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Vatican 'Prime Minister' speaks on leaks scandal

John L. Allen Jr. | Jun. 5, 2012 NCR Today

On Monday night, the Vatican press office dispatched an e-mail alert to journalists with the text of an interview given by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican?s Secretary of State, in the wake of Benedict XVI?s weekend outing to Milan for the church-sponsored World Meeting of Families. The trip was considered a major success for Benedict, culminating in an open-air Mass that drew more than one million people to Milan?s Bresso Park.

The Bertone interview is noteworthy primarily because it?s the first time the Vatican?s ?prime minister? has spoken at length about the leaks scandal which has engulfed the church?s central government since January, and which exploded anew in late May with the arrest of the pope?s butler. Bertone?s comments take on special significance given that many analysts believe he is the primary target of the leaks, reflecting dissatisfaction among some Vatican insiders with his leadership.

tAside from insistence that Benedict XVI will not ?allow himself to be frightened by attacks, of any sort,? perhaps the most striking element of the interview is Bertone?s comment that the leaking of confidential documents seems ?carefully aimed, and sometimes also ferocious, destructive and organized.?

tThat language would seem to lend credence to the theory that whatever the butler?s role may have been, he did not act alone, and that there?s a larger agenda behind the leaks.

tThe following is an NCR translation of the transcript of the Bertone interview, which took place with TG1, a news program of RAI, the Italian state television service.

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Interview with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
TG1, June 4, 2012

Question: You have just returned from Milan, who you accompanied the Holy Father for the World Meeting of Families. We have all seen, on television, so many people, an immense crowd, and above such great affection toward the Holy Father, who spoke words that touched everyone, including non-Catholics ?

Bertone: It?s true. We all experienced this extraordinary display of love for the pope and of accompaniment, of support for him and his magisterium, for his work, of joy and enthusiasm around him. I saw so many people who were moved, even in the streets of Milan. Think about the streets of Milan Friday and Saturday, which was the weekend, and not just the big events in the stadium or Bresso Park. It was truly everywhere. It was, therefore, a beautiful display of love for the pope in this particular moment and an act of esteem for Benedict XVI, who was called the ?great coach? of the universal church?s vast team for the championship of the third millennium. He got a standing ovation that no player, no coach, no protagonist of social or artistic life has ever had. The pope was therefore very happy, and also very moved.

Q: Naturally the family was discussed, because it was the World Meeting of Families, and the pope indicated some firm points. Then he surprised some people when he spoke about the family, pointing to it almost as a

useful and indispensable element to overcome the economic crisis that?s gripping our country and the rest of the world ?

Bertone: Yes. The family as a resource, a resource which is above all moral. A united family, a family that educates, a virtuous family which teaches the fundamental virtues to children through their tender years, which educates children in work and respect for others, and in solidarity. Moreover, a family that?s a great resource for society, which also has been confirmed by modern sociologists. I would say that the pope has also launched some concrete instruments ? instruments of solidarity, of twinning between families, supporting especially those in difficulty ? twinning between parishes, between communities and cities. It seems to me that he?s indicated some paths which can be concretely followed to relieve situations of need and to move forward.

Q: It was inevitable that the media would look at these three days in Milan with special attention, also for the coincidence with an internal Vatican inquest which everyone is talking about, and which is seen as a great test of transparency for the Vatican ?

Bertone: This is also true. I remember that Saturday night, while we were returning from Bresso Park, from the huge event that night, toward the cathedral of Milan. I was with Cardinal Scola in the car. We saw the stained glass windows lit up, and we immediately commented: ?This is the church, an illuminated house, notwithstanding all the defects of persons within the church.?

Transparency, however, is about commitment, solidarity one with the other, and trust. It?s not a matter of cynicism or superficiality. It?s not enough to become aware of some documents, or to publish partial documents, in order to know the full truth. Often, this is exactly what happens: Clarifications are the fruit of a work of dialogue, of personal relationships and conversion of the heart, which don?t come just from paperwork or bureaucracy. Papers are important, but personal relationships are much more so.

What?s most sad in these events and these situations is the violation of the privacy of the Holy Father and his closest collaborators. I would like to say, however, that these have not been, and aren?t now, days of division but of unity. I would also like to add that they are above all days of faith, or firm serenity, also in the decisions being made. It?s a moment of cohesion among all those who truly want to serve the church.

Q: A final question, which is the one everyone would like to ask. How has the Holy Father experienced this affair? Should we think, as someone has written, that there are inferences which have been instrumentalized in order to attack the church and the pope?

Bertone: There have always been instrumental attacks, in all times. I remember, for example, speaking of my personal experience of the church, of the times of Paul VI, which aren?t so far away. This time, however, it seems the attacks are more carefully aimed, and sometimes also ferocious, destructive and organized.

I would like to underline the fact that Benedict XVI, as everyone knows, is a mild person, of great faith and great prayer. He doesn?t allow himself to be frightened by attacks, of any sort, nor by the hard accumulation of prejudices. Those who are close to him and work by his side are sustained by the great moral strength of the pope. Benedict XVI, as I?ve said on other occasions, is a man who listens to everyone, he?s a man who keeps moving ahead faithful to the mission he?s received from Christ, and he feels great affection from the people. Especially in these days [in Milan], he?s felt complete affection from the people around him, from young people and families with children, who applauded the pope frenetically. It seems to me that the trip to Milan gave him extra strength.

Moreover, I?d like to underline a word that he?s repeated many times, including just before his departure from the Archbishop?s residence in Milan: It?s the word ?courage.? He said it to others, to the young, to young people who seek to form a family. He said it to families in difficulty, he said it to the civic authorities, and he

says it to the whole church. He speaks this word because he?s convinced on the inside, because it?s the strength that comes to him from faith and from God?s help, and thus he says it to all: ?Courage!? He said it also to the victims of the earthquake. I repeat: I?d like us to interiorize this word alongside the pope, and under the guidance of the pope.

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