

# Vatican II Taking Hold of Its (and Pope John's) Council Goals, September 1962–May 1963

*Jared Wicks, S.J.*

**Abstract:** The following text was given as a public lecture at the Pontifical College Josephinum on October 24, 2012. It relates how Pope John XXIII expressed goals for the Council and how the Council Fathers gradually took hold of these during Vatican II's First Period (1962). Deep roots of Pope John's vision go back to his seminary days and developed after his ordination first under the example of Bp. Radini of Bergamo and then during service as Apostolic Delegate in Orthodox Bulgaria and Muslim Turkey. Before Vatican II opened, most bishops showed little appreciation of the Pope's conciliar goals of ecclesial rejuvenation and adaptation, but Cardinals Bea, Frings, and Suenens did grasp his aims. In mid-November 1962, the Pope's goals came to the fore in appeals to his opening Council discourse and in the vote on tabling the first schema on revelation. In December 1962, Pope John made his goals normative when he mandated revision of most of the prepared draft texts. His vision has to this day an ongoing impact through the Vatican II documents, both the major ones on inner Church renewal and in the Council's *ad extra* declarations on human dignity with their wise guidance toward bettering human life in the world.

## Introduction

The title of this presentation makes a proposal about what to commemorate in these days fifty years after the formal opening of the Second Vatican Council. I suggest expanding our horizon from that memorable single day of October 11, 1962, to include both the month before and especially what followed during the First Period of the Council. In fact, this can also include the first "intersession" of intense work in early 1963 by the Vatican II commissions, down to the final days of Pope John XXIII, who died on June 3, 1963. The commissions' work in early 1963 was productive – so much so that by June 1963 all the Council members received by

mail twelve revised schemas of constitutions or decrees, to which two more were added in August.<sup>1</sup>

The commemoration, in this proposal, focuses on a process of a gradual acceptance, by a significant number of the Vatican II participants, of the Council goals, aims, and orientations originating with Pope John XXIII. October 11, 1962, remains important, because of John's keynote discourse, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* ("Mother Church Rejoices"), on that day, but from that discourse, during the weeks that followed, a clarifying process took place in the minds of many Council members. Initial developments, especially in November 1962, showed the Pope that his goals and orientations were "taking hold" in the minds of a growing number of council Fathers. One result of this came in early December 1962 when Pope John confidently took charge of the Council by ordering a wide-ranging revision of the existing or emerging draft-texts according to specific criteria coming from his keynote address.

## **Origins and Deep Seeds of Pope John XXIII's Goals for Vatican II**

Pope John XXIII sensed that he brought to the Council a singular vision of the Church's call to have a transforming impact on world, as he made clear in "Words Spoken on His Sickbed," on May 24, 1963, just ten days before he died. On that day, he said the following:

In the presence of my collaborators, it comes to me spontaneously to repeat the act of faith. This is right for us priests, because we are inspired by the will of the Lord to deal with matters of the highest importance for the benefit of the entire world.

Now more than ever, certainly more than in past ages, we are meant to serve human beings as such and not only Catholics. Above all and everywhere this means to defend the rights of the human person and not only those of the Catholic Church.

Present-day circumstances, such as what has been demanded of us the past fifty years, along with the doctrinal deepening, have placed us before new realities, as I said in the discourse at the opening of the Council.

It is not that the Gospel changes, but that we are beginning to understand it better.

---

1. The dozen draft-texts treated seminaries, Catholic schools, priestly ministry, the lay apostolate, bishops and diocesan governance, the pastoral care of souls, religious life, the Eastern Catholic Churches, divine revelation, the church (two chapters on its mystery and hierarchy), ecumenism, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. The two further schemas sent out in late July and August were on the sacrament of marriage and the church in further chapters on the laity and religious.

One who has lived long and found himself early in this century facing new tasks of social activity benefitting the whole person, one who lived, as I did, twenty years in the East and eight years in France, thus encountering different cultures and traditions, now grasps that the time has come to recognize the signs of the times, to lay hold of present-day possibilities, and look toward the distant future.<sup>2</sup>

This remarkable declaration shows how Pope John, fully aware that his death was near, reflected, within the horizon of the Catholic faith and its Creed, on his own priestly calling from God. This ministry, he now grasps, entails work “for the benefit of the entire world,” for “humanity as such” – beyond a parochial narrowness focused on inner-church issues or on one place or nation. Here “the rights of the human person” are of paramount importance. Six weeks before, at Easter 1963, he had issued the encyclical *Pacem in terris*, with its extended passage on human rights. That encyclical soon became a bright beacon which guided Vatican II’s *ad extra* declarations on religious liberty and on the Church’s relation to the modern world.

John senses that the past fifty years have brought “us,” in the Church, to confront realities which are new to priests. But with the challenges, the times have given as well new capabilities, through the “doctrinal deepening” that he mentions and a better understanding of the perennial Gospel of Christ – all of which John expressed for Vatican II in his opening discourse of October 11, 1962.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, his own biography contains the seeds of his orientations, which converge and fuse with the aims of the Council over which he has presided. Experiences during his service of the Holy See “in the East” and in France confirm his belief in opportunities for the good and in being called to take the long view toward the future in confidence – about which he has convinced the Council Fathers as well.

