned the "munus docendi," in its liturgical and catechetical dimensions, specifically preaching.²⁵

Other reform measures affecting clerical life, involved priestly formation, another important pillar of the Pian reform, promoted in the face of the modernist crisis. In this regard, Caruana announced the setting up of a "Fondo per Poveri Chierici," so that young men from poor families would not be precluded from answering to the priestly vocation.²⁶ In another pastoral letter, Caruana took the opportunity offered by the feast of the Epiphany to instruct the faithful on the zeal with which they should cultivate priestly vocation. He ordered a special collection to finance the costs for works undertaken in the Seminary housed at San Calcedonio in Floriana (already moved there by his predecessor Mgr Pietro Pace), so as to separate the minor seminary from the major one, according to the dictates of the Holy See, and also support poor clerics in their studies.²⁷

As to Church discipline, one must mention two specific pastoral letters: one regarding the promulgation of the 1917 Code,²⁸ the other, concerning local diocesan legislation, this being the joint promulgation of the decrees of the Regional Council.²⁹

iii. Significant Occasions in the Life of the Universal Church

A third of Caruana's pastoral letters were motivated by significant instances in the life of the Church.

On a universal level: the celebration of the Jubilee year³⁰ of 1925 promulgated by Pius XI through his Constitution *Infinita Dei Misericordia*. Caruana reminded

²³ Cfr 24 December 1918.

²⁴ 4 July 1918.

²⁵ Cfr 16 October 1919, 24 November 1919.

²⁶ Cfr 5 November 1918.

²⁷ Cfr 6 January 1922.

²⁸ Cfr 15 May 1918.

²⁹ Cfr 30 April 1936.

³⁰ Cfr 8 December 1924; 25 January 1926: The Lenten pastoral letter announces Pius XI's decision to extend the Jubilee year for another year; 21 April 1926. Once again, a pastoral letter on the jubilee year, in which the bishop announces a number of pilgrimages within the diocese to acquire once again the Jubilee indulgence. Of particular interest is the call upon parish priests to encourage the faithful to pray for the greatly persecuted Church in Mexico.

his flock of the need to convert, especially since the world had not found peace after the Great War and refused to seek it in Christ, the prince of peace. Only the cross could seal treaties and create true fraternity among peoples. In this light, Pius XI called upon the faithful to pray “for the peace of Christ, in the Kingdom of Christ.” Caruana also announced a national pilgrimage to Rome, while setting the conditions for the reception of indulgences in the diocese. Another pastoral letter issued in 1933 marked the Extraordinary Jubilee of Redemption.³¹

These pastoral letters also commemorated significant moments in the life of the Holy Father. Such was the one on the 50th anniversary of the priestly ordination of the Pius XI,³² to which Caruana also tied the Feast of Christ the King as a chance for the Maltese to demonstrate their faith publicly in a spirit of reparation for the attacks against the Church. This pastoral letter, a panegyric on the figure of the Pope, Vicar of Christ, successor of Peter, the principle of Unity, probably intended to show his detractors, that the Church stood triumphant, ready for the battle ahead.

The pastoral letter of the 23 January 1922 announced the death of the Holy Father Benedict XV. Another pastoral letter issued on the 11 February 1939, on the death of Pius XI described the latter as “Papa delle Missioni, Papa della Scienza, Papa della Conciliazione, Papa dell’Azione Cattolica, Papa dei Concordati... E noi siamo in grado di aggiungere che la nostra Malta occupava nel cuore del Santo Padre un posto distinto.”³³

The signing of the Lateran Treaty in 1929, and thus the resolution of the Roman Question, a conflict that for decades had marked the Catholic conscience worldwide, resulted in great jubilation. Caruana interpreted this event as a gift of divine providence. In this jubilee year of the Pope’s ordination, this treaty was to mark in history the names of Pius XI, of the King of Italy, of Pietro Gasparri and of the Duce, Mussolini. Caruana ordered the celebration of this event in the diocese on the 13 May. As a gift to the Pope, Caruana asked for funds for the completion of the church of Saint Gregory in Sliema.

