

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EVER ANCIENT, EVER NEW  
TALKS ON THE VATICAN II CONCIL: PART I  
A HISTORY AND OVERVIEW OF THE COUNCIL

I. To the surprise of almost everyone, in 1959, Pope John XXIII called for an ecumenical council to be held at the Vatican for the sake of church reform and to present the faith to the world.

A. On October 28, 1958, the Cardinals elected the archbishop of Venice, 77 year old Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, with many, and perhaps most of them, believing he would be a “transitional pope” to occupy the office until the cardinals worked out how to respond to the rapidly changing world. Then, on January 25, 1959, the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, Pope John XXIII astonished everyone by announcing that he was calling for an ecumenical council, the first in 90 years, to present the Church anew to the world. See, e.g., “Vatican II Council: Light for the Church and for the Modern World” in Vatican Jubilee Initiative at [vatican.va](http://vatican.va).

B. There had been 20 ecumenical (universal) councils up to this time, some dealing with central matters of doctrine, and others dealing with reform within the Church. Ecumenical councils are the highest level of meetings of the bishops and can only act with the Pope’s approval; they often define infallible dogma. Such councils are generally called in response to some crisis or crucial question that needs to be resolved. Although not an ecumenical council, the gathering of the Apostles in Jerusalem to resolve how the Jewish law applied to Gentile converts set a precedent. See Acts of the Apostles 15:1-29.

1. In the early centuries of the Church, the Pope did not always call an ecumenical council, but his approval was always needed for such a council to be effective. In the Middle Ages, the Popes called eight ecumenical councils; one more medieval council, the Council of Constance in the fourteenth century, initially met without papal approval, but then received it.
2. Since the Middle Ages, there had only been three ecumenical councils up to that point, the Fifth Lateran Council of the early sixteenth century, the central Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century, and the First Vatican Council in 1870.
3. Popes Pius XI and Pope Pius XII, who together had reigned from 1922 – 1958, had also considered calling an ecumenical council both because of the rapid changes in the world and because the previous council (Vatican I) had been interrupted in 1870 due to the Italian invasion of Rome. This fact became known to Pope John XXIII, but was not generally known to anyone outside the Vatican. See “Vatican II Council: Light for the Church and for the Modern World” in Vatican Jubilee Initiative at [vatican.va](http://vatican.va).

C. The reaction to Pope John XXIII’s call was mixed.

1. Many of the cardinals thought that there was no need for a council, and in fact that it could open up controversies better left alone. Other cardinals, especially

those of Germany, France and many missionary countries, saw an opportunity for reform and dialogue with the world.

2. Orthodox churches tended to welcome the council as an opportunity for a possible reconciliation. Protestant churches likewise saw the Council as a possible opportunity for dialogue. See Fr. John Vidmar, The Catholic Church Throughout the Ages (2005) 335-337. The press was generally very favorable, although often with some unrealistic expectations about what the Council would do, with many wanting a change in doctrine. See Fr. John O'Malley, What Happened at Vatican II (2008) 34-35.

D. Pope John XXIII considered the Council to be primarily a means of presenting the Church anew to the modern world, renewing Church practices, and making progress toward the unity of Christians.

1. His 1959 encyclical letter *Ad Petri Cathedram (The Chair of Peter)* said that the Council should focus on enhancing the faith, renewing the Church's traditions, and reforming her practices. See "Vatican II Council: Light for the Church and for the Modern World."

2. On Christmas, 1961, Pope John XXIII published *Humanae Salutis*, which described the reasons for the Council. In that document, he wrote about the spiritual crises of the modern world, which had led to much devastation, and could lead to more, but also of a vibrancy within the Church and her ability to bring hope to the world. He described the goals of the Council in terms of promoting ever greater vitality and beauty within the Church, presenting her gifts better to the world, and enhancing unity among Christians.

3. At the eve of the Council, Pope John XXIII gave a homily entitled *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia (Mother Church Rejoices)*, in which he again stated that the primary goal of the Council was to defend and promote Catholic doctrine in the modern world. He noted the spiritual blindness common in the world, but said that the Church can use current opportunities to present the faith better than ever before. He also held out the prospect of increasing Christian unity and unity among all peoples.

