

The Rise of the Cardinals c. 1049-1100

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The election of Pope Francis in the March brought to our attention one of the key roles undertaken by cardinals concerning papal elections. The subsequent appointment of eight cardinals to review the government of the Church by the Vatican has also stimulated wide interest in the responsibilities of cardinals. It therefore seems appropriate to go back nearly a thousand years to identify some of the historical issues which led to the cardinals' pre-eminent position in the continuation of the papacy, especially the late eleventh-century emergence of a College of Cardinals; this can be taken together with the actual origin and meaning of the term 'cardinal' itself.

Let us first start, however, in the 21st century by looking for clues relating to more recent cardinals. Pope Francis, when he was Archbishop Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, was appointed cardinal-priest of S. Roberto Bellarmino by John Paul II on February 21st 2001. That same day Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor was made cardinal-priest of S. Maria sopra Minerva. Pope Benedict XVI had originally been appointed to the cardinalate in 1977 as cardinal-priest of S. Maria Consolatrice al Tiburtino, then as cardinal-bishop of Velletri-Segni in 1993, and, finally in 2002, as cardinal-bishop of Ostia, the pre-eminent cardinal-bishopric. Cardinal Raffaele Farina, the former Vatican Archivist and Librarian was elevated on November 24th 2007 as cardinal-deacon of S. Giovanni della Pigna.

By now, from these linkages, we have some strong indicators towards the early history of the cardinalate. The attribute of cardinal, whilst accurate, is generic, with every one also bearing a suffix – bishop, priest or deacon; today only the generic term tends to be used. In addition each cardinal is attached (incardinated) to either a diocese just outside Rome or to a Roman church. Today's cardinal orders actually comprise four ranks. In October 2013 there were: seven cardinal-bishops, with their dioceses near Rome – so-called *suburbicarian*; four cardinal-bishop patriarchs of the Eastern Rite; 148 cardinal-priests; forty-three cardinal-deacons: in total, 201 cardinals (one cardinal-bishop has two dioceses).

In Pope Francis' election 115 cardinals under 80 years were eligible to vote,



Cardinal Cormac's church in Rome

taking just two days to elect a new pontiff. However, papal elections have not always gone through smoothly. The one which started in 1268 at Viterbo to choose Clement IV's successor, with only 20 cardinals in attendance, took 33 months to conclude due

to a difference of opinion between French and Italian participants. In the end town officials walled-up the meeting place, passing bread and water through a hole in the roof. Finally the whole roof was removed, that the cardinals would be subject to the elements. Gregory X was eventually elected in 1271; he decided that future elections were to be held behind locked doors cum clave (with a key – conclave).

Acclamation of the people

Prior to the eleventh century papal elections had taken various forms – some involving bribery or force of arms. In the fifth century Leo I declared that no bishop (including the bishop of Rome) should be imposed on a town or city; any appointment should receive the acclamation of the local people, as well as the approval of local clergy. Following the usurpation of the papacy in the eighth century Stephen III decreed that the bishop of Rome should be elected from the ranks of Roman cardinal-priests or cardinal-deacons. However, by the middle of the tenth century papal appointments were firmly in the hands of the Roman aristocracy.

Two families – the Tusculani and Crescentii – were vying for control of the papacy. In 1012 Theophylact, son of Count Gregory of Tusculum, was appointed Benedict VIII, ending a line of Crescentii popes. His brother, Romanus, was put in charge of the secular government of Rome. Effectively the Tusculani exercised both spiritual and temporal control of Rome, with the power of appointing papal officials, cardinals and others. When Benedict died in 1024 Romanus, still a layman, was appointed as John XIX and when he died in 1032 another brother was offered the post. He declined in favour of his own son, another Theophylact, who became Benedict IX. The papacy was clearly a family affair.

During this period the Roman cardinalate comprised three ranks. There were 7 suburbicarian cardinal-bishops (as there still are today) who, in addition to their own diocesan responsibilities around Rome, also undertook liturgical duties at the Lateran Palace on a *hebdomadary* or seven-day rotation basis. They also attended Roman councils and were seen as a type of quasi-standing committee; they also had to perform specific duties at papal enthronements.

There were 28 cardinal-priests, each with a *titulus* or title-church. In addition to their direct responsibilities they were called upon to carry out pastoral and cemeterial duties at the other four major basilicas in Rome, not too dissimilar to the cardinal-bishops, also on a seven-day basis. In recognition for this responsibility, they were able to participate in papal concelebrations on major feast-days. It is from these additional duties that the attribute *cardinal* emerges. The Latin *cardo* means hinge and, in a figurative sense, these churchmen were being transferred – incardinated, just like a hinge being opened – over to another church to perform extra tasks there.

