PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR: 
THE LIFE OF FR PAUL GRECH CUMBO S.J.

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The Maltese Jesuits have been linked with the Santal Parganas mission in India for decades. In recent years, they have also been active in other lands: Brazil, Chile, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Lebanon and Egypt among others. Over eighty years ago, a Maltese Jesuit – Fr Paul Grech Cumbo – asked to carry out missionary work in China.

Paul was born in Valletta on 27 December 1887 – the sixth child and son in the family of eight boys and one girl – of Vincenzo Grech Cumbo and Carmela née Azzopardi. He was baptised two days later in the Parish Church of Porto Salvo (popularly known as St Dominic’s) by the Parish Priest, Fr Thomas P. Zarb OP. He was confirmed by Bishop Pietro Pace on 1 May 1897. After his secondary education at the Lyceum in Valletta, he was admitted to the Society of Jesus as a novice by the Provincial, Fr Francesco de Paula Naibone, on 9 June 1904.

The Sicilian Jesuits had been settled in Malta since 1860 when they sought refuge here in the wake of Garibaldi’s insurrection, which led to his conquest of Sicily. They settled here for over forty years, opening a seminary in Gozo and various houses of formation in Malta. In 1896, all the novices and students of the Sicilian Province were gathered in one building which had just been built in Birkirkara and was dedicated to St Aloysius Gonzaga. Br Paul stayed here as a novice for only one year because, in 1905, the novitiate

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1. Porto Salvo (St Dominic’s) Parish Church, Valletta (PSPV). Baptismal Register 1883-1887, 580.
2. Ibid.
3. Fr Grech Cumbo’s Stats Personae (Province card) in the Archives of the Turin Province of the Society of Jesus (ATPSJ). Copy in the Archives of the Maltese Province of the Society of Jesus (AMPJS).
4. Ibid.
was transferred to Bagheria, near Palermo, Sicily, and Paul went there in October of that year. Although he had completed only fifteen months of the two-year novitiate and had not yet taken his First Vows, he commenced the study of literature, known as the Juniorate. He was a model religious and student and was loved by all. He then took his First Vows in Bagheria on 10 June 1906. It was at this time that Paul began to nurture his wish to be a missionary in China.7

In September 1908, after his literature studies, Paul began his study of philosophy at Stonyhurst, in Lancashire, England, but after a year he returned to Sicily and joined his Sicilian and Maltese colleagues in the Villarosa philosophate at Bagheria, where he spent the last two years of the philosophy course.8 Paul spent the next four years, from June 1911 to the summer of 1915, as a regent, teaching and prefecting, at St Aloysius’ College, which had opened as a school in 1907.9

In October 1915, Paul began the theology course at Chieri, near Turin, Italy. His wish to go to China being finally granted, he was purposely assigned to the Turin Province, that was responsible for the Pengpu mission in the province of Anhui, in central China.10 A year later, he was sent to St Beuno’s, in Wales, for the other three years of theology studies.11 He took Minor Orders on 20 April 1918, and was ordained Subdeacon and Deacon on 21 and 22 April respectively.12 Three days later, on 25 April, the Right Reverend Francis Mostyn, Bishop of Menevia, ordained him a priest at St Beuno’s.13

In October 1919, Fr Paul was sent to Florence for his final year of formation which the Jesuits undergo, namely, the Tertianship — the third year of novitiate — under the direction of Fr Luigi Querini.14 Among his fellow Tertians was Fr Giuseppe Demichelis, S.J., who had already been a missionary in China since 1910, and had come back expressly for the Tertianship.15

In autumn 1920, Fr Paul returned to Malta for a short family visit. This was the last time he met his family, for he never came back to Malta after he left for China.16 At that time, it was not customary for missionaries to return home every few years for some months rest as became the norm after Vatican Council II. During his 31 years in China, he did not even have the ‘consolation’ of meeting any Maltese.17 After this home visit, Fr Paul returned to Florence, from where, towards the end of September,18 he and Fr Demichelis started their journey to China,19 where they arrived on 6 October 1920.20

