

THE MALTESE CATHOLIC ENLIGHTENMENT*

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Emperor Charles V gave Malta to the Knights Hospitallers as a fief in 1530.¹ This was a significant event in the annals of the island because the arrival of these “haughty occupiers” meant that the inhabitants lost the self-government, or *universitas*, which they had enjoyed since 1428.² Nevertheless, this oppressive government had several redeeming factors. First of all, it made Malta a nation. Before the arrival of the Order, the island was considered one of the cities of Sicily, such as Palermo and Messina.³ Now the knights guarded jealously the “independence” of the island fortress. Secondly, Malta became a secure place to live in. The great siege of 1565 was the last time the “Turks” assaulted the island. Instead, the war was taken into the enemy’s own territory and Maltese as well as foreigners armed their ships in search of rich booty in Ottoman waters. This security made the population grow fivefold, so that by 1798, when the Hospitallers were expelled by Napoleon, it amounted to 100,000. And, what is even more suggestive, the advent of the Order transformed the texture of Maltese society. Previously it was a rural, sparsely settled society. After two and a half centuries, it had become a mobile society, with densely populated urban centers, whose inhabitants were to be found all over the shores of the Mediterranean. This exodus of Maltese was counterbalanced by

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Abbreviations: AAM—Archiepiscopal Archives, Malta; AC—Atti Civili; ACDF—Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede; ACM—Archivum Cathedralae Melitense; AIM—Archives of the Inquisition, Malta; AO—Acta Originalia; Arch.—Archives; AS—Archivio di Stato; ASV—Archivio Segreto Vaticano; Corr.—Correspondence; Lib.—Library; Mem.—Memorie; NLM—National Library, Malta; PA—Parish Archives; Proc.—Criminal Proceedings; RS—Registrum Supplicatorum; SS—Segreteria di Stato; St St—Stanza Storica.

¹ Roberto Valentini, *I Cavalieri di S. Giovanni da Rodi a Malta: trattative diplomatiche* (Malta: 1935).

² Charles Dalli, “Medieval Communal Organisation in an Insular Context: Approaching the Maltese *Universitas*”, in John Manduca (ed.), *The Making and Unmaking of the Maltese Universitas* (Malta: 1993), 1–12.

³ Frans Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition in Enlightened Malta* (Malta: 2000), 135.

the influx of immigrants—artisans, soldiers, sailors, actors, musicians and, above all, corsairs, who with their spoils made Malta an active commercial centre.⁴

This exchange of people was complemented by books. There is ample evidence that Maltese culture was open to European movements and that Malta was by no means an intellectual backwater. At first this assertion seems strange because censorship left little place for independent thinking, as works for publication had to be scrutinized by the inquisitor, the bishop and the grand master. Besides, the clergy were a veritable army, constituting 1.3 per cent of the population. But if this meant the death knell of local literature, fierce intellectual yearning did survive among the privileged few. The literate sectors of society could not be shut off completely from access to the printed word, as the trials of the inquisition amply prove.⁵

However, this cosmopolitan openness did not stray from reference to God. Two examples from the “crises of the European mind”⁶ illustrate this point clearly. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) identified God as the “first and eternal cause of all things.” But nowhere did he suggest that the “First Mover” continued to direct the world and the affairs of men; that is, he made no mention of a divine providence.⁷ The Huguenot exile Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) not only argued that, since matter is eternal, providence is redundant, but even claimed that a society of atheists would be as civil and moral as any other.⁸

Such painful anxieties did not affect the Maltese intellectual scene in the eighteenth century. In the 1768 statutes of the newly erected university, there is a sustained engagement with the arguments of Hobbes. The professor of natural law was to start his lectures by establishing the principle that only God preserved created things. To this end He implanted natural law in men’s hearts, which urged them to

⁴ Frans Ciappara, *Society and the Inquisition in Early Modern Malta* (Malta: 2001), 46–56.

⁵ Frans Ciappara, *Enlightenment and Reform in Malta 1740–1798* (Malta: 2006), 1–5.

⁶ For the significance of this term see Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la Conscience Européenne, 1680–1715* (Paris: 1961; orig.: 1935).

⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; repr. London: 1914), ch. 12 “Of Religion”, 54–62.

⁸ Pierre Bayle, *Pensées Diverses, Ecrites à un Docteur de Sorbonne, à l’occasion de la Comète qui parut au mois de Décembre 1680*, vol. 2 (Rotterdam: 1721), section clxxii. This paragraph depends heavily on John Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment. Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge, Eng.: 2005), 211–255.

organize themselves in a civil society. The theory that society is formed of free and equal men who voluntarily subject themselves to a ruler was debunked; it is providence that makes men do so. Nor do kings derive their right to govern from their own innate power, but from God; and whoever believes the opposite is guilty of treason against Him.⁹ Likewise, Baron Gaetano Pisani, in his *Lettera di un Maltese ad un Cavaliere Gerosolimitano Professo*, categorically asserted that there was no more potent means to make men act wisely than religion. Paraphrasing Giambattista Vico (1768–1744) he went on to assert that whoever pretended to form good citizens without any reference to religion was greatly mistaken, “as it has been clearly proven against Bayle, who held this to be realizable by atheism.”¹⁰

These two episodes make evident that Malta qualifies as one of those places in the eighteenth century where Catholicism, “far from being in discredited retreat, was still strengthening its intellectual hold on the elite as well as on the common people.”¹¹ In other words, the Maltese reformers came down decidedly on the side of the conservatives in the theological debate then going on in Europe. This is far from suggesting that they did not criticize the Church. On the contrary, like other Catholic rulers in the late eighteenth century, they carried out an unrelenting assault on it, through the movement referred to as “Jansenism.”¹² This term originally signified a corpus of religious belief inspired by St. Augustine (354–430) and supposedly revived by Bishop Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) in his vast Latin treatise *Augustinus* (1640). It emphasized predestination, denied free will and maintained that human nature is incapable of good. By the eighteenth century, however, it had been fragmented into a diverse range of tendencies within the Catholic Church.¹³ This Reform Catholicism or Catholic Enlightenment was a diverse movement and drew on a number of traditions: Gallicanism, Muratorian piety, Febronianism

⁹ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 575, fol. 477r.

¹⁰ Gaetano Pisani, *Lettera di un Maltese ad un Cavaliere Gerosolimitano* (Vercelli: 1783), 149.

¹¹ Derek Beales, “Religion and culture,” in T.C.W. Blanning (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: 2000), 138.

¹² For a good summary of the history of this term, William Doyle, *Jansenism* (London: 2000).

¹³ The two indispensable books on this subject are Enrico Damming, *Il Movimento Giansenista a Roma nella Seconda Metà del Secolo XVIII* (Vatican City: 1945) and Emile Appolis, *Le “Tiers Parti” Catholique au XVIII^e Siècle* (Paris: 1960).

and Josephism.¹⁴ It was no longer as much about grace and salvation as on a simplification of liturgical practices and a more informed spiritual life among the laity. This attempt to revive what Pietro Stella calls “the old trunk of the Church”¹⁵ also implied a return to the practices of the primitive Church, defending the authority of the bishops from the encroachments of Rome, castigating the religious orders as idle and corrupt and replacing them by a reformed secular clergy. Above all, it was an attack on the social, economic, political and cultural position of the Catholic Church.¹⁶

This chapter seeks to analyze whether religious discussion on the island of Malta was closely related to that in other European countries. That is, did it provide a microcosm of this European-wide movement? I will try to present a framework for all these queries by developing three arguments. Did simpler forms of religious expression replace the extravagances of baroque popular piety? To what extent did the grand masters assume control of the Church? And, finally, did they systematically erode papal jurisdiction in Malta?

Data come chiefly from Maltese archives: the deposits of the Order of St John, the bishop’s ecclesiastical court and the Roman inquisition. They are supplemented with material at the state archives of Florence, Naples and Venice but especially at the Vatican—*archivio della congregazione per la dottrina della fede* and the *archivio segreto vaticano*.

1. THEMES OF THE MALTESE CATHOLIC ENLIGHTENMENT

We can start our analysis by reference to the letter which Mgr Scipione de’ Ricci (1741–1810) sent to the Theatine Bishop of Malta Vincenzo Labini (1780–1807) on 6 May 1789. While reminding him of their old friendship at Rome, Ricci hoped that Labini would recognize “my Church’s orthodoxy and how much blame the enemies of every truth have laid on me.” He further asked him to give him support like so many other worthy pastors.¹⁷ The Maltese ordinary, in his answer of

¹⁴ For this term, Derek Beales, *Joseph II*, vol. 1, *In the Shadow of Maria Theresa 1741–1780* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1987), 439–479. And now Idem, *Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London and New York: 2005), 287–308.

¹⁵ Pietro Stella (ed.), *Il Giansenismo in Italia*, vol. 1/i (Zurich: 1966), 17.

¹⁶ Samuel J. Miller, “Portugal and Utrecht: A Phase of the Catholic Enlightenment,” *Catholic Historical Review* 63 (1977), 226.

¹⁷ Floriana, AAM, Corr. 20, fols. 323r–v.

5 June, assured him that he never doubted his orthodoxy but he would not anticipate the judgment of the pope, who, as “the center of our Truth,” was duty-bound to “strengthen his brothers.” Labini’s only wish was to see Ricci use his eloquence and wisdom in the service of the Church against the enemies of the holy faith.¹⁸

This reply draws attention to three remarks. First, it was an indirect though firm disapproval of Jansenist thought and practice. Secondly, this censure had been foreshadowed in 1744 with the controversy over the arrangements for the funeral of Mgr Domenico Scerberras, the archdeacon of the cathedral. Bishop Alpheran (1728–1757) would have liked to give him only a private burial, as a Jansenist who had died in mortal sin.¹⁹ Thirdly, the Maltese bishops showed their total subjection to Rome by including in their title—unlike, for instance, the Jansenist Bishop Mgr Serafino Filangieri of Palermo²⁰—the phrase *sedis apostolicae gratiae*.²¹ Nor did they take over any of the functions of the pope, such as issuing dispensations from diriment impediments to matrimony or to regulars from their solemn vows.

In short, if the synod of Pistoia (1786) granted to the pope only “honorable primacy”²² the Maltese hierarchy ignored the Jansenist concept of episcopal independence and instead acknowledged the pontiff as its supreme head. This reluctance to assert the freedom of ordinaries in turn echoed the popular aversion to austere and enlightened Catholicism, so much at the heart of Jansenist doctrine. Lodovico Antonio Muratori (1672–1740) in his *Della Regolata Devozione de’ Cristiani*, a highly influential book published in Venice in 1747 under the pseudonym of Lamindo Pritanio, had made a clear distinction between true and superficial devotion. The latter, he claimed, consists in decorating images, burning candles and practicing similar non-substantial signs of piety. In contrast, true devotion is expressed with sober inwardness, which Christians show when they meditate upon the life of the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, fols. 324r–v. For a copy of this letter see Florence, AS, Fondo Ricci, vol. 73, 765–766.

¹⁹ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 49, fols. 145r–46r, Margherita Scerberras to the pope, 5 Jan. 1745.

²⁰ Domenico Ambrasi, *Riformatori e Ribelli a Napoli nella Seconda Metà del Settecento. Ricerche sul Giansenismo Napoletano* (Naples: 1979), 21.

²¹ See, for instance, Floriana, AAM Edicta Pellerano 11, fol. 4r.

²² Florence, AS, Fondo Ricci, vol. 74, 178, Cardinal Gioannetti to Ricci, 30 Oct. 1790.



Redeemer, His teachings full of love and wisdom and most of all His passion and death.²³

The Maltese in the second half of the eighteenth century were practically strangers to this movement of religious piety. They were committed to a vibrant Catholicism and expressed their emotions with outward, exuberant gestures. The baroque architectural style of their churches, dominant and aggressive, was a symbol of their devotion. This was contrary to what was happening on the continent, where simpler, more personal and less ostentatious devotion was paralleled by the neo-classical style of Ste-Geneviève in Paris, San Francisco el Grande at Madrid and St. Blasien in Germany.

