

The Hunt for Thieves in the Vatican

Contributed by Sandro Magister
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ROME, May 31, 2012 – There's method in this madness. Since the butler of His Holiness ended up in jail, the scene has suddenly changed. At center stage is no longer the dispute over the contents of the stolen papers. It's the thieves. Intent on scheming in the shadow of a venerable white robe.

"With justice eliminated, what are kingdoms if not a great band of thieves?" The phrase is from Saint Augustine, but it was Benedict XVI who cited it in his first encyclical, "Deus Caritas Est" of 2005. He didn't know that seven years later it would become the public image of the Vatican. A citadel devastated by thievery, with no corner left inviolate, not even that "sancta sanctorum" which the private desk of the pope should be.

The real or presumed thieves of Vatican papers have declared in chorus to the newspapers, under anonymity, that they acted precisely out of love for the pope, to help him clean house. And it is true that none of the wrongdoing laid bare in the documents involves his person. But it is even more true that everything falls upon him, inexorably.

The pope theologian of the great homilies, of the book on Jesus, is the same one who reigns over a curia adrift, a den of "egoism, violence, enmity, discord, jealousy," all of the vices he stigmatized in last Sunday's homily for Pentecost and in so much more of his fruitless prior preaching.

It is the same pope who wanted as his secretary of state Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, and continues to keep him at his post, in spite of the fact that he sees more and more evidence of his inadequacy every day.

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In the Vatican today, the boundary between illicit acts and those of simple mismanagement has become very slender, almost nonexistent.

The glaring proof is showing up right now. Pontifical butler Paolo Gabriele has just been arrested for the theft of documents from the papal apartment, while within and around the Institute for Works of Religion, the Vatican bank (IOR), a clash of unprecedented violence has come to a head, registered with equal brutality first in an official statement from the Holy See itself and then in an internal document deliberately leaked to the press, so that the world would know that the president of the IOR, Ettore Gotti Tedeschi, had received a vote of no confidence from the other members of the bank's supervisory board.

And he had lost his support, the document said, because of his manifest incapacity to perform his role, for culpable ignorance of his duties, for "increasingly bizarre" personal behavior, and also, naturally, because of his suspected release of confidential documents – in short, because of a total of nine accusations shot through and through with a tone of insult, put to a vote and approved one by one by the board of renowned advisers: the German Ronaldo Hermann Schmitz of Deutsche Bank, the American Carl Albert Anderson of the Knights of Columbus, the Spaniard Manuel Soto Serrano of Banco di Santander, and the Italian Antonio Maria Marocco, a notary in Turin and the latest member to be added to the board.

The first three, in 2009, had given determined support to the appointment of Gotti Tedeschi as president of the IOR. And they had continued to give their support until a short time ago, when there were already bitter disputes between Gotti Tedeschi and the director general of the bank, Paolo Cipriani, a power player of the old guard. For six months, the two

have not been on speaking terms.

The statement with the announcement of the challenge to Gotti Tedeschi ended by saying that the next day, Friday, May 25, there would be a meeting of the commission of cardinals that oversees the IOR, the only one that could turn the motion of the board members into an executive order.

The meeting did in fact take place, but without any final statement. Formally, Gotti Tedeschi has not yet been dismissed, and he is mustering the weapons to make his defense.

But meanwhile, the conflict has moved to where it counts the most, within the commission of cardinals. Where there is Bertone as its president, but also Attilio Nicora, who has almost never been in agreement with him, and Jean-Louis Tauran, who as former foreign minister of the Holy See has never been able to swallow the entrusting of the secretariat of state to someone with no expertise in diplomacy, like Bertone.

One of the other two cardinals of the commission, Telesphore Placidus Toppo, lives in India, and the other in Brazil, Odilo Pedro Scherer. Justified absences.

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The last battleground between Bertone and Nicora was the set of regulations introduced in Vatican City for admission to the international "white list" of states with the highest standards in fighting money laundering.

It is amazing that in the statement against Gotti Tedeschi there is no reference to this essential point of contention.

To write the regulations, Gotti Tedeschi and Cardinal Nicora had called upon the two leading Italian experts in the matter, Marcello Condemi and Francesco De Pasquale, both of the brood of Banca d'Italia. The law, number 127 in the Vatican numeration, went into effect on April 1, 2011, and in conjunction with this Benedict XVI, with a motu proprio, endowed the Vatican with a Financial Information Authority, headed by Nicora, with powers of absolute control over every movement of money performed by any office within the Holy See or connected to it, including the IOR and the secretariat of state.

But as soon as these regulations were approved, the counteroffensive began.

