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ECUMENISM IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MALTA
DURING THE EPISCOPATE
OF ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH MERCIECA (1976–2007)

Abstract. The long episcopate of Mgr Joseph Mercieca, Archbishop of Malta from 1976 to 2007, is characterized by the fruitful application and implementation of the Second Vatican Council in this European nation, at the southernmost tip of the European Union of which it has been a member since 2004. This research article studies the gradual development of the Ecumenical Movement in this predominantly Catholic nation from the years immediately following the Council, right through the many initiatives during the period of Mercieca's leadership of the Church in Malta, particularly the establishment of a Diocesan Ecumenical Commission on a sure footing, the collaboration with other Churches and ecclesial communities, the two pastoral visits of Pope John Paul II and the celebration of a Diocesan Pastoral Synod in the concluding years of his episcopate. This article serves as a case study on the genesis and the subsequent development of ecumenical relations in a local Church, the ecumenical initiatives taken over the years, and the way forward in this important pastoral dimension of an extrovert Church.

Key words: ecumenism; Malta; Archbishop Joseph Mercieca; diocesan ecumenical commission; ecumenical relations.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

The long and fruitful episcopate of Mgr Joseph Mercieca,¹ Metropolitan Archbishop of Malta from 1976 to 2007, is marked by many practical appli-

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¹ Joseph Mercieca was born in 1928 in the diocese of Gozo. Following his priestly ordination in 1952 and further studies in the Pontifical universities of Rome, he served as rector of the major seminary of his native diocese from 1958 to 1969. Subsequently, he was a judge of the Sacra Romana Rota from 1969 to 1974 when he was appointed auxiliary bishop of Malta. On 30 November 1976, Pope Paul VI named him archbishop of the metropolitan see of Malta. He welcomed Pope John Paul II during his two pastoral visits to Malta, in 1990 and 2001. He celebrated a diocesan pastoral synod (1999–2003) which was a vibrant ecclesial experience of the Church in Malta. Mercieca died on 21 March 2016.

cations of the renewal brought about by the Second Vatican Council. The thirty years of his long and dedicated service to the Church in Malta² can be studied from many different angles. This long period was characterized by difficult years for the Church in Malta, especially between 1978 and 1987, when the Socialist government, then in power, sought to restrict and even hinder the mission of the Church in various ways, as in the expulsion of the Faculty of Theology from the University of Malta, the closing of hospitals run by religious orders, restrictions on the free functioning of Church schools, the devolution of Church property, the vandalism on the Archiepiscopal Curia, besides a long list of personal attacks, both verbal and physical, on Mgr Mercieca himself. In those difficult circumstances, the Church's fundamental right to religious freedom was often trampled upon in the worst possible manner.³

There are many facets to an in-depth study of an episcopate which spanned several momentous events in the recent history of Malta—the years following the independence of Malta from Great Britain (1964), the approval of a republican constitution (1974), the departure of the last British forces from Malta (1979), the years when democracy was seriously under threat (1981–87) and the accession of Malta as part of the European Union (2004). The several aspects of Mercieca's episcopate include the re-organization of the Archiepiscopal Curia, the implementation of various pastoral plans for the archdiocese, the creation of a whole spectrum of secretariats to address various aspects of ecclesial life and mission in today's world.

One of the dimensions of his episcopate which risks being forgotten is his unsung commitment to the ecumenical mission of the Church. This article pays tribute to the various ecumenical endeavours of the Church in Malta

² The Republic of Malta, the smallest nation of the European Union, lies 100 km to the south of the south-eastern tip of Sicily, in the central Mediterranean Sea. It consists of two main inhabited islands, Malta and Gozo and some other islets. The metropolitan see of Malta is geographically coterminous with the larger island, which is approximately five times the area of the suffragan see of Gozo which was created in 1864. The *Annuario Pontificio*, published by the Holy See, states that the see of Malta dates back to the apostolic era; it became a metropolitan see on 1 January 1944. The same yearbook gives the following statistical data on the archdiocese of Malta for the year 2014: its area is 246km²; its population is 413 000, of which 380 000 are Catholics; parishes: 70; resident diocesan priests: 277; resident religious priests: 345; priestly ordinations: 9; seminarians: 28; members of male religious institutes: 432; members of female religious institutes: 883; church schools: 83; charitable institutes run by the Church: 65; baptisms: 3 427. See *Annuario Pontificio 2015* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 439.

³ Cf. Emmanuel AGIUS and Hector SCERRI (eds), *The Quest for Authenticity and Human Dignity. A Festschrift in honour of Professor George Grima on his 70th birthday* (Malta: Faculty of Theology/University of Malta and Foundation for Theological Studies, 2015), 3.

during the pastoral leadership of Archbishop Joseph Mercieca. It is fitting to have researched and to offer this publication within a fourfold context: the fortieth anniversary of Mercieca's episcopal ordination (2014), the fortieth anniversary of his nomination as archbishop (2016), the fiftieth anniversary of the conciliar decree on ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* (2014) and the fortieth anniversary of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission in Malta (2017). The convergence of these four important anniversaries is being celebrated by means of this research article on the development of the ecumenical efforts within the local Church of Malta in the last decades of the twentieth century and the initial years of the new millennium. This article also serves as a case study on the genesis and the subsequent development of ecumenical relations in a local Church, the ecumenical initiatives taken over the years, and the way forward in this important pastoral dimension of an extrovert Church, as willed by Pope Francis.

2. EARLY PRACTICAL ECUMENICAL INITIATIVES IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MALTA

The Ecumenical Movement, on an international level, had its genesis at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴ Initial ecumenical seeds were sown in Maltese soil during the long episcopate of Archbishop Michael Gonzi (1943–1976), Mercieca's immediate predecessor. Those early seeds would eventually flourish and bear fruit during Mercieca's time as archbishop of Malta. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several private ecumenical initiatives were known to have taken place in the archdiocese of Malta, especially by priests who occupied important pastoral offices. It is striking to read about the poignant experience narrated by a Maltese Jesuit, Fr Anton Azzopardi S.J. (1925–2015), who can be described as one of the pioneers of ecumenism in Malta:

The first contact I had with ecumenists was in the early 1960s when the Reverend Professor Carmelo Sant invited me to join the Ecumenical Group which used to meet once a month to pray and discuss theological matters. I remember in our discussions we avoided as much as we possibly could points of divergence so as not to hurt the feelings and the beliefs of anyone.

