

VEFIE POELS

“THE ONE AND ONLY CANDIDATE”:
WILLEM VAN ROSSUM AT THE 1909 REDEMPTORIST
GENERAL CHAPTER

1. – INTRODUCTION; 2. – KRONENBURG’S REPORT: *Preliminaries to the election; Twenty-six ballots*; 3. – REFLECTIONS ON THE 1909 CHAPTER: *Van Rossum as Pius X’s candidate; Against Van Rossum; Post scriptum*.

1. – INTRODUCTION

On the first of May, 1909, the eleventh General Chapter of the Redemptorists elected a new Superior General as the successor of Matthias Raus, who had resigned because of his age and poor health.¹ The *Acta* of the Chapter, rather brief on the subject, mention that the German provincial Adolph Brors received two votes, Willem van Rossum² four, Jan Kronenburg, delegate of the Dutch province,³ eleven, and the Irish provincial Patrick Murray⁴

¹ *Acta integra Capituli Generalis XI Congregationis SS. Redemptoris*, Rome 1909, 10. Matthias Raus (Aspelt, Luxemburg 9.8.1829-Bertigny 9.5.1917) had been rector and prefect of students in the province of France and Switzerland, and consultor to the Superior General Nicholas Mauron from 1889 to 1893. Mauron appointed him vicar general in July 1893 and at the 1894 Chapter Raus was elected Superior General. BOLAND, 309.

² On Willem Marinus van Rossum (Zwolle 1854-Maastricht 1932), see Vefie POELS, Theo SALEMINK, Hans DE VALK (eds.), *Life with a Mission. Cardinal Willem Marinus van Rossum CSsR (1854-1932)*, Gent 2011, also published as a special issue of *Trajecta. Religie, cultuur en samenleving in de Nederlanden*, 19-20 (2010-2011) 1-2; Joop VERNOOIJ, *Cardinal Willem van Rossum, C.Ss.R. “The Great Cardinal of the Small Netherlands” (1854-1932)*, in SHCSR 55 (2007) 347-400; Jozef Maria DREHMANN, *Kardinaal van Rossum. Korte levensschets*, Roermond/Maaseik, 1935. See also the site www.cardinalvanrossum.eu.

³ Jan Kronenburg (Zutphen, 1853-Nijmegen, 1940), prof. 1873, ord. 1877. Superior of the Dutch province, 1894-1898 and 1918-1924. Published many devotional and edifying works and many years the main editor of *De Volksmis-*

thirty-eight, which made him the successor of Matthias Raus. Despite the brevity of the *Acta*, it must have been a most thrilling Chapter, seeing that it took no less than twenty-six ballots to reach a final conclusion only in the nocturnal hours. Four or five ballots are more common on these occasions.⁵

The *Acta integra* do not reveal much more about the course of events. However, several publications, without mentioning a source to prove their proposition, mention “the common knowledge” that during the election process two Dutch candidates, the old schoolmates Willem van Rossum and Jan Kronenburg, were opponents. After being tied in the balloting, it eventually swung in favour of Patrick Murray.⁶ On the face of it, a hitherto unpublished and confidential report of Jan Kronenburg corroborates this proposition.⁷ Even more fascinating is that this report states that the Superior General Matthias Raus and most of his consultants had entered the Chapter with only one candidate in mind: Willem van Rossum.

sionaris. DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie*, II, 235-238; BOLAND, 188; Laurentius DANKELMAN, *Oversten en officiales*, in *Monumenta Historica Provinciae Neerlandicae CSSR* (hereinafter this work will be cited as *MHPN-CSSR*) 5 (1953) 19-39; here 20-21.

⁴ Patrick Murray (Termon 1865-Limerick 1959), superior of the Irish province from 1907-1909, Superior General from 1909 until 1947. BOLAND, 252.

⁵ In 1855 the first and in 1894 the seventh ballot decided the election: *Acta integra*, 492 and 649.

⁶ VERNOOIJ, “*The Great Cardinal of the Small Netherlands*”, 370; DE MEULEMEESTER, *Histoire Sommaire* 1958, 2nd ed., 190; M. MULDER, “*Overzicht van de ontwikkeling der Congregatie*”, in *MHPN-CSSR* 1 (1949) 65-96, here 96; H. SCHÄFER, *Levensschets van Pater J.A.F. Kronenburg Redemptorist (1853-1940)*. *Ad usum strictae privatum CSSR*, 38 (manuscript, dated Nijmegen 1940, in AGHR).

⁷ St. Agatha, Erfgoedcentrum Nederlandse Kloosterarchieven (ENK), *Archives of the Dutch Province of the Redemptorists (ADPR)*, 8124: *Herinneringen over en aan den stemmingsdag v.h. Kap. van 1909. Na mijn dood ongelezen overhandigen aan R.P. van Grinsven. J. Kronenburg C.Ss.R.* The report which the envelope contains bears the title *Herinneringen aan het kapittel van 1909*. It is undated, but mentioning the death of Willem van Rossum, it must have been written after 30.8.1932. Marinus van Grinsven (1885-1950) was rector in Wittem from 1930-1933 and in 's-Hertogenbosch from 1933-1939. L. DANKELMAN, *Oversten en officiales*.

