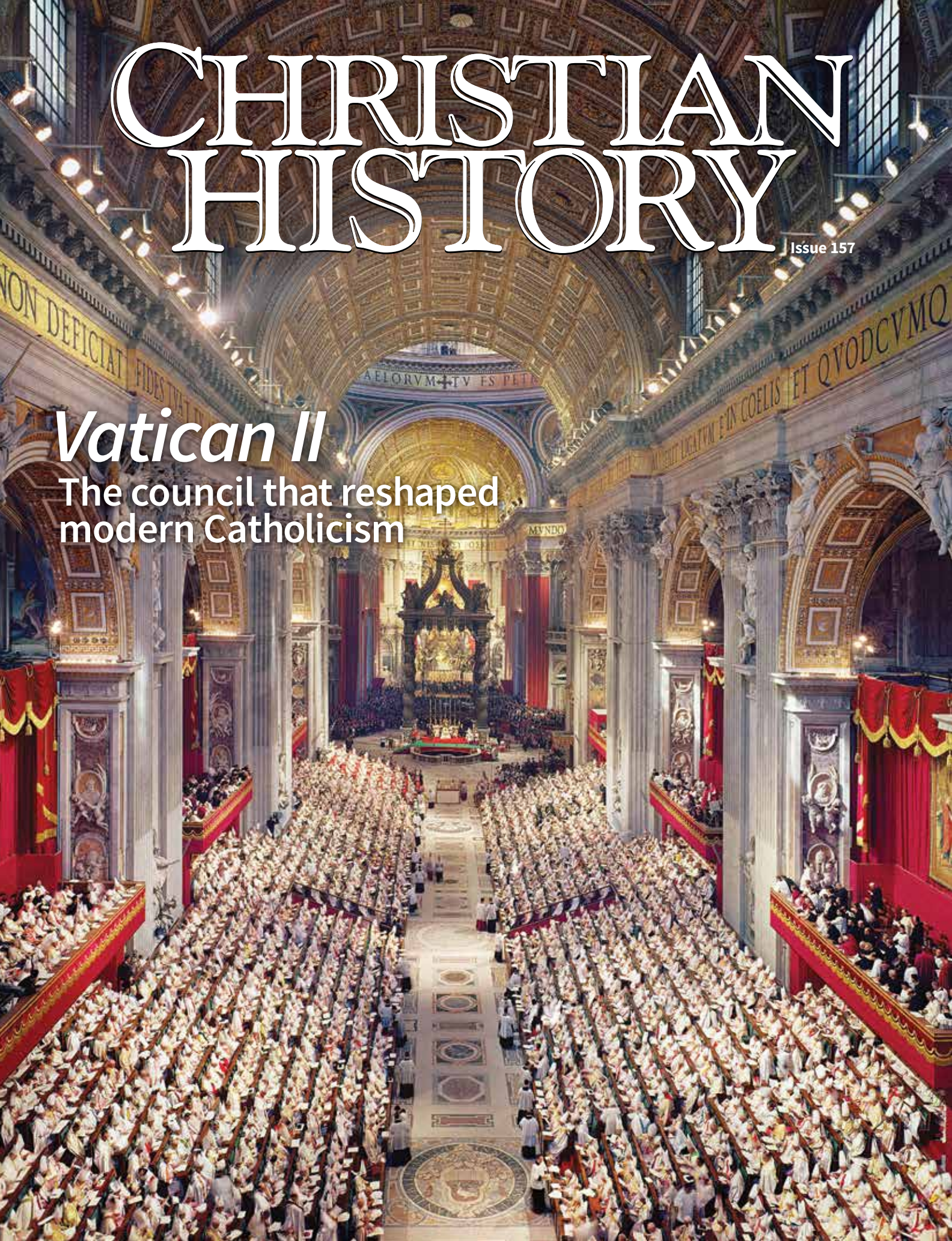


CHRISTIAN HISTORY



Issue 157

Vatican II

The council that reshaped
modern Catholicism



Did you know?

A HELPFUL INTRODUCTION TO TERMS AND IDEAS AS YOU BEGIN THE VATICAN II STORY

NEW POPE, NEW NAME?

When Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost was elected pope in the spring of 2025, he took the name Pope Leo XIV. The custom of taking a new name, regularly practiced by popes at their accession since the Middle Ages, may have begun for a number of reasons. Some, such as Pope John II (c. 475–535), whose birth name was Mercurius after the Roman god Mercury, changed names to signify a rejection of pagan roots. Others changed names to recognize the dignity of the new office, much in the same manner that monarchs take new names. Today the custom continues with an eye to the future by recognizing the spirit in which past popes led the church; Leo XIV explicitly took his name to honor the memory and mission of Leo XIII, for instance.

WHAT IS...?

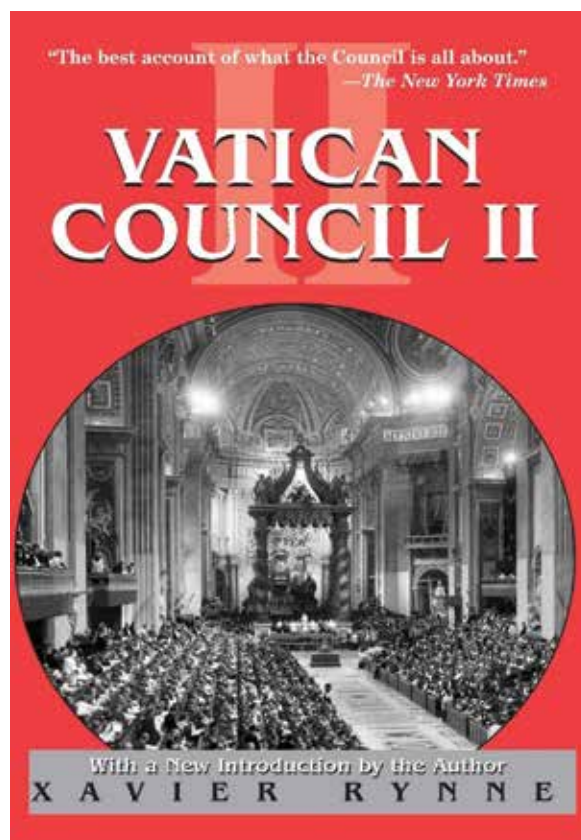
Here are brief definitions of some terms you'll encounter throughout the issue.

- **Aggiornamento**—an Italian word meaning “updating,” famously used as a sort of vision statement during Vatican II
- **Collegiality**—papal governance of the Catholic Church in collaboration with local church bishops and with respect to their autonomy. This is opposed to the ultramontanist (conservative) position, which assumes centralized papal authority (ultramontanism is more fully defined on p.1.)

INSIDER INFORMATION Francis X. Murphy, a priest and advisor at Vatican II, felt it necessary to leak council proceedings to the public. He did so under the pseudonym “Xavier Rynne.”

NODDING TO HIS NAMESAKE Robert Francis Prevost took the name Leo XIV in 2025 as pope, suggesting a commitment to continuing Leo XIII’s legacy.

- **Constitution**—a principal and official document produced by the Second Vatican Council. The four constitutions, which like all major Catholic documents take their titles from their first few words in Latin, are *Dei Verbum*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Lumen Gentium*, and *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. In English they are: On Divine Revelation; On the Church in the Modern World; On the Church; and On the Sacred Liturgy.
- **Council father**—a full participant in a council of the Roman Catholic Church, granted the right to both speak and vote. During Vatican II, this status was extended to “all the bishops of the world, as well as the heads of the main religious orders of men,” according to council regulations.
- **Dogma**—in Catholicism, a teaching believed to be divinely revealed and infallibly defined by the church. As such, a rejection of a dogma is considered heresy.
- **Nouvelle théologie**—a mid-twentieth-century intellectual movement within Catholicism (see CH #129: *Modern amnesia*). Called “New Theology” by its opponents because of its negative association with modernism, the movement in general sought renewal and a “return to the sources”—that is, a return to Scripture and the writings of church fathers. It also critiqued and rejected the dominance of neoscholasticism in theological interpretation, which was a revival of Thomas Aquinas’s theological methods.





STATE VS. ROME An 1899 cartoon pictures Uncle Sam rebuking the pope for erecting a cross over the US capitol. Find out more about church and state power dynamics on pages 6–11.

HERESY DETECTORS

The branch of the Curia concerned with church discipline and the clarification of Catholic doctrine is called the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith (but it has gone by several other names historically). Originally founded by Paul IV as the “Roman and Universal Inquisition” in 1542, it had the authority to issue doctrinal statements that clarified disputed points of church teaching and to investigate heresy and other religious offenses, including abusive behavior by priests. Under Joseph Ratzinger (later Benedict XVI), it became more zealous in attempting to silence theologians deemed unorthodox, including Hans Küng (1928–2021) who had once worked with Ratzinger as an expert at Vatican II (see pp. 45–49).

COUNCIL SPY

Much of what the world knew of the inner workings of Vatican II was thanks to the priest-turned-journalist Francis X. Murphy (1914–2002). Murphy was a Redemptorist (see “Viva! Viva! Gesu!” in CH #151) and attended the council as a theological advisor, where he grew incensed by the Curia’s attempts to control the council and block reform. Under the pseudonym Xavier Rynne, Murphy published a series of articles called “Letters from Vatican City” in *The New Yorker*. These

articles, sensational and often unflattering to his opponents, grabbed worldwide attention and shaped popular opinion of the council. Vatican officials suspected Murphy of being Xavier Rynne and tried to prove it; Murphy only admitted his authorship in 1998, four years before he died at age 87. **CH**

▪ **The Roman Curia**—the Catholic Church’s counterpart to the cabinet in American government: a complex array of administrative institutions that carry out the day-to-day management of the church on the international level. The departments of the Curia are typically headed by cardinals and are, since 2022, referred to as “dicasteries” (replacing the older terms “congregations” or “offices”).

▪ **Schemata**—draft documents, prepared by a commissioned committee, that outline official church teachings during the ecumenical councils. These were subject to discussion and debate, and in the case of Vatican II, were extensively rewritten and even rejected by council fathers.

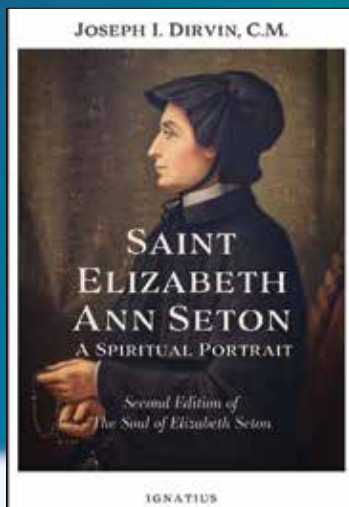
▪ **Synodality**—a process of collaboration that brings together clergy and laity, especially women. Synodality, such as seen in the Synod of Bishops, seeks to involve the whole people of God in discerning the life and mission of the church.

▪ **Ultramontanism**—an emphasis on papal power above other ecclesial authorities—for example, the pope’s unilateral power to appoint bishops and override local decisions. This was a model that dominated Catholic hierarchal structure between Vatican I and Vatican II. (Ultramontanism literally means “beyond the mountains,” referring to Italy, across the Alps from France.)

CALLING ALL CLERGY Thousands of bishops from around the world descended upon Rome for Vatican II.



SPLENDID WORKS ON HEROIC & HOLY WOMEN



◆ SAINT ELIZABETH ANN SETON A Spiritual Portrait

This 2nd edition of the classic spiritual portrait of Mother Seton by **Fr. Joseph Dirvin** traces the spiritual journey of the 19th-century American wife, mother, educator, and religious leader who became the first native-born saint of the United States.

An exceptional, unique work that is the only in-depth exploration based on the actual archival documents of Seton's life, conversion, spiritual growth, and founding of the Sisters of Charity. It underscores her great importance for the Church in America and the spiritual impact of her enduring legacy as a convert, educator, and religious leader.

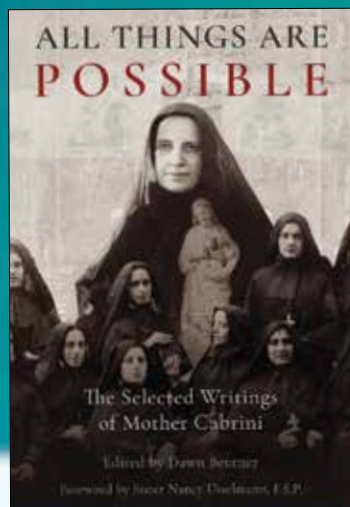
This is an astonishing account of an ordinary woman who lived an extraordinary life of heroic virtue, being released to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Seton's canonization as the first native-born American saint. **SES2P** . . . Sewn Softcover, \$18.95

"Easy and inspiring reading, and a scholarly work of art that should be read by everyone who wants to grow in holiness."

—**Fr. John Hardon, S.J.**, Author, *The Treasury of Catholic Wisdom*

"A splendid work that reveals Seton's intimate, courageous spirituality and the perennial relevance of her wisdom for our own times."

—**Ronda Chervin, Ph.D.**, Author and professor of philosophy



◆ ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE Selected Writings of Mother Cabrini

St. Frances Cabrini crossed oceans to spread the Gospel and serve the poor, founding schools, orphanages, and hospitals on three continents. She also wrote oceans of letters to her religious sisters as she traversed the globe.

This new collection of Mother Cabrini's writings introduces modern readers to her delightful personality and many gifts. They bear witness to the saint's famous business acumen, her wise leadership of her religious order, and her heroic perseverance through years of constant activity. It reveals a portrait of a woman of deep prayer, indefatigable missionary zeal, and great charity.

Her life and work testify to the truth of the Bible verse she took as her motto: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." **ATAPP** . . . Sewn Softcover, \$19.95

"Mother Cabrini is remarkably captivating in this abundant collection of her letters. Her great love for God and humanity shines brightly in these beautiful pages!"

— **Fr. Donald Haggerty**, Author, *Saint John of the Cross*

"These letters reveal her deep love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and her generous commitment to the missionary apostolate."

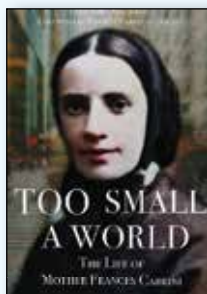
—**Bishop Michael Burbidge**, Arlington, Virginia

ALSO AVAILABLE

◆ TOO SMALL A WORLD

This compelling, authoritative biography of Mother Cabrini by **Theodore Maynard** chronicles her astounding life as she conquered all odds to become the first American citizen canonized a saint.

TSASP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$18.95



◆ CATHERINE OF SIENA

This in-depth work by renowned literary author **Sigrid Undset** is critically acclaimed as one of the best biographies of the amazing saint and Doctor of the Church.

CASIP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$19.95



ignatius press

P.O. Box 1339, Ft. Collins, CO 80522

www.ignatius.com

(800) 651-1531

Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*

HOW ABOUT AN ISSUE ON...?

Thank you for the balanced outlook that you brought to issue #155 [*The Mercersburg movement*]. How delightfully vast is the story of the Christian Church. How much should every believer revel in our rich heritage as blood-bought children of God, basking in the majesty and power of the Most High. Please consider doing a full issue on Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, the once great pastor of Westminster Chapel in London England.—*Michael Carlasccio, Sault Ste Marie, Ontario, Canada*

It seems your magazine is mainly focused on American Christianity. I would like to see it cover more history about early Christianity in Europe, Asia and Australia. I wish *Christian History* would cover the persecution of the Cathar Christians in Europe during the twelfth century. And I would like to see an article about the history of the Unitarian Churches.—*Richard Clark, Pekin, IN*

Hi, I am so blessed when I learn about those who went before us in the faith. I seem to recall that you have asked for suggestions for future issues. How about doing one on Christian communes in the 1800's and 1900's? I lived in a Christian commune for a while in 1971. It had quite an impact on me and others. Thanks.—*Arthur Manning, Vineland, NJ*

I was thinking that an issue on the history of Holy Week and all its services would be fascinating. The return of the Easter Vigil with the liturgical renewal of the 60's, services both East and West and the very special but largely unknown in the west, Service of the Great and Holy Fire (taking place the Saturday before Orthodox Easter in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) would all make interesting reading. Thank you.—*Charles Hadden, Broomall, PA*

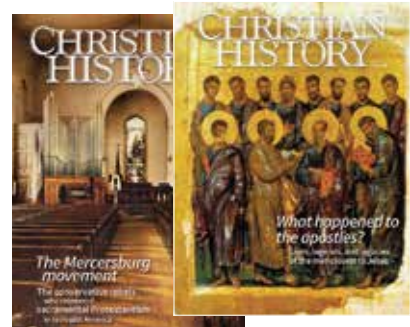
These are all great suggestions, and as always, we appreciate your feedback and take reader ideas into account when planning upcoming issues. Look for upcoming issues covering some of these topics—most immediately, a special bonus guide on the history of fasts and feasts during the Christian year! See the ad on page 56 for how to get a copy!

EPIC HISTORY

Just received my copy of issue #156 [*What happened to the apostles?*]. It is INCREDIBLE! The coverage of the apostles is outstanding. I look forward to re-reading in

detail. *CHRISTIAN HISTORY* continues to be a wonderful publication!—*Allen Gaines, Apex, NC*

Love all the research done for each issue to make it an epic.—*Jim Laurence, Springfield, PA*



If you love history, and the history of Christianity and the church interests you, this is the magazine for you! I just received the latest issue today. Of all my reading, I have to say, *Christian History* magazine is the only thing that I read cover to cover, every issue I receive!—*Michael Blackie, Rossiter, PA*

I just want to thank you guys for a wonderful, wonderful magazine. I have trouble typing. I have got some issues with my hands, and I am 81, so it is hard for me to type. So I just wanted to call somebody and thank them for the issue. Is just such a wonderful magazine. I keep it by my bed, read it all the time. You guys have really outdone yourselves. Thank the Lord for you. Have a blessed day and thank you again.—*Kirk Castleman, Searcy, AR*

LEARNING OUR STORY ONLINE

Always so thankful for the life of our earlier Christian martyrs and church fathers. It's really a huge blessing to be among recipients of these emails. Amen and AMEN.—*Isaac C. Mbunda, Zambia, Africa*

I have listened to two of these podcasts so far and my spirit is heavy with humility from learning of these saints who gave their all for their Savior and master. The music, narration, tempo, and message are touching. Thank you, sir. To Him be the glory and honor forever.—*stkyjones, Forgotten Podcast listener*

Thank you for sharing how Forgotten, one of our new podcast productions, is blessing you and challenging your faith. CHI recently launched several new podcasts that tell the stories of faithful believers in Christian history. You can listen to new episodes on our website, as well as through Spotify and Apple Podcasts. Give it a try, and let us know what you think! 

Editor's note



Why does the sixtieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council matter for the entire Christian church?

Growing up and living in an evangelical context—that is, one that was never too keen on anything that whiffed of Rome—I would have had a hard time answering that question with any real conviction before this issue.

For starters I really only ever experienced Catholicism through my grandmother, Maryann Gibbons, and the way she expressed her faith felt alien to me. I still remember the strangeness of seeing icons and crucifixes in every room of her home and attending her Mass, hearing unfamiliar prayers and responses in unfamiliar tonal chants, and trying not to touch the holy water in the basin by the door.

Yet in other ways, we shared more in common than I knew. Grandmom was committed to evangelism (she enthusiastically took her children to see *The Cross and the Switchblade* when it first aired in theaters in 1970), to the work of the Holy Spirit (she participated in charismatic conferences, where Catholics gathered with Protestants of all persuasions), and to a vision of the world that rejected secularization—just like us Protestants.

These commonalities, or at least my experience of them, are in large part due to the Second Vatican Council.

FROM TRENT TO VATICAN II

So what is Vatican II? In this issue of *Christian History*, we'll explore this historic council of the Roman Catholic Church and how it came to be. Starting with the Council of Trent and the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation, we'll see how multiple factors—Trent's consequences, the tenuous relationship between papal authority and state power, and movements such as the Enlightenment—created a desperate need for another council.

All this led to the First Vatican Council in 1869, which sought to clarify Catholic beliefs and defend the church's faith by defining one of its most contentious dogmas—papal infallibility. But even this wasn't the end of the dialogue. Crises outside the church and controversies

within would precipitate the next council, nearly one hundred years later.

ADDRESSING THE MODERN WORLD

Still, when Vatican II did convene, it was an unexpected and unprecedented move. But the modern world had brought with it modern problems, raising questions that required thoughtful reflection and answers. What, for instance, should liturgy look like in the twentieth-century church? How should clergy understand their authority in their locales and in relationship to the authority of the pope? What roles do laypeople play? How does the church respond to racism, worldwide wars, and other evils? How should Catholics relate to Protestant and Orthodox believers? How about those of other faiths?

At Vatican II bishops gathered to debate responses to these issues and more. Some debates were more divisive than others. But the council clarified doctrines and answered hard questions, leading to opportunities for unity within the church, dialogue across denominational aisles, and a renewed sense of mission and purpose for her people.

Wherever Catholics stand—and however Protestants may interpret the council's conclusions—undoubtedly Vatican II transformed everyone's experience of Catholicism. And 60 years later, that's still true.

It only struck me recently, as Grandmom sat beside me at my son's soccer game, that she had lived that transformation. Which I, of course, asked her about.

As we sat and talked, I was thankful. Thankful to hear history relived, thankful for shared roots (however the branches splay out), and thankful for the relationship we have. This open dialogue was part of Vatican II's legacy.

So why does Vatican II matter? As you read on, I hope you stay curious enough to find out. **CH**



Kaylena Radcliff
Managing editor

Find *Christian History* on Facebook as ChristianHistoryMagazine, or visit www.christianhistorymagazine.org. Read daily stories at www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/today. For X (formerly Twitter), use @christianHistory, for substack use @christianhistoryinstitute, and for Instagram, @christianhistorymagazine.

Sign up by January 2026 to get our next issue #158 on the Council of Nicaea.

We also thank our readers who support this ministry, making it possible for us to provide *Christian History* in print. Please visit www.ChristianHistoryMagazine.org to donate or to begin a subscription to *Christian History*.

