

“Sac. Congregation did not agree to the proposal and conferred the post of Vicar Apostolic for the Mogul’s dominions on the Bishop himself. . . .”

On his way back from Rome the Bishop of Baghdad heard the news at Aleppo, 4.9.1755,¹ and at once wrote to Rome:

“I presume the Sac. Congregation will not think of appointing a successor, seeing that there are hardly any Christians left in the whole of Persia, and the warfare continues more severely than ever, without any hope of peace . . .”:

he was so interested, indeed, that less than three months later, still from Aleppo, he began a letter of 2.12.1755:²

“This is the fourth letter that I have the honour to write to your Lordship to inform you of the death of Mgr Sebastian, Bishop of Isfahan. I presume the Sac. Congregation will not give him a successor so long as the disturbances in Persia continue. . . .”

But he went on to suggest the name of Fr. Fidelis of S. Teresa, Vicar at Baghdad, should a new appointment be made. When the Sac. Congregation met, however, on 8.8.1757 and Cardinal Ursini reported³ the question, in addition to Fr. Hyacinth (vicar-general)’s recommendation of the early appointment of a successor, the Cardinal observed that

“the (arch)bishop of Nakhchiwan had quitted Persia a long time ago, so that the whole of that very vast country remains without any Catholic bishop. Further the Fr. Procurator of the Discalced Carmelites—in the name of his superiors—begs the Sac. Congregation to be pleased to honour his Order⁴ with that bishopric, and proposes in the first place Fr. Cornelius of S. Joseph, a Milanese aged over 47: and Fr. Fidelis of S. Teresa from Novara, aged 50, both of the province of Lombardy and with 16 years or more in the missions, upright, of good reputation, setting a good example and perfect in oriental languages, having been seminarists at S. Pancrazio. . . . The rescript was worded: ‘His Holiness to be consulted about the appointment of Fr. Cornelius of S. Joseph to the vacant see.’ . . .” and “in an audience given on 15.8.1757 His Holiness graciously approved the opinion of the Sac. Congregation reported to our lord Pope Clement XIII by Mgr Nicolas Antonelli, the Secretary. . . .”

Fr. Cornelius was duly promoted in the consistory held, 2.10.1758.⁵

Joseph Reina, from Milan, born in 1710, the seventh and last Latin Bishop of Isfahan (it had been a bishopric in the Sasanian era) was evidently of very different stamp and gifts to Bishop Sebastian: to mention one point, his long reports and letters are a delight to read for their polished phrasing, yet clear and direct style, the neat handwriting and, above all, for their understanding of Persian personalities and current events in Persia, which he made it his business to set down in praiseworthy detail, so that they are a mine of information. The whole purpose of his term of office was to give satisfaction: his long reports, he began his letter of 2.5.1765, had no other motive

“except to have the satisfaction of hearing that the Sac. Congregation are content with my work.”

¹ *S.N.R.*, VI, p. 201, letter of 8.9.1755.

² *S.R.*, vol. 773, p. 279.

³ *Acta* for 1757, p. 321.

⁴ *Vide* also in *S.R.*, vol. 773, p. 275, a memorial to the secretariat of the Congregation:

“The Procurator of the Discalced Carmelite Missions, your humble petitioner, represents that the episcopal see of Isfahan in Persia is vacant on account of the death in Basra of Mgr Sebastian of S. Margaret, and at the same time humbly prays that the Sac. Congregation will deign to appoint another from his Order, so many times favoured by the Sac. Congregation in the appointment of bishops, who have always been useful and exemplary in that mission from its first inception. . . .”

This was a remarkable divergence from the attitude of the heads of the Order, opposed to all prelacies, in the 1630’s.

⁵ *S.N.R.*, VI, p. 426.