

THE ELECTIONS TO THE CONCILIAR COMMISSIONS

On Saturday, October 13th, the Council met for its first working-session. The agenda was the election of 160 bishops to serve on the ten conciliar commissions. Each commission was to have 24 members, sixteen elected by the bishops, with the other eight members appointed by the Pope.¹

The agenda had hardly been explained by Archbishop Felici, however, when Cardinal Liénart (Lille) took the microphone. Liénart pointed out that, despite their best efforts, many of the bishops did not know one another well enough to be able to choose members for the commissions. He then proposed that the session be devoted to studying methods for a better knowledge of each other with a view to the elections. He suggested also that the Episcopal Conferences meet and solicit three or four names for each commission. These lists could then be distributed to the Fathers, and they could vote on the basis of the lists. This intervention was twice interrupted by applause. Cardinal Frings (Cologne) immediately seconded the motion, adding that he spoke also for Cardinals Döpfner (Berlin) and König (Vienna) and proposing that the elections be postponed until the following Tuesday. He too was applauded.

The Council of Presidents conferred for a few minutes while the aula buzzed. Archbishop Felici then announced that the petition was accepted (applause) and that the Episcopal Conferences should have their lists in by Monday, so that the vote could be taken on Tuesday (applause).² According to Falconi, the whole session lasted only fourteen minutes,³ and Archbishop Hallinan compared it to a recent prize fight in which Sonny Liston had knocked an opponent out in the first seconds of the fight!⁴

The move apparently took many people by surprise. Cardinal Ottaviani is said to have been visibly disappointed;⁵ Cardinal Heenan quotes "some Italian cardinals: "*Scandalo! Che spettacolo davanti del mondo!*" [Scandal! What a spectacle we're presenting to the world!]⁶ and C. Balić, the mariologist, encountering a French *peritus* as they left the Basilica, quoted the *Marseillaise* to him: "Ces Français! Allons enfants de la Patrie, le jour de gloire est arrivé!"⁷ On

¹ Falconi claims that the Pope's appointing of eight members was "a retrograde step as compared with Vatican I, where all the commissioners except those on the 'Commission for Initiatives' were elected by the Assembly" (*Pope John and the Ecumenical Council: A Diary of the Second Vatican Council, September - December 1962*) [Cleveland: World, 1964], p. 159). According to Roger Aubert, *Vatican I* (Paris: Ed. de l'Orante, 1964), p. 69, the original proposal at Vatican I was that two-thirds of the twenty-four members of the four conciliar *Deputationes* would be elected by the Council and a third named by the pope; but Pius IX finally decided that all of them would be elected by the bishops.

² *AS, II*, pp. 207-208.

³ Falconi, *Pope John*, p. 158; only ten minutes, 30 seconds, excluding the prayers (*The Popes in the Twentieth Century: From Pius X to John XXIII*) [Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967], p. 338).

⁴ See Thomas Joseph Shelley, "The Life of Paul J. Hallinan, Archbishop of Atlanta, 1911-1968" (Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1987), p. 328.

⁵ Antoine Wenger, *Vatican II: Vol. I: The First Session* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1966), p. 37, claiming to have watched the scene on the evening television news.

⁶ See Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII: Shepherd of the Modern World* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), p. 439, citing Heenan's *Crown of Thorns*, p. 349.

⁷ Philippe Levillain, *La mécanique politique de Vatican II: La majorité et l'unanimité dans un Concile* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1975), p. 191n; Hebblethwaite, p. 439, mistakenly interprets this remark as having been addressed to Liénart himself.

the other hand, "a Dutch bishop on his way out of the Council hall called to a priest friend some distance away, 'That was our first victory!'"⁸

The surprise in the hall was duplicated outside. "The bishops streamed out of St. Peter's in their colorful choir-robos, but the buses which were to bring them to their residences were not there, since no one had counted on so early a conclusion of the session.⁹ An American bishop reported that it also surprised Pope John:

The first daily meeting of the Council lasted only about fifteen minutes! Then the meeting was adjourned until the following Tuesday, and immediately the bishops were streaming out of St. Peter's. Apparently Pope John was caught napping. He was not at his closed-circuit TV, thinking, perhaps, that the first daily meeting, taken up with voting for commission members, would be rather routine and tiresome. At any rate, when the Pope heard the noise of many voices out in St. Peter's Square, he dashed to his window to look down upon what appeared to be a flood of purple flowers as though a vast garden of azaleas had suddenly blossomed in the piazza.

"*Cosa c'è?*" he turned and asked a visitor to his apartment, in utter dismay.¹⁰

This was an extremely important incident. The conciliar commissions would have the responsibility of reviewing the interventions made on the Council-floor or in writing, examine the amendments proposed, and then decide which amendments would be brought back to the Council for a vote. In a sense, one could almost say, that it would be these commissions which would be the authors, or at least the editors, of the conciliar texts.

Obviously, these commissions needed to be in place as soon as possible. For that reason, at the bishops had been given on October 11th a list of all those with a right to attend the Council, a booklet explaining how the vote would be taken, the cards on which the votes would be written, and a list of all those who had served on the preparatory commissions.¹¹ It would, of course, be only natural to expect that, in the confusion of the opening days and even in the logic of things, many if not most of the members of the preparatory commissions would be chosen to work now on the corresponding conciliar commissions. Falconi's judgment was shared by many at the time: "by leaving the situation unchanged the Council would have been transformed into a mere appendix to register approval of the work of the preparatory organizations."¹² Joseph

⁸ Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber: A History of Vatican II* (Rockford: TAN Books, 1985), p. 17.

