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Pondering the 'what,' not the 'who,' of Vatileaks

John L. Allen Jr. | Jun. 1, 2012 All Things Catholic

While the arrest of the pope's butler has triggered feverish speculation about the "who" of the Vatican leaks scandal, there's been less attention so far to the "what" of the revelations contained in the sensational new book *His Holiness: The Secret Papers of Benedict XVI*, published by journalist Gianluigi Nuzzi.

In part, that's because the scores of documents in the 326-page book are complex and highly diverse, often composed in dense ecclesiastical Italian; in part, that's because a Vatican whodunit is tough to resist.

Yet the substance of the leaks obviously merits consideration, so below, I present a sampling of the highlights, including material likely to interest English-speaking readers. Later, I'll roll out more.

First, this caution: The mere fact that a document exists does not automatically make its content credible. Some official documents, even if they're stamped "top secret," do little more than record gossip, spin or self-serving opinion. Each purported revelation has to be evaluated on its merits.

Overview

The Secret Papers of Benedict XVI contains 11 chapters, two concerning Nuzzi's sources and the genesis of the project, and nine devoted to the documents themselves. Nuzzi quotes from the documents throughout the text, and an appendix contains reproductions.

The nine content chapters cover the following subjects:

1. The Dino Boffo case
2. Controversies surrounding Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, currently the papal ambassador in Washington, D.C.
3. Vatican finances
4. The Vatican's role in Italian politics
5. The Vatican security forces
6. Controversies surrounding Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican's Secretary of State
7. Communion and Liberation, the Legionaries of Christ, and the Lefebvrists
8. Globalization and its economic impact on the Catholic church
9. Vatican diplomacy

Nuzzi opens by describing the clandestine circumstances under which he met his principal source, whom he refers to under the code name "Maria." In light of debate over whether the pope's butler acted alone (assuming he's involved at all), it's interesting to note that Nuzzi describes "Maria" not as an isolated whistle-blower, but a conduit for a larger faction in the Vatican.

Nuzzi points to "a small group of persons with different functions and roles, in various entities of the Holy See,

but united in the same choice ... to preserve papers which reveal unknown plots, controversies and affairs of the church, in every corner of the world."

In terms of motive, Nuzzi describes this group as composed of reformers fed up with "crooks and power games" who believe Benedict XVI wants change but who have lost confidence in the people around him to implement it. The decision to leak, Nuzzi writes, is thus motivated by a desire to "accelerate the action of reform undertaken by Ratzinger."

The Boffo case

For Italians, the story of Dino Boffo, a prominent lay Catholic journalist, is already the stuff of legend. There's now even an Italian phrase, the "Boffo method," as a short-hand for a style of character assassination.

At one time the editor of *l'Avvenire*, the highly influential daily of the Italian bishops' conference, Boffo resigned amid personal scandal in September 2009. A newspaper owned by the brother of Italy's then-prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, had published a judicial decree from 2004 that found Boffo guilty of telephonic harassment, along with a set of purported judicial notes indicating Boffo is "a known homosexual who has already come to the attention of the police for this kind of activity."

It turned out, however, that while the harassment decree was real, the judicial note calling him a "known homosexual" was a fake. That discovery triggered massive speculation about who had sabotaged Boffo, all of which was amply -- some would say, excessively -- reported at the time, mostly through anonymous sources.

Nuzzi adds a bombshell: two lengthy letters written by Boffo himself, addressed to Monsignor Georg Gänswein, the priest-secretary of Pope Benedict XVI.

With no hesitation whatsoever, Boffo directly accuses Secretary of State Bertone and Gianmaria Vian, editor of the Vatican newspaper, of orchestrating the plot against him. Boffo asserts that Bertone resented his support for "continuity" in the Italian bishops' conference between its former president, the ultra-powerful Cardinal Camillo Ruini, and its current head, Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco. (At the time, Bertone aspired to replace the Italian bishops as the primary interlocutor with the Italian government.)

