

Anthony Ekpo, *The Roman Curia: History, Theology, and Organization* (Georgetown University Press)

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Review: Anthony Ekpo, *The Roman Curia: History, Theology, and Organization* (Georgetown University Press)

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Pope Francis' reform of the Vatican Curia is undoubtedly worthy of the Igbo-and-English-speaking Nigerian Monsignor Anthony Ekpo's accessible new 2024 book *The Roman Curia: History, Theology, and Organization*.

On March 19, 2022, the doctrinally conservative Pope Francis (born in 1936 in Argentina; elected pope in 2013) carried out the mandate of the cardinal-electors in 2013 to reform the Vatican Curia, when he published the new Apostolic Constitution titled *Praedicate Evangelium: On the Roman Curia and Its Service to the Church in the World* (it went into effect on June 5, 2022).

Praedicate Evangelium, which means "Preach the Gospel," is a major accomplishment of Pope Francis' papacy.

I have profiled the doctrinally conservative Pope Francis in my widely read *OEN* article "Pope Francis on Evil and Satan" (dated March 24, 2019):

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/Pope-Francis-on-Evil-and-S-by-Thomas-Farrell-Abortion-Catholic-God-Homosexuality-190324-51.html>

Now, of course, the work of the employees in the Roman Curia only figuratively involves their proclaiming the gospel – by manifesting the spirit of the gospel in the ways that they conduct their work. In short, their work in the Roman Curia involves their practice of the gospel. However, according to Monsignor Ekpo, Pope Francis sees his Vatican reform as deeply connected with the spirit of evangelization. Ekpo says, "To be genuine evangelizers and preachers of the Gospel of Christ, one [sic] needs to experience conversion of the heart. Evangelization is, above all, about the interior change that takes place in the hearts of those who encounter the transformative message of Jesus. The Church evangelizes when it seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message it proclaims . . . Evangelization [of the Roman Curia – or by the Roman Curia?] is therefore a journey from within – a journey of the heart. This also applies to the Roman Curia, which like the Church, 'cannot live without a vital, personal, authentic and solid relationship with Christ.' . . . If it [the Roman Curia] is to be a creditable instrument of evangelization, it must experience the renewal that begins from within. That is, there must be a conversion of heart of all those who work in the Roman Curia" (pp. 88-89).

I have no idea how many people work in the Roman Curia—and Ekpo offers no hints about this. However, in his "Introduction" (pp. 1-5), he does say, "Fielding questions after his election in 1958, the quick-witted Pontiff John XXIII was asked, 'How many people work in the Roman curia?' and his joking reply was 'About half'" (p. 5).

Now, back to Ekpo on pages 88-89. He also says, "As I highlighted in the introduction to this book, Pope Francis's teaching here is inspired by Saint Ignatius Loyola [1491-1556], who believed that a structural reform of the Church is possible only when the starting point is 'one's own life,' with one's eyes are [sic] fixed on the poor and humiliated Christ. This teaching [which one?] is born of the Ignatian spirituality and the outcome of the Ignatian spiritual exercises" (p.

89).

Saint Ignatius Loyola was the found of the Jesuit order (known formally as the Society of Jesus) and the author of the succinctly written *Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* by George E. Ganss, S.J. (1992) and of *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus: A Critical Edition with the Complementary Norms*, edited by Barton T. Geger, S.J. (2024). In addition to serving as the first Superior General of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius Loyola wrote thousands of letters. In the official calendar of the Roman Catholic Church, the feast day of St. Ignatius Loyola is July 31st each year.

My favorite scholar, the American Jesuit Walter J. Ong (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955) of Saint Louis University, published two important articles about St. Ignatius Loyola and Ignatian spirituality.

(1) "A.M.D.G. [*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* = 'For the Greater Glory of God']: Dedication of Directive?" in the *Review for Religious* (September 15, 1952). It is reprinted in volume three of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1995, pp. 1-8).

