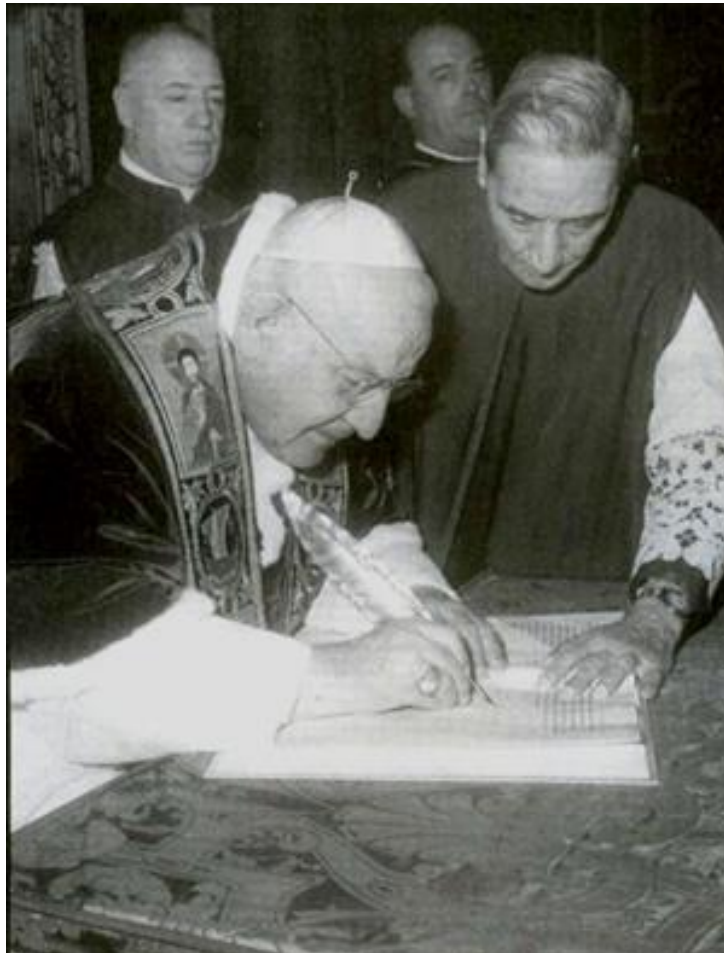


The Second Vatican Council 50 Years On



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"Good Pope John and his Council"

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**and the 50th anniversary
of the opening of the**

Second Vatican Council

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1. Catholic Life Before the Second Vatican Council

Golden anniversary

This year we celebrate the most important event in the Catholic Church in the 20th century; the opening of the Second Vatican Council, fifty years ago. Only Catholics over 60 years old will remember what life was like and how different it was, before the reforms of the Council.

Canterbury Outdoor Procession

In September 1947 Archbishop Peter Amigo shouted at me! It was very public and a little unfair, as I was only 8 years old and did not know that I was holding his crozier round the wrong way! Very caustically, and in a loud voice, he asked, 'are you the bishop or am I?' The Archbishop of Southwark, had pride of place in the annual outdoor Canterbury Procession, typical of many similar outdoor processions, up and down the country, at that time. Thousands of Catholics were bused in from all around SE England and South London. The procession of 3 to 4 thousand could not be more public or triumphant. It started at the Anglican church of St Dunstan, at the west end of the mile long high street, and processed, with singing and many splendid banners, to the Dane John park at the other end. Two beautifully vested deacons collected from the church the casket containing the head of St Thomas More, kept in the vaults of that church, and, with the Archbishop, led the procession. On arrival in the park there was rosary, sermon and Benediction. It is totally inconceivable that such an event could take place in 2012, yet in the 1950s such outdoor processions to celebrate, for example, Corpus Christi and Our Lady in May, were popular annual, events in most Catholic parishes.

Devotional life.

The devotional life of the average Catholic, before the Council, was strong, but it was mainly rosary-based. No service ever seemed to take place without the recitation of the rosary. Many Catholics 'said' their rosary during the Sunday Latin Mass and in October (month of the Holy Rosary) public Masses were often punctuated with decades of the rosary led by a priest, other than the celebrant. (There were priests to spare in those days.) There being no evening Masses on a Sunday, churches were full for the service of Rosary, Sermon and Benediction. Weekly evening services were also well supported; especially the Miraculous Medal services on a Tuesday evening.

Rosary Crusade

It seems hard to imagine now hundreds of coaches turning up at the old Wembley stadium for a day about family prayer. But that is what happened in July 1952 when 83,000 Catholics packed the famous football stadium to hear the American priest, Fr Peyton, preach and exhort families to pray the rosary together every day. The rally was a great success and parish services based on reciting the rosary increased. As, one hopes, did praying the rosary in the family.

Devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

There was a strong devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and very many Catholics had their homes dedicated to the Sacred Heart. This was linked, in many minds, with the desire to die a holy death. For example, the devotion to the Sacred Heart on the First Nine Fridays, (that is receiving Holy Communion on the first Friday of nine consecutive months) promised a happy and holy death and final salvation. This devotion was so ingrained that one Catholic Secondary School - St Paul's, in Plumstead, London SE 18 - had the following wording in its Admission application. 'Confirm that your child has made the First Nine Fridays' !.

Legalism

Every modern Catholic knows that our worship, prior to the Council, was conducted in Latin, but few realise how rigid the rules, for the priest, were governing how the Mass was to be celebrated. For example, when the celebrant turned round to greet the people with, 'Dominus vobiscum', the rules dictated that his fingers were not to be higher than his shoulders and the space between his hands no wider than his chest ! Few modern Catholics realise the legalism that ruled in the lives of pre-Vatican II Catholics. There follow three simple examples and then an extreme, but very real, one.

Mass Attendance

Recent commentators have drawn attention to the substantial drop in Mass attendance, comparing today's figures with those of the 1950's. Numbers have indeed dropped but two factors have not been taken into account. First, very many Catholics went to Sunday Mass because they were frightened not to!

