

Diplomacy

## China, Hong Kong and the Vatican's unsustainable morality

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One can understand that the role of Vatican diplomacy is to resolve any issues in order to ensure the Church's presence in these states. But is it permissible for this diplomatic effort to ignore the systematic persecution of Catholics in these states? In other words,

could the greater good of the Church involve the abandonment of individual Catholics, or even groups of them, including bishops, to their fate?

**This is the inevitable question that arises in light of the Holy See's relationship with Communist China.** Just a few days ago, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Secretary of State (see photo by LaPresse), referred to the secret provisional agreement on the appointment of bishops signed with China in October 2018. This agreement was renewed every two years until 2024, when it was extended to 2028. Parolin spoke of 'a seed of hope'. Parolin acknowledged that the agreement 'certainly does not claim to have solved all the problems', primarily referring to the blatant and humiliating violations of the agreement regarding the appointment of bishops.

**However, another issue we wish to highlight is the Holy See's silence regarding the imprisonment of bishops, priests, and laypeople**, as well as the increasingly restrictive measures imposed by Beijing authorities on religious worship. In the name of the 'seed of hope' — which many call an illusion — the Holy See remains silent on the present situation, which sees an increase in the persecution of Catholics. They also pretend that there is no 'underground' Chinese Church that does not submit to the regime's will to place the Church under the control of the Chinese Communist Party.

**Notably, in recent days, the Vatican media has** ignored the news of the death of **Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo**, the 90-year-old Bishop of Zhengding in the province of Hebei. Having already spent 15 years in prison and under house arrest, Jia Zhiguo was ordained bishop in 1981. He was perhaps the most prominent figure in the underground Church and made a huge contribution to the development of the Church in Hebei. He was constantly under surveillance by the Chinese authorities and had been confined to his episcopal residence since 2010.

**Not even a line of remembrance for him** — perhaps they would have been offended in Beijing.

**Since Cardinal Parolin claims that the current Secret Agreement is in perfect continuity** with the actions of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, it is worth remembering that, when Monsignor Jia Zhiguo was arrested for the umpteenth time in 2009, **the Holy See (under Benedict XVI) publicly protested**, stating that such action created 'obstacles to the constructive dialogue' that the Church was trying to establish with the Chinese authorities.

**It should also be noted that Saint John Paul II canonised 120 Chinese martyrs 25 years ago**

, despite strong opposition from the Beijing government. He did so on 1 October, which is a national holiday in the People's Republic of China. Unsurprisingly, the Vatican media have "forgotten" this event, and the 25 years have passed in silence.

**Perhaps the most sensational case, however, concerns Hong Kong.** The former British colony, which returned to China in 1997, is now being suffocated by Beijing. The slogan 'One Country, Two Systems', which was supposed to guarantee the state of freedom it enjoyed as a colony for 50 years, has been taken back by Beijing. The Church in Hong Kong does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Chinese Church, yet the Holy See remains silent on this repression involving many Catholics and is facilitating the absorption of the Hong Kong diocese into the process of 'Sinicisation'.

**There has been no mention from the Vatican** of the trial of 93-year-old Cardinal Joseph Zen, who has been on probation for years, nor of Jimmy Lai, whom we have spoken about multiple times recently and who was awarded the 'Made for Truth' prize by the Daily Compass during its annual Conference Day on 25 October.

**Jimmy Lai, who is 78 years old and a Catholic convert, has become the symbol of Hong Kong's struggle for freedom.** He is currently awaiting the verdict of his latest trial, whose hearings ended in August. He has been in solitary confinement in prison for five years, in dramatic conditions, and with serious health problems. The risk of him dying in prison is high, as his son, Sebastien, told us. Several governments have campaigned for his release, and even US President Donald Trump interceded on his behalf at a summit with Xi Jinping last week.

**Yet the Vatican has remained silent on his plight.**

**Cardinal Zen and the other Catholics in prison in Hong Kong and China can be sacrificed** and abandoned to their executioners in the name of an alleged future good of the Chinese Church. Therefore, the Vatican Secretariat of State's answer to our initial question is that it is permissible to abandon Catholics to their fate for the greater good.

**Yet the Church has always taught us that it is never legitimate to sacrifice a person's life** or dignity for the supposed benefit of the collective.

**While no one denies the difficulties that Vatican diplomacy can sometimes face**

in its relations with states, it is clear that one must act with prudence and balance. However, it is intolerable to theorise the suspension of morality, as is being done in the Vatican with regard to China. Such diplomatic conduct is a scandal for the Church, the consequences of which will not be long in coming.