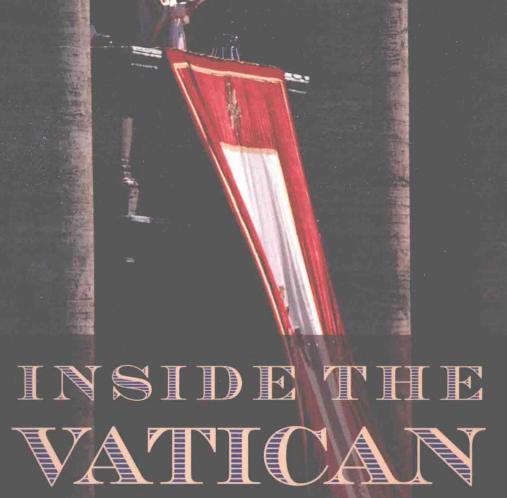
THE POLITICS AND ORGANIZATION
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH



THOMAS J. REESE

inside the Vatican



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AND ORGANIZATION OF

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THOMAS J. REESE

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Inside the Vatican

Preface

WHEN I TOLD my friends I was writing a book about the Vatican, they were skeptical. For most of them, the Vatican is a mysterious place, as impenetrable as a thick cloud of incense. Those who know a little about the Vatican warned that I would never be able to get any information out of it and, if I wrote the book, I was bound to get into trouble. At the same time, they all wanted to read the book as soon as it was finished.

The Vatican holds a fascination for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It is an institution rich in history and intrigue that still makes headlines as it attempts to govern the Catholic church and mold world events according to its own vision.

As a political scientist and a Jesuit priest, I was always curious about the workings of the present-day Vatican. But in 1972 when Aaron Wildavsky suggested the church as an object of research for my doctoral dissertation, I demurred, wanting to study "real" politics first. The book that emerged from my dissertation, *The Politics of Taxation* (1980), led me to three exciting years in Washington as a writer for *Tax Notes* and a lobbyist for Taxation with Representation, a public interest tax reform organization. In November 1978, I kicked the Washington dust off my feet and moved to New York City to become associate editor of *America*, a weekly magazine published by Jesuits in the United States, where for seven years I wrote about politics, economics, and anything else that struck my fancy.

When the American Catholic bishops began preparing pastoral letters on peace and economic justice, I had all the excuse I needed to turn my journalistic and political science skills toward examining the government and politics of the Catholic church. Ultimately this led me back to Washington to the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University, where I wrote

Archbishop: Inside the Power Structure of the American Catholic Church (1989) and A Flock of Shepherds: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1992). The first examines politics and governance in the local church, while the second looks at the church on the national level.

Inside the Vatican completes the series by examining the politics and organization of the church at the highest level, although it is not necessary to read the earlier books to understand this one. This is not a work of history, theology, or canon law, although these disciplines are sometimes used to explain how and why the Vatican operates as it does today. Rather, I examine the governance of the church from the perspective of social science. As part of my research, I spent the academic year of 1993–94 in Rome interviewing more than a hundred people working in the Vatican, including thirteen cardinals. (All quotations of Vatican officials are from these interviews unless otherwise noted.) I was surprised and pleased by the number of people who were willing to talk about their work in the Vatican. But while most allowed the interviews to be taped, very few wanted their names to be used. This in itself says much about politics in the Vatican.

I have tried to be objective in my reporting and have allowed those interviewed to speak for themselves. What opinions and conclusions I express are my own and certainly are not infallible. Some readers may be shocked by what they read, but the church has always admitted that it has more sinners than saints. The human face of the church is found not just in the pews but also in the Vatican. Over the centuries the Vatican has changed, along with the papacy it serves, and it will continue to change in the next century. My hope is that this book will contribute to a better understanding of this important institution so that it can evolve to meet the needs of the church and the world in the next millennium.

Many people deserve thanks for their kindness and help during this project. R. Scott Appleby, John Coleman, S.J., Jerry Filteau, Thomas Green, Gene Hemrick, Bishop James Malone, James Provost, and Robert Trisco read early versions of the manuscript and gave helpful suggestions. I am especially grateful to those both in the United States and Rome who were willing to be interviewed. Since most want to remain anonymous, I cannot thank them by name, but I still want to acknowledge my debt to them. Without their help this book could not have been written. I also wish to thank Nora O'Callaghan, Eugene Rooney, S.J., and Joseph Tylenda, S.J., of the Woodstock Theological Center Library and Julie Delong and Katherine Nuss of the Catholic News Service (CNS) library. CNS reporters John Thavis and Cindy Wooden were generous in sharing their experience and hospitality with me in Rome. As the

notes indicate, I am greatly indebted to CNS's reporters, who have covered the Vatican with distinction through the years.

