

ATTEMPTS BY PROTESTANTS TO PUBLISH THE NEW TESTAMENT 1927 – 1937

CARMELO SANT

The British and Foreign Bible Society in 1926 published the Maltese translation of the Book of Psalms prepared by Mr. J. Falzon, the agent of the World Evangelical Alliance in Tunis and Malta.

The same society had not the intention to publish other Maltese translations, partial or the whole Bible according to what Rev. R. Kilgur, secretary to the Editor superintendent of the BFBS, had written to Mr. H.M. Grooch, secretary of the WEA.¹

The First Attempt

In January 1927 a certain Mr. Percy W. Howard wrote to the secretary of the BFBS informing him that he had the idea of preparing and publishing the letter to the Romans in Maltese since copies of the whole New Testament were out of print and unavailable; he asked for information about the Gospel of St. John, so that he would not encroach on them in case he would make a reprint of the same. I may add here that the last edition of the whole New Testament was that of Camilleri dated 1847. Mr. Howard wrote with a certain degree of enthusiasm on paper with the letter head: *Gospel Testimony among Seamen* from London. He was attached to the King George V Hospital for seamen sited in Floriana and run by the Plymouth Brethren.²

Rev. Kilgur rejected the idea in no uncertain terms: "I hope that you will do neither. It always adds the difficulties in Bible distribution when private individuals try to issue separate publications"³

Two years later Howard returned to the attack. He told them that he intended to re-issue the 1912 edition of St. John's Gospel, with a revised orthography for free distribution. He asked for permission so that the translator (who was he?) could make use of the translation of the BFBS and asked them to suggest "any Maltese scholar in London to whom any final points might be referred".⁴

Rev. Kilgur was not at all enthusiastic; still he did not discourage him. He told him that the 1912 edition was the last one to be published and that at the time there was no demand for it "We have only a record of a very limited circulation",⁵ not to say that there were many Catholic translations in circulation. More specific information as to the purpose, his idea and purpose of such publication, the translator and such like details were asked for.⁶

Mr. Howard reported that the translator or revisor, was the same man who drafted the leaflet: *God has spoken*, published by the *Scripture Gift Mission*,⁷ unknown even to the latter people. He was introduced to him by a Maltese journalist, who was initiating him (Howard) into the Maltese language. This man was quite familiar with spoken Maltese and with current orthography. This leaflet *Alla Tchellem* was revised by a Maltese resident in North Africa.⁸

Who were these persons?

The person resident in North Africa was certainly Mr. J. Falzon, an ex-catholic Maltese priest, agent of the *World Evangelist Alliance* in Tunis.⁹ The other one would be G. Maurin, ex-catholic Maltese priest, moving within Protestant circles as from 1912.

Howard reported also that the translator worked on a literal translations of the Greek text comparing it with the Italian translation; he (Howard) himself revised the drafts for any defect. Such work is not easy, so he asked permission to use the BFBS translation (1912) or that of Camilleri (1847) as the basic text. He would change only where the text sounds “strange” or “difficult” in the original: “Hence I wanted your loving permission rather to make your translation the basis than to start all over again, or to use the 1847 translation”.¹¹

The printed translation would be issued under the name of Howard himself without the imprint of the BFBS. He was of the opinion that it could be printed at a low cost, thus circulation would be wider. The BFBS would help him by allowing him to use the 1847 edition as a basis and by suggesting to him a person or two conversant with Maltese to criticize his work and help him in proof reading.¹²

Dr. Kilgur replied on the 27th March, after having submitted the correspondence to the Editorial Board. He warned him that the circulation of such translation in Malta is difficult: “The information before us seems to suggest that the reason for this is not the quality of the versions, but simply the difficulty of the situation, including the fact that Maltese is not the only language on the Island. We do not think that anything would be gained by the course you suggest of an anonymous Maltese making alterations in the text published by us. These individualistic translations have unwittingly raised many obstacles in the past”.¹³

Then the correspondence came to an end. Up till now I have not met yet of any indication in the minutes of the Editorial Board (BFBS) that such a translation of St. John’s Gospel was ever published.

Indeed no correspondence whatever on the subject does appear in the records of the BFBS before 1934. It is a fact moreover that at this time there was going on an intense activity in this field amongst Maltese Catholics.

The Second and Final Attempt 1934–1937

In March 1934 Rev. W.H. Rainey, of the BFBS, informed the Editor of the Society by a letter dated from Rome that he was in search for a Maltese Protestant able to revise the orthography of the Gospel of St. Luke and he hopes that he would find one in Genoa.¹⁴

He further states that this Gospel has never been published by the BFBS, but in the Society’s library there is a copy published by the Church Missionary Society a long time ago. He must be referring to the translation of M.A. Vassalli (1829) or of M.A. Camilleri (1847).¹⁵

On the 3rd of April 1934 Rev. E.W. Smith sent a typed copy of the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel in Maltese, which he intended to send “to the gentleman in Malta for him to transcribe it in the standard orthography.” If this gentleman would satisfy them he would be asked to finish the whole Gospel and the payment of “£5, that he wanted”.¹⁶

This Maltese gentleman was Mr. Joseph Maurin, an ex-Maltese priest.¹⁷ At the end of April, Rainey sent the revised version of Jh1 to Rev. E.W. Smith, Editor Superintendent. The orthography is that of the Maltese Vernacular press. Moreover there would be need for some other person to control the work of Maurin.¹⁸ Maurin did nothing else but changing the orthography of the text of the 1872 edition (BFBS), according to his own views, without changing a single word, not even the title.¹⁹

