

Exploring Vatican II
TREASURES

Actors, Events, Insights

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A Heartfelt Invitation

As noted in the author's Introduction to this attractive volume, you are invited to use this book for:

- ✦ personal growth
- ✦ spiritual meditation
- ✦ deeper insight

Some practical suggestions are offered for your consideration. With the book in hand, you might:

- ✦ recommend it to your friends
- ✦ form a small discussion group
- ✦ develop a parish reading program
- ✦ make the book available to parish leaders, ministry groups, or to anyone involved in Christian education and formation

Personally, as you and your friends plumb the inspiring insights of the contents, you may ask after each brief vignette:

- ✦ What idea caught my attention and sparked further reflection?
- ✦ What insight would I highlight and share with a friend?
- ✦ Why is this reflection important for me as well as for our faith community?

Pope Francis has requested Catholics to once again read and absorb the insights of the four constitutions of the sixteen Vatican II documents. These are the Council statements on:

- ✦ Liturgy-*Sacrosanctum Concilium* (item 11)
- ✦ Church-*Lumen Gentium* (item 12)
- ✦ Revelation-*Dei Verbum* (item 13)
- ✦ Church in the Modern World-*Gaudium et Spes* (item 14)

However, kindly note that within this small booklet all sixteen Council documents are explored.

Whatever your role within the Church, you will find your specific charism addressed.

- ✦ The laity will note that the Council calls for their active involvement in the faith-life and mission of the Church (items 17 and 18).
- ✦ Religious will discover an entire document devoted to their lives and charisms (item 32).
- ✦ Bishops and priests will discover profound insights on their roles in the Church community (item 29).
- ✦ In addition, there are numerous thematic presentations: Mary (item 10), Eucharist (item 26), Ecumenism (item 23), Family (item 37), and Youth (item 47).

Should you wish to delve a bit deeper into the “actors, events, and insights” of Vatican II, all sixteen documents in various languages are freely available on the Vatican website: www.vatican.va.

Some popular books are:

- ✦ *101 Questions and Answers on Vatican II* by Maureen Sullivan. Paulist Press.

- *A Brief History of Vatican II* by Giuseppe Alberigo, Orbis Books
- *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* by Richard R. Gaillardetz, Liturgical Press.
- *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II* by Edward P. Hahnenberg, Franciscan Media
- *What Happened at Vatican II* by John W. O'Malley, Belknap Press.
- The very best video about the pope who initiated the Second Vatican Council is *John XXIII: The Pope of Peace* (starring Ed Asner), DVD from Ignatius Press.

Although Pope Francis is the first pope in over six decades who was not present at Vatican II, he has certainly deeply absorbed the dynamic vision of the Council. This renewing attitude is present in his numerous writings; consider acquiring the popular book, *A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis*; it is available from: www.faithalivebooks.com.

Friends, finally, as members of our Catholic Church community, we never tire of praying: *Veni, Sancte Spiritus!* Come Holy Spirit!

Gratefully,

Dan Pierson, publisher



HOLY SPIRIT

Introduction

"Ignorance of Vatican II is ignorance of the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church today" clearly echoes the famous words of Saint Jerome: "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the greatest religious event of the twentieth century, contains a wealth of insights. Pope Benedict XVI accurately and forcefully has noted: "Pope John Paul II rightly pointed out the Council as a 'compass' by which to take our bearings in the vast ocean of the third millennium."

This small book seeks to promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Council. Through fifty brief "Vatican II vignettes" that are focused on diverse actors, events, and insights, one can taste some "Council appetizers." Hopefully, you will be enticed to further explore the treasures found in this momentous Church event. In addition, this small volume is a contribution to the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the closing of Vatican II (1965–2025).

Pope Francis is the first pope in modern times who was not present at the Council. Five popes (John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI) participated in Vatican II. However, Francis has deeply absorbed its vision of *aggiornamento* (profound renewal of the Church) and continues to implement its renewing perspectives. One may validly assert that the Council provides the basic program for Francis' pontificate.

