

LIFE AND WELLBEING HISTORY

Mgr Amante Buontempo on the centenary of his birth



The chasuble that Fr Amante wore at his first solemn Mass.



FABIAN MANGION

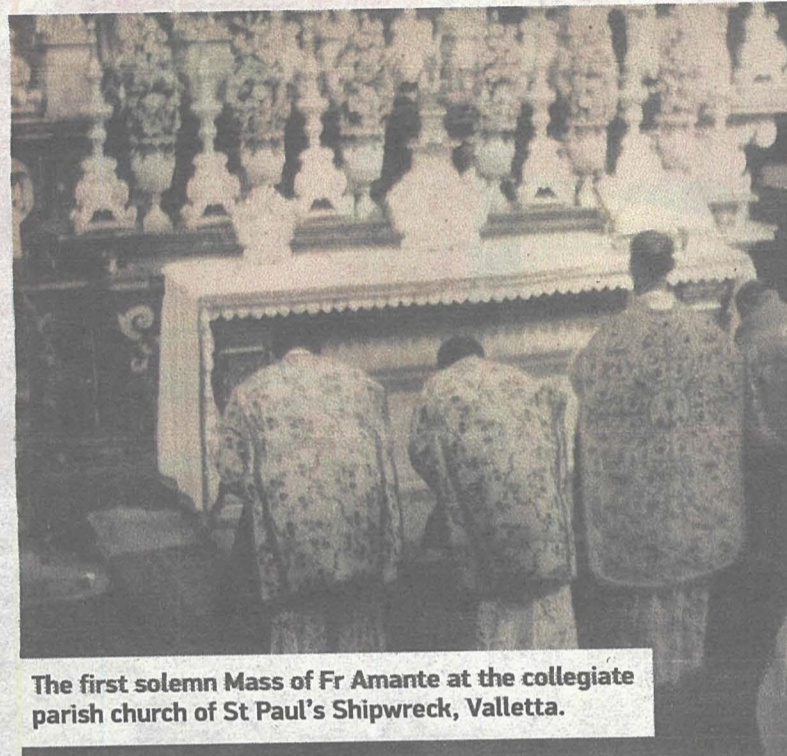
On Sunday, October 17, 1920, the baptistry of Senglea's collegiate church witnessed the baptism of a baby boy. Canon Joseph Adami, archpriest of Senglea, poured holy water on the head of the baby, born two days earlier, to Carmelo Buontempo and Victoria née Ferro, and named Amans, Michael, Joseph, Nicolaus and Marius.

Amante was brought up in Cospicua where the family lived until 1938 when they moved to Valletta, and evacuated to Xaghra, Gozo, during the war years. He was educated at the Lyceum (1932-1934), at the Archbishop's Seminary (1934-1939) and at the Gozo Seminary (1939-1943). He also studied at the Royal University of Malta between 1943 and 1946.

On September 1, 1946, he was ordained priest by Mgr Emmanuel Galea, Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar General, at St Paul's Shipwreck collegiate church, Valletta.

Buontempo celebrated his first solemn Mass on Sunday, September 15, 1946, at the same church. For that day, he wore a white lamé chasuble richly embroidered with gold thread. It was his parents' gift for the occasion.

On April 18, 2001, he personally donated this chasuble to the Society of Christian Doctrine (MUSEUM) to be dressed on the wax



The first solemn Mass of Fr Amante at the collegiate parish church of St Paul's Shipwreck, Valletta.

figure of St George Preca exhibited behind the main altar of the church of the Miraculous Medal in Blata l-Bajda, and on the sarcophagus enclosing the remains of the first canonised Maltese saint.

After his ordination, he continued his studies at the University of Nottingham, England (1946-47). While there, Fr Amante served as pastor and spiritual director of the Catholic Evidence Guild at the Cathedral of St Barnabas.