⁹ Josef Kardinal Frings, *Für die Menschen bestellt: Erinnerungen des Alterzbischofs von Köln Josef Kardinal Frings* (Köln: J.P. Bachem), p. 254.

¹⁰ Robert E. Tracy, *American Bishop at the Vatican Council: Recollections and Projections* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 32. Wenger, *Vatican II*, pp. 35-36, notes that the parade of bishops out of St. Peter took place "at the very moment when we were about to enter the bronze gate to attend the audience for journalists. It was a remarkable throng of bishops and reporters, the former coming down the steps and the latter going up them. There were more than 2,000 bishops, and over 1,000 journalists and those in related occupations. In such a crowd, the secret was not kept for long. The surprise was really too much for everyone, and tongues were burning to speak out. On our way to the audience with the Holy Father, we knew quite exactly what had occurred."

¹¹ *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, vol. II, Il Primo Periodo, ed. Giovanni Caprile (Rome: Ed. "La Civiltà Cattolica," 1968), pp. 18-19.

¹² Falconi, *Pope John*, p. 160.

Ratzinger noted that the "comparatively easy way out" for the bishops would have been for them to "reelect the members of the preparatory commissions appointed by the pope, thus dispensing with all effort and labor. It seems that the curia counted on such a solution." Instead, by agreeing with Liénart and Frings, "the Council had shown its resolve to act independently and autonomously, rather than be degraded to the status of a mere executive organ of the preparatory commissions."¹³

An American bishop has described the effect of the event upon him:

The development also had tremendous significance for the individual bishops. Personally, I came to the Council not at all sure that I would have very much of an active part to play in it. I was not a professional theologian, canonist or Scripture scholar. Moreover, I had been brought up to regard with awe officials highly placed in the government of the Church. As an ordinary administrative bishop, I would not have been surprised to find that, at the Council, the Vatican experts would simply tuck the ball under their arms and run with it. This is the way the only other Church council I had ever attended, the Sixth Diocesan Synod of New Orleans, had been run. The clergy, in general, simply came in and dutifully agreed with the Archbishop's decisions. There were advisory committees in advance, but they did not decide anything. And so, I felt, that the subject matter of the Council had been fairly well settled in the Preparatory Commissions, over the past three years, and that we were called to Rome simply to exhibit our solidarity with the 'approved authors' and with the Holy See.

The move of Cardinal Liénart and its quick adoption by the Council gave me a brand-new view of the Council: apparently every bishop who was interested could plan an active role in the proceedings.¹⁴

Another American bishop, of considerably different theological orientation, has a similar description:

It would be improper and imprecise to say that the success of the Council depended upon this or that incident or event. Yet certainly it would be hard to overestimate the impact of what happened on the first day of business. It was assumed by the Council moderators that the election of members-at-large, so to say, to the several commissions, would be effected without disturbance, as a matter of routine. Instead, at the determined instance of Cardinal Liénart of Lille and Cardinal Frings of Cologne, time was demanded for a thoughtful consideration of the proper candidates for offices of such responsibility. It was the first clear indication that the Council had no intention of allowing itself to be made a rubber-stamp for documents prepared in advance by Curia-dominated commissions; that, instead, it was to be a working Council insistent upon the adequate discussion of each item proposed for its consideration, upon full and free debate, and upon an openness of approach which would astonish not only the

¹³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), p. 8.

¹⁴ Tracy, *American Bishop*, pp. 34-35.

press-journalists who swarmed around the precincts of St. Peter's, but the non-Catholic observers as well.¹⁵

Bishop Joseph M. Marling (Jefferson City) gave a more serene description of the incident:

Evidently the American bishops did not suspect anything sinister in the original design, for whoever drew up the American list proposed two names for each commission, and in practically each case offered those who had been on the preparatory groups. And when the press spoke of a liberal victory and conservative defeat in what had transpired, very many American bishops protested that they had witnessed no such division. To this the press retorted that many at the Council were simply unaware of the forces already drawn in battle array.

What is the correct interpretation of the incident? I judge that the press was premature in dividing the Council into conservative and liberal camps over this first issue. The press was very accurate, however, in predicting a coming conflict, and in naming the leaders on both sides. In this respect they were ahead of us American bishops who journeyed to Rome with our customary reverence for Roman views, with an attitude of reserve that some regarded as innocence. It was far otherwise with the bishops from Germany, France, Belgium, and Holland. Quite a number of these spoke enthusiastically to anyone who would listen about breaking the power of the Roman Curia. They had meetings of every kind, and their mimeographed versions of how the Agenda should read began to appear in various places.

Undoubtedly the Roman authorities were taken by surprise. Despite rumblings at preparatory sessions they seem not to have anticipated this dissenting voice, much less its success. The Curia was accustomed to speaking, while others listened with respect. Commission members in harmony with Curial thinking were probably taken for granted, but there does not seem to have been any plot to achieve this end.¹⁶

It was for that reason that many press-accounts described the action of Liénart and Frings as "the revolt of the bishops," an attempt to prevent a Macchiavellian scheme from succeeding.¹⁷ If this was a widespread feeling, even among many bishops, it should be said in fairness that Archbishop Felici, as early as January, 1962, had asked the Subcommittee on the Council Rules

¹⁵ *Ecclesiastes: The Book of Archbishop Robert Dwyer: A Selection of His Writings*, ed. Albert J. Steiss (Los Angeles: National Catholic Register, 1982), pp. 168-69.

