



1. Mgr. Michael Gonzi when appointed Bishop of Gozo in 1924 (Aged 39)



2. Mgr. Gonzi on a pastoral visit in Gozo on 2nd June 1940 (Aged 55)



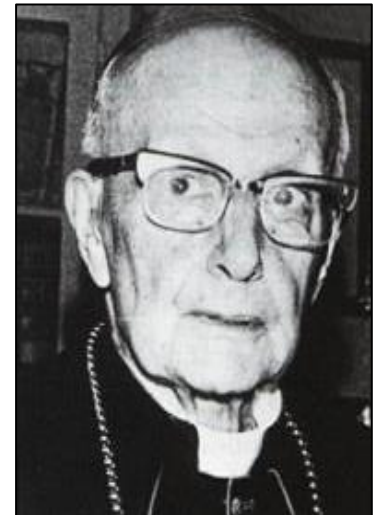
3. Mgr. Gonzi as Archbishop of Malta painted by Edward Caruana Dingli in 1943 (Aged 58)



4. Mgr. Michael Gonzi photographed on July 1955 (Aged 70)



5. Mgr. Gonzi photographed on 13th May 1965 (Aged 80)



6. Mgr. Gonzi at his resignation as Archbishop of Malta in 1976 (Aged 91)

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Image credits:

1. *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience*, Henry Frendo, Malta, 1979.
2. http://www.xewkija.net/mb/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=216&Itemid=119
3. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2f/E._Caruana_Dingli%2C_Portrait_of_Archbishop_Michael_Gonzi.jpg
4. http://arkivji.org.mt/share/PHO/PHO_01143.JPG
5. <http://www.unionbandmalta.org/story2.htm>
6. <https://www.angelfire.com/musicals/santamarija/domma.html>

Michael Gonzi was born in Vittoriosa, Birgu, the son of Giuseppe Gonzi and Margherita Tonna. Gonzi's younger brother, Lorenzo, was the grandfather of Lawrence Gonzi, Prime Minister of Malta (2004-2013).

In 1921 Gonzi was elected Labour Party Senator in the Legislative Assembly, a position he resigned when he was made Bishop of Gozo in 1924. In October 1943 he became Coadjutor-Bishop of Malta and Titular Bishop of Lyrbe. Three months later, Mgr. Mauro Caruana, Bishop of Malta, died, and Michael Gonzi succeeded him as the first Archbishop of Malta when Malta was elevated to an Archdiocese.

Gonzi's tenure as Archbishop of Malta was characterized by strained relations with the Malta Labour Party and its leader Dom Mintoff. Trouble started in 1948 when at a dinner in which Mintoff presided, some anti-clerical speeches were made. Relations deteriorated still further during the Integration campaign of the mid-1950s. Gonzi feared that the privileged position of the Catholic Church would be lost to the Anglican Church once Malta became part of the United Kingdom. The Church and its supporters were categorically against Integration and asked voters to vote 'no' or abstain in the Integration referendum called by Mintoff's government in 1956.

Gonzi's relationship with the Malta Labour Party worsened further in 1958 when street unrest ensued when discharges from the dockyard were announced and Mintoff's whole Cabinet of Ministers resigned in protest. Gonzi condemned the violent protests and criticized the Malta Labour Party for supporting them. The Malta Labour Party in turn accused the Church for condemning the protesting workers while never condemning the actions of the British colonial authorities.

During the election campaign of 1961-1962, Gonzi interdicted the supporters of the Malta Labour Party. The key issue was whether Malta should become a secular state in line with modern democracies, or whether the Church should retain its privileged position. During interdiction, the political climate in Malta was very tense. The Junta supporting the Church organized rallies in view of the forthcoming elections. The Malta Labour Party rallies were also often disrupted by continuous church-bell ringing and whistling and other deliberate noise by Catholic laymen. Sermons during Mass and the Bishops' pastoral letters read in all the churches were characterized by political issues.

The Interdict was eventually lifted in 1964 and peace between the Church and the Malta Labour Party was made on Good Friday 1969 through the mediation of Mgr. Emmanuel Gerada. By that time Gonzi had already started losing grip on the younger section of the Maltese clergy with the reforms promulgated by Vatican Council II (1963) and internal criticism on the way he led the Church during the dispute with the Malta Labour Party. When Dom Mintoff was re-elected for a second term as Prime Minister in 1976, Gonzi realized that the time had come for him to resign from Archbishop. With his resignation, the Pope bestowed on him the honorary title of 'Archbishop Emeritus of Malta.'

Further reading:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikiel_Gonzi
- <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/strong-leader-controversial-pastor.683271>
- Louis Cilia, *Il-Ħajja Mqanqla ta' Mikiel Gonzi u Żminijietu (1885-1984)*, Klabb Kotba Maltin, 2017.

Questions

1. When and why did Michael Gonzi get involved in Maltese politics on the side of the Labour Party?
2. How was he involved in the dispute between the Church and Gerald Strickland's government?
3. Why did the British colonial government object at first against Gonzi becoming the next Bishop of Malta after Mauro Caruana?
4. Why did the British colonial authorities change their mind about Gonzi's nomination as Bishop of Malta?
5. Explain TWO instances when Gonzi was at loggerhead with the Malta Labour Party after the Second World War.
6. Identify episodes from Archbishop's Gonzi's career that show his pro-British sympathies?
7. How did Gonzi's vision for Malta differ from that of Dom Mintoff?
8. Give THREE adjectives that best describe Gonzi's character and personality and give reasons for your answer.