

VATICAN

Father Spadaro's fake interview with Leo XIV

ECCLESIA

25_07_2025



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It could become the new summer trend: take old videos of famous figures, transcribe their words, insert questions, and present them to the public as unpublished interviews. This is more or less what happened with *Da Francesco a Leone* (From Francesco to Leo), the new book by Father Antonio Spadaro, published by Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna (EDB).

The cover of the volume announces: "With an unpublished interview with Cardinal Robert F. Prevost." Unfortunately, Spadaro's contribution was not an interview, let alone unpublished. In fact, it was a transcript of a **public conversation** that the prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops held on August 7, 2024, at St. Jude Church in New Lenox, Illinois. Cardinal Leo XIV was introduced by his friend, Father Ray Flores, and the conversation was moderated by Mr Frank. The latter asked Prevost questions, not Spadaro, who was presumably in Sicily and not America, as the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* incorrectly wrote. In fact, *La Stampa* referred to an "interview with the Pope" on its front page and to "Prevost's manifesto in an unpublished interview given a year ago to Father Spadaro" inside.

It was certainly a glaring error on the part of the Piedmontese newspaper, which was clearly misled by the wording "unpublished interview." The former editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Father Spadaro did not go that far, and, a few days earlier, in an *Avvenire* preview, he limited himself to writing that "the reader will find, in the appendix, the transcript of a spontaneous conversation that Cardinal Prevost had in an Augustinian parish in Illinois." Wisely, the Jesuit did not mention an "unpublished interview," yet it is hard to believe that he did not see the cover of his book before its release.

Following the uproar over *La Stampa's* blunder, which was sparked by *Dagospia*, both Spadaro and the publishing house clarified that Spadaro had not interviewed the future pope in New Lenox. EdiBolsena issued a statement saying that "the interview with Cardinal Precht contained in the book is a transcript of a spontaneous conversation held on August 7, 2024, at the Augustinian parish of St. Jude" and that "it relieves Spadaro of any responsibility for any misunderstandings arising from unclear communications between the press and the publishing house."

However, the story remains somewhat murky. Why did Edb refer to it as an "unpublished interview" on the cover rather than presenting it as it is? What was published is nothing more than a transcript of a speech found on YouTube. How can it be described as "unpublished" when it had already been online since August 7, 2024?

After the habemus papam, it received hundreds of thousands of views. On May 22 and 23, Spadaro published video excerpts with Italian transcripts on his Instagram page in an attempt to explain the "synodal consideration" of the new pope, he said. After the election, therefore.

Before May 8, there seems to be no trace of Prevost in the prolific editorial and social media output of the current undersecretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education. In the last twelve years, this output has included perhaps hundreds of prelates in photographs, quotes, and collaborations.

Were St. Jude's parish, event organizer Father Ray Flores, and Mr. Frank, who asked Prevost the questions, aware of the Jesuit's initiative and the Bologna publishing house? Did they know that the conversation they promoted would be presented as an "unpublished interview" on the cover of an upcoming book in Italy? We have asked them and will keep you updated.

The book's thesis is to demonstrate the continuity between the pontificates of Francis and Leo XIV, with the former editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica* being one of the main proponents of Francis. This trend does not please the dean of Vaticanists, Gianfranco Svidercoschi. When contacted by the *Daily Compass*, Svidercoschi expressed concern about those who want to "stick labels on Leo that are foreign to him." While the Pope wants to be left alone to do his job and resume and complete projects launched by Francis, Svidercoschi says that there are those who want to "frame" him in attitudes and situations of the past.

At this point, the only continuity with the previous pontificate that the promotion of *Da Francesco a Leone* seems to trace is the mess surrounding Ratzinger's letter. In 2018, this letter cost Dario Edoardo Viganò his position as prefect of the Secretariat for Communication.