

# Vatican Council II

“Throw open the windows of the Church and let the fresh air of the Spirit blow through”

*Attributed to Saint John XXIII*

# An Ecumenical (Worldwide) Council

- 2,540 bishops attended the opening session, numbers over 2,400 at all three sessions.
- Council of Trent 255 bishops at closing session, many sessions had 100 or fewer.
- Vatican I had 500 bishops at opening session, 774 participated at some point.
- Four sessions from October 1962 until November 1965.

# Pope John XXIII

- “Caretaker Pope”—humble, peasant origins; diplomatic career; expected to have a short, uneventful pontificate.
- Called for new council 3 months after election.
- “Venerable brothers and our beloved sons! We announce to you, indeed trembling a little with emotion, but at the same time with humble resolution of intention, the name and the proposal of a twofold celebration: a diocesan synod for the city, and an ecumenical council for the Universal Church”  
Pope John XXIII, Announcing council, January 25, 1959.
- “It was completely unexpected, like a flash of heavenly light, shedding sweetness in eyes and hearts”  
Pope John XXIII, Opening speech to council, October 11, 1962.

# Moved by the Spirit

“It is not that the gospel has changed; it is that we have begun to understand it better. Those who have lived as long as I have . . . were enabled to compare different cultures and traditions, and know that the time has come to discern the signs of the times, to seize the opportunity and to look far ahead”

Pope John XXIII, on his deathbed, June 3, 1963.  
<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-john-xxii>

# “The Signs of the Times”

- Vatican II was part continuity, it “was the 21<sup>st</sup> general, or ecumenical, council in the history of the Catholic church” (Hahnenberg 1).
- And part something entirely new, “radically” different in many ways.
- It was the first positive council, called to examine the goodness of the Church and its relationship to the world, rather than to fight heresy or defend doctrine.
- Pope John wanted to engage the modern world and to reach out to “our separated brothers,” the Orthodox and Protestant churches.

# A Change in Emphasis

- Vatican I was primarily about the primacy of the pope—it promulgated the doctrine of papal infallibility
- Vatican II took a different direction, it was focused on collegiality, the understanding that the pope leads the Church not as a single ruler, but in cooperation with the bishops of the world
- Vatican II looked back to the early Church, the sources of the faith, in order to move forward

# Groundwork Had Been Laid

- Post World War II Europe
- Liturgical movement
- Biblical Scholarship
- Lay movements
- Priest movements
- Papal documents

# *Divino afflante Spiritu* (Inspired by the Holy Spirit) — Pope Pius XII, 1943

- “often called the ‘Magna Carta’ of Catholic biblical scholarship” (*America*, September, 1993).
- Shifted Catholic biblical scholarship from the Latin Vulgate to original sources
- Recognized advances in archaeology and historical research
- Allowed textual criticism using original languages
- Allowed historical-critical method when properly informed by Tradition and the magisterium
- Forerunner to *Dei Verbum*



# *Mediator Dei* (On the Sacred Liturgy)

Pope Pius XII, 1947

- “Laid the foundations for the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council” ([catholic culture.org](http://catholicculture.org), dictionary).
- Emphasized centrality of the Eucharist
- Defended role of the clergy
- Elevated Liturgy of the Hours
- Promoted greater participation by the laity
- Recommended better liturgical catechesis
- Warned against liturgical experimentation

# Preparations for the Council

- For three years, Vatican preparatory commissions drafted over 70 documents for the bishops to consider at the council.
- Vatican curia developed lists of committees for the councils and suggested people from inside the Vatican to lead the committees.
- “The Vatican insiders wanted to see the prepared drafts approved and the Council concluded as quickly as possible, with little or no change to the status quo” (Hahnenberg 3).

# Surprise!

- The bishops wanted their own choices to lead the committees.
- The first session of the council was adjourned after 15 minutes so that the bishops could prepare their own candidate lists.
- The bishops rejected the prepared drafts and had their own experts write new documents.
- These documents were rigorously scrutinized by the bishops and their experts, and debated over in great detail during the council.

# First Session: October-December, 1962

- Discussed liturgy, revelation, communication with the world, ecumenism, and the Church
- No documents published
- Much of the work of the council was done by theologians and other experts between sessions

# Pope Paul VI

- Pope John XXIII died on June 3, 1963
- Pope Paul VI is elected on June 21, 1963
- From educated family, minor nobility, diplomat, advisor to Pius XII, never had a parish; made bishop of Milan in 1954
- Continued Vatican II and was involved, from a distance, in its deliberations
- Implemented the decrees of Vatican II

# Second Session: September-December, 1963

- Discussed liturgy, the Church, bishops, ecumenism, communication
- Published two documents:
  - *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
  - *Inter Mirifica*, The Decree on the Mass Media

# Third Session: September-November, 1964

- Busiest Session
- Discussed huge range of issues from the Bible and revelation, to religious liberty, to the role of bishops, priests, and religious, to the Church in the world
- Published 3 documents:
  - *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
  - *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches
  - *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Decree on Ecumenism

# Fourth Session: September-December, 1965

- Focused on revelation, religious liberty, the Church in the world, priestly formation, and missions
- Published 11 documents (first drafts had been written during previous sessions):
  - *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
  - *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation
  - Also documents on bishops, religious life, priests and priestly formation, Christian education, non-Christian religions, the laity, religious liberty, missions,



# Vatican II Is the Teaching of the Church

- “You can be with the church and therefore follow the council, or you can not follow the council or interpret it in your own way, as you want, and you are not with the church” Pope Francis
- “The council is the magisterium of the church . . . On this point we must be demanding, severe. The council cannot be negotiated”

*Pope Francis to catechists of Italian bishop's conference, Jan. 30 2021*

# Vatican II Set Roman Catholic Liturgy

- “The liturgical books promulgated by Saint Paul VI and Saint John Paul II, in conformity with the decrees of Vatican Council II, are the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite” (Pope Francis, *Traditionis custodes*, Article 1).
- “The bishop of the diocese in which until now there exist one or more groups that celebrate according to the Missal antecedent to the reform of 1970 is to determine that these groups do not deny the validity and the legitimacy of the liturgical reform, dictated by Vatican Council II and the Magisterium of the Supreme Pontiffs” (Article 3, 3.1).