Vatican Council II – Overview:
Rev. Benjamin P. Bradshaw

“Standing before you I tremble with emotion but am humbly resolute in my purpose to proclaim a twofold celebration: a diocesan synod for the city of Rome, and a general Council for the universal Church.”
–Pope Blessed John XXIII, January 25, 1959
(only 87 days after his election as Roman Pontiff)

I.) **What is an Ecumenical Council?**

General or Ecumenical Council are meetings/councils called by a pope, though historically not always a pope, whose attendees generally include the worlds bishops. They are not held on a regular schedule but are generally called as needed. Ecumenical Councils, such as Vatican II (21st Ecumenical Council), involve the worlds bishops with the pope. These should be distinguished from Local, Plenary, or Provincial Councils or synods of bishops occurring within a particular country (i.e. Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1800’s which produced the Baltimore Catechism). While it is not necessary that the pope actually attends all sessions or meetings of a Council, it is necessary that the Pontiff ultimately approve of the teachings and declarations of a Council in order for them to be binding upon the faithful of the Church and to be considered without error as regards faith and morals.

We are reminded that the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, in addition to the other twenty ecumenical councils, include teachings that we are required to believe in order to remain Catholics. While they were not *pronounced* as infallible dogmas per se, we believe that the Council Fathers, in union with the Roman Pontiff, were guided by the Holy Spirit in their deliberations and these teachings are without error, in spite of the fact that the Fathers themselves were fallible and imperfect men. Thus the teachings of an Ecumenical Council are not considered binding on the faithful until they are approved by the pope and he orders them to be published. The Code of Canon Law states:

The decrees of an ecumenical council do not have obligatory force unless they have been approved by the Roman Pontiff together
with the council fathers, confirmed by him, and promulgated at his order (c.341).

- **Ordinary Magisterium**: Non-Infallible. They are generally always correct because they are based on infallible teachings of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, but they can later be reformed or updated. *Example*: The teachings of individual bishops or groups of bishops (USCCB). Catholics are obliged to believe these statements but with a “religious assent” of faith (see: CCC#155,176). *Lumen Gentium* (VCII) notes clearly that even when the Pope speaks non-ex cathedra the faithful are to fully believe this with religious assent.

- **Extraordinary/Sacred Magisterium**: Always Infallible. When all the bishops of the world universally agree on an issue of faith and morals and is agreed upon by the Pope it is infallible. *Example*: Ex Cathedra statements or an Ecumenical Council. Must be adhered to by the faithful with the “assent of faith” or with the fullness of their faith (*fides divina*).

In believing and accepting what the Councils and popes teach to be genuine, true, and without error we think with the mind of the Church (*sentire cum ecclesia*). General councils have met for many reasons over the years: to refute heresy, to depose emperors, and to correct dogma. Thus many of the councils were called as a reaction to something, someone, or some event. Only the Second Vatican Council was not called under these circumstances. It was called to update the Church (*aggiornamento*) in accord with the modern world. Pope Paul VI addresses this in his encyclical published during the Council entitled *Ecclesiam Suam/His Church* (August 6, 1964):

> How often in past centuries has the determination to instigate reforms been associated with the holding of ecumenical councils! Let it be so once more, but this time not with a view to removing any specific heresies concerning the Church or to remedying any public disorders…but rather with a view to infusing fresh spiritual vigor into Christ’s mystical body considered as a visible society and to purifying it from the defects of many of its members and urging it on to the attainment of new virtue.
While the term “ecumenical council” is not mentioned in scripture specifically, the Acts of the Apostles does refer to the first Council (though generally not considered among the other twenty-one). At this Council Peter, James, Paul, Barnabas, and others considered as leaders among the Church were present wherein they decided as to whether or not it was necessary for the gentiles to first undergo circumcision prior to becoming Christian. James, in union with Peter and the other Church leaders, stands up and renders the verdict of the Council stating, “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities…” (Acts 15:28). As the bishop of the Church in Jerusalem, James stands up to render the verdict of the Council but only after the Apostle Peter has first spoken about how God has called the Gentiles to salvation as well (Acts 15:7). Thus James in union with the first pope, Peter, declares that it is by the Holy Spirit guiding their decision that the gentiles would not be required to be circumcised prior to becoming Christian. Interestingly enough, as much as most Protestants believe in Sola Scripture/Scripture Alone, they generally overlook the meaning of this passage and therein reject the authority of the ecumenical councils of the Church.


