

REFORM OF THE ROMAN CURIA

by Joseph O'Neill



It was Tuesday morning, the 28th of June, 1988, that Pope John Paul II, before an audience of 7,000 people in the Hall of Paul VI, promulgated Pastor Bonus, the constitution on the reform of the Roman Curia. The document represented 16 years of preparatory work, and wide consultations with members of the College of Cardinals, the National Episcopal Conferences, and, especially, the Roman Curia. Some of the reforms indicated in Pastor Bonus had already been defined in Paul VI's Regimini Universae promulgated on August 15, 1967.

In the drafting of the document, the present Holy Father was more concerned with service to the people of God than with the organizational structures themselves. He wanted to improve the Roman Curia's availability to the Bishops throughout the world and its service to them. In his preface, the Pope states: "Power in the Church should be exercised as a form of service so that the main attribute of authority should be its pastoral character".

Reform of the 400 year-old Curia was one of the unfulfilled desiderata of Vatican II, and it took a Karol Wojtyla to attempt to breathe new life into this central governing body of the Church. The Holy Father pointed out at the Public Consistory of June 28: "I desired above all that the image of the Curia should correspond to the requirements of our time, giving ample consideration to the changes that have taken place in these recent years." The Pope continued: "In the second place it was necessary to bring the regulation of the Curia into line with the New Codes of Western and Eastern Canon Law." In closing, he had this to say: "The activity of the Curia should correspond to an ever greater degree with the ecclesiology of Vatican Council II, that it should be ever more clearly adapted to achieving the pastoral ends of the conformation of the Curia."

The Curia, which is the central governing body of the Church, is composed of three principal structures: nine Congregations (the word "sacred" has been eliminated), twelve Pontifical Councils and three

Tribunals. Congregations are the central bodies of church government; Councils are bodies designed for a specific work, e.g. justice and peace, the laity, the family; Tribunals are principally concerned with legal and juridical matters, concordats, marriage cases, disputes, etc.

I. What does the Curia Look like?

Congregation: Secretariat of State
Prefect: Cardinal Agostino Casaroli
Remarks: This reinforced "super" congregation has two sections and also includes the Council of Public Affairs.

Congregation: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
Prefect: Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger
Remarks: Reviews all written documents from curial offices of significant relevance.

Congregation: Congregation of Bishops
Prefect: Cardinal Bernardin Gantin
Remarks: Its prefect presides over the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.

Congregation: Congregation of Sacraments and Divine Worship
Prefect: Cardinal Eduardo Martinez Somala
Remarks: Formerly two congregations now melded into one. Dispenses from vow of celibacy.

Congregation: Congregation of Oriental Churches
Prefect: Cardinal D. Simon Lourdusamy
Remarks: Cooperates with the Council for Christian Unity and for Dialogue.

Congregation: Congregation of the Clergy
Prefect: Cardinal Antonio Innocenti
Remarks: Prefect now presides over the Commission for Conservation of Artistic and Historical Patrimony.

Congregation: Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life
Prefect: Cardinal Jerome Hamer
Remarks: Formerly the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes now has added responsibility for female institutes of Consecrated Life, previously the responsibility of Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Congregation: Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples
Prefect: Cardinal Jozef Tomko
Remarks: The 15 male Missionary Societies of Apostolic Life remain under C.E.P.

Congregation: Congregation for Seminaries and Institutes of Study
Prefect: Cardinal William Baum
Remarks: No longer called the Congregation for Education.

Congregation: Congregation for the Causes of the Saints
Prefect: Cardinal Angelo Felici
Remarks: Diocesan Bishops now initiate the canonization process.

II. The Twelve Pontifical Councils

1. Pontifical Council for the Laity
2. Pontifical Council for Christian Unity
3. Pontifical Council for the Family
4. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace
5. Pontifical Council Cor Unum
6. Pontifical Council for Immigrants and Pilgrims
7. Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care and Health Workers
8. Pontifical Council for Interpretation of Laws
9. Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue
10. Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers
11. Pontifical Council for Culture
12. Pontifical Council for Social Communications

There have been some minor changes in the organization of the Councils. No longer are they called secretariats. The former Secretariats for Christian Unity, Non-Believers, and Dialogue are now called respectively the Council for Christian Unity, the Council for Non-Believers, and the Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. Pastor Bonus, in order to avoid any appearance of down-grading the authority of former secretariats to the conciliar level, was quick to point out that "all departments enjoy equal juridical status". In many of the twelve Councils lay-persons will be occupying more responsible and higher ranking positions than before.

