

Courtesy of Wide World Photos (Associated Press).

Framed by one of the 162 statues atop Bernini's graceful colonnade, Pope John Paul II greets pilgrims in St. Peter's Square from the window of his study in the Apostolic Palace. The labyrinthine palace, with its 10,000 rooms and hallways, is the center of official life inside Vatican City-State.

The Vatican

Pope John Paul II is in the public eye as leader of the Roman Catholic Church. He also happens to be sovereign of the Vatican City-State. Like Britain and Japan, the Vatican has a geography, a population, a language, and a national anthem ("Inno Pontificio," by Gounod). In some ways, its domestic problems are those of many a larger nation: Worldwide stagflation, for example, has drained the Vatican's exchequer. Domestic political and administrative reforms, long overdue, have not always worked out as planned. What set the Vatican apart, of course, are its tiny size and its religious mission. Here, theologian Francis Xavier Murphy describes the Vatican as a functioning mini-state; and political scientist Dennis Dunn analyzes its special foreign policy, which goes well beyond papal visits to Asia, Africa, and communist Poland.

CITY OF GOD

by Francis Xavier Murphy

It is the smallest independent state on earth. Its ruler, last of the absolute monarchs by divine right, is also its only permanent citizen. It boasts no natural resources. It must import all of its energy, labor, food, and building materials. It lacks a Times Square, on moral grounds, but it has its own Wall Street and Fleet Street, its own license plates, currency, postage stamps, and passports; it could charter its own airline and has run a merchant marine under its own flag. There is no government older—an unbroken train of succession trails back 1,900 years—and no other state occupies a position so anomalous in the international regime, perpetually inviolable and neutral.

As the realm of the pope, the Vatican City-State's global influence and international presence are greatly disproportionate to its size. The sums it allots to "foreign aid" of various kinds take up about half of its annual budget. Active in diplomacy, the Holy See has been at least as effective as the United Nations in focusing attention on the wretched of the earth. "We want to be

the voice of the voiceless," Pope John Paul II said in Mexico in 1979, his words carried around the world by the powerful Vatican transmitter at Santa Maria di Galeria. John Paul, born Karol Wojtyla, had been elected to the papacy only months earlier. The first Polish pontiff brought a new and much publicized dimension to the Vatican's foreign policy as Poland stumbled toward political and economic disarray in the shadow of the USSR.

The "Roman Question"

Rarely reflected in the headlines in recent years has been the Vatican its inhabitants know, a tiny state that shares the problems of a larger world. Inflation is high, energy costly, and labor disgruntled. As happens whenever all businesses are state-owned, complaints about red tape are frequent. Air pollution is a problem. So are sporadic crimes of violence, perpetrated by hammer-wielding vandals or would-be assassins. Though not burdened by a large defense establishment (there was once a *Pentagono*, but this referred to a clique of five powerful cardinals), the Vatican today is unable to make ends meet. In more ways than one, the Holy See has entered the modern world.

The Vatican City-State's 108.7 acres lie across the brown Tiber from Rome's *centro storico*, atop a gentle rise that served as a cemetery in the days of the caesars. The link between this plot of land and the papacy was forged around A.D. 67 when Peter, the Judean fisherman and first bishop of Rome, was martyred in the nearby Circus of Nero. According to tradition, Peter was buried in a primitive grave underneath what is now the main altar of St. Peter's Basilica; archaeological evidence, though not definitive, suggests that tradition has something to recommend it. Whatever the truth, the Emperor Constantine (306–37) took the sanctity of the site for granted when he erected the first basilica there, centering its axis on the presumed Petrine remains. The present structure, designed by Bramante, Raphael, Michelangelo, and others, was begun in 1506.

