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Peregrinatio Interrupta: **An Eclectic Success of a Failed Pilgrimage**

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This study explores the case study of two Quaker nuns, Ms Catherine Evans and Ms Sarah Cheevers. Their coincidental connection with the Mediterranean island of Malta caught the attention of several researchers, primarily interested in the micro history of the Quakers movement. Originally, Evans and Cheevers were entrusted to travel to Jerusalem, expecting to convert Christians at the epicentre of Christianity to Quakerism. After their ship called into the port of Malta en route to the Holy Land, their mission was interrupted due to their polarising and confrontational behaviour towards the Holy Office of the Roman Inquisition. Their intended short stay was turned into an incarcerated pilgrimage for about three and a half years. Based on the Quaker nuns' criminal proceedings of the Inquisition Tribunal located in the Mdina Cathedral Archives of Malta and other published literature, various interpretations are explored regarding their missionary-pilgrimage experience in seventeenth-century Malta.

The challenging situation experienced by these Quaker nuns during their detainment, their confined pilgrimage presents an intriguing opportunity to explore their experience as a spiritual and physical phenomenon, turning their mission into a missionary-pilgrimage experience. Considering the context within which this experience unfolds, and the complicated circumstances that dominated this situation, this study throws light on the historical context of how believers used temporal experiences, in this case the human body, as an attempt to navigate and communicate the spiritual world. Although the original missionary objectives could be easily regarded as an outright failure, it is here argued that the Quaker nuns continued their missionary purpose of preaching Quakerism. Conversely, their incarceration-turned-pilgrimage could be viewed as a resounding success, whereby the two nuns were able to reinforce their own understanding and beliefs in Quaker ideology while perpetuating their experiences among other Quaker communities.

Key Words: Malta, Quakers, Quaker nuns, Inquisition, pilgrimage, imprisonment, suffering, unbreakable spirit

Introduction

The history of early Quaker travel, including those of the Quaker nuns Catherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, has been well documented and widely published. Available literature explores the Quakers' journeys and the hardships they endured during their travels. Some historians consider early Quaker missionary women to be irrational social outcasts operating on the frontiers of society. Other than such itinerant experiences, this research explores the interaction of the two nuns with the officials of the Holy Office in an attempt to shed light on how the narrative of their Malta experience was embodied

in a missionary-pilgrimage mindset, clearly exhibited through their personality and interactions (Villani, 1998, 1999, 1999a; Barry, 2015; Arcara, 2007).

Following the teachings of the founder of the Society of Friends, the Quaker nuns continued to live their lives in a manner in which both their verbal and non-verbal means of communication were aimed to bring those confronted by them closer to God. The failure of converting anybody in Malta during their mission is supported by archival sources, such as the Archives Inquisition Malta [from now on, abbreviated to AIM]. However, these interactions provide an opportunity to explore the

extent of failure and success, especially at such an early stage of establishing the Society of Friends. The period of incarceration highlights Quaker practices, especially those which contrasted sharply with the Catholic tradition in Malta. Furthermore, it is argued that the two Quaker nuns transformed their incarceration into a spiritual pilgrimage. Beyond the continuous interactions with the learned churchmen employed to convert the nuns with the help of the Inquisitor, Evans and Cheevers felt that God constantly guided them through their verbal and non-verbal communication, including non-conformist gender behaviour, hunger strikes, and the writing of several reflective pieces of literature sent to the Friends in England.

On 21 December 1658, the two Quaker nuns disembarked at the iconic Grand Harbour of Malta. As soon as the 'two English ladies', dressed 'in Franciscan habit', set foot on *terra firma*, they were greeted by the English Consul, Mr John James Watts. The proselytising enthusiasm of Evans and Cheevers made Watts immediately caution his compatriots. While escorting them to his house in Valletta, he explained how the Holy Office of the Inquisition did not welcome their missionary role. However, Evans and Cheevers ignored Watts' words of wisdom.