(2) "St. Ignatius' Prison-Cage and the Existentialist Situation" in the Jesuit-sponsored *Theological Studies* (March 1954). Ong reprinted it in his 1962 book *The Barbarian Within: And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies* (pp. 242-259). It is also reprinted in volume two of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1992b, pp. 52-67).

Ong reprised his argument in his 1952 article in his 1986 book *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (pp. 78-81 and 87), the published version of Ong's 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto.

In any event, Ignatian spirituality is famous for emphasizing what is known as discernment of spirits. By spirits, St. Ignatius understood interior movements in a person's psyche. By discernment of spirits, St. Ignatius understood the self-conscious weighing and evaluating process to evaluate the worth and value of those interior movements. Even when we are able to imagine Jesus Christ moving us interiorly, our discernment process may not infallibly result in the optimal or best result. But we are diminished as human persons if we do not devote time and attention to making such interior evaluations. They are part and parcel of our spiritual life. At the present time, artificial intelligence is much discussed. My friend, the physicist Robert K. Logan (born in 1939; Ph.D. in physics, MIT, 1965), the author of *The Alphabet Effect: The Impact of the Phonetic Alphabet on the Development of Western Civilization* (1986) and the editor of the online journal *New Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communication*, recently remarked in an email message to me (dated August 1, 2024) that artificial intelligence "is only pure logic – no emotion – no soul – no beliefs." But we human beings have souls and beliefs and emotions. Our decisions are usually not based on pure logic alone.

Incidentally, St. Ignatius Loyola and his original companions founded the Society of Jesus after the Gutenberg printing press had emerged in Europe in the mid-1450s. But the Gutenberg printing press ignited a sharp increase in the demand for formal education in our Western cultural history. As a result, the newly founded Jesuits emerged as an influential cadre of educators. For an account of this history, see the American Jesuit church historian John W. O'Malley's book *The First Jesuits* (1993).

Now, the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* promulgated by Pope Francis in 2022 unfolds in eleven major sections, starting with section I. "Preamble," consisting of twelve paragraphs. In the opening words of the first paragraph, we are told that the words *Praedicate Evangelium* are based on Mark 16:15 and Matthew 10:7-8.

Mark 16:15: "Then he said to them: 'Go to every part of the world, and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation' (REB).

Matthew 10:7-8: “And as you go proclaim the message: “The kingdom of heaven is upon you”” (REB).

The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* is available in English and other languages at the Vatican’s website:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-constituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html

Now, besides Igbo and English, the Nigerian Monsignor Anthony Onyemuche Ekpo (born in 1981; ordained 2011; Ph.D. in systematic theology, Australian Catholic University, 2013; doctorate in canon law, Gregorian University, 2021) also speaks Italian and French. Monsignor Ekpo is also the author of the books *The Breath of the Spirit in the Church: The Sensus Fidelium and Canon Law* (2014) and *Temporal Goods of the Church: A Canonical Examination of Administrative Acts Concerning Their Ownership and Management* (2021).

(For complete bibliographic information about works I mention in the present meditation, see the “References” at the end of the essay.)

In any event, on April 18, 2023, Pope Francis, the first Jesuit pope, appointed Monsignor Ekpo as the undersecretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. About 70 people work at the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development – making it one of the largest of the sixteen dicasteries established by Pope Francis’ Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*:

<https://www.humandevlopment.va/en/il-dicastero/chi-siamo.html>

Monsignor Ekpo wearing his Roman collar smiles warmly is in the front row.

Now, in order to provide you with a full context for understanding Pope Francis’ Vatican reform, and the Nigerian Monsignor Ekpo’s accessible account of the Roman Curia, the present meditation is extremely wide-ranging. However, in the present wide-ranging meditation, I do not discuss the 2024 presidential election – or American politics more generally.