He studied Chinese for a year at Fengyangfu.21 He took his Last Vows in the Society of Jesus on 13 April 1921, the feast of the Patronage of St Joseph, in the Jesuit church dedicated to the Saint in Shanghai.22 From the very beginning, as his year at Fo-hien23 testifies, Fr Paul, as a missionary, was always on the go, responding to all calls on him and visiting the small Christian communities in the countryside. He ate what came to hand and slept in houses open to all the winds since the windows had no panes.24 He spent the next two years at Shanghai, where he taught at St Peter Canisius School and was preacher to the English community in the Church of St Joseph.25 Fr Paul was then posted to the Pengpu mission,26 covering an area of 60,000 km², that was entrusted to the Jesuits of the Turin Province, while

5. AMPSI, Meliak, Latin obituary, note 2.
6. ATPSI, Stato Personale.
7. AMPSI, Meliak, Latin obituary.
8. AMPSI, Meliak: The Times obituary, note 2; Catalogues of the Sicilian Province S.J. (Cat. Sic. Prov. S.J.)
9. Ibid.
12. ATPSI, Stato Personale.
14. ATPSI, Stato Personale.
15. AMPSI, Meliak: The Times obituary, note 2.
16. Ibid. His mother died shortly after, on 15 December 1920, aged 63; cf. PSPV. Register of the Dead 1917-1926, 264.
17. Anon.: Li Hsiaou (LH), June 1954, ‘Mie-Cina ghall-Gżegżer Filippin’, which includes Fr Paul’s last letter, 112. It was only in the Philippines that he met a Maltese, Dr Vincent Tabone, later President of Malta, who was there as consultant to WHO in an anti-trachoma campaign in the Far East. Fr Paul spent a day travelling to and from Manila to meet Dr Tabone. (Personal communication by Dr Tabone, 13 November 2004) A photo of this meeting was published with the Times obituary.
18. AMPSI, Meliak, Latin obituary.
26. So called after the city, the centre of the mission.
the other missions of Anking and Wuhu (in the same province) were in the care of Spanish Jesuits from Léon and Castile respectively.

**In the Pengpu mission during the warlord period**

At this time, warlords dominated China after the fall of the Ching dynasty in 1911-12 and the failure of republicanism which followed. In 1925, the nationalist Kuomintang army under Chiang Kai-shek began its so-called Northern Expedition from the south-east towards the northern city of Peking (now Beijing) to oust the warlord government and unite China under Kuomintang rule. The missionaries suffered in the armies’ incursions.

In November 1925, Sun Tien-ying, a rebel general of the southerners, attacked Pochow with an army of soldier-brigands. To avoid being molested by the bandits, Fr Grech Cumbo, with whom some 400 people had sought refuge, gave them all the money he had, his watch, his spare clothes and even his horse. However, Sun Tien-ying, curiously, took a liking to Fr Grech Cumbo and visited him twice. He gave orders that no one should molest those at the mission and ensured that the refugees would not lack food, at a time when everything was in short supply. News about the situation of the refugees reached Sun Tien-ying even by night as his aide-de-camp kept him informed. Sun Tien-ying punished anyone who stole from Fr Grech Cumbo, demanding that full restitution be made. With some danger to himself, Fr Paul served as go-between, in late December, in negotiations for Sun Tien-ying to be allowed to leave Pochow with his army, since he was pressed hard by his opponents.

When Sun Tien-ying returned to Pochow in 1930 and stood against a siege by government forces for three months, he once again befriended and protected Fr Grech Cumbo. He gave orders to provide him with a new pair of shoes when he came to know that the soldiers had stolen his shoes, and every day he saw to it that the children at the mission school had enough to eat. Fr Grech Cumbo, in turn, obtained food for the refugees and looked after the wounded soldiers.

In 1927 and 1928, at Pochow, the southerners’ soldiers occupied the mission buildings and continually molested Fr Grech Cumbo. Later, other troops changed Fr Grech Cumbo’s church into a conference hall and broke up the benches of the school and used them as firewood.

