

## “Thus Would We Elect Pope Ratzinger”

by *Lucio Brunelli*

1. “Sunday April 17. I checked into my room at the Casa Santa Marta in the afternoon. Setting down my bags, I attempted to open the Persian blinds, because the room was dark. I was unable to do so. One of my brothers addressed the housekeeping sisters about the problem, thinking it a technical problem. They explained to him that the blinds had been sealed. Seclusion of the conclave... A new experience for almost all of us. Out of 115 cardinals, have previously participated in the election of a pope.” So begins the diary of an influential cardinal who has recorded not only his overall impressions but also the results of the four votes that Benedict XVI took to office. Obviously we cannot reveal the author: we came into possession of the document thanks to a relationship of trust that has developed over the years.

Until now very few leaks have filtered out on the course of the conclave that chose John Paul II’s successor. Those that have emerged have been contradictory, for example on the actual role played by Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini. Finally it is possible to attempt the first complete reconstruction of the 24 concealed hours that gave the Catholic Church its 265<sup>th</sup> pontiff. A unedited picture emerges of the election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. On the third vote, the minority, reluctant to vote for the former prefect of the faith, formed a bloc over the Argentine cardinal, Jorge Maria Bergoglio, reaching 40 votes: too few to elect the first Latin American pope in history, but sufficient to prevent reaching the 77 votes required to elect the pope ( $115 - 40 = 75$ ). “The result of the conclave, for a few hours, after the third vote on Tuesday morning, April 19<sup>th</sup>, seemed to remain open.”

But before providing the background of the conclave, a brief word on the nature and reliability of the information on which this reconstruction is based. How precise can an account of the votes based on the memory of the participants be?

At the beginning of each vote, a ballot is distributed to each of the 115 cardinals as well as a sheet of paper containing the names of all the contenders. Following each vote, both are returned and placed in the old cast-iron stove of the Sistine Chapel. Many cardinals, however (including the author of this diary), upon returning to the Casa Santa Marta, immediately record the result of the vote.

And the obligation of secrecy? Our sources were conscious of violating at least in part an assumed commitment. If they have agreed to anonymously make this research possible, it is because they believed in the historical rather than scandalous intention of this work. The imposition of secrecy by the popes was intended to protect the freedom of the conclave, as any news released during or before the votes, with the “polling stations” still open, could influence successive rounds of voting. We believe a violation of secrecy *post factum* to be less grave. Here there is no possibility of altering what has already passed into history.

2. “Monday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 4:33 PM. The slow procession of cardinals from the Hall of Benedictions begins to move towards the Sistine Chapel, through the Sala Regia. A few minutes and here we are in the presence of Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*. The 115 cardinals—the fullest conclave in modern history!—arrange themselves at six great tables at the sides of the chapel. We intone the *Veni Creator Spiritus*; the emotion is palpable.”

The cardinal dean, Joseph Ratzinger, pronounces the solemn oath in everyone’s name: “Each and every voting cardinal present at this election of the Supreme Pontiff promises, obliges himself and swears to faithfully and scrupulously observe all the prescriptions contained in the Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, *Universi Dominici Gregis*, issued on February 22, 1996. Likewise, we swear that whoever of us, through divine disposition, is elected Roman Pontiff will undertake to faithfully and strenuously carry out the spiritual and temporal laws, as well as to defend the liberty of the Holy See. Above all we promise, oblige ourselves and swear to observe with maximum fidelity, among clergy or laymen, the secret of all that which concerns the election of the roman pontiff, and which occurs in the place of the election, concerning directly or indirectly the voting; not to violate in any way this secret either during or after the election of the new Pontiff, unless given explicit authorization by that same Pontiff; not to offer support or favor to any interference, opposition or any other form of intervention with which secular or other authorities wished to involve themselves in the election of the Roman Pontiff.”

After the solemn oath pronounced by Dean Ratzinger, each cardinal, according to the order of precedence (first bishop cardinals, then presbyter cardinals, finally deacon cardinals), rests his hand on the Gospels and repeats the abbreviated formula: “I promise, oblige myself and swear. Thus God helps me and these holy Gospels that I touch with my hand.” The first and last to swear are two Italian cardinals: Angelo Sodano, vice dean of the sacred college and Attilio Nicora.