The presence of Ms Catherine Evans and Ms Sarah Cheevers instantly became the talking point of the small urban community. Within hours of their arrival, they were conversing with their next-door neighbour. Astounded, and probably insulted as well, by the Quaker nuns' behaviour, he immediately informed Inquisitor Mgr Hieronimo Casanate (Figure 1) about their heretical talk and the printed material they were distributing (AIM, vol. 70A). On Christmas Eve, the Inquisitor's Assessor and his Chancellor arrived at Watts' house to learn more about the two English ladies. The meeting immediately turned sour since the Quakers objected to the jurisdictional powers of the Office of the Inquisitor and refused to take an oath before providing their testimony. With immediate effect, the nuns were placed under house arrest (AIM, vol 10; Villani, 2003: 33-35). The Inquisitor, the Pope, the Grand Master, and the entire population of Malta were thenceforth deemed guilty by association, earning the scorn of Evans and Cheevers and the predicate of 'uncivilised barbarians unsusceptible to a better culture' (Yu, 2012:2).

Figure 1: Inquisitor Hieronimo (Girolamo) Casanate



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girolamo_Casanate#/media/File:Girolamo_Casanate.jpg

Malta was regarded as a spiritual wilderness which needed cultivating, unquestionably a source of great fulfilment for the Quaker missionaries on their conversion pilgrimage. Quakers firmly believed that the Inner Light they received from God was superior to the laws of governments or any doctrines of religious authorities. Evans and Cheevers did not try to evade persecution, as it was a 'sanctified witness to their faith' (Yu, 2012:3). Suffering in prison became part of their pilgrimage toward receiving God's mercy for their soul. Evans and Cheevers regarded themselves prophets, martyrs, Chosen Ones, Handmaids of God, or Servants of God. They were driven by radical biblical tradition and were willing to sacrifice themselves readily, prepared to endure torment and misery. This all sounds rather fundamentalist. Indeed, it is widely accepted that Quakerism originated from radical Puritanism of seventeenth-century England (Carroll, 1978). Having apocalyptic expectations was no exception among these believers, who were convinced they were living in the last days of the world (where evil rules freely) before the New Age (where God's will shall rule unconditionally) would begin.

Figure 2: Inquisitor's Palace, Birgu, Malta. Now National Museum of Ethnography, Malta



Source: Kevin Griffin

In this light, the Maltese religious and legal authorities, embodied by the Inquisitor and his officials, thought they could not let this Quaker disruptive innovation tarnish the Roman Catholic fabric without countermeasures (Gill, 2009). Accordingly, since Evans and Cheevers refused to desist and stand down, they were first placed under house arrest for four months, followed by over three years of imprisonment at the Inquisitor's Palace in the harbour town of Birgu (Figure 2).

Early Modern Malta & The Holy Office

In what kind of a world had Evans and Cheevers moored? The Maltese islands are strategically located in the narrow channel separating Sicily from North Africa. Before the sixteenth century, Malta's state of isolation characterised its archaic cultural behaviours, with its unique language and customs (Cassar, 2000). A fortuitous change in the rule of the archipelago ushered a period of sustained growth and progress. In 1530, the Order of the

Knights of St John was granted Malta as its new home by Emperor Charles V after losing their island state of Rhodes to the Ottomans in 1523. Until their sudden expulsion in 1798 by Napoleon Bonaparte, the Order of St John transformed the geographical and cultural landscape of the islands, as Malta's domestic and foreign policy came to reflect the ebb and flow of Mediterranean affairs. New urban settlements surrounded the Grand Harbour, altering Malta and the life of its inhabitants. By the first half of the seventeenth century, the harbour towns became multifunctional and cosmopolitan. Almost a third of the island's population had settled along the urban conglomerate of fortified towns surrounding the Grand Harbour. The significant concentration of people in this condensed space generated a sense of claustrophobia. Maltese and foreigners shared a common space as the narrow streets and the main thoroughfares became theatres of transcultural experiences (Mallia-Milanes, 1994).

