

CHURCH AND STATE INTERVENTION IN FEASTS AND RITUALS IN INDEPENDENT MALTA *

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INTRODUCTION

The Maltese population has always loved feasts and rituals.¹ The local Roman Catholic Church has since late medieval times played a central role in these festivities. Boissevain has admirably described these ceremonies in the way they were celebrated just before independence.² The same author has pointed to the ever increasing scale of two community rituals, e.g. the Good Friday processions and the village *festi*.³ In this paper I would like to emphasize another aspect of feasts and rituals.

Ever since Malta became independent many attempts to interfere with various religious ceremonies have been made by different groups within the Roman Catholic Church, each of them claiming to implement the consequences of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The Socialist Government that was in power between 1971 and 1987,⁴ also interfered several times with the celebration of religious feasts. This may be seen as a consequence of its policy to curtail the influence of Church and clergy.

It is interesting to show why and how various factions within the Church and the Mintoffian government tried to interfere with several religious feasts and rituals. This is the subject of the present article.

After a brief overview of Maltese religious feasts and rituals I will show how various ecclesiastical authorities and the Mintoffian government tried to interfere with the celebration of some *rites de passage* and community rites, especially the village *festi*. We will notice how the Socialist Government has staged alternative community rites, I will conclude to point at the importance of the masses as useful allies for the parish priests to keep the *status quo*. Finally a short comparison with Kertzer's findings in the North Italian communist dominated *quartiere* of Bologna, Albora,⁵ cannot fail to give the impression that in the sphere of religious feasts and rituals Malta is still a tiny Catholic paradise.

CATHOLIC MALTA WITH ITS FEASTS AND RITUALS

According to the Constitution 'the Religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion'.⁶ Religious observance is general. Masses

are well attended, even on weekdays. The number of those receiving the Sacraments is high.⁷

The Church is nearly always present at the various rites of passage a person may pass from the cradle to the grave, such as baptism, first holy communion, confirmation, marriage and funeral.⁸

As far as community rites are concerned, most of the highlights of the Maltese civic year are based on the liturgical calendar. Of the fourteen public holidays listed in 1976, twelve were holy days of obligation. This is not to say, however, that many religious feasts in Malta do not have important secular aspects as well.

Ascension-day is known as *Lapsi*, the traditional opening of the swimming-season. The votive procession on the local St. Gregory's Day (first Wednesday after Easter) is followed by merry-making in the fishing-village of Marsaxlokk. On the eve of the feasts of St. Peter and St. Paul, known as *Mnarja*, thousands of people go to Buskett gardens where they spend the night frying and eating rabbit and listening to folk-singers, with an exhibition of agricultural-produce and animals to look at in between. This event has always been very popular: it was often even stipulated in ancient marriage-contracts that the groom should take his wife to *San Girgor* or to Buskett for *Mnarja*.⁹

In summer, it is almost impossible to spend more than a few days in Malta without seeing a procession. These processions can be distinguished according to the prevailing mood, which may be one of mourning, of joyfulness or of solemnity. There are two mourning processions, one of the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows and the other on Good Friday.

The procession of Our Lady of Sorrows, which is held a week before Good Friday, has a votive and penitential character. In many localities the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows is followed by a great number of people, often barefoot, in fulfillment of some vow. Good Friday is held in quite a few parishes.¹⁰ Groups of life-size statues representing episodes from the Passion of Christ are carried around. In between the groups of statues, individuals dressed in contemporary costumes, evoke biblical scenes. Some of the statues are followed by people carrying large wooden crosses or walking barefoot with iron chains around their ankles, as they had vowed. Members of the clergy, children, choirs and brass bands playing funeral marches complete the procession.

In some parishes foreign tourists can watch the procession from chairs hired from the Catholic Tourist Council. Often, the foreigners prefer to stand, jostled by local people whose houses are not along the route or who have come from other parishes. In many parishes nowadays the whole procession is explained to the public by means of a loudspeaker system the moment the various statues and participants leave the church.

This explanation is always in the vernacular, but brief summaries are sometimes given in English, the second official language of Malta, or even in German.

By contrast with the sorrowful character of Good Friday, the Easter processions which are held in a growing number of parishes, are joyful in character: the fasting and mourning focused on Christ's suffering and death, are now over. The statue of the Risen Christ, often carrying a pennant in his hand, is carried around at a fast pace, accompanied by the music and band marches. The statue is greeted with applause, confetti and fireworks. In Cottonera the bearers often run, making the statue bob up and down. This creates the impression of Christ waving at the public.

The procession in honour of the local patron saint on his *fešta* is a great occasion for merry-making. The statue is accompanied by a brass-band, and is subjected to a 'tickertape parade' with confetti thrown from windows and balconies in the narrow streets of the town or village. The main streets and the church are lavishly decorated and illuminated; the bells are peeling and all kinds of fireworks are ignited. Some *festi* are of more than local importance and are attended by Maltese from all over the islands.¹¹

Solemn processions are held on Corpus Christi and the feast of the Sacred Heart, when the Blessed Sacrament is accompanied by the boys and girls who have just received first Holy Communion; children seven years old in newly-bought finery.¹² The procession which since ancient times takes place in Żejtun on St. Gregory's Day, and which is customarily led by the Archbishop, also has a solemn character.¹³

Though the solemn processions never fail to attract large crowds, it is especially the *fešta* processions that watched by the people from the open windows of their houses (often decorated with pictures of the Saint or some religious episode), or sitting in chairs in front of their homes, together with relatives and friends invited for the occasion. Show is inextricably mixed up with the basic religious character of *fešta*, which provides an opportunity for ostentation, not only in clothes and finery, but also in respect of furniture and other household possessions, which are prominently displayed in the frontroom, with windows wide open, for the admiring gaze of the many passers-by in the street.

INTERVENTION WITH RITES OF PASSAGE

Church Intervention as a Consequence of Vatican II

There have been a number of changes in the Universal Church, and consequently in Malta as well, in the celebration of baptisms and weddings.

Baptism now takes place in front of the congregation during Mass as soon as the mother is fit to attend church again. In former days, baptism used to be administered in a private ceremony soon after the baby was born and without the mother being present. According to Boissevain the role of the godparents has become less significant and they are nowadays also supposed to be chosen from among the parishioners instead of influential persons. But sometimes the more well-to-do resist the levelling practice of baptism during mass for several children at once, rich and poor together.¹⁴ Personally, I have the impression that, as far as godparents are concerned, the practice now is to choose the mother of the wife and father of the husband or vice versa to be godparents, at least for the first two children. From the third child onwards people still may ask influential persons (or other close relatives); parochial boundaries do not seem to exclude people's acceptability as godparents. I also noted that many people, rich and poor alike, like to ask a relative or a friend who is a priest (or already ordained a deacon and on his way to priesthood) to perform the baptismal ceremony.

As far as weddings are concerned, the priest no longer waits for the couple at the altar, but meets them at the churchdoor, preceding them to the altar. This brings the clergy closer to the people and I heard nobody resent this. Traditionalist fathers still prefer to walk their daughter down the aisle with the priest and bridegroom waiting at the altar and present her there to the groom. More often than in the past couples prefer a priest and a church other than their own, which may show a strong bond with the priest and church of their choice, though it is always possible that some churches will be chosen for reasons of prestige or because of the proximity of the hall where the wedding reception is held, rather than personal attachment.