³¹ Cfr 17 February 1933: Lenten Pastoral Letter on the occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Redemption proclaimed by Pius XI, dedicated to a meditation on the act of Redemption, prayer for catholic missions, and for peace on earth. 18 April 1934: Pastoral letter on the extension of the Jubilee for a further year through the Bull *Quod superiori anno*; 18 February 1935: Pastoral letter proclaiming the diocesan pilgrimages so that the faithful can obtain further indulgences, granted by Pius XI on the occasion of the aforementioned jubilee of redemption.

³² Cfr 20 December 1928; 1 March 1929: Pastoral letter on the Jubilee proclaimed by Pius XI to mark his 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood.

³³ 31 March 1929.

The issue of pastoral letters also marked significant events in the life of the local Church: Caruana's first solemn entry according to custom in his Cathedral Church,³⁴ the celebration of the First Maltese Regional Council,³⁵ local anniversaries such as the commemoration of the XXIV International Eucharistic Congress of 1913,³⁶ and the solemn crowning of the icon of the Damascene Madonna.³⁷

Pastoral letters also announced the establishment of new parishes: Santa Venera,³⁸ *Sacro Cuor* in Sliema,³⁹ Gzira,⁴⁰ Saint Gregory in Sliema,⁴¹ an exception being that of Saint Sebastian in Qormi,⁴² for which only an edict was published.

Other pastoral letters were linked to the celebration of the saints, such as the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of Saint Joseph as patron of the Universal Church,⁴³ or the seventh centenary of Saint Francis of Assisi's death,⁴⁴ or the visit to Malta of the relic of Saint Francis Xavier's arm.⁴⁵

³⁴ Cfr 31 March 1915.

³⁵ Cfr 21 April 1935: Joint pastoral letter announcing the First Regional Maltese Council to study themes tied to faith, discipline, cult, and temporal goods of the Church; 12 May 1935: The publication of the decree of convocation of the First Regional Maltese Council received from Card. Lépicier, Pontifical Legate.

³⁶ Cfr 20 December 1917: A pastoral letter motivated by the inauguration of a monument commemorating the XXIV Eucharistic Congress of 1913, a high moment which had deeply marked the consciousness of contemporary Maltese Catholicism. 25 December 1937: Christmas pastoral letter in which Caruana issues directives for the celebration of a Diocesan Eucharistic Congress in 1938, commemoration the 25th anniversary of the celebration in these islands of the XXIV International Eucharistic Congress, and the nomination of a committee for this occasion.

³⁷ Cfr 5 October 1931.

³⁸ Cfr 4 September 1918.

³⁹ Cfr 24 September 1918.

⁴⁰ Cfr 15 May 1921.

⁴¹ Cfr 27 November 1940.

⁴² Cfr 25 October 1935.

⁴³ Cfr 12 March 1920.

⁴⁴ Cfr 8 September 1927: A pastoral letter at the end of the celebrations marking the seventh centenary from the death of Saint Francis of Assisi. Caruana takes the opportunity to encourage the faithful to imitate two great virtues of the saint: his willingness to fight the battles of the Lord against the spirit of the world, and his obedience towards Mother Church.

⁴⁵ Cfr 8 May 1924.

“Ad extra”

i. Significant Events in the Life of the Island

The following letters, marking memorable occasions in the period, were issued.

A social pastoral letter was issued on the 21 November 1917; in this letter Caruana expressed his concern for the growing poverty, and the social turmoil that gripped the island because of the increase in the price of bread, the war, and the increased taxes imposed by the colonial power. The British Colonial government had failed to match the rising cost of living with adequate wage increases to the dockyard and government workers. Food provisions were also inadequate to meet the needs of the population. The belief spread among the population that the grain importers and the millers were using the dire situation to their benefit, increasing the price of bread to their profit. All this came to a head during the tragic uprising of the “Sette Giugno” (7 June 1919) five months previously, during which a number of riots had taken place, and the British troops had fired on the crowd killing four. These riots were the result of the growing economic and political distress among the Maltese, and eventually led the British to grant the island the 1921 Constitution.

