

## THE PADRE RYLLO AFFAIR FROM CONTEMPORARY JOURNALS

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When the steamer *Great Liverpool* (Capt. Cooper) arrived in Malta on October 23, 1841, she carried on board a Polish Jesuit by the name of Padre Maximilian Ryllo. He was to dominate the local scene for the next two years.

Padre Ryllo was the only Jesuit at the time in Malta. He had arrived from Syria, where he had devoted most of his missionary activity. His service had received the full approbation not only of the British Governor Commodore Sir Charles Napier, but also of the highest authorities in Great Britain. Sir Charles in his memoirs of the Syrian Campaign wrote in respect of Padre Ryllo: "After going over the ground, we partook of the hospitality of Padre Ryllo, at Bechfaya. He had been an officer in the Polish army, and, after witnessing the destruction of his country, became a priest, and took refuge in the mountains of Lebanon. He was a most useful and intelligent man; had a large correspondence through the country, and was most serviceable in procuring information. Besides the Padre, there were half a dozen more priests in the convent, French and Italians, who possessed great influence in the mountains and turned their attention to the education of the people".<sup>(1)</sup>

But Ryllo fell a victim to political strains in Syria between Britain and France, so that he had to leave that country. Under these circumstances, Fr. Ryllo came to Malta.

He took up residence at the seminary of *San Calcidonio* in Floriana. Education in Malta was said to be at a very low ebb, and Protestant influence was felt in many directions, so that Padre Ryllo set himself to preach and instruct with his accustomed zeal and assiduity.

A surviving link with Fr. Maximilian Ryllo is the Catechism Institute which was founded by him in the church of St. James in Valletta. It was originally known as *Pia Opera della Dottrina Cristiana* and at one time had its seat at the oratory of the Immaculate Conception of the Jesuits' church also in Valletta. The Institute was permanently transferred to the church of St. James in December 1840. This Institute was the first of its kind in Malta for the teaching of Catholic Catechism and Catholic education and dates back to 1839, being founded by Padre Ryllo during a previous visit to Malta.<sup>(2)</sup>

Padre Ryllo was a prolific preacher: he delivered an average of two sermons a day on varying subjects dealing with the morality of private life and the principles governing the relations between Religion and public duties.

1. As quoted in the *Malta Times* of 31.8.1842.  
2. *Lehen is-Sewwa* - 24.6.1950.

However, it should be mentioned that the arrival of Padre Ryllo was heralded by various rumours, among others, that Padre Ryllo's main purpose in Malta was the setting up of a school or college.

Fr. Ryllo, who was known for his learned eloquence, was scheduled to give a series of lectures at the Jesuits' church. The lectures were to be held on Sundays and were to deal with theology, social, metaphysical and moral topics, and included such themes as the compatibility of the Catholic Religion with the individual and communal welfare, the origin of society (its aim, organisation, rights and obligations), revelation, public cult, religious and scientific instruction within the society set-up.

The Padre delivered his lectures to a large audience which included members of the clergy, legal and medical professions and leading citizens. The speaker was applauded for the manner he expounded his theses compatible with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

In one such sermon the Padre discussed the question as to the resistance which might be offered to a government by its oppressed subjects. He treated the thesis on an abstract and purely speculative level. The speaker in the course of his lecture discussed the basic principles relating to the individual and the government, and was quoted as referring "to the resistance which might be offered to the governing authorities by the governed in the case of grievous oppression".<sup>(3)</sup>

It would seem that that distinguished audience would vouch for the preacher's integrity, clarity and correctness: no doctrine or proposition contrary or in conflict to the dominant Religion in Malta (the Catholic Religion), to the evangelical morals, to the laws of the country and to public good order was noted. No objection of any sort was raised by the audience.

But this notwithstanding, Padre Ryllo was accused by hostile quarters "of using seditious language in the pulpit".<sup>(4)</sup> The same circles also complained that the subjects chosen for discussion were "perhaps more fitted for the *cathedra* of the University than the pulpit".<sup>(5)</sup>

Others even quoted the Padre as having allegedly said, whether Malta should always be subject to the British power! As if there were some private machinations of disloyalty, anti-clerical quarters accused the Jesuits, with Padre Ryllo as their ring leader, of concocting a revolt and of leading the Maltese to anarchy and revolt against the British so as to set up a government sympathetic to the Russians or the French! Anti-Catholic quarters advanced the most ridiculous accusations against the Rev. Padre.

