

Maltese Catholics: à la carte believers?

MaltaToday's survey finds out that the Maltese want to defend the crucifix in public buildings but favour the introduction of divorce, do not believe in papal infallibility, and disagree with the ban on condoms. Evidently, the signs of the times...

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ALTHOUGH over 90% of the Maltese believe in God and follow the Roman Catholic religion, a majority is departing from the Catholic Church's teachings on contraception, divorce, papal infallibility and the afterlife.

And while the absolute majority of Maltese (93%) agree with the exhibition of religious symbols like the crucifix in public buildings, in clear contrast with a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, the Maltese express more secular views on a number of issues: significantly, for the first time in a MaltaToday survey, an absolute majority (53%) favours the introduction of divorce.

This could be an indication that while religious symbols like the crucifix are still considered an integral part of Maltese identity (as suggested by the fact 90% of under-35-year-olds oppose any ban on religious symbols in public buildings) the Maltese are making a clearer distinction between Church and State than ever before.

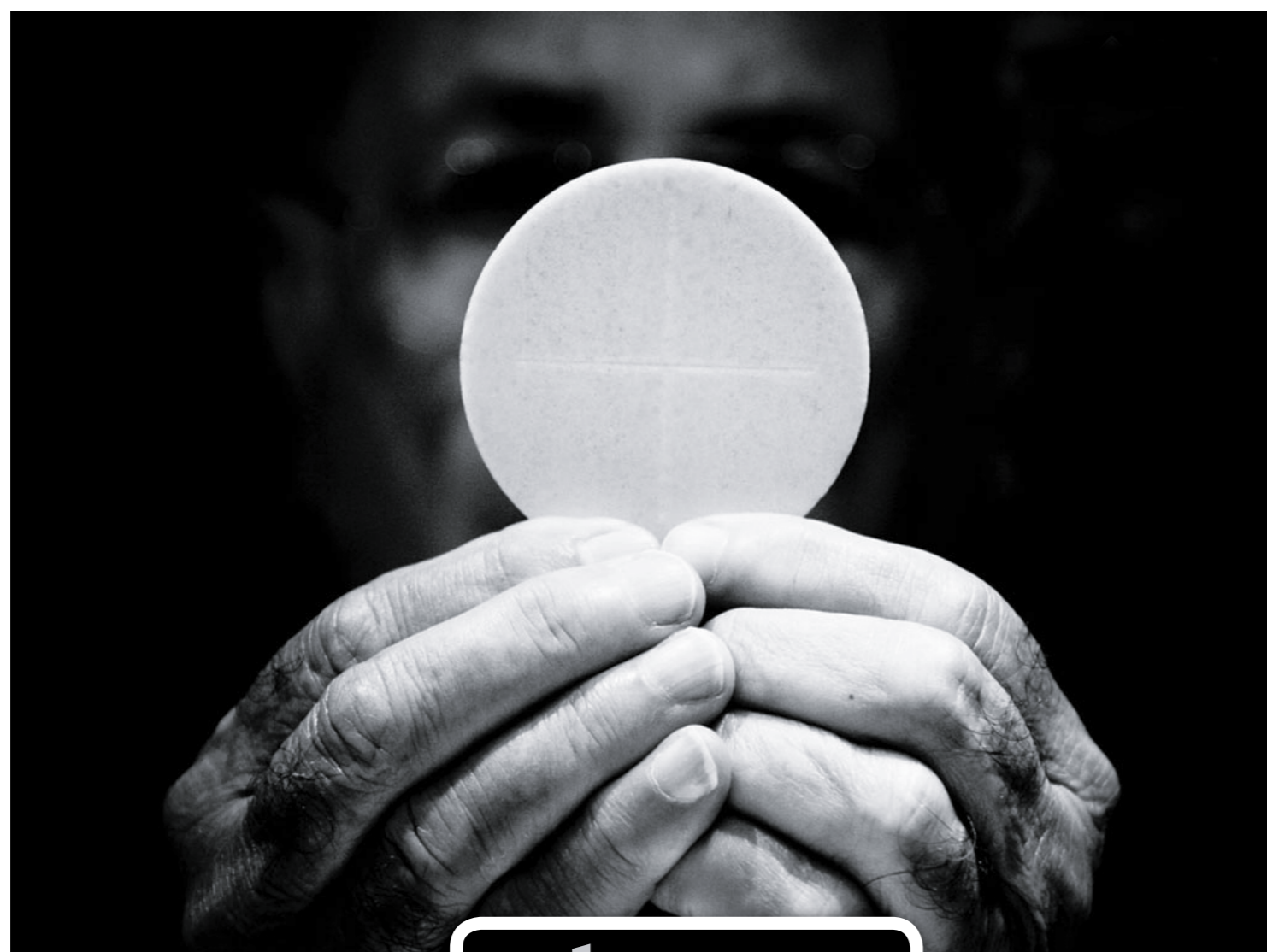
The survey shows the number of Maltese opposing divorce falling from 50% in October 2008 to 44%. This majority in favour of divorce is even more pronounced among 18 to 34-year-olds, among whom 62% favour the introduction of divorce.

