



Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, Pope John XXIII, 1881-1963

“In the daily exercise of our pastoral ministry – and much to our sorrow – we must sometimes listen to those who, consumed with zeal, have scant judgment or balance. To such ones the modern world is nothing but betrayal and ruin. They claim that this age is far worse than previous ages, and they rant on as if they had learned nothing from history – and yet history is the great Teacher of Life. . . . We feel bound to disagree with these prophets of doom who are forever forecasting calamity – as though the world's end were imminent. Today, rather, Providence is guiding us toward a new order of human relationships, which, thanks to human effort and yet far surpassing human hopes, will bring us to the realization of still higher and undreamed of expectations.”

*From “Mother Church Rejoices,” Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, October 13, 1962*

# The Second Vatican Council

## A Discontinuity in Tradition

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# Ecumenical Councils – What Are They?

An ecumenical council is a meeting of church leadership, principally bishops, abbots, and the heads of men's religious orders, that make decisions binding on the whole church, traditionally believed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Councils are usually convened to settle a dispute and/or respond to other serious issues facing the church.

There have been 21 recognized councils, beginning with the Council of Nicea convened by the Emperor Constantine in 315 and concluding with the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

# Ecumenical Councils – The 21 Councils

The 21 councils can be divided into two groups.

1. The first 8 were held in cities in Asia Minor, were conducted in Greek, and often dealt with arguments about the nature of Christ.. They were convened by the emperor or empress (Constantine himself presided at the Council of Nicea). No popes ever attended, although their representatives were influential in some of the councils.

2. After the Eastern Schism (1054) the remaining 13 were held in Italy, France, and Switzerland, were conducted in Latin, and were convened by the pope (except for Constance), occasionally under pressure from secular rulers (e.g. Charles V and Trent).

## Ecumenical Councils – Councils vs. Popes

The Council of Constance (1415-1418) in what is now Switzerland was convened to end the so-called Western Schism in which three men, elected by competing groups of cardinals, claimed to be pope. The council resolved the issue by deposing two of the “antipopes” and persuading the third to resign. It then elected a new pope, Martin V.

In subsequent years, popes struggled to assert their authority over councils and to establish that they, not councils, had supreme authority over the church. This effort reached its climax with the declaration of papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council (1870).



## Ecumenical Councils - Infallibility

*Papal Infallibility* is widely misunderstood, both by Catholics and those outside the Church (often encouraged by those wishing to centralize authority, including some popes and the Vatican bureaucracy, the Curia). It does not mean that popes cannot make mistakes or can define new doctrines out of thin air. It basically asserts that popes can do what councils do – decide between competing doctrines or make explicit, doctrines already widely believed – without having to call a council.

Many felt that this meant that there would never need to be another council, since the pope could decide any important issues himself.

## Context: Reformation and Trent

The “world view” of the Roman Catholic Church on the eve of the Second Vatican Council was largely shaped by events of the past 500 years, beginning with the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the Catholic Counter Reformation, embodied most significantly in the Council of Trent (1545-1563). This council dealt with two main themes: reaction to the Protestant Reformation (Charles V vainly hoped for reconciliation between his German subjects who supported Luther and those who opposed him), and more successfully, correcting widespread abuses within the church (e.g., worldly lifestyles of the hierarchy, bishops with multiple dioceses, uneducated priests).

## Context: The French Revolution

For the Catholic Church, the French Revolution (1792) was even more traumatic than the Reformation, for it erupted in Catholic France and its ideology spread to other Catholic countries, including the Papal States ruled by the pope in central Italy. Under the Reign of Terror in France, many clergy and members of religious orders lost their lives, church properties were confiscated (Notre Dame became for a while a warehouse), and the wearing of religious garb was prohibited. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, political upheavals challenged the privileged position of the Catholic Church in the union of church and state that dated from the time of the Roman emperor Constantine. After a 10-year struggle, the Papal States were taken from the pope and incorporated into a unified Italian nation.

## Context: The Fortress Mentality

The 170 years from the French Revolution (1792) to the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1965) is called by O'Malley "the long 19<sup>th</sup> century." In reacting to the external attacks, the Church adopted a triumphalist "fortress mentality" that viewed the Catholic Church as a perfect society and the world outside as hopelessly evil. Aided by new methods of communication, the telegraph and newspapers, popes issued repeated condemnations of "modernity" including Catholic intellectuals who tried to reconcile Enlightenment ideals with Christian values. As O'Malley notes, "The greatest (Catholic) ecclesiastical happening of the long nineteenth century was the almost unmitigated triumph of Ultramontanism", i.e. total deference to the pope, "the man beyond the mountains."