Every Catholic child had been brought up to believe that to miss Mass on Sunday was a mortal sin; which meant you were on the way to damnation, unless you could get to confession pretty quickly. If you had 'good cause' it could be just a venial sin, or no sin at all. That was for the confessor to judge. But what constituted a 'good cause'? Regularly people confessed 'I missed Mass on Sunday'. On closer questioning the confessor would often discover that the person had been ill. Then there is no sin, the confessor would say. The penitent would frequently then ask, 'how ill do I have to be, not to be committing a mortal sin'? The general rule of thumb used by confessors was, "if you were too ill to leave the house, you were too ill to go to Mass".

There were many devout Catholics who went to Mass twice on a Sunday, because, at that time, if a person wanted to go to Holy Communion they had to have fasted from midnight. This was strictly adhered to, so at the Sunday morning early Mass, say 8am, a large number of the congregation went up for Holy Communion. Most of whom, fearful that they might be in a sinful state, had been to confession the day before. Many of these would return for the late morning Mass, at, say, 11am, at which no one, except the celebrant received Holy Communion. Neither of the above factors are taken into account when Mass-going numbers of the 1950s are compared with the numbers of people freely attending these days.

Fasting

There were 28 days of fasting and abstinence in the years before the Second Vatican Council. These days were the Fridays and Saturdays of Lent, the Ember Days (4 groups of 3 days in the year) Christmas Eve, and the vigils of Pentecost and the feast of the Immaculate Conception. It was a mortal sin not to fast and abstain from meat on these days, so there was great anxiety not to miss, for example, an Ember day. There was further anxiety about not sinfully exceeding the food limits. One full meal was permitted with no limit given, but for breakfast one was allowed only two ounces of food and eight ounces for lunch. The average busy Catholic had no time to get out scales and weigh the corn flakes and toast, so just made a stab at it. But frequently this left conscientious Catholics feeling a little guilty that perhaps they had not got it right. Another reason to get to Saturday Confession.

Kissing and embracing

The pre-Council Church had all angles covered; even 'kissing'. The Moral Theology handbook stated, *'kissing as done as a sign of politeness and friendship is lawful, even between persons of the opposite sex'*. However, *'kissing, using the tongue, is usually seriously sinful'*. (It is worthy of note that the Moral Theologians who wrote on these issues were all celibate males!)

The Theatre Law

Most modern Catholics do not know that before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) if a Catholic priest, living and working in England or Wales, went to the theatre he committed a mortal sin and was automatically excommunicated! That severe penalty applied equally to Opera, Ballet and Shakespeare's plays. The ban came into effect and applied once the seminarian, training for the Priesthood, was ordained a subdeacon (a step on the journey to Ordination which no longer exists). In the weeks before ordination it was customary for seminarians to go out to the West End on an orgy of theatre visits, taking in opera, ballet and West End shows, before the law forbade it. The Law dated from the Westminster Council of 1873 and details can be found in the Clergy Review of April 1958 (pp 237-239). The over-bearing legalism that existed at that time is illustrated by the debate that took place between Canon lawyers, in their learned reviews. The question debated was 'Does the priest incur a mortal sin and automatic excommunication when he buys the ticket or when, having bought the ticket, he actually crosses the threshold of the theatre? It beggars belief now, in our more liberal post-Vatican II Church, that great minds could be exercised on such a question.

Liberation

Given the minutiae of the Laws that Catholics were expected to live by it really is no wonder that 'Catholic guilt' was mocked and lampooned by stand-up comics in the 1950s; which Catholics found offensive, but found it impossible to deny. As the reforms of the Council became known and appreciated, people learnt that they were God's 'Pilgrim People' journeying through the desert of this world and not constantly sinful members of a perfect institution that expected perfection of them.

2. Good Pope John and His Council

Secular tribute

If, on 4th June 1963, you had been traveling by train into London, bound for Charing Cross, you would have witnessed an historic moment in British history. As you rumbled across Hungerford Bridge you would have seen, to your left and right, the Union Jack flying at half mast from six or seven Government buildings. It was the day after the death of Blessed Pope John XXIII and never before had a British Government ordered mourning at the death of a pope. It was a remarkable turnaround and spoke volumes for the love and respect that Good Pope John (a title given to him by the Protestant Press) had won from all sections of society. If, on leaving Charing Cross station, you had walked up the Strand to the Sheed and Ward bookshop you would have found two books prominently displayed, full of the Pope's jokes and humour. One of the jokes reflects Pope John's character.

'At an audience with the Pope the flustered Religious Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit introduced herself as 'the Superior of the Holy Spirit'. To which the Pope replied, with a smile, 'It's good to meet you, I am but his humble servant'!

Following the aristocratic and aloof Pope Pius XII it was as much John's openness, loving interest in everyone and evident humility, on top of his jovial approach to life, that won hearts and minds.

Humble origins

Angelo Roncalli, born 25th November 1881, was of a large, poor family, from the small farming community of Sotto il Monte, ten miles from Bergamo in the Italian foothills of the Alps. He had 11 brothers and sisters and the family shared their home with their six cows! At 12 he went to the junior seminary at Bergamo. Gaining a scholarship, he moved to Rome and gained his first degree in theology in 1901; but later that year he had to join the 73rd Infantry Regiment to do his national service. Although he hated it and was deeply shocked by army 'culture', he rose to the rank of sergeant. Matured by his experiences he returned to his studies and gained his doctorate in theology in 1904; his ordination followed the same year. At first he lectured at the seminary and then became the bishop of Bergamo's secretary.

Frontline experience

When Italy, in 1915, became caught up in the First World War Father Roncalli was recalled to military service. Back with his regiment, Sergeant Roncalli worked as a hospital orderly and experienced all the horrors of the front-line trenches. He served for over 3 years and never lost his horror of war. He returned to clerical life and in February 1925 he was drafted into the Vatican's diplomatic service. Throughout his life Angelo Roncalli demonstrated his humility by his total obedience. He was appointed Apostolic Visitor to Bulgaria, a dead-end post that no other Vatican diplomat would accept. There were very few Catholics in Bulgaria, but Archbishop Roncalli built excellent relationships with the Greek Orthodox and the Muslim communities. Ten years later he was transferred to another unpopular posting, this time in Turkey, where there were even few Catholics.

