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Vatican lashes out at pre-conclave media reports

John L. Allen Jr. | Feb. 23, 2013 NCR Today
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On Thursday, a major Italian newspaper carried a sensation report alleging that a secret Vatican document commissioned in the wake of last year's leaks scandal had identified a shadowy "gay lobby" within the institution, suggesting that its influence might have been in the background of Pope Benedict XVI's decision to resign.

In the immediate wake of the report, Vatican spokespersons basically said "no comment," stressing that they couldn't confirm or deny the contents of a report that was supposed to be eyes-only for Benedict XVI.

Today, however, the Vatican's Secretariat of State lashed out in general terms against media coverage in the run-up to the conclave that it described as "unverified, unverifiable or completely false news stories, that cause serious damage to persons and institutions."

The complete text of today's statement, issued in both Italian and English, is below.

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Communiqué of the Secretariat of State

The freedom of the College of Cardinals, which is responsible for providing, under the law for the election of the Roman Pontiff, has always been strongly defended by the Holy See, as a guarantee of a choice that was based on evaluations addressed solely for the good of the Church.

Through the course of the centuries, Cardinals have had to face many forms of pressures exerted upon individual electors or on the College of Cardinals. Such pressures had as their goal to condition the decisions, following a political or worldly logic.

If in the past, the so-called powers, i.e., States, exerted pressures on the election of the Pope, today there is an attempt to do this through public opinion that is often based on judgements that do not typically capture the spiritual aspect of the moment that the Church is living.

It is deplorable that as we draw closer to the time of the beginning of the Conclave and the Cardinal electors will be held in conscience and before God, to freely indicate their choice, that there be a widespread distribution of often unverified, unverifiable or completely false news stories, that cause serious damage to persons and institutions.

In these moments more than ever, may Catholics focus on what is essential praying for Pope Benedict, praying also that the Holy Spirit enlighten the College of Cardinals, pray for the future Pope, confident that the future of the barque of Peter are in the hands of God.

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