

# What is a Conclave? (Understanding the Election of a Pope)

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“It is here, beneath this wondrous Sistine profusion of color, that the Cardinals assemble, the community responsible for the legacy of the keys of the Kingdom. They come here, to this very place. And once more Michelangelo wraps them in his vision...During the conclave Michelangelo must teach them. Do not forget: *Omnia nuda et aperta sunt ante oculos Eius*. You who see all, point to him! He will point him out...”

- Pope John Paul II  
*Roman Triptych*, 2003

## I.) **Biblical Overview of the Papacy:**

Jesus Christ gave to St. Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven and made him the Vicar of Christ on earth:

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:18-19).

The Biblical references to the authority of St. Peter as the first pope and the head of Christ’s Church include, though are not limited to, the following: Mt 10:2, Mk 3:16, Lk 5:8, Lk 6:14, Jn 1:42, Jn 6:68, Jn 13: 6-38, Jn 20:2, Jn 21:2-3, Jn 21:7-15, Acts 10:18, Acts 11:13, Gal 1:18, Gal 2:9, Gal 2:11, Gal 2:14, 1 Cor 11:2, 1 Cor 12:28, 2 Th 2:15, 2 Th 3:6. In addition to these references, it was Peter who delivered the first great sermon on Pentecost Sunday:

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, “You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words.” (Acts 2:14).

The Office of Peter and the Petrine ministry and authority are clearly established by Jesus Christ, Sacred Scriptures, and the Tradition of the Holy Roman Church.

Often Protestant apologists will claim that in Matthew 16:18, Jesus never intended to establish his Church on Simon Peter (Aramaic: *Kepha*, Greek: *Petra*) but rather by the word “rock” they argue that Jesus is referring not to Peter but rather to Himself. Often quoting 1 Corinthians 10:4 or Ephesians 2:20 (“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone.”). Protestants often argue that the Papacy is a man-made, rather than divinely-guided, reality. These Protestant

apologists will likewise quote Matthew 20:25-26 in claiming that the spiritual authority of the Pope is altogether invalid:

But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. <sup>26</sup> But it shall not be so among you."

They argue that Peter was thus an apostle just like the others and had absolutely no authority over them. Again, often arguing 2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11, they misquote St. Paul's references to the "super-apostles," which ironically, has absolutely nothing to do with the issue of Papal authority.

Many of these Protestant arguments against the authority of Peter and the Papacy can be traced back to Martin Luther's antipathy towards Church authority and the Pope, clearly delineated in his own writings in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in his references to the Pope as the "anti-Christ." John Calvin likewise addresses his venom towards the Papacy in chapters four and five of volume four in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It is deeply regretful that throughout the centuries so many Protestant theologians, though Catholics have been likewise guilty of this as well, have isolated the biblical passages they wish to argue and therein taken them completely out of the original context of the Sacred Author (proof-texting). This is nowhere more evident than in Protestant arguments of salvation (e.g. *Institutes*, Vol. 3: Ch. 21) and their arguments against the Roman Pontiff. The Protestant rejection of, and confusion surrounding the Papacy, does however present the opportunity for one to examine the question as to why there has been so much ambiguity, and to a large degree genuine hostility towards the Popes and their authority. One cannot accurately understand a Papal election and the spiritual authority of it without understanding the spiritual authority given to the Apostle Peter as the first Pope of the Church founded by Jesus Christ himself.

## **II.) Cultural Impact of the Papacy and the Election of Popes:**

Pope Benedict XVI is the 264<sup>th</sup> Successor to the Apostle Peter and the 265<sup>th</sup> Pope in the 2000+ year history of the Roman Catholic Church. The Papacy holds a place, and more accurately a position, in the history of world that no other institution holds or has even come close to by temporal standards. George Weigel, Papal biographer notes:

The papacy is unlike any other office in the world, and not simply because of an institutional longevity...To be pope is to take on a task that is, by precise theological definition, impossible. Like every other office in the Church, the papacy exists for the sake of holiness. The office, though, is a creature of time and space, and holiness is eternal. No one, not even a pope who is a saint, can fully satisfy the office's demands. Yet the office, according to the Church's faith, is of the will of God, and the office cannot fail, although the office holder will always fall short of the mark (*Witness to Hope*. Weigel. Harper-Collins. 1999. p.263-264).