In a letter dated 30th April, Rainey admitted that he was mistaken, because what he wanted was the translation of the Gospel of St. Luke, and not that of St. John. This was corrected as evidenced by a letter dated 12th September 1934 from Rainey informing Rev. E.W. Smith “that Mr. Maurin, the ex-priest has now finished the translation (sic) of St. Luke’s Gospel into modern Maltese written in the revised orthography.”²⁰

Mr. Rainey states further that up till then no person has been found to check this work. Maurin had in the meantime nearly finished the whole New Testament. His patrons were J.S. St. Clair (KGV Hospital), Colonel Beatlye, Dr. Langley and others. Hence the sum of £5.5.0 promised to him should be handed to St. Claire. Rainey goes on to suggest that the whole of the N.T. be published in one volume.²¹

Rainey received the whole text of St. Luke’s Gospel and sent it to Rev. E.W. Smith on the 26th September 1934 ready for the press. Proofs were to be sent to St. Claire in Malta at the King George V Hospital without any outside mark on the envelope.²²

This Ms was studied by the sub-committee. They were ready to pay Maurin for his pains, but they were not ready to send it to the press before it being checked by a competent person. They even wrote to a certain Dr. North requesting him to find such a person in New York. They were not ready to consider the publication of the whole New Testament before being sure of this work.²³

J.S. St. Claire stationed in King George V Hospital thanked Rev. E.W. Smith (BFBS) for the £5, which he had sent for Mr. Maurin, which he will pass to him in £1 weekly instalments! He informed him that Maurin had translated the whole of the New Testament and the Book of Isaiah and that of Job. The *Scripture Gift Mission* were ready to publish the *Letter to the Romans* and that the *Free Distribution of Scripture Society* the *Letter to the Galatians*. If the BFBS, which was the pioneer in this field, would accept to print the whole of the New Testament St. Claire would inform these societies about such project to avoid thus reduplication of work.

The great difficulty was to find a competent man to revise the work of Maurin. St. Claire was very reluctant to approach people in Malta, and the BFBS must be very careful to whom they would entrust the Ms, as according to him, Catholics are doing their best to get hold of Maurin’s Ms; they have offered him a substantial sum of money, and even threatened him with violence, so much so that he was toying with the idea of sending him to Turin to free him from danger: “They are determined to get it from him, and have visited him on several occasions and have even resorted to threats. . . . I am thinking of sending him to Turin to get away from the atmosphere here.”²⁴

One would say that this, at best, is an exaggeration or, at worst, completely false.

The reviser came from an unexpected quarters. Rev. W.T. Sharpley, Methodist minister, sent a note to the BFBS introducing to them a certain Mr. Michael DeGabriele, a Maltese turned Protestant. He went to England as he would not find

work because of his religious convictions. At the time he was hosted by the Plymouth Brethren; he was occupied in translating Biblical extracts for P.W. Howard to be published by the Scripture Gift Mission. Mr. DeGabriele was ready to translate or revise any existing Bible translation. He was ready to work without payment at first to prove his ability, and, if they would provide for him a job, he would then carry on a voluntary basis with a quiet mind as he had left behind his wife with a child in Malta.²⁵

Rev. E.W. Smith accepted the services of Mr. DeGabriele and sent him the Ms of Maurin for revision. He did not want to commit himself to publish the whole of the New Testament before having a full report from De Gabriele. He wrote to St. Claire in this sense.²⁶

Five weeks later Smith did send to St. Claire the revised Ms of Luke 1–3, annotated by DeGabriele for Maurin's comments: "I should be interested to have your friend's remarks. This will help me to decide whether Mr. DeGabriele should continue the work he has begun".²⁷

In March doubts were raised as to Mr. Maurin personally and to his work. Rev. S.A. Thomson, secretary of the BFBS (Midland District) wrote to Rev. Rainey: "While in Malta this (translation into Maltese) caused me great anxiety because of reports that came to my ears regarding the man who is doing the translation. . . .

In the meantime, however, I would strongly advise a postponement of any negotiations with Mr. Maurin, the one who is doing the translation".²⁸

One cannot say what the reaction of Rev. Smith was for lack of evidence. But St. Claire expressed his disquiet at the matter through a letter of the 27th August 1936.²⁹

In 4th January 1935 Smith sent the Ms of Maurin revised by DeGabriele to Mr. St. Claire, "for your friend's remarks".³⁰ On this depends whether one should proceed with the revision or not. Mr. DeGabriele thinks that "most verses convey rather an interpretation than a literal and Biblical translation as it should be". He gives some examples of autography (sic), that is, orthography. He consulted the new book *Taghrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija* and current Maltese papers. Smith encouraged him to proceed with work promising him that he would pay him when the work would be completed.³¹

St. Claire sent back the Ms revised by DeGabriele with the reactions of Maurin, who simply said that DeGabriele "merely used different words to express more or less the same meaning".³² St. Claire started to doubt the sincerity of DeGabriele; hence he suggested to have another opinion, so much the more since a newly Maltese convert had condemned them both: "He said that both are full of grammatical mistakes and neither were (sic) taken from the Greek and therefore missed in many instances the really spiritual meaning . . . of the two translations he preferred Maurin's".³³

St. Claire understood that Maurin's work was useless. He asked Miss May Boher for her opinion: "She has examined both translations and has condemned both as unworthy of publication".³⁴

Even a hurried reading of the two Mss would show us how justified Miss Butcher was to reject outright these translations. Thus Maurin translates Luke 1,1 thus: *Billi bosta hasbu sabiex jordnaw il wirja tal hwejjeg, li minnhom gejna bil bosta zgurati.*

DeGabriele substituted this version by “*Billi bosta inkarigaw ruhom sabiex jarfu kif imis taghrif shih ta dawk il hwejjeg li huma fi zgur emnuti beinitna.*” or: “*Billi bosta jnkarigaw nfishom biex jaghrfu tghakid fuq il hwejjeg ghal kollox emnuti bejnietna.*”³⁵