Following the indications in this declaration by John XXIII, it will help to quickly review parts of his biography to show several deep seeds both of his con-vo-king of Vatican II and of his expressions of its aims. His actions as Pope have their background in his experiences, which were quite different from those of previous popes and from that of the officials in the Vatican in 1958, when John became Pope.

(1) In January 1901, Angelo Roncalli, already a seminarian of the diocese of Bergamo, began his theology studies in the Roman Seminary. In a notebook of ex-

- 
2. As Pope John spoke, his secretary Fr. Loris Capovilla recorded his words, which Fr. Loris published in *Giovanni XXIII. Quindici Letture* (Rome 1970), p. 475. They have recently become the final entry in the considerably revised edition of *Giornale dell'anima (Journal of a Soul)*, edited and annotated by Alberto Melloni (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 2003), p. 500. The translation is by J. Wicks.
  3. The “doctrinal deepening” probably does not refer to the currents of the *nouvelle théologie* or the liturgical movement, with which Abp. Roncalli showed little sympathy while he was Nuncio in France 1945-1953. He found these overly intellectualist. His critical remarks about confusing innovations are scattered through his diaries of those years, edited by Étienne Fouilloux, as *Anni di Francia*, 2 vols. (Bologna: Istituto di scienze religiose, 2004-06). A more likely point of reference is his own sense of the distinction between the dogmatic substance of the faith and the possible variations in updated explanations and expressions of the same.

cerpts from his reading at this time, he copied a passage from the Bishop of Peoria, John Lancaster Spalding, which for him breathed the freshness of the “new world”: “We must exclude sterile attachments to the past and to dead realities. Better things are before us, not behind us. . . . The ancient faith, if it is to be held vitally, we must celebrate with an energy which is wholly youthful.” The young Roncalli found this to be, “full of life and of a good and holy modernity.”<sup>4</sup> Here is a distant and little-known American root of the optimistic hopes with which Roncalli approached his priestly ministry and as Pope issued his convocation of Vatican II.

(2) Angelo Roncalli was ordained for the diocese of Bergamo in 1904 and served as Secretary of his bishop, Giacomo M. Radini Tedeschi, from 1905 into 1914, while teaching Church History in the seminary. He accompanied the bishop’s pastoral visitation of the 380 parishes of diocese. Bp. Radini was for Roncalli an ideal churchman, energetic, close to people, not fearing to undertake pastoral and social projects, carrying out the duties laid down by the Council of Trent. As a historian Roncalli saw Bp. Radini’s continuity with Charles Borromeo and Francis de Sales who, three centuries before, had implemented in diocesan and parish practice Trent’s decrees on episcopal and pastoral residence, preaching, seminaries, and Catholic sacramental and devotional life.<sup>5</sup> Here is a seed of Pope John’s insistence on Vatican II exercising a magisterium that is above all “pastoral” in orientation, so as to contribute to the renewal of Catholic life in the dioceses and parishes.

(3) During World War I, 1915–18, Roncalli was an army chaplain ministering to the wounded and dying in military hospitals, where he came to appreciate goodness and nobility in the soldiers who, however, were in many cases far from the Catholic Church.

(4) 1925 to 1944 were his “20 years in the East” as the Pope’s representative in Bulgaria and then in Turkey and Greece – all countries with tiny Catholic communities amidst long-standing hostility to the Catholic Church. Consecrated bishop in 1925, he oversaw Bulgarian Catholics, in a land officially committed to the Orthodox Church, where however he became good friends with the Orthodox archbishop Stefan. In Turkey, he lived in Istanbul, amid millions of Muslims. In a characteristic diary entry of July 1936, Roncalli wrote, “I love these dear Turks in Christ crucified and I cannot stand it when Christians speak ill of them.”<sup>6</sup> The ever reflective Abp. Roncalli

---

4. These excerpts are given in the ample biography by Marco Roncalli, *Giovanni XXIII. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli. Una vita nella storia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006), 59–60. The text by Spalding was the lecture he gave in Rome in March 1900, “Education and the Future of Religion,” which appeared later that year in Italian in the journal *Rassegna nazionale*. The original English text is a chapter in Spalding’s book, *Religion, Agnosticism and Education* (Chicago: McClurg, 1903).

5. Young Fr. Roncalli wrote a biography of Bp. Radini, translated as *My Bishop* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969). A long-time project was Roncalli’s critical edition of the manuscript records of the pastoral visitation of the Bergamo diocese in 1575 by St. Charles Borromeo, who came to Bergamo along with ten associate “visitors,” to implement the reform decrees of the Council of Trent. *Gli Atti della visita apostolica di s. Carlo Borromeo a Bergamo (1575)*, ed. Angelo G. Roncalli, 2 vols. in 5 parts (Florence: Olschki, 1936–55).

6. Diary entry of July 26, 1936, in *La mia vita in Oriente. Agende de delegato apostolico*, ed. Valeria Martano, 2 vols. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 2006–08), 1, 204.

gave long thought to the good qualities he appreciated in Orthodox Christians and in the non-Christians among whom he lived.

