

THE ROYAL UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

It is not my intention in my description of the University of Malta in any way to suggest that this institution is a model, or even a particularly good example of what a Catholic University should be. It is, however, very well worth studying for two reasons. First, because it is unique of its kind, being the only Catholic University (I suppose) in the world which is also a State University supported and controlled by a non-Catholic government. Second, because its history and present state show very clearly that in order to secure a thorough and adequate intellectual and spiritual Catholic formation it is not enough to establish an officially Catholic University, with statutes which make the Catholic religion the basis of instruction and a staff of teachers who profess the Catholic religion. That is only the beginning. It is still necessary to give the body a living and reasonable soul, to make the University a real University and its Catholicism a living and productive faith. The University of Malta never seems quite to have found its soul.

It was founded by Grand Master Pinto de Fonceca of the Sovereign Order of Malta in 1769, and endowed with the buildings and property of the College of the Society of Jesus which the Grand Master had suppressed in 1768. Perhaps something of the atmosphere of Baroque Erastianism has clung about the University from its beginnings. Certainly the Founder, Grand Master Pinto, was a typical enough representative of that pompous and spiritually barren autocracy. From 1769 to the present day the University has continued to exist and function without a break except for a short period during the French occupation of Malta in the time of Napoleon.

The University was founded primarily as a House of Studies or College of (Higher) Education for Conventual Deacons of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Malta, though provision was made from the beginning for the education there of 'young men belonging to honourable families' of the Order's subjects. The Bull of Clement XIV. which conferred on Pinto the authority to found the University therefore gave him the same authority over it as was enjoyed by the Grand Masters over all the Churches, houses, Colleges and other property of the Order. It was staffed by Conventual Chaplains, and was in general in very much the same position as the School of Anatomy and Surgery founded nearly a century before in the Great Hospital of the Order.

In 1800 the British Governors, taking over the other administrative functions of the Grand Masters in Malta and even occupying their palaces, inherited also their authority over the University. The Catholic character of the education given there was maintained, and the canonical rights of the Holy See and the Hierarchy of Malta over the Faculty of Theology have been scrupulously respected. But the University of Malta is not, and has not been since the British occupation, a Catholic University in the full sense of an institute of higher studies independent of secular control and subject only to the authorities of the Church, in spite of the fact that it was founded by Papal authority. The Hierarchy of Malta has never exercised full authority over the University and it has never been organically connected with the Church in Malta as Louvain is with the Church in Belgium, or the Gregorian University with the Church Universal in its centre in Rome. Furthermore, the many changes which have taken place in the last 140 years, and especially in more recent times, in the constitution and status of the University have had the effect of steadily reducing its autonomy and the degree of ecclesiastical control and of making it more and more a State and secular institution; in fact it is now officially regarded by the Government (though not by many of its own Professors) as a Government Department. It does not, however, seem that the essential peculiarity of the status of the University is due to any deliberate policy of the British Government.

In the days of the Knights, from its foundation, the University was under the Grand Masters and not the Bishops of Malta. The situation can only be properly understood if the curious double character of the Sovereign Order of Malta in the 18th century is realised. At that time it was, and had been for centuries, a military and aristocratic society exercising a considerable temporal jurisdiction. The Grand Master was a sovereign prince and dealt with the other sovereigns of Europe as their equal. Yet at the same time he was Superior of a Religious Order in the Catholic Church which enjoyed all the customary privileges of Religious Orders, including that of maintaining its own educational institutions and exercising jurisdiction over them under the authority of the Holy See. (In any case, of course, there were plenty of precedents for State control of Universities in Catholic countries. The 'free' Catholic University is a mediaeval and modern, but not a Baroque phenomenon).

Under the Knights the University contained only the Faculties of Theology and Laws, as the School of Medicine was a separate institution attached to the Great Hospital, the *Sacra Infermeria*. At the beginning of the British occupation the School of Medicine was

transferred to the University and during the next century and a quarter other faculties were added in a somewhat haphazard way. There are now six. Theology, Laws, Medicine, Arts, Science and Engineering and Architecture.

The guiding principle of the whole development has always been the same. The providing of a truly universal and profound Catholic spiritual and intellectual formation has never been a primary object of the University of Malta, at least in recent times; nor yet the pursuit of truth for its own sake, disinterested and creative research. The University has always been conceived first and foremost as a professional training school, a place where those intending to follow one of the professions can acquire the necessary qualifications. Unfortunately professional training has been conceived in the most narrowly utilitarian and careerist spirit. Some attempt is made, in the 2 or 3 year preliminary courses in the Faculties of Arts and Science which precede the professional courses leading to the various doctorates, to give all students a smattering of general culture, including some knowledge of Catholic Philosophy. Much of the work however done in these preliminary courses is of a kind which should be done in the last years at school rather than the first years at a University; and the Faculties of Arts and Science are so strictly subordinated to the professional Faculties that they have no very rigorous life of their own. There are no Honours courses at the University of Malta, and no provision whatever is made for post-graduate research. Nor are Professors normally expected to engage in research. The great majority are distinguished Maltese professional men who divide their time between their University duties and the practice of their profession. The salaries offered by the University are in most cases too low to make it possible for a Professor to devote his whole time to University teaching and research.

