



His Holiness Pope Pius XI

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## THE ELECTION OF A POPE

Blessed in word and work was the sweet Ruler of Christendom whom God was pleased lately to call to his eternal reward. The reign of Benedict XV was unexpectedly shortened, but the holy Pontiff, by his labors and prayers, had already fulfilled a long time. Only yesterday he was zealously engaged in the interests of religion, and the discharge of his apostolic duties. Those lips, that spoke in accents of peace and good-will while fierce battles were raging, are now mute in death. The hands that were so often raised to bless the sons of every nation amidst the carnage of war, will no more be lifted in paternal benediction. He who so valiantly bore the burdens of a strenuous pontificate on earth, has gone to his eternal Maker, to receive the blessing of his Lord, and the glory from God, his Saviour.<sup>1</sup>

The solemn ceremonies that surround the burial of the Pope, continue throughout a period of nine days. During this season the Church is making remote preparation for choice of a new Head. The Cardinals are busied in reviewing the various Pontifical ordinances relating to the papal elections. Pius X, always solicitous for the exact performance of Church ritual, carefully readjusted and summarized all previous legislation on the subject, and published the result on Christmas Day, 1904. Henceforth the election of the Pope is to be regulated by the Constitution "Upon the Vacancy of the Apostolic Chair," as the Bull of Pius is designated.<sup>2</sup>

The assemblage of prelates gathered together under enclosure to elect a Pope is technically known as the Conclave. Under normal circumstances the election is held at Rome. To the princes of the Church is reserved the right of choosing the successor of the dead Pontiff. In order to avoid conflicts and

<sup>1</sup> Ps. XXIII, v. 5.

<sup>2</sup> The substance of this article has been drawn from Pius X's Constitution, "Vacante Sede Apostolica": v. Codex Juris Canonici, Roma, 1919, p. 647 et seq.

schisms, Clement V ruled that no ecclesiastical censure shall prevent a Cardinal from entering the Conclave and exercising his right to vote.<sup>3</sup> It is to be noted that during the vacancy of the chair of Peter, the College of Cardinals has no jurisdiction, and no legislative, judicial, or executive powers. All rights and privileges are reserved to the future Pope.

Within the Vatican, the chapel that has been chosen as the immediate scene of the election is prepared according to prescribed rule. All the doors leading from the enclosure, except one, are walled up. The single entrance is shut from without by the Pontifical Marshal, and locked from within by the Cardinal Chamberlain. A careful inspection is made to see that no holes, fissures, or other secret openings have been made in the walls, floors, or ceilings, and that no persons are concealed in hidden places. The officials admitted to the Conclave have been carefully designated:—a sacristan with one or more attendants; a confessor to the Conclave; a secretary of the Sacred College; not more than six Masters of Ceremonies; two physicians; a surgeon; a pharmacist with two assistants; a private secretary for each Cardinal; and such other persons as may be deemed necessary for general attendance upon the Conclave. All persons within the precincts of the Conclave are strictly forbidden to communicate with the outside world. In cases of urgent necessity, however, permission is extended for business with ambassadors or other high court dignitaries. Such affairs are always transacted in the presence of witnesses.

After the funeral obsequies of the dead Pontiff have been completed, the Cardinals with respective officials enter into Conclave. The chambers or cells used by the prelates while within enclosure are apportioned by lot. The morning following their inclosure the electors convene in the chapel at the sound of a bell; Mass is celebrated and the Cardinals receive Holy Communion. After the recitation of the hymn and prayer to the Holy Ghost they undertake the actual work of choosing a visible Head for the Church.

The methods by which the election may be effected are various. The first is by inspiration, when all the prelates without exception, filled as it were by the Holy Ghost, with living voice proclaim a Supreme Pontiff. The second is by compromise, and

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<sup>3</sup> Clem. V, Chap. 2: "Ne Romani," § 4 de electione I, 3 in Clem.

is accomplished when the Cardinals unanimously appoint a certain number of their colleagues to select the Pope. These two modes have long been obsolete. The third and ordinary process of election is by scrutiny or regular ballot. In this case no candidate is elected until he has received at least a two-thirds majority of all the votes cast. No Cardinal is permitted to vote for himself.

The rite of scrutiny<sup>4</sup> or election by ballot is divided into three distinct parts, which, for the sake of clarity, may be specified as the antescrutiny, the scrutiny proper, and the post-scrutiny. Each of these is to be considered in detail.

The ANTESCRUTINY, or process preceding the scrutiny proper, embraces five separate acts, the first of which is the preparation and distribution of the voting papers. This duty pertains to the Masters of Ceremonies. The papers are so contrived as to maintain the secrecy of the ballot, while at the same time they admit of an examination in case of need. They are divided into three compartments. In the top the elector inscribes his name. In the middle compartment is written the name of the candidate, according to the following formula: "I choose as Supreme Pontiff, my most Reverend Lord, Lord Cardinal. . . . ." The lower compartment contains some device that shall serve as an impersonal identification of the voter. Usually the ballots have been printed beforehand. To each Cardinal two or three are distributed, whereupon the Masters of Ceremonies and other attendants retire, leaving the Cardinals alone.

The second act of the antescrutiny is the selection of the Scrutineers, Infirmarians, and Revisors. The method employed is to place in a vase a number of ballots each inscribed with a Cardinal's name, according to the number of prelates in attendance at the Conclave. The names are drawn by the lowest Cardinal Deacon in the Sacred College. The first three names thus extracted are the Scrutineers, who count and check the votes; the next three are the Infirmarians or Deputies to receive the votes of the infirm Cardinals; the last three are the Revisors, who examine the work of the Scrutineers to make certain that no mistake or illegality has been committed. Should the name of any incapacitated Cardinal be extracted, it is, of course, discarded and another chosen in its place.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Le Conclave*, by Lucius Lector (Mgr. Guthlin).