Thus to be the Successor to the Apostle Peter is an eminently daunting, humbling, and to some degree, lonely task, in that while one is surrounded by millions, one is always alone by nature of the Office and its demands on the man who holds it. The pope is referred to

as *Pontifex Maximus*, or literally “bridge-builder.” Being a spiritual leader to the people of God, the Church, and all of humanity enables one to better become this “bridge-builder” from God to the faithful. Because a bridge, by design, connects one place to another, the Roman Pontiff is the connecting element between the Church, or the people of God, and God Himself. According to *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican Council I (1869-1870) and Chapter 25 of *Lumen Gentium/Light of the Nations* (Second Vatican Council), the Holy Father is guided on matters of faith and morals, not only when he proclaims an infallible statement (*ex cathedra*, or “from the chair”) but likewise when he speaks on matters of belief. The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes:

The whole body of the faithful...cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sesus fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, ‘from the bishops to the last of the faithful,’ they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals’ (CCC#92).

Thus, the lay faithful, the clergy, and theologians can be sure that even when a Pontiff himself is in a state of mortal sin or personally causes scandal to the faithful (e.g. Alexander VI, Julius II), his decisions as regards faith and morals are without moral error and the Church should follow them with an “assent of faith” (L.G. #25). While the Pontiff, if he were in a state of grave sin, would have to answer personally before God for his actions, the objective nature of infallibility, like the efficacy of the sacraments, does not depend upon the personal holiness of the office holder. In his book *Light of the World* (2010) an interview with Peter Seewald, Pope Benedict clarifies this nature of infallibility found among the Popes:

The concept of infallibility developed over the course of centuries. It arose in view of the question of whether there is somewhere an ultimate authority that decides. The First Vatican Council, following a long tradition from the time of the early Christian community, finally determined that there is an ultimate decision! Everything does not remain open-ended. Under certain circumstances and certain conditions the Pope can make final decisions that are binding, decisions that clarify what is and what is not the faith of the Church (p.7).

That being said, the extent of the personal holiness of the Pope or priest does profoundly impact the spiritual magnitude of the sacraments or teachings among the people of God, and the Holy Father and the clergy have a grave duty to offer the laity an admirable example of the faith and holiness. In addition to the titles Holy Father and Supreme Pontiff, the Pope likewise has other titles as well: His Holiness, Pastor of the Universal Church, Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Christ on Earth, Successor of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, Sovereign of Vatican City State, and Servant of the Servants of God (*servus servorum Dei*). Even though the Pope is the official Bishop of Rome, he need not actually be from Rome, nor be Italian, as was the case with the Netherlands-born Pope Adrian VI and the Pole-native John Paul II.

Many people think that the Pope is the “C.E.O of Catholic Church, Inc,” or that he is accountable to absolutely no one (Weigel). This is, however, in marked contrast to the teachings of the Catholic faith and even Canon Law, which is based on ancient Roman

Law. The Second Vatican Council fathers clearly noted that the Pope is “also bound to revelation itself, to the fundamental structure of the Church, to the sacraments, to the definitions of earlier Councils, and other obligations too numerous to mention” (Peter Granfield. *Limitations of the Papacy: Authority and Autonomy in the Church*. Crossroads. 1987. p.62-63). The Pope and the Magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church are not the author of revelation, but rather its servant, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes:

Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it...All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith (CCC#86).

The Catechism goes on to note:

It is clear therefore that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way, under the action of the Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls (CCC#95, *Dei Verbum*, #10-3).

Therefore, in addressing the nature of the election of a Roman Pontiff, the Church is likewise aware that God Himself has designed the nature of the conclave, the election procedures, and the formation of the man in question to be Pope, or the one to whom some refer to simply as “God’s Choice.” Because the Pope is the spiritual head of roughly 1.2 billion Catholics globally, and arguably the most recognized spiritual leader in the world, his proclamations, decisions, or in some cases even silence, inevitably have an enormous impact on world affairs and politics. Even those who have historically sought to destroy the Papacy have recognized this spiritual and political fact. In 1943, in reference to Pope Pius XII, Heinrich Himmler, head of the Nazi SS told a colleague: “In the end we should not forget that our greatest enemy is not Roosevelt, or Churchill, but the Pope in Rome.” There is perhaps a certain irony that those who seem to understand the spiritual, emotional, political, and temporal impact of the papacy on world governments and regimes have historically been those most opposed to the Papacy in the first place. Perhaps the foremost example of this in our time was the communist regime and its great nemesis, John Paul II. The communists were immediately aware of the vast socio-political impact that a communicator such as John Paul II could be, and likewise the capacity to which such a man could mobilize an emotional force against their agendas. This was likewise seen in other attacks on the papacy by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, attacks against the Catholic hierarchy in Sudan, the Middle East, parts of Asia, and especially China. Recently this point was reiterated by Pope Benedict XVI in a speech to the Holy See diplomatic core delivered on January 10, 2011, wherein he noted a growing aversion to Christianity worldwide, a growing persecution of Christianity, and an antagonism towards the Papacy. Again in *Light of the World*, Pope Benedict notes the following with regards to the Papacy:

It is an old axiom of the Catholic Church: Where Peter is, there is the Church. It goes without saying that the Pope can have private opinions that are wrong. But when he speaks...as the supreme pastor of the Church, fully aware of his responsibility, then he no longer says something that is personally his, whatever happens to occur to him. Then conscious of this great responsibility and at the same time of the Lord's protection, he knows that he is not misleading the Church in such a decision but, rather, is guaranteeing her unity with the past, present, and the future and above all with the Lord (p.8).

The ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Pontiff is known as the "Holy See" (Sancta Sedes), or the Apostolic See. The Pope is also head of the smallest country in the world, Vatican City State, which is a 108 acre facility located within the city of Rome. The Roman Curia ("court") is the administrative organ by which the Holy Father governs the Church. It is essentially the central governing body of the Church in Rome. It acts on behalf of the Roman Pontiff and with his spiritual authority. While the Curia is often referred to as a parliament or cabinet of sorts for the Pope, in reality the temporal and spiritual authority of the curia is much different. The curia, and for that matter individual bishops and cardinals, are not charged with representing a certain district or region of the world in the manner in which a representative from the House of Representatives or Congress is charged with doing. Rather, as George Weigel notes, they are charged with thinking and deciding on behalf of the entire welfare of the Church worldwide and the good of humanity. As a result of this reality, much of their decisions can take a prolonged period of time, as they exhaustively research and prudently decide on issues, based on the Holy Father's will, Sacred Tradition, and Sacred Scripture. Also, certain political irregularities can factor into socio-economic decisions and declarations as well, as is often seen in the Holy Father's *Urbi et Orbi* ("to the City and the World") addresses given at Easter and Christmas each year. Likewise, the Curia itself consists of Congregations (9 total), Tribunals (3 total), Pontifical Councils (12 total), Apostolic Services (3 total), and various Institutes of Apostolic Service and Life. Many of those who have historically worked in the Roman Curia have later been elected Pope, such as with Popes Pius XII, Paul VI, and Benedict XVI.

### **III.) The College of Cardinals:**

The college of Cardinals around the world, often known as the "princes of the Church," are charged to wear red as a symbol of their willingness to shed their blood for the faith, assuming they were called upon to do so, as more than a few have during the history of the Catholic Church (e.g. St. John Fisher). These close advisors to the Pope receive the word cardinal from the Latin *Carde*, or "hinge," which is where we get the reference to the Cardinal virtues as well, as the primary virtues by which all others are 'hinged.' Because, biblically speaking, there were seventy elders who assisted Moses (Exodus) and seventy men, besides the twelve Apostles, who assisted Jesus in his ministry, the traditional number of Cardinals was held for many years at seventy as well. Given the tremendous growth of the Catholic Church worldwide, this number became impractical and thus the number was amended by the Pontiffs over the years. While the College itself was given its current form in the twelfth century, it was actually in 1059 that the Cardinals began to act as Papal electors, thereby eliminating other electors who were

themselves not Cardinals. The Holy Father creates new Cardinals at a consistory. The Code of Canon Law # 353 – 2 notes:

All the cardinals, at least all those present in the city of Rome, are called together for an ordinary consistory to be consulted on certain serious matters which nevertheless occur rather frequently, or to carry out certain very solemn acts.

At the time of writing, there are roughly 201 Cardinals total worldwide, with a total of 18 Americans. Pope Paul VI decreed, and John Paul II reiterated, that once a Cardinal has reached the age of eighty he can no longer vote in an active conclave (though he may participate), given the practical demands that would be placed on him while serving as Pope:

Cardinals who celebrate their eightieth birthday before the day when the Apostolic See becomes vacant do not take part in the election (*Universi Dominici Gregis*. John Paul II. February 22, 1996).

Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI have all taken great steps both to internationalize the College of Cardinals, thus they are not solely Europeans, and likewise to appoint Cardinals from the third world to key positions within the Roman Curia itself. An example of this would be the appointment of Cardinal Peter Turkson from Ghana as current Prefect for the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice (his predecessor was the Vietnamese Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen van Thuan, whose cause is now being reviewed for Beatification).