Back in Malta, he taught English at the Seminary (1947-1949). Between 1949 and 1953 he resumed his studies at the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome, obtaining a Doctorate in Canon

and Civil Law. In 1954, he obtained an Advocate Diploma of the *Sacra Romana Rota* after completing another three-year course at the *Studium* of the same Apostolic Tribunal. In 1951, he served as interpreter and assistant secretary during the First International Catholic Congress on Problems of Rural Life at Castelgandolfo.

In 1952, Fr Amante was appointed Canon of St Paul's Shipwreck collegiate, Valletta, serving as chancellor (1956-1961) and dean (1964-1987) in the same collegiate chapter. In 1959 he was made an examiner of Canon Law at the Archbishop's Curia, and in 1961, a member of the Deputation of



The Buontempo family

Marriage Legacies in the same Curia. In 1962, with the creation of the Maltese government under the new Constitution, he was selected as chaplain of the House of Representatives (1962-1971).

In 1963, Canon Buontempo was appointed Perpetual Curate of St Paul's Shipwreck parish, and was appointed, by Pope John Paul II, *Cappellano di Sua Santità* with the title of monsignor.

Mgr Buontempo was co-founder of the *Ghaqda tal-Madonna tal-Konsagrizzjoni* (Movement of Our Lady of Consecration). He was in direct contact with Guza Mifsud, who is said to have experienced visions of Our Lady at Gġirgenti, limits of Siggiewi. He first met Guza on March 26, 1984, and was instrumental in supporting her to start speaking about Our Lady under the title of Gġirgenti.

On the occasion of the feast of St Paul's Shipwreck on February 10, 1964, his first as curate, Buontempo issued a fervent appeal to the faithful entrusted to his care, urging everyone to come closer on the day of the feast, to listen to the words of the Archbishop in the Lent pastoral letter. He also exhorted the members of the Catholic associations in the parish to work hand in hand with him for the benefit of the parish.

Although he never interrupted his foreign cultural contacts, his zeal for priestly ministry never diminished. He continued to work in the field of the apostolate through preaching, lecturing and hearing confession. Towards the end of 1966 his term as curate came to an end.

In 1967, and within just three months, Canon Buontempo suffered the passing away of both his beloved parents. While his mother Victoria died on July 7, the end of his father Carmelo's earthly life came on October 15.

In 1978, Buontempo relinquished his post as canon of St Paul's Shipwreck collegiate and was appointed, by Pope John Paul II, *Cappellano di Sua Santità* with the title of monsignor.

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He also drew up the statute for the movement. As spiritual director of the committee, he performed his responsibilities with utmost rectitude. As long as his health allowed, he was regularly present during prayer meetings held at Gġirgenti and addressed the congregation with meticulous and thoughtful words.

Mgr Buontempo was highly sought after for his writings. He was a member of the council of the Association for the Propagation of the Maltese Language (*Xirka ghat-Tixrid tal-Ilsien Malti*). He wrote some short plays and novels in Maltese that as yet are not published.

The play *Il-Kuraġġ ta' Missier* (The Courage of a Father), in three acts, may be seen as an autobiography. In it, the author himself is shadowed by many images, episodes and events, and while reading the text one feels that it is very true to life; indeed, the actual experiences of a family that bore trials and tribulations.

In 1975, Buontempo founded the *Ghaqda Poeti Maltin* (Maltese Poets Association) and was appointed its president during the first general meeting. He served in this post till 2000 (25 years). He was then appointed honorary president.

