

Episcopal Ordination

Catholic Church's humiliation in Shanghai demands change in Vatican

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When the Chinese government blatantly violated its agreement with the Holy See on 4 April 2023 by unilaterally appointing Monsignor Shen Bin as Bishop of Shanghai, it took the Vatican three months to decide how to respond. Ultimately, on 15 July, Pope Francis

recognised the appointment. At the same time, the [Vatican Press Office published an interview with Cardinal Pietro Parolin](#), the Secretary of State, which had been prepared by the Secretariat of State itself. Parolin, the architect of the secret agreement signed in 2018 and renewed biennially since then, denounced the violation of the agreement without mincing his words, while also reiterating the Holy See's willingness to continue the dialogue. The Secretary of State also expressed hope that such unilateral appointments would not be repeated, as they would seriously jeopardise the future renewal of the agreement, which mainly concerns the consensual appointment of bishops.

Nonetheless, two years later, the situation is worse: yesterday, [as planned](#), Joseph Wu Jianlin was ordained as auxiliary bishop of Shanghai. The Chinese regime had appointed him on 28 April, while the Apostolic See was vacant following Pope Francis's death the previous week. The Holy See then made headlines yesterday 15 October, by announcing that [Pope Leo XIV had ratified the appointment on 11 August](#): 'Having approved his candidacy within the framework of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China', according to the now customary formula.

However, it's a statement that is patently false in this case, unless the secret agreement gives the Chinese Communist regime carte blanche in its choice of Catholic bishops. Furthermore, the Patriotic Association of Chinese Catholics (APCC), which is controlled by the regime, never mentions the agreements with the Holy See or refers to the Pope in its announcements of the appointment and ordination in Shanghai Cathedral.

The China dossier was widely recognised as one of the most challenging issues facing the new Pope, who has a significant legacy to address. In the [renowned interview](#) at the end of his biography, written by Elise Ann Allen, Leo XIV himself stated that he would take time to determine his approach, and in the meantime, he would adhere to the path established by his predecessor. After all, Cardinal Parolin, a staunch defender of the Vatican agreement with China, manages this continuity in the Secretariat of State. However, in light of the Chinese government's unprecedented humiliation and outrage, including the appointment of two bishops during the sede vacante, remaining silent and pretending nothing has happened is disconcerting.

Cardinal Parolin would certainly have a lot of explaining to do. Not only has he been promising positive results for the Church in China for years thanks to his policy of dialogue, but things are also deteriorating. In the 2023 interview in which he “digested” the appointment of Monsignor Shen Bin, he set a very concrete condition. He had hoped

that the new bishop of Shanghai, having obtained the placet from the Holy See, would favour 'a just and wise solution to some other issues that have been pending for some time in the diocese', such as the position of the two auxiliary bishops: H.E. Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, who is still impeded; and H.E. Bishop Joseph Xing Wenzhi, who has retired.

The latter was appointed auxiliary bishop of Shanghai in 2005 — the first joint appointment between the Chinese government and the Holy See. Xing Wenzhi had already been designated as the successor to the elderly Aloysius Jin Luxian. However, he was forced to resign on 20 December 2011 and has since disappeared. In 2012, the Holy See appointed Thaddeus Ma Daqin in his place, but he was placed under house arrest at the seminary close to the shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan immediately after resigning from the Patriotic Association. Thus, the Shanghai diocese remained vacant after the death of Aloysius Jin Luxian in 2013 until the controversial appointment of Shen Bin.

If Cardinal Parolin thought that the Vatican's acceptance of Shen Bin's appointment would be beneficial, he was disappointed. Rather than resolving the situation of Msgrs. Ma Daqin and Xing Wenzhi, Shen Bin wanted Wu Jianlin as his auxiliary and was certainly the protagonist of the resounding slap in the face to the Holy See with the appointment during the sede vacante. Yesterday, Monsignor Shen Bin ordained Wu Jianlin as bishop in a cathedral under tight security, with all priests, seminarians, and religious men and women obligated to be present.

What happened in Shanghai is another hard blow to the Holy See's credibility, not only for Chinese Catholics who see the Church's compromise with the Communist regime being rewarded, compared to the many who have suffered ferocious persecution for their loyalty to the Pope. The relationship between the Catholic Church and states, and between the Church and political power, is also at stake in relations with China — an issue that Pope Leo will have to address quickly. Perhaps by intervening directly in the Secretariat of State.