## Context: Condemnations

Specific papal condemnations included:

Gregory XVI (1831-1846) opposed railroads and gas lighting in the Papal States, believing they would lead to liberal reforms. He condemned freedom of religion (“Error has no rights”), freedom of the press, and commanded “obedience to princes.” (He did, later, condemn the slave trade, granted to Spain and Portugal by earlier popes.)

Pius IX (1846-1878) and several successors forbade Catholics to vote in Italian elections or hold public office in the Italian government. His *Syllabus of Errors* condemned 80 erroneous beliefs including those Gregory identified plus separation of church and state, Protestantism, and “any accommodation of the pope to modern culture.”

## Context: Americanism

Leo XIII (1878-1903) condemned “Americanism,” never clearly defined but probably based on the writings of Paulist founder Isaac Hecker, on the compatibility of Catholic beliefs and American values of freedom and separation of church and state. Leo did, however, also issue the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) stating that workers had the right to a living wage, decent working conditions, and the ability to organize in unions, all considered radical in a time of unregulated capitalism in the U.S. and Europe..

## Context: Modernism

Pius X (1903-1914) condemned Modernism, a somewhat ill-defined collection of ideas including belief that the Church should adapt its teaching to the needs of society and that the laity and lower clergy should have a more significant role in church governance. With Pius' approval, a secret society was formed, the *Sodalitium Pianum*, that included an international network of informers to identify and discipline priests and bishops with Modernist sympathies. (Fortunately disbanded by the next pope, Benedict XV). Fr. Angelo Roncalli, later Pope John XXIII, came under suspicion for a seminary lecture he gave on faith and science.

## On the Eve of the Council

Some official Catholic beliefs in the 1950's:

If you were not a Catholic you were a Heretic or an Infidel and could only be saved through “invincible ignorance.”

It was a Mortal Sin to attend a Protestant religious service, and marriage to a non-Catholic required a promise by the non-Catholic spouse to raise the children as Catholics.

Widely believed that Jews alive today were guilty of Jesus' death (Mt. 27:25); Solemn Intercessions of Good Friday included prayer for conversion of the “faithless Jews.”

Theologians were rigidly censored, e.g., the American Jesuit, John Courtney Murray, was forbidden to write that religious freedom and separation of church and state were compatible with Catholic belief.



## Some Cracks in the Fortress - I

Most lay Catholics rarely thought about these restrictions. They got along well with their Protestant and Jewish neighbors and were much more laid back about other people's souls (and alcohol) than some evangelicals.

In 1943 Pope Pius XII encouraged modern methods of biblical scholarship, condemned by Pius X. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1946, Catholic scholars produced new, more accurate Bible translations.

In 1953 Fr. Leonard Feeney was excommunicated by Boston Cardinal Cushing for preaching on radio and street corners that Protestants and Jews could not be saved. Cushing was upheld by the Vatican!

## Some Cracks in the Fortress - II

For centuries, the liturgy had been almost entirely in Latin. All Mass prayers were recited in Latin and the only parts in the local language were the Epistle (new Testament) and Gospel, which were read in the local language after they had been read in Latin. In the 1930's and 40's, efforts began to involve people in the Mass as participants rather than only spectators. "My Sunday Missal" was published listing the Latin prayers alongside the English translation. In 1955, Pope Pius XII restored the ancient form of the Holy Week liturgies, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, in the evenings rather in the mornings when few could attend. This was earlier extended to the military and I attended Holy Thursday and Good Friday services in the evening on a military base in 1952.

## The Council Unfolds – Pope John XXIII

On October 28, 1958, following the death of Pope Pius XII the cardinals, split between liberals and conservatives, elected 76-year old Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli as Pope, viewed as a “safe” placeholder until they could agree on whom they really wanted. He surprised everyone by taking the name John XXIII. (One of the antipopes deposed at Constance was John XXIII, but he is not counted a pope.)

Only three months later on January 15, 1959, John caused greater surprise by announcing his intention to convene an ecumenical council. The cardinals were taken aback but consoled by the belief that the council would limit itself to condemnations of current society and perhaps add a new title to the Virgin Mary.

