

The Documents of Vatican II - Notes

WORSHIP

I. CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY / SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM

1. Four Aims of the Second Vatican Council

“This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church. The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy.” (SC 1)

2. Topics addressed in SC

- Ch. 1 General Principles for the Restoration + Promotion of the Sacred Liturgy
- Ch. 2 Most Sacred Mystery of the Eucharist
- Ch. 3 The Other Sacraments and the Sacramentals
- Ch. 4 The Divine Office
- Ch. 5 The Liturgical Year
- Ch. 6 Sacred Music
- Ch. 7 Sacred Art and Furnishings

3. Topics that generated most intense debate

- Use of vernacular in the liturgy
- Should priests be allowed to concelebrate Mass?
- Should laity be allowed to receive the Eucharist under both species?
- What role do national bishops have in allowing local adaptations in the liturgy?

4. Liturgy

- **“Liturgy”** is the public worship and ritual activity of the church (“leitourgia” / Gk, “the work of the people”) as distinguished from private prayer or pious practices
- **Liturgical renewal** had been stirring in the Church for over a century. Pope Pius XII’s 1947 encyclical, *Mediator Dei*, encouraged liturgical renewal.
- The **“paschal mystery”** of Christ is the heart of our faith (pesach/Hb; pascha/Gk = Passover); for earliest Christians Christ was the sign of a new Passover (1 Cor 5:7). The Paschal mystery refers to the mystery of God’s saving work in the history of the world. Jesus’ life, teaching, and ministry and especially his death and resurrection reveal the depth of God’s love for all humanity.

“For every Christian, the meaning of human history is manifested in this act of divine self-giving. Through his cross, Christ establishes a new covenant between

God and humankind. It is through his passing through death to resurrection that we are freed from sin and death and born to new life. While Christ has died and is risen once and for all, the unrepeatable gift of his total self-giving on Calvary – the mystery of his love – is at work in our lives in and through the prayer of the church. It is manifested in our lives whenever we choose not to live for ourselves but to turn away from our inclinations to self-centeredness in order to love and serve others. In the liturgy, the council affirms, ‘the work of our redemption takes place ... enabling the faithful to express in their lives and portray to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true church’ (SC 2)”

R. Gaillardetz, C. Clifford, Keys to the Council

Selections

SC 10 Nevertheless the liturgy is the **summit** toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the **font** from which all her power flows

SC 7. To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His **minister**, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross", but especially under the **Eucharistic species**. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His **word**, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the **Church prays** and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

SC 14. Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that **fully conscious, and active participation** in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, **this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else**; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work.

SC 51. The treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly, **so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word**. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years.

CHURCH

II. DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH / LUMEN GENTIUM

1. “LG is, in many ways, the crowning achievement of the Second Vatican Council... nowhere is the church’s own self-understanding -- its sense of itself, its nature and its purpose – laid out as clearly as in LG” Edw. Hahnenberg
2. Vatican I (1870) responded defensively to attacks from Protestantism, modern science and philosophy by defining papal primacy and infallibility, highlighting the Church’s hierarchy and institutional structure. The first draft of Vatican II’s document on the Church was attacked by Bishop DeSmedt of Belgium for its “triumphalism, clericalism and juridicalism.” A completely new draft was called for. More time was spent in debate on this document than any other.
3. Chapter on the People of God moved and placed before the chapter on the Hierarchy.
4. Theology/Ecclesiology – Christ is the Light of the World (Lumen Gentium) and it is the Church that reflects that light.
5. Topics addressed in LG
 - Ch. 1 Mystery of the Church
 - Ch. 2 People of God
 - Ch. 3 Hierarchy
 - Ch. 4 Laity
 - Ch. 5 Universal Call to Holiness
 - Ch. 6 Religious
 - Ch. 7 The Pilgrim Church
 - Ch. 8 The Blessed Virgin Mary
6. The Church is a sacrament. Like the 7 liturgical sacraments, the church is “a visible sign of invisible grace.” Jesus is the primordial sacrament (i.e. the perfect sign and instrument of God’s grace in human history) and the church is a visible sign of Jesus who is no longer visible to us.
7. The Church is a mystery and no simple definition can capture it. One must resort to images and metaphors. Chapter 1 offers a variety of images for the church.
8. The Church is the People of God. This image affirms the common identity and equal dignity of everyone in the church and yet also captures the Biblical image of God’s people on a journey, a pilgrim people, cf. LG 48-51.
9. The people of God are commissioned through Baptism to the work of Christ as priest, prophet and king.
10. LG restored the permanent diaconate.