It is 5:24 when the master of the pontific liturgical celebrations, Monsignor Piero Marini, murmurs the *extra omnes*. The cameras of the Central Vatican Television are turned off. Besides the voting cardinals, only Monsignor Marini and the ecclesiast in charge of holding the last meditation, Tomas Spidlik (a cardinal over eighty years old), remain. The meditation concludes and they exit from the Chapel.

Outside, for about two hours, no more information leaks. The numerous accredited journalists are not allowed to know if the cardinals are proceeding with the first vote or if they have decided to postpone it for the following morning. Both these options had been announced as possible, Saturday April 16<sup>th</sup>, in a briefing of the director of the Vatican press room, Joaquin Navarro Valls. But many think that the long ceremony will cause the vote to be postponed. “In reality”, notes our cardinal in his diary, “ it wasn’t so late. And no cardinal wants to needlessly prolong the conclave. The majority of those present is favorable to voting right away. It is about 6.”

The ballots are distributed. They are rectangular, made to be folded in two; the upper half bears the script *Eligo in Summo Pontifice*, in the lower half there is a space to write the name of one’s choice.

Next is the choosing among the cardinals of three counters, three proof-checkers and three in charge of collecting the votes from the infirm, called *infirmarii*. “These last, however, will remain unoccupied. All the 115 electors were able to reach the Sistine Chapel, even Cardinal Baum, the one in the most precarious position of health: in the other case, the *infirmarii* would have gone to the Casa Santa Marta to collect the votes of their sick brothers in a special urn.”

Everything is now ready to begin the first vote. "According to the same order of precedence, the cardinals rise one by one from their seats holding the ballot in a raised hand, proceed towards the altar." Before depositing the ballot in the urn, each cardinal pronounces again, in a loud voice, a new oath: "I call to witness Christ our Lord, who will guide me, that my vote is given to he who, according to God, I believe should be elected." After that, each cardinal deposits their ballot in the urn. The urns are silver and bronze plated, made *ex novo* for this conclave. There are three: in the first the ballots are inserted at the moment of the vote; the second is designed to collect the vote of the infirmed cardinals, should there be any; in the third the ballots are placed after being examined.

It is a few minutes past 7 when the last cardinal, the Italian, Nicora, returns to his seat after voting. The counting of the ballots may begin, to ascertain that the number of ballots matches the number of participants. The first counter shakes the urn a few times. Then he pulls out a ballot and shows it to all present before placing it in the third urn. Everything according to the rules: 115 voters, 115 ballots.

And now the moment they have been waiting for: the counting of the votes. Even here, the Wojtyla's "manual" for the conclave is followed to the letter. The first counter takes the ballot, opens it, checks the name printed there and passes it to the third counter who reads it aloud in a clear voice. At the moment in which each name is read, the counter perforates each ballot with a pin, at the point where the word *Eligo* is printed, and places it in a file with the others. This archaic procedure guarantees the conservation of the ballots and prevents tampering. "This procedure may appear excessive, involving voters who are, at least on paper, God-fearing and trustworthy. The Church is not by nature a parliamentary institution but when it decides to follow democratic-electoral practice, it does so with a scrupulousness, a cult of legality, which does not allow privileges or exceptions."

But the moment of truth has arrived. The first vote is finished. In his diary, our source will record only those votes that went to the figures with the greatest chances, ignoring numerous dispersed votes (about thirty):

### **The voting, Monday April 18<sup>th</sup>, 6:00pm**

Joseph Ratzinger, dean of the Sacred College	47
Jorge Mario Bergoglio, archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina	10
Carlo Maria Martini, archbishop emeritus of Milan	9
Camillo Ruini, former apostolic vicar of His Holiness, for the diocese of Rome	6
Angelo Sodano, former secretary for the Vatican state	4
Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras	3
Dionigi Tettamanzi, archbishop of Milan	2

The first vote seems to confirm the most credited predictions of the evening. The conclave opens with a unique "organized" candidature, able to count on a bloc of predefined votes, that of Cardinal Ratzinger. The predictions of the Vatican's most informed observers oscillated between thirty and fifty cotes already certain for the former prefect of the Congregation for the doctrine of the faith. In fact, he obtained 47 of them. An excellent base of departure, but Ratzinger still lacks 30 votes to reach the two thirds needed for election.

