

The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Curial Reform of 1968

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KARIM SCHELKENS

FROM *SUPERNO DEI NUTU* TO *REGIMINI ECCLESIAE*
THE SECRETARIAT FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
AND THE 1968 REFORM OF THE CURIA

Paul VI, A Reform Pope?

From medieval popes such as Gregory VII, through renaissance church leaders like Sixtus V, up to contemporary popes like Pius X, a number of pontiffs have received the epithet 'reform pope'. Though he is often neglected, when it comes to reform of the Roman Curia¹, besides Pius X's 1908 reform², one of the most influential popes was Paul VI. Giovanni Battista Montini is most known to the wider public as the 'second' pope of Vatican II and is greatly esteemed for his untiring attention to dialogue with the modern world, with other Christian denominations, with world religions. However, when it comes to internal Catholic Church affairs, the image is somewhat more ambiguous³. Nevertheless, the organizational structure of Roman Catholicism as we know it today is indebted to a large extent to the actions and decisions of this pope. On January 3, 1966, less than a month after the solemn closure of the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI issued the *motu proprio Finis Concilio*, instituting a list of postconciliar commissions charged with the implementation of the reforms proposed by the Second Vatican Council. Looking at the main points of focus for postconciliar reform under Paul VI, Philippe Chenaux has identified two: liturgical reform and curial reform⁴. Within the context of this

¹ The author of this contribution wishes to express his gratitude to Thomas Stransky CSP, for allowing me to access his personal papers, kept at St. Paul's College, Washington DC. We have also been able to make good use of the papers of Bernard Dupuy, at the Centre Istina in Paris, and the private papers of Cardinal Willebrands. For a general study on the Roman Curia which includes materials regarding the reform of 1968, see NICCOLÒ DEL RE, *La Curia Romana. Lineamenti storico-giuridici*, Rome 1970.

² This reform resulted largely out of Pius X's apostolic constitution *Sapienti consilio*, of June 29, 1908. We will not deal with its background here. On this, see the article in this volume by Hans de Valk.

³ New light is gradually being shed on Paul VI's reform activities and the pope's dealing with the postconciliar crisis. In 2013, a volume will appear by JÖRG ERNESTI, *Timoniere in tempi difficili. Paolo VI e la crisi postconciliare*, Brescia 2013.

⁴ PHILIPPE CHENAUX, *Il concilio Vaticano II*, Rome 2012, p. 117. We should add the important notion of synodality as an element of reform, see HERVÉ LEGRAND, *Synodes et*

volume devoted to the Roman Curia, our interest is naturally in the latter area, and more particularly in the so-called curial reform of 1968. In fact, this 1968 reform flows out of Paul VI's Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, promulgated in August 15, 1967. On March 1, 1968, the pope issued the new *Regolamento Generale della Curia Romana*.

In this short paper, we cannot possibly offer a full study of all the aspects of this round of reform. Still, its effects were quite strong. First of all, we wish to point to a general ambiguity, or tension, concerning postconciliar reform under Paul VI. This tension is noteworthy since it raises theological and, *a fortiori*, ecclesiological considerations. The tension is that between juridical and theological thought when it comes to implementing the church doctrine of Vatican II. One of the key issues debated at the council was the topic of collegiality and the nature of the relationship between the universal episcopate and primacy. At Vatican II, Paul VI had already shown himself very much aware of the importance of the problem, which became painfully clear during the council's so-called Black Week⁵ and its insertion of a *Nota Explicativa Praevia* to chapter three of *Lumen Gentium*⁶. The tensions raised here have remained strong in the conciliar aftermath; the challenge of reconciling collegial governance with a juridically and hierarchically defined church model has never been overcome. Any implementation of conciliar ecclesiology was to take place under the overarching framework of the old Code of Canon Law, issued by Benedict XV in 1917, and leaning on the ecclesiological notion of the church as *societas perfecta*. More in particular, the Code's Book II, *De personis*, grants a central role to the cardinalate. This role is in some tension with Vatican II ecclesiology and its focus on the sacramental foundations of the church. The Vatican II documents do not offer a single phrase with regard to the role of the cardinals, given that the cardinalate does not essentially pertain to the basic sacramental structure of the church.

All this is not to say that the curial reform of Paul VI was without effect. Its effects were soon felt in several domains⁷: one need

conseils de l'après-concile, in «Nouvelle Revue Théologique», 101 (1976), pp. 193-216. On the implementation of synodality, see JAN GROOTAERS, *Heurs et malheurs de la collégialité. Pontificats et synodes face à la réception de Vatican II*, Leuven 2012.