"I don't believe, to be honest with you, that Cardinal Bertone was informed of the details of the action conducted by Vian," Boffo tells Gänswein, "but [Vian] perhaps could count, as in other situations, on accurately interpreting the mind of his superior."

Gänswein called Boffo after receiving the letter, after which Boffo wrote him again, this time largely to assure the pope's secretary that he's not a homosexual.

Nuzzi adds a letter Boffo wrote to Bagnasco in September 2010, this time requesting rehabilitation. Boffo explicitly repeats his charges against Bertone and Vian. Noting that he had received numerous requests to give interviews, Boffo wrote he had declined because, "If I speak, it's not as if I can skip over the part played by Bertone-Vian."

One month later, his rehabilitation arrived, when Boffo was hired to run the massive SAT2000 broadcast empire of the Italian bishops.

Nuzzi draws this conclusion: We now know Boffo accused both the Cardinal-Secretary of State and the editor of the Vatican newspaper, by name, of very serious crimes -- defamation of character, as well as falsifying a legal document. According to Nuzzi, if Boffo's accusations were judged credible, then Bertone and Vian should have been prosecuted. If his accusations were considered false, then Boffo was a strange candidate indeed for

another high-profile church job.

Nuzzi thus implies that Boffo's story amounts to a case in which the desire to paper over a public mess and to keep everyone happy (or, at least, equally unhappy) prevailed over establishing the truth.

Vatican finances

Nuzzi's book offers several nuggets about the dollar-and-cents dimension of Vatican life.

On page 89, he summarizes a receipt for donations during one of Benedict XVI's general audiences in spring 2006. The haul that day was $62,000, of which $51,000 came in cash and the balance in checks. Nuzzi estimates a typical audience nets between $50,000 and $185,000, depending on the size of the crowd and other factors. If that's correct, the annual intake from the general audiences would come to roughly $3 million.

Those funds, he writes, are deposited in a Vatican Bank account to be used at the pope's discretion, usually for charities or other purposes, with Gänswein being the designated administrator of the account.

Nuzzi also provides details on how personalities in and around the Vatican use money, sometimes subtly and sometimes less so, to try to influence decisions.

In 2006, Italian layman Angelo Caloia, at the time the president of the so-called "Vatican Bank," offered a gift of more than $60,000 to Benedict XVI. Nuzzi publishes the note Caloia attached to the gift:

> "Holy Father, these days of Easter and your lofty messages have filled our hearts with joy. The first anniversary of your call to the Throne of Peter has been, for us, a confirmation of the great gift the Lord Jesus has made. In offering heartfelt thanks to the Most High for the grace in which he continually allows us to participate, and with the thought of being able to continue to enjoy your paternal benevolence, I wish to express to you, personally and in the name of all the personnel of the Institute, a deep sentiment of gratitude and heartfelt wishes that the Holy Spirit will always assist you in your ecclesial ministry. Please accept, Holy Father, a modest gesture to help your good works, and bless all of us and our families."

Nuzzi notes that it's unclear whether Caloia's gift came out of his own pocket or bank funds -- if the latter, it wasn't much of a gift, since the money belonged to the pope anyway. In any event, Nuzzi observes that since Caloia hoped to be reappointed bank president, the gift might not have been a completely selfless act. (Caloia remained in his position until 2009.)

Nuzzi also publishes an October 2011 note to Gänswein from Domenico Gianni, the head of the Vatican gendarmes, passing along a list of people who wanted to see the pope's secretary. Among them were officials of Renault about a helicopter with "advanced technological systems" they planned to donate to the pope for his trips back and forth to his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, and Mercedes, about potential upgrades to the popemobile.

In another chapter, Nuzzi reveals confidential memos written for Gänswein, to be passed on to the pope, by economist Ettore Gotti Tedeschi, who replaced Caloia in 2009 at the Vatican Bank, about the impact of globalization on the church.

