

Vatican council ii



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Second Vatican Council was formally opened by Pope John XXIII on 11 October 1962 and closed under Pope Paul VI on 8 December 1965. Its aim was "... to throw open the windows of the Catholic Church so that we can see out and the people can see in." - Pope John XXIII. The main topics discussed were the Church itself, ecumenism and other religions, relation to the modern world and the liturgy of mass. The Catholic Church recognised the increasing rift between people and their relationship with God and the Church, and created four constitutions which addressed the issue.

Dei Verbum (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy). These documents are responses to the external issues and internal issues that impacted the Church, and are further discussed later. The 1960's was a huge counter-cultural movement which challenged the traditional codes of behaviour linked to sexuality and interpersonal relationships.

With the sexual revolution brought the normalisation of pre-marital sex, the contraception and the pill, homosexuality and later; the legalisation of abortion. There was a rapid evolution of a youth subculture which encouraged experimentation and change, and religious values were disregarded and replaced with hedonistic attitudes. This impacted the Church because the one of the fundamental teachings of the Church is that sexual intercourse is only to express married love and for the procreation of children.

The Church opposed abortion and contraception as it goes against their teachings and this caused an uproar from the feminists. Their argument was that they should have “ free choice because it’s my body”. The Church until this time was also a male dominant body, and women began to fight for the right to become a priest and for female altar servers. The advancement of technology also impacted the Church as prior to TV and travelling technology, society had a narrow view of the world, and mainly stuck to their own local community.

The Church had played a huge role in their life because of this. But when TV became more popular, people began to spend more time watching TV and learning about things more relevant to their lives, and it became another “ voice” they listened to. With the rise of technology, the “ voice” of the Church became less significant. These were the major social changes which impacted the Church and some changes were made to counter the issues. During this time the Church was also facing internal issues as well as being confronted with social changes.

Mass attendance was falling due to a lot of social changes. This included the sexual revolution, the role of women in society and decreased respect for the church as an authority figure. “ The sexual revolution was a development in the modern world which saw the significant loss of power by the values of a morality rooted in the Christian tradition and the rise of permissive societies of attitudes that were accepting of greater sexual freedom and experimentation that spread all over the world. ” (Extract from Wikipedia).

Falling mass attendance may also have been due to people not being able to understand the mass, as it was in Latin or maybe feeling that the Church was

too hierarchal in the way that the laity weren't allowed to contribute during mass. Another issue was that religious numbers were also falling as many of the religious and priests had left Europe on missions. There was also tension between Protestant Churches and the Catholic Church, as the Church's main goal was to convert as many people to Catholicism as possible.

The role and structure of the Church was also under speculation as many thought the Church needed an "update" to society, and others believed that the old traditions should not be changed at all, and this caused some conflict within the Church. In order to deal with these internal and external issues, the Vatican Council II created four documents which responded to these matters. The first dogmatic constitution was Dei Verbum which was about Divine Revelation.

Divine Revelation can be defined as God's activity in making himself and his purposes known to mankind through Christ, the prophets and the apostles. Pre Vatican II, the Church taught that only priests could read and interpret scripture. But Council stated " Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful. But since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books. "(Dei Verbum p. 22). This basically meant that anyone could read the bible, but the magisterium alone has been trusted with guiding and teaching the meaning of the scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit. The aim of this change was so that " Through the reading and study of the sacred books " the word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified" (Thessalonians. 3: 1)

and the treasure of revelation, entrusted to the Church, may more and more fill the hearts of men. This change was adopted because the bible was written for everyone and therefore everyone has the chance to learn all about God's Revelation and his gifts to all people. The second dogmatic constitution is Lumen Gentium which redefined the structure and role of the Church. The church recognises Christ as the head of the body, and as the image of the invisible God, and that all members must be formed in his likeness until Christ is formed in them. It also became more focused on diversity and pluralism, rather than being a private circle of religious.