- An immensely popular pope, Angelo Roncalli, like other 20th century popes, came from extremely humble beginnings as both his parents were very poor and from the town of Sotto il Monte in Italy.

- John replaced Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli), whose Pontificate has been largely critiqued over the years as having been overly legalistic and doer. This is, however, an unfair assessment as Pope Pius XII and the Vatican City State were situated logistically in between the Axis Powers. Add to this Pius XII was immensely outspoken in his critiques and condemnations of Communism and Nazi ideology, contrary to what one frequently finds often circulating in the modern media such as Hitler’s Pope by John Cornwell and the documentary Constantine’s Sword. Pius XII, by necessity, needed to defend not only the Catholic Church but all of humanity. Two months prior to the outbreak of World War II and the invasion of Poland by Hitler, Pius XII released an encyclical condemning Nazi ideology and totalitarian theories entitled Summi
Pontificatus. It should be noted that Pius XI was equally firm in his attacks on Nazi and communist ideology (see: *Mit Brennender Sorge* – “With Burning Anxiety” [issued in German] – Pius XI, March 14, 1937. Pius XI wrote this as a response to a letter written to him by St. Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism, wherein she encourages him to pen such a document). That being said, the bubbly personality of Pope John XXIII was definitively in contrast to his immediate predecessor.

- Elected on the 12th ballot, Roncalli was the Cardinal patriarch of Venice.
- Being 78 at the time of his election he was largely considered *il Papa en pasaggio* (“a Pope in passing”) or a compromise/transitional Pontiff.
- The diocesan synod for Rome called by John XXIII was a precursor to the Ecumenical Council to follow and was an effort to spiritually revitalize the Roman clergy.
- John XXIII made the decision to call the Vatican Council as simply “an inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”
- When Pope John XXIII made the decision to call VCII it was suggested to him that he simply reconvene Vatican Council I, since it was brought to an abrupt halt with the Franco-Prussian War (September 20, 1870). Pope John chose to begin a new Council.
- Beyond Vatican Council II, John XXIII made numerous other contributions to the Church such as his numerous efforts at reformation of clergy, updating of Canon Law, and his encyclicals *Ad Cathedram Petri* (1959), *Mater at Magistra* (1961), *Pacem en Terris* (1963).
- Known for his clever wit and beautiful humor, John XXIII fell sick after the closing of the first session of the Vatican Council (December 1962) and died on June 3, 1963.
- He was beatified by Pope John Paul II on September 3, 2000 along with Pope Pius IX (the longest-reigning Pontiff for which there is reliable information).
- John XXIII was succeeded by Giovanni Battista Montini, the Cardinal archbishop of Milan who took the name Paul VI and who successfully oversaw the completion of the Second Vatican Council.
III.) **Key People at the Council:**

- **Giovanni Battista Montini/Pope Paul VI (1897-1978):** Ordained in May of 1920 he studied with the Jesuits at the Gregorian University in Rome and later worked for the Secretary of State. In 1937 he became an assistant to Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli (future Pius XII). He become Archbishop of Milan in 1954. In 1952 he declined the elevation to be a cardinal but later accepted after Pope John XXIII became cardinal (many thought he would be elected pope instead of John XXIII even though he was only an archbishop). After John XXIII died on June 3, 1963, Paul VI was elected on the 5th ballot on June 21, 1963. The day after his election he promised to see the Council through to its completion and to work towards Christian unity (a key theme at the Council). Because the Council had been suspended with the death of John XXIII, his immediate objective was to reconvene the Council and the Second Session was begun on September 29, 1963. Paul VI set about implementing a few notable changes in the Council right away; namely, the admittance of women religious, laity, moderators and a press office. The council was brought to an apt conclusion on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8), 1965. The year immediately following the Council (January 1 – May 29, 1966) was declared by Paul VI to be a jubilee year in preparation of the world for the implementations of the Second Vatican Council. Paul VI faced very serious challenges to his authority as pope. After the Council therein began many tumultuous years (to be discussed in greater detail in the last class) and within the Roman Curia he encountered opposition from both Conservative/Traditional Vatican officials who resisted the liturgical reforms and likewise opposition from the more Liberal/Progressive officials who accelerated the process of reforms so rapidly that many years of ensuing liturgical chaos followed. This dichotomy was seen more distinctly after the publication of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968). He died at Castel Gandolfo on August 6, 1978.