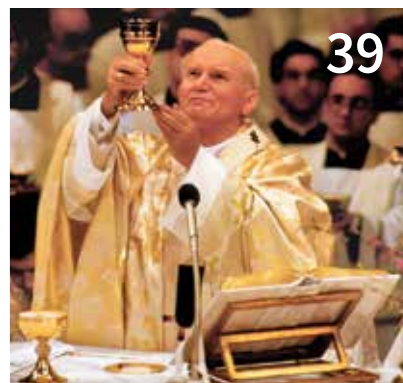
CHRISTIAN HISTORY



6



22



39

The Second Vatican Council

6 Piety and power

Politics, reforms, and lay movements
shaped Catholicism's modern era
Edwin Woodruff Tait

11 Altar without throne

Daniel T. L. Moore

12 Winds of change

The First Vatican Council
Kevin Schmiesing

16 Pope versus modernity

Documents of Vatican I

17 Witch hunts and "new theology"

Papal centralization and
the modernist crisis
Shaun Blanchard

21 Only Christ is king

Shaun Blanchard

22 Meeting the modern world

Vatican II's call to action for
the global Catholic Church
Nadia M. Lahutsky

27 Text turmoil

Luke Arredondo

30 Always reforming, always the same

How popes interpreted Vatican II and
helped reimagine the church
Barnaby Hughes

34 "This sacred council"

Documents of Vatican II

35 "That they may be one"

Vatican II and a new spirit
of ecumenism
Thomas Albert Howard

38 Gifts of the Spirit

Ralph C. Martin

39 Reforming liturgy, learning, and law

Vatican II's lasting effects
Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt

42 A tale of two liturgies

The original and the revised

44 "The effect was electrifying"

Jennifer Woodruff Tait

45 Reformers of Rome

Some Catholic leaders at Vatican II
*Jennifer A. Boardman and
Edwin Woodruff Tait*

50 Legacy and longevity: an interview

Impressions of Vatican II

Also: • Did you know?, inside front cover
• Letters, p. 3 • Editor's note, p. 4
• Timeline, p. 28
• Reflection questions, p. 53
• Recommended resources, p. 54

Founder
A. K. Curtis

Executive Editor
Bill Curtis

Senior Editors
Chris Armstrong
Jennifer Woodruff Tait

Managing Editor
Kaylena Radcliff

Design Editor
Doug Johnson

**Contributing editor and
scholar advisor, CH #157**
Edwin Woodruff Tait

Proofreader
Meg Moss

Layout
Dan Graves

Image Researcher
Max Pointner

Editorial Coordinator
Melody Belk

Editorial Assistant
Grace Bert

Circulation
Sara Campbell
Karen Kopp

Print Coordinator
Deb Landis

Publisher
Christian History Institute

©2025 Christian History Institute. Cover: Second Vatican Council Convened in 1963 (photo)—© David Lees Photography Archive / Bridgeman Images

Christian History is published by Christian History Institute, P. O. Box 540, Worcester, PA, 19490 and is indexed in *Christian Periodical Index*, ISSN 0891-9666. **Subscriptions** are available on a donation basis. **Letters to the editor** may be sent to editor@ChristianHistoryInstitute.org and **permissions requests** to info@ChristianHistoryInstitute.org. **Credits:** We make every effort to obtain proper permission to reproduce images. If you have information about an image source that is not credited, please let us know.

www.ChristianHistoryMagazine.org • 1-800-468-0458



Piety and power

POLITICS, REFORMS, AND LAY MOVEMENTS SHAPED CATHOLICISM'S MODERN ERA
Edwin Woodruff Tait

The Catholic Church emerged from the Reformation smaller in size but with renewed confidence and energy. Thanks to the reforms of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), Catholic bishops took their spiritual responsibilities more seriously and priests now had better training and a stronger sense of mission. The new Jesuit order rivaled the older Franciscans and Dominicans in both missionary zeal and intellectual prowess. Spanish mystics such as Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) and John of the Cross (1542–1591) built on rich traditions of medieval mysticism, while the practical advice of Francis de Sales (1567–1622) offered laypeople ways to live out their faith. Catholic art and music, also newly reformed, provided a way to know God through beauty (see CH #122).

These reforms throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries slowed the spread of Protestantism and even regained lost ground. Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary, on the verge of turning Protestant during the early Reformation, all swung decisively back toward Catholicism. Germany remained permanently divided between Protestants and Catholics, and the position of Holy Roman Emperor remained in the hands of the devoutly Catholic Hapsburgs. France, birthplace of John Calvin (1509–1564) and home to fervent Protestants, ultimately remained Catholic and officially ended the legal toleration of Protestantism in 1685.

REFORM AT TRENT The Council of Trent responded to problems posed by the Protestant Reformation with its own reforms, invigorating Catholic devotion.

The church won these victories through a close relationship with Catholic monarchs, often called the “throne and altar” alliance (see p. 11). Such an alliance between church and political authorities went back, of course, to the time of Constantine (d. 337). But during the Middle Ages, the relationship was often contentious, with the church checking monarchical power and even claiming supremacy over monarchs. In the Reformation’s wake, church leaders could no longer afford to push authority claims. They needed Catholic monarchs on their side. Popes negotiated concordats with various rulers—treaties that granted rulers considerable authority over the church. These agreements varied throughout Europe.

The Hapsburg family, the sixteenth century’s dominant Catholic dynasty, ruled Spain, parts of Italy, the Netherlands, and large parts of central Europe, as well as much of the Americas. The Austrian branch of the Hapsburgs also had a lock on the prestigious title of Holy Roman Emperor, which made them the official heirs of Constantine and counterparts to the pope as leaders of the Christian world. In fact the threat of a Protestant being elected to this position helped spark



THRONE OVER ALTAR? Both tension and brotherhood defined the relationship between Catholic monarchs and the pope. Hapsburg emperor Charles V converses with Pope Clement VII (*above*); Frederick III, a German Holy Roman Emperor, sits with Pope Aeneas (*right*).

the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). Hapsburg rulers in both Spain and Austria persecuted Protestants and waged holy wars against both Protestant and Muslim nations, representing an aggressive, militaristic vision of Catholicism. Within Spain itself it had been illegal to practice any religion except Catholic Christianity since the end of the fifteenth century. The Spanish Inquisition (1478–1834), controlled by the monarchy, enforced religious uniformity with persecution.

In Germany and Bohemia, the Holy Roman Emperors led their sprawling dominions into a war with Protestants in 1618. This Thirty Years' War devastated Germany and caused Europeans to question the kind of religious policies that produced such bloodshed and destruction. Eventually the Hapsburgs had to accept a peace treaty that reaffirmed the right of local rulers to determine the religion of their territories and officially acknowledged Calvinist as well as Lutheran Protestantism. Nonetheless the Hapsburgs purged their hereditary Austrian territories of Protestantism and and reimposed Catholicism on Bohemia and Hungary. They presented themselves, right up to the First World War, as model Catholic monarchs.

FRANCE ON ITS OWN

In Catholic France the national church functioned most independently of Rome. Many French Catholics adhered to what would later be called “Gallicanism,” the view that the church in France should govern its own affairs under the monarch’s authority. French Catholics tended to favor the late medieval ecclesiology of conciliarism, whereby ultimate authority rested not with the pope but with a council representing the whole church. Throughout the late sixteenth century, religious wars tore the country apart. Most notoriously, on St. Bartholomew’s Eve in 1572, an attempt to assassinate key Protestant leaders spiraled into a bloodbath fueled by Catholic preachers. After the Edict of Nantes in 1598, the king gave French Protestants (Huguenots) fortified cities in southern France as well as autonomy. But it would not last.



Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642) played a key role in shaping French religion and politics during the seventeenth century along Gallican lines. While often portrayed as a scheming, cynical villain, and certainly ambitious and capable of great ruthlessness, Richelieu seems to have also been sincerely pious. He believed he served the church by advancing French interests. Richelieu opposed Hapsburg ambition because he thought that the Hapsburgs used Catholic faith as a pretense for their ambitions. (Of course, the same could be said of him.) He centralized authority in France and waged war on the Huguenots; but unlike his Hapsburg neighbors, he did not believe in direct coercion to force them to return to Catholicism. Rather he sought to build up the Catholic Church as an appealing alternative.

During the seventeenth century, French Catholicism instituted reforms that led to a more educated clergy and a more devout laity. Many Huguenots did convert, but many did not. In 1685 King Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes and declared that Protestantism no longer existed in France, under the massively exaggerated pretext that most had converted voluntarily. Thousands of Huguenots fled; many others were forced to slave on galleys for refusing to renounce their faith. Louis’s persecution of the Huguenots represented the last major attempt to force religious uniformity. He did so in the interests of national unity as much as of Catholicism, but in Gallican France, the two were seen as identical.

NO ONE EXPECTS THE ROMAN INQUISITION

The popes of the era approved of attempts to promote Catholicism through government power. Pope Gregory XIII publicly celebrated the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, though he may have done so based on French propaganda, unaware of the atrocities involved. Official Catholic doctrine continued to affirm, as in the later Middle Ages, that heretics deserved the death penalty as violators of baptismal vows and traitors to God. Some Catholic theologians as early as the late sixteenth century argued that those raised as Protestants should not be



POPULAR PORTRAYAL Fiction, such as *The Three Musketeers*, often villainizes Cardinal Richelieu (left). In truth Richelieu was more complex.

REVOKED RIGHTS The Edict of Nantes (below left), written after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (far left), protected Protestants. It was revoked in 1685.



The Council of Trent had sidestepped papal authority questions and emphasized the need for a renewed episcopacy; bishops should be faithful pastors living among their flock rather than at Rome, exercising authority over the church within their dioceses. Individual bishops, however, could not negotiate effectively with their monarchs. Hence Trent's vision was never fully realized, and papal authority grew rather than shrank. For example Charles Borromeo, model bishop of the Catholic Reformation (archbishop of Milan, 1564–1584), often came into conflict with the Spanish government; Pope Gregory XIII, who did not want to offend Philip II (1527–1598), did not fully support Borromeo in these conflicts.

Ironically in France, where the monarchy controlled the church and often defied Rome, the council's vision took perhaps its fullest shape. Over the seventeenth century, the educational level and piety of French clergy increased dramatically. Gallican Catholicism, somewhat like its schismatic Anglican cousin across the Channel, emphasized the study of Scripture and the church fathers. Great French preachers like Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet and Louis Bourdaloue

edified the royalty and upper classes with their eloquence. Even at the rural parish level, French Catholics could expect a better educated and more dedicated pastor.

considered heretics in this sense, but most believed such people were still guilty if they refused to become Catholic after being presented with Catholicism.

The Roman Inquisition, established in 1542 under direct papal supervision to try heresy cases and other religious offenses, represented the most direct instrument of religious repression. The Inquisition only sentenced to death about 2 percent of those accused, but that still represents more than a thousand people. (The royally controlled Spanish Inquisition tried a much larger number of people with a similar proportion of death sentences, amounting to several thousand over nearly four centuries. Popes sometimes intervened to rebuke the Spaniards for being too ferocious or accusing someone of heresy on insufficient grounds.) For the most part, monarchs, not the pope, handled the job of using coercion to defend the church against perceived threats, as part of the often contentious but (from the church's perspective) still indispensable throne and altar alliance.

TOO MANY NUNS

While traditional medieval orders remained active, a profusion of new ones led the way toward a more devout and educated Catholicism. Foremost among these was the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1540. Jesuits originally strove to minister to Catholics within Europe and non-Christians elsewhere. However, within a few decades of their foundation, they had become deeply involved in both education and in attempts to reconvert Protestants. The Jesuits established a network of “colleges,” essentially secondary schools, across Europe, offering free instruction in the classics, and their boarding schools became elite institutions. Jesuit schools competed effectively with Protestant counterparts; many Protestant families sent their sons to the Jesuits to be educated, and many eventually converted to Catholicism. The Ursuline order provided similar quality education for girls, and a host of other orders dedicated themselves to providing primary-level education for the poor.



Like the growth in papal authority, new orders—particularly for women—were not something the Council of Trent had called for. On the contrary it had tried to limit new orders and had demanded that women's orders practice strict enclosure, remaining behind closed doors, living lives of seclusion and contemplative prayer rather than engaging in active ministry. But the opposite happened. Many new women's orders classified themselves as something other than a formal order to avoid Trent's restrictions.

Catholics organized for piety and education in other ways. Confraternities, organizations of laypeople for mutual support, fellowship, and common worship, had existed in the Middle Ages but proliferated even more now. Jesuits encouraged such disciplined groups of laypeople everywhere they went. While the church often restricted access to vernacular Bible translations, Jesuits made a host of religious books and pamphlets available. The Jansenists—a controversial movement in France with a theology too uncomfortably close to Calvinism for many Catholics—advocated for the removal of all limits on vernacular Bible reading but were condemned for doing so (see CH #150).

DIVIDING UP THE WORLD

In the sixteenth century, Catholicism spread outside Europe through Spanish and Portuguese conquest and accompanying missionary activity. Once again the Jesuits took a particularly active role, rivaled by the Franciscans and Dominicans. Spain and Portugal had divided the “undiscovered” parts of the world up between them in the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas on the principle that the pope had rightful authority from God over the whole world and delegated it to Christian



PREACHING, TEACHING, HEALING Charles Borromeo (*above left*) and the Ursuline order (*above*) exemplified the Catholic Reformation's spirit through their people-centered approaches to ministry. Ursulines and other religious orders proliferated as a consequence of reform, as this allegorical painting celebrates (*top*).

monarchs. (They hated this theory when applied in Europe but loved it when it gave them a justification for conquest and colonization.) Explorers perceived the destruction of idols and the defeat of pagan armies as righteous triumphs.

However, Catholic missionaries protested the cruel treatment of native peoples, often seeking to create separate communities for those converted to protect them from exploitation while also governing their lives in a paternalistic fashion. Dominican Bartolome de las Casas (1484–1566) was particularly active in speaking out for indigenous rights, but he was not alone. While some theologians argued that indigenous peoples had few or no natural rights due to their “inferiority,” most believed they had basic rights common to all human beings and could not be attacked and enslaved at will: all humans, Christians or not, should be treated as



fundamentally equal. Early modern Catholics failed to apply this principle consistently and were less likely to apply it to the treatment of Protestants (seen as rejectors of the true faith) or even Muslims (seen as heretics who had forcefully taken over formerly Christian lands). But the concept of universal human dignity hammered out, however imperfectly, during the colonial era would bear fruit at Vatican II.

ENLIGHTENED AND ROMANTIC

Throughout this era the church promoted a vigorous and often extravagant piety that rooted deeply in the hearts of laypeople. Despite political compromises and the spirit of intolerance and authoritarianism, love of Jesus and a desire for holiness flourished. However, Catholic theology remained wedded to Aristotelian philosophy and was generally hostile to new ideas. While the burning of Giordano Bruno (a mystical philosopher and cosmological theorist) in 1600 and the condemnation of Galileo in 1633 represent extreme examples, they indicated Catholic hostility to anything that might challenge the solid intellectual structures inherited from medieval scholasticism.

Increasingly secular philosophy posed a challenge to church supremacy. During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many Catholics began arguing for openness to these new Enlightenment ideas. Some pleaded for a more tolerant, ecumenical approach to Protestantism. Many sought to engage positively with new philosophical and scientific ideas and criticized what they saw as superstitious piety. Others argued for women's rights or criticized the execution of alleged witches. Some even attempted to reform the liturgy to make it more "rational," comprehensible, and educational, including through use of the vernacular.

The papacy's power was also waning. In the throne and altar relationship, the throne had become the dominant partner. Enlightened despots such as Emperor Joseph II of Austria (1741–1790) not only exercised control over the church in their dominions but used that power to make significant changes in how the church operated. Joseph tolerated Protestants

WANING SUPREMACY The Enlightenment challenged Catholic tradition (a man sheds the Latin "Our Father" for German at left) and loosened Catholic state control (Joseph II's Edict of Tolerance allegorized above).

and Jews, liberalized divorce law, and closed many monasteries. Portuguese prime minister the Marquis de Pombal enacted similar policies in Portuguese dominions, including the destruction of Jesuit reductions (independent indigenous communities) in Paraguay, which had stood in the way of exploiting the native peoples. Indeed the Jesuits, as the symbol of Counter-Reformation Catholicism, became targets everywhere under the new Enlightenment order. The pope, yielding to pressure from monarchs who saw the Jesuits as a threat, dissolved the order in 1773. (It was restored in 1814.)

Whatever its strengths or weaknesses, this new Enlightenment Catholicism did not last. After the French Revolution (1789–1799), the church came to see the Enlightenment as the enemy. In the nineteenth century, revolutionary governments used their power over the church to attack Catholicism itself. The papacy's power once again grew as throne and altar alliances collapsed. In response Catholics developed a new sense of identity as members of a global community with loyalties that transcended the state.

With the rise of Romanticism, nostalgia for the medieval past became popular. Catholics such as Rene de Chateaubriand (1768–1848) argued for the beauty and transformative power of Catholic faith, a mysterious reality that transcended rational understanding and spoke to the deepest longings of human beings. Gothic architecture was no longer seen as barbaric but as profoundly beautiful; new Gothic buildings sprang up all over Europe. Mystical visions and apparitions, seen as embarrassing during the Enlightenment, became central once more to Catholic piety. As the thrones crumbled, the altar appeared more beautiful than ever. **CH**

Edwin Woodruff Tait is a Reformation scholar, contributing editor of Christian History, and this issue's advisor.

Altar without throne: revolutionary Europe and the church

The French Revolution brought the “throne and altar” alliance crumbling down. In July 1790 the revolutionary government created the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which denied the pope approval of bishops and democratized the process of selecting clergy. All French clergy were required to swear an oath supporting this new order. Pope Pius VI (r. 1775–99) condemned the legislation, accusing the French government of “arrogat[ing] to itself the power of the Church.”

PIOUS PRISONERS

During the Reign of Terror (1793–94), revolutionary violence erupted against the church. Many clergy and members of religious orders were beheaded as supporters of the old regime, including the 16 Carmelite sisters of Compiègne. An uprising against the revolutionary government, largely fueled by devout Catholics, was crushed with horrific brutality.

The revolutionary general Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) invaded Italy and captured Pius VI, who died in captivity. Later that same year, Napoleon seized power in France and pursued a more pacifying policy toward the church. But he also incorporated the Papal States into the French Empire in May 1809. For this act Pius VII (r. 1800–23) excommunicated Napoleon and his associates, invoking “the rights of the Church.” An angry Napoleon imprisoned this pope too, forcing him to sign a concordat (treaty) on Napoleon’s terms in 1813.

When Pius VII returned to Rome in 1814, he was determined to see the church restored in post-Napoleonic Europe. He and his successors Leo XII (r. 1823–29) and Gregory XVI (r. 1831–46) accomplished this by making concordats with European powers, just as they did before the revolution. But the restoration of throne and altar would prove short-lived.

REVOLUTION IN ROME

In 1848 a new series of revolutions swept across Europe. In the Papal States, the revolution began with the assassination of Count Pellegrino Rossi (1787–1848), an economist appointed by Pius IX (r. 1846–78) to implement moderate reform. Revolutionaries then attacked the papal palace and forced the pope to agree to their demands. As an act of defiance, Pius IX declared, “But let Europe know that I am a prisoner here. I have no part in the [new] government; they shall rule in their own name, not in mine.” Several days later Pius secretly fled Rome.

The “Roman Republic” toppled after only five stormy months in 1849 due to a French invasion, and Pius IX returned to Rome in 1850. But the political



BLOOD IN THE STREET A revolutionary assailant stabbed Pellegrino Rossi on his way to preside over a government session, sparking a coup and the installation of the “Roman Republic.” It crumbled within the year.

temperature continued to rise. In 1859 to 1860, Italian nationalists managed to unify much of Italy and proclaimed the “Kingdom of Italy” in March 1861, with Rome as the official capital. Pius IX refused to abandon the long-standing “temporal authority” of the pope over the Papal States, and with French support he managed to hang on for another decade.

Meanwhile he issued the Syllabus of Errors in 1864, reflecting his conviction after 1848 that the pope could not “come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization.” Among other things, the syllabus condemned the belief that “the civil power...[could] define what [were] the rights of the Church, and the limits within which she [could] exercise those rights.”

Days prior to this, Pius declared his intention to call an ecumenical council to address more fully the challenges the papacy faced. The convening of the First Vatican Council in 1869 coincided with the final stages of the fall of the Papal States. In September French troops finally withdrew from Italy due to the outbreak of war with Prussia and its German allies. Italian nationalist forces then marched into Rome, ending a thousand years of papal authority over central Italy and inaugurating a new era in which the altar would stand without the throne.—Daniel T. L. Moore, doctoral candidate at Liberty University



Winds of change

THE FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL WRESTLED WITH MODERNISM

Kevin Schmiesing

A severe thunderstorm rolled across Rome on a hot July day in 1870, darkening the massive dome of St. Peter's Basilica. Inside, Pope Pius IX spoke above the rumbling, announcing that the council fathers had voted in favor of the decree defining papal infallibility. Some saw the dramatic weather as a sign of heaven's judgment on the proceedings. But was it approval or condemnation?

Pius had called the world's bishops together seven months earlier. Over 20 years into his record-setting 31-year papacy, he felt the ground shifting beneath him. His reputation had turned from liberal reformer to hidebound reactionary.

Two years after Pius's election in 1846, his friend and papal government minister, Pellegrino Rossi, was assassinated in the streets. Perceiving the murder as a harbinger of civil disorder and revolution, Pius fled Rome and a short-lived "Roman Republic" was erected (p. 11). Disillusioned by these events and the anticlerical character of Europe's liberal political movements, the pope turned against political reform and cultivated a vision of the church as a bulwark against the disintegration of the traditional order. Pius returned to Rome in 1850, where he enjoyed the tenuous protection of the French military, which kept the Italian revolutionaries at bay.

Many grumbled that the institution of the papacy, and perhaps the Catholic Church more generally, had outlived its utility. Successive blows from the Protestant Reformation,

VATICAN VENUE The First Vatican Council was also the first council to meet at St. Peter's Basilica. Some, like this painting's anonymous artist, saw its timing and location as divinely ordained.

Enlightenment agnosticism, and political nationalism (see pp. 6–10) seemed to confirm that old-fashioned Catholic doctrines and customs were in a state of terminal decline.

In the face of these challenges, Pius issued his Syllabus of Errors in 1864, in which he rejected the idea that "the pope may and must reconcile with and adapt himself to, Progress, Liberalism, and Modern Civilization." His terse syllabus contained references to other papal documents that offered fuller explanations of the propositions being condemned. But such details were largely lost in the ferment of the time. For many observers Pius appeared to be an incomprehensibly reactionary figure, opposed to inarguably good things such as "progress" and "democracy."

A CLARIFYING COUNCIL

Seeking to clarify and reiterate the timeless truths of the faith and teachings of the church, Pius convened the twentieth (in Catholic reckoning) ecumenical council, the first since the Council of Trent had responded to the Protestant movements of the sixteenth century. Previous councils in Rome



CHAMPION OF DEVOTION Though best known for Vatican I with its declaration of papal infallibility, Pius IX (above) also defended traditional Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary. He declared her Immaculate Conception as dogma in 1854 (right).



had been held at the pope's cathedral, St. John Lateran. St. Peter's Basilica on Vatican Hill would be the venue for this one, and so it became known as the Vatican Council. (The modifier "First" would be added later). In December 1869 some 700 bishops gathered at St. Peter's.