⁴ On the earliest beginnings of the Ecumenical Movement, cf. Evangelista VILANOVA, *Storia della teologia Cristiana*, III (Roma: Borla, 1995), 615-616. For a more detailed presentation, cf. Jos VERCRUYSE, *Introduzione alla teologia ecumenica* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1992), 46-59.

Reverend Fathers, Padres and Ministers of various denominations, some of them chaplains in the British Services functioning in Malta, (we were about ten or twelve in all) used to meet in an atmosphere of sincere and gentle friendship and cordiality. It was then that I discovered the great religious and even spiritual wealth that these new friends of mine, whom before I used to look upon as people “on the other side of the fence,” possessed. Indeed, in remoter years when I was abroad I did have a good number of friends belonging to different denominations, but I had never had such a wonderful opportunity of praying and of discussing religious matters as I did within the Ecumenical Group.⁵

In order for it to be authentic and efficacious, the ecumenical commitment of the members of the Catholic Church requires sincere conversion: “There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion. For it is from newness of attitudes of mind, from self-denial and unstinted love that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 5). Within our Judaeo-Christian tradition, we cannot talk about conversion without referring to prayer. In fact, the conciliar Decree on ecumenism highlights the centrality of prayer, affirming that it is the very soul of the Ecumenical Movement.⁶ In fact, today we have become accustomed to speak of *spiritual ecumenism*.

The common prayer of Christians from different Churches and Traditions on specific occasions is not only an important means whereby we approach each other, but is moreover an opportunity to be one in our plea to the Father who desires our unity. Before the Second Vatican Council, a number of such sporadic meetings were known to take place, although it was not uncommon for Catholic participants to be reprimanded by their superiors. I am referring particularly to the ecumenical encounters organized in France by individuals, such as Yves Congar (1904–1995) and Paul Couturier (1881–1953).⁷ The situation changed dramatically with the Second Vatican Council. Catholics started to involve themselves in ecumenical encounters, and great importance started to be given to the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity (18–25 January).

⁵ Anton AZZOPARDI, *Christian Churches and Reunion* (Malta: PEG Publications, 2003), 11.

⁶ Cf. the useful text by Cardinal Walter Kasper, former President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity until 2010, *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism* (New York: New City Press, 2007).

⁷ Cf. Mario FARRUGIA, “Y.-M. Congar and P. Couturier. Praying for Unity: Old Friends and Contemporary Issues,” in Hector SCERRI (ed.), *Living Theology. Studies on Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Bernard Lonergan and Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), 207–26.

The same development can be said regarding the newly evolving ecumenical situation in Malta. During the final phase of the long episcopate of Archbishop Michael Gonzi, meetings between Catholics and Christians from communities belonging to the Reformed Tradition started to be held. Dialogue meetings were initiated by biblical scholars, particularly—as already mentioned above—by Mgr Carmel Sant (1921–1992) and Fr Donatus Spiteri O.F.M.Cap. (1922–2011). The latter scholar organized what was probably the first ever ecumenical service in Malta. This was held in the Capuchin Church of the Holy Cross, in Floriana, on 27 December 1968, five days prior to the celebration of the World Day of Peace (1 January 1969). At this ecumenical service, the Governor General of Malta, Sir Maurice Dorman (1912–1993), was present.⁸ Within the Maltese ecumenical field, as from the early 1970s, one pinpoints the praiseworthy efforts carried out by other ecclesiastics, such as Mgr Philip Calleja (born 1928) and the Emigrants' Commission, as well as by Mgr Charles Vella (born 1928) and the Cana Movement for marriage and the family.

In the first months of his episcopate, Archbishop Mercieca decided to reorganize the coordination of the pastoral activity of the diocese by the creation of six diocesan secretariats: (1) Christian education; (2) the Social and charitable apostolate; (3) the Apostolate of the laity; (4) the Liturgy; (4) the Word of God; and (6) Emigration and tourism. It is within the latter secretariat that ecumenism features. The first coordinators of the Secretariat for Emigration and tourism were Mgr Philip Calleja and Fr (later Mgr) Arthur Said-Pullicino (born 1935).⁹

What had been organized in the ecumenical field, more or less, sporadically, was soon to be consolidated by the establishment of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission. In October 1977, Archbishop officially instituted this commission within the Secretariat for Emigration and Tourism.¹⁰ This

⁸ This information was provided to the author of this article on 18 January 2015 by Fr Martin Micallef O.F.M.Cap., the Provincial Minister of the Franciscan Capuchins in Malta. In the Archives of the Maltese Capuchin Province (Fondo Floriana), Micallef unearthed a fourteen-page booklet with the title *Ecumenical Service on the occasion of the World day of Peace* (The Capuchins, Floriana. 27.xii.1968). The copy in the archives is that used by Sir Maurice Dorman. A handwritten note on the booklet's cover says: "used by H.E. the Gov.Gen. Mr Dorman". On page 6, there is another note, indicating the biblical text read out by Dorman.

⁹ Cf. the Archdiocesan bulletin, published periodically, from five to six times a year, *Bullettin tal-Arcidjocesi* (Malta) 4 (August-September 1977), 77–80.

¹⁰ Cf. "Ecumenism in the Islands of Malta", *Bullettin tal-Arcidjocesi u Liturgija tal-Kelma* [Archdiocesan Bulletin and Liturgy of the Word] 20 (November 1979), 565. The Report for 1979 states: "The Diocesan Commission for Ecumenism was officially set up by the Archbishop,

bears witness to Archbishop Mercieca's commitment and conviction vis-à-vis ecumenism: he established this body within the ecclesial structures of the Church in Malta less than a year after his installation as archbishop in December 1976. Mercieca appointed Fr Hugh Cremona O.P. (1936–2014) to be the first chairman of the Ecumenical Commission; he also appointed the following as the members of this commission: Can. Joseph Debono (born 1948), Fr Guido Schembri O.F.M. (1923–2012) and Fr Dominic Portelli O.S.A. (1940–2009).¹¹

In the meantime, in September 1977, a few weeks prior to the establishment of the Ecumenical Commission, a course was organized for the ongoing formation of the clergy. There were nine different workshops during this course, one of which treated ecumenism. In the evaluation which was carried out, it transpired that there was a lack of interest in ecumenism among the Maltese clergy. It was also pointed out that members from other Christian Churches and Traditions could be integrated as members of social and charitable groups in Malta. Among the proposals made during the mentioned workshop, it is interesting to point out that some members of the clergy present suggested that the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity be organized in all the parishes. Other proposals were made, among which the organization of talks or courses wherein ecumenism could be studied at a parish level.¹²

It is worth pointing out that as from January 1979, the diocesan bi-monthly publication, *Bullettin tal-Arcidjocesi u Liturgija tal-Kelma*, started to include, on an annual basis, prayers and other texts to be used during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Through the dedicated collaboration of Mgr Joseph Lupi (1914–2000), the Diocesan Secretary, and others with him, these ecumenical resources started to feature annually and prominently in the *Bullettin*. The first time when this material featured was in the *Bullettin* of January 1979, and it continued to appear until Lupi remained at the helm behind the publication of material both from the diocesan level, as well as from the Magisterium and the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

The second Assembly of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (W.C.F.B.A.)¹³ was held in Malta, between 11 and 19 April 1978.