Saving Jewish people

During the Second World War Archbishop Roncalli used his diplomatic position to secure visas to help thousands of Jews to escape the Nazi regime. The liberation of France in 1945 by the Allied armies created a massive headache for the Church. The French cardinal, Suhard, along with a number of bishops, were accused of collaboration with the Nazis. The Pope, Pius XII, remembered Roncalli, off the scene in Turkey, and telegraphed him to go immediately to Paris, as his personal representative, to sort out the mess. In the following nine years, through gentle diplomacy and humble sanctity, deep wounds in French Church- State relationships were healed. Cardinal Roncalli - because Pope Pius XII rewarded his remarkable success with the red hat - was widely acclaimed by all in Church and State.

Pastoral work, at last!

Within a year or two he was appointed Patriarch of Venice. Angelo Roncalli was delighted for at last, at the age of 71, he was free of the diplomatic service and he had a role that he had always wanted; he could be a real pastor to his Venetian people. The Venetians took him to their hearts. In his introduction to them he spoke of his early years of poverty and how blessed he had been to meet so many people of different religions and ideologies, in his life's journey. He closed with these words, 'No doubt the great position entrusted to me exceeds all my capacities. But above all I commend to your kindness someone who simply wants to be your brother, kind, approachable and understanding'.

False facade

The new Patriarch soon discovered that the Baroque splendour seen by tourists was hollow; there was no money in the bank! Funds were so low that he could not afford to have his own transport. If he wanted to visit a parish he would ring up the police or fire brigade and ask if they could give him a lift, if one of their launches was passing his way! But he had never been happier; he was immersed in pastoral work and ecumenical relations. He wrote at this time, 'Now I am administering to souls...I desire and think of nothing else but to live and die for the souls entrusted to me'.

His Synod

As secretary of the Bishop of Bergamo, 45 years earlier, he had witnessed the value of a gathering of diocesan clergy; he immediately set about summoning a council, or synod, of his 15 bishops and clergy of the Patriarchate. His pastoral plan for Venice was put to the Synod in St Mark's Basilica from 25th to 27th November 1957. The next year, on 3rd October, he learnt of the death of Pope Pius XII. Three days later he bought a return train ticket from Venice to Rome for the funeral and the conclave. Cardinal Roncalli did not dream that he only needed a single!

The Conclave

Following the funeral there were two weeks of preparation, during which the small groups of cardinal electors, only numbering 51, discussed the 'job description' of the sort of pope the Church needed in 1958. Twenty four of the cardinals were older than Angelo Roncalli, who was a sprightly 77-year-old. The secrecy of the conclave descended on 25th October. It was a relatively tough contest; Roncalli did not receive the two thirds plus one votes needed, until the afternoon of 28th. He took the name John XXIII and he wrote in his diary, *'about three hundred thousand people applauded me on St Peter's balcony. The arc-lights stopped me from seeing anything other than a shapeless, heaving mass.'*

Beginning of a new Age

There can be no doubt that Cardinal Roncalli had been the candidate of the conservative Italian cardinals who looked for, and expected, a safe, traditional pair of hands to keep the status quo ticking over for a few years, until a more suitable candidate emerged. They totally misjudged their man. No one was expecting such energy or creative pastoral thinking; many were stunned. As *Time Magazine* of November 1958 put it:

'If anyone expected Roncalli to be a mere caretaker Pope, providing a transition to the next reign, he destroyed the notion within minutes of his election. He stomped in boldly like the owner of the place, throwing open windows and moving the furniture around.'

In his first speech he announced the two major themes that would mark his pontificate; unity and peace. He immediately followed that up by sending good wishes to the Orthodox Churches and *'all who are separated from this Apostolic See'*. The Roman Curia were not impressed and some were alarmed. The new Pope set out to gain their confidence and, by his actions, showed that he wanted to work with them, rather than against them.

Christmas in prison

As Bishop of Rome he did something new; he spent much of Christmas Day with the sick children of the Bambin'Gesù hospital and Boxing Day with the prisoners in the Regina Coeli prison. The new pastoral style was clear to all and the new pontificate got underway with the Press writing glowing stories, and audiences with the new Pope marked by their informality and lack of protocol.

Idea of a Council

Only two days after his election, on 30th October, Pope John shared with his secretary, Dom Capovilla, his idea of having a General Council. He discussed his thoughts with a few close friends and he met a mixed reception. He finally made up his mind in January and a few days later he nervously announced to all the cardinals, at a consistory, his intention to have a synod for the Diocese of Rome and an ecumenical council for the universal Church. Pope John was bitterly disappointed by the lack of reaction from the cardinals; they remained stony-faced!

What sort of Council?

Behind the scenes an epic struggle concerning the very nature of the Council began. Was it to be, as Pope John wanted, a Council of renewal and reform, or was it to be, as the Curia wanted, a defensive Council that would condemn modern errors.

3. The Struggle for the Council

'Journal of a Soul'

Blessed Pope John XXIII was the first pope in Church history to keep a personal diary. From the age of fourteen until his death at the age of 82, Pope John kept what he called his 'Journal of a Soul', jotting down in school exercise books, on odd pieces of paper, and old diaries, the record of his growth in holiness. In that personal record is reflected the breadth of his mind, his simplicity and the love that shone out of him for every one who came to visit him and for the whole world.

A life of maturing influences

Extracts from a 'Journal of a Soul' were published by Geoffrey Chapman in 1964. They reveal the gradual deepening of his understanding of himself and the emergence, from the moody adolescent and impetuous youth to the confident figure who amply filled the Chair of St Peter. The Diary records his career in the Church that took him to many parts of the world and gave him an experience of people and affairs which might well have embittered a lesser man. The first shock of his military service as a conscript at the age of 20; his bitter experiences, as orderly and chaplain, in the First World War trenches; the long period of isolation in Bulgaria and Turkey, under a regime hostile to all he stood for, apparently forgotten by Rome; the delicate diplomatic work in post-War France, when misunderstanding of the Church was at its height. Finally the joy of pastoral work in Venice followed by his struggle, as Pope, to provide the Church with the reforming Council that it so clearly needed.