A very serious lack in the University from the point of view of Catholic formation is the absence of any training in professional ethics. There is no course in the Catholic philosophy of law for law students or in Catholic medical ethics for medical students. The University offers at present no facilities for studying the social teaching of the Church. It may in fact be said, to sum up, that the University as such does not provide a Catholic higher education at all except for students of Theology, whose studies are of course regulated by the Papal decrees and who have quite a well-conceived three years' Preparatory Course before beginning Theology proper. Outside the Faculty of Theology the only Catholic characteristics of the University in its official and corporate activities are: the negative restriction imposed by the Statute which says 'The Roman

Catholic Religion is the basis of instruction and no teaching inconsistent with its principles is permitted,' a restriction which is observed fairly well by most of the Professors; the examination (of an appallingly low standard in spite of recent improvements) in religious doctrine which all Catholics (that is practically all students) entering the University must pass; and the religious forms observed in the ceremony of conferring degrees.

It remains to make some attempt to apportion the blame for this state of affairs and to see what, if anything, is being done to remedy it. I do not think that the main responsibility lies with the British Government. It is true that in Malta the Government officials, English and Maltese, have consistently shown themselves so ignorant of, or indifferent to, the purpose of education in general and the nature of a University, as to prove their unfitness for the exaggerated degree of control over the education of the island which they enjoy. It is true also that the British Government regards with not very well-concealed dislike and suspicion any development in the University or elsewhere of an active and militant Catholicism of a kind likely to have an effect on the political, social or economic life of the island. It is not, however, at all likely that the Government would resist a really united and vigorous demand by the Catholics of Malta for a radical transformation, deepening and spiritualizing of their University education. Much more, too, could have been done during the period of self-government after the last war, though the smallness of the island's own financial resources and the really scandalous parsimony of the British Government as regards contributions towards the cost of education and social services generally would always have hampered development.

There is, I am afraid, no doubt that it is the narrow, self-seeking and unconsciously materialist conception of professional education generally held by the Maltese which is principally responsible for the present state of affairs. It has never been realised clearly enough by educated Maltese Catholics that a mere traditional and unthinking preservation of the religious habits of their childhood is not enough and that a genuinely Catholic University with the highest spiritual, intellectual and cultural standards is essential for their own personal and professional lives and for the life of the Church in Malta.

The restoration of a large measure of self-government after the war, together with a very much more generous policy of financial help on the part of the British Government, will give the University of Malta great opportunities for development. There are, however, some new and serious dangers. The unintelligent following of foreign fashions, English or Italian, has always been one of the

courses of Malta. At the present time an important section of educated Maltese opinion is tending to an unthinking adoption of some of the worst features of modern English 'progressive' thought, resulting in an increased materialism of outlook and a deplorable hostility to the classical humanities and even an attempt to reduce the time devoted in the University to the teaching of Catholic philosophy to lay students.

On the other side some very encouraging signs are appearing of a general realisation among the really Catholic-minded Maltese that reforms are necessary and urgent if the Catholic traditions of the island are to be preserved and strengthened. The University Catholic Guild under the leadership of its admirable chaplain, who is also Professor of Philosophy, and the Malta Catholic Social Guild, which is largely composed of University students and graduates, are doing some very good work. There is also a movement supported by some of the best and most Catholic-minded of the Professors for the introduction of courses in professional ethics and the foundation of a Chair of Catholic Sociology. It is to be hoped that after the war Catholics in English Universities will do their best to establish the closest possible contact with this new movement of Catholic life in the University of Malta. Maltese clergy, graduates and students will be very eager for their help and co-operation, as long as they do not feel that it is likely to lead to a wholesale and unintelligent substitution of English forms of Catholic thought and activity for those traditional in Malta and suited to the character of the people.

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THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LILLE

LILLE was at one time the capital of Flanders, and from the early Middle Ages has held an important place in both the religious and military history first of Flanders, then of France. In the early nineteenth century it became the centre of a great industrial area, largely due to its climate and to the coal and iron deposits in its neighbourhood. The nearest parallel that one can find in the rise of industrialism in England is Lancashire, and one may well call the department of the Nord, including as it does Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing, Fives, Bethune and Lens, the Lancashire of France.

Due to the efforts of a few industrialists and manufacturers, a beginning was made in 1874 with a Catholic University; subscrip-