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Vatican ridicules report of plot to kill the pope

John L. Allen Jr. | Feb. 10, 2012 NCR Today

ROME -- In response to a report today about a secret letter from a former high-ranking Vatican cardinal warning of a plot to kill Pope Benedict XVI within the year, a Vatican spokesperson today said it consists of ?ravings which in no way should be taken seriously,? and is ?so incredible as to defy comment.?

tThe report, carried by the Italian paper *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, is based on a letter allegedly penned by Colombian Cardinal Dar'o Castrillón Hoyos, 82, who served from 1996 to 2006 as the Prefect of the Vatican?s Congregation for Clergy.

In the letter, which carries the date of Dec. 30, 2011, Castrillón supposedly relays information provided by Cardinal Paolo Romeo of Palermo in Sicily, regarding a plot to kill Benedict XVI within twelve months. The letter also speculates that Benedict's successor would be Italian Cardinal Angelo Scola of Milan.

tThe letter also refers to various alleged tensions and power struggles within the Vatican.

tReached today by various news agencies, the Vatican spokesperson, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, dismissed the report as ?madness.?

For his part, Romeo issued a statement today from Palermo saying the report is ?completely without foundation,? while Scola?s office in Milan had no comment.

tThe editors of *Il Fatto Quotidiano* are standing by their story, insisting that the letter attributed to Castrillón is authentic, and that it ?raises legitimate questions, not only about the health and security of the pope, but the disconcerting situation in which the church finds itself.?

tAnother Italian newspaper today, however, described the report as a ?spy story worthy of the TV series ?The Borgias,? suggesting that the alleged letter is a fake.

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