

VATICAN

A false scoop against Müller reveals nothing new

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For weeks now an article published by the US website [The Pillar](#) has been causing much discussion, according to which the non-renewal of Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller's mandate as head of the former Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2017 was caused by a financial investigation.

The (unsigned) reconstruction mentions 'sources close to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith,

the Secretariat for the Economy and the Vatican's Office of the Auditor General [who] independently told *The Pillar* that Müller's removal from office came after financial problems at the Dicastery led to an investigation and the Pope ordered the cardinal to repay hundreds of thousands of euros.' Indeed, according to *The Pillar's* source, 'tens of thousands of euros of dicastery funds were kept in cash in office drawers and used as discretionary funds (...); that money intended for the Dicastery's bank account was instead deposited into Müller's personal account.' Explaining that in 2015 the Secretary for the Economy led at the time by Cardinal George Pell conducted a financial investigation, carrying out random inspections in the Curia, *The Pillar's* source reported that 'in the office [of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] we counted thousands, thousands of euros in cash that they were trying to take out the back door in plastic bags.'

The anonymous account on the American website, however, is not by any means a revelation: it's been public knowledge since November 2022 when former Vatican Auditor General Libero Milone **spoke about it to a few journalists** in a law firm in Rome during a meeting organised to announce the claim filed in civil proceedings against the Secretariat of State in the Vatican Court. Milone and the former deputy auditor Ferruccio Panicco (who died in 2023) filed the legal claim requesting compensation of more than €9 million for the damage received from their dismissal in 2017 and alleging a series of acts of alleged 'lack of respect for the rules' that had emerged during the two years of work and 'diligently reported to the Holy Father'. Milone circumstantiated some of the contents of that annex in his meeting with journalists in November 2022, already reporting at the time that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 'received money very often in cash or cheques and part of it was paid into an account at The Institute for the Works of Religion (IOR). When we did the audit we saw that that account belonged to the Prefect and not to the entity, it was 250,000 euro'. Also on that occasion, the former auditor told the press of the discovery 'in Müller's office of a plastic shopping bag where there were bundles of banknotes worth 500 thousand euro, Panicco saw the bag; all this was written in a report to the Pope that will be attached like the others to the summons'.

So, *The Pillar's* account is anything but a scoop and the choice of resorting to the formula of anonymous sources for events already made public two years ago by someone with a first name and surname makes the anonymous author of the article lose credibility. Moreover, Cardinal Müller has already responded to the accusations by explaining that the Dicastery 'had not lost a penny' and recalling that at the time of his arrival as prefect there was a 'certain amount of confusion' in the management of

accounts and money that he himself, however, corrected. Müller also told CNA Deutsch that 'if people had realised, as Cardinal Pell did, that the Dicastery had not lost a single cent in the end, they could have spared themselves the repetition of an issue that had long since been resolved'. Indeed, those who were very close to Pell confirmed to the *Daily Compass* that the former Prefect of the Secretary for the Economy held his German confrere in the highest regard right up to the end. Müller also acknowledged to CNA Deutsch that there had been a case of an official who had 'recorded money back and forth between individual accounts in the Dicastery and, although not illegally, had retained unusually large amounts of cash' but without appropriating it.

The existence of an episode of confusion in the initial management of the funds of the former Holy Office that ended up under the lens of the Secretary for the Economy at the time headed by Pell is also reported by the *Daily Compass*, but the version of the former German prefect is correct: informed of the facts, Müller intervened to resolve it.

Chapter bank accounts: in those days the dicasteries could also have their own accounts in order to preserve their autonomy with respect to the Secretary of State and the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (A.P.S.A.), and it is not surprising to discover that they were headed by their respective prefects. In a meeting with journalists in November 2022, Milone himself, while clearly not happy about it, had described this mode as 'masterly' but had to admit that he could not state that the account was used for Müller's person and not for the Congregation.

If, as *The Pillar* claims, the German cardinal was 'retired' after only five years in the former Holy Office not because of his evident lack of harmony with the line of the current pontificate but because of alleged financial irregularities reported by Secretary for the Economy, why did the Pope not treat Monsignor Vincenzo Paglia in the same way? Libero Milone, in fact, speaking to the press in November 2022 said that during his tenure as auditor general, irregularities had been discovered in connection with construction work at the headquarters of the Pontifical Council for the Family headed by the prelate. *The Pillar* itself had reported, citing 'sources close to the Secretary for the Economy', that an investigation by the Secretary for the Economy between 2014 and 2015 had revealed how Paglia had 'diverted hundreds of thousands of euros allocated to support missionary and charitable works while he was president of the Pontifical Council for the Family' and had 'used much of the money to finance building projects in Rome, including the renovation of his personal flat'. According to *The Pillar*, this alleged diversion was reportedly pointed out by Milone to the Pope in a report. Yet it does not appear that Monsignor Paglia received the same treatment from the Pope as Müller

since he is still president of the Pontifical Academy for Life and grand chancellor of the John Paul II Pontifical Institute.

The weakness of *The Pillar's thesis* according to which an investigation into the management of the finances of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was behind the sacking of the German cardinal appreciated by Benedict XVI is therefore quite evident. In reality, as several curial sources confirm to the *Daily Compass*, the straw that broke the camel's back was the episode of the dismissal of three officials from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the end of 2016. Müller was not consulted and vigorously protested to the Pope in order to defend the jobs of his three valuable collaborators, but to no heed. From then on, the already less-than-brilliant relationship between Francis and his first prefect of the Doctrine of the Faith fractured irreparably until the non-renewal of the role in the summer of 2017 and his early 'retirement' at only 69 years old.

If *The Pillar's reconstruction were true*, there is no doubt that Cardinal Pell, a man of integrity and who, for the sake of truth, did not hesitate to acknowledge the unjust treatment suffered by the unloved Cardinal Angelo Becciu in the Vatican trial that ended with his conviction (in a sentence whose motivations are still awaited eight months later), would have stopped esteeming his German confrere. Instead, he continued to do so, reciprocated: so much so that last 9 January it was precisely Müller who celebrated Mass in the Domus Australia church on the first anniversary of the death of the Cardinal from Ballarat. The anonymous article that revives nine-year-old facts, already revealed two years ago, leaves one question unanswered: *cui prodest?*