4. A repeated theme of Pope John XIII and others in the years before the Council was also *aggiornamento*, which means a bringing up to date and engaging with others. The concept, which (as Cardinal Angelo Roncalli) he had already been using before his election, involved representing the faith, liturgy and practices of the Church to the world in a new and fresh way. See Kenneth Whitehead, The Renewed Church (2009) xvi, 9-10.

II. The preparation for the Council took almost four years, and involved 10 Preparatory Commissions. The Commissions took comments from bishops, leaders of religious orders, and scholars throughout the world, and then prepared schemata on various subjects. Even during the preparation, it became apparent that the Council would be more extensive than expected.

A.. The preparation took place in two phases.

1. First, the Ante- Preparatory Commission sent letters to all of the bishops of the world, the leaders of religious orders and other Catholic leaders such as the heads of pontifical universities and other leading theologians. The majority of those surveyed, including 77 percent of the bishops (1998), responded; and the Commission gathered together their comments into 12 volumes, with over 5000 pages.

2. Then, based upon these responses and their own views, the ten Preparatory Commissions prepared 72 schemata to be presented as the initial drafts to the Council.

3. The commissions were focused on: (1) Doctrine; (2) Bishops; (3) Oriental Churches, i.e., the Eastern Catholic Churches; (4) Sacraments; (5) Discipline of Clergy and Laity; (6) Religious Orders; (7) Missions; (8) Liturgy; (9) Seminaries and Catholic Schools; and (10) the Apostolate of the Laity. Except the last, the commissions were all based on Congregations of the Vatican, and were headed by the Cardinal Prefect of that Congregation. For the most part, the Commissions were guided by the Vatican Curia and people well known to them, for they were considered to be the experts and the ones most familiar with the whole Church. They prepared 72 schema (drafts) for the Council.

B. The work had been immense, but as the Council approached, it was clear that matters were going to be more complex than expected.

1. When he called the Council, Pope John XXIII fully expected it to last only one session, perhaps going to two months. Most expectations were along similar lines.

2. The Archbishop of Brussels Cardinal Leon Suenens spoke with Pope John XXIII in March of 1962; and the Pope agreed that a plan for the Council should be drawn up. Cardinal Suenens then proposed that there should be two sessions, one for dealing with the outside world, presenting Church teachings anew (ad extra) with internal Church matters, such as liturgy and the approach to Revelation (ad intra.) He also thought that the 72 schemata were too many, and that the documentation should be reduced.

3. He shared his views with other Cardinals, including the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, who many people rightly expected would be elected as the next Pope. Cardinal Montini then circulated a letter in which he agreed with the basic insights of Cardinal Suenens, but proposed that there should be three sessions. The first would deal with what the Church is, the second with what she does, and the third with issues of the world at large. See Whitehead, The Renewed Church 16-20. These views would gradually guide the views of the bishops who were to gather for the Council later that year. Consistent with the future Pope Paul VI's desire, "the central theme [of the Council was] the Church.

From this, the Council explored the mystery, outlined the divine design of the constitution, deepened the nature, illustrated the mission, and re-evaluated the vocation of the laity and their part in the mission of the People of God.” “Vatican II Council: Light for the Church and for the Modern World” in Vatican II Jubilee Initiative, vatican.va.

C. On August 6, 1962, Pope John XXIII published the Regulations that would govern the conduct of the Council.

1. The Council would open on October 11, 1962, the Feast of the Maternity of Mary, with all ordinaries (most commonly bishops, but also abbots and some leaders in religious orders) invited to attend and vote. The bishops brought experts called periti, and there would also be periti of the Council itself. Theologians and even representatives of the Orthodox Churches and Protestant denominations were also invited to attend, but not to vote. There were about 2500 bishops in attendance during the meetings of the Council.

2. The bishops would vote for 16 members for each of the 10 Conciliar Commissions that would cover the same subject matters as the Preparatory Commissions had. (On October 22, Pope John XXIII added an 11<sup>th</sup> commission, for Christian Unity.) The Pope would appoint the chairman of each Commission and could appoint additional members, as he eventually would.

3. The Preparatory Commissions would present the schemata to the Council and ask for recommendations regarding improvements. Those recommendations would be discussed by the Council and the new commissions would draft revised documents. The Council would then vote on the revised documents, with a two thirds majority needed for both changes to the documents and final approval.