State Intervention after the Proclamation of the Republic

The proclamation of the republic in December 1974 terminated the previous privileged position of The Roman Catholic Church in Malta and had direct consequences for the Church-State relations. The dismantling of the Church's powers could now commence.¹⁵

One of the first legislative measures after the proclamation of the Republic was the amendment of the Burials Ordinance so that every Maltese citizen became entitled to burial in the Addolorata cemetery (the main cemetery in Malta) and interment there could no longer be denied to persons who, according to Canon Law, placed themselves outside the pale of the Catholic Church.

The very fact of such legislation indicates the importance of the Church in Malta. The way in which it acted in the past in exercising

its spiritual monopoly and factual hold on the cemetery must have inspired the legislator, as we will see.

One of the main grievances of the MLP against the Church authorities during the so called 'politico-religious' conflict of the sixties was the fact that those Mintoffians, who were interdicted by the Church, could, in case of a sudden death, be denied by their parish priest the right to a proper Catholic burial. This was the most powerful weapon in the hands of the Church, considering that the afflicted were buried without the usual cortege preceded by the processional cross and without a priest to conduct the rites, in fact buried in unconsecrated ground segregated from the rest of the Addolorata Cemetery by a high wall and having its own separate entrance. The stigma this carried was social as well as religious.¹⁶

No one challenged this amendment, which was clearly meant to undo the power of the clergy in this respect. However, they can still refuse to perform the Catholic burial rites.¹⁷

The passing of a Marriage Bill caused much more consternation as it directly challenged the monopoly in this field of the clergy. Hitherto Canon Law had been indiscriminately applied to all Maltese with respect of marriage. Consequently, civil marriage and legal divorce did not exist.

The new Bill provided for the introduction of civil marriage. Ever since, ecclesiastical marriages are valid only if all provisions of the act are observed; this means that Canon Law ceased to have effect as part of the Maltese marriages law and that new rules apply to banns and the registration of ecclesiastical marriages. All Catholic Malta protested and priests in their sermons fulminated against the new law, but in the end there was nothing to do but demur and the law prevailed.¹⁸

The law hardly changed the celebration of marriages in Church. After the Nuptial Mass the couple are required to sign a declaration in front of a public registrar, who has attended the mass, in a room next to the Church. Even staunch opponents of the Government do not fail to instruct photographers and filmers to record the signing of the declaration, though I heard several times comments such as 'Mr. Mintoff's bloody registrar', which is not very appropriate for such good Catholics.

The number of plain civil marriages, without a Church ceremony, is negligible. Often one of the spouses is a foreigner, sometimes both are.¹⁹

At present, the marriage law seems to have been more or less reluctantly accepted. In their electoral programme of 1976 the Maltese Christian Democrats, the *Nationalist Party*, only promised, if elected to power, to amend the marriage law in order to reintroduce Canon Law as far as marriages were concerned.²⁰ But they were defeated in 1976, and in 1981 they did not mention Canon Law, only speaking of 'making

religious marriages also valid from a civil point of view'.²¹ When, in 1987, after another term in Opposition²² the PN was returned to the Government, a similar statement was made in the address by the Acting President of the Republic on the opening of Parliament.

Intervention with Community Rites

Postconciliar Reforms in Daily Mass

The liturgical renewals in the Universal Church meant the introduction of altars facing the people and the use of the vernacular in mass. As far as Malta is concerned these changes were heartily welcomed by the large majority of churchgoers.

Quite a few elderly and middle-aged priests regretted the loss of Latin and the beautiful Gregorian chant in mass, which made it so easy in cosmopolitan Malta for Catholics of different nationalities to join in. However, those priests generally thought that the advantages, which enabled the lay-people to participate more intensively in mass and understand what was going on outweighed the loss. They admitted these changes brought the clergy closer to the people, but they seemed to agree with this.

Not all lay-people were enthusiastic. A few middle-aged intellectuals were not. These people had learnt Latin at school and used to participate in mass. They seemed to be allergic to change, perhaps because it affected their status in the congregation and they blamed Pope John XXIII for what they called the 'deterioration of the Church'. They showed an extreme veneration for Pius XII, 'a Pope you could rely on'. One of them told me:

'Before the Council a bishop was a bishop and a priest was a priest. I loved to go to church in those days. Now I just go there to fulfill my obligations. I don't like to go to church any more. They have spoilt everything that was beautiful.'

Often a coalition of these conservatives together with some lovers of genuine Church music succeed in having the Pontifical Mass of the patron saint of the community in Latin, but that is only once a year. Masses said by the archbishop on Catholic feasts are also in Latin, but there will always be participation of lay-people in readings and prayers and this will always be in Maltese.

The relaxation of the abstinence rules for mass and the increased possibilities for taking Holy Communion a second time a day, in case of feasts, has positively influenced the taking of Holy Communion during mass, which is very popular in Malta.²³

Government transfers Carnival

As soon as Mintoff was returned to power he interfered with the date of Carnival. Already in 1957 Carnival had been transferred from its traditional date preceding Ash Wednesday and Lent to the weekend after Easter. This transfer had been ordered by Mintoff's previous government.²⁴ According to a few informants the arguments in favour of this transfer were tourism (though this was hardly developed in the fifties, A.K.) and the weather. So far I've not been able to trace the reactions of the Church (separation of Carnival and Lent), but I assume that this transfer was not very popular as it was undone in 1959 after the resignation of the MLP government. The fact that the weather happened to be inclement during the celebration of Carnival in 1957 and 1958 may also have helped to put the dates or its celebration 'back to normal'.

From 1972 onwards Carnival again has been transferred, this time to the second week of May, so that more tourists will be present to witness it and the weather will be better.²⁵ Nobody seems to have bothered about this transfer, probably because the fasting during Lent had been abolished a few years earlier and therefore the 'need' for Carnival had been greatly reduced.

Carnival is nowadays celebrated by parades with floats and band marches in Valletta. Costumed companies perform their dances in the Palace square. Indoor dances and balls may be held in some places. It seems that the traditional 'merry-making' that accompanied Carnival had already disappeared before its transfer. Already as early as the twenties the authorities forbade the wearing of masks in public as 'it was impossible to identify those who insulted the clergy and members of the upper classes'.²⁶

In the late sixties the local Carnival Committee tried to encourage the staging of some Carnival activities in towns and villages besides Valletta as it had long been felt that the concentration of the Carnival festivities in Valletta was extinguishing the flame of the Carnival spirit throughout the island.

There are various factors contributing to the decline of the popularity of Carnival in Malta and, consequently, its celebration. Two of these concern the ever increasing cost of materials for the companies' costumes and the absolute reliance on subsidies by the Carnival Committee for bands and most companies to participate.²⁷ This has seriously affected the standard of Carnival entries and reduced the competitive spirit as well as the spontaneity of the merry-making. Now that most Maltese are literate they also don't need Carnival as an outlet of their criticism against the authorities or the clergy as nowadays the local government and opposition press fulfill such a function with fervour.

