

Fr. Perozich comments —

In civil affairs men change structures to attain power for themselves in order that they have the ability to promote their agenda.

In the church which is composed of men formed by the same civil societies, the tendency toward power to promote agendas also exists.

Walter Cardinal Brandmüller is a 92 year old church historian. He reveals the history behind the election of the Bishop of Rome who also becomes the pope of the universal church.

His eminence gives a proposal for a renewed spiritual process rather than a political one, for the election of the Bishop of Rome who becomes also the Pope of the universal church.

It proposes qualifications beyond just being a member of the college of cardinals for eligibility both to hold the office and qualifications for eligibility to vote for the Bishop of Rome and the pope of the universal church.

(I traded in my red car because they pass me over at every consistory for naming cardinals who get to wear red. I leased a white car instead. Yet in light of Brandmüller's proposal for eligibility to hold the office of bishop of Rome and eligibility to vote for him, it is quite apparent that I will have to settle for the white car rather than a white zucchetto.)

The addition of the new cardinals Pope Francis has “in pectore” will soon increase the number of those who will elect his successor, but will do nothing to improve the quality of the college of cardinals, increasingly fragmented, geographically dispersed, packed with persons unknown to each other and no longer in the practice of meeting in consistory since all the way back in February of 2014.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the conjectures on the result of a future conclave should also be accompanied by proposals for a reform of the system for electing the pope.

The latest and perhaps best reasoned of these proposals is being made public today on Settimo Cielo. It bears the signature of Cardinal Walter Brandmüller, 92, a lifetime Church historian

and from 1998 to 2009 president of the pontifical committee of historical sciences.

Brandmüller proposes that the conclave appointed to elect the successor of Peter correspond better to its historical origins and theological foundations. The pope is above all bishop of Rome, and therefore should be elected by a college made up only of cardinals who are truly “Roman.” But he is also the supreme pastor of the universal Church, and therefore the circle of candidates should be extended to include the bishops of the whole Church.

Fewer electors and more eligibles. This is the proposal in its briefest synopsis. A leaner and more Roman conclave and a broader and more universal list of candidates.

With the limitation, however, of eligibility to those who have lived for at least a few years in Rome, with an important role in the Roman curia.

This limitation could appear to some confining, if not irritating. Brandmüller explains the reasons for it. In any case it is not at all far from reality. Having held roles in the Roman curia has been a prerequisite of almost all the popes of the last century: Benedict XV, Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, Benedict XVI. As well as of some papabili being whispered about today: cardinals Luis Antonio Gokim Tagle, Marc Ouellet, Pietro Parolin...

But let’s leave the floor to Cardinal Brandmüller. Enjoy the reading!

THE ELECTION OF THE POPE IN THE TENSION BETWEEN CENTER AND PERIPHERY. A PROPOSAL

by Walter Brandmüller

In a Church that inasmuch as it is Catholic embraces the whole world, the tension between the Roman center and the geographical periphery is activated in a special way when a pope is to be elected. This is because, as successor of Peter, the pope is both bishop of Rome and supreme pastor of the universal Church.

After, with Pope Nicholas II in 1059, the election of the pontiff had been reserved for Roman cardinals, the rank of cardinal and therefore of elector was often given also to abbots and bishops of important European sees. The situation remained such even after the great missionary expansion into the new world that began in the 15th century, until Pius IX and Leo XIII conferred the cardinal purple respectively in 1875 on Archbishop John McCloskey of New York and in 1905 on Archbishop Joaquim Arcoverde de Albuquerque Cavalcanti of Rio de Janeiro.

These two appointments initiated a process that led to a significant increase in the number of cardinals, previously set at 70 by Sixtus V. In fact, they marked the beginning of the internationalization of the sacred college, which with Pope Francis has gone even further toward the periphery of the Church, to the point of now numbering thirty cardinals from Asia and Oceania. On the other hand, the occupants of traditional European cardinalate sees such as Milan, Turin, Venice, Naples, Palermo, Paris have been left without purple. It would be useful to investigate - also for ecclesiological reasons - the motivations and intentions of the anti-European maneuver that is evident here.

