

VATICAN

Burke's Eviction, the Papacy loses out

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That Cardinal Raymond Burke will be punished by Pope Francis, by taking away his salary and apartment in Rome, is now beyond doubt. After the [revelation by the Daily Compass](#), several Vaticanists rushed to verify the news, finding confirmation through sources present at the meeting of the Roman Curia's Heads of Dicasteries, on 20 November, where Pope Francis made the announcement. But, it also seems that

someone is in a hurry to see Burke evicted. Thus in recent days the editor of the online newspaper *Open*, Franco Bechis, announced that the eviction and salary freeze had been enforceable since 1 December and that the cardinal - currently in the United States - had received two registered letters with the respective notifications. Concerning the apartment, however, an option to remain would have been offered on the condition of payment for the rent in excess of EUR 10,000 per month.

For its part, the American online journal *The Pillar* claims that Burke received a letter on 1 December, but dated 24 November, stating that he must start paying the market-rate for rent otherwise he would have to vacate the apartment by 29 February 2024.

Sources close to the American cardinal, however, flatly deny such registered letters were received, as well as the rumour that Burke "asked his collaborators to search real estate agencies for alternative accommodation not far from the Vatican but at more affordable prices". Moreover, contrary to what was written by *Open* and *Pillar*, the flat in which Cardinal Burke lives is not on free loan, but a rent is already paid, albeit obviously at a reduced price. Nonetheless, it is only a matter of time for the salary and house, and probably the anticipations come from sources close to the sender.

But, while everyone is busy speculating on the arrival of the registered letters, the real point of the matter is lost: a pope evicting a cardinal is an unprecedented event, and he does so not on the basis of a trial that has recognised any objective fault on the part of the cardinal, but on the basis of his personal assessment. And even though the usual 'firebrands' were quick to justify the pope's decision, no one can deny the fact that it is a purely arbitrary act, a sign of despotic power management. It's exactly what the papacy has never been and should not be, as canonist Geraldina Boni explains in another *Daily Compass* article.

So, there is confusion between obedience to the pope and agreeing with whatever the pope thinks, says and does. To have presented Dubia (questions for clarification) is not a crime against the unity of the Church or an attack on the Papacy, but it is a perfectly legitimate act when certain statements by the Pope do not appear to be in continuity with the perennial teaching of the Church. It is not an act of hostility, far from it: it is precisely the expression of love for the Pope, called to his task of safeguarding the depositum fidei.

It is a very different form of criticism from the boorish contestations made against St John Paul II and Benedict XVI by so many who today, as chance would have it, discover themselves enthusiastic defenders of papal infallibility always and in any case.

Moreover, Pope Francis' attitude of nonchalant use of power is also demonstrated by another curious episode related to the Burke case. While in fact, after the revelations by the *Daily Compass*, the director of the Press Office Matteo Bruni declined any request for confirmation or denial of the Pope's decisions, it was the English Vaticanist and Francis' biographer Austen Ivereigh who publicly reported the Pope's thoughts on the matter: "I met Pope Francis on the afternoon of 27 November (...). In the course of the conversation he told me that he had decided to take away Burke's cardinal privileges - flat and salary - because he was using those privileges against the Church".

The Pontiff then added that he had actually made the announcement at the meeting of the Roman Curia's Heads of Dicasteries but without adding any reasons, something denied by other sources present at the meeting who told Reuters and Associated Press instead that the Pope had accused Burke of "working against the Church and against the Papacy" and of being "a source of division". According to Ivereigh's account, the Pope then sent him a message telling him that he "never used the word 'enemy'". And finally, Ivereigh concludes, "he thanked me for clarifying" this matter.

In fact, much could be said just about what emerges from these statements alone, on the conception of Church and Papacy, but the aspect to dwell on is also that of communication. In the Vatican there are dozens and dozens of journalists working for the Dicastery of Communication, there is a Press Room that has precisely the task of communicating and possibly clarifying the Pope's thinking, but from here only silence. And instead the Pope entrusts a journalist friend of his with his decisions and what he thinks of Cardinal Burke, thanking him for communicating it to the world.

This raises two issues: either the Dicastery of Communication and the Press Office boycott the Pope and censor him so that he has to find other ways to make his intentions known (which is highly unlikely) or his contempt for the institutions of the Church (which he himself, moreover, reformed) goes so far as to ignore his closest collaborators and rely from time to time on those he recognises as his friends.

Certainly relying on improvised spokesmen carries the undoubted advantage of always being able to contradict them if things go wrong, but it is equally certain that the first victim of this behaviour is precisely the Papacy.