How the malarial Vatican hills became The Vatican is rather an intricate story. By the second century A.D., the bishop of Rome had already achieved a certain pre-eminence within the church in both doctrinal and disciplinary matters. (Irenaeus of Lyons

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Courtesy National Philatelic Collections, Smithsonian Institution.

speaks of Rome's *potentior principalitas*—its “more important origin.”) By the fourth century, the pope was master of much property in Italy and beyond, his rights protected by Constantine and later Christian emperors. As imperial government collapsed, the task of maintaining order on the Italian peninsula increasingly fell to the Roman pontiff.

The papacy at first pressed no formal claim to a temporal state—“My kingdom is not of this earth,” Christ had said—but papal rule of an autonomous territory in central Italy gradually became a fact of life, then a matter of principle. From the breakup of the Carolingian Empire in the ninth century to the reunification of Italy in the 19th, the bishop of Rome enjoyed sovereignty over a protean state whose size, borders, population, wealth, and stability seemed to vary from pope to pope. Although the territory was ruled from Rome, not until 1377 did the Holy Father move his residence from the Lateran palace across the river to the Vatican complex. It was to the Vatican that Pope Pius IX withdrew in 1870 when the new Kingdom of Italy suppressed and annexed what remained of the Papal States. Ironically, by relieving the papacy of its temporal responsibilities, the *risorgimento* unwittingly started that institution on the path to the international prestige it enjoys today.

Beginning with Pope Leo IV (847–55), the Vatican had been fortified against invaders. In protest against the usurpation, Pius

IX and his successors refused to pass beyond these 50-foot high, turret-studded walls, declaring themselves virtual prisoners. This adamant stand won the popes worldwide sympathy at a time when the papacy itself had reached a low ebb in public esteem. The impasse over the "Roman Question" continued until February 11, 1929, when the Basilica of St. Peter's and the in-walled cluster of palaces, gardens, chapels, and museums on its flanks were recognized in the Lateran Treaty as the independent enclave of *Lo Stato della Città del Vaticano*.

A Jurisprudential Quirk

Despite the loss of territory, the Holy See as the supreme directive organ of the Catholic Church had continued to exchange diplomats with many nations, claiming sovereignty to be "inherent in its very nature." In the Lateran Treaty, the Holy Father was acknowledged as Supreme Pastor of the Holy See and, in this capacity, ruler of an independent Vatican City-State. The Holy See, not the Vatican, possesses sovereign status in the international order. Though a jurisprudential quirk, this distinction, unique in international practice, has been maintained ever since. While the Vatican City-State as a geopolitical entity (official language: Italian) participates in the European Space Conference and conforms to the Berne Copyright Convention, it is the Holy See (official language: Latin) that is represented at UNESCO, that is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, that exchanges emissaries with more than 100 nations.* Recently Britain, willing finally to forget the unpleasantness over Henry VIII's divorce, re-established full diplomatic relations with the Holy See after a 448-year lapse.

There are two main roads into the Vatican City-State. One passes through a gate leading to the Arch of Bells on the south side of the basilica and is used primarily by cardinals, diplomats, and heads of state. The other is the Gate of St. Anna to the north of the basilica, which is used by workers, residents, or visitors on business. Most tourists approach the Vatican through the Piazza of St. Peter's, bracketed by Bernini's majestic colonnade.

Traffic control and internal security within the Vatican are

*One nation that has been rebuffed thus far is Israel. The Vatican's pretext is an ancient principle that precludes recognition until national boundaries are stabilized. In fact, the Holy See is displeased about the status of Jerusalem, which it would like to have declared an "open" city. The United States does not maintain formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See or the Vatican. However, every President since Franklin D. Roosevelt has dispatched a personal representative to the pope as head of the Catholic Church. The current envoy is William Wilson, a California stockbroker and realtor, a Catholic convert, and a friend of President Reagan. The Vatican's man in Washington is Archbishop Pio Laghi.

provided by a corps of 133 Swiss Guards, whose red, yellow, and blue Renaissance uniforms are believed to have been designed by Michelangelo. (All Swiss Guards are veterans of the Swiss Army, under 25, at least 5'8½" in height, Catholic, and, except for the commandant and sergeant major, single.) Their surveillance is supplemented by a platoon of well-trained secret servicemen. As part of his effort to trim the papacy's atavistic trappings, Pope Paul VI eliminated many of the more ostentatious displays of personnel: the uniformed Zouaves and gendarmes, the lay functionaries in ruffs and garters, the papal musicians. Also given notice were the "black" Roman aristocracy—relatives of former popes who had retained inherited titles as princes, counts, and other species of papal royalty.