In 1977 the Socialist Government reduced Carnival to just one weekend and abolished the two traditional free afternoons on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. This measure was scarcely resisted; it seems that Carnival was not particularly popular and only functioned as a tourist attraction.²⁸

The decrease in importance of Lent also affected the Carnival which was closely connected with it. This is just another indication of the importance of Catholic ritual to the Maltese population.

Note: Carnival was transferred to the weekend preceeding Lent by the present Nationalist government in 1988. (Eds.)

Restriction of Ritual in Government Premises

Since 1987 priests are no longer allowed to say mass and hear confessions during school-hours in government schools. The Church did not officially protest and the Nationalists did not promise to undo this in their 1981 and 1986 electoral programmes. Some private grumbling of members of the clergy and their supporters occurred, but the situation has just been taken for granted.

Early in 1981 the government announced that from now on no permission would be given for the traditional lenten sermons (often accompanied by a mass) to be held in government premises. These premises should also be omitted by the parish priests during their annual Easter blessing. Parastatal companies followed suit. This measure was probably in retaliation against the closing of Church owned hospitals by the civil authorities; the government also threatened to do the same with the public schools, one of the bulwarks of the Church in education. The Church did not protest officially, it seems that hardly any one protested.

Government tackles the Parish Priests: Candlemas abolished

In February 1972 the parish priests learned that the traditional Candlemas ceremony had been suddenly modified. The ceremony symbolized the close links between Church and State. It originated under the Knights of St. John.²⁹ Each year on 2 February (Presentation of Jesus in the Temple) all parish priests presented the Grand Master of the Order of St. John (the Head of State) a blessed candle as a token of respect for the highest authority of the islands. As there was (and still is) no local government in Malta we may assume that the Knights used the parish priests for the implementation of their measures at the local level. Later the British Governors adopted the function of the Grand Masters and addressed the parish priests at the Candlemas ceremony on important state affairs, so that they, as the traditional leaders of the villages and towns, could inform their parishioners.

In 1972 Sir Anthony Mamo, Mintoff's newly appointed Governor-General had been instructed by the government not to speak in the occasion. This led to disenchantment among the parish priests and many others. After the proclamation of the republic the Candlemas ceremony was abolished by the government a few days before it was due to be celebrated in February 1975, 'as its original goal had ceased to apply'. The Archbishop and parish priests expressed their regrets and thenceforward staged their own ceremony during a Pontifical Mass in St. John's Co-Cathedral.

The disappointment of the parish priests can easily be understood as from now on the government no longer recognized their civil leadership. The abolition of Candlemas was a manifestation of changed Church-State relations. Except for the parish priests and their staunch proclerical supporters not many lay-people really missed Candlemas; it was a private ceremony and it did not really affect them. The new public ceremony, which has replaced it does not seem to be particularly well attended.³⁰

Infighting within the Church about Black Damask and Good Friday Processions

Although Vatican II did not pronounce itself about paraliturgical events, it was often used by certain factions within the Maltese Church as a legitimation for certain 'reforms'. For instance, an overzealous local liturgical commission, consisting of some progressive clergymen, considered the black damask, which adorned many Maltese churches during Holy Week, an anachronism. They argued that before the liturgical reform the celebrant on Good Friday used to wear black vestments. As the new liturgy put more stress on Christ's Resurrection than on His Death the Vatican reform changed the colour of vestments from black to red for the Good Friday liturgy. Consequently, according to the commission, the black damask should be abolished as well. However, many priests and laymen did not agree. In their opinion black damask for Holy Week could provide a special atmosphere, quite different from *fešta* time, and still not speak out mourning. As one of them explained to me:

'The bridegroom wears black not because of mourning but just for the occasion.'

However, under pressure from the liturgical commission, the archbishop did insist on the abolition of the black damask, albeit reluctantly. So much so that he gave permission for gradual abolition. Some parish churches went along, but many resented this change. The parishioners were proud of their black damask, which had been very expensive, and

did not want to give it up.³¹ The parish priests were put under pressure and could not implement the change. Although this change was not imposed by the Vatican, I have often been told by the local lay-people and priests (!) that they kept the black damask in spite of Vatican instructions. They seemed to be proud to resist Rome in this way, and at present the archbishop wisely does not insist on the abolition of the black damask, which still continues to be used.³²

The liturgical commission also caused consternation with another suggestion. The traditional Good Friday processions should be transferred to Palm Sunday, because the length of these processions interfered with the Church services on Good Friday afternoon. The adoration of the cross and the kissing of the crucifix in these services takes a rather long time. The archbishop did not order such a transfer, but the more modern bishop of Gozo³³ perhaps was too rash and ordered the transfer to Palm Sunday. Before he knew it the bishop thus became involved in the conflict between the *partiti* of Rabat, the only town of his diocese and the target of the supporters of St. George. It took years before the conflict was solved and the compromise that was reached included the return of the procession to Good Friday.³⁴

The emphasis now laid on Christ's resurrection instead of his suffering has certainly not negatively influenced the Good Friday processions in Malta,³⁵ but it may have positively influenced the popularity of the Easter Sunday processions, which are gradually spreading over the island and attracting growing audiences.³⁶

The abolition of the obligatory fasts during Lent and on Fridays seems to have been well received. Nowadays only Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are official days of fasting and abstinence, but many devout Catholics also abstain from taking meat or alcohol and from smoking on Our Lady of Sorrows.³⁷ The termination of fasting during Lent has not affected the popularity of the traditional Lenten Sermons in Malta. They seem to enjoy an ever increasing popularity.

Relatively minor changes have been smoothly accepted, such as the transfer of the traditional Easter Vigil from midnight to the early evening of Holy Saturday.

INTERVENTION AROUND AND ABOUT THE FESTI

The Vatican tries to simplify prelate's insignnia

Although an attempt of the Holy See to simplify the vestments and regalia of canons and parish priests does, strictly speaking, not belong to feasts and rituals, these matters are so interwoven that treatment in this paper is justified. The Vatican attempt was successfully sabotaged by the threatened prelates with the tacit approval of the bishops and

overt encouragement of the faithful who were definitely not prepared to give up this pomp.

Centuries ago the canons of the Cathedral Chapter of Malta obtained the right to the personal title of monsignor and the wearing of a mitre. When the latter privilege was abolished in the early seventies, newly created canons had to do without it. This was deeply regretted, not only by some of the monsignors, but also by the faithful of their parishes. There the highlight of the year is the feast of the local patron saint, the *fešta*, and often monsignors are invited to conduct the most important solemn celebration, the translation of the relic, the Pontifical Mass and the procession. In the eyes of the parishioners nothing is better for the status of their feast than a fully apparelled monsignor, wearing his mitre, his shoes with silver buckles, and all other signs of his high dignity. Some parish priests refused to invite 'new' monsignors for their *festi*, which cost these unfortunate dignitaries a bit of their status as well as a fee for services rendered. Other parish priests were more broadminded and did invite them nevertheless, perhaps because they wanted to teach the faithful that mitres were not that important, but I vividly remember the reaction of one of the fanatics to a 'new' monsignor leading 'his' procession without a mitre:

'For me this is not a real procession. A monsignor without a mitre is no monsignor at all. He might as well lead the procession stark naked.'