St. Claire informed him that he had acquired a copy of the translation of Father Peter Paul Grima, which Miss Butcher thought “that on the whole it was very good”. Moreover she offered him to revise the orthography according to the new system of the Academy of Maltese. In fact she had already gone through the Gospel of St. Luke.³⁶

On September St. Claire had a meeting with E.W. Smith in London. He had in hand the Ms of the Gospel of St. Luke and Romans of P.P. Grima as revised by Miss Butcher in the standard orthography. He suggested the drafting of a legal document to be signed by E. Lombardi, the printer or editor of the original and asked Rev. Smith how much they would offer him for the copyright. He added “One would have to be very careful with such a man, although he seems to be a very decent man and honest fellow. As far as I can gather from him he has no other further interest in these translations than to sell the remaining copies on his hands. As I told you the type is long broken up.”³⁷

Smith did not commit himself in any way and told him: “As you are not returning to Malta for some time, we may have another opportunity of talking over this matter”.³⁸

The whole matter stopped there.

Fourteen months later in December 1936, Rev. W.H. Rainey secretary of the BFBS—Western European Agency, informed the Rev. E.W. Smith that he was embarking on a tour of Europe and that he would be in Malta in February, 1937. Hence he desired to be briefed on the situation prevailing at the time.³⁹ Rev. W.H. Rainey arrived in Malta on February 23, and left on March 4. He went through the whole situation, and when he returned he presented his report dated March 18.⁴⁰

First he approached E. Lombardi, who faced him with a curt refusal: “He very uncompromisingly refused.” Neither was he ready to sell them the text.

Then he met Professor P.P. Saydon, with whom he was not too much in sympathy: “Professor Saydon, is an old man and very conservative. This shows itself in the fact that he refuses to use the revised orthography in his version”.

How did Rainey arrive to such an outrageous conclusion? Professor Saydon was still 42 years old, he consistently made use of the new orthography already accepted and made use of in public administration and the Law courts. Saydon was no conservative at all in the generally accepted sense of the term; but he was prudent and never went to the extremes.

Rainey states that Saydon lamented that sales were very poor. Up to that time he had published up to the Books of Kings. When he was asked why he did not start with the New Testament, Saydon answered that he feared that it would have been used by Protestants for their own purpose. The real reason, however, was another one.

In the twenties A.M. Galea, P.P. Grima and P.P. Saydon planned to translate the whole Bible and publish it in parts. Saydon was assigned the first books of the Old Testament so that he would then proceed to the last ones on his own from the

original languages. The other two translated from the Vulgate or the Italian of Bishop Martini. In fact they succeeded to have the whole Bible translated by 1932. Saydon proceeded with his own project, which he finished in 1959.

Finally Rainey went to the Empire Press, “the official R.C. press of the Island. they had just published the Gospel of St. Mark prepared by the *Għaqda tal-Qari Tajjeb*. The priest in charge told him that the publishers had a subsidy of £40 from the Bishop’s Curia.” I may add here that this translation was the work of the seminarist Joseph Lupi. Miss Butcher told Rainey that it was a good translation, but not of Professor Saydon.

Rainey then approached Sir Harry Luke, who told him that the Government was to publish the Grammer of Miss Butcher.

The recommendations of Rainey were extremely negative: “I am not disappointed at not having a complete Maltese New Testament as I cannot guarantee a circulation. More liberal days may come in Malta but the time is not yet. Many Maltese hate the priests, but they do nothing against the Church, backed by the British Authorities. The old nobility and vested interests are also against any change in the semifederal system reigning in the Island. The best we can do at present is to encourage the use of the Roman Catholic Gospels, without taking too much public interest in them, for this would be the surest way to kill them”.

As a result of such recommendation the BFBS withdrew from the scene, although they kept an eye on future developments. Thus according to the minutes of the Board in 1945, the recommendation of Mr. E.B. Vella for a translation of the whole Bible was seriously discussed together with a proposal of Prof. Saydon for them to publish the whole Bible through an article in the *Bible Translator*.

Contacts between the BFBS and Maltese Catholic Biblical scholars were resumed thirty years later when on his own initiative Rev. Roulet, the agent of the BFBS, in Algeria approached the Malta Bible Society. Since then the Gospel of St. Mark was published jointly in 1971, and contacts have never ceased until the whole Bible was published in one volume by our Bible Society, which was acclaimed by their high officers, in 1984.

Notes

1 Arch. BFBS—Letter 13.10.1926.

2 Arch. BFBS—Letter 27.1.1927 Mr. Percy W. Howard was a journalist, member of the Plymouth Brethren with contacts at King George V Hospital for Seamen, at Floriana, run by the same Plymouth Brethren.

3 Arch. BFBS—Letter 1.2.1927.

4 Arch. BFBS—Letter 14.3.1929.

5 Arch. BFBS—Letter 15.2.1929.

6 Arch. BFBS—Letter 15.2.1929

7 Arch. Archbishop’s Curia, Civil Acts, 1927, Fol. 151.

8 Arch.. BFBS—Letter 16.2.1929. (Was he Mr. J. Falzon the translator of the Psalms?)

9 cfr. C. Sant *Protestant Bible Translation: The Book of Psalms 1919–1926*—JMS 15(1983) 3–13.

10 cfr. K. Sant: *Guzè Muscat Azzopardi: Traduttur tal-Vangeli u l-Atti ta’ l-Appostli 1895–1924. Il-Malti* 54(1978) 4–27.