(Gotti Tedeschi was removed last week in what the supervisory council of the Institute for the Works of Religion, the formal name of the "Vatican Bank," described as a personnel move related to erratic personal behavior and poor job performance.)

Among other things, Gotti Tedeschi warned the pope that the rise of Asian powers like China and India and the

relative decline of the West could mean less money for the church.

> "The major consequence is that the resources which traditionally have contributed to the needs of the church (donations, investment income) may diminish, while the requirements of evangelization will go up. Further, 'secularism' could take advantage of the situation to create a second 'Roman question' in aggression directed at the goods of the church (through taxes, ending privileges, exasperated controls, etc.) The 'Roman question' of the 21st century will not lie in the expropriation of the church's goods, but in the loss of their value, in reduced contributions due to the impoverishment of the Christian world, and eventually in the end of privileges and in predictably higher taxes on those goods."

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Gotti Tedeschi recommended the creation of a centralized Vatican agency to study the protection of the church's assets in a new globalized world.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone

It's long been clear that Secretary of State Bertone is a controversial figure. Many people, including some Vatican insiders, fault Bertone for what they see as a series of administrative missteps during Benedict's papacy.

Nuzzi's book confirms that the existence of such internal resistance is not a product of overheated journalistic imagination.

One example dates to early 2009, around the time of the lifting of the excommunications of four traditionalist bishops, including one who's a Holocaust-denier. In roughly the same period, Benedict XVI was also putting the finishing touches on his social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, which would be released that summer.

Nuzzi publishes a Feb. 5, 2009, letter to Benedict XVI from Cardinal Paolo Sardi, formerly a principal ghostwriter for John Paul II and still consulted on Benedict's texts. Sardi complains that Bertone was mishandling consultations on Benedict's encyclical, in part because of his frequent trips out of the country.

Toward the end of the letter, Sardi adds a stinging observation.

> "A final, painful annotation: For some time in various parts of the church, including among people extremely faithful to it, critical voices have been raised about the lack of coordination and confusion which reins at its center. I'm saddened by that, but I can't avoid recognizing, from my own modest angle of vision, that there's some foundation to it. For instance, I'd like to note that I was not consulted on the editing of the decree about the Lefebvrite bishops (and I could have given some suggestions which wouldn't have been useless). Moreover, yesterday the text sent to Your Holiness on the same subject by the substitute was not shown to me until a few minutes before the deadline, when Monsignor Gänswein yelled [at me] over the telephone to get it back. I'm trying to see in these situations (which, to tell the truth, are numerous) the benevolent intervention of Providence, that wants to prepare me to leave the Secretariat [of State] without regrets."

Nuzzi also includes the text of a lengthy memo from an unnamed senior Vatican official, presumably at the Prefecture for Economic Affairs, written for Gänswein in spring 2011. The memo ticks off a series of alleged problems with Bertone's leadership, including ignoring the Vatican's own internal checks and balances, "demoralization" of personnel, and the appointment of people "who lack the adequate competence" in important jobs.

The conclusion is unequivocal:

> "The problematic situations are numerous and of notable gravity, above all because they could have devastating effects in the future, even if they can't been seen right now and everything looks fine. My direct superiors, with whom I've spoken repeatedly, for now don't believe it's opportune to do anything. They say that our principal point of reference is the Secretary of State, yet in many cases he's precisely the problem. Conscience requires that I present these matters to the Holy Father."

Communion and Liberation and the Legionaries

1. Communion and Liberation

Founded by Fr. Luigi Giussani in Italy, Communion and Liberation is arguably the new movement in the church closest to Pope Benedict XVI. Then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger volunteered to celebrate Giussani's funeral Mass in 2005, and four female members of Memores Domini, a body of consecrated laity linked to the movement, serve in Benedict's personal household.

Recently, Communion and Liberation has been caught up in controversy in Italy, related to scandals surrounding high-profile politicians linked to the movement. Giussani's successor, Spanish Fr. Julian Carrón, published an open letter in which he apologized, saying that if people see Communion and Liberation as caught up in money and power, "we must have given them some pretext."