In 1925, anti-foreigner riots and strikes by Chinese students in Shanghai were put down ruthlessly. There were also anti-Christian protests. These protests spread to Linhwaesi, where Fr Grech Cumbo was stationed; the students, organising a riot against Fr Grech Cumbo, ‘gathered in front of the door of the mission and hurled death threats and stoned his effigy.

Fr Paul won the respect of the authorities. In 1941, the local authorities in the Taihao countryside occupied and confiscated the chapels, but the mandarin annulled the order after a recourse by Fr Paul.

In January 1942, Fr Sergio Ceruti, Fr Paul’s assistant, because he was an Italian, was placed under house arrest by the Chinese authorities and a guard put in front of the house. Fr Grech interceded with the mandarin to remove the guard, offering to stand guarantee for him. The authorities were contacted and a few weeks later the guard was removed.

**During the Japanese invasion**

In September 1931, imperialist Japan began its attack on China; it first occupied southern Manchuria, conquered the whole country (that is, Manchuria) within six months, and then invaded northern China. Inner Mongolia, parts of north-eastern China, Peking, and most of China’s east coast were occupied by the Japanese within a few years. The Nationalist government had to withdraw to the interior of the country, while the Japanese established puppet governments in Peking in 1937 and in Nanjing in 1940.

During the 31 years he had quietly and unobtrusively spent working for souls in the district of Pengpu, Fr Grech Cumbo faced many difficulties and dangers: he himself refers to the civil wars, the total anarchy, the brigands’

27. Burcone, 74-5.
34. *Notizie della missione di Pengpu* (*Notizie*), 6.IX.1941.
36. LH, June 1954, 111.
doings, as well as the hostile dispositions of the pagans militating against their acceptance of Christianity. It was not a rare occurrence for Fr Paul, on returning exhausted to his residence after long and difficult journeys, to find a band of brigands or a large number of soldiers occupying his home.

Loneliness was a recurring hardship. The missionaries led a hard, lonely life. After ten years in China, Fr Paul wrote: If only you knew! One remains often completely alone. The missionaries are too few, the country too vast, the Christians too much dispersed. We missionaries see one another, at times, after months and months and months... In the spring of 1938, he lamented that he did not know what was happening even in China. Early in 1941, the Japanese mounted an attack with bombers and armoured cars from the north, passed through Taiho and Kwoyang, and then moved westwards into Honan. Fr Grech Cumbo and the hundreds who sought refuge with him were safe, but for some weeks his colleagues had no news of him.

Besides administering Baptisms, imparting First Holy Communions and hearing confessions, he had to cater for the hundreds of students and personnel in the primary school. Moreover, he had to look after the 'schools of prayers' which he opened for periods of three to five months in the centre of his district, and sometimes also in the main communities. Fr Paul dedicated this time to prepare Catholic children for their First Confession and First Holy Communion and pagan children for baptism. The children received free instruction and meals. Fr Paul would also visit the communities situated in distant villages in the countryside for a couple of days three times a year.

A primary apostolate of Fr Paul was the organisation of courses for catechumens which would last for two months, also feeding them during that time. In December 1938, for instance, he visited a nascent community near Lingtsenhsien, close to Taiho, and opened a centre for female catechumens. It was a curious fact that the catechumens sought Baptism mainly to be freed from the devil who often molested them (especially the women) in overt ways and also caused them material harm. Baptism freed them completely, something which amazed the pagans. It was in fact recorded that, in 1941, a boy who had been accepted at the school in Taiho 'used to spend the night roaming about the dormitory rolling his eyes, screaming, imploring Satan to let him be'. Was this a true demonic possession or epileptic fits? Fr Grech Cumbo thought that he had better baptize him to free him from the presumed diabolic possession. The boy, who up to then 'had stayed apart, began at once to play with the other boys. His eyes, once full of fear, became mild and calm, and his face began to radiate peace and happiness.'