Finally there were 19 deacons, who at different times over the centuries also carried the attribute of cardinal. Attached to a diaconate church in Rome they originally performed welfare duties, such as to widows and orphans, as well as grain distribution. But this role was extended so that they could also act as personal assistants to the pope. Most importantly this included taking care of papal administration. So, as with the other cardinal ranks, they also took on additional duties. An archdeacon was in charge of the cardinal-deacons and he could act in the pope's absence as *vicarius papae* or papal vicar. Although hierarchically lower than cardinal-priests, cardinal-deacons

were much closer to the pope and, from time to time, were appointed bishop of Rome because of this proximity to a predecessor.

The papacy took a dramatic turn between 1044 and 1048. At one time there were three popes claiming to be successor to St Peter: Benedict IX, Sylvester III (a Crescentii) and Gregory VI, a strong supporter of Church reform. This confusing situation was brought to a head when Henry III, the German king, arrived in Italy in 1046. He was also in favour of reform but had an ulterior motive of receiving the imperial crown from the hands of a pope. He decided to dismiss all three popes, beginning a line of German imperial appointments to the Apostolic See. However, the pontificates of the first two, Clement II and Damasus II, were short-lived, their deaths the probable result of Roman aristocratic intrigue.

A great leap forward

Nevertheless the papacy was set for a great leap forward. Henry now appointed a distant relative, Bruno, bishop of Toul in France, who had already had a successful imperial career. In taking the name Leo IX, his pontificate became a watershed in papal history. Focusing on papal and Church reform he insisted that his elevation should be the result of the acclamation of the Roman clergy and people, in line with the ruling of his renowned predecessor and namesake. Much as he sought the support of Henry it was clear that his elevation and those of his two predecessors were still dependant on lay intervention.

No election had taken place; Leo had become pope as a result of imperial sanction and was determined to avoid it happening again, otherwise the papacy would still be subject to secular control. The same applied to Church councils where it was usual that pope and emperor sat as co-presidents. Leo soon discontinued this arrangement and, at breakneck speed throughout the empire, undertook a series of councils as sole president, spending barely six months of his six-year pontificate in Rome.



Leo IX

His reform agenda comprised: the buying and selling of clerical offices – simony – particularly when appointing bishops; clerical chastity, although many clerics, including bishops, had wives or concubines; and lay investiture whereby bishops received their office not from fellow bishops but from the king or leading noblemen. Leo's strategy was, firstly, to wrest control of the Church from all secular influence and, secondly, to establish the primacy of the Apostolic See over the universal Church.

But to achieve this he needed help. Gradually a dramatic institutional and ideological transformation took place, in part resulting from papal action but also shaped by concurrent events. Step one involved Leo's recognition of the seven cardinal-bishops as forming a body to which he and his immediate successors appointed like-minded reformers.

Because of the numerical limitation of seven cardinal-bishops Leo's recruitment policy was extended to appoint more reform-minded individuals to high papal office as cardinal-priests and cardinal-deacons. The success of doing so led to the development

of a corporate body within the papacy which, by 1059, four years after Leo's death, was able to assert its authority in a quite dramatic way. This group was able to expand and regenerate itself, possessing a sense of collective responsibility and powerful continuity. Beyond Rome Leo's cardinals undertook responsibility as papal legates, as well as presiding at Church councils to the extent that even a sub-deacon Hildebrand, (the future St Gregory VII), was sent to Germany with full papal authority to depose bishops who had failed to comply with papal rectitude. The self-awareness of this inner core of papal government, embracing key personnel, such as St Peter Damian, Humbert of Moyenmoutier, the papal chancellor, and Hildebrand, became the glue of Church reform during that decade.

Death of Henry III

Despite the progress made by Leo and his immediate successors two events clouded the reformers' horizon. In 1056 Henry III died at the age of 40, being succeeded by his six year-old son Henry IV. During the ensuing regency a major source of secular support for the papacy was removed. A bigger problem arose, however, following the death of Stephen IX in 1058, at a time when many of the papal inner core were outside Rome. Cardinal-bishop John II of Velletri, an appointment made prior to Leo IX's elevation, was elected Benedict X, apparently by Roman acclamation, although probably the result of bribery by the Roman aristocracy to whom Benedict had family connections.

Nevertheless his pontificate had a veneer of legitimacy, with support from one other cardinal-bishop. This break in their ranks left the remaining cardinal-bishops in a very precarious situation. Together with Hildebrand, they met at Siena, electing Gerard, bishop of Florence, as Nicholas II to succeed Stephen. But, it was only by the use of military force and Jewish connections within Rome that they were able to oust Benedict. However, a problem still remained: how to achieve retrospective legitimacy for Nicholas.