Mons. Joseph Mercieca in October 1977 as part of the Secretariat for Emigration and Tourism.”

¹¹ Cf. *Bullettin tal-Arcidjocesi u Liturgija tal-Kelma* 6 (Advent-Christmas 1977), 58.

¹² Cf. *Bullettin tal-Arcidjocesi u Liturgija tal-Kelma* 11 (May 1978), 310.

¹³ The World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate was founded in 1968. In 1990, its official name was shortened to Catholic Biblical Federation. It collaborates with biblical

It is interesting to highlight the fact that in the Final Declaration of the Plenary Assembly one encounters a paragraph on ecumenism which states:

Ecumenism is the grace which the Lord has imparted to Christians of the twentieth century as they seek, through the grace of Christ, their unity in him (Jn 17:23). The Plenary Assembly holds that the Federation has a vital role to carry out in encouraging dialogue and cooperation with other Christian Churches and the United Bible Societies.

The Assembly therefore recommends that the translations of the Bible, where this is possible, be inter-confessional. There is to be full cooperation with the United Bible Societies in the publication and distribution of Scripture, the organization of Bible Sundays, Bible Weeks, exhibitions, etc. Where possible, instruction and biblical research are to be carried out on an inter-confessional basis.¹⁴

We have mentioned the establishment of the Ecumenical Commission in the Archdiocese of Malta. Various reasons were given to justify its establishment.¹⁵ A number of priests who were lecturing philosophy and theology at the University of Malta were showing a genuine interest in ecumenism, among whom was Canon Joseph Debono who wrote a doctoral thesis on a closely related area.¹⁶ These priest-lecturers established several study-groups with a number of ministers from the Protestant communities in Malta. Together they began to organize ecumenical services during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and on other occasions during the year. A number of ministers, together with some Maltese Catholic priests, were chaplains to the British forces stationed in Malta. These, too, set up a group which met regularly on a monthly basis. A forerunner of this initiative was that taking place in the early 1960s, as described above in the experience narrated by Fr Anton Azzopardi S.J. Because the chaplains to the British forces were primarily engaged in pastoral duties, including pastoral work with the families of the members of the military, they started to involve these faithful in ecumenical activities and in common prayer.

As soon as the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission was set up by Archbishop Mercieca, it set to commit itself to the creation of an ecumenical

associations from the Protestant fold, among which the United Bible Societies. Every six years, a plenary meeting is held.

¹⁴ Author's translation of the text as reproduced in *Bullettin tal-Arcidjocesi u Liturgija tal-Kelma* 12 (August 1978), 339.

¹⁵ Cf. *Bullettin tal-Arcidjocesi u Liturgija tal-Kelma* 20 (November 1979), 566.

¹⁶ Joseph DEBONO, *The Ecclesiology of Karl Barth*, Doctorate in Divinity (D.D.) Thesis, Royal University of Malta, 1974.

mentality among Maltese Catholics. Very early in its existence, the Commission met the local parish priests so that the latter would be concretely encouraged to educate the members of their respective flocks in order for them to embrace an ecumenical mentality. Particular attention was given to the theology students in order for them to be taught, from their early years, the principles of ecumenism. In fact, after a number of years, it was noted—as expected—that the younger generation of priests was more ecumenically oriented than their predecessors.¹⁷

During 1979, various meetings were organized between the Ecumenical Commission and the mentioned ministers. These meetings started bearing fruit, especially after the difficulties met by the Protestant ministers were duly addressed. Two of the issues were the teaching of religious knowledge to non-Catholics in Church schools and pastoral chaplaincy in hospitals. A Report compiled in 1979 on the activity of the Ecumenical Commission reveals that on account of divergent opinions within the group, difficulties were encountered in seeking an agreement.¹⁸ The same Report evaluates the ecumenical services which were then celebrated. The Report affirms that these prayer services were instrumental in order for Christians from a particular Church or Community to appreciate those from other Churches and Communities. For the first time, a special Ecumenical Service was held on the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, on 25 January 1979. Priests and ministers from different Christian Churches celebrated solemn vespers at St Paul's Anglican Pro-Cathedral in Valletta, and subsequently walked in silence through the city's streets to reach the Catholic parish church of St Paul's Shipwreck where they prayed compline together. The silent walk through the streets of the city of Valletta left a striking impact on the people who witnessed this extraordinary sight. In fact, the Report affirms: "It was felt that walking in silence was very significant, as the people became very aware of the togetherness and at the same time the separateness of those who recognize Christ as Lord."¹⁹

During the period in question, ecumenism was the subject of several talks delivered on the media; furthermore, a number of articles on ecumenism appeared in the newspapers. Towards the end of the 1970s, a small resource library was created at the premises of the Emigrants' Commission in Valletta. Indeed, the latter then became the vibrant hub of the ecumenical acti-

¹⁷ Cf. *Bullettin tal-Arcidjocesi u Liturgija tal-Kelma* 20 (November 1979), 566.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 567.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

vity in the Archdiocese of Malta, so much so that the mentioned premises were described as “a Christian information centre.” The scope was that Churches and ecclesial communities team together in tangible projects, thus bearing Christian witness in common activities.²⁰

As a result of these efforts in the post-conciliar Church of Malta, many interesting and inspiring ecumenical contacts were forged. This article is duty-bound to shed some light on the several friendly personal contacts among priests and ministers from the different Churches and ecclesial communities. Among these positive ecumenical relations, one is bound to mention those initiated and maintained by Rev. Colin Westmarland of St Andrew’s Scots’ Church in Valletta. The long service of this Presbyterian minister of the Church of Scotland in Malta (1975-2002) practically coincides precisely with the episcopate of Archbishop Mercieca. As Westmarland himself stated to the author of this article, a very friendly relationship was established with one of the leading twentieth-century Maltese biblical scholars, Mgr Carmel Sant, already mentioned earlier. This friendship resulted in the long collaboration between Westmarland and the Malta Bible Society (*Ghaqda Biblika Maltija*). Sant was also the Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta. This therefore enabled other theology professors to come in contact with Westmarland, mainly the renowned professor of Dogmatic theology, Fr Maurice Eminyan S.J. (1922–2010) and the Church historian Mgr Vincent Borg (born 1929). Westmarland’s many contacts were extended to include Mgr Lawrence Gatt (born 1937), then Rector of the Major Seminary in Malta, and Mgr Lawrence Mifsud (born 1933), then Archpriest of St Lawrence’s Parish in the city of Vittoriosa. The ministers of the Church of England were in Malta for relatively shorter periods, although this did not hinder in any way the establishment of ecumenical friendships. The long succession of Chancellors at St Paul’s Anglican Pro-Cathedral, in recent history, include Can. David Strangeways, Can. Evans, Can. Philip Cousins, Can. Alan Woods and Can. Tom Mendel.

