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**[p.89] British Diplomacy and the Election of
Bishop Gaetano Pace Forno***

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“The protection which the Roman Catholic Establishment has constantly received at the hands of the British Government in Malta, the liberty which that Church has invariably enjoyed, and the care which successive Governors have unremittingly had to avoid anything that might give annoyance to the Ecclesiastical Authorities... enabled the Crown Advocate publicly to state in Council, in the presence of an ecclesiastical Dignitary who was then a member of the Council, and without any contradiction either in, or out of the Council, that there was no country in Europe where the Roman Catholic Church was better protected than it was in Malta, and... (this fact) has on more than one occasion, prompted the Pope to express his high satisfaction to certain Maltese gentlemen visitors to Rome.”¹

This statement by Governor Sir Gaspard Le Marchant in 1860 outlines the policy followed by the British towards the Church since they first set foot on Malta in 1800: liberty, protection and cooperation. In their very first proclamation, the British solemnly promised that “all rights, privileges and immunities in Church and state”² were to be preserved. More or less, they kept their word as long as local religious affairs were concerned. However, in the relations of the local Church with the centre of Christendom, Rome, they did not stay aloof of all proceedings. Sometimes, it must be admitted, they intervened in matters after being invited to do so by local contending parties to tip the balance one way or another; more often they intervened in affairs to channel them according to their own likings and to their own advantage. One such case is the affair under consideration—the election of the Augustinian Padre Gaetano Pace Forno to the bishopric of Malta in 1857.

[p.90] Malta in 1856

The Governor of Malta at that time was Major-General Sir William Reid, one of the most distinguished rulers ever to administer the Archipelago. At Malta, Reid displayed the unostentatious activity which had characterized his previous Governments at Barbuda and Barbados. He combined his renowned military skill with his administrative capabilities to better the fate of the country.³ He was wise enough to discern and appreciate the cleverness and ability of Adrian Dingli, a brilliant young lawyer who represented Gozo in the Council of

* This contribution is the result of research work carried out by the author during the compilation of his doctoral dissertation: *The Establishment of the Diocese of Gozo. Religion and Politics in a Crown Colony, 1798-1864*. For his thesis, presented and defended at the Gregorian University, Rome, on April 21, 1982, the author got a first-class doctorate in Church History. He also won the Pope's Award for the best history thesis presented at the University during 1981-82. It is hoped that the thesis will be published in book-form during 1983 as *Religion and Politics in a Crown Colony. The Struggle of Gozo, 1798-1864*.

¹ LE MARCHANT to the Duke of Newcastle (secretary of State for the Colonies), 25 Oct. 1860, draft, 5r, R[ecords] O[ffice] M[alta], *Letters* (1852-60).

² Ralph ABERCROMBY (Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean) to Henry Pigot (Major General Malta), 10 Dec 1800, quoted by A.V. LAFERLA, *British Malta I*, Malta 1938, 7-8.

³ Cf R.H. VETCH, *Sir William Reid*, in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, XVI, Oxford 1917+, 883-887.

Government. From the assumption of his office on November 14, 1851, the Governor continually sought his advice. Eventually, on December 27, 1954, Reid appointed Dingli Crown Advocate. From then onwards, his word was slowly but surely to become the law. "He entirely directs the Government of the island in legislative matters,"⁴ confirmed the bishop of Malta to an official at the Roman Curia. He is the advocate referred to in the opening statement.

According to a census taken in the beginning of the 1850s, the population of the Maltese Archipelago had, by the middle of the nineteenth century, rose to 123,495, of which 14,663 in Gozo and 108,933 in Malta. There were 117 secular priests in Gozo and 750 in Malta, while the members of the regular clergy amounted respectively to 27 and to 272. Barring aside some of the latter who were only lay brothers, there results a priest-population ratio of one to one hundred and five. There were also 125 nuns and sisters living in Malta.⁵

The bishop of Malta and Gozo was then His Lordship Monsignor Publius Maria dei Conti Sant. Elected bishop at 70, on November 17, 1847, he could hardly bear the burden of the administration of a diocese of such proportions. The strains of hard work soon began to bear upon him, and from the middle of 1855, he was confined to bed on many days of the year. Letter after another was despatched from Malta to the Vatican to urge the Roman ecclesiastical authorities to find a solution. The local religious and pastoral situation was deteriorating by the passage of hours.⁶

This was especially so in Gozo. During his term of office he did not travel more than once to Gozo. By 1856, many had died and many others had got married without receiving the sacrament of Confirmation. That year Giuseppe Bravi, a bishop in Sri Lanka, happened to pass through Gozo on his way to [p.91] Rome. On October 30 and 31, he confirmed no less than 1,286.⁷ A contemporary diary records how the Gozitans began queuing up behind the door of the Matrix Church at midnight, though the ceremony was scheduled to begin at seven in the morning, and many had to wait until the following morning to get confirmed.⁸ Bishop Bravi himself was so impressed with what he witnessed that he spontaneously drew a report and handed it in at the Vatican.⁹

