

## Il Mio Papa -- The Way of All Flesh

Ken Briggs | Mar. 5, 2014 NCR Today

The Italian publisher is banking on its version of "Hollywood Reporter" about the pope to rake in big profits, but from here it looks like a disaster for Francis.

According to Religion News Service, the Vatican isn't aiding "Il Mio Papa" as it brings the latest pictures and papal quips in glossy fashion to the news stands. Neither does the bastion of beanies knock it. The keenest publicists in the church know they have something hot and probably don't mind the splashy attention.

But all publicity, contrary to the old assumpton, is not good publicity. Taking advantage of Francis' popularity isn't the same as doing him a favor.

Here's why.

- 1) A personality focused publication promotes celebrity. Francis' attack on church luxury and vanity has given him the reputation as fiercely opposed to celebrity culture. Ironically, the acclaim he has received for iconoclasm threatens to engulf him in it.
- 2) It can turn him into just another tabloid-like face rather than retaining his place as a refreshing surprise from a source from whom you didn't expect to hear it. He loses his ability to surprise from the wings, having been featured at the center of the stage on the supermarket check-out racks.
- 3) Nothing could destroy Francis' stated vision of greater communal church that listens to and respects all its members more than a cult of personality. Things are heading in that direction already, with or without the assent of the pope and his aides, and "Il Mio Papa" could propel it along. One of Francis' chief targets has been narcissism and power hunger as symptoms of a hierarchical church gone wrong. If he becomes, in unintended ways, too fastened upon, too much the only game in town, too self seducing, it could weaken his best efforts to realize his goals.
- 4) Conversely, making the pope into a figure who fits into the same genre as tabloids and comic books can reduce the stature of the papacy with bad reporting, misleading excerpts, and gossip.

Magazines come and go, sparked by all sorts of instant appeals and current trends. As print media disappear, it's heartening in some ways that someone has jumped on what might be a lucrative idea that will help the struggling industry survive. But I hope the pope doesn't, as we used to say, get too engrossed his own publicity.

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