Three official authorities competed for their jurisdictional powers within this early modern space - the Order of St John, The Pope and the Inquisitors. The Order of St John, with its own independently chosen head of state, the Grand Master, formed the government of Malta with its courts. The Pope appointed bishops and Inquisitors, and each had their law courts. Although these courts presided on matters specific to each of their jurisdictions, there were various instances of overlapping jurisdictional interests, so, at times, the Pope had to intervene. The office of the Inquisitor enjoyed religious jurisdiction over all individuals in Malta. These powers became increasingly important within the newly urbanised settlements due to brisk maritime activity and services. Growing overseas travel among the Maltese and many foreigners engaged in trade, commerce, and naval operations in the Mediterranean introduced new ideas to Malta (Mallia-Milanes, 1994). The Holy Office became the watchdog of orthodoxy in an environment likely to offer numerous opportunities for the urban inhabitants to transgress against the precepts of the Roman Catholic Church. This was the ruling state of affairs when the Quaker nuns reached Malta. In one of their writings, the nuns commented about the popular knowledge among the Maltese that whoever enters the prisons of the Holy Office will be doomed forever (Evans, 1715).

The Quakers' Movement

Originally known as the Society of Friends, George Fox founded the Quakers' movement in England in the 1640s. Borne out of a somewhat unsettled period in history, Fox and his early disciples relegated the importance of the scriptures and rejected all forms of social hierarchy, basic tenets that generated significant cultural tension (Carroll, 1978; Friedrichs, 1995). The Society of Friends actively interrupted established religious gatherings, a strategy intended to convert the congregation through their preaching of the Quaker ideology of Inner Light (Hinds, 2015). As a movement, Quakerism experienced sustained growth during the 1650s. Radiating out of the English Midlands, several started to join the fold of Fox's Quaker movement. By the closing years of the 1650s, the Quakers aspired to propagate their teachings beyond England (Barry, 2015). Their ultimate mission was to become God's voice of reason, intended to transform people's mentalities.

Some missionary journeys, such as Fox's travels through North America, were relatively successful in establishing a Quaker community. However, most Quaker missionaries faced discrimination and persecution, especially from staunch Catholic communities, particularly in large parts of southern Europe (Barry, 2015). For instance, the Quaker missionaries Beatrice Beckly, Mary Prince, Mary Fisher, John Perrot, John Luffe, and John Buckley embarked on their travels in 1657 and intended to reach Jerusalem (Villani, 2003). Following their arrival in the port of Livorno in Italy, the Quakers' mission was met with an element of resistance. Despite the cosmopolitan nature of these territories, Rome and the Venetian Republic became the gatekeepers of the Quakers' missionary zeal.

Pilgrimage belonged from the very beginning to the Quaker repertoire of religious expressions. George Fox's pilgrimage in 1652 and his frequent imprisonments for blasphemy, the refusal to take up arms or swear oaths cemented his propensities for an apocalypse (Barry, 2015; Carroll, 1978; Hinds, 2015). This behaviour was met with staunch opposition in several southern European countries. In the late seventeenth century, Quakers recorded and published their hardships on a large scale, and Quaker authors often labelled ecclesiastical courts or inquisitors as religious criminals. Many Quaker

women spoke out against injustices meted out to them and would not be bridled or silenced (Gill, 2009). For instance, Elizabeth Hooton, the first of John Fox's female disciples, was relatively fearless. She would interrupt sermons, give priests a piece of her mind, confront Oliver Cromwell with his shortcomings, approach King Charles II without genuflecting, and walk alongside him while pleading the cases of imprisoned fellow Quakers (Rose, 2002). Hooton, filled with the 'Inner Light' and 'power of the Lord', thus asserted her spiritual equality (Rose, 2002).

Inspired by Fox and Hooton, Evans and Cheevers set out to Jerusalem on a missionary pilgrimage to convert the inconvertible. Convinced that they knew the truth, they would aim at people, who, having been taught a different truth all their lives, were at an essential part of their once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage experience at the place where the Lord had preached, suffered, and died on the Cross and had resurrected. It seems this could not have been a successful approach, surely meeting with resistance and anger from people who saw their pilgrimage to Jerusalem disturbed. Proselytising would undoubtedly have been regarded as a disruptive interaction.