⁵ ISTITUTO PAOLO VI, *Paolo VI e la collegialità episcopale*, Brescia - Roma 1995.

⁶ A rich dossier on the elaboration of this *Nota Explicativa Praevia*, is found in: JAN GROOTAERS, *Primauté et collégialité. Le dossier de Gérard Philips sur la Nota Explicativa Praevia (Lumen Gentium, Chap. III)*, Leuven, 1986. Also see the central role in its redaction by Msgr Gerard Philips, as becomes clear from the latter's council notes. Cfr. KARIM SCHELKENS, *Carnets conciliaires de Mgr Gérard Philips, secrétaire adjoint de la commission doctrinale*, Leuven 2006.

⁷ For a more general picture, see the article by PHILIPPE CHENAUX, *La réception du Concile Vatican II dans la curie romaine*, in LEO KENIS - JAAK BILLIET - PATRICK PASTURE

only recall that Cardinal presidents to the Roman dicasteries would henceforth be nominated *ad quinquennium* and were asked to resign at the age of seventy five. While Paul VI did not change the classic subdivision of curial offices as defined in Canon 242 of the 1917 Code, the Roman Curia under Paul VI did become increasingly international, some curial congregations were renamed, and a number of bureaus ceased to exist. The role of the Vatican State Secretariat became more important and influential, while the former Holy Office – already heavily attacked by Cardinal Frings in November 1963 during the council – was baptised the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and was no longer to function as the doctrinal watchdog of the Vatican. All of this constitutes the broad horizon for the present contribution, which is but a case study of a single office: the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

The Secretariat for Christian Unity: Origin and Delineation

Among the curial organs and bodies, the Secretariat was a fairly new element. It had been set up by John XXIII with a view to ‘guiding’ the ecumenicity of the council’s work. Established on June 5, 1960⁸ via the *motu proprio Superno Dei Nutu*, the Secretariat was headed by Cardinal Augustin Bea and had Johannes Willebrands as its secretary. This would be the first official Catholic organ set up by the Vatican to engage in ecumenism, and that alone indicated its importance. Moreover, it would continue the efforts of many Catholics belonging to the preconciliar *Catholic Conference on Ecumenical Questions*⁹. Many of the members of that group would carry on their activities with an official mandate, and the other Christian churches and communities would have an “official address” for communicating with the Roman Catholic Church. This new ecumenical organ had a double task. In the first place, it was to collaborate with the

(eds.), *The Transformation of Christian Churches in Western Europe, 1945-2000*, Leuven, 255-266. Also see the article by LUCAS MOREIRA NEVES, *Paul VI et la réforme de la curie*, in «Notiziario dell'Istituto Paolo VI», 8 (1984), pp. 51-66.

⁸ The best studies on the early years of the Secretariat are published by MAURO VELATI, *Una difficile transizione. Il cattolicesimo tra unionismo ed ecumenismo (1952-1964)*, Bologna 1996; ID., *Dialogo e rinnovamento. Verbali e testi del segretariato per l'unità dei cristiani nella preparazione del Concilio Vaticano*, Bologna 2011.

⁹ On the importance of the Catholic Conference for the establishment of the Secretariat, see PETER DE MEY, *Précurseur du Secrétariat pour l'Unité. Le travail oecuménique de la Conférence Catholique pour les Questions Oecuméniques (1952-1963)*, in GILLES ROUTHIER - KARIM SCHELKENS - PHILIPPE ROY (eds.), *La théologie catholique entre intransigence et renouveau*, Turnhout 2012, pp. 287-303.

pre-conciliar commissions and determine whether the preconconciliar schemata elaborated by these commissions were sufficiently “ecumenical” in nature. Another charge of the SCUF was to invite representatives from non-Catholic Churches to be present at the Council. Such an invitation – against the background of an ‘ecumenism of return’ – had already been sent out before Vatican I by Pius IX, with negative results. This time however, due to the impressive network of inter-confessional contacts and experience of the SCUF-members, John XXIII succeeded, even though it took serious efforts to convince some of the Orthodox patriarchates. Willebrands even had to travel to Moscow and Istanbul to smooth relationships and clarify the council’s agenda¹⁰. All of this is of some importance for the structural level. The Secretariat was raised to the rank of a conciliar commission on October 19, 1962 but kept its name. As a secretariat, it was quite free in its actions and from the outset it benefited from an open and informal environment that facilitated collaboration both among its own staff, members and consulters, as well as with representatives of other denominations. In the postconciliar era, however, the situation of the Secretariat would become quite different. While the aforementioned *motu proprio*, *Finis Concilio*, already indicated that the Secretariat would not cease to exist but was to remain active in view of the implementation of the Council’s ecumenical legacy, on June 2, 1966, the Cardinal State Secretary confirmed the Secretariat’s prolonged existence in response to some proposals, coming from the Secretariat itself, for its internal reorganisation¹¹.

