

BOOKS

Engaging Vatican Guide

"Inside the Vatican," by George Bull. St. Martin's Press (New York, 1983). 293 pp., \$13.95.

Reviewed by Father Robert Emmett Curran NC News Service

Despite the title, this is not an expose of Vatican politics or high finance, but an engaging introduction to the center of the Holy See that explains the main structures of the complicated ecclesiastical government, as well as the attitudes of papal officials in their administration of the Catholic Church.

George Bull, a Renaissance scholar and veteran journalist, knows his territory well, having spent years in Rome. He uses well-cultivated contacts effectively to provide an insider's view which is sympathetic but not uncritical.

The Vatican City State, unlike the Holy See, is a modern creation, the result of the agreement reached between the Holy See and the Italian government in 1929 which liberated the pope from the voluntary imprisonment he had endured since the fall of the Papal States in 1870.

Bull, aided by maps, is an interesting guide for a tour of St. Peter's, the Vatican Palace, the Secret Archives, and the other buildings, monuments and gardens which constitute the Vatican.

He is at his best when he turns to the business that takes place within the walls. About 4,500 persons work there, twice as many in the Curia (church's central offices) as in the civil sections of the Vatican State. Most of those who work for the Holy See and the Vatican are Italians, despite attempts to internationalize the Curia.

As Bull shows, one of the most important things Pope Paul VI did was to centralize power within the Curia in the Secretariat of State. Bull finds the curial mentality is still one that favors centralization, hierarchy, and the preservation of the status quo, but the Curia is slowly changing through the assimilation of such churchmen as Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, a black African from Benin, who heads the justice and peace commission.

Cardinal Gantin told Bull, "I feel a great sense of family here... There is more regalism and triumphalism in many African states than there is in the Vatican." Since the Vatican has refused to disclose its wealth or expenses, Bull is left to speculate about this potentially sensational subject. The Vatican, he notes, "feels poor even if it looks rich." Revenues, he estimates, have more than tripled over the past half century, but expenses have increased even

more so. What keeps the Vatican afloat, according to Bull, are not the sometimes notorious investments of the Vatican Bank but the annual contributions of the laity around the world, more than \$30 million by his estimate.

Looming over Bull's Vatican is Pope John Paul II. The author is deeply impressed by Pope John Paul's sheer vitality and magnetic presence. Still he wonders to what extent this dynamic but highly authoritarian pope — who is much closer in spirit to Pope Pius XII than Pope Paul VI — will be willing to continue the work of restoring the collegial tradition to the Church and respecting the limited but real independence of the local churches.

He concludes, "The composition of the college of cardinals and of the Curia is changing, the latter more slowly but no less definitely than the former, towards the same wide internationalization. This will transform the atmosphere of the Vatican during the last part of this century; but the newcomers may well take from the past elements of the old papacy which seem out of fashion in the West today." If so, it will

turn out to be a heavy price to pay for becoming part of the family.

(Father Curran is an associate professor of history at Georgetown University.)

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Fr. Albert Shamon

Word for Sunday

Seek First The Lord's Kingship

Sunday's Reading: (R3) Lk. 12/32-48. (R1) Wis. 18/6-9. (R2) Heb. 11/1-2, 8-19.

One of the fascinations of observing the super-rich is discovering how, and sometimes why, they spend incredible sums of money on small interludes of pleasure. A few years ago, Father Elmer Heindl, my brother and I stayed at Sand Ridge Hotel in Barbados, just a few homes down from Claudette Colbert's own summer home. Our hotel expenses hardly came to more than \$600 each. Yet not too long ago President Reagan spent a very short vacation at Claudette's home. It cost over \$300,000. Why?

One of the classic explanations for the lavish expenditures of the wealthy on vacations and enjoyments — what a writer labeled as "conspicuous consumption" — is to win the world's esteem. For "esteem is awarded only on evidence."

Today the super-rich go in for, not yachts or polo, but buying football and baseball teams or running for the Senate. They are seeking esteem through personal expenditure and adornment much the same as back in the days of the Vanderbilts, Whitneys, Rockefellers, Astors, and Morgans. Property and assets and other accoutrements of the gilded life are means to power.

To gain and win the esteem of others, it is not enough to possess wealth and power; the wealth and the power must become visible — for esteem is awarded only on evidence.

This theory of the leisure class is in direct contrast with that of the Kingdom of God which Jesus talks about in Sunday's gospel. The Kingdom is the core of His gospel. He speaks of it over 100 times. His first words were, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." His last forty days on earth were devoted to speaking about the reign (kingdom) of God.

Jesus says to those who believe in Him, "It has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom." Then He tells them how to

gain it: "Sell what you have and give alms. Don't amass worldly treasures in tapestries and rugs which moths can destroy nor in valuable things that thieves can steal or in purses that wear out. Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be."

The philosophy of His kingdom is just the opposite of the philosophy of the leisure class.

The kingdoms of the world are built on a life of acquisition and profits, together with the snobbery and social pretenses that go with it. The kingdoms of the world are founded on greed, selfishness and exploitation with its consequent strife and confusion.

The Kingdom of God is founded on a higher order: love, mutual aid, justice, and fair opportunity for everyone. It is a life of sharing, not hoarding; a life of renunciation, not acquisition; of seeking first God's interests, not one's own.

The wealth of the kingdom of the world will slip through one's fingers like an ice cube. The wealth of the Kingdom of God — relieving human needs in love — will last forever.

However, our Lord never taught that the material doesn't matter and only the spiritual does.

No, we are not only bodies, nor are we only souls. We are persons — animated bodies. We can no more separate the material and the spiritual than Shylock could a pound of flesh from blood.

The tendency is to emphasize the material to the neglect of the spiritual. Our Lord has simply tried to restore the balance; that is, do not become inordinately dependent on the material. Rather, "seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things (material needs) will be given you besides" (Mt. 6/33).

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Parish Plans Big Party for Father Cuddy

Webster — Parishioners at Holy Trinity are planning to fete Father Paul Cuddy on his 75th birthday, Sept. 7, at Sweet's Party House.

The program includes cocktails at 6:30 p.m. and a buffet dinner at 8 p.m.

Tickets for the event are \$15 per person and are reserved and paid for in advance by contacting Holy Trinity Church, 1460 Ridge Road, Webster, N.Y. 14580 before Aug. 24.

Further information is available from Kay Tichacek, 265-9354; or Betty Schreiber, 265-0834.

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