The number of cardinals with the right to vote in conclave was brought to 120 by John Paul II. This increase was and is aimed at expressing the geographical extension of the Church also through the number and countries of origin of the cardinal electors. One effect, however, is that the 120 electors, insofar as they come from the periphery, often meet for the first time in the consistories preceding the conclave and so know little or nothing about the college of cardinals and therefore about the candidates, thus lacking a fundamental prerequisite for responsible voting in the conclave.

To this is added the evident tension between the Roman center, meaning the pontifical curia, and the local Churches, which, sometimes lived out in a rather emotional way, has a certain influence on the vote.

These observations raise a series of questions relative to the conception and structure of the college of cardinals, which also concern the electors and those eligible for the papacy. I will now try to give a few answers to these questions, with a look at history.

I

The college of cardinals has its origin in the clergy of the city of Rome, which consisted of the bishops of the adjacent suburbicarian dioceses, the priests of Roman “titulus,” and the deacons of the city’s deaconries. It was Pope Nicholas II, after the turbulence of the “saeculum obscurum,” who for the first time established juridical norms for the election of the pontiff with his bull “In nomine Domini” of 1059. According to these provisions, the cardinal bishops, after having consulted the cardinal presbyters and cardinal deacons, elected the pope, after which the rest of the clergy approved, together with the people, by acclamation.

That the papal ministry is linked to the episcopal see of Rome follows from the fact that the first of the apostles suffered martyrdom and was buried in this city. But that Peter worked in Rome, suffered martyrdom there, and was buried there is not simply the result of chance. The believing eye sees in this the hand of divine Providence. In any case, Peter's martyrdom and burial in Rome are credited with essential theological importance. The bishop and martyr Ignatius of Antioch was already convinced of this back between the first and second centuries, and in his widely discussed and controversial letter to the Church of Rome he wrote that this latter presides over the "agápe," a word that should be correctly translated as "Church," as shown by the use of the same word in the other letters of Ignatius, when for example he writes: "The 'agápe' of ..." followed by the name of the city "greet you." Here, however, "agápe" is written without a city name, thereby defining the Church in general, over which the community of Rome presides.

In a similar way, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, around 200, attributed to the Church of Rome, since it was founded by Peter and Paul, a "potentior principalitas," meaning a strong pre-eminence. In summary: the link between the Petrine ministry and the city of the tomb of the apostles - not as capital of the empire - is an original conviction of the Church, and in fact until the 16th century was never questioned.

The college of cardinals, therefore, has its roots in the clergy of the city of Rome and so, starting with Nicholas II, it elects the bishop of Rome, who is at the same time also the supreme pastor of the whole Church.

Up to now the popes have always tried to meet these historical requirements by assigning a titular Roman church to the new cardinals from various continents and thus incardinating them

into the clergy of the city of Rome. In this way the world's important episcopal sees are more firmly linked to the center. Yet such an aim by no means requires this ritual fiction, since the imposition of the pallium by the pope on the occupants of the metropolitan sees throughout the world is already enough to express the bond with Rome and the unity of the universal Church.

II

It is therefore a matter of harmonizing in a well-considered way the two aspects of the Petrine ministry, that of the local Church and that of the universal Church, also in the way in which the election of the pope takes place. One starting point for reflections in this sense could be the consideration that the right to vote and eligibility, or voting rights active and passive, do not necessarily go together.

According to the rules currently in force, at the age of 80 the cardinals lose their active right to vote, but strangely not the passive one. Moreover, until today it has almost never happened that anyone not a cardinal has been elected pope. The last time was in 1378, with the election of Bari archbishop Bartolomeo Prignano, who chose the name of Urban VI.

We must then ask how the tension between center and periphery could find an adequate solution in the way the pope is elected.

First of all it should be remembered that the pope is not "also" bishop of Rome, but the opposite is true: the bishop of Rome is also pope. When he is elected, therefore, the successor of Peter is elected to the Roman chair. And this implies that the election originally belongs to the clergy and people of Rome.

III

The election of the pope, however, also concerns the whole Church. And it is evident that before and after a conclave more thought is given in general to the universal character of the Petrine ministry than to the needs and interests of the local Roman Church. It follows that the popes consider their duties as bishops of Rome almost secondary, delegating a cardinal vicar, that is, the titular of the basilica of Saint John Lateran - the pope's cathedral - to carry out their episcopal duties.

