

## Council, Controversy, Conversion, and Communion

A Six-Week Course on the Second Vatican Council

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Outline for Session 1 – October 5, 2021

- I. Introduction: Nearly sixty years after the end of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), some Catholics are only vaguely aware of its impact on the Catholic Church. For others, Vatican II stands out profoundly—with some people praising it and others rejecting or questioning it.
  - A. Vatican II is history but not “ancient history”, not irrelevant to the present.
  - B. This course is called “Council, Controversy, Conversion, and Communion”.
  - C. The course will examine:
    1. The **Council** itself: why it was called, what it said, and what it did
    2. The **Controversy** around the Council’s teachings and their implementation
    3. The **Conversion** the Council sought to foster among Catholics
    4. The **Communion** as the Council understood God to call all people to have with him and with one another
- II. Why Vatican II?
  - A. Background to Vatican II as the 21<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church
    1. Pope St John XXIII announced on January 25, 1959 his calling of a General or Ecumenical Council
    2. Ecumenical council = a council of all the world’s Catholic bishops (“Ecumenical” here shouldn’t be confused with the term as used when we talk about ecumenism, the effort to emphasize and foster unity among Christians)
      - a. Not all councils are ecumenical councils; some include only a small segment of the world’s Catholic bishops
      - b. Synod of Bishops is a select group of bishops, not an ecumenical council
    3. 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council: Council of Nicaea, in 325, addressed the controversy regarding the equal divinity of the Son in the Trinity; Nicene Creed came from this Council
    4. Ecumenical Councils usually address major theological controversies, moral issues, institutional failures and crises
    5. Vatican II followed Vatican I (1869-1870)
      - a. Vatican I dealt with issues of faith and reason, and defined the dogma of papal infallibility
      - b. Some thought papal infallibility would mean no more ecumenical councils but they were mistaken
      - c. Vatican I was supposed to follow its treatment of the papacy with a more general discussion of the nature of the Church, including the role of bishops, but the Franco-Prussian war forced Pius IX to suspend the Council
  - B. Pope St John XXIII’s reasons for calling the Council
    1. He envisioned the Council would, figuratively speaking, be like a new Pentecost—the Holy Spirit would renew the Church for mission in the modern age
    2. He sought to consider the growth of Catholicism, restoration of “sound morals” among Catholics, appropriate adaptation of Church discipline to conditions of the times, and to offer an invitation to other Christians “to seek and find that unity for which Jesus Christ prayed so ardently to his Father in heaven” (encyclical *Ad Petri Cathedram*, June 29, 1959)

3. Wittingly or unwittingly, John XXII's call carried out earlier popes' desire to conclude Vatican I and address some of its outstanding concerns
  4. Period leading up to Vatican II was tumultuous: post-World War II, Cold War between the West (led by US) and the East (led by Communist USSR), Atomic Age, the newly established United Nations, the emerging independent nations of former colonial powers, modern technologies of mass media, modern questioning of traditional ideas, values, and cultures
- C. Movements influencing John XXIII in calling Vatican II and affecting other church leaders at the Council
1. "The Long Nineteenth Century" idea of historians: 1879 (French Revolution) -1914 (beginning of World War 1) sometimes applied to the Church, except it runs from 1879-1958, the year of the election of Pope John XXIII
  2. Something to this outlook but it inadequately assesses the developments that shaped John XXIII and others; the transition out of the "Long Nineteenth Century" began well before 1958
  3. Various movements in the Church providing the background to Vatican II, later serving as catalysts to bishops' thoughts about how to help the Church's faithful to be more faithful and effective in her life and mission
    - a. George Weigel's stress on **Leonine Revolution** (Pope Leo XIII, pope: 1878-1903) —the Catholic Church under Pope Leo XIII and the "gingerly" exploring of modernity: recovery of philosophy of St Thomas (*Aeterni Patris*, 1879), Catholic engagement on social, economic, and political issues (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891, et al.), biblical studies (*Providentissimus Deus*, 1893), despite the emerging Modernist crisis—modernity and Modernism aren't the same thing. More on that later.
    - b. **Biblical movement; liturgical movement** in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pope Pius XII added papal imprimatur and further impetus to these renewal movements through his encyclicals *Divino Affante Spiritu* (1943) and *Mediator Dei* (1947)
    - c. **Ressourcement theology** of the 1930s-1940s, "return to the sources", emphasized:
      - 1) return to St Thomas Aquinas himself over commentators' interpretations and the highly elaborate framework they had constructed
      - 2) recovery of other scholastics in addition to St Thomas Aquinas
      - 3) patristic Recovery of the early Christian writers and their ideas, the Church Fathers, as a way to refresh and enrich theology and spirituality
      - 4) men such as Fr Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Yves Congar, and Louis Bouyer emerged and, though criticized and persecuted as purveyors of the "New Theology", influenced the ideas that would shape Vatican II, at which they would be periti— theological experts
      - 5) broader theological and philosophical enrichment aided by thinkers such as Romano Guardini, Karl Adam, Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Gabriel Marcel, among others
    - d. **Early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic literary revival** in France, England, and America showed how Catholicism could be a vital force for cultural engagement. It included such notable writers as Leon Bloy, Paul Claudel, Charles Peguy, George Bernanos, Francois Mauriac, Sigrid Undset, G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Gertrude von le Fort, Ronald Knox, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Thomas Merton, and Flannery O'Connor