Timeline

The Quaker nuns and their Maltese Interlude

- 21 December 1658 – Arrival at Malta
- 24 December 1658 – First visit by the Inquisitor's Assessor to Mr. Watts' house
- 4 April 1659 – Transferred from house arrest to the Inquisitors' Palace.
- 15 June 1659 – Confiscation of ink and paper
- 12 February 1660 – The nuns run out of money. During March and May 1660, intermittent hunger strikes
- September 1660 – Rejoined in a single cell and were allowed to earn some money by mending clothes
- 30 July 1662 – Transferred from the Inquisitors' Palace to the British Consul Alphonse Desclaus' house.
- October 1662 – Quaker nuns left Malta to return home.
- November 1662 – A hero's welcome in Britain.

The Malta Experience

A few days after the arrival of the Quaker nuns, the Inquisitor informed the Holy Office in Rome, requesting further instructions on how to proceed with this unprecedented situation. The Pope hurriedly advised the Inquisitor to detain and monitor the two nuns.

The position of the Holy See was motivated by several reasons. First, leaving no stone unturned was necessary for the head of the church since memories of the Reformation movement were still fresh in the minds of the church leaders. Knowledge of the Quaker movement was familiar to Pope Alexander VII (1655-1667). Apart from the wave of Quaker missionaries travelling through Italy, the Pope had first-hand experience with the aforementioned Perrot and Luffe. These Quaker missionaries were adamant about meeting the Pope in their attempt to convert the Holy See. Also, Pope Alexander VII was very familiar with the small island of Malta, where he held the office of Inquisitor between 1633 and 1636.

Were Evans and Cheevers of the same calibre as Perrot and Luffe? Just three months following the Perrot and Luffe affair, the Pope was convinced that the Quaker nuns in Malta could pose a threat of proportion to orthodoxy. As advised by the Pope, Cardinal Barberino instructed Inquisitor Mgr Casanate as follows:

Question the English ladies to get more information and names of those Quakers who are spreading all over the world, prepare the prisons for their transfer, consider the women as mentally insane similar to the two we have already dealt with in Rome, one of which had already died in a mental hospital (AIM, vol 10; Villani, 2003: 33-37; Arcara, 2007).

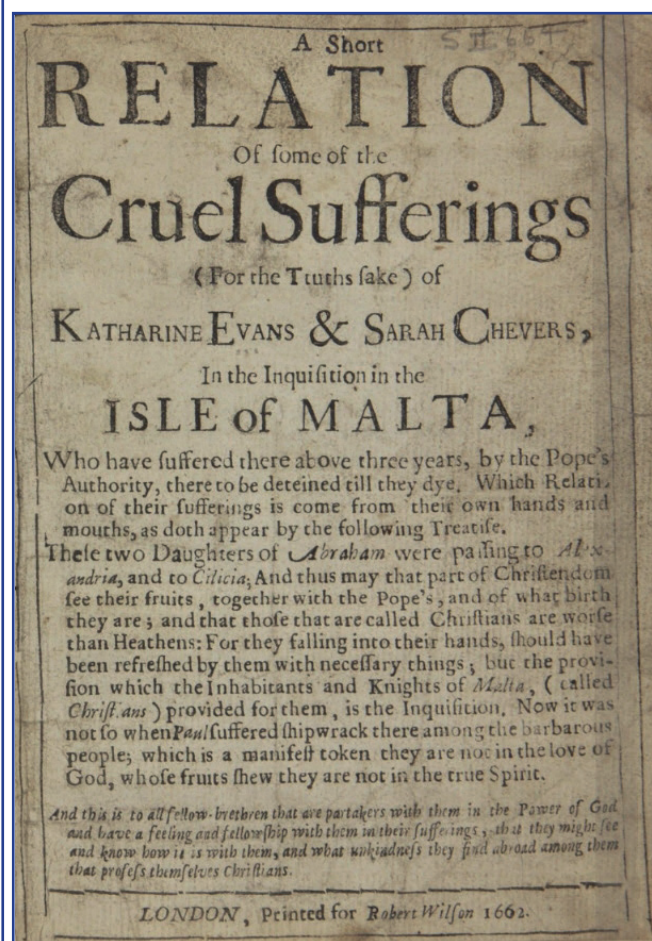
In contrast to the treatment of Quaker missionaries in other parts of the world, the incarceration of Evans and Cheevers was purely intended to get information about the Society of Friends and their future actions (Barry, 2015). Although the two Quaker nuns were interviewed frequently, at no point did the Inquisitor attempt to wrangle information out of them about the Society of Friends by subjecting the nuns to moments of physical torture.