- **Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani (1890-1979):** A preeminently powerful and influential cardinal within the Roman Curia, he was long the head of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office (now the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith - CDF). He was considered perhaps the most vocal of all the ‘conservative’ bishops present at the Council and was, in many ways, their spokesman. Ordained in 1916, he taught at the Lateran University and the Urban College. Pius XII appointed him undersecretary of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary
Ecclesiastical Affairs and later he became the sostituto, or substitute Secretary of State. He was named a cardinal in 1953 and John XXIII named him head of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office in 1959. Ottaviani was an outspoken critique of vast liturgical reforms implemented too quickly and warned that vast implementation not implemented accurately could yield disastrous consequences. He would live to see many of his warnings materialize into reality. Likewise, he was a vehement critic of Communism.

- **Cardinal Dominico Tardini (1888-1961):** Cardinal and Secretary of State under Pope John XXIII. Ordained in 1912, he served as a professor of sacramental theology in Rome (his hometown). Pope Pius XII named him Pro-Secretary of State in 1952. He was close friends with Giovanni Battista Montini (future Paul VI, with whom he worked at the Office of the Secretary of State). While certainly more theologically traditional than John XXIII, he gave undying support to the pope and assisted greatly in the crafting of his notable encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961), and helped formulate and organize the preliminary matters for the Second Vatican Council. He later founded Casa Nazareth, a home for orphaned children. He died on July 30, 1961.

- **Cardinal Augustine Bea (Died 1968):** German Jesuit Cardinal. A biblical scholar who taught Old Testament in Holland and Rome. He served as rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute from 1930-1949. He was the confessor to Pope Pius XII and greatly influenced his encyclical *Divino Afflante Espiritu*, addressing theologians and the interpretation of Sacred Scripture. He was made a cardinal in 1959. He wielded great influence at the Council as a scholar of the first rank. His presence was vital at the Council primarily because of his natural disposition. He was able to bridge the gap between those on the left and those on the right.

- **Jean Danielou, S.J. (Died 1974):** An instructor of theology and philosophy at the Institut Catholique in Paris, his influence was seen at the Council especially in the Church’s relationship to the modern world. After the Council he strongly critiqued the poor implementation of the Council teachings worldwide.

- **Archbishop Pericle Felici (1911-1982):** Titular archbishop of Samosata and Secretary General of the Council.

- **Cardinal Joseph Frings (1887-1978):** Cardinal Archbishop of Cologne. Fr. Joseph Ratzinger was his theological advisor or peritus.
Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (1905-1991): Controversial French Archbishop and founder of the Society of St. Pius X (it should be noted that the group itself greatly misinterprets the actual teachings of Pope St. Pius X). He was ordained in 1929 and sent as a missionary in Senegal. Along with Cardinal Ottaviani he worked on the preparatory commission for the Second Vatican Council and was an outspoken supporter of traditional Catholicism, or what he perceived to be this anyway. As time progressed and reforms, especially in the Liturgy, were introduced by the Council Fathers, he became more and more disenchanted with the Council, ultimately condemning it as heretical (see: I Accuse the Council! Marcel Lefebvre, 1982). In 1969 he established the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X in Fribourg, Switzerland (not to be confused with other traditionally Latin-rite groups in union with Rome, such as The Society of St. Peter). The group, and the seminary that followed, was established to train priests in Pre-Conciliar Catholicism. As a result of Lefebvre’s intransigence and, it can be authentically stated, his downright stubbornness, the Holy See withdrew approval of the order and the Archbishop was suspended from all public ministry. Not only did Lefebvre ignore this decree from Pope Paul VI, he likewise took efforts to expand his organization throughout Europe and the world. After years of attempted negotiations between Lefebvre and Rome failed he was finally excommunicated by Pope John Paul II via Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 1988 after he ordained four bishops without a Papal mandate from the Pope, in spite of being repeatedly warned prior to ordaining them that this was result in a latae sententie excommunication. Marcel Lefebvre died on March 25, 1991, without having reconciled with the Church. Today the Society of St. Pius X claims half a million members worldwide. Its members are in a state of schism and one should not attend the mass of priests within this group. On their website the group claims they maintain union with the Roman Pontiff but this is not accurate as they generally regard all popes after Pius XII to be unreliable. Our present pope, having known Marcel Lefebvre personally, has made tremendous efforts to bring these estranged Catholics back into the Church.