Other positive ecumenical contacts in Malta were forged between members of the Evangelical Lutheran community and the Roman Catholic German-speaking parish in Malta. The instrumental role of the series of parish priests of the latter—Fr Maurice Eminyan S.J., Fr Joseph Sammut (1939–2002) and Fr John Sammut (born 1941)—was conducive, in different ways, to the strengthening of ties with a succession of German pastors who exercised their ministry in Malta. Several common initiatives between the

²⁰ Ibid.

two German-speaking communities were organized over the years, such as St Martin's Day, carol-singing, joint outings and bible-study.

3. THE PASTORAL PLAN OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MALTA (1986-1991)

The long episcopate of Archbishop Joseph Mercieca was marked by the publication, over the years, of several Pastoral Plans. In one of the latter, the plan for the *quinquennium* 1986-1991, one finds many interesting references to ecumenism. One can rightly conclude that by the late 1980s, the Archdiocese of Malta, had sought to implement the conciliar dispositions underlined in the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, as well as those disseminated later among the local Churches all over the world by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. The *Pastoral Plan 1986-1991* delves into the many aspects of the pastoral mission of the Church in Malta, establishes new pastoral structures, provides a strategic pastoral vision for the local Church and presents a thorough planning process. As Archbishop Mercieca himself explains in his Message introducing the Pastoral Plan, the latter "is the result of a long and intensive project carried out by many individuals with the aim that the Church in Malta give its reply to the Lord's will as this is being revealed to us through the signs of the times ... The Plan puts a great emphasis on the need of evangelization, and calls the People of God in Malta to an on-going conversion, a commitment to reconciliation and to poverty of spirit."²¹

The Pastoral Plan enters into great detail when it treats the various aspects of the pastoral mission of the Church. It is interesting to note, in the context of this article, the ecumenical project of the Archdiocese of Malta within the wider framework of the pastoral vision of Archbishop Mercieca. In the second chapter of the Plan, on theological-pastoral reflections in the light of the consultation which had been carried out earlier, one encounters a section (3.24) treating the more urgent sections of the Church's pastoral mission in the years to come. In relation to this, there is a brief section which delves into the universal vision of the Church and the ecumenical spirit. Here, one observes the commitment of the Church—ten years after

²¹ Archbishop Joseph MERECIECA, *Messagġ lill-Poplu ta' Alla li hu f'Malta* [Message to the People of God in Malta] (24 November 1985). Cf. ARCIDIOĊESI TA' MALTA, *Pjan Pastorali 1986-1991* (Malta: Il-Hajja, 1985), 3.

Mercieca assumed the leadership of the Church in Malta—to be an extrovert Church, a Church which goes forth, a Church in dialogue:

The contacts and the relationships of an economic, political and religious nature with other countries are on the increase; the foreigners who visit Malta or who settle in it are asking us to respond in an adequate way.

The missionary zeal and the ecumenical spirit with which the Church in Malta desires to accomplish all this is derived from its very call as a local Church in communion with the Universal Church, a call which is put into practice under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²²

It is positive to note, in the above-mentioned section, the references to the Magisterium of the Church. There are references to a number of conciliar documents, among which the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (paragraph 8). One also encounters an interesting reference to the speech made by Pope John Paul II to a gathering of National Ecumenical Commissions on 22 November 1980.

The details regarding the ecumenical mission of the local Church, as presented in the Pastoral Plan, are indeed impressive. These are found in the Plan's fourth chapter whose theme is Evangelization. When the text talks about the ecumenical mission, the point of departure is focused upon the many contacts of the Maltese with Christians belonging to other Churches and ecclesial communities. This takes place on account of the Maltese who travel beyond the shores of the Island, as well as because of the large numbers of tourists who visit Malta. The Plan underlines the Christian witness borne by the Maltese people. The frequent contacts of the Church in Malta, and on a personal basis, the contacts which Maltese Catholics have both with other Christian Churches as well as with individuals from the latter calls for a special attention to be made in order that the Catholic witness which is given may bear abundant fruit.²³

The document highlights the importance of these contacts, and seeks to strengthen the ecumenical mission of the Archdiocese by organizing it in such a way as to be more effective. Ten years after Mgr Mercieca took over the helm of the Archdiocese of Malta, the Pastoral Plan in question makes a list of the more important and immediate aspects to be tackled by the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission. The latter is urged to focus on the following:

²² ARCIDJOĊESI TA' MALTA [Archdiocese of Malta], *Pjan Pastorali* [Pastoral Plan] 1986–1991, section 3.24.

²³ Cfr *ibid.*, 5.11.

- (i) The ecumenical task is to be a necessary dimension of catechesis; ecumenism is not to be part of catechesis, Catholic education and preaching simply as a sporadic reference, but has to be an integral part of it;
- (ii) A constant reference to Christian unity and its necessity and urgency; catechesis should engender within Catholics a great desire for Christian unity, a desire which should be followed by an effort at purification in humility as well as a greater enthusiasm to the stirrings of the Spirit who overcomes all the obstacles to unity in faith and love;
- (iii) The enhancement of a greater interest among Catholics in *spiritual ecumenism* which is the very soul of ecumenism.
- (iv) Providing information about the Christian Churches present on the Island [...]; the same has to be carried out—although necessarily with a different emphasis—with regard to the sects which are now present in Malta.²⁴

In this programme of ecumenical endeavours, we observe a number of aspects which characterize this particular dimension in the first decade of Mercieca's episcopate. One notes the importance given to a catechesis on the ecumenical mission of the Church. Another aspect which is underlined is *spiritual ecumenism*: the latter lies at the heart of the conciliar decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, the post-conciliar pronouncements on ecumenism and in the activity of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. The Pastoral Plan also places emphasis on the information to be provided about other Churches and Ecclesial communities. It is indeed positive to note that the Plan strongly calls for the ecumenical formation of future priests and religious. The way the members of the Church think and act with regard to ecumenical matters depends largely on the positive ecumenical outlook transmitted by the leaders and the teachers of the Christian community. The Pastoral Plan, once again, refers to this latter point in Chapter XI where the vision about priestly formation is delineated:

The ecumenical spirit, too, should inspire seminary formation. In Malta, where contacts with members of other Christian Churches and other religions are frequent, and the relations with countries with a different religion from ours are on the increase, it is necessary that the ecumenical spirit should be an integral part of seminary formation. The latter should enhance a mentality and actively prepare for a future mission as demanded by the new signs of the times.²⁵

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 5.12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.16.

