

WikiLeaks: Vatican Chatty Cathy?

Michael Sean Winters | Dec. 13, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Generally, I think the WikiLeaks scandal has been a big yawn. In fact, the dominant fact that emerges from the cables is that American diplomats mostly say in private what the government says in public.

But, one paragraph in the cables from the U.S. Embassy to the Vatican did catch my eye. In a discussion of the Vatican's handling of the sex abuse crisis in Ireland, this appeared:

"4. (S/NF) While Vatican contacts immediately expressed deep sympathy for the victims and insisted that the first priority was preventing a recurrence, they also were angered by how the situation played out politically. The Murphy Commission's requests offended many in the Vatican, the Holy See's Assessor Peter Wells (protect strictly) told DCM, because they saw them as an affront to Vatican sovereignty. Vatican officials were also angered that the Government of Ireland did not step in to direct the Murphy Commission to follow standard procedures in communications with Vatican City. Adding insult to injury, Vatican officials also believed some Irish opposition politicians were making political hay with the situation by calling publicly on the government to demand that the Vatican reply. Ultimately, Vatican Secretary of State (Prime Minister equivalent) Bertone wrote to the Irish Embassy that requests related to the investigation must come through diplomatic channels via letters rogatory."

N.B. "DCM" stands for Deputy Chief of Mission.

It is the job of the Holy See's Assessor, Msgr. Peter Wells, an American, to talk to embassies and answer their queries. But, that parenthetical warning "(protect strictly)" will no doubt raise some eyebrows. Why the need to protect someone as a source, if it is their job to be a source, unless that person is saying somethings out of school? At the Vatican, where discretion is a greater virtue than it should be and gossip is the new lingua franca, I suspect that parentheses has caused a bit of a stir.

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