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Workers inspect an ossuary at the Teutonic Cemetery at the Vatican in this July 20, 2019, file

Workers inspect an ossuary at the Teutonic Cemetery at the Vatican in this July 20, 2019, file photo. The ossuary was inspected in the hope of finding the missing remains of a German princess and duchess and possibly the remains of Emanuela Orlandi, who disappeared in 1983. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

View Author Profile

jmclellan@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @m/McLellan_Js



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Vatican City — April 14, 2023
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Pope John Paul II's longtime aide denied the "vile insinuations" that the former pope was maliciously involved in the case of Emanuela Orlandi, a Vatican schoolgirl whose

1983 disappearance is the focus of an ongoing Vatican investigation.

Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, who served as John Paul's personal secretary from 1966 until the pope's death in 2005, responded to comments made in an interview on Italian television by Emanuela's brother, Pietro Orlandi, April 11.

The cardinal said that Orlandi's claims about the Polish pope's involvement, claims which originated in the "elusive circles of the Roman underworld," are "rambling accusations, false from beginning to end" and even "laughable."

Emanuela Orlandi, the daughter of a Vatican usher who lived inside the walls of Vatican City, disappeared in Rome June 22, 1983, when she was 15. For nearly 40 years, her disappearance has fueled conspiracy theories involving the church and was the subject of a 2022 Netflix documentary.

During the television interview, Orlandi played an audio recording he presented to Alessandro Diddi, Vatican City's chief prosecutor, of a man he claimed was close to the Roman mafia group allegedly involved in Emanuela's disappearance.

In the recording, the speaker said that John Paul would bring young girls into the Vatican to be sexually exploited and that "when the situation turned into something foul," the Vatican secretary of state turned to the mafia via a network of prison chaplains for assistance in removing the girls.

Just before doing the interview, Orlandi met with Diddi, who is leading the Vatican investigation, and other Vatican prosecutors for more than eight hours; it was their first meeting since Diddi opened a new file in the investigation in January.

In the television interview, Orlandi said he was told that John Paul "would go out at night in a car with two Polish monsignors," and that "it certainly wasn't to bless houses."

Orlandi told the television interviewer he is "convinced" John Paul, Popes Benedict XVI and Francis are "aware of what took place" in 1983 that led to his sister's disappearance.

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In his statement, Dziwisz said that John Paul "took charge of the matter" of Emanuela's disappearance from the beginning and "never encouraged actions of concealment of any kind."

"What was done to Emanuela and her family was a huge crime," said the cardinal, but it also "is criminal to profit from it with uncontrollable rants aimed at preemptively discrediting people and places worthy of universal esteem until proven otherwise."

A statement April 14 from Laura Sgrò, the Orlandi family lawyer, said that Pietro Orlandi "did not intend to make accusations against anyone," but had "only asked that the search for the truth not have any conditions."

"The search for the truth is an act of courage, and the Holy Father has showed his desire to follow this path," continued the statement.

Speaking to reporters after their meeting April 11, Orlandi said Diddi assured him Francis had given him free rein to investigate "from the lowest to the highest up" in the Vatican.

Francis, said Diddi in an interview with Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera, has an "iron will" to shed whatever light is possible on what happened to Emanuel Orlandi.