The city within the walls is artfully landscaped, dotted with fountains and formal quadrangles, and laced with cool, cypress-lined walks. Within its borders, one will find a radio station (the first facility was set up by Guglielmo Marconi in 1931), a daily newspaper (*L'Osservatore Romano*), a railroad station, post office, *pensione*, clinic, pharmacy, clothing store, supermarket, victualer, gas station, publishing house, firehouse, and coffee bar—all owned by the Holy See. There is also a small mosaic factory. A \$1.6-million bomb shelter is being built. "God helps those who help themselves," observes the Right Reverend Alfonso Stickler, the Vatican's librarian, who is overseeing the construction.

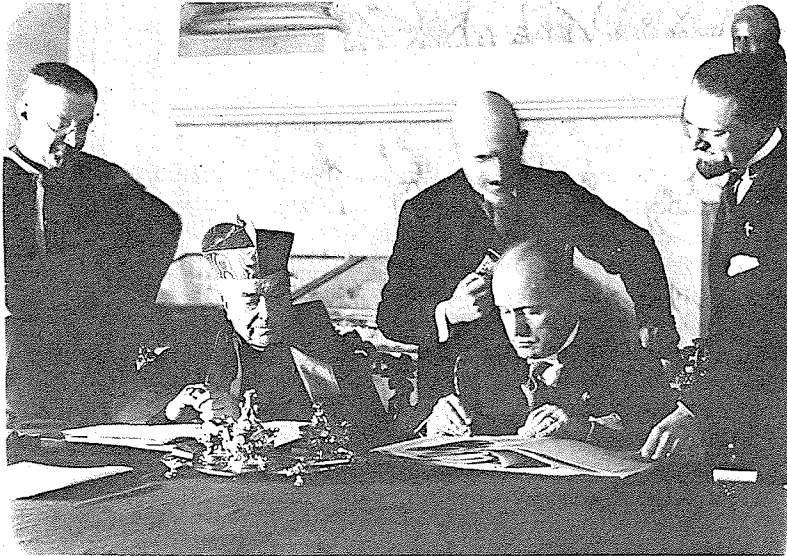
Running a Government

There are several tennis courts on the grounds, numerous audience halls, thousands of offices, and enough apartment buildings and messhalls to shelter and feed the Swiss Guards and the 900 prelates and laymen whose jobs entitle them to reside within the papal enclave. About 1,600 lay workers are employed in Vatican offices, shops, and services. Almost all of them live outside, in Rome. The Vatican issues passports to its diplomats, but emissaries and high-level staff (and sometimes their families, if they are laymen) receive citizenship only for the duration of their service. Currently, 729 persons are citizens of the city-state. No taxes are collected.

The business of the Vatican is the business of the Holy See, whose business in turn is that of the Roman Catholic Church. It is a sprawling enterprise. Worldwide, its religious personnel alone include some 404,000 priests, 950,000 nuns, 2,447 bishops, and 532 cardinals and archbishops. They are scattered among hundreds of thousands of churches in 1,803 dioceses in 162 countries. No accurate count exists of the numbers of schools,

colleges, hospitals, clinics, leprosariums, orphanages, halfway houses, and nursing homes run by the church. These efforts, together with the abbeys, convents, rectories, seminaries, retreat houses, and other properties, provide employment for upwards of five million laymen, food and shelter for another 13 million, and spiritual care for 724 million. The Holy See does not *pay* for all of this—church finances are highly decentralized. But it has the final say in church administration.