A more combative side of Carrón comes through in a lengthy private letter to Benedict XVI from March 2011, published in Nuzzi's book.

Asked to provide his thoughts on who should succeed Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi as the archbishop of Milan, Carrón wrote, "the only candidate that I feel in conscience able to present to the attention of the Holy Father is that of the Patriarch of Venice, Cardinal Angelo Scola."

Although it's hard to say how decisive Carrón's opinion was, Scola, who comes out of Communion and Liberation, was named to Milan in June 2011.

Carrón presents a blistering indictment of the Milan archdiocese under both Tettamanzi and his predecessor, Jesuit Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, a hero of the church's liberal wing.

> "The first important fact is the profound crisis of faith of the People of God, in particular of the Ambrosian tradition. In the last thirty years we've seen a rupture in this tradition, accepting on principle and promoting in fact the characteristic fracture of modernity between knowledge and faith. ... Theological instruction for future priests and for laity, with notable exceptions, moves away on many points from tradition and the magisterium, above all in Biblical studies and systematic theology. A sort of 'alternative magisterium' to Rome and the Holy Father is often theorized, which risks becoming a consolidated feature of what it means to be 'Ambrosian' today."

Carrón also blasts the political orientation of the church in Milan under Martini and Tettamanzi, protesting "a certain unilateralism of interventions on social justice, at the expense of other fundamental themes of social doctrine" as well as a "systematic" bias in favor of the political center-left rather than more conservative parties and politicians (some of whom, especially in the Milan area, have ties to Communion and Liberation).

2. The Legionaries of Christ

Critics have long asserted that the Vatican had all the information it needed to act against Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado, founder of the Legionaries of Christ, well before it sentenced him to a life of "prayer and penance" in 2006. Charges of sexual and financial misconduct by Maciel became public in the 1990s, though Vatican

officials have insisted those reports were not confirmed until later.

Nuzzi's book adds another detail, producing the brief notes taken by a papal secretary on Oct. 19, 2011, after a half-hour meeting with Fr. Rafael Moreno, a Mexican priest who served as Maciel's private assistant for 18 years.

The full text of the unsigned note reproduced by Nuzzi, written on letterhead of the "Particular Secretary of His Holiness," is as follows:

> 19 October 2011
> Meeting 9:00-9:30 am
> By me
> Meeting with Fr. Rafael Moreno, priv.sec. of M.M.
>
> - Was for 18 years private secretary of M.M.; from this was ? [word is illegible]
> - Destroyed proof against him (incriminating material)
> - Wanted to inform P.P. II in 2003, but he didn't want to hear them, didn't believe
> - Wanted to inform Card. Sodano, but he didn't concede an audience to them
> - Card. De Paolis had too little time

Nuzzi writes that in all probability, "P.P. II" refers to John Paul II. Cardinal Velasio De Paolis, meanwhile, is the Vatican official Benedict XVI has tapped to oversee a reform of the Legionaries.

For Nuzzi, the failure to take Moreno seriously in 2003 is especially damning, given that his testimony came "not from a victim, perhaps motivated by hatred, but the best possible witness: the secretary who for 18 years followed the founder of the congregation day after day, and who, therefore, knew of his double and triple life, the most secret aspects."

Nuzzi also publishes a lengthy September 2011 report from De Paolis to Benedict XVI, updating the pope on what's happening in the Legion. In it, De Paolis asserts that progress is being obstructed by a minority who want a root-and-branch reform, including replacing any leaders with personal ties to Maciel.

"They continue to engage in propaganda of discouragement and denigration of the process, creating some division and difficulties," he writes. "In reality the number of opponents ... is rather small, but they're very fierce."