Diverse authors in countless ways have tried to capture and summarize the pivotal insights of Vatican II. John O'Malley, SJ, identifies five foundational Vatican II Church perspectives: a participatory and collegial Church, a truly local Church, a listening and dialogical Church, an open and sensitive Church, and a Church of "servant leadership." With Pope Francis the Council is almost alive today as it was in 1965, sixty years ago!

Friends, you are invited to use this book for personal growth, spiritual meditation, and deeper insight into the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church—and in your own life. As members of the Church community, we never tire of praying: *Veni, Sancte Spiritus!* Come Holy Spirit!

James H. Kroeger, MM

Introducing Vatican Council II

The Second Vatican Council was the 21st general or ecumenical council of the Church; its four sessions extended from October 11, 1962, until December 8, 1965. The Council was undoubtedly the most significant religious event of the twentieth century.

On January 25, 1959, less than 100 days after his election, Pope John XXIII summoned the Council. Many people were surprised that this “caretaker” pope (he was already 77 years old) would undertake such an enormous project.

John XXIII himself set out three general purposes for the Council: (1) spiritual renewal of the Church; (2) an updating (*aggiornamento*) of its pastoral attitudes and approaches, and (3) the promotion of unity among diverse Christians.

In addition, the liturgy document in its opening paragraph noted four aims of Vatican II: (1) impart increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; (2) adapt the Church to the diverse needs of the times; (3) foster union of all who believe in Christ, and (4) help all humanity appreciate the community of the Church.

The entire Church now celebrates the 60th anniversary of the Council (1962–1965). Once again, Pope Francis urges Catholics to *appreciate* and *appropriate* the marvelous fruits of the Council.

Vatican II: Startling Statistics

The significance of the Second Vatican Council is to be found in its 16 documents as well as in the renewal of the Church wrought by the Holy Spirit; yet one may enjoy knowing some of the “impressive” facts of the entire Vatican II project.

The Council was attended by over 2,500 bishops and additional theologians, experts, and observers, all adding up to over 3,000 persons. Bishops by continent numbered 1,089 (Europe), 489 (South America), 404 (North America), 374 (Asia), 296 (Africa), 84 (Central America), and 75 (Oceania, Australia, and New Zealand).

There were 168 general meetings and 10 plenary ones. During the general meetings 147 introductions or reports were read and 2,212 speeches given; there were also 4,361 written interventions. The average daily attendance of bishops was 2,200; the peak of 2,392 was reached on December 6, 1965.

During the four sessions, 242 Council Fathers died, including 12 cardinals. The number of officially designated experts (*periti*) was 460, of whom 235 were diocesan priests, 45 were Jesuits, 42 Dominicans, and 15 Franciscans.

Statistics do not tell the full story of the Council, but they certainly reveal another rich dimension of John XXIII’s ambitious renewal project.

John XXIII: Father of the Council

Angelo Giuseppe Roncali, who took the name John XXIII, was pope from 1958 to 1963. He was the most beloved pope of modern times. His vision of Vatican II was eloquently expressed in the opening talk he gave on October 11, 1962.

“Good Pope John,” as he was affectionately known, noted that the Council would bring great joy to Mother Church. He encouraged an attentive reading of the “signs of the times,” so that the Church would be more attuned to the contemporary world.

John’s positive and optimistic outlook prompted him to say that he disagreed “with those prophets of gloom who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand.”

Describing the person and contribution of John XXIII during his visit to Bergamo on June 3, 2013 (50th anniversary of John’s death), Pope Francis said that John XXIII’s decision to convoke Vatican II was the result of a “prophetic intuition” based on his “love for the Church’s traditions and his awareness of the constant need for renewal.”

John definitely put his stamp on the Council, even though he died in 1963 after the completion of the first Council session.