

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EVER ANCIENT EVER NEW: PRESENTATIONS ON THE VATICAN II COUNCIL

The following are the outlines from a series of twelve talks that Father Horkan gave on the Vatican II Council during the Lent and Easter seasons of 2018. They cover most of the documents; two of the decrees were not covered because of a lack of time. They will be addressed in a later series.

There are three common errors in how people view the Vatican II Council. The more liberal error is that the Church was completely stagnant and unpastoral until the Council; and then suddenly the reforms began and a new light shone. The more conservative view is that everything was going wonderfully until the Council; and then everything went to pieces. And both of these views, as well as popular presentations, think of the Council as a clash of liberals and conservatives, which the liberals basically won. In fact, however, as the outlines will try to show, the Council took up reform efforts (e.g., with regard to the liturgy, clerical life, education, and ecumenism) that were already well under way. It brought these reform efforts together and gave them direction. Regarding problems in the Church, they were also well under way before the Council, although perhaps they became more manifest in the late 1960s. For example, the clergy, religious and theologians who promoted dissent in the late 1960s were almost all ordained and/or fully professed before the Council, which indicates that all was not right before that time. On the other side of the coin, both before and after the Council, the missions to Africa and the Far East, and the Church's struggles against tyrannies, both Communist and authoritarian, were ongoing both before and after the Council, culminating in the liberation of many countries in the 1980s and 1990s. On the conservative/liberal front, it is true that there were many fierce debates and unexpected turns at Vatican II, as is befitting a great Council. But, in the end, with careful leadership and the intervention of Saint Pope Paul VI at critical moments, every document passed with over a 90 percent vote; and most of them received 98 or 99 percent approval. Those results indicate that that the Council led to a consensus through dialogue that, if viewed rightfully, should be a model of deliberation.

What the Council did, in its 16 documents, was bring the entire Church together to focus on issues critical to her and to the world. The result was proposals for reform and a vision for a future marked by both great opportunities and great challenges. It must be conceded that the reforms and visions have been carried out with a variation of success and failure. But that result is hardly unusual in Church history; after all it took a century to enact the reforms of the Council of Trent. The difficulty in responding to the call of Vatican II should not lead us to neglect or a rejection of it. Rather we hear a calling to understand its wisdom, respond to its challenges, and so prepare for a springtime of faith and the kingdom of God, which is ever ancient and ever new.