For my most recent discussion of the 2023 presidential election, see my *OEN* article “Masha Gessen on the Seeds of This Political disaster” (dated July 22, 2024):

https://www.opednews.com/articles/Masha-Gessen-on-the-Seeds-American-Presidents_Jesuits_Political-Rhetoric_Representative-Democracy-240722-474.html

In any event, it is best for me to start with certain disclosures about myself and my point of view – which in turn will prompt me to provide you with certain wide-ranging information to help you contextualize Pope Francis, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Nigerian Monsignor Ekpo’s new 2024 book.

Disclosure:

I was in the Jesuits from 1979 to 1987. Then, from September 1987 through May 2009, I taught at the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD). Then, in September 2009, I started publishing articles at *OEN* – some of which I mention below. When the Argentine Jesuit Cardinal Bergoglio was elected Pope Francis in 2013, I took an interest in him. Over the years of his papacy, I have frequently written *OEN* articles about him. Over the years of my adult life (I turned 80 on my last birthday), I have devoted an enormous amount of time and energy to writing about my former teacher at Saint Louis University, the American Jesuit Renaissance specialist and cultural historian and pioneering media ecology theorist Walter J. Ong (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955). See, for example, my *OEN* articles (1) “Walter J. Ong’s Philosophical Thought” (dated September 20, 2020); and (2) “Thomas J. Farrell on Thomas J. Farrell” (dated November 17, 2023):

[https://www.opednews.com/articles/Walter-J-Ong-s-Philosophi-by-Thomas-Farrell-](https://www.opednews.com/articles/Walter-J-Ong-s-Philosophi-by-Thomas-Farrell-Communication_Communications_Communications_Consciousness-200920-664.html)

[Communication_Communications_Communications_Consciousness-200920-664.html](https://www.opednews.com/articles/Walter-J-Ong-s-Philosophi-by-Thomas-Farrell-Communication_Communications_Communications_Consciousness-200920-664.html)

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/Thomas-J-Farrell-on-Thoma-Professionalism-231117->

Some Background Information:

The media-shy German Pope Benedict XVI (1927-2022; pope from 2005 to 2013) surprised the world by resigning as pope in 2013. He had succeeded the media-genic Polish Pope John-Paul II (1920-2005; pope from 1978 to 2005). The world had watched the Polish pope struggle through his official public duties as he suffered from the debilitating impact of Parkinson's disease. By resigning as pope, Benedict spared the world from having to watch another spectacle of declining health in a pope.

Prior to the death of Pope John-Paul II, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had served during his papacy as the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 1981 to his election as pope in 2005. As the head of this important Vatican office, he had often been in the news – so often, that he was viewed as the right-hand man of Pope John-Paul II.

Consequently, it came as no surprise when the cardinal-electors elected Cardinal Ratzinger to be the new pope in 2005.

(The important Vatican office formerly known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith is now known as the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. At the present time, Argentine Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez is the prefect.)

For further information about Ratzinger/Benedict, see the lengthy *Wikipedia* entry on Pope Benedict XVI:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Benedict_XVI

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI had prompted me to publish my first *OEN* article, “Why Obama Should Shun the Pope’s Views on Abortion” (dated October 10, 2009):

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/Why-Obama-Should-Shun-the-by-Thomas-Farrell-091010-243.html>

More recently, I have written about abortion in my *OEN* articles (1) “How Important Will the Abortion Debate Be in the 2024 Elections?” (dated April 10, 2024); and (2) “On the Sheer Radicalness of the Moment of Conception Doctrine” (dated April 19, 2024).

https://www.opednews.com/articles/How-Important-Will-the-Abo-2024-Election_2024-Elections_Abortion_Abortion-Laws-240410-831.html

https://www.opednews.com/articles/On-the-Sheer-Radicalness-o-2024-Elections_Abortion_Abortion-Laws_Abortion-Legislation-240419-21.html

Now, after Pope Benedict’s dramatic resignation in 2013, the cardinal-electors subsequently elected the Argentine Jesuit Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio (born in 1936) as the new pope in March 2013 – the first Jesuit spiritual director ever elected pope. Taking the name Pope Francis, the new doctrinally conservative pope was no spring chicken. But he seemed friendly and energetic and humble. Like Pope John-Paul II, Pope Francis was media-genic – a striking contrast with the dour and media-shy Pope Benedict XVI.