No longer a ‘conciliar’ organ, the Secretariat had to gradually obtain and manage its own spot within the Roman Curia. This process proved quite complex, given the very nature of the Secretariat. Since 1964 it had been busy engaging itself in bilateral and multilateral dialogue with other churches. The activity of ecumenical dialogue constituted the very foundation of the Secretariat’s existence but also demonstrated its awkward position in Rome. On the one hand, given the mass of international contacts, there was a constant overlap with the duties of the Vatican State Secretariat, which was the official organ dealing with diplomatic affairs. On the other hand, entering into ecumenical dialogue always involves discussing doctrinal issues. There

¹⁰ On this journey and the diplomatic tensions surrounding it, see KARIM SCHELKENS, *Envisager la concélébration entre catholiques et orthodoxes?* in: «Istina» 57 (2007), pp. 253-277.

¹¹ In its meeting of June 11, 1966, the SCUF had discussed its own structure, and had later communicated the results to the pope. See ARCHIVE WILLEBRANDS, 324. On the background to the prolongation of the Secretariat’s existence, also see PAUL POUPARD, *Connaissance du Vatican*, Paris 1967, pp. 145-150.

the Secretariat encroached on the domain of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. A third partnership inside the Roman Curia proved equally important, namely, the partnership with the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. The precise location of the boundary between the Secretariat and each of these three offices became an issue with the establishment of the Secretariat in 1960, and continued to be one during the late 1960s. So as of 1966, for example, the question of the internal structure and organisation of the Secretariat was constantly recurring¹².

Becoming Part of the Roman Curia: Regimini Ecclesiae

The year 1967 would turn out to be a crucial moment in the history of the Secretariat for Christian Unity. While the official promulgation of *Regimini Ecclesiae* did not take place until August 15, it is clear that the curial offices were aware of the contents of the document before that. By the end of June 1967, one of the staff members who had been active inside the Secretariat since its foundation, Thomas Stransky, drafted a memo on the future programming of the Secretariat¹³. This memo was directed to the secretary, Msgr. Willebrands and to the vice-secretary, Jérôme Hamer. Stransky noted two things: First, he referred back to a meetings of the Ecumenical Commissions held by the Secretariat in May, in view of the Secretariat's future. And next, Stransky questioned his own position within the SCUF and proposed an exchange of ideas regarding its future setup. This memo prompted an immediate reply. On August 1, a mere two weeks before the official promulgation of *Regimini Ecclesiae*, Hamer drafted a note¹⁴ for secretary Willebrands, explaining that the Secretariat's increasing number of responsibilities as well as its growing membership called for a reorganisation. So on top of the note Hamer sketched two versions of an organogram, which yielded a provisional outline. Hamer's provisional outline can be considered a first step of a quite elaborate process. The document first offered the composition of the SCUF's central leadership, including Cardinal Bea (president), Msgr. Willebrands (secretary), and Fr. Hamer (vice-secretary)¹⁵. Hamer's note then

¹² ARCHIVE WILLEBRANDS, 324, contains a dossier regarding the Secretariate's activities in 1966.

¹³ ARCHIVE STRANSKY, T.F. Stransky, *Memo – Future programming of the Secretariat*, July 30, 1967, p. 1.

¹⁴ ARCHIVE STRANSKY: J. Hamer, *Note à Mgr. Willebrands sur l'organisation du Secrétariat*, August 1, 1967, p. 1.