The Woodstock Theological Center provided a supportive environment for my research, and I am especially grateful to the director, James Connor, S.J., Elizabeth Kostelac, and Adoreen McCormick. My research assistants, Ina Saal, Lara Winner, and Yu-Chen Fan, were also meticulous and generous in their work. Encouragement and companionship came from my Jesuit colleagues in the United States and Rome, especially those I lived with at the Woodstock Jesuit Community and Villa Malta. Financial support for my research came from the Woodstock Theological Center, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. (for a 1994–95 fellowship), and anonymous donors. Finally, my thanks to Joyce Seltzer, my editor at Harvard University Press, for helping me make this book interesting and accessible to a wide audience, and to Mary Ellen Geer for an excellent job of copy editing. In spite of all this help, I take full responsibility for everything in the book.

Thomas J. Reese, S.J. Woodstock Theological Center July 31, 1996

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Introduction

As THE WORLD MOVES toward the year 2000, there are few institutions we can point to that have played a major role in shaping practically every one of the last twenty centuries. In fact, there are few organizations that have been around that long. One of the most prominent is the Christian church. For almost two thousand years Christianity has intimately touched the personal lives of millions of individuals, whether rich or poor, powerful or powerless, famous or unknown. Even those who are not members of the church find it impossible to ignore because they are often forced to define themselves through their opposition to certain Christian teachings and practices.

Christianity has had an impact on family life, economic transactions, political alliances, artistic achievements, and the way in which we understand the meaning of life and human purpose. It has formed cultures and changed the course of history. Its teachings touch areas as private as sexual fantasies and as public as nuclear war. It preaches salvation to sinners and everlasting life with God for the faithful.

Christianity has accomplished this not as an abstract philosophy but as a community of believers who are organized as a church. The church has been the means by which new members (both converts and those born to Christian parents) are socialized into the community as the faith is passed on from generation to generation. Through the church individual Christians have also joined forces to meet their religious and social needs and to have a corporate impact on the world that has been both lasting and widespread.

In the Catholic form of Christianity, church organization is based on episcopal leadership of dioceses, the geographical units into which the church divides the world. In these local faith communities Christians live their faith and interact with the world. But these local churches do not exist in isolation; through their bishops they are united to one another and to the church of Rome. The leadership of the bishop of Rome, the pope, in this communion of churches has through the centuries unmistakably influenced the life of the church and the lives of individual Christians. Even the day on which we will begin the third millennium is due to Pope Gregory XIII, who in 1582 established the calendar in use throughout the world.

The role of the papacy through the centuries has varied tremendously: comforting Christians during the Roman persecutions, accepting imperial support from Emperor Constantine and his successors, confronting kings and other secular rulers, converting and civilizing the barbarian hordes, patronizing the arts, condemning heretics, calling the Crusades, and mediating disputes among nations. Some popes protected local churches from political rulers, while others sold benefices to the highest bidders. The popes have been saints and scoundrels, warriors and peacemakers, reformers and corrupters. Their actions have both united and divided the church.

The papacy is not just a quaint artifact of history irrelevant to the world of today. The present pope, John Paul II, will undoubtedly go down in history as one of the most influential leaders in the second half of the twentieth century. His support of the dissident Solidarity movement in Poland began the avalanche that swept Communism from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and freed the persecuted Catholic church. He has been an articulate voice for social justice, peace, and human rights in his visits to almost every corner of the world, from Alaska to South Africa. In his teaching he has also been a staunch defender of the traditions and practices that he believes are essential to the life of the church and society at large. That the papacy continues to have great relevance to the world today is obvious in the extensive coverage it is given by the news media.

Despite all this, the proper role of the papacy today is a hotly debated topic within the Catholic church itself. It is also a sticking point in ecumenical relations among the Christian churches. Many complain that the church has become excessively centralized, with local bishops behaving like branch managers of a multinational corporation where directives from the top are expected to be obeyed without question. Others feel that, in a world of moral and political chaos, a firm hand is needed at the helm. Papal leadership becomes more important than ever as communications and technology turn the world into a global village.

