

## PONTIFICAL INSIGNIA: THEIR ORIGIN AND USE

ON the 21st June 1968, Pope Paul VI promulgated a *motuproprio*<sup>1</sup>, followed by an instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites<sup>2</sup>, to put into effect a proposal approved at the Second Vatican Council and promulgated in the Constitution 'Sacrosanctum Concilium' on the Sacred Liturgy, that all pontifical insignia should be reserved for people who really exercise episcopal jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup>

The main reason for this reform in the use of pontifical insignia was primarily the desire to enhance episcopal dignity: in fact, the *motuproprio* says, these insignia were introduced during the ages to stress the dignity and the power of the bishops, who preside in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship, and officers of good order.<sup>4</sup> Besides, the tendency today is that liturgical rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity<sup>5</sup>, that the symbols and the visible signs of the Liturgy should mean what they are really supposed to mean, and that the meaning should be within the people's power of comprehension such that they would normally not require a lot of explaining. All this would be lacking in the case of pontifical insignia as long as there would be several ecclesiastics enjoying pontifical privileges without being bishops or exercising episcopal jurisdiction.

It is true that these privileges were granted during the ages by the

<sup>1</sup> *Litterae Apostolicae motu proprio datae Pontificalia insignia*, A.A.S. 70 (1968) p. 374.

<sup>2</sup> *Sacra Congr. Rituum, instructio Pontificales Ritus*, A.A.S. 70 (1968) p. 406.

<sup>3</sup> *Conc. Vat. II, Const. de Sacra Liturgia Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 130 A.A.S. 56 (1964), p. 123: 'Convenit ut usum pontificalium reservetur illis ecclesiasticis personis, quae aut characterem episcopali, aut peculiari aliqua iurisdictione gaudent'.

<sup>4</sup> *Conc. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia Lumen gentium*, n. 20, A.A.S. 57 (1965), p. 24: 'Episcopi igitur communitatis ministerium cum adiutoribus presbyteris et diaconis susceperunt, loco Dei praesidentes gregi, cuius sunt pastores, ut doctrinae magistri, sacri cultus sacerdotes, gubernationis ministri'.

<sup>5</sup> *Conc. Vat. II, Const. de sacra Liturgia, Sacrosanctum Concilium* n. 34, A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 109: 'Ritus nobili simplicitate fulgeant ... sint fidelium captui accommodati, neque generatim multis indigeant explicationibus.'

Holy See to enhance liturgical celebrations and render them more solemn, but nowadays there is a marked tendency to despise or ignore what is fictitious, merely external or untrue; in other words, all signs and symbols which do not clearly indicate an invisible reality, but are just external ornament, have no meaning for the people of today. Nowadays, more and more people are becoming convinced that the solemnity of a liturgical celebration does no longer depend on external magnificence, on what catches the eye, but it mainly depends on the ever greater active participation of all the congregation in the liturgical rites – the more active the participation, the greater would be the solemnity. A concelebration with the bishop as the principal celebrant, surrounded by his clergy, each one accomplishing his duties at the altar, with the whole congregation joining in the chants and in the responses and expressing its unity even externally, is nowadays considered to be a much more solemn celebration than a Pontifical High Mass in polyphonic chant, with mitred canons sitting in their stalls, and a dumb congregation assisting as spectators and dazzled by the pomp and circumstances of external display.

Everything connected with the Liturgy – words, gestures, ornaments – are meaningful and valid only with reference to the sacrifice of Christ renewed in the Church. In the early centuries Rome, especially, was rather contrary to external pomp and display in liturgical celebrations: 'We bishops,' says Pope Celestine I<sup>6</sup>, 'must be distinguished from the people and from others by our learning and not by our dress, by our life and not by our robes, by purity of heart and not by elegance ...' But in the Middle Ages the love for symbolism, which made writers continually see a higher meaning in the simplest and most material things used in the Church services, was the cause of considerable development in liturgical vestments, rites and ceremonies.<sup>7</sup> This medieval symbolism lost all its impact since the Renaissance with its continual insistence