¹⁶ Joseph M. Marling, *The Second Vatican Council*, no bibliographical data given, but text of a speech delivered in the spring of 1963; no pagination, but the citation is from pp. 4-5. (The pamphlet may be found in ACUA, Hallinan Papers, Box 146/1.)

¹⁷ For examples of the way the press treated the incident, see Caprile, I, p. 60. Cardinal Shehan evokes this atmosphere by recalling that Liénart's speech, "with evident exaggeration, was often called the first bombshell of the Council. In reality, it was nothing more than a dictate of common sense" (*A Blessing of Years: The Memoirs of Lawrence Cardinal Shehan* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984] p. 144).

to request papal representatives and episcopal conferences to propose lists of candidates for the conciliar commissions.¹⁸

Probably depending on Felici, Caprile gives the following account.¹⁹ The president of the Sub-commission on regulations presented it to the body on January 9th, but, perhaps for lack of time, it was not discussed nor raised again. Only in the meeting of May 28th was the proposal formulated that the Fathers be asked in good time to think about names; but it is not clear whether this invitation was ever communicated to them.

When, on the eve of the Council, no decision had been made about the elections, the only way to give any indications at all was to present them with the list of those who had taken part in the pre-conciliar commissions who, after all, had been chosen for various reasons, many of them on recommendation of the conferences themselves. The Pope approved the distribution of this list along with a list of all the conciliar Fathers. Nothing was ever said to them that they should or could choose only from the list of pre-conciliar commission-members.

As for the events of the day, when Felici began with the words, "*De mandato Praesidis*," there lay behind this the fact that at the beginning of the day Cardinal Tisserant had told Felici that some bishops intended to postpone the elections so they could get to know one another better. Felici replied that this could only be done by decision of the assembly but that since it was in any case unlikely that a two-thirds majority could be gained on the first ballot, the bishops would also have time to consult before the second ballot. Tisserant wanted to know the opinion of the Secretary of State who, when consulted by Felici, said that he agreed with him and that he didn't see any reason to depart from a procedure in accordance with the rules and approved by the Pope. This reply was conveyed to Tisserant who immediately informed Cardinal Liénart.

As for why Felici didn't simply ask the assembly what they wished to do, Caprile replies: "Probably there was neither the time nor the calm needed to decide; perhaps things would have gone differently if the Council of Presidents--as the General Secretary had several times asked--had met at some point beforehand, especially since there were already rumors in various Roman circles beforehand of the possibility of an act like the one carried out by Cardinal Liénart."²⁰

The history of the interventions by Liénart and Frings has been variously described. Perhaps it is best to begin with the accounts of the two principal actors. Cardinal Liénart says that on Oct. 11th the bishops were informed by Felici that the first meeting would be devoted to electing commission members.

The Fathers were upset at once. The most informed of them entered into negotiations with bishops of other countries in order to get information on possible

¹⁸ Pericle Felici, *Il lungo cammino del Concilio* [Milan: Ed. Ancora, 1967], p. 27n: "This would be the place to point out that, as can be seen in the preparatory Acts, the proposal that the episcopal conferences be consulted had been advanced as early as January 1962 by the Secretary General of the Central Preparatory Commission, but nothing came of it."

¹⁹ Caprile, II, pp. 22-24.

²⁰ Caprile, II, pp. 23-24. As evidence, Caprile refers to the remark of Antoine Wenger, *Vatican II*, p. 35, that Cardinal Liénart had remarked to him on the evening before "that it seemed premature to proceed with the voting because the bishops did not yet know one another."

candidates and to try to draw up lists of the most outstanding bishops of the Churches present. But how could all of them be consulted in the short time of a day and a half that we had? For myself, I was sure that the Secretary of the Council would take it upon himself to supply us, before the vote, either with lists of possible candidates or at least with some indications which would permit us to make an informed choice of the best specialists of each country present in our great assembly.

For that reason, I made myself the interpreter of the disquiet of my French colleagues to Cardinal Tisserant, President of the Council of Presidents of the Council, and I asked him how things were supposed to happen. He replied to me that he did not know anything about it. At that point I became disturbed. What would the Fathers of the Council do tomorrow if they were asked to vote without any information on the candidates for the different commissions which each of the countries present could rightly present? And what would I myself do if I found myself in that situation?

Should I intervene to state that a serious and reflective vote didn't seem to me possible in such conditions, as many bishops were asking me to do? I didn't even want to think of it. If I had considered doing it, I would have taken the time to write a text in Latin so that I could express my thought correctly to the Council. I did not do that because in my heart I continued to hope that the Secretariate of the Council would not leave us in that embarrassment.

This hope, unfortunately, was disappointed, and that is why, without any premeditation on my part, the incident exploded. Here is how.

On the morning of October 13th, as I arrived at St. Peter's Basilica, already filled with the Fathers of the Council, Cardinal Lefebvre, Archbishop of Bourges, whose moderation everyone knew, was waiting for me at the entrance. Very upset, he told me that we were going to be forced to vote without any information being provided by the Secretariate of the Council. He urged me to intervene to state that the vote was impossible under such conditions and to ask that the vote be postponed, to leave us time to gain information before having to vote. For this purpose, he gave me a text of a statement in Latin, all ready, which he allowed me to read...

I must say that I did not receive my colleague's entreaties kindly, so convinced was I that his fears were misplaced. I only accepted his text so as not to displease him and without promising to use it.

