Comment:
The Entertainment Business

The Rupert Murdoch Professor of Language and Communication in the Faculty of English Language and Literature in the University of Oxford might seem a fairly bizarre creation, funded by the media empire that some might regard as the greatest threat to language and communication on the face of the earth. More bizarre still, however, is the investiture by Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles of Mr Murdoch as a Knight of the Order of Saint Gregory, in recognition of his support of the Archdiocesan Education Foundation.

Celia Capstick, president of the National Board of Catholic Women, which advises the Bishops of England and Wales, had arranged a meeting with the British government's new Women's Unit, to discuss (among other things) the impact on society of the image of women promoted by the media. Not surprisingly, she felt obliged to apologize for the papal honour granted to the owner of *The Sun* , a journal no doubt little read in archiepiscopal circles in Los Angeles, but notorious on this side of the Atlantic as the first newspaper in Britain regularly to print photographs of half-naked women—'topless models' —in suggestive poses.

The Order of Saint Gregory the Great was founded in 1831 by Pope Gregory XVI to reward subjects of the Papal States. It has two divisions, civil and military. Each division is divided into four classes: Grand Cross Knights of the First Class, Grand Cross Knights of the Second Class, Commanders, and simple Knights. The costume on appropriate ecclesiastical occasions is a dress coat of dark green, open in front , and covered on breast and back with embroideries in the form of oak leaves. White trousers with silver side stripes, a bicornered ornamented hat and a knightly sword, complete the rig. The decoration itself is an eight-pointed red enamelled gold cross, in the centre of which is a blue medallion on which is impressed in gold the image of Saint Gregory with a dove at the side of his right ear; in a circle round the image is inscribed the words 'S. Gregorius Maximus', and on the reverse the device 'Pro Deo et Principe'. It may or may not be consolation to some that Mr Murdoch is only a simple Knight, of course in the civil division.

Catholics love dressing up, the clergy especially. A point in his favour, one might think, is that Mr Murdoch is unlikely ever to appear in public, dressed (as it would seem) like a Gilbert and Sullivan

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carabinieri officer. The honour bestowed on him has surely not just embarrassed the National Board of Catholic Women; it has reminded a fair number of Catholics that, in this day and age, there are still Orders of Christian knighthood, as they are called, conferred by the Papal Court — as our 1908 set of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* says — upon 'men of unblemished character who have in any way promoted the interests of society, the Church, and the Holy See'.

The Order of Saint Gregory the Great ranks third among the Papal Knighthoods. It comes after the Supreme Order of Christ , an entirely Portuguese institution, and the Order of Pius IX , founded in 1847 by the pope whose name it bears, 'to reward noble and conspicuous deeds which merit well of Church and society, and to stimulate others to follow the illustrious example set them' — the one knightly order in 1908 conferred also upon non-Catholics. In these more open and ecumenical days, obviously, papal decorations may be more widely distributed.

"The most certain and expeditious mode of procuring the coveted decoration', David Dunford says, inimitably and irresistibly quotably, in the entry on pontifical decorations in the *Encyclopedia* (he is listed as diocesan inspector of schools, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire), 'is by a petition of the bishop of the diocese of the person to be honoured'. The petition has to include a *curriculum vitae* — 'bringing out in relief the eminent labours or work in science, literature, arts, controversial or other religious writings, or generous and self-sacrificing gifts or endowments made or done for society, the Church, or its head, which are deemed worthy of papal recognition and reward'. The petition is examined in Rome, among others by the Cardinal Chancellor of the Order in question, who seeks information from other sources besides the bishop making the proposal, 'as to the character of the party and his eminent good works'.

Mr Murdoch owns *The Times* as well as *The Sun* . We read that *The Times* now avoids covering China in any detail for fear of damaging Mr Murdoch's business interests. HarperCollins, one of his satellites, cancelled its contract to publish the memoirs of Chris Patten, the last Governor of Hong Kong, for some forthright remarks about the Chinese government. But, as Mr Murdoch is reported to have said, when the Hitler diaries serialised in *The Sunday Times* turned out to be fiction: 'After all, we are in the entertainment business'.

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