Yet, by that time, the Vatican Authorities had become fully convinced of the necessity of a change. In fact, some time before, the papal Secretary of State, Giacomo Cardinal Antonelli, had confided to the British representative in Rome, R.B.P. Lyons,¹⁰ that "the great age of the present bishop occasioned so much inconvenience in the Diocese, that the appointment of a Coadjutor could hardly be any longer postponed."¹¹ Actually Bishop Sant himself admitted in a letter to Rome that "he was aware that his great age rendered him hardly equal to the efficient discharge of his Episcopal duties."¹²

⁴ Gaetano PACE to Giuseppe Berardi (Secretary Congregation Extraordinary Affairs), 28 Apr 1860, A[rchivio] della Congregazione degli Affari E[cclesiastici] S[traordinari], M III, 92/60, 66r.

⁵ Cf *Census of Malta and Gozo*, 1851. Malta 1853, abstracts 1, 4, 5.

⁶ Cf the voluminous correspondence at AES, M III, 70/56, 1r-110v.

⁷ Cf *Registers of Confirmation*. II, A[rchivum] E[piscopale] G[audiense], Victoria, Gozo.

⁸ Cf *Diary* in the possession of Monsignor Joseph Gauci, Victoria, Gozo.

⁹ Cf *Pro-Memoria sull'Affare del Gozo*, 1859, 1v, A[rchivum] A[rchiepiscopale] M[elicense], P[riate] P[apers of Bishop P[ietro Pace].

¹⁰ R.B.P. Lyons (1817-1887) was strictly speaking secretary to the British Legation in Florence (1856-1858).

¹¹ LYONS (confidential) to the Marquis of Normanby (British Minister Florence), 13 Sep 1856, P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice]; London, F[oreign] O[ffice], 43/63.

¹² SANT to Antonelli, 3 Nov 1856, AES, M III, 70/56.

However, though both the Vatican and the bishop agreed on the necessity of a change and candidates for the bishopric were not lacking, the situation was to prolong itself more than a year. For while the Vatican wanted to give Bishop Sant a Coadjutor, the latter preferred instead to resign. Yet Pope Pius IX would not hear of any resignation. The situation hence reached a stalemate, for according to Canon Law, it was the bishop himself who had to apply for a Coadjutor. The bishop was unwilling to do so and the Pope was not eager to demand such request by force, as he naturally could do.¹³ It was at that time that the British diplomacy entered the picture.

The first British requests

It is outside the scope of this paper to enter into the complicated question concerning the right of presentation to the Malta Bishopric. Various aspects and different periods throughout which the problem raged have been discussed elsewhere.¹⁴ Besides in a forthcoming publication, I have attempted to give a bird's eye view of the whole affair between 1798 and 1864.¹⁵ However, it [p.92] must be pointed out here that at the election of Bishop Sant, an agreement had been reached between the Vatican and the British Authorities concerning future appointments. The Roman Authorities bound themselves to unofficial discussions with the British before they proceed to elect a candidate to the bishopric of Malta.¹⁶

In view of this agreement, on September 12, 1856, Cardinal Antonelli confided to Lyons that, after strenuous efforts the Vatican had found a suitable candidate to be elected coadjutor bishop at Malta.¹⁷ Neither was the candidate himself, nor the bishop of Malta aware of the choice. The news was only confided to them and the Pope. Before the matter proceeded further, the Cardinal Secretary of State wanted to know the views of the British on the candidate.¹⁸ "I thanked the Cardinal for having spoken to on the subject so early," wrote Lyons to the British Minister in Florence, "and I dwelt a little on the great advantage of frank and timely communications on such matters."¹⁹

Even before having any information on the suggested candidate, except his name, Lyons put forward two British reservations: "In the first place, there were serious objections to the appointment, as Bishop or Coadjutor, of any Ecclesiastic who had been mixed up in the local politics, as member of the Legislative Council or otherwise; and secondly, that Her Majesty's Government was inclined to view with favour the claim of the clergy of Malta that their bishop should be chosen from their own body."²⁰

Through the first reservation, two Maltese ecclesiastics were excluded. The first mentioned by name in a letter that Lyons addressed to the Governor of Malta,²¹ was Annetto Casolani, titular bishop of Mauricastro and former Apostolic Vicar to Central Africa. Born at Valletta on August 10, 1815, he studied at the Malta Seminary and at the Urbanian College, Rome. It was probably he who had induced Pope Gregory XVI to found a missionarv post in central Africa, of which he was eventually created the first Vicar Apostolic. He was ordained

¹³ Cf correspondence at AES, M III, 70/56.

