

The relationship of the Order of Saint Lazarus in France to the Catholic Church during the inter-Wars period: 1918-1939

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Abstract

The early decades of the twentieth century saw the Order obliged to restructure itself to conform to the legal requirements prevalent in France and to re-establish some form of *fons honorum* after the Patriarch H.B. Cyril IX Moghabghab indicated his intention to withdraw his formal protectorship of the Order. The inter-Wars period therefore saw the administration of the Order reaching out to the Holy See to try establishing closer links. These efforts were hampered by State-Church relations relating to the Kingdom of Italy and eventually by the outbreak of the Second World War.

Keywords

Roman Catholic Church, Order of St Lazarus, inter-I/II World War period, relationship.

Introduction

Any relationship between the French Order of Saint Lazarus and the Catholic Church in the Vatican during the early decades of the twentieth century was determined by the political environment of the period prior to and after the First World War. The 19th century Italian Unification and establishment of the Italian Kingdom in 1861 resulting from the efforts by Italian nationalists and monarchists loyal to the House of Savoy had markedly restricted the temporal powers of the pontiff Pius IX who after the capture of Rome by the Italian armed forces self-styled himself to be a *captivus vaticani* [a prisoner of the Vatican]. This status quo was adopted by the subsequent pontiffs: Leo XIII [pontificate: 1878-1903], Pius X [1903-1914], Benedict XV [1914-1922], and Pius XI [1922-1939]. The *captivus vaticani* status quo ended following the Lateran Treaty of

1929 whereby the Italian government led by Benito Mussolini recognized the Vatican City as an independent state under the sovereignty of the Holy See, while the Holy See recognized the legitimacy of the Kingdom of Italy. There was also mutual acceptance of the honorary awards of each partner, including the Order of Sts Maurice and Lazarus now considered a de facto Italian state order for military and civilian merits.¹ The tense relationship between the Vatican City and the Italian government before and after the Lateran Treaty had repercussions over the dealings with foreign national or chivalric Orders.

The French Order of Saint Lazarus had lost its French Royal protection through the Constitutional Charter of the 14 August 1830 which established that only:

*'The Legion of Honour shall be maintained. The king shall determine its internal regulations and decorations.'*²

While a number of authors have interpreted this as an abolition of the Order of St Lazarus, the text simply refers to loss of French Royal protection since, having been set up by a pontifical decree, abolition could only follow a *contarius actus* from the Holy See. There is documented evidence that the Order continued to be active in the subsequent decades showing a philanthropic interest in Palestine, possibly through a connection with the Melkite Patriarchy.³ During the conflict engendered by the Italian Risorgimento of the late 19th century [1848-1871], it appears that a number of zouave supporters fighting for the Pontiff's cause were honoured by being invested as knights of the Order of St Lazarus by the Pontiff. After the fall of Rome in 1870, the loyal zouave supporters organized themselves as the *Militia di Cristo* with the aim of being in

¹ *Lateran Pacts of 1929*. English translation available (02/02/2022)
<https://www.uniset.ca/nold/lateran.htm>.

² J.P. Schmidt. *Charte Constitutionnelle 1830* (14.viii.1830). (Paris: Engelmann et Compagnie Faubourg Montmartre, 1830), lithograph.

³ Alexander Dumas and Adolphe Dumas, *Temple et Hospice du Mont-Carmel en Palesine*. (Paris: Fain & Thunot, 1844), 11-12.

readiness to fight for the rights of the Holy See and stand ready to assist it against its enemies.⁴ By 1905, the Holy See had completely abrogated any possible existing links with the Order of St Lazarus with the promulgation of the Papal Bull of Pius X *De Equestribus Pontificis*. This bull defines the chivalric orders that directly pertained to the Holy See, excluding the Order of St Lazarus from the list.⁵