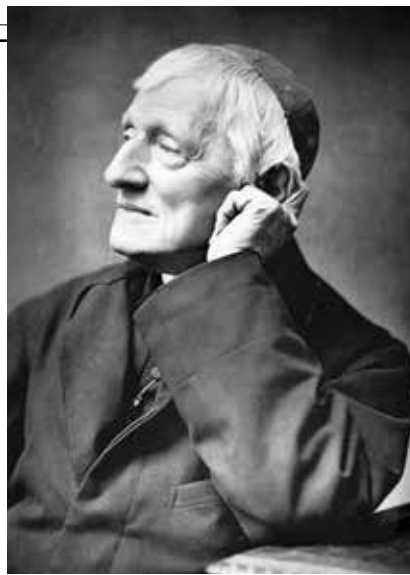
The original agenda was broader than the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility for which the council would be most remembered. The first order of business was a response to the Enlightenment project and its philosophical offshoots. Across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, thinkers such as John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and Benedict Spinoza had subjected Christian history, Scripture, and doctrine to scientific scrutiny, concluding that much traditional belief lacked a rational basis (see *CH* #139). Many of these philosophers saw themselves as defending religion, separating the wheat of reasonable Christianity from the chaff of myth and superstition. Some Christian thinkers acceded to this approach but sought to wall off religion as a separate category of human experience—personal, emotional, private, and thus invulnerable to rational attack.

In contrast the council fathers in Rome refused to cede the ground of reason to the critics of traditional faith. They insisted that the human intellect was a God-given faculty that, properly employed, enhanced rather than denigrated religious belief. The harmony of faith and reason was evident in Scripture, and it was a hallmark of the Catholic intellectual tradition that had reached its peak in the magisterial writings of the thirteenth-century philosopher-theologian Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224–1274). The faith's supernatural

elements, including miracles such as the Resurrection of Christ, might exceed the capacity of reason to fully grasp or explain, but they did not contradict it.

On April 24, 1870, the council issued its Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith (*Dei Filius*), which condemned "that doctrine of rationalism or naturalism . . . which spares no effort to bring it about that Christ . . . is shut out from the minds of people and the moral life of nations." Against those who sought to sever faith and reason, the council asserted that "there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only as regards its source, but also as regards its object." "Even though faith is above reason," it continued, "there can never be any real disagreement" between them, "because it is the same God who reveals the mysteries and infuses faith, and who has endowed the human mind with the light of reason."

Deliberations on other items of discussion were more contentious. Those present agreed that the church itself was infallible on matters of faith and morals. This represented the classic Catholic understanding of Christ's assurance, "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:20, RSV)—that the Holy Spirit would protect the church from falling into error. Less consensus existed on precisely what role the bishop of Rome played and the meaning of papal infallibility. That the successor of Peter had primacy in the church was without question, but did he have supreme jurisdiction, and were his teachings certainly inerrant and irreformable? If so, under what conditions? Is the pope always speaking God's binding



truth, or are there times his pronouncements are not binding? Further complicating the theological questions was a prudential one: even if papal infallibility was genuine Catholic dogma, was it wise to emphasize it, given the current political conditions?

INFALLIBILITY, INOPPORTUNITY, OPPOSITION

These considerations unfolded into three possible positions, each of them represented to some degree among the council fathers. Major figures from the numerically small but intellectually potent English Catholic Church exemplified the three perspectives: later life converts Cardinal Henry Manning (1808–1892) and Father John Henry Newman (1801–1890), and the prominent intellectual Lord John Acton (1834–1902). Manning was an “ultramontane” or “infallibilist,” enthusiastic about proclaiming the infallibility of the pope. Newman was an “inopportunist,” quietly affirming infallibility but believing that the question needed more study and the time was not yet ripe for a full-throated declaration. Historian Acton stridently opposed the doctrine, asserting that the historical record proved the opposite: popes had in fact been demonstrably mistaken on matters of doctrine. Another British observer colorfully reported that Vatican officials regarded Acton as “a devil in a holy-water font.”

Although Acton and others outside the council employed the press to create controversy around the deliberations, outright opponents of papal infallibility among the bishops themselves were few. Pius IX had himself exercised this prerogative by defining as dogma the doctrine of Mary’s Immaculate Conception in 1854, arousing little objection. Prior to promulgating the dogma, Pius had consulted bishops around the world regarding the sense of the lay faithful and appointed a panel of experts to examine the proposed doctrine’s history and theology. Far from being a raw exercise of power, the pronouncement of the Immaculate Conception was, in Pius’s estimation, simply the ratification of a teaching deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. The council’s approval of papal infallibility was not an inflation of papal power or an endorsement of papal opinion, but instead a recognition

WHICH WAY, WESTERN MAN? Henry Manning (left), John Henry Newman (middle), and John Acton (right) represented the three major positions on papal infallibility during Vatican I.

of the unique role of the successor of Peter as guarantor of theological orthodoxy.

A heavy majority of council fathers acknowledged this role. Thus, despite Acton’s maneuvering and the hesitation of the inopportunist, the pro-infallibility party carried the day, with the final vote passing almost unanimously, 533 to 2. In its first three chapters, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ (*Pastor Aeternus*), circulated July 18, 1870, affirmed Catholic teaching regarding the pope’s primacy and jurisdiction. Regarding infallibility the key passage appeared at the end of the document’s final chapter:

We teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman pontiff speaks *Ex Cathedra* that is, when . . . in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the church, irreformable.

The official tally on *Pastor Aeternus* was misleading, though, because most anti-infallibilist bishops left Rome before the vote was taken. (A preliminary vote had shown substantial but not overwhelming support for the dogma: 451 in favor, 62 in favor “conditionally,” and 88 opposed.) The bishop of Little Rock, Arkansas, Edward Fitzgerald (1833–1907), was one of only two participants who stayed to register a no vote. One motivation for early departures was to avoid the uncomfortable experience of publicly opposing the pope, but danger offered another excuse: the pressure of the Franco-Prussian War had compelled the French to withdraw their garrison, and the forces of the Risorgimento (Italy’s revolutionary nationalist movement) were closing in on the Eternal City. Rome was no longer safe for churchmen.



“SLIDING ON THIN ICE” A satirical cartoon illustrates the dangerous ground council fathers trod in defining papal infallibility as dogma (above).

Despite the declaration on infallibility, the papacy still appeared to be beleaguered. Believing that the church’s power had historically derived more from political clout than inherent spiritual merit, prominent American Unitarian minister Theodore Parker (1810–1860) wrote from Rome estimating papal influence in the wake of Italian unification: “When his temporal power is limited to this city, with 176,000 antiquated, good-natured people, his spiritual power will be worth little.” Opposition also persisted within the Catholic Church. Lord Acton’s historian-mentor, Father Ignaz Döllinger (1799–1890), joined a band of German-speaking Catholics in rejecting Vatican I. They formed a schismatic church known as Old Catholics, a small body that survives today.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Yet most Catholics rallied around the pope. Even those opposed to or uncertain about infallibility—including Bishop Fitzgerald and Father Newman (who became a cardinal in 1879)—deferentially accepted the council’s decision. And though Pius protested the seizure of the Papal States to his dying day, by the late twentieth century, the dominant perspective had changed. John Paul II’s official biographer, George Weigel (b. 1951), contended that “the loss of the Papal States was a great boon to the papacy and to the church’s evangelical mission.” Freed from the burden of political rule, the pope could focus his attention on spiritual matters and emerge as a defender of universal moral values.

Benedict XV, for example, unencumbered by political alliances or military obligations, became the world’s foremost voice for peace during the bloody days of World War I. In 1950, when Pius XII, teaching *ex cathedra*, defined as dogma the bodily assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven at the end of her earthly life, little dissent existed in Catholic circles—much like the experience of his predecessor’s declaration concerning her Immaculate Conception.

Back in Rome in the summer of 1870, with the threat of armed conflict bearing down on the city, the council broke up the day after the vote on infallibility. But the meeting was never formally adjourned, so technically Vatican I was in a state of postponement until 1962. In that year the council fathers of Vatican II began by officially closing Vatican I. The



LOSING ROME Papal troops converged in St. Peter’s Square in 1870 to halt the Italian Army’s entry (top). Nonetheless the city fell (above). Pius IX never accepted the government’s rule as legitimate.

Second Vatican Council was called in part to complete the “unfinished business” of the truncated earlier council. But by that time, almost 100 years later, four pontiffs had come and gone since Pius IX, and it was a different church in a different world. A new pope, along with a new generation of bishops, would respond in a new way to the challenges confronting the church. **CH**

Kevin Schmiesing is an instructor of church history in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati’s Lay Ecclesial Ministry Program and cohost of the Catholic History Trek podcast.

Pope versus modernity



COUNTERACTING KANT Vatican I dealt with problematic Enlightenment philosophies produced by thinkers such as Immanuel Kant (*left*). The council insisted instead on the harmony of faith and reason as proposed by theologian Thomas Aquinas (*far left*).

From the canons on faith and reason:

1. If anyone says that in divine revelation there are contained no true mysteries properly so-called, but that all the dogmas of the faith can be understood and demonstrated by properly trained reason from natural principles: let him be anathema.

2. If anyone says that human studies are to be treated with such a degree of liberty that their assertions may be maintained as true even when they are opposed to divine revelation, and that they may not be forbidden by the church: let him be anathema.

3. If anyone says that it is possible that at some time, given the advancement of knowledge, a sense may be assigned to the dogmas propounded by the church which is different from that which the church has understood and understands: let him be anathema.

—*Dei Filius*

That which our lord Jesus Christ, the prince of shepherds and great shepherd of the sheep, established in the blessed apostle Peter, for the continual salvation and permanent benefit of the church, must of necessity remain forever, by Christ's authority, in the church which, founded as it is upon a rock, will stand firm until the end of time....

Furthermore, it follows from that supreme power which the Roman pontiff has in governing the whole church, that he has the right, in the performance of this office of his, to communicate freely with the pastors and flocks of the entire church, so that they may be taught and guided by him in the way of salvation.

And therefore we condemn and reject the opinions of those who hold that this communication of the supreme head with pastors and flocks may be lawfully obstructed; or that it should be dependent on the civil power, which leads them to maintain that what is determined by the apostolic see or by its authority concerning the government of the church, has no force or effect unless it is confirmed by the agreement of the civil authority.

—*Pastor Aeternus* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ)

Excerpts from Vatican I's most important documents

Pius, bishop, servant of the servants of God, with the approval of the sacred council, for an everlasting record. Most reverend fathers, is it your pleasure that, to the praise and glory of the holy and undivided Trinity, Father, Son and holy Spirit, for the increase and exaltation of the catholic faith and religion, for the uprooting of current errors, for the reformation of the clergy and the Christian people, and for the common peace and concord of all, the holy ecumenical Vatican council should be opened, and be declared to have been opened?

—*Opening of the council, December 8, 1869*

Everybody knows that those heresies, condemned by the fathers of Trent, which rejected the divine magisterium of the church and allowed religious questions to be a matter for the judgment of each individual, have gradually collapsed into a multiplicity of sects, either at variance or in agreement with one another; and by this means a good many people have had all faith in Christ destroyed.

Indeed even the holy Bible itself, which they at one time claimed to be the sole source and judge of the Christian faith, is no longer held to be divine, but they begin to assimilate it to the inventions of myth....

The abandonment and rejection of the Christian religion, and the denial of God and his Christ, has plunged the minds of many into the abyss of pantheism, materialism and atheism, and the consequence is that they strive to destroy rational nature itself, to deny any criterion of what is right and just, and to overthrow the very foundations of human society....

—*Dei Filius* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith)

Witch hunts and “new theology”

PAPAL CENTRALIZATION AND THE MODERNIST CRISIS

Shaun Blanchard

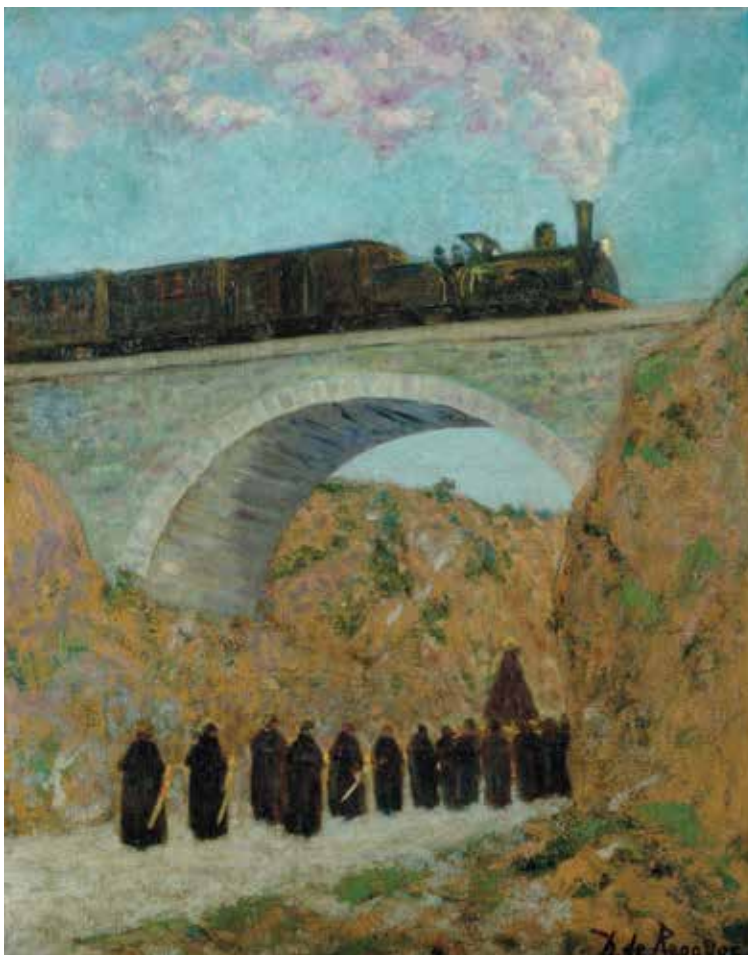
In the half century before Vatican II, the world struggled through staggering changes. Humanity suffered “the war to end all wars,” soon followed by a second, even more terrifying world war; the Russian Revolution led to the rise of communism; the Spanish flu and the Great Depression destroyed millions of lives; Nazis and fascists goose-stepped through the streets of Europe; the Holocaust and the atomic bomb shocked the conscience of the world; a wave of decolonization throughout Asia and Africa brought hope amid instability; a Jewish state of Israel was established for the first time in millennia; the dawn of the sexual revolution and the civil rights era changed Western culture forever; and a Cold War began that had no end in sight, behind which the possibility of nuclear annihilation lurked. All this in the span of about 50 years!

Understanding Vatican II and its agenda requires taking into account the varied and conflicting Catholic responses to an array of tumultuous world events as well as internal church challenges. Two key internal challenges ultimately came to a head at the council. The first was the need to balance diversity within unity. This was a particularly pressing challenge for an ever-expanding and diversifying world community led from Rome, where enormous practical and theoretical power was invested in a single person—the pope. The second challenge, one that Protestants experienced in equal measure, was how Catholics could preserve and defend a supernatural faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3) with the intellectual depth and rigor required in a rapidly changing, modern world.

CENTRALIZED ROME: BLESSING OR CURSE?

Pope Pius IX went to his grave proud of the spiritual authority that had been consolidated in his pontificate. After centuries of dispute, Vatican I had successfully asserted the pope’s supreme teaching and jurisdictional authority in the universal church, even when it was exercised outside of an ecumenical council. (An irony, since it took a council to definitively establish this doctrine, see pp. 12–16.)

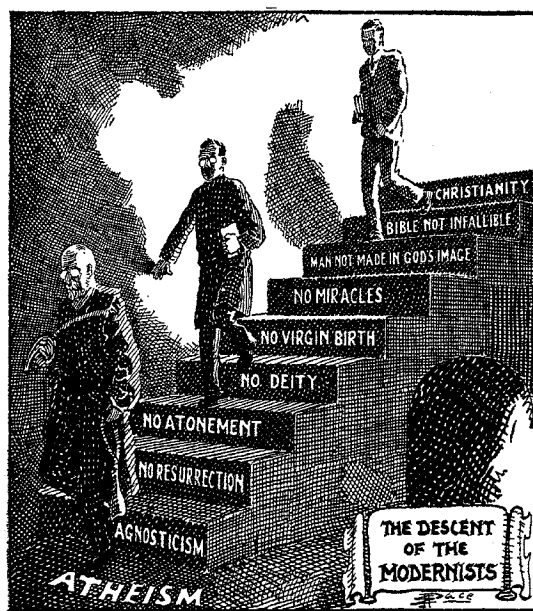
The dominant “ultramontane” (pope-centered) stream of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Catholicism was proudly unecumenical, imbued with Romanticism, and emboldened by conservative resurgences in politics and religion. Ultramontane culture was marked by a triple devotion:



PIETY AND PROGRESS A 19th-c. artist painted a Good Friday procession beneath a passing train, contrasting ancient church rhythms with the changing modern world.

to Mary and her multiplying apparitions, to the inviting image of Jesus with his Sacred Heart open to sinners, and finally to the person, office, and teaching of the pope, who functioned as a patriarchal bulwark against the “errors” and excesses of the modern world, from unbridled capitalism and birth control to atheism and communism.

When it came to the question of papal infallibility, a “minimalist” perspective, associated with John Henry Newman, was always tolerated. Indeed, after Vatican II, this minimalist perspective, which accepted papal infallibility but sought to limit its scope, became the norm. But the pope’s essentially untrammelled authority, which was built up with increasing effectiveness during this period, remains the status quo in the church to this day. Probably the most important development in this regard is



DANGEROUS DESCENT Pius X's (left) scorched-earth approach to modernism (middle) created division among the clergy. It exposed some unorthodox views but more often alienated those with legitimate questions.

EMBRACING THE SPIRITUAL Devotional art, such as this Sacred Heart of Jesus (right), combated modernity's antisupernatural influence in popular Catholicism.

the pope's relatively recent right to appoint (and depose) virtually all the world's bishops—a power unthinkable before the French Revolution toppled the old political regime in 1789 (see p. 11). Coupled with Roman control of the process of the codification of church law in the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* (and again in 1983), the papacy has more direct control over the Catholic Church now than at any time in the first 1,800 years of Christianity.

Despite concentrated power's threat of corruption, papal centralization did have its benefits; namely, in making necessary moral and strategic decisions for the global Catholic Church. For example, Pius XI's decision to ordain native-born bishops (like the six Chinese men he consecrated in 1926) meant that the days of feet-dragging on the issue of indigenous clergy were definitively numbered. John XXIII's calls in the early 1960s "for the elimination of every trace of racial discrimination" put Catholics ignoring or resisting the civil rights movement in an ultimately untenable position. It is difficult to imagine how the contemporary Catholic Church could, practically speaking, truly remain one ecclesial body from Santiago to Brussels and from Seoul to Cape Town without the papal rock at the center of it all.

However, Vatican II's response to this period of papal consolidation of power was mixed, even paradoxical. On one hand, the bishops quite boldly asserted that they were themselves successors of the apostles and that St. Peter wasn't a king but rather a servant-leader who had guided

the Christian community in collaboration with the Twelve and other apostolic leaders. But the reformist majority at Vatican II was unable or unwilling to revise papal and curial day-to-day control of the church. Popular perceptions equating the opinions of the pope with the teaching of the Catholic Church and views of the pope as a kind of spiritual celebrity or even an oracle have arguably increased rather than decreased since Vatican II.

MODERNISM: HERESY OR HONESTY?

The crisis of "modernism" that gripped the church around the turn of the twentieth century was a Catholic version of similar debates raging in the Protestant world over "liberal" and "fundamentalist" views of the Bible. Debates over Scripture took center stage for Catholics, with more liberal Catholics arguing that the early chapters of Genesis were spiritual and allegorical truth, but not history; that the Pentateuch was not the work of Moses but of a long redaction process; and that the book of Isaiah was actually the work of multiple authors.

While their opponents in the church did not necessarily assert a thorough-going fundamentalism in response to historical criticism, they did fear that these new "modernist" interpretations of the Bible would undermine divine revelation and trust in the tradition and teaching authority of the Catholic Church. Thus a Catholic "fundamental" response to modernism came from the top down.

This defensive posture reached its apex, or nadir, under Pius X (r. 1903–14). Pius should be commended for being close to the common people and a warm and conscientious pastor. He is fondly remembered for emphasizing daily reception of Holy Communion and lowering the age of First Communion. Unfortunately, however, he had none of the prudence or subtlety of his predecessor Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903), who was a fine exemplar of conservative innovation and adaption in response to the intellectual,



political, and social challenges of his time. Pius X, on the other hand, happily assumed the mantle of a reactionary, reveling in his own seemingly absolute spiritual authority. His bull-in-a-china-shop mentality in the face of perceived enemies outside of church and traitors within had disastrous consequences.

It was not as if Catholicism, indeed Christianity as a whole, was not facing serious intellectual challenges. New waves of thought in the realms of theology, philosophy, politics, and ethics—the question of “modernity” as a whole—posed grave challenges to the Christian faith as it was traditionally conceived. As with all challenges, however, modernity also posed opportunities. Some intellectually adventurous Catholics engaged optimistically and openly with modern philosophy, attempting to speak to the “turn to the subject” that they believed required at least a new apologetic, if not a radical rethinking of the Catholic faith. Others engaged with critical research on the Bible, reexamining the development of doctrine through the lens of the New Testament and the faith of the earliest Christians. And others, for religious as well as political and social reasons, challenged established notions of authority, obedience, and hierarchy in the civil and ecclesiastical realms.

