

# Vatican II: The Radical Shift to Ecumenism

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The Catholic Church is the world's oldest, most continuous organization in the world. But it has not lasted so long without changing and adapting to the times. One of the greatest examples of the Catholic Church's adaptation to the modernization of society is through the Second Vatican Council, held from 11 October 1962 to 8 December 1965. In this gathering of church leaders, the Catholic Church attempted to shift into a new paradigm while still remaining orthodox in faith. It sought to bring the Church, along with the faithful, fully into the twentieth century while looking forward into the twenty-first. Out of the two billion Christians in the world, nearly half of those are Catholic.<sup>1</sup> But, Vatican II affected not only the Catholic Church, but Christianity as a whole through the principles of ecumenism and unity.

There are many reasons the council was called, both in terms of internal, Catholic needs and also in aiming to promote ecumenism among non-Catholics. There was also an unprecedented event that occurred in the vein of ecumenical beginnings: the invitation of preeminent non-Catholic theologians and leaders to observe the council proceedings. This event, giving outsiders an inside look at

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<sup>1</sup> World Religions (2005). The Association of Religious Data Archives, accessed 13 April 2014, [http://www.thearda.com/QuickLists/QuickList\\_125.asp](http://www.thearda.com/QuickLists/QuickList_125.asp).

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the Catholic Church's way of meeting modern needs, allowed for more of a reaction from non-Catholics. Non-Catholics, for the first time, were affected by the events within the Catholic Church because of Vatican II.

Because the councils of the Catholic Church have not had much bearing on those outside of the Catholic faith and yet have had heavy impact on those within the faith, there has been vast amounts of research from the Catholic perspective on the Second Vatican Council but little research done on the topic from non-Catholic perspectives. Research from the Catholic perspective has been vast. Writings on the topic of Vatican II have spanned from simple commentaries on the conciliar documents, to interpretation of the documents and how to implement them within the Church to condemnation of the council for being too progressive.<sup>234</sup> Whatever the direction of the research, it must be noted that the vast majority of those who research and write on Vatican often have a suffix of religious orders following their names. This is not necessarily negative, as even Catholics have differing opinions of Vatican II. But, the non-Catholic voice, if heard in the academic realm, is very quiet, often being inadvertently spoken over by greater Catholic works.

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<sup>2</sup> An example of simple commentaries on conciliar documents: Flannery, Austin, O.P., ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1977.

<sup>3</sup> An example of implementation of Vatican II: Smith, Seth. "Implementing Vatican II in Two Rural, Southern Parishes." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 93-114. *America: History and Life with Full Text*, (accessed February 5, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> An example of the progressive attitude of some after Vatican II: Corrin, Jay P. "Book Preview: Catholic Progressives in England After Vatican II by Jay P. Corrin." *Political Theology Today*, 28 January 2014 (accessed 10 April 2014).

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The non-Catholic voices on Vatican II have been at times as mixed as much as the Catholic voices have. For example, on the topic of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) Dr. George A. Lindbeck, an American Lutheran theologian, describes the document as “highly ambiguous.” But he then goes on to describe the “intrinsic merits it possesses despite its ambiguities.”<sup>5</sup> There are however, dissenting voices to Vatican II from the non-Catholic perspective. In an article with The Guardian newspaper, Diarmaid MacCulloch pointed out the two opposing Catholic views of Vatican II. One view saw Vatican II as a council that “revolutionized the Roman Catholicism” while the other view “would mostly have preferred the council not to have met at all.”<sup>6</sup> MacCulloch then suggests that while the Catholic Church “has consistently spoken of its faithfulness to the principles of Vatican II” it actually has not. Instead, he says, the Vatican “must resort to “rewrit[ing] Vatican II’s history.” Despite the criticism of internal affairs within the Church proper, the point of this paper is not to offer a treatment of liturgy or Marian theology held within the conciliar documents. Rather, it is to discuss the Second Vatican Council’s adoption of ecumenism, the aim of promoting unity throughout the world’s Christian churches, and how that affected the non-Catholic reception and perception of the Catholic Church.

With the rise of an ecumenical attitude among Christians in the last few decades, the topics of the Second Vatican Council’s

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. George A. Lindbeck, “A Protestant Point of View,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John H. Miller, C.S.C. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966) 219.

<sup>6</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, “Vatican II: Benedict Rewrites History,” *Guardian* (London), 20 May 2010, accessed 12 April 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/may/20/pope-benedict-vatican-council>.

