

## Secularism and the Mission of the Catholic Church in Malta

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The Maltese Islands are strategically situated right in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea at the crossroads between two continents (Europe and Africa), as well as between two different worlds and two different cultures. They occupy an area of 316 sq. kilometres with a population of 428,000, according to the latest UN report (2012)<sup>1</sup>.

For centuries the country was considered a bastion of Christendom against the marauding corsairs hailing mainly from North Africa and the encroaching military and naval might in general of the Ottoman Empire. The ceding of the Maltese Islands on the part of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta as a fief in 1530 and the latter's presence during the following 268 years was marked by a history of mutual hostility between the Knights and the then expanding Ottoman Empire. The Order's rule in Malta also helped secure the Catholic faith in the islands and enhance the contribution of the Catholic Church in the fields of culture, the arts, education and philanthropy. Regarding the latter two, the contribution of the Church in Malta through religious orders and congregations was – and still is – immense. Generation after generation of orphans or children hailing from problem families have found love and solace, as well as a solid education (especially in the crafts) that has helped them forge for themselves a future and build good families.

The French occupation of Malta, albeit brief (1798-1800), and subsequent British rule (1800-1964) contributed towards the first exposure of Maltese society to secular thought. The French experience was more violent in this regard having resulted in the looting of churches and the planned closure

and occupation of religious houses. The British authorities, on the other hand, were more astute in their policies. Having realized that the Church wielded great influence upon Maltese society they strove to implement their policies without provoking unnecessary tensions with the hierarchy.

Malta gained its independence from Britain on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 1964 and was declared a republic by an overwhelming majority vote in parliament on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1974. The country joined the European Union on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2004 and adopted the euro as its currency on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2008.

### **The rise of secularism in Malta**

The origins of secularism in Malta date back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, albeit limited to the educated class by way of the writings of Mikiel Anton Vassalli (who, incidentally, was the first to translate substantial parts of the Bible into Maltese) and the liberal statesman, Camillo Sceberras (who, back in 1832, had petitioned the British Crown for the establishment of a Legislative Assembly). Both were the products of French and European Enlightenment and were influenced to varying degrees by the French revolution. With the influence of the *Risorgimento* and the presence in Malta of the movement of the *Garibaldini* in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-clericalism became more overt, especially in the harbour area. It is during this period that, partly as a reaction to these events, effigies of Pope Pius IX began to appear in towns and villages during the feast of the patron saint. They were intended as clear messages and acts of fidelity towards the head of the Catholic Church at a time of interior and exterior crisis.

The granting of limited self-government for the first time in 1921 and the increased role of political parties in the running of the country's internal affairs brought about an enhanced position of the Catholic Church in the political life of the Maltese but also marked the beginnings of a movement that was eventually to lead towards a better articulation of the different roles to be played by Church and State. This process continued to develop through the 1930's and onwards and then was confronted in the 1960's by two events that brought the Church authorities into direct conflict with a prime minister who was still in office (Lord Gerald Strickland) and the executive of the second largest political party in Malta, then known as the Malta Labour Party<sup>2</sup>, under the leadership of Dom Mintoff. In both instances the reaction of the Catholic hierarchy was swift and fierce: both leaders and their respective executive councils were placed under ecclesiastical interdict, and in the latter case absolution was withheld from those who intended to vote or who indeed voted Labour during the general election of 1962. One of the basic problems with Mintoff's policy was that he wanted Malta to become a secular state at a time when the necessary conditions for it to become such were not as yet in place. On the other hand, Archbishop Michael Gonzi, who led the Archdiocese of Malta during the period when these events were unfolding, viewed some elements connected with Mintoff's strategies as a direct threat to ecclesiastical authority. This political-religious conflict dragged on for eight years (1961-1969) and the harm inflicted upon the fabric of Maltese society is incalculable. The short-term consequence of these events was that the Malta Labour Party was relegated to the opposition benches for an entire decade (1962-1971). The long-term consequence was that no family has been left unscathed by this tragedy. It created an atmosphere of mutual distrust and paranoia that has yet to be overcome.