Now, both Pope John-Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI had established their respective philosophical and theological chops prior to being elected pope. But Pope Francis had not. He had started to work on a doctorate on Italian-German theologian Romano Guardini (1885-1968), but he did not complete it.

For an account of Father Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s study of Romano Guardini, see the Italian philosopher Massimo Borghesi’s intellectual biography *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s Intellectual Journey*, translated by Barry Hudock (2018; orig. Italian ed., 2017).

I reviewed Borghesi’s 2018 book in my *OEN* article “An Intellectual Biography of Pope Francis” (dated October 28, 2018):

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/An-Intellectual-Biography-by-Thomas-Farrell-Capitalism-Catholic-Consciousness-Culture-181028-792.html>

According to the *Wikipedia* entry on Pope Benedict XVI, mentioned above, young Joseph Ratzinger had been impressed by Romano Guardini's work.

Now, in 2013, the cardinal-electors gave the new pope a mandate to reform the Vatican Curia, the network of church offices that assist the pope in governing the church.

Journalists who cover the pope need to become familiar with the various Vatican offices – to get insider information about what is going on. The various Vatican offices are indispensable to the hierarchical governance of the church. Indeed, the cardinal-electors' mandate to the new Pope Francis called for reforming the Vatican Curia precisely to improve church governance. A word is in order here about the word hierarchical, which sounds somehow alien to our American sense of values. However, we Americans are quite familiar with the hierarchical arrangements of our own governance structures as local, state, and federal authorities.

Now, the 2022 Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* ("Preach the Gospel") formally establishes sixteen dicasteries as making up the church's governance structure centered in the Vatican:

- (1) Dicastery for Evangelization (articles 53-68);
- (2) Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (articles 69-78);
- (3) Dicastery for the Service of Charity (articles 79-81);
- (4) Dicastery for the Eastern Churches (articles 82-87);
- (5) Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (articles 88-97);
- (6) Dicastery for the Causes of Saints (articles 98-102);
- (7) Dicastery for Bishops (articles 103-112);
- (8) Dicastery for the Clergy (articles 113-120);
- (9) Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (articles 121-127);
- (10) Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life (articles 128-141);
- (11) Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (articles 142-146);
- (12) Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (articles 147-152);
- (13) Dicastery for Culture and Education (articles 153-162);
- (14) Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (articles 163-174);
- (15) Dicastery for Legislative Texts (articles 175-182);
- (16) Dicastery for Communication (articles 183-188).

Around two dozen or so people work for each dicastery.

Note the designated scope of each of the dicasteries. The sixteen scope-statements spelled out in the corresponding articles of the Apostolic Constitution show the complexity of the day-to-day ongoing governing the worldwide Roman Catholic Church today from its Vatican headquarters.

The prefect of each dicastery may occasionally issue a formal message to the world on behalf of the dicastery in question. Such messages may be reported by the news media. However, such occasional messages are usually not commented on by op-ed commentators.

Now, when the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* was released on March 19, 2022, the Vatican correspondent Gerard O'Connell published an upbeat commentary about it in the Jesuit-sponsored magazine *America* titled "With Pope Francis' reform of the Roman Curia, nine years of work is coming to fruition" (dated March 19, 2022). In it, O'Connell says, "The reform of the Roman curia was requested by the cardinals in the pre-conclave meetings in March 2013, and [Pope] Francis began work on this enormous task immediately after taking office. As he notes in the preamble to the constitution, it is only the fifth time in 500 years that such a task has been undertaken. [Pope] Sixtus V reformed the curia in 1588, [Pope] Pius X did so in 1908, [Pope] Paul VI reformed it after the Second Vatican Council [1962-1965] in

1967, and [Pope] John-Paul II introduced the last reform in 1988.”