Following the Second Vatican Council Lefebvre makes the following statement regarding the reforms that were undertaken:

“The poison which has spread throughout the whole Church as a result of the reforms of this Pastoral Council (VCII) and of
their applications is contained in its equivocations and its ambiguities…If we are to understand fully and to measure the harm done by this Council we must study this Council…This destructive occurrence (VCII) for the Catholic Church and all Christian civilization has not been directed nor lead by the Holy Ghost.” -Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, August 18, 1976.

- **Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski (1901-1981):** Primate of Poland and close friend of Archbishop Karol Wojtyla (later John Paul II). Initially Wyszynski worked against the nomination of the 38-year old priest to be named as an auxiliary bishop, but over time grew to a fond admiration and deep respect for Wojtyla. Wyszynski was feared by the communist regime as a man of granite integrity and will (his code-name during the communists era was “Sister Cecilia”). As Wyszynski was dying in 1981 it is believed by many that the KGB, most likely with Yuri Andropov as the chief architect, attempted to bear a double-blow to the Polish psyche by assassinating John Paul II coinciding simultaneously with the failing health and death of Wyszynski. Thus Mehmet Ali Acga was most likely contracted as an assassin via the Bulgarian Bureau of the KGB. In court he claimed that he never intended to kill the pope. He argued that if he had he would have expended all his bullets. Wyszynski was never that father figure to John Paul II in the ways that Pope Paul VI and Cardinal Adam Stefan Sapieha (Archbishop of Cracow) were. Nonetheless, their relationship was always marked by a deep fraternal respect and brotherhood. Only minutes after his election as pope on October 16, 1978, Wyszynski told the new Pontiff that his primary objective would be to lead the Church into the 3rd Millennium. Thus along with the implementation of the Second Vatican Council, John Paul always used these two objectives as his theological and spiritual loadstars.

- **Archbishop Karol Wojtyla (1920-2005):** At the opening of the Council Wojtyla was a newly ordained auxiliary Bishop of Cracow (titular Bishop of Ombi). He was named an Archbishop only four years later in 1967. He was well-respected as a man of deep intellect and balanced theology. His primary influences were on the documents *Dignitatis Humanae* and *Gaudium et Spes*, though he certainly contributed to all of them. In Cracow he implemented one of the most vast implementations of the Second Vatican Council in all of Europe. He was elected pope on October 16, 1978 after the sudden death of Pope John Paul I. Our present pope, Benedict XVI who
likewise attended the Council and both conclaves of 1978, once said that he thought the historical precedence of the brief Pontificate of John Paul I was to open-up the possibility for a non-Italian pope in the minds of the electors, since all agree that Wojtyla’s electability prior to John Paul I was completely non-existent. Papal biographer George Weigel has noted that during the Second Vatican Council Archbishop Wojtyla emerged as a Bishop of “extremely high voltage,” and apparently this reputation continued in the years following the Council as Wojtyla’s electability began to materialize. The cardinals in 1978 were looking for a pastoral pope who could give clear and cogent teachings of the faith to the world. The chaos of the years following the Council needed to be corrected and they sought a Universal Pastor who could be a uniter and, certainly to some degree, a teacher as well. The first words of Pope John Paul II after his election as Roman Pontiff were to inform his brother cardinals, still in conclave, that his primary tasks would be to implement the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and to lead the Church into the third millennium. He repeatedly referred to the Second Vatican Council as his “theological loadstar,” which guided nearly all of his pastoral decisions as Bishop and Supreme Pontiff.