## The Council Unfolds – New Initiatives

John did not wait for the Council to begin his efforts to improve relationships with other religions, establishing a new Curial department, the Secretariat for Christian Unity, under the German Jesuit biblical scholar Cardinal Augustin Bea, and meeting personally with leaders of Protestant, Orthodox, and non-Christian religions (to the horror of many Curia officials including Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, head of the Holy Office, formerly the Inquisition). In his first Holy Week service John dropped the prayer for conversion of the “faithless Jews.”

## The Council Unfolds – Preparations

Following communications with the World's bishops soliciting suggestions for the Council agenda, preparations for the Council began in earnest in 1960 with the formation of 10 Preparatory Commissions to draft documents for consideration by the Council. The Commissions were: (1) Doctrine (Holy Office); (2) Bishops; (3) Oriental Churches; (4) Sacraments; (5) Discipline of Clergy and Laity; (6) Religious Orders; (7) Missions; (8) Liturgy; (9) Seminaries and Catholic Schools; and (10) Lay Apostolate. The Commissions were headed by cardinals, all but one members of the Roman Curia, who uniformly did not want anything to change. But John XXIII personally added the Secretariat for Christian Unity under Cardinal Bea and made it the 11<sup>th</sup> Commission, a sign of things to come!

## The Council Unfolds – Participants

Invitations to attend the Council were sent to 85 cardinals, 8 patriarchs, 533 archbishops, 2131 bishops, 26 abbots, and 68 heads of men's religious orders. Only a few hundred could not attend because of ill health or refusal by their Communist governments to allow their attendance. About 2400 “council fathers” were present at a given time.

Many of the council fathers were accompanied by a secretary or a theologian or both. Meanwhile the pope appointed theological experts to help the bishops. By the end of the Council some 484 such *periti* had been appointed. Also attending were over 100 observers and guests from other religions and, beginning in 1963, a small number of lay “auditors” including a few women.

## The Council Unfolds – Venue

The council meetings were conducted in the nave of St. Peter's basilica, crowding its huge space ~2500 m<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, observers and guests from other churches got the best seats! Restrooms and coffee bars (no alcohol) were installed to serve the crowd. The council met in four sessions of about 10 weeks each, 1962-1965, but much work took place between the formal meetings.

The official language of the Council was Latin, but Latin pronunciation varied among countries and many of the fathers had to depend on assistants to translate for them. Cardinal Cushing of Boston offered to pay for UN-type simultaneous translation, but this was refused by the Curia, which was quite happy to keep most fathers in the dark.



Council fathers in the nave of St. Peter's Basilica



# The Issues: Council Documents - I

The Council issued sixteen documents:

Four “constitutions”: On the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacramentum Concilium*); On the Church (*Lumen Gentium*); On Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*); and On the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*)

Nine “decrees”: On the Mass Media (*Inter Mirifica*); On the Catholic Eastern Churches (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*); On Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*); On Bishops (*Christus Dominus*); On the Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis*); On the Training of Priests (*Optatum Totius*); On the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*); On Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*); and On the Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*)

## The Issues: Council Documents - II

Three “declarations”: On Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*); On Non-Christian Religions (*Nostrae Aetate*); and On Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*)

These three categories are supposedly in decreasing rank of importance, but the last two declarations, *Nostrae Aetate* and *Dignitas Humanae*, are far more significant than any of the decrees and were far more controversial.

As O’Malley notes, “The air of serenity these documents breathe obscures the fact that some of them were hotly, often bitterly, contested in the council and survived only by the skin of their teeth.” But even these were ultimately approved by overwhelming majorities.

# The Key Issues

The place of Latin in the liturgy

The relationship of Tradition to Scripture and application of modern methods of historical and literary analysis to the Bible

The relationship of the church to the Jews and to other non-Christian religions

Religious liberty, freedom of conscience, the separation of church and state

“Collegiality” – the relationship of the bishops to the pope

The dignity of lay men and women and the importance of their vocation in the church (non-controversial exception)

## The Issues under the Issues

Beneath the explicit issues above, O'Malley identifies three “issues under the issues” about which there were fundamental disagreements:

The circumstances under which a church that considers itself unchanging can change.

The distribution of authority between the “center” (the pope and the Roman Curia) and the “periphery” (the rest of the church).

The manner in which this authority is exercised, legalistic and authoritarian, or based on persuasion and invitation.

## The Issues off the Table

On June 3, 1963, not long after he had issued his great encyclical, *Pacem in terris* – Peace on Earth, in which he championed world peace along with most of the human rights condemned by 19<sup>th</sup> century popes, John XXIII succumbed to stomach cancer. To replace him, the cardinals elected his friend Giovanni Battista Montini, the archbishop of Milan, who took the name Paul VI.