In this article we are going to analyze the voting process of the 1909 Chapter on the basis of the report of Kronenburg.⁸ Next, we will try to get an answer to the question why Willem van Rossum, not being a representative to this chapter either as a *vocalis* (voting member from one's province) or as a *supplens* (substitute in case of an inability of a *vocalis* to attend), was a strong candidate for the office of Superior General. Here we will substantiate our hypothesis that Van Rossum was put forward by Pope Pius X. Finally, we will discuss the plausible reasons why Van Rossum in the end was *not* elected the new Superior General, again making a link to his Curial activities.

2. – KRONENBURG'S REPORT

Preliminaries to the election

In the archives of the Dutch Redemptorists in St. Agatha we find an envelope, labeled "Memories about and of the voting day of the Chapter of 1909. To be handed over unread to Rev. Father van Grinsven after my death. J. Kronenburg C.Ss.R."⁹ In these memories Kronenburg, being rector of the Roermond monastery in 1908, described his being delegated by the house Chapter to the provincial Chapter in Amsterdam. Here, with a small majority, he was chosen a *vocalis* for the General Chapter in Rome. At that moment, Kronenburg had the impression that Johannes Lohmeijer, the Dutch provincial at the time, disliked his election.¹⁰

Kronenburg traveled to Rome with Franciscus ter Haar,¹¹ the other *vocalis* of the Dutch province, with, as he recorded, only

⁸ The results of the twenty-six ballots as recorded by Kronenburg are confirmed by the notes taken by the secretary of the Chapter Franz Xavier Reuss. AGHR, *XVI Cap. Gen. 1909*: "P. Reuss. Note sul Capit. Gen. 1909." Reuss (1842-1925) of the province of Strasbourg, was personal secretary of both Nicholas Mauron and Matthias Raus, and *consultor generalis* from 1907-1909. BOLAND, 317.

⁹ ENK, *ADPR*, 8124: *Herinneringen aan het kapittel van 1909*.

¹⁰ Johannes Lohmeijer was Dutch provincial from 1907 until 1912.

¹¹ Franciscus ter Haar (1857-1939), taught exegesis in Wittem (1882-1892), was prefect in Wittem (1893-1904), and was appointed the first head of the Schola Major in Rome in 1909. In 1911 he succeeded Van Rossum as *consultor generalis* and stayed in that office until 1936.

one thing in mind: to choose a good new Superior General. On his arrival he visited the Superior General Matthias Raus, who told Kronenburg that to him “the one and only candidate was the Reverend Father Willem van Rossum.”¹² In subsequent meetings most members of the General Council told Kronenburg the same, except Karl Dilgskron,¹³ who literally said: “To me, there is only one candidate, and that is you.” This answer was a shock to Kronenburg. Traveling to Rome, he indeed had heard some rumors that in the Belgian province it was told that he would become the next Superior General. Kronenburg then had shrugged his shoulders and laughed about the idea, absolutely not giving it any serious thought. He suggested Dilgskron to contact Ter Haar, who could tell him all about Kronenburg and his past as a provincial superior.

Here Kronenburg alluded to the dramatic events of 1898, when he had resigned as Dutch provincial after having been severely criticized by Raus. What had happened was that after the 1894 General Chapter smoking dispensations for the Dutch province, which had existed since 1857, had been abolished. This had caused much turmoil and Kronenburg, appointed provincial in 1894, had bent the rules as far as possible – without crossing the line of obedience, as he emphasizes several times – in order to satisfy the Dutch Redemptorists. He even traveled to Prague in 1895 to have an eye-to-eye meeting with Matthias Raus who at the time was visiting the Austrian province. They came to a verbal agreement: officially and on paper Kronenburg would always submit to the Chapter regulations, but in practice he would be as lenient as possible. But even though Kronenburg in this way managed to avoid many pitfalls he could not prevent that some more rigid confreres – witnessing his inconsistent policy – sent serious complaints to Raus and his general consultors.¹⁴

¹² ENK, *ADPR*, 8124: *Herinneringen aan het kapittel van 1909*, 1: “P. Gen. zeide mij, dat R. P. van Rossum zijn eenige kandidaat was”.

¹³ Karl Dilgskron (Vienna 1843-Vienna 1912), *consultor generalis* from 1883-1909 to Nicholas Mauron and Matthias Raus.

¹⁴ Vefie POELS, “A desire to become what they were”. *Willem van Rossum as a Redemptorist before his Roman years (1873-1895)*, in *SHCSR* 62 (2014) 223-238.

It is of interest to mention that one of these “troublesome” Redemptorists was the orthodox Willem van Rossum, at the time rector in the old Wittem monastery. Van Rossum and Kronenburg had both attended the diocesan minor seminary at Kuilenburg, and were considered close friends. However, while Kronenburg tried to preserve the privileges and traditions of the Dutch province, Van Rossum was more in favor of the uniform line decreed by the General Chapter, which in his opinion, being the highest authority within the congregation, had to be strictly observed. Whenever he thought that Kronenburg deviated from that line, Van Rossum by his conscience felt obliged to send long letters of complaint to Rome. For Kronenburg this was an awkward situation and he decided to send Van Rossum to Brazil. This decision, however, was foiled by Petrus Oomen¹⁵ and Raus, who at the end of 1895 transferred Van Rossum to Rome.