It was also the great age of pompous church music when the works of Michel'Angelo Vella (1715–1792), Benigno Zerafa (1726–1804) and Francesco Azzopardi (1748–1809) resounded in all churches, ignoring Benedict XIV's prohibition of trumpets, a typical baroque instrument.²⁴ Similarly, the feasts of the patron saints were celebrated on a grand scale, and statues were processed through the streets, accompanied by the firing of petards and the playing of instruments. Pilgrimages to the sites of miracles and holy relics still attracted several participants. The principal Marian shrine was at Mellieha. Like other popular shrines on the continent,²⁵ it was believed to have been depicted by St Luke when he was shipwrecked on Malta together with St Paul in 60 A.D.²⁶

If pilgrimages and festivals were an integral part of outward ceremonial observances, so were the relic processions in which, as in Bavaria, complete skeletons of martyrs (*corpi santi*) imported from Roman catacombs²⁷ were carried in procession through the streets.²⁸ The themes of sacrifice, martyrdom and triumph over death expressed

²³ Lodovico Antonio Muratori, *Della Regolata Divozione De' Cristiani* (Venice: 1780; orig.: 1747), 34–37.

²⁴ See, among general works, Joseph Vella Bondin, *Il-Muzika ta' Malta sa l-ahhar tas-Seklu Tmintax* [Malta's Music till the end of the Eighteenth Century] (Malta: 2000) and John Azzopardi and Matteo Sansone (eds.), *Italian and Maltese Music in the Archives at the Cathedral Museum of Malta* (Malta: 2001).

²⁵ Nicholas Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1995), 25.

²⁶ For this event: Acts 27–28.

²⁷ Trevor Johnson, "Trionfi of the Holy Dead: The Relic Festivals of Baroque Bavaria," in Karin Friedrich (ed.), *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Lewiston: 2000), 31–56.

²⁸ For a detailed description by the parish priest of the translation of S. Vittorio at Naxxar on Sunday, 23 September 1787: Naxxar, PA, Lib. Bapt. II, fols. 667r–682r.

by these relic festivals supplemented the Good Friday pageants held in various towns and villages.²⁹

This exterior and triumphalistic aspect of religion associated with baroque piety also comprised the flamboyant and theatrical style of popular sermons. Emphasis was put on gesture and ritual to impress and convince simple souls as well as to transmit essential truths. Here are just two instances. At Senglea in 1743, the capuchin preacher addressed the congregation barefoot and with a rope round his neck and a crown of thorns on his head.³⁰ That same year, while the Jesuit padre Rossignoli conducted a mission at Valletta, he held a skull in his hand when preaching on death. In the sermon on hell, a man wearing a black robe brought to the scaffold on which the friar stood a painting of a damned soul with the words "Either Penitence or Hell" inscribed on it. Furthermore, the friar flogged himself so severely that the women started screaming and the bishop ordered him to desist.³¹

Closely associated with preaching was religious instruction. Contrary to the case in Lombardy where it was proscribed,³² in Malta the catechism of Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) was the only catechism in use. It had been translated by Bishop Alpheran's confessor, Don Francesco Wzzino, and published in 1752. It was attacked by the Jansenists particularly "for not having the power to enkindle by instruction the love of God that is the fullness and sum of all the Law."³³ Yet, the Maltese ecclesiastical authorities not only stipulated this one catechism but furthermore directed the parish priests as to how it was to be taught: absolutely not in the form of a dialogue but based on rote learning through recitation by the whole class, a question-and-answer statement of Christian faith. Put another way, unlike the Reform Catholics

²⁹ See, for instance Ġorġ Aquilina, *Il-Gimgha l-Kbira tal-Belt* [Good Friday at Valletta] (Malta: 1986).

³⁰ Senglea, PA, *Memorie Diverse* 1, fol. 35r.

³¹ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 360, 602–608. The classical work on missions is Louis Châtellier, *The Religion of the poor. Rural missions in Europe and the formation of modern Catholicism, c. 1500–1800* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1997).

³² Paola Vismara, *Il "Buon Cristiano". Dibattiti e contese sul catechismo nella Lombardia di fine Settecento* (Florence: 1984).

³³ Quoted in Charles A. Bolton, *Church Reform in 18th Century Italy* (The Hague: 1969), 18.

in Germany,³⁴ they relied rather on the children's power of memory than on their understanding.³⁵

We cannot say for Malta therefore, as has been claimed for the Habsburg Monarchy, that Church reform was "a movement inside the Church and by the Church to reform itself."³⁶ Muratori had foreseen this inability of church leaders to bring about change and called on the kings to perform this task. He expressed this program in his last work or spiritual testament, *Della Pubblica Felicità, Oggetto de' Buoni Principi*. This book, published in 1749, a year before Muratori's death, was formally dedicated to the prince-archbishop of Salzburg, Andreas Jakob von Dietrichstein (1689–1753), but in fact was addressed to all sovereigns and moderate reformers.³⁷

2. THE KNIGHTS' AMBIVALENT CONDUCT AS SOVEREIGNS AND RELIGIOUS

It will be argued in this chapter that in Malta the grand masters performed this task only in part. An investigation of their ambivalent conduct must take into account their unenviable position, unique in Europe. As Gasparo Soderini, the Venetian representative in Naples, correctly observed in 1781, they were the lay sovereigns of Malta, but they were also members of a religious order directly subject to the pope.³⁸ They condemned in no uncertain way the theology of grace of Port Royal³⁹ and expelled Jansenists who objected to *Unigenitus* from their commanderies or estates.⁴⁰

³⁴ Ernst Wangermann, "The Austrian Enlightenment", in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1981), 131–133.

³⁵ Floriana, AAM, RS 10, fol. 361v.

³⁶ Timothy C. W. Blanning, *Joseph II* (London: 1994), 44.

³⁷ For this point see Claudio Donati, "Dalla 'regolato devozione' al 'giuseppinismo' nell'Italia del Settecento," in Mario Rosa (ed.), *Cattolicesimo e Lumi nel Settecento Italiano*, (Rome: 1981), 91. See also Adam Wandruszka, *Pietro Leopoldo. Un Grande Riformatore* (Florence: 1968), 27–29, which describes the work as "a manual program of enlightened absolutism".

³⁸ Michele Fassina (ed.), *Corrispondenze Diplomatiche Veneziane da Napoli. Relazioni* (Rome: 1992), 236–37.

³⁹ See Pinto's *Lettre Circulaire pour les Grans Prieurs de St Giles de Toulouse, d'Auvergne, de France, d'Aquitaine, et de Champagne*, Mdina, AIM, Corr. 99, fol. 350r, 20 Dec. 1741.

⁴⁰ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 27, f. 144r, Ruffo to Gualtieri, 22 Sept. 1742. See also Roderick Cavaliero, *The Last of the Crusaders. The Knights of St John in Malta in the Eighteenth Century* (London: 1960), 123.

Indeed, the grand masters patronized several of the devotional practices of their subjects. They attended grand religious functions at St John's as well as the feasts of the patron saints in the villages. They processed through the streets on Corpus Christi and 8 September, the feast of Our Lady of Victories, commemorating the great siege of 1565.⁴¹ As if the involvement in these ceremonies were not enough, Pinto in 1749 had the skull of the founder of the Order, Blessed Gérard, brought to Malta from Monosque in Provence.⁴² In 1765 he received as a gift from Louis XV a part of the rib of St Louis and pieces of the cranium and thigh bone of the martyrs St Valerian and St Innocent.⁴³ He also paid for the translation of the *corpo santo* of St. Calcedonio from the Jesuit church at Valletta to S. Maria di Manresa at Floriana on a Sunday in May 1753.⁴⁴ And, far from abolishing confraternities, he enhanced their importance. He was rector and a great benefactor of the brotherhoods of the Holy Sacrament⁴⁵ and of the holy rosary at the Dominican church at Valletta. His joining the latter *fratellanza* on a Saturday morning, 18 October 1755, was an occasion for the display of baroque extravagance with the firing of petards, the ringing of bells, the playing of trumpets and the singing of minuets during Mass.⁴⁶

However, if the grand masters refrained from dismantling baroque piety, they were in the mainstream of Reform Catholicism by their assertion of secular power over the Church. There were two motivating forces behind these "most incisive reforms in the relationship between civil and religious society".⁴⁷ First, it has been argued convincingly that the success of Protestant countries like Prussia and England made Catholic states examine their ecclesiastical policies.⁴⁸ In confirmation of this thesis, there can be no denying that Protestantism offered a solution to most of the questions of the time. Was it not to Protestant North Germany that Austrian *Aufklärer* looked for

⁴¹ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 14, 492.

⁴² Anthony Luttrell, "The Skull of the Blessed Gérard," in John Azzopardi (ed.), *The Order's Legacy in Malta* (Malta: 1989), 45.

⁴³ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 14, 480–83.

⁴⁴ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 100, fol. 122r, Passionei to Valenti, 26 May 1753.

⁴⁵ Filipp Mallia, *Il-Fratellanza tas-SS.Mu Sagrament fil-Parrocca ta' S. M. tal-Portu Salvu il-Belt, 1575–1975* [The Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament at the Parish of Portu Salvu, Valletta, 1575–1975] (Malta: 1975), 334–35.

⁴⁶ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 11, 638–41.

⁴⁷ Franco Venturi, "Church and Reform in Enlightenment Italy," *Journal of Modern History* 48 (1976), 215.

⁴⁸ Beales, "Religion and culture," 161.

inspiration?⁴⁹ Did not state chancellor Kaunitz propose to Maria Theresa (1717–1780) to invite renowned Protestant scholars from Germany to act as advisers in developing the new educational policies and curricula in Austria?⁵⁰ Compared with the self-confidence of the Protestants, Catholic countries appeared too set in their ways. If they were to be as successful, they had to follow their example and reduce feast days, suppress monasteries, take away most Church land, introduce religious toleration, allow priests to marry and subject the Church to the State, diminishing the enormous influence it had acquired during the Counter-Reformation.

Secondly, we should remember that Reform Catholicism was influenced not only by the political situation of the time but also by general political theories and intellectual developments. Several writers, like Paolo Sarpi (1552–1623), had long proclaimed the independence of the temporal from the spiritual power.⁵¹ The theme now attracted again all the passions of keen apologists. “Febronius” (Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim (1701–1790),⁵² following in the footsteps of van Espen (1646–1728), was a strong influence in this regard. In his *De Statu Ecclesiae* (1763) he vigorously attacked the development of papal monarchy within the Catholic Church, while advocating a central role for secular rulers in Church affairs.⁵³

The argument became particularly significant after the pontificate of Clement XIII (1758–1769). In his encounter with the modern world, Pope Rezzonico appealed for the subordination of civil authority to Rome, which had found its highest expression in medieval Christendom.⁵⁴ He had misread the times, and his way of governing the Church alienated the kings accustomed to the conciliatory methods

⁴⁹ James Van Horn Melton, *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1988), 202.

⁵⁰ Ernst Wangermann, *The Austrian Achievement 1700–1800* (London: 1973), 84.

⁵¹ Paolo Sarpi, *Considerazioni sopra le Censure della Santità di Paulo V contro la Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia* (Venice: 1606).

⁵² Ulrich L. Lehner, “Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim and his Febronius,” in *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008): 93–121; Idem (ed.), *Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim—Justinus Febronius Abbreviatus et Emendatus (1777)* (Nordhausen: 2008).

⁵³ Owen Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution* (Oxford: 1981), 408–411.

⁵⁴ L. Cajani and A. Foa, “Clement XIII,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* vol. 26 (Rome: 1982), 328–343.

of his predecessor, Benedict XIV (1740–1758).⁵⁵ The powers called his abrogation of all the legislation passed by the Prime Minister Du Tillot (1711–1774) against the Church in Parma an “insulting interference.”⁵⁶ French troops occupied Avignon, Naples invaded Benevento and Pontecorvo while Modena menaced Ferrara.⁵⁷ It was in this circumstance, too, that Voltaire (1694–1778) published *Les Droits des Hommes et les Usurpations des Autres* which opened with the query of whether a priest of Christ could be a sovereign.⁵⁸

A new generation was coming up which abhorred the dramatic isolation of the Church. For instance, Cosimo Amidei (c.1725–c.1783) in his *La Chiesa e la Repubblica dentro i loro Limiti* (1768) proposed a lay monarchy founded on Christian principles, whose duty it was to oversee the Church by gentle and paternal means”. He applauded Charles V for having prohibited the works of Luther and Calvin but condemned the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, which included books extolling the jurisdiction of kings.⁵⁹ This fresh wind of new ideas found a willing hearer in the next pontiff, Clement XIV (1769–1774). His first encyclical *Cum summi apostolatus* was particularly telling. He renounced the temporal pretensions of the Church and exhorted bishops to serve society, most of all the poor.⁶⁰

Such public debate of Church reform was lacking in Malta. The three ecclesiastical writers of the period—canon Francesco Agius (1712–1770), the capuchin padre Pelagio (1707–1781) and Don Ignazio Saverio Mifsud (1722–1773)—contributed nothing to the argument. For such criticism one must look outside the Church. Signor Paolo Ignazio

⁵⁵ The best biography of Benedict XIV is Mario Rosa, “Tra Muratori, il giansenismo e i ‘lumi’: profilo di Benedetto XIV,” in Idem, *Riformatori e Ribelli nel ‘700 Religioso Italiano* (Bari: 1969), 49–85. See also Appolis, *Le “Tiers Parti” Catholique*, 155–367.

