

The Sixteen Documents and their Consequences*

This page provides a short history of each of the sixteen Documents and some perspective on results that the documents could have on the post-Vatican II future.

CONSTITUTION ON THE LITURGY

1962: October 22 to November 13: Debate.

November 17 to December 7: First voting.

1963: October 8 to 30: Continuation of the first voting.

November 18 to 22: Voting on the amendments (*modi*).

December 4: Solemn final voting (2147 for, 4 against) and promulgation

Future: The whole People of God joined in divine worship with everyone taking an active part; common prayer, singing, and common reception of the Body of Christ. Private masses deemphasized. An awakening of the sense of the 'living God', who still acts on us today through word and sacrament. Expanded scripture readings with a richer, more varied arrangement of passages, with services of the word of God even outside mass. Adjustment to national differences through introduction of the vernacular. Immediately understandable ritual; purifying and tightening of the liturgical structure with an emphasis on essentials. Concession of the chalice to lay people on special occasions. Concelebration of several priests made possible. Revision of the liturgy for the administration of the sacraments; rearrangement of the ecclesiastical year.

DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION

1962: November 14 to 21: Debate (on original schema, 'The Sources of Revelation').

1964: November 30 to October 6: Debate on the reworked schema 'On Divine Revelation'.

1965: September 20 to 22: First voting.

October 29: Voting on amendments.

November 18: Solemn final voting (2344 for, 6 against) and promulgation.

Past: Catechisms generally taught that not all revealed truth was contained in Holy Scripture. A biblical theology was largely lacking. The Bible played a secondary role in the religious life of the faithful. Ecclesiastical authority narrowly restricted modern scriptural study. The biblical movement met with many difficulties.

Future: The view that all religious truth is found in the Bible is permitted by the Church. Scripture and tradition form a unity. Development within doctrine is possible. The Church's teaching authority is not above the Bible but must serve it. Genuine science is fully recognized in biblical research. Scripture study must be the soul of theology. Preaching and proclamation must be biblical in approach. The scriptures are inerrant only insofar as truths of salvation are concerned; this inerrancy does not extend to secular statements. All are to diligently study the Bible, and provision is made for translations and for cooperation in this with non-Catholics.

DECREE ON THE MEDIA OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

1962: November 23 to 27: Debate.

1963: November 14: First voting.

November 25: Voting on amendments.

December 4: Solemn final voting (1960 for, 164 against) and promulgation.

Past: Modern mass media were often viewed with distrust in ecclesiastical circles. They were often judged in an almost purely negative way and exclusively from the standpoint of morality.

Future: The importance of press, film, radio and television for the evangelization of the world is officially recognized. Guidelines should be issued for their proper use. Evaluation of secular production should be raised to a higher level. The responsibility of lay people is emphasized; they will be more heavily counted upon in staffing the Church's media reviewing organizations.

DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH

1962: December 1 to 7: Debate on the first schema.

1963: September 30 to October 30: Debate on four chapters of the revised schema.

1964: September 15 to 18: Debate on two new chapters: eschatology, Mary.

September 16 to 30: Voting on chapters discussed in 1963.

October 19 to 20: First voting on the eschatology chapter.

October 29: First voting on the chapter on Mary.

October 30 to November 18: Voting on the amendments to the whole schema.

November 21: Solemn final voting (2151 for, 5 against) and promulgation.

Past: Since the Reformation the Church had chiefly been viewed as a spiritual super-state: the Pope at its head, like an absolute monarch then in graduated order bishops and priests. Ranged almost passively below them were the 'faithful'. Its legal and unchangeable aspect was obvious in the sharp opposition against all that was not the Church. Here triumphalism was mixed with clericalism.

Future: More emphasis placed on the Church as mystery and as People of God: the equality of all is stressed. Biblical images are used to highlight the various inner aspects of the Church, which is seen here as a Church 'on the move', and thus always in need of reform. The Church's boundaries extend far beyond the visible Catholic Church; this is clear in the recognition given to Christian Churches and ecclesiastical Church communities outside of her and even to non-Christians; even atheists can be saved. The Church's hierarchy is seen as service and not as domination; it must be seen as derived from the broader priesthood which belongs to all Christians, and not the reverse. Pope and bishops share a common collegial responsibility for the whole Church, though the overall government has been invested in a special way in the Pope. An individual bishop is given collegial responsibility by his very ordination as bishop. The permanent diaconate is revived; even married people may become

deacons. The doctrine on Mary is included in the teaching on the Church; it is no longer something separated from the Church.

DECREE ON ECUMENISM

1963: November 18 to December 2: Debate.