III. When the Council opened in October of 1962, events took a very unexpected turn.

A. The Council was held in the shadow of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which in turn created the threat of a nuclear war. Most of the bishops of the Church were in attendance, but some of them, especially in Communist countries, were not allowed to leave their countries; and a few bishops, as Pope John XXIII noted, were imprisoned by tyrannical regimes. Pope John’s homily at the opening reflected this unease, but also optimism that the Church could be a shining example to the world.

B. On October 13, the first working day of the Council, the bishops were expected to elect members of the Conciliar Council. And most people expected the proposed nominees to be elected. But things took a very different direction as the bishops soon decided to select their own nominees.

1. The Preparatory Commissions had already nominated the proposed 16 members of each Conciliar Commission. The expectation is that they would be selected.

2. However, Cardinal Achille Leichardt, the Archbishop of Lille, France proposed that the elections be delayed in order for the bishops to get to know each

other and be able to make an independent judgment regarding the best members for the Commission. The Archbishop of Cologne Germany, Joseph Frings immediately made a similar proposal and added that this idea was supported by the German speaking bishops. (Cardinal Frings' peritus was a young professor, Fr. Joseph Ratzinger.) The proposals were well received and the bishops voted overwhelmingly to delay the vote on the members.

3. Over the next week, the bishops began drawing up new lists for the Commissions. There was some debate over voting procedures, but eventually the Commissions were filled with very different members than first expected.

C. It soon became clear that the issue was not just the members of the Commissions, but also the fact that the bishops at the Council were going to exercise an independent voice, not simply make a few changes to documents already prepared.

IV. During the First Session, the Council considered the proposed constitutions on the liturgy, revelation and the church, and then documents on mass media, education and ecumenism. The debate and proposed revisions were much more extensive than expected, although there would eventually be a consensus on the documents by the end of the Council three years later.

A. The first document to be considered was the proposed constitution on the liturgy called Sacrosanctum Concilium. The constitution received a mostly favorable reception, but the Council fathers proposed many changes as well.

1. The Preparatory Commission on Liturgy presented this, the first, schema to the council, and the discussion began on October 22. Most of the speeches were favorable, but the bishops did seem to want a number of proposed changes.

2. After a three week discussion, the bishops voted 2147 – 4 to accept it as the basic text with the Commission instructed to make the needed changes. Things had gone slower than expected, and it was clear that the Council was going to be longer than expected. But that document had cleared the preliminary hurdle.

B. On November 14, the Preparatory Commission on Doctrine presented its proposed constitution On the Sources of Revelation. That document was much more controversial, and the debate made it clear that the Council was going to be longer and more active than anyone thought.

1. The initial speeches, including central ones by Cardinals Leinart and Frings, were more critical and indicated that it must be substantially revised.

2. On November 20, by vote of 1368- 841, the bishops voted to that the document should be sent for substantial revisions. Although the resolution technically did not meet the required two thirds majority requirement, it was clear that the Council was not ready to approve of that document unless there were the required changes.

3. And so, the next day, Pope John XXIII sent an instruction that the document would be sent to a mixed commission with representation from both the

Commission on Doctrine and the newly created Commission on Christian Unity.

C. After the debate on the document on revelation, the Council made progress on two other documents.

1. On November 20, the decree on mass media received favorable reception and was returned with requests for a few modifications.

2. The Commission had three commentaries on ecumenism, one document from the Commission on Christian Unity, one from the Commission on Oriental Churches, one a chapter in the document on the Church. In addition, the Commission on Christian Unity was preparing a document on relations with the Jewish people. When the Council document from the Commission on Oriental Churches began to be discussed on November 26, some bishops proposed that the Council merge all the documents into one; that proposal was passed by a vote of 2068 – 36.

D.. Then, the Doctrinal Commission presented On the Church, which most of the bishops considered to be the most important. The resulting discussions led to calls for some changes and to a new document on the issues of the modern world.

1. The initial schema focused on traditional teachings and the idea of the Church militant. Some bishops (led by Cardinal Ernetso Ruffini of Palermo) were basically satisfied by the text. Other bishops, such as Cardinals Frings and Leinart, were mostly satisfied with the text but wanted some changes, such as a greater emphasis on collegiality and the views of the Church fathers. Other bishops, such as Emile-Joseph De Smeldt of Brugge, Belgium, backed up by theologians such as the Jesuit Father Karl Rahner, rejected the text as fundamentally flawed.

