

# VATICAN II... 10 Years Later

## The Day Pope John Intervened

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Rome — Pope John XXIII had been Pope for just three months when, on Jan. 25, 1959, he made the first and completely unexpected announcement of his plan to convoke the Church's 21st Ecumenical Council, the first since Vatican I of 1869-70.



On Oct. 11, 1962, after nearly four years of exhaustive preparation, the Second Vatican Council finally opened.

Rome opened its festive arms to receive the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and other participants of the council who had streamed into the city from all corners of the world.

The atmosphere was charged with suppressed excitement and anticipation, but, beneath it all lay a disturbing weight of apprehension, even fear.

Aware of this undercurrent, the 80-year-old Pope John, in his opening address to the Council Fathers on the morning of Oct. 11, felt constrained to chide the prophets of doom.

But the bishops, in large numbers, were skeptical, confused, and disquieted. The Second Vatican Council, as they saw it beginning to take shape, could well set the Catholic Church back a hundred years.

What later became the "majority" in the council, in the first days of the first session, an unorganized and discouraged group of bishops.

For the past 3½ years of preparatory work they had been consistently overruled by the Pope's own officials in the Vatican congregations, especially by those in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Holy Office) and in the Congregation for Seminaries and Universities.

Various decisions of Pope John in the preceding months had given the impression that the Holy Father was entirely under the influence of the "conservative" elements in the higher echelons of the Church.

On the other hand, the Pope had charmed everyone with his informality and readiness to part with tradition. He had placed his pontificate under the sign of the

unity of Christians, and had given concrete expression to this by the creation of the Secretariat for Christian Unity. He had arranged that Protestant and Orthodox clergy be invited to participate as observers.

Despite all this, the bishops from northern Europe were pessimistic. The real decisions seemed, at least at that moment, to be in the hands of those who were hostile to all the liturgical, theological, pastoral, and other related enterprises already under way in those countries.

There are those who say that Pope John temporized in order to gain time for the council to constitute itself: once convened, it was believed, it would become the master of its own destiny.

This is a possible explanation of the pontiff's apparent softness in the immediate pre-conciliar months. In his inaugural address on Oct. 11, he stressed the "predominantly pastoral" role of the council. But his urgings, many feared, would be no guarantee that the council would not take the time-honored road of previous councils, marked by the customary warning signs of condemnations and anathemas.

The French and German bishops were particularly concerned, and their leadership in the first days was to prove vital and decisive.

Pope John's ideas were never very clear — or at least precise — to others, and probably not even to himself. But he did tip the balance at the most strategic and critical moment, in a way that was a revelation of his spirit and his methods.

The watershed for the council in those first formative days was the crucial vote of Nov. 20, on the issue of the relationship between Tradition and Scripture.

A preliminary draft of "The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" was presented for discussion and met with severe criticism. After a few days, a vote was taken to decide whether the draft should be rewritten. The result was affirmative by about 60 per cent; but according to the regulations set up beforehand, a two-thirds majority was required.



I remember vividly the thick gloom that pervaded the press room that evening, reflecting the despair of the French and German bishops.

It was at this point that Pope John made his famous intervention: he overrode the regulation, confirmed the majority preference, and constituted a new joint commission to recast the text.

Pope John's intervention reflected his pragmatic belief that, rules of procedure or not, when about 60 per cent of the Council Fathers felt the way they did about the draft document, their opinion ought to be respected.

On this occasion, an American Protestant observer remarked that now he understood how useful a Pope can be.

The vote on the Scripture-Tradition issue, combined with the Pope's dramatic acknowledgement of the validity of a majority opinion, was the first and most significant test of strength in the Second Vatican Council.

From that point on, the eventual "majority" felt its identity and power.

## The Quest for Unity

By EUGENE CARSON BLAKE  
Retiring General Secretary, World Council of Churches

Geneva (RNS) — The Second Vatican Council signaled a tremendous breakthrough for Protestant-Roman Catholic relations. It started us on the road to Christian unity in a way that would have seemed unthinkable before 1962. On the eve of the Ecumenical Council no one had the slightest hope that a document like the Decree on Ecumenism would be one of its results.

Now we need another such breakthrough, a second departure on the path toward unity (and this time I hope that Protestants, Anglicans and Orthodox will be an integral part of a single caravan). Why do I say this?

It seems to me that *de oecumenismo* is now out of date. It has been surpassed by events. In some places fellowship between the separate Churches has been growing so rapidly in the last few years that many old controversies no longer seem insurmountable. And on many levels attempts are being made to find common ways of expressing our faith.