The solution came by means of passing the Papal Election Decree of 1059, formulated by the remaining five cardinal-bishops. This watershed event would have a lasting effect right down to Pope Francis' election by cardinals; it was the first step towards papal elections being in the hands of this group. The subsequent road has been far from straight; nevertheless, the decree of 1059, which was subscribed to by seventy-five archbishops, patriarchs and bishops, opened the way for the arrangement we have today. Its key aspect was the granting to cardinal-bishops of sole rights in future papal elections. Adding further legitimacy to Siena, future elections should ideally be held in Rome and the candidate should also be Roman; however, these requirements could be waived under extenuating circumstances. The remaining cardinals and other Roman clergy had the right of assent, as did the populace of Rome, but this did not confer any right to object to the election. In recognition of previous imperial involvement, a so-called "king's clause" was introduced, allowing for confirmation or recognition of the cardinal-bishops' decision but, again, with no right to object. The Roman aristocracy had no involvement in future proceedings.

Another important aspect of this legislation, previously somewhat vague, was that papal powers were assumed on election and not enthronement, adding further to the legitimacy of Siena. In a succession of letters Peter Damian was also responsible for the development of a cardinal ecclesiology, describing the cardinal-bishops as sentinels or

eyes of the papacy, then evolving into papal custodians and, finally, becoming papal guardians, effectively governing with the pope, even to the extent of censuring an erring pope.

This decree created an initial hierarchy of five cardinal-bishops, four cardinal-priests and three cardinal-deacons, together with a new papal institution. The genesis of this early College of Cardinals provided a constitutional foothold in future papal elections. Effectively a monopoly of self-perpetuation was being crafted which, in theory, would guarantee the future election of reform-minded popes; it would also open the door for even greater cardinal participation in papal government.

The subsequent decade and a half was largely a period of consolidation for the papacy and Roman cardinalate. Monastic recruitment, particularly from nearby Monte Cassino, continued and cardinal legates were given increased power “as if the pope himself were present”. Cardinal-bishops spent increasingly less time in Rome, resulting in a rise in subscriptions to papal documents by cardinal-deacons and cardinal-priests. In parallel, another development within the Roman Church, albeit unintended, would also lead to another major step forward for the cardinalate. In a little-acknowledged papal document the twenty-eight cardinal-priests were given quasi-episcopal rights by Alexander II.

Rising status of the cardinal-priests

With a focus on bad behaviour and ostentation the priests of all other Roman churches came under the jurisdiction of the cardinal-priests. Whether this was the simple extension of an existing institution – the twenty-eight cardinal-priests – or the result of pressure from them for more authority is unknown. But in giving them supervisory and administrative responsibility, in addition to their duties at the four major basilicas, the status of the cardinal-priests increased significantly.

The next major development in the Roman cardinalate would be far more dramatic. Upon Alexander’s death Hildebrand, who had been archdeacon and effective power behind the throne, succeeded as Gregory VII. However, somewhat surprisingly, this was not carried out in accordance with the 1059 decree but resulted from popular acclamation. Yet Gregory’s single-minded pursuit of reform goals and his uncompromising style of papal government did not inspire support from all those around him and this became gradually worse. Even a close supporter, Peter Damian, had written about Hildebrand when archdeacon to Alexander II:

If you want to live in Rome you have to obey the pope’s lord, rather than the lord pope

Gregory also made greater use of local resident legates, rather than cardinals, to hold councils and there was little development in papal administration, probably because of Gregory’s strong hand on this area while archdeacon and even earlier. The deteriorating relationship with the cardinals also led to a loss in the earlier sense of collegiality. Gregory, too, introduced a new concept into papal government whereby an individual’s importance or participation was dependent on serviceability to the pope which meant, effectively, obedience to Gregory. In many ways his pontificate was a setback for the development of the Roman cardinalate.

Gregory equally applied his new concept outside the Church, in particular to Henry IV, by now a young man, who did not take kindly to having his imperial status overridden by a bishop in Rome. Of the many disputes between them the so-called Investiture

Controversy, concerning the right to appoint and invest bishops, took centre-stage. Henry refused to give up this level of authority particularly when, because of Gregory's restrictions on their authority, Henry's German bishops gave him and not the pope their full support.

