

EUROPEAN VALUES STUDY IN MALTA¹

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Over the past thirty years sociological research on Maltese society has employed variants of the secularization model in order to explain change in contemporary Maltese society. It has generally been assumed that socio-economic development in Malta² was conducive to a decline in the social significance of religion and the erosion of traditional values. Social scientists presumed that Malta would follow the trends of secularization which were evident earlier in Europe. The passage of time, however, and further analysis by the same social researchers, has shown that the secularization model does not fit the Maltese case completely.³

In fact, representatives of the Maltese often voice the concern of the aged who witness the disappearance of their inherited values, on how youths working in the tourist industry are affected by foreign culture and on how head of families are eaten by consumerism. At the same time many workers are found to be excellent head of families, not a few are proud and ambitious of their jobs and some see in work the development of creation. In the same way, Maltese youths experience the pains of broken marriages, the deception of false ideas and the rat-race for a successful career, materialism and consumerism though not a few

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1. An earlier version of this article was translated into Italian by Michele Simone S.I. and published in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1992 II 42-47 *quaderno* 3403.
2. The small Mediterranean Islands of Malta have a total surface area of 246 square kilometers, 93 km away from mainland Europe and 290 km from North Africa. Since its independence from Britain in 1964, Malta has become a Republic, non-aligned and neutral Nation-State, joined the Council of Europe, established trade agreements with the European Community and has applied for full membership on July 16, 1990. Most of its 350,000 population is practicing Roman Catholic.
3. See, for instance, J. Bossevain's *Saints and Fireworks. Religion and Politics in Rural Malta* (1965) and his follow-up study "Ritual Escalation in Malta", in E.R. Wolf (ed.) *Religion, Power and Protest in Local Communities*, (1984).

are animated by much goodness and generosity and strive for unity, solidarity and a more just society.⁴

Replying to these concerns, at the end of his three-day pastoral visit to the Islands of Malta, Pope John Paul II urged the Maltese to keep firm to their traditional religious values and beliefs. He recalled how Malta has historically been admired for her uncompromising defence of the Christian faith and her willingness to endure heroic sacrifices for the upkeep of its culture. John Paul II called on the Maltese to contribute to the spiritual unity of the Old Continent by offering their treasures of Christian faith and values. As a pastor and leader of the Church he observed that as Europe prepares to enter a new phase of its history, "Europe needs Malta's faithful witness too." But, we might ask, what is really happening to Christian culture and civilization in Malta? To what extent do the Maltese share traditional or alternatively, modern European values?

Research on values

A recent book on the transmission of values in European Malta adopts a scientific approach to the study of values.⁵ It makes use of comparable data available from the *European Value Systems Study Group*,⁶ in order to present an objective picture of Maltese values in an European perspective. This study builds on previous sociological theory and research but applies new methods of social scientific analysis in order to develop further the understanding of values, their meanings, transmission and transformation in the process of their communication. It addresses the problem of social change in Maltese society in terms of values and value systems. It adopts a reversal of the European model of secularization in that it takes as its point of departure the communication of tradition, rather than its erosion. It addresses such questions as: Which values unite and distinguish the Maltese from each other *and* from other Europeans?

4. See the addresses to Pope John Paul II in Malta (May 25-27, 1990) by the representatives of workers and youths.
5. Anthony M. Abela, *Transmitting Values in European Malta: A Study in the Contemporary Values of Modern Society*, (Jesuit Publications; Valletta, & Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana; Rome 1991).
6. A Maltese version of the Values questionnaire was administered by Gallup in 1984 but the data was not reported in the European or World Values studies. Gordon Heald summarily reported how Malta emerged as the proudest, most religious yet intolerant country, the most hardworking with the highest levels of family life satisfaction in Europe, closer in attitudes to Northern Europe than to neighbouring Catholic countries. M. Vassallo in *Close Up*, (Media Centre; Malta 1985) held that Maltese youths, unlike their peers abroad, are very traditional and have no strong aspirations for radical social change. Then P. Deloof, "The Church in Malta", *Pro Mundi Vita Dossiers*, (Brussels 1986) observed that although Malta is not a consumerist country people enjoy good physical and moral well-being, a matter which is not unrelated to their high religiosity.

