

Brother Louis Camilleri FSC – a legacy to be remembered

FABIAN MANGION

Some think that sanctity is to close your eyes and to look like a holy icon. No! Sanctity is something greater. Indeed, it is precisely in living with love and offering one's own Christian witness in everyday affairs that we are called to become saints. This is the call that Bro. Louis Camilleri heard, welcomed and lived throughout his life.

Before he undertook his religious vows his first name was Antonio. He was born on August 31, 1923, in Żurrieq, the second child of Emanuele Camilleri and Caterina Cachia.

After being educated at the Żurrieq government school, at the age of 11 he proceeded to Tarxien secondary school. A year later, in 1935, he went to the school at 96, Strada Buongiorno, Cospicua, run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools, known in Malta as the Frères. At this stage his intention was to work at the dockyard.

One day, after he visited the chapel of the Brothers, he approached Bro. William Tabone FSC and shared with him the wish to become a Brother. He was prepared by Bro. Michael Buttigieg FSC, and a few months later was left for France, since the institute of Frères in Malta formed part of the province of Avignon.

Antonio left Malta on the liner *Knight of Malta*, together with Angelo Farrugia, also from Żurrieq. Accompanied by Bro. Walter

Joseph Borg Coster FSC, who was in charge of vocations, they stopped in Marseille. After some days, on September 7, 1938, they left for Notre Dame de Sept Douleurs Juniorate in Avignon.

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World War II broke out on September 3, 1939. At the time, there were 12 Maltese aspirants studying to become Brothers. Due to the war, eight decided to return to Malta fearing estrangement from their families, four others decided to continue with their formation. Antonio was among them.

After his postulate, on October 16, 1940, he started the novitiate in Pibrac, in

Toulouse province. In August 1941, he took his annual vows, and on November 9, 1941, he started the scholasticate at the Lasallian Institute of St Maurice L'Exile.

In November 1942, at the peak of World War II, the Vichy regime was occupied by the Nazis. Nevertheless, Theodulpe Louis, as he was named after taking his vows, was determined to continue his studies at the Lasallian Institute.

Given these circumstances, together with Bro. Norbert, Bro. Louis fled, with a false identity card, to the south of Caluire, in Lyons. Without considering the risks involved, they boarded on a train filled with German soldiers. Fortunately, none of the passengers on the trip was asked to submit any documentation. There they continued with their formation.

During his last year in France, Bro. Louis was asked to teach in Beziers. After the Armistice, the Maltese Brothers asked to be allowed to visit their families in Malta. Bro. Louis returned, supposedly for two weeks. But Archbishop of Malta Mgr Michael Gonzi persuaded Bro. Louis to stay in Malta rather than go to a mission in Tunisia.

In 1945, Bro. Louis began teaching Geography, Religion and languages at De La Salle College, Vittoriosa. This was the beginning of long and fruitful commitment to academic and Christian formation among thousands of local and

foreign students in the schools run by the Frères in Malta.

Bro. Louis undertook his final vows on March 28, 1948. The Brothers, as religious, embrace the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. In addition, they take a vow to remain with the Brothers who are committed to run schools for the service of the poor, to go wherever they are sent and to do whatever they are assigned by their superiors. As if this was not enough, Bro. Louis wished to embrace another vow, namely that of “offering himself as victim to the merciful love of God”. He undertook this vow on February 2, 1966.

Bro. Louis' principal contribution was as a teacher in the apprenticeship courses for the Dockyard, which, over time, became renowned and made the college popular and successful. These courses offered boundless help to many people aspiring to take up a career at the Dockyard.

At the beginning of the 1968-69 school year, Bro. Louis was appointed director of De La Salle College. This coincided with the 30th anniversary of the relocation of the college from



Antonio Camilleri, 14, wearing the badge of the Society of Christian Doctrine. (Photo taken from his passport application found at the National Archives, Rabat.)



Antonio Camilleri (second from left) with Bro. Walter Coster FSC prior to leaving for France in May 1939. First from left is Jean Pace (Bro. Joseph). Third and fourth from left are Angelo Farrugia (Bro. Norbert) and Antonio Galea (Bro. Edward).



Bro. Louis together with his parents Emmanuel and Caterina and his 10 brothers and sisters.



Bro. Louis together with students from De La Salle College (from left) Luke Frendo, Alan Borg, Andrea Paul Mangion and Jean Gove.

Cospicua to Tal-Hawli, Vittoriosa. The Brothers' community was made up of 14 members. At the time there were 567 students at the school, which reached 875 by 1971. They were allocated to 30 classes and taught by 29 teachers. By then, the college had become renowned for the boarders, who came from 20 different countries.

In July 1971, Bro. Louis was asked to become director of Stella Maris College, Gzira. In September 1974, he organised and supervised the Sixth Form course there. Between 1981 and 1983, he was appointed director of the novitiate of the Brothers in Mellieha.

Throughout his life he encouraged both colleges to upgrade and transform themselves for the benefit of their students. He was instrumental in the introduction of new topics such as Technical Design and the study of technology. Indeed, in the arena of education, the Brothers always kept themselves abreast of innovations.

In the early 1980s, Bro. Louis was elected to occupy the office of provincial. In this role, he joined the Council of Maltese Religious Superiors. In this council, he served the post of secretary between 1984 and 1987. Fr Paul Cremona OP, then provincial of the Maltese Dominican province and now Archbishop Emeritus of Malta, held the office of president.