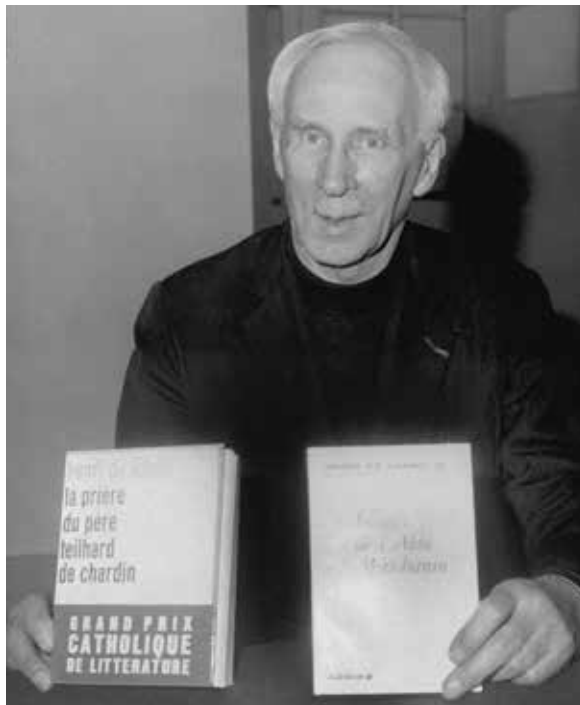
Pope Pius X seems to have sincerely believed that these loose networks of intellectuals were in fact a coordinated group of subversives, and that without an equally coordinated reprisal and suppression, this new heresy of “modernism” would destroy the church from within. Thus he felt unseemly methods were entirely justifiable. A secret society known as the *Sodalitium Pianum* (The Society of Pius V), led by the fanatic and anti-Semite Umberto Benigni (1862–1934), provided an extreme template for antimodernist witch-hunting around the world by spying, denouncing, and intimidating suspected modernists, sometimes for the offense of reading the wrong books.

MODERNIST ERROR Leo XIII (middle), pope before Pius X, responded with nuance to modern challenges; Pius XII (left) followed Pius X’s example instead. He suspected modernism in *nouvelle théologie* and covertly condemned the movement in *Humani Generis*. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (right) helped Pius XII formulate the encyclical.

Pius X brought the heavy ecclesiastical artillery with an encyclical called *Pascendi Domini Gregis* (1907), which included instructions for “Councils of Vigilance” in each diocese (local church territories) tasked with rooting out the many-headed hydra of modernism. In *Pascendi*, Pius X defined modernism as an all-encompassing “synthesis of all heresies”—an ideological cancer that was at root philosophical but had theological and even political and social dimensions. Predictably fear, suspicion, gossip, and score-settling abounded. In 1910 Pius X ordered that all candidates for ordination take an “anti-Modernist Oath”—a mandate that was only rescinded in 1967, after Vatican II wrestled with and rejected the once-hegemonic antimodernist ideology.

SUSPICIOUS QUESTIONS

As a coordinated movement, modernism never existed. Pius X had created a monster from his own nightmares. And yet, real people asking real questions certainly did exist. Most were Catholic intellectuals wrestling with the latest learning in science, philosophy, and history in a faithful way. Some, however, did go too far. One of the most famous “modernists,” the French biblical scholar Alfred Loisy (1857–1940), ultimately apostatized. Initially Loisy’s historical-critical work sparked lively debate because he said that Jesus had in fact preached the Kingdom of God, but what followed after him was the church. Unfortunately the increasingly radical conclusions of Loisy’s research, and his frustration with clerical conservatism, led him out of the Christian faith entirely. But Loisy was one of a handful of exceptions. Pius X’s antimodernist



crusade was, for the most part, a tragic exercise in kicking the can down the road, leaving a trail of ruined careers.

Despite the damage done by antimodernist witch-hunts, intellectually adventurous Catholics continued to think creatively about how to engage fruitfully with contemporary scholarship, rather than ignore or caricature it. Theologically the most significant movement to arise was known, originally pejoratively, as the *nouvelle théologie* or “new theology.” Many of them were French priests and typically of the Jesuit or Dominican orders, though scholars in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands also contributed to this new movement. These Catholics adopted a way of doing theology that was distinct from the “neoscholastic” method enforced since 1879, when Leo XIII promoted a revamped “Thomism” (based on the medieval giant Thomas Aquinas) in the face of modern philosophical “errors” that had sprouted up since the Enlightenment.

Instead “new theologians” like the Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) and the Dominican Yves Congar (1904–1995) sought to go back to the wellsprings of Christian life, found especially in the Bible and the church fathers. The guardians of neoscholastic orthodoxy, however, like Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877–1964; himself a French Dominican), saw in these thinkers a new, more covert form of modernism. The “new” theologians’ interest in philosophical subjectivity and critical study of the Bible and church history was seen as theologically dangerous, and their general cultural and political proclivities were suspiciously progressive.

But unlike many of their unlucky forebears, proponents of the *nouvelle théologie* were about to be vindicated. Pius XII’s elderly, jolly, and fat successor John XXIII (Angelo Roncalli, r. 1958–1963)—seen by most people as a “stop-gap” pope—made the shocking decision to convene an



THE USUAL SUSPECTS? After Angelo Roncalli (above) became Pope John XXIII, he discovered that he, too, had been suspected of modernism. The antimodernist crusades influenced the convening of Vatican II, which would exonerate some priests censured during the controversy’s height, such as Henri de Lubac (left).

ecumenical council. Even more shocking, it soon became clear that Pope John was not interested in forcefully reasserting the status quo or condemning a litany of “isms.” He was instead guided by the principle of *ressourcement* (return to the sources) and a genuine desire to dialogue with non-Catholic Christians and the world at large (what he called *aggiornamento* or “updating”). In many ways, as evidenced by his personal piety, Pope John was a thoroughly traditional Catholic. But his deep confidence in the beauty and truth of the gospel message made him unafraid of real debate and frank discussion. While he took doctrine and tradition seriously, his own experience of being under suspicion by the hyperorthodox inclined him to hear people out rather than silence them. In an amusing but telling episode, after his papal election, the new pope visited the Holy Office—the name at the time for the Vatican department that oversees and enforces doctrine. His own file read “suspected of Modernism.”

While numerous deep continuities between pre-Vatican II Catholicism and today’s church exist, the reformist agenda set in motion by the council marked a dramatic departure from the theological and ideological culture of antimodernism, so much so that we can speak of a new era of Catholic history dawning at Vatican II. **CH**

Shaun Blanchard is lecturer in theology at the University of Notre Dame Australia.

Only Christ is king

Papal responses to fascism shaped the Catholic world

In 1925 Pope Pius XI established the Feast of Christ the King. After the brutal First World War, he believed Europe needed to remember its Christian heritage. Only by returning to God and Christ the King's peaceful reign could they avoid further destruction. While his encyclical was for all, Pius XI specifically had enemies on the Left in mind.

Yet the next 20 years revealed that not every enemy of the church's enemies was a friend. One crucial development in the decades leading up to Vatican II was the church's experience with fascism. Wrestling with and ultimately rejecting this anti-Christian ideology laid the groundwork for the council's wide-scale embrace of democracy, human rights, religious freedom, and friendship with the Jews and other non-Christians.

"WITH BURNING ANXIETY"

Pius XI thundered against atheist communism, which he considered Christian civilization's primary enemy. Nevertheless, he correctly discerned godlessness on the Right. For instance he condemned the far-Right French movement Action Française which enraged many traditional Catholics. Its leader, the proudly anti-Semitic Charles Maurras (1868–1952), was an unbeliever who used Catholicism as a means to a civilizational end. Pius XI and many others found such instrumentalization of the faith unacceptable; herein, the pope thought, lay the fundamental deception of Christians embracing fascism. From the beginning among Hitler's Nazis and Mussolini's Blackshirts, Christianity was weaponized or tolerated only insofar as it could serve Hitler's ends.

Unfortunately Pius was slow to appreciate the threat of Mussolini. His attempts to bargain with "Il Duce" inadvertently hastened Mussolini's rise to power, and the pope stayed silent when Mussolini illegally and brutally invaded Ethiopia. Pius found his voice against fascism, however—and it was loud and righteously angry when he did. In the spring of 1937, church agents smuggled into Germany thousands of copies of an encyclical titled *Mit Brennender Sorge* (With Burning Anxiety—drafted in German rather than the traditional Latin). Read from every Catholic pulpit in the Reich on Palm Sunday, 1937, Pius XI's words denounced Nazi violation of the concordat (bilateral agreement) with the Vatican, coupling this with criticism of Nazi racial doctrine. Furious, Hitler and Joseph Goebbels increased persecution of resistant Catholics immediately.

Though unfortunately veiled in his criticism of Nazi anti-Semitism, Pius began to see racism as a serious modern heresy. An encyclical denouncing racism was drawn up, but Pius XI died, and this "lost



Dopo l'incursione su Roma. - Il Pontefice visita le rovine della Basilica di San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, s'inginocchia a pregare e poi benedice la folla.
(Illustrazione di G. Belloni)

WARTIME POPE A newspaper illustration shows Pope Pius XII praying by a bombed church. Pius XII left a controversial WW II legacy, both criticized and defended.

encyclical" (titled *The Unity of the Human Race*) was never published.

Pius XI's successor, Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli, r. 1939–58) left a complicated legacy in the face of Nazism and the Holocaust in particular. Though limited by his prejudices and diplomatic perspective, Pius XII still saved hundreds of Jews from almost certain death and helped facilitate resistance to Hitler. The times he lived in, however, called for a prophetic heroism he did not possess.

VATICAN II'S ANTIFASCISTS

Even so, papal leadership in response to fascism helped shape Vatican II. After Pius XI condemned Action Française, a young French intellectual named Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) ended his affiliation with the far-Right (see pp. 45–49), later becoming a great influence on many leaders at Vatican II, such as Pope Paul VI. Undoubtedly the world wars and fascist oppression profoundly shaped modern Catholic theology, social teaching, and political theory.—*Shaun Blanchard, lecturer in theology at Notre Dame Australia*

Meeting the modern world

VATICAN II'S CALL TO ACTION FOR THE GLOBAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

Nadia M. Lahutsky



BUSY BISHOPS Council fathers disperse during the Vatican II Council, presumably for a break between proceedings. The council became known for its collegial collaboration.

of the upcoming council and asking what issues they thought should be considered. Not everyone responded, and those who did proposed minor matters of pastoral concern. After all when was the last time Rome had asked them for an opinion? Opinions, that is, directives, usually went in the other direction. Nevertheless, the preparatory staff compiled the responses.

The “pre-preparatory” commission, largely filled with curial staffers or “safe” men—that is, none of the suspect theologians silenced under Pius XII (see pp. 17–20)—established 12 working commissions to draft documents (schemata) to present to the council fathers. These texts—in Latin—went out to all those invited in the summer of 1962, along with the admonition to read them and come ready to vote on them. They went also to ecumenical observers whose fraternal presence would be something new at a general council.

A council inspired by the ideal of Christian

unity could not proceed as though Christian communities beyond the Roman Catholic Church did not exist.

John XXIII opened Vatican II on October 11, 1962, with a solemn celebration of Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica, invoking the Holy Spirit. The pope’s opening address set the council’s tone. He urged the gathered bishops and heads of major religious orders to consider the “signs of the times,” to avoid being influenced by those “prophets of doom” who were always saying things were getting worse and worse, to aim for the “medicine of mercy” rather than that of judgment, and to pursue a council that would be pastoral in tone and effect. The church was, he said, in need of *aggiornamento*, a continual updating. True to Pope John’s vision, Vatican II would issue no anathemas, and it would make an effort, though halting in some aspects, to be in dialogue with the contemporary world.

CHANGING THE TONE

The hard work began the next day when Cardinal Liénart (Lille) rose to address—or protest, rather—the proposed

When **Angelo Roncalli**, patriarch of Venice, was elected pope in October 1958, the cardinal electors intended him to be a caretaker—a maintainer of the status quo. But John XXIII had something else in mind. His announcement in late January 1959 that he was calling a council surprised everyone, not least the Roman Curia, the men charged with the Catholic Church’s administration and, likely, his cardinal electors. A council? Why? There were no pressing doctrinal heresies to oppose. The worldwide church was humming along just fine. Hadn’t Vatican I settled every question one could ever imagine with its firm definition of papal primacy and papal infallibility? But John XXIII’s big idea responded to a question he had asked himself in prayer: *What can I do for Christian unity, beyond pray?*

A CAUTIOUS COMMISSION

The Curia dragged its feet over the next few years, although the preparatory work for John’s council did eventually get underway. Letters were sent to diocesan bishops and university leaders throughout the world informing them



SPEAKING TO THE TIMES Pope John XXIII (above) urged charitable dialogue and *aggiornamento*, an “updating” that provided answers to the church’s modern problems, at Vatican II. On Christmas of 1961, he signed a document establishing the council’s start the following October (right).



vote on the men appointed to fill out the various council commissions: those who would receive the work of the discussions and redraft the texts. The 2,679 council fathers (1,044 from Europe, 956 from the Americas, 379 from Africa, and 300 from Asia) were largely unknown to each other and couldn’t possibly know whether the people on the lists were competent to do the work. A vote that day would have made Vatican II a rubber stamp of the Curia’s usual business without ever dealing with the real issues the church faced in the modern world.

The council fathers erupted in applause, and the moderators determined they should adjourn for several days. By this act the driving force of the council was set in motion—that the bishops would own the work of this event. This filled with joy those council fathers who had taken to heart Pope John’s message of hope; but it produced dread in those satisfied by the status quo (most curial officials and a powerful minority of bishops). All the remaining events of Vatican II can be seen through the lens of these different sides, sometimes called “progressive and conservative,” though competing opinions were far more complex than this simple distinction suggests.

Vatican II met from 1962 to 1965 during the autumn months, each daily meeting (called a congregation) creating an astounding number of logistical needs. Bishops found lodging as they could, often with seminaries that served their church. The meetings took place in Latin without simultaneous translation, which limited the number of voices heard

from the floor. (Most bishops’ Latin skills did not extend to fluent oral communication.) The daily congregations met in the mornings after Mass, and the commissions’ work filled the afternoons. The council fathers met in language and regional groups developed on the first day of business to discuss the issues before them; they heard from many experts (called *periti*) in theology, canon law, ethics, church history, biblical studies, and so on, some of whom had accompanied particular bishops. With as many as 500 *periti* in Rome, one can imagine the cafes and trattorias filled with animated discussions about council matters!

INVITING THE WHOLE FAMILY

In the summer of 1962, when invitations went out to ecumenical observers—the Orthodox churches of the East and the Protestant communions in the West—many seasoned ecumenists received the letters with enthusiasm. Others, however, considered the overture with suspicion. Was this council going to be another “return to Rome” ploy? Moreover, Orthodox churches in some communist countries faced political reprisals if they attended, which inhibited Orthodox participation on top of their inherent objections to Roman claims of supremacy.

Nonetheless, 37 ecumenical observers did arrive, and, thanks to the efforts of Cardinal Augustin Bea (1881–1968), head of the newly created Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, the ecumenical invitation was no mere formality or ploy. Observers received excellent seats near the table of moderators, as well as a translation system to understand proceedings. A testimony to the excitement and goodwill generated by the first session (1962), the number of attending ecumenists had grown to 105 by 1965.



The first session included precisely one layman, Jean Guitton (1901–1999), a personal friend of the pope, who sat with the ecumenical observers. Ten Catholic laymen, heads of international organizations, arrived in 1963. The final session included 29 laymen, 13 laywomen, and 10 Catholic sisters, all of them auditors. Their “listen-only” status speaks volumes about the role of laity and women at that time.

John XXIII’s death in June 1962 threw the future of the council into doubt. Moderates and reform-minded bishops received with relief the news of the election of Giovanni Montini, who, as Paul VI, quickly announced the date for the opening of the second session in September. These inevitable human moments, such as not only the pope’s death, but also President John F. Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, the conflict escalations in Vietnam, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and other ongoing tensions of the Cold War, could not but affect the participants.

“FULL, CONSCIOUS, AND ACTIVE”

Vatican II’s renewing spirit appeared in the debates of the first session, especially in the discussions on three important documents. The schema (draft text) on the liturgy contained major voices from the liturgical movement of



MOVERS AND SHAKERS Bishops from around the world (above left) came to the council. Here, thousands flood St. Peter’s Square (above) between meetings. When Cardinal Liénart (in all red at left) rose to reject the vote on appointees chosen by the Roman Curia, he voiced the concerns of many council fathers and set in motion the bishop-led work that defined Vatican II.

the last 50 years, so this document reflected themes of renewal (see CH #129). Rather than a list of rules regarding the Mass, the schema exalted the presence of Christ in the church through the sacraments. The most-often quoted line from the final text, “The faithful should be led to take a full, conscious and active part in liturgical celebrations,” was a far cry from the pre-Vatican II experience of the Mass as a time for one’s private devotions and adoration of the Eucharistic elements.

The text also urged a renewed reverence for the Liturgy of the Word and a simplification of the rite of the Mass as well as of church décor, so as not to detract from the centrality of Christ. Further, local bishops could determine whether or not to extend the use of the vernacular in their parishes during worship. Finally approved in December 1963, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy changed the lives of Catholics every time they joined in a celebration of the Mass.

DEI VERBUM

In mid-November the newly empowered council fathers took up the schema On the Sources of Revelation. Fierce objections arose to the schema’s presentation of revelation as propositional, subject to logic and syllogism, and to the document’s view that there are two sources of revelation (Scripture and tradition). No, someone responded, “There is only one source of revelation, the Word of God.”

Pope John used his authority to commit this text’s reworking to a joint group composed of the curial-dominated Theological Commission and the more reform-minded Cardinal Bea. Thus subsequent revisions of the text resulted in a view of revelation as personal, involving God reaching out to humans; all the faithful were urged to engage in serious study of the Bible employing



ASSUMING THE MANTLE John XXIII's death was a blow to council proceedings, but when Paul VI was elected pope (above), he re-established the second session as soon as possible. His involvement in Vatican II (right) would have great significance in some of the council's most heated and controversial debates.

critical methods. *Dei Verbum* (the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), approved November 18, 1965, became an important basis for Catholic ecumenical dialogue, especially with Protestant churches.

POPE PAUL'S "BLACK WEEK"

The debates on the nature of the church covered three sessions and brought crises to the council. Council fathers had spent two months disagreeing with the curial-staffed commissions, and they pulled no punches in responding to the draft before them. "This document has in it nothing of the mystery that is the church." "It ignores all matters of an ecumenical nature, such as who exactly is a member of Christ's Church." "It ignores all recent developments in theology." "It's too clericalist; there should be more attention to the Church as the People of God and its mission to humanity." The objectionable description of the church presented in the first schema gave way over three council sessions to a deeper and more complex view of the church as communion in Christ, a communion that is lived out in history, the site not of perfection but of striving and—inevitably at times—failing in making effective Christian witness.

This communion ecclesiology (as it was called) led naturally to a view of bishops as in a collegial relationship with each other and with the bishop of Rome. Any such idea of an equalizing relationship among the clerical hierarchy, and especially the pope, could seem at odds with the century-old teaching of Vatican I. However, straw polls showed that roughly 2,000 of the council fathers approved of this emphasis. The other 500 or so were firmly opposed to any tinkering with the hierarchical view of the church. Paul VI deeply desired consensus.

On the heels of other fraught discussions on ecumenism and religious liberty, Pope Paul finally precipitated



what many in the majority group called "black week." On arrival into St. Peter's on November 14, 1964, each council father received a folder containing a "preliminary explanatory note" to the text on the church. Given "by mandate of the supreme authority," the note addressed the relationship between the bishops and the pope in a purely juridical fashion, occasionally repeating part of the text and often giving the exact wording from some of the minority bishops, specifically underlining papal authority.

Was Pope Paul offering a sop to the minority? Was he expressing his own fears? Was this document to be an interpretative key to the full text? Like John XXIII, Paul VI observed the council's workings through closed-circuit television; unlike John, Paul became more inclined to intervene. This intervention did at the time seem an enormous setback; however, it did not ultimately undermine the power of the final version of *Lumen Gentium* (adopted November 21, 1964), with its rich view of the church as a mystery in which the pilgrim people, laity and clergy alike, live out their Christian witness.

CHARITY AND LIBERTY

Pope John had set in motion Vatican II with the goal of Christian unity through renewal. Although the council began with an eye to other Christians, implications also emerged for people of other faiths, and of none, those whom John had called "men of goodwill." The Decree on Ecumenism reflected the spirit of *Lumen Gentium* in noting that all who have been justified by faith in Christ in baptism are incorporated into Christ. Protestants and

Text turmoil

How heated debate shaped Vatican II documents and their interpretation

The debates that unfolded in the Second Vatican Council are sometimes lost while studying its teachings. Anyone can look up the final documents on the Vatican's website or find any number of excellent printed editions of the texts, but this belies just how contentious the proceedings were. Two documents best illustrate the steps that ultimately produced all of the final texts: *Dei Verbum* (DV) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (DH).

CONTESTED CONSTITUTIONS

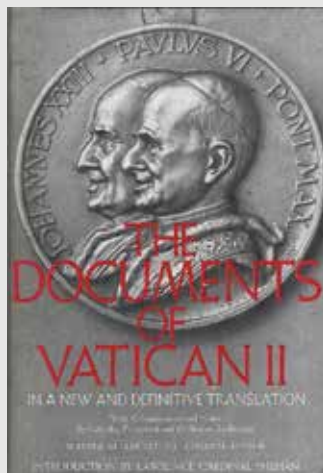
Word of God, the shortest constitution issued by the council, was by far the most controversial and underwent the most revision. The original draft text (schema), called *De Fontibus*, does address the concept of divine revelation, as DV later would, but its style and scope is considerably different from the version the council would eventually issue. In fact DV generated enough passionate debate that it required two direct papal interventions.

Its original title reveals the reason for criticism: On the Sources of Revelation. This proposed document defended the view that Scripture is inerrant and is one of two sources of revelation, the other being tradition (see p. 24). Some council fathers criticized it for its scholastic language and, though it defended dogmatic truth, it had little to say about the doctrine's spiritual purpose for ordinary Christians. Critics also argued that the document did not account for modern biblical scholarship and was unnecessarily divisive between Catholics and Protestants.

Content remained hotly contested until John XXIII removed the schema from the council's proceedings in 1963. When it resurfaced later, it would take the direct intervention of Paul VI to settle a question about the nature of divine inspiration. The final document speaks not of separate revelation sources but of one "Word of God" that comes in many ways. This stresses the centrality of Scripture as revelation for salvation, but it also affirms that Scripture is not the only means by which the church receives divine revelation. DV was the last constitution to be approved in the final session in late 1965. Even though the discussion was fraught with strong opinions on either side, the final text received nearly unanimous approval (over 2,000 for, 27 opposed).

DOES ERROR HAVE RIGHTS AFTER ALL?

The Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*, or DH) took a similar route to its final form. No separate document treated the issue of religious liberty,



DIVISIVE DOCUMENTS Much toil and sweat went into crafting Vatican II documents; their final forms still elicit debate today.

and initially, it was proposed as a section of *Lumen Gentium*. After over 400 amendments to this short document, it became its own text.