Hostile reception

Pope John was bitterly disappointed when, on 25th January 1959, he enthusiastically shared his idea of calling a General Council of the Church, with the Cardinals of the Curia, to be met with total indifference and apathy. The Curia were prepared to humour the old man and accept the project as long as they could control the preparations. From long experience the curial cardinals knew that he who controls the agenda controls the meeting!

Ecumenical dimension

From his twenty years in Bulgaria and Turkey Pope John was very aware of the need for dialogue with the Orthodox Churches and he wanted the Council, above all else, to be pastoral with a strong ecumenical dimension. Those Catholics, like Fr Jan Willebrands (later cardinal), who had been ploughing a lone furrow for Ecumenism, for many years, began pulling as many strings as they could to ensure that other Christians had some participation in the Council. None of this met with the approval of the old guard. Pope John would sometimes say, only half in jest, *'I'm only the Pope around here!*

A New Pentecost

Council preparations rumbled on - Cardinal Tardini, the conservative secretary of State - was given the leadership of the Preparatory Commission which met for the first time on 30th June 1959. Pope John told them that he hoped that the Council would be a 'new Pentecost' for the Church. He declared that, since the Holy Spirit had planted the idea of the Council, the Holy Spirit would take care of its unfolding and conclusion. Meanwhile Cardinal Tardini was recruiting experts (*periti*) from the Roman universities. He declared it would be cheaper to use them, rather than invite experts from the other Catholic universities around the world.

A 'dim' Pope!

On 30th October Cardinal Tardini summoned a Press Conference to tell the world what a Council was. It was clear to those attending that the Cardinal Secretary of State was not at all interested in Ecumenism or Church reform. In curial circles there was great delight, for many of the cardinals had already dismissed Good Pope John as 'not very bright' and a dangerous innovator. The Curia would allow 'the old man' to have his Council, for they were confidently and firmly in control!

Total Curial control

The Preparatory Commission consulted 2821 prelates and institutions and 76 per cent replied. The replies were kept confidential, so no one knew how the bishops had responded. Disquieting was the fact that the Central Theological Commission and its ten sub-commissions were under the control of the Roman Curia; this was evident when the names of the 800 members (all male) were released. The 'Romans' had successfully kept the 'foreigners' out. So famous, world-renown, theologians, biblical scholars and liturgists, like the Americans, John Courtney Murray and John L. McKenzie; Karl and Hugo Rahner from Bavaria; Henri de Lubac

and Jean Danielou from France; the influential Dominicans, Yves-Marie Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu and many others were all excluded. It was assumed that Roman male ecclesiastics held a monopoly of 'enlightened wisdom'. Many bishops around the world began to be disturbed, fearing that the Council would lack the best of modern scholarship and the essential attribute of freedom.

Strides in Ecumenism

Meanwhile Church Unity continued to be Pope John's personal interest and, in the face of the usual opposition, set up a new Commission, the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, under the energetic and inspiring leadership of Cardinal Bea. In the succeeding months Cardinal Bea, opposed every step of the way by the arch-traditionalist, Cardinal Ottaviani, had to work very hard in defence of his Secretariat. On 2nd December 1960, history was made when Dr Geoffrey Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, responding to the invitation of Cardinal Bea, visited the Pope. He was the first Archbishop of Canterbury, since the Reformation, to do so.

Final stages

The final stages of preparation for the Council started on 20th June 1961. Pope John told the Central Organising Commission that provision had to be made not just for the Press but also radio and television. (This would be the first Council in history to receive international media coverage.) He stated a simple principle; 'Nothing which helps souls should be hidden'. The Pope was most emphatic that the purpose of the Council was the *aggiornamento* or bringing up to date, of the Catholic Church.

New tensions

The Pope's Secretary of State, the conservative Cardinal Tardini was struck down by a massive heart attack and died on 30th July 1961. Pope John took the opportunity to appoint Cardinal Cicognani, a man more like himself, as the new Secretary of State. Cardinal Ottaviani, who, following the death of Tardini, assumed leadership of the conservative anti-Council faction attacked Cardinal Bea's proposal that non-Catholic Christian observers should attend the Council. He was shocked when Bea was stoutly defended by Cardinal Alfrink of Utrecht and Cardinal Konig of Vienna. The 'foreigners' were not expected to answer back! Pope John, now 80, was finding the preparations a heavy work load, but enjoyed the support of Cardinal Montini (soon to be Pope Paul VI) and Cardinal Suenans. These two were positive and crystal clear about the purpose of the Council. Montini said that its main business would be renewal and *aggiornamento*.

The Council Fathers arrive

In mid-September 1962, Pope John was experiencing gastric pains and was diagnosed with stomach cancer. He ordered that this should be kept secret; he wanted nothing to distract from his Council. He commented that his contribution to the Council, while it met, would be suffering. The Curia wanted a short, sharp Council, after which the 'foreigners' could go home and normality could be restored. So the general expectation was that the Council would complete its work in a single session (from 11 October to 8 December). By now bishops from around the globe were pouring into Rome.

The 217 from the United States installed themselves in Roman hotels, while the 42 from England and Wales took up residence at the Venerable English College; the 531 from South America found hospitality in national colleges. There was surprise when 800 missionary bishops arrived, out of an official total of 2449. There was no sign, at first, of bishops from Eastern Europe, then on 8th October Cardinal Wyszynski arrived with 13 Polish bishops (among them the young bishop from Krakow, Karol Wojtyla, later Pope John Paul II). After a few days the Eastern Bloc Communist authorities allowed a few more bishops to attend, but 274 were never allowed out.