What happens to their traditional value system as they come under the influence of new work opportunities, education, leisure, the media, overseas travel and mass tourism? Which values are deemed important to be transmitted to future generations and how are they transformed in the process of their reproduction? How is the family, religion and the quality of life of the local community likely to be affected as post-traditional Maltese adopt as European identity? Where does Malta stand on the map of European values?

Contemporary studies on European values discovered a unity alongside diversity and change. Divergent patterns are found to be coupled by an underlying organisation of values. Europe has distinct cross-national cultural contrasts but also a unified value system, demonstrating at a number of points an internal logic which clearly transcends national and linguistic boundaries.⁷ Such homogeneity at the structural level could be traced to a shared inheritance of European culture and civilisation. Yet, the separate analyses for each country reduces the risk of over-simplification and over-prediction of the behaviour of individuals.⁸

The most significant value system for Europe and by extension for each European country taken separately, is the traditional and post-traditional value orientation. Such a traditional-post-traditional divide, later to be constructed into a continuum links together family, religion, work, politics, morality, education, age and other social variables. At the traditional end stand the religious, the politically right, the morally strict, those educated in traditional qualities like obedience, good manners and thrift, parental duty and respect and the acceptance of instructions at work. In contrast, the post-traditional stands for the qualities of personal autonomy such as independence, imagination and a sense of responsibility. At this end of the scale are to be found the morally liberal, the politically left, the non-religious and those who are critical of social institutions and authority, the higher educated and the young. Generally, those adhering to traditional values report being well-contented with their lives, whereas those upholding secular-radical values emerge as more alienated, with low reported well-being, experiences of meaningless and lack of control.

7. See the first report by Jean Stoetzel, *Les valeurs du temps présent: une enquête européenne*, (Presses Universitaires de France; Paris 1983) followed by a more scientific study undertaken by Harding Stephen, David Phillips and Michael Fogarty, *Contrasting Values in Western Europe. Unity, Diversity and Change. Studies in the Contemporary Values of Modern Society*, (Macmillan and EVSSG; London 1986).
8. The studies for separate European countries were published by Orizo in Spain (1983); Rezsóhazy and Kekhofs in Belgium (1984); Fogarty *et al.* in Ireland (1984); Abrams *et al.* in Britain (1985); Calvaruso and Abbruzzese in Italy (1985); and Halman *et al.* in Holland (1987).

More recently Inglehart's analysis of survey data gathered from 1970 to 1988 from twenty-six nations, strengthens his earlier contention that in the post-war era there has occurred an inter-generational shift from materialist to post-materialist values. Materialist values are one component of traditional values, just as post-materialist are of post-traditional values. Inglehart shows how advanced industrial societies are gradually departing from a traditional value system. In his view, traditional value systems emerge in economies characterized by very little technological change and low economic growth and where social mobility is a zero-sum game and heavily loaded with conflict. Traditional societies discourage social mobility but encourage the accumulation of wealth. They achieve social integration by a rationale that legitimates the established social order and inculcates norms of sharing, charity and other obligations that help to mitigate the harshness of the economy. By contrast, in post-traditional societies where scarcity has been eliminated and the time-lag of socialization superseded, there gradually emerge post-materialist values. Socio-economic development, coupled with a high civic culture as an intervening variable, results in a post-materialist orientation. Inglehart insists, however, that shifts in culture are extremely slow because there is a remarkable stability of values within each society. He finds that there is seven times as much cross-national variation as there is change over time within a society.⁹

In the Maltese study a systems approach differentiates between terminal and instrumental values operating in distinct spheres of social life and examines the extent to which they are eroded, transformed or reproduced in a changed social context. Following previous European research the value system of the Maltese is identified in terms of traditional and post-traditional value orientations. Social values are first organized into systems by factor analysis, then differentiated and predicted in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. The chapters examine the values of the family, religion, work and leisure, tourism, social organisations, community and society.