The pope is the supreme executive, legislative, and judicial authority within the Vatican. Under his aegis, day-to-day administration is the task of the Roman curia—an entrenched bureaucracy of cardinals, prelates, priests, professors, nuns, and laymen that has at one time or another exasperated every pontiff. (When asked once how many people worked in the curia, Pope John XXIII replied, “About half.”) The organs of government are called congregations or secretariats. These function like cabinet offices. The decisions of the congregations and secretariats are rendered in letters, rescripts, admonitions, and other legal forms, many of them procedures with which the Emperor Hadrian would have been familiar.



Felici.

Italy's Fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, and Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, Vatican Secretary of State, sign the 1929 Lateran Treaty, ending a 59-year conflict between Italy and the Holy See.

Immediately beneath the pope is his Secretary of State, currently Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, 66, son of a Piacenza tailor. A nimble Vatican diplomat and architect of the city-state's *Ostpolitik*, Casaroli handled papal relations with the nations of Eastern Europe for two decades, successfully arranging for a restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in those lands. He looks frail but is not, and as Peter Nichols of the *Times of London* has discerned, is "so precise that he chooses his words like a bird pecking the appropriately flavored seed." Within his competence are two other offices: the Council of Public Affairs, primarily concerned with foreign policy, and the so-called *sostituto* to the Secretary of State, who acts as the pope's executive officer, conducting his day-to-day business.*

Paying the Bills

The current *sostituto*, Eduardo Martinez Somalo, is a Spaniard, a shock to many curial officials. They believe that only an Italian prelate can handle that office, since it requires an intimate knowledge of Italian politics. While Pope John XXIII once allowed that "Italy should be no more important to the Vatican than the Philippines," simple proximity along with certain provisions of the 1929 Concordat—plus the fact that the pope is both bishop of Rome and primate of Italy—long dictated otherwise. Now that a Pole occupies Peter's throne, however, the ideal of a *disimpegno* or "pulling out" of Italian political affairs is being pursued by the Vatican with considerable though by no means total success (see box).

Cardinal Casaroli may be the chief of staff, but the byzantine bureaucracy below him is hydra-headed, made up mainly of priests and prelates recruited on the *raccomandazione* of curial officials in league with diplomatic and episcopal intimates around the globe. There are nine congregations (the first was set up in 1542) dealing with everything from Catholic schools to relations between Rome and the various Eastern Rites. In addition, there are three newly created secretariats, overseeing a broad range of ecumenical activities. Special commissions—

*In the past, there has been rivalry between the *sostituto*, with his direct and frequent access to the pope, and the Secretary of State. This was particularly so when Archbishop Giovanni Benelli was *sostituto* under Pope Paul VI and seemed subtly to upstage the French-born Secretary of State, Cardinal Jean Villot. Credence was lent to this gossip when suddenly, in 1977, the octogenarian pontiff moved Benelli out of the Vatican, appointing him archbishop of Florence and raising him to the cardinalate. Critics were reminded of a similar situation in 1954 when Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, the man who would become Paul VI, was suddenly removed from his Vatican post by Pius XII and made archbishop of Milan without the traditional cardinal's hat, a highly embarrassing situation.

THE VATICAN AND ITALY

On September 20, 1870, Italian troops marched through the Porta Pia to defeat the armies of Pope Pius IX and capture Rome. It was the climax of a 10-year campaign to suppress the Papal States. Italy was united at last as a secular state under King Victor Emmanuel II. But the pope remained—and has been ever since—a force to be reckoned with in peninsular politics.