It soon became obvious that such ideas were being propagated by foreigners, namely by foreign refugees. In fact, those accusations were being circulated mainly by *Il Mediterraneo*,<sup>(6)</sup> a local paper which indulged in harsh diatribes against the clergy in general and the Jesuits in particular, and aired the views and opinions of

3. *Malta Times* - 20.4.1842.

4. *Malta Times* - 20.4.1842.

5. *Malta Times* - 20.4.1842.

6. *Il Mediterraneo* commenced publication in 1838 and continued up to 1871. It was edited by Carlo Cicognani Cappelli and Tommaso Zauli Sajani, a refugee from Forli. Text in Italian and English.

the intellectual Italian refugees.<sup>(7)</sup> It was an open secret that *Il Mediterraneo* in particular ventilated the views of "strangers" and not of Maltese citizens in the controversy. For this reason it was considered most unfair to have a stranger's paper in Malta discharging such seditious rumours amidst the local population.<sup>(8)</sup>

To most of the local newspapers and to public opinion in general that allegation against Padre Ryllo did not constitute in itself an offence, and especially the more so since the allegation was considered a foul calumny penned by those who wanted to perpetuate a base dastardly and wilful falsehood.<sup>(9)</sup>

However, the Ryllo Affair was climaxed with the suspension of the Rev. Padre from preaching. The suspension gave rise to a variety of conjectures as to why such drastic action was taken. At first, one was led to believe that the suspension of Padre Ryllo was the result of "some intrigue of the Maltese priests, who are alarmed at seeing a man wiser than themselves becoming popular amongst the people, and that the padre's eloquence was punished and not his mischief".<sup>(10)</sup> On the other hand, Padre Ryllo was allegedly blamed for his imprudence "in provoking discussions of a political nature, which the people in their backward state of intelligence are not able to appreciate".<sup>(11)</sup>

Sadly enough, "the most odious and industriously propagated calumnies"<sup>(12)</sup> led to the more serious charge, namely that the Padre stood out "as the preacher of sedition, as a wanton disturber of the public peace, and as an enemy of that Government whose protection he boasts".<sup>(13)</sup> To stigmatize any person with being an organ of sedition would in itself be a very serious accusation, and in this particular instance, it was the more serious since the charge was directed "against a preacher of the Kingdom of peace and righteousness".<sup>(14)</sup>

The clergy of Malta unanimously condemned in strong terms "the cruel persecution"<sup>(15)</sup> concocted against the Jesuit Ryllo.

The cause for the Maltese clergy in defence of Padre Ryllo was eloquently and authoritatively voiced by a letter which Monsignor Annetto Casolani, Precentor of the Cathedral Church of Malta,<sup>(16)</sup> published in *The True Tablet* of London.

*Inter alia* it was written in that letter, which the eminent prelate addressed to Lord Clifford, himself a prominent Catholic:

"I take the liberty of addressing you, without ever having had before the honour of being regularly introduced to your Lordship, confiding in the interest you take on

7. *Il Mediterraneo* - 7.3.1842, and subsequent issues.

8. "Ci dispiace di vedere uno straniero (che d'altronde sentiamo di essere dotato di ottime qualità) così vilipeso nel nostro paese. Buon per noi che la penna che lo carica di sì vergognose ingiurie non è penna maltese" - *Portafoglio Maltese* - 2.5.1842).

9. *Malta Times* - 20.4.1842.

10. *Malta Times* - 10.3.1842.

11. *Malta Times* - Ibidem.

12. *Malta Times* - 20.4.1842.

13. *Malta Times* - Ibidem.

14. *Malta Times* - Ibidem.

15. *Malta Times* - Ibidem.

16. Mgr. Casolani was described by *The True Tablet* (18.6.1842) as "an able and zealous minister of religion".

every subject that directly or indirectly affects Catholic interests in any part of the empire. My conscience would, for all my life-time, certainly blame my conduct, were I not to speak and show to those who are our natural advocates, the grievances to which the Catholic Church, of whom I am unworthy and one of the chief members of its Chapter in Malta, is subjected to by a government, cloaked under the specious name of Liberal. . .

