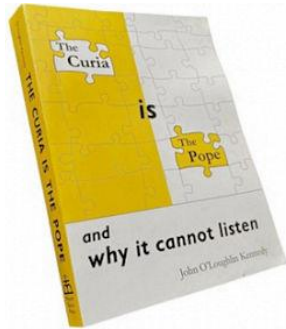


The Curia Is the Pope and Why It Cannot Listen

By: John O'Loughlin Kennedy

A review by: John Madigan, The Ottawa Valley, Ontario. Canada

Have you ever wondered why the Roman Catholic Church is so slow to change? Wondered why the Pope – the Supreme Pontiff – cannot, with just the stroke of a pen, make some of the changes that many of us see as so blatantly obvious, changes related to the ordination of women, contraception, abortion, the exclusion of the laity from decision-making and from financial transparency, the elimination of the homophobic articles in the Catechism dealing LGBTQ, and why the Church was so



ineffective in dealing with the sexual abuse crisis? Why the Vatican demands that no questions are to be raised about doctrines expounded in and dependent on a pre-scientific understanding of God, the cosmos, and human origins? Have you wondered why many of the changes outlined in the documents of Vatican II were sluggishly implemented, road blocked, or ignored, and how an awkward translation of the Roman Missal, that so many of the bishops and clergy opposed, made its way into our churches notwithstanding? And you have probably wondered about the basis for the claim that Christ intended that priestly ordination be reserved for men alone. How do these things happen?

To gain an insight into the answers to these questions, and many more, one must read this book. It is a scholarly work, well researched and documented, and written in plain language for the 'blue collar theologian', those of us, the backbone of the church, with little, if any, formal theological or scriptural background, who love the Church but see it slowly fading in membership and significance in our own lives and the lives of our children. Yet, it is demonstrably incapable of change and adaptation.

The people in the pews – and those who have already left in frustration – confuse the Pope with the Curia. The Curia is the religious bureaucracy that is a tier of management between the pope and the bishops. It is a self-perpetuating oligarchy that combines the three administrative powers, the legislative, the judicial and the executive. It controls the bishops and the elderly, overburdened pope of the day. It follows the pattern of most bureaucracies in preserving and extending its own powers and is out of touch with the 1.3 billion Catholics across the world. Once when Cardinal Evaristo Arns suggested that the Pope was giving the Curia too much free rein, John Paul II responded: "You are mistaken. The curia is the pope". And, as the author suggests, "Who better to tell us than Pope John Paul II after 17 years' experience of the office."¹ While the Curia and the pope together form the papacy, the Curia manages the pope and dominates in the medium and long term. The Curia is, in effect, the government of the Church.

As a young man, John O'Loughlin Kennedy, or 'Loughy', as he is affectionately known, says he started taking note of the lethargic ineffective workings of the Church governance structure

¹ O'Loughlin Kennedy, John. *The Curia is the Pope: and Why It Cannot Listen* (p. 26). Mount Salus Press. Kindle Edition.

while he and his wife Kay co-founded the international humanitarian agency *Concern Worldwide*. He felt that poor use was being made of such a large number of intelligent, prayerful, dedicated men, dressed in ostentatious attire and working in an organization which stifled their efforts and ignored the work and potential of women. Loughy's notes, his observations and study of secular bureaucratic structures, including those of the ancient Roman Empire, of feudal systems, and of the Roman Catholic Church, coupled with years of studious research provided a convincing foundation for this book.

The book takes us on a virtual tour of the history of the governance arrangements of the early church. We see the gradual transition from the loosely organized early Church following the mandate of Christ to his disciples – not just to his apostles – to a Church that, after three centuries, reflected the political constructs of the Roman Empire, giving rise to the diocesan structure of governance and finance with a powerful bureaucracy headquartered in Rome. Steadily, the political framework and managerial arrangements of the institution became ends in themselves and obscured the real purpose and objectives set out by Christ to his disciples.

As time progressed and the reach of the institution grew in boundaries, membership, and influence, the hierarchical structure sought to protect and perpetuate itself through a series of Councils, encyclicals, decrees, and letters. Slowly, but surely it garnered additional power, influence, and control over its environment and severely resisted any change that might have threatened it. For example, the Council of Trent, (1545-1563) prompted by the Reformation, made a number of sweeping decrees and dogmatic definitions to clarify almost every doctrine contested by the Protestants. While Vatican I (1869-70) dealt with the primacy and infallibility of the pope, thus garnering more power for the papacy, it enabled the Curia to shape itself into the permanent *de facto* government that writes its own rules. It manages the pope and controls who gets recruited and promoted.

Vatican II (1962-1965) was called by John XXIII in a spirit of renewal for the Church to address the relations between the Church and the modern world and to foster Christian unity. Yet, during the Council and ongoing in the Church to this day there are bitter and sometimes hostile ideological skirmishes between liberals and conservatives, between those who want to chart a new pathway for the Church and those whom Yves Congar in his book *My Journal of the Council* referred to as '*intégristes*' meaning "a camp of ultramontane, authoritarian, and clericalized ecclesiastics who wanted to control everything and did not want to see any change, but rather remain integrally or exactly the same as they had always known it to be" The Council produced sixteen documents and although the Church bureaucracy – the Curia - pays lip service to them, it has been seen to ignore, obstruct, or to reverse many of the teachings and decisions of the Council, the supreme authority in the Church.

A two-page review can hardly do justice to such a comprehensive, well-researched and well-reasoned work. It sheds a beacon of light on why the Church is so slow to change and offers twenty-nine proposals on how we, the laity, might enable some of the changes. Get the book! You won't regret it!

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