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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

MALTA.

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MALTA holds a position of strategic importance in the Mediterranean. It lies fifty-eight miles from Sicily and about 180 from the African coast. It possesses an important dockyard and arsenal and is the headquarters of the Mediterranean Fleet. The island, which is in area about ninety-two square miles, is the centre of a group of isles the largest of which is Gozo, with an area of twenty-four square miles, and it is highly cultivated. Its chief industry outside agriculture is shipping, and before the great decadence in the lace trade some 6,000 of its people were engaged in its manufacture. The population of the group is between 230,000 and 250,000, and the religion of the inhabitants has been and is Roman Catholic.

To understand the religious condition of the island, it is necessary to remember that no Protestant place of worship exists among the native Maltese, and that the Chaplains who minister to the soldiers and sailors confine their work to the men and their families under their immediate care. The Roman Church claims to exercise spiritual authority to the exclusion of all other forms of religious worship among the native population. Her claims are parallel to those she put forward in Spain when the Spanish Constitution gave a certain measure of tolerance to non-Roman Catholic Christians. At that time the Pope (Pius IX) wrote to the Archbishop of Toledo that the Constitution violated every obligation of truth and of the Catholic Faith. "It annuls illegally the Concordat between the Holy See and the Spanish Nation, exposes the State to the charge of wrong, and opens a door to error, error which is a precursor to a long succession of ruinous evils to the nation so long and true a lover of Catholic unity." In 1906 when Lord Elgin (Colonial Secretary) wrote to the Governor of Malta declaring the undoubted right of all persons in the island to the exercise of religious liberty, the then Archbishop—Bishop of Malta—wrote: "I can but signify my deep displeasure and that of all my diocesans at the sanction of liberty of religious worship in these Islands." Rome claims to be supreme, and what is more, declares herself not to be a Foreign Power. "Wherever there are Catholics, wherever there is a Catholic state or a Catholic people the Holy See is not a 'foreign power,' as its counsels and interventions are never political but essentially religious."

When in 1911 the right of self-government was given to Malta, as a British Colony, with foreign relations reserved to the Imperial Parliament, the Maltese hierarchy desired and pressed for the declaration in the Constitution that the Religion of the Maltese is Roman Catholic. The Home Government refused to insert this statement, and the first Act of the Maltese Legislature was to make

this declaration on its own part—which it had a perfect right to do—but it could not interfere with the direct assertion of Religious Liberty in the Constitution which states, “ (1) All persons inhabiting the Colony shall have full liberty of conscience and the free exercise of their respective modes of religious worship ; (2) No person shall be subjected to any disability or excluded from holding any office by reason of his religious profession.” On its being pointed out that no provision was made in the Constitution for the establishment of Civil Marriage in a Colony where Rome asserted the sole right to regulate marriage among the Maltese, in accordance with the Tridentine legislation, it was maintained that when occasion arose the situation would be faced.

The attitude of Rome may be judged by the remonstrance addressed by Cardinal Gasparri to the British Minister at the Vatican on February 23, 1929, because the Governor received three visiting Anglican Bishops in his official Residence, “ once that of the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, associated with so many glorious records touching the Catholic Religion, but offensive also to the convictions and sentiments of the great majority of the Maltese who are fervent in their profession of the Catholic Religion ; for they constitute a formal and official favouring of the Anglican Creed.” In a note to the Vatican White Book we learn that oral explanations were given by the Minister and the British Government and made known to the Holy See, that the visit was official and that it was an act of simple courtesy to receive them. It really is hard to reconcile anything like religious liberty with the view of the Vatican Authorities, that the Representative of His Majesty in Malta is unable to receive in his official Home visiting Bishops and permit them to hold there Conferences with the local Churchmen. Even in Spain we have not heard of any such protest being made when his Majesty’s Minister permits a Bible Society Meeting to be held in the Embassy. Rome attempts in Malta what she has not dared to do in Spain, for she knows that even reactionary Spanish Governments would not venture to lodge her protest with the British Foreign Office.

A Roman Catholic Friar, the Rev. P. Guido Micallef, was against his will ordered to leave Malta for Italy. The Maltese Government, fully cognizant of all the facts, declared in the local Parliament : “ If an alien like Father Carta would be able to send a Maltese subject into exile, public order would be imperilled.” Rome viewed the matter as grave, for it impeded “ the free exercise of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in matters pertaining to the religious life of a friar.” In plain English, this means the assertion of the right to override the liberty of the subject and to make the will of the Vatican prevail against the constitutionally exercised freedom of a British subject. It is the claim that the Vatican is not a Foreign Power but a supreme Power, when what it considers religious interests, i.e. its own interests, are at stake, and all other interests must yield to the demands of Rome.