“Besides the sectarians we have another enemy much more dangerous, namely, the *Rifugiati Italiani*, who are, generally speaking, the worse and most pernicious class in Malta; they introduce themselves everywhere as unfortunate persons, martyrs of liberty, etc., and in reality nothing but infidels, and the most immoral people in the world. With tears in my eyes, I confess that these persons have done a great deal of harm in the minds of the Maltese youth, especially by the means of the University, in which they have some influence. . . This being the state of Malta, many were obliged to send their children abroad for a Christian and literary education, the University itself being quite a failure, even in its literary fame. To avoid this, many respectable Maltese thought it very convenient to establish, by private funds, a college, to enable by its means, the Maltese youth to obtain a Christian, scientific, and literary education, at present only obtainable by the rich. They determined to call, by the consent of their superior, British Jesuits for instructions and Directors of the establishment. They intended, at the same time, to make them have a *convitto*, on the same principles of the one at Stonyhurst. . .

“A determination like this of an entire population frightened the rector and professors of the University; they knew very well that if once this plan was realized the University might be closed; they therefore conspired against it, in union with the *Italiani Rifugiati* and Protestant Missionaries, not being able to form any part amongst the people. Our government, ever ready to strike a blow to Catholicism, gave them their support, and the governor even threatened, that as long as he would stay in Malta, he would not allow any Jesuit to preach or teach. Not content with the threat, he ordered the archbishop (in his 85th year) to suspend Padre Ryllo of oriental notoriety, to preach any more in churches; under the pretext that this venerable father, in the course of some lectures, he was delivering at the church of the Gesu, on the connexion of Natural Philosophy with Revealed Religion, he declared himself favourable to the opinion of the sovereignty of the people. No measure could be more unpopular, for Ryllo was a great favourite with the Maltese; besides his personal merits, they consider him as the representative of a society expelled, against their father's will, from this island, by one of the most arbitrary acts of the despotic government of the knights of St. John. They consider his presence in Malta as a happy omen of the Jesuits soon coming to take the management of the establishment for instructing the Maltese youth. Government not content with this, gave another blow, by refusing to give to the promoters of the college the *Albergo dei Cavalieri Italiani* (property of the Crown), on lease, whilst the *Albergo d'Almagna* was given in property to Queen Adelaide,<sup>(17)</sup> for building on

17. The Auberge d'Allemagne was demolished in 1838–39 and the Anglican Collegiate church of St. Paul, subsequently raised to the rank of Cathedral was built on the site. The foundation stone of this church was laid by Queen Dowager Adelaide on March 20, 1839.



*Photograph of P. Massimiliano Ryllo S.J. found in the vestry of St James Church, Valletta.*

*(Reproduced by kind permission of the Maltese Jesuit Province)*

its site a church for the members of the established church by law in England and Ireland (but not in Malta) about 100 in number in these islands, and not Maltese, to whom that building appertained as national property.

“I wish you, my Lord, to consider if it is legal for a governor to prohibit British subjects to choose wherever they like religious and literary instructors? If it is lawful for him to interfere with the archbishop’s authority in regard to the clergymen that are to preach in churches that are under His Grace’s jurisdiction? If it is lawful for him to suspend Jesuits, even if they are British subjects (your Lordship’s honourable brother included) from preaching or teaching in one of Her Majesty’s colonies? If it is lawful to refuse to grant on lease part of the crown property, without any detriment to the revenue, only because it would be used for an establishment under the direction of Jesuits? If acts such as these are lawful in a colony, I have nothing else, my Lord, to say, I shall in that case endeavour to persuade my countrymen to submit to the will of God.”

That letter by Mgr. Casolani was followed by others in the English Press written by leading Maltese citizens.

It was common knowledge that the diocesan archbishop, Mgr. Francesco Saverio Caruana, was instigated to withdraw the permission to Padre Ryllo to preach under pressure put on His Grace by the civil government. The Padre was either at fault in the carrying out of his duties – in which case it was incumbent on the Bishop to suspend him from furthering preaching, without waiting for instructions from the civil government – or what the Padre had preached was not censorable and therefore compatible with the teaching of Mother Church – in which case one wondered how the government thought it fit to get involved in the matter, as this would have been purely a case for the ecclesiastical authorities. In the latter instance, the interference and involvement of the government in the affair was considered to have been a flagrant act of arrogance, so that one would have preferred that the incident should not have happened at all. . .! Apparently, the government was ill-advised.

