

NEW EVIDENCE

Cardinal Parolin intervened to close blasphemous exhibition in Carpi diocese

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The never-ending story of the blasphemous art exhibition *Gratia Plena* on show in the church of St. Ignatius, in the diocesan museum of Carpi, last March 2024 and forcibly shut down due to pressure from the faithful has recently taken a new twist involving no

less than the Vatican Secretariat of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin. Precisely at the apex of the storm, and at the same time when the *Daily Compass* had broken the news in an **exclusive report**, the Vatican Secretariat of State took pen to paper to add his weight to the request for the premature closure of the “art” exhibition. Evidently motivated by concern for the grave wound inflicted on the faithful in the diocese, Cardinal Parolin’s decision to intervene personally was decisive in convincing the Diocese of Carpi to close the *Gratia plena* exhibition without further ado.

The unexpected news, disclosed by the lawyer Francesco Minutillo, representing a group of faithful in litigation against the artist Andrea Saltini and the Archbishop of Carpi, Erio Castellucci, for contempt of religion, emerged on 20 January during the opening of criminal proceedings in Court. Moreover, it confirms that the case of the exhibition which includes an image of Jesus in a position incompatible with his divinity (but remarkably similar to oral sex), first denounced by the *Daily Compass*, had been scrutinised by the highest Vatican summits, leading to the direct intervention of the Secretary of State to have it closed.

On examination, Cardinal Parolin's letter adopts the linguistic style typical of diplomacy meaning his objective has to be read between the lines. But one thing is certain from the letter: Parolin intervened after taking note of the serious discontent of the faithful.

During the hearing the lawyer, Minutillo, explicitly quoted the letter that Parolin wrote to a member of the faithful on 23 April 2024, immediately after the exhibition was closed on 18 April, in which he explained the reasons for his intervention. The letter was presented during yesterday's hearing before Justice Andrea Scarpa in the contempt proceedings involving not only the artist Andrea Saltini, but also Don Carlo Bellini, curator of the exhibition in the Diocesan Museum Church, and the Bishop of Carpi and Modena, Monsignor Erio Castellucci, who sent their respective lawyers to the hearing.

“Although I am sorry and concerned,” Parolin wrote, “I have not found it easy to intervene in such a situation. I have tried to do so with compassion and respect for all parties involved, and with an eye to peace and unity in the community of believers, which has been tested by this affair. Last week I was informed that the exhibition had been closed”.

According to Minutillo, the diplomatic and cautious language of the Secretariat of State, means only one thing: “This is a document that opens up new scenarios in the affair, revealing for the first time the Vatican's concern about the impact the exhibition

was taking on the Catholic community”.

This conclusion is also borne out by the words Parolin uses later in his letter: “Such an exhibition”, writes the Secretary of State in the letter quoted by Minutillo and included in the minutes of the proceedings, “has caused concern and anxiety among many of the faithful, and a profound sense of disorientation and disappointment, as has also been reported to me by other parties”.

“There are two passages in the letter that we consider crucial,” said lawyer Francesco Minutillo. “The first highlights the disturbing effect of the exhibition on the faithful and confirms one of the key elements of our position: the serious and widespread offence to Catholic religious sentiment caused by the works on display”. The second passage “clearly suggests that Cardinal Parolin personally intervened to request the closure of the exhibition. In fact, the very diplomatic and measured language of the high ecclesiastical spheres, suggests possible internal pressures, culminating in his appreciation for the closure of the exhibition”.

According to Minutillo, “this would implicitly contradict the actions of Archbishop Castellucci and, above all, of the Diocese of Carpi, which had publicly defended the event, attributing the closure to a decision by the artist Saltini for economic reasons linked to security, following the episode of assault and damage to a work. These circumstances, in the light of this letter, appear increasingly in need of verification, as we have requested from the beginning, and require us to also indicate Cardinal Parolin as a witness to be questioned in the course of the additional investigations we have requested in this matter”.

The trial of the Carpi exhibition has thus been enriched with another piece of news. On the subject of possible witnesses, an audio recording of two visitors to the exhibition who claim to have spoken with the artist immediately after the opening of the exhibition (but prior to the *Daily Compass* article, which was published the following day): “During the meeting, the artist allegedly hinted at the possibility of the obscene nature of one of the most controversial works, *Longino*, (a painting depicting the Roman centurion bowed over the naked body of Jesus prostrated on the ground with his head placed directly above Jesus’ genitals). A thesis that the artist has always denied in his subsequent statements’.

Next Monday 3 March, the respective parties and the magistrate, will hold a new hearing. The last hearing on 20 January was adjourned to ensure a unified and thorough treatment of the complex case and to include the latest facts.

However, following the testimony of Parolin, who might also be called as a witness, the trial of the *Gratia Pena* exhibition risks to become even more heated.