- **Fr. Joseph Ratzinger (1927-):** A native of Bavaria, he was ordained as archbishop of Munich and Friesing on Pentecost 1977. Prior to becoming a bishop he was a theology professor at some of the most prestigious universities in Europe such as in Munster, Tubingen, and Regensburg. During the Council Ratzinger served as a theological peritus, or consultant, to Cardinal Frings from Cologne. Even those who tended to greatly vary theologically from Ratzinger all concede that he was one of the greatest theological minds at the Council. One fellow-theologian once described Ratzinger’s understanding of theology as simply, “encyclopedic” (*God’s Choice*, Weigel). His theological contributions were seen most clearly in the document *Lumen Gentium/The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. Only two years after being named as archbishop (he became a cardinal only one month after his ordination as archbishop), Ratzinger accepted the post of Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which he held from 1981-2005. Ratzinger and John Paul II remained close personal friends throughout the latter’s Pontificate. Joseph Ratzinger become the 264th Successor to Peter on April 19, 2005.
• **Henri de Lubac, S.J. (1896-1984):** He was a very influential French theologian and cardinal. After becoming a Jesuit he served as a theological peritus at the Council and was later named to the International Theological Commission. While de Lubac was renowned for his theological insights and writings he never earned a doctorate and remained deeply humble his entire life. Shortly before his death, John Paul II (a close friend of de Lubac’s) named him a cardinal in recognition of his theological contributions (John Paul II would likewise do this with Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J.).

• **Karl Rahner, S.J. (1904-1984):** Like Henri de Lubac, Rahner was a Jesuit who served as a theological peritus at the Council and would likewise die in 1984. Like Cardinal Ratzinger, Rahner served as a theology professor at the Universities of Munich and Munster. Ratzinger once noted that he and Karl Rahner “lived on two different theological planets.” Theologically the two men were quite different, yet both possessed a deep respect nonetheless for the other.

• **Hans Kung (1928- ):** A Swiss priest and controversial theologian, he was educated by the Jesuits at the Gregorian University in Rome. He was ordained in 1954 and appointed professor of theology at the University of Tubingen in 1960. Interestingly enough, while Kung and Ratzinger are virtually diametrically opposed in their theological perspectives, it was Kung who pressed for the hiring of Ratzinger to the faculty of the University of Tubingen. The opportunity to work largely with some of the Lutheran theologians there was a great draw for Ratzinger. Like Ratzinger, he served as a peritus/periti, or theological advisor during the Council. In 1970 he published his book *Infallible?*, an inquiry wherein he questions the issue of Papal infallibility as is understood at Vatican Council I. In the following years he was greatly outspoken against various Church teachings including Pope Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae*. His writings remain greatly suspect and many consider him as a leading voice of opposition against the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

• **Key American Prelates present at the Council:**
  *Cardinal Richard Cushing (Boston)
  *Cardinal John Dearden (Detroit)
  *Cardinal Albert Meyer (Chicago)
  *Cardinal Joseph Ritter (St. Louis)
  *Cardinal Francis Spellman (New York)
  *Archbishop Paul John Hallinan (Atlanta)
  *Archbishop John Krol (Philadelphia)
IV.) **Various Factors Affecting the Church at the Time of the Council:**

