

Key Issues Arising From The Council

Collegiality refers to the decision of the Council that the Governance of the Church should be in the hands of the Pope acting in concert with all of the bishops. During the Council it became clear that the bishops of the world wanted to take more responsibility for the world-wide church and to act more collegially through National Bishops Conferences. Since the Council the Vatican Curia has quietly overlooked this teaching so much so that it now appears that our bishops are not vicars of Christ in their dioceses but vicars of the Pope. An over-bearing Curia dominating decision-making is contrary to the teaching of the Council.

A collaborative relationship between the clergy and laity was to become the norm in the Church, recognising that the priesthood of the Baptised was the essential characteristic of all the People of God. This relationship between priests and people would eliminate clericalism. This change conferred on the laity rights such as a greater say in the structure of governance in parish and diocesan affairs while it also, however, equally conferred responsibilities.

Re-examination of the eligibility to the priesthood is required to move beyond a male celibate clergy. The Council did not make any firm decision about this, but it did indicate that it was a matter that the Church, acting collegially, should consider.

The importance of Christian unity featured prominently in the discussions of the Council and was followed by an upsurge in collaborative ecumenical projects. Many such projects still continue and provide a real Christian presence in communities, however it is largely true that much of the energy which drives such initiatives has diminished.

A comprehensive revision to the liturgy which the bishops decreed should be translated into vernacular languages in a comprehensible idiom as a means of bringing the liturgy closer to the people.

Resources

Books

Rediscovering Vatican II Series

published by Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah

- ◇ *Ecumenism & Interreligious Dialogue*, Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, 2005
- ◇ *The Church and the World*, Norman Tanner SJ, 2005
- ◇ *The Church in the Making*, Richard Gaillardetz, 2006
- ◇ *The Laity and Christian Education*, Dolores R. Leckey, 2006
- ◇ *Scripture*, Ronald D. Witherup, 2006
- ◇ *Liturgy*, Rita Ferrone, 2007
- ◇ *Religious Life and Priesthood*, Maryanne Confoy RSC, 2008
- ◇ *Evangelization and Religious Freedom*, Jeffrey Gros & Stephen Bevens, 2009

Vatican II – Did Anything Happen?

David G. Shultenover SJ ed., 2007, Continuum, New York & London

What Happened at Vatican II,

John W. O'Malley, 2008, Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Websites

www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm
(Council documents on the Vatican website)

www.standup4vatican2.org.uk

www.vatican2voice.org

The Second Vatican Council

An Explanation

www.standup4vatican2.org.uk

www.vatican2voice.org

Background

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) is widely regarded as the most significant event for the Catholic Church since the Reformation in the 16th century. Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council to update the Church and restore the unity of all Christians. Some in the Church were fearful of possible changes, but the majority of Catholics welcomed the opportunity of change; the opportunity to take down barriers and grapple with the challenges facing the world. Hope and joy, not fear and alarm, characterised the discussions and outcomes of the Council.

Although the announcement of the Council was something of a surprise the teaching of the Council was informed by the liturgical, biblical and ecumenical movements which date back to the late 19th or early 20th centuries. There was also a rising theological movement within Catholicism which drew upon scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers composed in about the first 600 years of the Church's life. This was a way of recovering the sources of the Church's Tradition without the accretion of subsequent teaching, sometimes distorted due to historical circumstances no longer applicable.

As the Council proceeded it gained more confidence by, firstly, rejecting the initial texts drawn up by the Vatican bureaucracy (Curia), which maintained the status quo, and then generating and refining documents which breathed new life into the Church and brought a refreshing hope to both Catholics and other Christians.

Often considered a pastoral Council, it was not condemnatory nor juridical but was positive and conciliatory especially to other Christian traditions and other religions. In this aspect it was groundbreaking and opened up possibilities for dialogue and future peace between Christian traditions and world religions.

The Council also shifted thinking of the Catholic faith from a church-centred focus to one that is Christ-centred within the context of the Trinity, thereby recovering a sense of the boundless presence of the Holy Spirit.

Inside The Church

Revelation and the Bible

Revelation is the self-communication of God through deeds and words rather than ideas about God. Christ, in whom the whole revelation of God is summed up, entrusted the apostles with his gospel. There is also a growth and insight into the words and realities being passed on as a result of lived experience. All this expressed a dynamic living faith not a static fossilised deposit. The Bible is part of the living Tradition of the Church

The Bible, formed by God acting in and through human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, contains truth necessary for our salvation. Modern methods of scholarly interpretation of the Bible were endorsed. Strong encouragement was given for the Bible to permeate more deeply across the whole life of the Church than had hitherto been the case.

Understanding of the Church

A number of images can be used to reflect an understanding of Church. The predominant image advanced by the Council was People of God having an inclusive character based on baptism with the sense of all the faithful guaranteeing infallibility of the Church. Collegiality of the bishops with the Pope in governing the universal Church was firmly endorsed. The laity have rights and responsibilities in order to contribute to the life and well-being of the Church.

Liturgy

Reform of the liturgy was to enable full, active, conscious participation of all the laity in its celebration. This reflected the understanding of the Church as all the baptised. The Council proposed a noble simplicity whereby the rites are short, clear, free from useless repetition and within people's powers of comprehension without need for much, if any, explanation. The Eucharist is the source and summit from which the life of the Church flows.

Church's External Relations

Other Christians

The Council saw the Church of Christ subsisting in the Catholic Church, but many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside its visible boundaries. All this impelled a move towards unity. All those baptised in Christ, but outside the Catholic Church, are considered in real but imperfect communion with the Catholic Church.

The Council encouraged Catholics to play a full part in the work for Christian unity both in prayer, the soul of ecumenism, and action. Recognising that there were faults on both sides it called for an inner conversion. Catholics are to study, know and value the riches in other Christian traditions.

Other Religions

The Council originated a positive outlook towards other religions by explaining that the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in other religions. Indeed, they often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all. There is a special relationship between Judaism and Christianity and the Council rejected all forms of anti-Semitism and blame on the Jews for Christ's death.

Religious Liberty

The Council spelt out that all have a right to religious freedom and to be free from coercion. All are free to seek the truth in religious matters appropriate to their human dignity. No one can be forced to act against their conscience.

Church and the World

The Council presented a positive relationship between Church and world, recognising what is good and true in the world. It stressed co-operation between the Church and worldly institutions, to be helped and promoted by the Church, as it addressed itself to all people of good will.