In the aftermath of the Bull *De Equestribus Pontificis*, the Order of St Lazarus in France set out to re-organize itself as a completely secular order managed by a council of officers under the protectorship (*souverain-pontife*) of the Melkite Patriarchy.⁶ It also undertook to bring itself in line with the legal requirements regulating associations in France registering the *Association Française des Hospitaliers de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem* in 1927, and re-registering again in 1937 following a change in administration structure.⁷ In 1930, the Patriarch H.B. Cyril IX Moghabghab (*1855 †1947) withdrew his formal protectorship of the Order to allow for the appointment of a grand master.⁸ Notwithstanding the withdrawal

⁴ Charles Savona-Ventura, 'The fons honorum of the Order of Saint Lazarus: 1800-1910', *Acta Historiae Sancti Lazari Ordinis*, 3 (2019), 65-90

⁵ Pius X. *De Equestribus Pontificis* (07.ii.1905). Transcribed in: *Acta Sanctae Sedis Ephemerides Romanae*. (Rome: Vatican, 1904-05), 565-571.

⁶ de Jandriac. 'Les chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare de Jerusalem et de Notre Dame de la Merci', *Rivista Araldica*, XI, 11, (November 1913), 679-683.

⁷ Paul Bertrand, *L-Ordre Militaire et Hospitalier de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem*, (Paris: Peyrnnnet, 1960), 100; 'Déclarations d'Associations (art. 1er du décret du 16 aout 1901)', *Journal Officiel de la République Francaise - Lois et Décrets*, 292 (17 December 1937), 13808.

⁸ Paul Bertrand de la Grassiere, *Histoire des Chevaliers-Hospitaliers de Saint-Lazare* (Paris: Chancelier - MHOSLJ, 1932), 189. The reason for the withdrawal of the Patriarch's Protectorship is not clear. It may have been a response to the reformation being undertaken to re-establish the Grand Magistery. However, at this point in the history of intra-Catholic relationships within the Middle East and according to political sensibilities of the times, H.B. Moghabghab appealed directly to the Congregation pro Ecclesia Orientali to limit Latin patriarchal institutions to allow the Melkite Church to recover and adapt to the new political situation in the Middle

of the protectorship, the Order continued to be supported by the Melkite clergy with the Archbishop of Galilee Gregorius Haggiar (†1940) continuing to serve as Spiritual Grand Prior of the Order and looking out for the Order's interests. During this reorganization, moves were also apparently made to attempt establish closer links with the Holy See.



Archbishop of Galilee Gregorius Haggiar
Spiritual Grand Prior of the Order

Building bridges

An early attempt to establish a bridge with the Holy See was apparently made on the 3 September 1927 when Chev Paul Bertrand forwarded a copy of his recently published book titled *L'Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem en Orient, son passe, son present* to Pope Pius XI through the intermediary of the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris H.E. Mgr. Luigi Maglione (*1887 †1944). On the 11 October 1927, the Secretary of State

East. The relinquishing of his protection to the Order of Saint Lazarus based in France may have been a result of this negotiation process. Paolo Maggiolini, 'Tradition and Modernity: The Melkite Catholic Church, the Holy See and the Ottoman Empire from the Tanzimat era to the Mandate System', *ARAM*, 25, 1&2 (2013), 271-287.

for the Holy See Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (*1852 †1934) informed Chev Bertrand that the pontiff had accepted the homage shown by forwarding this work, thanked him for this proof of filial veneration, and, as a pledge of his paternal benevolence, sent him a special apostolic benediction.⁹

This initiative was subsequently followed up by the President of the *Association Française des Hospitaliers de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem* Fernand de l'Église de Fèrier de Fèlix who on the occasion of the function held on St. Lazarus Day sent a note of filial tribute of good wishes in the name of the Order to the pontiff. On the 19 January 1928, a response was again received from the Secretary of State for the Holy See Cardinal Gasparri who passed on the pontiff's thanks and best wishes for the prosperity of the Hospitallers of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem and their families, along with a special Apostolic Blessing [cf. Doc. 1].¹⁰

A follow-up attempt to establish links with the Holy See was made by the Spiritual Grand Prior of the Order Mgr. Archbishop Gregorius Haggiar who on the 25 November 1931 approached the *Sacra Congregazione Pro-Ecclesia Orientali* of the Holy See with a request for the Order to be given special indulgences by the Holy See. A response to this request was received on the 30 August 1938, wherein the Assessor of the *Sacra Congregazione Pro-Ecclesia Orientali* Giuseppe Cesarini pointed out that H.B. the Melkite Patriarch, who dealt with the Order in the past, had relinquished his leadership, and, further asked for more information concerning the Order so that a study on the matter could be made by the Congregation [Doc. 2].¹¹

⁹ Paul Bertrand de la Grassiere, *La Vie Chevaleresque*, 2 (1935), 17.

