

THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF THE PROPAGANDA

The wonderful organization of the Catholic Church has provoked the admiration of men at all times. Even some of her enemies have grudgingly admitted that she is the greatest institution in the world. The centre of this eminently proficient organization, as comprehensive in its administration as the word "Catholic" itself, is the Roman Curia of which the Pope is head and which through a system of governmental departments controls every phase of Catholic interest throughout the world. The origin and development of this wonderful administrative system of the Church, aped by empires and republics, is an historical study of its own. Here we are concerned with the history of but one of these efficient administrative departments, which calls for our consideration at this time owing to the fact that overtures are now being made in Rome for the fitting commemoration of the third centenary of its institution. This is the congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, perhaps the most important of the Congregations, at least, the greatest in point of jurisdiction and power and the best known to us here in America owing to the popularity of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, its faithful ally and auxiliary.

An understanding of the special aim and scope of the Congregation of the Propaganda may be had from a glance at the seal of this Congregation. The orb of the world surmounted by a cross with the words: "Going teach all nations" is self-explanatory. Briefly, "to bring all nations to the knowledge of Christ and Him crucified" is the aim of the Propaganda. It is charged with the spread of Catholicism and the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs in non-Catholic countries where an organized hierarchy does not exist or exists in its formative stage. Catholic missions, therefore, and whatever is connected with and necessary for their management (Canon 252, New Code) fall within its jurisdiction.

While the formal institution of a congregation specially charged with the propagation of the faith dates back but three centuries, the Church has ever been conscious of her divine mission to evangelize the world. The missionary efforts of the first apostles are strikingly set forth in the gospel narrative, while the fathers and history bear eloquent testimony to the labors of

the devoted bands of missionaries who succeeded the Apostles in bringing the "good tidings" of the Gospel to unknown nations. No need of an ecclesiastical congregation charged with the special work of evangelization was felt until the sixteenth century when the so-called Reformation created many exigencies. Whole nations had been lopped off from the centre of Catholic unity. Timely and concerted effort had to be made to repair the damage and the reforms instituted by the Council of Trent offered the only solution. To supervise and apply these Tridentine reform measures Pope Sixtus V in his Bull "Immensa Aeterni Dei" of January 22, 1587, instituted fifteen congregations of Cardinals and this date marks the birth of the Cardinalitial congregations which constitute that efficient and chief governmental authority of the Catholic Church today. With the progress of time new congregations were created and others dissolved as the needs of Holy Church demanded while the perfection of the system of congregations kept pace. In 1622 the time was ripe for the institution of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, for Pope Gregory XV, who then occupied the throne of Peter, saw plainly that such a congregation would greatly expedite the work of the Counter-Reformation. The missionary reconquest of those nations separated from the Church by the Reformation no less than the evangelization of the vast regions then being explored in the expanses of America, Africa, and the Far East, where English and Dutch missionaries were working in the interests of Protestantism, immediately prompted the issue of the Bull "Inscrutabili Divinae" of June 22, 1622, by which the Congregation was formally established.

Propaganda as formally established by Gregory XV, however, was not an entirely new creation. It was rather an amplification of the work entrusted by Gregory XIII (1572-85) to a commission composed of three cardinals who were especially charged to promote the union with Rome of the Oriental Christians. The members of this commission were Cardinals Caraffa, Medici, and Santorio, whom the Pope designated president. Weekly meetings were held at which the practical needs of the Oriental missions, the founding of foreign seminaries, the printing of catechisms in foreign languages, etc., were discussed and voted upon. Its efforts were successful among the Ruthenians, the Armenians and Syrians. After the death of Gregory XIII in

1585 the progress of the commission was interrupted owing to the rapid succession of four Popes, but on the accession of Clement VIII in 1592 the work was revived. He retained Santorio as president and caused weekly meetings to be held in that Cardinal's residence. Every fifteen days the recommendations and decisions of the Commission were to be submitted to him. To this systematic administration is owed largely the notable triumph which marked this period when the Ruthenian nation was reunited to Rome.