This dire situation sets the context for this pastoral letter. The local Church now responded by setting up a “Fondo dei Poveri.” On a universal level, it also showed that the Church in Malta was fully in tune with the papal peace effort as regards the war, of which a main pillar was humanitarian concern.

Another aspect of the political and social sphere, that will continue to feature as an occasion for the issue of pastoral letters, is the calling of the people to vote in a general election. Experience had by then shown the Church that participation in the democratic process, through the casting of one’s vote, was a matter of grave responsibility for the faithful. Christians were called to promote political action in line with the teachings of the Magisterium which illuminated a Christian ethic considered to be the best means of promoting the common good. Experience in Italy had shown the Church that a strategy of “non expedit” would allow clear ground for parties holding values in opposition to the Church. By that time such a negative policy had been done away with, and the Holy See allowed in nearby Italy for the creation of parties with a Christian inspiration, particularly Don Luigi Sturzo’s Partito Popolare in 1919.

By 1924, totalitarian systems like Fascism were raising their head. Within such a context, and given the growing spirit of nationalism in Malta, on the 2 May 1924, just before a general election, the bishop reminded the faithful of the responsibility to cast their vote to elect candidates who were truly ready to

sacrifice themselves for the common good. He reminded the clergy that canon law prohibited a priest from presenting his candidacy without the bishop's explicit permission (Can. 139 §4). He ordered priests who cared for souls to stir away from partisan politics that not only damaged their mission but also provided opportunities for the enemy to attack the Church. Finally, he called on parish priests to substitute the prayer for rain during mass with one for all necessities.

Malta formed part of an empire, so royal celebrations were considered a significant occasion to be celebrated even by and within churches. Such was dictated not only by protocol, but also as a sign of fostering a good relationship between the Church and the colonial powers. On the 29 January 1936, the occasion being the ascension to the throne of King Edward VIII, Caruana's pastoral letter reminded his faithful of their duties towards the monarch and ordered the singing of a *Te Deum*. Given the dramatic circumstances through which Edward VIII abdicated the throne, another letter dated 26 April 1937 marked the crowning of King George VI.

Trouble was on the horizon, and following Italy's entry into the war on the side of the Axis on 10 June 1940, Malta soon found itself immersed in the Second World War. Already less than a month before, on the 19 May 1940, a collective pastoral letter was issued by Caruana and Gonzi about the war, reminding the faithful, in a strong patriotic voice, of the evils carried out by the Reich. It called upon all to pray for peace through the victory of the Allies, to follow the directives given by the Civil and Military authorities, and "a mostrare coi fatti la vostra lealtà verso la Corona Britannica in questa gravissima ora di prova." As expected, a number of pastoral letters were issued during this troubled period, calling for prayers for the victory of the Allies, such as the Lenten Pastoral Letter, issued on the 14 February 1941. It is significant to note that from this point onwards, pastoral letters started to be issued only in Maltese. Since the Italians were now the enemy, understandably, the long-standing custom of publishing these letters in Italian was discontinued. Further prayers were called for through the collective letter issued on the 31 December 1941.

Malta suffered the worst aerial attacks in 1942. Many churches were bombarded to demoralize the population, and food supplies were drying up. On the 28 April 1942, a collective pastoral letter contained recommendations for this time of war. This was occasioned by the greater rationing of bread announced by the Government. The bishops called upon the faithful to keep calm, to offer this sacrifice as a means of helping the empire, and to help all the destitute among them. Following the entry of the *Konvoj ta' Santa Marija* on the 15 August 1942,

averting famine and surrender, on the 25 August 1942 a collective pastoral letter was issued ordering prayers of thanksgiving and for the repose of the victims of this war.

ii. Specific Problems Arising in the Relationship between Church and State

As already discussed, the period following the First World War ushered in a growth in the nationalistic consciousness of the Maltese. Unfortunately this also coincided with a straining of the Church-State relationship, given the trouble stirred up by Gerald Strickland (1861-1940). The whole issue has been widely studied,⁴⁶ but can also be read through a number of pastoral letters issued through the whole crisis.