The situation did not last long. In 1976 the parish priest of Zabbar was appointed canon in the Cathedral Chapter, the usual way of pensioning off a parish priest.³⁸ To the surprise of many, however, this 'new' monsignor did wear a mitre at his first official appearance after his 'promotion'. When I asked some informants among the clergy for an explanation they suggested that Mgr. Zarb might be an exception to the rule because he was not just a canon, but also the archpriest of the Cathedral. However, new appointees to the canonship after Mgr. Zarb happily followed the latter's example and started wearing mitres right away. By and by their predecessors also appeared in public with mitres. Recently I was told that the archbishop had officially obtained permission from the Holy See for his monsignors to continue wearing mitres.

Together with the mitres the Holy See had also imposed the abolition of the traditional *muzzetta* (mozetta) for parish priests. This meant that parish priests appointed after 1975 had just to appear on festive occasions in a nice cassock, while those appointed earlier were allowed to wear the *muzzetta*. Most of the newly appointed parish priests (and their parishioners) did not like this, but some of these priests managed to obtain an honorary canonship in one of the many collegiate chapters of Malta.

Thus they could wear the *muzzetta*, as it had not been abolished for canons. The situation changed after the archbishop had accompanied Pope John Paul II to Poland in 1979 and noticed the many mitres, *muzzetta*, etc. there. The archbishop used this as an argument to obtain permission from the Holy See to reintroduce not only the mitres for the monsignori, but also the *muzzetti* for the parish priests appointed after 1975. I have been told that the archbishop insists parish priests wear the *muzzetta* whenever he visits them. Thus a certain difference in style at the Vatican after the last change in the papacy has certainly been welcomed in Malta.

Mgr. Zarb was an excellent position to provoke the wearing of the mitre. It may have cost Archbishop Gonzi all his persuasion to make powerful parish priest Zarb accept his 'promotion', maybe the dignity of archpriest of the Cathedral was part of the 'deal'. It was generally known that Archbishop Gonzi held his Cathedral Chapter in high esteem (all prelates were appointed by himself) and did not like the abolition of their privileges. Archbishop Gonzi needed the support of both the Chapter and the parish priests in order not to be forced to step down (he was in his late eighties) because he had long exceeded the age-limit of seventy for ruling bishops. So a policy of internal leniency, while giving the Vatican the impression of complying, was the best. The Maltese nunciature was vacant in those days, so who could complain in Rome? Mgr. Gonzi's successor is not extremely popular with his clergy. In allowing mitres and *muzzetti* he wisely has not antagonized them.

New Vatican Theology on Saints repulsive to the Maltese

It is interesting to note that the new theological outlook of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II has been more towards Christ and less towards the saints, whilst among the saints the position of the Virgin gained some extra prominence. In Malta this did not lead to the renaming of churches and parishes, as has been the case sometimes in the past.³⁹ However, nine out of the fifteen parishes newly created since the Second Vatican Council are dedicated to Our Lady, two to her 'spouse' St. Joseph, one to Christ himself, one to St. John of the Cross, one to St. Augustine (a parish long before its official creation already in the care of the Augustinian Order), and one to St. Pius X.⁴⁰ Thus a strong tendency towards dedication to the Virgin and the Holy Family, to the detriment of 'lesser' saints, can be distinguished.

One might expect that the new theological outlook mentioned above and the removal of certain saints from the revised liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church would have certain consequences for the celebration of their titular feasts in Malta. As far as I know this concerns St. Nicholas of Bari, patron saint of the parish of Siggiewi, and St. George,

patron saint of the oldest parish of Qormi and one of the two parishes in Rabat, Gozo. Both have been removed from the calendar. St. Catherine of Alexandria, patron saint of the parishes of Zejtun and Zurrieq, did not only undergo the same fate, but also had to accept the following crushing verdict:

‘..... Not only is the *Passio* of St. Catherine totally fabulous, but also nothing can be affirmed as certain of the very person of St. Catherine.’⁴¹

Mgr. Gerada, one time Coadjutor Archbishop of Malta, undoubtedly lost a lot of goodwill in his native town of Zejtun when, invited to deliver the traditional panegyric of St. Catherine during the Pontifical Mass on her feast day, he referred to the above mentioned doubts about her existence.⁴²

A quite different attitude was shown by the late Reverend Professor Seraphim M. Zarb, O.P. and was much more appreciated in Zejtun and Zurrieq. Father Zarb, an established scholar in biblical studies and dogmatic theology, did not forget how St. Catherine once won his heart as the patroness of Dominican students. As a gallant knight he used his encyclopaedic knowledge of hagiology for his weapon, and sharpened his pen to undertake a series of articles on the origins and development of the cult of St. Catherine. These articles, together with the art historian Mario Buhagiar’s articles, written at the invitation of Zarb, in the cult of St. Catherine in Malta, are now published in one volume by the St. Catherine Musical Society of Zurrieq and the Zejtun Parish Council.⁴³ Father Zarb once told me that not only did he disagree with the new *Calendarium Romanum* (1969) on St. Catherine of Alexandria, but also on St. Nicholas. The latter’s history and that of St. George have never been challenged by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome. That may be the reason why so far no sons of Siggiewi, Qormi or Rabat (Gozo) have come forth to defend their beloved patron saints. Along with others their feasts did not remain obligatory to the Universal Church, but only to local Churches. This has not prevented their *festi* to be celebrated with the usual Maltese pomp and splendour until this very day.⁴⁴

The Maltese episcopate took care in the new emphasis in Catholic theology by creating mainly parishes devoted to the Holy Family after Vatican II. The already existing devotion for the Virgin in the Maltese Islands was a favourable condition for this measure. A lesser devotion to some (existing or non-existing) saints without a ready alternative might lead to decline of their *festi* and thus indirectly make the clergy lose its grip on the (especially rural) masses. Besides, *festi* are lucrative sources of income for many members of the clergy (Masses and other special

church services as confessions, the procession) and they provide them with the opportunities to wear their prestigious vestments, mitres, etc., as we have seen above. A fine *fiesta* gives prestige to the parish priests of the organizing parish. Therefore it is easy to understand why there have not been many protagonists for a change in devotion to some saints and the abolition of devotion to non-existing saints.

Government abolishes Religious Public Holidays

Mintoff's government had just started its second term of office, when it felt strong enough to reduce the number of public holidays from fourteen to six, all the abrogated feast days being Catholic days of obligation.

As I mentioned above, of the fourteen public holidays listed in 1976, twelve were holy days of obligation: St. Paul's Shipwreck, St. Joseph, Good Friday, Ascension Day, St. Joseph the Worker, St. Peter and St. Paul, the Assumption, Our Lady of Victories, All Saints, the Immaculate Conception and Christmas Day. Of these May Day and the 8th of September were also celebrated by the State. There were only two wholly secular feasts, New Year's Day and Republic Day, the latter's introduction having led in 1975 to the suppression by the Government of Epiphany (6th January) as a number of public holidays because it was not considered desirable to add to the number of public holidays. Consequently, the archbishop cancelled Epiphany as a day of obligation and ordered its celebration moved to the nearest Sunday.

