

A Requiem for King Edward

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IT IS STARTLING to come across a record of a requiem mass held in the brand-new Sistine Chapel on 23 September 1483 for 'Edward King of England'. 'Which King Edward?' is the immediate question. Was this a belated ceremony for Edward IV (died 9 April 1483)? Or had it been reported at Rome that the deposed (25 June) Edward V was dead?

The notice occurs in the *Diary* kept by Iacopo Gherardi of Volterra, apostolic secretary and 'secret chamberlain' to Pope Sixtus IV.¹ The *Diary* is largely a record of Papal ceremonies, strictly speaking not a diary, since it was put together after Gherardi left papal service in 1492. Nevertheless it seems generally accurate and must have been written up from notes taken at the time. The entry reads:

Eduardo Anglie regi parentatum hodie septembris XXIII in maiori sacrario, pontifice et patribus presentibus, rem divinam egit Christophorus episcopus Modrusiensis. Sed novissima persolvit pontifex, vaparato thure et aqua sancta inspersa, non pluviali sed purpurea cappa circumdatus.

Christopher, bishop of Modruss, celebrated mass for the dead for Edward, king of England, today, 23 September, in the greater chapel [= the Sistine Chapel] But the Pope performed the last part of the service, after the incense had been burnt and the holy water sprinkled. The pope was wearing his purple *cappa*, not his *pluviale*.

Gherardi goes on to record that the Pope then took a jaunt into the countryside after the mass. The sun beat down, his doctors warned he would be ill, and indeed so he was!

The ceremony itself requires some explanation. It was presumably 'an office for the dead when the body is not present.'² On such occasions a catafalque or black pall is set where the coffin would normally stand, and is censed and sprinkled as if it were the coffin. Bishop Christopher does not seem to have been among the more high-ranking prelates available.⁴ The *pluviale* (literally rain-coat) and the *cappa* were both varieties of cope, worn liturgically by bishops; the *pluviale* for ordinary occasions, the *cappa* the more magnificent for special occasions. Prelates officiating at requiem masses would normally wear a black *pluviale*. By tradition, the Pope does not wear black; hence presumably the purple *cappa*.⁵

Similar honours had been paid only ten days before to Louis XI, King of France, on 13 September. The Pope and cardinals had been present in the Sistine Chapel, the Pope had worn his *cappa*. Louis, however, seems to have rated a more distinguished celebrant in the person of Giorgio della Rovere, Bishop of Orvieto, an adopted member of the Pope's own family.⁶

Was Edward IV the beneficiary of the requiem mass? Edward's death in April was known in Rome by 16 May, when a letter of condolence was sent to Queen Elizabeth.⁷ The regulations governing papal ceremonial held that a requiem mass should be held for an emperor or king as soon as the Pope had definite news of the death.⁸ Certainly this had been the case for Edward I and Edward III; and also for Louis XI, news of whose death only reached Rome two or three days before his requiem.⁹ All this makes it odder that Edward IV should have had to wait five months; and suggests the possibility that Edward V was the beneficiary.

News of Edward V's deposition had reached the Vatican by 8 August when a routine letter was despatched to Richard III.¹⁰ That Pope Sixtus could have believed by 23 September that Edward was dead is by no means impossible. As C.A.J. Armstrong has shown, Dominic Mancini believed that Edward and his brother Richard, Duke of York, had disappeared from view (with a strong hint that they were dead) before he left England in July.¹¹ He seems to have reported to Angelo Cato, the Italian Archbishop of Vienne, and that may well be the origin of the allegation by the Chancellor of France in January 1484 that Edward IV's sons had been murdered.¹² Cato was an old friend and correspondent of Pope Sixtus.¹³ The news could, just, have reached Rome by 23 September. None of this, of course, is evidence that the boys were in fact dead; only that Mancini's information spread far. If Rome thought that the boys were dead it would not, given the dictates of *realpolitik*, prevent normal relations with Richard III. Nevertheless, it could have been a contributory factor in persuading Pope Sixtus's successor Innocent VIII towards the cautious support he was to give Bishop Morton's machinations on behalf of Henry Tudor in 1485.¹⁴

