



## "Even Yesterday 'Fumate Nere' (Black Smoke) Out of the Sistine Chapel"

Article by Silvio Negro on Page 1 of *Corriere della Sera* (Milan, Italy)

October 27, 1958

Translation from the Original Italian

*Red bold print added for emphasis.*

---

### Even Yesterday "Fumate Nere" (Black Smoke) Out of the Sistine Chapel

*The cardinals have yet to elect the Pope but the ballots, thus far, would not have numbered eight. Tenacious minorities oppose the most favored candidacies*

Rome, October 27, night.

The chimney of the Sistine Chapel today uttered another "Nay" on both the appointments, and **this time without giving rise to suspicions**. This confirms what we wrote on the very eve of the vote, and that is, that two steadfast, not to say irreducible, minorities, had clearly emerged against some of the most popular candidacies, and thus the very swift election that received the general consensus was not at all probable. That which will name the successor of Pius XII promises to be, therefore, a genuine Conclave, such as had been those of Benedict XV, which lasted three days, that of Pius XI, which lasted four, and Pius X's, which took up five days.

#### Lengthy Ballots

Now, in place of a flash-Conclave, one speaks of a lengthy and hard-fought election, jumping to the opposite extreme. All it takes, to be sure, are seventeen votes, that is precisely one third, to block an election, and reasons and solidarity that might put together seventeen votes are certainly not wanting; rather, there might be many and various. Regrettably, today the non-Italian cardinals, non-European, rather, are many, and in most cases so little known, that in order to attempt a discrimination of any consequence for any case that would come about, one would have to be monsignor Montini or monsignor Tardini, one, that is, of the high exponents of Pius XII's Secretary of State, whom, because of their office, have built a thorough knowledge of all the current princes of the Church.

The ordinary observer is surely unable to embark into a similar examination; a good half of the names would suggest nothing to him. He could but presume, on the basis of what came to pass in previous Conclaves, that in the eight ballots carried out hitherto only the most famous names, put forward also by

the public, certainly appear, and that difficulties have arisen in regard to these names which may easily be overcome in the next few days. It is still too early to conclude that the Conclave be already in search of new names, on which the two-third majority might come together. And earlier still it is to speak, as it is already being done, of a positively lengthy Conclave, of stalled situation, of the necessity of extraordinary solutions, such as that of seeking the confluence of the two-third onto a person external to the Conclave. But were the ballots carried out in these first two days really eight, or is it not rather likely that they were merely four? This was a highly debated subject today amongst the journalists covering the election of the Pope, and the views were all but concurrent. The majority think the ballots had been eight, in accordance with the Constitution regulating the Conclave, which, after illustrating the reasons that played in favor of the abolition of the election so called by “access”, as being too complex, says:

“We, confirming the disposition of our predecessor, Pius X, who strongly desired to obviate to this inconvenience, and, on the other hand, in no way prejudice the expeditiousness of the desired election, newly establish and order that, in place of such “access”, the cardinals one time only, either in the morning or in the evening, after completing the ballot as provided for hitherto, should no election have been achieved, are to hold immediately a new ballot, in which they will renew their votes without taking into account those expressed in the previous one. We also rule that in such second ballot the ceremonies performed in the former be retained as valid, in order that the cardinals be not compelled to utter a new oath, nor select new scrutinizers, nurses and revisers, but that these be standing also for the second [ballot] without the need for renewal.” As clear as it appears that two ballots ought to be held in each session, this morning, however, the “Fumata” (smoke), or “Sfumata,” as the purists would have it, took place just after 11.00; the effective time, therefore, amounted to about one and a half hour, since the bell was heard around 9, and after the bell there had been the low common Mass that takes up half an hour. Is it materially possible that in an hour and a half one could carry out two ballots and, what’s more, light up the stove? By an approximate reckoning of the time it would require to complete such operations, this appears highly unlikely.

Let us assume, in fact, that when the cardinals remain alone in the Chapel, everything is ready, and the ballot papers already distributed, and ten minutes later the preparatory operations are over and all the ballot papers filled in. Fifty people, many of whom elderly, must immediately after, make it to the altar, pause there in prayer, proceed in front the chalice, utter the grave ritual words, place the ballot paper on the paten, throw it with the paten into the chalice, and make it back to their seat. It does not appear exaggerated to think it would take to each of them two minutes to accomplish that, and in that case the vote alone would take up one and half hours. And there remain yet the verification of the number, the counting of the votes, which is laborious, the control of the revisers, the proclamation of the result, and the lighting of the stove.

This morning, the buzz has it, the ballot could really only have been one, but for a set of completely different reasons, the most eminent had given up the second vote as one of the present would have fallen ill. The voice was later denied, since the secrecy surrounding the works of the Conclave affords some extenuating circumstances in these cases, if not in order to reassure the families; but the elderly are too many among the electors of the Pope, and not seldom in poor health, for similar voices not to find their way around.