Those favouring divorce are split between 29.7% who give a unqualified yes to divorce, and 23.7% who believe that divorce should only be introduced in "certain cases".

Significantly, the survey shows that on the eve of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Malta, 57% of the Maltese and 77% of under-35s do not think that the Pope is infallible in matters of faith, thus contradicting a Church dogma enshrined in the first Vatican Council in 1870. The dogma states that by action of the Holy Spirit, the Pope is preserved from even the possibility of error when he solemnly declares or promulgates to the universal Church a dogmatic teaching on faith or morals.

And while 11% feel closer to the Church since the election of Cardinal Josef Ratzinger as Pope, 20% feel more distant from the church. The percentage rises to 28% among those aged under 35.

The gap between the Church and the masses widens when it comes to Catholic views on sexuality. The ban on condoms was only last year reaffirmed by the Pope, who suggested that the use of condoms may even aggravate the AIDS crisis



mt survey

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- 53.4% favour introduction of divorce**
- 69% disagree with Church ban on condoms**
- 66% of under-35s disagree with ban on sex before marriage**
- 91.3% profess Catholic religion**
- 93.3% oppose removal of crucifix from schools**
- 19.5% feel more distant from Church since election of Pope Benedict XVI**
- 52.3% do not believe in Purgatory, 26% do not believe in Hell**
- 57% reject dogma on Papal infallibility**

in Africa. But only 22% of the Maltese and 12% of under-35s agree with the Church's ban on artificial contraception.

As regards sex before marriage, there is a clear split between different age groups. While 50.4% of all respondents think that sex before or outside marriage is always wrong, 66% of under-35s disagree with this outright ban.

But in line with Church doctrine, a large majority of the Maltese (58%) still oppose the ordination of female priests. The ban on women priests is also supported by 53% of under-35s.

Even when it comes to believing in the afterlife, the Maltese are showing a greater tendency to depart from church dogmas. Most notably, only 48% believe in the existence of Purgatory, which in accordance with Catholic teaching is a place or condition of temporary punishment for those who are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the penance for their earthly transgressions. The faith of the Church concerning Purgatory was first clearly expressed in the Decree of Union drawn up by the Council of Florence in 1031, but was firmly challenged by Lutheran

reformists in the 16th century. Although the majority of Maltese still believe in Hell, 35% of under-35s do not believe in this state of eternal damnation. Among the latter category, 16% do not believe in an afterlife at all.

On the other hand 10% of the Maltese still believe in Limbo – reserved for unbaptised babies too young to have committed

personal sins, but not having been freed from Original Sin. Having said that, belief in Limbo is very much in decline, with only 2% of under-35s responding positively to this question.

Growing scepticism on the existence of Limbo could be a reflection of a widely publicised news story that the church had "closed" limbo. In reality, however, the document issued in 2007 by the International Theological Commission, endorsed by Pope Benedict XVI, simply states that there are theological grounds for hope that those infants who die without being baptised will still be saved and enjoy the beatific vision of heaven.

Methodological Note

The survey was held between Tuesday, 16 March and Tuesday, 23 March. 437 respondents were chosen from the online and printed versions of the directory. 300 respondents accepted to participate. The survey has a margin of error of +/-5.7%.



Do you believe in God? (%)	
Yes	96
No	2.7
Don't know	1.3

To which religion do you belong? (%)	
Catholic	91.3
Non-practising Catholic	3.7
No particular religion	3.3
Islam	1
Others	0.7

Do you agree with divorce? (%)			
	April 2010		October 2008
Yes	53.4		46
No	44.1		50.2
Don't know	2.5		3.8

Agreement with divorce according to age groups (%)			
	Yes	No	Don't know
18-34	62.3	35.7	2
35-54	55.3	41.7	3
55+	44.3	53.7	2



Opinions on moral and religious issues (%)			
<i>(all respondents)</i>			
	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The use of condoms is always wrong	22.1	69	8.9
Sex before and outside marriage is always wrong	50.4	41.4	8.2
Women should be allowed to become priests	28.7	58	13.3
The Pope is infallible in matters of faith	32.1	57	10.9
Crucifixes in schools should be removed	4	93.3	2.7

Opinion on moral and religious issues (%)			
<i>(under 35 years of age)</i>			
	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The use of condoms is always wrong	12.2	81.6	6.2
Sex before and outside marriage is always wrong	30	66	4
Women should be allowed to become priests	32.7	53.1	14.3
The Pope is infallible	12.2	77.6	10.2
Crucifix in schools should be removed	8.1	90	1.9



Do you feel closer to the Church since the election of Benedict XVI as pope? (%)		
	All	18-34
Closer	11	4
Less close	19.5	28
The same	66	58
Don't know	3.5	10

Will you attend in public activities organised during the Pope's visit? (%)		
	All	18-34
Yes	34.4	26
No	32.3	42
Unable to attend	13.9	14
Don't know	19.4	18

Belief in the afterlife (%)		
	All	18-34
Believe in heaven	87	77.6
Believe in hell	74.3	65.3
Believe in purgatory	47.7	38.8
Believe in limbo	10	2
Do not believe in afterlife	7.3	16.3
Do not know	5.7	6.1