11. Universal call to holiness implies that priests and vowed religious no longer hold a monopoly on sanctity.

12. The Council had a close vote on whether to have a separate document on Mary, the Mother of God, or to include her in the document on the Church. Some wanted a separate document with a Christ-centered approach so as to emphasize Mary's closeness to Christ and her powerful role in his work of salvation. Others with a more Church-centered approach emphasized Mary's relationship to the community of believers and her role as first among the disciples and so voted to include her in LG. The final outcome tries to balance both approaches.

13. *"In its life and witness, the Church is to be a reflection of Christ himself, witnessing to his love for the poor, to his mercy and forgiveness in the face of violence and injustice, to his desire that all might enjoy the fullness of life. We carry out this healing and reconciling mission when we care for the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable in our families and communities... it would not be possible to continue Christ's mission without the presence and action of God's Spirit in our lives. Christ has sent his Spirit to dwell in us as a counselor (John 14:16-17) and guide so that we might discern how to live out the Gospel in our day."* Gaillardetz and Clifford, Keys to the Council

Selections

LG 1 Since the Church is in Christ like a **sacrament or as a sign** and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race

LG 39 Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is **called to holiness**, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification". However, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, **who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity**, thus causing the edification of others.

LG 48. ... for the Church already on this earth is **signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect**. However, until there shall be new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the **pilgrim Church** in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, has the appearance of this world which is passing and she herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God.

III. DECREE ON ECUMENISM / UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO

1. Ecumenism is the search for unity among Christians (Gk / oikumene = whole world). Traditionally, it was used for a universal council. Later it was broadened to describe efforts toward Christian unity with overtones of sympathy, openness and dialogue.
2. Catholics were previously prohibited from participation in ecumenical gatherings. Pius XI's 1928 encyclical, *Mortalium Animos*, argued that the only way to encourage Christian unity was to

encourage wayward heretics and schismatics to come back to the one true Roman Catholic Church. Pope John XXIII changed this with a new openness to other Christians and made it a key component in the Vatican Council, even inviting Protestants to participate as observers.

3. Topics addressed in UR

- Ch. 1 Catholic Principles of Ecumenism
- Ch. 2 Practical Aspects of Ecumenism
- Ch. 3 Christian Communities Separated from the Catholic Church

4. The Decree states that people on both sides were to blame for the historical splits that fractured Christianity. Today, separated Christians are to be viewed as brothers and sisters in Christ. Ecumenism is a challenge to restore unity among all Christians.

5. UR declares that the Catholic Church contains the “fullness of grace and truth,” yet God nonetheless works through these communities to bring their members to salvation.

6. Steps toward unity: a) avoiding negative stereotypes and assumptions about other Christians, b) respectful dialogue, c) join efforts to serve the needy, d) common prayer when appropriate, e) self-reform and renewal (UR 4)

7. Not everything the Church teaches is equally central to the faith. Understanding “the hierarchy of truths” can help Christians avoid focusing on differences of secondary importance (UR 11).

Selections

LG 8. This Church [of Christ] ... **subsists in the Catholic Church**, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, **although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure.**

UR 1. **The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council.** 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.

UR 3. Moreover, some and even very many of **the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church:** the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too. All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ.

The brethren divided from us also use many liturgical actions of the Christian religion. These most certainly **can truly engender a life of grace** in ways that vary according to the condition of each

Church or Community. **These liturgical actions must be regarded as capable of giving access to the community of salvation.**

It follows that the separated Churches and Communities as such, though we believe them to be deficient in some respects, have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church.

IV. DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS / NOSTRA AETATE

1. Pope John XXIII initially wanted just a statement on the Jews that would address anti-semitism stemming from the deicide charge and the holocaust. This eventually developed into NA, which turned out to be one of the great achievements of Vatican II.
2. "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions... [which] often reflect a ray of that Truth that enlightens all men" NA 2
3. NA strongly encourages dialogue and mutual understanding

Selections

NA2. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless **often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.** Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through **dialogue and collaboration** with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

LG16. 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. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.