¹⁴ Cf especially, H.I. LEE, *British Policy towards the Religion, Ancient Laws and Customs in Malta, 1824-1851*, in *Melita Historica* III/A (1963) 1-13.

¹⁵ Cf introductory note.

¹⁶ Cf LEE, *ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷ Cf LYONS to the Marquis of Normanby, 13 Sep 1856, PRO, FO, 43/63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2r-2v.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3r.

²¹ Cf LYONS to Reid, 17 Sep 1856, 2v, ROM, *Letters* 1852-60.

bishop on May 24, 1846. He did travel to Khartoum, Sudan, but it seems that his real aspirations were not Central Africa, but Malta. In 1849, and again in 1854, he contested the elections of the Council of Government and was elected on both occasions. This political activity completely ruled him out as a candidate to the bishopric of Malta. He is the Dignitary referred to in the opening quotation.

[p.93] The other “objectionable candidate” was Filippo Amato, secretary to the late Bishop Francesco Saverio Caruana and Vicar General of Malta. He was also a member of the Council, where, in the early fifties, he had taken an active part in the discussion on the new criminal code, especially where it concerned religious matters. The dropping of the chapter concerning the “dominant religion” from the final text rendered him irreconcilably disaffected towards the British Government. Governor Reid, writing to Lyons, described him, not without some exaggeration, as “a most violent man and, judging from his speeches in Council, ... very ill-affected towards our Government.”²² Added Reid, “the British Government ... should absolutely object (to him).”²³

However, while objecting to certain candidates, the British also pushed forward ecclesiastics of their own liking. In the mentioned meeting between Cardinal Antonelli and Lyons, the Cardinal informed him that “there was a member of the Chapter at Malta, whom the Pope said would be fitted for the office of Coadjutor.”²⁴ No name was made, but Lyons guessed, strange enough, it might be a reference to Canon Emmanuele Rosignaud, Rector of the University of Malta between 1834 and 1841. The British had backed the Canon on the occasion of the election of Bishop Sant. Yet to no avail. Lyons actually inquired no further, “I felt I should do the Canon no good by appearing too eager in his cause ... I am not without fears that Pope Pius IX has conceived some conscientious objection to appointing him, and in this case His Holiness would suffer almost any amount of inconvenience rather than consent to do so.”²⁵ In his letter to Reid, he further added: “As you well perceive, I doubt whether we can get Canon Rosignaud approved here, and am by no means certain that, in the present disposition of this Court, we can do as much for the present candidate, as we might have done ten years ago.”²⁶ Lyons was in fact quite sure that the Roman Curia’s “present disposition to assert, as far as practicable all over the world, the Church’s independence of the State, the nomination of the Civil Governments is, in the estimation of this Court, a very doubtful recommendation for a candidate for Ecclesiastical office.”²⁷ It must be made clear that the Canon the Pope had in mind was definitely not Rosignaud. Antonelli had in fact express orders to curtail recommendations on his behalf, if ever put forward by the British.²⁸ From the correspondence at the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, it seems that the Canon referred to was either the just mentioned Canon Amato or the Vicar [p.94] General Vincenzo Chapelle.²⁹

The second British reservation that the bishop should be Maltese – a point that favoured the local Church – was simply an affirmation of a policy that the British had adopted since the election of Bishop Ferdinando Mattei in 1807.³⁰

²² REID to Lyons, 22 Sep 1856, copy, 2r-v, ROM, *Letters* 1852-60.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2r.

²⁴ LYONS to the Marquis of Normanby, 13 Sep 1856, 3v, PRO, FD, 43/63.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4r.

²⁶ LYONS (confidential) to Reid, 17 Sep 1856, 2r, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

²⁷ LYONS to the Marquis of Normanby, 13 Sep 1856, 5r, PRO, FO 43/63.

²⁸ Cf AES, M III, 70/56 *passim*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Cf A.J. BALL (Civil Commissioner) to Lord Castlereagh (British Foreign Secretary), 6 Jan 1808, quoted by LAFERLA, *ibid.*, I, 59.

On the morrow of his discussion with Cardinal Antonelli, Lyons hastily sought information on the suggested candidate. For “it is comparatively easy to deal with the Court of Rome in Ecclesiastical matters before it has publicly committed itself; but after its sentiments have become publicly known, it is next to impossible to get it to consent to any change.”³¹ The candidate in question was Padre Pace, an Augustinian.

Gaetano Pace Forno

The Governor of Malta replied to Lyons on September 22. He confessed that he was “little acquainted with Padre Pace. I have occasionally met him, and I believe him to be a worthy man, much respected in Malta, and I have never heard his name mixed up in any way with parties or disputes. ... He has been much in Italy, but I believe he is a native of the island of Gozo.”³² He was indeed.