But the Council Mass was about to begin. I hastened to take my place at the Presidents' table and assisted at the holy Sacrifice, very upset in anticipating what was going to happen, but fervently asking God to show me my duty and to give me the courage to perform it.

After Mass, I had just enough time to read the manuscript text which Cardinal Lefebvre had given me in order to be able to read it correctly to the Assembly in that case, and immediately the meeting began.

Msgr. Felici, Secretary General of the Council, was content with distributing to each bishop, on the one hand, the list of members of the pre-conciliar commissions which had drawn up the drafts and, on the other, ten sheets of paper each of them bearing the name of one of the new commissions and numbers from one to sixteen. Then, without a word of explanation, he invited us to write immediately on these sheets the names of the Fathers we wished to elect.

It was a dilemma and I knew it. Without a doubt, it would have been easy for us simply to bring back the members of the former commissions. But could we take this easy way out without failing in our duty? As Fathers of the Council, we had the responsibility to elect for ourselves our delegates to the various commissions; and therefore we had to assume our responsibilities and not hand them over to what had existed before us. We had the chance to exercise our choices in a much larger field than the one offered when the preconciliar commissions were formed, because now the bishops of the whole world were present. We could not, then, neglect the opportunity to seat in the new commissions, which would be the work-horses of the Council, those among us who could be the most useful. But since we did not yet know one another, we were not in a position to carry out reasonable the vote asked of us.

So I saw clearly that I could no longer shuffle. I was sitting at the Presidents' table, to the right of Cardinal Tisserant. I was then the first one to be able to speak, and I was aware that if I did not do so, I would be failing in my duty.

Abruptly I leaned towards the Cardinal President and said to him in a low voice: "Your Eminence, it is really impossible to vote like this, without knowing anything about the most qualified candidates. If you allow me, I want to speak." "I can't allow you to," he answered, "the agenda for this meeting doesn't include any discussion." "Well, then," I said, "pardon me. I will speak."

The result is known. I stood and stated that an immediate vote seemed impossible to me under those conditions and to ask for a reasonable delay so that we could get information from our colleagues in different countries on the best candidates to elect. I used the Latin text which had been given me, since I hadn't dreamed of preparing another one, and the Assembly reacted spontaneously by bursting into applause. Then Cardinal Frings, Archbishop of Cologne, who, like me, was sitting at the Presidents' table, rose in order to second my proposal, and the applause doubled.

Confronted with this unexpected display, the Cardinal President wisely decided that the vote should be postponed and that the matter should be submitted to the Holy Father's judgment. And since no other question was on the agenda, he adjourned the meeting. It had only lasted twenty minutes.

But the event caused a stir. The journalists got hold of it and publicized it under sensational headlines. The Italian journals had articles with headlines like: "The rebellion of the bishops. The innovating wing imposes an international list." "Fierce fight between

two tendencies." "The devil's moment at the Council", etc., while in France *Paris-Soir* published a flamboyant article: "The French Bishops in Revolt at the Council!"

The rumor spread that my intervention was a coup mounted beforehand by a conspiracy of progressive bishops from France and Germany against the Roman Curia and even against the Pope. It was said that John XXIII was very unhappy over it. It was even said, then, that the Council was being oriented in a direction dangerous for the Church's future.

Now, all this is false. My intervention was not premeditated, since I had not even prepared anything. It was not plotted out with the other French or German bishops, since I had been more than reticent when Cardinal Lefebvre, at the last minute, begged me to speak and since I spoke without any prior agreement with Cardinal Frings and without knowing in advance that he would support me. It was not inspired by any feeling of revolt or of hostility towards anyone--not towards the earlier commissions, since in fact a good number of their members were reelected by us--nor, a fortiori, towards the Roman Curia, which had nothing to do with this affair--nor, of course, towards the Pope! John XXIII was not at all unhappy at my stance, for he said to me himself: "You did well to say aloud what you think, that is why I convoked the bishops in Council." Even more, he agreed to our request, giving us a delay of three days to allow the bishops of the different countries to consult before electing the members of the conciliar commissions. As for seeing in my action a deed to orient the Church in a direction dangerous for its future, this is unjust to the whole of Vatican II; for the effect of it was to endow the Council with excellent commissions, which worked tirelessly for four years to recast the drafts until they were in accord with the expressed desires of the Fathers, to the point that in the end all the texts they produced were approved almost unanimously.

There is a much more simple explanation of my intervention. I only spoke because I found myself constrained by a superior force, in which I have to recognize the power of the Holy Spirit himself, animator of all Councils. For, in fact, I spoke against my own wish, constrained by my conscience which made me see clearly that if I kept quiet, I would be failing in my duty as a member of the Council of Presidents, leaving the Fathers of the Council to have to make an important vote without the information needed to make it. I even felt myself constrained from without in some way, by a whole series of circumstances which left me no way out, not even the excuse that I can't improvise in Latin, since, without asking for it, I had in my hand a prepared text! In no way am I claiming that I spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but I attest that I felt his power in so constraining a way that it was impossible for me to escape from it without sinning against him. All I did was obey, and who can reproach me for it?