The British Minister to the Vatican placed the matter on its right footing when he declared that the command of a foreigner

that a British subject should leave British territory had placed His Majesty's government in a position of embarrassment. The Government had no desire to discuss this particular case or to interfere in the internal disciplinary affairs of monastic orders. It looked upon the case as a symptom of the unsatisfactory state of affairs in Malta, and asked that the Vatican should consider sending an Apostolic visitor to the island to investigate the whole questions of the relations of the ecclesiastical authorities in Malta to the political Government, "having regard to the importance of avoiding friction in the future of the intervention of Maltese priests in politics." He added that he had learned that the Holy See wishes "to discourage political agitation by priests. The disregard of this rule, and the intense participation by Maltese priests in local politics, it is considered lie at the root of the present trouble." The Vatican determined that a Delegate Apostolic—which meant a very high official of considerable importance, should be sent to Malta, and chose Monsignor Robinson, Archbishop of Tyana—"who must certainly be a *persona grata* to the British Government." The British Government approved most cordially of the nomination and on April 3, 1929, Monsignor Robinson arrived in Malta.

On May 29, 1929, the Governor of Malta wrote to the Colonial Office reporting that Monsignor Robinson had made his investigation and anticipated a happy solution of the matters in dispute. The settlement of the question would be in the form of a "Concordat or Protocol which would necessarily be respected by both parties." On June 27 the Foreign Secretary informed by telegram Sir Robert Graham that Lord Strickland would arrive in Rome on July 5 and asked Mr. Chilton, the Minister at the Vatican, to arrange an interview with the Cardinal Secretary of State on either July 5 or 6. On July 2 the Cardinal Secretary wrote to Mr. Chilton saying that he had written to the Bishops of Malta and Gozo saying that Lord Strickland is not *persona grata* to the Holy See, and suggesting that the matter should be brought to the notice of the Imperial Government, which in view of the harm that Lord Strickland's activities occasion will no doubt "adopt such measures as they (the Imperial Government) may consider necessary to prevent such subversive activity, or at least to divorce their responsibility from that of Lord Strickland." Enclosed in this letter were a *Résumé* of an Aide Memoire addressed by eye-witnesses to the Holy See on activities of Lord Strickland, and a letter dated June 30, addressed to the Maltese Bishops approving their attitude and stating that in spite of all insistence the Pope had refused to receive Lord Strickland—a reference to an episode in 1928.

It is necessary to glance at the internal politics of Malta. The island contains a larger number of clergy in proportion to population than any other area in Europe. Eighty per cent of its people speak Maltese only, and some 10 per cent speak Italian as a second language. There has been a long controversy concerning the necessity of making Italian culture the basis of the intellectual development of the island. Language has always been either an element of

political propaganda or oppression, and the Strickland Ministry believe that British culture should be maintained in Malta. For reasons that can readily be understood comparatively little has been said of this aspect of the question, but readers of the Maltese Press know how much it figures in local politics. Lord Strickland is a Roman Catholic, all his Ministers are Roman Catholics, and Lord Strickland in a statement made in reply to the Cardinal Secretary's note wrote on July 6: "Educated Catholics who take an Oath of Office and loyalty to the King, and who are responsible to their electors, cannot conscientiously surrender political authority in civil matters to any bishop under threats of hostility at elections and mixing up of religion with politics. There cannot be two Governments in Malta."

It is unnecessary to go into the charges and counter-charges in the long documents published in the Blue and White Books. It is evident that in the discussions of the proposed Concordat the two parties were so totally opposed to one another that they either genuinely or wilfully, through obsession, misunderstood one another. The closed mind was in evidence from the beginning as far as the Apostolic Delegate was concerned. He stood for the supremacy of the Roman Church, whereas in his opinion Lord Strickland wishes at all costs "to make the Church subservient to the State and to reduce the bishops and priests to the position of mere employees of the Government." "Lord Strickland cleverly endeavours to dispel all suspicion of antagonism against the Church, and to this end disguises his attitude against it, asserting that he is acting against the clergy in the interests of religion and of the Church, making pretence of protecting the Catholics of Malta against the intrigues and interference of foreign ecclesiastics: a pretext this, very much like the assertions of Luther at the time of the so-called Reformation." This sounds like an echo of the words of the Archbishop—Bishop of Malta—written in August, 1928: "The danger that is threatening is nothing less than the loss of the Faith, which for almost twenty centuries has constituted the greatest glory of our country, and which has also been a cause of infernal envy." Notwithstanding this Pastoral in November, 1928, the Cardinal Secretary wrote to Lord Strickland with reference to the "refused" interview referred to in his letter to the Archbishop of Malta, "the Holy Father has not refused the desired audience, but for very grave reasons has simply considered that it may be put off to a more opportune moment, also in order that it may take place in the form due to the high office held by Your Excellency. And it is in this sense that we will make it our early duty to inform the English Government." This certainly is diplomacy with a vengeance. Lord Strickland was informed that the interview was delayed in order that greater honour might be paid to him—the Bishop of Malta was told that in spite of all pressure the interview was refused because he was not acceptable to the Vatican.