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decree on ecumenical activity and dialogue both within the Christian community (*Unitatis Redintegratio* - "Restoration of Unity") and outside of the Christian community (*Nostra Aetate* - "In Our Age") have become increasingly important. Pope John XXIII, the man responsible for the council's initiation said in the opening session of Vatican II,

...the Church should never depart from the sacred treasure of truth inherited from the Fathers. But at the same time she must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and the new forms of life introduced into the modern world.<sup>7</sup>

This statement sums up the totality of Vatican II: the keeping of Church doctrine and tradition, but an opening to the era of modernity and the opening of doors of dialogue between two religious groups that had been shut for centuries.

It would first be beneficial to define the aspects and terms inherent to this topic before further discussion. First, there are two types of council in the context of the Catholic Church. The first is a regional council, which deals only with the issues of a state, region, or country, as its name suggests. The second, and the type that is dealt with in terms of Vatican II, is an ecumenical, or worldwide council. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines an ecumenical council as,

A gathering of all the bishops of the world, in the exercise of their collegial authority over the universal Church. An

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<sup>7</sup> Pope John XXIII, from his Opening Speech to the Second Vatican Council in St Peter's, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Vatican City, 11 October 1962.

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ecumenical council is usually called by the successor of St. Peter, the Pope, or at least confirmed or accepted by him.<sup>8</sup>

It would also be beneficial to break down this definition and define it further. The bishops, being the highest leaders of the Church, having their own areas of jurisdiction called *dioceses*, and being second only to the Pope, must come together in their collegial manner. In the past, the councils were suggested by figures such as the Roman Emperor Constantine in the First Council of Nicaea of 325, but they were usually, in more modern times, called by the Pope himself. If the council is not called by the Pope, it must receive his recognition and confirmation to be accepted as a valid council.<sup>9</sup> Once these criteria have been met, any documents or declarations are held as binding to the faithful, as is outlined by entry 884 of the *Catechism*: “The college of bishops exercises power over the universal Church in a solemn manner in an ecumenical council.”<sup>10</sup>

There are multiple reasons why the Catholic Church would call a council to be convened. Many times, the councils of the past were called to refute ideas or teachings that did not coincide with the set orthodoxy that the Church held. One example of this is the Council of Nicaea, in which the Church denounced the Christology of an Egyptian priest named Arius, who held that Jesus was subordinate, therefore “lesser” than the God the Father. Without going into particulars of the theology behind the matter, the Church taught that Jesus was co-equal with the Father. Because this idea was contradictory to Church teaching, the bishops wanted to make clear their stance, thus calling the council to articulate the doctrine of

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<sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., 2356.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 587.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

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Jesus's equality with the Father. Council can also be called to update certain practices or to better define the beliefs and doctrines of the Church. Other times, councils are meant to simply reaffirm current practices and beliefs that have inadvertently been pushed aside or forgotten.

In October 1958, Cardinal Angelo Roncalli was elected as the next Pope. After the death of his predecessor, Pius XII, the cardinals needed someone to care for the recently war-torn and still recovering world after World War II. Roncalli was actually not a leading candidate going into conclave. Christopher Bellitto, in his history of the councils, gathers from the evidence at the time that Roncalli was chosen as "compromise and caretaker pope."<sup>11</sup> In other words, he was expected to only keep peace until another more progressive and active pope would follow. No one expected much from the newly elected pope until he chose his papal name: John XXIII, the name of the antipope who had been deposed as a usurper by the Council of Constance in 1413. The name was a complete surprise as was the new pontiff's outlook for the future of the Church.

By 1959, talk was already circulating about an ecumenical council being convened.<sup>12</sup> There were expectations from the Roman Curia, the central government of the Vatican, that they would have an easy time at the council. They expected to be given an agenda and simply give it their stamp of approval. But, the local bishops, and seemingly John XXIII wanted to try another method.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils: A History of the Twenty-One Church Councils from Nicaea to Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002) 126.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

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The Second Vatican Council was called by Pope John XXIII and was convened on 11 October 1962. Since councils are somewhat rare occurrences, Catholics over the world were curious as to what would be discussed and addressed by the bishops. Bishop Christopher Butler, a preeminent Council Father who attended the Vatican II sessions, had this to say in his book reflecting upon the council:

So there was to be a Second Vatican Council. What would be its business? Nothing in particular, it would appear; or perhaps it would be truer to say: everything. ... Christian unity was the Pope's distant goal, no doubt, but his immediate aim was 'to let some fresh air into the Church' and to promote within her an *aggiornamento*.<sup>14</sup>

The Italian term used by Bishop Butler, along with many Council Fathers and even the media at the time, *aggiornamento*, is translated "refresh," but in this context is best translated as "bringing up to date" or "modernization."<sup>15</sup> As McCarthy says in his brief history of Vatican II, *aggiornamento* was not simply a rejection of all that was old and a nonchalant embracing of the new and novel. It was "a disengagement from the limitations of the the past and from a culture no longer viable."<sup>16</sup> And this is exactly what Pope John XXIII sought to accomplish. He did not wish to address a threat to orthodoxy, for there really were none. Nor did he wish to address any matters of faith and morals, but sought to convene for "the

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<sup>14</sup> Bishop Christopher Butler O.S.B., *The Theology of Vatican II* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "aggiornamento.", accessed April 13, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aggiornamento>.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: Before and After Vatican II, 1878-1993* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1994) 63.

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enlightenment, edification, and joy of the entire Christian people.”<sup>17</sup> In the end, there were four defined goals of Vatican II: “to revitalize Catholics in spirituality, to adapt church observances to the modern requirements of the age, to unite all Christians, and to strengthen the church’s mission to all peoples.”<sup>18</sup> Essentially, the plan was to deal first with internal matters, then move outwards to the world.

John XXIII understood the movement of the world into a more modern phase, especially in terms of technology and the “shrinking” of the world. He wanted to meet the needs of a shifting society. But, as a “shepherd of the Church” he also wanted a more involved flock. Before Vatican II, the laity were quite uninvolved, especially in the liturgy of the Mass. John XXIII and the local bishops wished to reform the liturgy, especially in terms of shifting the language of the Mass from Latin to the vernacular so that parishioners could actually know what they were saying and praying.<sup>19</sup> By 1964, in America, English was permitted for use only during the teaching portions of the Mass. But by 1970, a Mass entirely in English was submitted for approval. After review, it was approved for nationwide use by the National Conference of Bishops in 1974.<sup>20</sup> The changes were somewhat drastic when compared to the previous centuries of Catholic Christianity and the shifts caused by Vatican II were received with differing opinions among Catholics in terms of liturgical reform. But the most widely impacting changes made in Vatican II were not within the Church *per se*, but how the Church

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<sup>17</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 128.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: Before and After Vatican II, 1878-1993* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1994) 62.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 129.

<sup>20</sup> Colleen McDannel, *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reformation in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2011) 121.



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interacted outside of the walls of the Vatican and individual churches.

Catholic councils had never really impacted non-Catholics. Until the Reformation, they had no need to address outside ecclesial communities, except for the occasional discrepancy with orthodoxy. But even after the Reformation, the councils were focused on reiterating the beliefs of the Church internal and had no bearing on how Catholics and non-Catholics would interact, much less work together. But as John XXIII said in the announcement of the council, it was to be a continuation of, but also a break with, the past.<sup>21</sup> One way in which this was accomplished was through the invitation of non-Catholic delegates into the Council Chambers.

This was the first time anything like this had been done, or even, arguably, considered by the Church. Not only did the Catholic Church allow the media to report the goings-on of the council, giving the council more of an ecumenical, world-wide aspect, but it allowed non-Catholics into the chambers of the council.<sup>22</sup> In the first portions of the council there were, according to Bellitto, thirty-one delegates from outside the Church that were present.<sup>23</sup> Stransky, in his recollection of the council on its fiftieth anniversary, counted 38 delegates.<sup>24</sup> By the end of the council proceedings, there were nearly one hundred delegates present, comprised from the Orthodox, Anglicans, and multiple Protestant groups.<sup>25</sup> Among just the Orthodox Church, the Chaldean, Armenian, Syrian, Coptic and

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 127.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P., "Vatican II: Recollections of an Insider, "Vatican II after Fifty Years" Symposium (Georgetown University, October 11, 2012) 131.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 131.

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Ethiopian churches were all represented.<sup>26</sup> They were not allowed to vote on the topics presented to the council and could not address the council during the official proceedings. But, there was a time in which the delegates were able to express their opinions, thoughts, and qualms with the proceedings during a once-weekly meeting in a specific forum.

