

books

The Final Conclave

By Malachi Martin

New York: Stein & Day. 1978. 450 pp. \$11.95.

Reviewed by John Hospers

Well before Pope Paul died on August 6, 1978, and the cardinals assembled to select his successor, Malachi Martin had written a book about this very conclave—a part-historical and part-futuristic book.

Only one thing, according to the author, constituted the main thrust of Paul's papacy: *the drift to the left*.

In the first hundred pages of his book, Martin piles one piece of evidence upon another to nail down his point (almost to overkill) that the Catholic Church has consciously followed a policy of appeasing communist totalitarian regimes and that this policy was instituted and sustained, sometimes openly and more often covertly, by Pope Paul himself.

Why did Pope Paul adopt this policy? The author's answer, for which he presents elaborate documentation, is that the Vatican believes that the Communists will soon control Italy. Rome is in Italy, the Vatican is in Rome, and for the sake of its own survival, the Vatican must accommodate itself to whatever government exists in Italy. Why give in? "To be or not to be," one cardinal answers wryly.

But Italy is only a part of the picture. The Church's Secret Papers, detailed in this volume, cite piece after piece of evidence that in the next decade all the governments of Western Europe will be Marxist. If the Vatican then opposes Marxism, it will be either exterminated or made subservient to the Marxist wave of the future; and since survival is the Vatican's first responsibility, it must make an accommodation with the rulers-to-be. As for the United States, it will become gradually weaker, both economically and militarily, and will for its own survival's sake ally itself with Saudi Arabia and let Europe go communist.

After the first hundred pages, on the recent history of the Vatican vis-à-vis the world, the remaining 250 pages are written in the form of a futuristic novel: Pope Paul has died, and there is a conclave of Church cardinals to elect a new pope and establish the future direction of Vatican policy. Traditionalists wish to retain the emphasis of Catholicism on spiritual and not material welfare and to discourage involvement in the political

arena. "Progressives" and "radicals" favor the conscious adoption of a pro-Marxist policy. The battle between these groups is joined with increasing fervor in these pages as the cardinals debate one another, jockeying for position, making subtle theological and sociological observations, each trying to get a majority on its side.

The proponents of accommodation with the Marxist-wave-of-the-future gain more adherents as the conclave continues. If the Church does not ally itself with "the proletariat," it will be dead within a generation—this is the argument that sticks most in their minds.

There is no whitewashing of Marxist regimes; on the contrary, those who preach accommodation with them do so in spite of their horrors, which are fully exposed. At one point Cardinal Franzus (of East Germany) cries out, "I know all about Communist prisons, all about Communist oppression, interrogations and information-getting methods. . . . The Marxist states have amassed an agonizing corpus of imprisonment, assassination, massacres, calumny, isolation, torture, slavery of the mind, the penalty of living death—all of which we know to be true. I wonder if we should perhaps compare all that Gulag of agony with the earlier Gulag of agony imposed by the Church, and by Christians in the name of the Church, on Muslims. On Jews. On heretics. In witch-hunts. In religious wars. . . . Did any official Christian theologians condemn Christianity on account of all that? Those that tried—a Savonarola, a Huss—you know what happened to *them!*. . . . No, let us not compare Gulags. Let us rather talk of what Marxism is out to destroy. In a word, the bourgeois man—his society, his capitalism!"

There ensues a long and fascinating debate about the "true nature of Marxism." "Marxism has two faces," says a Chinese cardinal. "One it wears before it gets power. The other, after it gets power. We know. In my country. In my Asia. Our country is in the grip of terror. One vast concentration camp. One ant-hill. Do you know what it is to live with daily terror in your street, at your corner, in your bedroom, in the school, in the factory, in the Church—when a Church is open? *You don't. We do.*. . . Think well before you accept what some foolish ones are calling a working relationship with that. If you have to live under Marxism, pray your faith can outlive it!"

Nevertheless, the proposed accommodation to Marxism is persuasive to many

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MALACHI MARTIN



of the assembled cardinals. "Do not, my Brothers," says one, "do not lightly, or through fear, throw away the movement of two-thirds of humanity. . . . What good is there in Marxism, you ask? I answer: what good is there in your Christianity? For Marxism shares much with true Christianity. Communism seeks the integration of individuals with the group; so do genuine Christians. Communism holds that the economic system of production and distribution of goods and services has an essential importance for the life of the group, its culture, its humanism, its beliefs; so do genuine Christians. Communism says that it was bourgeois capitalism, blessed and fomented by the Church, which developed the usurious character of capitalism from which all the ills of our world have flowed—poverty, malnutrition, wars, colonialism, slaveries, drug traffic, fascism, dictatorial regimes; so do genuine Christians. . . . Bourgeois man with his oppression, his godliness, his anarchy, is hateful to communists; he is also hateful to genuine Christians." In this and numerous other passages we see the pro-accommodation forces recommending Marxism, not as a necessary evil, but as a worthy moral ideal.

The main reason put forth by the pro-accommodation forces, however, is bluntly pragmatic: the Soviet Union is now the dominant military force in the world and is expected to install puppet governments throughout Western Europe and elsewhere. The Church cannot survive and be its enemy; it must make a final "courageous leap" and accommodate itself to that enemy. During the debate on this issue, secret documents are read concerning Communist plans for the world's future—and, to cap it all, a secret communi-

cation from Moscow containing the offer of a quid pro quo. The USSR makes certain requests of the Vatican: (1) it must refrain from making any explicit anti-Marxist statements in official documents and pronouncements; (2) it must avoid condemnation of "liberation theology" and of any country's Communist affiliations; (3) it must increase the number of open diplomatic contacts between the Vatican and the USSR and its Eastern satellites; (4) it must discontinue any Vatican backing for right-wing regimes, especially in Latin America. In return for these concessions, the USSR will sanction the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Baltic countries and other satellite nations, ease up on anti-religious laws and stop excluding Catholics from government jobs and academic life, and require the Russian Orthodox Church to submit to the Vatican as the central governing body of the Church.