(5) Then, from 1944 to 1953, Roncalli was in Paris as Papal Nuncio to France, at a crossroads of Europe, meeting many French exponents of the aggressively “lay” character of public life. But in France, he also read Yves Congar’s *True and False Reform in the Church* after it came out in 1950.<sup>7</sup>

(6) From 1953 to 1958, as cardinal archbishop of Venice, Roncalli went to the parishes on visits and held a diocesan synod. His 1956 Lenten pastoral letter urged Venetian Catholics to take up regular Scripture reading for their personal formation in faith and spirituality – much in the way the Council’s *Dei Verbum*, no. 25, urges Bible reading upon all Catholics.<sup>8</sup>

Roncalli’s vision of history featured remarkable individuals, like St. Charles Borromeo and Bp. Radini, whom he saw as “rejuvenators” of the Church. For Roncalli, the Church had, from Christ and the Holy Spirit, an inner capacity to meet challenges, to adapt itself to changed times, and by this to show its perennial youthfulness.<sup>9</sup> Here is a seed of the calling of Vatican II, which he wanted to be a demonstration of the Church as youthful, adaptive, and large-hearted.<sup>10</sup> From John XXIII’s ecclesiology of “ongoing rejuvenation,” one can understand Vatican II’s goal of *aggiornamento* in a profoundly spiritual and theological way, beside which the image of “opening the windows to the world” pales into the banal superficiality of a bumper-sticker.

- 
7. During Vatican II’s Fourth Period, Congar noted in his diary that J. Greco, SJ, a *peritus* of the Commission on the Missions, told him that in 1952 he, Greco, visited Nuncio Roncalli in Paris, who spoke about Congar’s book which he was reading. Entry of October 19, 1965, in *My Journal of the Council* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 816.
  8. The diaries of the Venice years are *Pace e Vangelo. Agende del patriarca*, ed. Enrico Galavotti, 2 vols. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 2008). The 1956 pastoral letter is “La Sacra Scrittura e s. Lorenzo Giustiniani. Lettera pastorale per la Quaresima,” in Angelo Giuseppe Card. Roncalli, *Scritti e discorsi*, 3 vols. (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1959), 2, 329–51.
  9. In a retreat-note from 1910: “The Church contains in itself the eternal youthfulness of truth arising from Christ who belongs to all times.” At an episcopal consecration in 1938: “The youthfulness of the Church is evident in its ongoing life and the insertion of new pastors into the apostolate of Christ.” As he left Venice in 1958 for the conclave which elected him Pope: “We are not here in the Church on earth as custodians of a museum, but instead are called to cultivate a thriving garden, full of life, which has a glorious future.” At an audience, Sept. 2, 1962: “The Church is the guardian of the ongoing youthfulness of the Gospel.”
  10. Correspondingly, he was all his life long pained by those, for example, in the Bergamo clergy who see the present as worse than the past and fear new ventures. A diary note of 1918: “I never knew a pessimist who brought a good project to a successful end.” Again, in 1938, they “criticize everything, make malevolent interpretations and aggressive condemnations. What an affliction of my spirit.”

## The Pre-Conciliar Loneliness of John XXIII—Broken Only in Moments

Three months after being elected Pope, John took a decisive step on January 25, 1959, when he announced that he was going to convoke a Council. But he remained for a while quite alone in his vision of a rejuvenating Council.

A sobering experience was Pope John's first series of audiences, one on one, with the heads of the Vatican congregations. These were regularly scheduled, but in the 1950s Pope Pius XII had let them drop. But after his election John XXIII began them afresh. Later, he said that he found himself surrounded in the Vatican by narrow-minded and limited individuals, few of whom had lived outside Rome or central Italy, and so they don't see Church issues in a universal perspective.<sup>11</sup>

In late-summer and autumn 1959, the world's bishops were canvassed by letter, asking them, the future Fathers of Vatican II, to suggest Council topics and proposals. The canvass brought in nearly 2000 (77%) responses, but very few of them breathed the spirit of John XXIII. Most were cautious in their concern with modifying canonical fine points. There were calls for the Council to define that the Blessed Virgin Mary was *Co-redemptrix* and /or *Mediatrix* of all graces. Many gave "isms" for the Council to condemn, such as communism, the relativism of situation ethics, or neo-modernism in Catholic theology. Some creative proposals were made, especially by bishops who prepared their proposals in consultation, e.g., on restoring the permanent diaconate, renewing the liturgy, or reforming practices of the Curia, but very few of these urged the Council to deal with problems of the contemporary world.<sup>12</sup>

In October 1959 a prominent Italian cardinal, the Archbishop of Palermo, spoke at the Lateran University on the first anniversary of John XXIII's election. He said that a principal work of the coming Council would be to render definitive the teachings of recent popes in the encyclicals from Leo XIII to Pius XII. If Vatican II re-stated their content with the higher authority of a Council this would raise their enunciated doctrine and their censures of deviance above any future questioning.<sup>13</sup>  
- Not many rejuvenating hopes here.