WORLD

V. PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD / GAUDIUM ET SPES

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” GS 1.

“To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” GS 4.

“This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” GS 43

“For thus the ability to express Christ's message in its own way is developed in each nation, and at the same time there is fostered a living exchange between the Church and the diverse cultures of people” GS 44.

1. Cardinal Suenens' proposal: the Council should consider the Church in its inner life and, as well, the Church in its relation to the outside world.
2. Debate: Dialogue with the world? or Proclaim Christ to it! Is the world a place of God's love and goodness or corrupted with sin? Incarnation vs. Cross
3. Contemporary Issues Addressed: Marriage/Family (47-52), Church's relation to Culture (53-62), Economic and Social Life (63-72), Political Life (73-76), Peace (77-90)

Selections

GS 90. The council, considering the immensity of the hardships which still afflict the greater part of mankind today, regards it as most opportune that an organism of the **universal Church be set up in order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor** might be developed everywhere. The role of such an organism would be to stimulate the Catholic community to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice.

GS 80. While extravagant sums are being spent for the furnishing of ever new weapons, an adequate remedy cannot be provided for the multiple miseries afflicting the whole modern world. Disagreements between nations are not really and radically healed; on the contrary, they spread the infection to other parts of the earth. New approaches based on reformed attitudes must be taken to remove this trap and to emancipate the world from its crushing anxiety through the restoration of genuine peace.

Therefore, we say it again: **the arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity**, and one which ensnares the poor to an intolerable degree. It is much to be feared that if this race persists, it will eventually spawn all the lethal ruin whose path it is now making ready.

VI. DECREE ON THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY / APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM

1. “The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (AA) is remarkable not so much for what it says, but that it says it at all. By placing the laity as a major issue on the agenda, Pope John XXIII set Vatican II apart from all previous councils.” Edward Hahnenberg, A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II
2. Prior to the Council, 20th century popes encouraged lay involvement in “Catholic Action” which was defined as “the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the Church’s hierarchy.” AA makes the claim that Christ himself calls every baptized believer to serve the mission of the Church (cf. AA 3). Ministry belongs not only to the hierarchy, but to every baptized Catholic.
3. 13 lay people were invited as observers to the 2nd session. More were added to later sessions. One of the lay observers was eventually invited to address the Council.
4. The laity was acknowledged to share in the prophetic, priestly and kingly work of Christ by evangelizing, sanctifying and witnessing to others in the midst of the world and secular affairs. Their participation in the redemptive and salvific work of the Church stems directly from their union with Christ. Success depends on nurturing that living union with Christ.
5. The theme of the laity is a theme that runs throughout the Council and surfaces in LG and GS and several others.

Selections

AA 2. They exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the **penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order** through the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ and promotes the salvation of men. Since the laity, **in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ.**

AA 3. The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body **through Baptism** and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through **Confirmation**, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself. They are consecrated for the royal priesthood and the holy people (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10) not only that they may offer spiritual sacrifices in everything they do but also that they may **witness to Christ throughout the world**. The sacraments, however, especially the most holy Eucharist, communicate and nourish that charity which is the soul of the entire apostolate.

LG 30-31. But there are certain things which pertain in a special way to the laity, both men and women, by reason of their condition and mission. Due to the special circumstances of our time the foundations

of this doctrine must be more thoroughly examined. **For their pastors know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. They also know that they were not ordained by Christ to take upon themselves alone the entire salvific mission of the Church toward the world.** On the contrary they understand that it is their noble duty to shepherd the faithful and to recognize their ministries and charisms, so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind...

LG31. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made **sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ;** and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.