In this case, the nuns endured the prison experience as a voluntary penance, as they lived the Quaker doctrine: one does not accept gifts in kind or money and one must disregard Catholic authority. Therefore, although they did respect the Inquisitor, they did not want to bow or take off their hats when meeting him. However, there was only one person whom Evans and Cheevers truly despised: the English friar Malachi, as he was continuously humiliating and ridiculing them, laughing in their face, making fun of their misery, and mentally tormenting them. He did this of his own volition, not on orders of the Inquisition, believing that he represented a superior belief. Cheevers despised this monk to the point that she wrote an entire letter to express her disdain towards this friar and to justify the righteousness preached by the Quakers (Evans, 1715:58; Villani, 2003).

The challenging physical experience did not deter the religious spirit of the Quaker nuns. On the contrary, the evidence from the court case indicates how the Quaker doctrine was well defined. Repetitive interrogations resulted in flawless synchronic responses, even when physically kept in separate cells. Evans and Cheevers were truly unflappable; they always had the correct answers. To this effect, the Inquisitor could not fault them, apart from not being Catholic. They did not ridicule Catholicism but always tried to explain what they saw as the truth. The Inquisitor was moved by their conviction, love for God, commitment to salvation, and Quaker doctrine. Secretly, he probably wished all his Catholic subjects would be so upright and steadfast. In contrast, Evans and Cheevers did not allow the authorities to dominate their minds. The Inquisition entrapped their bodies but failed to control their minds.

In the name of the Inner Light, the two nuns endured sustained months of isolated incarceration, illnesses, and ridicule. Evans and Cheevers used their bodies as powerful weapons of protest, looking death in the eye. Both nuns shaved off all their hair, washed with cold water, and spent several cold days sitting bare-chested on the floor (Evans, 1715:115-6, 117-8, 120, 132; Barry, 2015; Arcara, 2007). The nuns also practised intermittent fasting, sometimes turning into hunger strikes (Evans, 1715:18, 28, 33, 34, 50, 51-52; Carroll, 2018). Their trip to Jerusalem was well funded, but they ran out of money in prison, as they were incarcerated at their own

Figure 3: Front Flyleaf of *A True Account of the Great Tryals and Cruel Sufferings*, by Katharine Evans & Sarah Chevers



Source: Evans & Cheevers 1662

expense. To earn some money for sustenance, they knitted garments and mended clothes for prison inmates (Evans, 1715:32). In the meantime, they continuously prayed for the Inquisitor, his assessors, the Government of the Knights, and the Maltese for them to see the Inner Light too.

The Inquisitor had initially provided the two nuns with writing materials which were confiscated after the letters they sent to their Friends in England failed to pass the censor's scrutiny (Evans, 1715:27, 34, 35). For the devotees of Quakerism, being deprived of voice or word was equal to being deprived of food for the body (Gill, 2009). Amid such challenges, the nuns were rather prolific, composing several poems, epistles, and letters each time the Inner Light inspired them during their spiritual journey (Evans, 1715:76-79, 80-81, 94-95).