Nevertheless, this is far from conclusive. It may be that the requiem mass for King Louis had underlined the point that nothing similar had been done for Edward IV; in the interests of justice, fair-dealing, and diplomacy, that needed to be rectified.¹⁵ A requiem mass for Edward IV may in fact have been the final service rendered by Edward's cardinal-protector at Rome, the Burgundian Ferry de Clugny, who himself died on 7 October (and was buried the same day).¹⁶ Again the Sistine Chapel itself had only just been consecrated, on the Feast of the Assumption, 15 August 1483.¹⁷ The chapel was the crowning achievement of Pope Sixtus's campaign to rebuild Rome ('*urbis restauratio*') in such a way as to make it a symbol of the papal primacy. In particular, the iconography of the chapel (before the original design was swamped by Michaelangelo's ceiling and Last Judgement), with its parallel scenes of the lives of Moses and of Christ is designed as an emphatic affirmation of the authority granted to Peter and to his successors in this world.¹⁸ Papal liturgy was becoming increasingly elaborate, increasingly spectacular, increasingly concerned to glorify the Pope himself as vicar of Christ.¹⁹ Of course, as the examples of Burgundy and England show, spectacle was also a feature of secular courts. Magnificence was an instrument of public policy. But in the papal case, liturgy was central to the enterprise; the

object of that investment in music, building, painting and sculpture which is the mark of the 'Renaissance Papacy'.²⁰ What better way to emphasise universal papal jurisdiction than, as a matter of routine, to celebrate requiem masses for deceased emperors and kings in the presence of the Pope in the Sistine Chapel. In those terms a delayed requiem becomes explicable. Either Sixtus postponed the requiem until such time as his splendid new chapel became available; or conceivably the requiem for Louis XI made the point of how impressive such ceremonies could be in such a setting and set him thinking of a reason to hold another.

The Sistine Chapel seems a world apart from St. George's Windsor, even if the Tower of London and Castel St. Angelo have some disconcerting similarities. These far-off echoes of English events are intriguing and frustrating; as with so many of the events of that much-studied but elusive year in English history, they raise more questions than they solve. I incline to think that the less sensational explanation — that the requiem was a delayed requiem for Edward IV — is the more likely. But the balance of probabilities seems a fine one. After all, studied ambiguity was not an entirely unknown feature of papal diplomacy.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Enrico Carusi (ed.), *Il Diario Romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra* (= L. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 2nd Ser., vol. 23, pt. iii, Rome 1904), p. 123. [Hereafter, 'Gherardi']. On Gherardi, see Egmont Lee, 'Jacopo Gherardi and the Court of Pope Sixtus IV', *Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 65 (1971), pp. 221-37. I am grateful to my colleague Dr S. J. Heyworth for saving me from egregious errors in translation from Latin; remaining errors, historical or linguistic, are my own.
2. Gherardi, p. 202.
3. Adrian Fortescue, *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described*, London 1918, pp. 424-5.
4. Bishop of 'Modrusiensis', alias 'Corbaviensis', now Zengg, in Croatia, since 1480. He held the see until his death in 1498 or 1499. See P. B. Gams, *Series Episcoporum Ecclesiae Catholicae*, Regensburg 1875, p. 388, and C. Eubel, *Hierarchia Catholica Medii Aevi*, 4 vols., Regensburg 1898-1935, vol. 2, p. 151. Tradition laid down that a cardinal should celebrate such a mass; see Filippo Tamburini and Joaquim Nabuco (eds.), *Le Cérémonial Apostolique avant Innocent VIII* (*Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae*: Sectio Historica, vol. 30), Rome 1966, pp. 204-6. But by Sixtus's reign a bishop normally officiated; Marc Dykmans (ed.), *L'Oeuvre de Patrizi Piccolomini ou le Cérémonial Papal de la Première Renaissance*, Series *Studi e Testi*, vols. 293-4, Rome 1980-2, vol. 2, pp. 446-8.
5. See *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, 12 vols., Rome 1949-54, vol. 3, p. 695; *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 18 vols., Washington, D.C. 1967-89, vol. 5, pp. 482-7, and vol. 10, pp. 972-3; J. G. Davies (ed.), *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, London 1986, p. 533; Herbert Norris *Church Vestments*, London 1949, pp. 157-64. For a black 'pluviale' worn by prelates officiating at funerals, see M. Dykmans, 'Le Cérémonial de Nicolas V', (*Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, vol. 63 (1968), pp. 365-78, 785-825), p. 798. Twentieth-century popes wear a red cope with a violet stole at funerals; *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, p. 973.
6. Gherardi, p. 123; for Giorgio della Rovere, see Gherardi, p. 29 n. 2 and index p. 198; Eubel, *Hierarchia Catholica*, vol. 2, p. 285. He was bishop of Orvieto 1476-1505.
7. Gherardi, p. 116 n. 12, quoting Vatican MS. Arch. Vat. arm XXXIX, t. 15, p. 546, which I have not seen. Gherardi himself thought Edward died on the nones of April, that is 5 April. This may be the result of the false information which apparently led to a premature requiem at York on 6 April; Cora L. Scofield, *Edward IV*, 2 vols., London 1923, vol. 2, p. 364; Charles Ross, *Edward IV*, (1974) pp. 414-5; Rosemary Horrox, *Richard III*, Cambridge 1989, p. 89. There is a misleading note in Dominic Conway, *Guide to documents of Irish and British Interest in Fondo Borghese*, ser. 1, (*Archivum Hibernicum*, vol. 23, 1960, pp. 1-147) p. 21, which implies that Edward was reported dead in Rome about 6 February; but the source quoted is one of several copies of Gherardi and is either misinterpreted or faulty: see Gherardi, pp. 115-6 and p. xxxiii.