#### D. Vatican II on the reasons for Vatican II:

1. “This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, paragraph no. 1).
2. Four aims of Vatican II according to Vatican II summarized—inward directed goals (ad intra) and outward directed goals (ad extra):
  - a. **Impart ever-increasing vigor** to the Christian life: universal call to holiness (ad intra)
  - b. **Adapt adaptable institutions** to the needs of the present. **Ressourcement** and **Aggiornamento** are key ideas here. Ressourcement—return to the sources of the Christian life, to foster growth in faith, hope, and charity, order to discern what may be changed (adapted, updated, **aggiornamento**) and among things that may be changed what ought to be changed to serve the life and mission of the Church. (ad intra)
  - c. **Foster Christian unity**: ecumenism (ad extra). Vatican II presumes an underlying, extant communion among Christians and seeks to deepen it.
  - d. **Strengthen whatever can help call all mankind into the Church**: catholic, universal mission of the Church; evangelize the whole world (ad extra)

#### III. What Vatican II Really Said: An Overview of Vatican II and Common Myths

##### A. An overview of Vatican II

1. Vatican II wasn't called to address some existing doctrinal, moral, or institutional crisis but to help the Church reinvigorate her life and mission
2. John XXIII wanted a different style from previous councils that corrected errors often by condemnation and confrontation; he thought the moment called for defending and promoting doctrine, maintaining the same content with more accessible language, but with “the medicine of mercy rather than weapons of severity”
3. Vatican II did not have canons condemning specific heresies and anathematizing those who culpably espoused them, as other councils; its approach is more expositional of church teaching and more dialogical in style, though it did have some condemnations
4. Basics of who, what, when, and where
  - a. 2,500 or so of the Catholic bishops of the world met in St Peter's Basilica. As many as 3,000 over the course of 4 years, including priests, lay observers (including some women) and non-Catholics (some 33 or so from various churches and church groups)
  - b. Bishops = 1/3 from Western countries (13% from US and Canada), 22% from Latin America, 10% from Asia, 10% sub-Saharan Africa; 3.5% Arab world; 2.5% Oceania. Approximately 2% from Eastern bloc countries.
  - c. 4 sessions over four years, 1962-1965, each session in fall, 2-3 months
  - d. John XXIII died between first and second sessions; Pope Paul VI elected and he was really the Pope of Vatican II
  - e. Bishops and their theological experts (*periti*) debated documents; bishops wound up take more control of the conciliar process than the Roman congregations and others originally envisioned; bishops insisted on revised documents; didn't just rubberstamp things