<sup>6</sup> Pope Innocent I, writing to the bishops of Vienne and Narbonne on the 26th July 428 (Ep. 4) deplores what he calls an abuse introduced in the Gallican Church, where several bishops (quosdam Domini sacerdotes) had adopted a girdle and a short mantle (amicti pallio et lumbos praecincti). 'Doing this,' the pope says, 'contra ecclesiasticum morem faciunt, qui in Ecclesia non creverunt sed alio venientes itinere secum haec in Ecclesiam quae in alia conversatione habuerant, intulerunt.' 'We bishops,' the pope concludes 'discernendi a plebe vel ceteris sumus doctrina non veste' (DACL, XV, 2990).

<sup>7</sup> Dom Pierre Salmon, *Etude sur les insignes du pontife dans le rit romain*, Rome, 1955, p. 15.

on the supremacy of human values, and so liturgical rites, vestments and ornaments became just the necessary elements of the courtly ceremonial and pageantry of the Divine King, and, perhaps, a means of fostering the foibles and vanities of the ecclesiastical Third State.

Nowadays we tend to laugh at the baroque mentality of yesteryear, but if we are not careful in a few years' time we will find ourselves performing liturgical rites in a setting resembling that of a stadium, a factory or a cinema<sup>8</sup>: this can only happen if liturgical renewal and revival becomes the prerogative of people who, although full of enthusiasm for a living Liturgy, lack expert knowledge in the nature and history of Liturgy.

The changes brought about by the motuproprio 'Pontificalia insignia' are not due to a desire to do away with all that medieval symbolism and baroque mentality burdened liturgical celebration, or to a desire to discard all that is not modern, up-to-date and progressive; the changes are due to a desire that all elements in the Liturgy should express what is true and not what is only fictitious and make-believe.

A brief survey of the origin and use of pontifical insignia during the centuries will help us in appreciating and understanding the reasons for the reform.

With the complete change in the relation between Christian Church and Roman State wrought by Constantine, bishops gradually came to be classed with the highest functionaries of the Empire and were considered as belonging to the group of the *illustres*, of whom there were five categories. The Pope himself was given the title of *nobilissimus*, a title reserved to the imperial princes, the highest rank of the *illustres*. Each rank had its own official vestments and insignia, and the bishops, therefore, once they were ranked with the *illustres*, had a right to their vestments and insignia.

Both Christian and pagan authors of the fourth century make references to episcopal vestments, but it is quite clear that there was no distinction between vestments worn outside the church and vestments worn in church during liturgical celebrations, neither was there any distinction between clerical and lay dress. In fact, although what one may call 'official costume for public acts' both in the case of magistrates and priests had been common in Greece and all over the near East, hardly anything of the sort existed in the West for many centuries before the

<sup>8</sup> Louis Bouyer, *Life and Liturgy*, London 1956, chp. 1.

Christian era.<sup>9</sup> It was a definite policy of the church in the fourth and fifth centuries that the liturgy should be celebrated always in the garments of everyday life. The use of symbolical liturgical vestments like those of the Old Testament was deliberately avoided; even the stole, which Rome refused to adopt for several centuries except for the bishop, cannot be strictly called a liturgical vestment as it can easily be classed as a scarf of office, of which many kinds were in common use in social and civil life in the late fourth century.

The acceptance of civil insignia by the bishops was not without its difficulties: many could hardly reconcile evangelical humility and simplicity with the situation brought about by the Constantine settlement, with the privileges, titles and honours deriving from the fact that the emperor had classed the bishops with the *illustres* of his court; the 'donatio Constantini', that famous forgery of 8th century Rome, in fact tries to justify the secular and imperial origin of papal insignia by arguing that, as the Pope was the 'vicarius Petri' and therefore Christ's representative on earth, he was entitled to the same, if not a higher, rank and dignity of the emperor, and therefore he ought to have a right to all the imperial insignia.<sup>10</sup> The same argument could easily be repeated with reference to the bishops.

