

All letters should be addressed to the Editor, The Sunday Times, PO Box 328, Valletta VLT 1000
 Fax: 2559 4510
 or e-mail: sunday@timesofmalta.com

Letters intended for publication in *The Sunday Times* should be as brief as possible and include the writer's full name, address and telephone or mobile number. They are also subject to editing. Those sending letters by e-mail should still include their particulars. The same letters should not be sent to any other newspaper. Letters carrying a nom-de-plume will not be published.

Ruins of 'savage' capitalism

Following news of the financial and economic crisis hitting Europe, particularly Greece, Spain and Portugal, I was impressed by two words I heard.

One was the word 'savage' used by a senior BBC journalist referring to the package which the European Union offered to Greece, and the other was 'rubble' used by a senior British politician when referring to Europe's financial mess.

During the past 25 years I have been living in Brazil as a priest working in a parish, this Third World country has served as an 'open university' for me, since I have been closely following local politics, social movements, and social pastoral activity within the Church.

As a result of this experience, the word 'savage' used by the journalist reminded me of the term 'savage capitalism', which has been the definition the Church and respectable social movements and parties gave to the capitalism practised and imposed on Third World countries, since the time of the highly respected prelate, Archbishop Helder Camara, who I think was the first to give capitalism this description in our times.

It was a controversial phrase, but now I feel this term, first coined by a Catholic bishop and adopted

by a host of bishops all over Latin America, has now been 'canonised', even if inadvertently, by the BBC journalist.

The same journalist said tax evasion in Greece has cost the country some €20 billion a year. If the country goes after this money, as Brazil did these past years, in a few years it will repay all the loans it is receiving, without the need to cut salaries and pensions - which to my mind justifies referring to the 'deal' approved by the Greek Parliament as 'savage'.

The term 'rubble' is, to my mind, the right word to explain the turmoil the US and European economies have found themselves in. 'Recession' is not the right word to describe the current financial confusion and humiliation. 'Rubble' is indeed a better description.

Once proud and untouchable western financial institutions have become like the Tower of Babel, where nobody knows what is what, which is which, what to do or not to do, and so on.

I hope Western governments realise that the G-7 got it all wrong and that the solution necessarily has to come through the G-20, which represents 80 per cent or more of the world's population,

Fr John Caruana
Guajara-Mirim-Rondonia, Brazil

No record of any *dhimma* pact at all

It would seem that, early on, Prof. Stanley Fiorini jumped to the conclusion that the poem referred to a *dhimma* pact was conceded by the Muslim invaders of 870 AD, without considering the geopolitical environment of the time.

When he realised that Gozo, not Malta, was involved, he says he checked what Al Himyari said about Gozo, and when he discovered that Al Himyari did not mention that island at all he felt there was "the distinct possibility, hitherto ignored by historians, that the vicissitudes of the two islands were not identical after 869". He forgot that when one refers to all the Maltese islands by the name 'Malta' one still has to mention Gozo specifically if things on Gozo went differently from those on Malta.

Prof. Fiorini is claiming that that was exactly what happened in Gozo that year. However, one would expect Al Himyari himself to have made it clear that there was a *dhimma* pact on Gozo but absolute devastation on Malta, which he did not. Prof. Fiorini seems to have thought the point would not be

noticed. For him the "distinct possibility" immediately became a fact.

Unfortunately for Prof. Fiorini, Al Himyari gives the length of his 'Malta' as 30 miles: *tulha tletin mil* (Maltese Arabic in place of the original Classical Arabic). He must have included the island of Gozo under that name. Therefore, there must have been devastation on Gozo as on Malta and no *dhimma* pact at all.

That did not deter Prof. Fiorini, though he must have noticed it since he tells us in the introduction that he had gone through the whole passage of Al Himyari and found no reference to Gozo, which made him confident that Al Himyari's account did not concern Gozo at all - unsound logic if you are trying to find out whether Gozo was included by Al Himyari under the term 'Malta'.

A few lines further on he must have come across Al Himyari's account of the events of c. 1048. Since by then he was looking for a *dhimma* pact he ignored Al Himyari's account. He must have known that I and others

had judged that pact as not at all a *dhimma* pact. Both Al Himyari and Al Qazwini before him had started off by stating that 'Malta' was inhabited by Muslims.

In the meantime, I had already reached an agonising reappraisal about Ibn Al Hauqal, whose account is close to being contemporary of the Malta about which he was writing, and he lived for some time in Sicily though there is no evidence he was ever in Malta. Al Himyari himself, who lived several centuries later, by all accounts used information from reliable sources. And no one has argued so far that Al Qazwini's 'Malta' did not include Gozo.

Prof. Fiorini's answer to all these problems: complete reticence both on Al Himyari's figure for the length of his 'Malta' as well as on the two available versions of the pact of c. 1048.

Need I go on? Let us say Prof. Fiorini was perhaps the victim of a serious case of self-deception. I rest my case.

Prof. Godfrey Wettinger
St Julian's

Rude clown on television

I am very grateful to Claire Bonello and Michela Spiteri (*The Sunday Times*, May 9) for informing us what went on during the previous Monday's *Bondiplus* on TVM.

