

Vatican Investigating Possible Russian Orthodox Hack of 2013 Papal Elections

The headline above caught the attention of many people. Some people caught up in the Presidential Elections even thought it was believable. The article comes from the website “Eye of the Tiber,” which in their description of themselves states “with the gallant and virtuous aim of reporting Catholic news as it happens, when it happens, and before it happens.” The *before it happens* should be the give-away. Other news stories include “Knights of Columbus Amassing Troops in Preparation for Vatican Takeover of Malta.” It is the Catholic version of “The Onion.” With a style and very little content that resembles the truth, these sites come up with a little humor, some sarcasm, and a lot of tongue-in-cheek stories that resemble the news. This is all well and good because readers know they are getting fiction.

“False news” is when people are getting fiction being passed off as fact. During the Obama Presidency there were all kinds of claims that Obama was a follower of Islam. After all there were all those pictures of his wedding band, with Photoshop placement of text from the Quran. There was so much of this that President Obama went public and said in 2008 to the publication Christianity Today: “I think it’s really important for your readers to know that I have been a member of the same church for almost 20

years, and I have never practiced Islam.”

The best revealed false news story that was popular was from Cameron Harris. He had a theory and decided to follow through on it. He came up with a headline, “Breaking: Tens of Thousands of fraudulent Clinton votes found in Ohio warehouse.” So he needed a news source for his story and so created the Christian Times Newspaper.com. He found a photo of an election worker in England moving boxes and made this man the character of his story. The story was picked up on Facebook and spread. It was shared by six million people.

The desire to create these stories is tied in with morality. People have an agenda that they want to get across. This is propaganda. While this term is usually seen as negative, it is neither good nor bad. Propaganda is evangelization in the civil world. Once it is out there, people are forced to react to it. We either accept or reject what we read. We either check for its accuracy or we accept its truth. The problem is when the propagandist starts to use examples. Are they the truth or what is assumed to be happening? Then when all else has failed the propagandist uses falsehood.

We many times accept propaganda because it makes us feel as part of a larger group and it reinforces our convictions. So we don’t check the accuracy and then we

spread the lie. We become responsible for leading others away from the truth. We have to go beyond the fact that the source says it is Catholic or Christian, Democrat or Republican, Russian or American. We have to see if the source is what it says it is. We can check reviews of the source as well. We also must see how many reputable source have the same facts but different stories. This gives it credibility. It is why we have Matthew, Mark and Luke. They give us the same facts but the situation is different. Rather than saying it must be false because Matthew’s Sermon is on a Mountain and Luke’s is on a Plain, we say the content is the same and those other details are related to the human editor.

A good reporter gives that facts. The evangelists are good reporters. But, when we spread news on FB and other sites are we spreading truth or lies? When we hit “post” and it puts our name on it, it tells the reader that we stand by the accuracy of what we share. “*These then are the things you must do: Speak the truth to one another; judge with honesty and complete justice in your gates. (Zechariah 8:16)*”; Paul to the Ephesians, 4:25: “*Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*”

Fr Jonathan Morse

RETRACTION

In the spirit of honest journalism, amid recent claims of “fake news”, retraction of a *New Star* article posted last month is in order, due to discovery of an earlier inaccurate interpretation of facts.

Regarding the shipment of parish bulletins to the cathedral rectory, a reasonable conclusion was drawn upon the carrier’s assurance that tracking numbers confirmed time and date delivery information for a package that was nowhere to be found.

Unfortunately an unknown and unidentified individual was rashly judged as covetous and greedy in the incident, and portrayed as such. After publication, it was learned that there were other developments that altered the veracity of the story.

It was learned that days later, a neighbor (on another block of W. Rice St) returned home from an extended absence to find a misdelivered package on the porch, and redelivered it.

Comments on “breaking news” often misstate facts—then further developments disclose the fullness of what *really* happened. So, TV and radio reports often need reworking.

Lest the honor and integrity of any Chicago resident be besmirched, an apology is in order. No crime was committed, no sinful avarice intended in this simple case of a courier mistakenly confusing a private residence with the cathedral office down the street (with the same last two digits of the address).

Another spiritual lesson may have been conveyed: “Judge not, lest you be judged” So many times we learn: God knows all the facts, long before we do.

Patience is a virtue. To err is human, to forgive, divine.