Marking a significant milestone on the path to achieving nationhood is a pastoral letter of great significance. This letter was issued on the 8 May 1921, on the occasion of the granting of a modified form of self-government to the Maltese people. It testifies to the emerging difficulties in relations between the local Church authorities and the British. Here Caruana takes a liturgical occurrence, Pentecost, to voice the bishops' concern that the British ignored the Maltese National Assembly's request to enshrine the clause establishing the Catholic Religion as the religion of the Maltese Government in the newly granted Constitution. It shows the strength of Caruana, and speaks volumes about where his loyalties lay. In no way was he going to allow the British to use his position for their own ends. In this pastoral letter, we get the inkling of the tormented relationship that lay ahead, a decade long conflict, the first of many, between Church and State in Malta that were to mark irredeemably the soul of local Catholicism and the birth of this nation state.

A similar note was that issued on the 21 October 1921. This is another pastoral letter motivated by the importance of the historical moment: the inauguration of the first Maltese parliament. Full of patriotic spirit and apologetically strong overtones, Caruana encouraged the Maltese, at this moment of joy at the birth of their nation, to recognize the Catholic roots that had built up the identity of this people; what distinguishes them from other nations was their faith. He also reminded them that they were one family, and thus should shun away from excess in partisan politics, for that which "comincia male, finisce peggio."

⁴⁶ Cfr Cesare Catania, *Strickland, Britain and the Vatican (1929-1932)* (Malta: Aguis & Aguis, 2011); Dominic Fenech, "A Historical Introduction," in *Responsibility and Power in Inter-war Malta: Book One, Endemic Democracy* (Malta: 2005).

On the 2nd November he published a further circular letter, expressing his joy that the Maltese in parliament had declared what the British had not granted: enshrining in the constitution that the Catholic religion is the religion of the Maltese Government.

The acquisition of this modified form of self-government did not come without its moments of crisis as regards the Church-State relationship. The end of the decade was to see the first political-religious struggles that would divide the Maltese, and leave a negative mark on a part of our people's relationship with their Church and their faith. Unfortunately, this was only the prelude to the trouble that would characterize the Church-State relationship for a good part of the 20th century. In a sense, it was the manner in which secularism gained grounds and manifested itself in the alienation of a part of the Maltese from their pastors, preferring their party allegiance, rather than their religious one. On a number of times, the bishops felt the need to call their flock to order.

The Lenten Pastoral letter, issued on the 2 February 1929, brings us into the thick of the politico-religious battle with Gerald Strickland, the leader of the Constitutional Party, and fourth Prime Minister of Malta (1927-32). Caruana opened with a lamentation for the disloyalty shown towards the Church by certain members of the faithful. The island stood locked in a political battle, and the bishop raised his voice against those who had forgotten that the harmony between Church and State assured the prosperity of the State. Disloyalty towards the Church was equal to the negation of religion, which could result in the destruction of civil society. In a passage that was to mark our island's history, Caruana reminded his faithful that the Church had the right not only to our love, but also to our submission to its authority. Disobedience to its laws entailed an attempt on its freedom and jurisdiction, beyond the gravity of sin, punishable in the sacred canons by excommunication *Latae sententiae*, incurred at the very moment of committing the crime, a decision especially reserved to the Holy Father. Caruana, although never mentioning Strickland himself by name, left no doubt to whom he was referring.