As in other Western European countries, Maltese values have both a traditional and a post-traditional dimension. The predominant traditional Maltese culture is reproduced in the family and the institutions of the Catholic Church and is transformed in the process. Religion is an integral dimension of social life in Malta. Religious values permeate all spheres of social life in Malta be it leisure, marriage, work, community and politics. The religious factor contributes to maintain the high traditionality of the Maltese but, curiously enough, also to the development of a post-traditional orientation by young religious leaders. Totally distinct from young people abroad who in the main

9. Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, (Princeton University Press; New Jersey 1990).

abandon the practices of the Church, not a few Maltese youths find a balance between tradition and modernity. In the local situation they experiment with the inherited models of religion and give new forms to the received traditional content. Generally, the Maltese at large have a high esteem of the institutions of the Catholic Church in Malta, most have high confidence in the leaders of the Church and want explicit guidance on major moral issues dealing with the family, social life, the spiritual needs of the individual even if a considerable number do not tolerate any interference in party politics.

The greatest variance between the traditional and post-traditional Maltese is to be observed for distinct levels of education. The lower educated tend to be predominantly traditional and materialist, whereas the higher educated are in the main post-traditional. Generally, when compared to other Europeans, the Maltese are highly traditional, religious, family-oriented but intolerant of others who hold different opinions and values from themselves.

Change in values

One would expect a rapid change in values that corresponds to a rapid social and economic development. Our findings, however, are counter-intuitive. Thus, for instance, there is no one-to-one relationship between exposure to tourism, foreign travel or the media and sexual permissivity. Only education remains the determining factor. The higher educated tend to favour an European identity and a post-traditional value orientation. Whereas most people think that change is inevitable irrespective of direct foreign influence or not, the higher educated tend to evaluate such change as not altogether beneficial. In their view the Maltese are becoming excessively materialistic. Accordingly, post-traditionality significantly depends on education, civic culture and a sense of European identity and less on social class, gender and foreign influence. Unlike other European countries Maltese post-traditionality is independent of age. Although there is no evidence to support a culture shift, the youngest generation is found to be the most diversified in post-traditional values.

The final chapters trace Malta's place on the European map of values — the quality of life of the traditional as against the post-traditional Maltese, the locally-bound as against the European-oriented — in order to assess the impact of Malta's aspiration for European integration. Contrary to expectations, whereas in the advanced industrial societies of Western Europe traditionality is strongly related to materialism, traditional Malta stands on middle ground between materialist and post-materialist countries. Thus, on the map of European values Malta emerges as a traditional country, highly traditional and religious but also a country where people enjoy high levels of satisfaction in their family, work, leisure and everyday life. As the Oxford sociologist Professor A.H. Halsey observes in the preface of the book: "Malta, in short, turns out to be a

critical laboratory of contemporary social experiment in adaptation to the transformation of traditional European society.”

The initial results from the Values repeat study in the Nineties report how the Maltese have retained their strong religiosity and a high confidence in the Church. Out of all European countries, the Maltese claimed the most satisfaction with their home-life, a matter not unrelated to their traditional attitudes towards marriage and the family. In fact, Malta figures as the most satisfied country in Western Europe, where the Maltese report more satisfaction in life than people in Britain, Italy, France or Belgium. They are second only to the Irish in national pride but they are still very suspicious of their fellow citizens, even if they have become more trusting in recent years. Although the Maltese are still fairly intolerant, particularly with regard to people with a criminal record, heavy drinkers, those with AIDS and homosexuals, Malta has become more tolerant of political extremists.¹⁰ It remains to be seen through a deeper sociological analysis of the repeat Values study in the Nineties whether the Maltese are successful to mitigate their social intolerance, to adopt post-materialist values, counter secularization and translate their religious faith into works of justice for the common good.

In a situation where not a few Maltese are motivated by a materialistic mentality of a traditional society, the Church has a duty to teach on the right use of material resources, to warn against greed and overwork, to elaborate on the morality of work, the responsibility that behoves workers and employers on the workplace, as well as on the protection of the environment.

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10. See the preliminary report on the Values Study in the Nineties, Gallup Press Release, February 7, 1992.