There was a specific group composed for the purpose of dialogue called the Secretariat for Christian Unity where discussion of the proceedings was permitted.<sup>27</sup> Bellitto, among others, argues that some of the leading non-Catholic delegates actually held varying degrees of influence on some of the bishops, curia officials, and theologians through the informal dialogue of the Secretariat, causing them to have an indirect influence on the council proper.<sup>28</sup> Falconi, in his book detailing the popes of the twentieth century, says that “the most impressive and decisive help” came from these delegates in terms of ecumenical attitudes that were portrayed in the conciliar documents.<sup>29</sup> The informal meetings also facilitated for bonds to be made between members of differing faith communities. McCarthy notes similarly to Bellitto that with the informal meetings in the Secretariat that there was a fair amount of bonding. He notes that the Council received “exuberant praise” from Athenagoras, styled as the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>30</sup> An historic moment of note was also facilitated by this invitation to observance and openness of the Secretariat. For the first time ever since the

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P., “Vatican II: Recollections of an Insider, 131.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 131.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Falconi, Carlo. *The Popes of the Twentieth Century* (London: Weidendorf and Nicolson, 1967) 333.

<sup>30</sup> Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition*, 64.

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Reformation and forming of the Anglican Communion, a leader of the Anglican Church was sent to Rome and met with the leaders of the Catholic Church. Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury, met with John XXIII on 2 December 1960. This was an instant stitch to begin the healing of the wound of the English Reformation that occurred under the influence of King Henry the VIII in the sixteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

The initial reactions to the opening session were almost unanimously positive. United Methodist Church minister, Rev. Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker, made this clear in the opening address of her speech to the North American Academy of Ecumenists in 2012, 50 years after Vatican II occurred. She noted that the ecumenical attitude of Vatican II allowed her to see “through her liturgical lens” that she could share with Catholics her use of liturgy and a common baptism.<sup>32</sup> The Orthodox speaker at the same conference said that the most striking event in the opening of the council was the use of the term “sister Churches” between Catholics and Orthodox.<sup>33</sup> Cardinal Albert Meyer even, though he was Catholic, perceived the shift in attitude: “I don't think any Council Father could go back home the same. In a sense I found the [first session of the] Council to be better than the best retreat I ever made.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Fuchs, Lorelei F. “Introduction to the NAAE 2012 Presentations: ‘The Ecumenical Legacy of the Second Vatican Council, 50 Years Later.’” *Journal Of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 2 (Spring2013 2013): 145.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>34</sup> Avella, Steven M. “I Don't Think Any Council Father Could Go Back Home the Same.” Albert G. Meyer and Preparing for Vatican II: A Case Study of Episcopal Transformation.” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 2 (Spring2012 2012): 25-37.

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The Second Vatican Council was by far the largest council in the history of the Catholic Church, at one point having as many as 2,700 attendees, and one of the longer councils, spanning three years from 1962 to 1965.<sup>35</sup> The council proceedings produced sixteen documents, totaling approximately in 103,000 words.<sup>36</sup> Each document produced a certain set of either reiterated and restated concepts or new or shifted ideas. There are too many principles to name without giving them their own treatment in their own respective documents. But there is one which is pertinent to the discussion of non-Catholic reception and perception.

The principle of most importance to outside relations with non-Catholic Christians is the principle of ecumenism. McCarthy explained this as a shift in Catholic thought from hostility towards other Christian churches to a respect of their shared heritage in Christianity and a shift to recognizing that other groups “possess true elements of the one and only Church of Christ.”<sup>37</sup> It should also be noted that after the council’s declaration of respect in ecumenism, especially in the documents *Orientalium ecclesiarum* (*Of the Eastern Churches*) and *Unitatis redintegratio* (*Restoration of Unity*), many events occurred that reflected that the sentiments did not exist in the documents alone, but also in the hearts of the participants.

In *Orientalium ecclesiarum*, the Catholic Church wrote respectfully of the Eastern Catholic Churches and noted that they all shared a belief in the primacy of Peter and therefore the pope, drawing a common thread between them.<sup>38,39</sup> This brought the

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<sup>35</sup> Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>38</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 141.

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Eastern Catholics closer to the Western Catholics, but also helped to heal some of the schism between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Talks took place on the difference and yet similarities of the methodology between the West and East that helped educated the two groups of their similar past.

