In the first part of a three-part feature, Gerald Fenech delves into the historical importance of church schools in Malta and the battle for their existence in the 1980s that led to the Catholic Church-State compromise.

In an effort to make them financially unsustainable, in the 1980s, the Church was receiving income from its considerable land and property, which was not taken into account in its accounts. For example, the Church's 1982 account showed a deficit of around Lm190,000, but this does not include the value of all immovable property which was not held for ecclesiastical purposes, thus creating an anomalous situation. The government passed the relevant legal notices to the education minister, and if these were broken, the schools would revert to government operation.

The government also insisted that the Church make financial statements with reservations and without renouncing its legal rights. As if everything was descending into the maelstrom but after returning from Rome in July 1983, the archbishop and the FP agreed to archbishop while Mifsud Bonnici berates the government to keep negotiations between government and Holy See officials.

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