Opening Ceremony

The long opening ceremony in St Peter's basilica was splendid and triumphant. Robert Kaiser of *Time* magazine, who observed the long colourful procession of bishops entering St Peter's said: 'My first impression was of the immense universality of the Church. I saw black faces, yellow faces, brown faces; from a distance it was like a waterfall of every colour of the rainbow'. At the end of the ceremony Pope John XXIII spoke of how a council was the celebration of faith ever-old, ever-new. He put the critics in the Curia firmly in their place by describing them as 'prophets of misfortune' who believed that this age is far worse than previous ages. 'On the contrary' he said, 'providence is guiding us towards a new order of human relationships'. Pope John concluded with an important principle. 'Authentic doctrine has to be studied and expounded in the light of the research methods and the language of modern thought. For the substance of the ancient deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another'.

High drama!

The first working day of the Council was 14 October. Once the Council Fathers were seated in St Peter's they were instructed by Cardinal Tisserant, who was presiding, to tick off, on the voting sheets provided, the names of the Commission members they approved of. The 180 names had all been selected by the Curia! In an already planned move, Cardinal Lienart of Lille asked for the microphone to speak to the Council; his request was refused by Tisserant. Ignoring him Cardinal Lienart seized the microphone and proposed to the assembly that there should be an adjournment while the Council Fathers had an opportunity to consult with one another and decide who they wanted as Commission members. In the face of the fury of Tisserant and Ottaviani, the Council Fathers agreed and so, only half an hour after entering, the bishops streamed out into the sunshine having regained control of their Council.

4 . Work of the Council : Our relationship with God

World-wide support

Blessed Pope John XXIII had to struggle for nearly 4 years to get his Council launched and in the final few months he had, in addition, to fight terminal stomach cancer. It was a bitter disappointment to him to realise that he would never live to see the completion of the Council's work. However, he was greatly relieved when the Diocesan bishops (regarded as 'the foreigners', by the Roman Curia) wrested the control of the Council proceedings away from 'the old guard' of the Rome-based cardinals. Good Pope John had a further 'lift' when, following the opening of the Council, the best wishes came pouring in from world leaders, including President Khrushchev of the USSR and President Kennedy of USA. Leaders of other World Faiths sent greetings, like Rabbi Brodie, the English Chief Rabbi; Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople and Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury. World-famous Christians, for example, Martin Luther King, Billy Graham, and Roger Schutz of Taize sent their best wishes and promise of prayers for the Council's success. Thus was Good Pope John's dream realised.



Working of the Council

The photograph that shows all the Council Fathers (the greatest number for the opening was 2860) sitting splendidly in St Peter's Basilica, in full regalia, is misleading. They only wore their albs, stoles, mitres and copes for the opening and closing ceremonies. For their work in groups and the full sessions when speeches were made and votes taken, the Council Fathers wore their usual ecclesiastical attire. Discussion papers and final drafts were prepared by the Commissions and worked over in the language groups; the outcomes were eventually presented to the Council as a whole. At this point the speeches were made for this position or that. Nothing was passed that was not first put to the vote and then, when agreed, presented to the Pope for his approval. For example, the first document to be voted on by the Council Fathers was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy; 2,162 voted in favour, with only 46 negative votes. Pope John took no part in the discussions and debates, and refused to take sides, leaving everything to the bishops; but he did follow much of it on a closed-circuit television link.

Slow progress

The work on the first document, the Constitution on the Liturgy, rumbled on for weeks. Meanwhile different styles of worship were taking place in St Peter's. Although in almost constant pain Pope John showed that he had not lost his sense of humour. When drum beats were heard emanating from the Basilica, someone asked him what was going on. Pope John replied, *'I don't know, but I think they are getting ready to boil a cardinal!'* November came and gloom settled over the Council as there was little to show for the weeks of debate; further sessions were definitely needed. On the 8th December the Pope closed the first session (everyone could see how ill he was). So far, Liturgy, Revelation, Ecumenism, Communications and the nature of the Church had all been discussed, but not worked into final form. One of Pope John's last acts was to write a personal letter to the 'Bishops of the Council' reminding them that although they were having a rest from the Council, work must continue. They were set homework on twenty draft copies of documents.

Good Pope John dies

On 3rd June 1963 the English national newspaper, *The Daily Herald* (relaunched in Sept 1964 as *The Sun*) carried the banner heading *Mass at Sunset, then the End*. A sub-heading underneath read *'100,000 kneel as the Pope dies'* and *'At 7.49 the long vigil is over.'* The following report started with the words, *'Pope John died at 7.49pm tonight - nine minutes after the end of a great sunset Mass said for him in St Peter's Square. So ended four days of agony for the 81-year-old peasant Pope who had suffered bravely for more than a year with a malignant stomach tumour.'*

Pope Paul VI

The biggest anxiety of the Council Fathers, following the death of Good Pope John, was whether the next pope would continue with the Council; he didn't have to! They need not have worried because Cardinal Montini, friend and supporter of Pope John, was elected on 21st June, taking the name Paul VI. His first act as Supreme Pontiff was to announce that the Council was to continue. He also announced that some Catholic laymen would be admitted and representatives of World Faiths would join the non-Catholic Christian observers. Pope Paul opened the second session on 29th September 1963.

Work of the Council

Space here does not allow us to trace the further month by month story of the Council. (This can be found in my book, *Good Pope John and His Council*) It is the fruits of that assembly that matter to us. The sixteen documents promulgated at the end of the Council, were all issued in Latin; the official language of the Church. They are sometimes referred to by their Latin names, for example the seminal Constitution on the Church is often called *'Lumen Gentium'*. We will look first at the documents that deal with our relationship with God, then with those that deal with our relationship with one another and with the world at large.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy - *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

General principles: Christ is always present in his Church; in and through his community of faith, the People of God, he gives constant praise and adoration to the Father. So every liturgical celebration is an action of Christ; no other action can surpass it. Our public worship is the very highest and most perfect activity of the Church; it is the source, or fountain, from which we draw our spiritual strength to live the Christian life. Liturgy is not outward ceremonial; it demands faith and people must approach worship with proper dispositions. It is the duty of the clergy to make sure that those who take part in the liturgy, do so *'knowingly, actively and fruitfully.'* The Church really wants its people to be led to *'a full, conscious and active participation'* in the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations. Services should be clear and dignified, with a noble simplicity, and be understandable to ordinary people.