11 Arch. BFBS—Letter 16.2.1929.

12 Arch. BFBS—Letter 16.2.1929.

13 Arch. BFBS—Letter 27.3.1929.

- 14 Arch. BFBS—Letter 16.3.1934.
 15 K. Sant *It-Traduzzjoni tal-Bibbja u l-Ilsien Malti 1810–1850*—L-Università Irjali Malta 1975 pp. 41–42.
 16 Arch. BFBS—Letter 3.4.1934.
 17 Arch. BFBS—Letter 30.4.1934.
 18 Arch. BFBS—Letter 30.4.1934.
 19 Arch. BFBS—Letter Ms St. John Annexed to Letter 30.4.1934.
 20 Arch. BFBS—Letter 12.9.1934.
 21 Arch. BFBS—Letter 26.9.1934.
 22 Arch. BFBS—Letter 26.9.1934.
 23 Arch. BFBS—Letter 22.10.1934.
 24 Arch. BFBS—Letter 8.11.1934.
 25 Arch. BFBS—Letter 24.11.1934.
 26 Arch. BFBS—Letter 12.12.1934.
 27 Arch. BFBS—Letter 4.1.1935.
 28 Arch. BFBS—Letter 15.3.1935.
 29 Arch. BFBS—Letter 27.8.1935.
 30 Arch. BFBS—Letter 4.1.1935.
 31 Arch. BFBS—Letter 18.1.1935.
 32 Arch. BFBS—Letter 27.8.1935.
 33 Arch. BFBS—Letter 27.8.1935.
 34 Arch. BFBS—Letter 27.8.1935.
 35 Arch. BFBS—Letter 27.8.1935.
 36 Arch. BFBS—Letter 27.8.1935.
 37 Arch. BFBS—Letter 29.10.1935.
 38 Arch. BFBS—Letter 30.10.1935.
 39 Arch. BFBS—Letter 30.12.1936.
 40 Arch. BFBS—Letter 18.3.1937.

DOCUMENT 1

Letter from Mr. Percy W. Howard to Dr. R. Kilgur (BFBS), 27th January, 1927:

My dear Sir,

Earnest wishes because of the Lord Jesus. You may know my name through the magazines graciously enabled,⁹ and through the use of many of your translations—am grateful to God we can obtain these—as your Sales Dept will be able to record interestingly. I do not know how many nationalities we have been privileged to meet in this service. Praise God for His Gospel—the power of God unto salvation! I am much interested for His sake in Maltese. As you may recollect the New Testament is long out of print, and you still have the Gospels and Acts, though, being issued at 6d, I take it only a few were printed, and I expect very few have been sold in island and in North Africa. Possibly, God willing, I shall be helping to issue a book of Scripture in Maltese. I had thought of the Epistle to the Romans, but before doing so, I thought I would enquire re Gospel of John. If and only a few were printed and only a few are in stock and you have not the plates for the wide circulation, I might think it to be

the Lord's will to send forth the Gospel of John. Could you therefore inform me as to these points,—(a) (b) (c) above to help prayerful thought—that I may not cover ground that will be covered by any cheap reprint you may make.

I think the spelling might be modified—by print I have received from Malta.

Above all, I do want the Lord's grace in this matter, and long to be prayerful, that I may know his will.

*Permit me to enclose
some of the publications
God has graciously enabled*

*Yours sincerely in Christ
all by grace*

I should be interested to know if you could tell me whether God has granted some thousands of Gospels have sold in Malta and Gozo and in Africa—or if the hard ground seems specially hard and only a few. Any particulars, my dear Sir, that will help prayer—much valued at your convenience.

P. W. H.

DOCUMENT 2

Letter from Mr. Percy W. Howard to Mr. R. Kilgur (BFBS), 14th February 1929:

Dear Friend(s),

All good wishes because of the Lord Jesus Christ. I think I am addressing this letter rightly to the Editorial Superintendent, but venture to include, by the plural above, other fellow labourers in the translation supervising.

As your Sales Dept knows we are by grace, interested in those of all nations for His name's sake, and particularly Malta has been laid on our heart.

Hence I was thankful to be privileged to see "God Hath spoken" in Maltese through the press for "The Scripture Gift Mission".

And now a thought is still before me—a thought of long ago—and I am waiting God's guidance. I know the excommunication sentence against any possessing "Alla Tch'llem", but it may be God will enable me to get many copies of the Gospel of John (so definitely emphasized as a Gospel booklet of testimony in 20—31) into the hands of these in the island. I am aware dear friends, if your feeling that societies should not

be multiplied and that Bible publishing should not be undertaken in too many different ways. But I think it may be God's will to issue this portion of Scripture without any Bible society or society's imprint. I want it, too, to be in the spelling that will be best understood and this would involve some alterations from your edition, apart from anything else.

The chief thought on my heart is this, dear friends, if the Lord enables us to do this as a free edition—I do not feel it God's purpose for us to sell at all—as a little missionary labourer for Malta— (1) may our translator take your editions the basis of his revision; and (2) can you give me an introduction to any Maltese scholar in London to whom any final points might be referred?

I am quite aware that translators always compare with existing translations and that this is anticipated, but I do want to feel that I am doing everything in a way that glorifies God, and that does not ignore the loving labours of others.

I think you only printed a few of the Gospels of John, and that (as informed in a letter of a long while ago) only very few were circulated in the island itself. Hence I do trust if God grants this missionary effort it will be evidently not building on another foundation but reaching some who have dire spiritual need, with the precious words of His unchanging Gospel. How precious is the Lord Jesus Christ and how precious the Gospel of Christ His poured out blood.

Yours in His service all by grace

(sgd.) Percy W. Howard

DOCUMENT 3

Letter from Mr. Percy W. Howard to Dr. R. Kilgur (BFBS), 16th February 1929:

Dear Friend,

Greetings because of Christ. I would thank you for your kind letter, the more so as your experience of translation work is valued.