Gaetano Pace was born in Rabat Gozo on June 5, 1809, to the lawyer Francesco Pace and the Noble Lucia dei Baroni Forno, a Palermitan. During the French occupation, his father was the envoy of Gozo to the Palermitan Court, where he was sent by the Governor General of Gozo, the Archpriest of the Gozo Matrix Church Canon Saver Cassar. For the good services rendered there, King Ferdinand III of Sicily knighted him at the beginning of 1799.³³

Gaetano was baptised on the same day at the Matrix Church, the present Cathedral. After being educated by private tuition and with Augustinian Friars at Valletta, he joined the Order of the Hermits of Saint Augustine on July 20, 1824. He studied at Malta until 1830, when he was sent to Fermo, Italy, to finish his theological course. He was ordained priest at Naples on September 22, 1832. He taught in various convents throughout the Italian peninsula, except for a short period between 1841 and 1843. During this interval, he was Prefect of Studies at the Augustinian Convent, Rabat, Malta. On May 30, 1847, he was chosen Provincial of the Maltese Augustinian Province. On August 31 of the same year, he got the consent of the Augustinian Council to open a free college [p.95] for boys at the Valletta convent. The College was eventually opened on September 23, 1848. During the cholera outbreak between July-October 1850, he took all sorts of risks to comfort the dying. On December 11, 1854, he was chosen Provincial for a second term.³⁴ He still presided his College and his Order when he was suggested, without his knowledge, as a coadjutor ‘*cum futura successione*’ to the ailing Bishop Sant.

Who, one may ask, suggested his name for the coadjutorship? It was certainly not Bishop Sant. As the Vatican had not yet reached any agreement with him, he still had made no names. In fact he never suggested anyone. An affirmation to the contrary by Edith Dobbie in her book *Malta's Road to Independence* is pure fiction.³⁵ Unfounded also is her other assertion that Governor Reid had suggested someone else.³⁶ His name was neither put forward by the British Diplomacy: Padre Pace was completely foreign to them. Nor was he proposed by “the active ... agents of the Maltese Clergy and of other aspirants to the Bishopric of Malta”³⁷ that Lyons noticed at Rome. As already asserted, Padre Pace was in the dark on the

³¹ LYONS to the Marquis of Normanby, 13 Sep 1856, 4v, PRO, FO, 43/63.

³² REID (confidential) to Lyons, 22 Sep 1856, copy, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

³³ Cf Saver CASSAR (Governor-General) to King Ferdinand III, 21 Feb 1799, Archivio di Stato, Napoli, *Ministero Affari Esteri*, 4271, 31r.

³⁴ This information is based on A[rchivum] S[ecretum] V[aticanum], *Dataria Apostolica, Processi*, 219/13, 229r-239v.

³⁵ Cf E. DOBBIE, *Malta's Road to Independence*, Oklahoma 1967, 28.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ LYONS to Reid, 15 Oct 1856, 1r, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

proceedings. It has not been possible to determine with definite certainty who had in fact suggested him. However, there is little doubt that he had been recommended to the Vatican by the Vicar General of the Augustinian Order, Paolo Micallef, a Maltese hailing from Valletta. Micallef was very well known within the Roman Congregation; it was Pope Pius IX himself who had chosen him Vicar of the Order.³⁸ Several months later, it was Micallef who eventually summoned Pace to Rome for talks.

Concluding his confidential despatch to Lyons, the Governor of Malta declared: “Not only have I no objection to raise against his being appointed Coadjutor with succession, but as the Court of Rome objects to all the Canons, including Canon Rosignaud, I think the solution a good one.”³⁹ This decisive statement mirrors the grandeur and statesmanship of Governor Reid. Conscious that “the appointment of a Coadjutor could hardly be longer delayed on account of the great age of the bishop,”⁴⁰ he was against further prolongation of a situation that was detrimental to the spiritual well-being of the Maltese.

Lyons received the letter of Reid on September 29. “Aware of the inconvenience which might arise, if the Pope should select and adhere to an objectionable candidate, I thought it might be very desirable to confirm His Holiness on his choice of Padre Pace before intrigues could be brought to bear to produce [p.96] a change.”⁴¹ So he immediately telegraphed the opinion of the Governor of Malta to the Foreign Office in cypher. The approval of Her Majesty’s Government was telegraphed, also in cypher, to the British Minister in Florence, who in turn passed it to Lyons at Rome. The official reply was communicated verbally to Cardinal Antonelli on October 3.⁴²