Within the College of Cardinals there exist three structured ranks as well, with the Cardinal Dean, who is elected by his brother Cardinals as the Head of the College itself. It is the Dean of the College of Cardinals who will direct much of the liturgical and practical gatherings among the cardinals during the vacancy of the Papacy and the Election of the new Pontiff. The three ranks of Cardinals include: Cardinal Bishops, Cardinal Priests, and Cardinal Deacons (all are bishops already, though the title designates responsibility given by the Pontiff to the individual man, often corresponding to his tenure of service).

#### **IV.) The Interregnum and the Ingresso:**

The term interregnum means literally in Latin “between the reigns.” The term is usually used in reference to the time frame between the death of one Pontiff and the election of another. During this time frame (*Sede Vacante*) there are to be no significant changes among the personnel and policies of the Holy See. It is interesting to note that the same principal applies even on a Diocesan level with the retiring or death of one bishop and the appointment of another (usually an administrator is appointed to care for the logistical and practical decisions of the Diocese). The word conclave means literally “with the key” or “under key.” It refers to the practice originally established at the Second Council of Lyons (1274) whereby the Cardinal-Electors should be locked in seclusion with little or no external distractions to influence their decisions. The first conclave, as we now understand them to be, was the conclave of 1241, whereby only ten electors met and decided upon Pope Celestine IV. Not long after this, Pope Gregory X

mandated that the Cardinal-Electors should meet within ten days of a Pope's death in order to elect his successor. Historically there have been many social, political, and economic factors which have lobbied for influence among the Papacy (e.g. Borgia family, Phillip II of Spain). The state has many times been an obstacle in the objectivity and availability of the Cardinal-Electors to meet, such as with the case of Pope Pius VI, who died in captivity under Napoleon's rule in 1799. After a fourteen-week delay, the Cardinal electors elected Pope Pius VII in March of 1800. Thus, it became obvious that this seclusion was vital for the clarity of thought and prayer that was required among the Cardinals during the elections of the Popes. The first of the conclaves to be actually held at the Vatican was the conclave of 1878 (others were held in Rome though not at the Vatican itself).

More than any other document in the history of the Church, John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis/Pastor of the Lord's Whole Flock* (February 22, 1996 – Feast of the Chair of St. Peter), influenced the election procedures, protocol, and arguably even spirit of the Cardinal-Electors. In it the Holy Father does not dictate procedure in an autocratic format but emphasizes to the Church, the Cardinal-Electors, and especially to the man chosen to be Roman Pontiff, that it is God Himself who is the one guiding the election process, not the ones writing their votes on a piece of paper. George Weigel, in his book *God's Choice* notes:

It should not have been surprising to find, in *Universi Dominici Gregis*, unmistakable traces of John Paul's conviction that the Holy Spirit is, in fact, the chief protagonist of a conclave (p.106).

While it is true that the College of Cardinals is composed of fallible and very human men, it is likewise true that in spite of this real fallibility God is working to elect a man whose decisions and teachings, with regards to faith and morals, will ultimately be written into the infallible doctrine of the Catholic Church. Weigel notes, "The Cardinals of the Catholic Church, while not angels, are men of faith and prayer. And it would be a very cynical and hardened heart indeed that did not sense a tremendous spiritual, evangelical, and moral energy flowing through Rome in April 2005 [election of Benedict XVI]" (p.107). Thus, just as with the human writers of Sacred Scripture, God uses the talents and weaknesses of men to bring about his will among humanity and the Church, his living Body on earth.

Among other things, *Universi Dominici Gregis* underscored that the Cardinal-Electors would continue to meet in the Sistine Chapel during the election process itself, "where everything is conducive to an awareness of the presence of God, in whose sight each person will one day be judged" (Introduction). In addition to this the Holy Father had built a specific facility where the Electors would live during the conclave itself, Casa Santa Marta, or St. Martha's House (patroness of hospitality). At other conclaves during the twentieth century the Cardinal-Electors had often encountered genuinely uncomfortable and at times, almost decrepit living conditions, with un-airconditioned facilities (August 1978), and a lack of beds (1922). The Holy Father evidently assumed that genuine progress among the Cardinals would be more likely possible if their living conditions were more suitable to comfort rather than discomfort. Likewise, *Universi Dominici Gregis* mandated that extra precautions be taken to ensure that secrecy be

maintained at all times before, during, and after the conclave process, thus a false-floor was built on the main floor of the Sistine Chapel with electronic jamming equipment in order to ensure no messages could be sent in or out of the chamber itself. Likewise, John Paul noted that if, after thirty-four ballots, there was somehow a dead-lock in the voting the Cardinals could elect a Pontiff by a simple majority or open-vote. Given that the current selection of “vote-able” Cardinals are the most diverse in the 2,000 history of the Church and that the vast majority of them speak varied languages, the practicalities of the conclave itself should not be assumed to be simple, even though virtually all movements during the conclave are dictated according to tradition.

