

VATICAN II Fact sheet

The Second Vatican Council opened on October 11, 1962. Pope John XXIII sought to define the nature, scope, and mission of the Church along with more than 2,000 bishops from all over the world.

By the time the Council closed on December 8, 1965, four key documents were drawn up:

- The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*)
- The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*)
- The Constitution of Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*)
- The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*)

As with papal encyclicals (letters), the first few words of the documents are taken as the title and indicate the key message of the text. The Latin titles of the four main documents are:

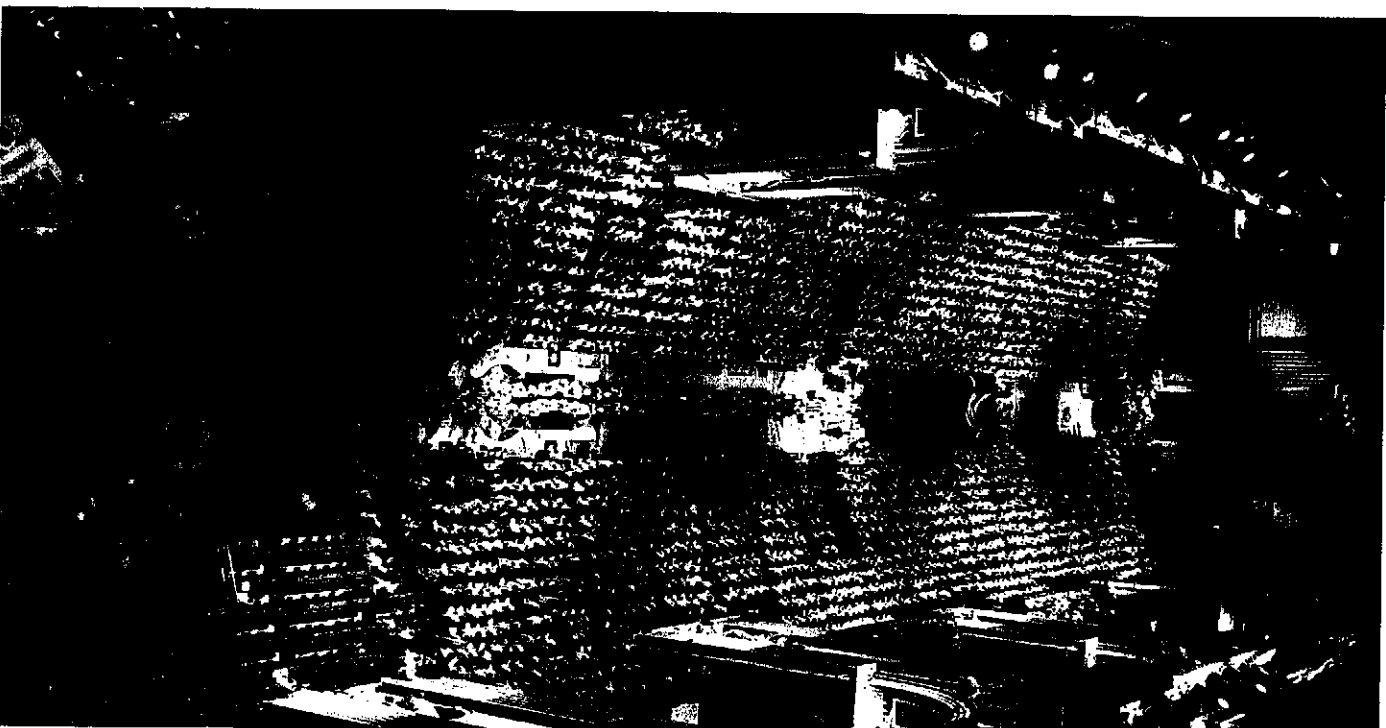
Sacrosanctum Concilium = Sacred Council
Lumen Gentium = Light of the Nations
Dei Verbum = The Word of God
Gaudium et Spes = Joys and Hopes

These constitutions form the heart of the Council's teachings on the mystery of the Church. Twelve other documents expanded on the teaching of the central four:

- Decree on Priestly Training (*Optatam Totius*)
- Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*)
- Decree on Means of Social Communication (*Inter Mirificam*)
- Decree on Mission Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*)
- Declaration on the Relation to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*)
- Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*)
- Decree on the Churches of the Eastern Rite (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*)
- Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*)
- Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops (*Christus Dominus*)
- Decree on Ministry of Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*)
- Decree on Apostolate of Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*)
- Decree on Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis*)

Much of the information on pages 12-14 was adapted from the *National Catholic Reporter*, October 4, 2002, edition, "Vatican II: 40 years later".

www.nacath.org/NCR_Online/archives/100402/vaticanII.htm



The opening session of Vatican II. All sessions were held in the central nave of St. Peter's Basilica (2,500 square metres). Rome.