This is indeed a highly positive vision which provides a direction in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. It is fundamental that in their priestly formation, seminarians are open to contemporary realities. One of the new realities is that Maltese culture is no longer monolithic as it was for many centuries. This means that future priests are to be constantly open to the presence of Christians belonging to other Churches and Traditions.

Ecumenism is referred to in yet another section of the Pastoral Plan (1986–1991) when it proposes the mission of the Justice and Peace Commission which was to be established. Having mentioned the principal fields of action where the latter Commission was to commit itself, the Plan insists that it should function within an ecumenical perspective.²⁶ This is important especially when one considers that the tasks of the Justice and Peace Commission are focused on bringing social realities, such as work and human rights, to the fore, in the light of the Social Teaching of the Church. The social reality in which the Church in Malta is immersed does not only concern Catholics, but also Christians from other Churches and Ecclesial communities, besides persons belonging to other religions. This explains the fact that the mission of the Justice and Peace Commission should always be within an ecumenical perspective.

During the first years of the implementation of the Pastoral Plan (1986–1991), Archbishop Mercieca gradually established the structures contemplated therein.²⁷ Two years after the Plan came into effect, Mercieca signed the decree with which he formalized the tasks of the Secretariat for Emigration and Tourism, an endeavour which had long been bearing fruit, since the 1950s, under the auspices of the Emigrants' Commission. In this decree, dated 16 September 1977, among other matters, we find:

On account of the fact that the majority of foreign residents in Malta and tourists visiting Malta are not Catholics, and because this Commission has several contacts with the Ministers of other denominations, the tasks concerning Christian unity (Ecumenism) and those concerning non-Christians are the responsibility of this Commission.²⁸

Further down in the same decree, among the details about the competencies of the Secretariat for Emigration and Tourism, we read that “it has

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 17.3.

²⁷ Cf. Charles BUTTIGIEG, *Ilkoll Ahwa fi Kristu. Guzeppi Mercieca. Memorji* [Brothers in Christ. The Memoirs of Joseph Mercieca] (Malta: Klabb Kotba Maltin, 2014), 304–306.

²⁸ Author's translation of Archbishop Joseph MERCIECA, *Decree* (16 September 1988). Cf. Archives of the Archiepiscopal Curia, *Civil Acts* 269 (1984–1988), n. 56.

the responsibility to promote ecumenical relations, as well as those with non-Christian religions, and that it is entrusted with the preparation of adults for the sacrament of Baptism or to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.”²⁹ Thus, we observe what we have seen earlier, namely, that the work carried out by the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission, since its foundation in 1977, was under the auspices of the Emigrants’ Commission. When referring to the composition of the Council of the Secretariat for Emigration and Tourism, the same decree by Archbishop Mercieca specifies that among the members of the said Council, there will be “the Chairman of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission.”³⁰

4. THE ECUMENICAL SERVICE DURING THE FIRST PASTORAL VISIT BY POPE JOHN PAUL II (1990)

A truly memorable event in the history of the Church in Malta was the first pastoral visit by Pope John Paul II in May 1990. This journey was spread over three days, from the afternoon of Friday 25 May to the late evening of Sunday 27 May. The programme of the pastoral visit was very tight and intense, especially when one considers that the Polish Pope then enjoyed good health and was able to endure a heavy programme of events and encounters within a short span of time. On the final day of his trip, on the afternoon of Sunday 27 May 1990, John Paul II participated in an Ecumenical Service in the Cathedral of the old city of Mdina. A marble inscription between the Chapel of the Crucifix and the Sanctuary of the Cathedral commemorates this historic event.

On that memorable occasion, three welcome speeches were addressed to the Pope: these were delivered by Fr Hugh Cremona O.P., the Ecumenical Officer of the Archdiocese, Rev. Colin Westmarland, the Church of Scotland minister, and Canon Philip Cousins, the Chancellor of St Paul’s Anglican Pro-Cathedral. In his speech, the Roman Catholic representative explained the concrete aspects of the ecumenical experience in Malta. He mentioned not only the positive steps which were made, but also the difficulties which normally arise, among which the difficulties caused by the presence of certain sects. He affirmed:

²⁹ Author’s translation of *ibid.*, article 1.2 (vii).

³⁰ Author’s translation of *ibid.*, article 3.4.

We are committed to work “for full unity in faith.” We know that the road is difficult, and we are watchful lest our enthusiasm makes us overlook the differences that still separate us. We try to overcome disappointments and setbacks as they arise, by reminding ourselves of the unity that we already enjoy, and we often thank God together for his gift of unity. We have discovered through personal experience how true it is that spiritual ecumenism is really “the soul of all ecumenical activity.” I can assure Your Holiness that the islands of Malta and Gozo are making a great contribution to ecumenism as far as prayer for unity is concerned. [...] Unfortunately, we are often hindered in our ecumenical endeavours because of the presence of sects, new religious movements outside the Church, and fundamentalism. But, we profess the “one baptism,” believe that through our common witness, and by growing together in a true ecumenical mentality, we can move forward in faith and hope, since we feel we are very much bound together in charity.³¹

These heartfelt words provide us with a clear picture of the ecumenical situation in Malta during the episcopate of Archbishop Mercieca. Fr Hugh Cremona referred to the great strides made in Malta in the relations between the Catholic Church and the ecclesial communities resulting from the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The importance of spiritual ecumenism was highlighted by the Ecumenical Officer of the Archdiocese. It is also interesting to observe the experience of our separated brethren. In his words of welcome to the Holy Father, Rev. Colin Westmarland stated that the family of Presbyterian and Methodist Christians had been present in Malta for a hundred and sixty years, and that “we receive nothing but respect, affection and assistance from the clergy and people of the Church in Malta.”³² Westmarland promised the Pope the commitment that Christians journey together on the ecumenical pilgrimage.