Within the Catholic church, the papacy's influence is all-pervasive. During 68 papal visits to 112 countries, millions have turned out to listen to and pray

with the pope during his first seventeen years in office. Even when he is not physically present, he controls much of what is going on in the church even at the parish level. Recently, for example, a papal commission completed *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a publication that will direct the religious education of adults and children into the next century. Papal opposition to married clergy and women priests has determined who will and will not lead parish communities in worship each Sunday. And practically every prayer uttered during those worship services has been approved in Rome, not only in its original Latin version but also in its various translations. Thus Rome decided that "man" would continue to be used to refer to humanity in Scripture readings at Mass and in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican regulations also determine how difficult it is for divorced Catholics to get annulments before they can be married again in the church.

Vatican officials also select, often without consultation with the local church, the bishops who govern these churches. By appointing papal loyalists as bishops, Rome can ensure that Vatican policies will be observed at the diocesan level. These bishops see to it that pastors, seminary professors, and other church employees support papal teachings. When necessary, Vatican officials intervene and demand that dissident theologians either recant or lose their right to teach. And in 1995, despite protests from his local French supporters, even a bishop, Jacques Gaillot, was deposed for being out of line with Vatican directives.

Papal actions and teachings are decisive not only to Catholics but to others because of their reverberations in the world outside the Catholic church. Participation in ecumenical dialogues by Catholics is both encouraged and controlled by the papacy. Papal teachings on birth control and abortion have demographic and environmental effects that are widely condemned by those supporting population control and "reproductive freedom," and widely endorsed by conservatives espousing "family values." Vatican diplomats successfully opposed the inclusion of abortion rights language in a UN document at the 1994 Cairo conference on population and development. Papal opposition to the Persian Gulf war angered some and pleased others. Vatican opposition to economic sanctions against Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Cuba has gone against American foreign policy goals. Vatican views on arms control, Third World debt, capitalism, religious freedom, and refugees are an integral part of the international discourse in which the Catholic church is a unique participant. The impact of papal actions on the world has led practically every nation except China and Vietnam to exchange ambassadors with the Holy See. Catholic and non-Catholic nations alike believe it is in their self-interest to have representation in the Vatican. And when popes speak at the United Nations, it is an event of major international importance.

Despite the importance of the papacy for the Catholic church and its prominent role in international affairs, its internal workings are little known to Catholics, to world leaders, or to the world at large. This is partly a result of the secretive nature of the Vatican, which sees little advantage to letting others know its internal operations. Nor does it have confidence that it will be treated fairly by outside observers. General ignorance of the Vatican is bred by the uniqueness of this institution that is like no other, with its unusual laws, structures, goals, procedures, personnel, and culture. An observer of the Vatican can quickly become lost in technical jargon, theological concepts, bureaucratic byways, and canonical procedures that have no parallel in secular society or in other churches. The confusion is increased as personnel, policies, procedures, and structures evolve and change, for this is a living institution, not one frozen in time.

Unfamiliarity with the workings of the Vatican has led many political leaders into unforeseen difficulties. The Clinton administration suffered an embarrassing confrontation with the Holy See at the Cairo conference when the Vatican delegation successfully opposed the U.S. delegation's language on abortion. The Reagan administration was thrown off guard by Vatican opposition to economic sanctions against the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981. This ignorance is not limited to political leaders. When they come to Rome, bishops are just as confused about Vatican decision making when confronted by a papal bureaucracy with overlapping jurisdictions and secretive procedures. Maneuvering through this maze without a friendly guide is difficult for insiders and almost impossible for outsiders. Even within the Vatican itself, people in one office often do not know what is happening in another.

A comprehensive analysis of the papacy as it operates today is long overdue. Knowledge about this complex, contemporary, and living organization is important to Catholics and non-Catholics alike, to those who love the papacy and those who fear it. Understanding how the papacy operates is especially important today as it approaches the end of this millennium and tries to prepare itself for the next. That the papacy has evolved and changed during the last two millennia is a historical fact. That it will continue to evolve and change is without doubt. Although many in the past have predicted the end of the papacy and of Christianity, both have outlived their doom-saying critics. The papacy of the future will undoubtedly have an impact both on the future of Christianity and on human history as a whole.