At present I am just seeking to find the will of God for me. Personal responsibility and limited time give certain problems, but God is faithful.

I would (prior to any conversation, which the Lord may grant later) give one or two particulars in answer to your questions:

1. The translator, or reviser, would be the one who prepared "Alla Tchellem" (copy enclosed). The problems in Malta are so great, as you know, that since he is there, even the Scripture Gift Mission do not know his name, but I may add he was introduced to me by one in considerable way of business in the island, (journalistic), to teach me some Maltese, and is himself a writer, with every opportunity to be in touch with the

spelling of today, and suitable idioms to be understood by the common people. "Alla Tchellem" was also revised by one recommended by the late Mr. Riley in N. Africa. (I think "Alla Tchellem" will explain the orthography fairly fully.) I felt (and should feel) personal responsibility before God as to translation not misinterpreting the words of the Holy Spirit as far as I could prayerfully see to this, with my very limited knowledge. Hence, I supplied literal translations from the Greek and the translator compared with Italian and the old 1847 translation of the New Testament a similar course would be taken, if the Lord wills in the future. Then in the proofs, I enquired as to anything which seemed to me

or the verse. But this is not an easy work. If God graciously guides as to the step I had thought not to prepare it complete literal translation of John's Gospel, but rather to look through your edition, and rather provide literal translation as to verses which I felt were difficult in the original or "strange" (as far as I could see, without presumption) in the rendering; and the English and Italian versions would be before the translator. Hence I wanted your loving permission rather to make your translation the basis than to start all over again, or to use the 1847 translation.

2. I think if the Lord enables, it may be His will to put simply on the front page "presented for free circulation to the glory of God by Percy W. Howard. . . . from whom further copies can be obtained", and no "society" or words to this effect.

3. Our arrangements as to personal printing of our publications—in various languages—will, I think, enable us to issue more cheaply than others could, and bring a fairly large edition within reach. But there will be a necessary looking upward that all may can help as you lovingly suggest, for example, (a) by approval of my suggestion as to the 1872 edition as a basis, and (b) by introducing me to one or two who know Maltese for kind criticism, and final help on the proofs, it will be a great encouragement, and may the Lord have all the glory in poor Malta, and North Africa, and wherever Maltese are.

I trust I have made clear and thanking you for your kind letter and enquiries, and trusting that my suggestions will (if in the Lord) meet both His approval and your loving consideration.

Yours sincerely in the Lord Jesus Christ,

(Sgd.) Percy W. Howard

I would like to postpone suggesting an interview—in accord with your letter for a few days—but your reply will perhaps help me to see more clearly how God will enable me. I want to be as to each step.

DOCUMENT 4

Rev. r. Kilgur to Mr. P.W. Howard:

27th March 1929.

*P.W. Howard,
61 Upton Lane,
Forest Gate,
London E7*

Dear Mr. Howard,

Arabic Maltese

In continuation of my letter of acknowledgement of the 21st February, I laid your letters before the Editorial Sub-Committee at its last meeting. We are glad to know of your interest in Bible circulation and the success which has attended your labours. Our experience in regard to Maltese Scripture, has been one of continued difficulties with regard to circulation. The information before us seems to suggest that the reason for this is not the quality of the versions, but simply the difficulty of the situation, including the fact that Maltese is not the only language on the Island. We do not think that anything would be gained by the course you suggest of an anonymous Maltese making alterations in the text published by us. These individualistic translations have unwittingly raised many obstacles in the past.

*With best regards,
I am,*

*Yours sincerely,
(sq) K
Edit. Dept.*

DOCUMENT 5

12th September 1934.

Rev. E.W. Smith,
Bible House.

Dear Mr. Smith:

MALTESE

This morning I had a long talk with Mr. J.S. St. Clair of Malta. He is staying at the Leinster Court Hotel, Leinster Gardens, Hyde Park, W.2. and will be there until October 4th.

You will be pleased to hear that M. Maurin, the ex-priest, has now finished the translation of St. Luke's Gospel into modern Maltese written in the revised orthography. Mr. St. Clair gave me the first 17th chapters, the remainder is being typed out and will be forwarded later.

You will remember that we mentioned, unofficially, Five Guineas as being a suitable honorarium for this work. I mentioned this to Mr. St. Clair and he thought the sum quite adequate. As he and a few friends—Colonel Beattye and Dr. Langley principally, are supporting M. Maurin, he asks that this sum, if voted by your Committee, should be handed to him to use for M. Maurin's benefit.

There is still the question of checking this translation. I am not able to suggest a solution of the problem. Perhaps you have got into touch with a suitable person?.

Not only has M. Maurin concluded the Gospel of St. Luke, he has almost finished the remainder of the New Testament. He is now actually translating Revelations. Mr. St. Clair has offered Romans and Galatians to the S.G.M., and they are willing to publish them if we do not want them. We have the refusal of the complete N.T.—Matthew, Mark, John and Acts, yet to be revised and the orthography modernised.

I told Mr. St. Clair that I did not think we should care to publish Romans and Galatians by themselves, but we might possibly be prepared to publish the complete New Testament. this, of course, is for you to decide. Mr. St. Clair would like to know your decision, if possible, before he returns to Malta.

It is obvious that the circulation of such a book would not be large, but something might be done among Maltese in U.S.A. and N. Africa, as well as Malta itself.

Trusting that you are having a good holiday.

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

(Sq) W.H. Rainey

DOCUMENT 6

26th. September 1934.

The Rev. E.W. Smith,
Bible House.

Dear Mr. Smith:-

MALTESE

You will have received my letter of the 12th. inst. dealing with the Maltese St. Luke.

I now have the pleasure of enclosing you under registered cover the text for the whole of this Gospel.