On his part, Canon Philip Cousins, too, referred to the positive relations among the different Christian communities in Malta. He mentioned the presence of many Catholics for the celebration of the hundred and fifty years of St Paul’s Pro-Cathedral in Valletta. He also stated:

Indeed we rejoice at the close and warm relations that exist between our two communions in these islands and recall with pleasure the fact that one of the early preparatory meetings for the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission took place in Malta some twenty-two and a half years ago. It is

³¹ Address by Fr Hugh CREMONA O.P. to Pope John Paul II, Cathedral Church, Mdina, Malta (27 May 1990), in *Pietru fil-Gzira ta’ Pawlu*, vol. II (Malta: Media Centre, 1990), 63.

³² Address by Rev. Colin WESTMARLAND to Pope John Paul II, Cathedral Church, Mdina, Malta (27 May 1990), in *ibid.*, 62.

a great joy to us Anglicans, working as we do among a foreign community, to serve alongside the Roman Catholic Church in these islands which are sanctified for ever by the apostolic labours of St Paul.³³

These two brief addresses by Westmarland and Cousins—both of whom enjoyed a very warm and friendly relationship with Archbishop Mercieca—bear witness to the living brotherhood between the Archdiocese of Malta and the ecclesial communities we have mentioned. The important speech made by Pope John Paul II on that occasion builds upon what had just been affirmed in the addresses made to him. The speech throws light on the ecumenical journey in a country where the large majority of the population is Catholic. The Pope’s speech offers an important vision to all those engaged in the ecumenical endeavour embraced by different Churches and Traditions:

We gather as Christians in response to the call of God. The *ecumenical movement*, which is a work not principally of man but of the Holy Spirit, is a *grace* for the times we live in. It is a gift for which we may fittingly give thanks and praise to God. [...] *The quest for Christian unity and the call to witness are intimately related*. It should never be thought that missionary endeavour and ecumenical endeavour are somehow in competition, or that one develops at the expense of the other. Our very striving for unity itself bears witness to the healing and reconciling work of God.³⁴

After having dwelt upon the Pauline context and the Apostle’s mission, as well as upon the general principles which should guide the ecumenical mission of Christians, Pope John Paul II then focused upon the specific task of the Ecumenical Commission in a country like Malta:

The Maltese people are almost entirely Catholic and the other Christians mostly come from overseas. Yet the Catholics of Malta have not failed to grasp that “the Catholic Church is committed to the ecumenical movement...” [...] The responsibility of carrying out this task does not lie only with those countries where there is a strong presence of Orthodox, Anglican, or Protestant Christians alongside the Catholic Church. On the contrary, those countries are in great need of the prayer, interest and support of countries with a large Catholic majority. *When another Church or ecclesial community agrees to enter into dialogue with the Catholic Church, it enters into a new relationship with the*

³³ Address by Can. Philip COUSINS to Pope John Paul II, Cathedral Church, Mdina, Malta (27 May 1990), in *ibid.*, 64.

³⁴ Pope JOHN PAUL II, Address during Ecumenical Service, Cathedral Church, Mdina, Malta (27 May 1990). Cf *ibid.*, 59, 60. Cf. also http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1990/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19900527_mdina.html [accessed 20.01.2016].

whole of the Catholic Church. The Ecumenical Commission in Malta, recognizing this fact, has aimed at fostering an ecumenical spirit within the Catholic community. This has in turn created a cordial relationship between Catholics and the other Christians living here. The importance of your local work and of these good relations should not be underestimated.³⁵

The content of the address by Pope John Paul II during the Ecumenical Service on the final day of his pastoral visit to Malta was not only a source of encouragement to the common ecumenical mission, twenty-five years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, but constituted a positive evaluation of the ecumenical effort by the Church in Malta during the episcopate of Archbishop Joseph Mercieca. Furthermore, the prophetic words of the Polish Pope continued to offer scope and direction to the commitment of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission in the Archdiocese of Malta.

5. THE 1990s AND THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL SYNOD OF MALTA (1999-2003)

An event of great importance which was held in Malta was the Fifth International Meeting for Peace, organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio, on 8–10 October 1991. This brought over three hundred delegates to Malta, representing not only the different religions of the world but also members of a whole spectrum of Christian Churches and ecclesial communities. The Sant'Egidio Community, founded by the renowned Italian historian and thinker Andrea Riccardi in 1968 in Trastevere, Rome, embraced the peace initiative initiated by Pope John Paul II when he called an International Meeting for Prayers for Peace in Assisi on 27 October 1986. The Peace Meeting in Malta was organized just two years after the Summit between Presidents George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev, held in Malta in 1989, the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. From the ecumenical point of view, various leaders from different Churches participated: the Polish Cardinal Józef Glemp (1929–2013), Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy (born 1924), President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Bishop Yona Okoth, the Anglican Primate of Uganda, Bishop Denis Singulane, the Anglican bishop of Maputo (Mozambique), Rev. Milan

³⁵ Ibid., 60–61.

Opocensky, the General Secretary of the World Reformed Alliance, Archbishop Valentin from the Patriarchate of Moscow, Rev. Christoph Stier of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Germany, and Bishop Henry Richmond, the special envoy of the Archbishop of Canterbury.³⁶

The first pastoral visit by Pope John Paul II to Malta in 1990 bore much fruit in various sectors of the Church and of society. One of these areas was the ecumenical field. The relationship between the Catholic Church and the various Churches and ecclesial communities continued to improve. In fact, this led to the establishment, in 1995, of another group committed to ecumenism, as we shall see later. In the meantime, there was a change at the helm of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission. In fact, after a distinguished service lasting sixteen years, Fr Hugh Cremona O.P. was called to carry out other duties in the local Church. Archbishop Joseph Mercieca accepted his resignation on 30 November 1993, and subsequently named Fr Maurice Eminyán S.J., on 7 December 1993 to be the new President of the Ecumenical Commission.³⁷ Some years earlier, Eminyán had completed a long teaching career as professor of Dogmatic theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Malta, besides being Dean and, later, Praeses of the Faculty when, for a time, it functioned as an autonomous institution.