Fr Paul often had pupils of the Catholic school stage sacred dramatizations to make the Gospel message more comprehensible and attractive. Evangelisation in the district of Pochow was rather difficult, but the prisoners in the local gaols were struck by Fr Grech Cumbo's powers of persuasion, especially when he preached the parable of the Prodigal Son.

The preaching of Spiritual Exercises has always been an important component of the Jesuit apostolate. In 1935, Fr Grech Cumbo preached the Exercises at Feihokow and at Taiho to large gatherings. To enliven the atmosphere, the schoolchildren serving as altar boys at solemn Masses

38. Ibid., 119.
39. Ibid., 118.
41. Ibid., July-September 1941.
42. Ibid., 29.xii.1939.
43. Bortone, 623-5.
44. Ibid., 305-8.
45. Notizie, 15.xii.1938.
47. Bortone, 388.
48. Ibid., 653.
also sang hymns and assisted the choir while passages from the Catechism texts and Sacred Scripture were being recited. It is interesting to note that Fr Grech Cumbo had put these passages into verse, for the Chinese loved verses in rhyme and memorized them without effort.69

Besides their religious ministry, the missionaries helped the villagers in their social and material needs, often having to feed their parishioners. In April 1939, Fr Paul had to provide food for some 400 persons, most of them schoolboys, who lived in his house, as well as soup for an average of 200 poor people.50 In December 1941, Fr Grech Cumbo was able, with financial help from the Vicar Apostolic Mgr Cassini, to organize ‘the kitchen of the poor’, offering food twice a day to hundreds of children, as well as to blind, crippled, and old people. They would wait out in the yard of the girls’ school in the cold for more than an hour with their empty bowls, their faces lighting up with joy at the sight of the servants and pupils of the school carrying out the steaming cauldron of soup. Fr Grech would be walking about, smiling, talking to each one, especially to the infirm whom he called his ‘jewels’.51 Most of the children in the town, who were undernourished because of the floods and the lack of commerce, could only eat their fill when Fr Paul provided them with soup.62

Floods were another danger in the life of the people. In the autumn of 1938, Fr Paul could only visit those communities which were not badly hit by the floods.53 At the end of February 1939, Fr Paul, thanks to a subvention of 500 dollars given him by Mgr Cassini, was able to distribute alms to the many Christians, suffering from floods, who daily flocked to him. ‘It is really heart-rending to see so much misery,’ he wrote.54

Fr Paul was a man of such outstanding charity that he favourably impressed people of different faiths. In Taiho, three Protestant educated and well-to-do ladies were so attracted by his charity and by the devout behaviour of the pupils of the mission school during liturgical services,55 and by their charity and kindness in the distribution of soup to the poor, that they sought Catholic Baptism and sent their children to the recently-opened Jesuit school.56 Impressed by his charity, many Muslims, too, showed Fr

Grech Cumbo great respect and even went to hear him teach catechism. Their two marabouts, too, paid him several visits.57 In 1944, Fr Paul was in Kwoyang, assisting the Chinese authorities as an intermediary between them and the American forces.58

His talent to write verses appeared also on a number of occasions. When, on Sunday 2 February 1947, four Jesuits took their final vows, a musicological accademia was organized in their honour and, as usual, Fr Paul contributed witty verses, partly sung, partly recited.60

Fr Paul lived for his parishioners: he became the father of the poor and destitute. He used to go begging for them from door to door, with a sack on his shoulders in which he used to put whatever his benefactors gave him. He visited the hospitals, the orphanages and prisons, comforting and helping as best he could, and like his Master, he served with such sweetness and humility that he was called ‘The Angel of God’s living Providence on earth’.61 This was Fr Paul’s preferential option for the poor, decades before the Church gave this option high priority at the Conferences of the Latin American Bishops in Medellín (1968) and in Puebla (1979).62

Fr Emilio Sogni, the Provincial of Turin, visited the mission in the district of Pengpu, recently raised to the rank of a diocese, in the last two months of 1948. The city of Pengpu, with a population of over a quarter of a million at that time, was the seat of the diocese and the heart of the mission entrusted to the Jesuits of the Turin and Rome provinces.63 The complex of buildings of the mission comprised the Cathedral, primary and secondary schools with some 1000 students (most of them non-Christians), an infirmary and pharmacy, a garden, courtyards, the residences of the Jesuits, the teachers and catechists, a theatre and laboratories.