But, to end on a pleasanter note this account of the incident, I will note the witticism which a German theologian in Cardinal Frings' entourage made to me the evening of that memorable day. Borrowing from the liturgy of the hour the verse, "*Gallo canente spes redit*" and playing on the two meanings of the word *gallus* which can also

mean "Frenchman," he gracefully applied to me: "The voice of a Frenchman has given us hope."²¹

Here is Cardinal Frings' account:

Two days later the first general congregation took place. Together with the other members of the presidium I took my place for the first time at the presidents' table. To our great surprise, Archbishop Pericle Felici stood and declared that the members of the commissions were to be elected today. We were to use the forms which had been distributed in place and on which the members of the preparatory commissions were listed.

As I heard this, a holy anger filled me. I raised my finger, although according to the rules it was not possible to speak unless a written copy of the speech had been submitted beforehand. Cardinal Liénart did the same thing at the same time. Tisserant, who was presiding, allowed Liénart to speak first, and he said that it would be very difficult to carry out the election of commission members today since the bishops hardly knew one another yet, and they should first think about the matter in the national conferences.

I then spoke also and said clearly and distinctly that I myself and also in the name of Cardinal Döpfner and of Cardinal König agreed with the remarks of my predecessor, and I proposed that the election of commission members be postponed for three days, to the following Tuesday. It immediately became apparent that the whole Council was of the same opinion as Liénart and I. The session was concluded after the national conferences were asked to prepare lists, and the session came to an end after only an hour.²²

Frings gives no indication of prior activities or planning except that he notes that at meetings of the German-speaking bishops the weekend before the Council opened, the issue was raised:

At this session the question was also discussed as to which German bishops were suitable as members of the commissions and various names were mentioned. But no one thought that we would have to deal with the question of the election of the commissions so soon. With regard to this question, Professor Jedin gave me the tip that the election of commission members was extraordinarily important for the future course of the Council and that at Vatican I this election had required a whole month.²³

Jedin himself has given an account. Informed only on September 29th that he had been named a *peritus*, he was not able to get permission to go to Rome soon enough to be present for the opening session and for the session at which the elections were supposed to take place. He then says:

²¹ Cardinal Liénart, *Vatican II* (Lille: Facultés Catholiques, 1976 -- *Mélanges de Science Religieuse*, numéro supplémentaire), pp. 65-69.

²² Frings, *Für die Menschen bestellt*, pp. 253-54.

²³ Frings, *Für die Menschen bestellt*, p. 252.

Cardinal Frings later recounted to me and to others that, as Secretary General Felici proposed the immediate election of the commissions, he remembered that in a talk with him on the experiences of Vatican I, I had characterized the composition of the conciliar commissions as highly important, indeed as decisive for the results. Because he was a member of the Central Commission, he had summoned me in the course of 1961 (on May 19th for the first time) to discuss with me questions concerning the future organization of the Council. Knowing my Paderborn presentation, he knew that I was familiar with these questions. In one of these conversations I made my remarks about the importance of the commissions, whose role at this far more numerous Council, which had three times as many members as the Lower House in England, appeared to me to be even more important than at Vatican I. "I didn't correctly understand Cardinal Liénart of Lille, who spoke before me," Cardinal Frings said, "and spoke in favor of postponing the election; but I remembered our conversation and cautioned against carrying out this election without careful preparation." The proposal of the Cardinal from Cologne received general approval, and the postponement of the election was agreed to. During the next two days, Cardinals Frings, Döpfner, König, Suenens and Alfrink, with the help of some colleagues, drew up some lists of candidates which contained the best experts, particularly but not exclusively from Europe. On the night of the 15th and 16th of October, the lists were duplicated at the Anima by Cardinal Frings' secretary, Luthe, who became auxiliary later, and distributed before the General Congregation. Surprisingly, the lists gained the votes of many bishops from Latin America and from the missions, so that a considerable number of the candidates on them were elected. But the most important thing was that the bishops of the world, gathered in Council, did not simply accept the lists that had been given to them, but felt called to assume their own responsibility. As I look back, this was certainly my most important contribution, even if only an indirect one, to the Second Vatican Council.²⁴

From both of these accounts, it would appear that the actions of Liénart and Frings were independent, spontaneous or unpremeditated. But there is some evidence that serious thought had been given to the problem before the first session began. According to Bishop Helder Câmara, there were a dozen other bishops ready to get up, if necessary, one after another, to make the same suggestion. Cardinal Montini was to be the eighth to speak.²⁵

Claiming to rest his account on a version of the events confided by Cardinal Liénart to a French diplomat and on conversations with various Roman figures in 1972, Levillain gives the

²⁴ Hubert Jedin, *Lebensbericht* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 1984), pp. 203-204. Jedin's Paderborn speech was published as "Die Geschäftsordnungen der beiden letzten ökumenischen Konzilien in ekklesiologischer Sichte," *Catholica*, 14 (1960), 105-18; reprinted in *Aufsätze und Vorträge*, I, pp. 577-88.