In the early days of incarceration, the ladies were deprived of human contact except for the prison employees. Anyone who attempted to come into contact with the nuns was immediately considered an enemy of the Religion. On one occasion, an English sailor, Henry Bruck, overheard the nuns reciting the rosary and singing hymns from their prison cell window. Bruck was rather excited to learn about the country he left twenty-five years ago. His Maltese friend did not hesitate to help him reach the prison window bars, letting Bruck stand on his shoulders. While they were conversing with Evans and Cheevers, a prison warden took the two men by surprise. The Maltese friend fled, leaving Henry Bruck dangling from the window bars. He spent a night in jail for his efforts before being interrogated, reprimanded, and released (AIM, vol. 70A).

Like other Quaker missionaries, Evans and Cheevers continued to proselytise their fundamental tenet that God manifested himself in endless manners. A series of events were considered a testimony of proof that God was punishing the Grand Master and his subjects for failing to recognise the truth behind Quakerism (Barry, 2015). The explosion of a major gunpowder storage facility and the rapid spread of fever among the Maltese became important talking points within the prison walls and beyond (Evans, 1715:130, 133).

In the end, the Inquisition, through the intervention of the British consul, gave up and sent them home. After four years of imprisonment, Cardinal Barberino was granted permission by Pope Alexander VII to release the two ladies. Eleven weeks later, the frail missionaries boarded the English frigate *Sapphire* (Evans, 1715:139). Little is known about the final days of their turbulent time in Malta, yet a pamphlet was published to describe their hardships. Still, the Quaker nuns remained as resolute as ever. The same pamphlet asserts that, when sailing out of the harbour's mouth, Cheevers's prophetic inspiration confirmed how the wrath of God would punish the 'Heads and Rulers, Princes and Governors of Malta' (Evans, 1715:127; Villani, 2003).

In an abstract manner, the journeying part of the pilgrimage of Evans and Cheevers may have been interrupted, but the spiritual part continued in prison. It was a pilgrimage to a destination unfulfilled while the

pilgrimage was still stationary in progress. In this sense, it still conforms with the description that a pilgrimage is a journey with a benefit, discovering the spiritual abstract self through the senses. Their fasting and suffering in imitation of the Lord are extreme in the same category as walking a procession barefoot, self-flagellation, or the crucifixion of believers during Easter, etc.

The Missionary-Pilgrimage Duality.

In recent years, the separate worlds of the missionary and pilgrim have become the subject of analysis among various scholars, highlighting various elements that bring together the two experiences. McIntyre and Olsen (2019) reviewed the relationship between missionaries and pilgrims related to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (a.k.a. the Mormon Church). Their conclusion highlights how proselytising missions by members of the Mormon Church portray similar characteristics associated with pilgrimage. In analogy, this paper links the Quaker mission with pilgrimage.

Similar approaches have widened the definition of pilgrimage. Morinis (1992:4) adds that

... a pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or state that he or she believes to embody a sacred ideal.

He stresses that a pilgrimage has a 'composite and varied nature,' ranging from a worldly to a spiritual concern. The relevance of 'in quest of a place' and 'sacred ideal' is quintessential. Given this quest, distance to that place is irrelevant, e.g., Luther thought that a person, in the light of the values his Reformation provided, could engage in a pilgrimage while sitting in an armchair and reading the Scriptures (Hobbs, 2021). All the properties of this definition apply to the Quaker nuns in question, justifying the arguments that the missionary had to pilgrim:

a paradigmatic and paradoxical human quest, both outward and inward, a movement towards ideals known but not achieved at home. As such, pilgrimage is an image of the search for fulfilment of all people inhabiting an imperfect world (Morinis, 1992:ix-x).

In contrast to the missionary-pilgrimage duality mentioned above, Hui-chu Yu (2012) argues how

seventeenth-century Quaker missionary journeys differed from the travels undertaken by pilgrims.

For pilgrims, the primary purpose of visiting famous shrines and holy relics was to strengthen their faith through the eyewitness experience. In contrast, Quaker itinerant ministers sought to reinforce the connection between the Quakers in England and those in the colonies and other territories (2012:3).