Nevertheless, other Dutch Redemptorists complained to the General Council as well. Eventually, this left Raus no other choice than to severely warn and admonish the still young and inexperienced provincial, accusing him of not being honest and playing double games. Kronenburg then decided to call it a day: just after he had started his second term as provincial in 1898, he tendered his resignation.¹⁶

Probably, during his visit to Prague in 1895, the Dutch provincial had met the Austrian provincial Franz Němec¹⁷ and had made a good impression, because some days before the election of the new Superior General in 1909, Němec, at that

¹⁵ Petrus Oomen (Breda 1835-Amsterdam 1910), prof. 1857, ord. priest 1860. Successively in Wittem he was lecturer, 1860-1862, prefect of students, 1862-1868, and rector, 1868-1874. From 1874-1887 he was provincial of the Dutch province, consultor to provincial 1887-1891, *consultor generalis* to the Superior General Nicholas Mauron, 1891-1894, procurator general, 1894-1909. Died in Amsterdam in 1910. BOLAND, 268. Oomen was a close friend to Van Rossum, but to Kronenburg as well.

¹⁶ ENK, ADPR, 66: Memorandum on the smoking issue 1894-95 dictated by Jan Kronenburg; *Herinneringen* (Memories). Notes written by Kronenburg in September 1929.

¹⁷ Franz Němec (1850-1922) had been superior of the Austrian province and became the first superior of the new Prague province from 1901-1912. BOLAND, 256.

time superior of the Prague province, paid him a visit. On behalf of the Bohemian and German confreres he asked him a great favor: in the event Kronenburg would be chosen to be the new Superior General, would he then accept his election?¹⁸ Again Kronenburg was in shock, but after having given the idea some thought, answered positively, feeling that whenever he was chosen in a regular way, he could not decline. The Bohemian and German Redemptorists, apparently looking for an alternative, were satisfied by this response. Kronenburg, however, entered the Chapter on the first of May with considerable anxiety.

Twenty-six ballots

In the first ballot Willem van Rossum obtained almost the majority of the votes, twenty-six, followed closely by Joseph Schwarz,¹⁹ with twenty-one votes. Kronenburg got four votes, Murray two, Němec and Brors both one. To be elected, one had to obtain two-thirds of the total number of votes. Since there were fifty-five voting members, with thirty-seven votes one would win the election.²⁰ In the succeeding ballots Van Rossum got close to this decisive number, obtaining thirty votes in the third, fourth and fifth ballot, but the supporters of Schwarz, giving him twenty-one or twenty-two votes, did not give in. The few other votes were shared by Kronenburg and Němec.

After the seventh ballot the support for Willem van Rossum showed a minor decrease, varying between twenty-four and twenty-six votes up to the fourteenth ballot. On the other hand,

¹⁸ If Němec meant both German provinces, this accounted for nine votes. For the German superior province the Chapter was attended by Josephus Stummer, Aloysius Uhl and Georgius Baumgartner, for the Lower German province by Adolphus Brors, Joannes Spooos and Andreas Hellbach, for the Prague province by Němec, Theophilus Pasur and Augustinus Benda. *Acta integra Capituli Generalis XI*, 10-13.

¹⁹ Joseph Schwarz (New Orleans 1849-Rome 1927) was provincial of the St. Louis province, USA, from 1893-1894. In 1894 he was elected consultor to Matthias Raus. After the election of 1909 he became *procurator generalis* under Patrick Murray. BOLAND, 357-358.

²⁰ *Acta integra Capituli Generalis XI*, 10. Before the start of the elections the assembly had decided that one needed thirty-seven instead of thirty-six votes.

for Schwarz these ballots developed dramatically, declining gradually from twenty-two in the seventh to only one vote in the thirteenth ballot and totally disappearing in the fourteenth round.

Apparently, the adherents of Schwarz had come to the conclusion that their candidate did not stand a chance, and refusing to support Van Rossum, they had to look for somebody else. In the seventh ballot a new name appeared among the nominees, the Lyon provincial Jean Baptiste Favre.²¹ In the ballots to follow Murray and Favre gradually stole Schwarz's previous votes away, so in the eleventh ballot next to Van Rossum's twenty-six votes, Murray got sixteen, Favre eight and Schwarz five. As the voters probably concluded that this was not going to work either, in ballot number twelve Kronenburg got in again, receiving four votes.

At this stage Murray, Favre and Schwarz apparently were considered candidates without prospect for election, while Kronenburg seems to have been more acceptable, for in the thirteenth ballot he suddenly got ten votes and, in the next ballot, twenty votes. Eventually, in the fifteenth ballot he outran his old schoolmate with twenty-five votes, leaving Van Rossum with twenty-one votes, while Murray got four, Favre one and three less significant candidates²² one or two votes. In the succeeding rounds the voting involved only Kronenburg and Van Rossum as serious candidates. For in the twenty-first ballot twenty-eight votes went to Kronenburg, with twenty-five going to Van Rossum. Only Murray had managed to get two votes as well.

