

THE VATICAN: It's By No Means Solely a Man's World

By EVA MARIA JUNG (NC News Service)
 Rome—There has been much talk lately about the reform of the Church's central administrative offices—the Roman curia—but nothing has been said about the employment of women.

Because of the unspoken but iron-clad rule never to employ women in the Vatican offices, even as secretaries or cleaning women, people have come to think of Vatican City as a man's world.

Yet this has never been the

case. There have been always women living inside the Vatican walls. Among 148 civil subjects and 319 residents without citizenship, there are more than 100 women, all housewives or nuns.

Besides the Sisters living in the four colleges and convents inside the Vatican, there are also 51 "female Religious" working for the administration, according to the official yearbook, Activities of the Holy See, 1967. These employees work in the bookkeeping department, the dispensary, the

bookshop, the clothing store and the laboratory for the restoration of precious Vatican tapestries. Three Sisters take care of the household of Pope Paul VI.

Then there are the other housekeepers, and some mothers and sisters of Vatican prelates.

Finally come the wives and daughters of the doorman and elevator operators, as well as of the few lay officials and officers of the Swiss Guard. The men in the ranks must be unmarried.

As long as there was a governor of Vatican City, his wife was the "First Lady of the Vatican." But since Pope Pius XII, the post has been vacant.

During the last years of World War II, the Vatican suddenly became crowded with women of all classes and nationalities. They hid there during the Nazi occupation of Rome. When the Allies arrived, it was the turn of the German diplomats accredited to the Vatican to move in with their wives and children.

The housewives and house-

keepers have a common meeting-place: the Annona Vaticana, a big supermarket.

In general, they have a peaceful life, pay little or no rent, and no taxes. Their children can play in the Vatican gardens. Their sons, if they are Vatican citizens, need not perform Italian military service. There is only one drawback: all residents must be in by 11 p.m., when the gates close.

The attitudes toward professional lay women is changing. Around the turn of the century, female students were finally

admitted to the Vatican Library and Archives. Now they may attend the two Vatican schools for library and archive sciences.

The first woman to be employed full time was Dr. Hermine Speier, a German-born archeologist. When she lost her job at the German Archeological Institute in Rome because she was a Jew, Pope Pius XI hired her to work in the Vatican Museums. This was not the revocation of an obsolete rule, but a political gesture of protest against racial discrimination.

Miss Speier worked for over 30 years in the Vatican

Museum. She had no official standing, and her name was not even listed in the directory of Vatican personnel.

Next was the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, which immediately after it was founded in 1960 hired two women as highly specialized secretaries. They are, however, attached to a secular institute outside the Vatican walls.

Then came a historical event. On Jan. 8, 1967, Pope Paul VI announced the foundation of a World Council on the Laity with a woman as vice-secretary,

Miss Rosemary Goldie, from Australia.

She was the first woman officially employed by the Vatican. Six more women were named members and consultants of the Council on the Laity and of the Pontifical Commission on World Justice and Peace.

In October, 1967, four nuns entered the Congregation of Religious as full time staff members. Later six superiors general of religious orders of women were named consultants of the same congregation. Five nuns and three laywomen were named consultants of the Congregation for the Evangelization of the World.

When the third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate took place in Rome last October, women had the same right and rank as men. The Pope announced his intention to declare St. Theresa of Avila and St. Catherine of Siena Doctors of the Church, a title previously conferred on only a few male theologians.

Mrs. Eleanor Shields, president of the U.S. National Council of Catholic Women, addressed the Synod of Bishops and presented a memorandum requesting a stronger role for the laity, including women.

Finally, a resolution on the "Woman in the Church" was adopted by the lay congress which recommended "that a serious doctrinal study be undertaken of the place of women within the sacramental order and within the Church. . . . that competent women be included in all pontifical commissions, and qualified women be consulted on the revision of the canons which concern women, in order to give full recognition to the women's dignity and to all women greater possibilities of service to the Church."

This, in principle, would open all doors to women, even the "Bronze Gate" of the Vatican which had been closed to them for almost 2000 years.



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