Who was there

The largest number of bishops in recorded church history attended one or more of Vatican II's sessions: a total of 2,860 bishops from all over the world. (Vatican I had 737 bishops.) Depending on the session, the number of bishops was between 2,000 and 2,500. Several communist countries refused to allow bishops to attend, and some bishops living under repressive regimes were afraid that if they left their countries they would not be allowed back in. As a result, at least 274 bishops could not take part in the council.

Present at the Council were:

- 1,089 bishops from Europe
- 489 bishops from South America
- 404 from North America
- 374 from Asia
- 296 from Africa
- 84 from Central America
- 75 from Oceania
- Observer (non-voting status)
 - 63 Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish religious leaders
 - 52 lay women and men

Vatican II marked the first time that a large number of non-Catholics were invited to attend as guests and observers. And it was also the first time that women—lay and religious—were invited into the council hall, also as observers.

Many bishops brought along an aide, a translator (sessions were conducted in Latin) and a personal *peritus*, or expert. As the bishops waded deeper into new theological and pastoral territory in successive sessions, the number of their advisors and experts increased as well. While numbering about 200 in the first session, *periti* more than doubled, to 484, by the council's end.

CNS file photo

Photo Service - L'Osservatore Romano

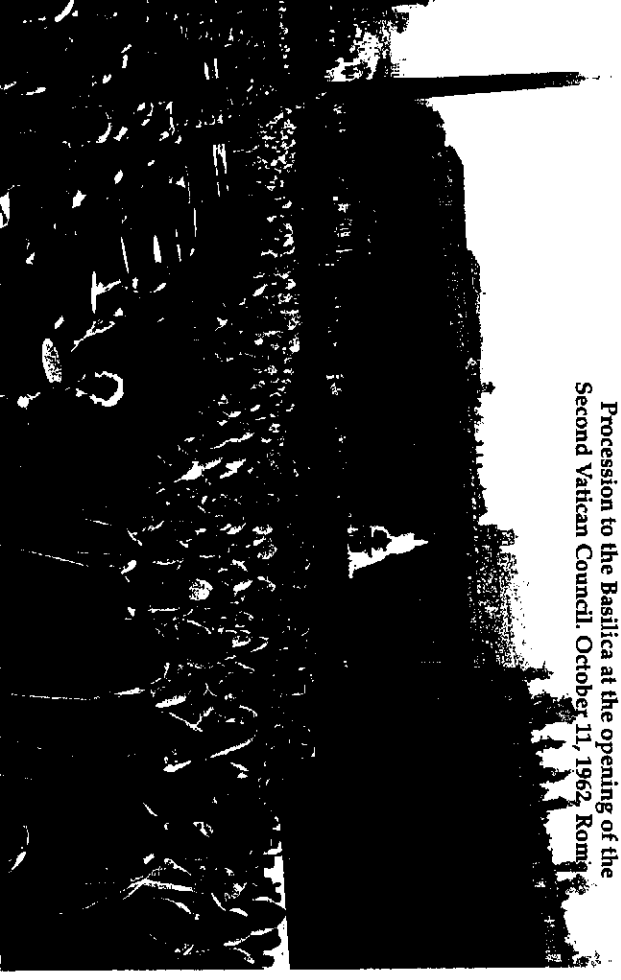


Main themes of Vatican II

- **The church as mystery, or sacrament** — In the words of the late Pope Paul VI, this means that the Church is “imbued with the hidden presence of God.” The Church is called to be a visible, communal sign of the invisible, renewing presence of God in the world and in human history.
- **The people of God** — The Church is first and foremost people. It is also an institution. But it is primarily a community. The church is us — all the baptized.
- **The church as servant** — The mission of the Church includes service to human needs in the social, economic, and political orders, as well as the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments.
- **The church as communion** — a communion between God and ourselves (the vertical dimension) and a communion of ourselves with one another in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (the horizontal dimension). The Church is collegial.
- **The church is ecumenical** — that is, embracing “the whole wide world” of Christians.

