

***Is it possible to communicate the essentials of the Faith?  
Getting beyond the surface in news coverage of religion.***

Dott.ssa Maria Grazia Murru  
AP Television News Senior Producer Rome-Italy

**Summary**

**AP Television News** is the international television division of The Associated Press. Our offices are located all around the world to produce, and then deliver breaking news, sport, entertainment, technology and human interest video content to broadcasters, online and mobile platforms.

*What do we do?* We follow important news wherever it happens, we film and deliver short video stories to our subscribers all over the world.

The Vatican is one of the main reasons why we have an office in Rome.

*What do we cover in Italy?* In Italy we cover the Vatican, as well as events of international interest like Italian politics, sports, entertainment, technology and human-interest stories.

*Who makes our audience?* We deliver our video packages to most of the television networks in the world, well known broadcasters like RAI, CNN and The BBC as well as smaller local stations like La 7, and RTI networks in Italy. Our audience is their audience.

*How do we deliver our video content?* Delivery from the bureaux or the location of an event to our main offices in London and Washington happens via fibre, satellite, FTP (compressed computer files) and other similar technology.

We can quite rightly say that AP Television News is the biggest international distributor of video coverage of Vatican events. This happens both through self coverage and through access to CTV (Centro Televisivo Vaticano) coverage.

AP Television News also provides LIVE coverage of all the most important international events. Live is more and more the way to inform. The audience can live an event happening on the other side of the world watching it happen on TV. During the long illness of JPII we provided extensive and continuous live coverage from Gemelli Hospital and from St Peter's square at the same time for months, night and day. We could have not given less to our global audience.

Covering events in the Vatican isn't easy, especially when you carry a videocamera and a microphone. CTV holds rights to every single image filmed inside Vatican territory, so this means that it is impossible to film on their ground unless authorized.

The biggest problems arise when we need to get reactions on camera to an important international breaking news event, like Milosevic's death for example. We are often requested to get someone from the Vatican to appear on camera for a comment, or to get the position of the Vatican on a particular issue. Impossible. It is absolutely impossible to get a cardinal, or a bishop or anybody from the Curia to talk on camera on any breaking news issue.

As agency television when we cover non- live events related to the Catholic Church today we do it with the tools we are given: video and audio, duration maximum three minutes, a script of 300/400 words. This limits the quantity of information we can deliver, not the quality. This format can certainly allow Faith to be communicated but only when the images (with their natural sound) are so powerful to be able to talk to the heart of the people watching them.

## INTRODUCTION

**AP Television News** is the international television division of The Associated Press. Our offices are located all around the world to produce, and then deliver breaking news, sport, entertainment, technology and human interest video content to broadcasters, online and mobile platforms.

***What do we do?*** The teams in the bureaux cover so called 'calendar stories' (we compile calendars of events every week), or we react to unannounced events like breaking news whenever necessary in constant contact with our editors in our London main office. Our crews consist most times of a producer-journalist and a cameraman. These two people are professionals trained to work in a team to quickly put together and deliver a quality video package that ultimately makes our agency successful. When alerted, they pick up heavy gear and run together in the 'field' to work hard to bring back the story to be edited and written as soon as possible to allow our audience on the other side of the world to be informed. What comes back to the bureau as a 10 minute film consisting of video and audio (interviews and natural sound) is edited down with the help of specific machines reading and recording video (we use DVcam machines). This usually becomes a 2 and half minute video package accompanied by a shot list and a storyline which makes the voice over to the story, all in English.

***What do we cover in Italy?*** In Italy we cover the Vatican, as well as events of international interest like Italian politics, sports, entertainment, technology and human-interest stories.

***Who makes our audience?*** We deliver our video packages to most of the television networks in the world, well known broadcasters like RAI, CNN and The BBC as well as smaller local stations like La 7, and RTI networks in Italy. Our audience is their audience (***Video captured by AP Television News can be seen by over half of the world's population on any given day***). The video packages we produce are also then widely used for online and mobile platforms.

***How do we deliver our video content?*** Delivery from the bureaux or the location of an event to our main offices in London and Washington happens via fibre, satellite, FTP (compressed computer files) and other similar technology. All our daily coverage from around the world is collected and checked in our main office, i.e. London for what concerns my bureau, and then redistributed encrypted to our international subscribers thanks to the same transmission technology I mentioned before. Our clients receive our video content together with our scripts through a decoder. During the day several transmission windows (bulletins), running more or less every 30 minutes, provide our subscribers with stories from all over the world ranging from reaction to the latest international events to coverage of a sudden natural disaster etc. In the past few years we've been delivering more and more live coverage.

Example of breaking news coverage. When I received the news of JP II illness February last year, I immediately called all the Rome cameramen and producers and assigned them to go to Gemelli hospital and St Peter's square. It was late night, so we all had to get up and run to the bureau to pick up the gear and then run to the location assigned as soon as possible. The first crew was on the spot filming within one hour, and within two hours we were live from both locations, as well as editing, writing and feeding stories from our Rome bureau non stop. During that night our Head of News, supervising the operation from London, assigned dozens of producers and cameramen from other international offices to move quickly to Rome with tons of gear to help us cover the biggest breaking news our bureau had ever seen: the long illness and death of Pope JP II.