With the death of Clement VIII and the Cardinal triumvirate, however, the work of the Commission began again to flag. Herein the essential weakness of its organization was revealed. It depended too much on the energy of its few members for existence. But Gregory XV, who ascended the throne of Peter in 1621, determined to provide for the permanence of the good work of propagation initiated by the Commission while enlarging the scope of its activities to meet the exigencies of the times created by the Reformation and exploration of new lands. The field of its missionary propagation was no longer to be confined to the Oriental Greek Christians, but was now to embrace the whole world not yet Catholic. Accordingly, on January 6, 1622, he summoned thirteen Cardinals and two prelates to whom he laid open his plans and constituted them the first members of the proposed congregation. The preliminaries of organization were quickly despatched and by June 22nd of the same year the papal constitution "*Inscrutabili Divinae*" which established the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith was issued.

Besides the thirteen Cardinals and two prelates the constitution provided for a secretary and consultor. The first presidents were Cardinal Sauli, dean of the Sacred College, and Cardinal Ludovisi, nephew of the Pope and founder of the Irish College at Rome. By subsequent constitutions "*Romanum Decet*," "*Cum Inter Multiplices*" and "*Cum Nuper*," issued by the same Pontiff, ample provisions were made in order to facilitate and accelerate its labors while providing for its maintenance. Gregory XV died, however, before the organization of the new congregation was completed. Fortunately, his successor, Urban VIII (1623-44) was Cardinal Barbarini, one of the original thirteen members of the congregation. With no less zeal than his predecessor, he took up the task of organization where Gregory

had left off. He directed that after the death of Cardinals Sauli and Ludivisi, the first two presidents, there should be but one prefect of the congregation and he nominated to this office his brother, Cardinal Antonio Barbarini, who opened the series of prefects of Propaganda. Among his achievements in the interests of Propaganda, the Urban College, founded by him at Rome in 1627 will stand as a lasting memorial to his zeal. It is the central seminary of Propaganda for the education of missionaries for foreign fields and answered the need of having in every country priests, educated in an international college where they could acquire a larger personal acquaintance, and establish in youth relations that might be mutually helpful in after life. It was established in the Palace of the Congregation and here at all times may be found students from all the territories subject to Propaganda. One may be sure that they constitute an interesting student body; and every feast of the Epiphany when they hold their solemn "Accademia Polyglotta," to symbolize the unity of the Church, visitors always find it interesting to listen to the medley of the strangest languages and dialects. By the close of the pontificate of Urban VIII in 1644 the definite organization of Propaganda was practically completed. Modifications, however, have been made contributing to the perfection of its administration while answering the changed conditions of the times, so that the present perfection of this smoothly functioning administrative department of the Church may be said to represent the result of three centuries of experience.

Today the visitor to Rome is attracted by the imposing palace or administration building of the Propaganda which is the residence of the Cardinal Prefect and his secretary and contains the offices of the various departments. Here the wonderful administrative machinery of Propaganda may be seen in operation. At the present time the entire work of the Congregation is carried on by means of a general cardinalitial congregation, a cardinalitial prefecture and a permanent commission. The general congregation is composed of all the Cardinals of Propaganda, about twenty-five in number, and in this body resides the chief authority of Propaganda. The creation and division of dioceses, vicariates, and prefectures, the selection of bishops and other ordinary superiors of missions, matrimonial causes, ecclesiastical appeals, and the like, all come under its jurisdiction. It