But Pope John also had some moments of consolation showing he was not completely alone in pursuing the rejuvenation of the Catholic Church. In June 1960, when he established ten commissions to prepare draft documents for the Council, he also brought into being the Secretariat for Promoting the Unity of Christians - a Vatican ecumenical office. Pope John named Augustin Cardinal Bea President of this body, with the mandate to aid the commissions and in time the Council itself

11. From the diary of Fr. Roberto Tucci, sj, director of *La Civiltà cattolica*, after his audience with Pope John on February 9, 1963. A full citation is given by Roberto de Mattei in *Vaticano II. Una storia mai scritta* (Turin: Lindau, 2010), 286-288.

12. Étienne Fouilloux presents the pre-preparatory proposals in *History of Vatican II*, Vol. 1, *Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II. Toward a New Era in Catholicism*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis & Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 97-132.

13. Ernesto Card. Ruffini, "Il Santo Padre Giovanni XXIII nel primo anno di pontificato," *Divinitas* 4 (1960), 7-28.

to make a Catholic contribution to furthering the cause of Christian unity. Even though Bea was, like the Pope, 79 years old in 1960, he took up his new mission with alacrity and the Secretariat was soon making creative proposals of theological *ressourcement*.<sup>14</sup>

In early 1962 the Pope read the Italian translation of an address by Cardinal Joseph Frings, Archbishop of Cologne and president of the West German bishops' conference. Frings surveyed changes in the world since Vatican I, ninety years before, in order to show spiritual and intellectual characteristics of the world in which Vatican II will be held. Consequences follow for the Council from the increased sense of human unity, the impact of technology, and the influence of ideologies. When Frings was next in Rome, John called him to the papal residence to thank him for setting forth a vision agreeing with his own concerning the Council's situation and tasks. Frings had to explain that his lecture was prepared for him by a theologian, Prof. Ratzinger, then teaching near Cologne, but still this showed the Pope that his hopes were resonating positively in one part of the world episcopate.<sup>15</sup>

As the opening of Vatican II came nearer, Pope John also read the Lenten pastoral letter on expectations of the Council, published by the new archbishop of Malines/Mechlen, Belgium, Léon-Josef Suenens. In an audience with Suenens, John expressed his agreement and the two discussed the problem of the huge number – and mediocrity – of the schemas of the Preparatory Commissions. At the Pope's request, in May 1962 Suenens presented to John a five-page note on organizing the Council's work. About 80% of the prepared texts should go to post-conciliar commissions and to those entrusted with revising the Code of Canon Law. What remains should be divided between issues *ad extra*, in which the Church speaks to the great issues of the world of the day, and issues *ad intra*, internal aspects of Church life, especially on how it becomes effective in its mission. The Pope encouraged Suenens to further develop his "plan" by consulting with other Cardinals, including Montini, Liénart, Siri, and Döpfner. From this, the Pope had Suenens' "plan" in his hands by July 1962.<sup>16</sup> – Some points from Suenens, including the structural division of outward/inward directed actions, entered the important September 11, 1962, radio address by John XXIII on the Council about to open in a month's time.

- 
14. On this initiative of long-term impact on the Church, see Thomas E. Stransky, "The Foundation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity," in *Vatican II Revisited by Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1986), 62–87. The texts produced by the Secretariat in its initial years are now given in *Dialogo e rinnovamento. Verballi e testi de Segretariato per l'unità dei cristiani nella preparazione del concilio Vaticano II (1960–1962)*, ed. Mauro Velati (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011). Also, J. Wicks, "Cardinal Bea's Unity Secretariat: Engine of Renewal and Reform at Vatican II," *Ecumenical Trends* 41, no. 12 (December, 2012), 1–5, 15.
15. I digest the Frings address, with translated excerpts, in "Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as *peritus* Before and During Vatican Council II," *Gregorianum* 89 (2008), 233–311, at 253–261.
16. From Cardinal Suenens himself: "A Plan for the Whole Council," in *Vatican II Revisited by Those Who Were There*, 88–105, especially Appendix I, the outline of March 1962, and Appendix IV, the plan of May. Also, Mathijs Lamberigts and Leo Declerck, "The Role of Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens at Vatican II," in D. Donnelly, et al., eds. *The Belgian Contribution to the Second Vatican Council* (Leuven: Peters, 2008), 61–217, at 66–75.

## Pope John XXIII's "Convocatory" Declarations on Vatican II

On three occasions, Pope John spoke directly about the topics and the aims of Vatican II, namely, in his Christmas 1961 Apostolic Constitution formally convoking the Council to meet during 1962; in his just mentioned radio address of September 11, 1962; and in his inaugural discourse "*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*" as Vatican II opened on October 11, 1962.

(1) *Humanae salutis*, of Christmas 1961, first contrasts crises in society, in which "distrustful souls see only darkness burdening the face of the earth" with John's reaffirmation of trust in Christ "who has not left the world that he redeemed."<sup>17</sup> Much in the world facilitates the Church's apostolate: "although the world may appear profoundly changed, the Christian community . . . has strengthened itself in unity; it has been reinvigorated intellectually; it has been interiorly purified." Where there is spiritual poverty in the world, this contrasts with the vibrant vitality of the Church of Christ. The coming Council will concern itself with promoting the sanctification of Church members and the articulation of revealed truth. It will turn to the problems and worries of the world, concerned to heighten in people a proper sense of their human dignity, to reaffirm the moral order and Catholic social doctrine, and so to benefit family life, education, and civil society.

