

P

Apostolic Constitution
Convoking the
Second Vatican
Ecumenical Council

Humanae Salutis

His Holiness
Pope John XXIII



NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE

1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

Washington 5, D. C.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/apostolicconstitjohn>

APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION
CONVOKING THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL
JOHN, BISHOP, SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD.
IN PERPETUAL REMEMBRANCE.

INTRODUCTION

The Divine Redeemer Jesus Christ, who before ascending into heaven conferred on the Apostles the mandate to preach the Gospel to all peoples, in support and guarantee of their mission, made the comforting promise: "Behold I am with you all days even unto the consumation of the world."¹

This divine presence, which has been alive and active in all times in the Church, is noticeable above all in the most grave periods of humanity. It is then that the spouse of Christ shows itself in all its splendor as the master of truth and minister of salvation. And it is then also that it deploys all its power of charity, prayer, sacrifice and of suffering, invincible spiritual means and the same used by the divine founder, who in the solemn hour of His life declared: "Have faith for I have overcome the world."²

PAINFUL CONSIDERATIONS

Today the Church is witnessing a crisis under way within society. While humanity is on the edge of a new era, tasks of immense gravity and amplitude await the Church, as in the most tragic periods of its history. It is a question in fact of bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel, a world which exalts itself with its conquests in the technical and scientific fields but which brings also the consequences of a temporal order which some have wished to reorganize excluding God. This is why modern society is

1. *Matt.* 28,20.
2. *John*, 16,33.

HEAT 110
earmarked by a great material progress to which there is not a corresponding advance in the moral field.

Hence there is a weakening in the aspiration toward the values of the spirit. Hence an urge for the almost exclusive search for earthly pleasures, which progressive technology places with such ease within the reach of all. And hence there is a completely new and disconcerting fact: The existence of a militant atheism which is active on a world level.

REASONS FOR CONFIDENCE

These painful considerations are a reminder of the duty to be vigilant and to keep the sense of responsibility awake. Distrustful souls see only darkness burdening the face of the earth. We, instead, like to reaffirm all our confidence in Our Saviour, who has not left the world which He redeemed.

Indeed, We make Ours the recommendation of Jesus that one should know how to distinguish the "signs of the times,"³ and We seem to see now, in the midst of so much darkness, a few indications which augur well for the fate of the Church and of humanity. The bloody wars that have followed one on the other in our times, the spiritual ruins caused by many ideologies and the fruits of so many bitter experiences have not been without useful teachings. Scientific progress itself, which gave man the possibility of creating catastrophic instruments for his destruction, has raised questions. It has obliged human beings to become thoughtful, more conscious of their own limitations, desirous of peace and attentive to the importance of spiritual values. And it has accelerated that progress of closer collaboration and of mutual integration toward which, even though in the midst of a thousand uncertainties, the human family seems to be moving. All this facilitates, no doubt, the apostolate of the Church, since many people who did not realize the importance of its mission in the past are, taught by experience, today more disposed to welcome its warnings.

THE PRESENT VITALITY OF THE CHURCH

Then, if we turn our attention to the Church, we see that it has not remained a lifeless spectator in the face of these events, but it has followed step by step the evolution of peoples, scientific progress and social revolution. It has opposed decisively the materialistic ideologies which deny faith. Lastly, it has

3. *Matt.* 16,4.

witnessed the rise and growth of the immense energies of the apostolate of prayer, of action in all fields. It has seen the emergence of a clergy constantly better equipped in learning and virtue for its mission; and of a laity which has become evermore conscious of its responsibilities within the bosom of the Church, and, in a special way, of its duty to collaborate with the Church hierarchy.

To this should be added the immense suffering of entire Christian communities, through which a multitude of admirable bishops, priests and laymen seal their adherence to the Faith, bearing persecutions of all kinds and revealing forms of heroism which certainly equal those of the most glorious periods of the Church.

Thus, though the world may appear profoundly changed, the Christian community is also in great part transformed and renewed. It has therefore strengthened itself socially in unity; it has been reinvigorated intellectually; it has been interiorly purified and is thus ready for trial.

THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

In the face of this twofold spectacle--a world which reveals a grave state of spiritual poverty and the Church of Christ, which is still so vibrant with vitality--We, from the time We ascended to the supreme pontificate, despite our unworthiness and by means of an impulse of Divine Providence, have felt immediately the urgency of the duty to call Our sons together, to give the Church the possibility to contribute more efficaciously to the solution of the problems of the modern age.

For this reason, welcoming as from above the intimate voice of Our spirit, We considered that the times now were right to offer to the Catholic Church and to the world the gift of a new ecumenical council, as an addition to, and continuation of, the series of the twenty great councils, which have been through the centuries a real heavenly providence for the increase of grace and Christian progress.