¹⁰ Cardinal P. Gasparri. *Lettre du Cardinal P. Gasparri, Secrétaire d'Etat au Saint-Siège du 19 Janvier 1928*. No. 3511/27. Transcribed in: *La Vie Chevaleresque*, 2 (1935), 17.

¹¹ Giuseppe Cesarini. *Letter from G. Cesarini, assessore of the Sacra Congregazione Pro-Ecclesia Orientali, dated 30 August 1938 – No.8/32*. Ms. Torri ta' Lanzun Archives, Malta, +1 fol.

In the interim, on the 15-16 April 1935, the Vatican publication *L'Osservatore Romano* published a statement respecting the Order of St Lazarus in response to the reported attempts at reviving and introducing in Italy the Boigni branch of the Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus. It concluded that'

'Because the Order of Saint Lazarus of Boigni, not only is not recognised in Italy, but it results that it was definitely suppressed, from at least from 1608 by the action of Pope Paul V and King Henri IV, the above mentioned actions must be considered illegal and therefore were given the necessary instructions why it must stop proceeding, where appropriate, in confrontation of those responsible, in accordance of law.'

It further reiterated the list of Pontifical Equestrian Orders and defined the relationship of the Holy See with the Sovereign Order of Malta and the Order of Holy Sepulchre.¹² In response, the Chancery of the Order published a clarification in its official newsletter stating: (1) that the Order was not a decoration linked to the Holy See; (2) that the Order was not a religious one; and (3) that the Order was not under the protection of the Holy See.¹³ It also published a commentary on the supposed 1608 suppression of the Order reported by *L'Osservatore Romano* and published the transcribed text of the 1609 mandate given by King Henri IV to the appointed grand master of the Order to show that the Order was not suppressed in 1608.¹⁴

The declaration in *L'Osservatore Romano* is surprising considering the previous cordial communication between the Holy See and the Order in France. However, it must be placed in context of the times. The Holy See had recently (1929) come to an agreement with the Italian

¹² 'A proposito dell'Ordine di S. Lazzaro', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 89 (15-16 April 1935), 2.

¹³ 'Le Saint-Siège et l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem', *La Vie Chevaleresque*, 9 (April 1935), 7.

¹⁴ 'La prétendue suppression de l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem en 1608 – Mandement d'Henri IV, Roi de France du 20 Mai 1609', *La Vie Chevaleresque*, 9 (April 1935), 8-9.

Government led by Benito Mussolini – an agreement that included mutual recognition of honorific awards, including the Italian state Order of St Maurice and Lazarus. The Holy See could in no way support the establishment of a supposedly Chivalric Order in the Italian Kingdom an Order with a similar namesake to the de facto Italian state order awarded for military and civilian merits. The Italian government had legislated that citizens may not use within its territory any honours or distinctions conferred upon them by non-national orders or foreign states, unless authorised by a decree of the president of the Council of Ministers. In 1937, the almoner of the Order archimandrite Demetrius de Ser Leo was apparently sentenced to 6 years in jail by a military tribunal in Rome for trafficking illegal orders and decorations.¹⁵ Notwithstanding the legislation, Italian ecclesiastical nationals admitted to the French Order of St Lazarus included the Archbishop of Florence Cardinal Elie dalla Costa (adm. 1934); the Archbishop of Genoa Cardinal Charles Minoretti (adm. 1934); the Bishop of Massar Mgr. Cristoforo Arduino Terzi O.F.M. (adm. 1934); Mgr. Aldo Fontanse (adm. 1934); Mgr Francesco Zaraga (adm. 1934) appointed referendary to the Order; Rev. Pere Piombino O.F.M. (adm. 1936) appointed chaplain to the Order. In addition, the cape and sword cameriere to Pope Benedict XV Count Luigi Zara was admitted as a knight of justice in 1937.¹⁶