(2) A month before Vatican II opened the Pope spoke on the radio about the Council.<sup>18</sup> Seven draft documents had gone out to the Council's members and Pope John had studied these during his August vacation at Castel Gandolfo. Early in the address, he recalled the symbolism of the Easter candle and the cry, "*Lumen Christi*" answered by "*Deo gratias*" – for Councils are encounters with the Risen Lord in which the Church reaffirms her grateful "Yes" to the mission Christ has given it. The Council will concern the Church's vitality *ad intra*, by presenting the light of its doctrine and the sanctifying power of grace.

But John then spoke expansively on issues *ad extra* in the world, about human aspirations which will have their echo in the council: issues of the family, work, peace within nations, education, culture, social duties, and the freedom that corresponds to human dignity. This longer portion of the address featured topics largely absent from the draft decrees already in the hands of the bishops. The contrast was striking and had to raise questions about John XXIII's readiness to give his backing to the first draft texts. His heart seemed instead to be reaching out in solidarity to embrace the wider world of the human family.

(3) Then, as Vatican II opened, Pope John gave his famous address of October 11, 1962, which has been cited often in the days of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I will not try to condense its abundance here, but instead will look ahead to the appeals made to it and to how it was cited in the following weeks of Council debate. This is to take the opening discourse in terms of its effective impact. Pope John's *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* injected concerns and hopes into Vatican II's First Period. As the Council

17. I cite the translation in *Council Day Book. Sessions 1 & 2*, ed. Floyd Anderson (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), 6-9. The Latin original is in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962), 5-13.

18. *Council Day Book. Sessions 1 & 2*, 18-21; Italian original in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962), 678-85.

went to work, the Pope listened attentively to hear echoes of these concerns in the Fathers' interventions. He soon sensed that his aims, orientations, and goals were in fact "taking hold" in the minds of many, even of most, of the Council members.

### Four Crucial Days of Vatican II Debate (Nov. 14, 16, 17, 19)

As is well known, the first major text discussed at the Council, for three weeks, was the draft Constitution on Liturgical Renewal.<sup>19</sup> The Cardinals and Bishops who spoke on it were divided over the schema's proposals of introducing vernacular languages, eucharistic communion under both forms, and the concelebration of mass, and over giving key roles to national or regional episcopal conferences in preparing the changes that would be called for. But on November 14 the liturgy debate wound down and the Council Fathers were asked whether they approved the draft-text in its main lines as the basis of further work, while the commission would revise details in accord with their suggestions. Surprisingly, of 2208 who voted, 2162 voted *placet*, giving their basic approval to the schema, with only 46 (2%) opposing – which showed that those who had spoken against the text spoke only for themselves and had not convinced any others. Something was moving in this huge assembly and Pope John, listening by a private radio connection to what was said in the Council hall, would have to be pleased that *aggiornamento* was taking hold. However, only fifteen of the ca. 700 interventions included appeals to the Pope's pastoral and ecumenical aims, with none of these appeals referring to his addresses on September 11 or on the day of the Council's formal opening.<sup>20</sup>

November 14 was also the first day of debate on the draft text "on the sources of revelation."<sup>21</sup> This came from the Preparatory Theological Commission, offering treatments of Tradition as a source of revealed teachings which are not in Scripture, on biblical inspiration and interpretation, and on Scripture in Church life, that is, as read by Catholics, as interpreted by Catholic exegetes, and as serving in Catholic theology as a basis of work. As the Fathers read the text of 29 paragraphs, three places

19. The Liturgy schema had 105 numbered paragraphs spread through eight chapters. The fifteen Council meetings on it, from October 22 through November 13, 1962, included 328 oral interventions in St. Peter's, along with 377 written texts of observations by Council Fathers who did not ask to address the assembly. Mathijs Lamberigts relates this discussion in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2. *The Formation of the Council's Identity, October 1962-September 1963*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis & Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 107-66, especially 112-49.

20. Widely scattered references in *Acta Synodalia Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. I, parts 1 and 2, argue in favor of the draft, because it will promote Pope John's aim of updating, revitalization, and the "*scopus pastoralis*" he has given (e.g., Bp. Ancel, I/1, 449; Bp. Zak, I/2, 150; Bp. Hoa Neyen Van Hien, I/2, 613). On October 27, Bp. Marcos McGrath opened his remarks in favor of the draft by recalling that the Pope has gathered the pastors, "*ad rinovationem Ecclesiae in sua missione et in suo cultu*" (I/1, 517). I found only two appeals to the ecumenical goal of Pope John as a reason to accept the schema (Bp. Mendes Arceo, I/1, 358; Abp. Hallanan, I/2, 75).