Adapted from Fr. Richard P. McBride's, "Essays in Theology," June - August 2011, National Catholic Reporter, www.NCRonline.org

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Procession to the Basilica at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, October 11, 1962, Rome

Glossary of terms

Agglomamento: Italian for "updating", used by Pope John XXIII to describe the church's need to renew and update itself through the Second Vatican Council.

Ecumenical: Literally "universal," from the Greek *oikoumene*, the inhabited world. Used to identify the church's general councils which gathers bishops from all over the world. In the movement for Christian unity, the noun ecumenism has become synonymous with striving for unity among the Christian churches.

Peritus (plural Periti): Latin for "expert." During the Second Vatican Council many bishops brought along their own experts in various disciplines, such as scripture, canon law or theology, to help their understanding of a topic and decision making.

Collegiality: An increased sense of shared authority, or collegiality, among bishops and between them and the pope, was underscored by the Second Vatican Council. Though admittedly a sensitive issue, some level of collegiality is seen in the world synods that have been regularly convoked in Rome since the Council. (*Leonard Foley, OFM, Catholic Update*) During the Council it became clear that the bishops of the world wanted to take more responsibility for the world-wide church and to act more collegially through National Bishops Conferences.



How councils evolved

The Second Vatican Council was the 21st council in church history and was so named because it was the second council to be held at the Vatican. The Acts of the Apostles records the church's first official council: the council of Jerusalem in 51 AD. There the early church, under Peter's leadership (following his own personal "conversion" experience), decided that converts to the new Christian faith were not to be obliged to make their entry through Judaism. The council ruled that new Christians did not need to follow Jewish practices such as circumcision and dietary laws. Here we have the first written record of church collegiality as the apostles conveyed their decision to the believers in Antioch: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us..." (*Acts 15:28*)

By the second century, church documents show that bishops from Africa to Greece were regularly getting together to decide matters of church teaching and pastoral practice in regional meetings, synods and councils. Until the strong centralization of the papacy at the end of the first millennium, many of these regional councils were called at the bishops' own initiative; in some cases the pope was not even notified, or learned of their respective deliberations when the news finally made its way to Rome, sometime after several years.

... The first eight ecumenical councils were held in the East (starting in 325 AD): two in Nicaea, four in Constantinople, and one each in Ephesus and Chalcedon. The remaining 13 were held in the West: Lateran Councils I through V at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran in Rome, Vatican I and II at the Vatican, and one Council in Florence. Trent became a second home to many bishops (and their successors), running in 25 sessions over 18 years (Trent was interrupted by wars, internal politics, unrest among the faithful, and even the plague.) Two councils were held in Lyons, France.

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Blessed John XXIII

Pope John XXIII died on June 3, 1963, after Vatican II's first session. Just three months later, in September 1963, his successor, Pope Paul VI, reconvened the council. If a pope dies during a council, it is automatically suspended unless or until another pope reconvenes it.

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Pope Paul VI

VATICAN II... A timeline

1959 June 5: Pope John XXIII announces his intention of convening an ecumenical council

WORLD EVENTS

Fidel Castro becomes premier of Cuba
Hawaii becomes the 50th state
Karl Barth publishes *Dogmatics in Outline*
Films include *Ben Hur* and *La Dolce Vita*

1960 June 5: Preparatory commissions and secretariats for the council set up by *motu proprio*, meaning under the pope's personal authority, to prepare draft documents for the council to consider

WORLD EVENTS

US U-2 spy plane shot down over Russia
Belgian Congo granted full independence
John F. Kennedy elected president of the United States
Aboriginal peoples in Canada given right to vote without having to give up treaty rights
Films include *Psycho* and *The Apartment*

1961 Dec. 25: The council is formally summoned

WORLD EVENTS

President John F. Kennedy inaugurates the Peace Corps
UN General Assembly condemns apartheid
Unsuccessful invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs
Berlin Wall constructed
Irving Stone publishes *The Agony and the Ecstasy*
Michael Ramsey appointed archbishop of Canterbury
Meeting of the World Council of Churches in Delhi
Films include *West Side Story*
Russian Yuri Gagarin orbits the Earth
Alan Shepard makes the first US space flight