How clever of the anchorman to invite a crowd-puller to increase his viewership! He is quite likely to receive a 'Telecat' or something of the sort, during next year's TV awards!

He will go up on stage to the sound of *We Are The Champions* and he should, in fairness, take with him the King of Clowns!

For it is clowns, be they wicked or tear-jerking, that attract most crowds. Notwithstanding several SMS messages exhorting me to tune in to *Bondiplus* for a good laugh that Monday, I refused to be counted among the viewers.

Pity, for once I would have heard the interviewee's voice above the interviewer's. But listening to *Imperium Europa* personified is not exactly my cup of tea. How many of your readers stand to be counted with me?

Patricia Salomone
Swieqi

The Down Syndrome Association would like to draw the attention of all those responsible for the airing of *Bondiplus* (TVM, May 3), including those running PBS itself, that Norman Lowell's comments regarding people with a disability were most disrespectful to these people and their families.

This programme, aired on our public station and financed by public funds, hurt many people.

Freedom of speech does not mean the freedom to offend others.
Pio Fenech
PRO, Down Syndrome Association Valletta

Thank you for your help

I want to heartily thank the Mission Fund for the financial help to King Mariout Monastery of St Clare in Alexandria, Egypt.

I am a Poor Clare nun from Siggiewi with the above-mentioned community. A few years ago we were living in an old and desolate monastery and were forced to move out. With the limited financial situation we had to build a new monastery.

We were blessed with some financial help from the Mission Fund in Malta. We appreciated this benevolence which alleviated some of the many difficulties we were facing.

I take this opportunity to appeal for donations of used stamps and other financial help to the Mission Fund of Main Street, Mosta, MST 1018.

Other donations to the Monastery of King Mariout would be appreciated.

For further details contact Madre Rose Therese Ellis of St Clare's Monastery, Mikiel Anton Vassalli Road, Kappara, San Gwann SGN 9040.

We remember all benefactors in our daily prayers and Masses.
Sr Marie Bernadette Aquilina
Alexandria, Egypt

How to save Gozo from disfigurement

I read with interest Mark Micallef's front-page report last Sunday ('Is this eco-Gozo?') but had to chuckle at the comments reportedly made to him by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority, the mayor of San Lawrenz and the representative of the Gozo Joint Committee for Law Enforcement.

So Mepa has opened a case on the matter. Wow, what an amazing step forward in stopping illegal dumping! How long has illegal dumping been going on in this country?

The mayor is going to take action, and there may be more than one eco-warden for Gozo, sometime, maybe never. The key point in the story was the comment reportedly

made by David Soler of the Joint Committee, namely that "people's mentality also has to change".

Unless Gozitans start to take more pride in their priceless island and are prepared to defend it against all those whose greed and ignorance sees nothing wrong in disfiguring, polluting and abusing its charm and beauty, there is little hope of stopping this blatant abuse.

The government is unlikely to ever have the resources to police the country unassisted. On the other hand, it could, at little cost, make it possible for the public to be proactive against the perpetrators by reporting instances of vandalism, illegal dumping, etc., provided

they can do it without fear of reprisal.

It could be through educating and training those in the industry, through advertising in the press and through education in the schools and colleges to encourage people to phone a confidential hotline when abuses are witnessed or observed so that the limited law enforcement resources may be directed where it counts.

Most people will prefer not to get involved, but if we don't start doing something to protect our heritage and country there won't be anything worth passing on to the next generation.

Alan Jones
Ghajnsielem

Roman law and right to private property

The concept of Roman law and land expressed in 'Fr Peter's perspective' (*The Sunday Times*, May 2) was somewhat perplexing in today's context.

Private property today is a fundamental human right, and violation of other people's property is called misappropriation, other than that which serves the common good for public purposes, lawfully construed, including

compensation to property owners. Further thinking on intellectual property is even more perplexing in terms of being interchangeable with land. Some clarification is necessary.

Does it mean land and intellectual property are interchangeable like a bill of exchange? How can this transaction take place in violation of private property, not used for public purposes occasionally, and not the rule? This equation

seems to be rather an imbalance in the administration of justice in today's context.

Who can qualify in the placement of the common good by obtaining misappropriated land when and if Roman law is applied?

What is the real context of Roman law today when privileges have been abolished?

Lina Caruana
Tarxien

Well done for first Sliema Spring Fest

I wish to thank the organisers of Sliema's Spring Fest held last Sunday (May 9) outside Our Lady of the Sacred Heart parish church.

A big thank you also goes to the numerous people drawn to this first but surely not the last event of its kind. Apart from the traditional Maltese food and lace, which was

the main attraction, the stands were very nicely decorated.

Keep up the good work.
Robert Mifsud
Sliema

Like should be compared with like

The Delimara power station issue just does not smell right. Enemalta's PR campaign comparing the proposed Delimara plant with the old Marsa power station is a big joke.

They are comparing the emissions of the new plant with a plant built over four decades ago, in technologically prehistoric times. They should be comparing

the new plant emissions with those of power plants built today.

George Grech
Ghajnsielem