⁵⁶ For a summary of these struggles: Dino Carpanetto and Giuseppe Ricuperati, *L’Italia del Settecento: Crisi, Trasformazioni, Lumi* (Florence: 1990), 234–39; Alba Mora (ed.), *Un Borbone tra Parma e l’Europa: don Ferdinando e il suo tempo, 1751–1802: atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Fontevivo, Parma, ex Collegio dei nobili, 12–14 giugno 2003* (Reggio Emilia: 2005).

⁵⁷ Bianca Betto, “Papa Rezzonico attraverso le Lettere inedite del Confessore Apostolico”, *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia* (1974), 431.

⁵⁸ Venturi, *Settecento Riformatore*, vol. 2, 230.

⁵⁹ Ettore Passerin D’Entrèves, “Chiesa e Cattolicesimo fra Riformatori Illuministi e Stati Assoluti”, *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 14 (1978): 58–67.

⁶⁰ Daniele Menozzi, “Tra riforma e restaurazione. Dalla crisi della società cristiana al mito della cristianità medievale (1758–1848)”, in Giorgio Chittoli and Giovanni Miccoli (eds.), *La Chiesa e il potere politico dal Medioevo all’età contemporanea*, (Turin: 1986), 778.

Gauci was one of these free spirits. In 1774 he congratulated kings who “stop money from their countries going to Rome” and “order the bishops in their dioceses to issue dispensations because ordinaries can do anything that popes can do”.⁶¹ Dr Michel’Angelo Grima (c.1731–1798), the foremost surgeon in late eighteenth century Malta, was another critic. He had studied at Florence and served in the French army in the Seven Years’ War.⁶² In 1775 he was reported to the inquisitor for having allegedly charged clergymen of being disturbers of the peace and of having predicted that one day they would lose all their privileges.⁶³

These detractors did not constitute a party, a tightly knit group committed to the realization of a specific program of Church reform; they acted as single individuals and expressed their own personal opinions. The reform party, which led the charge on ecclesiastical power, was to be found only within the government. It was led by the two grand masters, Pinto (1741–1773) and Rohan (1775–1797), both self-consciously “philosopher kings,”⁶⁴ who united in their persons the roles of head of the Order and prince of the Maltese, a distinction associated with the notion of the monarch’s “two bodies.” The former, a Portuguese, who closely followed events in his home country,⁶⁵ was a firm believer in his absolute power: “I am the prince and master of the island,” he reminded Inquisitor Mancinforte (1767–1771) in 1768. The Frenchman Rohan, the correspondent of La Chalotais (1701–1785)⁶⁶ and Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), whom he hailed as one of the great men of history,⁶⁷ had been born in Spain but followed the Bourbon duke Philip to Parma (1720–1765). Here he was imbued with the spirit of the *philosophes*, especially Condillac’s (1715–1780)⁶⁸ and, possibly, initiated into Freemasonry.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Mдина, AIM, Proc. 131A, fol. 301r.

⁶² Joseph Cassar Pullicino, “Michel’Angelo Grima Chirurgo Maltese del Settecento”, *Rivista di Storia di Scienze Mediche e Naturali* 40 (1949): 1–39.

⁶³ Mдина, AIM, Proc. 131B, fol. 791r.

⁶⁴ Hamish M. Scott (ed.), *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: 1990). For a recent analysis of the term: Beales, *Enlightenment and Reform*, 28–29.

⁶⁵ In 1768 he sent the Hospitaller Pecci to be the director of the Academy of Nobles set up by Pombal at Lisbon—Mдина, AIM, Corr. 56, f. 2r, Torrigiani to Mancinforte, 10 Jan. 1769.

⁶⁶ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1581, 297–298, Rohan to la Chalotais, 21 Sept. 1782.

⁶⁷ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1582, 250–251, Rohan to Franklin, 21 June 1783.

⁶⁸ Claire-Éliane Engel, *Histoire de l’Ordre de Malte* (Geneva: 1968), 282.

⁶⁹ Mдина, AIM, Proc. 141, fol. 115r.

An enlightened elite of government officials served both these grand masters. These professional bureaucrats were unquestionably aware of belonging to a distinct intellectual and political movement promoted by the Catholic Enlightenment. They harbored a self-conscious pride in Malta's emergence as a nation, as well as a willingness to refashion the ideas coming from other European countries to Maltese needs. One of these Maltese Rucellais⁷⁰ and Caracciolos,⁷¹ lawyers by training, was Fabrizio Grech (d. 1759), Pinto's confidante.⁷² However, the more fearless *uditore*, Giovanni Nicolò Muscat (b. 1736), was the funnel through which much of Reform Catholicism entered Malta. It was mainly this Maltese Catholic *philosophe*,⁷³ the correspondent of Kaunitz,⁷⁴ who single-handedly forged the theoretical weapons with which to fight the claims of the Church. He was an avid reader of the natural law philosophers. In His *Apologia* he cites both Hobbes and Grotius (1583–1645), but especially Samuel Coccejus (1679–1755) and the “celebrated” Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694). His policy was to leave to the Church full responsibility only for the administration of the sacraments and for doctrine.⁷⁵ Even marriage was a civil contract that did not pertain to the Church. The foundation of his reforms can best be expressed by such remarks as “this is no longer the Church's century” and “I would like to leave to the bishop only the crosier and the miter!”⁷⁶ The grand master, so he asserted in 1787, was devoted to the Holy See, but the secular power cannot appropriate to itself the stole to become a lawgiver; nor could the ecclesiastical power lawfully brandish the sword to make use of royal rights.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Andrea Pasquinelli, “Giulio Rucellai, Segretario del Regio Diritto (1734–1778). Alle Origini della Riforma Leopoldina del Clero”, *Ricerche Storiche* 13 (1983): 259–296.

⁷¹ Among other literature on this prime minister see Michelangelo A. Schipa, *Nel Regno di Ferdinando IV Borbone* (Florence: 1938) and Raffaele Ajello, “I Filosofi e la Regina. Il Governo delle Due Sicilie da Tanucci a Caracciolo (1776–1786)”, *Rivista Storicistica Italiana* 13 (1991): 398–454, 657–738.

⁷² Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition in Enlightened Malta*, 150–161.

⁷³ For the meaning of this term see Beales, *Enlightenment and Reform*, 60–89.

⁷⁴ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 102, fols. 27r–29v, Gallarati Scotti to de Zelada, 19 May 1792.

⁷⁵ Mdina, AIM, Mem. 28, fols. 247v–48r.

⁷⁶ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 102, fols. 14r–18v, Gallarati Scotti to de Zelada, 31 March 1792.

⁷⁷ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1585, 647–51, memoria by *uditore* Muscat attached to letter to M. Cibon, 25 Oct. 1787.

In a word, he believed that the Church had overstepped its true sphere to the disadvantage of civil society. Driven by extravagant vanity and ambition, as Inquisitor Gallarati Scotti (1785–1793) claimed in his memoirs, Muscat imagined himself a great minister of state and had the presumption to introduce into Malta the most absurd regalism. In the words of Hamish Scott, “he was to an impressive extent a man fully aware of the ideas and arguments of the European Enlightenment.”⁷⁸ It is somewhat curious, therefore, that hardly any of the writers who wrote about this period mentioned Muscat at all. Professor Andrew Vella, for one, dismissed him as “a certain Maltese lawyer”⁷⁹ and it was only in 1993 that he started being rehabilitated.⁸⁰

Muscat was certainly an anti-clerical but, like Antonio Genovesi (1712–1769), professor of commerce and mechanics at Naples,⁸¹ he hedged his campaign against the Church with solemn and consistent protestations of orthodoxy. He had the most interesting things to say on his faith. He never showed the least doubt in the absolute truth of Roman Catholicism, without which the Republic would be doomed, but expressed his belief in the unity of the Church and its one visible Head.⁸² He railed against Frederick the Great, who in a fit of “frenzied ambition” claimed that if he had been with God at the creation of the world he would have suggested to Him more refined ideas.⁸³ In a word, Muscat belonged to that group of *chrétiens éclairés*⁸⁴ whose enlightenment was neither “pagan” nor “radical.”⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Hamish Scott, “Foreword”, in Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition*, xiv.

⁷⁹ Andrew A. Vella, *The Tribunal of the Inquisition in Malta* (Malta: 1964), 39.

⁸⁰ Frans Ciappara, “Gio. Nicolò Muscat: Church-State Relations in Hospitaller Malta during the Enlightenment, 1786–1798”, in Victor Mallia-Milanes (ed.), *Hospitaller Malta, 1530–1798. Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem*, (Malta: 1993), 605–658. See also Ciappara, *Enlightenment and Reform in Malta 1740–1798*, 21–37.

⁸¹ Giuseppe Galasso, “Il Pensiero Religioso di Antonio Genovesi”, *Rivista Storica Italiana* 82 (1970): 800–823.

⁸² Giovanni Nicolò Muscat, *Apologia a Favore dell’Inclita Nazione Maltese, suoi Tribunali, Segnatura, e Legisti. Contro il Libello Famoso Intitolato Ragionamenti del Signor Cavaliere Gian. Donato Rogadeo* (Rome: 1783), 25–26.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸⁴ For the evolution of this term see Daniele Menozzi, “Aufklärung delle Chiese e ‘Chrétiens éclairés’”. In margine ai Lavori della Terza Sezione del Congresso C.I.H.E.C. di Varsavia”, *Critica Storica* 1 (1979): 150–161.

⁸⁵ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: 1966).

3. THE PROGRAM OF THE MALTESE CATHOLIC ENLIGHTENMENT

Having introduced the *dramatis personae*, what was the program of the Maltese Catholic enlightenment? It must be at once acknowledged that it was much restricted when compared to other Catholic countries.⁸⁶ For example, toleration never became a topic for discussion,⁸⁷ and if the grand masters did diminish the number of feast days,⁸⁸ they never hinted that the policy of churchmen could seriously limit or distort the economic development of the island. Unlike the case at Modena, they never prohibited their subjects from giving gifts of land to the church and endowing Masses for the dead.⁸⁹ With the exception of the Jesuits' property they did not tap the Church's wealth for the advantage of the state.⁹⁰ A plausible attempt to undermine the Church's wealth was soon dropped, perhaps to avoid a head-on collision. On 18 December 1769 Inquisitor Mancinforte informed the cardinal secretary of state that in the previous November several Maltese who resided in Rome had sent the news that the grand master had asked the pope to impose a levy on church property at the rate of eight per cent.⁹¹ As it was also presumed that the pope had already complied with the suggestion, some priests presented a memorandum to the cathedral chapter, demanding the summoning of the clergy to halt such a "pernicious blunder."⁹² The canons discussed the matter on Wednesday 6 November, but, having been assured by one of Pinto's *uditori*, Carlo Ferruggia, that the rumor was false and "full of black lies,"⁹³ the clergy were not convened.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ For an excellent study of Reform Catholicism in the Habsburg lands see David Sorkin, "Reform Catholicism and Religious Enlightenment", *Austrian History Yearbook* 30 (1999): 187-219.

⁸⁷ For this subject see Charles O'Brien, "Ideas of Religious Toleration at the Time of Joseph II. A Study of the Enlightenment among Catholics in Austria," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 59 (1969): 5-80.

⁸⁸ Floriana, AAM, Editti 8, ff. 568r-v, 13 Sept. 1759. See also the letter dated 1763 from the Maltese commune to the pope—Floriana, AAM, Corr. 15, fol. 16v.

⁸⁹ Susan N. Nicassio, "'For the Benefit of my Soul': a Preliminary Study of the Persistence of Tradition in Eighteenth-Century Mass Obligations," *The Catholic Historical Review* 78 (1992): 75-96.

⁹⁰ P. G. M. Dickson, "Joseph II's Reshaping of the Austrian Church", *The Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 89-114.