2. Cardinal Suenens made a crucial speech in which he argued that the bishops must go back and consider what the main goal of the Council would be. He argued that the Council must first discuss what the Church is at her essence and what she is called to do (ad intra focus) and then address the world regarding the great issues of the day (ad extra focus.) Cardinal Giacomo Larcaro of Bologna and Cardinal Montini likewise supported the proposal and it was greeted with great enthusiasm.

3. And on the next day, December 6, Pope John XXIII sent a communication, apparently agreeing with Cardinal Suenens. He said that, from now on, the work of the Conciliar Commissions would be under a Central Coordinating Commission., headed by the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Cicognani, which would both revise the constitution on the Church and take up work on the schema regarding modern issues. That latter schema would become the longest document of the Council Gaudium et Spes, the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

E. The First Session concluded with a Mass on December 8. The Council had not approved any documents yet, but as Cardinal Ratzinger would later say, that was an accomplishment, for it indicated that it was taking the issues very seriously.

V. During the ten months between the First and Second Sessions, Pope John XXIII died, Pope Paul VI was elected, and the Commissions began the redrafting of the documents to be presented to the Council.

A. The Coordinating Commission met in January, 1963, and reduced the number of schema to seventeen basic texts, which would form the core of the final documents to be approved. The seventeenth text, dealing with the Church in the modern world, would mostly go by the name Schema 17, and then Schema 13, until near the end of the Council, when it was called Gaudium et Spes.

B. Different mixed commissions worked on the constitutions on Revelation and the Church. The discussions about the constitution on Revelation were more contentious, and that document would not be considered at the Second Session. The second set of discussions, on the Church, led to a shortened four chapter constitution on the Church, which called for the restoration of the permanent diaconate and emphasized among other things the collegiality of the bishops and the universal call to holiness. The Commission turned the chapters on ecumenism, evangelization, religious life and church-state relations into their own documents, while other sections on the Magisterium and obedience were made part of other chapters.

C. Pope John XXIII died on June 3, 1963, less than two months after his final encyclical letter Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth.) During the conclave that followed, it appears that the two leading candidates were Cardinal Montini and Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, the archbishop of Bologna, who had been active in supporting Sacrosanctum Concilium. On the sixth ballot, the cardinals elected the 66 year old Cardinal Montini, who took the name Pope Paul VI.

D. Pope Paul VI decided that the Coordinating Commission would still guide the drafting of the documents. He revised the laws for the Council such that four “moderators” would preside over the council, working out among themselves how they would rotate their time in charge. The moderators were Cardinals Suenens, Lacaro, Eugene Dopfner (the archbishop of Munich) and Gregoire-Pierre Agagianian, who had been the patriarch of the Armenian Catholic Church and was at that time the prefect of the Congregation on the Propagation of the Faith, in charge of missions. That arrangement was a simplification of the governance by the council of the 10 presidents of the drafting Commissions. But there would be some tension regarding who was in charge, the Coordinating Commission or the coordinators, and how much power any of them had.

E. Meanwhile, the Coordinating Commission published five documents for consideration during the Second Session. The topics were the Church, the Virgin Mary, bishops, the lay apostolate, and ecumenism. The second session was also to take up the slightly revised text on the mass media.

VI. The Second Session then conducted active discussions on the proposed documents and approved on the Constitution on the Liturgy and the Decree on Mass Media.

- A. The Session opened on September 29, the Feast of the Archangels, with a Mass presided over by Pope Paul VI. In his homily, he focused on renewal within the Church, engagement with the issues of the world, and dialogue with other Christians.
  