Giacomo Cardinal Antonelli expressed his satisfaction at that positive communication and informed Lyons that he would acquaint the Pope with the British reply so that the preliminary steps might be taken.⁴³ On October 17, 1856, Antonelli referred the matter to the Pope, who instructed him to write to Bishop Sant and invite him to request a Coadjutor.⁴⁴ The bishop replied again that he would rather resign and eventually tendered his resignation in December.⁴⁵

Cardinal Antonelli again inquired Lyons if he “will take it for granted that the consent of Her Majesty’s Government ... includes their sanction to his (Pace) being created bishop at once.”⁴⁶ The great pains taken by the papal Secretary of State to inform the British of every step taken, show how much did the Pope cherish the increasingly good relations with the government of Queen Victoria. For even though Padre Pace had been suggested, from the beginning, as a coadjutor ‘*cum futura successione*,’ the Secretary of State did not think it superfluous to inform Lyons once more on the slightly altered situation.

Neither did Lyons, who again questioned the Foreign Office and the Governor. Notwithstanding all this, he noted sadly to the latter that, “unfortunately, the sentiments of the Court of Rome, both with respect to England, and to the voice to be allowed to the civil Governments in church matters, have undergone a great change.”⁴⁷ On December 16, the Colonial Office, to whom the Foreign Office had applied for a reply, sanctioned also the

³⁸ Cf ASV, DA, *Processi*. 225/12, 77r-89v.

³⁹ REID (confidential) to Lyons, 22 Sep. 1856, copy, 1v, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1r.

⁴¹ LYONS to Reid, 15 Oct. 1856, 1r. ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

⁴² Cf *ibid.*, 1v-2r.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2r-2v.

⁴⁴ Cf SECRETARY OF STATE to Sant, 18 Oct 1856, draft, AES, M III, 70/56.

⁴⁵ Cf SANT to Antonelli, 19 Dec 1856, AES, M. III, 70/56.

⁴⁶ LYONS (confidential) to Reid, 25 Nov. 1856, 1v-2r, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

⁴⁷ LYONS (confidential) to Reid, 11 Dec 1856, 2r-v, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

choice of Pace as bishop.⁴⁸ Meanwhile neither Padre Pace nor Bishop Sant had been informed of the choice.⁴⁹

‘Rights’ or ‘no rights’

The rapidity and facility with which Padre Pace had been approved, could [p.97] have easily led the Vatican Authorities to believe that the British were waiving their presumed rights of presentation to the Malta bishopric. Such fears were expressed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies by Governor Reid, who added: “I have been given to understand that the Maltese would very unwillingly see the British Government give up their rights of nominating the bishop in case the bishopric should become vacant by death. The same feeling would I suppose exist should the bishopric become vacant by resignation.”⁵⁰ The person who conferred with Reid supposedly on behalf of the other Maltese, could have been none other than the Crown Advocate. It is not far fetched to imagine that Adrian Dingli, then slowly but progressively rising in power, agitated the question to extend his authority even in ecclesiastical affairs.

Dingli seemingly succeeded through that mysterious power of telepathy to transmit his thoughts to Lyons hundreds of kilometres away. In fact, a few days afterwards, Lyons wrote to Reid on the same subject. “We shall of course never get the Court of Rome to admit in principle our right to nominate the bishop of Malta, or any other Roman Catholic bishop. But I suppose if things come to extremities, we should have effectual means of preventing a bishop intruded by the Pope without our consent from taking possession of the temporalities of the See, and from residing in the Island, or practically exercising Episcopal Jurisdiction there. If we could not come to an agreement with Rome respecting a candidate, our resources would be to follow the example of Emperor Nicholas who kept nearly all the Roman Catholic Sees of his Empire vacant during his reign, because the Pope would not appoint the persons he nominated. But, of course, it would be most painful and undesirable to let things go anything as far as this without an absolute necessity.”⁵¹

The reference is to Czar Nicholas I (1825-55) and the question of the vacant Sees during his reign is far more complicated than the passing reference by Lyons makes one believe. It is not to say too much that the Catholic Church was so integrated in the Russian state that it did not differ at all from any other state religion.

Lyons was compelled to such an assertion by his preoccupations that steadily increased as days became weeks and no announcement concerning Padre Pace was made. He began doubting seriously if, after all, the Pope had changed his mind. Meanwhile he had neither informed the Vatican of the second British approval. So on February 17, 1857, in an informal conversation with Cardinal Antonelli, he told him that “he should be aware that Her Majesty’s Government did not view the question of appointing a Coadjutor to the present bishop of Malta, and that of appointing a bishop in case the See being vacant, as identical. In the latter case Her Majesty’s Government considered that they [p.98] had certain rights which must not be lost sight of.”⁵² While informing him that the British have again approved Pace,

⁴⁸ Cf H. LABOUCHERE (Secretary of State for the Colonies) to the Earl of Clarendon (Foreign SS), 16 Dec 1856, PRO, FO, 43/63.

