



## THE ELECTION OF THE ROMAN PONTIFF (L'Elezione del Romano Pontefice)

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From "Il Dovero Dell'Ortodossia"

*Red bold print added for emphasis.*

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Many, too many, have spoken apropos, and, more than ever, out of turn about the future election of the Roman pontiff, that is, about the law regulating the conclave. It is evident that they have been attempting to wield a pressure, that is absolutely improper, toward the adoption of new and very arguable criteria in the papal election. The issue is extremely serious, and so our magazine feels that it must discuss it.

Whoever wishes to put forward the issue of conclave reform must know that this lies only with the supreme authority of the Church, and that any possible interlocutors, when proposing reforms, must thus take this principle into account

Let us review the central theological aspect. The first Vatican Council, in the canon, which follows chapter two of the bull Pastor Aeternus, so recites: «Si quis ergo dixerit non esse ex ipsius Christi Domini institutione seu jure divino ut beatus Petrus in primatu super universam Ecclesiam habeat perpetuos successores, aut romanum pontificem non esse beati Petri in eodem primatu successorem, anathema sit» (D.S. 3058 ) (If, then, anyone shall say that it is not by the institution of Christ the Lord Himself, or by divine right, that Blessed Peter has perpetual successors in the primacy over the universal Church; or that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of Blessed Peter in the same primacy; let him be anathema.) ( D.S. 3058)

This means that the succession of Peter is the prerogative of the bishop of Rome. If the succession is the prerogative of the bishop of Rome, and not to another, this signifies the absolute bond between the Roman episcopate and the Petrine succession. It must logically and necessarily be inferred that the Pope is such because he is the bishop of Rome. This causal bond between the Roman episcopate and the Petrine succession becomes clearer if one reads the entire second chapter of the cited constitution (D.S. 3057); it becomes very clear when the whole tradition, especially the primitive tradition, that which benefits with immediacy and certainty of the provisions taken by the prince of the apostles, is observed. In fact Clement (first century) intervenes strongly in the Church of Corinth, with a lengthy and solemn letter, whilst the apostle John is still living and geographically nearer, in the name of the Roman Church. It is evident that he intends to infer from his Episcopal see the power to

look after the far-off Church of Corinth, upon which he could only intervene as a universal pastor, being Corinth well out of the Roman diction. The two great witnesses of the very early age, Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus, in the well-known texts, use the same language as Clement.

That said, it is hard to grasp how one could theologically sustain a separateness of the supremacy in the Church from the Roman Episcopal see, or reasonably deny that the Roman see be itself the legal title of the succession to Peter.

Having clarified the fundamental theological aspect, it is not at all pointless to consider the logic that Christ has placed inside His Church. There is a primate; there are bishops successors of the apostles who are such by divine right within the framework of the catholicity of the college and of the right of the primate. Constitutive cells of the Church are the individual local churches, led by a successor of the apostles. All of the faithful belong to the Church, but the immediate reason for her unity and catholicity lies in the particular churches under Peter. The error, made by many, that has been clearly witnessed in the recent and not always orthodox diatribes on the «Lex Fundamentalis,» is precisely that of assimilating the Divine Constitution of the Church to any state political constitution. The first is absolutely unique and inimitable, like other things within the Church. It therefore appears clear why Christ entrusted the primate to Peter, and why the latter exercised it and bequeathed to his successors, as bishop of a designated cell of the Church, the diocese of Rome.

That placed, no idea of democratic or federalist constitution can surface when the issue of the election of the Roman pontiff is posed theologically and legally. It is the Roman Church that must elect her bishop.

**One cannot leave out the practical aspect of the issue, an aspect that by its nature belongs to history.**

The law of the conclave, brought about by Nicholas II in 1059, put an end, by reserving the election right solely to cardinals, an agony, at times humiliating, of a thousand years. Be it noted that the cardinals, as such, belong to the Roman Church and to her only, as her suburbicarian bishops, priests, and deacons. The theological reason, in the necessary and inevitable reform of Nicholas II, was perfectly adhered to.

The law of the conclave rests on two hinges: the exclusive right of the Sacred College, and the “clausura” (segregation). The latter was not put forward immediately: it came at a later time to fulfill evident situations and grave necessities. The two hinges sustain one another. It is obvious that an election entrusted to too wide an electoral body, would, humanely speaking, prove more difficult and easily influenced, and thus with a lesser guarantee of reasonableness and correspondence to the supreme interests of the Church. Only with a body of men, accurately selected, is it possible that in the ballot prevail, as humanly possible, the criterion of the true good. **The segregation of the conclave is yet more necessary; with modern means, with modern technology, without an absolute segregation it would not be possible to save an election from the pressure of external powers. Today the superpowers (and the lesser ones alike) have too great an interest in having on their side, through condescendence or weakness, the highest moral authority in the world. And they would do all that they are so very good at doing. The pressures to overturn the substance of the law of the conclave could be driven by the will to obtain precisely this result.**

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