



ANCIENT: *There are only one hundred members, all told, of the famous pontifical armed force, the Swiss Guards. This troop dates from 1505, and each recruit must be a Swiss Catholic of legitimate birth, unmarried, 25 years old, at least five feet eight inches tall, and free from bodily disfigurement*

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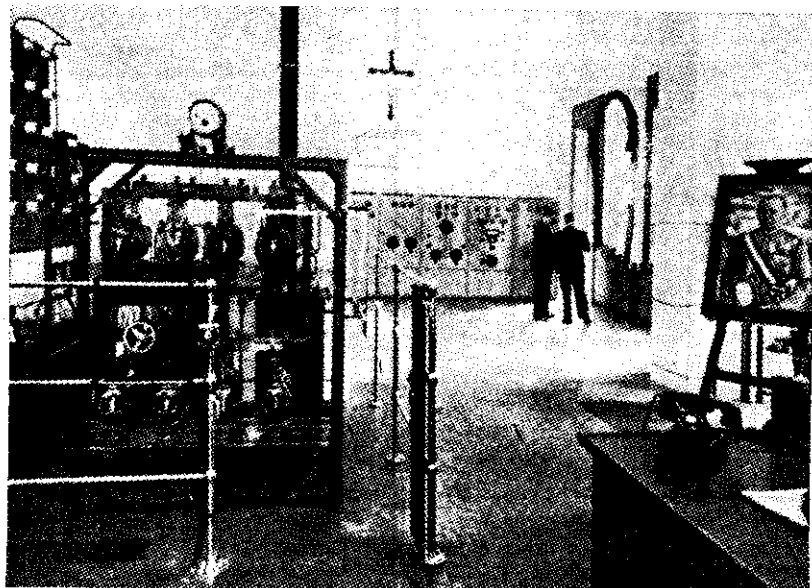
Modern innovations merely accentuate this Ruritanianism, like the toy reforms of an Oriental princeling. For example, this Empire of 109 acres runs a one-station railway. It possesses a store, one only store, but departmentalised and "ultra" with gleaming chromium and glass. For 900-odd "subjects" it has complete sets of coinage and postage stamps, systems of motor registration and passports, a post office, a gaol, a fire brigade, a daily newspaper, a radio station . . . Citta Vaticano with its walled "frontier" has even foreign possessions—several buildings elsewhere in Rome possessing "extra territoriality"—and one practically overseas: the summer villa of Castel Gandolfo 18 miles distant in the Alban hills.

"A Tool, Not a Toy"

However, the tourist who concentrates on these things is seeing only the surface. The Vatican is in reality no more "a picturesque medieval hang-over" (as I overheard one American call it) than the Papacy itself. Citta Vaticano exists to further the Catholic Church's strictly practical concerns, both temporal and spiritual. It is a tool, not a toy. A going concern, not a vestigial remnant.

The Library indeed (of manuscripts, not books) is there because the Church is patron of antique Scholarship. The Renaissance treasures continue to amass because She is patron of accepted Arts. And the Observatory proclaims the patron of Science. But HVJ (Vatican Radio) provides a means of addressing Catholics over the entire world and of quickly instructing nuncios and envoys in foreign capitals by means of short-wave code. *Observatore Romano* writes for world audience, not Citta Vaticano's few hundred readers. Post office and coinage help to provide the cash—mainly from philatelists and souvenir hunters—to carry on these informative enterprises. Even the apparently ridiculous railway is as practical as the *pasta* and potatoes it shunts in twice or thrice daily.

The City's actual function of "General Headquarters" or "Head Office" of the world-wide Roman Catholic Church indeed appears quite strikingly in its "business equipment" statistics—20 foreign telegraph lines, 800 telephones, 200 motor-cars.



—AND MODERN: Vatican Radio (HVJ), well-known to short-wave listeners

But why go to all the trouble and expense of running an independent state simply to house Church offices and run a religious newspaper and radio? Because you *must* do it in the present world if your radio is to speak freely and your paper appear at all except by leave of some blue-pencilling nationalist censor. Of course priests remain men with human emotional attachments and frailties of judgement—which is why the Pope's children fight with equal sincerity on both sides in this war—and for this reason, and because the Vatican is financially dependent on revenues from Italian property, the Papacy is more than sufficiently suspected as it is of pro-Italian and pro-Fascist bias. But if Pius XII were a subject of the King of Italy, his person liable to arrest and his correspondence liable to search and censorship, how impossible would his exercise of spiritual authority and moral suasion become in a world split by war.

How It Began

Citta Vaticano in its present form dates from the Lateran Treaty between the present Pope's predecessor and Mussolini in 1929, but its Temporal Power began with the occupation of Imperial Rome by the barbarians well over a thousand years ago. For in the centuries of anarchy that ensued, one protection alone remained to the local populace—the moral aura of the local clergy, that is of the Presbytery of Rome (College of Cardinals) and of their universally-revered Head (the Holy Father). In such circumstances, for the

district's welfare as much as for their own freedom of action, the Popes had to organise temporal rule. Later, this led to their becoming involved in the power politics of the peninsula's princes, sometimes to the scandalous embarrassment of their spiritual functions.

The millennium-long Roman clash between temporalities and spiritualities has been, in fact, a persistent personal problem writ large. We need a body to house our immaterial self and translate its invisible intentions into externally effective action. But all too easily, body acquires more than instrumental importance and hinders the aims it exists to promote.

However, even the possession of political independence has not always in the past preserved freedom of action and expression to His Holiness. As late as 1797 Pope Pius VI was kidnapped north by the Revolutionary French and died in Florence: with the result that his successor was elected in Venice, where the largest number of Cardinals happened to be. That successor in turn suffered long detention in Paris, though not in his case actual violence, by the Hitler of his day. With plenty of precedent for attempted political use of his person, it would be indeed surprising if the present occupant of Peter's chair has not already (as is rumoured) taken steps to delegate his authority elsewhere should the Vatican be invaded or the pressure of belligerents prove otherwise overwhelming.