

THE PRIEST WHO DECLINED A BISHOPRIC

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The episode which forms the subject of this paper took place during the initial period of the long-drawn out negotiations relating to Canon F.S. Caruana's nomination by the British Government as successor to Bishop Ferdinand Mattei in 1829. The diplomatic hurdles that had to be surmounted before Caruana, who ruled the Diocese for more than two years as *Vicario Capitolare*, could be appointed Bishop and consecrated in May 1831, have been fully explained by the late Mgr. Arturo Bonnici, founder and Past President of the (Malta) Historical Society, in his paper *Reasons for the Delay in the appointment of Bishop F.S. Caruana*, which was read before the members of the Society on the 9th January, 1953. (1) The following account is a record partly of what went on behind the scenes to designate someone for high ecclesiastical office in anticipation of the day when Caruana, like all mortals, would quit the stage of human life, and partly of a tale of frustration and vexation making up, as it were, a play within a play worthy of serious attention.

It is known that when Bishop Mattei died on the 14th July, 1829 the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Frederick Cavendish Ponsonby (1826-1836), immediately submitted Archdeacon F.S. Caruana's name to succeed Mattei. The official despatches also show that on the 6th November, 1829 Sir Frederick Hankey, Chief Secretary to the Governor in Malta, who had been in Rome since the 25th October, 1829 on a mission aimed at resolving outstanding difficulties that had arisen between the British Government and the Holy See, requested the Pope through Cardinal Albani, *inter alia*, for the speedy nomination of Caruana as Bishop "and submitting the name of the Most Rev. Salvatore Lanzon ... to be made Archdeacon of the same (Cathedral) in the room of Mr (sic) Caruana". On the following day Cardinal Albani set Hankey's mind at ease on this point, stating "... it is understood ... that the person whom that Government (i.e. the British Government) wishes as a successor to the Archdeaconry when vacant by the promotion of Mr. Caruana is the Rev. Canon Salvatore Lanzon". (2)

What the official despatches do not say is that from about the second week of August to the 13th October, 1829, Ponsonby had been trying to induce

1. See *Melita Historica*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1954), pp. 156-163.
2. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MALTA (N.L.M.) *Despatches* 1829: Report — Hankey to Albani 6.xi.1829, p. 304; Albani to Hankey 6.xi.1829, pp. 304-306.

another ecclesiastic to accept, first a simple nomination to the Archdeaconry and, later, an offer of appointment as coadjutor with the right of succession to the bishopric after the death of Caruana.

The ecclesiastic on whom Ponsonby had set his eyes was Cospicua - born Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi, a comparatively young priest of 33, whose letters preserved at the National Library include copies of part of the correspondence exchanged between him and the Governor on this matter. (3) The three surviving letters, though unsigned, are fully dated, figuring as enclosures forwarded to Rome under cover of a letter dated October 15, 1829 addressed to a Cardinal whose name does not appear but who, as I shall explain later on, very likely was Cardinal Carlo Odescalchi (1786-1841).

There had been a previous communication addressed to the Cardinal on the 14th August, 1829 informing him that the Government had offered to nominate Mifsud Tommasi for the Archdeaconry. On October 10, Sir Vincent Casolani, who was Acting Treasurer to Government at the time, (4) approached Mifsud Tommasi and, on behalf of the Governor, explained that the original idea had been dropped and that Ponsonby intended to offer him the post of coadjutor with the right of succession to the bishopric after Caruana's death "... *la coadjutoria e futura successione a questo Vescovato per dopo la morte dell'Arcidiacono Caruana già supposto Vescovo di questa Diocesi*". (5) Mifsud Tommasi, however, was not particularly thrilled and replied that he would react passively to the Governor's proposal.

To avoid any misunderstandings he recorded his reaction in a letter to the Governor signed on the following day, 11th October, 1829:

Eccellenza Onorabile,

Dopo undici e più anni di un continuato servizio da me prestato a favore di questa Diocesi, io potevo giustamente lusingarmi di essermi acquistato un

3. N.L.M. Ms. 621, *Epistolae ad Familiares*, ff. 34r-37r. Both Ms. 621 and Ms. 622 are listed in the National Library catalogue under the title *Scritti e Lettere Familiari di Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi*. However, Ms. 621 carries the title *Epistolae ad Familiares* on the title page, while the words *Carteggio Familiare* appear at the top of the first page of Ms. 622.
4. Sir Vincent Casolani acted as Treasurer to Government from January to October 12, 1829. On the 29th July, 1829 he was informed by William Sim, Acting Chief Secretary, of the allowance payable to Caruana as *Vicario Capitolare*, i.e. "the sum of £26.16.8 per mensem... during the time the See may remain vacant, commencing from the date of nomination to that charge". — See Records Office, the Palace, Valletta, Vol. *Letters June 1828 — May 1839*, pp. 330-332; 336-337.
5. N.L.M. Ms. 621, f. 34r.

titolo al Vescovato di Malta per la prima vacanza della sua sede, qualora il Governo di Sua Maestà postergando il merito in altrui persona non avesse voluto proporre la persona (per altro degna) da lui protetta; sebbene per altro l'Eccellenza Vostra ha creduto di apporvi un compenso da principio mediante l'offerta fattami dell'arcidiaconato ed in oggi con quella di una futura successione ad esso Vescovato.

Fortunatamente però che li miei servigi mai furono diretti da un qualunque secondario fine di interessate vedute, non desiderando mai altra cosa e non essendomi proposto altro scopo nel disimpegno degli uffici dello Stato datomi da Dio, che di servire a Lui e la sua Chiesa, quindi ho creduto e credo tuttavia di ricusarmi a qualunque offerta fattami a questo riguardo.

Nel ringraziare però a Vostra Eccellenza del suo buon animo per me io mi fo un dovere di anticipare quanto mai sarà per dirle il Signor Cavaliere Casolani, cioè che qualora Ella crederà di onorarmi con la lettera dal medesimo offertami per parte ed a nome dell'Eccellenza Vostra di una commendalizia, io non potrò far altro che contenermi passivamente, ricevendo la stessa lettera per non far cosa contraria al rispetto dovuto al Rappresentante del mio Sovrano.

Accolga li su enunciati miei sentimenti non come uno sfogo di lamenti, bensì come effetto di lealtà sincera, e confidenza giustamente fondata nella sua connaturale equità et obbligatorissima condiscendenza verso la mia persona, mentre pieno di parziale stima e doveroso rispetto mi do l'onore di segnarmi.