With the very survival of the Church at stake, the Soviet offer is extremely tempting to the assembled cardinals; the urge to survive is very strong. Many believe that in the process the avowed communism and atheism of the USSR will be tempered and that in the end the Vatican will win. But other cardinals remain bitterly opposed.

The drama of argument and counter-argument continues, but the book ends before the reader learns what decisions the cardinals reach.

The author, a former Jesuit professor in Rome, with a doctorate in Semitic languages and Oriental history, and a close friend of the late Pope John, clearly knows in minutest detail what he is talking about when he discusses church history, theology, church politics, and church sociology. On international relations, he has

thousands of little-known facts at his fingertips, though whether the "secret documents" revealed in the book are genuine or part of the fiction is not divulged in the book itself. His projection for the future of the Catholic Church ("The Church is finished") will disturb most people much less than his dismal projections for the future of Europe and the world. Whether or not one accepts that view, the book contains many insights on policies one should or should not adopt in a world populated by increasingly hostile powers—for example, when to compromise and when not to. The book is filled with high drama. There is no sex, no romance, no physical combat—only the clash of wills with opposed ideologies behind them, and it is tremendously exciting reading for anyone interested in the future of the world, whether or not he is also concerned about the future of Catholicism.

The chief defect of the book, it seems to me—not necessarily of the author, but at least of the characters he portrays—lies in the realm of economics. Capitalism is never really defended by any of the contending parties; that it is a "system of exploitation" is never questioned. Conservatives among the cardinals do not defend it; they only avoid the issue by asserting that the Vatican should be devoted more to spiritual than to temporal well-being; the "progressives" and "radicals" hold that only a socialist egalitarian society can fulfill men's economic needs, and the opposition never questions this.

Specifically, it is not clear, first, what the word *capitalism* is used to mean in the mouths of the characters. Most of the "capitalist nations" (such as the United States) criticized in the book are semi-so-

cialist. What is erroneously called state capitalism is apparently included in what the book refers to as capitalism. Second, none of the characters in the book appears to see the connection between the vaunted "social benefits" desired (welfare, guaranteed minimum wage, social security, guaranteed health benefits) and the police State that arrests, interrogates, tortures, and exiles to labor camps. Not one appears to realize that the State that doles out welfare can also withhold it for political reasons and that the benefits themselves are bought at the prohibitive price of liberty and autonomy. Nor, third, do any of the characters, in their pleas for the alleviation of world poverty, appear to be aware that, to the extent that they would have governments impose economic equality, to that extent they are (in effect, if not in intention) bringing down upon their heads equality of poverty and destitution.

The terrors of the totalitarian State are vividly brought home to the reader of this book. But that same reader, if he has not previously read any free-market economics, could also, for anything the book tells him to the contrary, conclude that socialism is the only system that will enable the poor of the world to have bread.

The book contains revealing and compelling descriptions of the recent past; possibly, but hopefully not, it also contains descriptions, dismal but hard-nosed and scholarly, of the present or the near future; but it gives no sound prescriptions for how the terrors that are envisaged in it can be avoided.

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The Governmental Habit

By Jonathan R. T. Hughes
New York: Basic, 1977. 260 pp. \$11.95.

Reviewed by Alan Reynolds

This is perhaps the strangest mixture of brilliance and nonsense since Forrest McDonald's *Phaeton Ride*. Not until the last chapter was it clear that the brilliance would, on balance, win out.

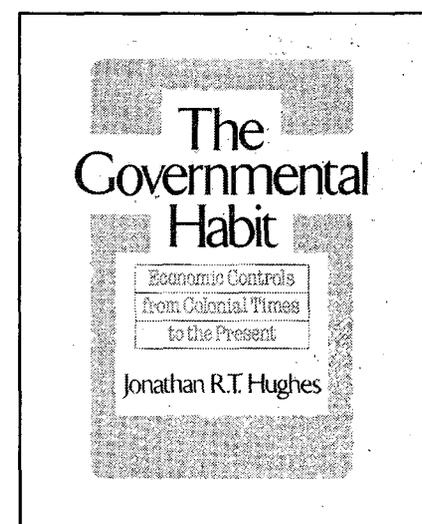
The book jacket comes with profuse praise from the economic historian Douglass North and the novelist John Kenneth Galbraith—two men whose views on the appropriate degree of government intervention in the economy are about as different as possible. The apparent paradox is quickly resolved in the first chapter, where Hughes writes that "the federal nonmarket control structure is a half-way

house, without the virtues of either economic planning or free-market economy." Neither a planner nor a free marketer could be entirely unhappy with such diplomatic ambiguity.

But Hughes doesn't really view "economic planning" as a serious alternative. He offers copious illustrations and juicy quotes to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the encroachment of government regulation has been, more or less continuously throughout US history and that it has been uniformly disastrous.

Colonial America adopted large chunks of the "economic planning" apparatus of medieval England, including compulsory labor for "vagabonds," controls on prices and interest rates, monopoly franchises for ferries, toll bridges, inns, and breweries, and, of course, a government monopoly on counterfeiting.

In the period of continental expansion, the narrative gets bogged down in a discussion of uncertain relevance about how land was distributed. But we also learn something about the notoriously incestu-



ous relationship between the government and the railroad and canal builders, and also about the lucrative practice of licensing professional and business monopolies.

On the subject of banking and money,