In *Unitatis redintegratio*, the Catholic Church acknowledged their own portion of blame in the events leading up to, during, and following the Protestant Reformation. There was another assertion of the common heritage in Christianity that Catholics and non-Catholics shared, even if the link was more separated than that of the Orthodox. It also sought to form an atmosphere of respect, even in areas of disagreement. To further form this respect, the council declared that Catholics and non-Catholics alike should seek to “treat each other fairly, learn about each other, pray together, and share in social justice activities.”<sup>4041</sup>

The aforementioned Secretariat for Christian Unity played a pivotal role in both the ecumenical activity and in the growth of ecumenical attitudes among those present at the conciliar proceedings. The Secretariat acted as the bridge between the Catholic and non-Catholic churches, having individual “sub-commissions” that each dealt with the specific nature of each visiting group. The Secretariat was split up into seven “conversation groups:” the Orthodox Church in the United States, the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Churches, the Presbyterian-Reformed Churches, other Christian Churches (such as the Baptist Church or

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<sup>39</sup> Flannery, Austin, O.P., ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1977) 535-552.;

<sup>40</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 142.

<sup>41</sup> Flannery, Austin, O.P., ed. *Vatican Council II*, 535-552.

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the Disciples of Christ), the Methodist Church, and the National Council of Churches together with the U.S. Conference of the World Council of Churches.<sup>42</sup>

For example, The Orthodox met with the Secretariat for the first time on 26 September 1966. The proceedings of the Secretariat allowed for certain topics to be discussed and decided on. There were three immediate tasks that the members of the joint committee wanted to discuss and come to terms on. The first was “the diversity of methodology in [their] separate traditions.”<sup>43</sup> This topic addressed the similarities and differences of liturgy and other practices of worship. The discussion did not come to any sort of agreement or disagreement, but instead was a learning opportunity for both parties.

The second task addressed the subject of Eucharistic intercommunion between the two churches. Where the Catholic party believed that due to valid apostolic succession<sup>44</sup> the Orthodox had a valid sacrament for Catholics, the Orthodox disagreed and forbade intercommunion later in 1966. A year later, the Catholic Church recommended jointly with the Orthodox that intercommunion not be practiced.<sup>45</sup> This decision had a positive effect in that the Catholic and Orthodox leaders mutually agreed on

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<sup>42</sup> Philip Gleason, ed., *Contemporary Catholicism in the United States* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) 78.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Apostolic succession is the doctrine that the powers of ordination and the ability to perform sacraments were passed down from the Apostles. According to both Catholic and Orthodox belief, without being given the direct handing on of this power, the sacrament is non-existent.

<sup>45</sup> Philip Gleason, ed., *Contemporary Catholicism in the United States* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) 78-79.

their standing in relation to each other. But, the recommendation (and forbidding on the part of the Orthodox) reinforced the division between the two churches, but with theological caution rather than prejudice.

The last task discussed was the “possibility of cooperation in theological education and priestly formation.”<sup>46</sup> The discussion only addressed the possibility of such cooperation and did not come to an official decision. Though the differences between the Catholic and Orthodox kept them from fully cooperating in terms of joint seminaries, they could still cooperate and discuss in matters that they agreed such as matters of social justice. All of the churches within the Secretariat had proceedings similar to this as they strove to find common ground with each other.

Ecumenical councils, especially since the Great Schism of 1054 and the Protestant Reformation, had often been internal affairs that excluded those outside the Catholic Church. Some councils, such as Lyons II and Florence, attempted to bandage and heal the wounds to the Church. They seemed to work in the immediate outset, but they eventually, and quickly, failed. However, Vatican II was different. The *aggiornamento* of John XXIII brought in newness. There was now an atmosphere of good will and inclusion that breathed life into Catholic and non-Catholic relations.<sup>47</sup> It was also the actions of Paul VI, the immediate successor of John XXIII, that proved this loving attitude of good will. A quote from Douglas Horton’s book *Toward An Undivided Church* explains the new spirit that Vatican II offered:

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 78.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 141.