By now, the election of the new Superior General seemed to have reached total deadlock. The approximately twenty-five adherents of Van Rossum refused to let him down, and the opposing bloc, of equal size, refused to vote *for* him. In an inter-

²¹ *Acta integra Capituli Generalis XI*, 11. Jean Baptiste Favre (Lyon 1864-Toulouse 1943) was elected consultor and admonitor to Patrick Murray in 1909. BOLAND, 126.

²² These were the Spanish provincial Omer Allet, the Baltimore provincial William Lücking (also spelled as Licking) and the Parish provincial Desiré Castelain. With regard to Castelain it is of interest to mention that he was a member of the integrist organization La Sapinière of Umberto Benigni. Louis VEREECKE, *Les Rédemptoristes et le mouvement intégriste au début du XXe siècle*, in *SHSCR* 20 (1972) 393-410; here 403-404.

mission Ernest Dubois²³ addressed Kronenburg, telling him that he had to make sure that the election should come to an end that day. If not, some Vatican official certainly would come and ask why they had not yet reached a conclusion. Kronenburg kept aloof, answering that he could do nothing about it and, moreover, he did not want to interfere.

Finally, in the twenty-second ballot, after an interruption of a quarter of an hour,²⁴ – it is likely that during this interval the voting members in one way or another were influenced – the firm bloc around Van Rossum began to crumble. While Kronenburg still obtained twenty-eight votes, Van Rossum only got thirteen; both Murray and Allet got five votes, and Castelain, Schwarz, Brors and the Belgian provincial Camillus Van de Steene each got one.

This was an important turning-point. Kronenburg relates that by now he got so nervous that he no longer was able to take notes. Ter Haar, sitting next to him, took over the recording of the subsequent results of the ballots, while continuously putting courage into Kronenburg: “Cheer up, trust God!” In the meantime, the more votes Kronenburg received, the more agitated Johannes Lohmeijer got, finally uttering to Kronenburg that he would ask Matthias Raus to burn all the letters [of complaint] about Kronenburg that were sent to Rome in the 1890s.

However, despite the declining support for Van Rossum, Kronenburg did not obtain the required number of votes. Apparently, the bloc that had supported Van Rossum, refused to support Kronenburg. In the twenty-third ballot Kronenburg got twenty-nine votes, which proved to be his maximum. Van Rossum got ten, but at this moment Patrick Murray returned on the scene, coming in with eight votes, strengthening in the next ballot up to fifteen votes (Van Rossum having seven) and twenty-

²³ Ernest Dubois (Verviers 1835-Jette 1911) was ordained priest in Wittem in 1862. Dubois and Van Rossum knew each other well: Dubois was the prefect of students in Wittem when Willem van Rossum was a student at the Studendate from 1874-1880. Later Dubois was appointed superior of the Belgian province from 1892-1894 and elected *consultor generalis* to Matthias Raus from 1894-1909. BOLAND, 118.

²⁴ AGHR, *XVI Cap. Gen. 1909*: P. Reuss. Note sul Capit. Gen. 1909.

one votes in the twenty-fifth round (Van Rossum having five). But at this moment Murray still trailed Kronenburg who had received twenty-six votes.

In this almost hopeless situation the German Redemptorists, sitting at the other side of the room, looked at Kronenburg, motioning to him to give them a clue as to how to proceed. At this point Kronenburg interfered after all: nodding his head towards Murray's back, who was sitting in front of him, he suggested the Germans to vote for the Irish candidate. They understood the message and so at last the voting came to an end – “*Deo gratias et Mariae*” as Kronenburg concluded – with the election of Patrick Murray as the successor of Matthias Raus in the twenty-sixth ballot. The distribution of the votes as recorded in the *Acta integra Capituli Generalis XI* is mentioned at the beginning of this article.

3. – REFLECTIONS ON THE 1909 CHAPTER

Probably on the basis of Kronenburg's report, Redemptorist historiography suggests that the election was a race between Van Rossum and Kronenburg and that eventually Murray emerged as the compromise candidate.²⁵ However, if we look closely at the voting process, this suggestion proves to be incorrect: the fundamental issue of the 1909 election was not choosing between Van Rossum and Kronenburg, but *to be with or against Van Rossum*. Three succeeding candidates were placed opposite of Van Rossum: first Schwarz, then Kronenburg, and eventually Murray.²⁶ The support of Van Rossum was strong, but so was the resistance. We now proceed to search for possible reasons for both stances.

Van Rossum as Pius X's candidate

Assuming the correctness of Kronenburg's observation that Willem van Rossum was the only candidate of Raus and most of

²⁵ See FN 6 above.

²⁶ It is worth mentioning that the four most promising candidates at this election were from the rather young and flourishing provinces in the United States of America, the Netherlands and Ireland.

his consultors for the office of Superior General – and thus far we have no reason to doubt its reliability – we must ask ourselves how Van Rossum had reached his position as the strong favorite. In this respect the buildup to the Chapter and the resignation of Matthias Raus are of major interest.