To reflect in a particular way the universal aspect of the Petrine ministry, it has been proposed that the right to vote in conclave be granted to the presidents of national episcopal conferences. But it must be forcefully reiterated that episcopal conferences in no way constitute a structural element of the Church, and that such a solution would not meet the requirements raised by the bond between the See of Peter and the city of Rome. The solution to the problem must therefore not be sought in any sort of extension of the right to vote in conclave.

It could instead be found in the already mentioned decoupling of the active and passive right to vote, in practice reserving the right to vote to a very streamlined and truly Roman college of cardinals, at the same time widening the circle of the eligible to the universal Church. Another advantage of this method would be that a pope could no longer so easily influence the choice of his successor by creating cardinals in a targeted manner.

Of course, the circle of eligible candidates should not include the entire episcopal body. It would be necessary to formulate objective, institutional criteria for eligibility, so as to limit in a sensible way the circle of papabili. One of these criteria should be, without exception, that the candidate shall have spent at least five years in a senior position in the curia of Rome. This would

guarantee the voters a prior knowledge of the candidates through personal relationships, and the candidates a direct experience of the structures, procedures, and problems of the Roman curia. This would limit the circle of candidates while at the same time taking into account the universal aspect of Petrine primacy. The need for more than superficial knowledge and experience of the Roman curia appears evident if one considers the tasks of the cardinals indicated by canons 349, 353, and 356 of the code of canon law, regarding the assistance they provide the pope, alone or in consistory, by word and deed.

As for the number of electors, it would not be difficult to reduce this, since they would no longer have to be a broad representation of the universal Church, which would already be guaranteed by the provision regarding the eligible. The number of electors could be comfortably moved back below the 70 set by Sixtus V.

Indeed, it is all too evident that the current number of 120 cardinal electors, many if not the majority of whom have no experience of Rome, poses various problems. For a college in which the preference is to make cardinals of the heads of peripheral dioceses, it is practically impossible to carry out the aforementioned tasks adequately, even under the conditions allowed by modern communication technologies.

It must also be taken into account that in certain circumstances it may be difficult or even impossible for some electors to travel to Rome. Difficulties similar to those that obstructed the participation of bishops of communist countries in Vatican Council II could impede the participation of cardinals in a future conclave. Others could even make it impossible for cardinals from the “periphery” to arrive in Rome promptly, for example, natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, epidemics, as well as political turmoil or wars. For these and other similar reasons,

given the large number of cardinals who have the right to vote and at the same time the obligation to participate, an election carried out by an “incomplete” college could be contested, with serious danger for the unity of the Church.

Faced with the hypothesis of such an eventuality, at least the question of a possible “quorum” for the vote to be valid should have been raised and defined. If, on the other hand, the electors were already in place because they were part of a really Roman college, there would be no need to fear such a scenario.

In short, given the current composition of the college of cardinals, in which most of the electors are geographically dispersed, do not know each other and know even less about the real demands of the Petrine ministry, an essential prerequisite for responsible voting is missing. With one very insidious consequence.

In such an electoral college, everything ends up depending on those opinion leaders, internal and external, who succeed in making their chosen candidate known to the less informed and in mobilizing their support. This leads to the constitution of blocs, where individual votes are like blank proxies granted to enterprising “grand electors.” These behaviors follow norms and mechanisms studied in sociology. When instead the election of the pope, successor of the apostle Peter, supreme pastor of the Church of God, is a religious event that should be governed by rules of its own.

That in this context more or less abundant streams of money flow from rich Europe to poorer areas of the world, so that their cardinal electors in the conclave feel obliged to the donor, is a known reality, even if morally reprehensible. It may have been such considerations that prompted John Paul II to keep excommunication in force against these modern forms of simony. At the same time, however, that pope stated that an election that

took place in this way would still be valid, in order to guarantee legal certainty and therefore the unity of the Church (“Universi dominici gregis,” no. 78).

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The reflections presented here are aimed at bringing out more clearly, even in the way the election takes place, the sacral character of the papal ministry, which is constitutively instituted in the Church of Jesus Christ, which must not forget that it is “in” the world , but not “of” the world.