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The reason that so many of us feel our faith in the church revived, as thirst is slaked and vitality returned to a mountain climber when he reaches a spring, is because we realize that with the Vatican Council and the ecumenical movement of today we are given, in the providence of God, a new chance. We can drink the same pure waters that gave strength to the early church.<sup>48</sup>

With this new spring of ecumenism, Vatican II began the path to, if not eventual complete union, Christian unity. The quest now is “for genuine understanding and... unity.”<sup>49</sup> As Colman J. Barry, O.S.B., a Catholic historian, says, “separated Christians have moved from looking upon one another basically as strangers to seeing each other more and more as brothers. To that, one can only add a fervent “Amen.”<sup>50</sup>

The first outwardly evident event that came from the ecumenical attitude of Vatican II took place in January 1964, before Vatican II had even drawn to a close. Pope Paul VI, the successor of John XXIII (who had died before he could see the fulfillment of his council), met with Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I in Jerusalem at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and had a friendly and brotherly exchange.<sup>51</sup> In December 1965, an unprecedented and unexpected event took place between Paul VI and Athenagoras I: the

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<sup>48</sup> Douglas Horton, *Towards An Undivided Church* (New York: Association Press, 1967) 48.

<sup>49</sup> Lerond Curry, *Protestant-Catholic Relations in America: World War I Through Vatican II* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972) 89.

<sup>50</sup> Colman J. Barry, O.S.B., review of *Protestant-Catholic Relations in America. World War I through Vatican II* by Lerond Curry, *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (October 1975) 575-577.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 142.



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mutual excommunications that had been in place since the Great Schism of 1054 were lifted. Athenagoras I later welcomed Paul VI to Istanbul while on one of his pontifical tours. Paul VI, mirroring the gesture of love, did the same in Rome only three months after.<sup>52</sup>

Pope John Paul II, in his twenty-seven year pontificate, worked tirelessly to care for his own flock but to also continue the goal of unity and cooperation that Vatican II began. In 1995, he wrote a papal encyclical titled *Ut Unum Sint*, "That They May Be One." In this encyclical, he shifted from the position that was previously presented by Pope Pius XI.<sup>53</sup> In 1928, Pius XI put out an encyclical that gently, and with theological reasoning, forbade Catholics from "interfaith reunion movements" so as to limit the risk of his flock leaving the Church through compromising their beliefs.<sup>54</sup> Pius XI instead thought that the only return to unity that could be made was through bringing the "separated churches" back into communion with the Catholic Church proper. John Paul II shifted the line of ecumenical thought and took a much more active approach.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Papal encyclicals do not carry the full authority of the Magisterium, the teaching body of the Church. Yet, they are not just scholarly works for theologians. They are addressed to the whole Church, and even to those outside of it, for the betterment of the world and Christianity in general.

<sup>54</sup> William H. Lazareth, *The Ecumenical Legacy of Pope John Paul II*, <https://www.carthage.edu/augustine/discussions/summer2005-2/>.

Pius XI's reasoning for not communing with other Christian services is not due to bias but for the thought that "the union of Christians can only be promoted by promoting the return to the one true Church of Christ of those who are separated from it, for in the past they have unhappily left it."

<sup>55</sup> The shift of thought from Pius XI to John Paul II seems contradictory, but were, in reality, approaches that differed in pastoral policy and thought. Pius XI indeed wanted to restore unity, but feared in a watered-down Catholicism. John Paul II simply took a more emboldened and open approach.

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Granted, the times shifted as well and allowed for a less strict interpretation of ecumenism than the Twenties provided. He wrote that "ecumenism is not 'an appendix' added to traditional church activity." Rather, he said it was "an organic part of [the Church's] life and work that consequently must pervade all that she is and does."<sup>56</sup>

Having worked on the original Vatican II document *Unitatis Redintegratio*, then as Archbishop of Krakow Karol Wojtyla, John Paul II had always had a mind for unity. One of the biggest breakthroughs in ecumenical activity was the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification from 1999 between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church. It read,

Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.

The Catholic Church had never before officially endorsed and accepted an ecumenical document as such. This Catholic-Lutheran joint agreement marked a major breakthrough in Christian ecumenism. The two churches could finally agree on the manner of justification and it allowed for more unity to occur later. In 2006 the World Methodist Council also accepted this joint document in an unanimous vote.<sup>57</sup>

After the death of John Paul II, Benedict XVI succeeded him and continued his quest for ecumenism, but in a more conservative

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<sup>56</sup> William H. Lazareth, *The Ecumenical Legacy of Pope John Paul II*, <https://www.carthage.edu/augustine/discussions/summer2005-2/>

<sup>57</sup> Wooden, Cindy. "Methodists adopt Catholic-Lutheran declaration on justification". Catholic News Service (24 July 2006) Retrieved 2014-01-17.