1988 was the most recent reform of the Vatican Curia. And yet the cardinal-electors in 2013 called for the new pope to reform the Vatican Curia. So how long will the 2022 reform of the Vatican Curia last before the next reform?

Now, the Jesuit journalist and columnist Thomas Reese (born in 1945; Ph.D. in political science, University of California, Berkeley), the author of the 1998 book *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church*, published a critical commentary about *Praedicate Evangelium* titled “Pope Francis reforms the Vatican Curia. Here’s hoping he’s not done” (dated March 24, 2022) in the *National Catholic Reporter*:

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/pope-francis-reforms-vatican-curia-heres-hoping-hes-not-done>

In it, Reese says, “The most visible change is that Vatican offices will no longer be called congregations or councils but will be called ‘dicasteries,’ a word going back to the ancient Greeks. The unwillingness of the Vatican to use modern terminology, like ‘department’ or ‘office,’ reflects its insistence that the Vatican is unique and cannot learn from modern organizations.”

The *Wikipedia* entry on “Dicastery” notes that this term was used in the document *Pastor Bonus* issued by Pope John-Paul II in 1988, mentioned above.

Well, the Vatican is unique – just as the Roman Catholic Church is unique! The church emerged after the historical Jesus was crucified under the authority of the Roman Empire. However, at that time, ancient Greek was still the lingua franca. With the exception of a few words in Aramaic, all the texts gathered together in the Christian New Testament were written in Greek – not in Latin.

I have not taken a position as to whether or not the historical Jesus was literate in the sense of knowing how to read and write. In the residual form of primary oral culture in which he grew up (in Ong’s terminology), he could have listened to the Hebrew scripture being read aloud – without learning how to read it himself. In any event, he was an oral teacher/ preacher. However, the obviously written texts that were eventually gathered together in the Christian anthology known as the New Testament mark a major contribution to chirographic culture in our Western cultural history.

The leading historical Jesus specialist John Dominic Crossan has culled his research down to 93 sayings that he attributes to the oral teacher/ preacher in his 1994 book *The Essential Jesus: Original Sayings and Earliest Images*.

I have discussed Crossan’s 1994 book in my article “Walter J. Ong’s Bold Thought and John Dominic Crossan’s Timid View of the Historical Jesus” in the online journal *New Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communication* (2022):

<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/nexj/article/view/38353>

Now, according to the 2022 Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, “The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has the task of promoting the human person [as operationally defined and explained by the Roman Catholic Church] and the God-given dignity of all, together with human rights, health, justice, and peace. It is principally concerned with matters relating to the economy and work, the care of creation and the earth as our ‘common home’ [see Pope Francis’ widely read 2015 eco-encyclical *Laudato Si’*], migration, and humanitarian emergencies” (article 163.1).

Pope Francis’ widely read 2015 eco-encyclical *Laudato Si’* is available in English and other languages at the Vatican’s website:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa->

[francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/curia/enciclica/20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has its own rather extensive website:

<http://www.humandevlopment.va/en.html>

Now, the doctrinally conservative Pope Francis' papacy involves him as the pope, to be sure, but his papacy also involves all the Vatican helpers known collectively as the Roman Curia (or the Vatican Curia).

The word Curia may sound strange to our American ears, because it is not widely used in the United States.

For further discussion of this term see the *Wikipedia* entry on "Curia":

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curia>

In it, we are told that "Today, the most famous curia is the Curia of the Roman Catholic Church, which assists the Roman Pontiff in the hierarchical government of the Church."

In addition to carrying out specific administrative and governance functions assigned to each Vatican office, the Roman Curia provides the reigning pope with a stable of capable translators, research assistants, and potential ghostwriters to help him prepare the official documents that he wishes to promulgate (e.g., encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, apostolic constitutions, etc.).

In the United States, the presidency is held by one person, but the executive branch of our American government involves all the people who help the president run the government. However, before we proceed to look at the 2022 Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* or at Monsignor Ekpo's new 2024 book *The Roman Curia*, some background information is in order to establish the context.