⁴⁹ Cf LYONS (confidential) to Reid, 31 Dec 1856, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

⁵⁰ Cf REID (confidential) to Labouchere, 6 Jan 1856, draft, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

⁵¹ LYONS (confidential) to Reid, 13 Jan 1857, 2r-v, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

⁵² LYONS (confidential) to Reid, 31 Dec 1856, 1v, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

he made it clear that “serious inconvenience might arise, if any attempt were made to fill up the See without due regard for the right claimed by Her Majesty’s Government.”⁵³

The Secretary of State told him straightaway that “there was no right of patronage in the case of the See of Malta, but that it would certainly be in conformity with the usual practice of the Court of Rome, to confer confidentially with Her Majesty’s Government, before proceeding to appoint a bishop.”⁵⁴ Antonelli also informed Lyons that as the bishop’s proffered resignation needed much consideration, no decision had as yet been taken.

Either on his own initiative, or after intimations by his superiors, Lyons was attempting to commit Antonelli to accept their claimed rights. Malta had become indispensable to the British, as the Crimean hostilities had lately shown. With this in mind Lyons wrote to the Marquis of Normanby, the British Minister in Florence: “It is manifestly extremely desirable for the promotion of good government and loyalty at Malta, that the nomination to the Bishopric and to other high offices in the Church should be secured to the British Authorities.”⁵⁵ Lyons was of the opinion that in the present circumstances they had two options. They could either limit themselves “to some formal statement, either verbal or written, that in giving our consent ... we do not in any way give up or weaken our own right to nominate; (or we could) enter into a question of principle with Rome, and positively refuse to recognise any bishop at all, unless our right of nomination be admitted.”⁵⁶ Lyons also suggested that the British should resort to drastic measures, not dissimilar to those practiced formerly in Russia, to claim that right.

These opinions were repeated in a letter to Governor Reid, who must have screwed up his face when he digested the contents. For on reading the second option, he noted in the margin: “This will never do here”; and in a further endorsement towards the end, he added: “Most important not to bring matters to this point.”⁵⁷

Lyons, however, seemed set to leave no stone unturned to achieve that right for his Queen. He paged through all the relative correspondence at his disposal from the times of Bishop Ferdinando Mattei,⁵⁸ inquired into the method of election of the last bishops of Malta,⁵⁹ examined similar cases in Prussia [p.99] and Russia,⁶⁰ queried the Marquis of Normanby for more information,⁶¹ induced Reid, through the Foreign Office, to prepare him a memorandum on such rights,⁶² sought news on the relative rights of the French Emperor,⁶³ and, finally, procured a “curious book (which) would have caused me to be well prepared had Our Government decided upon maintaining its presentation to the Patronage of the See.”⁶⁴

The Crown Advocate soon prepared a lengthy memorandum on the right of patronage to the Bishopric of Malta;⁶⁵ it was forwarded by the Governor to Lord Clarendon, the British Foreign Secretary. Adrian Dingli was of the opinion that the right of patronage formerly

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2r-v.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2v.

⁵⁵ LYONS to the Marquis of Normanby, 20 Feb 1857, 5v-6r, PRO, FO, 43/63.

⁵⁶ LYONS (confidential) to Reid, 18 Feb 1857, 7r-v, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

⁵⁷ Cf *Endorsement on ibid.*, 8r.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5v-6r.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6v.

⁶¹ Cf LYONS to the Marquis of Normanby, 20 Feb 1857 (13ff long), PRO, FO, 43/66.

⁶² Cf A. DINGLI, *Memorandum on the Right of Patronage*, 17 Mar 1857, PRO, FO, 43/66.

⁶³ Cf Earl COWLEY (British Ambassador Paris, 1852-67) to the Earl of Aberdeen (then at the FO), 24 May 1857, copy, ROM, *Ecclesiastical Despatches*, 691.

⁶⁴ LYONS to Reid, 20 May 1857, ROM, *Letters* (1852-60).

⁶⁵ For the original *Memorandum*, PRO, FO, 43/66.

belonging to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was transferred to the Crown of England in the fullest and clearest manner by the European Treaties of 1814-1815. Dingli, however, omitted a very important fact. He failed to show, in fact he could not, whether the right of patronage had been transferred to the British with the consent of Rome. As this was wanting, his arguments were null and void.

