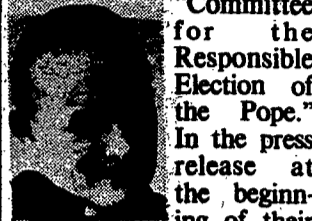


The Church 1978

By Father Andrew Greeley

Making Conclaves Public

A group of Catholic lay persons has just announced the launching of a



Fr. Greeley worldwide activities, they observed that given the tremendous importance of the papacy as a position of moral and religious leadership, it is astonishing that there never has been such a committee before.

Spokesmen for the committee referred to an about-to-be-published work, "The Inner Elite: Dossiers of Papal Candidates" (Sheed Andrews and McMeel) which profiles the active members of the College of Cardinals, from which the next pope will be selected, and analyzes their positions. One method the committee will use to provide information is through its "Conclave Confidential," a monthly newsletter giving

topical and behind-the-scenes information from the Vatican.

I have no quarrel with their point about the importance of the papacy. It is the most influential religious leadership position in the world. But the committee ought to read a little more history before it claims to be the first group of laypersons to get involved in worrying about papal elections.

For at least half a millennium the bishop of Rome was elected by the clergy and laity of the city of Rome. At a later date, the German emperors (most of whom at that time were called Otto) intervened to take over control of the election process, because the vote of the Roman laity had been usurped by the most powerful of the aristocratic Roman clans (Colona, Orsini, etc.). These lay emperors were barbarians perhaps, but pious barbarians interested in reform of the papacy. Even those conservative Catholic historians who in principle disapprove of the "Otto Connection" have to admit that it was a beneficial influence on the Roman Catholic Church.

In the centuries since

that time, dukes and princes have repeatedly concerned themselves with the outcome of papal elections. At one election Catholics would rather forget, the ineffable Cesare Borgia (Orson Welles in the movie, if you remember) controlled all but two electors (by bribes). As recently as the beginning of this century, the emperor of Austria successfully exercised his ancient right to veto a candidate who was close to the necessary two-thirds plus one majority. This particular veto was outrageous, but the emperors had gained veto rights precisely because they claimed that they were acting in the name of the Christian people to defend the papacy from the folly of cardinal electors.

So the committee is in fact following an ancient and sometimes honorable tradition. The uniqueness is that its members are not kings, emperors, princes, dukes or Orson Welles. They are rather professional men and women concerned about the church and convinced that the selection of the next head of world Catholicism is too important to be left to hasty last-minute decisions made by a group of elderly men suffering from jet lag.

It is no accident that they have begun their

work on the 10th anniversary of the birth control encyclical, "Humanae Vitae," a document which has affected the lives of Catholic laity all over the world and which was issued without even the pretense of understanding the experience of marital intimacy of the Catholic laity.

Pope Paul and his advisers should not be surprised at the appearance of the committee (which is supporting no candidate but only seeking to raise public discussion of the issues). If you make critical decisions which will enormously influence the life of the laity and ignore those laity in the process of making the decision, then one of two things will happen: Either the laity will leave the church or they will do everything in their power to see that nothing like that ever happens again.

In the next two weeks there are going to be "celebrations" all around the world — engineered by Rome — of the anniversary of the encyclical. It's kind of like celebrating the anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. Most of the people engaging in this hollow applause know that more than four-fifths of the laity and clergy reject the

teaching of the encyclical, that the hierarchy has chosen not to attempt to enforce it and that it has been a shattering blow to both Catholic religious practice and the world prestige of the papacy. Still they politely applaud.

Many Catholics realize that the encyclical may have been based on a serious misunderstanding of Catholic natural law theory and a total misreading of the biological evidence about the nature of human sexuality. They also know that the pope convened a committee of experts from all over the world to find if there was a way to modify the church's traditional stand. These experts agreed overwhelmingly that there was. Then the pope, given the way out he had been seeking, finally succumbed to the pressures of Vatican politics and rejected the advice of his own experts.

The Committee for the Responsible Election of the Pope is a reaction to that kind of papal decision-making. On the basis of its public statement, it is not concerned specifically with birth control and intends no criticism of Paul VI. It merely says that the selection of the pope is too important to be left to backstage Vatican politicians. Its appearance ought to hearten church authorities for it is evidence that many people still care.

For the Aging

A directory listing 160 non-profit long-term care facilities in the state has been published by the New York Association of Homes for the Aging. Included are senior citizen residences and apartments, health-related facilities and homes offering skilled nursing. Anyone interested in obtaining a free copy should send a self-addressed stamped envelope to NYAHA, 111 Washington Ave., Suite 104, Albany, N.Y. 12210.

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