1964: October 5 to 8: First voting.

November 10 to 14: Voting on amendments.

November 21: Solemn final voting (2137 for, 11 against) and promulgation.

Past: The prevalent attitude toward other Christians was hostile and purely defensive; the object was to prove to them their deficiencies and errors. In contrast the Church tried to cover its own deficiencies. There was little concern to understand the others, and the common heritage was rarely mentioned. Other Christians were simply a danger to the Catholic faithful. Authorities regarded the developing ecumenical movement with reserve.

Future: There is an effort here to understand other Christians and make the Church's position understandable to them. Recognition is made of the Church's guilt for the division of the Church and the Church's present shortcomings. The common heritage is recognized, and the Church is supposed to live up to the Christian responsibility stemming from this heritage. The others are recognized as Churches and church communities; it is even admitted that the Church can learn something from them. What separates is not glossed over, but ways are sought to overcome divisions through common dialogue, with deepened knowledge of scripture. Common desire for unity should be awakened in all through common prayer and through avoiding all conflict and all competition.

DECREE ON EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES

1964: October 15 to 20: Debate.

October 21 to 22: First voting.

November 20: Voting on amendments.

November 21: Solemn final voting (2110 for, 39 against) and promulgation.

Past: The Catholic Churches of the Eastern rite were considered primarily as relics of a bygone age. They were not recognized as genuine parts of the Church and attempts were constantly made to Latinize them in their law, liturgy and theological thinking. Thus they had become an obstacle rather than a bridge to reunification with the non-Catholic Eastern Churches.

Future: The existence of different parts of the Church all equal in standing - the Western, Latin Church is only one of many - is recognized and even encouraged. Therefore the rights and individual approaches proper to the Eastern Churches, even before the division, must be restored. They also have the right of naming bishops. Priestly ordination in the separated Orthodox Churches is recognized. Their faithful can, if they so desire, receive the sacraments in Catholic Churches, just as Catholic Christians may receive them in Orthodox churches when no Catholic priest is available. Marriages before an Orthodox priest are valid. Joint use of the same church is permitted.

DECREE ON THE PASTORAL OFFICE OF BISHOPS

1963: November 5 to 18: Debate 'On the Bishops and Governance of Dioceses'.

1964: September 18 to 23: Debate on passages taken from the schema 'On the Pastoral Office'.

November 4 to 6: First voting.

1965: September 29 to October 6: Voting on amendments.

October 28: Solemn final voting (2319 for, 2 against) and promulgation.

Past: The bishops, with their powers increasingly whittled away, were in practice nothing but an executive organ of the Roman central administration. There were often no horizontal ties between country and country; the bishops' responsibility for the Church as a whole was scarcely realized.

Future: The bishops' collegial responsibility is expressed in the institution of a council of bishops (synod) together with the pope. Since these general synods are largely to consist of representatives elected by the conferences of bishops, such conferences should be established on national and supra-national levels, with fixed statutes, standing secretariats and the authority to make binding decisions in certain cases. They may rearrange dioceses, transfer bishops' sees to more suitable locations, and make contacts with other countries for supra-national pastoral problems. The Roman administration is increasingly to include diocesan bishops as well as lay people. Roman offices must reform their procedures. The power required for normal administration of dioceses is to be restored to bishops. The powers of nuncios must be strictly defined. The bishops of each diocese enjoy independent, immediate authority; they should adapt their boards of consultants to the times and set up pastoral councils made up of priests and lay people. Even parishes are to create pastoral councils.

DECLARATION ON NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

1963: November 18 to 21: General debate on the schema on ecumenism of which this text is still chapter 4 (on relationship to non-Christians and especially Jews).

1964: September 28 to 30: Debate on the declaration 'On the Jews and non-Christians', meant to be a second appendix to the decree on ecumenism.

November 20: First voting on the now independent declaration.

1965: October 14 to 15: Voting on amendments.

October 28: Solemn final voting (2221 for, 88 against) and promulgation.

Past : Catholic missions formerly took an almost purely negative stand against the world religions. They were seen only from the viewpoint of conversion. The stand was even stronger in the case of the Moslems, who were considered militant enemies of the Church, and the Jews, who were considered an obdurate people. The Catholic attitude was permeated by an anti-Semitic strain without which there might have been no persecution of the Jews by the Nazis.