Conservatism has changed the garments of everyday life and various insignia of secular and imperial origin into special liturgical vestments and insignia; when laymen changed their dress in the sixth and seventh century, adopting it to the new and more practical barbarian fashions, the clergy, as the last representatives of the old order, retained the old costumes, which through a period of about three centuries, from being old-fashioned, became later on archaic, and finally hieratic.<sup>11</sup>

In seventh century Rome the liturgical vestments used by the Pope at Mass were the *linea*, the *cingulum*, the *anagolaium*, the *linea dalmatica*, the *maior dalmatica*, and the *planeta*;<sup>12</sup> he put on these vestments, in

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Westminster, 1954, chp. 12, Vestments.

<sup>10</sup> Dom Pierre Salmon, *Etude sur les insignes du pontife dans le rit romain* Rome, 1955, chp. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Westminster, 1954, chp. 12 Vestments.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani du haut moyen age*, II, Louvain, 1948, p. 78. Ordo I, n. 34: 'Et tunc ceteri subdiaconi regionarii secundum ordinem suum accipiunt ad induendum pontificem ipsa vestimenta, alius lineam, alius cingulum, alius angolaium (id est amictum), alius lineam dalmaticam et alius maiorem dalmaticam et alius planetam et sic per ordinem induunt pontificem.'

the order mentioned, in the sacristy, then, with all his clergy, preceded by seven candle-bearers and a subdeacon with a thurible, he went to the altar and, after kissing it and the Gospel book, he took his seat at the end of the apse behind the altar.<sup>13</sup> When the Pope was absent, and a bishop said Mass, the bishop's seat would be at the right-hand side of the altar and not at the end of the apse.<sup>14</sup> This was also the use outside Rome, in Gaul, where the liturgy was more or less similar to that of Rome, whether a bishop, an abbot, or a priest celebrated Mass, for in Gaul this was a period characterized, at least in Liturgy, by a movement to follow Roman uses in an effort to reorganize religious affairs after the Arab invasion, as the splendour of Roman ritual at that time far surpassed what was done in Gaul.<sup>15</sup>

A century later we find the *orarium* and the sandals added to the list of vestments used by the Pope at Mass, and the vestments used, perhaps through Oriental influence, were all of precious cloth. The Pope's head-dress at this time, outside liturgical celebrations or when not officiating himself, was the *phrygium*. Outside Rome, in Spain, France and Britain, it seems that all bishops used sandals and the dalmatic under the chasuble; some had been granted the use of the *pallium*, gloves were coming into use, and the ring was more or less used by all; the bishop's seat, a simple movable chair, was at the right hand side of the altar and not at the end of the apse.<sup>16</sup>

Towards the end of the ninth century we notice outside Rome a marked tendency to add to the number of vestments used at liturgical celebrations: a new idea now comes to the fore, i.e. some sort of vestment must be interposed between ordinary every-day dress and the sacred vestments used during the celebration of the Liturgy — this seems at least to be the reason for the introduction of a *camisia* held by a *cingulum*

<sup>13</sup> Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, II, p. 82-83, Ordo I, n. 46: 'Tunc subdiaconus (sequens) cum tymiamaterio praecedit ante ipsum, mittens incensum, et septem acolyti illius regionis cuius dies fuerit, portantes septem cereostata accensa praecedunt ante pontificem usque ad altare'. n. 51: '... pontifex osculat evangelia et altare et accedit ad sedem et stat versus ad orientem.'

<sup>14</sup> Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, II, p. 115, Ordo II: 'Si autem summum pontificem ubi statio fuerit contigerit non adesse, haec sunt quae ab alio episcopo dissimiliter fiunt: ... secundum namque quod non sedit in sede post altare. Tercio, non dicit orationem post altare, sed in dextro latere altaris.'