Others alleged that in his lectures the orator touched on political matters, and according to the same sources, these lectures contained wrong concepts – a fact which would have justified the government to get involved. But such judgement should have been left wholly to the audience to say so.

On the other hand, it is true to say that at the time the Island was flooded with subversive literature from foreign sources and with anti-Catholic propaganda fomented by Protestant and sectarian societies. Yet in all instances the government did not feel the need to censor this type of press, perhaps because it was considered that the State had no right to intrude on private conscience and opinion. On this point the government was being criticized for its non-interference and absolute aloofness – consequently indirectly manifesting its tacit consent – whenever others propagated ideas, contrary to the dominant religion (i.e. the Catholic Religion) of the Maltese inhabitants. It was generally felt that the Governor, Sir Henry Bouverie (1836 – 1843), himself a Protestant, gave vent to sectarian interests and did not deal with the matter objectively.<sup>(18)</sup>

18. *Portafoglio Maltese* – 7.3.1842.

The result of the controversy was in any case that Padre Ryllo was "un-ceremoniously and arbitrarily suspended".<sup>(19)</sup>

The second aspect of the Ryllo Affair was the question of establishing a new school or college in Malta to be run mainly by the Jesuits.

From the outset the question of establishing a rival to the University was received with mixed feelings and occasioned contrasting opinions.

The project of setting up a college was indeed the result of an initiative of those parents who felt the need to provide their children with a Catholic education. Many Maltese were dissatisfied with the manner in which the University was being conducted, so that they proposed the setting up of a new college independent of the University. And Padre Ryllo was in no way directly connected with the establishment of such a college. Only in the event that the proposed college should materialize, the promoters asked Padre Ryllo to be on its teaching staff. As soon as it was known that such a request had been made, some of the University party – prominent amongst them were Italian refugees – took exception to the idea.

The opponents to the project, on the other hand, argued that the opening of a new college was dangerous, and, at the same time, unnecessary and unasked for. It was dangerous because most of the tutors were going to be Jesuits, who, on the pretext of opening a new school, were going to establish themselves in Malta. Moreover, the type of instruction desired was not that which the Jesuits could provide. . .!<sup>(20)</sup>

It would seem that all those objections to the plan were based on a wrong premise: it was not intended to limit the teaching staff strictly and solely to Jesuits; in fact, it was desirable and intended to engage suitable local lay teachers, and, if the need arose, foreign tutors. As *Il Portafoglio Maltese* (a local paper friendly to the Jesuits) put it in an editorial comment: ". . . ci è al momento indispensabile (e ci si permetta l'espressione) un nuovo assortimento d'idee, se vogliam cavarci dall'arretramento in cui ci troviamo. Bisogna aver il coraggio di credere e far credere ad altri questa verità; l'illudersi è una fanciullaggine, è una colpa".<sup>(21)</sup>

The presence of Padre Ryllo in the matter continued to provoke a barrage of letters from leading personalities in the local and British Press mainly in favour of the project of the opening of a new school in Malta.

At the time the Rector of the University in Malta was Fr. Thaddeus O'Malley, a Catholic priest, who advocated a latitudinarian system of education. This meant in practice that his notion of religious education in schools was one which included the teaching of "the morality of all religions and the religion of all sects"<sup>(22)</sup> – no definite religion or morality of any kind.

O'Malley was not a person popular with the majority of the Maltese. Before coming to Malta to take up his post of Rector of the University, O'Malley vehemently attacked in the British Press Archbishop MacHale in a controversy relating to the national system of education in Britain. O'Malley was, in fact, severely censured by

19. *Malta Times* – 31.5.1842.

20. *Portafoglio Maltese* – 14.3.1842.

21. *Portafoglio Maltese* – 14.3.1842.

22. *Malta Times* – 15.7.1842.

the Vatican for his writings on that occasion, as a result of which he was compelled to leave Ireland. Subsequently, he went to Belgium where he experienced a similar fate. On the same issue he opposed the Catholic clergy in France, Russia, and Holland, where a more Catholic method of instruction was desired.