58. L.H. June 1945, 6.
60. M. Alb. Latin obituary; cf also Times of Malta obituary.
61. The preferential option for the poor can be briefly described by this paragraph in Pope John Paul II’s 1987 encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (On Social Concern) (Donders), #42: ‘A consistent theme of Catholic social teaching is the option for preference of the poor. Today, this preference has to be expressed in worldwide dimensions, embracing the immense numbers of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care, and those without hope’. The Society of Jesus gave it top priority in its apostolate in the 32nd General Congregation (December 2nd, 1974 – March 7th, 1975), in Decree 4 on the promotion of justice and the service of the faith. General Congregation 33 (2008) mentioned it together with other priorities.
62. The information in this and the next paragraph is taken from Fr Sogni’s article, entitled ‘Una papeggiata a Pengpu’ in Societas, published by the Jesuit Turin Province, IV, 3, May-June 1949, 76-81.
After morning assembly in the yards at 8.30, the students would go to their respective classes. At this time, Fr Sogni recounts, Fr Paul could be seen coming in from his morning rounds of the sick and the poor, ‘with his shabby grey hat, European grey greatcoat, grey beard and hair’, in the midst of a large crowd of boys and girls, all thin and shabbily clad, while many others would be waiting for his arrival. ‘He speaks with his kindly smile, rather than with words.’

Fr Paul was Vice-Parish Priest of the Cathedral, but the poor and the sick were his special concern: he used to visit, help and console them, conversing with them in the language of his love and the bounty he brought them. ‘He is the most expressive image of the father of the poor that I have ever met,’ the Provincial wrote. Fr Angelo Chiotti S.J., a fellow missionary, described him as ‘a man of peace and a peacemaker, always cheerful and ready to help, ... truly a good man, perhaps a trifle too simple, and therefore easy to deceive, and this happened more than once’.  

**Under the Communists**

The civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China, which began in 1927, ended in 1950 with the Communists controlling mainland China. Shortly after the Provincial’s visit, the Communist People’s Liberation Army won a decisive victory over Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Kuomintang forces near Pengpu. The Communists spread calumnies about the missionaries and soon enough began to expel them from Pengpu, as they had done elsewhere.

Fr Paul described thus the *modus agendi* of the Red revolutionaries in China: wherever they arrived, the Communists killed a lot of people; they promised freedom of religion to deceive the people and the missionaries, but did not keep their promises, for freedom was incompatible with their tenet that the State was supreme, to be served and loved above religion, family and fatherland. The Communists kept perfect order at the cost of individual liberty: everybody was treated as a slave and had to work, including the rich, who were impoverished, stripped of all their property. Land was divided among the people who, according to the Communist principle that the State (not the people) owned the land, had to hand to the State ‘the best and better part of the harvest’.  

The Communists used to leave some churches open in the large cities and allowed Mass to be said therein, but in small towns and in the interior of the country there were no concessions, and no one risked ‘going to a priest openly and during the day’. Instead of expelling the missionaries openly, the Communists forced the people to ask for their expulsion or left the priests to starve so that they would leave of their own accord. Many priests were tortured to make them renounce their loyalty to ‘the Pope’.  

The Communists confiscated the churches and other mission buildings for party meetings and offices. Foreign priests were expelled, whilst Chinese priests and religious were forced to work like the rest of the population; they risked their lives and risked execution to give the Sacraments clandestinely once in a while.