Many other hypotheses have instead backed Cardinal Martini. Various media outlets have imagined a head to head in the first vote between the two eminent personalities and some (in the following days) will maintain that Martini had actually surpassed Ratzinger in the first vote. "The difference however was clear. It is necessary to remember that while the Bavarian cardinal's nomination was real, the name of the Italian cardinal was put forth primarily as a "banner candidate", able to gather and unite a part of

the “dissent” against Ratzinger. But Cardinal Martini never felt himself to be truly likely to become pope and not only for his known health problems.”

The true surprise of the first vote is the Argentine Cardinal Bergoglio. He is a Jesuit, like Martini, though the two brothers have not always been in perfect harmony: during the Seventies, at the time of the Arrupe generalship and the fiery debate over liberation theology, Bergoglio had to resign from a position in the Society of Jesus because he did not agree with the line taken by the organization. The archbishop of Buenos Aires has earned himself widespread fame as a man of God, especially in the last few years. “A man of prayer who leads a sober and evangelical lifestyle.” Secure on the doctrinal level, open on the social one, impatient on the pastoral level towards the rigidity shown by certain collaborators of Wojtyla on matters of sexual ethics (“they want to put the whole world in a condom”, he commented to friends on the eve of the conclave). All characteristics that, lacking a true candidate on the “left”, as an alternative to the Ratzinger line, make Bergoglio the man of reference for the entire group of cardinals more reluctant to vote for Ratzinger. “A group whose core is constituted by Karl Lehmann, president of the German Episcopal Conference, and by Godfried Danneels, archbishop of Brussels, who lead a significant group of US and Latin American cardinals besides some within the Roman Curia.”

The handful of votes obtained by Ruini (6) and Sodano (4) must be noted; numerically modest results, but “politically” not without relevance. The supporters of the president of the Italian Episcopal Conference and the outgoing secretary of the Vatican State, both chosen by Wojtyla, did not immediately reverse votes over Ratzinger. This support will carry more weight in the successive votes, when every single vote will become more precious for reaching the necessary quorum for election (77 votes).

But let’s return to the minute by minute chronicle in the Sistine Chapel. “Although the negative result is already clear to everyone, counters and revisers must complete their work. The first making a precise count of the votes that each candidate has received. The second checking both the ballots and the count of the counters to ascertain that they have faithfully and exactly followed their duty.” After painstaking labor, all the materials must be destroyed. Ballots and papers are placed in the stove and burned.

In Saint Peter’s Square, the media army tries in vain for over an hour to predict the result that will emerge from the chimney mounted on the roof of the chapel. Just when some begin to let down their guards, the first blast of smoke rises over the sky above Saint Peter’s. White or black? The uncertainty lasts seconds that seem an eternity to the press agencies. It is 8:24 on April 18<sup>th</sup>.

Up above, in the Sistine Chapel, numerous cardinals linger to assist in the burning of the ballots, an event not to be missed. The major part of the voters (113 out of 115) have never participated in a conclave—a collateral effect of the long reign of John Paul II. There are only two “non-Wojtylan” cardinals participating in the conclave. One is the American ,William Baum, 79 years old, former archbishop of Washington, now on pension, almost blind and confined to a wheelchair. The other is the German Joseph Ratzinger, who is 78 years old but is presented as a man of the future. They were both made cardinals by Paul VI.

But now it has truly grown late and is time to return to the Santa Marta. Six minibuses, 15-20 places each, are ready to take the cardinals to the new official residence of the conclave. Until 1978, the cardinals were lodged in cells in the apostolic building. The conclave of 2005 will be remembered also for this novelty. The new residence is a small palace in front of the Vatican station.

Since 1996 Santa Marta has functioned as the most exclusive hotel in the world, reserved only for a small circle of ecclesiastical residents. It was the Venezuelan cardinal, Rosario Castillo Lara, in the early Nineties, when he was titular head of the most important economic offices of the Holy See, who proposed restructuring the old Santa Marta hospice to transform it into a hotel that could host the participants of the conclave. He did not have the courage, however, to mention the word conclave: it seemed an evil one, with the Pope alive and happily regnant. He spoke to the Polish Secretary of the Pope, Don Stanislao, and Wojtyla approved the project.