In a letter received from Mr. St. Clair, he asks that the printers' proofs be sent to him at Malta, under registered cover, in an envelope bearing no distinctive sign. His full name and address are as follows – Mr. J.S. St. Clair, King George V. Merchant Seaman's Hospital, Malta.

He returns on Saturday to Malta. In a letter sent to him this evening, I have asked him to try and see you before leaving. It would be a good thing for you both to talk the problem over together. You will note that I said about him offering us the remainder of the translation made by Nr. Maurin, in my last letter.

I leave for the Canaries on Saturday but hope to be back by the end of October.

With kindest regards,
Sincerely yours,
(Sq) W.H. Rainey

DOCUMENT 7

8.11.1934

Rev. W. Smith
British & Foreign Bible Society
146 Queen Victoria Str.
London. EC4

Dear Mr. Smith.

Many thanks for your letter of 24th inst. in which you very kindly enclose a cheque for £5 for M. Maurin. I am giving this to him at £1 – per week. Will you please thank your Committee for their kind gift.

He has now translated the whole of the N.T. Valso Isaiah Job. I would very much like the Maltese to have the whole N.T. in their own language. England has possessed these Islands for 160 years & all we have given them of the Scriptures is six books! This is truly a reproach on the Church of God. And the error of it all is that many people who were naked savages a year or so ago and some still are yet they have the N.T. in their own tongue and praise God for it! But surely Malta should not be forgotten. The Maltese should have a strong claim upon us. The fact that they are Rcs. does not lessen their claim to be given God's Word in its simplicity.

When I was at home the S.G.M.

DOCUMENT 8

17 Shooters Mill Road,
Blackheath,
S.E.3.

24th November 1934

Information as to

Michael De Gabriele, a Maltese, convert from Romanism to Protestantism, who has left wife and child in Malta and came to seek work in England, because he cannot get occupation in Malta on account of his religious convictions.

He brought a letter of introduction from our Chaplain in Malta, Revd. F. Wilfred Hilbourne, who commends him to us.

Having considerable knowledge of Malta, through residence there, I have taken interest in him and am myself convinced of his genuineness.

His present address is 61 Upton Lane, Forest Gate, London, E.7 at the house of one of the "Brethren" who allows him lodging in return for which he is translating tracts from English into Maltese. He is grateful for this slight remuneration but in difficulty as they want him to conform to their religious beliefs. This he feels unable to do as they are extremists and he says "I do not feel inspired to be baptised as they extremely wish me to, not to conform myself to their rules which are like precepts . . . I feel greatly agitated when I think about my wife and child's and my future. In these three months I have left Malta I have almost spent the money I possessed. . . ."

He wishes to point out (a) I possess the literary qualifications required to translate either English or Italian into Maltese, or to revise any Maltese Scriptures already translated.

(b) I am prepared to offer my services for two weeks as a test, without remuneration.

(c) I have translated for Mr. Percy W. Heward English tracts with Biblical verses and I am translating Biblical verses from English booklets for the said gentleman to be issued by the Scripture Gift Mission.

(d) I am checking my translations with the original Greek through the aid of Mr. P.W. Heward who apparently has a good knowledge of the old Greek and a good idea of Maltese.

(e) In the event of the British & Foreign Bible Society have not sufficient funds I will gladly accept any small alms the Society can afford till I may find some job. I feel inspired then to devote my spare hours in such translations without any remuneration whatsoever.

I have assured Mr. Gabriele that there is no hope of his doing translation work in Maltese for the Bible Society and asked him whether he has done any platform work and he replied that for the last two months he has been visiting twice a week a number of Maltese in the open air at Cable Street and St. George's Street (near the Docks) London. E.T. He says he found much response from them & that several times they

were dispersed by the police because they were blockading the public pavement. He tried to secure a room from a Revd Hill who was not able to give him one, but he thinks this is really because "He thought I am associated with the Brethren who are really very extremist". Mr. Gabriele says "I am told that here are many other Maltese at the West End. I desire to meet them but as I am unaided I think it wise not to meet them for the present".

I cannot help feeling that this man might make a very useful colporteur in Italy.

Mr. Gabriele says he would be extremely grateful if he could have some copies of the Gospel in Maltese for distribution.

Would it be possible for him to have some for sale to the Maltese seamen?

(Sq) W. T. Sharplery
Superintendent Minister
Blackheath Circuit.

DOCUMENT 9

12th December, 1934.

J.S. St. Clair, Esq.,
King George V. Merchant Seamen's Hospital,
Malta.

Dear Mr. St. Clair,

MALTESE

I have delayed replying to your letter because I wished to have some definite information to give you. I am now happy to say that we have found a person who appears to be capable of judging Mr. Maurin's manuscript of St. Luke. He is a Mr. Michael de Gabriele, a Maltese, who left Malta because he could not get occupation on account of his religious convictions. He has been doing certain literary work here in England. I saw him yesterday and he made a favourable impression upon me. He has undertaken to go through the manuscript and will let us know his opinion. I am interested to know that Mr. Maurin has translated the whole of the New Testament. It is impossible for me to give you any guarantee that our Society will publish this New Testament. We must first know how far his work is satisfactory. We should be able to judge this perhaps after receiving Mr. Gabriele's report.

I am sending you herewith a copy of our price list as requested.

Yours sincerely,

Enclo.

Edit. Supt.

DOCUMENT 10

18th January, 35.

Michael De Gabriele, Esq.,
c/o P.W. Heward, Esq.,
61, Upton Lanc,
Forest Gate, E.T.

Dear Mr. Gabriele,

MALTESE

I am grateful for your letter and your preliminary report on the Gospel of St. Luke in Maltese. You have evidently put in a great deal of work and we cannot allow you to do all this for nothing. When you have completed it, I hope you will have no objection to receiving a cheque from us. Will you please continue your criticisms and let me have them in due course. I am most grateful for the care which you are taking in this matter.

