

## **The «Vatican Insider project»: News and behind the scenes analysis.**

The «Vatican Insider» project brings, I think, something new and original to the world of international media. Many have asked how it is possible to get independent information about the Holy See and the life of the Catholic Church around the world in the form of hard news, good analysis and insightful comments. How is it possible to maintain a high level of credibility in the public forum without any direct or indirect connection with institutions, religious orders or new catholic movements and associations?

How is it possible to interest people in this whole area of information about religion, and to offer them something with which they can connect?

To respond to these challenges, under the inspiration of Mario Calabresi, *La Stampa* assembled a «team» of leading «vaticanists» from different countries. The idea was to create a partnership of journalists with different sensibilities, languages and points of view, who would work together and analyze the news and events about the Catholic Church and the Vatican, as well as the other Christian Churches and religions, particularly in their relationship to the former. We built a team but are always keen to enhance the level.

I will try to offer some examples of how we tried to do this, taken from the articles published in Vatican Insider since we started in June 2011.

In the first week of our project (26 June 2011), we published an article about the behind the scenes “battle” concerning the Vatican Governorate and Archbishop Viganò. We wrote:

*«It is a tug of war that is still in progress, with unpredictable results, even though the fate of one of the protagonists appears to be decided, the septuagenarian Archbishop Viganò, who has been secretary of the Governorate since July 2009, and who should be leaving his post in the coming weeks... He should receive the purple hat. But now, instead of a ticket for the appointment of cardinals at the next Consistory, Viganò may be receiving an airline ticket to one of the diplomatic missions of the Holy See in the world. What happened in these two years? And why will Viganò soon be replaced? The answer, says a knowledgeable source close to the Pope, “is the negative climate that reigns within the Governorate, and in the relations between the lay office directors and the secretary general”. Viganò arrived at the Governorate with the intention (and mandate) to clean up, put his hand to waste and balance the books. Already in 2010 the State budget, from a negative of seven million passed to a surplus, thanks to savings on costs as well as a more favourable economic situation and the increasing number of visitors».*

Our article, published in Vatican Insider a few months before the appointment of Viganò as papal nuncio in the USA, and a few months before the «Vati-leaks» scandal, was quoted in a letter sent by Viganò himself to the Pope, asking Benedict XVI if he really thought that what was written in Vatican Insider was correct.

All the most important pieces of news about this “internal battle” were published on our website last year, seven months before the release of the «leaks».

In the following months, when the Vati-leaks documents began to be published, we always dealt with the subject without hiding any news, while always seeking to provide a deeper analysis, more information, ever seeking to describe and explain what was happening in the Vatican. At the same time

we avoided the trap of sensationalism and tried to help our readers distinguish between the different kinds of documents, and between fact and fiction.

Other examples of articles with exclusive news included the appointment of Cardinal Scola as archbishop of Milan, the announcement of the new Concistory (in advance of the news agencies around the world), the confirmation about the decision to celebrate next year the GMG (XXVIII World Youth Day) in Rio de Janeiro.

On the 3rd of November 2011, after the Pope's decision to use the mobile platform prompted speculations about his health, we wrote in Vatican Insider: *«Benedict XVI suffers from artrosis, a problem that affects fifty percent of people over the age of 60. When walking long distances he feels pain in the right hip and he asked to use the mobile platform of his predecessor, Karol Wojtyla, a platform that is pushed through the Saint Peter's Basilica central nave. However, when his closest aides suggested bringing out again the old gestatorial chair, which is the former ceremonial mobile throne carried over the shoulders, Ratzinger replied without hesitation, "No, thanks."»*. Our article was quoted around the world.

In addition, last February Vatican Insider published the entire text of the "decree 159", which had been approved in the Vatican on the 25th of January but remained unpublished. This decree, which was signed by the President of the Vatican Governorate, includes the new law about transparency.

In the case of the delicate and complex matter of Vatican finances, we have always spoken without reticence, and described the clash that was going on behind the scenes, without hiding the internal conflicts regarding the finances of the Institute for the Works of Religion (IOR, the Vatican Bank) and Controlling Authority headed by Cardinal Nicora. But we have never taken sides. Moreover, we have always done so on the basis of documents that we had, and we were the very first to publish the text of the new law governing all this in the Vatican.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2011, we published an article about the new Libyan government and the «old friend» of the Vatican, Aref Ali Nayed. He was one of the authors and creators of the "Letter of 138", after the crisis that followed the interpretations of Pope Benedict XVI's famous speech in Regensburg in 2006.

In September 2011, we dedicated a few articles to what I consider one of the most important speeches of the Pope. During his visit to Germany, Benedict XVI spoke about the Church poverty, and also spoke in a positive sense about secularization: *«The Church, at that time in history, shared in the requirement of a poverty that was opened to the world, so that it would rid itself of its material attachments; in that way, its missionary activity would turn out to be credible»*.

The Pope's words were completely overlooked by the media because two stories without little or no foundation hit the front pages of many papers, especially in Italy: the shooting in Erfurt (far from the square where the Pope said mass!) and the article that the Pope would resign. Yet, I believe we did right because the speech, though prepared and dedicated to the German Church, contained a message for the whole Church. We analyzed this message with interviews and focused on it.

Beyond Germany we focused on the problems in Ireland, Belgium, Austria and Poland, and covered – also thanks to papal visits – the developments in Spain and Portugal.

Europe, however, has not been the only focus of our attention: we dedicated many articles and analysis to the situation of Christians in the Middle East, and in the African continent where Christianity is flourishing, but so too is Islam and conflicts of various kinds. We have also given some considerable attention to the Church in the United State and its somewhat conflict-ridden relationship with the Obama administration.

While two-thirds of the world's Catholics live in the Americas, we are also very conscious that two-thirds of humanity lives in Asia, and so we have from the beginning devoted a lot of attention to the situation of the Church in Asia, particularly to China and India – the political and economic superpowers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but also to Pakistan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, ever conscious that the majority of the world's Muslims live in Asia, as do its Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs.

We publish in Italian, Spanish and English, but we also have some significant input from the Francophone world too. In particular, I would draw your attention to our partnership with the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, as a result of which we are allowed to translate and publish in Vatican the articles posted in his blog by the well-known French Vaticanist Jean-Marie Guenois.

We published some fine reportages: I want to mention for instance, the last papal trip to Mexico and Cuba. Before, during and after the visit to Cuba, the attention of Italian and international newspapers was focused on the reaction of the dissident's groups and the meeting between Pope Benedict and Fidel Castro. Instead, we published reportages that focused on the reaction of the Catholic people in the country to the pope's visit.

Furthermore, I want to mention the articles and analysis about Latin America. Finally I'd like to remember one of the most widely read articles in Vatican Insider, which was written by our senior Vaticanist Marco Tosatti and dedicated to the Turin Shroud. The National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development, has published a report on five years of experiments conducted in the ENEA center of Frascati on the «*shroud-like coloring of linen fabrics by far ultraviolet radiation*». They tried to understand how the Shroud of Turin was imprinted by an image so special.

We still have a lot of work to do and many things to improve. However, in addition to offering the latest exclusive news, I think that the most important contribution that Vatican Insider can give is to provide the background, the analysis and the support to enable people across the globe to better understand what happens, and why it happens in the Vatican and in the Catholic Church worldwide.