Villa Lia 11 Ottobre 1829 (6)

This letter must have crossed another one dated October 10, which Ponsonby addressed to Mifsud Tommasi after the meeting with Sir Vincent Casolani. In this letter, which only reached Mifsud Tommasi on the night of the 12th October, Ponsonby renewed the offer of the coadjutorship with the right of succession and urged him to accept the nomination, considering that the person recommended, owing to his advanced age — Caruana was already 70 years old at the time — was incapable of carrying the full burden of the Diocese. The text of Ponsonby's letter reads as follows:

Monsignore,

Le sue virtù personali, i servigi prestati alla Chiesa ed i giusti riguardi alla sua rispettabile famiglia, indipendentemente dalle qualità di Vescovo Tito-

lare, mi avrebbero nella presente occasione fatto determinare a proporla per nuovo Vescovo di questa Diocesi, se eguali virtù personali e servigi di più antica data resi alla Chiesa ed allo Stato non mi avessero indotto a raccomandare per questa volta N.N. Come però l'età avanzata del proposto personaggio lascia un ben fondato dubbio se egli possa, senza valido aiuto, portare tutto il peso di una sì estesa Diocesi io vedo proprio di partecipare Vossignoria Illustrissima e Reverendissima che, incontrando il di lei piacere, sono nella determinazione di proporla nel decorso di un altro anno per Coadjutore del Vescovo Diocesano colla futura successione, cioè sarà tosto accordato. Con una tale misura tutta tendente al bene di questa Diocesi, io crederò di aver posto nelle mani di V.S. Illma. e Revma. una giusta caparra dell'alto riguardo del mio Governo per la di lei degna persona.

Ho l'onore di essere

Palazzo 10 8bre 1829 (7)

With equal frankness Mifsud Tommasi replied on the 13th October reiterating his passive reaction to the offer, stressing that it was Divine Providence that regulated human events in such spiritual matters. At the same time he pointed out that His Excellency was sufficiently enlightened to choose a suitable person for nomination; and he further assured Ponsonby that the Bishop-Designate could count on his (i.e. Mifsud Tommasi's) full cooperation and support in his future pastoral cares. The following is the text of Mifsud Tommasi's final letter, dated October 13, 1829:

Eccellenza Onorabile,

Alla lettera di Vostra Eccellenza segnata il dì 10 del corrente e ricevuta soltanto ier sera a notte, sebbene potrei credere aver sufficientemente soddisfatto colla mia del dì 11 contenendo la medesima le precise espressioni dell'animo mio rapporto la partecipazione delle disposizioni favorevoli della prelodata Eccellenza Vostra verso la mia persona, credo però mio dovere nell'atto di ringraziarla nuovamente del suo buon cuore di soggiungere quanto segue.

Che trattandosi appunto del peso spirituale di una sì estesa Diocesi, come molto bene ed a proposito Ella mi accenna, io non saprei affatto decidermi di mia privata elezione ad accettare l'incarico; lascio perciò il tutto nelle disposizioni della Divina Provvidenza, che è appunto quella che regola le umane vicende.

Vostra Eccellenza poiché è al governo di questi dominj saprà benissimo

con quel lume, che ha da Dio, contribuire efficacemente non solo alla felicità temporale della mia patria, ma influire eziandio il ben essere di questa Chiesa, mediante la scelta del personaggio da proporre al Santo Padre.

Riguardo al Signor N.N., potrà in qualunque evento contare su la mia cooperazione in secondare le sue future pastorali cure, ed è per lui una caparra non equivoca la nostra vicendevole armonia e stima, la quale spero durerà quanto la nostra vita.

Ho l'onore intanto di raffermarmi costantemente ...

Villa Lia 13 8bre 1829 (8)

Mifsud Tommasi went on to inform the Cardinal that, unless the Holy Father willed otherwise, he was firmly resolved to persevere in declining any such poposal, the more so when the offer came from a heterodox Government. At that particular time the Maltese Diocese needed a really vigilant Pastor, and although he himself was not lacking in good will to be of service to the Church, yet he realised that he did not possess the ability and the strength to assume such a heavy burden. Besides, there were other personal reasons of a most serious nature which he omitted to mention so as not to bore His Eminence but which he was ready to reveal at the slightest notice.

Mifsud Tommasi requested his Cardinal patron to submit his humble feelings to His Holiness if he considered it opportune, and to entreat him not to accede to any requests that may be made in his favour. After all, other persons could always be found whom to entrust with the pastoral ministry of the Diocese with more spiritual profit and to the greater glory of God. (9)

8. *Ibid.*, ff. 36v-37r.

9. *Ibid.*, ff. 34r-35r. The full text of this covering letter reads as follows:

In seguito a quanto ho sottoposto alla considerazione di V. Ecc.ma Rev.ma con mia del 14 agosto p.p. credo mio dovere di manifestarle ancora la continuazione delle comunicazioni fattemi da questo Governo e la mia corrispondenza col medesimo. Il dì 10 del corrente Ottobre, per organo del Cav. Vincenzo Casolani, il Governatore di quest'Isola m'ha fatto sentire come egli desisteva dalla prima offerta fattami dell'Arcidiaconato, ma che mi esibiva in oggi la coadjutoria e futura successione a questo Vescovato per dopo la morte dell'Arcidiacono Caruana già supposto Vescovo di questa Diocesi. Risposi che io non desiderando cosa alcuna di tal natura, perciò mi sarei comportato passivamente a quanto sarebbe per fare il Governatore.

Non contento però di questa mia verbale risposta, a scanso di qualunque equivoco riferita (?), ho creduto espediente d'inviare allo stesso Governatore una mia lettera segnata il dì seguente, 11 detto mese (come nell'accluso foglio N. 1) esponendo li miei sinceri ma franchi sentimenti rapporto la sua offerta.

Sotto la data dell'istesso giorno 10, ma ricevuta soltanto il dì 12 a notte, mi vedo presentata una lettera direttami dal prelodato Governatore (N. 2) con la quale egli rinnovava, o veramente sembra farmi per la prima volta la suaccennata offerta della

And there the whole thing ended, for it appears that, faced with Mifsud Tommasi's adamant stand, Ponsonby did not press the matter further. The choice eventually fell on Canon Salvatore Lanzon; but it is significant that Lanzon's appointment as Archdeacon did not carry with it the right of succession as Bishop after Caruana's death.

Let us now analyse critically the contents of this correspondence and try to establish, with the help of other documents by or about Mifsud Tommasi, the reasons which prompted him to decline the British Government's offer. It is clear from the texts of the letters that:

(i) Mifsud Tommasi was held in high regard by the British Government both for his personal qualities and services rendered to the Church as well as on account of the respectable family he came from;

(ii) In spite of Mifsud Tommasi's protestations of disinterested services to the Church, he would have jumped at the offer had he been chosen straight-away to fill the vacancy, instead of being cast to play second fiddle during Caruana's remaining span of life before he could succeed to the bishopric;

Coadjutoria, ricercandomi del gradimento delle sue esibizioni e motivando l'incapacità del suo raccomandato, stante l'età avanzata, a poter reggere a tutto il peso di questa Diocesi.