Initially, the Vatican refused to recognize the new Italian state and forbade Catholics to vote or hold public office. Not until 1929 did the two parties make their peace. The accords that year between Pope Pius XI and Fascist Party leader Benito Mussolini settled the Vatican's legal status (in the Lateran Treaty) and included a Concordat that established Catholicism as Italy's state religion, prohibited civil marriage and divorce, and mandated religious instruction in public schools. According to Pope Pius, the treaty gave "God back to Italy and Italy back to God." According to *Il Duce*, "We have not resurrected the [pope's] Temporal Power, we have buried it."

For the Vatican, the achievement indeed proved double-edged. Conciliation enhanced Mussolini's prestige and led to an overwhelming Fascist victory in the March 1929 plebiscite. Brutal attacks by Mussolini's supporters on members of Italy's Catholic Action followed; the national lay organization was emasculated as a potential source of opposition. Pope Pius XI condemned aspects of Fascism in a 1931 encyclical (*Non Abbiamo Bisogno*—"I Have No Need"), but the document was suppressed in Italy, and all political activity by the clergy was banned. Church and state papered over the differences, but tempers flared again during the late 1930s when the Holy See criticized government-sanctioned anti-Semitism.

A new era began with the fall of Mussolini and the end of World War II. In a 1946 referendum, Italian voters abolished the monarchy and created a republic. (The Concordat was incorporated into the

e.g., on family life, the liturgy, communications—are innumerable. There is a judicial branch comprising the Apostolic Signatura (a kind of Supreme Court), the Sacred Penitentiary (responsible for indulgences and excommunications and for resolving cases of conscience submitted secretly), and the Sacred Roman Rota (dealing with divorce, annulment, and the like). These tribunals were all in existence by the 14th century.*

No pontiff has ever succeeded in getting all of the curial

*The Vatican has a court to handle petty crimes and has, on a handful of occasions during the past five decades, imprisoned offenders for short periods of time. Under the Lateran Treaty, the Holy See is bound to extradite to Italy all persons accused of serious criminal offenses. Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk who attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square, was tried, convicted, and jailed in Italy.

new constitution.) The Vatican promptly allied itself with the Christian Democratic Party (CDP) and helped to defeat the Communists in the 1948 parliamentary elections. (The CDP won 305 seats out of 574 in a contest involving eight parties.) In 1949, Pius XII excommunicated all Communists and ordered Catholics not to support the Reds. Encouraged by the Vatican, Christian Democrats pursued an anti-Communist strategy at home throughout the 1950s.

Under the leadership of Pope John XXIII, elected pope in 1958, the Vatican deliberately sought to reduce its meddling in Italian politics. In his 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, John drew a distinction between communism as a political system and as an atheistic political ideology—implying that voters in good conscience could support the former. In adopting a new Pastoral Constitution in 1965, the Second Vatican Council explicitly endorsed the idea of ecclesiastical withdrawal from local politics—not only in Italy but in Ireland, Spain, and elsewhere—in order to play a more purely spiritual role throughout the world. When John Paul II was inaugurated in 1978, he refused to be crowned with the tiara (symbol of temporal power), accepting instead the pallium, a white woolen band embroidered with crosses, symbolizing the metropolitan authority of a bishop. The Holy See, meanwhile, acquiesced in Italian parliamentary moves during the late 1970s disestablishing the Catholic Church.

For all the Vatican's good intentions, there has been some backsliding. Parliamentary legislation permitting divorce (1970) and abortion (1978) was endorsed by Italians in national referendums (in 1974 and 1981) that deeply engaged Paul VI and John Paul II. Both spoke out—to no avail. Some politicians contended that the church had gone back to its old ways. But a commentator in Rome's daily *La Repubblica* probably summed up the situation best a week before the 1981 vote: "Neither the Church nor the society is the same, nor is it the same curia or the same Christian Democratic Party, and the pope is neither an Italian nor a Christian Democrat."

