

# VATICAN II

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## *The Continuing Agenda*

Edited by Anthony J. Cernera

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## Contents

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Preface <i>Anthony J. Cernera</i>	vii
Vatican II: The Church's Self-understanding <i>Georgia Masters Keightley</i>	
Revision, Reform, Renewal: The Impact of <i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> on Roman Rite Liturgy and Worship <i>Jan Michael Joncas</i>	25
The Roman Catholic Church and the Contribution to Christian Unity <i>Jeffrey Gros</i>	53
Scripture in the Life of the Church <i>Brigid Curtin Frein</i>	71
The Catholic Church and Interreligious Dialogue <i>John Borelli</i>	89
The Church <i>in</i> the Modern World: Rereading <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> After Thirty Years <i>William C. McDonough</i>	113

Catholic Social Teaching Since Vatican II <i>David J. O'Brien</i>	135
Full, Conscious, and Active Participation: The Laity's Quest <i>H. Richard McCord, Jr.</i>	149
The Journey from the Side Chapel to the Main Aisle: Religious Life in the Postconciliar Church <i>Margaret Palliser</i>	171
Learning to Reason Well: Moral Theology Since Vatican II <i>James F. Keenan, S.J.</i>	199
Vatican II: Pastoral Care and Practical Theology <i>Oliver J. Morgan, S.J.</i>	223
Reading the Signs of the Times: An Ongoing Task of the Church in the World <i>Anthony J. Cemerá</i>	249
Notes on Contributors	275

## *Preface*

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**O**N THE FEAST of the Conversion of St. Paul, January 25, 1985, a generation after the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II surprised the world by announcing his decision to call an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops to join him in reflecting on that Council. Twenty-six years to the day earlier and almost in the same place, Pope John XXIII had announced his intention to convoke an ecumenical council of the Catholic Church. Now, John Paul II was calling together 165 bishops from around the world to examine how the Council had been received and how to further deepen the application of the Council in the Church's life in the light of new needs that had emerged in the succeeding twenty years. In John Paul II's own words,

The aim of this initiative is not only that of commemorating the Second Vatican Council twenty years after its conclusion, but is also and above all to revive in some way the extraordinary atmosphere of ecclesial communion which characterized that ecumenical assembly, through mutual participation in suffering and joys, struggles and hopes, which pertain to the Body of Christ in the various parts of the earth; to exchange and deepen experiences and information concerning application of the Council at the level of the universal

Church and the particular churches; to favor further deepening and constant application of the Second Vatican Council in the Church's life, also in the light of the new needs.

*Origins 14* (February 7, 1985): 557.

In their two public declarations at the end of the Extraordinary Synod, the Synodal Fathers declared that the Second Vatican Council had been a "gift of God to the Church and to the world." "Indeed," they declared, "we have celebrated the Second Vatican Council as a grace of God and a gift of the Holy Spirit, from which have come forth many spiritual fruits for the universal Church and the particular churches, as well as for all men of our time." The bishops recognized that the large majority of the Catholic Church had received the Council "with zeal" and that only a few had shown resistance to it.

For the bishops, there can be no doubt that "the Council was embraced with heartfelt adherence because the Holy Spirit was prompting his Church to do so." The favorable reception of the Council by the Church and also by many people outside the Church took place during a period of rapid changes and profound transitions within the global community.

Every major council in the history of the Catholic Church has required time to be received and implemented into the life of the Church. As one who teaches a course on the Church to both graduate and undergraduate students, I am reminded regularly that many committed and active young Catholics were born after the Council ended. There was no attempt in this book to address all the issues that are on the Church's agenda today. Such an undertaking would have required a multi-volume work.

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*Anthony J. Cermera, Ph.D.*