⁹¹ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 100, fol. 351r, Mancinforte to Pallavicini, 18 Dec. 1769.

⁹² Mdina, ACM 12, fol. 507r.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, fols. 510r, 514r-15v.

⁹⁴ Vatican, ASV, SS (Malta), 161, fols. 23v-24v.

This is far from saying that, if the state refrained from touching ecclesiastical wealth, it did not claim the right to interfere with the Church's government, discipline and organization. On the contrary, the grand masters, like the other "enlightened despots,"⁹⁵ set as one of their primary aims and their personal duty to improve the quality of the parochial clergy. When the Jesuits were expelled and their monopoly on education broken, their resources were used to set up a university. This institution was to initiate an educational system that would form the right kind of men for Church and State. Its protector was none other than Bailiff Guedes, the antagonist of the Jesuits, while Domenico Malarbì (1732–1784) was a rector. When this *abate* arrived in Malta in 1778, Inquisitor Zondadari (1777–1785) described him as being "very far from the spirit of novelty."⁹⁶ In fact, the pope's delegate was grossly mistaken in this last remark. Malarbì was an intimate friend of Mgr Andrea Serrao, the regalist Italian bishop of Potenza, who was eventually murdered by the anti-revolutionaries of Cardinal Ruffo.⁹⁷

Next to the choice of the best administrators and reliable teachers, the curriculum was to show no sign of narrow and pedantic scholasticism. The Jesuits had to come to grips with the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and clung obstinately to Cartesian metaphysics and the deductive method. On the contrary, the grand masters admired "the much-applauded" Newton, the hero of the age, who had laid bare the workings of Nature, which were both rational and intelligible.⁹⁸ The university's constitutions, which hailed the Copernican system and the modern physicists, described the contemplation of Nature as the food of souls and men of talent.⁹⁹ In other words, knowledge could be gained only by induction, observation and experiment.

Furthermore, several scholastic theological propositions were rejected as accretions to revealed truth. Like the humanists of the sixteenth

⁹⁵ For the definition of this elusive term see Derek Beales, "Was Joseph II an Enlightened Despot", in Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms (eds.), *The Austrian Enlightenment and its Aftermath* (Edinburgh: 1991), 1–21. Also Catherine B. A. Behrens, "Enlightened Despotism", *Historical Journal* 18 (1975), 401–408.

⁹⁶ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 101, fol. 46v, Zondadari to Pallavicini, 5 Sept. 1778.

⁹⁷ Elvira Chiosi, *Andrea Serrao. Apologia e Crisi del Regalismo nel Settecento Napoletano* (Naples: 1981).

⁹⁸ Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT: 1932), ch. II, "The Laws of Nature and of Nature's God", 33–70.

⁹⁹ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 575, fol. 477v.

century, enlightened Catholics directed their attention to the core of their faith, the Gospel as taught by the early Church. Theology therefore was divested of scholasticism, a waste of time, which damaged the mind in a thousand ways.¹⁰⁰ It was necessary, in the very words that the renowned padre Paolo Maria Paciaudi had used for the statutes of the university of Parma,¹⁰¹ “to keep away from the schools the subtleties and the quibbling, which the ignorance of time has introduced into the science of divinity”.¹⁰² Typical of this way of thinking was the choice of textbook for the course in moral theology. The professor was to lecture only on the book by Gabriel Antoine (1678–1743), *Theologia Moralis Universa*. Antoine was a Jesuit but an adversary of probabilism and let the anti-Jesuit Dominican Daniello Concina (1687–1756) dedicate his *Theologia Christiana* to him. It was also laid down that in all difficulties the lecturer must follow “the teachings of St Augustine or of his faithful interpreter, St Thomas Aquinas.”¹⁰³

Needless to say, canon law, or “the code of the universal monarchy of the Church of Rome,” was a bone of contention among regalists. Genovesi asked that it be dropped, as it “disunites people and subverts sovereignty.”¹⁰⁴ It still continued to be taught in Malta but, as a concession to the spirit of the Catholic Enlightenment, it was to be interpreted in the context of ecclesiastical history.¹⁰⁵ Simply put, it provided the raw material from which students were to learn what abuses had been introduced into the Church and how the realms of Church and State were to be differentiated. Its lecturer was no other than Fra Prospero Grech, a solitary representative of the Catholic Enlightenment in clerical garb. According to the biased Inquisitor Gallarati Scotti, in addition to his effrontery and ignorance, he was known for his hatred and contempt of the Holy See.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Venturi, *Settecento Riformatore* vol. 1, *Da Muratori a Beccaria* (Turin: 1969), 179.

¹⁰¹ Widar Cesarini-Sforza, “Il padre Paciaudi e la riforma dell’Università di Parma ai tempi del Du Tillot”, *Archivio Storico Italiano* 74 (1916), 121.

¹⁰² Valletta, NLM, Arch. 575, fol. 480v.

¹⁰³ Damming, *Il Movimento Giansenista a Roma*, 382–383. For Concina as an apologist for Catholicism see Alfonso Prandi, *Religiosità e cultura nel ‘700 italiano* (Bologna: 1966), 193–224.

¹⁰⁴ Franco Venturi (ed.), *Illuministi Italiani*, vol. 5, *Riformatori Napoletani*, (Milan: 1962), 318–330.

¹⁰⁵ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 575, fol. 480v.

¹⁰⁶ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 101, fol. 184v, Gallarati Scotti to Boncompagni, 2 Oct. 1786.

It was not enough for the clergy to be educated; only those who were worthy of their calling were to join the priesthood. This meant a reduced "clerical army," but, to Pinto's complaint in 1767 about the excessive number of clerics, the *sacra congregazione dell'immunità ecclesiastica* replied that the bishop was to follow the decrees of Trent and that priests were to be ordained according to the needs of the Church.¹⁰⁷ Rohan, however, succeeded where Pinto had failed, and ten years later a *motu proprio* reduced the number of clerics drastically. It laid down that to receive the tonsure one had to be at least ten years of age; one would also have to be endowed with a benefice worth 80 scudi a year and would have to have resided in a seminary for three years.¹⁰⁸ These measures had the intended effect. In 1758 the number of those receiving the tonsure had amounted to 223. Between 1777 and 1797 the average was only 10.1 so that in 1787 Bishop Labini lamented the scarcity of priests.¹⁰⁹

As we should expect, the government extended its authority over every aspect of ecclesiastical life. In 1749 Pinto backed the joining at St Helen's of the *prepositura* with the *arcipretura* in the hope that the long-standing disputes between the provost and the archpriest would come to an end.¹¹⁰ The good administration of the Maltese Church also demanded that it be financially well governed. In 1751 Pinto reported Don Deodato Formosa to Rome for financial embezzlement when he was *procuratore* of the collegiate church at Gozo.¹¹¹ And, since according to the inquisitor "not a few irregularities" were found, he succeeded in having him replaced by Don Giovanni Maria Stellini.¹¹² Unlike the case in the Habsburg Empire, the government was not involved in the reorganization of the parishes.¹¹³ But Rohan on 29 March 1788 wrote to his ambassador in Rome, Labrillanne, recommending the erection of the parish of St Publius. He listed the usual reasons which parishioners gave for the founding of new parishes. Floriana was quite dis-

¹⁰⁷ Floriana, AAM, Corr. 15, fols. 539r–540v, *S. Congzne. dell'Immunità Ecclesiastica* to Bishop Rull, 24 Sept. 1768.

¹⁰⁸ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 273 fol. 161r.

¹⁰⁹ Vincent Borg, *The Diocesan Priests in the Maltese Islands: 1550–1950* (Malta: 1982), 8.

¹¹⁰ Vatican, ASV, SS (Malta) 157, fol. 22r, Valenti to Passionei, 12 Aug. 1749.

¹¹¹ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1509, fols. 268v–69r, Pinto to d'Armenia, 11 Oct. 1751.

¹¹² Mdina, AIM, Corr. 100, fol. 111v, Passionei to Valenti, 23 Oct. 1751.

¹¹³ For the case of Milan see Lucia Sebastiani, "La Riorganizzazione delle Parrocchie Milanesi nel Periodo Giuseppino", *Quaderni Storici* 1 (1970): 866–910.

tant from the mother church of St Paul's at Valletta; at night the city gates were closed so that people could not ask for the sacraments; and, finally, the population had risen to 3000 souls.¹¹⁴

The notion of an autonomous clergy was a myth, since a well-ordered state was responsible for the supervision of everyone who held any office in that state. The grand masters did not express their ideas in a coherent theological or historical formula. That is, they never produced the like of Pombal's (1699–1782) *Dedução chronológica* with its devastating conclusions that ecclesiastical interests should be subordinate to those of the State.¹¹⁵ Even so, their actions proceeded along similar lines. One way of limiting the jurisdiction of the Church was to secure control over appointments to major ecclesiastical benefices. The grand masters held the right of presentation to the Maltese bishopric¹¹⁶ and kept the ordinaries under continual supervision. Bishop Carmine Giovanni Pellerano (1770–1780) is an extreme example of this tight control. He was accused of inciting the clergy against the government and was recalled to Rome. The details of how this was done need not detain us too long. When in 1774 he imprisoned some galley soldiers who had beaten up one of his *alarii* (marshals), some twenty knights forced the prisons open and set them free. The ordinary took fright and retired to his palace at Mdina. Representatives of the clergy from all the parishes gathered in front of his residence and demanded the convocation of a chapter general, pledging to defend ecclesiastical privileges with all their power and means. The government put the blame for these disturbances on the bishop and, on the grand master's insistence, Mgr Pellerano had to leave the island.¹¹⁷

The case of Mgr Bartholomew Rull (1757–1769) is different in detail but similar in concept. As he suffered from ill health, he transferred all responsibility to his vicar general, Mgr Giovanni Maria Azzopardi Castelletti.¹¹⁸ This "corrupt and capricious" man, as Inquisitor Durini (1760–1766) described him,¹¹⁹ boasted that he was inflexible, even if

¹¹⁴ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1538, fols. 33v–34v.

¹¹⁵ Samuel J. Miller, *Portugal and Rome c. 1748–1830. An Aspect of the Catholic Enlightenment* (Rome: 1978), 212–217.

¹¹⁶ Antonio Zammit Gabarretta, *The Presentation, Examination and Nomination of the Bishops of Malta in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Malta: 1961).

¹¹⁷ Philip Callus, *The Rising of the Priests. Its Implications and Repercussions on Ecclesiastical Immunity* (Malta: 1961), 17–21.

¹¹⁸ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 12, 259.

¹¹⁹ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 100, fol. 242v, Durini to Torrigiani, 4 April 1761.

hell rose up against him.¹²⁰ Everything was for sale; the tonsure was “sold” for twelve and a half scudi while prostitutes could “buy” the *bolettino* or communion ticket at will.¹²¹ In an undated document entitled *Ristretto delli aggravi e violenze fatte da Mons. Vescovo, e Vicario di Malta al clero e popolo Azzopardi* is described as vindictive and violent, besides having turned the diocese upside down.¹²² On 2 June Pinto sent a memorial to the Holy See showing the “imbecility” of the bishop and the “insolence” of his vicar and asked the pontiff to have mercy on this “abandoned diocese.”¹²³ Following this lurid description of ecclesiastical chaos, Rome, with the approval of the grand master, chose Don Giuseppe Vella, parish priest of St George’s (Qormi), in his stead.¹²⁴

In contrast, if the weight of the government bore down with relentless strength on the upper clergy, in the best Catholic Enlightenment tradition there was much cooperation between the grand masters and the parish priests.¹²⁵ Did not Rohan have Don Antonio Muscat of Cospicua as his confessor?¹²⁶ The reason for this understanding is easy to locate. In Malta, unlike Spain, the government did not use the pastors to foster, for instance, cottage industry among the faithful.¹²⁷ Still, they were the government’s public officials or unpaid agents of the state, “a kind of second arm of the state.” More to the point: in the absence of local government, parish priests provided the bond between the parish and the government.¹²⁸

The ways in which the grand masters lent their help to the parish priests were several. In the first place, the incumbents needed support against their own parishioners. Two cases illustrate the nature of this intervention. In 1783 Rohan issued a *bando* threatening with exile

¹²⁰ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 14, 143–146.

¹²¹ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 9, 648–650.

¹²² Valletta, NLM, Libr. 13, 633–652. See also “Copia di un Manifesto presentato in Roma nell’anno 1760, circa li trascorsi del Cancro. D. Gio. Ma. Azzopardi Castelletti, Vicario Generale di Malta”—NLM, Libr. 2, 703–727.

