

Alfons Maria Galea (1861 - 1941)



Fr Hermann Duncan

Alfons Maria Galea was born in Valletta on 23 April 1861 to Peter Paul and Maria Carmela née Galea. Alfons Maria was the fourth among his six siblings. He was better known as Is-Sur Fons, and was a philanthropist, a senator, and a Maltese author.

His early education took place in his own home at his parents' house, taught by the teacher and writer Annibale Preca, who worked as a clerk for his father for some years. When Alfons Maria turned eight, he was sent to the Jesuits in Gozo where he studied for eight years, and then moved on to the Jesuit College in Marseille in France.

At the age of nineteen, when his father retired, he took over the family business as a fabrics dealer where he worked for 25 years between the years 1881 until 1896.

At the age of thirty two, he got married to Elizabeth Asphar who hailed from an Indian family and who also had a similar business of textiles and precious stones. They had five children, one of whom became a sister. Three years after his marriage, he decided to close the business as he felt that this was not his true calling and began to distribute much of his property and



wealth to charitable institutes. Among the institutes he helped were the Salesians of Don Bosco to whom he gave land so that they could build the Salesian Institute in Sliema, where he moved when he got married. The building was inaugurated in 1904 and served as a recreation centre for young children where they could learn doctrine. Similar centres were also built in Żejtun, Mosta, Cospicua and Gozo.

In 1939 he set up the St Elizabeth Institute of Franciscan Sisters in Sliema to cater for young girls, to have a place where they could learn. In addition he also provided financial assistance to the Blue Sisters Hospital and the Good Shepherd Convent in Balzan. Sur Fons contributed greatly to the missions and in 1896 was appointed treasurer of the Mission Committee. To help people become more aware



Alfons Maria Galea and an old Maltese coin commemorating him

of poverty around the world, and to enable them to offer their contributions, he began publishing a monthly magazine with records of the 'Propaganda Fide'.

For many years, Sur Fons was the President of the Anglo Maltese Bank, and later became the treasurer of the Bishop's Curia and the Poor Claire's nuns (Klarissi) whose monastery is situated in Saint Julian's.

Alfons Maria Galea worked tirelessly to aid workers, the poor and the weak by making his voice heard on institutions of charity.

He was promoted to Chevalier of St Gregory in 1913 and in 1920 he became a secret 'server' to the Pope. Between 1921 and 1927, he was a Maltese Senator.

Sadly in 1941 at the age of 80, he passed to Eternal rest in the Bonpastur Convent.

Alfons Maria Galea was a prolific writer. Among his publications we find the following:

La Chiesa e la Scienza - Torino 1894
Tliet Tfaġliet Mārtri - 1925
Tagħlim ta' Ġesu mill-Vanġelju u Tagħlim tal-Appostli 1934

Biblical translations from the Vulgata into Maltese

Ktieb il-Qwiel ta' Salamun - 1926
Ecclesiastes - 1927/1928
Songs of David (Psalms) - 1929
The two books of Maccabees - 1929
The Book of Job - 1929
The Book of Isaiah - 1930
 And a large number of other books.

Here we will take a look at his book 'Mogħdija taz-żmien' Nr. 129 about the farmer.

"U! 'Dak bidwi'" (Oh! he's a farmer), is an expression to show that someone has a low education. In his book, Galea praises the farmer instead, as he works in the fields, and is skilled at all the work related to his trade. The people from the cities rarely think about the hardships farmers go through. When a farmer sells his products, people rarely 'praise' him and are often very stingy when buying their vegetables. Thanks to the farmer we find food to cook in our pot.

The farmer knows that after the "lightning comes the rain." He knows all about horses and cattle, sheep and goats. He leads the cow or the horse on the threshing floor. He understands the vegetables and the diseases of livestock. He still works with some tools our ancestors used to use, like the hoe and the spade, and if he had more modern machines he would be able to be more successful. He works under the blazing sun and comes to recognize the magnitude of the creator. He comes to understand that his life is lit by God's love when he glimpses at the birds flying over the trees. He becomes like St Francis, calling the birds his brothers.

Many farmers understand the Psalm "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." The farmer accumulates a lot of knowledge which he didn't pick up from books and newspapers found in cafes but from farm-life experiences. Often after reading newspapers people do not think with their own mind, they fail to learn anything except that which the editor has written. The shops open at seven until close and understand only those who read the newspapers on travel and current events. The farmer comes to learn from his work and understands everything that he discovers in the field.

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