With best wishes,

*Yours sincerely,
Edit. Supt.*

DOCUMENT 11

*c/o Mr. Percy W. Heward.
61 Upton Lane, Forest Gate
London ET.*

28th January 1935

*The Revd Edwin W. Smith,
Superintendent of the J&E Dept.
London.*

Dear Rev. Father,

*Many thanks for your encouraging letter dated 18th Instant.
Herewith enclosed, please, find:*

*Document A consisting of 3 pages, typed, of the manuscript under
my care.*

*” B ” ” 9 handwritten pages as a correction
” x ” ” 2 pages of criticism on Doc A.
” y ” ” Corrections in autography.*

I have just completed the checking of Chapter I of the manuscript in Maltese concerning the gospel of Luke. As explained in my letter of the 16th instant, corrections practically in every verse could not be avoided; and as there occurs a good number of corrections, I preferred to write down the whole chapter modified as in doc: B. The difference between docs: A&B is:

Doc: A is considered as an ordinary translation wherein no great efforts have been shown to embellish same by laying it down in a biblical form.

In Doc B every word has been carefully pondered before being written, so that the translation may transmit full meaning in the most possible literal form.

I have not continued Doc X because some involves much of my time, and above all because I am not sure whether your goodself are interested in this way of criticism, as it refers to a language in which perhaps you are not versed.

As regards doc: Y corrections have been pointed out re page 1 only, because I consider this may also be useless. I feel confident that, if the manuscript (doc A) be scrutinised by a competent person who has scriptural translation at heart, it would not be suggested to have some printed.

The last remark is on doc B, the one I have submitted. I understand that, as this is my first opportunity in writing with the new autography, there may be some autographic errors which I may be able to correct after acquiring at least another week's experience.

I desire to have by now gone much further in the translation, but the time is not mine. I cannot spend more than an hour sometimes little more a day in this task. If I had certain commodities and ease such as better food and a warm room, I would be able to spend more hours on it. I am praying Almighty God to provide for me a humble situation, that I may be free in mind and spirit, and have more ease to devote delightfully in scriptural translation.

*With the best of regards,
Yours ever gratefully,*

N.B. by the end of this week I hope I will be able to forward to you some more of the corrections.

DOCUMENT 12

15th March, 1935.

My dear Rainey,

I am back as you can see. There is a great deal to be done, however, and I have not yet been able to finish my report. I will do as soon as the rush is over.

There is one thing of great importance which I must let you know immediately. That is with regard to a proposed translation into Maltese. While in Malta this caused me great anxiety because of reports that came to my ears regarding the man who is doing the translation. I had so many private conversations that it would appear that I ought to have a talk with you as some of the things were told me in confidence. In the meantime, however, I would strongly advise a postponement of any negotiations with Mr. Maurin, the one who is doing the translation. You probably know something about this already.

If you like I will send you such information as I have, though I would prefer to pass it on by word of mouth. I cannot come to London, however, until after April 4th.

With best wishes,

*Yours sincerely,
(Sg) J.A. Thomson*

P.S. Will you let Mr. Smith know about this?

27th August, 1935.

Rev. E.W. Smith,
 B. & F. Bible Society,
 146, Queen Victoria Street,
 London. E. C. 4.

Dear Mr. Smith,

MALTESE

I feel very guilty in not having written you on the subject of your letter of 4th January last, which I duly received, but I have been much troubled and perplexed over the whole question of the Maltese translations during the past six months, that I have really not had anything definite to give my advice upon.

As you are aware I do not know Maltese myself and cannot give you my own personal opinion on the matter.

On receipt of your letter Mr. De Gabriele's criticisms were handed over to Mr. Maurin for opinion, but I did not get very much out of him as he said, after spending much time over it, that De Gabriele had merely used different words to express more or less the same meaning.

Personally, I was not struck with De Gabriele's mode of approach. His aim seemed to be to down Maurin to the advantage of himself. The last par. of his letter to you dated 28th Jan. showed that his reason for translating the gospels was to find a job for himself, viz— "If I had certain commodities and ease, such as better food and a warm room, I would be able to spend more hours on it. I am praying Almighty God to provide for me a humble situation that I may be free in mind and spirit, and have more ease to devote delightfully in scriptural translation." That paragraph to my mind stamps the man and his intentions.

The difference in the two translations showed that a third opinion was absolutely essential before going further in the matter; but I did not like to consult any Roman Catholic Maltese on the subject. However in April a converted Maltese came on a visit to Malta and I showed him both translations. He had not time during his stay to go through the whole, but he examined the first chapter and condemned both translations; he said that both were full of grammatical mistakes and neither were taken from the Greek and therefore missed in many instances the really spiritual meaning. Maurin had made his translation principally from the Italian, and I suppose De Gabriele made his from the English with the help of Maurin's Maltese. Of the two translations he preferred Maurin's.

I was therefore very little advanced except that I was beginning to realise that all Maurin's work would have to be scrapped, and this was confirmed some time later when I showed them to an English lady who has made a study of Maltese and has just written the first Maltese Grammar which the Government have bought and which they will shortly publish for use in their schools. She has examined both translations and has condemned both as unworthy of publication. This was a great blow to me as I had taken much trouble over Maurin's work during the past 16 months.

A few weeks after this I was cheered to hear of a translation made a few years ago by a Maltese priest (he died in 1932 or 1933, of the whole of the New Testament and the Minor Prophets, and after enquiries was able to procure a copy. It bears the imprimature of the Archbishop of Malta and the Bishop of Gozo. I showed it to Miss Butcher—the English lady above referred to—and she said that on the whole it was very good. As it was written before the spelling was standardised she is going through St. Luke's Gospel and altering the spelling accordingly.