21. The text is in *Acta Synodalia*, I/3, pp. 14-26. The history of its genesis in the Preparatory Theological Commission has been set forth by Karim Schelkens in *Catholic Theology of Revelation on the Eve of Vatican II. A Redaction History of the Schema De fontibus revelationis (1960-1962)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

stood out which issued censures (*reprobat . . . damnat*) of theologians of inspiration and of scholars of the Gospels.<sup>22</sup>

In eighty-two speeches the Council members evaluated the schema *De fontibus* as a whole over four days, with some sharp clashes, as thirty-two speakers expressed their disapproval of the draft text and urged their fellow Council members to join them in voting it down. Of these thirty-two dissenters, eighteen appealed to Pope John's intentions for the Council, especially to *Gaudet Mater*, with which they said the schema did not conform but instead breathed another spirit. Suddenly, the Pope's aims and intentions in convoking Vatican II became a crucial factor in the Council's development. After four days of such exchanges, a momentous vote occurred on November 20.

In the debate, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* began having its positive reception in the Council. On Nov. 14, Card. Frings said that the tone of the text was that of a professor defending theses, lacking that "pastoral note with which the Holy Father ardently wants Council statements to be imbued." Card. Léger (Montréal) said that fear of errors underlay the text, making it dissonant with "the spirit of positive renewal desired by the Pope in this Council." Cardinal Alfrink (Utrecht, Netherlands) cited Pope John from October 11 on the Council's aims: we are not here to repeat settled doctrine, but to enunciate Catholic truths in a way which will promote unity with separated Christians. Cardinal Bea repeated this, indicating that the Council should penetrate Catholic teaching more deeply and then give it a fresh expression which will affect souls, for as the Pope said, our Magisterium is "pre-eminently pastoral." Two bishops from Indonesia said that their conference had compared the schema with what the Pope said at the start, and so they propose not only a thorough revision of *De fontibus*, but also of the three other drafts from the Theological Commission, so that the Council may effectively attain its pastoral goal.<sup>23</sup>

On Nov. 16, Day 2 of the debate, those opposed were outnumbered by those favorable to the schema such as the Cardinals of Lisbon, Los Angeles, Buenos Aires, and Manila. For these backers the first pastoral and ecumenical duty of a council is to propose the whole of Catholic truth. But the French Cardinal Joseph Lefebvre (Brouges) stated that the schema's lack of any elegance by which it might attract souls makes it dissonant with the pastoral concern of the Pope's opening discourse. Cardinal Silva Henriquez (Santiago, Chile) spoke for several Latin American bishops against the document, contrasting its condemnations with "the medicine of mercy" privileged by the Pope in *Gaudet Mater*. Abbot Christopher Butler (Downside, England) saw a clash between the schema and the Pope's hope that the Council would

---

22. In the text, three strong censures drew attention, namely, of any effort to "extenuate" the nature of biblical inspiration ("*Ecclesia omnino reprobat*" in no. 8), of denials of the historical truth of gospel narratives of the deeds of Jesus ("*Synodus illos damnat errores*" in no. 21), and of attributions to the evangelist or the community of the words given as from Jesus in the gospels' texts ("*Synodus errores damnat*" in no. 22).

23. *Acta Synodalia*, I/3, 34 (Frings), 41 (Léger), 43-44 (Alfrink), 49 (Bea), and 55-59 (Manek and Soegijapranata, from Indonesian). But at the end, Abp. Morcillo Gonzalez spoke for 47 Spanish bishops who judged *De fontibus* to be a valid foundation for the Council's work (AS I/3, 59-62), as had Cardinals Ruffini (Palermo), Siri (Genoa), and Quiroga y Palacios (Compostella) earlier (37-38, 38-39, 39-41).

announce good news to the world. Touching up the present text will not remedy its defects. But because a doctrinal text like this has to gain virtually unanimous approval, the Council has to have another text – an intervention with which several Fathers registered agreement in the next two days.<sup>24</sup>

On Day 3 of debate, Nov. 17, the schema had several backers, but two speakers, Cardinal Döpfner (Munich) and Abp. Zoa (Yaoundé, Cameroon, Africa), opposed the schema in the name of many bishops who signed on to their interventions, that is many German-speakers with Döpfner and many Africans, both Franco-phone and Anglophone, with Zoa. Both Döpfner and Zoa added weight to their case by naming the Cardinals who had already cited *Gaudet Mater* as their criterion for opposing the schema (Alfrink, Bea, Frings, Léger, Silva Henriquez, and Joseph Lefebvre). At the end of the day, Abp. Julio Rosales (Cebu, Philippines), said that since John XXIII had approved the distribution of the text for discussion, we should hear what he thinks of it.<sup>25</sup>

On Day 4 of debate, Nov. 19, Cardinal Gracias (Bombay) hoped that a joint group of the backers and opponents could work together on a new text “which would correspond more with the goal of the Council and the intention of the Pope.” Cardinal Meyer (Chicago) agreed that the schema did not agree with the aim set by the Pope’s inaugural allocution and so a new text was needed, for which Card. Bea had given guidelines. The Auxiliary Bp. of Caracas, Luiz Henriquez Jiminez, cited *Gaudet Mater* as a principal reason why all the Venezuelan bishops wanted *De fontibus* to be removed from the agenda. A highlight of the day was the intervention by Bp. De Smedt (Bruges, Belgium), speaking on behalf of the Unity Secretariat, to explain what would be an ecumenically constructive style of Catholic teaching – in which *De fontibus* was defective – but which Pope John wants in documents of the Council. Abp. Denis Hurley (Durban, South Africa) said that John XXIII had specified the goal as pastoral, but for this just defining the truth is not enough, for the mode of speech must show revelation’s expansive power and bring the reader or hearer to experience delight in the truth.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, on November 20 the Council members were asked to decide the fate of the schema *De fontibus*. But, in an action found strange by several observers, the board of presidents did not ask the members to give a judgment of *placet* or *non placet* (approve / don’t approve), on the schema itself, as had been done a week before on the draft text on liturgical renewal. Instead, the motion was on procedure: does it please the Fathers to interrupt treatment of *De fontibus revelationis* by setting the text aside? Thus opponents of the schema had to vote *placet*, agreeing to interrupt debate, while its backers had to vote *non placet*, against the interruption. This was explained in Latin, French, Spanish, German, English, and Arabic. In spite

