

TOWARDS THE CONCLAVE

Malore, Becciu and China: the system closes ranks around Parolin

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There is no doubt: the power that dominates the media is closing ranks around former Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, protecting him in his race for the papacy. How? By ignoring and suppressing news and articles that could in any way harm him, and even

by launching campaigns against those who try to report the news accurately.

One first curious fact is the disappearance of an article in the latest issue of the popular Italian weekly magazine *L'Espresso*, withdrawn just as it was going to press. This was noticed by an Italian website *Professione Reporter* simply because the title of the article ('*Parolin, the diplomacy of the invisible*') remained in the summary, and the two page article was hastily filled with advertisements. What was in the article? We do not know, but there is a strong suspicion that it contained something unwelcome for the former Secretary of State, who must have a good relationship with the progressive weekly. It's worth remembering that in September 2020 it was *L'Espresso* that published the investigation into the Vatican's purchase of a building in London, which was at the root of Cardinal Angelo Becciu's troubles. The latter, as number two in the Secretariat of State behind Cardinal Parolin, was allegedly the mastermind of a fraudulent and failed operation for the Holy See.

Unsurprisingly, the simultaneous news of *the sentence imposed by the British High Court on the Secretariat of State of the Holy See*, again in connection with the London building affair, was also overshadowed: €4 million (€1.5 million immediate payment) to be paid to the financier Raffele Mincione. The Secretariat of State (read Parolin) had accused Mincione of fraud, a charge that was rejected by the British court. Another slap in the face for the former secretary of state, but it was decided not to dwell on it.

Even more significant is the story of the illness that Cardinal Parolin allegedly suffered on the evening of 30 April: a sudden rise in blood pressure that required medical intervention for about an hour. The news, which was circulating among the Cardinals, was first ignored and then, when it appeared in the international news, the Vatican Press Office issued an official denial.

Meanwhile, in Italy, *Corriere della Sera*, *Repubblica*, *Messaggero* (the three most read daily newspapers in Italy) and others launched vulgar attacks against alleged "crows", with completely fabricated and not very original background stories (the American right is always involved, playing in leftist narratives the same role that the CIA played in student assemblies in the 1970s). Also noteworthy is the work of men in the Curia to deny a rumour - which many sources claim to be true - that could harm the election campaign, just as they are trying to win the necessary votes among the supporters of Hungarian Cardinal Peter Erdo.

The most serious fact, however, which demonstrates the failure of Cardinal Parolin's diplomatic approach, is the appointment by China of two bishops while the Chair of St

Peter is vacant. As the *Daily Compass* has already written, notably Wu Jianlin, auxiliary bishop in Shanghai, and Li Jianlin in Xinxiang, in Henan province. Beijing's gesture is very serious because only papal appointments have canonical value, and in this way the Communist regime wants to clearly assert its total control over the Chinese Catholic Church. It is a direct challenge to the Holy See and to whoever will be the next Pope, but above all it is a defeat for those who wanted and defended tooth and nail, even against all evidence, the secret agreement signed in 2018 and then renewed every two years until 2024, when the renewal was extended to four years.

Although the terms of the agreement are secret, the Secretariat of State has always maintained that the Pope has the final say on appointments. However, this has been consistently contradicted by the facts, as of the 12 bishops appointed after 2018 (this is the most realistic estimate), there are several cases where it is clear that the Pope has had to make the best of a bad situation.

And this is without taking into account that all these bishops are well integrated into the structures of the Chinese Communist Party. The most sensational case was that of the Bishop of Shanghai, Joseph Shen Bin, who was installed by the Chinese authorities on 4 April without even informing the Holy See. The Holy See protested (without raising its voice too much), but then had to swallow the appointment and make it its own on 15 July. In the name of the agreement with China, the Holy See also had to digest the geographical redefinition of some dioceses, which the Beijing government wanted to coincide with administrative boundaries. As a result, the 150 archdioceses, dioceses and apostolic prefectures listed in the Pontifical Yearbook will be reduced to just under 100.

Even taking into account the most recent appointments, a comparison between the Vatican bulletin and the corresponding Chinese communiqué (which, incidentally, never mentions the Pope) shows that the official dates of appointment differ by several months. This is the case of the new bishop of Luliang, Anthony Ji Weizhong, ordained on 20 January: according to the Chinese government, the bishop was elected on 19 July 2024, but according to the Holy See, the Pope's appointment came on 28 October, more than three months later.

Now, with the appointment of two bishops while the Holy Chair of Saint Peter is vacant, the Chinese government has raised the bar, showing, for those who want to see, that the emperor has no clothes, that in China it is the Communist Party that appoints bishops, and that - as the *Daily Compass* has always maintained - this agreement represents the sell-out of the Church to the Communist regime; a

humiliation for Chinese Catholics and an affront to the memory of the many martyrs who shed their blood for their fidelity to the Pope and to the universal Church.

Yet something so important has found no space in the mainstream Italian press

(and not only there), which is entirely focused on promoting the man who is the main architect of this diplomatic disaster.

And still on the subject of China, it is only right not to forget that there are other cardinals in the conclave who are at the forefront of supporting Parolin in this agreement with China. First and foremost Matteo Zuppi, since "his" Community of Sant'Egidio strongly supports the agreement and has been the main ally of Parolin and Pope Francis. Nor should we forget the new Bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau-yan, who even promotes courses of Sinicisation (in fact, the creation of a Chinese national church under the leadership of the regime) for his priests. And finally, the Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, according to whom the agreement with China serves to "safeguard the valid apostolic succession and the sacramental nature of the Catholic Church in China". At what cost does not seem to matter.