

HOLY SEE

Pope creates new commission to resolve Vatican debt problems

ECCLESIA

28_02_2025



**Nico
Spuntoni**



Latin is no longer fashionable in the Vatican, but *pecunia non olet* is the best way to describe the Holy Father's latest **chirograph**, published two days ago. On 11 February, three days before his hospitalisation, Pope Francis created the *Commissio de donationibus*

pro Sancta Sede. The organisation was created in response to a major concern that has been occupying the Roman Pontiff for some time: the Holy See's huge deficit. It will have to seek solutions by "stimulating donations through specific campaigns addressed to the faithful, Episcopal Conferences and potential benefactors, emphasising their importance for the Holy Father's mission and charitable works" and by "seeking funding from willing donors for specific projects presented by the Institutions of the Roman Curia and the Governorate of Vatican City State".

The creation of the *Commissio* seems to reinforce the process of bureaucratisation in the management of Vatican finances. The attempts at centralisation made a few years ago within the framework of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA) failed after a redistribution of responsibilities among the various subjects involved. It is now difficult to understand who is responsible for what between the Secretariat of State, the APSA, the Governorate and the Secretariat for the Economy (SE). The latter, very powerful and feared under the leadership of the layman Maximino Caballero Ledo, seems to have been weakened by the umpteenth economic measure. Indeed, Article 7 of the Statute of the European Commission states that "the *Commissio* shall have recourse to the Secretariat for Economic Affairs for all matters it deems necessary and shall forward to it, for its information, an annual summary of its initiatives". In short, there is little that the Ministry of Economy and Finance can do in the face of this Commission, which 'answers directly to the Roman Pontiff'.

What's more, paragraph 2 of article 1 of the Statute seems to open up a complicated future scenario for the management of Peter's pennies, currently in the hands of the Secretariat for the Economy, which the Commission could take away from them, even if the regulation doesn't seem entirely clear.

And unlike APSA and the Governorate, the Secretariat for the Economy will not have any of its representatives among the members of the Commission. Looking at the organisation chart of this new creature, we can see the new balance in the Curia that could have influenced its creation. In fact, Monsignor Roberto Campisi, General Counsellor of the Secretariat of State, was appointed President. According to authoritative sources, the Sicilian diplomat has risen rapidly in the Curia to the point of being considered one of Francis's new "favourites". So much so that some expected to read his name in the list of new cardinals announced last October. Instead, the purple in the Secretariat of State went to the man in charge of papal trips, the Indian George Jacob Koovakad. However, there are those who have confided to the *Daily Compass* that

they expect the councilor to be promoted to archbishop soon. In any case, his appointment as president for a five-year term, signed on 11 February but published with a cautious prognosis from the Pope in hospital, must not have won him any favours in the Vatican.

In addition to Campisi, the name of Sister Alessandra Smerilli appears among the members of the commission. The religious economist appeared to be a rising star in the Vatican firmament and was tipped to take on the role of prefect after Sister Simona Brambilla broke the glass ceiling in the Curia. But it's no longer certain that she will be promoted to the Dicastery for Integral Human Development - of which she is secretary - following the retirement of Cardinal Michael Czerny, although her admirers - according to some well-informed people - believe that she would even be suitable for the most important post in the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples in the event of unexpected changes. However, the nun can count on a relationship of absolute trust with the influential Campisi, who was expected to have opened the doors of the newly formed Commission to her. In the past, Francesco had been favourably impressed by Smerilli's activism, especially after accompanying several groups of entrepreneurs to an audience with him. Useful contacts for those who, according to their statutes, are called to "seek funding from willing donors".

In short, the pontificate of Pope Francis, now approaching the beginning of its thirteenth year, seems to be in desperate need of rich people in order to keep the promise he made to Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, immediately after his election, not to forget the poor.