<sup>15</sup> Salmon, *Etudes sur les insignes du pape*, chp. 1, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* chp. 2, § 1, pp. 34-36.

under the alb, which is described as a *linea cum costis serica*.<sup>17</sup> The ring and crozier are also in use though no mention of them is found in the *Ordines* of the time, probably because they were considered to be extra-liturgical or para-liturgical insignia.<sup>18</sup>

In the twelfth century we find the mitre mentioned for the first time, as well as a *cappa de pallio* which later on developed into the *cappa magna*.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, II, p. 313. The idea is of Frankish origin according to Andrieu, and he mentions the Gallican *manicae* which served to hide profane vestments during the divine liturgy: 'prohibet autem manica tonica ne appareat vile vestimentum, aut quodcumque indignum tactum sordium super divina sacrificia, quo manus immolantes discurrunt' (Pseudo-Germanus, ep. II). This was in the seventh century; the idea was still prevalent in the thirteenth, and Andrieu quotes a decree of a council of Cologne which says: 'Sacerdotes autem ipsi, quotienscumque celebraturi sunt missam, veste camisiali sub albis non careant, ne albam, quae consecrata est vestis, ipsorum tunicae valeant immediate contingere nec ipsa tunica apparere' (Mansi, Concil. t. XXIII, c. 1017-1013). The *camisia* or *vestis camisialis* had to be used by all those serving at the altar, even the bell-ringers: 'Campanarii ecclesiarum, quorum servitus sive onus circa altare versatur, numquam absque veste camisiali compareant' (Mansi, *ibid.*) Roman Missals, published before the *Codex Rubricarum* of 1960, in the *ritus servandus in celebratione missae* still had the following rubric: sacerdos celebraturus missam ... accedit ad paramenta ... calceatus pedibus, et indutus vestibus sibi convenientibus, quarum exterior saltem talum pedis attingat, induit se, si sit Praelatus secularis, supra Rochettum, si sit Praelatus regularis vel alius Sacerdos saecularis, super Superpelliceum, si commodum haberi possit, alioquin sine eo supra vestes communes ...'

On the other hand, Amalarius in his *De ecclesiasticis officiis* (bk. II, chp. 18) identifies the *camisia* with the *linea* or alb, and does not mention the need of any vestment to be interposed between ordinary every-day dress and the liturgical vestments.

<sup>18</sup> The crozier is depicted in the miniatures of some tenth century MSS and it appears more frequently in eleventh century MSS. Cfr. Salmon, chp. II, pp. 36-37.

<sup>19</sup> The Roman Pontifical of the twelfth century (M. Andrieu, *Le Pontifical Romain du XIIe siecle*, Rome, 1938), mentions the amice, alb, stole, girdle, tunic, dalmatic, chasuble, the buskins and sandals, the crozier and the ring, but not the mitre. It is mentioned by Honorius of Autun (+1145) in his *Gemma animae* and listed among the pontifical vestments only in the Pontifical of Apamaeus (Latin Patriarchate of Antioch) which is a copy of a pontifical in use at Rome towards the end of the twelfth century. This pontifical was one of the nine MSS used by Andrieu for his edition of the Roman Pontifical of the twelfth century. (Cyril Vogel, *Introduction aux sources de l'histoire du culte chretien au moyen age*, Spoleto 1865, VI A, pag. 205). The *cappa de pallio* is mentioned in the Roman Pontifical of the twelfth century. (Cfr. Salmon, chp. II, p. 45).

During these centuries there is actually a lot of uncertainty with regard to the use of the various liturgical vestments: vestments with different names in Rome and outside Rome, vestments used in one place but not in others, vestments adopted for use and then after some time falling into disuse, vestments reserved to certain orders in one place and used by all in others.<sup>20</sup> This uncertainty is easily explained by the fact that the Liturgy, and therefore also the use of the various vestments, is regulated by each bishop for his diocese. It is only in the thirteenth century that we find a certain uniformity in the use of pontifical vestments and insignia with the gradual adoption of the Pontifical of William Durand, bishop of Mende. In this Pontifical we find a *subcinctorium*<sup>21</sup> added to the list of pontifical vestments, the mention of mitres, a common one and a *mitra aurifrisiata*, and, for the first time, the pectoral cross, which the bishop is at liberty to use or not.<sup>22</sup>