When Lyons received the memorandum and read it, he immediately noted such a fallacy in the Crown Advocate's arguments. Notwithstanding his eagerness to prove the British rights, Lyons admitted to the Marquis of Normanby that "the ecclesiastical law of the Roman Catholic Church is the only rule which the Court of Rome admits as applicable in such matters, I am not competent to give an opinion as to how far the conclusions of the Crown Advocate are in accordance with that Law; but I ought perhaps to say that I do not think that they would be admitted by the Court of Rome."⁶⁶

Anyway, the Palmerston Government was in no mood at that time to engage in disputes with Rome. Though both the Foreign Office and the Colonial office approved of Lyon's eagerness, he was informed "that Her Majesty's Government has no desire to claim the right of nomination either to the bishopric or to other ecclesiastical dignities in Malta, but that they will not in the slightest degree waive the right of veto upon appointments they may consider objectionable, (and that) they will not therefore be prepared to admit any person to enjoy the temporalities of Ecclesiastical appointments in Malta, whose nomination shall not have received their previous consent."⁶⁷ A note in this sense was transmitted from the Foreign office to Cardinal Antonelli on May [p.100] 16, 1857.⁶⁸ On May 29, Lyons had a discussion with the Cardinal. The papal Secretary of State repeated to him that "the Court of Rome, before appointing the Bishop, (would) communicate confidentially with Her Majesty's Government," however, he also pointed out to him that "the right of veto on appointments in general, so explicitly asserted in the Note, involved very important questions respecting the liberties of the Church."⁶⁹ Lyons answered that he simply wanted "to place on record this clear and unequivocal statement of their determination... (and) their earnest desire to avoid any difference or misunderstanding with the Court of Rome on the subject."⁷⁰ The question was settled at that.

The election of Pace and the establishment of the Diocese of Gozo

The question of these presumed rights of the British had in the meantime caused another local long-standing affair at the Vatican to be shelved. This concerned the petitions of the priests and the people of Gozo to establish a diocese on their island. Through a succession of circumstances, this affair soon got mixed up with that of the coadjutorship of Malta.

Towards the end of May, Cardinal Antonelli "requested the Superior of the (Augustinian) Order to find some pretext for summoning Pace to Rome without giving him any hint of there being an idea of appointing him Coadjutor or Bishop of Malta."⁷¹ "Padre Pace ... was personally very little known at Rome," Antonelli had confided to Lyons, and the Ecclesiastical Authorities there wanted "to judge whether he was fit to be bishop as had been represented."⁷²

⁶⁶ LYONS to the Marquis of Normanby, 24 Mar 1857, PRO, FO, 43/66.

⁶⁷ Lord CLARENDON to the Marquis of Normanby, 1 Apr 1857, PRO, FO, 43/66.

⁶⁸ Cf LYONS to Antonelli, 16 May 1857, copy, ROM, CO-Government, vol. 54, 262v.

⁶⁹ LYONS to the Marquis of Normanby, 1 Jun 1857, 1v, PRO, FO, 43/66.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2r.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3r.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2v.

Pace travelled to Rome in the beginning of July 1857 supposedly on matters of his Order. A coincidence, however, led some, perhaps even Pace himself, to presume that the visit concerned in fact the island of Gozo. Pace was an eminent son of Gozo and, as such, he was not only aware of the attempts of backstage promoters.

At Rome, the Acting-General of the Augustinian Order, Paolo Micallef, informed Pace Forno that he was wanted by the Papal Secretary of State. He also confided with Pace that the Gozitans had lately sought his aid in their attempts to erect a diocese. They even wanted to suggest him as their first bishop, but he had refused.⁷³ Padre Pace had no more doubts. He was certain that he had been summoned in connection with the bishopric of Gozo [p.101] and went to his appointment at the Vatican with this hatched idea.⁷⁴ On July 21, 1857, Pace Forno was received by the Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, Giovanni Battista Cannella. After discussing at length the religious situation in Malta and Gozo, Cannella informed him of the many reports concerning Bishop Sant's shortcomings as well as of the Gozitans' petitions. Cannella was thus able to ascertain himself of the true spiritual needs of the people of Malta and Gozo. Padre Pace confirmed the reports on the ailing bishop and, naturally enough, fully backed the Gozitan petitions; he even proposed either the election of an Auxiliary bishop for Gozo or the erection of that island into a separate See.⁷⁵ It was either towards the end of that meeting, or, more probably on a later date,⁷⁶ that Cannella made known to him the reason of his summons. He was being proposed as a Coadjutor to the bishop of Malta.⁷⁷

Pace Forno could hardly believe his ears. He certainly confided the news to Don Pietro Pace, a Gozitan priest studying and working in Rome and the main promoter of the Gozitan petitions for an independent diocese. Don Pietro wrote immediately to another Gozitan who was promoting the affair of Gozo, the Crown Advocate, Sir Adrian Dingli, and informed him of the latest developments. He shared with him his anxiety that the election of Pace Forno '*cum futura successione*' would wreck the Gozitan hopes. For the Gozitans had found out that the chief obstacle in the establishment of the Diocese proved to be the aversion of the Maltese Hierarchy. As little opposition was expected from a bishop ailing in bed, Don Pietro begged Dingli to intervene with the British Government so that the latter insist that the question of the coadjutorship of Malta and the erection of the Diocese of Gozo be settled simultaneously.⁷⁸

When the letter of Pace reached Dingli, the Governor was on leave in London. He could only communicate with him by a letter, in which he induced the Governor to press for a postponement of the affair. He promised him further explanations on his return to Malta.⁷⁹ The Governor understood the point and in a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, he suggested that "it (is) desirable that Mr. Lyons should be instructed to put an end to it."⁸⁰ Dingli sent a copy of his letter to Lyons, who at that time was substituting the British Minister in Florence.