8. Tamburini and Nabuco (eds.), *Cérémonial Apostolique*, pp.204-6. The text emphasises that requiem masses were an exceptional honour reserved for emperors and kings; empresses and queens or lesser princes, even sons of kings, were not to be so honoured, although some exceptional cases from history were cited. The text, a consolidation of existing practice, dates from the reign of Nicholas V (1447-55).
9. Walter Ullmann, The Curial Exequies for Edward I and Edward III, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 6 (1955), pp.26-36. Louis XI was taken ill on 25 August 1483 and died on 30 August (Charles Ross, *Edward IV*, p.415, mistakenly gives 25 August as date of death). The news had reached Rome by 11 September when a letter of condolence was sent to his successor; Gherardi, p.122 n2.
10. *Calendar of Papal Registers*, vol. 13, pt.ii, pp.826-7, for letters of 4 July to Edward V and 8 August to Richard III. These were routine letters about appointments to Welsh and Irish bishoprics. There seems no trace of any congratulatory letter to Richard III. However Richard himself neglected to inform the Papacy officially of his accession until February 1484, and his 'orator' did not arrive in Rome until the end of 1484; see R. Horrox and P. W. Hammond (eds.), *British Library Manuscript 433*, 4 vols., Upminster and London 1979-83, vol. 3, pp.58-9, and Johannis Burckard, *Liber Notarum 1483-1506* (= L. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 2nd Ser. vol. 32, ii parts, Rome 1907-8), vol. i, pp.97, 99.
11. Dominic Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard III*, ed. C.A.J. Armstrong, 2nd ed., Oxford 1969, pp.5, 93.
12. *ibid.*, p.22.
13. *ibid.*, pp.5, 31, 39-40, 48.
14. C.S.L. Davies. Bishop John Morton, the Holy See, and the Accession of Henry VII, *English Historical Review*, vol. 102 (1987), pp.2-30.
15. Prompt action on behalf of King Louis's soul was to be expected; Louis was an invaluable ally of Pope Sixtus in Italian politics at the time. Edward IV, although the recipient of marks of papal favour (the 'Golden Rose and Sword' in 1481) was, inevitably, rather more marginal in Roman calculations; Gherardi himself reports that the Rose and Sword were sent to Edward, 'quamvis sit in ultimis terris', 'even though he lives at the ends of the earth', p.84.
16. Gherardi, p.123. D.S. Chambers *Cardinal Bainbridge in the Court of Rome*, Oxford 1965, p.2. Ferry de Clugny's appointment as cardinal-protector in 1482 seems to be the first by an English king.
17. Gherardi, pp.121-2.
18. L.D. Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel before Michaelangelo*, Oxford 1965; John Shearman and André Chastel and others, *The Sistine Chapel: Michaelangelo Rediscovered*, Eng. ed. London 1986, pp.22-91.
19. See Dykman's preface to his *L'Oeuvre de Patrizi Piccolomini*, vol. 1, p.v., 'Le lecteur du livre est ainsi averti. L'ouvrage est bien de la Renaissance . . . Le culte divin y reste l'objet premier. Le culte du pape, en tant que vicaire du Christ, y prend toutefois une place parfois en apparence prépondérante'.
20. Joaquim Nabuco, in Tamburini and Nabuco, eds., *Cérémonial Apostolique*, p.22*, remarks that in the reign of Nicholas V papal liturgy 'conservait encore sa fonction pastorale; il n'en devait plus être ainsi longtemps', as, 'crescendo', the accent shifted towards spectacle. From 1466 the 'Master of Ceremonies' became one of the great prelates of the Curia. For papal liturgy in the reign of Pope Sixtus, see Dykman's *L'Oeuvre de Patrizi Piccolomini*. For the view that artistic and liturgical elaboration, far from being a sign of decadence, was a conscious policy to assert religious authority, see, amongst a number of recent works, Charles L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1985. Stinger emphasises the importance of church building within the whole strategy of Sixtus's massive building programme in Rome, pp.222-234.