Cordial relations were retained with the Holy See. In 1937, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of His Holiness Pope Pius XI, the Chancery

¹⁵ François Velde, "*Revived*" Orders of Chivalry: the case of the Order of Saint Lazarus. Internet page dated 5 September 1996, updated 6 March 2013. <http://www.heraldica.org/topics/orders/lazarus.htm> [accessed 02/02/2022]. This event is not reported or commented upon by the Order in its official journal *La Vie Chevaleresque*.

¹⁶ *La Vie Chevaleresque*, 6 (July 1934), 117; 14 (September 1936), 103; 18 (October/December 1937), 23.

sent its respectful best wishes. This was responded to by the Secretary of State for the Holy See Cardinal Pacelli¹⁷ with a telegram stating:

*'Cita del Vaticano 15 16 1 140 – voie T.S.F.. Trè sensible hommange filial sa Santetè envoie meilleures bènèdictions. Cardinal Pacelli.'*¹⁸

Following the election of Cardinal Pacelli as Pope Pius XII in March 1939, the grand master of the Order H.R.H. François de Bourbon, duke of Seville sent a congratulatory telegram stating:

'Prince François Grand Maître au nom des Chevaliers Saint Lazare de Jérusalem prie Sa Sainteté agrèè filial homage et entre dèvouement.'

The response, under the signature of Mgr Giovanni Montini¹⁹, dated 5 March 1939, stated:

*'Sa Sainteté remercie vivement et envoie avec voeux paternels première Bènèdiction Apostolique gage faveurs divines.'*²⁰

In response to the letter received from the *Sacra Congregazione Pro-Ecclesia Orientali*, Mgr Haggear wrote to the Superintendent of the Order in France Chev. Charles Otzenberger-Detaille (*1881 †1944) encouraging him to provide a report addressing the requested details [Doc. 3].²¹ Chev. Otzenberger-Detaille prepared the requested report dated 12 April 1939

¹⁷ Eugenio Pacelli (*1876 †1958) was appointed Cardinal Secretary of State 1929. In 1935, he was named Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church and elected pontiff as Pope Pius XII in 1939.

¹⁸ *La Vie Chevaleresque*, 17 (July/September 1937), 2.

¹⁹ Giovanni Montini (*1897 †1978) served in the Holy See's Secretariat of State from 1922 to 1954. Named Archbishop of Milan in 1954 and elevated to the College of Cardinals in 1958. Elected pontiff as Pope Paul VI in 1963.

²⁰ *La Vie Chevaleresque*, 23 (April 1939), 114.

²¹ Gregorios Haggear, *Letter from Mgr Gregorios Haggear, Spiritual Grand Prior of the Order, dated 28 March 1939*. Ms. Torri ta' Lanzun Archives, Malta, +1 fol..

presumably to send to Mgr. Haggear [Doc.4].²² However, there is no evidence in the Torri ta' Lanzun Archival Library as to whether this report was ever forwarded to Mgr. Haggear or to the Holy See. A few months later in September 1939, war broke out with France eventually being invaded by Germany in June 1940. The social upheaval engendered by the conflict and its aftermath created new problems to the organization efforts of the Order putting the development of links with the Holy See initiated in the pre-Second World War period on the backburner.²³

Appendix

Document 1 – Letter from Cardinal P. Gasparri to Fernand de l'Église de Fèrier de Fèlix (19.01.1928)

SEGRETARI DI STATO
DI SUA SANTITÀ

-o-

Dal Vaticano, 19 gennaio 1928

No. 3511/27

Di citarsi nella risposta

MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT,

Le Saint-Père a agrée avec bienveillance le filial hommage des voeux qu'an nom de l'Ordre vous lui avez adressès à l'occasion de votre fête annuelle de fin d'annèe.