3. Monday evening, dinner is at 8:30. "The isolation is truly total. Television, radio and journals are inaccessible. Telephones and cell phones are blocked. But one can speak. People converse around the tables, exchanging impressions on the first vote. Other discussions, with maximum discretion, take place after dinner in the chambers. Small groups, 2-3 persons, there are no big gatherings. As in all hotels, smoking is prohibited. The Portuguese cardinal, Jose Policarpo da Cruz, famed inveterate smoker, cannot resist and escapes out into the open to light himself a good cigar."

In these few hours, with great secrecy, various strategies for the following morning are taking shape. Ratzinger's supporters are concentrating on the vast bloc of uncertain. The friends of Cardinal Ruini make it known that their little group (6) will reverse itself in Ratzinger's favor. On the opposing front, those who contest the Ratzinger's election are coalescing around Bergoglio. The cardinals that voted for Martini convince themselves to bet on the archbishop of Buenos Aires. He would be the first Latin American pope, and surely at least a part of the 20 cardinals from Latin America support him. A part. It is known to all, in fact, that at least two cardinals from the same continent are strongly with Ratzinger: the Columbian Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, Vatican minister for the family, staunch adversary of liberation theology, and the Chilean Jorge Arturo Medina Estevez, prefect emeritus off the Congregation for the Divine Cult, formerly responsible for the Chilean edition of the journal *Communio*, Ratzinger's theological child.

For his spiritual virtues, Bergoglio is highly regarded in both moderate and traditional circles. All are aware however that it is almost impossible for the Argentine Jesuit to become Wojtyla's successor. Nor is it certain that he would accept election. "I watch him while he goes to place his ballot in the urn, on the altar of the Sistine Chapel: his eyes are fixed on the image of Jesus who judges the souls at the end of days. The suffering countenance, as if imploring: God don't do this to me."

The realistic objective of the minority party that intends to support Bergoglio is to create a stalled situation, which would lead to the withdrawal of Ratzinger's candidacy. In concrete terms, this means breaking down the wall of 39 supporters, in order to prevent him from reaching 77 votes. Then the game would start anew.

Tuesday April 19<sup>th</sup>, the wakeup call sounds at 6:30 in the rooms of the Hotel Conclave. At 7:30, celebration of Mass in the Casa Santa Marta. The appointment in the Sistine Chapel is at 9, with the recitation of praise. "The majority of the cardinals has used the minibus service for transportation. But some preferred a scenic and healthy walk. Among these, the German cardinal, Walter Kasper."

The votes begin at 9:30, according to the same ritual of the previous evening. These are the preferences recorded by our source

## **II vote, Tuesday April 19<sup>th</sup>, 9:30am**

Ratzinger	65
Bergoglio	35
Martini	0
Ruini	0
Sodano	4
Tettamanzi	2

As foreseen, Ratzinger rises still, but remains 12 votes short. He has earned 18 votes since the first round; in part from the arrival of Ruini's supporters (6), in part from the formerly undecided (12). Bergoglio is 30 short of his rival, but has added 25 votes to his count. He has picked up Martini's supporters (9) and a discrete number of cardinals who had dispersed their votes the previous evening. The Argentine Jesuit is within sight of the 39 votes that would theoretically allow an organized minority to block any candidate.

At eleven, they proceed to the second vote of the morning. And the hopes of the minority seem on the point of becoming reality.

Our source has left out the Cardinals without any chance, and instead records the name of Dario Castrillon Hoyos, a Columbian of the Roman Curia, because he was one of names circulated as electable, on the eve of the conclave. And he notes the disappearance of the two votes that had previously gone to the Milanese cardinal, Dionigi Tettamanzi. But everyone's attention is focused on the two real candidates.

## **III vote, Tuesday April 19<sup>th</sup>, 11:00am**

Ratzinger	72
Bergoglio	40
Castrillon	1
Tettamanzi	0

Ratzinger grows again, from 65 to 72. He lacks just 5 votes to become the 264<sup>th</sup> successor of the apostle Peter. But Bergoglio has grown as well, from 35 to 40. It is a small jump, but enough to render Ratzinger's election mathematically impossible. If the supporters of the archbishop of Buenos Aires decided to hold out to the end, the German cardinal would be able to reach at most 75 votes.

