

THE TIME
BEFORE CONCLAVE:
THE PRE-CONCLAVE
BULLETINS,
1970-1977



Series One—1970

FIRST RUMORS POPE PAUL WILL RESIGN

Rumors of Pope Paul's resignation fill the air by 1970. As early as 1966, visiting the grave of Pope Celestine 5—one of the last Popes to resign (in 1294)—Paul spoke of abdication. By then, he was already embroiled in troubles: a bitter clash with the Jesuits; looming problems with Vatican investments; difficulties in post-Vatican Council developments; Vatican involvement in the United States' intervention in Southeast Asia. Paul spoke of "having been deceived by those around me."

In 1967, he ruled that all Bishops in the Church, on reaching their 75th birthday, must offer to resign and be prepared to have their resignation accepted. By 1972 Paul himself would be 75. Cardinal Parente, in fact, spoke in his rancor over Paul's new ruling: ". . . if a 75-year-old Bishop is not capable of ruling a diocese, please tell me how can a 75-year-old Pope be capable of governing the universal Church!" Parente had a point. And, indeed, Paul considered resignation.

POPE PAUL FORESEES END OF AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY—MAKES FIRST MOVES TOWARD RADICAL CHANGES IN CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND PAPACY

"We bear the responsibility of ruling the Church of Christ because we hold the office of Bishop of Rome and consequently the office of successor to the Blessed Apostle Peter, the bearer of the master keys to the Kingdom of God, Vicar of the same Christ who made of him the su-

preme shepherd of his world-wide flock." So Paul said in one of his first encyclical Letters,* on August 6, 1964.

But by the opening of the seventies, Paul's thinking has changed radically. He is thinking of a more open Church, another mode of Papal government, and a different kind of Papacy.

He wants to abolish Conclave altogether. That is the only way he sees to break the hold of the all-powerful "club" of Vatican officials and their lay supporters around the world who have, for centuries, decided who will be Pope—frequently before the Conclave took place. Of course, the Pope was no less Pope, no less Bishop of Rome and Vicar of Christ, for the way he was elected. But he was less effective. Paul sees Conclave as a product of the Middle Ages, of Southern Europe, of the old European establishment, the ancient regime. That is past. Finished. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century style democracy as it exists in the United States and some Western European countries also is finished, in Paul's view. The future, he thinks, lies in the Third World of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

He begins to prepare an encyclical Letter to point out all this, and to open new paths of thought—to plough the ground for extreme change. He is willing to resign by 1972 provided that he will have achieved two goals. First: Total revamping of the method of electing a Pope. Second: The election of the man he chooses for next Pope; a man who can be trusted to follow through with all of Paul's changes, and with whom Paul will be able to work.

Paul, by means of conversations and correspondence, begins a discreet probing of opinions about changing the Conclave system, about his own abdication, and about the identity of his successor. Word of his attitudes and plans spreads through the main chanceries, to the Cardinals and to the Pope-makers among the bishops, all over the world.

Meanwhile, Paul begins to key other major actions to his plans. He has to make a huge transfer of Vatican finances. And, through the Commissions set up by the Second Vatican Council, he has to try to change the attitude of the mass of Catholics. That mass is Traditionalist by habit and not open to vast change, at least not

* *Ecclesiam Suam* (His Church) was the title of this Letter.

to the vast changes that Paul judges necessary in this day and age.

*LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR NEXT POPE
BEING FORMED*

As of now, the majority of *papabili* are Italian: Cardinals Dino Staffa, Antonio Samoré, Sebastiano Baggio, Paolo Bertoli (all Vatican-based), Giuseppe Siri of Genoa, Corrado Ursi of Naples. Jan Willebrands is Dutch, but he too is Vatican-based. The only black African whose name is mentioned now and again is Lauren Rugambwa of Dar-es-Salaam.

But these names will change according as death and disfavor overtake the Cardinals in question, and according as other more ambitious and/or more promising candidates come to the fore. Paul intends to create more Cardinals anyway. There is some talk of seeking a non-Italian, but still European, candidate in order to make a transition from the custom of electing an Italian. The second-next Pope could then conceivably be a non-European.