Sa Saintetè vous en remercie de coeur, et formant à son tour les meilleurs voeux pour la prospèritè des Hospitaliers de Saint-Lazare de Jèrusalem et leurs familles, leur envoie à tous une spèciale Bènèdiction Apostolique.

Veillez agrèer, Mobsieur le Prèesident, avec mes remerciements pour les souhaits que vous m'avez adressès, les voeux que je forme pour l'Ordre ainsi que l'assurance de ma haute considèration. P. Card. GASPARRI

²² Charles Otzenberger-Detaille, *Note sur l'Association Catholique des Chevaliers Hospitaliers se Saint Lazare de Jerusalem. Reponse à la lettre du 30 Aout 1938 (Sacra Congregacione pro Eccl. Orientali), dated 12 April 1939.* Ms. Torri ta' Lanzun Archives, Malta, +2 fol.

²³ Charles Savona-Ventura, *The WWII war effort of the Order of Saint Lazarus,* (Malta: Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands – MHOSLJ, 2021).

Monsieur le Président
De l'Association Française de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers de St-Lazare de
Jérusalem, Paris.

**Document 2 - Letter from Mgr. G. Cesarini to Mgr. Gregorios Haggear
(30.08.1938)**

Città del Vaticano, 30 Agosto 1938

Sacra Congregazione
Pro-Ecclesia Orientali

Proto No 8/32

Eccellenza Reverendissima,

L'Eccellenza Vostra Rev.ma, con lettera del 25 Novembre 1931 si rivolgeva a questa S. Congregazione domandando che fossero concesse dell' indulgenze all'associazione Cattolica dei Cavalieri Ospedalieri dell' Ordine di S. Lazzaro di Gerusalemme : e faceva tale istanza nella Sua qualità di Superiore e Direttore Spirituale dell'associazione predetta.

Vostra eccellenza forse non ignora che Sua Beatitudine il Patriarca Melchita si occupo, nel passato di questa Associazione, ma poi non volle piu interessarsene: e, nella sua qualifica di Superiore deve certamente conoscere anche : 1) quanti sone i membri de tale Ordine di S. Lazzaro, 2) quali le onorificenze, 3) quale l'attività svolta e dove essa viene esplicata, 4) quali sono gli altri membri direttivi dell' Ordine.

Sato molto grato a Vostra Eccellenza, se oltre a qualche notizia storica di Suo dominio, e a questo S. Dicastero le notizie che riguardano i vari punti cui ho accennato nella present, dovendosi fare uno studio su tale materia.

Nel ringraziarla fin d'ora, approfitto della corcostanza per rinnovar Le i miei ossequi e confermarmi,

per l'E.mo Sig. Cardinale Segretario
di Vostra Eccellenza Rev.ma
signe : G. Cesarini, assessore

Document 3 – Letter from Mgr. Gregorios Haggear to Chev. Charles Otzenberger-Detaille (28.03.1939)

Ciaffa ce 28 Mars 1939

Monsieur le Comte
Charles Otzenberger-Detaille
75 Rue Blanche 75
Paris IX

Cher Ami,

Je vous adresse sous ce pli, une copie de la lettre reçue du Cardinal Tisserant concernant des indulgences que j'avais demandé autrefois pour les membres de l'Ordre de St Lazare.

Comme la chose presse, je vous prie de bien vouloir me donner au plus tôt et de me les retourner par avion tous les renseignements demandés par le Cardinal; je les crois de la plus haute importance.

J'aimerais recevoir quelques croix de Galilée des différentes classes; que deviant le projet de restauration à St Jean d'Acre ? mon secrétaire est sans nouvelles de vous depuis longtemps et il craint beaucoup de perdre le terrain surtout après tant de peine et de démarche pour récupérer.