Paul withheld three explosive issues from the council agenda: clerical celibacy, birth control, and reform of the Roman Curia. (Did not trust the Holy Spirit as John had.)

## The Issues: Council Themes

Three words are often used to describe the sense of history that was operative at the council:

*Aggionamento* (Italian for updating or modernizing): adapting the church to the needs of the Catholic community in the present age.

Development (progress or evolution): the concept that ideas are not static but evolve, i.e. change, with the times, underlying the most controversial “issue under the issues”

*Ressourcement* (French for return to the sources): looking past the accretions of the middle ages to the early beliefs and practices of the Christian community as exemplified in the Bible and the writings of the early church fathers.

## The People - The Popes

O'Malley gives a fairly extensive list of council participants. Listed here are just a few who exerted significant influence.

Pope John XXIII sought to “open the windows of the church and let in fresh air.” He frequently used the word *aggiornamento* to mean updating of the church, reading the “signs of the times” to meet current needs. Once the council was underway, he trusted the Holy Spirit and seldom intervened. He died after the first session.

Pope Paul VI was torn between openness to new ideas and a deep-seated, perhaps repressed, fear of change. His interventions during the second, third, and fourth council sessions were sometimes negative, but ultimately allowed the council to deal successfully with the major issues.

## The People - Majority and Minority

Although a clear distinction emerged between those council fathers who favored development and those who opposed it, O'Malley avoids the use of terms "liberal" and "conservative," since some of those who usually opposed change sometimes favored it (conservative American and Eastern Europeans who supported freedom of conscience and separation of church and state) and some who usually favored change sometimes adopted conservative positions (some northern Europeans who did not condemn war). He prefers the term "majority" to describe the large group that normally favored development and "minority" to describe the much smaller group that normally opposed it.



## The People: Leaders of the Majority - I

**Cardinal Jan Bernard Alfrink**, archbishop of Utrecht, influential in revision of several original documents

**Cardinal Augustin Bea**, German Jesuit, president of the Secretariat for Christian Unity; instrumental in preparing and obtaining approval of the documents on religious liberty and on relations with the Jews and other religions

**Émile-Joseph De Smedt**, bishop of Bruges, powerful spokesman for document on religious liberty

**Cardinal Julius Döpfner**, archbishop of Munich, supporter of liturgical change including use of vernacular in the Mass.

**Joseph Frings**, archbishop of Cologne, most noted for his attack on centralization and, esp., the Holy Office.

## The People: Leaders of the Majority - II

**Cardinal Franz König**, archbishop of Vienna, advocate for many council documents, esp. on Jews and other religions

**Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger**, archbishop of Montreal, led rejection of Curia-developed draft on Divine Revelation

**Cardinal Achille Liénart**, archbishop of Lille, on opening day moved to postpone voting on commission members, first sign that the council would be independent of the Curia

**Maximos IV Saigh**, Melkite patriarch of Antioch (Syria), addressed the council in French, repeatedly reminded the fathers that the church was more than just European and that hot issues like married priests and vernacular liturgy had always been accepted in the Eastern churches

## The People: Leaders of the Majority - III

**Cardinal Joseph Elmer Ritter**, archbishop of St. Louis, American spokesman for the majority

**Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens**, archbishop of Malines-Brussels, one of the most influential members of the council, proposed plan for the scope of the council, adopted at the first session.

## The People: The *Intransigenti*

**Michael Browne**, Irish Dominican, defended papal primacy and obligation of lay people to “obey”

**Fenton, Joseph Clifford**, American theologian at the Catholic University of America, adversary of Murray

**Marcel Lefebvre**, archbishop of Dakar (Senegal), formed schismatic group repudiating the council, esp. re the Jews

**Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani**, head of the Holy Office, principal spokesman for the minority (Darth Ottaviani?)

**Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini**, archbishop of Palermo, frequent spokesman for the minority

**Cardinal Giuseppe Siri**, archbishop of Genoa, frequent spokesman for the minority

## The Debates - I

The Preparatory Commissions, dominated by the Curia, had prepared draft documents for approval that simply repeated earlier condemnations and were designed to assure that nothing would change. They pressed for quick ratification so that the council would end quickly and any potential trouble-makers go home.