As a seasoned and well-respected theologian, Maurice Eminyán S.J. already had a long experience in ecumenical dialogue, in Malta and beyond its shores. Like his predecessor, he regularly advised Archbishop Mercieca on ecumenical matters and related situations. With the Archbishop's blessing, Fr Eminyán was instrumental in the foundation of a new group—the Malta Ecumenical Council—whose role would be to strengthen the already positive relations among the different Churches and ecclesial communities in Malta. The Malta Ecumenical Council is not part of the Archdiocese of Malta. Rather, it is an independent grouping which brings together around the same table, representatives from the different Churches and ecclesial communities in Malta. This group holds regular meetings in order to plan ecumenical activities in collaboration with the Diocesan Ecumenical Com-

³⁶ A detailed account of the International Gathering is found in the Archdiocesan Bulletin of 1991. Cf. *Bullettin tal-Arcidjocesi u Liturgija tal-Kelma*, Supplement to no. 71 (Advent 1991). With regard to ecumenism, see pp. 92–97.

³⁷ Cf. the decree by Archbishop Mercieca whereby he appointed Fr Maurice Eminyán S.J. to be President of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission, 7 December 1993: Archives of the Archiepiscopal Curia, *Civil Acts* 271 (1991–1993), n.118.

mission. The Malta Ecumenical Council organizes the main ecumenical service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, public dialogue meetings and other reflection and prayer encounters among Christians.

Six years after the foundation of the Malta Ecumenical Council, Fr Maurice Eminyán himself confessed: "I feel that this Council has given a strong impetus to ecumenical relations in Malta, not only because we have met each other and regularly prayed together, but also because in the many meetings and doctrinal discussions we have had over the years, we have come to realize that there are far more things that unite us than things which separate us from each other."³⁸

Another event of great ecumenical significance was Archbishop Mercieca's participation in the International Ecumenical Conference, held in Graz in Austria, 23-29 June 1997. At this meeting of enormous ecumenical importance, Mercieca was accompanied by the head of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission, Fr Maurice Eminyán S.J. The theme of the gathering was *Reconciliation: A Gift of God and a Source of New Life*. There were 700 official delegates, and about 10 000 participants. The Assembly, the second of its kind after that held in Basle in 1989, was co-organized by the Conference of European Churches (KEK) and the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe (CCEE). A total of 118 Churches and ecclesial communities (from KEK) took part in Graz. Archbishop Mercieca represented the Maltese Episcopal Conference.

Among the themes discussed at the Meeting, one notes the following: reconciliation among the Churches, cultures, peoples and religions, as well as the environment, cultures, peoples and world religions, biological diversity and climate change. The main speakers at Graz included the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow, Alexij II, and the Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Karekin I. A good number of prominent ecclesiastics were also present, such as Cardinals Martini, Vlk, Cassidy, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. The great majority of the participants were lay people who had ecumenism at heart. An expression which dominated the Graz Assembly was *ecumenism of the people*: these are the ecumenical relations as lived and experienced in the imperfect communion among Christians

³⁸ Maurice EMINYÁN, "L-Ekumenizmu f'Malta" [Ecumenism in Malta], *Knisja 2000* [Church 2000] 14/58 (October-December 2001), 38.

in their fraternal encounters, joint prayer sessions and common initiatives and projects.

The Final Message at Graz incorporates a number of resolutions by means of which Christian Churches committed themselves to continue striving for unity, seeking to overcome past wounds by acknowledging historical truths, and by cooperating in fields such as mission, open dialogue and the rights of minority Churches. Another commitment taken by the participants was to work hard to encourage young people to embrace the ecumenical journey.³⁹

The final years of the episcopate of Archbishop Joseph Mercieca are characterized by an event of great pastoral and ecclesial significance to the local Church: the Diocesan Pastoral Synod, celebrated between 1999 and 2003. It is interesting to study the process of the synod, in all its phases, namely the pre-assembly consultation process, the meetings of the diocesan assembly, the approval and publication of the synodal documents and the eventual implementation process. It is also worth focusing upon the pastoral vision enkindled during the pastoral synod, a vision which has to be seen within the perspective in the shift in ecclesiology created by the Second Vatican Council and the years that followed. This part of the research article will highlight those texts from the pastoral documents of the diocesan synod of the Archdiocese of Malta which refer to the ecumenical mission of the Church. Between the months of February and April 2003, eight pastoral documents were approved by the synodal assembly, composed of about 250 members who, in their majority, were lay members of the Church in Malta. During the summer months of the same year, Archbishop Mercieca himself scrutinized these documents, and eventually promulgated them on 29 September 2003, a date which coincided with the twenty-ninth anniversary of his episcopal ordination.

The documents of the Pastoral Synod were the fruit of a great deal of ecclesial discernment and wide consultation; they gave, and still give, a pastoral direction to the Archdiocese of Malta at the beginning of the third millennium. The document *Vizjoni ta' Knisja Komunjoni* (A Vision of the Church as Communion) encourages the members of the Church in Malta to build bridges with other individuals beyond the shores of the country. It was

³⁹ Cf. <http://oikoumene.net/eng.regional/eng.reg.graz/eng.reg.graz.1/index.html> [31.10.2014].

Pope John Paul II who in his parting speech, before leaving Malta after his second pastoral visit to the country in May 2001, emphasized Malta's vocation in the building of bridges between Africa and Europe, among others by fostering dialogue between cultures and religions. He called the people of the nation to consolidate the value of hospitality, the commitment to freedom, justice and peace.⁴⁰ The above-mentioned synodal document suggests: "In order to put communion into practice at the widest possible level, we have to foster active bonds between Catholics and other Christians outside the country, especially in international groups and movements".⁴¹ The same excerpt encourages pastoral efforts among the large numbers of tourists who visit Malta, as well as among the many foreigners who, for different reasons, reside in the country.⁴² It is evident that a large number of these foreigners are non-Catholics. If they are Christians, ecumenical dialogue can be practised, starting from the most basic of all possible dialogues – the dialogue of life. Moreover, the Synod proposes the creation of projects of dialogue, both with members of other religions, as well as with those from other Churches and ecclesial communities.⁴³

An inspiring text from the synod documents of the Archdiocese of Malta, focusing upon the ecumenical mission of all Christians, is found in that on *Kultura – Socjetà – Knisja* (Culture—Society—Church). The excerpt in question recalls what we have already seen in the Pastoral Plan of the Archdiocese of Malta (1986–1991), and in the speech made by Pope John Paul II during the ecumenical service at the Cathedral Church of Mdina in 1990. The principal theme of the text in question is the positive and healthy relationship between the local Church and other Christians; this is conducive to bearing a common Christian witness to society:

In Malta, the Catholic Church is the church of the majority of the population; the Christian denominations are small and their congregations are generally composed of foreigners. Yet, together, we are called to build a Christian culture. There are many ways how the Catholic Church can seek unity with other Churches and Christian communities in order to create a wider Chri-

⁴⁰ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, Farewell speech, Malta International Airport (9 May 2001), in *Pietru fuq il-Passi ta' Pawlu*, 57.