The management of the IOR, the secretariat of state and the governorate objected that with it the Vatican was losing its sovereignty and becoming an "enclave" of external banking, political, and judicial powers. They had a trusted American lawyer, Jeffrey Lena, rewrite the law, and last winter, by decree, they implemented a second version that limited the supervisory powers of the Financial Information Authority, subordinating them to those of the secretariat of state.

According to its proponents, the new regulations also correspond better to the international requests for transparency.

But both Nicora and Gotti Tedeschi are of a diametrically opposed view. They judge the new law 127 as "a step backward" that will cost the Holy See its admission to the "white list."

A first response from the international authorities on the anti-laundering regulations in effect at the Vatican is expected in July.

But the preliminary judgments expressed by the inspectors of Moneyval after two rounds of investigation at the Vatican do not bode well.

The first version of law 127, examined under ten different aspects, had received six votes in favor and four against.

The second version received eight votes against, and only two in favor.

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Meanwhile, in the Vatican it is war. Cardinal Bertone is also under fire for the campaign he conducted in 2011 for the purchase, with the money of the IOR, of the San Raffaele, the cutting edge hospital established in Milan by a controversial priest, Fr. Luigi Verzé, plunged into a whirlpool of debt.

At first Gotti Tedeschi supported the purchase offer, but very soon he joined the opponents, including cardinals Nicora and Angelo Scola, the new archbishop of Milan, and Benedict XVI, highly opposed to the purchase not only because of the direct involvement of the Holy See in a worldly affair too far from its spiritual ends but also because at the San Raffaele and the affiliated university activities are practiced and teachings are imparted that are in glaring contradiction with Catholic doctrine; and it is certainly not possible to replace en masse the physicians, scientists, and professors.

In the end, Bertone gave up and the San Raffaele was purchased by a leading Italian entrepreneur in the health care sector, Giuseppe Rotelli.

But for the exuberant secretary of state, the dream of creating a Catholic hospital center under the control and guidance of the Vatican dies hard. As proven by another of his failed initiatives: the conquest of the Gemelli, the Roman general hospital of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart that became famous all over the world for having accommodated and cared for John Paul II.

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There was one obligatory step for the conquest of the Gemelli: the control of the founding and sponsoring institute of the Catholic University, the Toniolo, controlled in turn by the Italian episcopal conference and traditionally headed by the archbishop of Milan.

The Toniolo was for years the target of a hostile takeover that aimed to remove by any means necessary its representatives most closely allied with the cardinal who was the president of the CEI until 2007, Camillo Ruini.

The attack that in 2009 struck Dino Boffo, a member of the Toniolo and the director of the newspaper of the CEI, "Avvenire," with accusations of homosexuality that were afterward acknowledged as false by the very newspaper that had published them, was the fiercest moment of this battle.

Bertone did not defend him. Worse, the director of the newspaper published by the Vatican secretariat of state, "L'Osservatore Romano," Giovanni Maria Vian, peppered Boffo with criticisms in a merciless interview with "Corriere della Sera," precisely at the crucial moment of the attack against him.

There would be no need today to read the heartbroken letters written by Boffo at that juncture, which have appeared among the papers stolen from the pope. The substantial dynamic of the facts was already before the eyes of all.

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The San Raffaele operation, the attack on Boffo, the attempted conquest of the Gemelli, Bertone's claim of outranking the CEI in the role of leading the Church in Italy. It all fits together.

In 2010, the irrepressible secretary of state, claiming a presumed mandate from Benedict XVI, even intimated to Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi in writing that he should leave the presidency of the Toniolo. The archbishop of Milan flew off the handle. And Benedict XVI agreed with the latter, after calling both contenders before him.

This correspondence was also stolen and made public. But here as well the story was already well known. Today the presidency of the Toniolo has passed peacefully to Tettamanzi's successor in the see of Milan, Cardinal Scola.

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In a public letter to the bishops of the whole world, in 2009, Benedict XVI warned: "If you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by one another."

The pope had taken these words from Saint Paul. Because even in Christianity at its origin, there were fierce contrasts.

And also with Jesus, among the apostles, there were some who jostled for places of power, and some who protested against the wasting of the precious ointment poured out upon the Master's feet, instead of "selling it and giving the proceeds to the poor."

Benedict XVI has the refinement and the humility never to identify himself with Jesus. But to associate himself with him, yes. Last May 21, at the toast at a luncheon with cardinals, he concluded trustfully: "We are on the team of the Lord, and therefore on the winning team."

But what a struggle, when everyone is playing against him, even those "disguised with the truth."

Immediately before this, speaking to the cardinals, the pope had cited Saint Augustine: "All of history is a battle between two loves: love of self even to disregard of God; love of God even to disregard of self."

And he added: "We are in this battle, and in it it is very important to have friends. As concerns me, I am surrounded by my friends of the college of cardinals, I feel safe in their company."