The Eucharist: Lay people should feel welcomed and involved in the parish Eucharist. The structure of the Mass needs to be made simpler, so that there can be active participation by all. *'The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly'*; with a new three year cycle of readings. The Prayer of the Faithful is to be restored and the local language used throughout. People should be encouraged to receive Holy Communion at every Mass and may receive under both kinds.

Strengths of the document:

- the Easter Mystery is re-established as central.
- the Sacraments are seen as communal, not just personal acts of worship.
- laity and clergy have important roles; liturgy is not just the work of the clergy.
- the place of Scripture is restored with its own rite, as the Liturgy of the Word.
- an important distinction is made between *unchangeable* parts (those divinely laid down, eg. water in Baptism); and *changeable* parts (which in the course of time may vary, eg the language used).

Constitution on Divine Revelation - *Dei Verbum*

Background: Much drama accompanied the passing of this document. Four times the Council Fathers threw out drafts presented by the Theological Commission. Only at the Fourth Session was the Constitution accepted by an almost unanimous vote.

The Bible is central to the Christian Faith, but in Catholic life so is Tradition. How can we know God? How does he communicate with humankind? On the one hand the Protestant reformers had declared 'the Bible alone'. The Catholic Church had responded by down-playing the importance of the bible, not encouraging bible reading by the laity, and after 1910 making life almost impossible for Catholic Biblical research. Protestant Biblical scholarship in the 19th century had challenged the assumption that the Bible should be understood literally. In 1943 Pope Pius XII approved Catholic Biblical studies with his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, which proved to be a building block for the Council's document.

General principles: The invisible God desires to receive human beings into friendship with himself. Through the covenants and the prophets and, in this last age, through his Son, he prepared the way for the gospel. Christ, in whom the full revelation of God is brought to completion, entrusted the Apostles with his gospel. The Apostles' teaching is expressed in a special way in the inspired books of the Bible. Both sacred Tradition and Holy Scripture flow from the same source and merge into a unity.

Inspiration and interpretation : The Church holds that the books of the Old and New Testaments are sacred because they have been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but God chose and employed human agents of a particular time and social setting. In searching out and interpreting the intention of the human authors, to find what God wished to communicate to us, care must be taken to study literary forms and the historical and social context of the writings.

Strengths of the document :

- 'revelation' is the revealing of a God who is love, seeking our friendship.
- the approach to Scripture and Tradition is that they form a single deposit of the word of God.
- historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation are approved.
- the Gospels are a unique blend of history and theological interpretation.

5. Work of the Council: Our relationship with One Another

Open-faced cheek

During the second session of the Second Vatican Council, that was opened by Pope Paul VI on 28th September 1963, the story was circulating of the 'Button Lady', as the Council Fathers politely called her. A dynamic middle-aged American woman made colourful pin-on badges with liberal slogans, like 'Give laity a voice' and 'Mass in our own language'. She stood outside St Peter's Basilica every day and, with open-faced cheek, tried to persuade the in-going bishops to take and wear one!

Legacy

The First Vatican Council (1869-1870) only met for a few months and had to close in a hurry because of the out-break of the Franco-Prussian War. It had prepared a lengthy draft document on the Church, but only the definitions concerning the Papacy were passed. There was not time to consider the actual nature of the Church and the role of bishops and other Church members. The Second Vatican Council set out, early on, to rectify this.

Constitution on the Church - *Lumen Gentium*

Background The first draft of the document was not accepted by the Council Fathers, who expressed the view that a radically different vision of the Church was needed, more biblical, more historical, more vital and dynamic. An entirely new discussion document was prepared, between the first and second session. After debating this, the Council Fathers sent it back and further debate took place. Finally it was passed at session three with the resounding majority of 2151 votes to 5. However the Council Fathers acknowledged that there was still much to discover and say about the Church.

The Mystery of the Church The Church owes its existence to Christ; the Holy Spirit guides it as a community of fellowship and service. The authors offer a variety of biblical images in an attempt to describe the mystery of the Church; it is a sheepfold, a vineyard etc. It is a community of faith, hope and love, with a visible structure, through which Christ communicates truth and grace to all. The Church subsists in the Catholic Church, but many elements promoting sanctity and truth can be found outside the Catholic community in other ecclesial communities.

The People of God It was God's plan to save not individuals but a people; he chose Israel to be this people. Christ is the head of the new messianic people; his Church is the new Israel. All God's people share in the one priesthood of Christ; incorporated into it by Baptism; they also share in Christ's prophetic role. The mission of the Church is to continue the work entrusted by Christ to his Apostles.

The Hierarchy Just as Peter with the Apostles formed one 'college' so too does the Pope with the bishops. They lead 'local churches' as vicars of Christ, not as vicars of the Pope. The authority they exercise is theirs by right. Bishops are helped by priests and deacons; priests lack the fullness of the priesthood they receive authority from their bishop. It is the local priest who makes the universal Church visible in their local community. The permanent diaconate is to be restored in the Church.

The Laity By Baptism lay people are incorporated into Christ and share his role of priest, prophet and king. Their special vocation is to seek God and his kingdom in the ordinary everyday tasks of life. All share the same dignity so there is no inequality in the Church, on the basis of race, nationality, gender, or social condition. The clergy are to promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity, who have the right to make known to their pastors their needs and desires. Pastors should welcome initiative on the part of lay people and be willing to take advice from them.

The Call to Holiness Everyone in the Church, regardless of their position and ministry, is called to be holy and live the fullness of the Christian life.

Religious Being a Religious is not some middle way between priests and people, but a life in its own right. Their consecrated life must not be dedicated to their own personal good alone, but to the good of the whole Church.