## Chapter 1.

**HOW WE COVER THE CHURCH/VATICAN? LIVE COVERAGE.**

The Vatican is one of the main reasons why we have an office in Rome. When APTV opened a bureau in Rome in 1994, even though The AP had been there for several decades, we had to work hard to be acknowledged as a serious media organization before being allowed accreditation to cover events.

Now we can quite rightly say that AP Television News is the biggest international distributor of video coverage of Vatican events. This happens both through self coverage and through access to CTV (Centro Televisivo Vaticano) coverage.

We cover, or access coverage of, all Vatican calendar events attended by the Pope, inside and outside the Vatican. Most of the time such events, like the Angelus on Sundays, are edited down to a 2-minute story and the Pope message is run on most of our daily transmissions windows, thus reaching all the world continents. When an event in the Vatican is particularly important at an international level our managers in London request live coverage which we access through CTV, if located in Vatican territory, through the host broadcaster if abroad. AP Television News also travels with the Pope every time he schedules trips abroad. As agency pool we alternate with Reuters to cover every pope trip abroad on his personal airplane, as well as self covering on the ground every single trip.

Example of Vatican coverage. The Concistory March 24, 2006. The first Concistory of Benedict XVI certainly attracted a lot of international interest. This is how AP Television News covered it.

Between March 23rd and March 27th the Rome bureau produced 13 stories on the Concistory and its protagonists. On March 23rd we produced a preview explaining the Concistory, then a package with arrivals of the new Cardinals to Rome/The Vatican, a feature on 'Gammarelli' Tailor House, and then a story on the Filipino Cardinal and his followers. On the same day we uppicked the meeting of Cardinals in the Synod Hall from CTV. On March 24th we filmed an early security package, then part of the CTV Concistory coverage ran live, but we also edited a package of our own self coverage together with some close ups of Pope Benedict source CTV. On top of the Concistory itself on the same day we were requested to put together a package for our Latin American clients consisting of interviews and video of all the new Cardinals from that region of the world, and the same happened for our Asian clients. We ended the day with another Cardinals' package consisting of interviews and video of the courtesy calls of some more cardinals. The day after, March 25, we self covered the 'Ring Mass', and we conducted an exclusive interview with Cardinal Zen from Hong Kong. Concistory coverage ended with a CTV uppick of the first audience of Pope Benedict XVI with the new elected Cardinals and their families. In short, out of 13 stories we self covered 10 stories and we uppicked 3 from CTV.

**LIVE COVERAGE**

AP Television News provides live coverage of all the most important international events. Live is more and more the way to inform. The audience can live an event happening on the other side of the world through television and/or Internet. The biggest international broadcasters, and especially channels transmitting only news 24 hours a day, feed their audience what they like most, that is live events like natural disasters, funerals, weddings, etc. That is why live is a particularly important part of our coverage.

During the long illness of JP II we provided extensive and continuous live coverage from Gemelli Hospital and from St Peter's square at the same time for months, night and day. We could have not given less to our global audience.

## Chapter 2.

**PROBLEMS**

Covering events in the Vatican isn't easy, especially when you carry a videocamera and a microphone. CTV holds rights to every single image filmed inside Vatican territory, so this means that it is impossible to film on their ground unless authorized. In order to request authorization to participate as a TV crew in any Vatican event, or simply film St Peter's square, we need to send a request via fax or e-mail to the Pontifical Council of Social Communication a few days before. Sometimes we are late with our requests, but the fact that most of us are known by Dott. Scelzo (Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications) and his experienced team helps us get through accreditation problems most of the times.

Even though all of us hold a permanent accreditation with the PCSC office (but renewed every year), as a security measure and also to avoid too many TV crews around, we still need to request accreditation for coverage, event by event.

Sometimes accreditation is refused. I'll never forget Bishop Milingo's Korean wife going to St Peter's square every day in August 2001 to demand that the Pope return her husband to her. TV crews were forbidden from entering the square to film her, so we had to film from outside the banners limiting the square, and wait for her to step out to get a short interview. This said we always respect what they tell us and try to get the story out in some other way, if possible.

The biggest problems arise when we need to get reactions on camera to an important international breaking news event, like Milosevic's death for example. We are often requested to get someone from the Vatican to appear on camera for a comment, or to get the position of the Vatican on a particular issue. Impossible. It is absolutely impossible to get a cardinal, or a bishop or anybody from the Curia to talk on camera on any breaking news issue. In order to interview a cardinal we need to send a request to the PCSC office and to the Cardinal's secretary, with the list of questions. The answer often comes and it's 'no' 99% of the times. There are exceptions but linked to specific church events, see Concistory, and aftermath of Pope JPII death when many cardinals would speak on camera about him and the future of the church ( topics that many Cardinals probably felt they could freely express themselves about before choosing a new Pope)

Now it's not easy again to get reactions on camera, and we stand better chances to get them to talk to us with the so called 'doorstepping' when they are walking away from somewhere and they are easier to answer a quick question. These problems aren't shared by our print colleagues who most of the time can pick up the phone and call them, or approach them at the end of a mass and talk to them easily: it's unlikely the Swiss Guards or the PCSC people would stop them since they don't carry a big videocamera. This, I must say, doesn't apply to American cardinals, who on the contrary, are most of the time very organized and available for interviews (when they themselves don't decide to organize a press conference in the North American college, perfect venue for live coverage). For example the sex abuse scandal a few years ago. On that occasion American cardinals and bishops handled TV requests very well and did not hide but faced the unpleasant questioning of all the media in several press conferences which we even covered live.