Raus had been elected Superior General at the Chapter of 1894, after having been assigned as vicar general by his predecessor Nicholas Mauron just before he died in the summer of 1893.²⁷ Mauron, who had been Superior General for almost forty years since 1855, was an autocratic type, and in 1894 the Redemptorists were looking for a leader who would tend more to shared decision making.²⁸ They chose Matthias Raus. In 1908, after fifteen years of administrating the Redemptorist congregation, at the age of almost eighty, Raus chose to resign. A circular letter with this message dated 21 June, 1908, was spread within the congregation and a date was fixed for a General Chapter. The curial Congregation of the Religious agreed with the course of events.²⁹

As has already been revealed by Giuseppe Orlandi in an article in *Spicilegium Historicum*, Raus' consultors were not displeased with his resignation.³⁰ On the contrary, fearing that his resigning – the Superior General was elected for life – would not be accepted by the majority of the voting members out of sheer loyalty and tradition, or that they would simply decide to appoint a vicar general to support the weakening Raus, they addressed themselves in a secret letter to Pope Pius X. In this letter of 7 August 1908, signed by Ernesto Bresciani, Ernest Dubois, Joseph Schwarz and John Magnier,³¹ the consultors stressed the

²⁷ Nicholas Mauron (b. Sankt Silvester, Fribourg, Switzerland, Jan. 7, 1818; d. Rome, July 13, 1893), Superior General of the Redemptorist Congregation from 1855 until 1893. He saw his Congregation increase in these years from some five hundred members to more than three thousand. BOLAND, 230-231.

²⁸ DE MEULEMEESTER, *Histoire*, 166-167, 188.

²⁹ *Acta integra Capituli Generalis XI*, IX-XV.

³⁰ Giuseppe ORLANDI, *I Redentoristi nell'archivio particolare di Pio X. A proposito dell'Inventario di Alejandro M. Diéguez*, in *SHCSR* 52 (2004) 513-535. See also Alejandro M. DIÉGUEZ, *L'Archivio particolare di Pio X. Cenni storici e Inventario*, Città del Vaticano, Archivio Segreto Vaticano 2003, 64-65.

³¹ Ernesto Bresciani (Finale 1838-Rome 1919) and the Irish John Magnier

necessity for the congregation to have a much younger and more capable leader and administrator. They held the opinion that Raus, although pious, humble, charitable and edifying, did not stand up to the required responsibilities that were part of the job. He failed in taking the initiative, and what was worse, in dexterity and firmness in the spiritual and temporal administration of the congregation. How little faith they had in Raus can be deduced from their bold request that Raus be definitively removed from office and even be removed from Rome. Their wording in Italian was “*il ritiro totale dal governo e l’allontanamento da Roma.*”³² In short, while the Chapter of 1894 had opted for a less rigid leader than Mauron had been, these consultors in 1908 once more asked for a strong leader.

The consultors actually entreated Pius X to confirm the Superior General’s resignation in an audience at Raus’ golden anniversary of ordination (8 August 1908), which would make it almost impossible for the voting members of the Chapter not to accept the resignation. They also asked the Pope to propose that the election might take place right at the start of the Chapter, with the result that not Raus but the new Superior General would preside at the meetings.³³ Finally, which is fascinating as well, they asked the Pope to keep their request a secret, for the two other consultors, F.X. Reuss and K. Dilgskron, due to their indiscretion, had not been consulted.³⁴

Apparently at the time, though in a secret request, it was not unusual for the Redemptorists to seek the direct involvement of the Pope. Ever since the headquarters of the congregation had been moved to Rome in 1855 and the Redemptorists had proven themselves to be strong supporters of papal infallibility in 1871, the congregation was considered to be especially devoted to the

(1842-1914) were consultors to Matthias Raus from 1894-1909. BOLAND, 50, 218.

³² A. DIÉGUEZ, *L’Archivio particolare di Pio X*, 64-65. Indeed, Raus retreated to Bischenberg. In 1911, Murray gave him permission to visit Rome and Pagani once more, for which Raus thanked him exhaustively. Rome, *AGHR* LIII, Raus Litt. ante et post generalatum, M. Raus to P. Murray, 30 Jan. 1912.

³³ G. ORLANDI, *I Redentoristi nell’archivio particolare di Pio X*, 528-530.

³⁴ Petrus Oomen, who since 1894 was *procurator generalis* and strictly speaking not a member of the General Council, is not mentioned.

papacy.³⁵ Pius X let Bresciani know that he had received the message and that the Redemptorists should not worry.³⁶

Is it daring to conclude that Pius X saw his opportunity to push Willem van Rossum forward as his candidate? Van Rossum had proven his worth as consultor of the Holy Office, especially with regard to the Pope's anti-modernist policy, as is amply shown by Otto Weiss.³⁷ Van Rossum was also respected as one of the fellow workers of Cardinal Pietro Gasparri at the huge project of the codification of canon law.³⁸ Several colleagues of Van Rossum at this project seem to have been "rewarded with a generalate" for their contribution: the German Franz Xavier Wernz became the Superior General of the Jesuits (1906-1914) and the Dutch Bernardinus Klumper the General Minister of the Franciscan order (1921-1927).