- B. The Council then began discussion on the Constitution on the Church, now called Lumen Gentium, the Light of Nations.
  1. The bishops approved the text as a good basis by a vote of 2231 – 43. There, was, however, a great deal of debate about the way in which its teachings would be phrased, about the permanent diaconate, and about incorporating the document on Mary into this constitution.
  2. At this and future sessions, there was a great deal of debate about “collegiality”, how much authority bishops have on their own and as a group, and how much is derived from the Pope. The Council overwhelmingly agreed that the episcopacy has its own sacrament and makes a man a member of the college of bishops; and they also voted to emphasize collegiality.
  3. While the bishops generally supported the notion that those who seek God, and even more other Christians, are joined to the Church in some way, they debated how to describe this relationship.
  4. On a very narrow vote of 1114 - 1097, the Council decided to incorporate the document on Mary into the Constitution on the Church, making it the final chapter.
  5. The Council also voted, by a margin of 2120 – 525, to restore the permanent diaconate in the Latin rite
  
- C. The document on bishops received on the whole a favorable vote, but led to a great deal of debate over the role of the Vatican Curia.
  1. On November 5, the Commission on Bishops presented its document, which had not been discussed at the First Session and was in the same form that was initially to be presented then. The bishops voted to accept it as the basic text; but there was then a great deal of debate over how much authority the Vatican Curia should have.
  2. Cardinal Lecaro proposed a new commission to discuss revising (and reducing) the powers of the Curia. Cardinal Frings made an even more dramatic speech, saying that the Curia should have only limited specified powers. On this point, he was strongly opposed by Cardinal Ottaviani and other defenders of the Curia.

3. Cardinal Marella, prefect of the Commission on Bishops, said that he would take the proposed revisions under consideration and revise the document.
- D. The Commission on Christian Unity presented its document, which now consisted of five chapters, on the first three dealing with ecumenism, the fourth with non-Christian religions, and the fifth with religious liberty.
1. Given the fact that they represented a much more positive view towards ecumenism that the Church had often expressed in the past, the first three chapters received perhaps surprisingly favorable review, although some bishops wanted more of an emphasis on the fact that Jesus did establish the one Catholic Church.
  2. The fourth chapter was criticized for being almost exclusively focused on relations with Jews. And the fifth chapter likewise was more controversial.
  3. The result was a favorable vote on the first three chapters to accept them, with some modifications, and an understanding that the other chapters would be considered separately. They would become their own documents.
- E. On December 4, the final day, the Council approved of the Constitution on the Liturgy and the Decree on Mass Media by votes of 3147-4 and 1960 – 164.
- There had been some debate earlier in the session about whether the Decree on Mass Media, called Inter Mirifici, was needed. On a vote of 1598 – 503, they decided that it was and called for a final vote later.
- F. The documents on the lay apostolate and religious life had to wait until the next session to be considered.

VII. Between the Second and Third Sessions, debates continued about the documents, particularly regarding Lumen Gentium and how many other documents should be considered.

- A. The Coordinating Commission produced a preliminary draft of Lumen Gentium, followed by thirteen recommended changes from Pope Paul VI. The Commission made some, but not all, of the changes. The Commission added back chapters on the laity and religious life even though those subjects would have their own documents. Meanwhile, 25 cardinals and 16 leaders of religious orders asked the Pope to change the constitution's language on collegiality to emphasize the supreme role of the Pope.
- B. The Coordinating Commission and many bishops were concerned that the Council was taking too long and would not be able to consider the most important issues properly. In response, Cardinal Dopfner proposed that the Council only consider six additional documents, on the Church, bishops, revelation, the laity, ecumenism, and the Church in the modern world. The other documents would be drastically shorted to a short series of propositions. The Commission initially accepted this idea, popularly called the Dopfner Plan. However, at the next session, the bishops made it clear that they wanted to consider the full range of documents.

- C. Pope Paul VI was active, both with his celebrated pilgrimage to the Holy Land in January, including warm meetings with representatives of the Orthodox Churches, and with his first encyclical letter Ecclesiam Suam, which emphasized both the unity of the Church and dialogue with the world.
- D. In addition to the Constitution on the Church, the Commission reworked the decree on bishops and the laity and drafted the initial version of schema 17, which would eventually come to be known as Gaudium et Spes.

