

## The College of Cardinals: An anachronism

Maureen Fiedler | Oct. 21, 2010 NCR Today

I read with some interest -- and amusement -- the news that Pope Benedict had named 24 new Cardinals, including two Americans. (I was not amused, however, by the selection of Raymond Burke, formerly Archbishop of St. Louis, who insulted Catholic women during his tenure and interfered in our political system by denying communion to pro-choice Catholic candidates for office.)

But the whole process of these 'princely' appointments highlights the anachronism of this institution.

The College of Cardinals is reminiscent of a royal court. Its members are loyalists who (apparently) enjoy the pomp and rarely give advice that challenges the status quo in any significant way.

The College does provide a colorful history (complete with red hats), and the appointment of new cardinals always gives Vatican analysts an opportunity to read the papal 'tea leaves'. When it actually meets for the papal election, it offers great background material for various novels. But the business of 'princes' (all male, all appointed) electing a ruler is anachronistic. The College of Cardinals is a remnant of the 18th centuries, not the present where we are striving for societies that maximize participation and some semblance of democracy.

The main function of the College of Cardinals is the election of the next Pope. Most Catholics I know would welcome some voice in that process. It's time to think creatively about that possibility -- one long advocated by church reform groups.



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