Contrary to Hui-chu Yu's distinction, it is here argued that there is a vital element of a pilgrim-missionary rapprochement, keeping an open mindset toward the understanding of pilgrimage (McIntyre & Olsen, 2019). Further to the discussion regarding the various formats pilgrimages may take, it is proposed that any type of travel can be akin to pilgrimage as long as it is relevant and meaningful to the travellers. The current authors argue that what had started as a missionary trip to Jerusalem became a pilgrimage when their travel was interrupted in Malta. For the case study of Evans and Cheevers, pilgrimage is not necessarily linked to physical exercise, and distance is irrelevant. In a Classical sense, the situation of the Quaker nuns in Malta can be compared to the Greek pilgrimage concept of *Oreibasia*, whereby the aspect of suffering and seeking hardship is the core objective to please God better (Elsner & Rutherford, 2005; Kowalzig, 2005). In the case of Evans and Cheevers, their pilgrimage was linked to physical endurance and place. When the mission failed 'to reinforce the connection between the Quakers in England and those in the colonies and other territories' according to Hui-chu Yu's definition (2012:3), it transfigured into a pilgrimage.

The Quaker nuns' conviction could uphold any accusation akin to Jesus Christ meeting the Devil in the desert, where Jesus comes out victorious (Lk. 4:1-13): the spirit led Christ into the wilderness, who stayed there for forty days, where the Devil tempted him. Christ retreats to a solitary place, the wilderness, and in the case of Evans and Cheevers, a cell where God's elemental enemy is met; Christ resists the Devil, and the two nuns resist the Inquisitor. Jesus fasted for forty days to take on his nemesis, and so did Evans and Cheevers on a regime of bread and water. Quoting Jesus: 'One does not live on bread alone,' i.e., trusting God keeps people alive. In

the case of the Quakers, this is represented through their conviction of the 'Inner Light'.

Regarding the Turners' *liminality* (Turner & Turner, 1978:3), Evans and Cheevers went far beyond the limit. The saying of William Blake (1972) comes to mind:

*The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom
... You never know what is enough until you
know what is more than enough.*

Their piety satiated in this way; the two nuns received a heroines' welcome in England and became near-saints. Turner's *communitas* here applies to the Society of Friends and other Quaker contemporaries, who could be forgiven for looking at them as heroes and martyrs, living saints, walking in the footsteps of many other exemplary people of the Quaker religion. They were *de facto* pioneering heroes and, as Quaker role models, raised the benchmark of enduring suffering, reaching the same level as confessor martyrs had they been Catholics.

These parallels are also manifestations of verbal and non-verbal interactions intended to profess faith while preaching religious teachings; in other words, manifestations akin to missionary behaviour. Therefore, it is argued that interactions represent one of the most important common precepts for the pilgrim-missionary. The pilgrim and the missionary constantly interact, propagating a system of dispositions that epitomise the individual's behaviour within a group or a community. Therefore, interaction is the source and means that the pilgrim-missionary would replicate and propagate the whole gamut of faith and practice in a particular environment.

To further understand the social interaction context of the Quaker nuns in Malta, reference is made to Bourdieu's theory of practice: the *habitus*. In a nutshell, Bourdieu states that culture is second nature. In other words, the *habitus* is composed of embodied, largely unconscious dispositions that allow individuals to structure and be structured by the environment within which they operate. Therefore, the *habitus* provides the means for individuals with predisposed ways of relating to and categorising experiences. In this sense, verbal and non-verbal communication reveals the *habitus*'s nature. Embodied manners, according to Bourdieu (1977), become an analytical tool to evaluate the social world:

If all societies ... that seek to produce a new man through the process of 'deculturation' and 'reculturation' set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners, the reason is that, treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical (mnemonic) form, the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of culture (Bourdieu, 1977:94).

Thus, the *habitus* is that process that generates a shared sense of behaviour in an individual, consciously or otherwise and connects with those cultural practices and meanings that continuously reinforce individual and collective identity. In the case of Quakers, the Friends started to define their precepts in opposition to the rest of society. Especially after publishing their so-called *Discipline* in 1656, adherents to the movement agreed to the potential loss of property and freedom. Consequently, *the Discipline* formalised a mode of behaviour that instinctively gave structure and character to the movement. As explained by Bourdieu, structure provides a basic minimum level of communication; it establishes a social disposition that allows for a basic consensus of meaning among adherents of the same faith while setting them apart from the other.