- **Updating:** Following the strong and outspoken leadership of Pope Pius XII, the numbers of Catholics worldwide grew exponentially in addition to the numbers of priestly and religious vocations. Nonetheless, the Church needed updating and a reemphasis that She was not a defensive Church (i.e. against totalitarian regimes), but one of joy and hope. Pope John XXIII appointed a preparatory commission, which he himself headed, in order to prepare for the Second Vatican Council. They gathered suggestions from the world’s bishops as to what issues should be addressed at the Council. Many thousands of suggestions were compiled and categorized. The auxiliary bishop from Cracow, Bishop Karol Wojtyla, asserted the notion that what had gone drastically wrong with the 20th century up until the 1960’s was that mankind had lost a sense of the dignity of the human person. Man had lived through such tyrannical leaders as Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini and the time had come for the Church to answer the call of human dignity with a Council that asserted that dignity. Thus, Wojtyla would be one of the primary architects of *Dignitatis Humanae/Human Dignity*. The preparatory commission initiated its work in November 1960 and was finished in June of 1962. On Christmas Day of 1961 Pope John XXIII published the apostolic constitution *Humanae Salutis*, indicating that the Council would officially open in 1962, which it did on October 11th. After having officially placed the council proceedings under the protection of St. Joseph, Universal Patron of the Church, Pope John requested that all Catholics do penance and fasting in anticipation of the Second Vatican Council (see: *Paenitentiam Agere*).

- **Political Factors:** The world was constantly on the edge of the living through the possibility of nuclear war as the Cold War intensified and President Kennedy assumed Office in 1960. Add to this the growing influence of the Soviet Union, the persecution of religion in China, and the steady but growing influence of the sexual revolution. The general sexual attitudes of most of the western culture began to change radically as matrimony began to be perceived as unnecessary and even stifling, whereas abortion
rights and access to contraceptives, as the birth control pill became available, deeply influenced the worldview of Catholics. All this added to the many factors the Council Fathers had to consider as they met. Add to this that many within the Roman Curia were not at all happy about the prospect of an Ecumenical Council. Cardinal Dominico Tardini, the Secretary of State for the Holy See, publicly acknowledged that he hoped the Holy Father would forget that he had called the Council. Likewise, the day following the announcement by Pope John XXIII regarding the Second Vatican Council, the Vatican newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano* mentioned virtually nothing about the announcement at all (it was sandwiched in between two hum-drum stories). The general sentiment among many in the curia was, “why do we need a Council?” They were confused and certainly, to some degree, very reluctant to embrace a new Ecumenical Council.

- **Social Upheaval:** Few people could have predicted the political and social upheaval that began to occur worldwide throughout the 60’s and 70’s with the anti-authoritarian mentalities (which included bias against a ‘hierarchical’ Church), to the mass defections in vocations that would follow the Second Vatican Council. Many of the problems within the Church did not arise as a result of the Council itself or the actual teachings of the council, but of the failure in proper implementation of the teachings of the Council. This is a very key point that we will return to in others classes.

V.) **Council Sessions:**
- **Session I:** October 11 – December 8, 1962
- **Session II:** September 29 – December 4, 1963
- **Session III:** September 14 – November 21, 1964
- **Session IV:** September 14 – December 8, 1965

- **Facts:** Held at St. Peter’s Basilica, each session included roughly 2860 bishops from around the world. 274 bishops did not attend due to poor health, age, or lack of permission from government officials (most often Communists). The Council included representatives from other Christian communities and lay people. Because the Council was covered in detail by the world media, it was undoubtedly one of the major media events of the 1960’s. The
Second Vatican Council was only the second such council since the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The first was Vatican Council I (1869-1870). Vatican I was brought to an abrupt halt due to the Franco-Prussian war. The ecclesial role of the bishops was to be discussed at VCI, following the document on papal infallibility *Pastor Aeternus* (the other VCI document was *Dei Filius* addressing largely the relationship between faith and reason following the Enlightenment Era). When Pope John XXIII made the decision to call VCII it was suggested to him that he simply reconvene Vatican Council I. Pope John, however, chose to begin a new Council (see above: Pope John XXIII bio).

- # of Council Fathers who died during the Council: 242
- # of officially designated guests who were theologians, canon lawyers, or other advisors or experts present: 460.
- # of these advisors/experts who were priests: 235
- # of Speeches made during the course of the Council: 2,212.
- # of Orthodox & Protestant groups present: 21

- **Death of Pope John XXIII:** Less than eight months after the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII died. On June 21, 1963 the Cardinals elected a very humble Archbishop from Milan named Giovanni Battista Montini, who took the name Paul VI. His first announcement was that the Council would continue and that that it would be his primary task to see to its completion and implementation. Pope John Paul II reiterated this point years later in October of 1978, which seems to indicate that the proper implementation of the Council was yet to be accomplished. A fact later affirmed by our present pope in his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (Ignatius Press). Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI have issued literally hundreds of statements regarding the proper interpretations of the Council and the sixteen Council documents.