A tale richiesta, mi sono creduto nel preciso dovere di manifestare con eguale franchezza la costante mia elezione alle precedenti risposte, e ciò feci con altra mia in data 13 suddetto mese (N. 3).

Intanto non devo tacere come (ogni qualvolta non mi sia nota una contraria volontà del S. Padre, alla quale mi protesto di voler ciecamente ubbidire) io mi trovo nella ferma risoluzione di perseverare in ricusare qualunque offerta, molto più da un Governo eterodosso. La Diocesi di Malta è in oggi difficoltissima (sic) a ben governarsi; con frutto, ed abbisogna di un assai vigilante Pastore, e sebbene non manca in me la buona volontà di servire la Chiesa, pure conosco che manca affatto l'abilità e la forza per reggere ad un peso così enorme, e ciò oltre le altre gravissime personali ragioni che taccio per non tediare l'Eminenza Vostra ma che sarò prontissimo a manifestare al minimo cenno.

Qualora crederà opportuno prego caldamente Vostra Eminenza degnarsi sottoporre questi miei umili sentimenti a piè del trono di Sua Santità e supplicarla a non voler discendere alle istanze che talvolta gli si potranno fare in mio favore; in qualunque tempo non mancheranno al S. Padre altre persone alle quali potrà affidare il Pastorale ministero di questa Diocesi con suo maggior profitto spirituale e con più onore di Dio.

Appoggiato al validissimo patrocinio di Vostra Eminenza confido di ottenere l'implorata grazia e supplico nuovamente ancora da Sua Santità l'Apostolica Benedizione, nel mentre facendo umilissima riverenza con il dovuto ossequio passo a baciarle il lembo della Sacra Porpora.

Malta 15 Ottobre 1829.

(iii) Ponsonby would surely have proposed Mifsud Tommasi's name to succeed Bishop Mattei were it not for Caruana's equal merits and undoubted seniority (... *eguali virtù personali e servigi di più antica data resi alla Chiesa ed allo Stato ...*)

We have to admit that the biographical details we possess of Mifsud Tommasi's early life do not present any spectacular features. He was born into a well-to-do family at Cospicua on the 18th November, 1796. His father, Francesco Mifsud, who was in business, had married Angelica Tommasi, by whom he had eleven children — six girls and five boys. The Tommasi family had been established in Malta (Portosalvo, Valletta) since at least the middle of the 17th century. (10) It appears that his parents had destined him from an early age for the priesthood. In 1806, when he was just ten years old, he entered the Seminary as a boarder. (11) Three years later, on the 10th October, 1809 his parents assigned to him the use and usufruct of two houses, yielding an annual rent of 80 *scudi*, which they possessed in Sda. Scozzese, Cospicua, "*ad effetto di poter essere promosso agli ordini e farsi un giorno sacerdote secolare*". (12) A special proviso precluded Ludovico from such use and usufruct before the day on which he received his tonsure.

For ten years he studied at the Bishop's Seminary. He then followed the prescribed courses at the University where he successfully sat for the required examinations and obtained the doctorate in both Canon and Civil Law, as well as in Sacred Theology. (13) He was ordained priest in 1820.

In 1826 Mifsud Tommasi commissioned Peter Paul Caruana to paint an altar canvas of the Immaculate Conception (14) and on its completion in 1828 he donated the materpiece, for which he paid 600 *scudi*, (15) to the Collegiate Church of Cospicua.

10. I am indebted to Mr Anthony Mifsud Tommasi, L.P., for various details of family history culled from papers filed in the Court Case *Libello Angelica Mifsud VS Sac. Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi*, dated 28th January, 1858. (*Prim'Aula N.* 289).
11. Cathedral Museum, Imdina: C.E.M. — *Concursus pro Paroeciis*, Vol. 19. I wish to thank the Curator, Canon John Azzopardi, for his assistance in tracing this document.
12. Notarial Archives, Valletta: A.N. 29/1.134 — *Atti del Notaro Francesco Saverio Zammit*, ff. 148-151.
13. Cathedral Museum, Imdina: C.E.M. — *Concursus pro paroeciis*, Vol. 19.
14. Personal communication by Rev. C. Galea Scannura, of Cospicua, dated 12th July, 1975. See also J. Borg's letter in *Times of Malta* of 18th February, 1978, entitled "Distinguished Maltese".
15. Personal communication by Mr. Anthony Mifsud Tommasi, L.P. — see footnote 10 above.

Mifsud Tommasi showed early signs of his literary inclinations. His first efforts at Italian verse, dated 1812—1816, still extant in Ms form, include a strongly anti-Napoleonic poem *All'Eroico Valore di Alessandro il Gran Imperatore di tutte le Russie*, written in May 1814, a few months before the Battle of Waterloo. (16) Between 1816 and 1821 he experimented, separately from but probably by mutual understanding with Luigi Rosato, in the composition of *canzonette* written in Maltese in a romantic vein on the hackneyed theme of unrequited love or, if we are to consider a few stanzas as being possibly autobiographical, of a hopeless passion for a relative that was frowned upon by her parents and at one time may have given rise to a temporary crisis in his vocation. (17) His literary friends included Cesare Vassallo, later appointed Librarian of the National Library, and the Latinist, Abate Giuseppe Zammit, known as *Brighella*, with whom he kept an intimate correspondence

16. G. CASSAR-PULLICINO, "Versi bikrija bit-Taljan ta' Mifsud Tommasi" *Forum*, Marzu-Mejju, 1977, pp. 3-5.

17. I am grateful to Dr. Albert Ganado, LL.D., for allowing me to read Mifsud Tommasi's early poems contained in a manuscript which includes, inter alia, a *Raccolta di varie canzonette maltesi indirizzate da L.M. a L.V. l'anno 1816*, together with some pages of verse written after this date. A "Canzonetta" dated 5th October, 1821 contains the following stanzas:

Jien inghix mita tkun mieghi
Fost il-hena wil-kuntentizza,
Minhabba fik jien kont abbati,
Ghamilt craret l-ispellizza.

Ghamilt craret l-ispellizza,
Inzajt minn ghonqi il-kullar
Biex mieghek nista' nitgharras
U lilek ingawdi lejl u nhar.