At the time the consultors' request reached the Pope, in the beginning of August 1908, Van Rossum, together with his most pious confrere Antonio Losito³⁹ of the Naples province, was just in the middle of a most secret and mysterious mission: the visitation of the famous Abbey of Montevergine, established by Saint William of Vercelli in the early twelfth century. Already in the first week of June, Pius X had sent them on this mission. It was of such an importance, that the visitators would be in need of "much prudence, much wisdom, much confidence in God and many prayers."⁴⁰

What their delicate mission of reform exactly included is unknown, obviously, but some notes of Van Rossum suggest that

³⁵ Jean BECO, *Les cent cinquante ans de la maison 'Sant'Alfonso' à Rome*, in *SHCSR* 54 (2006) 3-36, here 11-12; A. SAMPERS, *Congregatio SSmi Redemptoris et Concilium Vaticanum I*, in *SHCSR* 10 (1962) 424-449, here 439.

³⁶ G. ORLANDI, *I Redentoristi nell'archivio particolare di Pio X*, 531.

³⁷ Otto WEISS, *Der Glaubenswächter van Rossum*, in *SHCSR* 58 (2010) 85-138.

³⁸ Anna Luisa CASIRAGHI, *The Proceedings of the Codification of Canon Law and the Contribution of Willem van Rossum*, in *Life with a Mission*, 82-95.

³⁹ Antonio Maria Losito (Canosa 1838-Pagani 1917), Italian Redemptorist, who has been put forward for beatification. BOLAND, 209.

⁴⁰ AGHR, *Correspondence of G. van Rossum Wittem Praef. et Rector with the Generalate 1886-1895 (Corr.VR with Generalate): A. Losito and W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Pagani, 7.6.1908*: "quanta prudenza, quanta sagesza, quanta confidenza in Dio e quante preghiere."

the assignment was related to the noviciate and the training of the monks.⁴¹ It is quite revealing that in the middle of this mission the abbot, bishop Vittore-Maria Corvaia, OSB, who had been in office since 1884, resigned on July 12, 1908. In September of that year he was succeeded by Carlo Gregorio Maria Grasso.⁴²

Van Rossum, who originally had thought that the mission would last only several weeks, remained three-and-a-half months in the abbey. It was a real sacrifice to him, if only because he missed the annual festivities on August 2, the feast of St. Alphonsus, and the golden anniversary of ordination of his Superior General. There were several moments when he was hoping to have papal permission to leave the abbey and attend these festivities. And, indeed, his companion, Father Losito did receive such permission. But in each instance special Vatican orders arrived (even in the middle of the night) stating that Van Rossum had to remain at Montevergine. In a letter to Raus he frankly expressed his annoyance: "Always again Montevergine; Montevergine endlessly! (...) It is really hard; but we must generously say with Saint Alphonsus: The will of the Pope is the will of God!"⁴³ Finally, on September 24, 1908, the visitators returned in the Holy City. Highly pleased with the success of the mission, Pius X received the two Redemptorists immediately in a private audience, embracing them in such a warm and affectionate way that it made an indelible impression on Van Rossum.⁴⁴

It is clear that at this moment, the relationship between Pius X and Van Rossum was most cordial. The hypothesis that Van Rossum was put forward as Pius X's candidate, whom he had just groomed for the job, would explain why Van Rossum, not a

⁴¹ AGHR, "Box file with correspondence of Van Rossum sent from ADPR to Rome," 2. "Losito-Montevergine," W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Montevergine, 31.7.1908 (draft).

⁴² <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmver.html>.

⁴³ AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Montevergine, 15.9.1908: "Encore toujours Montevergine; Montevergine sans fin! (...) C'est bien dur; mais nous voulons dire généreusement avec Saint Alphonse: Volonté du Pape, volonté de Dieu!"

⁴⁴ *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van Zwolle's grooten kardinaal. Overdruk uit het Overijselsch dagblad*, Zwolle 1932, 36-44; AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: A. Losito and W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Rome, 24.9.1908.

voting member of the Chapter, gained so much support. It would also explain why Matthias Raus and most of his consultors considered him the only candidate and were not inclined to abandon their support, since it would affect their relation with the Pope. The expected interference of the Vatican, announced by Dubois as recorded by Kronenburg, proves the Pope's interest in the election process.

However, the opposition to Van Rossum proved to be insurmountable. Could the papal support also be the key to understand why Van Rossum in the end was *not* chosen by his confreres?