Although during the period we have been discussing, several vestments now reserved to the bishop were also used by other members of the clergy, we always meet with some vestments or insignia reserved to particular persons and the right to use them was granted to other persons

<sup>20</sup> This will be evident from what will be said later on when each particular vestment is discussed; for the moment the following may serve as examples:

(i) the Ordo I mentions the *mappula* (n. 37-38), while the Ordo VIII (2-8) mentions the *sestace* (an arabo-persian word meaning handkerchief, according to P. Braun, quoted by Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani* II, p. 314 n. 2) used by all ecclesiastics from the bishop to the cleric in the lowest order, on their left hand, with the exception of the deacons who used a *brachiale* on their right hand.

(ii) The Ordo VI (Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, II, p. 243), says in n. 11: 'Subdiaconi regionarii, secundum ordinem suum accipiunt ad induendum pontificem ipsa vestimenta, alius lineam, alius ambolagium, id est amictum *quod dicitur humerale*, alius lineam dalmaticam, *quam dicimus albam*, alius cingulum alius dalmaticam, alius orarium, alius planetam, et sic per ordinem induunt pontificem.' This Ordo is of a very slight documentary value: it is a summary of Ordo I, often misunderstood, and compiled during the second half of the ninth century, probably at Metz (Cfr. Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, II, pp. 236-238).

<sup>21</sup> The *subcinctorium* in the Pontifical itself is described as 'quod habet similitudinem manipuli et dependet a cingulo in latere sinistro' It is also mentioned in the list of pontifical vestments given by Honorius of Autun in his *Gemma animae* (I, 206).

<sup>22</sup> At the end of the Pontifical (published by Andrieu, *Le Pontifical Romain du moyen age*, III, Rome 1940) is a list of all the vestments and insignia required by the bishop when celebrating high mass: the list is followed by another list of things required for use during a pontifical mass.

as a special privilege. From the ninth century Popes began granting to various bishops and abbots the privileged use of various insignia; abbots, especially, were very important and influential persons in the Middle Ages, for they were not just heads of a monastic community but exercised great political and economic influence as their communities were very numerous and the monasteries very rich; in some cases abbots were more powerful and influential than bishops in religious affairs. These privileges were often granted at the request of civil authorities, but more often than not they were granted as a reward for personal merits or for services rendered to the Holy See.

The granting of episcopal privileges to abbots was not unopposed in the Middle Ages, but one can never speak of usurpation and abuse of pontifical honours. Actually several abbots renounced to the use of the privileges granted to them by the Holy See, and the desire to avoid the use of the *pontificalia* may have been the main reason for grouping priories and not monasteries round the great abbey of Cluny.

Rank and dignity must have been the main reason for the extension of pontifical insignia to persons who were not bishops. Historically the bishop, before being the administrator of a portion of the universal church under the sovereign Pontiff, was the Pastor of the local church and the Pontiff of its liturgy. The development of monasticism led to the founding of monasteries independent of the local church and its bishop, with their own particular liturgy: in these monasteries the divine office, centred round the solemn celebration of the Mass in the middle of the morning, reached its full development; quite evidently the abbot presided over the office and the Mass as the Pastor of the monastery and the Pontiff of its liturgy: it was logical and natural that he would enjoy the insignia of a bishop. And once this trend of extending pontifical insignia to the head of a particular church on account of its dignity or because it was the centre of a popular devotion began, it was quite logical that the rectors, the provosts, the deans and the priors of particular churches, to enhance the dignity and popularity of their church, would ask for and be granted pontifical privileges. This proliferation of pontifical insignia reached its peak in the Middle Ages and has continued with various vicissitudes to the present day.<sup>23</sup>

The first concessions we know of are the use of sandals to the deacons of Messina by a predecessor of Pope Gregory the Great<sup>24</sup> and of the

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. Salmon, chp. II, § 2 and 3, pp. 49-65.