A.) *The Death of the Roman Pontiff:* According to *Universi Dominici Gregis*, Chapter I: “During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, the College of Cardinals has no power or jurisdiction in matters which pertain to the Supreme Pontiff during his lifetime or in the exercise of his office; such matters are to be reserved completely and exclusively to the future Pope.” Among the first things that must be done after it appears that a Pope has died is to actually certify that he has passed from this life to the next. This task of verification is done by the Camerlengo of the Church (Cardinal Martinez Somalo was the Camerlengo during the death of John Paul II). Usually in the presence of others (Papal Master of Ceremonies) and other medical personnel, the Chancellor of the Apostolic Camera (Latin: *reverenda*. Head of Central Board of Finance for the Holy See) actually writes up a certificate of death for the late Pontiff. At this point the Pope’s ring (Fisherman’s Ring) is removed and will later be destroyed. Likewise, if the late Pope has left a last Will and Testament, this man is charged with carrying out the will of the late Pope (John Paul II often rewrote his last Will and Testament each year during his private Lenten retreat). The Camerlengo therein notifies the Archpriest for the Vatican Basilica and the Cardinal Dean of the College of Cardinals, who is often the one to make the announcement to the world that the Pope has died, although with John Paul II it was Archbishop, now Cardinal, Leonardo Sandri the Deputy Sustrituto for the Secretary of State. It is the Dean of the College who thereafter notifies the other Cardinals around the world of the Pope’s death and that their presence is required in Rome. At this point the Camerlengo likewise takes custody, albeit on a very temporary basis, of all Vatican and Holy See properties around the world (embassies, Apostolic Palaces, etc.). It is at this point that the Pontiff’s body is prepared and lies in state in St. Peter’s Basilica, above the tomb of St. Peter himself, for the lay faithful to honor. In the case of John Paul II, many people often waited twelve hours in line for twelve seconds before the Pope.

B.) *Novendiales:* The novendiales (Latin: *noven* or “nine,” and *diales* “days”), or nine days of mourning from the death to the actual funeral mass of the Pope, with a different Cardinal celebrating a mass in each of the nine days which follow. For Catholics, the number nine is very important, as there are nine choirs of angels, nine days in a novena, and nine months whereby our Blessed Mother bore Our Lord in her womb. During this time frame of masses throughout the world in honor of the deceased Pope, the priests and pastors of the Church are often clad in black as a symbol of mourning. Often a Church is likewise garnished in black fabrics or cloths as well. After a period of public veneration, and often private veneration by close



Papal confidants, the Pope's face is covered with a white cloth, symbolizing his new birth (baptism) into new life and the covering of the face of Moses as he entered the tent during his meetings with God. The Pope's body is placed in a cypress coffin, symbolizing that the Pope is human and buried as any other man. At this point the rogito is placed into the coffin. The rogito is a tube containing a legal document from the Holy See testifying to the Pontificate of the deceased Pope. Likewise, the Pope is buried with a bag of coins minted during his Pontificate as well, symbolizing that that he has "rendered unto God what is God's and unto Cesar what is Cesar's" (Mt 22:21). During this time the Dean of the College of Cardinals, the Camerlengo, and the College itself decide on a date for the funeral mass of the Pontiff, often with the Dean himself being the primary celebrant and homilist, as with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and the funeral mass of John Paul II on April 8, 2005.

C.) Papal Funeral: The funeral mass is usually attended by clergy, dignitaries, representatives' of other Christian denominations, and other non-Christian faiths. During the funeral mass for John Paul II there were likewise over four thousand journalists present from all over the globe. The actual funeral rites for a Pontiff are governed by the document *Ordo Exsequiarum Romani Pontificis/The Order of Service for the Burial of a Pontiff* (2000). During the mass the *Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine* ("Eternal rest grant unto Him, oh Lord") is sung. During the Papal Funeral, the College of Cardinals are traditionally dressed in red, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, likewise worn on Pentecost. Prior to the sealing, the Pope's body is carried outside the Basilica for the mass by the Papal pallbearers, or Gentiluomini. Often a book of the Gospels is left open on the casket itself. The coffin of John Paul II bore a simple cross on the outside of it with a capital M underneath it, symbolizing the Pontiff's devotion to the Mother of God (Papal Mott: *Totus Tuus*). Following the post-communion prayer the Litany of the Saints is sung as the body is incensed and blessed one last time (Rite of final Commendation). The Cyprus coffin is later placed inside of a lead coffin, which bears the name of the Pontiff. This coffin is then placed inside an oak or zinc (as in the case of John Paul II) coffin. This final coffin is then sealed and lowered into the ground, as John Paul II was (taking the original burial place of Blessed John XXIII who was moved on display in the Basilica above). John Paul II specifically requested that his body be placed in the ground that his ashes might "mingle" with those of the Apostle St. Peter, the first Pope. At the funeral mass of John Paul II it was estimated that over two billion people watched the liturgy via television, with another two million in and around Rome during the week prior (source: NBC).