Against this background, the case of the Quaker nuns in seventeenth-century Malta is interesting for many reasons. First, since their arrival in Malta was so close to the publication of *the Discipline*, their *habitus* became an important measure of their social disposition towards the recently defined Quaker theology. In other words, Evans and Cheevers were expected to represent the proper practice consistently. Second, their interactions with various individuals during their incarceration continued to confirm their belonging to a particular group. The quality and consistency of their verbal and non-verbal communication also indicated the level of belonging to the Society of Friends. Third, the environment within which the Quaker nuns operated was also extremely challenging. Bourdieu (1990:76-86) argues that the more complex the situation, the more the practice becomes codified. In other words, the degree of risk influences the degree of codification exhibited by an individual or a group. This brings us back to the notion of interaction that either assimilates or differentiates between individuals or groups.

Reflections

Without any doubt, the story of the Quaker Nuns in Malta is more complex than a simple cause and effect. However, the following reflections provide insight into how the segregation missionary and pilgrimage experiences were not always as distinct as one might assume.

Evans and Cheevers never made it to Jerusalem. At face value, their original missionary intent to convert the Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land never materialised. As missionaries, they also failed to convert any Maltese. However, although they lacked the supporting Quaker infrastructure to convert the Maltese, they undoubtedly had some sympathisers on their side.

On the other hand, as pilgrims, the Quaker nuns were an absolute success. The incarcerated pilgrimage experience in Malta checks all the boxes of Morinis' (1992:4) definition. It had been a *paradigmatic* and *paradoxical* human *quest*, both *outward* and *inward* (physical and spiritual), a movement *towards* (Quaker) *ideals* known but not achieved at *home*. Furthermore, their *habitus* communicated a social world that influenced several individuals through their interactions. A stout wooden cell door did not silence the nuns' missionary zeal; on the contrary, the force of containment energised their beliefs. People were moved by their resolute success as they radiated their resolve. They surprised everyone with their kind disposition, understanding, love, and forgiveness. The extent of their deplorable state motivated the Inquisitor to petition the Pope to release them, as he could not see any harm in them. Therefore, these officials expressed a severe sense of pity, especially when they considered what the Quaker nuns had endured during their incarceration. Hence, their *search for the*

fulfilment of all people inhabiting *an imperfect world* was indeed *undertaken*. However, when they arrived home in England, they had yet to achieve the Quaker mission goal of establishing a connection between the Quakers in England and other territories (Hui-chu Yu, 2012: 3), *i.e.*, a Turnerian *communitas* had not been established.

Suffering can be experienced anywhere in the world, but Malta had proven to be a *Deodandum* for Quaker purposes. The incarceration period became their pilgrimage, helping them every day and night to reflect and study the Quaker doctrine, becoming more Quaker than John Fox himself. In an abstract manner, the journeying part of the pilgrimage of Evans and Cheevers may have been interrupted, a destination unfulfilled. Still, the spiritual part continued in prison, stationary in its progress. In this sense, it still conforms with the description that a pilgrimage is a journey with a benefit, discovering the spiritual abstract self, in their case, the so much yearned for Inner Light through the senses. Regarding Turner's *liminality*, Evans and Cheevers were way off the scale, but the excess was an expected Quaker behaviour (Barry, 2015).

In the long run, their story resonated with the Quaker movement and was published several times to ensure that later Quaker generations would never forget this successful pilgrimage. At the same time, the Malta experience could serve as a benchmark of those ideals that Quakers should possess. As pilgrims, they lived and embodied the Quaker concept of the Inner Light. Yet, in the greatest of contrasts, they were forgotten in Malta the moment they sailed out of the Grand Harbour. They did not leave as much of a dent in the armour of the Inquisition, notwithstanding Cheevers's prophesising.

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