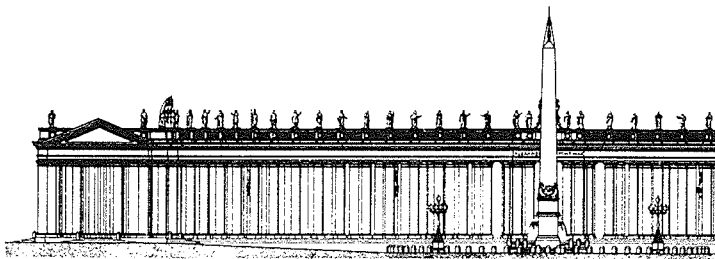
offices and factions under his thumb, and some popes have complained of being a "prisoner of the Vatican". The bureaucracy has, after all, evolved over hundreds of years. Its character is partly imperial, partly feudal, partly modern, and partly rational. No one disputes the pope's ultimate authority. Everyone knows, however, that frequently the curia represents a powerful barrier to the exercise of his free will.

Pope Paul VI's ambitious attempt to overhaul the Vatican bureaucracy in 1965–67, for example, met with only mixed success. To some extent, he "internationalized" the curia, reducing the number of Italians. Most key appointees were given fixed terms of office. Certain kinks in the line of authority were rem-

edied. Yet some operations seemed impervious to change. Thus, Paul reorganized the much-criticized Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office—the Vatican's doctrinal watchdog—into a Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and abolished its Inquisition and Index of Forbidden Books. The congregation was directed to encourage theological inquiry rather than impede doctrinal evolution by censoring the church's most advanced thinkers. Unhappily, its prefect, the prosecutorial Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, proved hard to dislodge. Ottaviani eventually retired, but many who shared his views continued in their jobs. The recent cases of Hans Küng (stripped of his title as a Catholic theologian), Edward Schillebeeckx (called to Rome to defend his writings), and Jacques Pohier (whose *Quand je dis Dieu* was actually condemned in 1979) suggest that the congregation is still capable of waging a minor campaign of terror.

Pope Paul instituted a number of financial reforms. But he was unable to rationalize fully the Vatican's domestic "economy," and the situation is still highly confused. While the Holy See is essentially a spiritual organization, it cannot subsist on the love of God alone. Its worldwide activities cost money: about \$200 million a year. Accused of hoarding enormous riches and severely criticized for their failure to publish an annual financial report (they have never done so), Vatican officials take some satisfaction in reminding critics of Pope Pius IX's reaction at the close of Vatican Council I in 1870, where papal infallibility had been proclaimed. Asked how it felt to be infallible, the pontiff replied: "I do not know if I am fallible or infallible, but I do know I am *in fallimento* [bankrupt]."

Despite an inestimable deposit of treasures—from prehistoric artifacts and Roman sculptures to Renaissance frescoes—the Vatican since shortly after Vatican Council II has been continually on the verge of bankruptcy. The ceiling of the Sistine

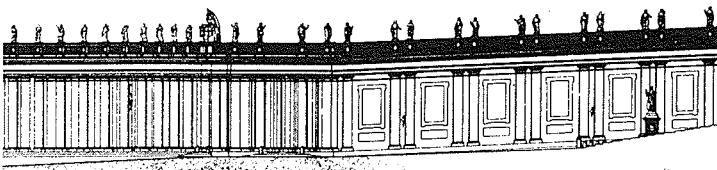


Chapel may be priceless, but it is not a liquid asset. Papal generosity after World War II in helping to resettle refugees and rebuild devastated areas of Europe was unstinting. So has been the Holy See's response to more recent catastrophes: earthquakes, famines, droughts, the devastations wrought by war and revolution. The expansion of the Holy See's far-flung missionary and relief efforts has proven a great drain, as have the extensive papal travels of recent years.

The Vatican's overhead alone is exorbitant—a fact illustrated dramatically by the recent threat to strike by lay workers within the City State: the policemen and firemen; construction crews and repairmen (the *santipietrini*); gardeners in the Vatican and at the experimental farms at the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo; postmen; telephone operators; ushers; typographers. (Average salary at the Vatican for lay workers is \$7,000 per annum, indexed to inflation.) The Holy See also supports some 35 curial cardinals plus an estimated 3,000 other officials and clerics, including papal emissaries and their staffs in more than a hundred countries.