In 1977 the feast of St. Joseph was abolished as a public holiday, just a few weeks before its celebration (19th March). In Parliament the Prime Minister announced on 16th March that the Government had been informed by the Vatican that St. Joseph, Ascension Day, Corpus Christi, St. Peter and St. Paul, All Saint's Day and the Immaculate Conception were no longer to be observed as days of obligation. In the case of St. Paul the obligation to hear mass would remain, but it would not be a sin to work. As a consequence the above feast days and September 8 would no longer be public holidays.⁴⁵ The bishops confirmed that the feasts mentioned by the Prime Minister were no longer days of obligation, but remained as days of devotion on which the faithful would do well to hear mass. On those days the hours of mass in all churches would be the same as on Sundays.⁴⁶

Many people, the clergy included, grumbled, but Mintoff with his move at the Vatican had outwitted the archbishop. Even if the latter had wanted to, there was now nothing he could undertake.

A minority of the workers protested against this restriction of their rights, but their industrial actions failed. Not only public holidays were abolished, from now on the government would refuse the necessary

permission to have these religious feasts celebrated on weekdays. As it motivated its measure by the need to increase national productivity, most probably it was afraid that celebration of these feasts on the traditional days might lead to peaks of sick-leaves. Now most of them have been transferred to the next Sunday. This means that quite a few Sundays are no longer available for the celebration of village *festi* and therefore many of them must share their celebration on the remaining Sundays of Summer; thus a decrease in the possibilities of keen festagoers to watch their competitors from other villages. Theoretically this could lead to a decrease in inter parochial rivalry, but I doubt if this will ever happen.

I have the impression that now church going on these previous feasts is not as substantial as the clergy would desire.

In a way the Nationalists seem to have accepted the *fait accompli*, as they mention in their 1981 electoral programme that the ecclesiastical authorities have accepted the transfer of these feasts. They only promise to restore these public holidays, which 'are a vital link with our cultural past', such as St. Paul's Shipwreck, St. Peter and St. Paul (*Mnarja*), Our Lady of Victories and the Immaculate Conception.⁴⁷ So they accepted four abolished public holidays (St. Joseph, Ascension Day, Corpus Christi and All Saint's Day). Of these only St. Joseph was celebrated as a secondary feast in Rabat. This feast was added to the list of feasts to be restored as public holidays in the Nationalist electoral manifesto of 1987, while St. Paul's Shipwreck had just been reinstated by the Labour Government before its celebration on the eve of the election.⁴⁸

Of these feasts the Nationalists wanted to reinstate as public holidays *Mnarja* which used to be tremendously popular (see above), while the others belong to the category of parish *festi* of more than local importance.⁴⁹

It is interesting to note that the Nationalist Party used 29 June 1982 (*Mnarja*) as a starting point of its campaign of civil disobedience and passive resistance, meant 'to restore democracy'.⁵⁰

The party issued directives to observe the feast or *Mnarja* as a public holiday. Consequently workers should not go to work, parents should not do any shopping on that day. Employers should give their employees a paid holiday and double pay to those workers whose service was essential. The government warned it would take all the necessary measures against those obeying the directives. However, the party was satisfied with the response to its directives. It said the measure of success was higher than had been expected. Thousands of people, waving Maltese national flags and Nationalist Party banners, invaded the sandy beach of Ghadira, where the party had organized a popular outing.⁵¹

Government lifts Restrictions against Secondary Partiti

A peculiar institution in Malta is that of *fešta partiti*, divisions within a local parish, embracing the supporters of the titular saint and the supporters of a secondary saint, who has assumed almost equal social importance. This fascinating phenomenon of Maltese social life is still far from extinct in spite of many efforts of the Church authorities to restrict the celebration of the secondary feast as much as possible. Therefore certain decorations of the church are not allowed on the secondary feast and only a limited number of village streets around the church was allowed to be specially decorated and illuminated. The route of the procession of the secondary saint was also much smaller than that of the patron saint. These last restrictions were always enforced with the loyal help of the Malta police.

Suddenly, in August 1975, the government announced that it was no longer prepared to instruct the police to enforce these restrictions. This announcement can be seen as a reflection of the changing power-balances between Church and State. However, also a particular reason was repeatedly given to me. The announcement came just a few weeks before the celebration of a particular secondary feast. One of the senior ministers is president of the band club supporting the feast.

According to Boissevain and Gullick supporters of the secondary feast are more often members of the lower classes than supporters of the patron saint.⁵² Hence this measure can also be seen as an indication of the shift of power towards the working class, which certainly occurred since 1971. Although the Church still continues its policy of restricting the secondary feasts, they certainly have grown since 1975. The supporters of the primary feasts don't like to be outdone and therefore have been keen to expand the festivities of the patron saints as well. This measure helped to expand both primary and secondary parish feasts in Malta.⁵³

Bishop and Prime Minister deplore excessive use of Fireworks

One can imagine that the Maltese parish feasts with their conspicuous consumption of food, drink and especially fireworks did not fit in with the new approach of the universal Catholic Church after Vatican II. The following recommendation of the archbishop seems to reflect this mentality:

'Let us compensate for these reductions in Obligatory feasts by good works, above all by financial aid to the many families who are in want and whose number we fear will increase; let us assist these unfortunate families. And while writing the recommendations we recall to mind recommendations made by us on more than one occasion by word of mouth and in writing, to cease the wasting

of money during parish feasts on excessive pyrotechnics, which, besides ending up in nothing and disturbing many people, give a bad impression of the country to the many foreigners in our midst, causing them to be scandalized and to form an unjust judgement of the Church.

At least, let some part of the money spent on fireworks be given to the poor and needy families of the Island.

It is necessary that this fanaticism should come to an end, and everyone should help to ensure that it disappears from the Island's feasts.⁵⁴

It would be unfair to say that the archbishop's recommendations have not been followed at all. In many parishes nowadays there is a special collection during the *fešta* for a deserving cause (poverty has practically disappeared from Malta because of increased social services). Many parish priests nowadays attach great importance to the spiritual aspect of the feast, much more than before. The liturgical celebrations are updated and well attended (open air masses, folk masses, etc.). This in its turn has increased the scale of the *fešta* celebrations. In the meantime fanaticism has far from disappeared and the (subsequent) use of fireworks has ever been increasing over the last fifteen years.⁵⁵

As the amount spent on fireworks and the quality of the fireworks directly affects the prestige of the parish priest and the clergy resident in the parish we can hardly expect any enthusiasm of them to curtail fireworks. But the archbishop had an unexpected ally.

Already in the fifties opposition leader Dom Mintoff fulminated against the excessive use of fireworks. It was a waste of energy and money and often explosions in the village fireworks factories cost a few human lives.⁵⁶ Mintoff can be proud that since 1971 he realized almost all his ideas of the fifties and sixties. But as we have just seen above the fireworks continue at an ever increasing scale.