The Holy See is a unique organization because it pursues spiritual and

secular goals at an international level. Its organizational complexity arises from the fact that the pope plays many roles in order to fulfill these goals. He is the bishop of Rome, the sovereign ruler of the State of Vatican City, and the successor of St. Peter as head of the college of bishops. As bishop of Rome, he is directly responsible for the spiritual needs of the 2.6 million Catholics in the diocese of Rome, just as every bishop throughout the world is responsible for the spiritual needs of the people in his local church. As monarch of Vatican City, a 108.7-acre independent state with fewer than 500 citizens, the pope is a civil chief of state like any other monarch of a small state recognized under international law. And as head of the college of bishops, which includes all the bishops of the world, the pope leads and directs the Catholic church over which he and the college are the supreme authority.

The papacy touches the moral and spiritual lives of millions of people through the pope's pastoral visits to scores of countries, his comprehensive teachings on doctrine and morals, his appointment of bishops, and his supervision of local churches. His decisions can foster unity in a multinational and multicultural church by reminding far-flung local churches that they are part of one communion. His decisions can also divide the church when he insists on teachings or practices that alienate and estrange portions of the faithful. His episcopal appointments have been greeted with joy by some and consternation by others. His strong voice has reminded richer local churches of their responsibility to help less fortunate local churches. Because of his role within the Catholic church, the pope's constituency is global, and he works for peace and human rights throughout the world. As the leader of this constituency he is a force to be reckoned with. When he focuses his attention and energy on specific issues, he can sometimes marshal the attention and energy of the entire church to further his objectives.

Essential to the pope in doing his work and accomplishing his goals are the offices housed at the Vatican. The name "Vatican" comes from the ancient Roman name for the hill and land around it on which St. Peter's Basilica, the Apostolic Palace, and the Vatican museums are built. The Vatican City State takes its name from this hill. The Roman curia is the complex of offices, housed in or near the Vatican, that help the pope in governing the universal church. The term "see" in Holy See (Santa Sedes) refers to "seat" (as in the seat of government) or "diocese." Although Holy See originally referred to the diocese of Rome, the seat of St. Peter, it is now more commonly used to refer to the pope and the Roman curia. Purists would limit the term "Vatican" to the Vatican City State, but I, like those working in Rome, also use it to refer to the Roman curia and the Holy See.

The Vatican, like any organization, is a system by which people, resources, and technologies are organized through structures and procedures to achieve goals within a given environment.¹ Therefore, in order to understand the Vatican, we must look at its structures and procedures, its people and their goals, its resources and technologies, and the environment in which it operates. As a living institution, it must and does respond when any of these factors changes. Thus, an important purpose of the historical material in this book is to show that the Vatican has changed its structures and procedures over time not simply because of different popes but because of the changing environment within which the church operated.

Understanding the Vatican requires looking at it from many angles. Too often observers focus on one aspect of the Vatican, such as the personality of the pope, and try to explain everything from that perspective. Although the personality of the pope is certainly important, the papacy is as much an institution as an individual. It is an organization made up of a variety of people pursuing different goals while working together in Vatican structures that have evolved over the centuries. It is also a vital institution in which the structures are changing under the impact of new people, new historical circumstances, and new goals.

Most Vatican officials are diocesan priests and members of religious communities who have given up family and alternative careers to work for the church. They have gone through an extensive indoctrination and training that appeals to the highest ideals of service and commitment based on Christian faith and principles. Most also have specialized training in theology, canon law, or diplomacy. The people who work in the Vatican are a key to understanding the Vatican itself. Their goals, their values, their professional and personal culture are part of the unique character of this institution.

Beyond the geographical boundaries of the Vatican is the larger world community in which the papacy operates. The papacy interacts with an everchanging secular environment—political, social, economic, and cultural—that demands sophisticated knowledge and skills. As a religious institution, the papacy also exists in a theological and religious environment with which it constantly interacts. Sometimes this external world is supportive, sometimes it is threatening, but at all times it is the source of the money, people, technology, and ideas the papacy needs to lead the Catholic church. Sometimes forces in the larger environment crash upon the papacy like invading armies that cannot be kept out and force change. Willingly or unwillingly, the Vatican is shaped by the world in which it operates, while at the same time the Vatican tries to shape this world according to its ideals and values.