This was a tough period for the Church in Malta and a period of trial for its schools due to a Church-State dispute. "I always saw in him a



The late Archbishop Emeritus Mgr Joseph Mercieca, assisted by Bro. Emmanuel Sciberras FSC, blessing the corpse of Bro. Louis at the chapel of Stella Maris College before the funeral.

holy man," Mgr Cremona told the author, referring to Bro. Louis. He was very worried about the issue of Church schools "...but his concern was that of a man full of trust, and prior to each meeting we held... sometimes three times a week... he spent time in adoration". In Mgr Cremona's words, "facing me, during the meetings, I saw holiness, not a good man".

During that same period, Bro. Louis was also secretary of the Representative Council for Church Schools (RCCS), an ad hoc council formed on April 6, 1984, because of the ongoing disagreement. It was he who corresponded with the government authorities of that time, as directed by Archbishop of Malta Mgr Joseph Mercieca, who had absolute authority to speak for the Church schools in Malta and Gozo.

As provincial, Bro. Louis lived at St Benild's School, Sliema. Many students, even after they had completed their studies, knocked on the doors of this school and sought Bro. Louis.

In him they found a friend and a man who was able to converse with God. Always ready with a smile, he was of a humble, prudent, peaceful character, adept to get on well with everyone, especially youths, who saw in him an exemplar of integrity and a genuine Christian teacher.

In 1981, Bro. Louis founded in Malta the Signum Fidei Lasallian Fraternity, where lay members, both men and women, joined the Brothers in living the Lasallian charisma. Until his death, he remained its moderator.

He published on a monthly basis *Sigmun Fidei*, a booklet with short biographical notes about the saint of each day, a Biblical reflection and an excerpt from the writings of St John Baptist De La Salle. The booklet continues to be published regularly.

Apart from being a worthy son and disciple of St John Baptist De La Salle, Bro. Louis cherished a sincere devotion towards St Joseph, protector of the Institute of the Frères. He also treasured a

special devotion towards the Blessed Virgin Mary and meditated daily the mysteries of the rosary.

He held an authentic devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament, which expressed the fullness of his spirituality. Very often, even during the night, he visited the Brothers' chapel and spent time in adoration.

Towards the end of his life, Bro. Louis was in constant dialogue with God. This is evidenced by the multitude of prayers and reflections he wrote daily, most of them in French, in a small booklet he carried with him. These alone are an authentic testimony of his union with God and his profound desire to live in his presence.

He bore his sickness with admirable fortitude, determined to be of as little trouble as possible to his colleagues, and died on May 29, 2011, at the age of 88. He faded away in the same way as he had lived, as a serene giant, a remarkable man who found all the saints waiting to embrace him.

His funeral was held on May 31 at Stella Maris College, and he was buried in the Brothers' graves at Santa Maria Addolorata Cemetery.

On May 29, 2016, the fifth anniversary of his death, the cause for his beatification was initiated. The process begins with the documentation of the life and virtues of this Brother who, after serving the Church and the Institute of the Brothers faithfully and zealously, died renowned for his holiness. The aim is to place Bro. Louis with the glorified in Heaven.

In the words of superior general Brother Álvaro Echeverría FSC, Bro. Louis "throughout his long life he was a tireless worker in the apostolate and he showed a deep love for his vocation as a Brother and for the vitality of the Institute. As an enthusiastic teacher, he was one of those teachers students never forgot. The wisdom and experience accumulated during his many years made him a point of reference and an invaluable counsellor for young people and adults as well; he was a person who, above all, knew how to listen".

Fifty years ago

May 14, 1967

LABOUR ATTACKS POLICE COMMISSIONER

In yesterday morning's sitting, which went on till 1.50pm, came the yearly Opposition attack on the Police Commissioner, Mr V. de Gray. Mr Mintoff pledged that if his party were returned to power Mr de Gray would not be given his pension. He also called for a commission of inquiry to be set up by the government to investigate the Police Commissioner's conduct on the basis of the Commissioner's own evidence in a libel case by Mr Mintoff against Fr Bianco, the publisher of a booklet entitled *The Quarrel of the Malta labour Party with the Church in Malta*.

HOTEL PLAN FOR RAMLA BAY

A joint consultative meeting has been held between the principals, Jesse Holness Group Management Ltd, and the local promoters, Messrs Real Estates (Malta) Ltd, to discuss progress in connection with an application to construct a 150-double-bedroom hotel with chalets, beach and water sports facilities at Ramla Bay, Gozo. A spokesman for the promoters said yesterday that negotiations were progressing with the Malta Government Tourist Board, although certain difficulties had been raised. It is envisaged that government approval will be forthcoming.

LIJA WOMAN ELECTROCUTED

Giovanna Cutajar, of Lija, yesterday died after an electric shock she received while at her residence.

Ten years ago

May 14, 2007

RESUSCITATED SWIMMER DIES

An afternoon dip at Ghadira Bay turned into tragedy on Saturday when 30-year-old spinster Romina Abela found herself in difficulty while swimming and, despite being resuscitated, died yesterday morning in hospital. The sea was calm and the woman could not have been swimming in more than a depth of one metre, Paul Ellul, manager of the Ghadira Sailing Centre and Lido told *The Times*.

FARMERS TO GET LAND BACK

The Prime Minister has told farmers in Manikata that the government is to give them back the land they tilled at Ix-Xaghra l-Hamra, l/o Ghajn Tuffieha, after plans to build a golf course there were dropped. The announcement by Dr Gonzi in an e-mail sent to *Harsien Rurali ta' Ghajn Tuffieha* committee on Saturday evening, ended two years of limbo for farmers whose livelihoods had been threatened by the project launched in July 2005.

SANT ON 'HUNTING U-TURN'

Labour leader Alfred Sant yesterday called the government's decision to end the spring hunting season an unjust U-turn and said law-abiding hunters had suffered because of the few "who were left to do as they pleased". The season was brought to an abrupt end on Thursday after dozens of protected birds were killed by hunters. Police also made several arrests.