There have been Government efforts to suppress fireworks, which led, according to Gullick, to

'..... fireworks being made in the homes and not factories, and to displays of illegal fireworks.'⁵⁷

In spite of Government restrictions on fireworks (the use of *murtali*, noisy bombs), the use of electricity in church illuminations, a fixed end for the saint's procession etc., it seems that these regulations have never been taken seriously, nor enforced by the police, who are somewhat reluctant to enforce them, may be because

'..... if fireworks are aimed low they can be extremely efficient weapons, and in any event who wants to quarrel with an explosives expert.'⁵⁸

Gullick also hints to the use of illegal fireworks as an 'anti-government declaration'.⁵⁹ But how can we explain this when we know that most of them belong to the working classes, the traditional electorate of the MLP?

The death-toll of explosions in fireworks factories has severely increased recently,⁶⁰ but parliamentary regulations have not been accepted. Parliament had to give in, otherwise most *festi* would not be celebrated at all. Why did the authoritarian government accept this? They could have easily formed a coalition with the Church authorities. The only reason I can think of is that most *fešta* supporters belong to the MLP electorate. Since 1971 all elections have been decided by the narrow margins in Malta and therefore every vote counts. Maybe the restrictions of feasts has been one of the few items the Socialist Government just could not accomplish in Malta.

Clergy loses some grip on the festi

Several secular elements have crept into the village *fešta*, much to the chagrin of the clergy. One of them is the Sunday morning band march which more and more parish priests have been forced to allow. This band march which often starts when the Pontifical Mass is still going on, frequently degenerates into a brawl of drunken fanatics. The faithful are often insulted by the same fanatics, when at the end of the feast the statue of the saint is carried back into the church, by clapping and continuing to shout their extreme adoration for the saint. Only a few parish priests can prevent these scenes by their personal authority.⁶¹

Another example that the clergy are losing their grip on the *festi* is that, in spite of the official day of mourning prescribed by the archbishop, the parishes of Hamrun and Vittoriosa did not cancel the band marches and fireworks on the eve of the celebration of the feasts of St. Cajetan and St. Lawrence respectively, which was the day of the funeral of Pope Paul VI.⁶² It should be noted that these two parishes have many anticlerical parishioners who are also *fešta* fanatics. Hamrun is notorious for its Sunday morning band march, and at Vittoriosa it is impossible to stop the supporters from misbehaviour in church when St. Lawrence is carried back into the church.

This is not to say that the clergy is losing its grip altogether on the *festi*. Generally the parish priest is very much in charge and together with the parish clergy and the invited celebrants he is the focus of everybody's attention during the *fešta*.

GOVERNMENT STAGES ITS OWN COMMUNITY RITES

National Day: Transfers and Troubles

Mintoff's interference with National Day was foremost aimed at his predecessors in government, the Nationalist Party, now on opposition. It is generally assumed that Mintoff just could not stomach the fact that it was not he but the Nationalist Dr. Giorgio Borg Olivier who secured for Malta its independence on 21st September 1964.

Ever since, 21st September had been a public holiday as Independence Day and Malta's National Day. As such it replaced 8 September, Our Lady of Victories, the date which recalled Malta's triumph after the Great Siege by the Turks in 1565 and the Second Siege by the Germans and Italians during World War II. The 8th September was mainly a feast of the Church, which was also the annual *fešta* of three local parishes.

Although the Church was conspicuously present at the Independence Celebrations we may assume that the introduction of Independence Day as Malta's National Day is an indication of the changing power-balances between Church and State after Independence.⁶³

Since he had been returned to power Mintoff did everything to undo what he called 'mock-independence'. Immediately in 1971 21st September was abolished as Malta's National Day (8th September was reintroduced) and as a public holiday, to the chagrin of the Nationalists who continued to celebrate Independence Day ever since.

The proclamation of the republic was claimed by Mintoff as the fruit of his constitutional endeavors, but there were hardly any festivities on the 13th September 1974 whereas people remembered the pomp and splendour of the Independence Celebrations in 1964. Republic Day now became a public holiday and it replaced 8th September as Malta's National Day, until it had to give way to 31st March, 'Freedom Day' the anniversary of the departure of the last British troops from Malta in 1979, which is considered by Mintoff and his MLP as their greatest achievement.⁶⁴

From 1979 till 1987 Freedom Day was celebrated by the Socialist government and its supporters with great pomp, while it was boycotted by the Nationalists. The present Nationalist Government restored Independence Day as a Public Holiday.⁶⁵

My informants do not recall any special enthusiasm on September 21, Independence Day, in the years following 1964. Efforts to stir up this enthusiasm at the local level by holding patriotic addresses in towns and villages had varying, and dubious measures of success. While the MLP supporters tended to boycott these celebrations even quite a few Nationalists had a feeling, perhaps not vociferously expressed, that

September 21 was much too near to September 8, and that it would have been better to graft the new event on to the date of the old National Day, which not only commemorated two great historic events and almost coincided with September 5, which some years before had begun to be commemorated as marking the surrender of the French in 1800 after two years' blockade by the Maltese.

It is interesting to note that the Nationalists started staging great celebrations on September 21st *after* it had been abolished as Malta's National Day and cancelled as a public holiday in 1971. This was resented by the MLP and some times even fights started between overzealous MLP and PN supporters. On the other hand the Nationalists boycotted the several National Days since 1971, which are being celebrated with increasing pomp by the MLP supporters. In 1982 the Nationalists staged a counter demonstration at Luqa Airport, which led to fights between rival supporters.

It seems that the Nationalist supporters did not feel much need before 1971 to celebrate Independence Day. They used to be composed more of the upper and middle classes than the Labour supporters, though the difference cannot be too large as both parties are supported by circa 50% of the population. But we may say that the traditional Nationalists just were not so fond of feasts. The traditional Labour supporters are often keen festagoers, so we should not be surprised that they wholeheartedly participate in the secular feasts organized by the government of their party. The increased enthusiasm for Independence Day among the Nationalists can be seen as a mass manifestation of their abhorrence of the Labour government, but also as a success of the Nationalist policy to find more support among the lower classes, who are keen of feasts.

It seems as if the phenomenon of *fiesta partiti*, which is still vigorously existing at the local level, has been extended to the national level, where the polarization between the two political parties and their supporters found its manifestation in the ever increasing rivalry between Independence Day and Freedom Day. It is significant to note that, contrary to local *fiesta partiti*, the role of the Church has been peripheral on the national level. The party leaders have taken the place of the saints. Furthermore the archbishop never took sides, but just celebrated Pontifical Mass on the consecutive National Days. This does not prevent the Nationalists together with a great majority of the (traditionally pro PN) clergy, to be utterly disappointed when the archbishop refused to pontificate on Independence Day, but does so on Freedom Day.

It is too simple to explain the development around National Day as a reflection of the increasing importance of the national level at the expense of the local level. The situation is much more complicated. The

national level has certainly gained importance during the last two decades, but it is not fair to say that consequently the local level has decreased in importance.⁶⁶

May Day or St. Joseph the Worker

May Day certainly gained importance since 1971. It had already been made a public holiday in the fifties upon the proclamation of its dedication to St. Joseph the Worker and becoming a holy day of obligation by the Roman Catholic Church. During Pontifical Mass the Archbishop blesses the tools of several workers. From 1972 onwards large parades were held in Valletta with decorated floats of all local MLP clubs showing the achievements of Mintoff and his government or the failures of the Nationalist opposition. Several bands took place. The whole spectacle was reminiscent of a procession with its slow progress. Instead of the statue and the clergy bringing up the rear there is a lorry carrying the V.I.P.'s of the MLP. The cheers and the confetti were the same as for a patron saint; nor are the fireworks absent from the scene. The spectacle was still going on when Pontifical Mass started. Therefore people had to choose where their first loyalty lay, but some may have been done as I: see the first part of the parade, go to the Cathedral when the Mass starts and when it is over see the last part of the parade.