Dans l'attente de vos bonnes nouvelles et très prochainement, je vous prie de croire, cher Ami, à mes sentiments les plus dévoués, je bénis de tout Coeur l'Ordre tout entier en votre chère Personne,

Signed Grigorios Haggear, Arch de Galilee

Document 4 – Note sur l'Association Catholique des Chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare de Jerusalem. Reponse à la lettre du 30 Aout 1938 (Sacra Congregacione pro Eccl. Orientali) (12.04.1939)

L'administration de l'Ordre Hosp. de Saint Lazare de Jérusalem n'ignora pas que S.B. le Patriarche Melchite s'était occupé de l'Ordre en qualité de Protecteur de l'Ordre, comme l'avaient fait avant Lui, ses prédécesseurs au Patriarcat; mais depuis 1930, Il a manifesté son intention de ne plus s'y intéresser. Concernant

les renseignements demandée par S. Em. le Cardinal TISSERANT, relatifs aux indulgences, nous vous indiquens ceux qui suivant:

1)° – NOMBRE de MEMBRES: Les Membres de l'Ordre, qui font tous profession de foi catholique et qui s'engagent à servir LA SAINT ÉGLISE, sont au nombre de 320 (Une Cinquante sont décédés) comprenant des laïques – 'Les Chevaliers de Dévotion' – et des ecclésiastiques – 'Les Chapelains'. A côté d'eux et sans être membres, existent les 'affiliés' categorie d'Hommes, qui s'associent aux Oeuvres hospitalier de l'Ordre, la lutte contre la lèpre et d'une manière générale contre la souffrance humaine, mais sans être tenus de participer à l'action religieuse des membres de l'association des Chevaliers Catholiques de l'Ordre en question. Ils deivent toutefois et ceci est imposé par les statuts-affirmer leur respect pour La Sainte Église et La Souverain-Pontife en s'engageant à Prier pour qu'il y ait un seul Troupeau et un seul Pasteur. C'est dans cette categories, que sont inscrites les Dames. Le Nombre total des Affiliés hommes et dames, dépasse le chiffre de 400 membres.

2)° – Le marque d'honneur de l'Ordre est l'antique Croix verte à huit points sans bordure ou avec bordure blanche selon les insignes; alle porte de diverse manières, selon les catégories et les grades.

3)° – L'ACTIVITE de l'Ordre est double:

A) Défense de La Sainte Église Catholique et La Souveraineté du Saint Père, notamment en collaberant à l'Oeuvre du retour des communautés chrétiennes d'Orient à l'unité catholique;

B) Lutte contre la souffrance humaines, notamment en participapant à la lutte contre la lèpre, rôle traditionnel de l'Ordre.

4)° – DIRECTION. Les membres directeurs de l'Ordre, aux côtés du Directeur Spiritual de l'Association Catholique des Chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare de Jérusalem, sont: Le Grand Maître: Son Altesse Royale, Le Prince FRANCOIS de BOURBON, DUC de SEVILLE, actuellement Général Commandant un corps d'Armée, dans l'Armée Nationale Espagnole, et son Co-Adjuteur: Son Alt. Roy. Le Prince FRANCOIS de BOURBON et BOURBON, et les Membres du Grand Conseil de l'Ordre, parmi lesquels: Le Duc de CLERMONT TONNERRE, le Prince

de BAUFFREMONT-COURTENAY, le Duc de LEWIS-MIREPOIX, ainsi que les Représentants de l'Ordre dans les différents Pays: notamment en Allemagne: S. Alt. Roy. le Prince Frédéric de HOHENZOLLERN et S. Alt. S. le Duc Georges de MECKLENBOURG, en Bohême: S. Alt. SD. Le Prince Charles de SCHWARZENBERG, aux Etats-Unis: Le Marquis Georges MACDONALD, en Espagne, Le Représentant était: S. Alt. Roy. Le Prince Alphonse de BOURBON, Marquis de Sqillache, (fusillé par les Marxistes comme étage à la Prison à Madrid en 1936) et au Brésil: Mr. Le Procureur Général J.M. MACDOWELL da COSTA. L'Administration est confié au Surintendant Général et au Grand Capitulaire.

LA SURINTENDANCE GENERALE:
Le Comte OTZENBERGER-DETAILLE

PARIS, le 12 Avril 1939