The 1971 general election brought the Malta Labour Party back to power, and the newly elected prime minister Dom Mintoff

soon set out his agenda for sweeping reforms, especially those connected with the separation of Church and State. But his version of the separation of powers meant in fact that the Church should be subject to the state, and that it should not interfere in politics, meaning that he did not want it to interfere in the way he ran the country. The spectre of the 1960's conflict militated against even a reasoned response or opposition where it might have been necessary on the part of the Church which, from 1977 till 2005, was led by the mild-mannered Archbishop Joseph Mercieca. It served as a trump card in the hands of the government against any involvement whatsoever of the Church in the political and social affairs of the country. It also helped the government to act with impunity. Four incidents highlight this increasingly tense situation. The first was the ransacking and burning of the headquarters of *The Times* in 1979 by Labour supporters. The second was the revocation in 1980 of the licence granted to a congregation of nuns to administer a private hospital, which ultimately led to its closure and their subsequent departure from Malta.<sup>3</sup> The third was the Church schools crisis that forced the Church authorities to temporarily close down all schools under the Church's administration, owing to the fact that some of them had been refused a renewal of their licence as teaching institutions. The fourth was the turning of a blind eye by the government and the Police Force, when a motley crowd of Dockyard workers ransacked the Archbishop's Curia<sup>4</sup>. The last two incidents took place in 1984.

With the return to power of the Nationalist Party in 1987 Church-State relations took a turn for the better. The Church in Malta agreed to hand over to the Government much of its property while being compensated by way of government bonds. The Maltese government agreed to partly fund the running of Church schools. Barring a few hiccups relations between Church and State have since been cordial and mutually respectful.

During the past five years Malta has experienced three major events that have redefined its social, cultural and moral landscapes. Being an integral part of Maltese society, the Catholic Church has been particularly affected by these dramatic changes and has yet to come to terms with both their short and long term effects. The first major challenge was the issue of the introduction of divorce. Discussion on the issue had been going on for years, but matters came to a head in August 2010 when a Private Members Bill was proposed and tabled by a former Member of Parliament for the then governing Nationalist Party [PN]). This triggered a heated debate in the local media, especially in the local newspapers and on local TV stations.

The issue of divorce was decided by a referendum on May 28, 2011 with 52.67% in favour and 46.4% against. A law introducing divorce was then approved by Parliament on July 25 of the same year and it came into effect as of October 1.

There were many Nationalist supporters, even some Nationalist members of parliament, who were in favour of divorce for many reasons, not least, perhaps, for personal ones as well. In fact, today there is very little to choose between the two major parties on this and other issues which challenge Catholic doctrine. It must also be remembered that the governing Nationalist Party had been driven by internal dissent, and had become extremely unpopular with the electorate. Another political party in Malta, the Alternattiva Demokratika (AD), was totally in favour of the introduction of divorce. However, the pro-divorce lobby was spearheaded mainly by the Labour Party (PL). There is little doubt that the majority in favour of divorce was more a result of unwavering adherence to Labour; its leader (then Leader of the Opposition) had openly declared his position on the matter and the overwhelming majority of his supporters followed suit.

The campaign that preceded the referendum has uncovered not only deep divisions within Maltese society but also an increasing hostility towards the Catholic Church and especially towards its hierarchy.

The entire campaign was transformed from one of reasoned debate and a grasp of the essentials to an exercise in mud-slinging that gave vent to anti-Catholic and anti-clerical sentiment. Articles in newspapers, especially those leaning towards the political left applied a tried and tested strategy against the Catholic Church in Malta: ridicule-demonize-destroy. In many ways it was a carbon-copy of the second referendum on the same question that had taken place more than a decade earlier in Ireland. Issues such as child sex-abuse by clerics were brought out in the open in order to undermine the credibility of the Catholic hierarchy and neutralise (if not do away with) its leadership role. At one point the spectre of the religious political crisis of the 1960s that saw the entire Executive of the Labour Party placed under interdict in 1961 was resuscitated in order to instil fear of a possible return to those “dark days”.