Now, the prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development is the Canadian Jesuit Cardinal Michael Czerny (born in 1946 in Czechoslovakia; Ph.D. in interdisciplinary studies, University of Chicago, 1978). Cardinal Czerny is the co-author, with the younger Italian theologian Father Christian Barone (born in 1982; doctorate in dogmatic theology, Gregorian University, 2015) of the book *Siblings All, Sign of the Times: The Social Teaching of Pope Francis*, translated by Julian Paparella (2022; orig. Italian ed., 2021). Their book is a contextualizing commentary on Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical title *Fratelli Tutti* ("Siblings All"). (The pope's 2020 encyclical is available in English and other languages at the Vatican's website.)

I reviewed their co-authored 2022 book in my *OEN* article "Michael Czerny and Christian Barone on Pope Francis" (dated July 10, 2023):

https://www.opednews.com/articles/Michael-Czerny-and-Christi-Catholic_Pope-Francis_Theologians-230710-468.html

In the above-mentioned group photo of the people who work at the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, both Cardinal Czerny and Father Barone are pictured wearing Roman collars. Cardinal Czerny, wearing tinted glasses, is in the second row (to the left of Monsignor Ekpo as you look at the photo), and Father Barone, sporting a beard and wearing glasses, appears at the end of the second row (to the right of Monsignor Ekpo as you look at the photo).

Anthony Ekpo's New 2024 Book *The Roman Curia*:

Now, Monsignor Ekpo's new 2024 book *The Roman Curia: History, Theology, and Organization* is a contextualizing commentary on Pope Francis' 2022 Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*.

Christopher White, the Vatican correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter*, interviewed Monsignor Ekpo for his *NCR* article "An insider's guide to the Vatican's inner workings" (dated

June 28, 2024):

<https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/view-vatican/insiders-guide-vaticans-inner-workings>

In it, White says, “Francis’ emphasis on evangelization as the chief mission of the Roman Curia has been a revolutionary idea, although in many ways it is a natural continuation of his leadership,” Ekpo told me. “This evangelization involves individual and communal thinking: that is one of synodality and subsidiarity; the understanding that we are all companions on the journey to heaven.”

White also says, “Through his actions, Pope Francis has underscored this even before the arrival of *Praedicate Evangelium*, and he has continuously shown that the goal of power, and especially its exercise in the church, is service,” Ekpo told me. “*Praedicate Evangelium* is, therefore, in many ways the articulation of the longstanding vision of Pope Francis for the Roman Curia.”

In addition, White says, “Working closely with the pope, Ekpo says that Francis’ ‘personality and style testify that he lives the reform, leading by example.’”

Now, the cover of the paperback edition of Ekpo’s new 2024 book *The Roman Curia: History, Theology, and Organization* features blurbs from four reviewers recommending it.

The American Kathleen Sprows Cummings of the University recommends his book, in part, because “[t]he text is erudite, eminently readable, and occasionally moving, as its author writes compellingly about the Roman Curia in the light of its most recent reform.”

The Nigerian Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu says, in part, that Ekpo “masterfully weaves together the history, theology, and present juridical ordering of the Roman Curia with brilliant and simple words.”

The British Archbishop Paul Gallagher says, in part, “This well-written volume comes in accessible language and draws on all the relevant scholarship. It seeks to explain in depth the on-going reforms initiated by Pope Francis and will remain for the future a reference source for both researchers and students alike.”

Now, the most efficient way for me to provide you with an overview of Ekpo’s new 2024 book *The Roman Curia: History, Theology, and Organization* is to give you a detailed account of its parts:

“Abbreviations” (pp. vii-viii).

“Acknowledgments” (p. ix).

“Introduction” (pp. 1-5).

Chapter 1: “The Notion of the Roman Curia” (pp. 7-30).

“The Vatican City State” (pp. 7-11).