Father Federico Lombardi also guaranteed, on May 29: "There are no cardinals among the persons of interest or suspects."

Not to inconvenience the police, but not all of the cardinal "friends" are playing on the team as the pope expects.

This same article was published in "L'Espresso" no. 23 of 2012, on newsstands as of June 1, under the title:

Corvi e demoni nella curia vaticana

GUERRA SANTA

Carte trafugate. Veleni. Arresti. Nella Santa Sede è in atto un violento scontro con al centro il potente cardinale Bertone. Mentre il papa è sotto assedio e gravato dagli scandali

On May 29, "L'Osservatore Romano" published its first commentary on the arrest of the pope's butler, Paolo Gabriele, after five days of absolute silence on the case.

It did so in an interview conducted by the director, Giovanni Maria Vian, with the substitute of the secretariat of state for general affairs, Archbishop Giovanni Angelo Becciu.

In the interview, Becciu reports that Benedict XVI is "also pained about the violation suffered by the authors of the letters or of the writings addressed to him."

The complete text of the interview:

> The papers stolen from the pope

The crime for which Gabriele is under investigation is defined by "L'Osservatore Romano" as "possession of a large number of confidential documents belonging to the pope."

Benedict XVI expressed himself in this way on these events at the end of the general audience of Wednesday, May 30:

"The events that have taken place in these days concerning the curia and my collaborators have brought sadness to my heart, but have never obfuscated the firm certainty that in spite of human weakness, difficulties and trials, the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, and the Lord will never deprive it of his help in upholding it on its journey. Nevertheless there has been a multiplication of conjectures, amplified by some means of communication, that are entirely gratuitous and have gone well beyond the facts, offering an image of the Holy See that does not correspond to reality. I therefore would like to renew my trust and my encouragement to my closest collaborators and to all those who on a daily basis, with fidelity, with a spirit of sacrifice, and in silence help me in the fulfillment of my ministry."

With regard to the shakeup at the top of the Institute for Works of Religion, it must be noted that there had been public signals of the rupture between the president and the management of the IOR even before the meeting of the supervisory board on May 24 that produced the vote of no confidence on Ettore Gotti Tedeschi.

On May 15 and then on May 22, in the auditorium of the Vatican bank, director general Paolo Cipriani extensively illustrated the structure of the IOR and the services it administers to two large groups of diplomats accredited to the Holy See.

At the same meetings, vice director Massimo Tulli and director Giovanni Marinozzi provided clarifications on "the compliance of the IOR with the most demanding international standards in the matter of the fight against money laundering."

The convening of the ambassadors was handled by the assessor and the head of protocol of the secretariat of state, Monsignors Peter B. Wells and Fortunatus Nwachukwu, who also spoke at the two meetings.

But Gotti Tedeschi did not take part in either of the meetings, in spite of the fact that his presence was mentioned by "L'Osservatore Romano" in reporting on the first of the two.

Not all of the ambassadors have found the explanations they have received to be satisfactory.

In an interview with Vatican Radio after the first of the meetings, British ambassador Nigel Baker cautioned that the process of adding Vatican City-State to the "white list" would in any case be "bumpy, because there will be some things where the IOR can't yet say we've reached full international compliance and indeed other Vatican institutions."

About the strong reservations expressed by Cardinal Attilio Nicora, president of the Financial Information Authority, on the second version of law 127 on anti-laundering, in effect at the Vatican as of January 25, 2012, see the excerpts from one of his letters in an article in "Il Fatto Quotidiano" of last February 16:

> Trucchi e cavilli, così lo IOR torna in paradiso (fiscale)

The letter bears the date of January 12, 2012, and is addressed to Cardinal Bertone.

The complete text of the statement of May 24, in Italian and English, with which the Press Office of the Holy See made public the vote of no confidence on the president of the IOR, Gotti Tedeschi:

> "On 24 May 2012..."

And the notification with which the supervisory board of the IOR communicated to Gotti Tedeschi the vote of no confidence, with the accusations and the account of the meeting:

> Notice and Memorandum

On May 29, "Avvenire" published a defense of Gotti Tedeschi written by Marco Tarquinio, director of the newspaper owned by the Italian episcopal conference.

Responding to some letters from readers, Tarquinio praised the president of the IOR not only for his "professional expertise, his dedication and generosity in resolving open problems in a transparent way by looking always to a greater good," but also because "his constant, delicate, and primary thought has been and is for Pope Benedict."

For more details on Cardinal Bertone and his role in the Boffo and San Raffaele cases:

> No Glorious Sunset for Cardinal Bertone (2.2.2012)

> Bertone Has a Fever, He Wants the San Raffaele (15.7.2011)

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