VIII. The Third Session, which opened on September 14, 1964, the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross,

- A. The Council opened with a Mass celebrated by Pope Paul VI, and (in an innovation allowed by Sancrosanctum Concilium) concelebrated by 24 other bishops. Pope Paul VI's homily defended the role of the Pope in guiding the Church.
- B. The first topic for debate was again Lumen Gentium with the issue of collegiality and the permanent diaconate taking center stage.
  1. There was extensive debate on the issue of collegiality with numerous votes on the topic. The final vote on the issue on the phrasing was 1624 in favor, 572 in favor with qualifications, and 42 against. Pope Paul VI later added a footnote to the chapter on the hierarchy to emphasize the unique role of the Papacy.
  2. The restoration of the permanent diaconate was reaffirmed, with additional votes providing that married men could become permanent deacons, but that deacons could not remarry after ordination.
- C. The Commission on Bishops presented its decree, which recalled the centrality of each bishop in his diocese, but also called for a greater role of national conferences of bishops and of consultative bodies within diocese. This decree received a large number of affirmative votes in principle, but with many of them having qualifications. As a result it was sent back for further revisions.
- D. The Secretariat on Christian Unity had drafted the new declaration on religious liberty with a great deal of help from the American theologian Fr. John Courtney Murray, the peritus for Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York. During the Session, there was extensive debate both over substance and over who would make further revisions. Central to the debates was the question of how to reconcile new ideas of religious liberty with historic Church teachings. Because of the recent changes, there was no final vote on this document during the Third Session. After some wrangling the Secretariat on Christian Unity was given the commission to make needed revisions.
- E. The same secretariat then presented the declaration on Jews and other non-Christian religions. The debate tended to emphasize the importance of including more material on religions other than Judaism. Once again the document was sent back for more revisions.

- F. The mixed commission on Revelation presented its constitution on October 6, which evaded a central question about whether there are truths in Sacred Tradition that are not revealed in Scripture, a debate that continues to this day. The constitution received a mostly favorable response, with comments on the subject of Sacred Tradition and progress in understanding Revelation. The mixed commission went back with further recommendations for revision.
- G. The documents on the lay apostolate, the Eastern Catholic churches, the priesthood, priestly formation, religious life and the missions received mostly favorable comments, but there were calls to add back material that the Commissions had eliminated for the sake of getting through the work more easily.
1. On October 6, the Commission on the Clergy and Laity presented its decree on the lay apostolate and the speeches were mostly positive. There were several changes proposed including calls for additional material on specific apostolate. The Commission returned to make the revisions.
  2. On October 13, the Commission on Clergy presented its decree on the life and ministry of priests, which had been drastically reduced in size to make approval easier. The reception was again favorable, but will many calls to restore omitted material.
  3. On October 15, the Commission on Oriental Churches presented its decree on eastern Catholic Churches, which reaffirmed their fundamental equality of the Eastern Catholic Churches with the Latin side of the Catholic Church. Once again, the reception was brief and favorable, and the minor revisions easily made such that the final document was approved at the Third Session. On November 6, Paul VI assisted as a Mass at the Council in the Coptic (Egyptian) rite.
  4. On November 6, the Commission on missionary activity presented a much reduced decree on the Church's missionary work. The comments on the material kept were favorable, but many bishops wanted to add comments about the need to preserve local customs when that can be done. As with the decree on the clergy, the vote was to add back much of the omitted material.
  5. On November 8, the Council soon turned to the decree on religious life. Once again, the schema had been reduced dramatically in size. And, once again, there were calls to restore much of the deleted material. The vote to accept the text was close, 1155 – 822, with the result that the Commission on religious life understood that they were again to revise the text and make it more comprehensive.
  6. On November 12, the Commission on clergy presented a decree on priestly formation, which called for more decentralization and flexibility in this

training. After a short debate, which again called for more material on intellectual formation, the vote was 2074 – 41 in favor of accepting it, with a call for some revisions.