Lilek ingawdi lejl u nhar
Jekk niesek jippermettuli,
Jommi, x'piena liema bhalha
Jekk lilek qatt jichduli!

In these lines Mifsud Tommasi may be referring to some strong emotion experienced before he was ordained priest in 1820 (*Cf. also Footnote 38*) It is also possible that, writing in the folk-style and using the octosyllabic metre characteristic of traditional folk-songs, he was re-working and elaborating the cleric/collar motif which features as a popular theme in Maltese folk-poetry during the first half of the 19th century. In a manuscript collection of 192 quatrains in my possession I came across the following stanza:

Ghaddej is-Sur Abbati,
Ghaddejja l-hanina mieghu,
La jnehhi l-kullar minn ghonqu
Jehodha b'gharusa tieghu.

in Latin. (18) In 1824 this trio had published various laudatory compositions — an Italian sonnet in the case of Mifsud Tommasi — on the occasion of the installation of Don Giuseppe Fenech as Canon Theologian in the Collegiate church of Vittoriosa. (19) More importantly, when the Marquess of Hastings arrived in Malta on the 7th January, 1824 to succeed Maitland as Governor, Mifsud Tommasi wrote a sonnet to mark the occasion, expressing Malta's strong attachment to Britain and urging her to pray and hope for better days under the new representative of the King. (20)

Hasting's successor, Ponsonby, who assumed the governorship of these islands on the 15th February, 1827 may have known this and a lot more that has not come down to us about the Cospicua-born priest whom he proposed to nominate as Archdeacon with the right of succession to the bishopric after Caruana's death. It seems, however, that Ponsonby's main preoccupation was to persuade Mifsud Tommasi to cooperate with Caruana and to see them work together as a team for the good of the Maltese Diocese. Everything depended on the relations between the ageing ecclesiastic, who had been one of the island's leaders, and a hero, in the rising against the French in 1798, and the comparatively unknown and, on the face of it, unambitious though learned young priest who had publicly praised Caruana on his appointment as Archdeacon in 1822 and presaged his elevation to the bishopric in an acrostic sonnet ending with the following sestet:

All'onor di Arcidiacono ti esalta
Roma, e dell'alma Roma al plauso al voto
Unisona risponde l'Eco in Malta.

Anzi il nostro sincer *Presagio* a voto
Non deve andar: il Cielo meta più alta
Affisse al Nome tuo: l'Arcano è noto. (21)

Ponsonby, therefore, had every reason to believe that his choice was the right one and he could not have suspected the incompatibility of character, and the long-standing animosity that separated the two ecclesiastics. Indeed, had not Mifsud Tommasi himself, in declining the offer of the future succession,

18. N.L.M. Ms. 621, ff. 1r-10r.

19. N.L.M. Misc. 429 (20), *Al perillustre... D. Giuseppe Fenech Canonico Teologo nell'insigne Collegiata e Parrocchiale Chiesa della Città Vittoriosa in occasione del suo solenne Primo Sacrificio*. Malta, 1824.

20. N.L.M. Misc. 'P' 1294, *Versi, Sonetti, Dediche* (8).

21. N.L.M. Misc. 482, *Il Presagio avverato: Corona di sonetti a Sua Eccellenza Reverendissima Monsignor D.F. Saverio Caruana Arcivescovo di Rodi e Vescovo di Malta da Sua Santità Papa Gregorio XVI esaltato*. Malta, Stamperia del Governo, 1831.

assured him that Caruana could still count on his continued support in his future pastoral cares, and that this was an unequivocal pledge of the reciprocal harmony and esteem between him and Caruana?

We have seen that both in his reply to Ponsonby and in his covering letter addressed to the Cardinal, Mifsud Tommasi stressed that he was not interested in seeking such high ecclesiastical office as that offered to him through Sir Vincent Casolani. This is not to say, however, that Mifsud Tommasi did not entertain hopes of advancement by way of some lower appointment or assignment of a lucrative benefice within the Diocese. Like so many others in those days, he relied on patronage to reach his goal. In the course of a long stay in Rome from July, 1827 to July, 1828 he sought the support of influential prelates and managed to obtain the protection of some Princes of the Church. One of these was Cardinal Carlo Odescalchi (1786—1841), who at that time was Prefect of the *Congregazione de' Vescovi e Regolari*. On the 18th June, 1828 Odescalchi addressed a letter to Bishop Mattei, in which he recommended for advancement the Maltese priest whom he came to know in Rome and whom he held in high esteem. The opening and closing paragraphs of the letter, which was to be delivered by hand to the Bishop by Mifsud Tommasi himself, are as follows:- *“Avendo avuto occasione di vedere nella sua permanenza in Roma il Sacerdote maltese Signor D. Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi e sapendo che è ora per ripatriare ho voluto procurarmi il piacere di confermare a Vossignoria Illustrissima e Reverendissima i sentimenti della particolare stima che nutro per la sua degna persona consegnandoli questa lettera di cui l'ho pregato di caricarsi ... Pregherò ... V.S. Illma. di permettermi di raccomandare, siccome fo caldamente, all'autorevole sua protezione il sacerdote renditore sembrando che meritar possa per il suo zelo i benigni riguardi del suo Superiore ove poteste farsi luogo a migliorarne in qualche modo la condizione ...”* (22)

After a rather long delay of nine months Mattei replied on the 17th March, 1829 and assured the Cardinal that he would heed the recommendation made in respect of Mifsud Tommasi *“... di tener conto del di lei raccomandato affine di agevolarlo negli incontri di suo vantaggio ...”* (23)

The delay, however, was not due to any procrastination on the part of Mattei. We learn from a letter addressed to Mattei that the bishop had instructed Mifsud Tommasi to be back in Malta in time for the re-opening of studies in September, 1828 so as to resume lectures on Ecclesiastical History

22. N.L.M. Ms. 621, f. 28r.

23. *Ibid.*, f. 31r.



Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi
(by courtesy of the Council of the
"Akkademja tal-Malti")

at the Seminary. Since August of that year Mifsud Tommasi had been trying to call on the bishop, pay his respects (*a chieder il bacio della sua mano*) and hand over Odescalchi's letter, but he had been prevented from doing so by the Vicar, Canon Dr. Emmanuel Rossignaud. As if this affront was not enough, Mifsud Tommasi did not receive the usual notice to resume lectures at the Seminary, or else to resign honourably "... anzi per colmo della mia sciagura duplicarsi sento la scossa allorchè vien a compiersi l'apertura degli studi, ed io non ricevo l'usuale avviso di ripigliar le mie lezioni, oppure un' onorata dimissione. O l'uno o l'altra io attendevo, ma l'uno e l'altra attesi indarno..." (24) Mifsud Tommasi concluded his submissions to the Bishop by pointing out that he had been asked by Rome to account for the letter entrusted to him by the Cardinal. What was he to say in reply? If he were to write direct and express his resentment without warning his Bishop, he would be doing him a great wrong. Besides, he would surely irritate a most amiable Pastor who had the authority both to strike him down and to give a reward where merit was due. He was sure that he would finally attain his hope and have his wish granted to be allowed to call on the Bishop. Eventually it appears that Mifsud Tommasi was able to see Mattei through the good offices of the Consul of His Majesty the King of the Two Sicilies. (25)

This was but a prelude to a more serious clash, this time between Caruana and Mifsud Tommasi, which started just two months before Mattei's death. On the 13th May, 1829 — with the concurrence of the Bishop, we must assume — Don Tommaso Xicluna, Parish Priest of Żebbuġ (*Città Rohan*) and Don Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi appeared before Notary Raffaele Giuseppe Portelli. Because of the many infirmities afflicting him, which were preventing him from carrying out his duties, as testified by Dr. Giuseppe Camilleri, the ageing parish priest nominated Mifsud Tommasi, whom he knew as possessing the necessary aptitude, honesty and probity, and who, apart from his academic record and his known services as preacher and confessor, had been thrice approved at the examination held for vacant parishes, as his coadjutor, or assistant in the said Parish with the right of succession (*colla futura successione*). And in order that this nomination may have full effect Don Tommaso Xicluna authorised Mifsud Tommasi to appear in Rome in his name before His Holiness to take all necessary steps and request the despatch of the requisite apostolic bulls — which authority he could also delegate to others. (26)

Although we have not been able to confirm whether Mifsud Tommasi

24. *Ibid.*, ff. 29r-30r.

25. *Ibid.*, ff. 30r-v.

26. Notarial Archives, Valletta: A.N. 13/1014 — *Atti del Notaro Raffaele Giuseppe Portelli*, ff. 176-179; 294. I am grateful to Rev. Ġużeppi Micallef, of Luqa, for drawing my attention to this source.

proceeded to Rome or not, it is a fact that within a month the parish of Żebbuġ was raised to archpresbyterial status, thanks to his initiative. The historian Ferres unequivocally stated that "*questa chiesa (parrocchiale) fu eretta in arcipretale per opera del Sac. Dr. Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi, come per bolle apostoliche di Pio VIII, spedite gli 8 giugno 1829.* The same author also wrote that, besides obtaining from Rome this higher status for the parish in 1829, Mifsud Tommasi was himself designated to be the first archpriest of Żebbuġ "... *il quale ... ottenne da Roma l'erezione della chiesa parrocchiale in arcipretale, di cui fu designato per primo arciprete...*" (27)

Fate, however, intervened and robbed Mifsud Tommasi of his prize. Bishop Mattei died on the 14th July, 1829, before Mifsud Tommasi's bull of appointment could be executed and he was never installed as Archpriest of Żebbuġ. A perusal of the baptismal records of the period kept in the parish archives of Żebbuġ shows that he never even baptised a single child born after June, 1829, which makes one doubt whether he ever set foot in Żebbuġ at all to carry out the duties of coadjutor to the ailing Don Tommaso Xicluna. (28)

For two whole years while Caruana, who was ruling the Diocese as *Vicario Capitolare*, was waiting for his appointment as Bishop, Mifsud Tommasi was the target of systematic and repeated attempts to make him renounce his election as Parish Priest of Żebbuġ. The available sources which mention this episode tend either to play down the whole incident or to show a decided bias against the Cospicua-born priest. The relative entry in the parish chronicle steers away from all controversy and presents a cosmetic version, stating that "... *succeduta quindi la morte del curato Scicluna li 6 giugno 1830 e non essendo fin allora eseguite le Bolle Apostoliche, esso Mifsud spontaneamente cedette l'arcipretura, la quale, conosciuta tra i concorrenti la anzianità del Molto Rev. Sigr. Don Francesco Saverio Vassallo Parroco di Casal Haxiac, venne a questo conferita, e furono a favor suo spedite le Bolle dal Pontefice Gregorio XVI li 9 ottobre 1832 e li 11 novembre dell'istesso anno ne prese il possessore*". (29)

The abovequoted Ferres states summarily that Mifsud Tommasi subsequently renounced the Bull, retaining however a pension. (30) Much nearer

27. A. FERRES, *Descrizione storica delle chiese di Malta e Gozo...* Malta, 1866, pp. 413, 421.

28. Żebbuġ Parish Archives: *Liber Baptizatorum Vol. X* — Febbraio 1825-Dicembre 1835.

29. Żebbuġ Parish Archives: *Notamenti sulla Prebenda Arcipretale*, pp. 16-17. Thanks are due to Rev. Archpriest Lawrence Cachia, Archpriest of Żebbuġ, for facilities given to consult the Parish Archives.

30. A. FERRES, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

the truth, though evidently biased, was the Rev. S. Ciappara's account to the effect that, following his appointment as Bishop in February, 1831 Caruana considered Mifsud Tommasi as unfit to rule the parish. Caruana, he added, had good reasons to do so — without, however, specifying further — and he did not allow him to take formal possession of the parish. Caruana then dazzled Mifsud Tommasi by promising him a canonry of the Cathedral Church, and the latter renounced the Żebbuġ parish. On the 11th November, 1832 Don Francesco Saverio Vassallo was installed as Archpriest. (31)

We have seen that Mifsud Tommasi never assumed his duties as coadjutor to the ageing parish priest of Żebbuġ. It also appears that several rumours concerning him began to circulate — a sort of whispering campaign calculated to damage his reputation as a priest, to show him as unsuitable for the delicate position of spiritual head of the parish and gradually force him to resign and give up his appointment as the first archpriest of Żebbuġ. To combat such rumours Mifsud Tommasi obtained nine testimonials between the 24th February and the 12th March, 1830, which were entered and registered "*per futura memoria*" in the Acts of Notary Ignazio Molinos on the 13th March, 1830. (32) One testimonial was signed by 46 ecclesiastics (priests, parish priests or rectors of churches), another one by the Rector the University, a third one by 18 other ecclesiastics or nobles. 59 persons belonging mostly to the medical, legal and other professions signed another testimonial, while 62 others, all Maltese, were the signatories of yet another testimonial. This responsible and substantial representative cross section of Maltese Society testified to Mifsud Tommasi's exemplary life, good conduct and reputation as a priest and confessor as well as to his recognised and proved ability as a preacher in both the Maltese and Italian languages. On the 5th March, 1830 John Pulis, United States Consul in Malta, also released a testimonial with the official seal of the Consular Office in Valletta, attesting that the Rev. Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi was publicly and generally esteemed as a priest of great merit, and a true Minister of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. (33)