The divorce campaign turned out to be a dress rehearsal for the ensuing electoral campaign which brought a revamped Labour Party to power under the leadership of Joseph Muscat with a resounding victory at the polls on March 9, 2013<sup>5</sup>.

The second major event concerned the passing of the Embryo Protection Bill on November 26, 2012<sup>6</sup> This took place after long months of debate and discussion inside and outside Parliament, as well as across the political divide, as would befit such a delicate matter. The then Archbishop of Malta Mgr Paul Cremona and the Bishop of Gozo Mario Grech issued a joint and detailed pastoral letter on the issue entitled *Celebrating Human Life*<sup>7</sup>. Its purpose, they wrote, was “to guide those Catholics (in the first place, married couples who are experiencing difficulty with procreation, as well as other persons who work in the field of science, politics and law),

in order that they may form their consciences rightly on a subject such as human life, a subject which is so sacred and fundamental.” It reaffirmed Church teaching “that the value of human life must remain untarnished and the Church defends it from the very moment of conception, always striving to bring to light the unique dignity of the human being.” However, it also warned that “[t]he IVF process involves methods which at times consider the person, who is still at the embryonic stage, to be merely ‘a mass of cells’ which may be used, selected and dispensed with. Many times, a significant number of human embryos are sacrificed for the sake of the birth of the desired child.” The Bishops therefore affirmed that “civil law in respect of assisted procreation should aim to safe-guard ... the value of life and physical integrity of every person, the value of the unitive aspect of marriage and the value of human sexuality in marriage.” The Letter came out strongly against the freezing of human embryos, the deliberate destruction of supernumerary human embryos, and the genetic selection of human embryos by pre-implantation diagnosis, manipulation or experimentation on human embryos. However, the wording in this context created some unease in certain circles. Some priests went so far as to refuse reading the letter in church during Sunday Mass<sup>8</sup>. In its present form the law allows doctors to attempt to fertilize a maximum of two eggs while also allowing eggs to be frozen. But the debate has recently been rekindled with some doctors calling for greater latitude concerning the freezing of eggs and embryos<sup>9</sup>.

With its landslide victory at the polls the new Labour government set out immediately to implement its intended programme towards a complete secularization of Malta not only as a state, but even more so as a society.

The third challenge has been the introduction of a law on civil unions which also included the granting of legal recognition of homosexual and lesbian couples and placing them on a par with heterosexual ones.

The wording of the law as it stands caters for the establishment of gay marriage in all but name. The law also gives such couples the right to apply for the adoption of children<sup>10</sup>. As in all the other countries that have introduced the right of child adoptions for homosexual and lesbian couples, what appears to be most disconcerting is not only the fact itself, but the reduction of child adoptions by the Gay Rights lobby to the level of the right to private property. Where the wellbeing of children should have been (as it should always be) paramount to legislators, this has been overruled by the purported right of same sex couples to attain what for obvious and natural reasons is unattainable. Here mention must be made of the fact that the law as it now stands has gone far beyond what had been promised in the electoral programme of the Labour Party. It was also enacted without any prior consultation with the Board on Adoptions<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, the then President of the Republic had refused to sign the bill into law and the Labour government had to wait until he ended his term of office in order to have its wishes granted by his successor. The next step would be the employment of surrogate mothers and sperm donors for the same end. This, however, has already met several legal pitfalls in the United States<sup>12</sup> and these are bound to appear also in EU countries.

The introduction of all three legislations has been hailed by some local NGOs and pressure groups as being decisive steps toward “bringing Malta out of the Dark Ages” and offering all citizens equal opportunities, with the Prime Minister being quoted as having stated that “*Malta is now more liberal and more European and it has given equality to all its people*”<sup>13</sup>. It goes without saying that these laws also run counter to the moral teachings of the Roman Catholic Church; therefore the role of Roman Catholicism as the official religion of the Republic of Malta as enshrined in its Constitution will be increasingly branded as contradictory and its removal would be a matter of ‘when’ rather than ‘if’. Opposition to such laws, whether on

the part of the Catholic Church or from other religious denominations, has been constantly labelled as a sign of obscurantism and moral discourse as imposition. Such attitudes have been a common characteristic of secularism throughout the European Union for decades.