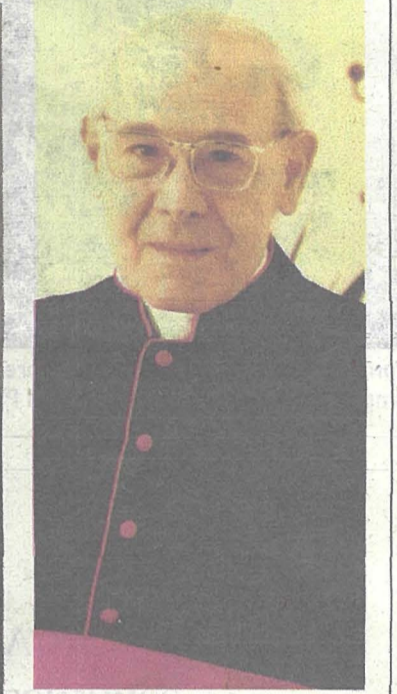
"Mgr Buontempo was highly sought after for his writings"

Amante Buontempo wrote several poems of patriotic and religious nature, most of which were published in various anthologies. His interest in poetry led him to attend many world congresses on poetry.

His writings, mainly dealing with ecclesiastical and legal issues, appeared in Maltese and foreign newspapers and periodicals. He authored *Problemi di Diritto Ecclesiastico Maltese* (1954), a number of articles in Latin in the four volumes that make up the *Dictionarium Morale et Canonicum* (1962-1968) and the *Dizionario dei Concilia* (1963-1967), formulated under the direction of Cardinal



Amante Buontempo as a young priest and (right) as a monsignor in later life.



Pietro Palazzini, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Council.

Other collections were published. In the booklet *I Was Called* (1967), he collected a number of poems with the aim of showing the beauty and heartache of his priesthood. The book *I Have Won* (1968) is his poetic consolation following a victory in court that he had over-malicious accusations that threatened to ruin his reputation.

Over time, with failing health, Buontempo began to realise that his life was at its twilight. He spent the last years of his life in his own home, no. 55, St Paul Street, Valletta. When the end appeared near, he was taken to St James Capua Hospital, Sliema, for further care and attention. There he died on June 21, 2004. His funeral was held the next day, at St Paul's Shipwreck collegiate church. Mgr Amante is buried in the family grave at Santa Maria Addolorata Cemetery.

Mgr Buontempo had three missions in life that he accomplished with great passion. The first was the priesthood. He was a priest who loved the Church more than anything else; ministry for him had absolute priority.

The second was his family. His was a large, united family of 12 siblings, many members of which distinguished themselves in one area or another in life.

The third was poetry. Since 1940, he wrote several poems to convey his thoughts. He won numerous awards and honours. In 1966, he was honoured by the

Accademia Tiberina in Rome. In 1970, he was appointed *Socio ad Vitam e Delegato Onorario per Malta* by the president of the *Centro Cultura Europea, Enemanzo-Udine*, Italy. In 1973, he was nominated Poet Laureate International by the World Academy of Art and Culture in Taiwan, and in 1981, honoured as an International Bard by the International Guild of Contemporary Bards in Australia.

In 1984, he was made an Honorary Professor of Literature at the Universal Human University, Sardinia, Italy. Selected by the American Biographical Institute as Man of the Year for 1990 and 1995, he also received honours and awards from the International Biographical Centre, most notably being appointed deputy director general of the organisation.

Mgr Buontempo was a man of principle, ready to lose his life for his beliefs. He was both a priest and a poet, loyal to these two vocations. He defended the Church with zeal and often expressed himself through poetry.

He felt it a duty to defend what is right and never backed down from it. In fact, he suffered many injustices because he openly demonstrated his principles. He fought and won legal battles against those who sought to defame him, but in the end he suffered a great deal from the prejudice against him.

It is a misfortune that Mgr Buontempo was culturally more appreciated abroad than in his homeland; he carried a broken heart with him to the grave.



Part of the ceremony when Fr Amante was made canon at St Paul's Shipwreck collegiate church.



Four of Mgr Buontempo's numerous publications.



Mgr Buontempo together with Guza Mifsud. PHOTO: LEHEN IL-GIRGENTI, JANUARY 2015



Mgr Buontempo in his office in St Paul's Street, Valletta, near a showcase filled with a number of trophies he won from poetry contests.