Future: The activity of God in all religions is recognized, notwithstanding the conviction that the Church was given the fullness of truth by and in Christ. All therefore deserve understanding and esteem. Moreover, the Church is linked to the Moslems in as much as Moslems honor Jesus and the prophets. The Church must recognize its unique relationship

with the Jews: they also possess the Old Testament as sacred scripture. The Jews were and are God's chosen people. The idea that all Jews are collectively guilty for the death of Christ is rejected. They must not be called an 'accursed people'. All anti-Semitism must be uprooted from preaching and education; common biblical studies are especially recommended.

DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

1963: November 18 to 21: General debate on this topic as chapter 5 of the schema on ecumenism.

1964: September 23 to 28: Debate on the 'declaration', now considered an appendix to the decree on ecumenism.

1965: September 15 to 22: Debate on the completely revised declaration.

October 26 to 27: First voting.

November 19: Voting on amendments.

December 7: Solemn final voting (2308 for, 70 against) and promulgation.

Past: Religious liberty as a human right was considered a product of relativistic thinking and therefore unacceptable; only truth could have rights. Religious tolerance was permissible as a lesser evil, but as far as possible any propagation of error was to be suppressed. Wherever Catholics were in the minority, they worked for religious liberty; where they constituted a majority, they claimed liberty for the Catholic religion alone.

Future: Because of the dignity of the human person, every man has the right to free exercise of religion, private and public, individually and collectively. Therefore, nobody must be prevented by force from practising his religion or be discriminated against because of his religion. Political authority must not interfere in pastoral appointments, nor in free interchange between believers and their co-religionists and Church leaders abroad. It is the state's responsibility as well as that of society and Church, to protect religious liberty as a fundamental common good. Wherever a restriction upon religious liberty becomes necessary because of the rights of others or public safety, this restriction must be limited to the minimum. Wherever a particular religious community has for historical reasons a special position, this must not cause a restriction of the right of all others to religious liberty.

DECREE ON THE LAY APOSTOLATE

1964: October 7 to 13: Debate.

1965: September 23 to 27: First voting.

November 9 to 10: Voting on amendments.

November 18: Solemn final voting (2305 for, 2 against) and promulgation.

Past: The clerical view was dominant, which meant that laymen were given a more passive role. They were to accept and obey. Lay people were the object, not the foundation of the Church. The Church often simply meant the clergy. Models of holiness proposed to lay people were often characterized by monastic traits. In ecclesiastical affairs the lay person was most often treated as a minor.

Future: The lay person is recognized as a fully responsible member of the People of God. He has a much larger share of self-determination in the modern world. He shares in the universal priesthood and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit - who works where He pleases. That is why the hierarchy is to regard the lay person with great trust, and his advice must be valued and sought. All are obliged to be witnesses in their own sphere; the lay person has a share in shaping the structures of the world in line with the Christian spirit. And finally, he has a direct apostolate of preaching the word of God, especially within the family. The various forms the organized apostolate may take are secondary. Nor must collaboration with other Christians and even non-Christians be neglected.

DECREE ON PRIESTLY FORMATION

1964: November 12 to 17: Debate on a 'guideline draft'.

November 17 to 18: First voting.

1965: October 11 to 13: Voting on amendments.

October 28: Solemn final voting (2318 for, 3 against) and promulgation.

Past: It was not until some time after the Council of Trent that seminaries were established everywhere. Trent had not intended to make their establishment generally mandatory. In seminaries a life of monastic seclusion became customary. Such a life was little suited to personality development and to adult assumption of responsibility. Human virtues took second place to the exercise of obedience. The teaching was abstract and often polemically pointed.

Future: Great freedom is given to bishops' conferences in organizing seminaries. Seminaries must be adapted to practical needs. A biblical piety should be promoted; study of the Bible and biblical theology should be emphasized. Contrasting views should no longer be presented only in their negative aspect. There should be more contact between seminarians and people in the world. All seminarians should be encouraged to be open and aware of the problems of contemporary man. More opportunity must be provided for personality development and for amicable teamwork. And the seminarians must also get to know and respect non-scholastic ways of thought.â€œ

DECREE ON THE CONTEMPORARY RENEWAL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

1964: November 10 to 12: Debate on a 'guideline draft'.

November 12 to 16: First voting.

1965: October 6 to 11: Voting on amendments.

October 28: Solemn final voting (2321 for, 4 against) and promulgation.

Past: During the middle ages the religious orders were the agents of culture and civilization. Their ideal of holiness was formed by scripture on the one hand and by the needs of the age on the other; this ideal frequently marked the entire era. In the rapid development of modern times, many religious communities arose to provide for temporary special needs. Religious orders often lost contact with reality in the course of this modern development; they came to symbolize a bygone era, and thus their function of service within the Church at large came into question.

