

THE CARDINALATE

Empowered to designate the Head of the Church, and constituting with him as auxiliaries and counselors the spiritual body known as the Sacred College, the Cardinals of the Catholic Church rank next to the Sovereign Pontiff in ecclesiastical dignity and official importance (writes the Rev. M. Kenny, S.J., in *America*). Though not of divine origin nor essential to the constitution of the Church, the office grew with the Church's external development as by natural necessity, and had risen to its present eminence before the discoverer of America was born.

It was only in the twelfth century that the Sacred College was definitely constituted substantially as it exists to-day; but the beginnings from which it grew had their roots in the Catacombs. The word 'cardinal' (from *cardo*, a hinge) was first applied, in the sense of principal, to the clergy who were permanently and officially attached to a particular church, then to the archpriest of that church. In Rome, according to some, twenty-five 'titles' or churches in which the Sacraments were administered and the liturgical offices celebrated, were established in the first century, according to others from the second to the fifth, and the priest in charge was called the *presbyter Cardinalis*. Such presbyters were entrusted by the Pope with the supervision of discipline and other ecclesiastical and administrative functions in the Roman See. The title of Cardinal priest, which was at first extended to archpriests elsewhere, was soon restricted to the arch-presbyters of Rome, and was definitely confined to the Roman Cardinals by Pius V. The number of 'titles' was increased, but the rearrangement of titular churches, begun by Innocent III. and completed by Paul V., remained fixed until Leo XIII. added the Church of San Vitale. The titles are now fifty-three, though by the ordination of Pope Sixtus V. the actual number of Cardinal priests is limited to fifty.

Of Equal Antiquity are the Cardinal Deacons, who may be said to have sprung from the graves of the martyrs. Pope St. Clement (88-97) is said to have divided Rome into seven regional districts, in each of which a rotary or deacon was appointed to collect the Acts of the martyrs. St. Evaristus, his successor, charged them also with bearing witness to the teaching of the bishops, and Pope St. Fabian (236-250) enlarged their duties, appointed seven subdeacons to assist them, and had buildings (*diaconiae*) erected, in connection with a neighboring church, for the reception of the poor and other charitable works, in the cemeteries of the martyrs whose Acts they recorded. Besides being official executors of the Papal charities, the regional deacons assisted the Pontiff at Mass and at the liturgical services in the principal Papal churches, and, being gradually assigned to disciplinary and other ecclesiastical functions of continually extending scope, attained a fixity of relation to the Church of Rome, which made the term Cardinal Deacon analogous to that of Cardinal Priest. With the change of Roman topography other charitable institutions replaced the original deaconries. There were eighteen under Gregory the Great, and these are still existent, but the actual number of Cardinal Deacons was reduced to fourteen by Sixtus V.

As the Papal headship of the Church became more externally manifest and ecclesiastical business accordingly increased, the Popes called in the seven neighboring or 'suburbicarian' bishops to assist them in counsel at synodal meetings and represent them at episcopal functions; and these were known as Cardinal Bishops. When Porto was in ruins Rufina was joined to it, thus reducing the Cardinal Bishops to six, a number which was made permanent by Sixtus V. By a Decretal of Alexander III., 1159, the three orders of Cardinals were definitively unified into one body, to which the election of the successor of St. Peter was exclusively attached. Thereafter they were the only official legates and counsellors of the Pope. Sixtus V. fixed their number at seventy, which has been seldom reached.

From the earliest period, therefore, the Cardinals, in various degrees, were assistants of the Pope in the care of the poor, in liturgical functions, in the administration of Papal finances and possessions, and the disposition of important ecclesiastical business. Their manifold activity was exercised in the Consistory, that is, the formal assembly of the Cardinals under the presidency of the Pope. There they dealt with practically all the affairs of Christendom, for when Christendom was Catholic religious and secular matters usually touched or overlapped, and hence they gradually outranked bishops and archbishops, and towards the fourteenth century even patriarchs. Innocent III. granted them the privilege of the red hat, and extended to all the scarlet robe previously worn by Papal legates. They have a ring with sapphire stone, and may wear the pectoral cross even in the presence of the Pope. Leo X. placed them immediately after the Pope in order of precedence; in secular courts they rank with princes of the blood royal, and they were long acknowledged as equals by Emperors and Kings.

The Cardinals Have Charge of the Roman Congregations,

and the Pope alone is their ecclesiastical judge. Among other rights and privileges, they have place and vote in general councils, and they alone can be sent abroad as legates *a latere*. In private Consistory they counsel the Holy Father on the nominations of Cardinals and bishops, on the conclusion of concordats, and on all important ecclesiastical and politico-ecclesiastical matters; and on the death of the Pontiff they assume the management of necessary Church affairs and proceed to elect his successor. Their powers and duties were increased and simplified in our own day. The Congregations of Cardinals, including among others the important Consistorial Congregation and the Holy Office, established or regulated by Sixtus V., have been completely reorganised by Pius X. according to the great Constitution *Sapienti Consilio*, June 29, 1908, which enlarged and demarcated the powers of the Roman Cardinals and made the famous *Immensa* of Sixtus V. applicable to modern conditions.

The Popes have been always free in the nomination of Cardinals, but the Tridentine decrees, enforced by Sixtus V., and ratified by the Vatican Council, ordained that all Christian nations should be represented in the Sacred College. It was also established that the College of Cardinals should contain doctors of theology, four at least to be taken from the mendicant Orders, and that every person nominated must possess the qualifications required of a bishop. Their creation, which is the function of the Pope, is effected by the publication of their names in secret Consistory. The new dignitary, who has been informed of his nomination some weeks in advance, is invested by the Pope with the rochet and red biretta, and a few days later, in public Consistory, with the Cardinal's hat, while

The Holy Father Pronounces the Words:

'To the glory of the omnipotent God and the honor of the Holy See receive the red hat, the mark of the singular dignity of the Cardinalate, whereby it is signified that, for the exaltation of the holy Faith, the peace and quiet of the Christian people, and the increase and permanence of the Holy Roman Church, you should show yourself fearless even unto death and the shedding of your blood, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.'

The Pope makes the Sign of the Cross thrice over the new Cardinal, and in secret Consistory confers on him the ring, assigns him his title or *diaconia*, and performs the ceremony of the opening and closing of the mouth, signifying his duty and right to observe secrecy and express his opinion on matters presented to his consideration. A Papal Ablegate conveys the red biretta to foreign Cardinals who cannot attend the Consistory, but the red hat is always conferred in public Consistory by the hands of the Sovereign Pontiff.

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