

# Vatican Power Over Governments



This is a chapter from a book, AMERICAN DEMOCRACY & THE VATICAN: POPULATION GROWTH & NATIONAL SECURITY By Stephen D. Mumford. It's recommended to read by [Christian J. Pinto of Noise of Thunder Radio](#). "The Church" referred to in this article is the Church of Rome, not the true Church of Jesus Christ.

It is also true that the Vatican controls governments whenever possible—either completely or partially.

Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, professor of sociology at the University of Montreal, a Catholic, and author of Papal Power: A Study of Vatican Control Over Lay Catholic Elites,<sup>9</sup> has studied extensively Vatican efforts to achieve this dominance:

[The] Vatican is, above all, an organizational weapon in the hands of the papacy and other top ecclesiastical officials. Religious ideology has increasingly become subordinated to organizational imperatives. Among these internal and external organizational imperatives, organizational control of lay elites seems to have become a major preoccupation and necessity for Church authorities.<sup>10</sup>

No matter who the pope is, there are structural and institutional influences that operate because the Vatican is not only a religious institution and a center of political power but also an economic institution with vast financial and real estate holdings, a "fiscal paradise" which ranks alongside Monaco and Hong Kong as a haven for tax evasion.<sup>11</sup> In spite of the purely religious image that it endeavors to put for ward, **the Vatican is deeply involved in Italian and international politics and finance**, promoting conservatism and capitalism while professing a Christian approach to democratic reforms. The Vatican is constantly intervening in Italian politics to protect its interests, including its economic interests. The Vatican is not only a political and a religious entity, it is also an important financial enterprise. . . . Church authorities have let themselves be used by political and economic elites as ideological legitimators of capitalism and conservatism, in return for economic advantage and political favors.<sup>12</sup>

It is a fact that **the Vatican exercises enormous control over governments in**

## **predominantly Catholic countries:**

From its inception, the Catholic Church has moved gradually from grass-roots democracy and collegial authority to a vast concentration of power and authority in the hands of the hierarchy, and especially in the hands of the pope and his curia. This development has been accompanied by the alliance of these ecclesiastical leaders with the dominant classes and elites in civil and political society.<sup>13</sup>

"Shogun," another recent highly successful television mini-series based on a novel, dramatized the development of just such an alliance in an Asian country three centuries ago.

This alliance is truest in developing Catholic countries and developing countries that have substantial Catholic leadership and is less true now than it once was in countries in which the population is well educated, such as France, Italy, Belgium, and The Netherlands:

On the basis of its office charisma, the Church obtains certain privileges from the state, like tax exemptions, special subsidies, and protection from disrespect and even from secular jurisdiction.

In particular, the Church establishes a distinctive way of life for its officials. This requires a specific course of training and hence a regular hierocratic (of or relating to government by ecclesiastics (as priests or prelates) education. Once it has created the latter, it also gains control over education and, through it, provides the political authorities with officials and subjects who have been properly brought up in the hierocratic spirit.

From parochial schools to Catholic colleges, from minor seminaries to the pontifical universities in Rome, **the Catholic educational system, with few exceptions, was organized under the central control of the Catholic hierarchy and the Vatican.** . . . Building on all these educational institutions, with the help of a private taxation system and important investments, the Church developed a far-reaching system of socialization and controls which ultimately functioned to block threats to the established secular system. This ecclesiastical system of controls included, besides the various educational facilities, a whole network of mass media and meeting places for retreats, meetings, and various other kinds of sessions and congresses of groups and organizations, the most important of which have been examined in some of the preceding chapters.

The relative independence of the Catholic Church bureaucracy vis-a-vis political and socioeconomic forces permit it to fulfill better the role of an agent of ideological control which the ruling class assigns to it, and which it willingly assumes because of its links with that ruling class. Conservative Church officials do not have to receive direct orders from businessmen and from politicians to act in accordance with interests, since their own interests coincide with those of the ruling class.<sup>14</sup>

**The Church functions optimally when it teams up with a right-wing dictatorship or single-party government** such as commonly seen in Latin America, certain African countries, and the Philippines. The government offers an environment in which the Church can prosper and the Church reciprocates by controlling the masses—the laity—and ensures the status quo for the government. Referring to Italy as an example, Vaillancourt says:

The papacy gives religious legitimization to the socioeconomic and political status quo in Italy in exchange for political and economic advantages. It is itself controlled partly by the remunerative power of the ruling class, and in return it uses various kinds of normative and social control mechanisms to keep the laity loyal to itself and to the socioeconomic and political system that supports it. It helps reproduce the monopoly capitalist system and is in part determined in its own internal control activities by economic and political imperatives.<sup>15</sup>

The Church controls the masses using techniques that took centuries to develop. These have been classified by Vaillancourt as: (1) ecological power; (2) remunerative power; (3) coercive power; (4) social power; (5) legal power; (6) traditional power; (7) expert power; and (8) charismatic power.

**Through its control of large segments of the population, the Church can and does perpetually intimidate governments.** Persevering and monolithic (two well-recognized characteristics), **the Church is eminently qualified to overcome the resistance of any government on any issue**, given sufficient time.

The Church is accurately described as a **totalitarian international government**:

After the financial power which is practically uncontrolled, the ecclesiastical hierarchy exercises an authoritarian power. The accession to the episcopacy comes through a system of aristocratic co-optation. The people of God, the faithful, have no controlling power. The bishop's power, once acquired, is nearly absolute, as long as one respects the supreme norms of orthodoxy that the ruling stratum itself has established. Without elections, without parties, without unions, ecclesiastical power rules according to the model of absolute monarchy. . . . In its relationship with political power, ecclesiastical power is in perfect symbiosis, as long as there is no mutual disagreement. . . . The financial basis and the power of the Church condition its doctrine and its ideology.<sup>16</sup>

Its preoccupation with power also affects the way in which it defines morality. Because the Vatican answers to no one, it can define morality in any way it chooses—and it does. Anything that threatens its power is automatically deemed immoral. For example, legalized abortion seriously threatens its authority and thus its power. It is thus immoral and great attention is given to this immorality. Illegal abortion, on the other hand, does not threaten the authority of the Church, because the government has passed no law confronting the Church's authority. Its authority over the

people is upheld, and the government does not try by legalizing abortion to assume greater authority over the people than held by the Church. For example, Portugal, Argentina, and Uruguay all have illegal abortion rates greater than five hundred abortions per one thousand live births– even higher than the rate seen in the United States. However, the Church pays only lip service to illegal abortion since it does not directly threaten Church authority and thus Church power. “Illegal” abortion is apparently much less “immoral” than “legal” abortion, and little attention is given it by the Church leadership. **Abortion thus becomes an issue of power—not morality!**

## **References:**

9. Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, *Papal Power: A Study of Vatican Control Over Lay Catholic Elites* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
10. Ibid, p. 15.
11. Ibid, p. 245.
12. Ibid, p. 283.
13. Ibid, p. 11.
14. Ibid, p. 261.
15. Ibid, p. 284.
16. Ibid, p. 265.