D.) Preparation for the Conclave: In Chapter VI of *Universi Dominici Gregis*, Pope John Paul II specifies that the Cardinal-Electors are to guard against any form of clericalism, favoritism, or external influences upon their decision making within conclave itself. They are charged, as Weigel notes, "with the responsibility for the world Church" (*God's choice*. Weigel. Harper-Collins. 2006. p.112). Thus, they are to consider the genuine needs of the world Church and of humanity as a whole, rather than their own regional districts. With that in mind, each Cardinal-Elector should be

asking himself: “What are the characteristics the world now requires of a Pope?” In U.D.G., the Holy Father notes:

The Cardinal electors shall further abstain from any pact, agreement, promise, or other commitment of any kind which could oblige them to give or deny their vote to a person or persons. If this were done, even under oath, I decree that such a commitment shall be null and void and that no one shall be bound to observe it; and I hereby impose the penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae* upon those who violate this prohibition (#81).

Upon a close reading of *Universi Dominici Gregis*, it would appear to some that the Holy Father seems perhaps overly strict or even authoritarian regarding conclave politics and procedures. However, history has clearly shown that these procedures have been influenced by a number of insidious factors and intentions among both clergy and the state, and His Holiness evidently thought it vital to guard against this in the future inasmuch as is logistically possible, even at risk of sounding excessively attentive to detail. Likewise, the Cardinals are naturally permitted to talk amongst each other during pauses and free time exchanging thoughts regarding the characteristics, personality traits, and talents required of the next pope. This is also known as the *pratique*, or informal conversations among the Cardinal-Electors regarding a future Pope or those who are *Papabile*, or literally “Pope-able.”

The conclave proper is usually begun on the fifteenth or sixteenth day after the death of a Pope. On the morning of their first meeting together, but prior to being sealed into conclave, the Cardinals come together to celebrate the Misa Pro-Eligendo Romano Pontifice/Mass for the Election of the Roman Pontiff. The Dean of the College of Cardinals is usually the principal celebrant, although he may have a different homilist. It was during this mass on April 18, 2005, that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, soon to be Pope Benedict XVI, delivered his poignant homily discussing the “Dictatorship of Relativism,” which our culture now finds itself addressing on a daily basis. Weigel once referred to this as Ratzinger’s definitive “un-campaign speech,” or a speech delivered to his brother-Cardinals saying essentially, “Here is what I think, unvarnished” (p.140). Later the Cardinal-Electors gather in the Sistine Chapel of the Apostolic Palace, where they further call upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit singing the Veni Creator Spiritu/Come Holy Spirit.

E.) *The Ingresso*: Literally the “Ingress” or entry into conclave proper. While the College of Cardinals is not sequestered like a jury, they are similarly permitted absolutely no contact with any ‘from the outside’ and by penalty of automatic excommunication, must maintain complete secrecy in regards to the conclave proceedings and choice. As with the case of the conclave of 2005, the Holy See now permits the admittance of cameras into the Sistine Chapel to film the entry of the Cardinals into conclave and the Great Ingresso. In what the world has come to know as the “world’s largest voting booth,” the Cardinals of the world now enter into the Sistine Chapel two-by-two, as Christ sent out the seventy-two disciples. The Cardinal-Electors are then sworn into the conclave by the Cardinal Dean, following the prescribed text from *Universi Dominici Gregis* #53:

We, the Cardinal electors present in this election of the Supreme Pontiff promise, pledge, and swear, as individuals and as a group, to observe faithfully and scrupulously the prescriptions contained in the Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, *Universi Dominici Gregis*, published on 22 February 1996. We likewise promise, pledge, and swear that whichever of us by divine disposition is elected Roman Pontiff will commit himself faithfully to carrying out *munus Petrinum* [Mission of the Petrine Office] of Pastor of the Universal Church and will not fail to affirm and defend strenuously the spiritual and temporal rights and the liberty of the Holy See.

The promise of the Cardinals goes on to note that they will in no way, shape, or form reveal any of the details of that particular conclave or Papal choice, unless permission is given specifically by that chosen Pope. Thereafter, one-by-one, each Cardinal-Elector approaches the Book of the Gospels and takes a formal promise to secrecy by stating the following:

And I, *N.*, Cardinal *N.*, do so promise, pledge, and swear. So help me God and these Holy Gospels which I touch with my hand.