24. *Acta Synodalia*, I/3, 74–76 (Lefebvre), 81–82 (Silva Henriquez), and 104–107 (Butler).

25. *Acta Synodalia*, I/3, 125–126 (Döpfner), 148 (Zoa), and 155–156 (Rosales). Pope John’s answer came on November 21, in his act of removing *De fontibus* from the agenda and creating a Joint Commission (from the Doctrinal Commission and the SPCU) to revise it.

26. *Acta Synodalia*, I/3, 166–168 (Gracias), 169–170 (Meyer), 178–179 (Henriquez Jiminez), 184–186 (De Smedt), and 198–200 (Hurley). Abp. Hurley mentioned as a good example of pastorally positive expression the Unity Secretariat’s schema *De verbo Dei*, approved in the June 1962 meeting of the Central Preparatory Commission.

of some remaining confusion, those voting to interrupt and set aside the text were 1368 Council members, 62% of those voting. Those wanting to keep the schema on the agenda were 822, but according to the Council's Rules such a procedural vote required a two-thirds majority. Thus the November 20 motion to interrupt did not carry – and the Council seemed destined to discuss chapter-by-chapter a text which a majority had wanted removed from the immediate agenda.

But the vote was still of enormous importance, since it showed that the speakers of the previous days who wanted the schema rejected, although fewer than half of those heard from (32 of 82), had swayed a majority of the Council members (62%) by their arguments, especially by their appeals to Pope John XXIII's goals, which the document was said not to promote. The Pope had to be buoyed up by this evidence of his goals "taking hold." So he intervened. The next day's assembly, on November 21, began with a notice that the Pope was removing the text from the immediate agenda and setting up a Joint Commission, from the Doctrinal Commission and the Unity Secretariat, to rework the text, emending, abbreviating, improving it, so it could in time come back in a revised form and gain the full approval of the Council Fathers.<sup>27</sup>

## Pope John Giving Directions to the Council

The intervention by the Pope in November was not the end, but instead the beginning, of his actions to steer the Council along paths on which he now knew many Council members were ready to follow.

On December 6, the members heard read out a set of directives, coming from the Pope on the work to be done in the months following, before they would reconvene on September 8, 1963. The next day, Dec. 7, these directives were in their hands in a booklet.<sup>28</sup>

First, the council commissions are mandated to once more examine the texts they have produced or are still working on. A new context has been set, by the clarification of Council goals and so they have to re-evaluate the work done so far.

Second, this examination has its guidelines, namely those given in Pope John's inaugural discourse of October 11, from which the text cites 28 lines – to leave no doubt about the controlling criteria of work in this new phase. John gives *Gaudet Mater* an effective impact on what follows in Vatican II. This appears in six points cited from or based on his opening discourse:

- study afresh all Catholic doctrine, with a view to its deeper penetration of souls,
- reformulate Catholic teaching in ways that our times require,

27. *Acta Synodalia*, I/3, 259.

28. *Acta Synodalia*, I/1, 96–98; partial English translation, *Council Day Book, Sessions 1 and 2*, 114.

- truths of the deposit of faith are given; now find for them better formulations,
- act as a Catholic Magisterium which is prevalently pastoral in nature,
- raising the torch of truth, the Church regards with maternal love its estranged children among other Christians,
- to suffering humankind, we say with Peter, “Silver and gold I have not, but what I have I give you, ‘in the name of Jesus Christ, rise and walk.’”(Acts 3:6)

This is how Pope John’s words of October 11 entered the Council’s work – as the normative guidelines of revising the texts to be treated.<sup>29</sup>

Third, John mandated that the draft texts be subjected to a selection-process, to assure that the Council would move ahead only on topics pertaining to the universal Church, to all believers in Christ, or to the whole human family. Particular matters should go to a Commission for the revising the Code of Canon Law or to post-conciliar commissions which will be set up to deal with special issues.

Fourth, this work of selection and revision in particular commissions will be supervised, for the council is to have a new Coordinating Commission of seven cardinals to be named soon. They will follow closely this new phase of commission work, especially to insure that the revised schemas conform to the goals of the Council – as they are now clarified.

Fifth, the commissions should expand their competency, by consulting others, especially those experienced in the pastoral and apostolic works of the Church.

Sixth, and finally, once the schemas are ready they will go to the Council members, who must examine them and send in their feedback, so that the commissions may further emend their texts before they come up for evaluation in the Council hall.

