

Curia Stories. The Comeback of the Cardinal Secretary of State

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[Settimo Cielo](#)



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The [address](#) that the pope delivers at the beginning of each year to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See bore an unmistakable imprint on Monday, January 8: that of the secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

It was the address of a great professional of diplomacy, entirely devoid of those third-worldist reprimands which are dear to Jorge Mario Bergoglio. A sign that the “comeback” of Parolin, who has now regained full control of the Vatican curia, has even made inroads with Francis.

At the beginning of the pontificate this was not the case. Francis had set up around himself a grand council of eight cardinals, and the secretary of state was not one of them; on the contrary, the reform of the curia that was bandied about was aimed above all at his office, which from the time of Paul VI had been the focus of the highest concentration of power, excessive in the judgment of many curia officials.

And in fact, the first attempts at reform moved precisely in this direction. In March of 2014, one year after his election as pope, Bergoglio created a brand-new secretariat for the economy to which he assigned the future control of all the assets of all Vatican offices, including the substantial sums, never shown on the public balance sheets of the Holy See, administered by an all-powerful office of the secretariat of state which was obeyed even by the APSA, the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See, the strongbox of the Vatican’s goods and properties.

Australian cardinal George Pell, whom Francis put at the head of the new organism, didn’t pussyfoot around. He laid out in public the amount of unaccountable money in the possession of the secretariat of state and of other

Vatican offices, 1.4 billion dollars, obviously asserting control over it, and presented as imminent the absorption of the APSA into his secretariat.

But none of this happened. Without making any noise, the power centers besieged by Pell resisted, and then struck back. With the pope increasingly listening to and accommodating them instead of the Australian cardinal. And with Parolin, whom Francis in the meantime had added to the eight cardinals of the grand council, pulling the strings of the counterattack.

Today the results are plain for all to see.

Pell retreated to Australia months ago, embroiled in a trial in which he seems more victim than offender, without the pope having appointed any successor for him at the head of the secretariat for the economy.

Also remaining vacant since last June is the key post of auditor general, after the brutal **dismissal** of its first and last occupant, Libero Milone, accused of investigating where he shouldn't have.

The cardinal prefect of the APSA, Domenico Calcagno, has in fact replaced both of them, with the full support of Bergoglio, who often has him as a mealtime guest at the refectory of Casa Santa Marta.

And Parolin is more powerful than ever, thanks to Pope Francis's predilection for churchmen who, like him, belong to the **diplomats'** guild.

In fact, two other key cardinals of this pontificate come from diplomacy: Lorenzo Baldisseri, appointed by Bergoglio as secretary general of the synod of bishops, and Beniamino Stella, whom the pope made the head of the congregation for the clergy. They have no specific expertise, but they are perfectly obedient executors of the will of Francis to steer things in the predetermined directions: from communion for the divorced and remarried to the ordination of married priests.

At the secretariat of state, it is the "substitute" Angelo Giovanni Becciu, another career diplomat, who acts as executor of the pope's wishes and as headsman, as for example with Milone or with the **Knights of Malta**.

In this latter case, Parolin as well was personally involved in the removal of the Grand Master. But it is rare for him to show himself. The dirty work is left to others. He flies high. So high as to be now the only **candidate** for succeeding Francis with a serious chance of being elected pope.

(English translation by **Matthew Sherry**, Ballwin, Missouri, U.S.A.)

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