I hope to return to London about the 10th of September and shall be very glad to call upon you and show you this Gospel. I feel with this copy you will have as good a translation as it is possible to get, and moreover as already stated it bears the approval of both Roman Catholic Bishops.

Surely the Lord has dealt bountifully with us. Praise His Name.

I do hope you keep well. Perhaps you are also enjoying a well-earned rest.

With all good wishes and many apologies for the long delay.

*Yours sincerely,
(Sg) S. St. Clair*

*Mr. De Gabriele's Enclosures
and returned herewith.*

Rev. E.W. Smith.

DOCUMENT 14

*Linster Court Hotel
Linster Gardens W.2
29.10.35*

*Rev. Edwin W. Smith
B&F Bible Society
Queen Victoria St. E.C. 4*

Dear Mr Smith,

With reference to my call upon you on 16th Sept. when I left with you the Gospel of St. Luke and the Epistle to the Romans in Maltese I understood you to say that you would write me explaining more fully the requirements considered necessary to safeguard your position should you permit these translations. Will you also give me a copy of the Legal document you would want from the Maltese printer. You also said you could be prepared to pay him something for his ownership, if any, Maltese scriptures.

Will you please let me know up to how much you would be prepared to pay him.

Of course one would have to be very careful in dealing with a man of this kind, although I consider him to be a very decent honest fellow. As far as I gathered from him he has no further interest in these translations than to sell the remaining copies on his hands. As I told you the type is long broken up.

I am sorry to say my return to Malta has been delayed because of the present foreign situation, but before going I want to know your mind exactly in the matter is that I can do the best within the limits set.

With all good wishes.

*Yours Sincerely,
(SG) S. St Clair*

DOCUMENT 15

18th March 1937

The Rev. Edwin W. Smith,
Bible House.

Dear Mr. Smith:

GONGO

Thank you for your letter of the 22nd February received on my return from the Continent.

I have not seen M. Auguste Eicher since I was at Cologne in August 1934 and do not know his address. I presume he has returned to his field in the Belgian Congo. However, he has a brother employed by the "Action Biblique" in Syria, thus it is probable that Mr. Alexander could get the address for us.

I have written to ask him.

MALTESE

I was in Malta from the 23rd. February to the 4th. March.
MALTESE N.T. I called on E. Lombardi of 20 Strada S. Maria, Sliema, who is apparently the owner of the text of the N.T. translated by Father Peter Paul Grima.

About 48 copies of the book remain. The price is 13/2 unbound. There are also 12 copies of the Minor Prophets at 2/8d. There is a 25% discount to booksellers. I am not sure whether we have the Minor Prophets in the Library. If not it would be worth while to secure a copy.

I pointed out to Lombardi that the book had a very small sale as the price was beyond the reach of people who rarely earned more than 5/- a day. I asked him whether he would be prepared to grant us the use of the text. We would then probably publish an edition that could be sold at 1/- and could be at the reach of everybody. He very uncompromisingly refused.

I then asked whether he would be prepared to sell it to us at a figure to be agreed upon. He again replied very strongly in the negative. He said he was going to publish a new edition himself.

PROF. SAYDON. The Professor is very disappointed at the poor sale of the portions of the Scripture published by him. Samuel and Kings had hardly any sale at all. When asked why he had not published the N.T. first, as this would have had a larger sale, he said that he was afraid the Protestants might use it for their own purposes. Prof. Saydon is an old man and very conservative. This shows itself in the fact that he refuses to use the revised orthography in his version. I bought the 1st. & 2nd Kings for the Library. We have now, I believe, all that has been published. The address of the publishers is The Empire Press, 266 Strada San Paolo, Valletta. This is the official R. C. press of the Island. I called there and found that most of the clerks in the office were priests.

MALTESE GOSPELS. *The same Press has just issued St. Mark's Gospel in Maltese revised orthography. The price is one penny. It is obvious from the "get-up" of the book that it cost more than that, so I went and had a chat with the priest in charge of the office to find out how it had been done. He told me that the Archbishop had contributed £40 from the Church funds to make the publication possible. He also said that the other Gospels would be published shortly.*

I bought two copies for the Library and one for the Rome dépôt. I got Miss Butcher to go through the translation. She says the Maltese is good but that proper names are not always spelt uniformly. The name of the translator is not mentioned but it is not the work of Prof. Saydon. I asked her to obtain the other Gospels as they were published and send them to us.

MALTESE GRAMMAR *Miss Butcher's Maltese Grammar is just being published by the Oxford Press at 3/6d. The expense is being paid by the Malta Government. Sir Harry Luke told me he was very pleased with it. She says Maltese is allied to Syriac and therefore to Hebrew.*

Our Maltese Portions have a very small circulation. A few Evangelicals buy them to give away secretly but it is very dangerous. The following incident illustrates the position. The Sunday I was there, a sailor who was giving away invitations to a Gospel meeting, inadvertently gave one to a Maltese. He was immediately arrested and taken to the Police Station. He was not released until a deputation had called and explained that the sailor had mistaken the Maltese for an Englishman. I am not disappointed at not having a complete Maltese N.T. as I cannot guarantee a circulation. More liberal days may come in Malta but the time is not yet. Many Maltese hate the priests but they can do nothing against the Church backed by the British Authorities. The old nobility, and vested interest, are also against any change in the semi-feudal system reigning in the Island. The best we can do at present is to encourage the use of these R. C. Gospels, without taking too much public interest in them, for this would be the surest way to kill them.

I will bring the Maltese Scriptures with me to the House next week. The cost is so small that I have paid for them out of my expenses; it was not worth while making a special item in the Accounts.

(Sq) *W.H. Rainey*