The Holy See, or Pius XI himself, made the battle of the Church in Malta his own. He was suffering at home with the growing totalitarian face of Fascism, and wanted to win the battle in Malta, as an example of the Church's strength for others to note. The pastoral letter issued on the 11 July 1929, contained Cardinal Gasparri's letter following Mgr Robinson's visit to the island as Apostolic Delegate. Gasparri reminded the Maltese of the concern caused to Pius XI by the serious situation created by the politico-religious struggle and that the latter had denied an audience to two representatives of the Maltese Government.

Gasparri also reminded the faithful, especially those going on pilgrimage to Rome in August for the jubilee, to intensify their prayers to resolve this grave state of affairs.

Given the present crisis, on the 10 August 1929, the bishops of Malta and Gozo ordered that Sunday the 18 August to be wholly dedicated to the celebration of the Supreme Pontiff in a spirit of filial devotion and in union with the group of Maltese on pilgrimage to Rome and Lourdes.

By the 28 February 1930 victory for the Church was assured. "Roma Locuta est, causa finita!" cried Caruana towards the end of this Lenten pastoral letter. He reminded his flock that although Church and State were independent as regards their spheres of action, nevertheless all authority, as St Paul taught, came from God. It was futile to assert that the Pope had been misinformed, for so did Luther. In strong terms indeed, Caruana reminded his faithful, that whoever refused to obey the Pope and the bishops, refused to obey Christ, and disdained God.

Elections were soon to follow, and on 27 April 1930, he issued a pastoral letter, that was to indelibly mark the history of our nation, on the occasion of the general elections, reminding the faithful that the Church had no business to interfere in politics, other than to defend the rights of religion. In this pastoral letter, bishops Caruana and Gonzi condemned Lord Strickland and his party. They issued three instructions to the faithful on how they were to vote in the upcoming general election:

- 1) The faithful could not vote for Lord Strickland, his party, or those parties who had supported him in the past, under penalty of mortal sin.
- 2) The faithful could not participate as candidates for these parties.
- 3) In conscience, the faithful had the grave duty to vote for those candidates offering the best guarantees for the good of religion and the State.

Priests were to refuse administering the sacraments to those not obeying these instructions, and the bishops asked the faithful to pray. The exceptional character of this pastoral letter can be gauged by the fact that it was published in Maltese, in the printed format of a pastoral letter, and not in the form of the usual pamphlet, other than the customary Italian. On the 3 June 1932, another pastoral letter marking the end of this struggle, which spoke of the act of submission of Lord Strickland and his letter of apology to the Holy Father, was issued.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Malta emerges fully taken up by an intransigent, siege mentality that characterized the Catholic Church during this period. The Church felt her privileged position in society was threatened politically. Through the advancement of liberal, often anti-clerical legislation and the spread of communist ideas, it even felt threatened morally. Changes brought about by the new technologies (the cinema, printing, etc.), changes in fashion and in attitudes made the Church conscious that a new mentality was slowly taking root doctrinally, as it languished in the effects of the modernist crisis. The British authorities fully understood that it was impossible to govern Malta without the co-operation of the Catholic Church, and they sought to respect this principle, regarding it as the very “bedrock of good governance in Malta.”⁴⁷

These pastoral letters give witness to all these challenges the Church was facing. They speak of a Church that truly felt it had exclusive right to a total claim over Maltese society, of being a truly totalitarian system, as Pius XI would define the Catholic Church in his struggle with the Fascist totalitarian claims. It is also a Church conscious of its heritage, its significance to the formation of a Maltese national identity ready to defend at all costs its determining role in Maltese society. The local political situation and the granting of the 1921 Constitution, had assured its direct control on political activity, a role that the Church is ready to defend. The pastoral letters prove this was not decided out of caprice or selfishness, but because it truly believed that respect towards religion guaranteed a true common good of the citizens.

These letters expose the ultramontane heart of Maltese Catholicism, a heart that beat in union with that of Peter, from whom it sought direction and strength. The local Church rose to its Catholic (understood as universal) vocation, without limiting itself to an island mentality, but participated fully in the joys and struggles of the universal Church.