This then is the way Pope John “took charge” of Vatican II, with some first results when the Coordinating Commission began reviewing the work of the commissions in early 1963.<sup>30</sup> With this, a “second preparation” of Vatican II began, now clearly under directives and criteria given by Pope John XXIII.<sup>31</sup> His goals had “taken hold.”

---

29. Pope John also cited the central passage of his Oct. 11 keynote address, in Italian, on December 23, at his pre-Christmas gathering of the Cardinals and officials of the Curia. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 55 (1963), 43-45, at 44-45.

30. The Commission’s members were named on Dec. 14 and soon began overseeing particular schemas. They were Cardinals A. Liénart (*De revelatione*), L. J. Suenens (*De ecclesia, De beata Maria virgine*), J. Döpfner (*De episcopis, De cura animarum, De religiosis*), A. Cicognani (*De oecumenismo, De ecclesiis orientalibus*), G. Urbani (*De clericis, De apostolatu laicorum, De matrimonio*), C. Confalonieri (*De sacrorum alumnis formandis, De scholis catholicis, De missionibus*)

31. Jan Grootaers gives an ample narrative in “The Drama Continues between the Acts: the ‘Second Preparation’ and Its Opponents,” in Alberigo-Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, 2, 359-495. Grootaers’s reference to “opponents” indicates some pockets of resistance

Now the Council has to translate them into texts which will rejuvenate the Church *ad intra* and speak words *ad extra* of guidance, healing, and encouragement to the whole human family.

## Two Further Words of Pope John XXIII

A further notable word by Pope John went out in his Epiphany 1963 letter on the Council to each bishop of the Catholic Church.<sup>32</sup> He insists that during the recess the Council's work goes on, not only in the commissions but as well in the focused attention of all the bishops, who should keep in mind the Council topics. Even though the Pope will in time officially promulgate the Vatican II decisions, "it is nevertheless the duty of the Council Fathers to put forward all such decrees, deliberate on them, decide on their final form, and eventually subscribe to them together with the Roman Pontiff." The Council is having world-wide impact. "Indeed, the energy and activity displayed by the Church in recent months has exceeded all expectations. Such is the joyful and consoling news that reaches us daily from all quarters of the globe. It is indicative of the Church's abundant vitality." He is very pleased with the presence of the delegated observers from the separated communities. This prompts his reflection that while the council must deal with realities which impact the lives of Catholics, it cannot confine itself to these; otherwise, it would be inadequate to Christ, who gave himself for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Thus, the Council members must be ready to receive draft texts which will look *ad extra* and speak to points of urgency for the well-being of all peoples.

Finally, for interpreting the "first movement" of Vatican II in 1962, we have a precious word of Pope John himself, recorded by Fr. Robert Tucci, director of *La Civiltà cattolica*, after a long audience with the Pope on February 9, 1963. Tucci had asked how the Pope saw the Council's work so far.

He said that he was quite satisfied with the Council, even though it had entered fully into its work only during the final weeks, when it began to grasp the implications of his message of September and of his inaugural address of October 11. . . . During the first session, he preferred not to intervene in the debates, so as to leave to the Fathers their freedom of discussion and the chance to find the right way on their own. The bishops had to learn on their own, and they had done so.<sup>33</sup>

---

to the new directions, in Council commissions in which some influential members held doggedly to the drafts already prepared.

32. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 55 (1963), 149-159, in English in *The Encyclicals and Other Messages of John XXIII*, eds. John F. Cronin, Francis X. Murphy, and Ferrer Smith (Washington: TPS Press, 1964), 447-458.
33. Translation by J. Wicks from the text given by Roberto de Mattei, *Il concilio Vaticano II. Una storia mai scritta* (Turin: Lindau, 2010), 286-288. The author cited Fr. Tucci's diary from the manuscript copy kept in the Istituto per le scienze religiose, Bologna.

## A Glance Ahead to Vatican II's Documentary Outcome Now in Our Hands

The "second preparation," set in motion and guided by Pope John XXIII, led directly into the further unfolding of Vatican II in the Council's three further Periods and in the sixteen Vatican II documents approved and then promulgated by Pope Paul VI. The documents are the lasting fruit, which we now have, of what Pope John initiated.

*Ad intra* Vatican II gives us *Dei Verbum*, on God's saving revelation and inspired Scripture. Vatican II gives us *Lumen gentium*, on the mystery of the Church and the universal call to holiness. And Vatican II gives us *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, on the worship by those associated with Christ the Highpriest in glorifying God and sanctifying souls. These are three notable texts that can still promote what John XXIII longed for, that is, the Church's ongoing rejuvenation.

*Ad extra* Vatican II gives us and gives the world *Gaudium et spes*, on human dignity and on human tasks in the face of critical issues of modern life (family, culture, economic activity, war and peace). Vatican II gives us and the world *Nostra aetate*, on respect for the world religions and especially on the Jews as our elder brothers in covenant with God. Vatican II gives us and the world *Dignitatis humanae*, on the basic human right of immunity from any coercion regarding religion. These are three notable words to humankind – loving words of solidarity and wise guidance toward a better life for humanity in our world. ■