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Judges in 'VatiLeaks' case say computer tech was hard to believe

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Explaining why they found a Vatican computer technician guilty of aiding and abetting the papal butler who stole private papal correspondence, Vatican judges said they found much of his testimony hard to believe.

The Vatican court Nov. 10 found Claudio Sciarpelletti, 48, a computer technician in the Vatican Secretariat of State, guilty of obstructing the investigation into the leak of Vatican documents. The court gave Sciarpelletti a two-month suspended jail sentence.

As is the normal practice at the Vatican and in Italy, the judges released a detailed explanation of their findings and of their sentence weeks after the verdict was delivered.

The 11-page explanation of the Sciarpelletti decision was published Saturday, the same day that Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, announced that Sciarpelletti's lawyer had dropped his request for an appeal of the guilty verdict.

Neither the defense nor the court contested that a file folder with a sealed envelope, marked with the butler's name and containing papers related to the leaked documents, was found in Sciarpelletti's desk at the Secretariat of State.

However, the judges' described Sciarpelletti's trial testimony and his earlier statements to investigators as to how he had obtained the envelope and whether he knew what was in it as "not credible" and "not truthful."

Questioned in May, Sciarpelletti originally told investigators the butler, Paolo Gabriele, gave him the envelope. The next day, he said it came from his superior, Msgr. Carlo Maria Polvani. At the trial, he admitted changing his story, saying he'd had the envelope so long he couldn't remember where it came from.

The judges said it appeared that Sciarpelletti was trying to protect Gabriele when he said the material came from Polvani.

Gabriele testified at Sciarpelletti's trial that he had given the computer tech the documents contained in the envelope, asking him to read them. Polvani also testified, saying he had nothing to do with the envelope and had no idea it existed until Sciarpelletti was formally indicted in August.

None of the testimony at the trial provided details about the documents other than to say that one of them concerned an incident involving gunshots fired at a Vatican police car parked outside a restaurant.

The judges said they found both Gabriele's and Polvani's testimony credible, and they found it difficult to believe Sciarpelletti could not recall the source of the envelope.

The judges also said they found it unlikely that Sciarpelletti never looked at the papers inside, an affirmation he made both during the investigation and at the trial.

As the judges' report was published, Italian media reported that in the wake of the "VatiLeaks" scandal, the Vatican Secretariat of State had adopted new security measures to monitor access to its offices, track the location of documents and register all photocopies made.

One report said employees' ID cards, which allow them to open doors, but also keep track of who goes in and out when, also would be equipped with a microchip that would give Vatican officials the ability to know where each employee is on Vatican property at any given time.

Lombardi told Catholic News Service on Monday that upgraded security measures have been implemented over the past two years and are not directly connected to the "VatiLeaks" scandal, but the scandal may have encouraged officials to implement them more quickly.

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