Against Van Rossum

As for the reason why an essential part of the voting members refused to vote for Van Rossum, we are actually groping in the dark. Kronenburg's report does not contain a clue, which in itself is not that strange since it mainly is a vindication of his honor, aiming at his own rehabilitation after the above mentioned dramatic events of 1898. Therefore, he focuses on the reasons why *he* was not elected Superior General. On the day of the election, during one of the intervals, he heard one of his confreres say out loud that he would never vote for a dismissed provincial. The instantaneous objection of Father Ter Haar that Kronenburg was not dismissed but had resigned, had made no difference. Kronenburg also learned after the election that some voting members considered him a weakling, not apt to stick to the rule and constitutions of the Redemptorists. After the election, Favre would have told Kronenburg that, if he had known the whole story of 1898, he and at least five others (the French provinces?) would have voted for him. For Kronenburg the most convincing rehabilitation of his damaged reputation were the words of the new Superior General Patrick Murray, who, according to Kronenburg, in a private meeting had confessed that on most of the ballots he had voted for Kronenburg.

However, it is not the fact that Kronenburg was not chosen which is puzzling, but that he was a candidate at all. In 1909, he was neither a provincial superior nor a *consultor generalis* as the other candidates (apart from Van Rossum) were. He had been a provincial superior in the past, but the 1898 drama proved that his administration had not been a great success. Compared to

Van Rossum, he had shown a more diplomatic and flexible policy, which might have impressed Nĕmec, but one wonders if that alone could explain his candidacy, even if we add his skillful administration of the minor seminary (“juvenate”) of the Dutch Redemptorists in Roermond.⁴⁵

Van Rossum had never been a provincial superior, although as rector of the Wittem house he had shown himself a good organizer. He was a rigid man and favored central control of the congregation’s administrative policies, which, since the consultant’s request asked for a strong leader, must have been a point in his favor. In the eyes of those wanting a more lenient regime, as perhaps the German and Bohemian confreres did, Van Rossum’s rigidity was a liability. But, given that he had the support of the outgoing Superior General, the General Council, and even Pius X, one must conclude that his rigid style was not the only cause of strong resistance to his candidacy. And this opposition to Van Rossum did not seem to be a personal hostility, for his subsequent election as consultant general (representing the Belgian and Dutch provinces), was by a huge majority – he got forty-nine votes, with Kronenburg getting five, and Oomen only one.⁴⁶

Looking once more at the private correspondence of Pius X at the time, we find one other remarkable letter that might be a clue to the enigma of the non-election of Van Rossum. On the first of November, 1908, Matthias Raus, as was requested by the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*, wrote a letter to the Pope, stating that there were no modernist tendencies to be found within the Redemptorist congregation.⁴⁷ The only (unnamed) lecturer who had erred in this respect, had died. In their training and

⁴⁵ There is a possibility that Petrus Oomen brought up the name of Kronenburg as an alternative to Van Rossum to satisfy the Dutch province. At the start of 1909 Oomen fell seriously ill. The Chronicles of the General House mention that one feared for his life on 14 March 1909 and that an altar was erected in his room, at which Father Van Rossum celebrated Holy Mass on Friday 19.3.1909. However, he did attend the General Chapter and the election day. AGHR, DG vol. II 4, 237-239; *Acta integra Capituli Generalis XI*, 10. After the Chapter he went to Amsterdam, where he died in 1910.

⁴⁶ ENK, ADPR, 8124: “Herinneringen over en aan den stemmingsdag v.h. Kap. van 1909.”

⁴⁷ G. ORLANDI, *I Redentoristi nell’archivio particolare di Pio X*, 532-533.

study, the Redemptorists used only methods that were approved of by the ecclesiastical authorities. With regard to moral theology, the teachings of Alphonsus de Liguori in the approved editions of Clemens Marc, Joseph Aertnijs and Anton Konings were used, and in the field of dogmatic theology the manual of Jean Herrmann was their guide. Raus added that a new edition had just been launched, which not only comprised a list with errors of Anglicans, Lutherans etc., as in the preceding edition, but a list of modernist errors as well.

As Van Rossum had been studying the dogmatic teachings of Alphonsus since the 1880s, and had examined the work of Herrmann already under Mauron, without any doubt he must have been directly involved in this new edition.⁴⁸ Not only because he had done so before, but because at the Holy Office, “modernist errors” were his core business since he had been the first to expose Alfred Loisy’s “errors” in 1901. Taking into account Van Rossum’s involvement in the preparation of *Lamentabili sane exitu* (1907) and *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907), we are facing here the consequences of the anti-modernist activities, which, in the years to come, would oblige all Catholic lecturers and priests to submit to the “anti-modernist oath” formulated by Louis Billot SJ and Van Rossum as consultants of the Holy Office in 1910.⁴⁹ Van Rossum, rightful or not, was considered a friend of the anti-modernist bloc around Umberto Benigni, who would establish his “La Sapinière” in 1909.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ V. POELS, “A desire to become what they were”, 200-212.

