

TOWARDS THE CONCLAVE

Parolin, the great manipulator who wants to be Pope

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It is like the Synod, they manipulate the General Congregations. The disappointment and frustration of the cardinals who had hoped for an open and free dialogue in preparation for the conclave is palpable. And who is manipulating? The pre-conclave

meetings of the cardinals are mainly led by the former Secretary of State Pietro Parolin (former, because with the death of the Pope all the appointments to the heads of the Vatican dicasteries were deposed) and the Camerlengo Kevin Farrell, former Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. And what is this manipulation? To suppress and direct as much as possible the debate on the most important issues for the Church. Some cardinals would have liked to have had the whole of next week at their disposal, with more time for speeches, given the unprecedented number of cardinal electors - 135, well over the maximum of 120 provided for in the *Apostolic Constitution Universi Dominici Gregis* (1996) - who do not know each other and are not even familiar with the situation of the universal Church; but there was not even time to discuss this, because a compromise solution was immediately imposed on 7 May. Then there is the order of the speeches (some Cardinals complain of having been "forgotten"), the reduction of the speeches from 10 minutes (which is already too short when serious issues are raised for the first time) to 5 minutes.

After 12 years of an autocratic pontificate that has carefully avoided any interaction between the cardinals, who have been appointed and removed from every corner of the world according to mysterious criteria, one might have hoped that at least during the preparatory meetings for the conclave there would be an open discussion about the situation of the Church and the priorities and challenges it faces. Instead, the desire to hurry seems to prevail, just enough time to secure the votes needed to reach the two-thirds majority required for the white smoke. This haste only serves Cardinal Parolin, who has prepared the ground very carefully in recent months, showing himself on the one hand to be close to Pope Francis and his successor, but at the same time giving the impression of marking the distance that would reassure those who have suffered the confusion (to use a euphemism) of the pontificate that has just ended.

This haste, however, serves above all to conceal the serious flaws of the former Secretary of State and to prevent a closer examination of his background and ideas (see the article by Luisella Scrosati).

The scandalous handling of the case of Becciu, Parolin's main opponent in the Secretariat of State, is a case in point. After a week of long discussions on whether Becciu would be present at the Conclave or not, it was only at the beginning of this week that Cardinal Parolin appeared before the General Congregations to announce that the case had been resolved, since two letters from the Pope (September 2023 and March 2025) had appeared decreeing his exclusion. The second even took the form of a *motu proprio* signed with an F. when the Pope was already in hospital in a very serious

condition. These letters were never communicated to the person concerned, whose subsequent resignation smacked more of blackmail or the promise of a future role than of love for the unity of the Church. It is a situation that has left many cardinals incredulous, but they have not yet had the opportunity to ask questions that would be considered 'inconvenient'.

But Parolin's manoeuvres do not stop at taking revenge on an old rival: although he can currently count on the votes of those who favour continuity with Francis (at most seventy, according to experts in the College of Cardinals), he must find the support of about twenty cardinals in the opposing camp. This is why, in the last few hours, there has been talk of an agreement with those who were ready to vote for the Hungarian Cardinal Peter Erdő as the first candidate. We know from our sources that it is Cardinal Parolin himself who has approached some of his fellow cardinals, promising to cancel *Traditionis Custodes* (the witch-hunt against the ancient rite) and *Fiducia Supplicans* (the blessing of same-sex couples) in exchange for their votes. This may satisfy some, but it remains to be seen whether it will be enough to reach a quorum.

This is also because, in order to vote for Parolin, one has to turn a blind eye to other issues that are not insignificant. Not so much the fact that he has no pastoral experience (which would be important for a Pope), having always held diplomatic positions, but above all his failed management of the Secretariat of State. First of all, the secret agreement between the Holy See and China: signed in 2018, then renewed every two years and now, from October 2024, for four years. It was supposed to guarantee the Holy See the right to appoint bishops in the dozens of dioceses that remained uncovered, but so far it has only worsened the situation of Chinese Catholics; it has legitimised the Patriotic Church run by the Communist Party, abandoning to their fate the "underground" Catholics who have paid dearly over the years for their loyalty to the Pope. Above all, in more than six years there have been only about ten episcopal appointments, and it has become clear that these were appointments made by the Communist Party, to which the Pope gave his consent, willingly or unwillingly.

And to underline this point, after the death of Pope Francis, two more episcopal appointments were announced by Beijing, obviously without the consent of the Holy See: Wu Jianlin, auxiliary bishop in Shanghai, and Li Jianlin in Xinxiang. This is a post-mortem slap in the face for the Pope, but above all it confirms the failure of an agreement that Secretary of State Parolin negotiated, signed and defended tooth and nail. It certifies the sell-out of the Church, which even the Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen, had opposed in every way, apparently unheeded and even

marginalised.

Speaking of Cardinal Zen, 93, despite his age and difficulties in travelling, he received permission from the Chinese authorities (he is still on trial for supporting pro-democracy demonstrations) and is present in Rome for the Congregations. But Parolin, who was severely criticised by Zen in the past, does not seem to have anything to fear this time: talking about China and Parolin (which would be an indirect attack on China) would mean prison for Cardinal Zen as soon as he sets foot in Hong Kong. But his very presence should be a warning to those who think that Pope Parolin is the lesser evil.