¹⁵ ARCHIVE STRANSKY, J. Hamer, *Essai d'organigramme pour le Secrétariat*, August 1, 1967.

outlined, in French, nine specialised sections according to the various activities of the Secretariat:

- I. Relations avec la Curie Romaine. Administration, Finances, Relations hiérarchiques
- II. Relations spécialisées à l'intérieur de l'église catholique. Missions, laïcat, justice et paix, jeunesse, organisations catholiques internationales, séminaires.
- III. Relations avec le COE
- IV. Relations avec les églises orientales
- V. Relations avec les alliances confessionnelles mondiales.
- VI. Organisations chrétiennes internationales. YMCA, YWCA, WSF, Mouvements divers...
- VII. Relations avec les grands secteurs régionaux.
- VIII. Relations avec les sociétés bibliques.
- IX. Problèmes juifs

The second version of this outline exhibits the same structure, but refines these nine sections and assigns them to either the secretary or the vice-secretary. Interestingly, Hamer seems to group all the sections that involve fundamental theological dialogue on his side, leaving the more technical elements, as well as the relationships with the world alliances, youth movements, etc., to the vice-secretary¹⁶. This division into nine sections would not last, though, and soon other suggestions were circulating. Key issues at stake were the number of members, whether to appoint two vice-presidents, how to appoint members (coming from a variety of regions) and how to obtain the assent of their *ordinarius loci*. Another hot topic was the number of consultors to be appointed, and finally the practical issues surrounding the need to organize annual meetings with the representatives of local episcopal conferences.

All of this indicates something of the complex nature of the Secretariat in the postconciliar era. For a start, where this Secretariat had known quite a dynamic setup during the council and ample freedom to organize itself on the internal level, the curial reform posed a certain threat: members feared that something of that initial dynamism would be lost, once the Secretariat had fully accustomed itself to the system of the Roman Curia. This reveals something of a paradox surrounding the 1968 curial reform: for the 'old' dicasteries of the Curia reform would likely enhance their dynamism and was much needed in this sense, while for young offices such as the Secretariats set up by the pope, the reform threatened to have the opposite ef-

¹⁶ ARCHIVE STRANSKY, J. Hamer, *Place du P. Stransky dans l'essai d'organigramme*, August 1, 1967.

fect. There was a growing scepticism about whether the proposed reform measures were suitable to the calling of the Secretariat. For a start, along with the elaboration of an ecumenical directory¹⁷, the Secretariat had already launched itself into the local implementation of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the decree on ecumenism that had been strongly supported, despite some private reservations, by the Pope¹⁸. Practically, each episcopal conference had been asked to establish an Ecumenical Commission, and one of the Secretariat's tasks was to coordinate this local ecumenism. This task required a vast organisation and brought with it high expenses. On top of that came issues of internal organisation regarding the Secretariat's correspondence, its library and archives, etc. Thus, the time had arrived to rethink the entire system. All of the points touched upon were discussed during an internal staff meeting¹⁹ on March 11, 1968, in attendance of protagonists such as Willebrands, Hamer, Stransky, as well as others, such as Jean-François Arrighi and Cees Rijk. While *Regimini Ecclesiae* offered general rules for the Roman Curia and its offices, each office was required to draft its own set of *Normae particulares*. The outcome of the meeting was presented to Cardinal Bea, and with his agreement the process was taken to the next phase.

The Plenary Meeting of November 1968 and the Reform of the Secretariat

Upon Cardinal Bea's agreement to initiate the process of restructuring the office, several draft documents were written. An important one was a note from the pen of Arrighi, in preparation for a meeting on April 1, 1968. Arrighi's note²⁰ discussed the activities of the Secretariat in five sections. The first treated its basic structure: the Secretariat would have a certain number of members and consultors. Next to these, there would be a permanent staff, divided over two main sections (Western and Oriental), and finally attention was to be given to the relationship between the office itself and the plenary meetings with the members.

¹⁷ The first part of the Ecumenical Directory also constituted part of the immediate background to the Secretariate's attitude in the curial reform. It had been published very recently, in May 1967, entitled *Directory for the application of the decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican concerning ecumenical matters*, London 1967.

¹⁸ MAURO VELATI, *L'ecumenismo al Concilio. Paolo VI e l'approvazione di 'Unitatis Redintegratio'*, in «Cristianesimo nella Storia», 26 (2005), pp. 427-476.

¹⁹ ARCHIVE STRANSKY, *Per la redazione delle Normae particulares del Segretariato per l'unione dei cristiani*, March 13, 1968, 3 p.

²⁰ ARCHIVE STRANSKY, J.F. Arrighi, *Allegato VI per il congresso di lunedì 1° aprile 1968*, April 1, 1968 p. 1.