During these past few months it has become patently clear that the strategy being applied by the present Labour government in the enactment of laws (especially those that are bound to court controversy) is that of raising as many issues as possible in the public forum, thereby fragmenting public opinion, in order to steamroll its policies and, supposedly, bringing Malta in line with other EU countries. It is a strategy that had already been applied by the Zapatero government in Spain with disastrous results to the social (to say nothing of the economic) fabric of that country<sup>14</sup>.

It is patently clear that there do exist lobbies within the European Union and especially inside the European Parliament, whose role is that of applying constant pressure on all member states to conform on certain issues especially those perceived as touching upon so-called 'civil rights'. As the Prime Minister's speech quoted above indicates, the perceived idea is that in not following other EU countries who have introduced divorce, gay marriage, etc., Malta would be somehow lagging behind other member states that in turn are portrayed as liberal and progressive. The message is clear: Malta must bring itself into line with similar legislation in order to constantly prove her European credentials.

These prospects appear to be mounting given that shortly after the law on civil unions was passed through parliament the Civil Liberties Minister was reported to have stated during a press conference that the legalisation of abortion is a "categorical no at *this point in time*<sup>15</sup>". Later the Department of Information of the Government issued a press release denying the claim that this implied its eventual introduction<sup>16</sup>. However, the fact that

both the Ministry of Civil Liberties and the Prime Minister himself were obliged to categorically deny that a Labour government was considering legislation on abortion (or even being in favour of it) speaks volumes<sup>17</sup>.

### **The attitude of the Church in Malta**

These issues have brought to light a lack of preparedness on the part of both hierarchy and clergy for the onslaught that has taken place. The Curia's handling of the issue and its participation in the campaign against divorce has left many sincere Catholics somewhat bemused. Right from the start of the campaign people were receiving mixed messages from Church authorities. While addressing members of the Judiciary in a homily marking the opening of the Forensic Year 2010/2011 the Judicial Vicar of the Metropolitan Tribunal called on members of the Judiciary and lawyers to desist from taking part in divorce proceedings and be conscientious objectors. Invoking Church teaching he also stated that whoever cooperated in any way in the introduction of divorce, who applied the law and who sought recourse to it, though not the innocent party, would be breaking God's law and so would be committing a grave sin<sup>18</sup>. A few months later, on the eve of the referendum on divorce, one of the leaders of the 'Yes' campaign was barred from assisting her clients during annulment proceedings at the Metropolitan Tribunal since her position was considered as running counter to the Church's teaching on marital indissolubility<sup>19</sup>. Needless to say this measure was given wide coverage in the local press and again the Curia bore the brunt of the attacks levelled against it by mainly left-leaning newspapers. The response from the ecclesiastical authorities was a constant reference to and quotes from official Church documents which, although useful, are not the best way of communicating with the man in the street. She was reinstated in August of that same year, a move that was interpreted as a U-turn of the part of the Curia<sup>20</sup>. Added to these two incidents, mention must be made of quite a few local priests who had voiced their dissent publicly on the issue

of divorce by way of letters or opinion pieces in newspapers and even through interviews<sup>21</sup>.

One very popular position concerning the perceived role of the Catholic Church in Maltese society following the passing of the above-mentioned legislation, and recently highlighted by a regular opinion leader, is that the bishops “know the Church has grown weaker than ever before and that direct or perceived meddling in politics will not help reverse the situation, but will make it worse (...) They gently remind Catholics of the teachings of the Church on key issues and leave it to them to decide without threatening hellfire and brimstone. Much less do the bishops presume that they can dictate to those who do not follow the Church’s teachings”<sup>22</sup>. Without resorting to threats of eternal punishment and damnation it takes more than just a “gentle reminder” to drive home the message that what is at stake is the future moral landscape of Maltese society irrespective of confessional and/or political leanings. Moreover, the Church’s stand on certain doctrinal and moral issues cannot be equated with the marketing policy of some multinational companies. The moral teachings of the Catholic Church cannot be considered in the same way as some product that is put on the market and then withdrawn when sales take a nose-dive. Nor can the Catholic Church be considered a competitor among others in the “market of ideas”. It is not a question of “adapt or face extinction”. The Catholic Church has a message to proclaim, and that message is Jesus Christ, his teachings and his deeds. The way it *communicates* the message needs to develop according to time, place, circumstances and cultures; but the *content* remains unchanged. And even if one were to argue from the viewpoint of Church attendance, it is a time-proven fact that a religion attracts most attention not when it is more accommodating but when it is more *challenging*. A religion that demands much from its adherents offers multiple challenges; a religion that seeks to accommodate does not. A religion that is accommodating is not worth bearing witness *to*, let alone dying *for*.