1962 Oct. 11-Dec. 8: First session of the council meets

WORLD EVENTS

Cuban missile crisis
Uganda and Tanganyika become independent
Films include *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Cleopatra*
Drs. F.H.C. Crick, M.H.F. Wilkins and J.D. Watson win Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology for determining the molecular structure of DNA

1963 June 3: Pope John XXIII dies

June 21: Pope Paul VI elected; announces to continue the council

Sept. 29-Dec. 4: Second session of the council meets

WORLD EVENTS

Civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama; Martin Luther King Jr. arrested and 3,000 troops called out by President Kennedy
200,000 Freedom Marchers descend on Washington to protest discrimination
Nuclear test ban treaty signed by the United States, Soviet Union and Great Britain
President John F. Kennedy assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas
Kenya becomes independent republic
Morris L. West publishes *The Shoes of the Fisherman*
Hannah Arendt publishes *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*
Films include *The Cardinal*, *The Birds* and *Dr. Strangelove*
Beatlemania begins

1964 Sept. 14-Nov. 21: Third session of the council meets

WORLD EVENTS

US destroyer attacked off North Vietnam's coast; US aircraft attack North Vietnam bases
Race riots break out in cities across the US as reaction against enforcement of civil rights laws
UN Peace Force takes over in Cyprus
Films include *Lord of the Flies*, *A Hard Day's Night*, *Zorba the Greek* and *My Fair Lady*

1965 Sept. 14-Dec. 8: Fourth session of the council meets

Dec. 4: Prayer Service for Promoting Christian Unity held at St. Paul Outside the Walls
Dec. 8: The Second Vatican Council is solemnly ended; extraordinary Jubilee Year proclaimed to familiarize the faithful with the teachings of the council

WORLD EVENTS

Pope Paul VI addresses UN assembly in New York
Outbreaks of racial violence in Selma, Alabama; Martin Luther King Jr. leads march of 4,000 people from Selma to Montgomery
Race riots in Watts district of Los Angeles; 35 dead, 4,000 arrests
Thousands take part in student-led demonstration in Washington against US bombing of North Vietnam
Films include *Help*, *Dr. Zhivago* and *The Sound of Music*

Adaptation of a timeline compiled by Gary Macy, theology professor at the University of San Diego.



VATICAN II... A litany

By Mike MacDonald, Catechetical Coordinator

Reproduced, with permission, from his "Catechetics with Mike" blog on the website of the Archdiocese of Regina, Saskatchewan

The year 2012 is the 50th anniversary of the first session of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Rather than focus on the actual changes promulgated by the Council, Fr. John O'Malley, S.J., suggests that the "style" of Vatican II is its most distinctive feature. Do you agree? Do we maintain that style today in Catechetics and in other areas of Church life?

Here, in part, is what Fr. O'Malley says. The literary form and the vocabulary were the constitutive elements of the distinctive style of discourse of Vatican II. The style of Vatican II, as is always the case, influenced content, just as the content of some of the decrees of Vatican II influenced the form... Perhaps that style of Vatican II can be summarized by a simple litany that indicates some of the elements in the change in style of the Church indicated by the Council's vocabulary:

- **from commands to ideals**
- **from passivity to activity**
- **from ruling to serving**
- **from vertical to horizontal**
- **from exclusion to inclusion**
- **from hostility to friendship**
- **from static to changing**
- **from prescriptive to principled**
- **from retrospective to forward-looking**
- **from definitive to open-ended**
- **from threat to invitation**
- **from behavior modification to conversion of heart**
- **from the dictates of law to the dictates of conscience**
- **from external conformity to the joyful pursuit of holiness**

Every one of those phrases needs a thousand qualifications, but the litany as a whole conveys the sweep of the change in the style of church held up for our contemplation and actualization by the Second Vatican Council. **This is the substantive teaching or doctrine of Vatican II.**

"Trent and Vatican II: Two Styles of Church," by John W. O'Malley, S.J., in Raymond F. Bulman & Frederick J. Parrella (editors), From Trent to Vatican II: Historical and Theological Investigations. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)