²⁵ See Jan Grootaers, "L'attitude de l'Archêvêque Montini au cours de la première période du Concile (octobre 1962 - juin 1963)," in *Giovanni Battista Montini Arcivescovo di Milano e il Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II: Preparazione e primo periodo* (Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 1985), p. 265, citing a conversation with Bishop Helder Camara. Cardinal König recently stated that a postponement of the vote "was also Cardinal Montini's line of thinking;" see Cardinal Franz König, *Where is the Church Heading?* Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1986), p. 27.

following account.²⁶ Archbishop Garrone (Toulouse) became uneasy about the procedures for the election when he first read them in August, 1962. When he arrived in Rome, he inquired why the rules did not say anything about the way in which the elections would take place. Cardinal Jullien, who was on the pre-conciliar Commission for Rules told him that it had been left undecided and would be determined by the Council itself. Garrone sent Canon Martimort to raise the issue with Cardinal Tisserant who dismissed the issue rather rudely. Similar efforts to get Cardinal Leger and Archbishop Veillot to address the issue proved unsuccessful as well. And so he spoke to Cardinals Liénart and Lefebvre who declared themselves ready to try to alter the process. Working with two other bishops, Ancel and Larrain, Garrone drew up an alternate proposal and sent it to Liénart the night before the vote was to take place. Liénart memorized it in his car on the way to St. Peter's and then delivered it in the hall. He was not at all sure that it would succeed. Technically, changes in the rules had to be approved by the Pope, which would have meant delays. But, it seems, the Presidents decided to take the applause of the bishops as their agreement with Liénart and so decided on their own to postpone the vote.²⁷

Falconi gives a colorful description:

Many Fathers had already discussed all these reasons in the preceding days, and some episcopates had held meetings to decide on the line to be adopted at the first General Congregation. Last Friday afternoon the French bishops met at San Luigi dei Francesi before going on to an official reception at the French Embassy to the Holy See at Villa Bonaparte in Via XX Settembre, the Dutch met in a hotel in Via Crescenzo, the Germans, Austrians, and Swiss at the College of Santa Maria dell'Anima, and the Belgians at their seminary in Via del Quirinale.

Each of these episcopates voted practically unanimously in favour of postponing the voting for the short time necessary to consider the possible candidates; they then worked out the best way of presenting the motion, or rather they approved the method already decided on in principle on 10 October by the Cardinals of the Western European countries (namely, that a motion should be presented by the President of the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops of France, with which immediately afterwards the President of the plenary Conference of the German dioceses would associate himself).

Thus it came about that some 200 Fathers as they approached St. Peter's yesterday morning were already relishing in advance the *coup de théâtre* which was to make famous the first Congregation. In fact, Cardinal Liénart had barely finished reading his motion when an anticipatory outburst of applause drowned his last words, reinforced by a further wave from those who now learnt of the initiative for the first time and realized its

²⁶ Philippe Levillain, *La mécanique politique de Vatican II: La majorité et l'unanimité dans un Concile* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1975), pp. 187-92.

²⁷ The role of Garrone is confirmed by a remark he made in a letter to Caprile: "As for the place given to the conferences, I remember the many steps I took for the two days before the election to obtain from the authorities some interest in the proposal; and I remember the failure of these efforts, especially with Cardinal Jullien, who was even one of those responsible for the organization" (see *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, vol. V: Quarto periodo, [Rome: Ed. "La Civiltà Cattolica," 1969], p. 585n).

importance. The applause that greeted Frings' adherence a few minutes later was not only a recognition of the two prelates' courage but an outburst of rejoicing on the part of the majority of the assembly, which congratulated itself on having succeeded in affirming its own autonomy by evading the Curia's attempt to dominate the Council.²⁸

In his article published on October 12th, Henri Fesquet had already noted the problem:

The Council Fathers, barely arrived from the four corners of the earth, don't know one another very well yet. Many of them are not sure whom they should vote for. Because of this the bishops, or more exactly the cardinals, who have had some preconciliar experience are prompted to enlighten the future voters. And quite naturally the lists of "suggestions" that are furtively distributed reflect the interests of those who have drawn them up.²⁹

With the postponement of the elections, vigorous efforts were made to draw up lists within the various conferences and among several of them. The Americans had already been giving thought to a list of candidates. On October 10th, the archbishops of the United States met at the North American College to draw up a list of American candidates. Archbishop Hallinan's suggestion that they make the list international was turned down.³⁰ After the dramatic event on October 13th, Hallinan, Tracy, and Dworschak (Fargo) set to work, as Tracy describes:

Exhilarated by this new openness, we immediately went to work contacting leaders of various countries to ask whom they had to offer as candidates for the Council Commissions, while we, in turn, expressed our own views about the possible American candidates. Other U.S. bishops were doing the same thing, and, by the time a meeting of American bishops was called on Monday, a fair consensus had been reached among us, independently of each other, as to the make-up of an international slate of candidates for each commission.³¹

Assisted by Frederick McManus, they drew up an international list of candidates only to find at the next meeting of American bishops that Archbishops Cody and Shehan, along with Bishop James Griffiths (New York) had already produced such a list, to which they ceded.³²

²⁸ Falconi, *Pope John*, p. 161. Unfortunately, Falconi gives no documentation for this account. Gian Franco Svidercoschi, *Storia del Concilio* (Milan: Ancora, 1967), p. 155, refers to the same meeting of the French episcopate on October 12th, where "various bishops had expressed the view that a wider consultation was needed before proceeding to the election of the members of the commissions. The Cardinal was, therefore, charged with expressing these reservations in the hall, with which, a series of inquiries had made it clear, other episcopal groups fully agreed." Levillain, pp. 173-74, does not mention this meeting; indeed his sources maintained that at the reception that evening at the French embassy, to which Falconi refers, no mention was made of the elections on the next day. Wenger, p. 35, however, says that Cardinal Liénart did talk about it with him.

²⁹ Henri Fesquet, *The Drama of Vatican II: The Ecumenical Council, June 1962 - December 1965* (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 17-18. Fesquet was unusually well informed and this may reflect his knowledge of conversations already taking place among the French bishops especially. Among those who apparently drew up lists of their own candidates was the Holy Office; see Robert Rouquette, *La fin d'une chrétienté: Chroniques*, I (Paris: du Cerf, 1968), p. 224.