## The Sick Pair

Today again the name of cardinal Canali came out, causing concern, in the sister of the cardinal, and the name had come out on account of a misunderstanding. It had been learned that the surgeon on the other side of the wheels, doctor De Lollis, had the Fatebenefratelli hospital send him some case sheets and it was murmured that these belonged to some cardinals, obviously Roman, whereas they belonged to people who had undergone recent surgical procedures, and whose conditions the surgeon wished to check upon. It seems certain, on the other hand, that the cardinals that today did not have to use their

nurse colleagues in order to hand over their ballot paper, had been at least two as the archbishop of Malines, Van Roey, is also forced into bed.

The cardinals make large use of mineral water, to judge from the bottle-cases that pass through the wheel (turn-stile) of the Borgia courtyard. While the crowd tonight awaited the “Fumata” (smoke) at St. Peter’s square, by the same passageway it was introduced a conspicuous supply of meat, eggs, vegetables, and fruit.

### The Case of 1939

Through the small wheels (turn-stile), located at the entrance of the St. Damaso courtyard passed a large amount of mail, a large package containing books and documents, addressed to the secretary of the Conclave and closely inspected before being allowed in, a purplish-blue mozzetta for the archbishop of Quito, Carlo Maria de la Torre, two pieces of woolen clothing for cardinal Micara. Just minutes before the noon closure the Chinese minister by the Holy See showed up, with the same retinue as yesterday, and sent in the by now customary roast chicken and soup tureen.

The buzz had it that, on account of a breach at one of the wheels (turn-stile) , a Swiss guard had today been expelled. The military (guard) had allegedly let in, without authorization, a woman carrying a small bundle of clothing for her son, a mechanic inside, as a member of the staff. The guard had, in fact, been expelled by the very severe new commander, but on disciplinary charges that had nothing to do with the Conclave’s wheels (turn-stile) ....

Prince Sigismondo Chigi is always present at the opening and closing of the wheels (turn-stile) , but he no longer wears the severe costume with which he appeared Saturday night to take his oath at the Sistine Chapel. Yesterday, he was at the ladies’ lodge, with the commissary of the Conclave, the consistorial counsel Corsanego, **when there came the “Fumata” (smoke) that was taken as good. Since the pair soon after was to show up at the Conclave’s door, for the opening ceremonies, they rushed to get ready for the occasion and learned of the false alarm only when they came back suitably appareled.**

Today the Vatican radio assured that similar incidents would never happen again. “We will tell you the Pope has been made only after an irrefutable confirmation” said father Pellegrino, who yesterday was betrayed by an enthusiasm that renders honor to his habit, and carried by the excitement he reasoned as though the stove of the Sistine Chapel had an understanding and a will of its own, it could make out what was passing on the roof, it could perceive the anxieties and doubts that had come of it, and it were even capable of putting a remedy to it with “undisputable” manifestations.

It might be of comfort to Father Pellegrino to learn that what happened yesterday had already occurred in 1939: the “Fumata” (smoke) that was supposed to be black appeared initially very white, thick, almost chalky, and streaked with black shadings in the end.

That night, after the positive “Fumata” (smoke) that followed the first ballot and, therefore, ahead of time - a case which might take place even this time both in the morning and in the afternoon - the “Fumata” (smoke) was white as that of the morning, but not as thick, complete with black streaks in the end, and hence the opinions were presently heatedly divided. The radio, however, very composed, declared the “Fumata” (smoke) to have been white, and invited the population to go to the square to be blessed by the new Pope. And that took place only because the secretary of the Conclave, then monsignor Santoro, utterly distrustful of the stove, had had prince Chigi summoned to one of the wheels (turn-stile), and handed him a letter in which he told him to advise the radio that, in any case, the “Fumata” (smoke) would have been white and positive.

*Silvio Negro*

---

**Note:**

Novus Ordo Watch had previously touted this article as indicating that there was proof from inside the 1958 conclave that a Pope had been chosen on October 26, 1958 – two days before Cardinal Roncalli (John XXIII) emerged upon the Papal Balcony. We had been assured that the incident involving Msgr. Santoro passing a note out of the conclave referred to the conclave of 1958. As it turns out, Msgr. Santoro was in the 1939 conclave, not the 1958 conclave. We had relied on an Italian/English translator, who had assured us on two occasions that the Santoro incident in the above article referred to the conclave of 1958. As it turns out, this translator had been mistaken about this himself. We have now been informed that several other translators had made the same mistake, due to ambiguous wording by the reporter in at least one place. All involved are glad that the correct interpretation has now been discovered. We apologize for this misunderstanding.

[Back to Cardinal Siri Page](#)

**Fair Use Notice:**

This web site may contain copyrighted material the use of which may not always have been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in our efforts to advance understanding of political, human, religious, and social issues. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this site for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.