Mifsud Tommasi's efforts to clear his name and to hang on to his appointment proved unavailing. Slowly but surely, Caruana wore down his resistance by various means, including blandishment and deceit. The resignation and renunciation was finally signed in Valletta in the presence of witnesses, and registered in the Acts of Notary Giuseppe Metropoli, Deputy Chancellor

31. S. CIAPPARA, *Storia del Żebbuġ e sua Parrocchia con molte e svariate notizie riguardanti la stessa terra e parrocchia*. Malta, 1882, p. 82.
32. Notarial Archives, Valletta: A.N. Minutario 969/24 — *Atti del Dr. Ignazio Molinos*, ff. 107-124.
33. N.L.M. Ms. 703, *Miscellanea di documenti*.

at the Curia, on the 5th May, 1831. (34) The document describes Mifsud Tommasi as "*Arciprete, e Parroco eletto della S. Parrocchiale Chiesa Arcipretale della Città Rohan di questa Diocesi in vigor di Bolle Apostoliche spedite sotto li ...*". Nowhere is the date of the Apostolic Bull given, and I have not been able to trace a copy so far. The operative part of the resignation states that Mifsud Tommasi, "out of respect towards His Excellency the Most Rev. Mons. Archbishop of Rhodes, Bishop of Malta Don Francesco Saverio Caruana, freely, simply and spontaneously has resigned and renounced and expressly renounces and resigns the abovementioned archpresbyterial and parish church with its rights, appurtenances, obligations and burdens, singly and severally, in the hand of His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI happily reigning, and of the above-praised Archbishop Bishop of this Diocese, and of any other person to whom it belongs and pertains; humbly petitioning that this resignation be accepted and granted, declaring that there has intervened no fraud, or deceit or act of simony..."

There is no reference whatever in the resignation document to the assignment of a pension by way of partial compensation, nor is there any mention of the various promises by which Caruana tried to persuade Mifsud Tommasi to renounce his post of Archpriest. Caruana had in fact throughout opposed the grant of a pension to Mifsud Tommasi, who made this a *sine qua non* condition for his resignation. The latter therefore decided to go on fighting for his rights, knowing that if he won, the glory would be his, and if he lost everyone would know that there had been an abuse of power. His only regret, as he put it in a letter dated 1st July, 1830, was that he was forced to remain idle until the final outcome of this unequal struggle. In his capacity as *Vicario Capitolare*, Caruana had also refused him permission to return to Rome on the pretext that he could well throw the tribunals there into confusion. Mifsud Tommasi then wrote to Rome asking permission to appear before the Holy See, and if he were to return to the Holy City in his present frame of mind he would be inclined to settle down there permanently. It was for him a long and bitter struggle, but he had never felt better before and he was continuing the fight with redoubled strength. The following are the relevant extracts from this letter: "*Io era divenuto a far la cessione dell'Arcipretura purchè mi concedesse una pensione, ma anche questa mi ha contrastato il feroce. Onde son risoluto di andar avanti. Che mai seguir potrà? Se vincerò sarà mia la gloria, se soccomberò, chi non vedrà la prepotenza? Io non ho altro dispiacere se non che quello di vedermi disoccupato, odiando infinita-*

34. Archivio Arcivescovile, Floriana: *Brevia et Constitutiones Apostolicæ*, Vol. 45[48] — Mons. F.S. Caruana (Vescovo) 1831-1832, p. 40. See also, in the same Archives, *Atti Civili*; 1829-1832 — *Renunciatio Sac. D. Ludovici Mifsud Tommasi*, pp. 118-119.

mente l'ozio e finchè non sarà decisa la gara non posso appigliarmi a veruna risoluzione. Io chiestogli avea la discessoria per recarmi di bel nuovo a Roma ma egli me l'ha negata sotto il pretesto che io sia capace di sconvolgere tutti quei tribunali. Pazienza. Io intanto non ho mancato di chiedere a Roma la licenza dell'accesso alla S. Sede affinchè occorrendo me ne possa prevalere. Chi sa se dovrò tornarvi? Staremo a vedere. Io ci ritornerei volentierissimo, e ci butterai pur le ancore... La mia salute non era mai così vigorosa e par che alla battaglia io vada raddoppiando le forze...' (35)

Beneath the cold formality of the legal jargon used in the resignation document lay hidden a completely different story showing that the resignation was anything but voluntary or spontaneous. In September, 1833 Mifsud Tommasi thanked his friend and protector, the Cardinal, for the pension of 15 ducats allowed to him on the parish which he had to renounce owing to the arrogant vexations and flattering promises of the Bishop. Caruana had tried to deprive him of any pension whatsoever by reducing the figure for the income accruing from the Żebbuġ parish to a mere 100 Roman *scudi*, whereas only a short time before Mifsud Tommasi had accepted as fair and reasonable his predecessor's assessment of same at 400 *scudi* of the same currency, and paid the registration fees thereon. As Mifsud Tommasi put it, before his resignation Żebbuġ was the richest and most extensive parish in the Diocese; after his resignation it suddenly became the poorest and smallest one. As for the assurances by which he had been induced to renounce the parish, he stressed that these turned out to be hollow and empty promises: "On the very day on which I was induced to resign I was restored to the full exercise of my former rights as preacher and confessor. I was likewise elected and nominated *Teologo Consultore* to the Bishop, and the promise of a Canonry at the Cathedral Church, which had been made to me on other occasions, was renewed. But to what avail? As *Teologo Consultore* I was never consulted, as Preacher I was never assigned any of those sermons usually in the gift of the Ordinary, except for the panegyric upon the Conversion of St. Paul at the Cathedral Church which I delivered last January. Deprived for many years of the mass stipend I applied many times for such stipend but in vain, and finally I was told to have recourse to your Eminence once you declare yourself to be my Protector." (36)

Mifsud Tommasi further importuned his patron to confer on him the abovementioned canonry and to intervene on his behalf with the Bishop with a view to giving him an ecclesiastical job and providing him with masses from

