

A red, white and blue roundup

John L. Allen Jr. | Jul. 6, 2012 All Things Catholic

In honor of the July Fourth holiday, this week's column presents a red, white and blue roundup of recent news, meaning current events somehow linked to, or suggested by, those patriotic colors.

For the record, the idea comes from a local classic rock station that played "Panama Red," "White Wedding" and "Devil in a Blue Dress" over and over again on Wednesday. My hope is that if such a gimmick works on the FM airwaves, then it ought to fly here, too.

Red: Cardinals, traditionalists and money

In Catholic symbolism, red is the color of the cardinals, and it's also associated with the Holy Spirit, recalling the tongues of fire at Pentecost. In the financial world, red is the color of deficits, as in "red ink."

Three news items bring all those bits of reddish imagery into play.

On the subject of cardinals, there's news regarding Italian Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican's Secretary of State. It's been widely speculated that the ultimate aim of the recent Vatican leaks scandal is to embarrass Bertone, compelling Pope Benedict XVI to dump the 77-year-old Salesian as his top aide. Italian papers have been full of anonymous comments from purported leakers who say they're friends of Benedict XVI and who insist Bertone is in over his head.

If that's really the agenda, then it has to go down as one of the most pointless exercises in recent Catholic memory. It's been clear from the beginning that Benedict and Bertone, for better or worse, are joined at the hip. Further confirmation came Wednesday, with Vatican publication of a letter Benedict XVI sent to Bertone just before leaving for his summer break.

"On the eve of my departure for the summer outing to Castel Gandolfo, I want to express profound gratitude for your discrete closeness and your illuminating counsel, which I've found especially helpful in these recent months," the pope wrote. "Having noted with regret the unjust criticisms directed at you, I intend to renew the demonstration of my personal faith, which I already made clear with my letter of January 15, 2010, and the content [of that letter] for me remains unchanged."

Bertone has been criticized not just for the leaks scandal, but a series of other management gaffes over the last six years. They include the 2009 cause célèbre over a Holocaust-denying bishop and a surreal affair in 2010 involving charges of a plot to humiliate an Italian journalist by manufacturing police documents accusing him of homosexual harassment.

Whatever the merits of those charges, Benedict XVI has made the usual round of speculation about their fallout unnecessary. Plain and simple, Bertone stays put.

Turning to future cardinals, Benedict XVI consummated a long-awaited personnel move Monday, accepting the

resignation of 76-year-old American Cardinal William Levada as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and replacing him with 64-year-old Bishop Gerhard Müller of Regensburg, Germany, who became an archbishop with the appointment and who will almost certainly become a cardinal the next time the pope hands out red hats.

I published [an analysis piece](#) [1] Monday. Suffice it to say here that Müller is an interesting character, a strong theological conservative who nevertheless is personal friends with Peruvian liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez and whose writings have drawn sharp criticism in traditionalist Catholic circles.

Interestingly, within 15 minutes of the news Monday, I had emails both from liberal Catholic activists in Germany comparing Müller to the Nazis for his emphasis on obedience and from traditionalist Catholics calling him a heretic for allegedly unorthodox views on the Virgin Birth, transubstantiation and ecumenism. Although it's too simple to say that just because someone is attacked from both sides, he's necessarily in the middle, it's still interesting that Müller draws fire from both these constituencies.

This brings us to red as the color of the Holy Spirit. As it happens, the late French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre was the superior general of the Holy Ghost Fathers before going on to fame as the leader of traditionalist resistance to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Müller now inherits responsibility for bringing Lefebvre's Society of St. Pius X back into the fold, and early signals suggest he may need some help from the Holy Ghost to get the job done.

Not only are the traditionalists unhappy with Müller, but they've also been irked by a Monday interview with American Archbishop Augustine "Gus" Di Noia, recently tapped as the Vatican's lead official for relations with the traditionalists.

Here's the key line from [the Di Noia interview](#) [2], published by *Vatican Insider*: "Vatican II repudiated anti-Semitism and presented a positive picture of Judaism. John Paul II took us further in recognizing the significance of the Jewish People for Christianity itself. This is a new concept which we know the traditionalists will not be able to accept immediately. Convincing them will take time, and in this respect we will have to be patient."

In some traditionalist circles, that paragraph has been touted as a smoking gun, proving that the Vatican is trying to shove a break with the church's eternal truths (a "new concept") down their throats.

Here's how commentator John Vennari interpreted it: "Traditional Catholics are expected to effectively abandon the perennial truths of the Catholic Faith regarding the absolute necessity for non-Catholics -- Jews included -- to leave their religious affiliations and convert to Christ's one true Church ... This is neo-Modernism in action, something no Catholic is bound to accept. In fact, our first duty is to resist."

If the traditionalists are looking for reasons to slow down their march to Rome, the Müller and Di Noia appointments could do the trick.

Finally, let's turn to red as in deficits. The Vatican released its brief annual financial statement Thursday, reporting a 2011 deficit for the Holy See, the central government of the universal church, of \$18.5 million. The statement attributed the shortfall to costs for personnel and social communications, compounded by the overall global financial situation.

Meanwhile, the government of the Vatican City State, referring to the administration of the Vatican's 108-acre physical space (including its museums, postal service, gardens and so on) had a surplus of \$27 million. That result was attributed primarily to an increase of visitors to the Vatican Museums, which reached more than 5 million last year, boosting revenues from \$101 million in 2010 to \$113 million in 2011.