⁷³ Cf F. XUEREB, *Bibliografija tar-Religjużi Agostinjani Maltin*. Malta 1976, 7-28.

⁷⁴ This is implied from a later letter of Pace Forno; cf footnote 76 below.

⁷⁵ Cf ANTONELLI to Pace Forno, 13 Mar 1858, draft, AES, M III, 92/610, 36r.

⁷⁶ Cf PACE FORNO to Antonelli, 19 Mar 1858, AES, M III, 92-60, 38r.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Further references in my forthcoming work referred to in the introductory note.

⁷⁸ Cf PACE to Dingli, written towards the end of August, quoted by A. MERCIECA, *Stato e Chiesa in Malta. Smembramento dalla Diocesi*, in *Archivum Melitense*, X/2 (1937) 26.

⁷⁹ Cf DINIGLI to Reid, 3 Sep 1857, quoted in REID to Labouchere, 11 Sep 1857, copy ROM, *Government-CO*. vol 8. 195-196.

⁸⁰ REID to Labouchere, 11 Sep 1857, *ibid.*

[p.102] Lyons acted instantaneously. From the information in one of his reports,⁸¹ one can almost picture, Lyons rushing around Florence in an attempt to comply with the wishes of Adrian Dingli. Early in the morning on September 15, a few hours after he had received the letter of the Crown Advocate, he went to discuss the matter with Alessandro Franchi, the Apostolic Internuncio in Florence. He begged him “remind Cardinal Antonelli of what had occurred in England in 1850, and to point out to His Eminence the great imprudence of any fresh attempt on the part of the Court of Rome to erect a bishopric with a Territorial Title in the Queen’s Dominions.”⁸² Lyons even begged permission from the Foreign Office to recur to Rome if he deemed it necessary. A few days later, on October 24, having received no communication from Franchi, he wrote to Antonelli “on the imprudence which, according to me, there might be, by the erection of a new Episcopal Title in the Queen’s Dominions without the favourable consent of Her Majesty’s Government.”⁸³ He also reminded him of his promise “that the Court will not take any measure relative to Crown Colonies, without previously conveying information to the Government of Her Majesty.”⁸⁴

Clearly enough, Lyons misunderstood the scope of Dingli’s letter.⁸⁵ He believed that he had to obstruct the election of an auxiliary bishop for Gozo or the erection of that island in a separate See to avoid an uproar similar to that which occurred in London after the re-establishment of the hierarchy on September 29, 1850. Antonelli denied all such plans to Lyons, not directly, but through Franchi and by word of mouth, for “for reasons which Your Grace can well understand, it is not convenient that I reply directly in writing.”⁸⁶ By doing so, Cardinal Antonelli would have given a diplomatic bearing to the representative of the British Government.”

Meanwhile, on September 23, 1857, the Secretary of the Segnatura Apostolica, Giovanni Ianni, conducted the *Dataria* process for the election of Padre Pace. The witnesses were Don Pietro Pace and Don Giuseppe Calamatta, the agent of the bishop of Malta in Rome. In the Consistory of September 25, 1857, Gaetano Pace Forno was created Auxiliary to the Bishop of Malta. He was consecrated bishop in Rome on October 4, and on December 3, he succeeded to the Malta Bishopric, for Sant, true to his word, resigned. The longings of the Gozitans seemed wrecked. And they would have been without the precious presence of Don Pietro Pace in Rome and the assiduous activity of Adrian Dingli in Malta. The interference of British Diplomacy in the election of Bishop Gaetano Pace Forno and, later on, in the Gozitan question, was certainly instrumental in hastening both affairs to a rapid conclusion.

⁸¹ Cf LYONS to the Earl of Clarendon, 15 Sep 1857, PRO, FO, 43/66.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4r.

⁸³ LYONS to Antonelli, 24 Oct 1857, AES, M III, 92/60, 25r.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 26r.

⁸⁵ Dingli himself, when he understood what had happened, noted that he had been misunderstood; Cf MERCIÉCA, *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸⁶ ANTONELLI to Franchi, 31 Oct 1857, draft, AES, M III, 92/60, 28r.