While *de oecumenismo* was precedent-shattering, it was designed primarily to set forth the conditions under which encounter might take place between Protestants and Roman Catholics. It prompted a proliferation of visits between church dignitaries at the highest level, many theological consultations, as well as formal gestures of goodwill and protestations of friendship.

But this is not unity. It is only a first step, the first leg of the journey. Certainly it does not ensure a safe passage or guarantee a timely arrival. Actually the drafters of the Decree on Ecumenism must have realized this, for its final section expressed the need for "the future inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

Perhaps one reason why Christian unity has not progressed in some quarters beyond the friendly gesture stage is that Protestants, Anglicans and Orthodox still consider themselves only "delegated observers," as they were at Vatican II. They mistakenly thought that *agglomeramento* was a Roman Catholic word and failed to see the need for genuine renewal in their own Churches. Where, in the past 10 years, has there been a Protestant effort comparable to Roman Catholic renewal of the liturgy? Where have Protestants shown the same zeal for delving into the meaning of Scripture and making fresh efforts to attain a collegial ministry?

Responding to post-Vatican II Roman Catholic overtures, the World Council of Churches launched the Joint Working Group with the Roman Catholic Church to work on theological issues that have divided us for centuries. Some measure of agreement has now been reached on the need for common witness to the Christian faith and the concepts of "catholicity" and "apostolicity."



By far the most gratifying and promising result of the Decree on Ecumenism has been the blossoming of Protestant and Roman Catholic collaboration at local and national levels. Today, Roman Catholics participate in 18 national councils of churches scattered around the world. Locally they are involved in 73% of the local councils in Great Britain, in all 250 councils in the Netherlands and 50 in the U.S.A. And it is impossible to catalogue all the ad hoc consortia working on specific projects of mutual concern.

And wherever Christians in local situations experience true spiritual fellowship through working and praying together, they soon begin to ask: Why are we still separated at the Lord's Table? Why can't we celebrate the central sacrament of unity together? Isn't this a denial of the common affirmation of the Lord, one faith, one baptism?

One cannot blame them for their impatience to get on with the achievement of Christian unity.

Likewise, I would hope that American Christians of various communions will soon sit down and work out commonly agreed solutions to two specific problems that vitally affect masses of people in the United States. I am thinking of abortion and education. Here are two very practical tests of our will to Christian unity.

## Sister Mary Luke Tobin

### A Woman's View

Denver (RNS) — "Greater personal responsibility, individual dignity, social concern and participation" are the most striking fruits of the Second Vatican Council for women religious in the Catholic Church, according to a nun who was an auditor at the council.



Making an assessment of the impact of Vatican II some ten years after it began, Sister Mary Luke Tobin, a former superior general of her order, the Sisters of Loretto, said that from her perspective the Church is "making headway" in its renewal, although at times "slowly."

At the same time, she noted that "many Catholics" especially the laity, have failed to integrate into their lives the concept of responsibility that was put forward by the council. "The council told us, 'you are the Church,' but many Catholics have not understood that they must participate more fully."

She indicated that it may be the particular role of the religious to "take the lead" in making the entire People of God more aware of their opportunities for participation and responsibility.

Generally "optimistic" about the changes that have taken place and which she believes will continue to occur in years to come, Sister Tobin said that from her point of view change for religious women has centered in four areas: "personal responsibility, individual dignity, social concern and participation."

A strong social activist and outspoken opponent of the Vietnam war, Sister Tobin also is a strong proponent of women's rights in the Church and in society.

"I would have liked some stronger positions on these areas in the Vatican documents," she observed. "But I still think there is enough substance there, and, after all, progress has been made."

Touching again on her Vatican II "theme"—you are the Church—she said this "made a great difference to many in the religious life and to many congregations," because it also can be stated, "You are the congregation."

Today, she said, as typified by her own order, all members of the congregation are "involved" in the operation more than ever before. "Each one feels she has an important responsibility."

Sister Tobin pointed to increased participation of nuns in general chapters and assemblies, the growing involvement in policy-making and decisions, the openness, and especially the "improved communication" on all levels.

One of the new approaches to religious life which Sister Tobin attributes to Vatican II is the emergence of the "importance of the person" as opposed to the importance of the congregation. She said the person is the "greatest asset" even though she must work within the framework of the congregation and follow its general policies.

