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Papal frontrunner distances himself from conservative movement

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NCR Today

ROME -- Cardinal Angelo Scola, widely considered a leading candidate to be the next pope, has distanced himself from sharp criticism of his two predecessors in Milan leveled by the head of Communion and Liberation, a Catholic movement born in Italy and seen as a bulwark of conservative Catholic opinion.

Scola's criticism is considered especially significant, given that his own background as a young Italian priest was in the Communion and Liberation movement.

The confidential letter from Fr. Julian Carrón, successor of the renowned Fr. Luigi Guissani as head of Communion and Liberation, was addressed to Pope Benedict XVI in March 2011. It was among the leaked documents published in the recent book *His Holiness: The Secret Papers of Benedict XVI*, by journalist Gianluigi Nuzzi.

In the letter, Carrón urged Benedict XVI to appoint Scola to Milan, and offered a starkly negative assessment of the two previous archbishops, Cardinals Carlo Maria Martini and Dionigi Tettamanzi. Martini was long considered a hero of the church's liberal wing, while Tettamanzi is seen as a centrist.

Carrón told Benedict that under the two prelates, doctrinal teaching in Milan moved away "on many points from tradition and the magisterium, above all in Biblical studies and systematic theology." He warned that "a sort of 'alternative magisterium' to Rome and the Holy Father is often theorized," creating a "profound crisis of faith."

Carrón also blasted the political orientation of the church under Martini and Tettamanzi, protesting "a

certain unilateralism of interventions on social justice, at the expense of other fundamental themes of social doctrine, as well as a systematic bias in favor of the political center-left rather than more conservative parties and politicians.

Revelation of the letter caused protest in Milan, including an open letter signed by 550 Catholic intellectuals, clergy, and leaders of church-run institutions. According to the letter, "the ministry of these two pastors was a long and unforgettable treasury of grace, in the search for a coherent realization of the choices of the Second Vatican Council in the difficult contemporary context."

That ferment set the stage for Scola's address on Friday to his Presbyteral Council, informally referred to as the "senate" of the Milan archdiocese. The body is composed of 74 members, including diocesan clergy, members of religious orders, and heads of archdiocesan offices.

Although Scola is generally considered a Ratzingerian, and thus somewhat to the right of both Martini and Tettamanzi, he expressed great esteem for the two prelates.

"What I think is clear, even if I refer solely to what I've said directly to the pope," Scola said, quoting from positive remarks he'd made about Martini and Tettamanzi to Benedict XVI, applauding the "rich legacy" they left behind.

According to the website of the Milan archdiocese, Scola has asked an aide to meet with the local leadership of Communion and Liberation "to request the necessary clarifications, and to pursue the process of pluralism within unity which is appropriate to ecclesial life."

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This is not the first time Scola has tried to put some space between himself and Communion and Liberation, which has recently been tarred by scandals involving high-profile politicians in Italy with links to the movement.

In late April, reporters pressed Scola to comment on the controversies.

"What do I know about Communion and Liberation?" Scola replied. "I deal with the church of God. If you want to know something about Communion and Liberation, go ask them."

On another occasion, Scola, 70, said he hasn't been active in Communion and Liberation for decades, insisting that he doesn't even know any members of the movement who are under 60 years old.

Over the years, Benedict XVI has been fond of Communion and Liberation. He celebrated the funeral Mass for Giussani in 2005, his last public act before the death of Pope John Paul II, and four consecrated female members of the Memores Domini group that grew out of Communion and Liberation serve his personal household.

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