When the British Government received the astounding suggestion that, in virtue of the civil tyranny and religious persecution of the

Maltese Ministry, the activities of the Ministry should be restrained and its policy disavowed, the British Government replied on August 8 deploring the character of the request and the charges made. In a reply two days after receiving the remonstrance of the Imperial Government, the Vatican wriggles in explaining the contrast between the Secretary of State's letter to Lord Strickland and his words to the Archbishop—Bishop of Malta—and declares its inability to continue conversations or conclude a concordat "so long as it is not persuaded that Lord Strickland intends to respect the rights of the Church and to practise a proper regard towards the local ecclesiastical authorities."

The triennial General Election drew near and efforts were made to avoid trouble arising from the interference of the Maltese ecclesiastics in political controversy. The Minister at the Vatican after reviewing his conversations and negotiations was forced to say that there is no hope of the Vatican instructing the Bishops not to intervene or of negotiating a concordat while Lord Strickland is Premier. On May 1, 1930, the Maltese Bishops issued a Pastoral in which the Maltese as Catholics were told that to vote for Lord Strickland or his candidates, to present themselves as candidates in support of Lord Strickland and not to vote for the candidates who would offer greater guarantees both for religious and social welfare, would be a grave sin. "In order then to prevent abuses in the reception and administration of the Sacraments, we remind our priests that they are strictly forbidden to administer the Sacraments to the obstinate who refuse to obey these instructions." Even before the publication of the Pastoral the Parish Priests refused absolution to the Stricklanders and told them they were bound to obey orders. The orders were issued, according to the evidence, so that those Roman Catholics who wished to make their Easter Communion, were denied absolution on the sole ground that they were Stricklanders!

On May 9 the British Minister in a note to the Cardinal Secretary of State said, "These acts seem to His Majesty's Government in the highest degree reprehensible and protest against them in the most emphatic manner. To this protest they can only add a renewed expression of their regret that the Holy See has been unable either to countermand the directions issued by the Maltese hierarchy or to seek, in co-operation with His Majesty's Government, some means by which the interests of Church and State can be brought into lasting harmony." The Elections were suspended, and on May 16 another note was handed to the Vatican in which a Memorandum issued on May 7 by the Vatican, is described as not putting "an accurate construction on their intentions and proposals, or that indeed in several passages it reflects correctly the upshot of the communications which have been exchanged between them and the Holy See."

The Vatican issued a long reply and the Maltese Bishops a Memorandum in which they refer to the duty of the Governor to obey the Law which declares the "Roman Catholic Religion to be

the recognized Religion of Malta." After a further exchange of notes the British Legation on May 30 handed a note to the Cardinal Secretary, which complains of fine distinctions drawn by the Vatican's representatives, which do not in any way affect the case on which the protest of His Majesty's Government is based, and concludes by stating boldly that the resumption of negotiations is rendered impossible "by attaching a condition as to the personality of the Head of the Maltese Administration, which constitutes nothing less than a claim to interfere in the domestic affairs of a British Colony." The Vatican replied that it had declared itself ready for negotiations on August 10, 1929, and that it then also stated that "it was not possible to begin these negotiations as long as the cause of the trouble persisted." "The Holy See opposed the work of Lord Strickland not on account of political reasons, but solely because of his attitude towards religion." The attitude of the Vatican can best be understood from a paragraph which shows the medieval mentality of the Curia: "Such a defence of the Catholic Faith in Malta can be considered by the Government of His Majesty as an improper political interference even less, because this same Government of His Majesty from the beginning of its possession of the island gave the Maltese people the most ample assurances that the Catholic religion would be protected and defended." Clerical absolutism has always endeavoured to assert itself in Malta and it is precisely because this absolutism comes into conflict with the rights of citizens to exercise freely their political privileges and responsibilities that this Maltese trouble has arisen. We have an object lesson of the demands of Rome which cannot fail to influence public opinion in this country. As yet Rome has hesitated to apply the principles of absolutism to the affairs of Great Britain, but it is because she knows she has not the power to do so. She hopes that in Malta, Government will be made impossible unless her will prevails and the Government of England goes to Canossa.

But Lord Passfield has declared in the House of Lords, "We have retained the noble Lord, Lord Strickland and his colleagues in office, we have saved their position. We have not allowed them to be eliminated: we are not in any sense giving way to the demand of the Vatican that Lord Strickland and his colleagues should be removed, and we have no intention of doing so." The Vatican had asked for his elimination! And this is described as non-political intervention when a Prime Minister is constitutionally in office. It is the old claim to appoint and dethrone Kings. Pope Boniface of the fourteenth century makes his appearance in the twentieth century in the spirit of his pronouncement that "to be subject to the Roman Pontiff is for every human creature a necessity of salvation." Monsignor Robinson says if the English Government understood the damage Strickland is doing in Malta it could "decline all responsibility for the line of politics pursued by Lord Strickland, or oblige him to modify the same, or, if that be not considered possible, to find some means of eliminating him peacefully from the political field in Malta!" And this is non-interference.