The voting cardinals are aware that this is the crucial moment of the conclave. Its destiny will be decided in the informal discussions of the next few hours, before the next vote in the afternoon. "Already in the Sistine Chapel, before going to Santa Marta for lunch, the first contacts are made. The cardinals who seek Cardinal Ratzinger's election are the most preoccupied. The most active is Cardinal Lopez Trujillo". Trujillo is seen by many approaching the Latin American cardinals; he seeks to convince them that there are no real alternatives to Razinger.

On the other front, a cautious optimism arises over the possibility of blocking the course of the Bavarian cardinal. "Tomorrow, great new things", proclaims Cardinal Martini with a smile to one of his colleagues. Asked for an explanation, Martini confides that he foresees a change in candidates the morning of the next day, as the two votes of the coming afternoon will come to nothing. The archbishop emeritus of Milan even offers possible new candidates. A few accounts have him accosting the Portuguese cardinal, Jose Saraiva Martins ("the bridge between Europe and Latin America", as some newspapers have defined him on the eve of the conclave): the two know one another from the Seventies, when they were both rectors of pontifical universities in Rome.

Such was the atmosphere at lunchtime on Tuesday April 19<sup>th</sup> in the sealed residence of the conclave. “No possible outcome is discounted”. But the success of the plans of the minority hinges upon the solidity of the bloc formed around Bergoglio’s candidacy. However, a crack is appearing. When the 115 voters return to the Sistine Chapel at four in the afternoon, the result of the conclave has already been decided.

This is the result of the last and decisive vote. Our source has noted the oddity of the votes acquired by Cardinal Bernard Law, former archbishop of Boston, shaken by the scandal of the pedophile priests, and Giacomo Biffi, pugnacious archbishop emeritus of Bologna. The other curiosity is the vote given to the young cardinal from Vienna, Christoph Schonborn, a figure tied to Ratzinger by an old friendship. But here are the definitive numbers for the election of Ratzinger.

#### **IV Vote, Tuesday April 19<sup>th</sup>, 4:30pm**

Ratzinger	84
Bergoglio	26
Schonborn	1
Biffi	1
Law	1

Ratzinger added another 12 votes to the 72 obtained in the third round. Bergoglio lost 14 of them and the math tells us that they went to the German cardinal. We don’t know who these bishops were or what were their motivations for withdrawing their votes from the Argentine cardinal and offering them to Ratzinger in the fourth round of voting. Perhaps they simply felt it inopportune to bet on a prolonged stall, with the risk of a grave division, in lack of a real alternative to Ratzinger. “This conclave tells us that the Church is not yet ready for a Latin American pope”, the Belgian cardinal, Danneels, will comment later. The last impressions noted in the diary are these: “When, at 5:30, Ratzinger surpassed the quorum of 77 votes, there was a moment of silence in the Sistine Chapel, followed by a long, cordial applause.”

The information transcribed by our source, and confirmed by other participants in the conclave tells us that this was not a unanimous election: 84 votes, a margin of just 7. His immediate predecessors, Wojtyla and Luciani, according to a reconstruction by Senator Giulio Andreotti (cfr. *A ogni morte di papa*, p. 176), obtained respectively 99 and 98 votes out of slightly fewer participants (111).

This conclave was in any case one of the most rapid in contemporary history. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only Pius XII, elected in 1939, required fewer with just three rounds of voting. Five were required to elect Paul VI (1963); eight for John Paul II (1978); eleven for John XXIII (1958).

As far as the motives that caused the majority of the cardinals to choose Ratzinger, they were already declared by numerous participants (cfr. *30 Days*, 5/2005). The undisputed moral and intellectual authority of his character; the continuity with the papacy of Wojtyla, in the form of a sobriety of style and doctrine; the guarantee (given his age) of a shorter pontificate than the preceding one; the convincing way in which Ratzinger managed the Sacred College. A merit that a large majority of the cardinals recognized. Even if, our source noted the perplexity of a few cardinals at the potential conflict of interest of a dean of the College who was a likely future pope. “To prevent a similar situation, a few cardinals propose that, in the future, the charge of dean be given to a cardinal over eighty years old, and thus excluded from the conclave.”