When Mao Tse-tung’s army arrived in Pengpu, Fr Grech Cumbo and his companions were allowed, for a time, to continue with their ministry and the Christians were allowed freedom of religion. But, as Fr Paul wrote, the Communist officials occupied their house; he himself had to share a room with two other priests, and two young priests were obliged to leave the country. His fellow Jesuits of the Turin province and the other missionaries at Pengpu, and Fr Paul himself, hoped that he would be allowed to remain in China, as his work was ‘mostly with the poorest and most wretched people of this City’. In fact, he was one of the last to be expelled.

Mornings and evenings he continued to roam the streets with his threadbare bag to distribute alms with his customary smile. But when the Communists ordered him to desist, the needy sought him out in the mission house ‘in an endless procession’. The authorities finally lost patience and expelled him: the Communists could not let anyone interfere with or disrupt their plan, namely, of gradually subjugating everything to their ideology. He had worked in China for 31 years, dedicating his life with un stinting love to the poor and needy.

64. LH, June 1954, 111.
65. Ibid., 112.
66. Ibid., 112.
67. Ibid., 112.
68. LH, April 1951, 518; letter by Fr Grech Cumbo to his brother Publio, dated 1.1.1951.
69. LH, June 1954, 111; LH, February 1950, 241, Letter by Fr Grech Cumbo to Fr Joseph Delia S.J., the Maltese Provincial.
70. LH, June 1954, 111.
72. Ibid.
In the Philippines

After his expulsion from China, Fr Paul asked to continue working among the Chinese and he was sent to the Philippines, where great numbers of Chinese had sought refuge from the Communists. He was posted to the Diocese of Lucena, being first stationed at Tayabas, at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Junior Seminary. His duties here included that of Director of the Catechetical Association. He started teaching catechism, which had been neglected, in the parish church of Tayabas, with the help of catechist girls he grouped together. Unfortunately, these catechism lessons had to be discontinued for some months because the humidity of Tayabas began to tell on Fr Paul’s health and the bishop, Mgr Alfredo M. Obviar y Aranda, moved him to his own drier residence in Lucena City, 137 km southeast of Manila. Fr Paul, now over 60 years old, learned Tagalog, the dialect of the region, ‘in a relatively short space of time, enough to hear confessions and explain the catechism.’ He was also the chaplain of the Maryknoll Sisters and their 800 pupils. He spent a lot of time in the cathedral, ‘hearing confessions, performing baptisms and marriages and presiding at funerals’. Twice a week he taught catechism in a public school. On Wednesdays, he visited the soldiers in the military camp to hear their confessions and give them a conference. He also heard confessions and distributed Holy Communion to the sick in the hospital, and attended the weekly meetings of a praesidium of the Legion of Mary. He preached in English in the cathedral but, after some months, he felt confident enough to change to Tagalog.

He found the people here very courteous. They were very pious, had great respect for priests, and loved very much novenas, singing, long functions and prayers, processions, and lighting candles. They did not get tired of being in church for hours. But ‘in the interior [of the region] they hardly ever see a priest, there are too few of these...’ Fr Paul blamed this great dearth of priests, ‘to us, too, a mystery’, on ‘the beautiful and warm climate’ that ‘is an invitation to a comfortable and pleasurable life, whereas the Priest’s life is a hard life of sacrifice’, the poverty which prevented many young people from studying and attending a seminary for many years, and religious ignorance: ‘those who live far from the cities do not get religious instruction, they do not have churches, and never see a Priest’.

Fr Paul perceived two great dangers for the Church in the Philippines: the activities of the Protestants and Freemasonry. He wrote: ‘These pious people seek God and spiritual consolation, and since they never see a Catholic priest, they follow the Protestants who preach to them and teach them to sing.’ With regard to Freemasonry he wrote that ‘many influential
people, especially in the field of Education, are active Freemasons, and do great harm to young people, though their wives, daughters and relatives are pious and good.

When the President of the Philippines, Elpidio Quirino, visited Lucena on 28 October 1953, Fr Paul was assigned to greet him at the entrance to the Cathedral and intone the Te Deum.