Because it wrestles with the particularly modern consideration of the right to religious freedom, the council had many questions about how this text

would maintain continuity with previous papal and conciliar pronouncements. Historically the Catholic Church believed the state should uphold right religion and discourage (or prohibit) false religious practices, without forcibly converting anyone. Before Vatican II many condemned proposals for complete religious neutrality on the part of the state as "indifferentism," repeating the slogan, "error has no rights."

The council's final draft of DH proclaims that all human beings have a basic right to religious freedom rooted in human dignity as created by God and a right to seek truth freely and express it to others, even if they err. An official spokesman for DH explained how to interpret key passages in the text, a practice that was necessary to settle some of the debates and smooth the voting procedures.

LIBERTY AND LATIN

Sixty years later, debates continue about all the documents and their interpretations. With respect to *Dei Verbum*, Paul VI's intervention on the nature and limits of divine inspiration did not settle everything. Scholars still disagree about the Latin grammar of that intervention and, consequently, about the nature and limits of divine inspiration. And increasingly scholars question the official narrative surrounding *Dignitatis Humanae* and prior magisterial statements about religious liberty.

These two specific debates are very different: DV deals with finer details while DH's interpretation has more serious implications. But each case shows that, even within Catholic theological contexts, official documents of the highest level (an ecumenical council!) do not simply end debates. They require interpretation, implementation, and continued reflection and teaching on the part of the church's official teaching body.—*Luke Arredondo, executive director of St. Brendan Center for Evangelization and Spirituality in Pensacola, FL*

Tracing Vatican II

Significant moments before, during, and after the historic council



The Council of Trent, 1545

1545–63 The Council of Trent convenes as a response to the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic Reformation includes an increase in lay orders, global missions, and a greater dependence of the church on an alliance with Catholic monarchs.

1618 The Thirty Years' War begins, devastating Europe as Catholic and Protestant monarchs struggle for control.

1790 The “throne and altar” alliance between the papacy and the secular government dissolves during the French Revolution.

1798 Napoleon Bonaparte invades Italy and holds Pope Pius VI prisoner; Pius dies in captivity the next year.

1809 Pope Pius VII excommunicates Napoleon for incorporating the Papal States into the French Empire. Napoleon responds by imprisoning him.

1814 Napoleon releases Pius VII after forcing him to sign a treaty. Pius VII and subsequent popes attempt to restore the papacy's relationship with other European powers via more favorable treaties.

1848 Revolutionaries assassinate pope-appointed economist Count Pellegrino Rossi in Rome; Pope Pius IX flees during the coup.

1850 Pius IX returns to Rome in 1850 after the collapse of the Roman Republic.

1864 Pius IX issues the Syllabus of Errors as a decree against “progress, liberalism, and modern civilization.”

eralism, and modern civilization.”

1868 Pius IX calls for the First Vatican Council.

1870 As armed conflict threatens Rome, Vatican I adjourns after the vote defining papal infallibility; it would not officially close until the council fathers vote to begin Vatican II.

1879 Pope Leo XIII issues *Aeterni Patris*, which leads to the dominance of neoscholastic theology. Critics of this approach would eventually come to be known as proponents of *nouvelle théologie*.

1903 Pius X is elected pope and begins a crusade against modernism that targets Catholic intellectuals—censuring, intimidating, and excommunicating many in the process.

1910 Pius X orders all ordination candidates to take an “anti-Modernist Oath.”

1914 The First World War begins, setting in motion a period of global turmoil. Benedict XV is elected pope.

1917 World War I ends. The unified *Code of Canon Law* gives the papacy more direct control over the Catholic Church. In Russia the Bolshevik revolution topples the czardom.



Pius XII with Allied troops, 1944

1925 Pope Pius XI establishes the Feast of Christ the King with the encyclical *Quas Primas* as a response to both communism and rising fascism.



Pope John XXIII, 1958



Pope Paul VI with Cardinal Albino Luciani (the future Pope John Paul I), 1972

1965 Key declarations on non-Christian religions, religious freedom, and Christian education are approved in October. During council deliberations, Paul VI travels to New York to address the United Nations.

1965 On December 7

the council approves the final Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), and concludes the council the following day.

1967 A wave of revival, now known as the Catholic charismatic renewal movement, sweeps across college campuses in the United States and becomes a global phenomenon.

1969 The reformed rite of the Mass is produced, introducing changes such as services in the vernacular and expanded roles for laypeople.

1972 Theologian David Wells publishes *Revolution in Rome*, a widely read Protestant assessment of Vatican II.



Folk Mass in New Ulm, Minnesota, c. 1975

1978 Albino Luciani is elected pope and takes the name John Paul I, honoring his Vatican II predecessors and signifying his commitment to the council. After he dies two weeks later, Karol Wojtyła, his successor, takes the name Pope John Paul II.

1983 The Catholic Church produces an updated *Code of Canon Law* as a result of Vatican II.

1992 A new Catholic catechism is produced, also a result of the council.

2005 John Paul II dies; Joseph Ratzinger, an influential reform-minded *peritus* at Vatican II, is elected Pope Benedict XVI. He continues the more conservative interpretation of Vatican II begun by John Paul II.



Mass in Ávila, Spain, 2005

Popes in this timeline

Pius VI	(1775–99)
Pius VII	(1800–23)
Pius IX	(1846–78)
Leo XIII	(1878–1903)
Pius X	(1903–14)
Benedict XV	(1914–22)
Pius XI	(1922–39)
Pius XII	(1939–58)
John XXIII	(1958–63)
Paul VI	(1963–78)
John Paul I	(1978)
John Paul II	(1978–2005)
Benedict XVI	(2005–2013)



Always reforming, always the same

HOW POPES INTERPRETED VATICAN II AND HELPED REIMAGINE THE CHURCH

Barnaby Hughes

It has often been said that the Catholic Church would never have an American pope. Yet on May 8, 2025, “the least American of the American cardinals,” Robert Prevost (b. 1955), was chosen to be the 267th bishop of Rome. Catholics worldwide immediately began scrutinizing the new Pope Leo XIV to see where he would stand on a whole host of issues. Traditionalist Catholics rejoiced as he appeared on the papal balcony following the conclave, wearing the heavily embroidered stole and mozetta (cape) that his predecessor, Francis, had eschewed. His chosen papal name reassured progressive Catholics—a name that evoked the Catholic social teaching of Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) and promised that he would continue Pope Francis’s work of implementing the Second Vatican Council.

DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS

Pope John XXIII had convoked the Second Vatican Council in 1962, and his successor Paul VI continued it upon his election in 1963. When he died in 1978, Pope John Paul I took both of their names to signal his commitment to the Second Vatican Council. And so did John Paul II, six weeks later.

But 27 years later at the death of John Paul II in 2005, Vatican II’s legacy stood at the center of the liturgy and culture wars in the Catholic Church. Instead of taking the name

ANCIENT CHURCH, MODERN WORLD A 20th-c. painting captures St. Peter’s Square, which has changed little since its initial design in the 17th c.

of his immediate predecessors, Benedict XVI sought to take the church in a somewhat different direction. His papal name evoked not only peacemaker Pope Benedict XV from the early twentieth century, but St. Benedict of Nursia (480–547), the patriarch of Western monasticism. His papacy marked a nuanced return to tradition, though that nuance was often lost on both his champions and his critics.

Benedict XVI spoke frequently of the hermeneutics of the council. (A hermeneutic is a theory or method of interpreting a text or event.) He favored a hermeneutic of continuity in contrast to the hermeneutic of discontinuity or disruption. There was to be no more talk of the “spirit of the council,” which could be used to justify almost any departure from tradition. Instead, the church needed to return to the sources and examine the documents of the council itself. For example, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy did not promote “active participation,” as if everyone must always be doing or saying something in worship, but “actual participation” (*participatio actuosa*), a phrase expansive enough to encompass silent prayer.



COUNCIL-HONORING NAMES Pope John Paul I (*above*) held the office for only six weeks before he died, but his chosen names honored Vatican II and the popes who served during the council. Karol Wojtyła chose John Paul II when he became pope (*above right*), signaling his commitment to do the same.

Another way Benedict sought to bring peace and revitalize tradition included his attempt to end the Lefebvrist Schism. Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (1905–1991) had disagreed with many documents of the Second Vatican Council, such as the Declaration on Religious Liberty, which he saw as a reversal of Catholic doctrine. Most famously he rejected the reformed liturgy mandated by the council. His actions led to schism in 1988 when he ordained four bishops without a papal mandate. Pope Benedict XVI sought to heal that schism by lifting the excommunications of the four bishops and by giving wider permission for the celebration of the pre-Vatican II form of the liturgy. This latter move was meant not merely to be a return to tradition, but a “reform of the reform.”

FRANCIS’S SYNODS

Unfortunately Benedict’s actions failed to bring the Society of St. Pius X (founded by Lefebvre in 1970) back into the Catholic fold. And eventually Pope Francis (successor of Benedict whose name was inspired by the poverty, simplicity, and reforming ways of the Franciscans’ founder), in consultation with the bishops, placed new restrictions on the celebration of the preconciliar liturgy.

Under Francis the council took on new importance as he strove to consolidate its liturgical and other reforms. Francis’s wide-ranging reform of the Roman Curia placed evangelization at the center and gave laypeople more power of governance in the church, allowing them to hold high administrative offices for the first time.

However, synodality—a process of collaboration and discernment that brings together clergy and laity, especially laywomen—might have been his most significant initiative. This development grew organically from the episcopal collegiality that took root at the Second Vatican Council (see



PAPAL PRESENT AND FUTURE (*above*) Pope John Paul II greets Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI.

pp. 22–26). It showed first in the growing independence of many bishops who rejected the Curia’s conservative agenda. Second, it was seen in the delegation of much liturgical responsibility from the Curia to the bishops’ conferences. And third, it appeared in the creation of the Synod of Bishops, an advisory body to the pope independent of the Curia that would gather every three years.

Early in his papacy, Francis convened two contentious synods to address present pastoral challenges regarding marriage and families. Although many Catholics praised the synods’ efforts to address issues like divorce and homosexuality, conservatives felt that the pope had muddied the doctrinal waters. His later synods addressing young people and believers from the Amazon region of South America showed a promising path forward by incorporating more lay voices. Pope Francis’s Synod on Synodality (2023–2024) began at the parish level before successively broadening to the diocesan level, the national, and the continental—finally gathering clergy and laity in Rome for prayer, listening, and frank discussion. Yet Francis and others saw synodality as more than a mere reform



“UNCATHOLIC” COUNCIL Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (*far left*) publicly rejected Vatican II as a contradiction of Catholic doctrine. He ordained bishops without papal mandate, for which Pope Paul VI excommunicated him. Benedict XVI (*left*) attempted reconciliation with the Lefebvrists, but was ultimately unsuccessful.

collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love.” Dialogue is also mentioned in the Decree on Ecumenism: “From dialogue . . . will emerge still more clearly what the true posture of the Catholic Church is. In this way, too, we will better understand the attitude of our separated brethren and more aptly present our own belief.” Again, the church’s dialogue is described as an opportunity of learning so that it may teach more effectively.

This new emphasis on dialogue was not meant to preclude evangelization, which is well covered in the Decree on Missions. What

of the Synod of Bishops; they thought synodality was a natural development of the call for renewal of Christ’s church at the Second Vatican Council in dialogue with the world.

THE “MEDICINE OF MERCY”

The church has convoked ecumenical councils somewhat regularly throughout its two-millennia-long history; these have mostly dealt with heresy, doctrine, and schism. Vatican II, though, sought to do something rather different: to engage the modern world positively and pastorally. But it is not quite accurate to say that the Second Vatican Council was only pastoral rather than doctrinal; it was clearly both. According to Pope John XXIII in his opening speech at the council, the church now prefers the “medicine of mercy rather than that of severity . . . by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.”

Longest and last of the conciliar documents approved by the bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World is also the most ambitious. It is addressed not only to the church but to the “whole of humanity,” envisioning a dialogical relationship between the church and the world. The church and the world meant here, of course, are perhaps akin to St. Augustine’s city of God and city of man. The dialogue envisioned is primarily about seeking to understand the world to teach it. And so the document builds on Catholic social teaching, from the dignity of the human person to solidarity and the common good. The council did not go so far as to suggest that the church has as much to learn from the world as it does to teach the world.

This kind of dialogue, according to the Second Vatican Council, must characterize all the church’s relationships. Thus, in the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, the church urges “dialogue and

was different and new, however, was the council’s expansive teaching on salvation outside the church. As expressed in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: “Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.” And yet the Decree on Ecumenism states that “it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.” In other words while salvation is possible outside Christ’s church, it always comes through or by means of the Catholic Church.

What does this look like, according to the council? The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church states: “This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, that is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor, although many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside of her visible structure.” This somewhat ambiguous phrase implies that the church Jesus Christ founded abides, remains, and continues in the Catholic Church, but is not exclusively identified with it. This dynamic conception of the church flows into the constitution’s next concept: the “People of God.”

CALLED TO BURN WITH THE SPIRIT

People of God theology is biblical in origin and often rightly invoked to emphasize the laity as a corrective to clericalism. Yet it is much more expansive. According to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the “Catholic faithful as well as all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind” belong to the People of God or “are related to it in various ways. . . . For all men are called to salvation by the grace of



HOLY LAITY Pope Francis's interpretation of Vatican II led to the Synod on Synodality (*both*), which elevated the roles and voices of laymen and -women.



God." This dogma also clarified how this teaching related to the Jews, expressing in the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions: "Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the holy Scriptures." Though the Catholic Church does not include the Jews in the People of God as defined by the council, it considers Jews almost as Christians. The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews forms part of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity rather than the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.

If the theology of the People of God enthused the laity, they responded even more positively to the Second Vatican Council's universal call to holiness. Laypeople knew that their priests are called to be holy and that monks and nuns spend their lives in pursuit of holiness, but many felt that it was out of reach for the average person. Not so, said the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: "all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society." An unintended consequence of this democratization of holiness was that many monks and nuns abandoned their vows and returned to the lay state.

One further inspiration for the laity came with the Council's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. Whereas prior to the Second Vatican Council, the laity were called to work for the mission of the church in concert with the clergy and under their guidance, now they were given greater autonomy to pursue their apostolate (their Christian work or calling) directly in union with Jesus Christ:

Since it is proper to the layman's state in life for him to spend his days in the midst of the world and of secular transactions, he is called by God to burn with the spirit of Christ and to exercise his apostolate in the world as a kind of leaven.

Much of the groundwork for these teachings on the lay apostolate and the universal call to holiness were laid before the council by new ecclesial movements, and many more



LOOKING FORWARD (*above*) Pope Francis appoints Robert Prevost as a cardinal in 2023. Prevost became Pope Leo XIV in 2025, honoring Leo XIII and indicating a continuation of Vatican II's legacy.

communities were formed after the council. Among these are Opus Dei, Cursillo, Focolare, the Neocatechumenal Way, Communion and Liberation, Chemin Neuf, Sant'Egidio, and Regnum Christi.

By opening up the Catholic Church to the modern world, encouraging dialogue with other religions and churches, and motivating greater involvement of the laity by calls to holiness, Vatican II undoubtedly changed the church. Some changes happened too quickly, while others did not happen fast enough; some were embraced enthusiastically, while others were virtually ignored. What is certain is that popes, bishops, priests, monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen will continue to argue about the council and how best to implement its vision for decades to come. *Semper reformanda; semper eadem* (the church is always reforming; it is always the same). **CH**

Barnaby Hughes is metadata editor at Atla, production editor of Atla Open Press, and editorial committee chair for Catholic Library World.

“This sacred council”



Excerpts from some of the most influential documents of Vatican II

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. She has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles.—*Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)

The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter. For there are many who honor Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and a pattern of life, and who show a sincere zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Savior. They are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ. . . . They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits. Likewise we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power. Some indeed He has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood.—*Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)

MUTUAL RESPECT This menorah by Ben Shahn (1898–1969) is in the Vatican Museum. Its inclusion reflects the spirit of the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*.

In order that the Christian people may more certainly derive an abundance of graces from the sacred liturgy, holy Mother Church desires to undertake with great care a general restoration of the liturgy itself. For the liturgy is made up of immutable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These not only may but ought to be changed . . . if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become unsuited to it.

In this restoration, both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify; the Christian people, so far as possible, should be enabled to understand them with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community.—*Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues. . . .

In her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.—*Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)

Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided. Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.

But the Lord of Ages wisely and patiently follows out the plan of grace on our behalf, sinners that we are. In recent times more than ever before, He has been rousing divided Christians to remorse over their divisions and to a longing for unity. Everywhere large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day the movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. This movement toward unity is called “ecumenical.” —*Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism)



“That they may be one”

VATICAN II AND A NEW SPIRIT OF ECUMENISM

Thomas Albert Howard

The Second Vatican Council easily ranks as one of the most significant religious events of modern history. It was groundbreaking in its intention to be an ecumenical council—not merely in the sense of involving the global Catholic Church, but in the theological sense of seeking unity among all Christians. An unprecedented vision in modern Catholicism, the council prompted significant theological reflection, brought about a notable shift in attitude toward Protestants and other non-Catholic Christians, and laid the groundwork for a new era of ecumenical engagement.

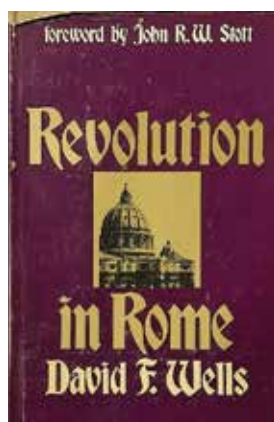
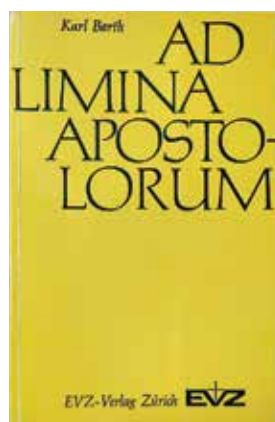
When John XXIII announced the council in 1959, he made clear that its purpose was not only to address internal reform but to promote Christian unity. To that end he established a Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in 1960 to help guide the council’s work, appointing German Jesuit cardinal Augustin Bea to head it. Known for his biblical scholarship and openness to interconfessional dialogue, Bea quickly became one of the key figures in the council’s ecumenical efforts. In his opening address at the first session in 1962, the pope expressed a deep desire for “the unity

YOU’RE INVITED Augustin Bea, responsible for the Protestant and Orthodox presence at Vatican II, greets Lutheran Edmund Schlink, an official council observer.

of all Christians.” This marked a radical departure from the tone of earlier councils, especially the First Vatican Council, at which the proclamation of papal infallibility and the universal jurisdiction of the pope had further alienated many outside the Catholic fold, not least Protestants.

OPENNESS TO UNITY

By contrast Vatican II’s ecumenical orientation was reflected not only in words but also in its structure. For the first time in conciliar history, official observers from Protestant and Orthodox churches were invited to attend. Although they had no voting rights, their presence was not incidental. Many of these observers offered informal advice to the bishops and theologians and, in doing so, subtly shaped the substance and theological direction of the council. Their inclusion signified a genuine attempt on the part of the Catholic Church to listen to and learn from the



REUNION IN ROME Yves Congar's ecumenical work, *Divided Christendom*, informed several council documents. Protestant responses, such as Karl Barth's *Ad Limina Apostolorum* and David Wells's *Revolution in Rome*, were cautiously optimistic.

significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation." This marked a theological and rhetorical sea change. Protestants were no longer viewed as erring Christians or heretics to be corrected, but as fellow believers

and participants in God's salvific purposes for humanity.

ORBITING CHRIST

Protestant responses to Vatican II were diverse—shaped by denominational traditions, theological commitments, and broader ecclesial concerns. Some received the council's developments with cautious optimism; others remained guarded. Switzerland's Karl Barth (1886–1968), arguably the most important Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, did not attend Vatican II due to ill health, but he followed its proceedings closely. In 1966 he was able to visit Rome and afterward published a brief but important reflection on the council titled *Ad Limina Apostolorum* (1968). While remaining critical of certain features of Roman Catholicism—especially its hierarchical structure, doctrine of papal infallibility, and reliance on natural law reasoning—Barth welcomed the council's renewed attention to Scripture and its openness to the modern world. He also saw in Vatican II a “wake-up call” for Protestant churches as well, encouraging them to pursue their own reforms.

Another Protestant theologian who offered a detailed and sympathetic response was Edmund Schlink (1903–1984), a German Lutheran and an official observer at the council. Schlink regarded *Unitatis Redintegratio* as a sincere and substantial invitation to ecumenical dialogue. He praised the council for acknowledging the ecclesial reality of non-Catholic churches and communities. In his reflections Schlink warned that “every church is in danger of understanding itself as the center around which the other churches are to revolve.” What was needed, he suggested, was a “Copernican revolution” in ecclesiology, in which Christ—not any single church—would be recognized as the true center.

In such a vision, each Christian community must see itself not as the measuring stick for others, but as one community among others being measured by Christ himself. Schlink called both Catholics and Protestants to a posture of mutual humility and charity, urging all churches to view themselves as co-orbiters around Christ rather than as rival centers of the faith. Along with his fellow Lutheran George Lindbeck (1923–2018) and others, Schlink went on to play

broader Christian world, even as these visitors also learned from the Catholic Church.

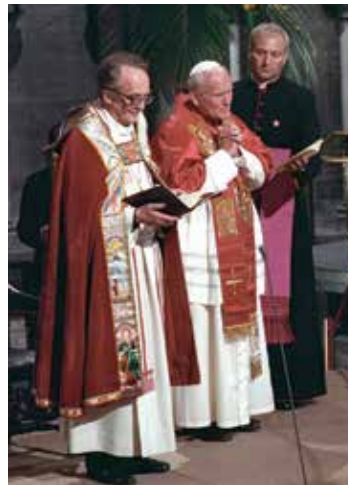
Alongside Cardinal Bea, Dominican theologian Yves Congar played an especially significant ecumenical role. Congar, who had been marginalized for years by the Roman Curia due to his openness to Protestant and Eastern Orthodox theology, was nevertheless appointed by John XXIII as a *peritus*, or theological expert, to the council. He would go on to become one of its most influential theological voices. Decades earlier, Congar had written *Chrétiens désunis: Principes d'un “œcuménisme” catholique* (1937), translated into English as *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion* (1939), a work that many regard as the *magna carta* of Catholic ecumenism. Congar's reflections on the church, the laity, and Christian unity shaped several of the council's key documents. He also left one of the most detailed diaries of the council.