It remains to be seen whether May Day will continue to be celebrated at the same scale now that the Socialists are relegated to the Opposition.

CONCLUSION

Now that we are able to review the developments in Maltese feasts and rituals it is not difficult to note that hardly anything has changed as far as *rites de passage* are concerned. Church interference, meant to diminish the distance between the clergy and the lay-people, has been well accepted, but it cannot be called very substantial. State interference has hardly been with ritual itself. No alternative funeral ritual has been organized, while the alternative marriage ritual does not enjoy popularity among the Maltese.

As far as community rites are concerned the Church has not been able to implement many changes. Small wonder as we have noticed that the Church itself has been utterly divided. Small groups of 'reformers' within the clergy, legitimizing themselves by referring to the Second Vatican Council's alleged call for more sobriety, have been frustrated in their efforts by these clergymen who felt their prestige and position threatened by the 'reforms'. Especially the parish priests have been able to use the genuine Maltese love for pomp, which is foremost manifest in the working class, to stay in charge and keep up the signs of distinction.

And as the working class is now in power, it is a useful ally in resistance to simplify feasts and rituals in Malta.

Vatican II did not only inspire 'reformers', it also served as a legitimation for some new religious activities, like Easter Processions, now that Easter has become more important.

During its three terms of office the Socialist government has successfully penetrated in several spheres of social life. It also did not leave the community rites untouched. Carnival has been transferred, religious ritual in government premises restricted, Candlemas abolished, while the *festi* were seriously affected by the abolition of many religious public holidays and the lifting of restrictions on secondary *partiti*. The government created its own community rites, but all these measures have not been able to diminish the increasing popularity with the masses for the *festi*.

It is obvious that the developments in the Bolognese *quartiere* Alborà have been much more detrimental to religious feasts and ritual than in Malta.⁶⁷

Most people still prefer Church organized rites of passage to the civil alternative, though some may have a non-religious funeral, which hardly exists in Malta. While some people in Alborà prefer a plain civil marriage, the amount of Maltese who do so is negligible.

The differences are even more striking in the sphere of community rites. Mass attendance is low in Alborà, but high in Malta. The communist *festi* are much more popular among the population than those of the Church and have taken the place of the religious feasts for the majority in Alborà, while the community rites staged by the Mintoffian government are only an alternative for the religious *festi* for a small majority. For most MLP supporters they have just been added to the religious feasts. How can we explain the differences?

First we should keep in mind that Bologna has a much older socialist tradition than Malta, while the communists have dominated local politics since the end of the Second World War. Second, while in Alborà 65% votes communist within a multi party system, Malta has a two party system, where both parties can count on almost 50% of the electorate. Consequently, while in Alborà the communist *festi* are aimed at the majority of the population, Freedom Day (which is complementary to Independence Day) and May Day are only aimed at barely half the Maltese population. While in Bologna the religious community feasts are only aimed at the churchgoing minority, in Malta they are aimed at the whole population and the clergy sees to it that the masses enjoy themselves, while in the meantime their attention is generally focussed at the religious impact of the feast.

It seems that the working class consciousness in Bologna is less

hampered by other cross cutting loyalties than in Malta, where allegiance to the Church as an institution is still dominantly existent. Although the amount in which the Maltese are still tied to the clergy is gradually diminishing, the remnants of these ties are only slowly disappearing. And this may explain why increasing State interference has hardly affected religious feasts and rituals in Independent Malta.

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Notes

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¹ Among the Maltese there are very few who have not been baptized according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. During British rule (1800-1964) the Church provided the population with a national sense of identity.

² Boissevain, 1965, pp. 55-66.

³ Boissevain, 1984.

⁴ Ever since 1966 Malta virtually has a two party system. Since 1971 the marges of electoral support between Prime Minister Dom Mintoff's ruling Malta Labour Party (MLP) and the Maltese Christian-Democrats, the Nationalist Party (PN), around which all anti-Mintoffians have rallied, has been extremely small. In fact the greatest difference was 3% (51, 5% MLP, 48, 5% PN) in 1976. The MLP is rather anticlerical, the PN is not.

An extensive treatment of the conflict between the Maltese Roman Catholic Church and Mintoff's MLP, which led to the 'mortal sin', is given in Koster, 1984b, pp. 151-215.

⁵ Kertzer, 1980, pp. 131-168.

⁶ *Constitution of the Republic of Malta*, section 2.

⁷ In population areas there is always a church or a chapel just around the corner and priests, monks and nuns go about in the apparel traditionally befitting their religious status. One may presume that Malta still has the highest ratio of religious vocations in the world (Mizzi, 1971, p. 9).

⁸ A rather new custom is the blessing of the rings by a priest at the engagement party (Boissevain, 1969, p. 33).

⁹ Cf. Leopardi, 1958 and Cassar-Pullicino, 1955.

¹⁰ In 1982 Good Friday processions were held in twelve Maltese and three Gozitan parishes; this does not include the few processions already held on Palm Sunday.

¹¹ E.g. St. Paul's Shipwreck (Valletta), St. George (Rabat, Gozo), Our Lady of Victories (Senglea, Naxxar and Mellieha) and Santa Maria (the Assumption, which is the titular feast of eight parishes).

As I am still not yet fed up with *festi* and visited more than sixty I might with some justice be called another *fešta* fanatic.

¹²The girls are dressed as miniature brides.

¹³This procession, originally from Mdina to Zejtun, is already mentioned in 1571 by pastoral visitor Mgr. Duzzina 'as something rather long established' (Carabott, 1971, p. 56). Buhagiar (1981, p. 766) gives 1543 as the year when it was first organized on a national scale.

¹⁴Boissevain, 1977, p. 91.

¹⁵In the amended Constitution of December 1974 the term 'corrupt practices' was introduced with respect to elections. According to its definition 'any temporal or spiritual injury' constitutes a corrupt practice (*Electoral Polling Ordinance*, Cap. 163). This means that an election result can be annulled if priests have, for example, refuses absolution to voters of a particular party.

In 1975 the government enacted legislation concerning the Church. First, *Privilegium Fori*, the right that bishops could not be taken to a Government Court, was abolished. Then the Burials Ordinance was amended and a Marriage Bill was passed. Finally the exemption of bishops, parishes, churches and religious communities from income tax was abolished. For an elaborate account of this legislation cf. Koster, 1984b, pp. 229-234.

¹⁶About six Mintoffians had been interred in the *mizbla*, including one of Mintoff's former Ministers, and this was a cause of great bitterness for the MLP which added fuel to the fire. As if to demonstrate their defiance, Labour organized annual 'pilgrimage' to these unconsecrated tombs. In 1969 Bishop Gerada had already ordered to demolish the wall which separated the *mizbla* from the rest of the Addolorata Cemetery; cf. Koster, 1984b, pp. 202, 211.