## Chapter 3.

**CTV**

Centro Televisivo Vaticano is our biggest source of live coverage of Vatican events, inside Vatican

territory. We are not authorized to do what they do: they hold rights to filming in Vatican Territory and are the only ones authorized live coverage during important events, and they do it very well (sometimes jointly with RAI).

Only CTV crews can get close to the Pope and provide us with powerful close up images such those of the face of the suffering old pope unable to speak. They film with a microwave camera retransmitting the signal live, something no other TV is allowed to do inside Vatican territory.

On top of covering live events, they cover all the ceremonies attended by the Pope as well as his private audiences to then distribute the pictures. The quantity and quality of their coverage has improved dramatically in the past few years. Created by JP II in 1983 its role is now fundamental for the church it serves. JP II understood the importance of a Vatican television.

AP Television News maintains a good and longstanding relationship with CTV. A contract authorizes us access and retransmission rights to all their coverage that we access via satellite in London. Our relationship to CTV is reciprocally positive. Thanks to us their images and their message can reach all the corners of the Catholic and non-Catholic world. Small TV stations which cannot see the CTV signal were able to see the new pope thanks to our technology and global presence.

It is though true that since the death of JP II attention to the church message has decreased. This is reflected in the reduced quantity of Vatican coverage we run weekly. Unless of an event like the Conclistoro our subscribers aren't very interested in seeing the Pope every day and or listen to all the things he says. It was somehow to be expected since with JP II attention had been growing mainly due to the strong personality of a suffering and aging Pope, a situation which created a particular climax around his death. Now the church has to find another way to speak to the people about its message, another way to attract their attention to the matters of the faith.

## Conclusions

*Is it possible to communicate the essentials of the Faith? Getting beyond the surface in news coverage of religion.*

As agency television when we cover non- live events related to the Catholic Church today we do it with the tools we are given: video and audio, duration maximum three minutes, a script of 300/400 words. This limits the quantity of information we can deliver, not the quality. This format can certainly allow Faith to be communicated but only when the images (with their natural sound) are so powerful to be able to talk to the heart of the people watching them: JP II trying to bless the crowd in St Peter's square from his studio's window and unable to pronounce but a sound of suffering, making the sign of the cross and disappearing behind the curtains, one of his last most powerful images which left in everybody's heart an unforgettable message, certainly of strong Faith and love, and so powerful because of his pain, his strong will right through the end, all shown to everybody without veils.

The message of the Church needs to be simple and powerful to attract attention first, and to get to the heart of the people second. The message the Church tries to deliver today seems destined to its followers only, those people who have the knowledge to understand and so listen. Most of the time the Church speaks today to the people it does it with doctrinal words trying to teach Faith more than communicate it, in a way that seems institutional, and unable to reach the hearts of the people.

On top of this let's not forget what television is, passive fruition of video and audio by the viewer - the only effort requested to watch TV is to push a button to turn it on and another one to choose a channel. Television is generally speaking 'surface'. In order to maintain attention and interest (and

avoid your viewers to change channel) those speaking through TV need to address interesting topics, current issues of interest to the common people, and do it with color and passion and keep it short and simple!

So, the communicators of the church should bring its message of Faith to the surface, and find a way to make it accessible and understandable to more people everywhere in the world. The Church should also speak when the people want/need to hear its voice about something. They should speak to everybody in the world through media institutions like AP Television, this would turn to their advantage and would allow them to achieve their goal of spreading their message around the world.

## **APPENDIX**

AP Television News is the international television division of The Associated Press ([www.ap.org](http://www.ap.org)), the world's oldest and largest newsgathering organization.

In May 1846, Moses Yale Beach, the second owner-publisher of the original New York Sun, offered to share news from the US war with Mexico with rival newspapers. The resulting agreements formed the basis for co-operative newsgathering by telegraph just as Samuel F B Morse's revolutionary invention began a swift expansion throughout the country, linking New York to points north, west, and south.

Those agreements evolved into The Associated Press - the AP - that today has 4,000 employees and delivers news around the clock to more than 130 countries and 1 billion readers, listeners, and viewers.

One hundred and forty-eight years later, in 1994, the AP launched its international television division - basing its headquarters in London, UK.

AP Television News is now the world's leading video news agency, delivering breaking global news, sport, entertainment, technology and human interest video content to broadcasters, online and mobile platforms. Video captured by AP Television News can be seen by over half of the world's population on any given day.

**VERSIONE PROVVISORIA  
IN ATTESA DELLA  
PUBBLICAZIONE DEGLI ATTI**