Among the 16 documents produced by Vatican II, two stand out for their ecumenical significance: *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism). Congar had a hand in shaping both. *Lumen Gentium* redefined the nature of the church in more inclusive and nuanced terms. It famously declared that “the Church of Christ subsists in [*subsistit in*] the Catholic Church” rather than being synonymous with it. Though subtle, this phrasing represented a significant theological development: while affirming the Catholic Church's fullness, it also acknowledged that genuine ecclesial elements exist outside its visible boundaries. The term *subsistit in* was a departure from the older, more exclusivist formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation), and it opened the door to a broader and more charitable understanding of other Christian communities.

Even more direct in its ecumenical focus was *Unitatis Redintegratio*. This document recognized “separated brethren” as belonging to communities that the Spirit of Christ continues to use. It declared that “many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church,” and it called for “dialogue,” “mutual understanding,” and joint prayer. One striking statement from it reads: “The separated Churches and communities . . . have been by no means deprived of



REACHING ACROSS THE AISLE Vatican II spurred efforts toward ecumenical partnership. Pope Paul VI met with Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras in 1964 (right); Cardinal Bea continued dialogue with both Orthodox and Protestants, including the Archbishop of Canterbury (above); Pope John Paul II was the first pope to visit Norway and the country's Lutheran bishops (middle).



John Paul II's emphasis on the "new evangelization" also resonated with many conservative Protestants. They saw in him an ally in resisting modern secularism, relativism, and moral decline. In this way the legacy of Vatican II—especially as embodied in John Paul II's papacy—helped to create new partnerships across denominational lines, even if fuller theological agreement remained elusive.

Vatican II marked a decisive turning point in Catholic-Protestant relations. It helped to change the climate from confrontation to conversation, from mutual suspicion to mutual recognition. The presence of Protestant observers, the influence of theologians such as Bea and Congar, and the council's own documents—especially *Unitatis Redintegratio*—contributed to breaking down walls of silence and hostility and opening doors to conversation. And yet, as many theologians have acknowledged, real differences remain. The central issues that divided the church at the time of the Reformation—justification, authority, sacramental theology, and ecclesiology—have not been fully resolved, at least not to the satisfaction of all Protestants. Some Protestants continue to worry that Catholic theology has not gone far enough in addressing the concerns of the Reformation, while some Catholics have expressed concern that ecumenical efforts might water down essential truths of the faith.

Still, as the council itself emphasized, ecumenism is not a matter of church etiquette or optional diplomacy—it flows from Scripture itself in the so-called High Priestly prayer of Christ "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). The legacy of Vatican II is thus both hopeful and unfinished, but its vision articulated in *Unitatis Redintegratio* continues to challenge Christians across traditions to seek truth in love, to embrace mutual understanding, and to pursue together the unity for which Christ prayed. **CH**

Thomas Albert Howard is professor of humanities and history and holds the Duesenberg Chair in Christian Ethics at Valparaiso University. He is the author of The Faiths of Others: A History of Interreligious Dialogue and other books.

an important role in postconciliar Lutheran-Catholic dialogue and in many other ecumenical efforts.

From a different Protestant perspective, American Reformed-evangelical theologian David Wells (b. 1939) offered a more cautious assessment in his 1972 book *Revolution in Rome*. Wells acknowledged the council's "more irenic tone and ecumenical gestures" and its willingness to engage with modern concerns. But he also expressed theological reservations. He criticized Vatican II's continued reliance on the magisterium and tradition alongside Scripture, which he saw as conflicting with the Protestant notion of *sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone). For Wells the council's treatment of authority and doctrine was "theologically ambiguous and potentially unstable." Nonetheless, he urged evangelicals not to dismiss the council, but to engage it in good faith, appreciatively but also critically.

PRACTICING WHAT WAS PREACHED

While Vatican II laid the foundation for a new ecumenical era, its implementation was sometimes uneven. Under Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005), the council's ecumenical vision gained fresh momentum. A former council *peritus*, the Polish pope's extensive travels, frequent meetings with Protestant leaders, and public gestures of reconciliation—including visiting Lutheran churches—earned him wide respect across denominational lines. In his 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (That They May Be One), he doubled down on the ecumenical mandate of Vatican II, writing: "The Catholic Church is committed to the ecumenical movement and considers it one of her primary pastoral tasks." He also expressed an openness to rethinking the exercise of the papal office so as to make it more acceptable to Protestants and other non-Catholics.

Gifts of the Spirit



"COME, SPIRIT OF LIFE!" Pope John Paul II waves to the gathered crowd in Rome on May 30, 1998. His address affirmed charisms (divine gifts) and many of their expressions.

estimates indicate that more than 120 million Catholics worldwide have been touched through the charismatic movement.

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

Those who have experienced what is commonly called "baptism in the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:8) testify to an experiential knowledge of Jesus and the life of the Holy Trinity following repentance; oftentimes a manifestation of charisms such as speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; 1 Pet. 4);

the Scriptures "coming alive"; and a desire to tell others about the Lord.

From the beginning of this outpouring, Catholic theologians got involved and wrote defenses of a balance between the charismatic dimension and the institutional dimension that they believed should be normative in the Catholic Church. Catholic bishops around the world welcomed the renewal, and it has had a major impact on the church, influencing music, worship styles, and the greater prevalence of personal witness and testimony.

Also from the beginning, an ecumenical dimension existed in which Catholics discovered that their relationship with Jesus as Savior and as baptizer in the Spirit was shared widely in the global Pentecostal movement and among many evangelicals as well.

Of course not every Catholic has welcomed either the overall shift of Vatican II or the charismatic renewal with open arms. More traditional Catholics look on this kind of religious experience and of positive relations with brothers and sisters in Christ from other churches and communions with some suspicion. But as this heartfelt prayer of John Paul II affirms, openness to the Holy Spirit remains foundational to the church:

Today from this upper room in St. Peter's Square, a great prayer rises: Come, Holy Spirit, come and renew the face of the earth! Come with your seven gifts! Come, Spirit of Life, Spirit of Communion and Love! The Church and the world need you. Come, Holy Spirit, and make ever more fruitful the charisms you have bestowed on us. Give new strength and missionary zeal to these sons and daughters of yours.... Make them courageous messengers of the Gospel, witnesses to the risen Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Saviour of man. Strengthen their love and their fidelity to the Church.

—Ralph C. Martin, president of Renewal Ministries and a leader in the Catholic charismatic movement

Vatican II and charismatic renewal

It was a stirring sight in 1998 when 500,000 people from 50 different renewal movements in the Catholic Church gathered in St. Peter's Square in Rome to hear Pope John Paul II declare:

Whenever the Spirit intervenes, he leaves people astonished. He brings about events of amazing newness; he radically changes persons and history. This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council during which, under the guidance of the same Spirit, the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as one of her constitutive elements: "It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the people, leads them and enriches them with his virtues."—*Lumen Gentium*, no. 12

REORIENTING THE CHURCH

Preparation for this moment began more than 33 years earlier when Vatican II concluded with the publication of 16 documents reorienting the theology and pastoral attitudes of the Catholic Church.

In document after document, the council called for an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit with numerous specific mentions of the importance of charisms (divine gifts) in the life of the church. The quote from John Paul II references a foundational document of the council.

Two years after the council concluded in 1965, what is now known as the Catholic charismatic renewal movement exploded across the world, flowing forth from a retreat of students and professors at Duquesne University, a Catholic University in Pittsburgh. While getting an exact count of participants in a grassroots movement such as this is often impossible, reasonable

Reforming liturgy, learning, and law

VATICAN II'S LASTING EFFECT ON CATHOLIC PRACTICE

Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt

John Henry Newman said that, just as Christ possessed the offices of priest, prophet, and king, “after His pattern, and in human measure, Holy Church has a triple office too.” For Newman the priestly office of the church is manifest in its liturgy, the prophetic office in its teaching, and the royal office in its governance. It is a measure of the Second Vatican Council’s significance that in its wake the Roman Catholic Church underwent dramatic change in all three of these areas, seen in the reformed rite of Mass (1969) and reformed rites for the other sacraments, the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), and the revised *Code of Canon Law* (1983).

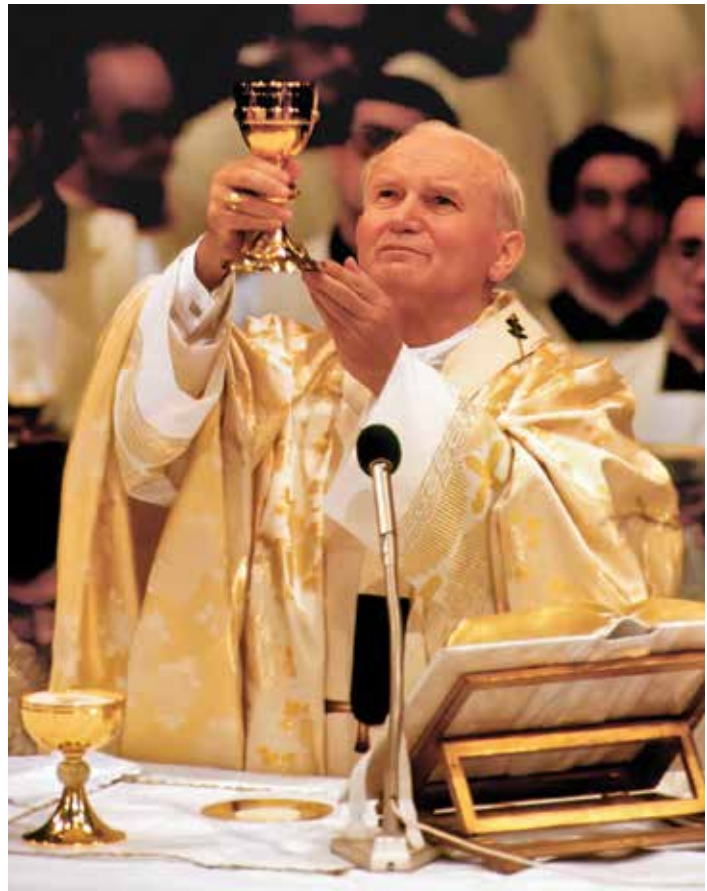
LIVING LITURGY

I once heard a potential convert to Catholicism ask a lifelong Catholic what Vatican II was, to which she replied, “that’s when they turned the altars around and we started having Mass in English.” The average Catholic churchgoer experienced the council as chiefly changing how the church exercises the priestly office through the worship of God.

The council itself prescribed relatively few specific liturgical changes but stated in its document on the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) the desire that “the rites be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times.” This need for care in liturgical revision was paired with a sense of urgency: “The liturgical books are to be revised as soon as possible.” Reform details were left to a body called the Consilium that set to work on a comprehensive reform of all the liturgical books, but even before the council closed in 1965, changes began to appear: the most significant being the use of vernacular languages for the Scripture readings and the parts of the Mass that the laity were expected to say.

Along with the introduction of the vernacular, other changes quickly took place, such as the priest facing the people across the altar, rather than facing the same direction as the congregation with his back to them. The method of distributing Communion was also changed: people no longer knelt at an altar rail that stood between the altar and the congregation, but rather approached the altar in a line and received Communion while standing. Moreover the laity began to take on new roles formerly reserved for the ordained, such as proclaiming the Scriptures and helping distribute Holy Communion.

The net effect communicated a new sense of the nature of Catholic worship: not a sacred drama enacted by the priest to which the laity were expected to be devout



A MASS CHANGE John Paul II celebrates Mass at Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, facing the congregation.

observers, but rather a communal celebration in which the congregation’s role is as important as that of the priest.

In one sense this was not an innovation but a recovery of something very old. The prayers of the Mass itself, which date from the early centuries of the church, were almost always written in the plural, so that the priest was voicing the prayer of the people, not his own private prayer. But this truth had been obscured over time as fewer people understood the Latin of the prayers, and elements of the liturgy that had been spoken or sung by the congregation began to be taken over by clerics and choirs.

For several decades prior to the council, advocates of what was called the liturgical movement (see p. 43) had labored to recover the participation of the people in the Mass, encouraging them to sing the Latin chant and follow the Latin prayers in a vernacular translation. But the simple act of putting parts of the liturgy itself into the vernacular did more than any of these efforts had done



to convey to people that the liturgy is something in which they are, as the council put it, “full, conscious, and active” participants.

These initial changes led to a cascade of others, some of them officially mandated, such as the simplification and streamlining of the rituals of the Mass, and others appearing by popular demand, such as the rise of the “folk Mass,” which replaced ancient chants with popular folk music and new compositions in a folk style. If you had told Catholics in 1960 that within a decade they would be singing along with guitars at Mass, they would have thought you had lost your mind.

And indeed some Catholics *did* think that the church *had* lost its mind—tossing out a centuries-old spiritual and artistic patrimony for a mess of puerile pottage. In the ensuing years, younger Catholics have reappropriated things abandoned as outdated by their post-Vatican II elders, showing increasing interest in more solemn ritual and ancient liturgical forms such as chant. But the general tenor of liturgical reform has now taken firm root in the church, such that even those who desire a more traditional liturgy still expect it to be one in which all are actively engaged in exercising the church’s priestly role.

TEACHING FOR TODAY

Though liturgical changes were the most obvious ones, the council’s official documents also displayed a significant change in the prophetic office of the church as teacher. In comparison with the statements of past councils, Vatican II documents are more positive and less juridical in tone. The council’s major pronouncements



BEFORE... A French lithograph depicts the preconciliar Mass (*above*), with the priest facing the altar.

...AND AFTER? A young man plays guitar at a “folk Mass” in 1975, which allowed worship with contemporary musical styles and instruments (*left*). Today however, some Catholics seek to return to ancient liturgical forms.

show the influence of the mid-twentieth-century theological movement known as *ressourcement*, which sought a renewal of Catholic theology by a “return to the sources” and an effort to state biblical truths in a way intelligible to modern people. Council participants believed church teachings ought to undergo “updating” (in Italian, *aggiornamento*, see “Did you know?”)—not by changing their substance, but by learning from modern philosophy and social sciences how to bring the church’s perennial faith to bear on modern concerns.

When the new catechism appeared in 1992, Pope John Paul II explicitly linked it to Vatican II’s approach to teaching, which he characterized as “not first of all to condemn the errors of the time, but above all to strive calmly to show the strength and beauty of the doctrine of the faith.” In pursuit of this, the catechism abandons the question-answer format typical of the genre, suggesting that it is less a collection of timeless statements to memorize and more a resource for reflecting on the truths of the faith. Like the documents of the council, it is replete with biblical and patristic quotations; it likewise seeks to speak to modern people, discussing not only the articles of the creed and the sacraments, but also such pressing modern issues as war, justice, sexuality, and economics.



“FIDELITY IN NEWNESS” The 1917 *Code of Canon Law* (above) unified church law and governance. The 1983 revision (above right) reflects a Vatican II commitment to collegiality—that is, freedom for bishops and local churches to act without as much papal oversight.

TEACHING TO THE TIMES Joseph Ratzinger, then cardinal, displays the new catechism in 1992 (right). The modern revision takes John XXIII’s *aggiornamento* (updating) precedent seriously.



This has made the catechism something of a “living document,” revised on occasion as the church responds to ongoing developments. (Most recently, Pope Francis revised the section on the death penalty to state the church’s opposition to it more strongly.) The catechism also presents itself as a resource from which more local catechisms, tailored to particular cultural sensibilities, might be developed. This too reflects the council’s emphasis on the need for the church’s prophetic office to be exercised in ways attentive to specific circumstances.

“NEWNESS IN FIDELITY”

The church’s third area of change after Vatican II came in revision of its governance. Church law had for centuries existed as a rather messy amalgam of pronouncements and rules; but in 1917 the church produced a unified *Code of Canon Law*, which governed the church until 1983, when a new code was produced. As with the catechism, John Paul II linked this revised code to Vatican II, calling it “a great effort to translate . . . the conciliar ecclesiology into canonical language.” He noted that not only its contents but also its actual method of production reflected the council’s “collegial” approach to the church.

Rather than a law handed down from above, the 1983 code grew from wide consultation with the bishops of the church, “so that . . . by a method as far as possible collegial, there should gradually mature the juridical formulas which would later serve for the use of the entire Church.” Moreover the goal of canon law was now understood not as simply obedience or conformity, but “rather to create such an order in the ecclesial society that, while assigning the primacy to faith, grace, and the charisms, it at the same time renders

easier their organic development in the life both of the ecclesial society and of the individual persons who belong to it.”

The code itself reflects Vatican II’s emphases: the church as the “People of God,” the nature of authority as service, the universal church as constituted by a “communion” of local churches, the rights and duties of the laity, and ecumenism. Like the council, it seeks, as John Paul puts it, “fidelity in newness and . . . newness in fidelity,” and part of this newness is the way in which the royal office of the church is exercised in a less monarchical manner.

For example, the code allows local assemblies of bishops, such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, to issue “complementary norms” that address specific needs of their geographic area. This less centralized approach to unity serves the overarching principle expressed in the final canon of the code: “the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church, is to be kept before one’s eyes.”

The Second Vatican Council, though it ended over half a century ago, is an event whose effects still reverberate through the Roman Catholic Church. They reverberate not least in how the reformed liturgy, catechism, and *Code of Canon Law* continue to shape the ways the church lives out its priestly, prophetic, and royal identities. **CH**

Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt is professor of theology at Loyola University Maryland, permanent deacon of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and author and editor of books on Catholic theology.

A tale of two liturgies



A LOFTY LITURGY Pre-Vatican II Catholic congregations said the Mass in Latin.

The priest, bowing down at the foot of the altar, makes the Sign of the Cross and says:

In nómine Patris, et Filii, + et Spíritus Sancti. Amen. (In the Name of the Father, + and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.)

Then joining his hands before his breast, he begins the Anthem:

Introibo ad altáre Dei. (I will go in unto the Altar of God.)

[Server] Ad Deum qui lætíficat juventútem meam. (To God, Who giveth joy to my youth.)

[In most masses Psalm 42 follows, said in Latin and alternating verses between priest and altar server. It is omitted here for space.

Afterward:]

The priest, signing himself with the Sign of the Cross, says:

Adjutórium nostrum + in nómine Dómini. (Our help + is in the Name of the Lord.)

[S.] Qui fecit cælum et terram. (Who hath made heaven and earth.)

Then, joining his hands and humbly bowing down, he says the Confiteor:

Confiteor Deo omnipoténti, etc. (I confess to Almighty God, etc.)

[S.] Misereátur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimísis peccátiis tuis, perdúcat te ad vitam ætérnam. (May Almighty God have mercy upon you, forgive you your sins, and bring you to life everlasting.)

The server says the Confiteor:

[S.] Confiteor Deo omnipoténti, beátæ Mariæ semper Virgini, beáto Michaéli Archángelo, beáto Joanni Baptistæ, sanctis Apóstolis Petro et Paulo, ómnibus Sanctis, et tibi, Pater: quia peccávi nimis cogitatione, verbo et ópere: [he strikes his breast three times] mea culpa, mea culpa, mea máxima culpa. Ideo precor beátam Mariám semper Virginem, beátum Joánnem Baptistam, sanctos Apóstolos Petrum et Paulum, omnes Sanctos, et te, Pater, oráre pro me ad Dóminum Deum nostrum. (I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever Virgin, to blessed Michael the Archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, to all the Saints, and to you Father, that I have sinned exceedingly, in thought, word and deed: [he strikes his breast three times] through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. Therefore I beseech blessed Mary ever Virgin, blessed John the Baptist, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, all the Saints, and you Father, to pray to the Lord our God for me.)

After Vatican II the Novus Ordo (New Order), often called the Ordinary Form or the Mass of Paul VI, incorporated insights and decrees from the council's documents as well as other liturgical research. It is almost always celebrated in the vernacular, though a Latin form of it exists. The previous Tridentine liturgy is now called the Extraordinary Form (because special permission is needed to celebrate it) and is invariably celebrated in Latin.

Here is how the Mass begins in each liturgy. (The + indicates a place where priest or people cross themselves.) The Ordinary Form gives a number of options at each point; some of the most common ones have been chosen here.

EXTRAORDINARY FORM

[Instruction to the congregants] *Kneel.*

[S.] Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimissis peccatis tuis, perducat te ad vitam æternam. (May Almighty God have mercy upon you, forgive you your sins, and bring you to life everlasting.)

[P.] Amen.

[The priest] bows his head and proceeds:

Deus, tu conversus vivificabis nos. (Thou wilt turn, O God, and bring us to life.)

[S.] Et plebs tua lætabitur in te. (And Thy people shall rejoice in Thee.)

[P.] Ostende nobis, Domine, misericordiam tuam. (Show us, O Lord, Thy mercy.)

[S.] Et salutare tuum da nobis. (And grant us Thy salvation.)

[P.] Domine, exaudi orationem meam. (O Lord, hear my prayer.)

[S.] Et clamor meus ad te veniat. (And let my cry come unto Thee.)

[P.] Dominus vobiscum. (The Lord be with you.)

[S.] Et cum spiritu tuo. (And with thy spirit.)

ORDINARY FORM

Entrance Song

Stand

The Entrance Song of the day is said. If desired, another Psalm or hymn of similar spirit may be used in its place. The priest comes to the altar, he makes the customary reverence with the ministers, kisses the altar and (if incense is used) incenses it. Then, with the ministers, he goes to the chair.

Greeting

Priest: +In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

People: **Amen.**

Priest: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

People: **And also with you.**

The priest, deacon, or other suitable minister may very briefly introduce the Mass of the day.

Penitential Rite

After the introduction to the day's Mass, the priest invites the people to recall their sins and to repent of them in silence.

Priest: My brothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins.

A pause for silent reflection follows. After the silence, one of the following three forms is chosen.

People: **I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault [they strike their breasts] in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed**

THE NEW ORDER The revised Mass, or Ordinary Form, is done in the vernacular. The priest also notably faces the people.



to do; and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Priest: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

People: **Amen.**

Or:

Priest: Lord we have sinned against you:

People: **Lord, have mercy.**

Priest: Lord, show us your mercy and love.

People: **And grant us your salvation.**

Priest: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

People: **Amen.**

Or this:

Priest: You were sent to heal the contrite: Lord, have mercy.

People: **Lord, have mercy.**

Priest: You came to call sinners: Christ, have mercy.

People: **Christ, have mercy.**

Priest: You plead for us at the right hand of the Father: Lord, have mercy.

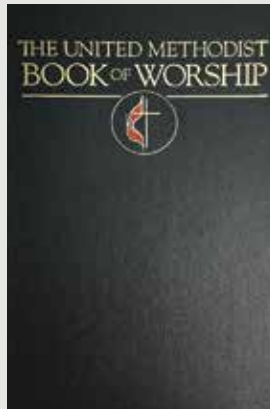
People: **Lord, have mercy.**

Priest: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

People: **Amen.**

Adapted from the [Liturgy Archive](#)

“The effect was electrifying”



THE NEW OLD-FASHIONED WAY The Order of St. Luke helped bring Vatican II's liturgical changes to United Methodism. The group recovered clerical dress (*far left*) and influenced changes to the liturgy (*left*).