The second section of the document was devoted to the distribution of responsibilities among the staff, and to the various types of meetings on the level of permanent staff. Section three discussed the organization of plenary meetings at the Secretariat, and the fourth section discussed the Secretariat's relationship to other curial offices. The final section then treated the dialogue with the Jews as a separate topic. Arrighi's note was quite technical, but it constituted an internal point of departure. In the next phase, the reorganisation of the Secretariat would no longer just be a matter of 'insiders', but would come to the fore in a plenary meeting held in Rome from November 4 to 14, 1968. During that meeting, the precise role granted to the Secretariat by Paul VI's Apostolic Constitution would be examined more closely. The invitation letter to the plenary extended to the members and consulters by secretary Willebrands on September 10, 1968, prominently put the question on the agenda:

L'ordre du jour de notre session plénière concerne le futur rôle du Secrétariat pour l'unité des chrétiens. Il nous amènera au cours de la discussion à mettre en lumière ce que doit être notre programma futur avec son ordre de priorité. La plénière de novembre 1968 nous permettra donc de mieux saisir la 'competentia et munus christianorum unitatem fovendi' que le Saint Père a confié au Secrétariat dans la constitution *De Romana Curia* (nn. 92-95)²¹.

However important the preparatory notes within the inner circle of the Secretariat, the plenary meeting would have to take two official documents as its point of departure for its organizational debat. First, *Regimini Ecclesiae* itself. This document constituted an important attempt at reorganisation of the entire Roman Curia on several levels. As such, the Apostolic Constitution contributed much to ending the immobility and careerism that reigned among certain members of the preconciliar curia²². And the fourth section in particular reflected the pope's personal emphasis on the need for 'dialogue', which he had already clearly expressed in his programmatic encyclical of 1964, *Ecclesiam Suam*. Indeed, this was the section devoted to the three recently established Secretariats, the one for Non-Christians, one for Non-Believers, and the Secretariat for Christian Unity, which was

²¹ ARCHIVES CENTRE ISTINA, Paris, J.G.M. Willebrands, *Letter concerning the program of the plenary*, prot. N° 4330/68, September 10, 1968.

²² ANDREA RICCARDI, *Preparare il Concilio. Papa e Curia alla vigilia del Vaticano II*, in *Le Deuxième concile du Vatican (1959-1965)*. Actes du Colloque (Rome, 28-30 mai 1986), Rome 1989, pp. 181-205.

described under Chapter I, articles 92 to 95²³. But while the organisation of a new curia rightfully strove towards ending the *inamovibilité* of the prefects and secretaries of certain dicasteries, the insertion of the ‘newer’ offices such as the three secretariats created an ambiguous situation. Inside these offices, and *a fortiori* inside the Secretariat for Christian Unity, a loss of initial dynamism was feared, precisely through its forced integration in the curial network.

The second official document was the *Regolamento Generale* for the Roman Curia. Inasmuch as they were relevant to the formation of the Secretariat, the two documents were presented to the members present at the plenary meeting in the first half of November 1968. Let us, then, examine articles 92 to 95 of *Regimini Ecclesiae* more closely, basing the examination on the note used to present these documents to the plenary meeting²⁴.

For a start, the note explained that article 92 of *Regimini Ecclesiae* implied that the Secretariat would have a Cardinal President, a secretary and a vice-secretary. Its members were to be cardinals or bishops²⁵, and its consultors could be either clergy members or laypersons. Quite important was the appointment of a series of members *de iure*, who were prefects of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and for the Evangelisation of the Peoples – and eventually also the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The secretaries of these same dicasteries would also be appointed consultors *de iure*. Finally, it was made clear that the Secretariat should consist of the two aforementioned sections: an Oriental and a Western section. An increase in staff became possible, since at that moment the permanent staff counted fourteen persons, whereas the *Regolamento* for the Roman Curia foresaw the possibility of nineteen members of staff.

Article 93 discussed the Secretariat’s area of competence, describing it as follows: ‘secretariatus competentiam et munus habet fovendi christianorum unitatem’. This description is at once precise and vague. Nevertheless, this section of *Regimini Ecclesiae* was the largest one, and

²³ EMILE BERGH, *Nouvelle organisation de la curie romaine*, in «Nouvelle Revue Théologique», 93 (1968), pp. 298-306.

²⁴ ARCHIVE STRANSKY, T.F. Stransky, *Nota Plenaria n° 43*, November 4-14, 1968.