¹²³ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1519, Pinto to de Breteuil, 2 June 1763.

¹²⁴ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 100, fols. 271v–272r, Durini to Torrigiani, 20 June 1763.

¹²⁵ Beales, *Enlightenment and Reform*, 232.

¹²⁶ Cospicua, PA, Lib. Matr. (1760–1780), fol. 1r.

¹²⁷ C. C. Noel, “The Clerical Confrontation with the Enlightenment in Spain”, *European Studies Review* vol. 5, no 2.(1975), 112.

¹²⁸ Frans Ciappara, “Parish Priest and Community in 18th century Malta: Patterns of Conflict”, *Journal of Early Modern History* 9 (2005), 345. See also *ibid.*, “Intercessory Funerary Rites in Malta”, *Nuova Rivista Storica* 91 (2007), 150–151.

from Malta the members of the confraternity of the Holy Crucifix at Cospicua if they held their meetings in the absence of the parish priest. And the next day, 1 May, the rector of the *fratellanza* and four other members were summoned to the court of justice to be handed a copy of the law. They were to keep it in their archives so that no one would be ignorant of its contents.¹²⁹ In another instance, Rohan defended Don Francesco Maria Xuereb of St Catherine's (Zejtun) against the hatred and "malign lies" of his parishioners.¹³⁰ In 1785 he published an edict which ordered all who had information on whoever had prevented their parish priest from entering his parochial church to report them within four days.¹³¹

Secondly, these financially well-off¹³² priests of the "second order" found the support of the grand masters in the keen contests in which they were engaged with the bishop. In Malta it was a far cry from the union of parts "of the same edifice, of branches of one trunk, of limbs of one body", which Mgr Scipione de' Ricci proclaimed at Pistoia.¹³³ These struggles were an expression of the spirit of richerism or the assertion of the parish priests' newly found strength. Parish priests aimed at the elevation of their status and consequent power to a level from which they could participate in the administration of the diocese.¹³⁴ Their aspirations were symbolized by the comfortable parsonages they built anew or, as in the case of St Mary's (Qrendi), enlarged.¹³⁵

The case of Don Tommaso Cirillo Formosa of Casal Tarxien is the best example of the government's patronage for incumbents. This resolute man had founded a sodality of parish priests and led them in their struggle against the bishop over the exorbitant expenses they were being made to pay during pastoral visitations.¹³⁶ He had also been behind the parish priests' victory in 1759 gaining them the right to wear the rochet and the cape,¹³⁷ achieved in the face of strong opposition

¹²⁹ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 429 (vii), fol. 149r.

¹³⁰ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1532, fol. 102v, Rohan to Labrillanne, 10 July 1780.

¹³¹ Valletta, NLM Libr. 429 (viii), fol. 44r.

¹³² Frans Ciappara, "The Financial Condition of Parish Priests in Late Eighteenth-Century Malta", *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53 (2002): 93-107.

¹³³ Scipione de' Ricci, *Lettera Pastorale* (Pistoia: 1786), 9.

¹³⁴ Richard M. Golden, "Jean Rousse, Religious Frondeur", *French Historical Studies* 12 (1982): 461-485.

¹³⁵ Ciappara, "Parish Priest and Community in 18th century Malta: Patterns of Conflict", 331-332.

¹³⁶ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 9, 639-641.

¹³⁷ Mdina, CEM, AO 666, fols. 358r-389v.



from the cathedral chapter.¹³⁸ This was a challenge to Bishop Rull, who discontinued the pastoral visitation he was conducting in order to humiliate Don Cirillo.¹³⁹ He accused him of governing the parish badly and deprived him of his position.¹⁴⁰ Don Cirillo appealed to the metropolitan court of Palermo,¹⁴¹ where he found the full support of Pinto, who, on 26 June 1762, wrote to Marquis Stefano Airoldi, president of the tribunal, recommending his cause.¹⁴² The parish priest won the case, and, when he returned to Malta in 1763, the grand master sent him his personal carriage to bring him to the grand master's own palace to congratulate him.¹⁴³

Having said this, it cannot be imagined that the grand masters would ever have allowed untrustworthy priests to govern a parish. Appointment to a vacant parish was complex, though the bishop often chose incumbents after a written examination.¹⁴⁴ All the same, the grand masters did recommend their favorites so that in 1780 Rohan expressed his pleasure to his ambassador at Rome that Don Giuseppe Raffaele Camilleri had won the parish of St Mary's (Gudja).¹⁴⁵ And, in any case, they still reserved to themselves the right of confirmation. The case of Don Giovanni Sant is a good instance of this fundamental way in which the government was able to make its mark on the diocese. This priest had been installed as parish priest of St Savior's (Lija) in 1770 but had to be removed on the insistence of Pinto, who considered him an unworthy incumbent.¹⁴⁶

The example of the parish of Zebbug casts that of Lija into relief. In 1762 Don Felice Borg, on Pinto's recommendation, won the cure of St Philip's against the other nominee, Don Giuseppe Agius. The latter appealed to the Holy See, but Pinto sent a dispatch to Cardinal Derossi, the prefect of the *sacra congregazione del concilio*, to restrain what he termed the temerity of the pretender. The latter's appeal was both unfounded and calumnious¹⁴⁷ since the bishop, as the grand

¹³⁸ Mdina, ACM 9, fols. 13v, 17r.

¹³⁹ Mdina, AIM, Mem. 16, fol. 134r.

¹⁴⁰ Naples, AS, Affari Esteri, fasc. 708, Fogliani to Tanucci, 30 Sept. 1763.

¹⁴¹ L. Fiteni, *Giornale Cattolico* (Malta: 1841), 200.

¹⁴² Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1518, fols. 151v-152r.

¹⁴³ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 14, 37-38.

¹⁴⁴ Ciappara, "The Financial Condition of Parish Priests", 95

¹⁴⁵ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1532, fol. 103r, Rohan to Labrillanne, 15 July 1780.

¹⁴⁶ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1526, fols. 76r-v, Pinto to Orengo, 2 April, 1770.

¹⁴⁷ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1518, fols. 148r-149v, Pinto to de Breteüil, 8 June 1762.

master pointed out, had acted according to his conscience on the unfavorable information he had about Don Giuseppe. Furthermore, the people of Zebbug were not easy to govern. They were so happy with their new parish priest that unrest would follow if he were to be removed.¹⁴⁸ Eventually, a compromise was reached, and Don Felice kept the incumbency while Don Giuseppe was compensated for his legal expenses, 119 Roman scudi.¹⁴⁹

Hitherto, the discussion has focused upon the secular clergy and ignored the religious. There is a compelling reason for this, because the friars, with the exception of the Dominicans at Valletta, were not involved in parish provision. What is worth doing now is to examine the Maltese government's relations with them. In his *De L'esprit des lois* Montesquieu congratulated Henry VIII, who, "resolving to reform the Church of England, ruined the monks, of themselves a lazy set of people".¹⁵⁰ Kaunitz fleshed out his ideas in his memorandum of 1769, where he denounced monks as the cause of the corruption of the patristic Church and of the Reformation. He also argued that celibacy was a serious threat to the propagation of the human race and that monasteries represented a brain drain, in which talented people removed themselves from useful social functions.¹⁵¹

No such criticism of monasticism can be detected in Malta. The expulsion of the Jesuits, it will be argued later on, was an act of state in which popular feeling played no crucial role. Nor did it open up any debate. All this suggests that Pinto and his advisers were jealous of their power but not hostile to monasticism in general. This is only natural since, it hardly needs repeating, the Hospitallers were a religious order themselves. Indeed, Grand Master Hugues de Loubens de Verdalle (1582–1595) founded in 1583 the monastery of the contemplative Hospitaller nuns of S. Ursola at Valletta, which remained ever since under the jurisdiction of the grand masters, who funded it

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., fols. 155r–v, Pinto to de Rossi, 17 July 1762.

¹⁴⁹ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1359, fols. 121v, 24 Sept. 1764, de Breteüil to Pinto.

¹⁵⁰ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* vol. 2, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York: 1949), Book xxiii, ch. 29.

¹⁵¹ Franz A. J. Szabo, *Kaunitz and enlightened absolutism, 1753–1780* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1994), 237–238. For the suppression of monasteries in the Habsburg Empire see the magisterial book by Derek Beales, *Prosperity and Plunder. European Catholic Monasteries in the Age of Revolution, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, Eng.: 2003).

Table 1. Male religious houses in Malta in the 18th century

	Valletta	Rabat	Mdina	Cospicua	Vittoriosa	Senglea	Gozo	Total
Augustinians	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	3
Capuchins	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	3
Carmelites	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	2
Conventuals	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	3
Discalced Carmelites	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Dominicans	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	3
Jesuits	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Minims	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
Oratorians	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	2
Total	7	4	1	1	3	1	3	20

generously.¹⁵² It is true that Rohan in 1790 demanded the suppression of the minims at Rabat. But this was only because the convent had only three inmates, who left pious legacies unfulfilled and neglected liturgical services, including the administration of the sacraments.¹⁵³

In the late eighteenth century there were twenty male religious houses in Malta (Table 1), but the government's preoccupations with them concerned neither their wealth nor their utility to the community. They expected them, however, to lead the flock with their exemplary life. In 1764, therefore, Pinto accused the minims of only thinking about how to raise money disgracefully and asked for the removal of the *guardiano* Fra Giovanni Felice from the convent at Rabat.¹⁵⁴ It would be easy to widen the range of evidence in support of this argument. In a 1791 case, it was being rumored that Padre Gian Carlo, the superior of the Capuchin convent at Vittoriosa, was having relations with prostitutes. Rohan reported him to his general, who recalled the friar to Rome. Gian Carlo was acquitted of the charge but Rohan still refused to let him return to Malta.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Gorg Aquilina, *Is-Sorijiet Gerosolimitani, il-Knisja u l-Monasteru ta' Sant'Ursola, Valletta* [The Hospitaller Nuns, the Church and the Monastery of Saint Ursula, Valletta] (Malta: 2004).

¹⁵³ Vatican, ASV, SS (Malta) 182, fols. 278r-288r—"Soppressione del Convento dei Minori Osservanti della C. Nottle (1790)".

¹⁵⁴ Valletta, NLM. Arch. 1520, fols. 104v-105r, Pinto to padre commissario, 20 June 1764.

¹⁵⁵ Mdina, AIM, AC 534, fol. 110r.

Secondly, the grand masters held themselves responsible for the tranquility of convents. Hence, Pinto felt greatly irritated when the general commissioner of the capuchins nominated without his knowledge the new *custode* and other officials of the convents of Malta.¹⁵⁶ He set down his objection in a note to his ambassador at Rome. Not only did he demand the reason for such a new procedure, but he also claimed that the friars chosen were unsuitable. As this did not make for the internal peace of the communities, he refused to recognize them and instead sent his own list with his choices.¹⁵⁷

The chief cause of faction within the monasteries was the rivalry between Sicilian and Maltese religious, particularly in the convents of the minims. Troublesome friars, like Padre Salvatore of Syracuse, whom Pinto reported to his general for his "restive spirit,"¹⁵⁸ were expelled, but harsher measures were needed to bring the strife to an end. A good solution would have been to separate Maltese convents from their Sicilian provinces and place them instead under the direct supervision of their generals.¹⁵⁹ It was only because Naples resisted the attempt that the government backed down.¹⁶⁰

4. THE LIMITATION OF ECCLESIASTICAL JURISDICTION

This last incident underlines the obstacles faced by the government. But with all these difficulties the grand masters continued to take the initiative and succeeded in achieving one more essential element of a "well-ordered state": the limiting of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In fact, the Maltese Catholic enlightenment, as has been observed for Italy,¹⁶¹ was concerned to an exceptional extent with this matter. It meant leaving the Church in control only of matters of doctrine and stopping the pope from interfering in the affairs of Malta.

The issue of the pope's claim to universal sovereignty will be investigated first. The question at stake was: would the grand masters

¹⁵⁶ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1521, fols. 77v-78v, Pinto to de Breteüil, 26 March 1765.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., fols. 139r-140v, Pinto to de Breteüil, 27 June 1765.

¹⁵⁸ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1520, fol. 5r, Pinto to general of minor observants, Madrid, 7 Jan. 1764.

¹⁵⁹ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 96, fols. 172r-v, Durini to S. Congz. dei Vescovi e Regolari, 30 Nov. 1765.