Following the last promise from the last Cardinal-Elector, the Papal Master of Ceremonies pronounces: “Extra omnes,” meaning that all those who are not Cardinal-Electors must leave (i.e. media, journalists, etc.). It should be noted on rare occasions, as with the case of William Cardinal Baum from Washington D.C. in 2005, a priest-assistant may be present to assist the Cardinal if needed. Once it is ascertained if the Cardinals have any final questions they finally are sealed into conclave. The seal is to protect the secrecy and the Cardinal-Electors themselves from prying eyes and ears and a waxen seal is actually placed over the door leading into the Basilica itself. On the first day of voting only one vote is permitted, usually due to the fatigue of the Electors by that time of day, whereas on the following days two votes are permitted.

- F.) *Election of the Roman Pontiff*: The election of a Pope is arguably the, or at least one of the most followed events of our times. This is certainly nothing new, and given the impact of a particular Pope on the life of the Church, the politics of the world (e.g. John Paul II and Communism), and his future appointments of the world’s bishops, the socio-spiritual significance of any given Pontiff cannot be over-estimated. Even though generally no one other than Cardinal-Electors have historically been present during the conclaves in the last nine hundred years, we know quite a bit about the elements of conclave politics and the actual voting procedures as well.

*\*Phase I - the Pre-Scrutiny*: During this initial phase all ballots are prepared and distributed to the Cardinal-Electors, now sealed into the Sistine Chapel. A total of nine Electors are chosen among the Cardinals gathered to serve as three Scrutineers, three Infimarii, and three Revisers: The three Scrutineers are the ones actually counting the ballots. They stand at the high altar as each Elector brings forth their

ballot. If an Elector is unable, due to age or disability, to bring up his vote one of the Scrutineers goes to get it. Thereafter all the votes are counted they must be sure that the total number of votes matches the total number of Cardinals (ensuring no one has voted twice or *in absentia*). At this point the Scrutineers actually count the votes seated at a table near the high altar. The Infirmarii take the ballots to those elderly or sick Cardinals who are locked in conclave but may not be able to be present in the Sistine Chapel due to illness. A ballot is taken to them and after they complete it the ballot is placed in small locked box, where it is then taken to the Scrutineers. The three Revisers are the auditors of sorts whose job it is to double-check the ballot count and to ensure that the tabulation was done correctly. As each Elector writes his choice on a small piece of paper designed for the occasion, he then comes forward and presents this paper on a small paton (gold plate), which is then turned upside down by one of the Scrutineers wherein it falls into a chalice containing the other votes. Because the paton and chalice are used to hold simple elements, bread and wine, which become the Body and Blood of Christ this act likewise represents that God will use the weakness of man to bring about His will in the Office of Peter.

*\*Phase II – the Scrutiny:* Once it is confirmed that all the votes are in, the first Scrutineer shakes the receptacle which now holds the votes in order to mix them up. At this point the third Scrutineer actually begins the counting, placing them into a second, and empty, receptacle. The task lies to the third Scrutineer to actually read aloud the name of each Cardinal as he sees them on the vote. As he reads each one, only as it is written, he writes down the name on a separate piece of paper as well. Likewise, each of the Cardinal-Electors does the same thing as well in order to ensure greater authenticity of vote. On the word “elect,” from the each ballot which read “I elect...,” the piece of paper is pierced with a large needle and thread as each vote is read aloud. This is done in order to ensure that no votes have been lost and/or hidden away. After all the ballots have been read, the ends of the string with the votes are then tied and placed into a final receptacle on the same table.

*\*Phase III – the Post-Scrutiny:* The Scrutineers tabulate all votes given to individual Cardinals and then write the results on a separate sheet of paper. The Revisers then verify that these votes are accurate and coincide exactly with what was just counted.

It has historically been the case, more than a few times, that the Cardinal-Electors have been found in dead-lock (most recently Conclave I in 1978, with Cardinal Siri and Cardinal Benelli). In such an instance, where there has been three to four days without a conclusive vote, the actual voting may be suspended for up to one full day in order to allow the Cardinals time to pray and informally discuss the situation and the characteristics needed in a new Pope. In the document *De Aliquibus Mutationibus*, Pope Benedict XVI points out that in order for one to garner the votes needed in order to be elected Roman Pontiff he must obtain a 2/3 majority of all those voting. If a Cardinal has received less than 2/3 majority votes no election has occurred. If this was the first of two ballots taken during the day, these ballots are saved until the results of the second ballots are obtained and both are burned together.