It is most unfortunate that words such as “dictate” and “impose” are all too often being levelled at the Catholic Church’s position on moral issues in order to thwart any attempts on its part to speak out forcefully<sup>23</sup>.

### **The future role of the Catholic Church in Malta**

Like many European Union countries Maltese society has become increasingly mired in a babel of political correctness gone awry. Catholics, be they members of the hierarchy or laity, should not be considered as if they were oddities, minorities and foreigners in their own country. Another worrying factor is that the objective truth is construed as being equivalent to the opinion of the majority; in other words, the truth is measured according to public opinion.

There exists an urgent need to strengthen the ties between the Catholic hierarchy and the laity. *All* must experience a sense of belonging. The Catholic laity, and especially the Catholic *intelligentsia*, in Malta must be nurtured, encouraged and supported by the Church authorities, especially when they courageously voice their concerns as Catholics on matters of legislation and public policy and are at times subjected to a torrent of abuse for taking a stand on recent moral and political issues. Within the next few years they will have to take upon themselves a more direct role in the public forum. The Catholic Church in Malta must also embark upon a thorough overhaul on the manner in which the Gospel message is transmitted, beginning with the catechesis of the young, the teaching of the subject of religion in schools and theological reflection both on the academic and on the parish levels. It must also seek to reinforce its dialogue with society, both local and European, in order to continue conveying its message that human dignity and human rights are grounded in the Christian faith and in the Biblical teaching that the human being is cast in the image of God. The “new evangelization” must go hand in hand with “dialogue within the Courtyard of the Gentiles”. Furthermore, the message of the

Church authorities needs to be clear and unambiguous.

The future role of the Catholic Church in Malta depends in no small measure upon the solidity of marriage and the family and the nurture and education of the young. In the wake of the introduction of divorce and civil unions this issue has become a grave pastoral challenge that requires constant study and effort in order to strengthen relationships between married couples themselves and their children. Two years ago the Holy See sent to all Episcopal Conferences a questionnaire in preparation for the Extraordinary General Synod that has just been celebrated. Here in Malta this project was entrusted to the Institute *Discern*<sup>24</sup>. In late May of last year this institute drew up and published a Preliminary Report<sup>25</sup> based on a sub-sample of 1,590 respondents. In some cases the results made for some sober reading. 69.7% of respondents admitted that they selectively accepted the Church's teaching on family life. For example, whereas the vast majority accepted that marriage is a sacrament implying fidelity, exclusivity and indissolubility, 15.8% find it difficult to follow particularly the Church's teaching on contraception and birth control. Only 47.2% believe that the Catholic Church in Malta is doing enough to help couples who are facing a crisis in their married life. While 83.3% of parents who responded consider it their vocation to transmit their faith to their children and relatives, only 6.2% "teach" religion to their children. 57.7% of respondents thought that the family is not always helping to give a Christian view of humanity and the human vocation and 59.9% believe that the many crises of faith which we are facing today have a "great" influence on family life. 62% still pray together as a family and 65.2% attend Mass on Sundays whereas 53.1% replied that they attend frequently.