How Vatican II influenced one Protestant denomination

In 1946 a Methodist pastor and ecumenically minded magazine editor, Romey Pitt Marshall (1901–1985), gathered a few like-minded pastors and founded something unusual for 1940s Methodism—a group that sought not only to “promote the public worship of the church” but to “magnify the sacraments.”

The group named themselves the Brotherhood of St. Luke (changed to “Order” in 1948—O.S.L.). Its first “rule of life and service” included the timid proviso that “insofar as possible we will wear recognizable clerical garb when engaged in the business of the church, and will wear at least a pulpit gown in morning worship and sacramental services.” (They soon relaxed the garb rule, said Marshall, “because of the very great prejudice in some quarters against anything that seemed in the least ‘Catholic.’”)

HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Despite being a minority voice within Methodism, the order was not alone ecumenically. Many Protestants, inspired by the changes among Roman Catholics (see *CH* #129), desired new approaches to worship. However, it took the fire of Vatican II to light the spark that transformed the worship of many mainline denominations. O.S.L. was primed for change, but even they could not imagine how great the change would be. Leader Hoyt Hickman (1927–2016) wrote of the moment he and Marshall knew nothing would ever be the same:

[Marshall] shared with me his enthusiasm for the liturgical renewal that was taking place in the Roman Catholic Church and his hopes for the Second Vatican Council then in progress. He had spent considerable time at a Benedictine abbey and become acquainted with progressive Catholic thinking.... That summer... he invited me to join him... for the 1964 convocation of the Liturgical Conference. There, with about 9,000 persons in attendance, the first version of the Mass in English translation was celebrated....

The effect on me was electrifying. I saw the handwriting on the wall, not only for the Latin Mass, but also for the prevailing style of worship in Anglican and more formal Protestant churches. Prayerbook English as we had known it would go the way of Latin. Liturgical music and other arts would be radically changed. The newly-authorized Methodist Hymnal and Book of Worship would be out of date the day they were published. A whole new process of liturgical reform was needed—one that would combine our expanded knowledge of ecumenical liturgical history and theology with a freedom to use whatever language or art form most fully expressed the faith of the Church of all times....

Hickman and theology professor James F. White (1932–2004), who almost single-handedly produced an entire bibliography on how worship must change in light of Vatican II, both became part of the UMC's Alternate Rituals Committee in 1970; this group's work ultimately produced the 1989 Hymnal and 1992 Book of Worship for the United Methodist Church.

These worship resources completely overhauled the way Methodists had experienced Sunday worship and sacramental services for the last 200 years. Gone were Sunday services based on a revivalistic frontier pattern and Communion liturgies deriving, through John Wesley, from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. In their place, Methodists' new official liturgies, like Catholic liturgies after Vatican II, drew on early church and ecumenical patterns to emphasize community and relevance over formality and reverence (see pp. 42–43). These liturgies, as well as some social justice motivations behind them, met with mixed reactions and backlash. The movement's most lasting legacy was that United Methodists largely began to celebrate Holy Communion monthly rather than quarterly.

Today O.S.L. is an ecumenical religious order with an abbot, priors, life-vowed members, and its own monastic habit. United Methodism split in 2022; while post-Vatican II liturgical reform was not a leading reason for the split, its fault lines often cut between those who had welcomed the reforms and those who had resisted them. The effect was as electrifying as Hickman had foreseen; as in many other places, it was also more divisive than he ever imagined.—*Jennifer Woodruff Tait, senior editor of Christian History*

Reformers of Rome

SOME CATHOLIC LEADERS WHO INFLUENCED VATICAN II

Jennifer A. Boardman and Edwin Woodruff Tait

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, CONVERTED CARDINAL (1801–1890)

Born in London to a banker father and a mother with Huguenot ancestry, John Henry Newman began his faith journey as an evangelical Christian with deep Calvinist leanings.

He attended Oxford and was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1825, and throughout the years became more convicted of church authority. In particular he sought to purge all nonconformists (Protestants who did not want to conform to the Church of England's governance model) from the Church Missionary Society, of which he was then secretary. Newman later became an activist in the Oxford Movement.

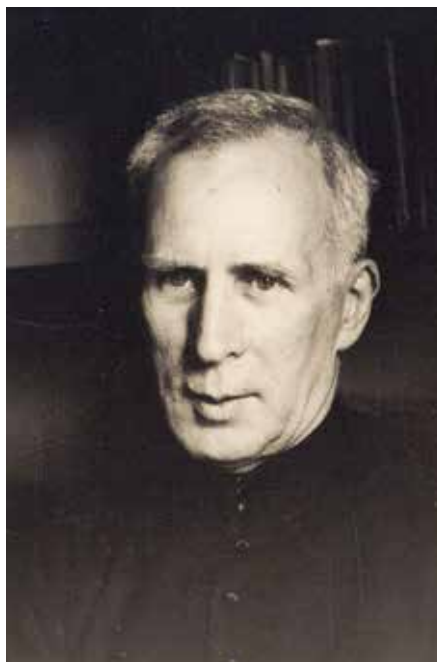
By 1842 Newman had withdrawn to a community in Littlemore, where he lived a semimonastic life with other like-minded Anglicans. Slowly these men converted to Catholicism, and Newman was received into the Roman Catholic Church on October 9, 1845. Eventually he settled into a religious community outside Birmingham, where he served for almost 40 years, first as a priest and then as a cardinal.

Newman was passionate about scriptural theology and the theology of the ancient church fathers. This contrasted with the emphasis on scholastic theology typical of mid-nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism. Newman, who some consider the most important Catholic convert since the Reformation, was alive during the First Vatican Council and is sometimes referred to as “the father” of the Second.

Pope Leo XIII named John Henry Newman a cardinal in 1879. Newman died in 1890 at age 89 and was canonized in 2019 by Pope Francis. Pope Leo XIV proclaimed him Doctor of the Church in 2025.

JACQUES (1882–1973) AND RAÏSSA MARITAIN (1883–1960), INTEGRAL HUMANISTS

Jacques Maritain and Raïssa Oumansoff came together as young students at the University of Paris. Jacques was the descendant of a prominent French politician, Raïssa the daughter of Jewish immigrants. The purely materialistic philosophy they were learning left them unsatisfied. They concluded that if they found nothing to meet their hunger, they would kill themselves. Through Catholicism they discovered the spiritual reality they sought. They married in 1904 and were baptized in 1906. After their conversion, first



CANCELED THEOLOGIANS Both Henri de Lubac (*above left*) and Yves Congar (*above right*) faced censure for positions they held in their theological works. However, both received vindication when they were invited to Vatican II as influential advisors.

Raïssa and then Jacques discovered Thomas Aquinas, whose philosophy would be central to their work.

Jacques Maritain used the phrase “integral humanism” to express the Christian understanding of human dignity as people made in God’s image, and this exercised a significant influence on Vatican II. Involved in the right-wing Action Francaise movement in the 1920s (see p. 21), Maritain rethought his far-right position due to the pope’s condemnation. He came to see democracy as the best expression of Christian beliefs about human dignity. Rather than seeking dominance, as the church had historically done, Catholics should take part in democratic societies as partners alongside nonbelievers, working for justice.

The Maritains spent the war years in Canada and the United States, where Jacques taught philosophy while denouncing the Vichy government and working to help refugees fleeing the Nazis. After the war Jacques became French ambassador to the Vatican and attended the UNESCO conference in 1947 that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. His thought influenced many, including Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968). Raïssa



died in 1960; Jacques lived with the Little Brothers of Jesus in Toulouse, France, until his own death in 1973.

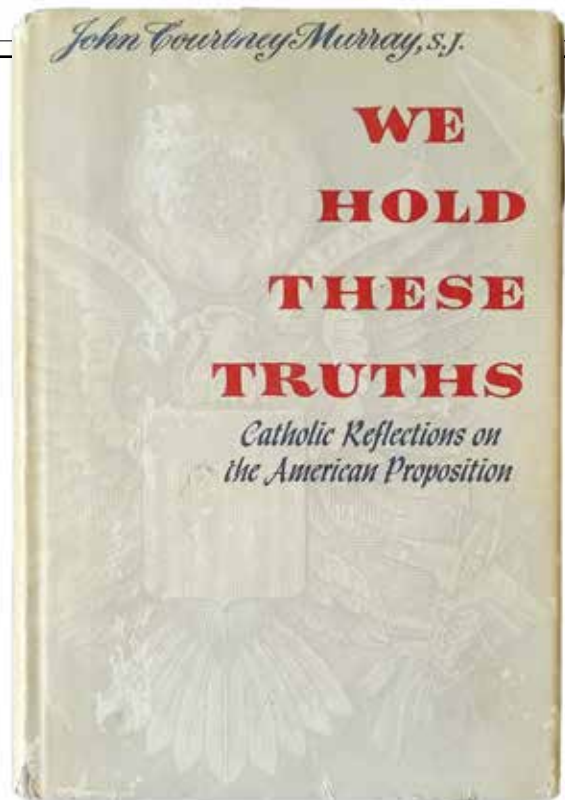
HENRI DE LUBAC, NEW THEOLOGIAN (1896–1991)

Henri de Lubac was born in Cambrai, France, to an aristocratic French family. He attended a Jesuit school and joined the Society of Jesus at age 17. In 1914, de Lubac was drafted into the French Army during the beginning of World War I. After being discharged in 1919, de Lubac continued his theological education in both France and England, and he was ordained a priest in 1927.

In 1929 de Lubac became a professor of fundamental theology at the Catholic University of Lyon, where he taught until 1961. With the rise of Nazism, de Lubac began to write for an underground journal resisting the Nazi regime called *Christian Testimony*. These dissident writers asserted the many ways Christianity was discordant with the regimes set up in both Germany and Vichy France. Throughout much of World War II, de Lubac was in hiding, but he continued to write even as other cowriters were captured and killed.

In June 1950 Jesuit superior general Jean-Baptiste Janssens ordered that some of de Lubac's publications be removed from all Jesuit libraries, due to his promulgation of *nouvelle théologie* (see pp. 17–20). Pope Pius XII later issued an encyclical against modernism, which heavily implied an attack on *nouvelle théologie*, and the church did not allow de Lubac to return to his professorial role until 1958.

His favor changed 10 years after his original censure. In 1960 Pope John XXII made de Lubac a consultant, then a theological expert, and finally a member of the Theological Commission for the Second Vatican Council. Two of de Lubac's ideas were particularly influential on the council. One was the insight that the church is the Body of Christ as a community gathered around the Eucharist, so that "the Eucharist makes the Church." The other was his denial of a sharp distinction between nature and grace, so that all of human life was seen as ordered toward the vision of God.



(ETERNAL) LIFE AND LIBERTY Karl Rahner (*above left*) was known for his concept of "anonymous Christians," which eventually influenced how Roman Catholics understood salvation of those outside Catholicism. John Courtney Murray's works (*above*) heavily shaped Vatican II's conception of religious freedom in civil society.

De Lubac later cocreated the journal *Communio* with Joseph Ratzinger and became a cardinal in 1983. He died in 1991 in Paris at the age of 95.

JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY, CONSTITUTIONAL CATHOLIC (1904–1967)

Born in New York City, John Courtney Murray entered the New York Province of the Society of Jesus as a teenager in 1920. Ordained as a priest in 1933, Murray earned his doctorate in 1937 from Georgetown. The same year he became a professor of theology at the Jesuit seminary Woodstock College in Woodstock, Maryland, and was named editor of the journal *Theological Studies* in 1941. He maintained his professorship and role as editor until his death.

In addition to specializing in trinitarian theology, Murray was interested in the intersection of the church and pluralism: how can Catholicism flourish in a modern, pluralistic society? He believed that the US Constitution was correct in both limiting government's power and separating church from state. He believed constitutionalism gave people their own moral agency over their faith instead of relying on top-down paternalistic structures, and he presented his views in *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition*. The idea that a "new moral truth" could be wrought outside of the Roman Catholic Church was too far for the Vatican at the time, however. The Vatican forbade Murray from publishing his last two articles on the subject.



FATHERS OF VATICAN II Both converts to Catholicism, John Henry Newman (*above*) and Jacques Maritain (*above right*) influenced the Second Vatican Council through their theological and philosophical contributions. Newman participated in Vatican I; Maritain's main work took place between the councils.

However, almost a decade later, the Vatican invited Murray to the second session of the Second Vatican Council. He worked on his document for religious freedom, and in 1965, the council officially endorsed his work in *Dignitatis Humanae Personae*. The document articulates the church's support for secular states to have religious freedom. The final document states, "Religious freedom . . . which men demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society." Murray continued working and writing until his death from a heart attack in 1967. He was 62.

KARL RAHNER, PHILOSOPHER THEOLOGIAN (1904–1984)

Karl Rahner was born in Freiburg, Germany, in 1904 and lived a largely uneventful life dedicated to writing, teaching, and pastoral ministry. He joined the Jesuit Order in 1922 and worked as a theology professor at various Austrian and German universities for most of his life. He also wrote prolifically, producing thousands of works during his career. This quiet life was the basis for an adventurous theology. Rahner integrated the theology of Thomas Aquinas with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). He taught that our very existence is a manifestation of God's grace and that we have a fundamental awareness of God beyond words and concepts; people who respond to God's manifestation of himself within their hearts are, in Rahner's terms, "anonymous Christians."

When Vatican II began, Rahner was under "pre-censure" by the Vatican and the Jesuit Order, which meant that he was not allowed to publish anything without prior approval. He was not initially invited to be one of the

scholar-experts advising the bishops, but Pope John XXIII appointed Rahner as a theological consultant. From being a theologian under a cloud, Rahner became one of the most influential figures at the council, and his concept of "anonymous Christians" in particular influenced how the church spoke of the salvation of those outside the faith. In 1984 Rahner fell ill and died, just after his eightieth birthday. This prayer of Rahner's summarizes his life's work: "You are the first and last experience of my life. Yes, really You Yourself, not just a concept of You, not just the name which we ourselves have given to You!"

YVES CONGAR, ECUMENICAL REFORMER (1904–1995)

Yves Congar was born in France and experienced most of his childhood under German occupation during World War I. He entered seminary as a youth and, after a short stint of required military service, joined the Dominican Order at Amiens. He was ordained as a priest in 1930 and wrote his dissertation on the unity of the church.

Congar was a professor at Le Saulchoir, a Dominican school, from 1931 to 1939, where he taught theology and ecclesiology. When World War II broke out in Europe, Congar was drafted as a chaplain in the French Army. The Germans captured and held him as a prisoner of war from 1940 to 1945, during which he attempted many failed escapes. Following his release, he was awarded numerous medals for bravery.

After the Second World War, Congar continued his theological work and teaching. He increasingly focused on ecumenism and encouraged collaboration and understanding among the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Protestants. He criticized what he viewed as overextended papal powers and advocated for stronger lay leadership within Catholicism.

The Vatican limited Congar's writings from 1947 to 1956, especially his 1950 book *True and False Reform in the Church*. In 1954 he was banned from teaching or publishing



by Pope Pius XII. The tide turned under Pope John XXIII, however, as Congar was invited to participate in the Second Vatican Council. In retrospect numerous Catholic thinkers believe that of all the Catholic theologians who took part in Vatican II, Congar had the most influence. He participated in primary writing roles on some of the most important conciliar documents, including *Unitatis Redintegratio* (see pp. 35–37), which was close to Congar's heart.

In 2021 Pope Francis said before the formal opening of the Synod on Synodality, "There is no need to create another church, but to create a different church." These words were from Congar's once-disregarded *True and False Reform in the Church*. Made a cardinal deacon before his death, Congar once said, "I am a man of tradition. This does not mean I am a conservative. Tradition, as I understand it, is like the Church itself: It comes from the past but looks forward to the future and sets the stage for a new eschatology." He died at the age of 91.

THOMAS MERTON, RADICAL MONK (1915–1968)

Thomas Merton was born in France to a father from New Zealand and an American mother; both were artists. Merton was likely baptized in the Church of England per his father's wishes, but of this, Merton had no proof. When he was still an infant, the family moved to Queens, New York, due to World War I. He was 6 when his mother died of cancer and 15 when he lost his father to a brain tumor.

After a brief and unhappy stint at Clare College, Cambridge, Merton returned to the United States to study at Columbia University. Shortly after graduating in 1938, Merton met and was impressed with Hindu monk Mahanambata Brahmachari (1904–1999). Instead of encouraging Merton to explore Hinduism, however, Brahmachari encouraged the young man to reestablish his

THE REAL RADICALS Thomas Merton (*left*) was a sometimes controversial figure within the monastic community and was radical in his pacifism and civil rights activism. Likewise Hans Küng (*above*) held theological positions that many believed too radical; he was barred from teaching Catholic theology in 1979.

connection with Christianity. Merton was baptized as a Roman Catholic at Corpus Christi Church in New York later that year, and by 1941, had joined the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance. Now a Trappist monk in the most ascetic Catholic order, he began his ministry at the Abbey of Gethsemani near Bardstown, Kentucky.

Merton was a prolific writer; his most famous book was *The Seven Storey Mountain*, his 1948 autobiography. He also strongly supported the American civil rights movement, believing that race and peace were the most important issues of his time. He described the nonviolent movement as "certainly the greatest example of Christian faith in action in the social history of the United States."

As the tumultuous 1960s played out in the United States, Vatican II was also in session. Though Merton had qualms about where the church would ultimately land after the council, he was most concerned with war, peace, and the church's view and treatment of non-Christian religions. But ultimately Merton agreed with John XXIII's ideas and ideals, writing in 1965 ahead of the final council that the Catholic Church's task is "proclaiming the Gospel of love and hope to modern man in a language that he will understand, without any alteration or distortion of the essential Gospel perspectives."

Though not without controversy, Merton remained a devoted Trappist monk for 27 years. He died in Bangkok, Thailand, at a monastic conference in 1968. He was 53.

POPE, PRIEST ... AND PROGRESSIVE? A young Joseph Ratzinger, ordained in 1951, holds Mass in Germany in 1952 (*far right*). He became Pope Benedict XVI in 2005 (*right*). While some accused him of breaking with supposedly “progressive” views he had held at Vatican II, Ratzinger maintained he hadn’t changed.

JOSEPH RATZINGER, CONTINUITY POPE (1927–2022)

Born in Germany, Joseph Ratzinger attended seminary starting at age 12 until his school was closed for military use in 1942. Ratzinger’s father was a police officer, despised the Nazi regime, and he was continuously demoted as a result. At the age of 14, Ratzinger was conscripted into the Hitler Youth, but he often refused to attend meetings. Forced to participate in the German infantry, Ratzinger was captured by Americans as a prisoner of war. He was released on June 19, 1945, and resigned his post.

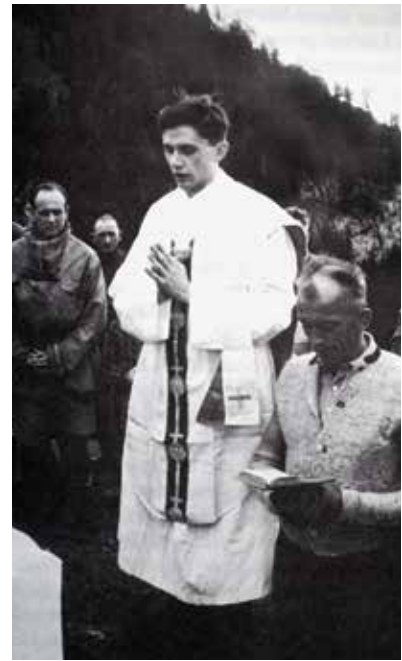
After the war Ratzinger and his brother attended Saint Michael Seminary and were ordained on the same day in 1951. Ratzinger also studied philosophy at the University of Munich, where he was a curate before moving on to professorships in both Bonn and Münster. From 1962 to 1965, Ratzinger was asked to participate in the Second Vatican Council. He was considered part of the church reform movement of *nouvelle théologie*. Ratzinger was concerned with the pope’s profound authority, liturgy, religious freedom, ecumenism, and how the Catholic Church approached the secular world around it.

Though during the 1960s many viewed Ratzinger as a progressive, Catholic thinkers today believe “progressive” is a misnomer in context. Ratzinger was interested in going back to the sources of the early church fathers and the Bible itself, while separating the Catholic Church from the dry neoscholasticism so popular the century before. When he was accused of having morphed into a conservative in the 1990s, Ratzinger responded, “I see no break in my views as a theologian.”

When he was elected Pope Benedict XVI in 2005, Ratzinger carried this view with him as he sought continuity with the pre-conciliar church. He served until his resignation in 2013 due to poor health. He was the first pope to resign in almost 600 years. He died in 2022 at the age of 95.

HANS KÜNG, LIBERAL ADVISOR (1928–2021)

Swiss-born Hans Küng was the youngest of the *periti* at Vatican II—the scholar-experts who advised the bishops. He was also the most radical of the major theologians at the council. His 1960 book *The Council and Reunion* correctly predicted many of the directions the council would take, but the council failed to live up to Küng’s hopes. In



particular he had hoped that the council would lead to reunion with Protestants.

Küng wrote his doctoral dissertation on Karl Barth, and was convinced, like Rahner, that Protestant theology was not fundamentally incompatible with Catholicism. However, while Rahner became the voice of the post-Vatican II consensus, Küng faced censure after his explicit denial of papal infallibility in 1971. Küng argued that the church was “indefectible” rather than infallible. God would never abandon the church, but no specific church teaching could be enshrined as beyond question.

Rahner expressed sympathy with Küng’s criticism of papal authority but believed he went too far in denying infallibility altogether. In 1979 Küng’s former colleague Joseph Ratzinger, acting as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, stripped Küng of his license to teach Catholic theology. The University of Tübingen responded by making Küng’s Institute for Ecumenical Research independent of the Catholic theology faculty, and Küng continued to teach there until he retired in 1996.

Küng’s condemnation made him a hero for liberal Catholics and a symbol of dashed hopes for more radical church change. Küng’s Christology was also controversial, since he spoke of Jesus in primarily human terms and was accused of downplaying or even denying his divinity. He also criticized priestly celibacy, advocated a liberalization of church teaching on sexuality, and defended the legitimacy of euthanasia under some circumstances. **CH**

Jennifer A. Boardman is a copyeditor and writer. She holds a master of theological studies from Bethel Seminary with a concentration in Christian history. Edwin Woodruff Tait is a contributing editor to CH and scholar advisor of this issue.