Ultimately this led to a rebellion against the pope, with decrees issued by imperial-led councils in Germany and Italy, calling for Gregory's deposition and the election of an anti-pope. At these councils a forged copy of the 1059 decree was in circulation. The simple omission of the word *episcopi* (bishops) after the word *cardinalis* (cardinals) now implied that all cardinals had the right to elect a pope. This thereby provided a major incentive for any disaffected cardinal-priests whose status under Alexander II had been improved and yet was being held back under Gregory. The forgery became of enormous importance to the Roman cardinals.

Overt internal opposition within Rome surfaced in 1082 when, without Gregory being present, a meeting took place between high-ranking cardinals over his intention to mortgage Church property in order to fight Henry IV, militarily if necessary. Those present comprised supporters and opponents of Gregory. The outcome was unanimous in rejecting Gregory's plan. Finally matters came to a head in 1084 with the defection from Gregory of one cardinal bishop, eight cardinal-priests and three cardinal-deacons, together with many other leading Roman clergymen including handpicked recruits of Gregory.

The Wibertine schism

This rebellion at the heart of papal government heralded the final stage in the transformation of the eleventh-century Roman cardinalate. Two rival factions emerged during the so-called Wibertine schism, unleashing a major polemical battle. Amongst many issues, the defectors claimed that the Petrine commission, whereby Christ gave Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven and upon which papal succession was founded, was supplemented with an Apostolic commission with the notion of placing the cardinals collectively on an almost equal footing with the pope, since Christ had charged all the apostles to go out into the world and convert.

Bringing to Rome a military force, Henry IV saw an opportunity to rid himself of Gregory who took flight to Salerno where he died in 1085. Meantime, the anti-pope, Clement III, was installed with the support of the defecting cardinals and clergy. It was not until 1087 that Gregory's supporters managed to elect Victor III as their pope; his short reign was followed by Urban II. Neither he nor Clement was able to hold Rome for any length of time but it was clear that both sides needed the support of Rome's clergy.

Furthermore although there were two sets of cardinal-bishops during the schism there was only ever one set of cardinal-priests and cardinal-deacons, split between both camps; it was they, after all, whose base was in Rome. This presented an ideal opportunity for cardinal-priests to take advantage of the situation and seek a greater say in papal government, a principle first accepted by Clement and soon followed by Urban. To acknowledge this, in one of his few surviving decrees, Clement went as far as describing his cardinals as papal eyes, having the authority to act collectively as his vicar during his frequent absences from Rome. He confirmed that papal justice and papal decrees were being issued through the cardinals and that they provided mutual cooperation in papal affairs and government.

It was also in Clement's papal documents that the expression *De fratrum consilio* (concerning the advice of our brothers) began to appear more frequently, thereby demonstrating this joint decision-making process. It was also amongst Clement's cardinals that the deacons began more frequently to add the attribute *cardinalis* as they began to subscribe more and more to papal documents.



Paschal II

Whilst Clement tended to be predominant for most of the schism, ultimate victory came to his opponent. Although he died in 1099, Urban was immediately succeeded by the cardinal-priest Rainer of S. Clemente as Paschal II. Clement died soon afterwards and, with loss of imperial support whilst Henry IV was attending to the rebellion of his own son, the future Henry V, support for Clement's faction waned. There were two further anti-popes, but only for short periods, attracting very limited Roman clerical support. During the first decade of Paschal's pontificate most bridges between the rival cardinals were mended, either by compromise or as a result of deaths from natural causes. Over time Paschal was able to call on the support of nearly all cardinals. Far from this period marking the end of the rise of the cardinals their roles within the papacy evolved further over successive decades and

centuries, encompassing the coalescence of all three cardinal ranks and the honorific appointment of high-ranking clergymen to them.

However, the second half of the eleventh century had witnessed a major breakthrough – the transformation of the Roman cardinalate from liturgical functionaries into papal counsellors, with their responsibility for papal elections established. Despite roles and responsibilities still to be clearly defined cardinals were now at the heart of papal government, increasingly evidenced by the ongoing growth in subscriptions to papal documentation and by consistently appearing ahead of all other clergymen in such lists.

Accident and design

It was the self-awareness of the cardinals themselves, and their vision of the role they felt they should play in papal government, that brought about these long-lasting changes. It was not linear progression; transformation had come about by both accident and design:

- The formation of a 'kitchen-cabinet' of reformers at the heart of the papacy
- the development of a cardinal ecclesiology
- the 1059 Papal Election Decree and its subsequent forgery
- the decree of Alexander II concerning cardinal-priest responsibilities with the Roman Church
- finally, the schism that forced the rival popes to involve cardinal-priests and cardinal-deacons progressively more in papal government

And, at every turn, this progression was underpinned by a vision of cardinal self-awareness, ultimately leading to the College of Cardinals we recognise today.

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