35. N.L.M. Ms. 622, *Carteggio Familiare*, ff. 110r-112v.

36. N.L.M. Ms. 621, ff. 32r-v. (translation).

the parish which he had renounced, which parish could well afford to provide as it had more than enough available. I quote the text of this part of the letter, which also specified the amount of 4000 Maltese scudi that Mifsud Tommasi had spent to raise the parish of Żebbuġ to the dignity of an arch-presbyteral church: "... *Esistono in Cancelleria (?) li testimoniali de' miei meriti inseriti nel ricorso quivi fatto pel conseguimento della Parrocchia di C. Rohan che mi è costata la spesa di scudi quattromila maltesi parte pella spedizione della Bolla e parte pegli agenti. Dunque Ella ben può volendo conferirmi detto canonicato, oppur in caso diverso farmi ritenere sullo stesso una pensione, raccomandarmi a questo Vescovo che mi provveda di un impiego ecclesiastico, e che prescriva che io sia provvisto di messe della parrocchia da me rassegnata la quale ne sovrabbonda! Io forse desidero troppo? ... Dia un' occhiata l'Eminenza Vostra a' servigi da me prestati in ventisette anni continui alla Chiesa nelle predicazioni, nelle confessioni e nel magistero per un decennio in questo Vescovile Seminario, alle oppressioni, ed alle spese sofferte, e finalmente all'obblivione nella quale m'hanno immerso ...*" (37)

It is not clear why Caruana persistently showed such ill-will towards Mifsud Tommasi. It certainly was not a sudden dislike for the junior priest engendered by the British Government's proposal to nominate him in his stead as Archdeacon with the right of succession to the bishopric after his own death. It had far deeper roots, for in a letter dated July 1, 1830, which has already been quoted, Mifsud Tommasi referred to "my arch-enemy the Canon who, pretending to be my friend, has persecuted me for twelve whole years without any other motive but that of envy, (and) can never agree with me..." (38)

And yet, at least judging by his public writings, Mifsud Tommasi had

37. *Ibid.*, ff. 32v-33r.

38. N.L.M. Ms. 622, f. 110r. Some of Mifsud Tommasi's letters written between 1825 and 1827 and copied in the *Carteggio Familiare* show that he had never really got over the emotional disturbance caused by his hopeless affection for a relative — the same affection that had almost brought about a crisis in his vocation in 1819. With his parents' consent and the Bishop's approval he decided to go to Italy and test his will-power "... *per far prova della mia fortezza*". He left Malta on the 11th July, 1827 and returned home via Naples and Catania after more than a year, late in July, 1828 (Cf. N.L.M. Ms. 622, ff. 34r-55v; especially an undated letter (ff. 34r-v), letter dated 29th September, 1827 (ff. 37r-38v), letter dated 29th December, 1827 (ff. 45r-48v) and letter dated 22nd July, 1828 (ff. 55r-v). It is possible that Caruana had got wind of Mifsud Tommasi's predicament and that this may have prompted him to consider the Cospicua-born priest as unsuitable for the post of Archpriest, as alleged by Rev. Ciappara (*op. cit.*, p. 82). In his old age Mifsud Tommasi wrote an autobiographical poem entitled "Lill-Mewt" which appeared in *Il-Habbar Malti* of the 8th Nov-

invariably shown the greatest respect for Caruana. In spite of the many vexations to which he had been subjected for two whole years he sang Caruana's merits on his elevation to the bishopric in 1831 in a sequence of 15 sonnets or, as he called it, *Corona di Sonetti*, printed at the Government Printing Press. (39) Putting aside his personal feelings, and with a complete subordination of emotion to reason, Mifsud Tommasi declared that he had always been an admirer of Caruana for the signal services which, like Dun Mikiel Xerri, he had rendered to his country. He also referred to the protracted negotiations and the happy solution finally reached between the Vatican and Great Britain with regard to the nomination of Malta's bishops:

Parla Gregorio, e ria Discordia tace:
 Sceglie il Monarca, ed il Gerarca approva:
 Tra la Chiesa e l'Impero lega nuova
 Del popolo fedel mantien la pace.

(Sonnet X)

Because of his rare gifts and high qualities Caruana's name will live for ever:

Di CARUANA l'illustre Nome, e grande,
 Immortale è già fatto, e più non more,
 Per l'orbe Fama lo divulga, e spande

(Sonnet XI)

ember, 1878, a few months before his death. The following lines clearly refer to this dark episode of his life:

(.....)
 Sakemm liebta l-ghira hemdet
 Hieni hajti jien ghaddejtha,
 Izda fl-ahhar b'qilla kbira
 Rasha harget din mill-bejta.

Kiefra! halfet li teqridni,
 Izda kelli sebghi dritt:
 Jekk xi tebgha kellj qatt,
 Kieku zgur bil-ghali mitt.

(.....)
 Lili haqret wisq l-inkejja,
 Bahar sqewni minn ta' mrar,
 Mewt, ja Mewt, f'halqek gabuni:
 Sa lj mitt xerrdu l-ahbar!.....

But for all those public protestations of loyalty and respect and in spite of the fact that Mifsud Tommasi surrendered his title and rights to the parish of Żebbuġ in May 1831, the newly consecrated Bishop did not relent. In a letter to one of his sisters, dated April 19, 1834, Mifsud Tommasi wrote: "I had thought that this Monsignor was a man of some character, or at least that he possessed human sentiments; for this reason I yielded to his flattering promises and surrendered. However, now that I have surrendered I find that he has let me down badly, and he always ignores me..." (40)

Until some hitherto unknown factor comes to light, one can put forward a psychological explanation for Caruana's antagonism in his dealings with Mifsud Tommasi concerning the Żebbuġ parish. There can be no doubt that he resented Mifsud Tommasi's intrusion upon his native parish of Żebbuġ. For here was an outsider, he must have thought, a comparatively unknown priest from Cospicua, still in his early thirties, with direct access to high-ranking and powerful prelates and princes of the Church in Rome, whose prestige would surely increase out of all proportion if his Bull of nomination as first Archpriest of Żebbuġ, emanating directly from Rome without the usual recommendation of the local Bishop, were to be carried into effect. Such feelings of distrust, which may be considered as a normal human shortcoming, could have been fanned and transformed into open animosity if, as one might well suppose, Ponsonby let Caruana know of his intention to nominate Mifsud Tommasi as Archdeacon on his appointment as Bishop, and with the right of succession after Caruana's death. For the last thing that Caruana — or, for that matter, any bishop — wished was surely to have as his coadjutor a priest with powerful connections in Rome, who could bypass his superior at will and turn out to be a veritable pain in the neck whenever there was a difference of opinion or serious clashes between them!