But Pope John's carefully worded opening address to the council, "Mother Church Rejoices," set a positive tone absent from earlier councils. As O'Malley notes, "It said that the council should look forward . . . should not be afraid to make changes where appropriate . . . should emphasize commonalities rather than differences, encourage cooperation with others, and see its task as pastoral."

## The Debates - II

The first sign of trouble came on the first day of the council. The bishops were asked to vote for 16 members of each of the 10 commissions from the ~2500 present. Amid general confusion, Cardinal Liénart of Lille, France, rose and asked that the voting be postponed to give the bishops time to know one another and time for the national bishops conferences to develop their own lists. This drew prolonged applause and the session was adjourned for several days.

Curia officials were dismayed at this sign of independence. Cardinal Siri wrote in his diary, “The devil has a hand in this”

## The Debates - III

As the Curial draft documents were debated and uniformly rejected or greatly modified, the debates were intense and at times bitter. Disagreements were implicit in the “Issues under the Issues” identified by O’Malley: the possibility of change in an unchanging church, the relative authority of the pope and Curia vs. the rest of the church, and the way in which authority was expressed, authoritative and legalistic or open and pastoral. During the second, third, and fourth council sessions various council members sought to persuade Pope Paul VI to intervene in favor of their position or to postpone discussion to give them time to organize their forces. As noted earlier, sometimes his interventions were helpful and sometimes harmful; sometimes he did not intervene at all.

## The Debates - IV

No issue was more bitterly contested than the Declaration On Non-Christian Religions, *Nostrae Aetate*. Not only did its positive statements contradict 400 years of papal and council condemnations going back to the Council of Trent, its positive treatment of the Jews aroused concern of the Middle Eastern fathers that it implied political support for Israel and, more fundamentally for all, that it contradicted the Gospels, especially John's frequent identification of Jesus' enemies as "The Jews" and the unfortunate verse in Matthew (Mt. 27:25) placing the guilt for Jesus' death on the Jews and their descendants. As a German, Cardinal Bea was strongly sensitive to the need to absolve the Jews of the charge of deicide (often raised in Hitler's tirades) and to recognize their positive role in salvation history.



## The Debates – V

Official Vatican press releases attempted to downplay the disagreements and project an image of uniform harmony. However, the real stories quickly leaked out. The “Letters from Vatican City” by Fr. Francis Xavier Murphy under the pseudonym “Xavier Rynne,” among other sources, gave a blow-by-blow description of the council debates. Two particularly significant incidents:

During the debate on the liturgy, Cardinal Ottiaviani made an extended plea for keeping the liturgy in Latin and rejecting any of the other proposed changes such as allowing communion under both bread and wine and concelibration of the Mass by more than one priest. He ran over time and Cardinal Alfrink, presiding, cut off his microphone to extended applause.

## The Debates – V

During the debate on the document, On the Church, *De Ecclesia*, bishop De Smedt of Bruges denounced the Curia's draft document for its three *isms* -- triumphalism, clericalism, and juridicism -- viewing the church as a perfect society rather than a wounded, pilgrim people, viewing the church as a pyramid with the pope at the top, rather than as the People of God, and exemplifying the church in rigid laws rather than in pastoral concern for people. These criticisms could well have been applied to most of the Curia's draft documents.

## The Results

The final votes on the council documents were overwhelmingly in favor of change. Out of some 2400 votes cast, the document On the Sacred Liturgy received only 46 negative votes, On Divine Revelation only 27 negative votes, On Religious Liberty only 70 negative votes, On The Church In the Modern World only 75 negative votes, and even the highly controversial document On Non-Christian Religions (which included the positive statements on the Jews) only 243 negative votes.

The willingness of an overwhelming majority of the council to take positions that contradicted centuries of triumphalism and condemnation marked a clear discontinuity in the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church; one that many traditionalist Catholics even today refuse to recognize.

## 50+ Years Later - I

For the Catholic in the pews (and for many outside the church) how is religion expressed differently than it was on the eve of the council in 1962? Some lasting changes:

Protestants are no longer referred to as “Heretics” but as “Separated Brethren.” With reference to non-Christian religions, “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions.” Christians and Muslims are urged to forget past quarrels and strive for a “mutual understanding for the benefit of all.” With respect to the Jews, “Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ, neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion.”

## 50+ Years Later - II

Catholics can attend Protestant and other religious services without sinning. It is not uncommon for both Catholic and Protestant clergy to participate in a wedding.