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manner. He was not as forward as his predecessors. He tended to spend more time in a more scholarly setting, writing books and encyclicals, and also dealing with the internal affairs of the Church. Yet, he still sought to maintain if not increase the sense of unity they had helped create. Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens, of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece, visited Pope Benedict XVI in December 2006. It was the first time any leading member of the Church of Greece participated in an official visit to the Vatican. Archbishop Christodoulos was also present for the funeral of Pope John Paul II. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, was also present for the funeral mass, showing the growth in affection between the sister churches.

In his book *Christianity and Politics*, Pecknold described how Pope Benedict XVI met with Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople:

Celebrating the Feast of Apostles Peter and Paul in St. Peter's Basilica together, both pastors delivered homilies reflecting on the respective missions of Peter and Paul, whose relationship has always held so much significance for Catholic-Orthodox relations. Patriarch Bartholomew I, especially, stressed how Peter and Paul had become brothers in their martyrdom, and how in Orthodox icons they are often portrayed exchanging a "holy kiss." The Orthodox patriarch reflected on how, in celebrating the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, that holy kiss is shared once more as a witness to all people.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> C.C. Pecknold, *Christianity and Politics: A Brief Guide to the History* (Cascade, 2010) 168.

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Benedict XVI also had some ecumenical contact with Lutherans especially, which was somewhat expected due to his German heritage. John L. Allen, Jr., in his book *Cardinal Ratzinger*, describes Benedict's feelings towards Lutherans to be much like John Paul II's feelings towards the Orthodox; feelings of affection and longing for unity. Both popes wanted to reunify the division that separated them so long ago.

Pope Francis has outspokenly made it clear how he feels about ecumenism. An article in the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, Francis shares that "ecumenism is a priority [for me]." When Bartholomew I visited the Pope the Patriarch said:

"When we met there, the fact we were both living in the *Domus Sanctae Marthae* meant we had the chance to have a few brotherly chats and sit down to table together. As you know, the Pope took the suite I usually stay in when I come to the Vatican. At one point he said to me: 'I stole your room...' to which I replied: 'You're welcome to have it!'"<sup>59</sup>

At the end of a homily during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Pope Francis said: "Unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather unity comes about in journeying. If we do not walk together, if we do not pray for one another, if we do not collaborate... then unity will not come about."<sup>60</sup> He also discussed another type of ecumenism, one not explicitly discussed in a wide circle. Francis, in the same *La Stampa* article, was quoted discussing an "ecumenism of blood." In this quote, Francis told the

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<sup>59</sup> Andrea Tornielli, Pope Francis' Ecumenism, *La Stampa*, 28 January 2014, accessed May 2, 2014, <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/francesco-francisco-francis-ecumenismo-ecumenism-31594/>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

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story of a parish priest after the Nazi occupation of Hamburg. The priest was working on the beatification of another priest who was guillotined for teaching children the catechism. A Lutheran minister was killed for the same reason. The priest in charge of the beatification insisted that he work not only on the recognition of the priest, but also of the Lutheran minister. This, Francis says, is the ecumenism of blood. He said, "Those who kill Christians don't ask for your identity card to see which Church you were baptized in. We need to take these facts into consideration."<sup>61</sup> He then stated that "we are united in blood... unity is a gift that we need to ask for."<sup>62</sup> The call for brotherhood in the tone of Francis's speeches has been and continues to be unmistakable.

Ecumenism and unity, two of the most key aspects of Vatican II, have become a major focus of not just the Catholic Church, but many other Christian groups as well. Where before there was animosity and chilly separation between Catholics and non-Catholics, there is now a warm appreciation and cooperation to simply make the world a better place together. One of the most forward acknowledgements of Vatican II's strong influence on Christian cooperation comes from a Methodist theologian who was present at the Council, Albert C. Outler. After seeing the progress that had been made due to the council's influence he said,

What about us non-Romans in the aftermath of Vatican II? The first part of my answer to this question is that, in a curious way, the council has given us a charter for change, too. For the blunt truth is that, with Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church has leapfrogged the rest of us on at least two

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

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fronts: church renewal and ecumenical action.... But there is finally no evading the challenge of Vatican II that we go and do likewise – with our equivalents of renewal and reform.<sup>63</sup>

Vatican II not only changed the path of the Catholic Church, but that of the other Christian churches as well. And the future of Christianity, as is suggested by Outler above, is bound to see more of a move towards unity and cooperation.

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<sup>63</sup> Will, J. Abbot, “*Strangely Warmed:*” *United Methodist Reception of Vatican II*, class paper.