³⁰ See Shelley, p. 327.

³¹ Tracy, p. 35.

³² Shelley, p. 329.

The episcopal conferences had between Saturday and Monday to meet and draw up their lists. Meetings for this took place all over Rome, some of the conferences (Italy's, for example) meeting for the first time in history. There was also a great deal of interchange of ideas and names among many of the conferences, with the Italians, however, acting largely alone. (It seems that the US bishops did not meet in full conference.[?]) In addition, the bishops of the Eastern-rite churches and the superiors-general drew up their own lists.

By Monday night, some 34 lists of candidates had been drawn up, although many of them simply listed a few names from their own ranks as candidates.³³ The most important list was drawn up by a coalition of European bishops from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Scandinavia, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia. It contained 112 names of bishops from all over the world and was deliberately incomplete to allow names to be drawn from other lists. In contrast, the Italian bishops proposed only 62 names, 47 of them Italians, with non-Italians being suggested only for the Doctrinal Commission and the Commission on Missions. There was also a rumor that a list was circulating of bishops favored by the Holy Office.

Here is Frings' description of the European list's origin:

Afterwards [that is, after the council session had been suspended] the presidium of ten Cardinals met, but without coming to any significant resolution at all. That led me to invite the Cardinals whom I knew, Alfrink, Suenens, Liénart, Konig, Döpfner and others from central Europe to the Anima the afternoon of the same day. They all came and we put together a list of commission members. We did not fill all the posts, however, so that every bishop would have the opportunity to make other proposals from his own circle of acquaintances and from his own nation. And so we proposed around ten candidates while a total of sixteen were to be elected for each commission. It took until the following day for the lists to be completed and duplicated. There were some difficulties because at the Anima there was only an old duplicating machine, which, of course, soon broke down and had to be fixed, and, because it was Sunday there was no workman available. But with great effort the secretary...succeeded in having the list ready by Monday evening. I could leave it to Felici to see that the list was printed, and on the following day all the Council Fathers could read: The bishops' conferences of Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and a few others proposed the following men as commission members.

The result of the election at first was quite uncertain. It took several days before we learned the results. It was announced that there were no candidates who had received the required two-thirds majority, but Pope John was content with a simple majority and that those who had received this were to be considered elected. We later learned that all our candidates except one had won, and this one was more of a concession from one of the southern European countries. This result of the election had an essential influence on the subsequent course of the Council. From Archbishop Heim, then Nuntio to Cairo, I

³³ These lists are printed in *AS, I/1*, pp. 40-77.

learned shortly afterwards that the pope was not at all unhappy that the old list of the members of the preparatory commissions had not been elected....

But we were informed by Archbishop Heim, who had been the Pope's secretary in Paris, that the Holy Father approved of our action.³⁴

The vote was taken on Tuesday, October 17th. At the session, Cardinal Ottaviani proposed that the Rules of the Council for this election be altered from the requirement of a two-thirds majority to allow a simple majority to suffice. He was told that the Rules could not be altered without the Pope's approval and that the vote would be taken as prescribed, with the question being referred to the Pope while the votes were being counted. At the end of the week, the Pope approved the change, so that the sixteen bishops who on this first ballot received the most votes were considered to be elected.

Ottaviani's suggestion was presented in the interest of expediting things, although some people put dark interpretations on it. In fact, the voting was a long and complicated business. It was not possible to count the votes electronically, and so seminarians from Roman colleges were enlisted to sort through the 400,000 ballots by hand (2500 bishops each voting for 160 posts). It took three and a half days to collate all the ballots, and the Council did not meet in the meantime.

The results of the meeting were considered a great triumph for what was already being considered the "progressive" faction. The "European" list did very well, with over 70% of their candidates being elected. The Italians, on the other hand, were discomfited to find that only nineteen Italians were elected, five of whom had not been on their own list!

On closer inspection, however, one can wonder whether in fact the drama of the day was appropriate. Almost 60% of those elected to the conciliar commissions, it turned out, had served on a preparatory commission, sometimes the analogous one, sometimes not. And 70% of Pope John's appointments had served on preparatory commissions, to make a total of 62.5%. (The more important question, of course, would be to know the orientation of the bishops elected, but that is not now possible.)

The results of the election were announced on October 20th and 22nd.³⁵ On the 20th, Pope John also appointed eight members to the Commission on Liturgy, so that the debate on this document could begin right away. Shortly after, he appointed a ninth member, Archbishop Dante, a decision he followed also for the appointments to the other nine commissions which were announced on October 29th.³⁶ Interpretations of this breach of the Council Rules have varied. The official explanation was that this was done so that there would not be an even number in the commissions.³⁷ Others said that it was done to assure the presence on the Committees of the Secretary or Assessor of the corresponding Curial office. Still others saw it as an attempt to offset the "progressive" orientation of the elected members, the Pope not wishing

³⁴ Frings, *Für die Menschen bestellt*, pp. 254-55.

³⁵ See *AS, I/I*, pp. 225-29, 259-61.

³⁶ *AS, I/I*, pp. 559-562.

³⁷ *AS, I/I*, p. 88.

the "conservative" faction to be able to protest against the Council's work (as the "minority" at Vatican I had done). Falconi adds some other possibilities:

According to Monsignor Martinez [one of his pseudonymous sources?], the formal request for the inclusion of the secretaries and assessors was put forward as a counterpoise to the Pope's request to them to intervene only with the utmost discretion in the Council's sittings.