7. There was also a brief discussion on the document on Catholic schools. Many bishops, including the Americans Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York and Joseph Ritter of St. Louis argued that the focus should be broader, including public schools, education in secular fields, and religious education outside of schools.
- H. On October 20, Cardinal Centro presented the draft of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which had a main section on teachings and an appendix applying them to the modern world. There followed three weeks of mostly favorable commentary that still led to a number of recommendations for changes.
1. Some bishops, led by Cardinal Frings, thought that there needed to be more focus upon the spirituality of the cross, and cautions about trends in the modern world.
  2. There were some calls for a stronger condemnation of war and the arms race. Although usually allied with the more traditional causes, Cardinal Ottaviani spoke in way that was borderline pacifist.
  3. There were calls to include an explicit condemnation of Communism. However, due in part to opposition from Eastern European bishops, who thought that such a condemnation would make things worse for them, the decision was to avoid such express language.
  4. The chapter on family life condemned abortion and said that people should not use forbidden means of contraception. Pope Paul VI told the Council not to address the issue of whether the newly developed pill could be permissible, for he had a commission advising him on that very topic. Nevertheless, there was an informal debate on that topic and on artificial contraception generally. Paul VI made it clear in private that he was going to decide the issue.
  5. The bishops called for the appendix dealing with modern issues to be included as part of the main text.
- I. The final week of this session saw several important developments, as Pope Paul VI began to play a larger role at the Council.
1. In addition to postponing the vote on the declaration on religious liberty and adding the footnote on papal primacy to Lumen Gentium, Pope Paul VI sent a list of 19 changes to be made in Unitatis Redintegratio, the Decree on Ecumenism. On November 20, that decree was passed by a vote of 2054 – 64.
  2. On November 21, the final day of the Council, the bishops promulgated the final version Lumen Gentium by a vote of 3256 – 5. They then promulgated

Orientalium Ecclesiarum, the decree on the Eastern Churches, by a vote of 2110 – 39.

3. Pope Paul VI gave the final speech for the Third Session, in which he made two points. First, he emphasized the Lumen Gentium did not change any teaching about the Church. Second, he declared Mary to be “the mother of the Church.” During the debates over the Church, many people had called for such a declaration, with particular lobbying by the Polish bishops. However, to avoid debates and disagreements that could lead them astray and interfere with ecumenical dialogue, they had agreed that the Council documents would not include additional titles for Mary. And so Pope Paul VI took up the issue himself, to the great applause of those at the Council.

IX. Between the Third and Fourth Sessions, the Commissions worked on the final draft of what was now understood to be eleven remaining documents.

- A. After a well-received visit to India, Pope Paul VI made it clear that there would be one and only one more session, and that it would begin on September 14, 1965. Shortly before that date, he issued a *moto proprio*, in which he authorized the summoning of synods of bishops. On the one hand, such synods would respond to calls for more participation by the world’s bishops in the governance of the church. On the other hand, they would be for specific issues, and would be guided by the Pope, avoiding the error of conciliarism, the view that a council can be above the Pope.
- B. Meanwhile, the Commissions worked on revising the eleven remaining documents. (A twelfth proposed document on how to deal with lapsed priests was set aside on the grounds that the Vatican could deal with that issue.) Four of the documents required the most substantial revisions. The Constitution on Revelation was still the subject of heated debate, as was the lengthy Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which had just been presented for the first time at the Third Session. The declaration on religious liberty was still opposed by many bishops, who thought that the idea of separation of church and state and religious liberty for promoting apostasy contradicted previous Church teachings. Finally, many objected that the decree on Judaism and other non-Christian religions favored the Jewish faiths above others, especially Islam.

X. The Fourth Session proceeded relatively calmly towards the promulgation of the remaining eleven documents.

- A. After a positive address from Pope Paul VI at the beginning of the Council, the shops addressed the most contented document, the decree on religious liberty, now called Dignitatis Humanae. The American bishops strongly supported the document, as did the most of the bishops from eastern Europe and Latin American. There was strong opposition from the Spanish bishops, with Francesco Franco still leading that country. After a week of debate the text received a vote of 1997 – 224. The Commission on Christian Unity made further revisions as the session continued, resulting in a final vote of 2308 – 70.

B. The Council then turned to the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, now called Gaudium et Spes. There were two and a half weeks of debates, including many more proposed changes, and an extensive discussion of whether to forbid war and how to deal with the issue of stockpiling arms. During and after the debates, a commission of bishops and periri, including Fr. Ratzinger and Fr. Karl Rahner, were making rapid changes to the draft. At the end of the Council, the bishops would vote in favor of the document 2309 – 75.

C. A week long debate on the decree on missionary activity (Ad Gentes) then began. The reception was favorable, with some bishops from missionary countries calling for additional material regarding local autonomy and adaptations for different areas. The Council made a few changes, and the decree passed at the end of the Council on a vote of 2394 – 5

D. Debate then began on the decree on Christian education, Gravissimum Educationis, which actually dealt also with education in general. The Commission on education had expanded the document drastically from its original focus only on Catholic schools. The document soon came to a vote on October 28 and passed by a vote of 2290 - 35.