<sup>24</sup> Writing to John, bishop of Syracuse, Gregory says: 'We have heard that the



dalmatic, the peculiar dress of Roman deacons, first granted by Pope Zachary (†752) to Austrobert, bishop of Vienne.<sup>25</sup> Then followed the gloves first granted in 986 to the abbot of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro of Pavia by Pope John XV, who also granted the use of the ring and tunic to the abbot of Lobbes in 990, and the use of the mitre, *mappula* and *balteum*<sup>26</sup> to the abbot of Brevnov in 993. Finally it is the turn of the crozier to be granted as a privilege from the twelfth century onwards.<sup>27</sup>

Pontifical insignia in the Middle Ages were not only granted to abbots, provosts, priors and rectors of particular churches but also to all the canons of a cathedral or collegiate church, and even to secular princes<sup>28</sup>. This custom has continued up to the present days, but with a different emphasis. Originally the idea of granting honours and privileges and insignia was to enhance episcopal dignity and to distinguish the bishop from those standing beside him at the altar; through the Middle Ages the person of the bishop became so encumbered with these ornaments, that it disappeared under their weight, and what could be seen was not the

deacons of the church of Catania have dared to use the *campagi* which no person in Sicily up till now has been authorised to use, except the deacons of Messina, to whom permission had been graciously granted by our predecessors. An act of such audacity cannot be lightly accepted, but your fraternity should make a very diligent enquiry about the affair. One must find out if these deacons have presumed doing this on their own' (Lib. VIII, ep. 27).

<sup>25</sup> In the letter to the bishop, Pope Zachary expresses himself in this manner: 'Dalmaticam usibus vestris misimus ut quia Ecclesia vestra ab hac sede doctrinam fidei percepit, et morem habitus sacerdotalis ab illa etiam percipiat decorem honoris' (quoted from Joachim Nabuco, *Ius Pontificalium*, Tournai, 1956, p. 183 n. 22).

<sup>26</sup> Balteus is the name generally given to the *subcinctorium* in Gallican, Norman and German documents.

<sup>27</sup> The concession of the crozier to abbots is first mentioned in four documents of the twelfth century; actually abbots already used the crozier, in fact the sacramentary of Marmoutiers (ninth century) shows abbot Ragonaldus in front of the throne with a crozier, for the crozier was the first and oldest of the abbots' insignia; the documents mentioned refer to the time when the use of the crozier was strictly liturgical. Cfr. Salmon, chp. II § 2, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Nicholas I, between 1059-1061, granted the mitre to the first king of Bohemia, a privilege later on confirmed by Alexander II and Gregory VII. In 1144 Pope Lucius II granted the dalmatic, sandals, ring, mitre and crozier to Count Roger I, king of Sicily and in 1298 Pope Innocent III granted the dalmatic and mitre to King Peter II of Aragon. The rite for the consecration of the emperor in the thirteenth century Roman Pontificals includes also the imposition of the mitre before the crowning. Cfr. Salmon, chp. II, 3, p. 64-65.

person of the bishop, the pastor of Christ's Church, but the office, the prince. With the Renaissance, and the baroque period up to the present times, it was no longer a question of new ornaments and new honours: through a spirit of pomp and ostentation we now have a diversification of the various insignia according to the dignity of the person using them, a diversification mainly resulting in the fact that the higher the dignity, the higher would be the richness and sumptuousity of the ornaments and the decorations. With the unification of the Latin Liturgy after Trent, the use of the *pontificalia* is minutely detailed, but the number of the privileged continues to multiply, and the *pontificalia* often became a means of promoting the ambitions of worldly prelates, whose part in the eucharistic celebration would be less evident than their pretensions to impose on others their rights and dignities. Such pretensions are out of tune with modern thought, and pontifical insignia as long as they really symbolize the dignity of the episcopate should not belong by right to a person who lacks episcopal jurisdiction. For this reason the Holy See has felt the need of simplifying episcopal rights and of regulating the use of the *pontificalia*, and has invited those who enjoy these privileges without having episcopal jurisdiction to renounce them willingly.

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(to be continued)