Legacy and longevity: impressions of Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council concluded on December 8, 1965. Sixty years later, it still has widespread implications that go far beyond the inner life of the Catholic Church. Christian History talked to two historical theologians, one Catholic and one Protestant, for more on the consequences and interpretations of Vatican II. Lucas Briola is associate professor of theology at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Carl R. Trueman is professor of biblical and theological studies at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY: Debates about Vatican II have often centered on the question of “continuity” vs. “discontinuity.” What would you say was the main way in which Vatican II changed Catholicism—genuinely offered something that hadn’t been there in the tradition before, or hadn’t been explicitly or fully worked out?

LUCAS BRIOLA: The primary achievement of Vatican II was its quite explicit articulation of the “universal call to holiness,” a call for all Christians to belong more fully to Christ (see Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*, chap. 5). As John O’Malley memorably says in his magisterial history of the council, “For the first time in history, a council insisted on the ‘universal call to holiness’ and made clear that promoting that call was what the church was all about.” While

BACK TO BUSINESS Bishops arrive at the second session of Vatican II, which reconvened on September 28, 1963. The council had paused after John XXIII died.

other councils *assumed* that holiness and some spiritual writers *described* that holiness prior to the council, Vatican II put that call front and center of the church’s life. Moreover, it is that call that organizes and explains its other more noticeable achievements, like the organic interplay of Scripture and tradition as Christ-mediated, active participation in the liturgy, an empowered episcopate (bishops), the legitimacy of the lay vocation, a commitment to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and a constructive engagement with modernity.

CARL R. TRUEMAN: I would rephrase the question. The intention of the council was not, first and foremost, to wrestle with the question of continuity or discontinuity but to apply the church’s teaching to the challenges posed by modernity. This included the rise of religious pluralism, the challenges posed by postwar European culture, the growing loss of cultural status and influence for Christians, and the threats posed by alternative ideologies, whether intellectual or more broadly sociological. Clearly any answers to these challenges were inevitably going to be scrutinized in terms of

SIGNS OF CHANGE Congregants line up and stand to receive the Eucharist, a subtle post-conciliar change to the Mass.

continuity and discontinuity with established dogma and practice, but that was not the primary purpose.

CH: What major sign of continuity—something the Second Vatican Council emphasized or brought about—do you think was fully in keeping with the existing tradition?

CT: The council exhibited many points of continuity. Perhaps most important was the office of the papacy. In *Lumen Gentium* the council affirmed the primacy of Peter and the pope of Rome as his successor. That is continuous not only with Vatican I but with centuries of Catholic teaching.

LB: The central question that the council faced—namely, the widespread secularization brought on by modernity—matched the questions faced by the earliest Christians: how do you proclaim Christ to a world that knows little about him, hates him, or ignores him? To root our own discipleship in that question is paramount; otherwise, we become complacent and lose our evangelical fervor. It is a question that the council can return us to.

CH: Is the major need in Catholicism today for more continuity, more appreciation of the council's radicalism, or some third possibility?

CT: Much depends on how one interprets the council. There are those who see it as essentially a reprimating (restoring) and renewed application of traditional Catholicism to modernity. Others see it as justifying some radical breaks with aspects of that. The role of Cardinal Newman's concept of doctrinal development, itself subject to contested interpretations by traditionalists and progressives (see pp. 45–49), is central to this. So strange as it is to say, before this question can be answered, Catholics themselves need to come to a consensus on how to understand the council.

LB: Councils take a long time to digest, and we aren't there yet with Vatican II. The Council of Trent took at least a hundred years! Today there stands a need to consolidate the gains of Vatican II in view of the pontificates since the council—especially Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis. How might we integrate a robust Christocentrism with, say, a radical commitment to resolving social injustices? How can we overcome the various polarizations that have plagued the Catholic Church since the council? In many ways I think this work of consolidation will be a key priority of the newly elected Pope Leo XIV.

CH: If you could go back in time and change one thing about either the council itself or its consequences, what would it be?

LB: I know it sounds very insignificant, but I would join the famous British anthropologist Mary Douglas



(1921–2007) and say that I would have maintained the Friday abstinence (from meat) rules that marked preconciliar Catholicism. Leading up to the council, the eating of fish on Fridays throughout the year had served as a Catholic shibboleth, a key boundary marker that set Catholics apart. In the council's aftermath, even while the council itself said nothing about these rules, the bishops relaxed those rules. Not only was this change—along with the liturgical reforms—the most palpable experience of the Vatican II Council for most Catholics, it came to stand for precisely what the council did not intend: an iconoclastic dilution of Catholic identity amid the waves of modernity. Interestingly in our time of ecological catastrophe, some Catholic bishops have recently called for the restoration of Friday abstinence.

CT: There were Protestant observers at the council who were invited to attend the public sessions and were able to contribute to the theological discussions, but they (understandably) had no vote. I would have liked to see a higher profile given to these voices, though I am not sure how that could practically have been achieved.

CH: Dr. Briola, what one aspect of Vatican II or its effects is most important to your own faith?

LB: For me, the council's identification of the liturgy—especially the Eucharist—as the source and summit of the Christian life (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, paragraph 10) has shaped my faith and theology in profound ways. It invites me to think about how the church's worship might shape everything I do, and how might everything I do find its fulfillment in the church's worship. It serves

CHRIST VICTORIOUS This triumphant interpretation (right) envisions Vatican II bringing together the People of God and conquering Satan.



WHAT'S NEXT? Like the popes before him, Pope Leo XIV (above) will need to interpret Vatican II and address the polarizations it caused within the Catholic Church.

as a continual reminder that the most primary work of the church is the praise of God; all else follows from there.

CH: Dr. Trueman, how does Vatican II affect your evaluation of Catholicism as a Protestant? What's one way in which it was, in your view, a move in the right direction, and one in which you think it was a mistake?

CT: On the positive side, *Dei Verbum* and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* affirmed the need for the laity's access to, and reading of, the Bible—and actively encouraged this for personal Christian growth, as well as paving the way for more Scripture to be read in formal church services. That was a very welcome development and has encouraged me as a Protestant to realize that many committed lay Catholics are now biblically literate (and have worship services where more Scripture is read than in many of their Protestant equivalents).

On the negative side, the council, given its ecumenical authority, could have superseded or even revoked the anathemas against Protestantism of the Council of Trent. It did not do so, and therefore those anathemas remain in place, as part of the church's infallible teaching.

CH: What do you think is the most common misunderstanding people have about the council?

CT: That it represents a radical break with the past and a deep opening up of Catholicism to alternatives.

LB: For its boosters and detractors respectively, there runs the risk of rendering the council as either an accommodation or a capitulation to modernity. Against both those



misinterpretations, the council's primary intention was to transform the world through the paschal light of Christ: the true *lumen gentium*!

CH: Do you think the church should call another ecumenical council in the near future? Why or why not? What should be on the agenda if so?

CT: Yes and no. Clearly there is a need for the church to clarify in an official way what Vatican II means today. But there is also the danger that another council might simply deepen the problems rather than solve them. Catholicism seems so fragmented internally that any council is likely to reflect that.

LB: While I would never place bets against the Holy Spirit, I doubt we will see another ecumenical council in our lifetime. Vatican II itself will continue to need time to mature in the life of the church. Moreover Pope Paul VI's recovery of the Synod of Bishops and Pope Francis's emphasis on synodality for the entire church means that the sort of consultation an ecumenical council represents is happening more regularly in Catholicism. Nevertheless the questions raised by something like artificial intelligence over the next several decades point to an ongoing need for theological reflection and magisterial guidance. Whether something like an ecumenical council is needed for that work is an open question. **CH**

The Second Vatican Council

Use these questions for self-study or guided discussion.

1. How did the Council of Trent respond to the Protestant Reformation (pp. 6–10), and how did the council's response affect the practical faith of Catholic laypeople?
2. What is the “throne and altar” alliance? How did this balance of power change after the Reformation and into the nineteenth century (p. 11)?
3. What were the major issues that the First Vatican Council was convened to address (pp. 12–15)? What was the council's answer to them?
4. How did the Catholic Church respond to modernism after Vatican I (pp. 17–20)?
5. What is *nouvelle théologie* (see Did you know? and pp. 17–20)? Is this originally pejorative nickname an accurate depiction of the movement? Why or why not?
6. Describe the papal responses to rising fascist powers in Germany and Italy before World War II (p. 21). Where did these popes succeed? What could they have done better?
7. What unique and/or unexpected events took place during the Second Vatican Council (pp. 22–26)?
8. Why, according to page 27, was there so much debate concerning the documents Vatican II produced? (You can refer to excerpts from some of the most important documents on page 34.)
9. Consider the ways in which popes after Vatican II applied its dogmas (pp. 30–33). Whose interpretation do you think is most in keeping with the spirit of the council? Why?
10. In what ways did council documents such as *Unitatis Redintegratio* shape Catholics' relationship with Protestants (pp. 35–37)?
11. What did charismatic renewal look like in the Catholic Church (p. 38), and how did Vatican II influence this movement?
12. How was the update to the Catholic catechism an outworking of Vatican II (pp. 39–41)? In what ways did the catechism change?

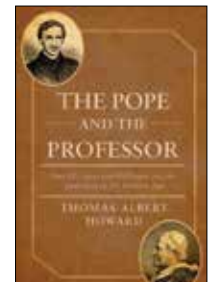
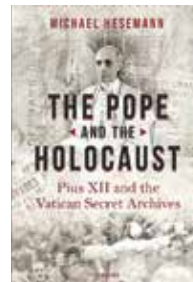
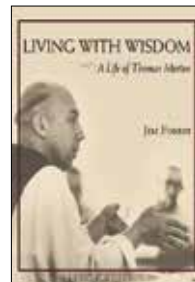
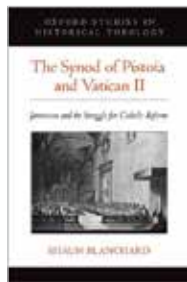


REFORMED RITES Vatican II precipitated significant changes in the celebration of the Mass. What altered practice do you notice here?

13. Compare the Tridentine liturgy with the New Order liturgy on pages 42 and 43. What differences do you notice? In what ways are they the same?
14. “The effect was electrifying” on page 44 gives an example of how Vatican II influenced one Protestant denomination's liturgical practice. Has your denomination experienced change because of Vatican II? If so, how?
15. Which figure from the Gallery (pp. 45–49) do you think had the most influence on the trajectory of Vatican II and why?
16. In the interview (pp. 50–52), whose perspective on Vatican II most resonated with you? Why?
17. What do you think about the effects and consequences of the council? **CH**

Recommended resources

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL WITH THESE RESOURCES WRITTEN AND RECOMMENDED BY OUR AUTHORS AND EDITORS.



BOOKS

To begin, discover the **Catholic Reformation and responses to the Reformation** with John O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (2013) and Joseph Stuart and Barbara Stuart, *The Church and the Age of Reformations: Martin Luther, the Renaissance, and the Council of Trent* (2022). Also, James White, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today* (2004) and John O'Malley, *When Bishops Meet: An Essay Comparing Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II* (2019) both provide comprehensive looks at Catholic ecumenical councils from Trent on.

For more on Catholicism in the **early modern era and the modernist controversy**, see John Birely, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450–1700* (1999); John O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (2002); and Ulrich Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment* (2016).

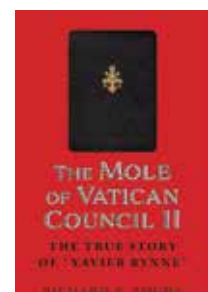
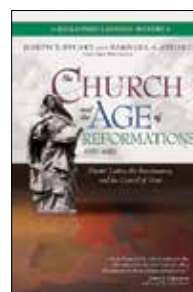
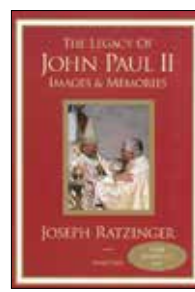
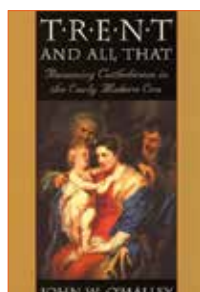
Learn also about **reform and renewal** in the Catholic Church with R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal* (2005); Matthew Lamb and Matthew Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* (2008); and Shaun Blanchard, *The Synod of Pistoia and Vatican II: Jansenism and the Struggle for Catholic Reform* (2019). Finally, read about **the world wars and Catholic responses** with James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (2018); Michael Hesemann, *The Pope and the Holocaust: Pius XII and the Secret Vatican Archives* (2022).

For the **First Vatican Council**, read John O'Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church*

(2018) and John Quinn, *Revered and Reviled: A Re-Examination of Vatican Council I* (2017). For overviews of the **Second Vatican Council**, read John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (2010); Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (2012); Matthew Levering, *An Introduction to Vatican II as an Ongoing Theological Event* (2017); Shaun Blanchard and Stephen Bullivant, *Vatican II: A Very Short Introduction* (2023); and Catherine Clifford and Massimo Faggioli, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II* (2023).

Follow these up with the actual **documents of Vatican II** themselves, which are available online at the [Vatican website](#). Print versions include Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (2014); *Vatican Council II: More Post-Conciliar Documents* (1983); and *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations: The Basic Sixteen Documents* (1996). Read Edward Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II* (2007) for a handy guide.

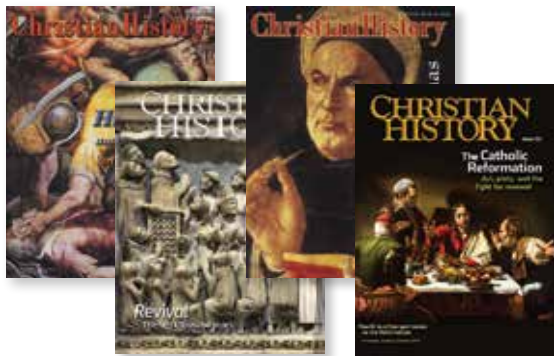
Find out about the lives of some **popes** named in this issue with Owen Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution* (1980) and also *A History of the Popes 1830–1914* (1998); Richard McBrien, *Lives of the Popes* (2000); Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (2002); Roberto de Mattei, *Pius IX* (2004); Joseph Ratzinger, *The Legacy of John Paul II: Images and Memories* (2005); John Allen Jr., *Pope Benedict XVI: A Biography of Joseph Ratzinger* (2005); and Georg Ratzinger and Michael Hesemann, *My Brother, the Pope* (2012);



and Thomas Albert Howard, *The Pope and the Professor: Pius IX, Ignaz von Döllinger, and the Quandary of the Modern Age* (2017).

For **other people of interest**, read Karl-Josef Kuschel and Herman Haring, *Hans Küng: New Horizons for Faith and Thought* (1993); Harvey Egan, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (1998); Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1999); Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri De Lubac: His Life and Work* (2008); Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom—A Life of Thomas Merton* (2008); Barry Hudock, *Struggle, Condemnation, Vindication: John Courtney Murray's Journey toward Vatican II* (2015); Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (2019); David Grumett, *Henri De Lubac and the Shaping of Modern Theology* (2020); Jean-Luc Barré and Bernard Doering, *Jacques and Raïssa Maritain: Beggars for Heaven* (2022); Etienne Fouilloux and Patricia Kelly, *Yves Congar 1904–1995: A Life* (2023); and Richard Zmuda, *The Mole of Vatican Council II: The True Story of Xavier Rynne* (2024).

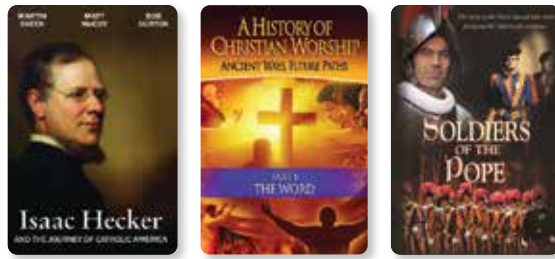
And finally, for more on **Protestant and interreligious dialogue with Vatican II**, see James White, *New Forms of Worship* (1971); *Christian Worship in Transition* (1976); and *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (1989); Hoyt Hickman et al., *New Handbook of the Christian Year* (1992); Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (1995); Rob Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace* (1991); Don Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality* (2016); and Thomas Albert Howard, *The Faiths of Others: A History of Interreligious Dialogue* (2021).



PAST CH ISSUES

Check out these past issues of *Christian History* for more content related to this issue—all are available online; some are available for purchase as hard copies.

- 28 – *100 Most Important Events in Church History*
- 65 – *Ten Most Influential Christians of the 20th Century*
- 71 – *Huguenots and the Wars of Religion*
- 72 – *How We Got Our History*
- 73 – *Thomas Aquinas*
- 122 – *The Catholic Reformation*
- 149, 151, and 153 – *Revivals I, II, and III*



VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO

History of Christianity contains a helpful overview of some topics relevant to this issue. While *History of Christian Worship* covers Catholic expressions of worship, *Ritual: The Language of Worship* is a deeper explanation of the Mass and liturgy in the Catholic Church. Each of these documentaries has a free downloadable study guide. Some Catholic figures whose stories were told in this issue or are contemporary to the issue's topic include *Pope Benedict XVI*, *Father Placido Cortese*, *Isaac Hecker and the Journey of Catholic America*, *Journey of the Heart: Henri Nouwen*, and *Soldiers of the Pope*. Most of these titles are only available via digital download; you may access more content by streaming on Redeem TV.



WEBSITES

Numerous organizations and universities have compiled documents and scholarly resources relevant to Vatican II; some of the most extensive include *The Catholic University of America*, *Atla LibGuides*, and *Internet Archive*. As noted on page 54, *The Holy See*, which is the Vatican's official website, has made available all the council documents.

Public-domain primary source documents mentioned in this issue can be found in the usual collections, including the *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, *Gutenberg Project*, and *Internet Modern Sourcebook*.

Papal Encyclicals Online provides a directory of popes with accompanying authored documents, letters, and council addresses. See our own website for dates of concurrent *Popes and Patriarchs*.

Find out more about the United Methodist Church's *Order of St. Luke's* liturgical renewal tied to Vatican II. Finally, the multi-authored website *New Liturgical Movement* seeks to work out Vatican II's theology for today. **CH**

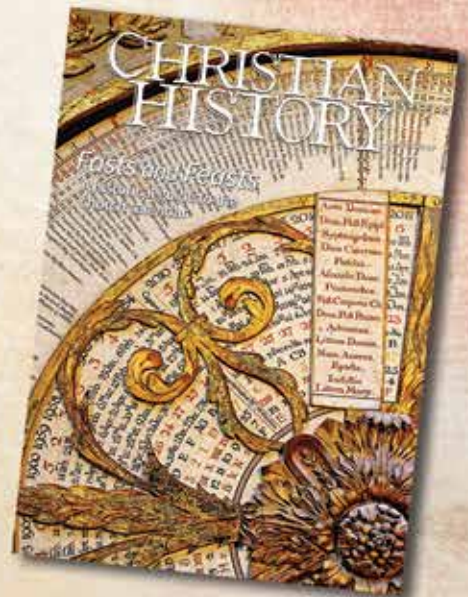
GUIDES TO THE SEASONS

FASTS AND FEASTS: A historical guide to the church calendar

One of the distinctive aspects of the Christian faith is that it is a story rooted in time—centered around the true story of a Savior who lived at a moment in history that we can pinpoint. Because of this, Christians began very early to celebrate the life, death, and Resurrection of their Savior by marking time. Weekly at first, and then yearly, joyful commemorations and penitential periods developed; over the first few centuries of the church they achieved a rhythm, year in and year out, intended to help believers grow in faith and become closer to their Lord.

In ***Fasts and Feasts: A historical guide to the church calendar***, you will find an introduction to this rhythm—to inform you about its history and, perhaps, give you ideas to make it part of your own discipleship or that of your church. *56 pages*

#4930, \$9.99



THE GRAND MIRACLE: Daily reflections for the season of Advent

Enter what C.S. Lewis described as “The Grand Miracle” with this collection of reflections designed to draw you into the story of the Incarnation day-by-day through the season of Advent. Based on the writings of Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, George MacDonald, Dorothy Sayers and others, each day’s reading offers a fresh look at the birth of Christ through the eyes of a modern author. Scripture, prayer, and full-page contemplative images complete each entry. *64 pages*

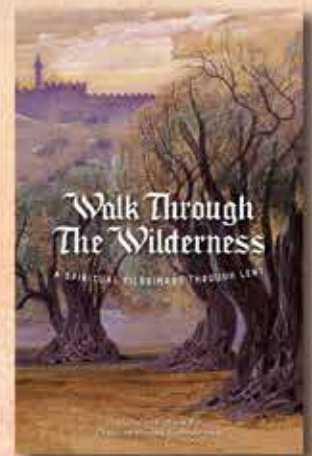
#4901, \$4.99



WALK THROUGH THE WILDERNESS: A spiritual pilgrimage through Lent

Walk with Jesus this Lent through this collection of reflections written by the Christian History Institute team, based on Scripture selections chosen from the Revised Common Lectionary and quotes from the writings of great Christians of the past. Ponder anew Christ's life, death and resurrection, and be led by your brothers and sisters in Christ throughout church history as you contemplate our need for redemption and His gracious gift. *76 pages*

#4918, \$4.99



BUNDLE THE THREE GUIDES FOR ONLY \$16.99, #97141.

**Christian History Institute, PO Box 540, Worcester, PA 19490
1-800-468-0458 • www.ChristianHistoryInstitute.org**



RedeemTV is a FREE streaming service for faith building and family entertainment!

Join over **350,000** subscribers in **200** countries
for viewer-supported, ad-free, hope-filled programming.

Visit us at RedeemTV.com or download our app and stream goodness wherever you go!





Subscriber #

Source Code

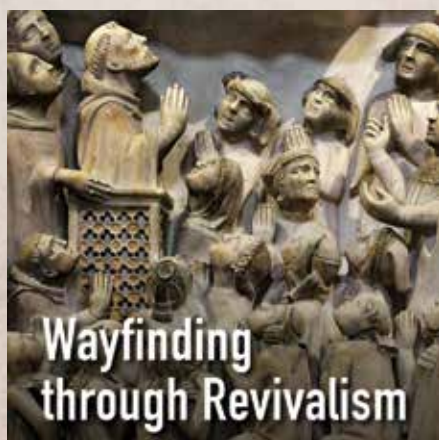


Introducing Christian History Podcasts



Bonhoeffer

Learn how to navigate
the Christian life with
Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Revivalism

Hear how God has
revived the church
throughout the ages



Forgotten

Discover stories of
forgotten Christians
of the past

Listen now on the CHI website, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or RedeemTV.
New episodes every week!