At this point significant is the letter which the illustrious statesman and parliamentarian Lord Clifford wrote in the *Malta Times* (which paper though of Protestant inspiration stood in defence of Padre Ryllo); in this letter he puts the question of setting up a new college in Malta in its right perspective and discusses objectively the circumstances which led to the project:

"The public preacher or writer who brings the moral influence of Christianity in aid of social improvement to the authority of the State or in aid of Public Liberty to the rights of the subjects of any throne, is entitled to the support of every true lover of mankind; and in this sense I consider Padre Ryllo and the Editor of the *Malta Times* as fellow-labourers in the same vineyard, fellow-soldiers in the same camp. . .

"He (O'Malley) introduced as professors in the University some of the Italian refugees, who *called themselves* indeed Catholics, but were not considered to be such at Rome, where the appointment, by the British Government, of the present Rector, could not be expected to be looked upon with a favourable eye. . . The objections raised to the preaching or lectures of Padre Ryllo, were utterly insincere on the part of those who were loudest in making them. Some of them are absolute falsehoods; others are frivolous or capitious. . . The real sin of Padre Ryllo, in the eyes of the University party, is, that he is a man of very superior intelligence and of a very liberal and independent mind, though thoroughly attached to his Faith and Church, both of which the Italian refugees, attached to the University party, most cordially hate; and they did not wish such a character to be enlisted in the *opposition college*".<sup>(23)</sup>

On the background of this state of things in Malta at the time, and especially to counterbalance the hands into which public education was made over by the Whig Government, Catholic opinion and clergy members came forward to rescue education from such a gripe; it was intended to give the Catholics of Malta an opportunity of having adequate instruction for their children, without having them tainted by sham Catholicism and spurious liberality.

And Father Ryllo was one of the zealous members from among the clergy involved in the matter. He had the advantage of being a man of distinguished intellectual acumen, ability and learning, a great favourite with the Maltese.

All rival forces – atheists, Protestants, refugees, University men – rallied together in an effort to discredit Father Ryllo. Accordingly, they found a pretext towards their aim by raising a cry against the Reverend Padre's sermons which culminated in his interdiction as a preacher.

Apart from the suspension of Padre Ryllo from preachig, his staunch enemies further advocated his immediate expulsion from the Island. The foreign instigators

23. *Malta Times* – 5.7.1842.



of this suggestion endeavoured to implicate not only lay citizens but also members of the clergy.

The whole affair in all its aspects is summed up in a letter which Padre Massimiliano Ryllo, the person directly concerned, wrote to Lord Clifford.

“... The general wish of this colony was to have a college (*convitto*) where scholars board and lodge in the house of Jesuits, for the education of families in easy circumstances in this Island... The Italian refugees and certain jealous and interested persons, particularly the sector of the University, fearful of a competition, determined upon opposing the scheme. They founded a pretence upon my preaching. From the 14th November (1841) to the 3rd March (1842) I have preached 200 times, and with the exception of only eight sermons, the argument of all was the morality of the Gospel applied to the wants of private life.

The eight sermons were discourses upon the harmony of the Catholic Religion with the public good of society, as well as with the private welfare of individuals... Well, on the 3rd March the Bishop sent for me, and informed me that, by order of the Government he was obliged to suspend me. I received the sentence with resignation, although given without any trial, and without any previous admonition”.<sup>(24)</sup>

The Padre's irritation with the whole incident is obvious from this letter. Ryllo felt sad at being misinterpreted: a fact which made him use at times strong words in submitting his case to Lord Clifford.

That letter by Padre Ryllo was soon followed by yet a second letter from the same pen of Padre Ryllo, who explained further the events of the whole affair. And like the preceding one, the letter was addressed to Lord Clifford. The many letters, including those of Padre Ryllo, and particularly one from Lord Clifford, who had a personal acquaintance of Padre Ryllo, continued to arouse public interest in the controversy.

The protests against the decision for the suspension of Padre Ryllo from preaching included an address signed by some 1170 inhabitants of Malta, whose signatures were procured in the short space of four days. The petition was duly presented to Governor Bouverie.