Future: The guidelines leave it to the individual orders to renovate themselves. They are encouraged to go to the sources - sacred scripture, the spirit of their founders, and the needs of the contemporary world. Therefore they are to discard all outmoded forms, and renovation is to be carried forward, not by the superiors of the orders alone but through the cooperation of all members. Class distinctions within religious orders are to be eliminated. Subjects are no longer to be kept in a kind of state of spiritual dependency. Orders which have no promise of productive work may not accept any new candidates.

DECREE ON THE MISSIONARY ACTIVITY OF THE CHURCH

1964: November 6 to 9: Debate on a brief schema.

1965: October 7 to 13: Debate on a longer, completely new draft.

November 10 to 11: First voting.

November 30: Voting on amendments.

December 7: Solemn final voting (2394 for, 5 against) and promulgation.

Past: By and large, the basis of missionary activity used to be the idea that pagans who were not baptized were doomed to eternal damnation. Missionary activity had a 'colonialist' cast. The way of life and thought of the new converts was Europeanized. There were often rivalries between Christian denominations; thus Christianity seemed unworthy of belief.

Future: Non-Christian religions now meet with great understanding. The special cultural values of other peoples are sincerely respected and the Church intends to root itself in these cultures. They can enrich the Church and help it to discover new perspectives in scripture. Fraternal relations should be established with other Churches; all should give a common witness to Christ in their everyday life. At the suggestion of the bishops' conference, a commission on missions made up of bishops and experts is to be formed which will exercise a decisive influence on the activities of the curial Congregation for the Propagation of Faith.

DECREE ON PRIESTLY LIFE AND MINISTRY

1964: October 13 to 15 : Debate on 'guideline schema'.

1965: October 14 to 26: Debate on new schema.

November 12 to 13: First voting.

December 2: Voting on improvements.

December 4: Solemn final voting (2390 for, 4 against) and promulgation.

Past: The priest used to be a one-dimensional, sacral figure, seen only as a minister at the altar and administrator of the sacraments. The priestly ideal was strongly marked by a monastic type of asceticism. The priests were separated from the people; sociologically they constituted a kind of 'privileged state'; they were differentiated from the bishops by their comparative lack of personal responsibility.

Future: The emphasis now is on the priest as servant. The priest is to be fully a man, not separated from lay people but with them in his life and work. He is really a leader within his congregation. An appropriate kind of priestly piety should be developed, deriving from priestly service within the world. The bishop should listen to and work with his priests; he

should form his own council of priests. The text especially commends married priests of the Eastern Churches.

DECLARATION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

1964: November 17 to 19: Debate.

November 19: First voting.

1965: October 13 to 14: Voting on amendments.

October 28: Solemn final voting (2290 for, 35 against) and promulgation.

Past: The introduction of general compulsory education caused difficulties in Christian schools. They were too few in number and unable to compete with public schools. And they were too much focused on preserving truth rather than on developing minds.

Future: The educational obligations of parents get primary emphasis; the state's right to cooperate in education is recognized. The right of the Catholic Church to maintain schools is emphasized. But it is also recommended that more be done to encourage individual student initiative. Catholic schools should accept non-Catholic students. Finally, more attention should be paid to Catholic students in non-Catholic schools.

PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

1964: October 20 to November 10: Debate on a first draft.

1965: September 21 to October 8: Debate on a newly revised draft.

November 15 to 17: First voting.

December 4 to 6: Voting on amendments.

December 7: Solemn final voting (2309 for, 75 against) and promulgation.

Past: Because of the autonomy of the exact sciences and the spirit and style of modern civilization, there had been a growing cleavage between Church and world. The Church tried partly to defend its former position of dominance, partly to recover it. This often put it in a posture of hostility toward the world, which no longer felt that the Church understood it, and which regarded the Church as outmoded.

Future: The Church recognizes on principle the progress of man and feels bound to gratitude for this. But it cannot overlook dangers and errors. Human achievements which made for a deepened receptivity to the gospel message, and therefore have an eschatological connotation, are valued by the Church as 'signs of the time'. The Church sees itself as in solidarity with the world and as sent into the world for the service of humanity.

As to details, the Constitution speaks especially of the roots of present-day atheism, which leads the Church to self-criticism. On marriage, there is strong emphasis on conjugal love and the personal responsibility of the married couple. In the analysis of the present-day process of human socialization, there is a call for vigorous effort on behalf of the weak. In connection with the common progress of mankind toward an international community, modern war is unmasked as a criminal enterprise.

Footnote

* Text from *The Council and the Future*, Mario von Galli, 1966, McGraw-Hill, New York