In the light of what has emerged from the last General Synod on the Family, the Catholic Church in Malta must also give the necessary attention and pastoral care to those

among its members who have divorced and remarried or have opted in favour of a civil union<sup>26</sup>. Most of those concerned consider themselves rejected by the Church since they are not allowed to frequent the sacraments. Here one also has to state that for many people, membership in the Church is comparable to membership in a club, the bottom-line being that if one does not follow the rules one is ejected and membership is terminated. 43.3% believe that the fact that cohabiting couples are not allowed to receive communion is a cause of pain. 30.9% think that people living in an irregular marriage expect the Church to treat their children in a similar manner as the children of those whose marriage has been blessed by the Church and 19.2% expect the Church to forgive them and to allow them to receive the sacraments. The Catholic Church must also be prepared to address those psychological problems that will eventually emerge among children belonging to divorced couples and who will be undoubtedly traumatized by this bitter experience.

Also, due attention should be given towards homosexuals and lesbians as well as to same sex couples. In a statement issued immediately after the Civil Unions Bill was passed through Parliament the Bishops of Malta and Gozo had expressed their wish that the discussion on these issues "continues with due respect to every person, irrespective of his/her sexual orientation and choices made," while continuing to affirm that "our society should strive to keep cherishing and giving preference to the natural family, built upon marriage between a man and a woman<sup>27</sup>".

The Church in Malta today does not and must not wish for a return to the ways of the past, but neither is it condemned to remain bogged down in the present. Nostalgia of "better times in the past" does not bode well for a Church that needs to be forward looking and which requires leaders capable of realizing its aspirations and hopes. On the other hand, the Church must never agree to allow itself to be relegated to the sacristy or to

have its role restricted to liturgical functions; nor should the Church's pastoral planning reduce itself to a reaction to government agendas and legislation. It also needs to be vigilant in order to avoid ambiguities that have, alas, become the hallmark of much of European Union policy.

The role of the Church in helping construct a more humane Maltese society is to be an attentive listener to the cries of anguish which betray a sense of the meaninglessness that lies at the heart of humanity today, as well as an impassioned and coherent witness of a faith that is forever new, dynamic and relevant. Maltese society is also suffering from a deficit of hope, that hope which enables its citizens to give meaning to their lives and history, and to look ahead and continue on their way *together*<sup>28</sup>.

The Church in Malta has a future because it has always risen to the occasion whenever the Maltese population was in dire need of inspiration and hope. Participation in the life of the European Union should not be a cause of fear, but a call to live up to one's faith and find in it the realization of human dignity and purpose.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See

<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Malta>

<sup>2</sup> The party's name has recently been changed to *PartitLaburista* (Labour Party).

<sup>3</sup> Part of the hospital was later re-opened as a home for the elderly under the administration of *Caritas* Malta. The rest of the building subsequently underwent a thorough refurbishing and was inaugurated by the Nationalist government as a rehabilitation centre for elderly patients recovering from operations performed at the general hospital.

<sup>4</sup> See Fr. Joe Borg, "The day when time did not stand still", in *The Sunday Times* (Malta), 28<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

<http://www.timesofmalta.com/blogs/view/20080928/fr-joe-borg/the-day-when-time-did-not-stand-still>

<sup>5</sup> The Labour Party (PL) won 54.83% of the valid votes cast against 43.34% acquired by the Nationalist Party (PN).

<sup>6</sup> See

<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20121127/local/IVF-Bill-finally-approved-as-the-Opposition-withdraws-division.447025>

<sup>7</sup> The full text of the pastoral Letter can be accessed from:

<http://thechurchinmalta.org/en/posts/29119/pastoral-letter-celebrating-human-lifepastoral-letter-celebrating-human-life>

<sup>8</sup> See Ivan Camilleri, "Bishops' IVF letter snubbed by priests" in *The Times of Malta*, 7 August 2012: <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120807/local/Bishops-IVF-letter-snubbed-by-priests.431818> Accessed 12.07.2014.

<sup>9</sup> See Kurt Sansone, "Compromise over IVF law leaves doctors split in *The Times of Malta*, 10 July, 2014, p. 6; Kurt Sansone, "IVF success rate isn't comparable to before", in *The Times of Malta*, 13 July 2014, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> The inclusion of this detail triggered the Nationalist opposition's abstention from voting during the final reading of the Bill.

