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Bertone hits out at Rome 'vipers'

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The Vatican's outgoing Secretary of State has lashed out at the "vipers" in the curia who undermined him - a day after Pope Francis named his successor.

Asked about his seven years in office by the Ansa news agency, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone said: "I see the record of the past seven years as positive. Of course, there were a lot of problems, especially in the last two years."

He hit out at "a combination of crows and vipers" - the Italian word for crow, *corvo*, denoting people who leak secrets. "But this should not cloud what I consider to be a positive record," he added.

He made his comments a day after Pope Francis named Archbishop Pietro Parolin, 58, currently nuncio in Venezuela, as Cardinal Bertone's replacement, with a handover due next month.

Announced on Saturday, the move to replace Bertone - which had been widely expected - has been seen as a vital step in Francis' long-awaited reform of the Vatican bureaucracy.

The last years of Benedict XVI's papacy were overshadowed by the so-called "VatiLeaks" affair that depicted the curia as riddled with corruption, mismanagement and cronyism.

Bertone said it was wrong to assume the secretary of state "decides and controls everything", suggesting he had been kept out of the loop on a number of issues. "There were matters that got out of control because they were problems which were sealed within the management of certain people who did not contact the secretary of state," he said.

"I always gave everything but certainly I had my shortcomings and if I could relive certain moments now I would act differently. But that does not mean that I did not try to serve the Church," said Bertone, 78, on Sunday.

Bertone was appointed by Benedict XVI in 2006 to occupy the Secretary of State role even though he had no diplomatic experience.

On his relationship with Benedict XVI, he said: "An honest assessment cannot but take note of how the secretary of state is the first assistant of the pope, a faithful executor of the tasks with which he is entrusted. Something I did and will do."

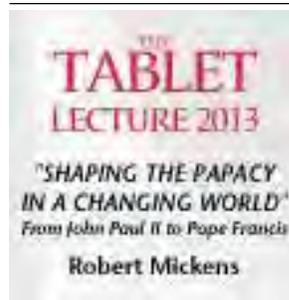
He added: "The secretary of state works in a team of five, a fine group that works very much together," a reference to the senior officials at the secretariat of state who worked alongside him. On Saturday it was announced that Pope Francis was reconfirming the rest of the group in their roles.

More Bertone replaced as reshuffle begins

Above: (L-R) Benedict XVI, his personal secretary Archbishop Georg Gänswein, Cardinal Bertone and the papal spokesman Fr Federico Lombardi. Photo: CNS

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