The Pilgrim Church The Church is not perfect; it will only reach perfection when Christ comes again in glory. Christ accompanies the pilgrim members of his Church on their journey.

The Blessed Virgin Mary The Church honours Mary, for to her belongs the dignity of being the Mother of the Christ, God's Son. Through her motherhood Mary is also Mother of the Church. She is a type of the Church, a model of holiness and the Christian life

Strengths of the Document

Bishop Christopher Butler OSB hailed this Constitution as 'a great achievement', but still only a 'stepping stone, not a final achievement'.

- the Council firmly rejected the notion that the Church is 'the perfect society'
- the document refuses to identify the temporal Church with the kingdom of God.
- the Church must speak to the age and be open to scrutiny.
- the Church of Christ is not confined within the limits of the Roman Catholic Church. Other Churches participate in the reality of being 'Church'.
- the dignity of the laity arises from their Baptism; they share in the priesthood of Christ.
- the Bishops form one college **with** the Pope, not under him.
- the Council calls all members of the Church to seek holiness.

Limitations

- while there is magnificent teaching on the Laity, the role of women in the Church is not addressed.
- the renewed understanding of the Church as the whole people of God has opened up the issue of the role of authority in the Church and the role of priests.

It has been observed that the Curia, in recent times, have dropped the use of the term 'the People of God' (with its suggestion of the dignity of the Laity) and now prefer to use the word 'Communion'.

Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity - *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

History was made on 13th October 1964 when an English man, Patrick Keegan from Liverpool, became the first lay man ever to address an Ecumenical Council, on 'The role of the lay person'.

Background For centuries 'the Church' had been identified with the clergy; the laity were often regarded as second-class members. In the 19th century the laity were encouraged to assist the clergy (eg. 'Catholic Action') but the usual passive role of the laity was summarised by the phrase : 'pray, pay and obey'.

The Lay Vocation

Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation lay people share in Christ's roles of priest, prophet and king. From this comes their right and duty to be involved in the apostolate of the Church. There is only one apostolate in which all the Baptised share. The Laity do not *belong* to the Church, they *are* the Church.

Various fields of the Apostolate The laity's contribution is both special to them and very necessary. They are called to witness to Christian values in places where the clergy cannot go. With other citizens they should promote justice and fairness and the common good; be it in the parish, in local affairs or in national and international affairs. Christian couples should show to the world the dignity of marriage and family life. Young people should receive every help and encouragement. The clergy should gladly and gratefully welcome the involvement of lay people.

Exhortation The document closes with an earnest appeal to each and every lay person to answer Christ's call to make the gospel known and become his co-workers in the modern world.

Decree on Ecumenism - *Unitatis Redintegratio*

In 1910 the Ecumenical Movement, seeking unity among the Christian Churches, was launched. It was a wholly Protestant movement. The official Catholic position was clear; if the heretic protestants wanted unity - likewise the schismatic Orthodox Churches - all they had to do was return to the fold of the one true Church. Pope John XXIII, didn't see it that way. One of his intentions in calling the Council was to seek ways towards Unity. The Pope coined the phrase '*our separated brethren*' and insisted that there should be Protestant and Orthodox delegates at the Council.

Catholic Principles Christ prayed, at the Last Supper, '*that all may be one*' and he gave his followers a new commandment of mutual love. Paul writes '*all who are baptised into Christ, have put on Christ...for you are all one in Christ Jesus*'. The Council therefore encourages all Catholics to take an active part in the work for Church Unity. Ecumenism is governed by three principles : unity in essentials, freedom and variety in non-essentials, and charity in all things. Catholics are invited to recognise the presence and work of the Holy Spirit among our separated brothers and sisters.

The Practice of Ecumenism The whole Church, clergy and people, should be concerned about restoring unity. Renewal and reform are ever necessary in a Pilgrim Church. Ecumenism calls for a change of heart and for holiness of life. Praying together should be the soul of the whole ecumenical movement. Catholic theologians are invited to study theology with other Christians, in a spirit of love for the truth.

6. Work of the Council: Our relationship with the World

International dimension The international character of the Second Vatican Council is revealed by a few statistics. The total attendance of Council Fathers (Bishops and Religious superiors) was 2860; the largest attendances being at the opening and closing sessions. A total of 274 bishops from Communist countries were not permitted to attend. Radio Vatican broadcast over 6000 hours of Council information in 30 languages. Over 1,000 newspaper reporters and cameramen covered the four sessions. The Council sat for 10 months, over four years, and Council Fathers made 4229 written interventions and 2205 oral interventions during the sessions.

Final session The final session of the Council began on 14th September 1965 and concluded ceremonially with a Mass, celebrated by Pope Paul VI, in St Peter's, on 8th December. This last session was the most productive completing and promulgating eleven documents. The most significant of these was *Gaudium et Spes*, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. This document enjoys the interesting distinction of being the only document to have originated directly from a suggestion made by a Council Father during discussions.

Pope John XXIII, the father of the Council, would have been thrilled with this pastoral document which was so in tune with his pastoral aims for the Council. In fact the most telling influence on *Gaudium et Spes* were Good Pope John's encyclical letters, *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*.

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World - *Gaudium et Spes*

Background Here, finally, some may think, is a document that really 'speaks' to the concerns of ordinary people: marriage, family, work conditions, leisure, peace, etc. What encouraged people was the openness and the constant effort of the Council Fathers to accentuate the positive in a realistic appraisal of the trends and movements at work in the modern world (as it was in 1960s). The document is in two parts; the first part develops Church teaching about humanity and the world in which we live. The second part concentrates on several aspects of modern living and the problems which, in the '60s, appeared most pressing for humanity.

Part One *The Church and Humanity's Calling.*

Joy and hope and all basic human experiences are shared by all Christ's friends and so by the Church. It is the Church's duty to examine the signs of the times; particularly at this time of rapid change.