Next in order is the signing of the electoral ballot. In the top compartment is written the name of the elector; in the middle that of the candidate; while in the lower section a number is inscribed together with a text from Holy Writ, or some similar device. Then the ballot is folded by turning under the upper and lower sections in such fashion that only the middle compartment is visible. On the back of the upper and lower sections respectively are printed in large type, the words NAME (of voter) and SIGNS (of identification), to prevent the Scrutineers from inadvertently opening the ballots. The fifth and last act of the antescrutiny is the sealing of the ballot. This is done by securing the folded compartments with red wax upon which is impressed a seal, not the one ordinarily used by the Cardinal, but of a peculiar design known only to himself.

The SCRUTINY proper comprises eight acts, the first three of which may be described together because of their intimate connection, namely: the carrying of the ballot to the altar, the testification or taking of the oath, and the placing of the ballot in the chalice. Each Cardinal, after he has signed and sealed his voting paper, carries it between thumb and forefinger, with hand raised and opened, to the altar, upon which rests a large chalice covered with a paten. He genuflects and prays for a short space, then rising, reads in a loud and intelligible voice, the oath that is written on a tablet above the altar: "I call to witness Christ the Lord Who shall be my Judge, that I am electing him who, before God, in my judgment, ought to be elected." He then places his ballot on the paten, and thence slips it into the chalice. After he has made an inclination before the altar, he returns to his seat.

Should any Cardinal within the chapel be unable to walk to the altar with his vote, this office is performed by the third Scrutineer, after the infirm prelate has properly signed and sealed his voting paper, and taken the oath. Occasionally it happens that the sick Cardinals are confined to their cells. In this case a small box is arranged with a top that may be fastened with a lock. In the lid an opening is made sufficiently large for the insertion of the ballot. The box is previously displayed before the assembly to ensure of its being completely empty; then it is locked and the key left upon the altar. The three Infirmarians proceed to the cells of the infirm Cardinals to receive

their votes together with the necessary oath. If a Cardinal is so weak that he cannot sign the ballot, either a Cardinal Infirmarian or any one in clerical orders, as the sick man chooses, signs and seals the ballot. The deputy in this instance is bound to secrecy under pain of excommunication. The three Infirmarians then return to the chapel with the box, which is opened by the Scrutineers. If the number of votes be identical with the number of sick Cardinals, all the ballots are placed in the chalice at once.

The next act of the scrutiny is the mixing of the ballots, an office which the first Scrutineer performs by holding the paten over the chalice and shaking the latter several times. The counting of the ballots follows immediately. The third Scrutineer draws them one by one from the chalice and drops them into another vessel prepared for the purpose. Should the total number of votes fail to correspond to the number of Cardinals in Conclave, all the voting papers are burned and another election must at once ensue. If the number be correct, the officers proceed to the next act of the scrutiny which is known as the publication of the votes. The same Scrutineers sit at a table before the altar. The first draws a ballot from the chalice, reads to himself the name of the candidate, and passes the slip to the second, who likewise reads the ballot to himself, and hands it in turn to the third. Then in a distinct and audible voice, the third Scrutineer announces the candidate's name to all the Cardinals. Thus each prelate may make a record of every ballot cast.

The seventh act of the scrutiny is the filing of the ballots for their preservation. To perform this office the third Scrutineer uses a needle and thread provided for the purpose, and pierces the ballot at the words "I choose." The last act is the depositing of the voting papers in a chalice or on a table, after the third Scrutineer has attached the ends of the thread.

The POSTSCRUTINY or ceremony following the scrutiny proper, embraces three acts. The first of these is the counting of the votes to determine whether any one candidate has received the required majority. In the event that an exact two-thirds has been obtained, the ballot of the Cardinal-elect is opened, in order to make sure that he has not voted for himself. Next the Revisors inspect all the ballots that have been cast, as well as the annotations of the Scrutineers, to preclude the pos-

sibility of fraud or mistake. Finally the votes are burned before all the assembled Cardinals. This is done by the Scrutineers assisted by the Masters of Ceremonies, who at this juncture are recalled to give their services. If no definite result has been reached, damp straw is mixed with the ballots when they are consumed.

This detailed method of election by scrutiny is repeated in its entirety at every morning and afternoon session of the Conclave. At least two ballots are held daily. Only on the first day, however, are the Cardinals obliged to receive Holy Communion in a body. In the afternoon the assembly convenes at a convenient hour and begins session with the hymn and prayer to the Holy Ghost. It is a solemn undertaking, and all are earnestly exhorted to have God alone before their eyes, to silence passion, and to trample under foot worldly interests. In this, the most august assembly held on earth, party-spirit, trickery, or illicit contracts can have no part without incurring the severest displeasure of the Holy Spirit of truth Who animates the assembly and expresses His choice through its decision.

It must have been an impressive sight in the recent Conclave as the Masters of Ceremonies went from chair to chair lowering the canopies over each Cardinal's head—except one, Achilles Ratti. Before this humble prelate every Prince of the Church came and knelt, and reverently offered his homage to Christ's newly chosen Vicar. Rome and the world heard the glad tidings and rejoiced that the Church was once more blessed with a visible Head. Pius XI, vigorous alike in soul and body, with firm and steady grasp, now holds the reins laid down by the hands of the beloved Benedict XV. This new Ruler of Christendom is indeed a mighty Shepherd, who will lead his flocks undauntedly through green pastures, tenderly caring for the Master's lambs and sheep, and confirming his brethren in the purity of their faith. *Fides intrepida!* Under thy guiding hand, O Holy Father, we shall walk confidently, trusting always that thou shalt direct us on the paths of justice for Christ's own name's sake.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ps. XXII, v. 3.