⁴¹ Author's translation of ARCIDJOCESI TA' MALTA, SINODU DJOCESAN, Dokument *Vizjoni ta' Knisja Komunjon* (Malta: Media Centre, 2003), para. 30.

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*

stian community and to foster reciprocal respect. This can take place through common moments of prayer on a regular basis, as well as through common social and cultural initiatives. Together, then, we are able to bear witness to unity in the presence of other religions and those who do not profess any religion at all.⁴⁴

This text, approved by Archbishop Mercieca, throws light upon the already cordial relations between Maltese Catholics and the members of other Churches and ecclesial communities. Mutual respect is the foundation for common prayer experiences, as well as for joint initiatives among Christians from different Traditions who pool their human and material resources to carry out works of charity among those in need, whatever their beliefs. Such initiatives leave a powerful impact through the Christian witness given to society. The same Synod document also refers to the presence of “a number of evangelical Christian communities, sects and other forms of spirituality.”⁴⁵ Although these groups—in contrast to the mainstream Christian communities—often fail to give priority to ecumenism (perhaps on account of elements of fundamentalism), one can nonetheless attempt to dialogue with them. We are encouraged in this when we observe the contacts made by Pope Francis with Pentecostal Christians.

6. CONCLUSION

This presentation reveals the long ecumenical journey travelled by the Archdiocese of Malta from the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council to the present day. It was during the thirty-year-long episcopate of Archbishop Joseph Mercieca that much progress was accomplished in the ecumenical field. This endeavour was very often carried out silently, yet constantly and with great determination, by individuals who

⁴⁴ Author's translation of ARCIDJOCESI TA' MALTA, SINODU DJOCESAN, Dokument *Kultura – Soċjetà – Knisja* (Malta: Media Centre, Malta 2003), para.10.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, para. 19. On the Church's response in such situations, cf. *ibid.*, para. 20. It is also useful to consult the leaflet published by the Pastoral Secretariat of the Archdiocese of Malta, soon after the conclusion of the Synod, on the relationships with foreigners in the documents of the Pastoral Synod. It consists of a large number of useful references about the behaviour of the Maltese Catholic with foreigners. Although the direct references to ecumenism are few in number (and these have already been mentioned in this research article), the attitudes which are highlighted are all very useful and appropriate in ecumenical dialogue and in the exercise of the ecumenical mission of the Church.

were convinced of this aspect of the Church's mission. Although this research has not been successful in unearthing any speeches or official pronouncements on ecumenism by Mgr Mercieca,⁴⁶ he was nonetheless always supportive in this field of the Church's pastoral action. The generous hospitality and the kind attention he afforded to the leaders of other Churches and ecclesial communities, over the years, bears witness not only to the Christian charity which shone through him in abundance, but shows how much he believed in the importance of ecumenical dialogue.

During the episcopate of Mercieca's successor, Archbishop Paul Cremona O.P. (2007–2014), the ecumenical mission of the Church in Malta continued to bloom and bear fruit. Many new initiatives were taken by the establishment of a revamped Diocesan Ecumenical Commission within the set-up of the Pastoral Secretariat of the Archbishop's Curia. Archbishop Cremona approved the Statute of the Commission on 11 January 2010, wherein the aims of the said commission are clearly defined to reflect the contemporary situation in the Church and in society. During the Solemn Installation of the new Metropolitan Archbishop of Malta, Mgr Charles J. Scicluna, on 21 March 2015, a conspicuous gesture of ecumenical importance was carried out. On his way to the Cathedral Church on that memorable day, Archbishop Scicluna personally greeted the representatives of a number of Christian Churches and ecclesial communities.⁴⁷ The present ecumenical climate, which is extremely positive, is the result of the humble efforts in the field during the long episcopate of Archbishop Mercieca. In this context, the fine words of Pope Francis are indeed encouraging: "We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face. [... The] commitment to a unity which helps [divided Christians] to accept Jesus Christ can no longer be a matter of mere diplomacy or forced compliance, but rather an indispensable path to evangelization".⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The author systematically consulted the collected texts of the transcribed speeches, homilies and pronouncements by Archbishop Mercieca, published annually by the Press Office of the Archdiocese of Malta, between the mid-1980s and 2007. No direct references to ecumenism were found.

⁴⁷ In front of the centuries-old Chapel of St Agatha, in Mdina, Archbishop Scicluna greeted Canon Simon Godfrey, Chancellor of St Paul's Anglican Pro-Cathedral, Valletta, Rev. Kim Hurst of St Andrew's Scots' Church, Valletta, Abouna Paul Elsouriany, head of the Coptic Orthodox community, and Rev. Ionut Iftimia, parish priest of the Rumanian Orthodox parish in Malta.

⁴⁸ Pope FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 244, 246.

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EKUMENIZM W ARCHIDIEZEZJI MALTAŃSKIEJ
W CZASIE POSŁUGI ARCYBISKUPA JOSEPHA MERCIECY (1976-2007)

Streszczenie

Długi okres posługi Arcybiskupa Malty Józefa Merciecy (1975-2007) naznaczony był owocnym przystosowaniem i wdrażaniem postanowień II Soboru Watykańskiego w tym europejskim narodzie żyjącym na najbardziej na południe wysuniętym krańcu Unii Europejskiej, której członkiem jest od 2004 r. Artykuł ten dokonuje refleksji nad stopniowym rozwojem ruchu ekumenicznego na Malcie, postępującym od lat bezpośrednio po Soborze, poprzez liczne inicjatywy podejmowane podczas okresu przywództwa Merciecy nad Kościołem maltańskim, zwłaszcza założenie na solidnych podstawach Diecezjalnej Komisji Ekumenicznej, współpracę z innymi Kościołami i wspólnotami kościelnymi, dwie wizyty apostolskie papieża Jana Pawła II i Die-

cezejalny Synod Pastoralny w latach kończących tę posługę. Artykuł jest analizą przypadku odnoszącą się do początku i rozwoju relacji ekumenicznych w lokalnym Kościele, relacji ekumenicznych podejmowanych przez lata i wyjściem naprzód w tym ważnym duszpasterskim aspekcie Kościoła otwartego.

Słowa kluczowe: ekumenizm; Malta; arcybiskup Józef Mercieca; diecezjalna rada ekumeniczna; relacje ekumeniczne.