¹⁶⁰ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1511, fols. 49v-55v, Pinto to d'Armenia, 6 March 1754.

¹⁶¹ Arturo Carlo Jemolo, "Il Giansenismo Italiano", *Rivista Storica Italiana* 40 (1923): 268-284.

demand that Rome discard that “air of superiority and despotism” which harked back to past ages and was no longer permitted elsewhere? Or would they recognize the pontiff as the chief ruler of their subjects, the “supreme prince within their dominion?”¹⁶²

A symbol of this war against what Ricci called “the ancient machine of papal monarchy”¹⁶³—and in a way symptomatic of the half measures that the government for the most part had to be content with—was the attempt by the grand masters to proscribe the bull *In Coena Domini*. This charter, with its overtones of medieval nostalgia, asserted the Holy See’s supremacy over civil power.¹⁶⁴ It is no wonder, therefore, that in this classic age of the power-state, which began its relentless progress in just this period, several countries, including Venice, France and Spain, prohibited its reading in their territories.¹⁶⁵

In 1768 it was the turn of Naples. This was an excellent opportunity for Pinto to inform Inquisitor Mancinforte on 28 December that he wished to do the same. It is hard to exaggerate the impact of this petition on the inquisitor. The grand master was made to see the irregularity of such a step, along with the seriousness of the matter. Moreover, it would be a grave scandal, and the pope would be forced to institute reprisals. Pinto derisively dismissed Mancinforte’s response with a roar of laughter. Besides, the prelate was kept under pressure by it being rumored that the metropolitan of Palermo had forbidden the public reading of the bull under threat of confiscating the lands of the Maltese Church in Sicily. This was a bold attempt at blackmail but Labini refused to give in.¹⁶⁶

Still, the secular government always hoped to do away with this charter which “tries to overthrow the authority of kings and judge the world”. In 1771 Pinto disallowed its being read at St John’s, the Order’s church,¹⁶⁷ and in 1789 Rohan once more requested its sup-

¹⁶² Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition*, 133.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Bolton, *Church Reform*, 55.

¹⁶⁴ Tomaso A. Contin, *Riflessioni sopra la Bolla In Coena Domini* (Venice: 1769). See also Massimo Carlo Giannini, “Tra politica, fiscalità e religione: Filippo II di Spagna e la pubblicazione della bolla: ‘In Coena Domini’ (1567–1570),” *Annali dell’Istituto Storico italo-germanico in Trento* 23 (1997): 83–152.

¹⁶⁵ Janus [i.e. Ignaz von Döllinger], *The Pope and the Council* (London: 1869), 384–87.

¹⁶⁶ Vatican, ACDF, St St HH4—a, Mancinforte to Pallavicini, 29 Dec. 1768, 30 Dec. 1768, 2 Jan. 1769, 27 March, 1769.

¹⁶⁷ Vatican, ASV, SS (Malta), 167, Mancinforte to Pallavicini, 1 April 1771.

pression.¹⁶⁸ On Wednesday, 8 April, as Mgr Labini was about to leave his palace at Valletta for Mdina for the Easter service, there arrived Dr Muscat, who enjoined him not to read the bull the following day. The bishop could not execute an illegitimate order that would make him guilty of disobeying the pope to whom he had sworn allegiance. He stood his ground well and published it to the great satisfaction of the cathedral chapter.¹⁶⁹

Forbidding appeals to the Holy See was another way of eliminating the pope's interference in the affairs of Malta. Appellants to the court of Rome were labeled rebels, while those lawyers who gave them legal advice had their warrants withdrawn¹⁷⁰ or, like Dr Alessandro Moneta, were exiled.¹⁷¹ It is informative to see what reasons the grand masters brought to defend their actions. They affirmed that stopping knights from having recourse to Rome was a matter of discipline. This Roman practice had to be eradicated, Rohan claimed, or else "it will destroy us." What would become of military discipline, he asked rhetorically, if insubordination, disobedience and contempt of the laws were countenanced in Rome?¹⁷² The pope was strongly urged to refer such lawsuits back to the Order's tribunals, and, in addition, European powers were requested to make Rome desist from taking cognizance of such affairs.¹⁷³ Nor was this all. In a further piece of scornful defiance, clearly seeking to cause maximum offence, Rohan declared in unambiguous terms that the Holy See's authority would soon come to an end in Malta with the help of the kings of Europe.¹⁷⁴

The assumptions behind the government's prohibiting the Maltese from appealing to the pope were three. First, being judged in foreign courts would have meant a great expense for them. More immediately to the point, if they were judged in Malta, the government would have recovered the money carried away to Roman tribunals.¹⁷⁵ Stopping such appeals represented in a most forceful way, therefore, the

¹⁶⁸ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 76, fol. 55v, Boncompagni to Gallarati Scotti, 31 March 1789.

¹⁶⁹ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 101, fol. 257, Gallarati Scotti to Boncompagni, 11 April 1789.

¹⁷⁰ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 13, 252.

¹⁷¹ Mdina, AIM, AC 539 (i), fols. 95r–100v.

¹⁷² Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1585, fol. 711r, Rohan to de Suffren, 15 Dec. 1787.

¹⁷³ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 101, fol. 236v, Gallarati Scotti to Boncompagni, 30 Aug. 1788.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 249v, Gallarati Scotti to Boncompagni, 17 Jan. 1789.

¹⁷⁵ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 17, fol. 9v—*Memoriale* by Nicola and Orsola Bonafue (1709).

Order's subtle attack against the presence of Rome in the economic life of Malta.

It would have been difficult to spell this out more clearly, but the Order brought another reason why foreign judges should not harass Maltese citizens.¹⁷⁶ In an undated document which, however, internal evidence suggests was contemporaneous with Pinto's magistracy, it was claimed that the subjects surrendered their rights only to the prince, who could allow nobody to govern them without breaking these agreements. In other words, the grand masters were bound to bequeath to their successors the rights of the principality in the same condition they had received them. This duty derived from the oath they swore before the *giurati* (aldermen) of the Mdina commune to defend the inhabitants' privileges.¹⁷⁷ One of these fundamental freedoms, given to the Maltese by the sovereigns of Sicily, was never to sustain litigation outside their country.¹⁷⁸

Besides reserving their right to hinder recourse to Rome, the government subjected papal documents to the *exequatur*, or, as it was called, the *vidit*. This "wall of sovereignty," or the "great fortress from which spiritual shots are fired on all sides," was published on 6 November 1786.¹⁷⁹ A measure of its significance is the considerable resentment it stoked up in both the bishop and the inquisitor. This was to be expected, because it was upon their shoulders that the burden of the protection of the Church's interests principally fell. They protested, therefore, that it was an attack upon the Church's independence and the power of the Roman curia to intervene in Maltese ecclesiastical affairs.¹⁸⁰ As a result, several lawsuits could not start or continue, since the ecclesiastical authorities refused to recognize documents which had been presented to the advocate general to be marked with the *vidit*.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 13, fols. 207r–208v, Barberini to Pallavicino, 25 June, 1678.

¹⁷⁷ Valletta, NLM, Libr. 751, 52.

¹⁷⁸ Giovanni Francesco Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta* (Malta: 1647), 423.

¹⁷⁹ Valletta, NLM, Lib. 429 (viii), ff. 189r–190r. See also Paolo De Bono, *Sommario della Storia della Legislazione in Malta* (Malta: 1897), 209.

¹⁸⁰ Floriana, AAM, Corr. 19, fols. 754r–v, undated letter from Labini to Boncompagni.

¹⁸¹ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 80, fols. 82v–83r, de Zelada to Camille de Rohan, 21 May 1793.

5. CONFLICTS WITH JESUITS AND PAPAL INQUISITORS

So far we have observed the government's efforts to stop Rome's direct interference in Maltese affairs. There remains one further aspect of the changing character of the relationship between throne and altar to analyze: the conflict with the pope's representatives, the Jesuits and the inquisitors. It is to this two-pronged offensive against these formidable opponents that we must now turn.

The Jesuits stood vulnerable on several accounts. Besides pillorying their relaxed morality and probabilism, their enemies denounced them for promoting papal supremacy. More significant was the fact that by their personal obedience to a "foreign prince" they repudiated the sovereignty of the throne and challenged the rights of the nation. These were heavy charges against the Company, but Clement XIII further provoked the major Catholic powers by his brief *Apostolicum pascendi* (1765), which described the Jesuits as "pious, praiseworthy and useful to Religion, the Church and Society."¹⁸² He and his secretary of state, Cardinal Torrigiani (1758–1769)—"a person with a red habit but a black soul," as the pope's confessor Borini described him¹⁸³—had overreached themselves: The Jesuits were expelled first from Portugal¹⁸⁴ and then from all Bourbon lands.¹⁸⁵ Tanucci (1698–1793), who called for "the rod of Spain and France on the shoulders of the Torrigianis and the Rezzonicos,"¹⁸⁶ ordered Malta, whose Jesuits fell under the Sicilian superior, to banish them as well.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Mdina, AIM, Mem. 16, fols. 431r–435r.

¹⁸³ Bianca Betto, "Papa Rezzonico attraverso le lettere inedite del Confessore Apostolico", *Rivista della Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, Anno 28, no. 2 (1974), 411.

¹⁸⁴ The classical work is Miller, *Portugal and Rome*. See also Kenneth Maxwell, *Pombal: Paradox of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1995), 82–83.

¹⁸⁵ Dale van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits in France* (New Haven: 1975). Richard Herr, *The Eighteenth Century Revolution in Spain* (Princeton: 1969), 19–24. Egidio Papa, "I Beni dei Gesuiti e i Preliminari della loro Espulsione dal Regno di Napoli nel 1767", *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia* (1976): 81–113. Giovanni Gonzi, "L'Espulsione dei Gesuiti dai Ducati Parmensi", *Aurea Parma*, Anno 50 (1966), 154–68; Anno 51 (1967), 3–62. For a general survey, Pastor, *Storia dei Papi dalla fine del Medioevo*, vol. 16, part 1, *Benedetto XIV e Clemente XIII, 1740–1769* (Rome: 1933), 576–997.

¹⁸⁶ On this main representative of Catholic Enlightenment at Naples see Rosa Minuzzi, *Bernardo Tanucci ministro di Ferdinando di Borbone, 1759–1776* (Bari: 1967).

¹⁸⁷ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1993, fols. 1r–2v, Tanucci to Pinto, 19 March 1768.

Loyola's followers had been sent to the island in 1582 by Gregory XIII "for the reform of the city."¹⁸⁸ Here they set up a college, but they enlarged their influence by their missions¹⁸⁹ and confraternities,¹⁹⁰ as well as the direction of the retreat house at Floriana.¹⁹¹ They had already been expelled once in 1639, and it appears that this hostility still rankled.¹⁹² Thus, in November 1767, Inquisitor Mancinforte reported to Rome that the grand master was not at all favorable to "these unfortunate friars". Pinto, who was kept abreast with the Jesuits' vicissitudes by his ambassador in Rome,¹⁹³ was surrounded by arch-enemies of the Company. Chief among these was the vice-chancellor, Pinto's compatriot, Guedes, "who talks openly against the Holy See and the members of the Society and with malevolent courage endeavors to expel them".¹⁹⁴ Moreover, Tanucci's ordering their expulsion was an excellent opportunity for the grand master to earn the king's approval, besides sequestrating the Jesuits' property.¹⁹⁵

Running through the correspondence, one readily discerns that the inquisitor's fatal pessimism was well founded. On 22 April 1768, troops surrounded the college. A few hours after midnight, between two and three in the morning, the vice-prior of the conventual church, the public prosecutor and a notary summoned the Jesuits to the rector's room, and the *fiscale* read them the grand master's decree of expulsion.¹⁹⁶ All twenty of them remained under arrest until 29 April when, towards 2:30 a.m., all but three were put in carriages and taken

¹⁸⁸ Pio Pecchiai, "Il Collegio dei Gesuiti a Malta," *Archivio Storico di Malta* 9 (1937–1938), 135–136.

¹⁸⁹ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1993, fol. 8r.

¹⁹⁰ Daniel M. Glavina, "Ignatian Devotion to Our Lady and the Jesuits in Malta," in Vincent Borg (ed.), *Marian Devotions in the Island of Saint Paul 1600–1800*, (Malta: 1983), 358–368.

¹⁹¹ Pier Francesco Rossignoli, *Relazione della pia Casa in Malta per gli Esercizi Spirituali di S. Ignazio* (Naples: 1753).