III. The Tribunals

There has been no change in the number and judicial authority of the three Tribunals.

1. **Apostolic Penitentiary**

Deals with indulgences and cases pertaining to the internal forum.

2. **Apostolic Signature**

Supreme Tribunal of the Church deals with juridical matters and includes the Highest Court of Appeals; new Prefect is Cardinal Achille Silvestrini.

3. **Roman Rota**

Deals chiefly with marriage cases and certain types of court appeals.

Besides the above three general categories, there also are the following offices: Camera Apostolica, Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, the Prefecture of the Pontifical Household, and the Office of Pontifical Ceremonies.

There is also a Central Labour Office whose primary concern is for the welfare of the 3,000 civil employees of the Holy See.

The reforms mandated by the Apostolic Constitution Pastor Bonus did not take place until March 1, 1989. However, at this time we can ask the question, Are the goals which John Paul II has spelled out for the Commission on reform reflected in the final document? Indeed, while some new service agencies like the Council for Pastoral Care and Health Workers, and the Council for Immigrants and Pilgrims have been established, on the whole, there is an even greater concentration of power and control centered in the principal governing bodies of the Curia, namely the Congregations.

The Secretariat of State is still all powerful. The integration of the Council of Public Affairs as a juridical reality of the Church only helps to increase the power of the Secretary of State's role in government.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith will now have the final word on all written documents of doctrinal relevance prepared by the other Congregations. This is especially true for the Council for Christian Unity. Pastor Bonus says in part that the Council for Christian Unity should proceed in strict collaboration with the C.D.F., especially in the promulgation of new documents or declarations which touch on matters of faith. In matters of importance which touch the separated Churches of the Oriental rites, it should consult with the Congregation of Oriental Churches.

The authority of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also comes out stronger in Pastor Bonus. It now serves not only as

the "watch-dog" of the Catholic faith outside the walls of the Vatican, but also within the Curia itself.

The Episcopal Conferences do not appear in the document of curial reform at all. This omission would appear to go against the spirit of collegiality as set forth in Christus Dominus. In an appendix to the documents, it is the individual Bishops and their ad limina visits, along with the smaller regional episcopal groups, that are considered most important. Such ad limina visits serve to strengthen unity and communion with the Holy See. Ordinaries will now be required to submit their ad limina reports on the state of their jurisdictions six months in advance of their visit.

One of the more interesting changes has to do with the so-called Vatican Bank, or the Instituto per le Opere di Religione. Previously the bank operated almost like a corporation accountable only to the Holy Father. Articles 24 and 25 of Pastor Bonus stipulate that the Vatican Bank is accountable and must provide all necessary information to the existing Council of Cardinals dealing with economic affairs. The Council is composed of 15 Cardinals, chosen from around the world, and meets at least twice a year.

By no means can we consider the reforms that have taken place in the Curia catastrophic. However, many have been disappointed by the results, feeling that the reforms did not go far enough. One disappointment was the failure of the reform to raise the Council for the Laity to the level of a Congregation. Such a move would have reinforced the increasingly responsible role of the laity and their commitment to the Church. The laity would then be acknowledged as participants by virtue of their baptism and confirmation in the highest levels of Church government. This would have been a radical change and a true sign of the working of the Holy Spirit.

Other questions could be asked: Is it possible for an institution as large and complex as the Church to reform itself? Were too many Curia offices guilty of merely trying to protect their own turf? Why were disinterested parties such as outside managerial experts not called in to assist in the work of curial reform?

In the last analysis, it comes down to what is to be our dominant model of Church in modern times. If it is to be the institutional model, then the minor retouches and "fine tuning" that the reforms represent can be considered a success. If the model is to be a church of communion and service, then the document on the reform of the Curia leaves much to be desired.