

Joy and Hope in Christ: Vatican II

Part 2 in a series

January 22, 2012

This year, 2012, marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which began on October 11, 1962, and closed on December 8, 1965. Throughout the year, we'll mark this milestone anniversary by celebrating the Council, and exploring its teachings through bulletin inserts, lectures, and a variety of special events.

A whirlwind tour of the Ecumenical Councils

An "ecumenical Council" in the Church is one to which all the bishops of the world are invited. Here is a whirlwind tour of the first 20 ecumenical councils of the Church. During the coming year, we will be marking the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II, which was the twenty-first ecumenical Council in the history of the Catholic Church.

THE FIRST COUNCIL OF NICAEA (325) was summoned to combat the heresy of Arianism, which denied the divinity of Christ. This Council declared that Jesus was "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father."

THE FIRST COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (381) continued to define the Creed which had been formulated at Nicaea (though we commonly call this the "Nicene" Creed, it is more accurately termed the "Niceno-Constantinopolitan" Creed).

THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS (431) combated the Nestorian heresy, and declared Mary to be not only the mother of Jesus, but the *theotokos* - Mother of God.

THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON (451) continued to define the Church's understanding of the true nature of Christ, both God and man.

THE SECOND COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (553) was called to address the heresy of monophysitism, which argued that Christ had only one nature – his divine nature. This Council reaffirmed the Church's teaching that Christ has two natures, and is fully God, and fully human.

THE THIRD COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (680-681) continued to define what it meant for Christ to be fully God and fully human.

THE SECOND COUNCIL OF NICAEA (730) defended the use of icons and images in the Church.

THE FOURTH COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (869-870) marked the growing divide between the Church in the East and West.

THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE LATERAN (1123) was convoked by Pope Calixtus II to ratify the Concordat of Worms, which had defended the Church's right to appoint bishops—rather than the Emperor.

THE SECOND COUNCIL OF THE LATERAN (1139) was convoked to decide who was Pope – after the death of Pope Honorius II, two Popes were elected by two different groups of

The Ecumenical Councils of the Church

First Council of Nicaea (325)
First Council of Constantinople (381)
Council of Ephesus (431)
Council of Chalcedon (451)
Second Council of Constantinople (553)
Third Council of Constantinople (680-681)
Second Council of Nicaea (730)
Fourth Council of Constantinople (869-870)
First Council of the Lateran (1123)
Second Council of the Lateran (1139)
Third Council of the Lateran (1179)
Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215)
First Council of Lyon (1245)
Second Council of Lyon (1275)
Council of Vienne (1311-2)
Council of Constance (1414-1418)
Council of Florence (1431-1442)
Fifth Council of the Lateran (1512-1517)
Council of Trent (1545-1563)
First Vatican Council (1869-1870)
Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)

Cardinals. This Council also discussed priestly celibacy and other matters.

THE THIRD COUNCIL OF THE LATERAN (1179) addressed a wide variety of concerns, chief among them the process for electing a Pope. Many of the rules this Council established are still binding today.

THE FOURTH COUNCIL OF THE LATERAN (1215) decreed that Christians should go to confession and communion at least once a year, during the Easter season. It also clarified the Church's teaching on the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation.

THE FIRST COUNCIL OF LYON (1245) was highly political. Its main action was to depose Emperor Frederick II of Germany.

THE SECOND COUNCIL OF LYON (1275) addressed a variety of political and ecclesial concerns, including aid to Jerusalem. The new religious orders of Franciscans and Dominicans were debated and affirmed. There was more discussion about papal elections, including the decree that if the cardinals could not come to an agreement after eight days, they were to be given bread and water only.

THE COUNCIL OF VIENNE (1311-2) addressed issues related to the Crusades, especially the Knights Templars. It also decreed that Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic be taught in Catholic universities.

When the **COUNCIL OF CONSTANCE** (1414-1418) began, there were three Popes reigning. Little wonder, then, that this Council decreed that the authority of an ecumenical Councils is greater than that of the Pope, deposed all three of them, and elected Martin V in their stead.

THE COUNCIL OF FLORENCE (1431-1442) continued the debate on the authority of Councils, or "conciliarism."

THE FIFTH COUNCIL OF THE LATERAN (1512-1517) was called to address the need for reform, but ended up dealing mainly with small matters of governance.

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT (1545-1563) was a wide-ranging, incredibly influential reforming Council. It responded to the Protestant Reformation by defining Catholic teaching on issues of Scripture, salvation, and the sacraments. It created the seminary system for the formation of priests, reformed the liturgy, issued a Catechism, and much more.

THE FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL (1869-1870) was cut short by the occupation of Rome by the united Italian forces. It defined the dogma of papal infallibility and discussed, but did not define, the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (that would happen in 1950).

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL (1962-1965) was convoked by Blessed John XXIII as a reforming Council to bring the Church up-to-date in light of the needs of the modern world.

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