- f. Official gatherings: **public sessions** presided over by the Pope; **general congregations** at which bishops discussed and debated documents (in Latin; 8-minute interventions); **commissions**, which amended documents based in bishops' comments. 2/3 approval vote required in official session
- g. Theological experts involved in various ways and to various degrees included Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict), Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, Jean Danielou, Hans Kung, Edward Schillebeeckx, among others; these men would later debate the proper interpretation of the Council
- h. Unofficial gatherings including lectures, discussions, coffee klatches, private conversations, impromptu talks, and seminars by bishops, theologians, journalists, and others in and around Rome, aimed at influencing the Council or public's perception of it.
- i. "Politics in religion" aspect—different groups and divisions
  - 1) **"The Rhine Flows into the Tiber"** approach (based on the book of that title)—influence of those bishops and their assistants from countries along the Rhine River (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands—with nearby Belgium). The "Tiber" refers to the Council itself, which was at St Peter's, next to the Tiber River.
  - 2) Majority v minority
    - a) Progressive/reformist majority vs conservative minority
    - b) Progressive/reformist majority tended to reflect the influence of the biblical, patristic (ressourcement) movements, with more openness to adaptation and Christian engagement with modernity
    - c) Conservative minority tended to be more concerned about the risks to the Church in seeking to go behind the established, dominant synthesis in theology and had concerns about the risks of adaptation to the stability of the Church
    - d) Both groups played a role in formulating Vatican II's teaching. Neither party was Vatican II; what was ultimately agreed upon by them was and is the teaching of Vatican II—not the opinions of theologians of any camp.**
    - e) Actually, there were three groups at Vatican II: **two groups of the progressive majority; one group of conservatives.** The two progressive groups' differences were not as evident at the time as they would later be. These two groups would later contest the interpretation of Vatican II. Sometimes referred to now by names they would later come to have from their respective association with two theological journals leading members eventually came to be involved with: **Concilium** and **Communio**. More on that in later class sessions.
- j. What did Vatican II say?
  - 1) A lot: 400p book worth; most documents from an ecumenical council in history
  - 2) 4 Constitutions, 9 Decrees, 3 Declarations
    - a) **4 Constitutions**—dogmatic Constitutions on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and the pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). Constitutions treat fundamental issues and are key to understanding the other documents.
    - b) **9 Decrees**—decrees apply the principles of the Constitutions to specific groups of people and apostolates. *Christus Dominus* is the decree on bishops, for example. *Unitatis Redintegratio* is the decree on Ecumenism. Decrees on laity, missionary activity, bishops, media, ministry and life of priests, Eastern Catholic Churches, religious life, and ecumenism.

- c) **3 Declarations**—declarations tended to cover more contingent issues, subject to greater modification or revisions due to circumstances. Declarations on religious freedom, non-Christian religions, and Christian education.
  - B. Three common myths
    - 1. **Myth: Vatican II wholly revised Catholic worship.** It didn't, as we will see when we study *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.
    - 2. **Myth: Vatican II made the Church optional for salvation.** It didn't, as we will see when we study *Lumen Gentium*. Possible for those not visibly in communion to be saved by Christ but this doesn't make Church optional for those who know of the obligation to be in visible communion with the Church.
    - 3. **Myth: Vatican II sought a radical break with the Church's past.** It didn't. In 2005 Benedict XVI explained why the Council hadn't been fully implemented—due to debate of proper interpretation (hermeneutic), a misunderstanding implying a radical break.
      - a. Hermeneutic of rupture and discontinuity vs a hermeneutic of reform in continuity.
      - b. Vatican II intended a hermeneutic of reform in continuity.
      - c. Thus, Vatican II was neither a radical break with past nor an event at which nothing happened; genuine reform involves both continuity and discontinuity. The discontinuity part of a larger, deeper continuity.
      - d. More on the myths to come, especially the debate over the proper hermeneutic of the Council.
- IV. Why It Matters Today
- A. Vatican II a major event in church history, but not just “history”—still effects us today; still the official teaching of the Church.
  - B. All 5 popes since Vatican II have affirmed it; John Paul II and Benedict made a point of expounding the teaching of Vatican II.
  - C. To reject Vatican II or treat it as irrelevant or optional is tantamount to rejecting the teaching office of the Church (magisterium) as it has interpreted and applied Tradition for over half a century.
    - 1) This is to question tacitly the Holy Spirit's guidance of the Church.
    - 2) It risks establishing oneself as the Magisterium over against the Apostolic authority established by Jesus: “He who hears you hears me.”
    - 3) Catholics are obliged to receive authoritative Church teaching pertaining to faith and morals, even when that teaching isn't presented in an irreformable (infallibly) way.
    - 4) Catholics may respectfully debate interpretation and implementation of the Council, and to some degree, depending on their competence, may respectfully critique how the teaching is presented, but they are generally obligated to accept the teaching as involved with their belonging to the community of faith.
    - 5) Sometimes Catholics may have to struggle prayerfully, humbly, conscientiously, and inquisitively to receive Catholic teaching, but the teaching isn't for that reason “optional” or a question of personal “preference”; authoritative teachers, such as the Pope and the vast majority of the college of bishops teaching in unity with him, can reasonably expect faithful Catholics will receive their teaching as that of the Church.
    - 6) Vatican II is part of that authoritative teaching, and should be received by Catholics, even while they may have questions, concerns, and struggles.