²⁵ This was an important element of the 1968 reform, in consequence of Paul VI’s *Motu proprio Pro Comperto Sane*, of August 6, 1967, only a week before *Regimini Ecclesiae*. It was observed that such decisions are not only of a practical nature, but also reflect a theological undercurrent to the initiatives of reform under Paul VI. See ANTONIO ACERBI, *L’ecclésiologie à la base des institutions ecclésiales post-conciliaires*, in GIUSEPPE ALBERIGO (ed.), *Les églises après Vatican II. Dynamisme et prospective*, Paris 1981, p. 236: «Cette intention de rationalisation bureaucratique, satisfaite seulement en partie par la réforme de Pie X, inspire encore certains aspects de la réforme de Paul VI. Mais cette dernière sous-entend aussi quelques principes théologiques».

it will prove worthwhile to look at how this particular area of competence is filled in by the document. It listed the duties of the Secretariat as follows:

- re prius delata ad S. Pontificem, rationes curat cum fratribus aliarum communitatum
- agit de recta interpretatione et executione principiorum oecumenismi
- coetus catholicos cogit vel alit coordinat tum nationales tum internationales unitatem christianorum promoventes.
- colloquia instituit quoad quaestiones et activitates oecumenicas cum Ecclesiis et communitatibus ecclesialibus a Sede Apostolica seiunctis.
- Observatores catholicos deputat pro conventibus christianis
- Fratrum seiunctorum observatores ad conventus catholicos invitat, quoties id opportunum videtur
- Decreta conciliaria, quae ad rem oecumenicam attinent, executioni mandat.

These points constitute an interesting mandate, positioning as it does the duties of the Secretariat between two poles: one the one hand fidelity to the Pope, and on the other hand fidelity to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Precisely this point will be made in Willebrands' report presented to the plenary meeting on November 4, 1968, where he stated that:

Le Secrétariat pour l'unité des chrétiens comme organe de l'église, a une tâche responsable dans le développement actuel. Il devra suivre et encourager le mouvement oecuménique selon l'enseignement donné par le concile et par le magistère de l'église. Il devra interpreter et appliquer aux circonstances actuelles les principes catholiques de l'oecuménisme, comme il l'a déjà fait dans la première partie du Directoire oecuménique. Nous espérons que la présente session plénière nous aidera à poursuivre cette tâche²⁶.

But let us return to the presentation of *Regimini Ecclesiae* to the members of the plenary meeting. Next came article 94, which was very concise and stated that the Secretariat 'also has the competence to deal with questions regarding the Jews. But with an unambiguous restriction: *sub aspectu religioso*. Only with regard to the religious aspect of dialogue. Clearly, any attempt at entering into the field of political and diplomatic contacts with Israel was out of the question.

Finally, article 95 dealt with the question of overlapping areas of competence, the so-called *negotia mixta*. At this juncture, *Regimini Ecclesiae* confirmed what had been going on in the past: for political

²⁶ ARCHIVE STRANSKY, Johannes Willebrands, *Rapport du secrétaire à la session plénière*, November 5, 1968, p. 9.

matters and matter of diplomacy, collaboration with the State Secretariat was needed²⁷, for theological matters, with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and for matters regarding Greek-Catholics, with the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

The second document to be taken into account, the *Regolamento Generale*, did not so much enter into the particular duties of the various offices, but rather listed a set of common rules for how they were to function. The basic structure of the Secretariat would thus be similar to that of any other curial office: a Cardinal president, a secretary, a permanent staff, and a group of members and consultors. The *Regolamento* also stressed the need for each office to organize annual plenary meetings and foresaw the possibility of organising *congregazioni ordinarie*, inviting only bishops and cardinals present in Rome. On top of this, all dicasteries were granted the possibility of organizing consultative meetings, that is, meetings to which its consultors were invited. The *Regolamento* also indicated that consultors could only be appointed for five year periods, with an option for re-appointment to a second five year term.

Given the list of indications already fixed by these two key documents in the 1968 reform, one can ask: what then was left to discuss at the Secretariat's plenary meeting? And how was the discussion to be organized? The latter point was easily arranged. During the ten-day plenary meeting, four subcommissions were established to prepare for the general discussion. The program of the meeting shows that subcommission IV was made responsible for preparing the debate on the structure of the Secretariat, its relationships to local Ecumenical Commissions and the organization of these commissions on a global and regional scale²⁸. This arrangement already reveals the important issues at stake.

However much the Secretariat was due to become a 'real' curial office, it still had to define its interior regulation within the confines given by the two aforementioned documents. The main point of the agenda was thus the drafting of a set of *normae particulares*. At this

²⁷ Precisely in this context, it should be noted that the grip of the State Secretariat over other curial offices would increase heavily, as was pointed out, among others, by WILLEM F. AKVELD, *De Romeinse Curie. De geschiedenis van het bestuur van de wereldkerk*, Nijmegen 1997, pp. 88-96. Also see ACERBI, *L'ecclesiologie à la base*, p. 238-239.

