



## Settimo Cielo



di Sandro Magister

26 giu

## China Is Persecuting the “Underground” Bishops Even After Death. Vatican Uneasy

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As is known, in order to sign the September 22 2018 **secret accord** with China on the appointment of bishops, Pope Francis had to pardon eight bishops previously installed without the approval of Rome, who had thereby incurred excommunication.

One of these had died two years before, but the government of Beijing demanded and obtained this anomalous posthumous amnesty as well.

In exchange, however, Francis did not obtain the corresponding recognition, on the part of China, of the so-called “underground” bishops, consecrated by Rome without the government’s agreement.

One of these, Stephen Li Side, bishop of Tianjin, died at the age of 93 on the eve of Pentecost, but even after his passing the Chinese authorities did not display clemency.

They even denied him a funeral at his cathedral.

This is what is noted, in carefully measured words, by the official obituary that the Vatican secretariat of state published on June 24, sixteen days after Li’s demise:

“The commemorative Masses, the condolences and ceremonies of grieving, were held at a funeral parlor in the district of Jizhou, and not at the cathedral of Saint Joseph in Tianjin.”

And this in spite of the exemplary life of the deceased, not only as a minister of God but also as a citizen:

“Bishop Li Side lived in poverty and in extreme humility. He always urged the faithful to respect the country’s laws and to help the poor. Even in the painful vicissitudes of various kinds that marked his long life, he never complained, accepting everything as the will of the Lord.”

The “painful vicissitudes” that he experienced consisted of four years in prison from 1958 to 1962, seventeen years of forced labor from 1963 to 1980, and two more years in prison from 1989 to 1991. After which, as a consecrated bishop without government recognition, he had to spend the rest of his life - again in the words of the Vatican obituary - “under house arrest in the isolated mountain village of Liang Zhuang Zi, in the district of Jixian, 40 miles from Tianjin, where he remained until his death, able to leave only to go to the hospital.”

But “in spite of the exile and separation,” the obituary continues, “the faithful who came to visit him were always numerous. The prelate consistently defended the principles of the Catholic Church and bore witness to the Gospel of Christ, remaining heroically in communion with the successor of Peter.”

For details on the surreal treatment reserved for Li after his death, for whom the Chinese authorities have persisted in denying the very title of “bishop,” see these two articles from “Asia News,” the agency of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions specializing on China:

[> No public funeral for Msgr. Stefano Li Side, bishop of Tianjin](#)[> Mgr Li Side's funeral treated as a 'state affair', monitored by police and security forces](#)

For Vatican diplomacy, this stubborn ostracism by the Chinese authorities is not encouraging in terms of the future developments of the September 22 accord. On the part of Rome there have followed gestures of openness, as for example the extensive and conciliatory **interview** given on May 15 by cardinal secretary of state Pietro Parolin to the “Global Times,” the English-language branch of the “People’s Daily,” an official organ of the communist party. But it then happened that the interview **was not translated** into Mandarin, not even a small part of it, in any Chinese newspaper.

And then there is the obstacle of Hong Kong and of the rebellion of much of the population against the law - now suspended - that would allow the extradition to Chinese territory of political opponents as well, a rebellion in which the driving force from the beginning has been above all the Catholics of the city, starting with their two most recent bishops and cardinals, not only the intrepid Joseph Zen Zekiun, a diehard critic of the September 22 accord between the Vatican and China, but also his successor **John Tong Hon**, more moderate.

The selection of the new bishop of Hong Kong, since Tong too is on his way out now that he is past the age limit, will be a considerable puzzle for Pope Francis, who between rebellion and dialogue naturally leans toward the latter, if not toward outright submission, but he will also have to take into account the thirst for freedom and dignity of many Catholics - and bishops - of Hong Kong and of China as a whole.

Condividi:

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