It said that " In virtue of this catholicity each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to attain fullness in unity," (Lumen Gentium p. 13), explaining that the Church is not just about bishops, priests and the pope, but also all the faithful. Priests were described as " its support and mouthpiece, called to the service of the People of God," (Willis, M. Lumen Gentium Summary, p. 3), which clarified their vocation as not just preaching the word of God, but also being there to guide and support the community. A dogmatic constitution on the Church was also formed about sacred liturgy. This document revealed the changes made to mass. One of the external issues during the 60's was falling mass attendance. The youth were rebelling and trying new things and their attitude towards the Church had changed. Before Sacrosanctum Concilium, there were several differences between the traditional mass, and the mass we know today. God who " wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (Timothy 2: 4).

Probably the biggest change was that the language of the mass changed from Latin to vernacular. This meant that the laity could now completely understand what was going on at mass. To promote participation, the people were encouraged to take part by means of readings, responses, hymns and giving out communion. The communion rail was withdrawn, and the priest now has his back to the tabernacle to face the people. The document also allowed altar girls. These changes were made so that the Church was more appealing to people, so that they felt more welcome and interested in the Church again.

The last dogmatic constitution made was *Gaudium et Spes*. This document deals with the relevance of the Church and its place in society. It also talks about interaction with other faiths. The Council expresses a desire to engage in conversation with the entire human family so that the Church can cooperate in solving contemporary problems. It addresses this Constitution to Catholics, to all Christians, and to the whole of humanity. The Council sets out to establish a working relationship with the world, claiming " Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic or social order.

The purpose which He set before her is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law. " (*Gaudium et Spes* p. 11). The Church is desired to assist the whole of humanity to overcome all strife and conflict between nations, and this sense of unity comes from one of its fundamental beliefs that the Church is one with the Holy Spirit. One way this was shown Pope John XXIII invited

other Christians outside of the Catholic Church to send observers to the Council.

Acceptances came from both the Protestant denominations and Eastern Orthodox churches. The goal of conforming people to Catholicism was no more, instead the Church now preaches Ecumenism. While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass. " The Council wished to ponder the many problems and possibilities of the modern world " in the light of the gospel and of human experience". Michael Paul Gallagher SJ, *Reaching out to the world: Gaudium et Spes*). In its final form, *Gaudium et Spes* encourages a " new humanism" marked by a greater sense of our responsibility for history. God, so to speak, gives the world into our hands. We are dramatically free and called, with the help of grace, to transform this planet through loving service. These responses strengthened the mission of the Church for a contemporary society. The Church acknowledged that there was growing secularism in society, and that growing numbers of people are abandoning religion in practice. Church does not only communicate divine life to men but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth, most of all by its healing and elevating impact on the dignity of the person, by the way in which it strengthens the seams of human society and imbues the everyday activity of men with a deeper meaning and importance", (*Gaudium et Spes*, p. 40) summarises the mission of the Church in contemporary society; to bring salvation. It was Pope John XXIII who realised that the Church had "... o throw open the windows of the Catholic Church so that we can see out and

the people can see in," (Pope John XXIII), so that they can understand and come to terms with the always changing society, to reform itself to the needs of the people. Through the four dogmatic constitutions of the Second Vatican Council, the Church was able to renew their relationship with the world, renovate new ways to communicate with the whole of humanity, and achieve its goal of making Church more engaging and relevant to a contemporary society.

The Second Vatican Council was the most significant event for the Catholic Church in the 20th century. It had four aims; to impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful, to adapt more closely to the need of our age those institutions which are subject to change, to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ and to strengthen whatever can help to call all mankind into the Church's fold.

The four dogmatic constituents; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dei Verbum* and *Lumen Gentium*, addressed internal and external issues that impacted the Church, and endeavoured to answer them. Such issues included the sexual revolution of the 60's, the feminist movement, the reformation of the protestant church, and falling mass attendance. The responses strived to improve these circumstances and help to bring people closer to God. The allowance of female altar servers, the changes to liturgy in order to make it more engaging to people and the preaching of ecumenism helped restore relationships between the Church and the faithful, and the Church and other religions. There are still unresolved issues and debates involving the Church, such as contraception and abortion and the request for female priests, and if the Church was to call another Council,

these would be the issues discussed. Overall, the Second Vatican Council was successful in making a difference and re-establishing its role in the world today.

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