²⁸ ARCHIVE STRANSKY, *Nota plenaria, n° 11: Programme*, November 4-14, 1968. As is clear from the program, the four subcommissions divided the work as follows: I. Relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches; II. Report of the Secretary; Relationships with the Orthodox, Anglican Communion, and Methodists; III. Relationships with Lutherans, Old-Catholics and others. Relationships with Jews. Common bible project; IV. Structure and organization of the Secretariate. Relationships with local Ecumenical Commissions, Organisation on a global and regional scale.

point the plenary meeting could hold real discussions and could define its identity. Five crucial issues were to be discussed:

- First, the possibility, given the fact that the Secretariat had two separate sections, of appointing two vice-presidents. The question of the duration of their term was also raised.
- Second, the practical organization of plenary meetings, and their frequency.
- Third, the duration of appointments to membership. One will recall that the five-year term had only been stipulated for consultants, while the duration of membership had been left open. Here the question was whether members would also be restricted to serving five-year periods.
- Fourth, a very important question for the Secretariat was its way of dealing with consultants, and, *a fortiori*, the number of consultants. Precisely due to its strong focus on local ecumenism, the Secretariat chose to have a vast number of consultants. Two of them were appointed *de iure*. But the interesting decision lay in the fact that the outcome would be a list of over fifty consultants²⁹.
- Finally, another central issue was local ecumenism. How would the Secretariat manage and coordinate the large number of National and Regional ecumenical commissions? Such management would greatly increase the cost of the Secretariat's activities and thus posed a serious problem.

On Saturday November 9, 1968, a session, prepared by the subcommission, was devoted to all of these topics. The subcommission's report on the general structure of the Secretariat reflects the decisions made and was strongly influenced by three key players in the Secretariat's reform, namely, Stransky, Arrighi and John Long³⁰. To conclude this overview of the reform process, let us briefly sum up the contents of this report. The subcommittee made the following recommendations.

On the level of membership, the subcommittee recommended that the Secretariat have a *membership* of about 40 and that more repre-

²⁹ This reflected the attention given to local representation. The list holds six consultants coming from the Roman Curia offices, plus two consultants *de iure* (from the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and for the Evangelisation of the Peoples). These eight 'Roman consultants' are by far outnumbered by their international colleagues. It was decided to confirm sixteen of the already active consultants in their role, and to appoint no less than 43 new ones. The truly global scope of the *consulta* is immediately clear from this list of countries: Germany: 6; England: 1; Belgium: 2; Denmark: 1; Scotland: 1; Spain: 1; France: 5; The Netherlands: 2; Ireland: 1; Italy: 3; Switzerland: 1; Yugoslavia: 1; South Africa: 1; Nigeria: 1; Zambia: 1; Egypt: 1; Israel: 1; Beyruth: 1; Argentina: 1; Chile: 1; Canada: 2; USA: 6; Australia: 1; India: 1; Indonesia: 1; New Zealand: 1; Philippines: 1.

³⁰ ARCHIVE STRANSKY, T.F. Stransky, *Rapport partiel de la Sous-Comm. IV (Stransky)*, November 1968.

sensation be given to the Churches of the Middle East. It also stated that membership be restricted to a period of five years. Some concrete measures were proposed at this juncture in order to create a period of transition towards the new situation created by Paul VI's curial reform. For instance, it was agreed that beginning in 1970, eight of the more senior members, to be chosen by lot, would have to retire each year. Their places would then be filled by eight new members.

On the level of permanent staff, the subcommittee recommended that there be a Cardinal President and a General Secretary. But, given the particular composition of the Secretariat, there would be two-vice-presidents.

Another point was the organization of meetings. With the large groups of both members and consultors, the Secretariat was no longer the small dynamic group of eight years earlier. This increase in size had some practical implications: the permanent staff, instead of inviting all the consultors to its plenary meetings, would be free to choose a certain number of them to be invited, according to their special competence and according to regions. Furthermore it was decided that, if necessary, meetings of members in a particular continent or region might be held, with the cooperation of the staff of the Secretariat.

More particular rules followed. For instance, the subcommittee recommended that the plenary meeting authorize the Cardinal President to choose a small committee of about five members to study a particular question, should the occasion arise.