They also stand as witness to the social heart of the Church, one that beats with the heart of its people, coming to their material help whenever the need arose - the Church as defender of its people in their struggles.

The patriotic element is evident on two levels: the first in defending the catholic identity of the Maltese people, and the second in standing with the people in moments of joy, as well as during the crisis of war. The linguistic battle aside, at the time of war, the Church showed that its loyalties lay in the right place.

⁴⁷ Catania, *Strickland*, v.

The pastoral letters allow us to see, unfortunately, a rather regressive development in Caruana. From a man genuinely and energetically devoted to the exercise of his office in reforming the diocese on many levels in the first decade of his episcopate, he is later revealed as an exhausted individual. Although, he had ultimately secured victory over his political opponents, this struggle, coupled with the internal opposition he continually faced from members of his own curia, had inevitably tired him out. Maybe Orlich and Robinson were right in their judgement about him; the first judged him “a good religious, serious and pious. But he perhaps lacks the spiritual resources to rightly assess situations and face them with apostolic firmness,” the second, “(he) seems to lack the practical sense necessary to overcome a difficult situation.” His pastoral letters testify to this sense of exhaustion. They become progressively fewer in the thirties. One has to consider the obvious slow-down in any office linked to the passage of time and the effect of age and ill-health on Caruana.⁴⁸ Caruana remains enveloped in a growing isolation - a situation for which his aristocratic attitude, as well as the total disparity between his mentality and formation, and that of the local clergy, certainly contributed. His overly optimistic attitude, maybe even his naivety and his inability to choose his collaborators well, coupled with the efforts of some of the latter to systematically undermine him certainly left a lasting effect. Such factors fuelled a sense of mistrust⁴⁹ towards him among clergy and laity, ensuring that his legacy remains shrouded in the controversies that enveloped his life. However, in the era of nationalisms, Caruana’s pastoral letters reveal his sincere dedication to the needs of his compatriots, and above all a man completely given

⁴⁸ Cfr AA.EE.SS., *Inghilterra IV*, 1930-1944, Pos. 230, fasc. 74, fol.37: Appunto senza data: prot: 3783/32 (allora probabilmente alla lettera dopo il 16 Dicembre 1932 (Lettera precedente di Rossi, ma entro quel anno): “Date le condizioni di salute di Mons. Caruana, data la sua debolezza di carattere, data la necessità che a Malta si inizi presto un energico lavoro per rimediare abusi, migliorare la disciplina del clero e la vita religiosa del popolo, sembrerebbe opportuno di assegnare a Mons. Arcivescovo non già un ausiliare, ma un coadiutore sempre che non si credesse possibile (ciò che sarebbe senza dubbio il meglio) persuadere Mons. Caruana alla rinuncia. Per la nomina del Vescovo di Malta o di un coadiutore bisogna interrogare il Governo inglese.”

⁴⁹ CFR AA.EE.SS., *Inghilterra IV*, 1930-1944, Pos. 230, fasc. 74, fol. 28r.: Da una lettera di Monsignor Sanna Vescovo di Gravina e Irsina in data 20 Febbraio 1930 (da notare che Monsignor Vescovo fu a Malta dal 15 Gennaio al 14 Febbraio 1930) : “Monsignor Caruana piissimo Vescovo è tratto in errore dal suo esagerato ottimismo. Assistito inoltre da un Vicario Generale meno adatto e amicissimo del Segretario di Lord Strickland, il Bartolo, cui non vuole cagionare il minimo disgusto e illuso dalla falsa pietà di molti stricklandiani che come il Bartolo mettono insieme sacramenti, vita scorretta e politica anticlericale, ne segue i consigli con grave danno dagli interessi della Chiesa e delle anime. Perciò il Clero migliore è sfiduciato, i buoni laici non hanno ardire di affrontare essi soli la lotta.”

to the loyal service of his Church, to the defence of her rights, in filial devotion to the demands of the Magisterium and the person of the Roman Pontiff.

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