In its English translation, the petition read:

“We, Her Majesty's most faithful subjects having heard that some few individuals connected with that pernicious paper, the *Mediterraneo*, have endeavoured to deceive Your Excellency's just mind and to induce you to have recourse to strong measures against Father Ryllo, a most worthy missionary-apostolic in this colony, and having, moreover, understood that as their ordinary intrigues have failed, they have gone so far as to solicit names to an address in order to try to mislead also, if possible, the clear mind of the noble lord, the Minister for the colonial department, we deem it our positive duty to make the following true statement:

24. *Malta Times* – 20.5.1842.

“1st. – That the *Mediterraneo* – a calumnious and mendacious journal – is not the organ of the honest and loyal Maltese in the affair of Padre Ryllo.

“2nd. – That Father Ryllo, so far from being the character he is therein described to be, is a man who deservedly enjoys the esteem of ourselves as well as of all the most distinguished personages of the Island, and that he has always edified us as much by his private conduct as by his public preaching.

“We trust, therefore, that Your Excellency, repudiating the calumnious measures of a few individuals, will deign in your justice to second the common desire of all by removing the existing obstacles to his preaching, and by making known this our prayer to the colonial Minister.”

An attempt was made by *Il Mediterraneo* to produce a counter-protest. But it met with no encouragement. In fact, in *Il Mediterraneo* was published a protest supported by a long list of names of inhabitants from Cospicua criticizing that petition submitted in favour and in defence of Padre Ryllo. However, it so transpired that the protest of *Il Mediterraneo* was false and wholly fictitious, and proved to be a complete hoax and the machination of imposters and foreign refugees!<sup>(25)</sup>

The people of Cospicua particularly took exception to being involved in that false protest drawn up behind their backs and in their name.

The Cospicuans energetically expressed and manifested their condemnation of the misdoings of *Il Mediterraneo* by means of a declaration signed by more than 90 Cospicuans, including leading citizens of Cospicua.

“Noi sottoscritti animati dallo spirito di svelare unicamente la verità e ad oggetto di togliere qualunque abuso, che da qualche tempo s’è sfacciatamente introdotto da alcuni due o tre individui che non sono già nativi di questa nostra Città (Cospicua), di inserire articoli o lettere nei pubblici fogli a nome di noi Cospicucani senza veruna nostra partecipazione e consenso; solennemente dichiariamo che tutte quelle lettere inserite nel supplemento No. 199 e nei Nri. 202 e 203 del *Mediterraneo* e segnate con nomi ideali finti e falsi di alcuni abitanti della Cospicua, non sono affatto di nostra pertinenza, e commissione, e ci protestiamo essere tutto il loro narrato falso e contrario alla nostra comune opinione e volontà”.<sup>(26)</sup>

\* \* \*

Tempers eventually calmed down, so that time was ripe for reflection.

The petition, which was submitted to Governor Bouverie on Thursday, May 26, 1842, and which sought the reinstatement of the Reverend Padre, was signed by “some of the most respectable of the inhabitants of Malta”.<sup>(27)</sup> It was clear that Padre Ryllo in this affair had the support of the greater number “of the most enlightened Maltese in the Island”.<sup>(28)</sup>

It seems that that petition had the desired result, because on Saturday, August 12, 1843, it was made public that Fr. Maximilian Ryllo was reintegrated and was at liberty to resume his preaching.<sup>(29)</sup>

25. *Malta Times* – 15.7.1842.

26. *Malta Times* – 15.7.1842.

27. *Malta Times* – 31.5.1842.

28. *Malta Times* – Ibidem.

29. *Malta Mail* – 18.8.1843.

Indeed, Padre Ryllo soon resumed his spiritual activity. One may say, in concluding, that the moral harm or injury which the whole controversy – described as “an act which was one of religious oppression”<sup>(30)</sup> may have caused to the Rev. Padre, was partially counterbalanced by arousing public conscience and alertness and bringing to the foreground the state of education on the Island.

One of the last public functions of Padre Ryllo was the administering of the Sacrament of Baptism at Cospicua. On August 29, 1843, at 5 o'clock in the afternoon the Rev. Padre arrived at Cospicua. At the invitation and on behalf of the parish priest of that parish, Fr. Ryllo, assisted by Dr. Don Giuseppe Schembri, baptized the daughter of Signor Michele Albanese. The child was given the name of Massimiliana to recall the Padre Gesuita. As his last public function Padre Ryllo delivered a panegyric on the occasion of the feast of the Holy Cross (*Santa Invenzione delle Croce*).<sup>(30a)</sup>

The Ryllo Affair definitely came to an end as Padre Massimiliano Ryllo left Malta for Syracuse on board the Neapolitan *speronara* “*Verginella*” on September 1, 1843.