E. The Commission on Clergy then presented the decree on the life and ministry of priests, Presbyterorum Ordinis. Some bishops had wanted to bring up the issue of whether celibacy should still be required in the Latin rite, but Pope Paul VI and most bishops agreed with the current discipline. The decree had been expanded again after the debate of the last session. And, after a short debate, the decree was promulgated at the end of the Council by a vote of 2390 – 4.

F. On October 14, the Council turned to the declaration on non-Christian religions, now called Nostrae Aetate. It had been revised further to deal with religions other than Judaism at more length. Because of the revision, the reception was more favorable than expected. After a brief recess, the Council re-adjourned; and the final vote on October 28 was 2234 – 88.

G. Also on October 28, the Council voted on the decrees on bishops, religious life and the training of priest. They all passed with only one to three negative votes.

H. The Council then turned to the Constitution on Divine Revelation, now called Dei Verbum. There had already been debate on the document during the debate on Gaudium et Spes. And, as a result of the comments, the mixed commission designated to revise this document had been continuing with revisions during the session, including incorporating a call from Pope Paul VI to emphasize the importance of Sacred Tradition alongside Sacred Scripture. The document now came up for a vote, chapter by chapter, and then on the entire document. On November 18, the Council passed the constitution on a vote of 2344 – 6.

I. There was also a discussion of the revised decree on the lay Apostolate now called Apostolicam Actuositatem. Also on November 18, the Council promulgated that decree by a vote of 2305 – 2.

J. The final days of the Council were dedicated to making the needed revisions and taking the final votes. The Council concluded on December 8, 1965, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Pope Paul VI celebrated the concluding Mass in St. Peter's Square, with 300,000 people in attendance. Archbishop Pericle Felici, the secretary to the Central Coordinating Commission, then read Pope Paul VI's letter *In Spiritu Sancto*, which concluded the Council and envisioned that "everything the council decreed be religiously and devoutly observed by the faithful."

XI. The documents of the Vatican II Council include four constitutions, nine decrees and three declarations. The Latin name comes from the first two or three words in the original Latin text, and gives an idea of the focus of the document.

A. The constitutions are the highest level of conciliar document. At this council, they concerned the liturgy, divine revelation, the Church, and the Church in the Modern world. Those constitutions are:

1. Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy.
2. Dei Verbum, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation
3. Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
4. Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

B. The decrees are the next level of Church teaching. There were eleven decrees of the Council:

1. Christus Dominus, the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church
2. Presbyterorum Ordinis, the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests
3. Optatam Totius, the Decree on the Training of Priests
4. Perfectae Caritatis, the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life
5. Apostolicam Actuositatem, the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People
6. Ad Gentes Divinitus, the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity
7. Unitatis Redintegratio, the Decree on Ecumenism
8. Orientalium Ecclesiarum, the Decree on Catholic Eastern Churches

9. Inter Mirifica, the Decree on Mass Communication.

C. There were also three declarations, on religious liberty, relations with non-Christians, and Christian education.

1. Dignitatis Humanae, the Declaration on Religious Liberty

2. Nosta Aetate, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions

3. Gravissimum Educationis, the Declaration on Christian Education

XII. Some good resources on the Vatican II Council include:

Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition, edited by Matthew Lamb (Oxford University Press 2008)

Edward Hahnenberg, A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II (Franciscan Media 2007)

John O'Malley, What Happened at Vatican II (Harvard University Press 2008)

Warren and Ann Carrol, "The Vatican II Council Confronts the Modernist Heresy" chapter 17 in The Crisis of Christendom (Christendom Press 2013)

Kenneth Whitehead, The Renewed Church: The Second Vatican Council's Enduring Teaching About the Church (Sapientia Press 2009)

James Likondis and Kenneth Whitehead, The Pope, The Council and the Mass: Answers to Questions the "Traditionalists" Have Asked, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Emmaus Road Publishing 2006)

"Vatican II Council: Light for the Church and for the Modern World" in Vatican Jubilee Initiative at [vatican.va](http://vatican.va).

"The Council at 50," a series of blogs by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops published in 2012 on the [uscbb.org](http://uscbb.org).