Also according to Monsignor Martinez, it was the inclusion of the the Curia leaders that prompted the Pope to alter the number of members on each individual Commission, raising it to 25 instead of 24; and the odd number of members will make voting easier."³⁸

Falconi's reference to the admonishment of the Curia is clarified later:

It was also foreseeable that the 'pezzi grossi', the big shots, of the Curia would throw their weight about a bit. In fact they did so quite early on. On the 22nd, at the fourth General Congregation and the first day of actual discussion, three of them spoke, Vagnozzi, Scapinelli, and Dante, and two days later four more, Van Lierde, Zanini, Parente, and Staffa; not to mention the occasional Cardinal. This was obviously too much; complaints rained down on the Chairman's desk, and the Pope when he heard of it intervened unofficially, as I mentioned earlier. It is difficult to say whether he did the same about the Curia Cardinals; given the recognized privileges of the members of the Sacred College, I would be inclined to think not."³⁹

The table on the last page gives a breakdown of the members of the conciliar commissions, elected and appointed, in terms of their origins (those elected are in the first row and those appointed by the Pope beneath them). As can be seen easily, Europe and the United States were over-represented, and Latin America, Asia and Africa were under-represented. This disproportion is even greater if one remembers that the figures for Asia and Africa include several Eastern-rite bishops from the Middle East and northern Africa. It should also be noted that 17 of the 35 Asian bishops and six of the 12 African bishops served on two commissions, for the Missions and for the Oriental Churches. In addition, as Jan Grootaers has pointed out, many of the Asian and African bishops were from Western European countries, such as Ireland, Belgium and Holland (for example, there were 67 bishops from Holland representing non-European dioceses, while there only 9 of them from Dutch sees). Of the 349 bishops from Africa, only 77 were of African descent, and of the 434 from Asia, only 88 were Asians. These figures help to explain why the problematics addressed by the Council were largely set by the European bishops.⁴⁰

³⁸ Falconi, p. 224.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 240. Caprile, II, p. 79n, confirms this: "In those days, after interventions in the debate by an apostolic delegate, two secretaries and two assessors of the sacred Congregations, the Holy Father, it is said, let it be known that perhaps it would be better if in the future those who had such charges abstained from speaking in the Council."

⁴⁰ See Grootaers, p. 31.

It will also be noted that the European emphasis was also favored by Pope John's appointments. He raised the number of Italians on the commissions from 19 to 42, and the number of Curial representatives from 2 to 16.

On October 22nd, an important announcement was made about the Secretariat for Christian Unity. The Pope decided that it would have the same members and the same roles as during the preparatory period. These were then specified as being to keep in contact with the observers and guests, to contribute to the discussion and amendment of the conciliar documents, to offer draft documents for the Council's review, and to participate in mixed commissions on any topics of ecumenical interest.⁴¹ This document in effect raised the Secretariat to the status of a conciliar commission and ended the dispute which had haunted the Secretariat since it had been founded, particularly as a result of Cardinal Ottaviani's insistence that the Secretariat had no right to propose documents for the Council. Cardinal Bea was, of course, made president of the Secretariat. Of the other 13 members, 12 were from Europe.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note the contemporary interpretation given to the election of the conciliar commissions by the young German theologian, Joseph Ratzinger. He found four positive results in the event: (1) The conversations among the episcopal conferences promoted "the development of a 'horizontal Catholicity,' with cross-connections among those who call themselves Catholic." (2) "The Council had taken a giant step beyond being a mere sounding board for propaganda. It had decisively assumed the function assigned it by canon law--the exercise of supreme power over the entire Church." (3) "...in this independent body of bishops, the curia found a force to reckon with and a real partner in discussion." This meant "the restoration of a fruitful interplay between periphery and center, between the living multiplicity of Catholic life (represented by the episcopacy) and the unity which the primacy must protect." (4) A first sense of "what Pope John was soon after to call 'the holy freedom of the Council.'" In the "openness and candor" encouraged by the Pope, "the anti-Modernist neurosis which had again and again crippled the Church since the turn of the century here seemed to be approaching a cure. Here there emerged a new awareness of how the Church could conduct a dialogue in fraternal frankness without violating the obedience that belongs to faith."⁴²

⁴¹The text of the rescript in *AS, I/1*, p. 78.

⁴²*Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, pp. 8-11.

MEMBERS OF THE CONCILIAR COMMISSIONS

This table sets out the geographical distribution of the members of the conciliar commissions. For each commission, the top row indicates those elected by the Council, the second those appointed by Pope John XXIII.

	Europe	US/Can	LatAmer	Asia	Africa	Oceania	Curia
Doctrine	8 6	5 1	2	1			1
Bishops	8 2	3 1	3	1 4	1		1 1
Clergy	10 2	3 1	3 3	2			1
Liturgy	11 5	2	1 1	1	1		3
Missions	5 2	1 1	3	4 4	3 1		1
Laity/ Media	8 6	2	4	1 1	1		2
Oriental Churches	7 1	2	2	4 5	2		1 1
Sacra-ments	7 3	3	3 1	1 3	1	1	2
Religious	9 6	3	2	1 1	1	1	1
Studies	8 4	3 1	4 2		1	1	1
TOTALS	81 37	27 5	27 7	14 21	7 5	2 1	2 14
Percent	47	12.8	13.6	14	4.8	1.2	6.4