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The eminent prelate Can. Mgr. Annetto Casolani, who as mentioned above, had written in defence of Padre Ryllo, was asked by the Congregation of the *Propaganda Fide* in Rome to lead a mission in Central Africa for the purpose of establishing a Catholic mission “before Islam could extend its hold”<sup>(31)</sup> to those regions. Mgr. Casolani requested the cooperation of the Jesuit Fathers in this enterprise. However, the Jesuit General in Rome, Fr. Roothaan, opposed the project, and proposed instead a preliminary exploration of the African region by Mgr. Casolani, who was to be accompanied by Fr. Ryllo.

In January 1846 the *Propaganda Fide* appointed Mgr. Casolani, Fr. Ryllo, Fr. Ignatz Knoblecher and Fr. W. Rhuntheler to lead that mission. But that same year Fr. Ryllo had left for Syria in order to establish the nuns of St. Joseph in Beirut.<sup>(32)</sup> It was planned that Mgr. Casolani, who had earlier that year been consecrated titular Bishop of Mauricastro *in partibus infidelium*, should meet Fr. Ryllo in Alexandria. Subsequently, Fr. Ryllo on orders from his superiors took over the leadership of that expedition.

The mission started in earnest in mid 1847, although the journey up the Nile was delayed for some time in Cairo as Fr. Ryllo suffered from dysentery. In February 1848 the mission reached Khartoum.

Fr. Ryllo drafted a long report in French on that mission and sent it to the central council of the Congregation of Propaganda of Lyons. The report sent from Khartoum bears the date: 10 April 1843.<sup>(33)</sup> Whilst that report was on its way to Lyons, Fr. Maximilian Ryllo succumbed to an illness in June of that year.<sup>(34)</sup> Before he died

30. *The True Tablet* – 18.6.1842.

30a. *Malta Mail*, 1.9.1843.

31. *Heritage*, No. 26, p. 507.

32. *Heritage*, Ibidem.

33. Mizzi, Padre Angelo, ofm.Cap.: *L'Apostolato Maltese*, Vol. 2, p. 30.

34. Strangely enough, in February of that year (1848) the *Malta Times* (22.2.1848) had already announced the “untimely” death of Fr. Ryllo in Abyssinia!

Fr. Ryllo recommended to Mgr. Casolani to return to Rome and report on the success of that mission and to request more missionaries.

On Friday, August 25, 1848, a public funeral service for the repose of the soul of Padre Ryllo was held at the Jesuits' church in Valletta, when the church was hung in black.<sup>(35)</sup>

The well-known Maltese epigraphist, Dr. Don Giuseppe Zammit composed the following inscription which was hung on the main door of the church:

Stanislao Maximiliano Ryllo S.I.  
Nobilissima Polonorum Familia  
Qui Pietate Doctrina Animi Ingenuitate Vniuersalem  
Existimationem Sibi Conciliavit Melitensium Amantissimvs  
Collegium S. Pavli In Vrbe Notabili Inchoavit Perfecit  
Varias Nationes Sacris Expeditionibus Illvstravit  
Animabus Lvcrandis Cvpidissime Inhians Christiano Nomini  
Propagando Remotissimas Infidelium Regiones Peracrauit  
Laboribus Supra Modum Qvam Cuique Credibile Est  
Immanibus Confectus Pie Obiit Khartum in Africa  
Penitissima XV Kal. Ivlis An. MDCCCXLVIII Aetatis  
Svae An. XLVI Religiosae Professionis An. XXVIII  
Melitenses Amici  
Sacerdoti Spectatissimo Oratori Eximio  
Viro Incomparabili De Se Optime Merito  
Cvm Lacrimis Parentant.<sup>(36)</sup>

35. The *Malta Mail* of 1st September 1848 took exception of that event and textually commented: "... Considering he (Fr. Ryllo) was ordered to quit the Island for seditious preaching, we cannot but consider the compliment paid to his memory as an insult to the Government notwithstanding that several of the Government employees were present."

36. Zammit, Joseph, *Carmina et Inscriptiones*, Pars. 11, p. 58.