**VI.) Goals of the Second Vatican Council:**
- Surprisingly enough, Pope John XXIII did not assert specific and numerous goals to be addressed by the Council Fathers. He preferred instead to allow the Holy Spirit to lead the Council,
which was a tremendous act of faith from a Pontiff who encountered no little opposition to the idea of a new Council from senior members of the Roman curia. Pope John XXIII made his few goals very clear:

i. The spiritual renewal of the Church and its updating, which he referred to as *aggiornamento* (updating). In referring to this he stated that it was time to “open the windows” of the Church in order that a new breeze may enter and refresh her. John emphasized, however, that a proper “updating” of the Church to the modern world could only come by rooting this updating in the Traditions and historical teachings of the faith, which came to be known by the French term *ressourcement* (“to return to the sources”).

ii. The Unity of Christians.

It was with this understanding of *aggiornamento* that in the years to follow the Council that many such as Hans Kung and, to a lesser degree Karl Rahner, began to detach aggiornamento, or an updating of Church teaching, from *ressourcement*, or a grounding in the traditional teachings of the faith (i.e. Church Fathers, past Councils, etc.). Pope Benedict XVI, who knew both Kung and Rahner personally at the Council, referred to this tragic separation as process whereby “believing” simply meant “having opinions.” Papal biographer Aiden Nichols referred to this by saying, “Once aggiornamento parted company from *ressourcement* adaptation could degenerate into mere accommodation and habits of mind and behavior in secular culture” (*God’s Choice*, Weigel, 172). In other words without an updated teaching grounded in the traditional teachings of the faith, anything goes. One can justify anything on the basis of ‘updating.’ Unfortunately this is seen frequently in many Catholic Universities today which, by all practical purposes, remain Catholic in name only. Under the guise of “academic freedom” and updating, more than a few Catholic Universities have all but ignored the clarion call of Pope John Paul II in his documents *Ex Corde Ecclesia/From the Heart of the Church* and *Sapientia Christiana/Christian Wisdom* wherein he reiterates the importance of Catholic Universities to retain their moral obligation
to actual teach the Catholic faith as we have received it over the years (*Traditio*) rather than their own opinions per se.

VII.) **Post-Conciliar Abuses to Follow the Council:**

The Pontifical Council on Social Communications arose as a result of the need for constant media updates and as a result for perpetual media misinterpretations, such as the reporting of Council commentators such as Fr. Francis X. Murphy (aka Xavier Rynne), who wrote commentaries on the Council for The New York Times and The New Yorker. Fr. Murphy largely misinterpreted the teachings of the council and, as a result, many in the States followed suit assumingly following the teachings of the Council Fathers. These repeated misinterpretations of the Council ultimately became known as the “spirit of Vatican II.” Many moral, theological, and liturgical abuses followed suit in the years following the council. The result was a defection in vocations, lack of sound catechesis, and a time that Pope Benedict XVI once referred to as a time “decidedly unfavorable for the Church” (*The Ratzinger Report*, Ch.2, Vittorio Messori). As a result of the many liturgical abuses many either abandoned their Catholic faith or flocked to Traditionalist groups such as The Society of Pope Pius X/SSPX founded by archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (1905-1991). As an antidote to this tumultuous time, Pope John Paul II has repeatedly stated that the actual documents of the Second Vatican Council should “serve as a sure compass to guide us on the path of the century that is now beginning.” Likewise, he argued that “any understanding of the Second Vatican Council that fails to acknowledge it as a great spiritual event will simply fail to grasp what the Council was all about” (*Witness to Hope*, Weigel).

VIII.) **Logistics of the Second Vatican Council:**

The Council was given its organization by the motu proprio of John XXIII entitled *Appropinquante Concilio* (August 2, 1962). Much of the logistical preparation for the Council was done by the Curia (*curia* has historically referred to the meeting place of the Roman Senate during the era of Julius Cesar. The name now refers to those Roman Congregations/Dicasteries which assist the
Pope in administering the practical duties associated with the Holy See and Vatican City State).

