

## **“MOTU PROPRIO” ON PONTIFICAL INSIGNIA**

**The following Apostolic Letter on the use of pontifical insignia was issued by the Holy Father on June 21st.**

Pontifical insignia were instituted and accepted by the Church in the course of the centuries, so that the sacred dignity of bishops might be more clearly manifested to the faithful. This was especially so when their presentation was made in solemn manner and included in the very rite of Ordination or Consecration, together with formulae which expressed the pastoral duties of the new bishop in relation to the flock committed to his charge.

There have been writers, especially in the Middle Ages, who wrote treatises on these insignia showing their pastoral and spiritual significance. These insignia show forth the dignity and power of the bishop as the pastor and teacher of his flock whom he must guide and nourish since he “is to be considered as the high priest of his flock from whom the life in Christ of his faithful is in some way derived and upon whom it in some way depends”. (Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctorum Concilium*, n.41: A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 109)

Gradually, however, the pontifical insignia which had remained the prerogative of bishops for several centuries, were granted as a token of dignity or honour to other ecclesiastics who assisted the bishops in the exercise of their ministry; to those prelates who, like abbots in their own monasteries or territories, enjoyed a certain jurisdiction withdrawn from the local bishops; and also to many other clerics, either individually or as members of the college.

Thus at the present time there are many clerics who, although lacking the dignity of the episcopate, nevertheless possess the privilege of

using pontifical insignia for a variety of reasons and in a greater or lesser degree. This has been provided for in the Code of Canon Law, or in the Apostolic Letter, "motu proprio", "Inter multiplices", of our Predecessor St. Pius X, Feb. 21st, 1905, or in the Apostolic Constitution "Ad incrementum" of Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XI, August 15th, 1934.

The recent Second Vatican Council has thrown a new light on the dignity and offices of bishops in the Church and has shown more clearly the distinction between them and the priests of the second order. Moreover, that same Council, when treating of liturgical celebrations, had laid down "that the rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity. . . they should be within the people's power of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation". (ibid., n. 34:A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 109). The elements used in sacred celebrations are signs portraying divine and invisible things (cf. ibid., n. 33:A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 108), and they should therefore, be easily and, as far as possible, immediately understood by the faithful, so that they may be led to a knowledge of heavenly realities.

Consequently, among the norms governing the reform of the sacred Liturgy there is found one which states that "it is fitting that the use of pontificals be reserved to those ecclesiastical persons who have episcopal rank or some particular jurisdiction". (ibid., n. 130:A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 133).

In view of the mentality and conditions of the present age which attaches the highest importance to the true meaning of signs, and bearing in mind the need that liturgical rites should be characterized by a noble simplicity, it is necessary that true symbolic meaning should be restored to the use of pontifical insignia so as to set forth the dignity and office of the pastoral care of the people of God.

To put into effect the will of the Council, We therefore by Our Apostolic Authority, "motu proprio" and with full knowledge, decree the following:

I. According to the provisions of the article 130 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, We order that, besides bishops, only the following

prelates, endowed with real jurisdiction though lacking episcopal dignity, may henceforth use pontifical insignia:

- a) Legates of the Roman Pontiff,
- b) Abbots and Prelates possessing jurisdiction over a territory not subject to any diocese (cfr. CIC can. 319 § 1, can. 325);
- c) Apostolic Administrators permanently constituted (can. 315 §1);
- d) Regular Abbots "de regimine", after they have received the blessing (can. 625)

II. Pontifical insignia, with the exception of the chair and the crosier, may be used by the following though they do not have episcopal rank:

- a) Temporary Apostolic Administrators (can. 351 §2, 2; cfr. also can. 308)
- b) Vicars Apostolic and Prefects Apostolic (can. 308)

III. The Prelates mentioned in nn. 1 and 2, enjoy the aforesaid rights only within their own territory and during their tenure of office. However, Abbots Primate and Abbots General of Monastic Congregations can use pontifical insignia during their tenure of office in all monasteries of their Order or of their Congregation. Other regular Abbots "de regimine" possess the same right in any monastery of their order, but only with the consent of the Abbot or conventual Prior of the monastery.

IV. Regular Abbots "de regimine" who have received the abbatial blessing, when they have ceased from office, and likewise titular Abbots, may use pontifical insignia in any monastery of their Order or Congregation, but only with the consent of the Abbot or conventual Prior of the monastery.

V. Other Prelates, lacking episcopal rank, who were nominated prior to this Apostolic Letter, continue to enjoy the privileges granted to them by whatever title whether personally or as members of a college in regard to the pontifical insignia which they now possess. They may, however, of their own free will surrender these privileges in accordance with law.

VI. In conformity with what was recently decided by the Sacred Ecumenical Council and with the principles stated by Us concerning the observance of the true meaning of signs in sacred celebrations, Prelates who will be appointed in future, except those mentioned in nn. 1 and 2, will no longer have the right to use pontifical insignia.

VII. What is stated here regarding prelates applies also to clerics who, by whatever title, use pontifical insignia.

VIII. The provisions of the Apostolic Letter will come into force on September 8th of the present year.

We order that all things decreed by Us in this letter, "motu proprio", shall be firm and ratified, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even though worthy of most special mention.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, June 21st, 1968, the sixth year of Our Pontificate.

(Reference: L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO, July 4, 1968)