¹⁹² For this event: David F. Allen, "Anti-Jesuit Rioting by Knights of St John during the Malta Carnival of 1639," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 65 (1996), 3–30. Pio Pecchiai, "La Sòmossa dei Cavalieri di Malta contro i Gesuiti nel Carnevale del 1639," *Archivio Storico di Malta* 9 (1938), 429–432; Vincent Borg, *Fabio Chigi Apostolic Delegate in Malta (1634–1639). An Edition of his Official Correspondence* (Vatican City: 1967), 99–104.

¹⁹³ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1523, fol. 79r, Pinto to de Breteüil, 11 May 1767.

¹⁹⁴ Alfredo Mifsud, "L'Espulsione dei Gesuiti da Malta nel 1768 e le loro Temporalità," *Archivum Melitense* 2 (1913), 116–17.

¹⁹⁵ Venice, AS, Senato. Dispacci, filza. 161. A. Alberti to the Senate. Naples, 9 Dec. 1783.

¹⁹⁶ A. Mifsud, "L'Espulsione dei Gesuiti", Appendix II, 154–58.

to the harbor. Here they boarded *Le Soleil*, a French *pollacca*, and were shipped out of the country to Civitavecchia, where they arrived on 7 May, towards midnight.¹⁹⁷

The government had got rid of the pope's chief defenders, but the Roman presence in Malta was still visible in the person of the inquisitor, who was also the pope's nuncio in Malta. The grand masters had no say in the appointment of these prelates, but they could still apply pressure to have them replaced. This point is well illustrated by Pinto's success in having Mgr Mancinforte, whom he called "a liar and a hypocrite," recalled to Rome in 1771,¹⁹⁸ together with his "ignorant" and "fanatic" *uditore*, Abate de Dominicis.¹⁹⁹

The next best thing would have been to suppress the Tribunal altogether, "this hydra, which often destroys their (the inhabitants') wealth as well as their happiness."²⁰⁰ This was the appropriate time to strike at the Holy Office, since in the late eighteenth century most of the tribunals in Europe were either reduced to a shadow of their former selves or, as in the case of Parma²⁰¹ and Modena,²⁰² closed down. The closure of the tribunal in Sicily in 1782²⁰³ had a direct bearing on that of Malta. In November 1783 Malta's representative in Naples, Gaetani, was told that once the inquisition stopped functioning in Sicily the king would no longer tolerate it in Malta.²⁰⁴ The Venetian representative in Naples, Andrea Alberti, who passed on this piece of information to his superiors in Venice, could not fathom the reason for this. Some suspected that it had been Rohan himself who had demanded the Tribunal's

¹⁹⁷ P. A. Leanza, *I Gesuiti in Malta al Tempo dei Cavalieri Gerosolimitani* (Malta: 1934), 27, note 1.

¹⁹⁸ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 58, fol. 30r, Pallavicini to Mancinforte, 25 Feb. 1771.

¹⁹⁹ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1363, fol. 14r, de Breteuil to Pinto, 22 Jan. 1771.

²⁰⁰ Naples, AS, Affari Esteri, fasc. 6832, Grimaldi to Acton, 23 July 1792.

²⁰¹ Venturi, *Settecento Riformatore*, vol. 2, *La Chiesa e la Repubblica dentro i loro Limiti* (Turin: 1976), 234.

²⁰² G. Salvioli, "La Legislazione di Francesco III di Modena," *Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Antiche Provincie Modenesi. Atti e Memorie*. Modena, serie IV, ix (1899), 33. Albano Biondi, "Lunga Durata e Micoarticolarzine nel territorio di un Ufficio dell'Inquisizione: Il Sacro Tribunale a Modena (1292-1785)," *Annali dell'Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico in Trento* vii (1982): 73-90.

²⁰³ Vito La Mantia, *Origine e Vicende dell'Inquisizione in Sicilia* (Palermo: 1977), 146. For the political and cultural significance of this event see F. Renda, "Società e Politica nella Sicilia del Settecento", in Gianvito Resta (ed.), *La Sicilia nel Settecento* vol. 1, (Messina: 1986), 25-26.

²⁰⁴ Venice, AS, Senato. Dispacchi, filza 161. A. Alberti to the Senate. Naples, 9 Dec. 1783.

suppression.²⁰⁵ At first, Inquisitor Zondadari could foresee no successful solution, but eventually the matter was dropped and the holy office continued to function till 1798.

Why the Order should have dreaded the inquisitors is an intriguing question.²⁰⁶ For one thing, it considered the number of their dependants exorbitantly high. It was believed in 1760, for instance, that the island had been “inundated” by some two hundred *patentati* who, including their dependants, perhaps added up to a thousand. Behind this exaggeration lay a certain amount of truth, because the number of these patentees “was hidden with so much skill” that it was impossible to know it for sure. The government had repeatedly petitioned Rome that, as in the case of the bishop’s dependants, and as was the practice in Sicily and Sardinia,²⁰⁷ a list with their names be exhibited in a public place. Such demands, however, came to nothing. This hampered the course of justice, since it was not unusual for a patentee to be identified only when he was cited to appear in the secular courts.²⁰⁸ Sometimes this happened when a lawsuit was already in progress and had to be transferred to the inquisitor’s tribunal.²⁰⁹ One must also bear in mind that all kinds of stratagems were devised for increasing the number of patentees. The *gabellotti*, or tenant farmers, for instance, sublet their plots to other tenants or else took on *castaldi*, or bailiffs.²¹⁰

Disputes over number were linked to issues over quality. The *patentati* were the members of the principal families of the island, so that the grand masters claimed that among people of substance there were hardly two families that were not outside their jurisdiction.²¹¹ Allowing for exaggeration, they did include nobles like Testaferrata, Manduca, Xara, Mompalao, Xeberras and de Piro, as well as leading merchants

²⁰⁵ For this argument, see Frans Ciappara, “Malta, Napoli e la Santa Sede nella seconda metà del ’700”, *Mediterranea. Ricerche Storiche* 12 (2008): 173–188.

²⁰⁶ For the government’s grievances against the inquisition, see *Mémoire Présenté au Roy Tres Chrétien sur les entreprises des Inquisiteurs députés à Malthe* (s.a.; s.l.).

²⁰⁷ Carlo Alberto Garufi, *Fatti e Personaggi dell’Inquisizione in Sicilia* (Palermo: 1978), 214; Romano Canosa, *Storia dell’Inquisizione Spagnola in Italia* (Rome: 1992), 177.

²⁰⁸ For the case of Felice Portelli: Mdina, AIM, AC 502, fols. 383r–v.

²⁰⁹ For one such instance: Mdina, AIM, Corr. 94, fols. 279v–282r, Stoppani to Ottoboni, 15 Sept. 1731.

²¹⁰ Mdina, AIM, Registrum Actorum Civilium C4, fol. 443r.

²¹¹ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1577, fol. 203r, Pinto to Labrillanne, 28 Nov. 1755.

like Mannarino and one Arena, a rich draper in contact with merchants in Genoa, Lyons and Sedan.²¹²

Even more serious was the government's attack on the Tribunal's jurisdictional claims. Did not Pinto claim that "this principality is being ruined by the Tribunal of the holy office"?²¹³ This wish "to take shelter under the protection of the Tribunal" was so strong that it led to some landowners donating their own plots of land to the holy office to receive them back in return as the inquisitor's tenant farmers.²¹⁴ Other such cases of "inexcusable absurdities" included people like Salvatore Magro, a grocer from Zebbug, who was supposed to be the *castaldo* of Giuseppe Farrugia but who never moved out of his village.²¹⁵ It is significant that this fraudulent practice concerned not only "peasants" but served also as an excuse for, say, a wool merchant to take the patent of the Tribunal's doctor.²¹⁶ In much the same way, Giacinto Testaferrata, the *depositario dei mobili*, was in charge of a few chairs, some small tables, beds and kitchen utensils. The truth was that, on the evidence of Inquisitor D'Elci (1711–1715), he rendered no service at all to the holy office, since it was the duty of the chamberlain to look after such furniture.²¹⁷

We may wonder how the grand masters faced this challenge to their authority. As the only sovereigns of Malta, should not their laws be binding on all? On 18 August 1755, therefore, Pinto asked the cardinal inquisitors for a perpetual and stable agreement that would bring a "sure peace to this small state".²¹⁸ The bargaining dragged on for five years. Eventually, with the help of the government's Jansenist friends at Rome like Cardinal Corsini, a concordat was signed on 31 July 1760, which almost coincided with another agreement over sanctuary.²¹⁹ The details of its clauses can be extracted from the dossier at the *archivio della congregazione per la dottrina della fede* at the Vatican. The number of patentees was fixed at sixty-eight. It could not be

²¹² Mdina, AIM, AC 543, fols. 1r–2v.

²¹³ Naples, AS, Affari Esteri, fasc. 720, Parisio to Tanucci, 20 Aug. 1759.

²¹⁴ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 94, fol. 165, D'Elci to Marescotti, 5 Sept. 1711.

²¹⁵ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1526, fol. 154r, Pinto to de Breteüil, 18 June 1770.

²¹⁶ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1366, fols. 417r–v, Labrillanne to Pinto, 28 July 1778.

²¹⁷ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 94, fol. 173r, D'Elci to Marescotti, 23 Jan. 1712.

²¹⁸ Vatican, ACDF, St St HH4—d, Pinto to Corsini, 18 Aug. 1758.

²¹⁹ Frans Ciappara, "Non Gode l'Immunità Ecclesiastica: Sanctuary in Malta, c.1740–1828", *European History Quarterly* 38 (2008): 227–243.

increased on any account, and the inquisitors were to keep a catalogue of their names, which they dispatched annually to the cardinal inquisitors. When a patentee died or renounced his patent, he was to be replaced by someone who lived in the fear of God and was not of ill-repute, quarrelsome or dissolute. The rich imparted dignity to the Tribunal, but the inquisitors were reminded that they should not give the impression that they were looking for the wealthiest inhabitants. Neither were patentees to hunt in areas reserved for the knights or to be involved in the slave business—"so odious to God's and man's laws."²²⁰

This agreement was a great political victory for the government, but it did not bring the jurisdictional squabbles with the inquisition to an end. Patentees in the lucrative insurance business, for instance, appealed to the inquisitor whenever an unfavorable verdict was pronounced against them in the lay courts.²²¹ Guided by the enlightened vision of the public good and of the country's general interests, Pinto could not connive at such disorder without "destroying the commerce of these islands with which, more than any other means, the inhabitants maintain themselves". Foreign merchants would be deceived and cheated if, after they had sustained their suit in the commercial court, they found themselves dragged to church tribunals and finally to those of Rome or Palermo.²²² At last a compromise was reached in 1772, and a patentee could now act as an insurer on condition that he presented a government's subject as a surety.²²³

Other sources of contention remained, and the Church in Malta sustained a ferocious attack in the 1780s. The direction of reform was the same, but the pace was quicker. Why? In attempting to answer this question, a great part of the explanation must lie in Rome's hopelessly divided forces after Clement XIV's demise. Pope Ganganelli's way of government had been innovative. It gave a breathing space to intellectual forces favorable to the reform of the Church. We should not make too much of this fresh approach, though, which met with firm resistance. Prophecies and visions announced terrible punishments by

²²⁰ See dossier in Vatican, ACDF, St St HH3—g. Also Naples, AS, Affari Esteri, fasc. 721, Parisio to Tanucci, 24 Sept. 1760. For the whole episode in detail: Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition*, 170–181.

²²¹ For such an incident involving a merchant from Maone, see Mdina, AIM, Corr. 100, fols. 411r–v, memoria attached to letter from Lante to Pallavicini, 6 April 1772.

²²² Valletta, NLM, Arch. 1528, fols. 88v–98r, Pinto to de Breteuil, 6 July 1772.

²²³ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 33, fol. 91r, Stoppani to Lante, 10 Oct. 1772.

