

Rome Notebook: Vati-leaks, Nigeria, and women deacons

John L. Allen Jr. | Jun. 16, 2012 NCR Today

ROME -- Today's big Vatican news may well turn out to be basically no news at all. This afternoon, at roughly 6:00 pm Rome time (10:00 am on the East Coast), Pope Benedict XVI will meet the three cardinals whom he appointed in late April to investigate the mushrooming Vatican leaks scandal.

Those three cardinals, all over 80 and therefore holding no current Vatican jobs, are Spanish Cardinal Julián Herranz, 82, formerly the president of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts; Slovakian Cardinal Jozef Tomko, 88, a former prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples; and Italian Cardinal Salvatore De Giorgi, 81, who resigned in 2006 as the archbishop of Palermo.

In the current atmosphere, any development on the Vati-leaks front inevitably generates excitement, and today's nondescript announcement concerning the pope's calendar is no exception.

That's especially so given that, under church law, cardinals may only be judged by other cardinals. In light of speculation that the ultimate architects of the leaks scandal are to be found among the Princes of the Church, news that the three cardinals empanelled by the pope to investigate the affair are due to make a report inevitably has people wondering precisely what it is they might have to say.

The Vatican announcement did not make clear whether the pope simply summoned the three cardinals for a progress report, or whether they requested the meeting in order to offer the pope some new information.

Apparently this meeting is designed as a private affair, as Vatican spokespersons have advised the press not to expect any public statements after the fact.

Just to illustrate how crazy things have become, news that the three cardinals are meeting the pope came just a day after the Vatican announced that Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the former Secretary of State under John Paul II and a figure widely linked to the Vati-leaks scandal in media speculation, is in Slovenia through Monday for a private visit. In the Vatican press office today, some journalists only half-jokingly wondered if Sodano had arranged to be out of town just in case the three cardinals meeting with the pope were prepared to indict him for some role in the affair.

For the record, there's no indication whatsoever that's the case.

Herranz has worked in the Vatican in various capacities since 1960, and Tomko since 1962, so between them they have 102 years of Vatican experience. Though never a Vatican official, De Giorgi has served as a member of various Vatican departments and is a veteran of the Italian church scene, which is especially relevant given that Italian ecclesiastical rivalries are widely presumed to be part of the background to the recent scandals.

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Today in *Corriere della Sera*, considered Italy's newspaper of record, four Italian politicians representing both the right and the left issued an appeal on behalf of persecuted Christians in Nigeria.

Most recently, six people were killed and dozens injured after members of the Islamic militant sect Boko Haram detonated a bomb at one Christian church and opened gunfire at another last week. On Thursday, Boko Haram, which in Nigeria's Hausa language means "Western education is banned," released a statement asserting that, "The Nigerian state and Christians are our enemies and we will be launching attacks" until we achieve our goal of establishing an Islamic state in place of the secular state.

The Italian statement demanding action to protect Christians in Nigeria was signed by Maurizio Lupi, a well-known conservative politician in Italy who was the baptismal sponsor of Magdi Allam, the country's most famous convert to Catholicism from Islam; Franco Frattini, another high-profile conservative who served as Italy's foreign minister under Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi; Andrea Riccardi, the founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio, a center-left figure who currently serves as Italy's Minister of International Cooperation; and Walter Veltroni, a leading member of the Italian left.

An NCR translation of the statement follows.

We cannot wait for next Sunday. If there remains alive in us even a crumb of humanity and justice, we cannot lose a single moment. We have to mobilize ourselves at every level to stop the hunt against Christians which explodes every Sunday in the northern regions of Nigeria. Since the beginning of the year, roughly 600 deaths have been caused by Boko Haram, most of which were assassinated during the Mass and Sunday celebrations.

We deeply admire the courage with which millions of persons, most of them young people, still go to the churches, choosing the freedom to believe and to manifest their faith instead of allowing violence to win. The aim of the terrorists, who act because of the impotence of the government, is to "purify" the north of Nigeria from any presence which isn't Islamic. The same objective has been pursued in other areas of Africa and of the world, wherever religious ideology becomes a pretext for claiming power without any respect for freedom and human rights.

We cannot be complicit in the basic indifference that surrounds these atrocities and the denial of religious freedom, a principle which applies to every religion, the expression of which is always and everywhere an indispensable value.

How many other Sundays must pass with the rite of bombs and innocent blood?

With this protest, we affirm the will to commit ourselves in every sphere and at all levels so that in Nigeria, in Africa, and in all the world, the killing of unarmed persons guilty solely of professing their Christian faith will stop.

We solicit all men and women of good will, whatever their creed may be, to adhere to this appeal for religious freedom. Only a vast mobilization of public opinion can inspire the highest European and international authorities to resist this murdering hatred.

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Today's Vatican news bulletin announced that the web site of the International Theological Commission, the principal advisory body to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has been "renewed, reorganized and updated," principally by providing versions in various languages of the 25 documents the commission has published since 1969.

Although these documents do not carry any official weight, since they are merely advisory for the CDF, they nevertheless signal both the subjects in which the Vatican's top doctrinal authorities are interested, and provide

some indication of the thinking circulating in the Vatican on these topics.

The value of these documents is underlined by the fact that the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is also the commission's president, and generally he authorizes the publication of its conclusions.

A 2002 document on the diaconate may be of special interest, since it's the only official Vatican text to explicitly take up the question of whether women may be ordained as deacons. While not closing off the possibility, the document appeared to take a somewhat negative position on the question.

Alas, there's still no official English version of the text, which is made available on the updated web site only in French, Spanish and Italian. Here's an unofficial translation, from the Italian version, of the document's concluding paragraph on women deacons.

Regarding the ordination of women to the diaconate, it's useful to note two important indications that emerge from what has been exposed to this point: 1) the "deaconesses" mentioned in the tradition of the early church, based on what is suggested by their rite of institution and the functions they exercised, are not purely and simply comparable to deacons; 2) the unity of the sacrament of orders, despite the clear distinction between the ministries of the bishop and of priests on the one hand, and the diaconal ministry on the other, is strongly underlined by ecclesial tradition, above all in the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council and in the post-conciliar teaching of the magisterium. In light of the elements placed in evidence by the present historical-theological research, it will await the ministry of discernment which the Lord has established in his church to pronounce with authority on the question.

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