



A potentially explosive report has linked the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI to the discovery of a network of gay prelates in the Vatican, some of whom – the report said – were being blackmailed by outsiders.

The pope's spokesman declined to confirm or deny the report, which was carried by the Italian daily newspaper La Repubblica. The paper said the pope had taken the decision on 17 December that he was going to resign – the day he received a dossier compiled by three cardinals delegated to look into the so-called "Vatileaks" affair.

Last May Pope Benedict's butler, Paolo Gabriele, was arrested and charged with having stolen and leaked papal correspondence that depicted the Vatican as a seething hotbed of intrigue and infighting.

According to La Repubblica, the dossier comprising "two volumes of almost 300 pages – bound in red" had been consigned to a safe in the papal apartments and would be delivered to the pope's successor upon his election.

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