God, angry at the pope's consenting to the anticlerical policies of the kings. The secret *Amicizie Cristiane*, founded by the ex-Jesuit N. Diessbach in north Italy, were the most significant reaction. Their members condemned the satanic refusal by kings to recognize the supreme authority of the Church in the direction of man. The election of Pius VI (1775–1799) confirmed this conservative movement. Pope Braschi compared the times with the end of the world as described by St Paul to Timothy²²⁴ and prepared for a frontal clash with the forces of the modern world. However, his visit to Vienna in 1782 to persuade Joseph to modify his dash for Church reform was a diplomatic disaster. Chronicling this extraordinary tale of rivalry, one must also say that Joseph II was not the pope's sole hurdle. At that time, the papacy was also engaged in a bitter encounter with the kingdom of Naples over a renewed concordat to decide whether the clergy were "citizens of Naples or a colony of Rome".²²⁵ Relations became so bitter and reached such an impasse that on 17 October 1787 Cardinal Boncompagni (1785–1789) came to Naples for discussions.²²⁶

Such was the atmosphere when the Maltese government assailed with renewed vigor ecclesiastical jurisdiction in temporal affairs. Marc'Antonio, who had fallen in arrears in his rents to the bishop, was a case in point. In 1788 the curia ordered the auction of his animals, but on Thursday, 10 July, *uditore* Muscat reminded the bishop that Marc'Antonio was a *particolare* (private person) and could be cited only before the secular court. In response, Mgr Labini sent his assessor, Simone Biagio, that same day to Rohan, informing him that the peasant had been given a respite. The ecclesiastical court believed that the matter was over, but the next morning the advocate general dispatched a letter "not very consonant with the bishop's honor" declaring that Mgr Labini had not understood anything. The laws of Malta prohibited the auction of debtors' oxen or agricultural implements,²²⁷ and, on the authority of Grotius and van Espen, the bishop was reminded that the ecclesiastical judge should obey the laws of the prince in temporal affairs.²²⁸ Furthermore, the court, in another show of defiance,

²²⁴ 2 Tim. 3:1–5.

²²⁵ Cited in Schipa, *Nel Regno di Ferdinando IV Borbone*, 92.

²²⁶ Venice, AS, Senato. Dispacci Napoli, vol. 31, filza 165, 718, Francesco Alberti al Senato, 30 Oct. 1787.

²²⁷ *Del Dritto Municipale di Malta* (Malta: 1784), 91.

²²⁸ Vatican, ASV, SS (Malta) 182, fols. 196r–202v, Gallarati Scotti to Boncompagni, 19 July 1788.

and with “abominable and inexcusable temerity”, as the inquisitor put it, advised the grand master to punish the bishop for his “daring.”²²⁹

This episode was significant, but equally so was the government’s order to witnesses not to answer citations by the civil court of the holy office. Furthermore, patentees were made to renounce their patents because these availed them nothing. In one such instance, Muscat warned Saverio Alessi, a marshal of the *Sant’Ufficio*, that the grand master could send him into exile even for minor offences.²³⁰ Above all, the wish to denigrate the inquisitors was so keen that they were discredited in their administration of justice by being charged with excessive severity or lack of judgment.²³¹

Nevertheless, no better illustration of the government’s animosity towards the Church can be chosen than the Fenech case. On 3 September 1791, Count Giuseppe Fenech petitioned the grand master to transfer his lawsuit from the ecclesiastical to the government’s court.²³² Both Mgr Gallarati Scotti and Mgr Labini raised a number of objections and accused the count of violating ecclesiastical liberty and usurping the Church’s immunity. The count refused to be subdued and submitted a second petition to the government on 8 October in an extraordinary document of seventeen folios. First, the count argued that the two prelates injured the grand master’s sovereign authority and the rights given to him by God as his vice-regent on earth. Secondly, he claimed that Malta had always been the last country to emulate the example of other European states. Thirdly, he contrasted Malta with the grand duchy of Tuscany and the kingdom of Naples, where such practices, reminiscent of past centuries of rude ignorance, had been repealed.²³³ The grand master referred the matter to the supreme court of justice, which issued its report on 23 November. It was nothing more than a summary of Muscat’s own ideology regarding Church-State affairs: all authority and jurisdiction exercised by the *sacerdozio* in temporal matters was only a concession given by the *imperio*.²³⁴

Faced with this challenge, the pope’s reaction as defender of Church immunity was instant. Pius VI, who already had the civil constitu-

²²⁹ Floriana, AAM, Corr. 22, fols. 26r–28v, undated *memoria* by Bishop Labini to Pius VI.

²³⁰ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 101, fol. 203r, Gallarati Scotti to Federici, 15 Sept. 1789.

²³¹ Ciappara, “Gio. Nicolò Muscat”, 615–618.

²³² Mdina, AIM, Mem. 28, fols. 234r–238v.

²³³ *Ibid.*, fols. 240r–256r.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, fols. 258r–271v.

tion of the clergy in France on his hands, demanded on 29 November 1791 the removal of Muscat—"the principal author and cause of all the exorbitant novelties promoted in the island of Malta"—from his posts of general advocate and *uditore*.²³⁵

Muscat gave full vent to his offended dignity. There are several interesting points to note in his defense against the charge of fomenting dissension between "stole and sword". If in the exercise of his arduous office he had sinned and violated Church laws, so he claimed in an assertive and strident tone, it was only because he believed that his prince's supreme dignity had been offended. And he once more expressed his Catholic faith and his wish to die in the bosom of the Church.²³⁶ However subservient Muscat appeared to be, though, he did not convince Mgr Gallarati Scotti (1785–1793), who expressed his surprise at such sentiments of respect and veneration. There was no person in Malta, so the inquisitor informed the papal secretary of state, who was not fully aware of Muscat's antagonism. On receiving the pope's demand for his removal, he had exclaimed, "I would eat with no less appetite!"²³⁷

All Muscat could do now was to provoke a decisive decision. With this object, in July 1792, on a Tuesday, towards midnight, he sailed to Naples. The pretext was that he wanted some peace of mind that his enemies denied him. But documents at the state archives of Naples reveal that he had a more urgent practical reason. He wanted to give to the king an account by word of mouth of the "strange vehemence" with which Rome battled against the rights of Malta.²³⁸ In support of this view, he had summoned before his departure all the judges in an extraordinary session and advised them how to proceed in his absence. Nothing was to be changed in the relations between Church and State. He expressed his firm belief that he would return after fifty days and restore with royal support the tranquility of the Order and the inhabitants, continually harassed by church courts. But even if this did not materialize, he would still have felt proud of having undertaken a glorious confrontation with the pope.²³⁹

²³⁵ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 78, fols. 237r–v, Boncompagni to Gallarati Scotti, 28 Nov. 1791.

²³⁶ Vatican, ASV, SS (Malta) 165, Boncompagni to Gallarati Scotti, 31 Jan. 1792.

²³⁷ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 102, fol. 3v, Gallarati Scotti to de Zelada, 7 Jan. 1792.

²³⁸ Naples, AS, Affari Esteri, fasc. 6829, Grimaldi to Acton, 19 July, 1792.

²³⁹ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 102, fols. 35v–37r, Gallarati Scotti to de Zelada, 19 July 1792.

For this purpose, on 1 September he sent a dispatch to Acton, the foreign minister of Naples. He did not want to annoy him unduly, but here he paused to explain that “if Hannibal is in the harbor how can I not hasten the defense of the besieged city?” He proceeded to implore him to cast his eyes on his island home and reach some agreement with the Holy Father to prevent further disturbances.²⁴⁰ Such strong language demonstrates both the extent to which Muscat was ready to go as well as the vigor of his purpose.

This “declared enemy of the pope”—so was he identified by the cardinal secretary of state²⁴¹—returned to Malta by way of Messina less than four months later in October 1792. Did he not fully appreciate the difficulties he had created? Did it not cross his mind that his victories could tumble down almost overnight? However that may be, he did not see the writing on the wall. And his downfall, however dramatic in itself, came as a perfectly logical conclusion.

There were several reasons for this. By this time the Order’s power of maneuver had been greatly diminished. The challenge of the French revolutionaries weighed heavy on the minds of all monarchs. Was it not easy to argue that the cause of religion was the cause of sovereigns as well, and that attacks on the altar were aimed at the throne? The Order was on its knees and in need of the support of the Holy See. On 19 September 1792, the National Assembly had confiscated the Order’s lands in France;²⁴² and, to make matters worse, the island was strangled by a shortage of corn.²⁴³ It is well to remember, too, that Pius VI very keenly felt the necessity of striking back at what appeared to be a disintegration of the centralized ecclesiastical system so painstakingly built up since the sixteenth century.

To strengthen the pope’s hand, on Tuesday, 15 October 1793, Prince Camille, the Order’s ambassador in Rome, arrived in Malta. He inveighed strongly against “this rascal,” whom he would have liked to see hanged and warned the grand master that if Muscat were to remain in office, he would not dare to present himself before the

²⁴⁰ Naples, AS, Affari Esteri, fasc. 6829, Muscat to Acton, 1 September 1792.

²⁴¹ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 79, fols. 178v, de Zelada to Gallarati Scotti, 14 Aug. 1792.

²⁴² Frans Ciappara, “La peur de la Révolution française à Malte”, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 341 (2005): 53–68.

²⁴³ Venice, AS, Senato, Secreta. Dispacci dei Consoli, Malta 1793–1797, filza 9, Miari to Senate, 17 April 1793. See also Mdina, AIM, Corr. 80, fol. 167v, de Zelada to Carpegna, 15 Oct. 1793.

pope.²⁴⁴ He had pledged his word to the pontiff that never would the Holy See have any further cause to complain against the Hospitaller Government.²⁴⁵ Under this pressure, Rohan gave in and dismissed Muscat, who was replaced by Benedetto Schembri.²⁴⁶ The Holy See agreed with the choice of the new advocate general, even though it would have preferred that Muscat had not been pensioned off at his own request.²⁴⁷

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, as in Spain,²⁴⁸ the skeptical Enlightenment of the *philosophes* had no place in Catholic Malta. The university's metaphysics lecturer explained the spirituality or immortality of the soul, thereby firmly confuting the errors of those authors who attacked that truth.²⁴⁹ Similarly, a philosophy student in 1789 defended his thesis that atheists were "horrible monsters." The whole universe, he asserted, "is like a book in which he who does not read God's existence is absolutely stupid."²⁵⁰

However, if Malta was closely allied with Catholic European trends, the program of the Maltese reformers did not suggest any Muratorian kind of piety. It did entail, though, the improvement of the clergy's education to promote the spiritual well-being of the faithful, the crack-down on the bishops and the alignment of the grand masters with the parish priests as their representatives in the parishes.

Even so, the Maltese government was much more willing to take on the Church. If the grand masters did nothing to transfer resources from Church to State, they did attempt to free the Maltese Church from the bureaucratic centralization of the Roman curia and place it under their own control, leaving it with purely spiritual authority. It meant making the clergy servants of the state in ecclesiastical matters and preventing the pope and his representatives, the Jesuits and the inquisitors, from exercising their authority in Malta. Such a program

²⁴⁴ Mdina, AIM, Mem. 36, fol. 108r.

²⁴⁵ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 102, fol. 97v, Carpegna to de Zelada, 24 Oct. 1793.

²⁴⁶ Mdina, AIM, Corr. 102, fols. 96v-97r, Carpegna to de Zelada, 21 Oct. 1793.

²⁴⁷ Vatican, ASV, SS (Malta) 165, de Zelada to Carpegna, 19 Nov. 1793.

²⁴⁸ Noel, "The Clerical Confrontation with the Enlightenment in Spain", 108-122.

²⁴⁹ Valletta, NLM, Arch. 575, fols. 476r-v.

²⁵⁰ Aloysius Assenza, *Conclusiones Philosophicae* (Malta: 1789), iv.

did not lead, as it did in Portugal between 1760 and 1770, to a breakdown of relations between the two sides. Nevertheless, it was a sustained attack causing foreign observers to “remain surprised by how much of an assault on Church power there was in eighteenth century Malta.”²⁵¹ Part of the explanation of course lies in the fact that the Maltese Church had acquired so much power that the break with the past had to be severe, abrupt and violent.

One final question deserves our attention: did this massive change lead to some kind of secularized anti-clericalism? The answer is a definitive no. The attempt to restrict the pope’s authority over the Maltese Church was confined to a tiny, limited circle. It was wholly the affair of the government, which did not affect the people at large. In fact, as in Mainz,²⁵² the Maltese Church succeeded in preserving and even deepening its hold on the devotions of the people. The cult of the Sacred Heart and the devotion of the *via crucis* bear eloquent witness to this.

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²⁵¹ Personal communication by Professor Derek Beales to the author, 13 March 2008.

²⁵² Timothy C. W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz, 1743–1803* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1974), 121–122.

- Vatican,
 ACDF, St St HH3, HH4.
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