Some Vatican agencies, it should be noted, do run in the black. The *Governatorato* or Governor's Office, under the guidance of Marchese Don Giulio Sacchetti, oversees the buildings and grounds of both the Vatican City-State and its extraterritorial possessions in Italy. Thanks to the sale of stamps and coins, fees from the museums, and revenue from other enterprises such as the polyglot press, real estate investments, art and tapestry repair workshops, and the Vatican commissary, it reportedly turns a small profit. The same seems to be the case with the Fabbrica of St. Peter, run by a cardinal and four architects, charged with the upkeep of the Basilica of St. Peter's.

The principal source of Vatican income is the financial settlement made in the Lateran Treaty of 1929 when the Italian government turned over to the pope the equivalent of \$70 mil-



lion in cash and another \$100 million in government bonds as compensation for papal territories lost in 1870. Under the watchful eye of a highly respected banker, Bernardino Nogara, this nest egg was invested wisely with the help of New York's Chase National Bank (now Chase Manhattan) and National City Bank (now Citibank), London's Hambros Bank and N. M. Rothschild & Sons, and France's Lazard Frères, and Credit Suisse. No one knows how much money the Vatican actually has now, not even the pope. Estimates placing the amount at several billions are considered absurd by European financiers, who generally cite figures of about \$500 million (equivalent to about one-third of Harvard's endowment).

A second source of income is the generosity of Catholics all over the world who make contributions in special collections—most notably "Peter's Pence." (This was originated by Britain's King Canute in the ninth century as an annual giving of one penny from each household; it was revived during the middle of the 19th century by devout English and French Catholics.) On visits to the Holy See, cardinals and bishops from affluent nations typically make special donations. Well-to-do laymen often pick up part of the tab for such extravagances as the new papal Hall of Audiences, built by architect Pier Luigi Nervi for Pope Paul VI.

A Day in the Life

The Vatican's money is handled by a labyrinth of institutions. The bulk of the portfolio is managed by the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, headed by an experienced diplomat and economist, Cardinal Giuseppe Caprio. Peter's Pence is paid directly into the Secretariat of State. The Vatican also has its own bank, the *Istituto per le Opere di Religione*. With assets of at least \$100 million and no debts, the Istituto is under the general supervision of five cardinals and an executive director, the 60-year-old Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, an avid golfer from Cicero, Illinois, who doubles as the pope's advance man on his worldwide travels. It handles the funds of various congregations and religious orders and serves as the local bank for the curia and for Vatican employees.

Pope Paul attempted to exert some control over Vatican finances by appointing the former apostolic delegate in Washington, Cardinal Egidio Vagnozzi, as a sort of overall comptroller and, until his death in December 1980, chief of a new Prefecture of Economic Affairs. The Vagnozzi are well-known businessmen—the family runs the largest confectionery in

Rome—but even the cardinal was soon quoted as saying that it would take a “combined effort of the CIA, KGB, Interpol, and the Holy Spirit” to make heads or tails of the ledger books. Pope John Paul II has since appointed a commission of 15 cardinals, including John Kroll of Philadelphia, to tackle the Holy See’s annual deficit, estimated at about \$30 million in 1980.*

If the administration of the city-state was all the pope had to worry about, the Vatican might well be a smoothly functioning operation, a mini-Switzerland on half a square kilometer. But he has many other tasks—writing, greeting, praying, thinking, preaching—and perforce must delegate much administrative responsibility. Even then, there is never enough time.