And finally, it was deemed useful for the staff to have special contact with a representative of each Episcopal Conference. This representative could keep the staff informed of ecumenical developments in his area, and a meeting of these representatives might be held about every three years.

Closing Considerations

Glancing over the entire process of discussion within the Secretariat for Christian Unity, some observations might be made. However, before doing so, we wish to stress the provisional nature of this note. Only a few sources have been made accessible for scholarly research, and in the future, new material will undoubtedly shed more light on Paul VI's reform of the curia. In general, however, one can safely state that for a young office such as the Secretariat for Christian Unity the impact of the curial reform was large. The Secretariat faced difficult transitions in several fields at once. In the background, the global ecumenical movement changed around 1968 and in the years to come this

change would weigh on the Secretariate³¹. But on the inside of the Secretariat another drama was playing out. The plenary meeting that took place in Rome from 4 to 14 November 1968, discussing the reform of the Secretariat, did so at a moment when its Cardinal President was gravely ill. The President's death, which took place only two days after the closing of the meeting, caused a period of grief among his close collaborators inside the Secretariat. The loss of its protector put the Secretariat in a politically delicate situation within the Roman Curia³². Only in April 1969 would Msgr. Willebrands be created cardinal and appointed as successor to Cardinal Bea. This was an important decision from the side of the Pope, since it ran counter to the tradition that new heads at curial offices were sought outside of the respective office. With the choice of Willebrands, Paul VI clearly indicated his desire that the Secretariat continue the direction taken.

So, at a moment when the office's leadership was uncertain and the future remained vague, the outcome of the plenary meeting and the reform lay in the hands of Msgr. Willebrands. One and a half weeks after the death of Cardinal Bea, on November 27, 1968, the *congresso* of the Secretariat staff, presided over by Willebrands, evaluated the outcome of the meeting³³. While it became clear that the program had been too packed, the General Secretary also complained that his own proposal to establish an 'executive committee' had not been sufficiently entertained. So, even though a majority of the decisions that were taken remained untouched, new propositions were discussed, ranging from a *comitato esecutivo* to a *consiglio di presidenza*, until it was decided to organize a 'restricted assembly'. Others points

³¹ On Roman Catholic involvement in ecumenism after Vatican II, see the excellent study by LUKAS VISCHER, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Roman Catholic Church*, in HAROLD E. FEY (ed.), *The Ecumenical Advance. A history of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva 1986², pp. 312-352. From a Roman Catholic point of view see JOSEF FREITAG & DOROTHEA SATTLER, *Zur Wirkungsgeschichte des Ökumenismusdekrets*, in: WOLFGANG THÖNISSEN (ed.), *Unitatis redintegratio. 40 Jahre Ökumenismusdekret – Erbe und Auftrag*, Paderborn 2005, pp. 83-116, and ELEUTERIO F. FORTINO, *L'action du Conseil Pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens depuis la promulgation d'Unitatis redintegratio*, in WALTER KASPER, *Rechercher l'unité des chrétiens. Actes de la conférence internationale organisée à l'occasion du 40^e anniversaire de la promulgation du décret Unitatis Redintegratio du Concile Vatican II*, Montrouge 2006, pp. 114-170.

³² In that sense it is interesting to point out that the Secretariat's official communication channel, the Information Service, offers a brief report of the 1968 plenary. See *Service d'Information* 7/2 (Mai 1969), p. 1: «Il (card. Bea) parla des conséquences de la réforme de la curie qui a consolidé la place du Secrétariat et accru la collaboration entre les divers dicastères. Ceci s'est manifesté d'une manière particulièrement heureuse par le fait que sont devenus membres du Secrétariat pour l'Unité des Chrétiens prélats distingués et des membres du haut personnel d'autres départements, parmi lesquels Son Em. Le Cardinal Préfet de la Congrégation pour la Doctrine de la Foi».

³³ ARCHIVE ŠTRANSKY, *Verbale del Congresso del 27 novembre 1968, presieduto da S.E. Mons Willebrands*, November 27, 1968.

accepted on November 9 were taken up. The number of members, for instance, was revisited. The discussion reflected a fear of the Secretariat becoming a moloch with all due consequences for its practical functioning and its administration. Willebrands proposed presenting a note to the pope, explaining why it was thought best to reduce the number of members to 30. Ultimately, it was decided to organize a meeting of all the international secretaries of the local ecumenical commissions. With this new meeting in sight, the 'new Secretariat' launched itself into the future.