⁴⁹ Claus ARNOLD – Giacomo LOSITO (eds), *Lamentabili sane exitu* (1907). *Les documents préparatoires du Saint Office*, Rome 2011, 359-395; O. WEISS, *Der Glaubenswächter van Rossum*, 94-98; 111-117. Weiss mentions the preparation of a document by Van Rossum and his fellow consultant Domenico Palmieri SJ which had the intention to protect the Catholic youth from erroneous teachings, for instance by dismissing all teachers who taught or who were suspected of teaching errors (September 30, 1907). The document could be related to the proposed disciplinary measures in *Pascendi dominici gregis*. On the anti-modernist oath see Judith SCHEPERS, “So viel und so rasch wie in der Modernisten-Verfolgung hat die Kurie lange nicht gearbeitet...’ Zur kurialen Interpretation des Antimodernisteneides”, in Hubert WOLF, Judith SCHEPERS (Hgg.), “In wilder zügelloser Jagd nach Neuem.” *100 Jahre Modernismus und Antimodernismus in der katholischen Kirche*, Paderborn 2009, 337-367.

⁵⁰ Émile POULAT, *Intégrisme et catholicisme intégral. Un réseau secret in-*

Is it possible that a vital part of the Redemptorists refused to vote for Van Rossum, simply because they did not want to have a Superior General who was known for his anti-modernist ideas, thus risking an anti-modernist campaign within their own walls?

Post scriptum

It is told that, when Pius X learned that Van Rossum was not elected, the Pope replied that he would give him another, a much better position; and in fact Pius created Van Rossum a cardinal in 1911. Kronenburg ended his report with the remark that he and Father, later Cardinal, Van Rossum always remained good friends. The day after the election, while standing in front of a window cordially talking and laughing together, Matthias Raus passed them and commented: "Look upon these two, yesterday antagonists, cheerfully talking together." "Well," Kronenburg had replied, "we have always been good friends."⁵¹ Apparently, Van Rossum's secret letters of complaint to Rome had not bred bad blood with Kronenburg, nor had the one-way ticket to Brazil caused long-lasting ill feelings with Van Rossum. But this, clearly, did not mean that they would vote for each other at the General Chapter.

Looking at Van Rossum's loyal attitude as *consultor generalis* to the new Superior General Patrick Murray in the years 1909-1911 and his good relations with the Redemptorist congregation in general in the years thereafter, it seems that Van Rossum got over his non-election.⁵² As indeed he should have, if only because it opened the way to his cardinalate and to one of the highest positions within the Catholic Church: prefect of Propaganda Fide (1918-1932).

ternational antimoderniste: La "Sapinière" (1909-1921), Tournai 1969, 329-330; L. VEREECKE, *Les Rédemptoristes et le mouvement intégriste*, 399-402, mentions that the position of Van Rossum as pro or contra Benigni is ambiguous.

⁵¹ ENK, ADPR 8124: *Herinneringen over en aan den stemmingsdag v.h. Kap. van 1909*, 6.

⁵² AGHR, [L], Correspondence with the Curia, 13.6.1909. Pius X granted several indulgences to the Redemptorists by signing a document in Van Rossum's hand.

SUMMARY

In 1909 the Redemptorists had to choose a new Superior General because Matthias Raus, being old and feeble, had announced his resignation the previous summer. After his announcement, in secret, four out of six general consultors wrote a letter to Pope Pius X, asking him to interfere in the election process. They wanted to have a strong candidate and not such a weak administrator as Raus had been. It seems that Pius X then pushed forward Willem van Rossum, in whom he confided as is shown by his sending him on several secret missions. Both men shared orthodox and anti-modernist ideas. The Dutch Redemptorist Jan Kronenburg, one of the voting members, recorded that when he arrived in Rome, Raus and most of his consultors told him that for them there was only one candidate: Willem van Rossum. A part of the voting members, however, refused to take this stance, probably because they did not want to have an anti-modernist Superior General. With two firm blocks, the General Chapter promised to become a most thrilling event. Eventually, it took twenty-six ballots on the first of May, 1909, to reach a final decision in which Patrick Murray emerged as the compromise candidate.

RÉSUMÉ

En 1909 les Rédemptoristes eurent à se choisir un nouveau Supérieur Général car le Père Mathias Raus, Recteur Majeur du moment, ne se sentant plus capable de continuer sa tâche, l'été précédent avait annoncé son désir de se démettre. Ceci connu, quatre des six Consultants Généraux écrivirent en secret au Pape Pie X pour lui demander d'intervenir dans le processus électoral. Ils voulaient un candidat fort, et non plus cette faible administration du temps de Raus. Il semble que Pie IX poussa en avant le nom de van Rossum en qui il avait confiance comme le montre le fait qu'il l'ait envoyé dans plusieurs missions secrètes. Les deux hommes partageaient les mêmes idées, orthodoxes et anti-modernistes. Le Rédemptoriste Jan Kronenburg, membre du corps électoral, se souvint qu'à son arrivée à Rome, la plupart des Consultants lui dirent que, selon eux, il n'y avait qu'un seul candidat valable: Willem van Rossum. Cependant, une partie des votants refusèrent cette option, probablement parce qu'ils ne voulaient pas d'un Supérieur Général anti-moderniste. Face à ces deux blocs, le Chapitre Général promettait d'être agité. En effet il fallut vingt-six tours de scrutin pour atteindre la décision finale le 1^{er} mai 1909 lorsqu'émergea une figure de compromis en la personne de l'Irlandais Patrick Murray.