“Legislative Power in the Vatican City State” (pp. 12-13).

“Judicial Power in the Vatican City State” (pp. 13-14).

“Executive Power in the Vatican City State” (p. 15).

“The Holy See” (pp. 15-18).

“The Roman Curia” (pp. 18-22).

“Members of the Roman Curia” (pp. 22-25).

“Meetings and Assemblies in the Roman Curia” (pp. 25-26).

“Notes” (pp. 26-30).

Chapter 2: “The History of the Roman Curia” (pp. 31-58).

“From the First to the Eleventh Centuries: The Period of the Roman Presbyterium and Synod”

(pp. 32-). [Pope Francis has promoted synodality.]

"From the Eleventh to the Fifteenth Centuries: The Period of the Consistory" (pp. 35-40).

"The Sixteenth Century: *Immensa Aeterni Dei* of [Pope] Sixtus V, 1588" (pp. 40-42). [The Gutenberg printing press emerged in Europe in the mid-1450s – inaugurating what Ong refers to as the print culture (also known as typographic culture) in our Western cultural history.]

"From the End of the sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century" (pp. 42-46).

"From the Twentieth Century to the Present" (pp. 46-54).

"Notes" (pp. 54-58).

Chapter 3: "A Theology of the Roman Curia" (pp. 59-71).

"Community of Service" (pp. 59-60).

"Missionary and Evangelization Service" (pp. 60-61).

"Service of Communion" (pp. 61-65).

"The *Diaconia* [Stewardship] of the Petrine Ministry" (p. 65).

"Safeguarding Unity" (pp. 66-68).

"Safeguarding Discipline" (pp. 68-69).

"An Ecclesial Phenomenon" (pp. 69-70).

"Notes" (pp. 70-71).

Chapter 4: "An Introduction to *Praedicate Evangelium*" (pp. 72-98).

"Principles and Criteria of *Praedicate Evangelium*" (pp. 74-75).

"The Incipit and the Preamble of the Apostolic Constitution" (pp. 76-78).

"Noteworthy Innovations of *Praedicate Evangelium*" (p. 78).

"The Power of Governance and the Role of Laypeople in the Roman Curia" (pp. 78-85).

"Service to the Pope and Bishops" (pp. 85-88).

"Reform of the Roman Curia as a Journey That Begins from Within" (pp. 88-90).

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As you can see, Ekpo covers a lot of ground. In the “Index,” the papal names of 46 popes are listed alphabetically, followed by the parenthetical notation “pope.” In the text, Ekpo usually gives the years of the reign of a given pope in parentheses after he first mentions him. Incidentally, Ong’s pioneering study of print culture (also known as typographic culture) in our Western cultural history is also his pioneering work in media ecology – his massively researched 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (for specific page references to the aural-to-visual shift in cognitive processing in our Western cultural history, see the “Index” [p. 396]).

In Ong’s essay “The Opening of closed Systems” in his 1977 book *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (pp. 305-341), he works with systems terminology. In my estimate, what Ong elsewhere refers to as ancient and medieval chirographic culture and modern typographic culture (also known as print culture) tend to foster what he refers to in his 1977 essay as closed-systems thinking. But what Ong refers to as our secondary oral culture, in which the communications that accentuate sound dominate human consciousness, tends to foster what he refers to in his 1977 essay as open-systems thinking. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), mentioned above, was a manifestation of our contemporary secondary oral culture – and of the movement away from closed-systems thinking and toward open-systems thinking.

In any event, I have written about secondary orality in my essay “Secondary Orality and Consciousness Today” in the anthology *Media, Consciousness, and Culture: Explorations of Walter Ong’s Thought*, edited by Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell, and Paul A. Soukup (1991, pp. 194-209).

In conclusion, even if you read Pope Francis’ 2022 Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, you might enjoy reading Monsignor Anthony Ekpo’s accessible new 2024 book *The Roman Curia: History, Theology, and Organization*.

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