1. The Dignity of the Human person

- Scripture teaches that the human person was made in the image of God to be a social being.
- Deep within their conscience individuals discover a law, which they are bound to obey, summoning them to love and do good.
- Only in true freedom can a human being seek truth and love.
- Mankind is called to an endless sharing in the divine life, a life lived beyond the mystery of death and corruption.
- Atheism can take many forms and have many causes; not least the failure of Christians to live up to their calling.
- The Incarnate Word's message of love and authentic freedom is in harmony with the deepest desires of the human heart.
- Faith gives us the power to be united with Christ.

2. The Community of Mankind

- With one heavenly Father every human being belongs to God's family.
- Love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbour.
- Every human person's inviolable rights should be respected.
- Whatever is opposed to life (genocide, abortion, euthanasia) or offensive to human dignity (eg. trafficking women and children), or disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere tools for profit; all these are infamies.
- Every type of discrimination is to be overcome and eradicated.
- Human freedom can be crippled, as much by indulging it too much, as by extreme poverty.

3. Human Activity throughout World.

- Science and technology have brought recognition that the human family is a single world community.
- Faith and Science are not in opposition, for they both seek the truth.
- Human progress brings strong temptations; the world ceases to be a place of true brotherhood when individuals and groups seek their own interests.

4. The role of the Church in Today's World

- The Church serves as a leaven in society.
- Through individuals and its societies the Church can contribute to making the human family more human.

- There should be no opposition between professional and social activities that further the human lot and the life of religion.
- While it helps and receives much from the world, the Church has but one goal, that is the coming of God's kingdom and the accomplishment of salvation for the whole human race.

Part Two *Some Problems of Special Urgency.*

Having set out the teaching on the dignity of the human person the Church now draws attention to certain specific issues. *(Although easy reading, this is such a long document that the reader is advised to consult the document itself. A few key concepts are given)*

- **Marriage** : Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is enriched by Christ's redeeming power.
- **Family** : The family that springs from marriage can manifest to all the Saviour's loving presence in the world.
- **Sexual relationships** : Sexual acts, which are proper to conjugal love and exercised in accord with human dignity, must be honoured with great reverence.
- **Work** : By offering daily work to God a person becomes associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, who, at Nazareth, worked with his own hands.
- **War** : Leaders of our time must realise that they will have to render account for their deeds of war.

Strengths of the Document

The widespread support in the Council for the text of *Gaudium et Spes* is witnessed by 2309 votes for and 75 against. The sense of hope for the future, which pervaded the closing stages of the Council, is a strength of this pastoral document. It professes the need to read the signs of the times and recognises that questioning and searching are the norm in modern life. It is significant that Part Two starts with marriage and the family. Here, for the first time, is a clear acknowledgement that both mutual love between the partners, and the raising of children are equally to be affirmed as the aims of marriage.

Limitations

The principle limitation is that it is time and culture bound. In the twenty-first century many of the issues are broadly similar, but some have passed, e.g. the Cold War of '60s, while other life issues e.g capital punishment, euthanasia, stem cell research, gay marriage and the trafficking of women and children have become written large in our Christian consciousness. Environment issues would have a prominent place in a modern edition of the document.

Over the Years

Gaudium et Spes has made a big and lasting impact. Papal teaching has been deeply influenced by it, for example, Pope Paul VI's encyclicals *The Progress of Peoples* (1967) and *On Human Life* (1968). At parish and diocesan level the document's substantial influence can be seen in the great movement for justice and peace which has become an integral part of Catholic life. The development of the theologies of Liberation in Latin America, Africa and Asia were inspired by the theology of this document. In the USA the bishops have engaged in a process of discernment about their country's nuclear weapons and its economic wealth. In England and Wales the hierarchy, in similar fashion, have issued documents like *The Common Good* and *Cherishing Life*.

The Council closes

It took an hour for the procession of bishops to wind its way past the vast crowd gathered in St Peter's square, to witness the closing ceremony of the Council. Then a small crippled boy and a blind man - little need to impress the symbol of Christ's ministry here - were brought forward, through the Council Fathers to the steps of St Peter's where they received a blessing before the crowd. Three years and two months after it opened Cardinal Felici read the papal Decree which proclaimed the end of the greatest of all the twenty-two Councils of the Church. It declared that all Catholics were bound by its decisions and any actions undertaken against the Council's decisions were invalid.

At the end of the Mass the Pope bade an emotional farewell to the observers from all the Christian denominations and the different world faiths, saying :

'Do not forget the love with which the Roman Catholic Church will think of you and follow you. Allow us to confide to you this intimate impression: your departure produces a solitude around us, unknown to us before the Council and which saddens us. We should like to see you with us always'.

Work begins

One of the departing European bishops commented, *'I suddenly feel quite alone. Quite frightened by the task ahead. For the first time in my priesthood I can understand the story of the Ascension and how anxious our forebears felt. Now it's time to take the Church to the world'.*

It had been for the returning bishops a remarkable experience in group dynamics and the evident working of the Holy Spirit. They were faced with the unforeseen problem of how to impart the spirit of the Council and fire up their priests and people with that spirit. Most of whom were totally uncomprehending of the reasons and purposes of the changes that started with the promulgation of the 16 Council documents. If there was a major flaw in the aftermath of the Council, it was the lack of provision for adult education

There can be no doubt that Good Pope John's Council, that he struggled and fought for, transformed the Catholic Church. For while there remain parts of the Council's documents that still need to be implemented, no one would want to return to the form of Catholic Life that was described in Part 1 of this pamphlet.

Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity recently (end of July 2012) said, *'Pope John XXIII was convinced that the Council must above all pursue two aims - namely the renewal of the Catholic Church and Christian Unity. That was the focus of the entire Council'.*

So our conclusion can be found in the words of Cardinal Lawrence Shehan who wrote the introduction to *The Documents of Vatican II* : *'It was a sense of continuity which inspired the saying, "The king is dead; long live the king". A similar sense would justify the statement, "The Council is over; the Council has just begun".'*

It is to be hoped that Pope Benedict XVI would be pleased with this pamphlet :
On Sunday 15th July 2012, speaking at Frascati, he said,

'Re-read the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

They contain an enormous wealth for the formation of a new generation of Christians'.