If the 2/3 majority required has been achieved in voting for a particular Cardinal, the Papal Master of Ceremonies, who has now been readmitted into the chamber, the

Scrutineers, and the Dean of the College of Cardinals (assuming of course he is not the one being elected as with the case of Joseph Ratzinger) approach the Cardinal being elected and ask him (usually the Dean posing the question):

Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?

The one being elected then responds in the affirmative with “accepto,” or in the negative. If the man chosen to be Pope declines the election, the process of balloting is repeated. While it is not canonically necessary that the one being elected Pontiff actually be present within the conclave, it is necessary that he actually accept the election. If he is not present, the Cardinals must wait until he is summoned. The only requirement for the election of a Pope is that the man be a Catholic male. If, on the rare instance, a man is not yet a bishop, he must be ordained a bishop first prior to his acceptance of the Office of Peter. After the man accepts his election as Pope, the Dean of the College of Cardinals asks him:

By what name do you wish to be called?

After the new Pope informs them of his new Papal name, a document is drawn up by the Papal Master of Ceremonies certifying the Cardinal’s former name, his acceptance, and his new Papal name. It is at this point that the newly elected Pontiff is lead to what is known colloquially as the “Crying Room,” or the Room of Tears, signifying that often at this point a man is overcome with emotion in the face of his humanity and in humility of the task presented to him, which, truth be told, is beyond the abilities of any human being and must be divinely guided. Within the Room of Tears there are three white cassocks present (small, medium, and large) for the new Pontiff. Likewise there is a simple Crucifix and a kneeler for the man to pray for as long as he feels is necessary. Thereafter, one-by-one, each of the Cardinal-Electors approaches the new Pope and offers a sign of obedience and admiration for his new office.

G.) “Habemus Papem!” Once the College of Cardinals have offered their signs of homage to the new Pope, the bells of St. Peter’s Basilica begin to toll loudly and white smoke (the *fumata*) coming from the stove-pipe adjacent to the Basilica itself (with black smoke for an unsuccessful ballot). Often chemicals are now added to the ballots as they burn in order to make the white or black smoke more distinguishable. The Senior Cardinal Deacon (Cardinal Jorge Arturo Medina Estevez in 2005) then goes to the loggia overlooking St. Peter’s Square and makes the following prescribed announcement:

Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum. Habemus papem.  
Eminentissimum ac Reverendissimum Dominum, Dominum *N.*, Sanctae  
Romanae Ecclesiae Cardinalem *N.* qui sibi nomen imposuit *N.*

[I announce to you a great joy. We have a Pope. The Most Eminent and Most Reverend Lord, Lord *N.*, Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, *N.*, who has taken the name *N.*]

At this point the newly elected Pope comes out onto the central loggia overlooking St. Peter's Square and blesses the city and the world (*urbi et orbi*). Historically, until the election of John Paul II, the new Pontiff would generally bless the crowds without making further statements. Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI changed this, greeting the crowds in Italian and asking for their prayers.

**V.) Installation Mass for the Roman Pontiff:**

As the new Pontiff begins his ministry, he assumes a Papal coat of arms with a motto. With John Paul I (Albino Luciani), his Papal motto was simply: *Humilitas/Humility*. The motto of John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła) was: *Totus Tuus/Totally Yours* (to the Blessed Mother). Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) retained as his Papal motto the motto from his Episcopal coat of arms: *Cooperatores Veritatis/Co-Workers of the Truth*. During the Pontiff's mass of installation, usually held in St. Peter's Square, the new Pope receives the Pallium, (sign of an archbishop) the Fisherman's ring (sign of the Office of Peter), and possibly a new crosier (John Paul II and Benedict XVI assumed for some time the crosier used by Paul VI). Prior to the beginning of the mass the new Pope stops to pray before the tomb of the Apostle St. Peter (the *Trophaeum*). As with the Room of Tears, this is usually a very emotional moment for the man, now overcome again with feelings of personal inadequacies, hope, and faith. At this point, the Pontiff, Cardinals, and other clergy, dressed in white, process outside the Basilica into St. Peter's Square and begin the mass and the Pope's new ministry. During the mass itself the new Pontiff receives the Cardinals one-by-one as each of them comes to the Pope to promise their fidelity to the man and the Office of Peter. Pope Benedict XVI likewise received representatives of all vocations including a priest, a nun, and various members of the lay faithful. During his homily the Pope usually picks a theme by which he intends on directing his future ministry. With John Paul II, this Installation Mass theme was: Be not afraid!