By nature and habit, John Paul II is an early riser, up by 5:30 A.M. He spends an hour or so in private meditation, usually says Mass for his household, then eats a hearty breakfast, frequently with guests. From then on, the day is not his: briefing after meeting after reception after audience. The appointment log is as varied as that of the President of the United States—one minute Andrei Gromyko, the next a choir of retarded children. In between, there are a worldwide bureaucracy to run, encyclicals (pastoral letters) to write. Sundays and Holy Days are devoted mainly to visiting parishes or participating in the great traditional religious festivals at one of Rome’s basilicas. John Paul makes a point of finding time to exercise—taking brisk walks in the Vatican grounds or a swim at Castel Gandolfo, where he had a swimming pool installed, remarking that it was cheaper than holding another conclave to elect a successor.

“Popes come and go . . .”

The tenor of the papacy in each age depends upon the person of the pope and his idiosyncrasies. While his rule is monarchical, it is not despotic. He has no coercive force to impose his will but must rely on the compliance of bishops and theologians and ultimately on the faith of the Catholic people. Down through the ages, the saying *Roma locuta, causa finita*—“Rome has spoken, the case is closed”—has been honored in the breach.

*Vatican officials have denied suffering great losses in the scandalous Michele Sindona affair. During the late 1960s, Pope Paul VI tapped the Sicilian-born Sindona, considered a financial wizard, to diversify the Vatican portfolio. Instead, Sindona shunted it into a tax shelter in Luxembourg, then used the money to help finance the Italian Banca Unione and the Swiss Finabank. Luckily, the Vatican began to bail out before the crack-up that started with the failure of the Long Island-based Franklin National Bank in 1974. Cardinal Caprio maintains that Vatican losses were on paper, but no one really knows. More recently, in July 1982, the Vatican bank came under fire for its links with the scandal-ridden Banco Ambrosiano. John Paul II has appointed three lay bankers from the United States, Italy, and Switzerland to investigate the matter.

Most recently, Pope Paul VI's condemnation of artificial contraception was challenged from within the Catholic hierarchy, and Catholic family practice largely ignores the papal ban.

Predictions that Paul's decision would destroy papal authority have proven premature—as, I expect, will similar forecasts stemming from John Paul II's intransigence on such issues as women in the priesthood, clerical celibacy, and divorce and remarriage. The papacy has survived greater perils—persecution, schism, reformation, revolution. Its principal enemy is stagnation, a state, fortunately, that the Vatican's immersion in the secular world has rarely permitted for long. Instead, a resilient sort of traditionalism has prevailed, at once preserving the church's essential teachings and forcing popes and papacy to confront the changing realities of the world outside the walls.

Though ecclesiastical in mission, the church has always adapted to the political structures of secular society. Early Christianity sloughed off the synagogical legalisms of its origins as the papacy gradually acquired the forms and juridical usages of imperial Rome. The pope became a feudal suzerain in the Middle Ages and, during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, an absolute monarch by divine right. Today, the church's government is undergoing a subtle change in the direction of democracy—a change John Paul II seems reluctant to acknowledge. In 1967, Pope Paul VI instituted a series of triennial synods of bishops in Rome, designed to solicit the views of the church's worldwide leadership on such problems as heresy, missionary methods, and family life. At this point, however, the synods are consultative only, and it is still the pope and curia who prepare a “final report” and publish the results.

Nevertheless the papacy, like the church itself, is subject to evolutionary forces. The more strenuously its leaders oppose change, the more likely that change is about to occur. At Vatican II, this phenomenon was unwittingly acknowledged by the former archbishop of Lyons, Cardinal Pierre Gerlier, who complained: “The church is so much in love with tradition that it is continually creating new ones.”

And the Vatican? “Popes come and go, but we go on forever” is the centuries-old, if unofficial, motto of the Roman curia. The sentiment is echoed by the city-state's inhabitants. “Thou art the rock,” said Christ to Peter, establishing the authority of the papacy. But also founded on a rock is the Vatican City-State, this tiny trapezoid of papal turf symbolizing the City of God where, within the shadow of eternity, one man's word is law.