Since one of the more spectacular charges to emerge in the recent leaks scandal involves alleged corruption and cronyism in the City State, that surplus is likely to be viewed as especially consoling by Vatican officials.

In 2011, according to the statement, a total of 2,832 people worked for the Roman Curia, the bureaucracy of the Holy See, while 1,887 were employed by the Vatican City State.

Dioceses around the world, according to the statement, kicked in \$32.1 million in 2011 to support the Vatican, while religious orders provided \$1.2 million. The Vatican Bank, formally the "Institute for the Works of Religion," provided \$60 million.

The statement also reported a slight bump in contributions to Peter's Pence, an annual collection around the world to support papal charities, from \$67.7 to \$69.7 million.

Although the statement did not provide an overall total for the Vatican's expenses in 2011, in general, the annual operating budget is in the neighborhood of \$300 million.

White: the Vatican and transparency

White is the papal color around the Vatican. In secular argot, it's also the color of so-called "white lists," meaning lists of countries certified by external regulators as playing by the rules in fighting money-laundering and tracking the movement of money.

While America celebrated its Independence Day on Wednesday, the Vatican actually reached a milestone in the voluntary surrender of a small sliver of its own autonomy. Moneyval, the European arm of the Financial Action Task Force, an intergovernmental body that sets transparency standards, formally adopted its evaluation of the Holy See during a plenary meeting in Strasbourg, France.

The process marks the first time the Vatican has opened its financial operations to objective external review, the results of which will be a matter of public record.

(It's actually not the first time the Vatican has sought outside help. In 2009, the City State brought in McKinsey & Company, a secular management consulting firm founded in Chicago, to look things over. In that case, however, the Vatican paid the tab, the results weren't disclosed and the Vatican was free to accept or disregard the advice without consequence.)

According to statements released both by the Council of Europe and by the Vatican, the Vatican now has one month to check the report for inaccuracies and to provide comments. Once that happens, the report, along with the Vatican's comments, will be published by Moneyval. Given the timeline, the report should be made public by early August.

As I've [already reported](#) [3], leaked versions of an early draft suggest the Vatican will avoid being flagged as a problem nation and consigned to a special review process. Instead, it will finish somewhere in the middle of the global pack, with scores analogous to recent evaluations of Germany, Israel and the Czech Republic, not to mention Italy itself.

The Moneyval report is expected to identify three areas of concern:

- Whether the Vatican's new anti-money-laundering law creates a political "veto power" in the Secretariat of State over requests for international cooperation.
- The absence of regulations outlining how the Vatican's new financial watchdog agency, the Financial Information Authority, will perform inspections -- in particular, of the Vatican Bank.

- Whether Vatican law permits the watchdog unit to examine data from the period before it came into existence April 1, 2011. That's especially sensitive in light of an Italian probe of two allegedly suspect transactions by the Vatican Bank in 2010.

On background, Vatican officials have stressed that this is their first evaluation while other states are now on their third or fourth cycle, and generally scores improve with subsequent reviews. They've also insisted that the results are less important than the fact the Vatican has entered the process in the first place, which officials argue represents a historical step in the direction of transparency and accountability.

Blue: the U.S. bishops lose a lion

Catholics associate the color blue with the Blessed Virgin Mary, but in street lingo, people often use "blue" to refer to feeling a little sad. It's that colloquial sense I have in mind here as I catch up to something that happened a month ago, but which in the press of time I haven't yet mentioned.

In early June, John Carr announced his retirement as executive director of the Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which takes effect at the end of August.

To be sure, Carr isn't heading out to pasture. He's accepted a fellowship for the fall at the Kennedy School at Harvard University, focusing on the links between faith and public life. Nonetheless, his presence at the conference will be missed.

Normally speaking, the bureaucratic shuffling of chairs might not rate as a news item. Carr, however, has been a chief policy advisor for the bishops for almost a quarter-century, and his fingerprints are on virtually every important faith-and-politics story over that span, including several versions of the controversial "Faithful Citizenship" document, health care reform and the bishops' interventions on Iraq. Quite possibly, no single person has had more conversations over the last 20 years with American politicians on both sides of the aisle to voice Catholic concerns.

Carr is a friend, so I'm not the guy to offer an objective appraisal of his impact. Instead, I'll just say this: One can debate how he's handled this or that issue, but he deserves enormous credit for striving to hold a divided church together.

In an era in which the pro-life and peace-and-justice wings of the church often seem to be on different planets, Carr has always been firmly in both camps. At a time when many Catholics seem determined to cram the square peg of partisan allegiance into the round hole of Catholic identity, insisting that a good Catholic must align either with the Republicans or the Democrats, Carr has always insisted that someone who takes the full range of Catholic social teaching seriously is destined to wind up "politically homeless."

Carr returned to that point in his retirement letter. Here's what he wrote:

"For years, I and others have said we sometimes feel 'politically homeless,' alienated from polarized politics and false choices that ask us to choose between defense of the unborn and protection of the poor, between Catholic moral principles and the church's social teaching, between promotion of economic justice and protection of religious liberty. When we are 'politically homeless,' it is not enough to proclaim our purity or complain about others; we need to find a home, or at least build a shelter. We need places and strategies to advance a consistent vision of defending human life and dignity, to bridge differences through civil dialogue and pursuit of the common good, and to form and encourage more lay leaders to act as 'faithful citizens' in American public life."

Carr will, I'm sure, continue saying all that from his new perch at Harvard, and then whatever comes next. I don't mind admitting, however, that the fact he will no longer be saying it as an official representative of the U.S. bishops, or acting on it on their behalf, leaves me just a little bit blue.

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