In responding to the world around it, the Vatican uses structures and procedures that are unique: the college of cardinals, the synod of bishops, congregations, councils, secretariats, tribunals, papal diplomats, the State of Vatican City, the Code of Canon Law. Most of these structures have their roots centuries deep in history, and yet church structures and procedures are constantly evolving. Changes in structures and procedures have been particularly noticeable since the Second Vatican Council as Paul VI and John Paul II have attempted to reorganize the Vatican to deal with the contemporary church and the modern world.

In order to achieve its spiritual and temporal goals, the Vatican must operate in the real world. It has to buy equipment and office supplies, pay salaries, and cover the costs of telephone, utilities, printing, travel, and other items. Limits on funds mean limits on activities. The Vatican requires a stable and dependable financial organization to raise money and spend it wisely, but financial scandals and mismanagement have repeatedly blemished the papacy. Vatican finances have traditionally been hidden from view, but recently more information has become available that sheds light on how the Vatican manages its finances and how such management affects its policies.

Understanding the Vatican as a complex organization in a complicated and changing environment requires an awareness of many factors. Sometimes an event in the external environment, such as Italian reunification in 1870, changes the papacy against its will. Sometimes individuals, especially the popes themselves, have a deep impact on the Vatican because of their ideas and skills. Sometimes it is structures that provide the mechanism for processing information and making decisions that have an impact on millions. Looking at the total picture, despite its sometimes Byzantine complexity, is essential for understanding such a unique organization.

Visiting the Vatican for the first time can be an overwhelming experience for anyone. The pilgrim or tourist is dwarfed by gigantic columns and high ceilings. Everywhere one turns there is a piece of history or a priceless work of art. The journalist's first impression of the Vatican is likewise daunting. Hardly anyone will speak on the record, and separating fact from rumor is an art, not a science. Nor is the bishop who comes to Rome for the first time at all sure what he will find. He knows he must pray at the tombs of the Apostles and see the pope, but then he wanders from office to office hoping for assistance or at least sympathy. Even a newly elected pope, like John Paul I or John Paul II, can be intimidated by the strangeness and the complexity of the internal operations of the Vatican.

If the visitor sneaks past the Swiss Guards in their colorful uniforms and the security guards in their plainer attire, he can look into offices where ambassa-

dors discuss UN documents, where theologians nervously await examination, where millions of dollars are transferred from the First to the Third World, where the appointment of a new American archbishop is decided, where the ethics of arms sales are debated, and where penalties for pedophile priests are discussed. Dressed in cassocks or black suits, the priests and religious, like millions of their secular counterparts, process paper for their superiors. The decisions that come out of these offices can change people's lives, cause international incidents, and control the way the Christian message is presented to the world.

Since the pope is central to the Vatican, it is appropriate to begin this inquiry by looking at the pope's roles as the bishop of Rome, civil monarch of Vatican City, and head of the college of bishops. Ensuing chapters will describe the roles of ecumenical councils, episcopal conferences, synods of bishops, and the college of cardinals in the governance of the church. I will also examine the Roman curia—its people, culture, organization, procedures, and finances. I will then look at how the pope uses the Roman curia to have an impact outside the Vatican, especially in the selection of bishops, the control of theologians, and papal relations with secular rulers. Finally, I conclude by examining how the papacy and the Vatican might be reorganized to serve the church and the world in the twenty-first century.

Many people would like to look over the walls of the Vatican to find out what is going on inside: the Catholic or other Christians who want a peek into the engine room, the ambitious cleric who is tempted to higher office, the journalist who despairs of peeling the Vatican onion, the bishop who wants an affirmative response to his request, the world leader who wants to know with whom he is dealing, the church reformer who needs data to support his conclusions, the intellectually curious who delight in Chinese puzzles and Byzantine politics.

The pope sits on St. Peter's chair (Santa Sedes). This is an uncomfortable chair because the man sitting in it is burdened with the enormous spiritual, political, and social concerns of people all over the world. It is a throne from which it is easy to fall from grace. It is a highly visible chair that makes its occupant the target of cranks, prophets, pundits, reformers, and even assassins. The pope and those trying to understand the papacy and prepare it for the next millennium face a monumental task. The salvation of souls and the future of humankind will be influenced by decisions made inside the Vatican.