

THE 1903 AUSTRIAN PAPAL VETO: LESSONS FROM CONCLAVE HISTORY

While fully admitting that the Papal Conclave of 1903 may not be high on your list of pressing topics, there is an often-overlooked aspect of it that justifies discussing it a full 115 years after the event. Following the death of 93-year-old Pope Leo XIII, who had sat in the Chair of Peter for more than a quarter century, the dawn of the 20th century brought new possibilities and new horizons to a Church in the aftermath of the industrial revolution. It was a very consequential election. A total of sixty-two cardinals participated (average age of 66 years), including just one American, James Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore (the primatial see in the USA) and the first American ever to participate in a conclave. However, when the Cardinals gathered between July 31 and August 4, 1903, “palace intrigue” soon ruled the day.

Monarchs of predominantly Catholic countries had previously invoked what was known as the *Jus exclusivae*, (lit. right of exclusion) which was essentially a right of veto of the deliberations of the Cardinals in a conclave. It was almost always for political purposes, though was not formally recognized by the papacy. But it was tolerated. The last to assert that right was **Franz Joseph I** of Austria. The presumptive “favorite” for the Chair of Peter was Cardinal Rampolla, Vatican Secretary of State under Leo XIII. But Franz Joseph had pre-arranged to nominate a Cardinal to exercise that veto power on his behalf in the upcoming conclave. A ballot that had been smuggled out of the conclave and was sold at an auction reveals that indeed Cardinal Rampolla had secured nearly half the votes after the second ballot, **just prior** to the veto being ordered. Franz Joseph was adamant that Rampolla was excessively pro-French.

A Cardinal from Bologna, Italy had kept the ballot along with a hand-written note from himself indicating that he had voted for Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto on his own behalf **before** the veto was invoked, perhaps to demonstrate to the future Pope Pius X that he supported him all along, and not only after the attempted imperial veto. I try to imagine the looks on the faces of the Cardinals, when Cardinal Puzyna of Krakow Poland requested permission to speak after the second scrutiny (vote) took place. At that time, Cardinal Rampolla held a substantial lead. He proceeded to read a letter in Latin containing the key words, “. . .jure et privilegio antiquo ut volentis, **veto exclusionis contra** . . .Marianum Rampolla del Tindaro.” (emphasis added) Yikes—talk about sucking the air out of the Sistine Chapel! This effectively ravaged any chance and the vote tally took a turn. Instead, **Giuseppe Sarto** began to gain votes, and on the seventh ballot was elected, taking the name Pius X. He became a saint!

The “veto” had been invoked ten times prior to 1903, which thankfully was the last. But during the 1963 conclave, General Francisco Franco of Spain had sent a letter of “advice” through a Spanish Cardinal to be shared with the other cardinals in which he opposed the election of Cardinal Montini. That “advice” was treated with contempt by the assembled Cardinals and Montini became Pope Paul VI in short order, notwithstanding the General’s misgivings. Pius X forbade the *jus exclusivae* in a papal document released on 20 January 1904—never again would such a power play be tolerated. Why was a veto power ever allowed? The intersection between Church and State was a reality throughout much of Europe, and the need to peacefully co-exist often led to such arrangements. Why do I bring this up now?

The relationship between Church and State is a thorny issue; and has been for centuries. The Catholic Church tries to remain above the fray, seeking peaceful coexistence wherever possible, as well as to be a contributing presence in countries all across the globe. The Church, universal according to her divine mandate, exists in countries in which varying forms of government exist. Some of them are supportive, others indifferent, and still others negatively disposed to all for which the Church stands. And yet there are faithful in all these countries. The situation of China especially comes to mind, given the recent signing of a “Provisional Agreement on the appointment of Bishops” which I intend to explore in more detail in a forthcoming column. Suffice it to say, it is complicated! Whenever government plays a significant role in the life of the Church, there is always the danger that outside pressure could alter our fundamental mission, with consequences that may not be readily foreseen.

As two examples, I cite Germany and Canada. In Germany, dating back to the Weimar Republic in 1919, the

Church has benefitted tremendously from an 8-9% tax levied on citizens who profess the Catholic faith. This literally brought **billions of dollars** into Church coffers, but imagine what would happen if the rules changed? Catholic schools are subsidized between 35-70% of cost in five Canadian provinces. I am giddy to think of how our Catholic schools could thrive with that level of funding in this Archdiocese! Ah, but therein lies the rub. Might there be outside pressure to conform to secular standards given the largesse of the government? In short, fostering civil relationships with governments remain in the vital interest of the Church, while at the same time preserving her legitimate autonomy. The lesson of the 1903 conclave is not just one for the history books—it demonstrates the inherent challenges in trying to be “in the world but not of the world.” May our interactions with the government enable us both to remain faithful Catholics and engaged citizens.

- Whatever your personal opinion of **Tiger Woods** and his “off the course” struggles, it is an amazing feat for a man who has endured four back surgeries to play himself back into shape at age 42 and win a PGA Tour event. But he did so last weekend and now will be part of the U.S. Team in the bi-annual Ryder Cup against Europe.
- We **welcome back** our parish Choir to the 10:00 a.m. Mass. Our volunteer choir members are working hard to provide beautiful music to support our worship. While financial constraints necessitated eliminating eight paid section leader positions this year, the music selections take this new reality into account. I am delighted that a number of new singers have joined this year, though we still need more male voices! It is not too late to join.
- An 18-year-old Indonesian youth was **adrift at sea for 49 days**, surviving on sea water (how on earth can you do that?!) and fish he managed to catch. The vessel is called a *rompong*, essentially a wooden raft with a hut on top that is lit at night to attract fish. It slipped from its moorings and he drifted 1,200 miles. He was found near Guam. But what really kept him sane was the bible that he read daily. He plans to seek other employment. Amen, brother, Amen!
- California passed a law **enabling 12-year-olds** under foster care the ability to receive confidential (i.e. without permission of foster parents) gender affirming health care, and taxpayers’ funds would pay for it. Mind you, you need to be 21 to buy alcohol and 25 to rent a car without additional fees being applied, but only 12 to make such a significant life decision, and then without your parent’s consent.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,

Rector