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Editorial

VATICAN II AT 60: AN ONGOING LEGACY AND CHALLENGES

Sixty years after the opening of Vatican II, its impact on the Catholic Church and the world at large continues to be felt. While some have criticised the Council for being too liberal or for causing confusion within the Church, others have seen it as a vital step toward the Church's evolution and its adaptation to the modern world. Regardless of one's perspective, Vatican II remains a significant event in the history of the Catholic Church. According to Pope Benedict XVI, the Second Vatican Council proved to be not only meaningful but also necessary.¹

The purpose of the Second Vatican Council was to bring the Church into the modern world. For the first time in her history, the Catholic Church convened a Council to examining herself and reflecting on her nature and mission.² The 60th anniversary of Vatican II provides an opportunity to reflect on this historical event and its ongoing legacy, as well as to consider the challenges that the Church faces today as it seeks to navigate an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world in the 21st century. As we commemorate the 60th anniversary of Vatican II's opening, it is worth considering the challenges that the Church faces today, including the declining number of priests and religious, its changing attitudes toward religions in many parts of the world, and the ongoing debates over issues like the role of women in

¹ Pope emeritus Benedict XVI sent a letter to the 10th international symposium, 20-21 October 2022 on "The Ecclesiology of Joseph Ratzinger" held at the US Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio.

² Pope Francis in his homily during Mass on the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, (Rome – October 11, 2022).

the Church and its response to the sexual abuse cases, Its impact on liturgy, its relations with the laity, the world and so on.

The legacy and reception of Vatican II are reflected mainly in three stages or periods. The first period (1965-1985) is from Conciliar Euphoria to the Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985. John Paul II announced about an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985, twenty years after the council ended. The synod highlighted the intricacies of Vatican II's documents and their interpretation. 1) Each passage and document must be interpreted in the context of all the others, so that the integral meaning of the council may be rightly grasped, 2) The four constitutions of the council are the hermeneutical key to the decrees and declarations, 3) The pastoral import of the documents ought not to be separated from or set in opposition to their doctrinal content, 4) No opposition may be made between the spirit and the letter of Vatican II, and 5) Vatican II must be understood as illuminating the problems of our day.³ In summary, the Synod stated that the Council's own theology for the modern Church and men of our time must be understood in harmony with the great tradition.

The second stage, from 1986 to 2012, shows a struggle for meaning between Vatican II's Continuity and Discontinuity. Pope Benedict XVI then suggested the Hermeneutics of Reform as an alternative to the Hermeneutics of Discontinuity. The main argument of the pope was not about the material continuity of teaching but about the continuity of one subject - Church.⁴ The "Francis Effect" is a new period of reception that began in the third period (2013 -). For Pope Francis Vatican II was a re-reading of the Gospel in light of contemporary culture.⁵ He approaches Vatican II with an update of its message in a deeply changed context of both the Church and the world and he advocates a Church of YES. The Synodal Church is the culmination of the "Francis Effect," and Synodality is a renewal outcome/fruit of Vatican II.

The synodal Church is the pinnacle of the "Francis effect," and "synodality" is a renewal outcome of Vatican II. This is still the legacy

³ See "The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod," A Message to the People of God and the Final Report, Washington DC: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986, 11.

⁴ Salvador Pie - Ninot, "The History of Conciliar reception," in *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, Catherine Clifford, Massimo Faggioli (eds.), UK: Oxford University Press 2023, 350.

⁵ Pope Francis, "The Interview," edited by Antonio Spadaro, *America* (19 September 2013), 30.

and the task of Vatican II sixty years after it was opened. The theology of the Council, as it pertains to the present Church and the men of our day, needs to be understood in harmony with the great past/tradition.⁶

The articles in this issue discuss the legacy of Vatican II and examine the challenges of its reception. Margit Eckholt examines the changes that have taken place in the reception process since 1965, taking into account the signs of the times, particularly in local churches in Latin American, African, and Asian countries, to demonstrate the potential of the Council and the motivation released from the conciliar return to the Gospel. He emphasises the methods of reception in the South: New subjects and voices have gained power in the polyphonic concert of the global Church, which must also change the synodal power structure of the Roman Catholic Church's deliberative and decision-making processes. Philippe Chenaux unveils a historiographical overview of the Second Vatican Council. He finds an emphasis on a Historiographical Reconstruction of Vatican II in the council's work, conciliar commissions, and various experts. Post-Tridentine and post-Constantinian Christianity ended with Vatican II. The council's history was criticised for its hegemonic interpretation, while John Paul II's Magisterium sought consistency. Benedict XVI distinguished between correct and incorrect council interpretations. Francis' pontificate has shifted the Second Vatican Council to a theology of the people instead of defending doctrine against post-conciliar innovations.

Francis Thonippara writes about the Council's decree: *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* on Eastern Catholic churches, and finds it applying to India's pluralistic ecclesial traditions. The decree recognises the need for clarification and discussions on local churches, rites, and Oriental Church traditions. The decree took years to take effect because the Holy See did not issue a proper directive. He notices that for a variety of reasons, the Church authority was unable to comprehend the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. The Indian Church, therefore, adopted OE gradually and selectively. Rafael Luciani observes that the current synodal process is fostering a deeper comprehension of the *sensus fidei* as a priceless theological gem that can be found in the People of God's attentiveness to the Spirit. A new communicative dynamic called *restitutio* gives rise to one of the most novel elements. He proposes that we must strengthen hermeneutics and the Church's acceptance as the People of God in every place and

⁶ Salvador Pie - Ninot, "The History of Conciliar reception," 347.

time in this new phase of the Council's reception if we are to create a Synodal Church for the third millennium.

Bincy George makes an effort to shed light on the situation of women in the Church prior to, during, and after Vatican II. She acknowledges the constructive adjustments made by the Council and the teachings of recent Popes and calls for additional progressive measures to enhance the position and participation of women in the Church. She advocates that the process of giving women their due place in the Church should continue and that women will also need to play a proactive role in this process after appreciatively discussing the proclamations of the post-Vatican II popes. According to Jolly Vasupurathukaran, the Second Vatican Council placed a strong emphasis on modernising the Catholic liturgy in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The liturgy has thus undergone numerous revisions and reformulations since Vatican II, signifying a renewal. Marriage renewal was part of the general liturgical renewal during this time because SC 77 and 78 specifically requested it. Marriage rituals were modified by this invitation. She examines the liturgical text, renewal principles, and guidelines of this liturgical tradition in this article.

Finally, Ingeborg G. Gabriel examines *Gaudium et spes* sixty years after its publication and shows that, despite needing some revisions, it remains relevant for Christians' social and political engagement worldwide. Its fundamental perspective as a hermeneutics of recognition that works toward the incorporation of all human beings and its application in post-conciliar realities, particularly in the current pontiff's words and actions, are examined. Despite initial and ongoing doubts, the Pastoral Constitution GS of Vatican II has produced rich fruit over the past sixty years, she concluded. It has inspired Christians to join God in remaking a good world.

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