VII. DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM / DIGNITATIS HUMANAE

1. The Declaration on Religious Liberty (DH) was the most bitterly contested document of Vatican II. For much of the Church's history, the Church had sought ways to use the state to promote faith. For large parts of history the Church and state were closely aligned.
2. American Jesuit, Fr. John Courtney Murray, was the outspoken critic of the Church's long held belief that "error has no rights" and prompted the debate to move toward the dignity of the human person. He came to be the key figure in drafting the text of the document. Council Bishops came to realize that without a clear affirmation of the right of all Christians to practice their faith, no real ecumenical dialogue would be possible.
3. DH asserts that no one should be forced to act against their conscience. It states: "Truth can impose itself on the human mind by the force of its own truth, which wins over the mind with both gentleness and power." (DH1)

Selections

DH 2. This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be **immune from coercion** on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very **dignity of the human person** as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.

Archbishop Aymond Offers '10 Ways Vatican II Shapes the Church Today'

www.usccb.org. October 1, 2012

WASHINGTON—The Catholic Church marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council by Blessed Pope John XXIII on October 11. The Council ran from 1962-1965, producing 16 documents over the course of four sessions. Over 2,000 bishops from around the world participated. The Council introduced major reforms and stands among the most significant religious events of the 20th Century.

To honor this anniversary, as well as the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI called for a Year of Faith, beginning October 11 and ending November 24, 2013, to strengthen the faith of Catholics and draw the world to faith by their example. Archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Divine Worship, offers "10 Ways Vatican II Shapes the Church Today" to help Catholics appreciate the Council and how it relates to the Year of Faith:

1. Vatican II presented a **renewed vision of what it means to be the Church**. The Council document *Lumen Gentium* on the nature of the Church called the Church a light for the world and the source of salvation. The document *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the modern world said the Church shares the joys and sufferings of the world. Both documents refer to the Church as the People of God, reflecting a new appreciation of lay people that surfaced repeatedly at the Council.
2. It called the **Eucharist the source and summit of the faith**. The Council's document on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, describes Holy Communion as the main source of God's grace for Catholics. In the Eucharist, Catholics encounter the person of Christ. In this way, it is truly the foundation of the Church.
3. It **reformed the liturgy**. The changes to the Mass, perhaps the most well-known conciliar reform, promoted "full and active participation," which led to the Mass being translated into the vernacular, or local language, and celebrated as a dialogue between the celebrant and the congregation.
4. It said **every Catholic is called to holiness and to be a missionary**. The document on missionary activity, *Ad Gentes*, expanded the view of how the Church evangelizes. Missionaries were no longer sent just to remote areas of the world to spread the Good News; now all Catholics play a role in evangelizing through their lives.
5. It emphasized the **importance of the family**. According to *Lumen Gentium*, the family is the "Domestic Church." While the faith of the Church flourishes in parishes, dioceses and nations around the world, before all else is the family. It is the family that provides a strong foundation for each believer.
6. It **reshaped the Church's relationship with other Christians and other religions**. At Vatican II, the Church adopted a spirit of respect and dialogue toward other faith traditions. Ensuing dialogues

have built bridges of understanding and strengthened relationships with Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims, Protestants and others.

7. It **promoted collaboration**. The document *Christus Dominus* encouraged “**collegiality**,” or collaboration within the Church. Bishops, priests, religious and lay people all work together in a way that didn’t in the past. Bishops collaborate through episcopal conferences like the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and state-level Catholic Conferences. The Council also encouraged “**subsidiarity**,” by which authority is divided up and decisions are made at the appropriate level.

8. It updated the Church... John XXIII saw Vatican II as a chance for renewal in the face of the “**signs of the times**” and said he called the Council to open a window and let in fresh air. This resulted in reforms that **made the Church more accessible to the modern world**, such as Mass in the vernacular and dialogue with other believers, and the openness of the Council was reflected in the presence men and women religious, lay people and even non-Catholics among its official observers.

9. ...but it also **returned the Church to its roots**. Vatican II also reformed the Church through a back-to-basics approach. This meant renewed appreciation for Scripture, the Church Fathers and the restoration of ancient traditions such as the permanent diaconate and the multi-step process for adults joining the Church.

10. Then-Father Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) played a significant behind-the-scenes role. The bishops at Vatican II were **assisted by brilliant theologians**. These assistants, or periti, included Joseph Ratzinger, who assisted Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne, Germany. Father Ratzinger was involved in drafting speeches, shaping documents and defining the overall trajectory of the Council.