<sup>11</sup> See Matthew Xuereb, "Same-sex adoptions in by stealth – board head", in *The Times of Malta*, 12 May 2014, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/relationships/10595447/Sperm-donor-must-pay-child-support-to-lesbian-couple-court-rules.html>

<sup>13</sup> See

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/14/us-malta-gays-idUSBREA3D1OS20140414>

<sup>14</sup> See Editorial: In Zapatero's footsteps, *The Malta Independent on Sunday*, 20 April 2014, p. 15. See also

*The Times of Malta*, 24 April 2014, Letters to the Editor: "Historic Indeed", by Alfred Griscti.

<sup>15</sup> See

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEso06LLe14> .

See also *The Malta Independent*, 22 April 2014, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> See

<https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/Press%20Releases/Pages/2014/April/21/pr140832.aspx>

<sup>17</sup> See *The Malta Independent*, 23 April 2014, p. 5

<sup>18</sup> *Judicial Vicar's homily on the opening of the Forensic Year*, 4 October 2010. The full text is to be found on the website of the Archdiocese of Malta:

<http://thechurchinmalta.org/en/posts/12804/judicial-vicars-homily-at-the-opening-of-the-forensic-year-l-omelija-tal-vigarju-gudizzjali-fil-ftugh-tas-sena-forensi> Accessed 18.06.2014. See also Kurt Sansone, "Judicial Vicar warns judges who rule for divorce: 'God being put aside'" in *The Times of Malta*, Friday, October 8, 2010:

<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20101008/local/judicial-vicar-warns-judges-who-rule-for-divorce.330364> Accessed 18.06.2010

<sup>19</sup> See David Schembri, "Divorce lobbyist barred from Church tribunal: 'Divorce is not a civil issue... it's an issue of God'" in *The Times of Malta*, Thursday, April 28, 2011:

<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20110428/local/Divorce-lobbyist-barrd-from-Church-tribunal.362575> Accessed 18.06.2011.

<sup>20</sup> See Matthew Vella, "Archbishop reinstates divorce campaign figurehead to Ecclesiastical Tribunal, 26 August 2011:

<http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/12306/archbishop-reinstates-divorce-campaign-figurehead-to-ecclesiastical-tribunal#.U6FS3v-KC01> Accessed 18.06.2014.

<sup>21</sup> See the interview with Mgr. Charles Scicluna, then Auxiliary Bishop of Malta and presently its Archbishop, entitled: "The Church is here to propose... not impose" in *The Times of Malta*, 23 November 2012:

<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120807/local/Bishops-IVF-letter-snubbed-by-priests.431818> Accessed 12.07.2014.

<sup>22</sup> Lino Spiteri, "Dragging religion into Politics" in *The Times of Malta*, 21 April 2014, p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> See art. "Muscat has silenced the Church – Simon Busuttill interviewed" in *MaltaToday*, 20 April 2014, p. 1. Watch the full interview on:

<http://vimeo.com/92405877>

<sup>24</sup> According to its website *Discern* (Institute for Research on the Signs of the Times) "is a non-profit organization funded primarily by the Archdiocese of Malta without the exclusion of other sources of funding. It seeks to promote collaboration with similar bodies both national and international, especially with the University of Malta." See <http://www.discern-malta.org/index.html>

<sup>25</sup> This Preliminary Report was published in, among other media sources, the weekly Catholic newspaper *Lehen is-Sewwa* on 25 May 2014 on page 28. The results quoted above are taken from this publication. See also Fr Joe Borg, "A second coming for Malta *Cattolicissima*?" in *The Times of Malta*, 25 May 2014.

<sup>26</sup> See the Final Document of the recent Bishops' Synod on the Family, n. 25.

<sup>27</sup> *A Statement by the Bishops on the Civil Unions Law* issued on April 16, 2014:

<http://ms.maltadiocese.org/WEBSITE/2014/PRESS%20RELEASES/41%20STQARRIJA%20TAL-ISQFIJJIET%20ENG.pdf> Accessed 14.07.2014.

<sup>28</sup> See Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 4. cf. n. 109.