¹⁷So far I have not come across such a case.

¹⁸Cf. Koster, 1984a, pp. 202-204; 1984b, pp. 223-234.

¹⁹In 1976 there were only 51 civil marriages out of 2938 (1.7%), (Demographic Review, 1976).

²⁰Nationalist Party, 1976, p. 20.

²¹Nationalist Party, 1981, p. 68.

²²Although the PN gained 51% of the votes in the general election of December 1981, the MLP managed to obtain a three seat majority in Parliament (because of gerrymandering, according to the PN) and assumed the government in spite of continuous protest of the PN. The third and last term of office of the Socialists was to a great extent dominated by one single question: Should a majority of the electorate be assured of a parliamentary majority? The question was only settled just in time before the 1987 election so that such a situation would no longer be possible. As a matter of fact, as a result of this agreement the PN was returned to the Government with one seat majority, while the actual results hardly differed from those of 1981.

²³Nowadays one does not have to abstain (even from drinking water) from midnight until Communion, but only one hour, while water is always allowed (and rightly so, as it can be very hot in Malta).

²⁴Mintoff was also Prime Minister during 1955-58 under supervision of the British colonial authorities; cf. Austin, 1971.

²⁵This seems to be in line with the transfer of many village *festi* from the original dates of celebration to summer, but against government policy to attract tourists to Malta during the whole year, and not only in summer.

²⁶Jeremy Boissevain, private conversation with the author.

²⁷Cf. Cassar-Pullicino, 1976, pp. 21-26; Gullick, 1981.

²⁸Now that the present Nationalist Government has once more restored Carnival to its traditional place before Lent, it will be interesting to find out if it will regain some of its original character.

²⁹The Sovereign and Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem ruled the islands between 1530 and 1798.

³⁰So far there has not been any indication of some restoration of the Candlemas Ceremony by the present Nationalist Government.

³¹In Malta, the parishioners consider themselves the collective owners of the treasures of the parish church and rightly so as many generations generously contributed to them (and still do) in work and money.

³²I noticed this myself during Holy Week 1982.

³³Compared to Malta, the island of Gozo – a separate diocese – is more rural, more conservative, clinging to ancient ways and customs, and more deeply religious.

³⁴Cf. Boissevain, 1978, p. 124 for a brief discussion of the difficulties; the same author gives an admirable description of *festa partiti*, generally divisions within a Maltese parish, embracing the

supporters of the titular saint and the supporters of a secondary saint, who has assumed almost equal social importance (1965, pp. 74-96) and 1969, pp. 81-86). In Gozo the situation has been even more complicated as the supporters of St. George claimed to be a parish in their own right in Rabat, a right which was finally granted in 1976. Now the intraparish rivalry has changed these into interparish rivalry.

³⁵Boissevain, 1984.

³⁶In 1982 eight Easter processions were held in Malta and one in Gozo.

³⁷Many Maltese, especially women, still wear the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and refrain from taking meat on Wednesdays and Fridays. They believe this will reduce their time in purgatory considerably.

³⁸Cf. Koster, 1984a, p. 189.

³⁹For instance Paola was first dedicated to St. Ubaldesca and later to Christ the King.

⁴⁰Of the nine parishes dedicated to Our Lady in one form or another three are dedicated to O.L. of Mount Carmel, two to O.L. of Lourdes, one to O.L. of Fatima, one to Maria Regina, one to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and one to the Immaculate Conception.

⁴¹*Calendarium Romanum*, 147, as quoted by Zarb, 1979, p. 7.

⁴²For a detailed account of Mgr. Gerada's unhappy performance as Coadjutor Archbishop of Malta, see Koster, 1981, pp. 225-228 and 239-245.

⁴³Zarb and Buhagiar, 1979.

⁴⁴The fact that the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome did not prescribe the feasts of these saints brought great joy to their parishioners. This is not to say that their disappearance from the *Calendarium Romanum* was accepted in any sense. Thus when the secretary of the Congregation, Mgr. Bugnini, was appointed Apostolic Delegate to Khomeini's Iran, the appointment was considered 'merited punishment' according to the 'devotees' of St. Catherine.

⁴⁵*Times of Malta*, 17 March, 1977.

⁴⁶Circular Letter issued jointly by the archbishop of Malta and the bishop of Gozo, quoted by the *Times of Malta*, 18 March, 1977.

⁴⁷Nationalist Party, 1981, p. 85.

⁴⁸Nationalist Party, 1987. The feasts mentioned became public holidays once more since the change in Government.

⁴⁹See note 11.

⁵⁰See note 22.

⁵¹Although according to the Acting Prime Minister the appeal had failed miserably, the government showed its anger by mass suspensions of teachers, civil servants and workers in parastatal firms, who had observed the directives. The businessmen 'will pay bitterly for their action' said the Acting Prime Minister; *The Times (Malta)*, 30 June, 1 July, 1982.

⁵²Boissevain, 1965, pp. 83-84, 107-111; Gullick, 1974, p. 97.

⁵³Boissevain, 1984, p. 176.

⁵⁴Gonzi, 1967.

⁵⁵Cf. Boissevain, 1984. My own personal observations also point into this direction.

⁵⁶Mintoff, 1953.

⁵⁷Gullick, 1980, p. 12.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁰Boissevain, 1984, p. 171.

⁶¹Although quite a few informants told me that this was a rather recent phenomenon, Jeremy Boissevain, in a private conversation, informed me that even as early as 1929 the parish priest of Kirkop carried a gun with him in order to make his parishioners behave in church when St. Leonard was taken back into church after his procession.

⁶²*Times of Malta*, 12th August, 1978.

⁶³The souvenir-folder of the Malta Independence Celebrations (Anonymous, 1964) provides us with splendid illustrations of the dominant role of the Church during the Independence Celebrations.

⁶⁴In 1979 every effort was made to celebrate the termination of the defence agreement with the United Kingdom with a lot of splash, and presumably some pressure was brought to bear on the hierarchy to make them play their part. Therefore the archbishop staged a Pontifical Mass with the *Te Deum* in St. John's Co-Cathedral and issued a pastoral letter which proved to be almost

a verbatim copy of the one his predecessor had written on the occasion of independence. He ordered a mass to be said with special prayers for the nation. All churches had to be illuminated on March 30 and 31 and the bells rung at midnight between Saturday March 30 and Sunday April 1. As all Nationalists ignored the celebration of 'Mr. Mintoff's All Fool's Day' and the majority of the clergy supported them more or less overtly, most parish priests were very reluctant to comply and quite a few of them lit only lamps on the facade of the church for just one hour and ordered the minimum of bell-pealing.

⁶⁵A new National Day has not been designated so far as the Government's reconciliation policy seeks agreement between both parties on this item.

⁶⁶Or is increasing attention for the local level, as it has been noticed by Boissevain (1984) and observed by myself another manifestation of growing integration and thus indirectly stressing the importance of the national level (as has been maintained at the Conference on Feasts and Rituals in Europe)?

⁶⁷Kertzer, 1980, pp. 131-168.

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