In a similar vein, Nuzzi publishes a report by Cardinal Domenico Calcagno, president of the Apostolic Patrimony of the Holy See and a veteran Vatican financial expert, on the economic condition of the Legion. While Calcagno writes that the order is suffering from serious debts, "situations of illegality or abuse have not been found." (Calcagno does recommend reducing the role of a group called "Integer," a controversial holding company for properties belonging to the Legion and its lay branch, Regnum Christi.)

Perhaps most explosively, Calcagno's report advises against giving in to demands for large-scale financial compensation for Maciel's victims.

Calcagno says reconciliation with some victims "has not been difficult," but it's more complicated with regard to "those who demand, in the name of justice, enormous sums that the Legion absolutely cannot afford, and which in fact cannot be based on claims of justice."

"A concession in this area," Calcagno writes, "beyond being unjust, could provoke an avalanche of equally

unsustainable requests."

Other Nuggets

Nuzzi's book contains two other items of special interest to English-speaking readers.

1. Bishop William Morris

Bishop William Morris of Toowoomba, Australia, was removed from office in 2011 on charges of favoring women priests, collective absolution, and other deviations from official teaching and practice. Nuzzi publishes a set of November 2009 notes on the Morris case, written by Benedict XVI himself and addressed to Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, at the time the prefect of the Congregation for Bishops.

The notes were written after a June 2009 meeting between Benedict and Morris, and after Morris had written a letter objecting to the way his case had been handled.

Among other things, Benedict writes that Morris' "theological formation ... is not adequate for his office," citing his views on women's ordination and the possibility of Anglican ministers leading Catholic liturgies.

In his letter, Morris accused the Vatican of a "lack of care for the truth," in part for implying he had agreed to step down. Benedict appears to take responsibility for that point, blaming it on a problem of language.

"Obviously there was a misunderstanding, created, it seems to me, by my insufficient knowledge of the English language," Benedict writes. "In our meeting, I tried to convince him that his resignation was desirable, and I thought he expressed his willingness to renounce his functions as bishop of Toowoomba."

"From his letter, I see this was a misunderstanding," Benedict writes. "I acknowledge that, but I must say decisively that this isn't a case of 'a lack of care for the truth.'"

In the end, Benedict writes, "there's no doubt of his very good pastoral intentions," but "the diocesan bishop must be, above all, a teacher of the faith, since the faith is the foundation of pastoral activity."

Benedict tells Re to recommend that Morris accept "free renunciation of his actual ministry, in favor of a ministry more consistent with his gifts," and asks Re to "assure him of my prayers."

2. Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn

Nuzzi's book also includes an encrypted 2011 cable from the papal embassy in Washington back to the Secretariat of State, relaying a request from Cardinal Francis George of Chicago that the Community of Sant'Egidio, a Rome-based movement active on peace and justice issues, be asked to withdraw an award it planned to bestow on Gov. Pat Quinn of Illinois for suppressing the death penalty.

According to the cable, George objected to Quinn's positions on abortion and gay marriage, including policies about serving same-sex couples, which effectively put Catholic adoption agencies in Illinois out of business.

The cable was signed by Monsignor Jean-Francois Lantheaume, the embassy's charge d'affairs. The full text is:

> From: Washington
> To: Decryption Off., Decr. N. 300
> Date of encryption: 03/11/2011
> Date of decryption: 03/11/11
> His Eminence Cardinal George, Francis, Archbishop of Chicago, has informed this pontifical embassy

that the Community of Sant'Egidio has plans to present an award to the Governor of Illinois, Mr. Quinn, for suppressing the death penalty in that state. Attested that Mr. Quinn is of the Catholic faith, the bishops and Cardinal George retain that this recognition is inopportune for the following reasons:

- He promoted the law on homosexual marriage;
- He is in favor of abortion;
- He withdrew from the Catholic church the right to contract with federal agencies for the adoption of minors.

Cardinal George courteously requests an intervention with the authorities of the Community of Sant'Egidio so that the decision will be reconsidered. On the part of this embassy, a nulla osta [no objection] to what is proposed by His Eminence the Archbishop of Chicago. Lantheaume, charge d'affaires.

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