Mass is celebrated in the language of the local community. Those present are urged to be active participants, not merely spectators. Singing by the congregation is encouraged, and some excellent sacred music is being written for congregational singing. (In the pre-Vatican II church, hymns were normally sung only by the choir – and many of the English hymns were terrible!)

The church is no longer identified with only the pope and hierarchy (except by the media) but is specifically identified as “The People of God.”

## 50+ Years Later - III

But not all has gone smoothly.

Although the Curia did not have its way with the council documents, it still remained in control of day-to-day operations in the Vatican and was able to drag its feet on implementation of many council initiatives. Pope Francis is currently trying to reform the Curia, but how well he will succeed is still not clear.

## 50+ Years Later - IV

During the debates on the document *On the Church in the Modern World* it became clear that many of the fathers wished to remove the ban on artificial birth control and any form of sterilization, but Paul VI had removed this from the council agenda and assigned it to a special commission, enlarged from that originally formed by John XXIII. The commission by a large majority recommended that the ban be lifted. However, under pressure from the Curia, Paul disregarded the recommendation and in 1968 issued the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* reaffirming the ban. Widespread and vocal disagreement ensued from many theologians and clergy, and even some bishops. The significant result is that a large majority of Catholics now believe that you can disagree with the pope and still be a good Catholic!

## 50+ Years Later - V

Paul VI did not try to silence those who disagreed with him, but Pope John Paul II, whose experience as a bishop in Communist Poland convinced him that the church must speak with one voice, acted quickly to silence those who expressed any independent thoughts and required that any new bishop must formally agree to *Humanae Vitae*.

Theologians silenced before the council, e.g. John Courtney Murray, Hans Küng, Karl Rahner, and Yves Conger, were major contributors to the council documents, but under John Paul II they were frequently silenced again. His principal enforcer was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) as head of the CDF, Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Holy Office).



## 50+ Years Later - VI

The repressive policies of John Paul II were continued under his successor, Pope Benedict XVI; Benedict did recognize the need to reform the Curia, but felt that he was not up to the task and resigned. His successor, Pope Francis I, the first Jesuit and the first Latin American to hold the office, has adopted a totally different management style, encouraging discussion of formerly forbidden topics such as communion for the divorced and remarried and effectively stopping the flow of condemnations from the CDF. As noted above, he is attempting to reform the Curia, and he makes no attempt to stamp out disagreements with his initiatives. However, he is encountering strong, well financed opposition, especially in the U.S. and Italy. Some have even warned of the danger of schism.

## 50+ Years Later - VII

So where does this leave us? Undoubtedly the council changed the Catholic world and to some degree the entire face of Western Christianity. Its outlook was fundamentally optimistic, seeking to heal old wounds and encourage peaceful cooperation. However, divisive issues such as optional clerical celibacy, ordination of women, single-sex marriage, and many others, remain to be dealt with. Sadly, too many of the current bishops are obsessed with these and other “culture war” issues. Pope Francis reminds us that our first concern as Christians should be with care for the poor and the environment.

## 50+ Years Later – The 3 *isms* Again

We could go on for hours about the abuse of children and seminarians by Catholic clergy, but we only note here that the underlying cause is not homosexuality and the moral laxness of society, or celibacy, but rather the three *isms*:

*Triumphalism* that impels church leaders to believe that it is more important to protect the image of the church as the “perfect society” than to protect children from abuse

*Clericalism* that sets priests apart as above suspicion, and enclosed seminary training that fails to develop healthy sexual attitudes.

*Juridicism* that does not recognize that you can't fix things by changing the rules without also changing people's hearts, the *metanoia* that Jesus preached.

## 50+ Years Later – Evolution of Tradition

The *Intransigenti* saw the council actions as a discontinuity, a break with the (supposedly unchanging) “Tradition of the Catholic Church.” Cardinal Ottaviani is said to have expressed a wish to die before the council ended “so that he could die a Catholic.”

But tradition evolves like everything else. Many of the traditions the council seemed to reject, for example centralization of authority in the pope and Curia, were not present in the early days of the church but originated in the Middle Ages when most people were illiterate and the church had to fight continually for independence from the powerful, mafia-like, Italian families. Hence the idea of *Ressourcement*, a return to the sources.



We can give thanks today that a humble Italian peasant, short, chubby, and not particularly handsome, brought a frightened, inward-looking institution out of its shell and, in his words, “opened the windows of the church to let in fresh air.” The road ahead may be rough and unclear, but I have trust that the spirit of St. John XXIII will stay with us and guide our footsteps.