40. N.L.M. Ms. 622, f. 119v (translation)

41. According to J. Borg (*Times of Malta* of 18th February, 1978) Mifsud Tommasi served as Canon of the Cospicua Chapter from January 2, 1838 to July 20, 1868. This statement has to be supplemented and qualified by other data. In applying for appointment as Parish Priest in 1864 Mifsud Tommasi stressed that he had been serving for many years in the Collegiate Church of Cospicua "*in qualità di povero Canonico*". (Cathedral Museum Archives, Imdina: C.E.M. — *Concursus pro Paroeciis*, Vol. 19). On the 2nd January, 1858 he entered into the possession of the Prebenda Spiteri, at Cospicua, which he relinquished ten years later in June 1868, when he was appointed Canon of the Cathedral Church of Malta (Cf news items carried in *L'Ordine* of December 18, 1857 and of June 18, 1868, indicated to me by Winston Zammit; also personal communication by Rev. C. Galea Scannura of July 12, 1975, and January, 1966 issue of *Cospicua*). I find, however, that in 1863 the donation "pro unica vice" of the Canonato di Giuspatronato Laicale founded in the Cospicua church by the Primitivo Antonio Debono had been confirmed to Mifsud Tommasi (Archivio Arcivescovile, Floriania: *Volume Suppliche* 1863 (i), pp. 264-268.

Against this background one can also understand, at least in part, Caruana's questionable methods to obtain Mifsud Tommasi's resignation from his archpresbyteral position in Żebbuġ. For with all the importance and respect enjoyed by Caruana in his native village, it was an outsider, a priest from Cospicua, who managed to obtain from Rome, within a surprisingly short time, the Bull raising Żebbuġ to archpresbyterial status. This achievement could not but arouse some envy among both the village clergy and their more important representative, Caruana.

In the matter of ecclesiastical preferment, we have seen that Mifsud Tommasi had been promised a canonry at the Cathedral Church. The promise, however, was not kept and this benefice continued to elude his grasp throughout Caruana's government of the diocese, and long after that Bishop's death in 1847, until 1868, when he was promoted Monsignor of the Cathedral Church. (41) This appointment led Mifsud Tommasi to modify the arrangements he had laid down for his burial. (42)

We have seen initially how Mifsud Tommasi declined Ponsonby's offer to nominate him as Archdeacon, and Coadjutor to Caruana with the right of succession when the old bishop died. We also know that with Caruana's appointment as Bishop on February 28, 1831, when he was already 72 years old, the British Government proceeded to nominate as Archdeacon Canon Salvatore Lanzon, who proved to be "a remarkably able Vicar General". (43) On June 31, 1831, Mifsud Tommasi dedicated to Lanzon the panegyric to St Paul delivered on February 10 of that year at the Church of St Paul Shipwreck, Valletta. Couched in the ornate and flowery language characteristic of such writings, one cannot help noticing the tone of restraint, the mastery of feeling with which he commented on the appointment for which he himself had originally been earmarked by the British Authorities. He expressed his heart-

42. On the 23rd September, 1845 Mifsud Tommasi acquired from Paolo Wolflozier, of Valletta, for the sum of 60 *scudi*, the tomb existing in the Parish Church of Luqa, near the altar of Our Lady of the Girdle, complete with marble slab and suitable inscription (Cp. A.N. Minutario 40/643; *Atti del Notaro Antonio Giacomo Calleja*, ff. 340r-v). On the 3rd October, 1867 he directed, in his last will and testament, that after the funeral service to be held in the Collegiate Church of Cospicua, his corpse was to be carried to Luqa and buried in the said tomb (Notarial Archives, Valletta: Minutario 13/711 — *Atti Originali del Notaro Salvatore Catania* (Atto N. 16 del 3 Ottobre 1867). On August 20, 1869, i.e. just over a year after his appointment to the Canonry at the Imđina Cathedral, Mifsud Tommasi made another last will and testament superseding all previous ones, and directed that his corpse "be buried in the Cathedral Church of this Diocese in the usual way as his other colleagues" (*ibid.*, — Atto N. 10 del 20 Agosto, 1869).

43. A. BONNICI, *History of the Church in Malta*, Vol. III, Malta, 1975, p. 18.

felt joy at Lanzon's well-deserved promotion and placed on record the pastoral and other activities which the new Bishop, Caruana, had so judiciously entrusted to him as Vicar-General. He then mentioned Lanzon's personal contribution to the deliberations of the Permanent Committee of the Charitable Institutions and of the University Council, to which Ponsonby had been pleased to appoint Lanzon as member. Hollow praise, one might well say! But then, what better way of assuring Lanzon that he bore him no grudge for getting an appointment which had initially been offered to himself and in which he had not shown any interest!?

So much for this episode in the life of Ludovico Mifsud Tommasi. One must admit that there was a deep touch of irony in the turn of events described; for while this priest declined the offer of a future succession to the bishopric guaranteed by the British authorities, at the same time he was deprived of the humbler office of Archpriest to which he was rightfully entitled by virtue of a papal Bull of appointment which was never executed by the Bishop whom he had been earmarked to succeed.

Speaking with the benefit of hindsight after the lapse of more than one hundred and fifty years, one can perhaps point to one positive outcome of the whole business. The Cospicua-born priest was only 34 years old when he signed away his rights to the parish of Żebbuġ. Thereafter, for almost half a century until his death on the 23rd October, 1879, he was to give free vent to his literary talent. (44) From 1833 onwards there came out of his pen an impressive output of devotional verse in Maltese which had a decisive and lasting effect on the religious education of the unlettered masses throughout the rest of the century and, in some villages, right up to our own times! In the process he carved out a name for himself in the history of 19th Century Maltese Verse and directly influenced a whole generation of younger writers, amongst them Gużè Muscat Azzopardi who, in his turn, played a major role in the shaping of Maltese Literature. It is always risky to indulge in historical "ifs"; but "if" Mifsud Tommasi had accepted Ponsonby's offer and eventually succeeded Caruana as Bishop, or "if" his Bull of appointment as Archpriest of

44. Public Registry, Valletta: — *Act of Death* No. 2683 of 1879. This entry records that Mifsud Tommasi died at premises No. 17, Piazza Celsi, Notabile, Mgr. V. Borg has kindly drawn my attention to a brief biographical entry under Mifsud Tommasi's name at the Cathedral Museum Archives (*Canonicorum Melitensium Brevis Biographia*, ff. 7r-v) where we read, inter alia: "*Facili carmina canendi vena etiam ex tempore praeditus, nativo praesertim idiomate, propterea Melitensis Metastasius appellatus, fuit LUDOVICUS MIFSUD TOMMASI, quo auctore, innumerae exstant tota insula preces versibus politae in honorem Dei eiusque Sanctorum, quas populus pie recitare solet.....*"

Zebbuġ had been implemented by Caruana, I feel that it is most unlikely that he would have blossomed out into a literary figure at all. The Maltese Diocese, as it turned out, was none the worse for his declining the offer of the bishopric; but without his contribution Maltese as a written language would have been much poorer, and its literary development might have been retarded.