holds regular meetings twice a month at which only the Cardinal members are present, together with two prelates and the general secretary. To the Cardinal Prefect belongs the duty of despatching all matters pertaining to the General Congregation and on account of the wide range of his authority he is commonly known as the "red pope." Assisting the Cardinal Prefecture is a general secretariat presided over by the general secretary who countersigns all letters addressed by the Cardinal Prefect to persons outside of Rome and signs all letters from the prefecture destined to points in Rome. Until December 1, 1917, a second secretariat charged with the administration of the affairs of the Oriental Church was subject to the general prefecture, but on that day Benedict XV in his *Motu Proprio* "Dei Providentis" created a special congregation to look after the administration of the oriental missions known as the Congregation of the Oriental Church and hence from that day it ceased to be part of Propaganda. The same constitution separated from Propaganda the permanent commission charged with the revision of liturgical books of the oriental rites, so that at present the only permanent commission under Propaganda is the special commission which supervises the celebration of councils in territories subject to Propaganda. This department is presided over by a cardinal and is always in close communication with the general secretariat, which may be called the executive department of the whole congregation, for under the immediate supervision of the cardinal prefect it despatches all the current business of Propaganda. The vast amount of business that passes through this department is discharged by an efficient corps of auxiliaries who are divided into three classes. The "minutanti" make minutes of the ordinary acts of the secretariat and prepare the printed copies of the cases destined to come before the general cardinalitial congregation. At the weekly meetings of the secretariat held in presence of the cardinal prefect and the general secretary each "minutanti" reports on all matters for settlement. After hearing the report and consulting with the secretary and others present, the cardinal prefect, having decided the case, or, if need be, referred it to the general congregation, turns over the matter to the "scrittori" who draw up the official documents which in turn are sent to the "protocolлисти" who stamp, number, and register all papers received

and sent out. A record is then made and committed to the archives. The legal document is now ready for the despatch office which keeps its own register of all documents issuing from Propaganda and sees to their actual forwarding. The whole routine is completed with a rapidity and regularity worthy of our twentieth century business methods under the immediate responsibility of the several persons in charge.

An appreciation of the amount of business that passes through the various offices of the Propaganda may be had from a consideration of the wide range of authority conceded to this congregation. All the work done by the other congregations for the territories of the Apostolic See is performed for the missionary countries of the Latin rite by the different branches of Propaganda. For practical reasons, however, the congregation does not make full use of its universal competency. Questions of faith, for instance, are referred to the Sacred Office, petitions for dispensations and absolutions for the internal forum to the Sacred Penitentiary, questions relating to the Tridentine decrees to the Congregation of Councils, etc. Propaganda makes its chief concern the energetic development of the missions which it seeks to accomplish by the training of the missionary priests in the Urban College and other seminaries of the mission subject to Propaganda, by the appointing of apostolic missionaries, of apostolic prefects, and missionary bishops for mission districts, and in a general way by the supreme direction and control of missionary affairs. Disputes being possible even among missionaries Propaganda, in such instances, exercises supreme jurisdiction. Members of religious orders are also subject to it in so far as their missionary activities are concerned. The decrees of Propaganda when confirmed by the Prefect, subscribed by the Secretary, and duly sealed have the force and value of an Apostolic Constitution, and are inviolably to be observed by all. Finally, Propaganda has legislative power for missionary countries, as was decided in plenary session of July 30, 1652. Hence there exists a special canon law for missionary districts known as the "*Jus Pontificium de Propaganda Fide*."

A retrospect of the three hundred years since the institution of Propaganda reveals a missionary activity prosecuted by this Congregation worthy of the Church's best traditions. Through its efficient administration the light of the Gospel has been borne

to the four quarters of the earth literally fulfilling the words of the divine commission "to teach all nations." To-day it administers the affairs of over 60,000 missionaries, composed of 15,000 priests, 40,000 Sisters besides native priests and brothers scattered throughout the world wide mission field. This record is surely a certain proof of the Catholicity of the Church. Well, then may the third centennial of the institution of the Congregation of the Propaganda of the Faith be an occasion of great joy to holy mother the Church. To the Dominicans of St. Joseph's Province who have but recently taken over a foreign field of missionary endeavor in the heart of China, the celebration of the tercentary will be the occasion of renewing their pledges of whole-hearted support to the great work of the propagation of the faith—a work ever dear to the hearts of the sons of St. Dominic.

—Bro. Bertrand Johannsen, O. P. .

TODAY I SAW A TREE IN BLOOM

Today I saw a tree in bloom,
 And sweet within the fragrant flowers,
 Gay bees of gold sang a soft tune
 To while away the honied hours.

But then I thought, how on the morn,
 When I should come again that way,
 The lovely blossoms would be shorn,
 And gone the bees with their glad lay!

So too, so too, in tears I sing,
 Life quickly yields her fleeting breath,
 And golden hours with subtle wing,
 Steal swift away to silent death!

—Bro. Gregory Herold, O. P.