3 Types of Meetings during the Council:

1.) Commissions of Twenty-Four members: These Commissions included groups such as the Doctrinal Commission for Faith and Morals, Commission for the Eastern Churches, and the Commission for the Discipline of the Sacraments.
2.) General Congregations: Where first votes and other various discussions were held.
3.) Public Sessions: Which were headed by the Pope, wherein final votes on documents could be cast or opinions vocalized.

- Language & Location:
  Surprisingly enough, not many of the bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and patriarchs that came to the Council would have been comfortable interacting in Latin on a day-to-day basis. Obviously, there were many pockets of language groups speaking constantly in their language (Archbishop Wojtyla moved freely among nearly all of them due to his language proficiency), but English, Italian, and French were used most often in day-to-day interactions, though the actual Council sessions were conducted in Latin.

  Because Vatican City now accommodated roughly 2800 new bishops, along with thousands of other official guests, members of the media (there were more than 1000 reporters), theologians, canon lawyers, and security agents, people were housed in colleges, monasteries, retreat houses, convents, and shrines.

  In typical Italian fashion, Pope John arranged to have two coffee bars set up near St. Peter’s in order to meet the caffeinated needs of the bishops! (They were known affectionately as Bar-Jonah [from “Simon Bar-Jonah” in the Gospels] and Barabbas). The actual seating during the Council was prearranged and set according to seniority. Participants were not seated according to national groups or language affiliation, thus it was very unlikely that one would know the person they were sitting next to. For many of these bishops it was an extraordinary opportunity to chat with prelates and brother-bishops from around the world. To their great surprise many discovered that bishops all over the world often faced many of the same problems and
struggles. Pope John Paul II repeatedly said that this experience of brotherhood was “deeply moving” for him. He would later argue that the results of various synods of bishops is often not as important as what happens “to and among them together” during the synods.

No other previous Council had as many participants, nor did any other Council have the use of microphones either. Microphones were placed throughout the nave of the Basilica and those who wished to speak, with the exception of Cardinals, were required to make a petition with the general secretary beforehand.

- **Voting Procedures & Order:**
  
  Voting occurred at the general congregations in St. Peter’s Basilica. Ballots were tabulated using an IBM system of punch cards, which was a bit confusing for some. Generally speaking a two-thirds majority was needed for a ballot to pass (similar to a conclave wherein two-thirds plus one is needed). Many times vote totals varied widely during the course of the Council due to the fact that not all the Council Fathers were present for each vote and at times they experienced technical difficulties reading the punch cards.

  Each working session of the Council was presided over by the Council Presidents; there were ten total, who would take turns presiding over the Council for that day in stead of the pope. Each Council father was assured freedom of speech and opinion, but was given only ten minutes to make their point. If they exceeded the ten minute mark they were “gently but firmly” interrupted and asked to conclude their remarks (*The Council*, Bill Huebsch, 82).

- **The Unique Characteristics of the Second Vatican Council:**
  1.) This Council included the largest number of Council Fathers of any of the previous twenty Ecumenical Councils in the history of the Church.
  2.) This council included representatives from non-Catholics faiths and from the Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches.
  3.) This Council was truly international in every sense of the word. Vatican I had been composed of primarily European bishops.
  4.) This Council included a virtual army of press corps, which indicated a greater openness within the Holy See to social communications. This was apparent within the decree on Social Communications composed by the Council (*Inter Merifica*).
5.) Vatican Council II was the first council to have the use of electricity, telephones, typewriters, and computerized voting. These small factors certainly increased the overall efficiency of communications and accommodations among the Council Fathers as a whole.

6.) This Council met without the influence of a temporal power, without temporal pressures, and without the need to refute any specific heresy per se.

7.) Women: This was the first Ecumenical Council wherein women played a definitive role as well. They were by no means passive spectators. Pope Paul VI invited a select group of women to attend the 3rd and 4th sessions. 23 women served as official auditrices/listeners, offering proposals, coordinating meetings, and taking active roles in the meetings on the documents on the Laity and the Church in the Modern World.