Death and Funeral

On Wednesday of Holy Week, in 1954, Fr Paul heard confessions in the church of the convent of the Maryknoll Sisters until about ten o'clock at night. He seemed 'in good health as usual... and in good spirits'. At 3 a.m. on the following day, Maundy Thursday, 15 April, 'his neighbour was awakened by groans which seemed to come from Fr. Greek's (sic) room'. The door was forced open and Fr Paul was found 'lying on the floor unconscious but uttering intermittent groans and breathing heavily'. One of the priests quickly gave him absolution and administered Extreme Unction. The doctor administered several injections with no apparent effect and then suggested that he be taken immediately to the hospital. He breathed his last at about four o'clock, just some five minutes after arriving there; he was two months short of celebrating fifty years as a Jesuit.

His room was practically bare, 'a wonderful example of poverty', just the most essential articles of clothing and little else, except many books to help him learn Tagalog and a great number of notebooks filled with catechism lessons and sermons that he had composed in that language.

The news of Fr Paul's sudden demise 'came as a big shock in the city as Fr. Greek (sic) was dearly loved by all'. The body lay in state for four days in the hall of the Maryknoll School and hundreds of people visited him to pay their last respects and pray for him. The funeral took place on 19 April, Easter Monday, in the Cathedral, in the presence of over one thousand people. The congregation included, among others, Mr Constantinino, the Governor of the Province, the mayor of Lucena, Jesuits, Chinese priests and seminarians, delegations from the communities of nuns of which Fr Paul was the confessor, as well as a guard of honour by soldiers. At the Solemn High Mass the Bishop, who presided, delivered the oration in which he eulogized Fr Paul's as 'a true apostle, an imitator of his patron, a worthy son of St. Ignatius following in the footsteps of St. Francis Xavier', and mentioned many other excellent qualities he had possessed. Almost everyone, among them Mr Constantinino and the Mayor, followed the bier to

86. Ibid.
88. BW, II (3), 1.xii.1953, 18.
90. LH, July 1954, 128.
91. Both the Catalogus Defunctorum in recto Societatis Jesu ab a. 1614 ad a. 1970, Generalis Curia, Rome 1972, (entry 26-400) and the Catalogue of the Maltese Vice-Province, 1955, give 14 April as the date of Fr Grech Cambo's death. This can only be explained with reference to the different time zones: it is seven hours earlier in Malta.
92. In 1928, Fr Paul had almost died while saying Mass and was only saved by acupuncture administered by a native Chinese practitioner; Fr Paul then 'foretold' he would die suddenly. Cf. Obituary, At Nostri Amici, July 1954, 355.
the cemetery, one kilometre distant, under a blazing sun. Fr Paul’s remains were accorded full military honours by the soldiers before the coffin was lowered into the grave. The ceremony had begun at 8.15 am and ended at almost 11 am. Many affirmed that ‘the crowd would have been tripled’ if the funeral had taken place in the evening or on a Sunday. Even so, it was a memorable funeral.

**Tributes to a worthy Maltese missionary priest**
Fr Paul Grech Cumbo was the genuine type of Christ’s devoted missionaries, fearless and unflinching in facing the hardships of the mission life and tireless and unsparing in giving himself wholeheartedly to the ministrations of the flock entrusted to his pastoral care. He was known by all as the Father of the poor, and the sick and the outcasts on whom he loved to lavish the exquisite tenderness of his Christ-like charity. He was always about in the streets, in the hospitals, in the orphanages and prisons, comforting and assisting those who were in need and hailed by all as the Angel of God’s living Providence on Earth. Unassuming, quiet, meek, with a captivating smile, that gave warmth and light to his every word and action, he was a perfect copy of his model, Christ, whom he had chosen to serve as his Leader and King.93 Fr Grech Cumbo was ‘one of those hidden heroes’ of the Church of Christ, ‘the greatness of whose work can be known by God alone.’94 With his death, the Church has lost a valiant missionary and Malta one of her glorious children, of whom she may rightly be proud and whose name should be inscribed in letters of gold in the annals of her history.95

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95. Cf. note 93 supra. See also I.H, July 1954, 129.