The joyful echo brought about by its announcement, followed by the prayerful participation of the whole Church and by a truly encouraging fervor in the work of preparation, as well as by the lively interest, or at least respectful attention, on the part of non-Catholics and even of non-Christians, proved in the most eloquent manner that the historical importance of the event has not escaped anyone.

The forthcoming council will meet therefore and at a moment in which the Church finds very alive the desire to fortify

its Faith and to contemplate itself in its own awe-inspiring unity. In the same way it feels more urgent the duty to give greater efficiency to its sound vitality and to promote the sanctification of its members, the diffusion of revealed truth, the consolidation of its agencies.

This will be a demonstration of the Church, always living and always young, which feels the rhythm of the times and which in every century beautifies itself with new splendor, radiates new light, achieves new conquests, while remaining identical in itself, faithful to the divine image impressed on its countenance by its spouse, who loves her and protects her, Christ Jesus.

Then, at a time of generous and growing efforts which are made in different parts for the purpose of rebuilding that visible unity of all Christians which corresponds to the wishes of the Divine Redeemer, it is very natural that the forthcoming council should provide premises of doctrinal clarity and of mutual charity that will make still more alive in our separated brothers the wish for the hoped for return to unity and will smooth the way.

And, finally, to a world, which is lost, confused and anxious under the constant threat of new frightful conflicts, the forthcoming council must offer a possibility for all men of good will to turn their thoughts and their intentions toward peace, a peace which can and must, above all, come from spiritual and supernatural realities, from human intelligence and conscience, enlightened and guided by God the Creator and Redeemer of humanity.

THE WORKING PROGRAM OF THE COUNCIL

These fruits that We expect so much from the council and on which We like so often to dwell, entail a vast program of work which is now being prepared. This concerns the doctrinal and practical problems which correspond more to the requirements of perfect conformity with Christian teaching, for the edification and in the service of the Mystical Body and of its supernatural mission, and, therefore, the sacred books, venerable tradition, the sacraments, prayer, ecclesiastical discipline, charitable and relief activities, the lay apostolate and mission horizons.

This supernatural order must, however, reflect its efficiency in the other order, the temporal one, which on so many occasions is unfortunately ultimately the only one that occupies and worries man. In this field the Church also has shown that it wishes to be "*Mater et Magistra*," according to the words of Our distant and glorious predecessor, Innocent III, spoken on the occasion of the Fourth Lateran Council.

Although the Church does not primarily seek an earthly goal, nevertheless along its way, it cannot stand aloof from those problems which are of the temporal order or neglect the concerns which they generate. She knows indeed of what great concern to immortal souls are those helps and protections which are necessary to bring about a kindlier tranquil life for every man whose salvation is to be gained. She knows that in the same way she is able to bring it about that men may know themselves thoroughly since she enlightens them with the light of Christ. For from this point she guides them that they may understand what they are, with what dignity they excel, and what end they must pursue.

Hence the living presence of the Church extends, by right and by fact, to the international organizations, and to the working out of its social doctrine regarding the family, education, civil society and all related problems. This has raised its magisterium to a very high level as the most authoritative voice, interpreter and affirmer of the moral order, and the champion of the rights and duties of all human beings and of all political communities.

In this way the beneficial influence of the council deliberations must, as We sincerely hope, succeed to the extent of imbuing with Christian light and penetrating with fervent spiritual energy not only the intimacy of the soul but the whole collection of human activities.

CONVOCATION OF THE COUNCIL

The first announcement of the council made by Us on January 25, 1959, was like a little seed that We planted with anxious mind and hand. Supported by heavenly help, We then readied ourselves for the complex and delicate work of preparation.

Three years have passed during which we have seen, day by day, the little seed develop and become with the blessing of God a great tree.

Contemplating the long and tiring road covered, there rises from Our spirit a hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord for His generous help that everything developed in a suitable manner and in a harmony of spirit.

Before deciding the questions that had to be studied in view of the forthcoming council, We wished to hear beforehand the wise and enlightened opinions of the College of Cardinals, of the episcopate of the whole world, of the sacred congregations of the Roman Curia, of the general superiors of orders and religious congregations, of Catholic universities and of ecclesiastical faculties.

This work of consultation was carried out within a year and there emerged clearly from this the points that had to be submitted to a thorough study.

We then instituted the different preparatory organizations to which We entrusted the arduous task of drawing up the doctrinal and disciplinary projects, among which We will choose those we intend to submit to the council. We finally have the joy of announcing that this intense work of study, to which the cardinals, bishops, prelates, theologians, canonists and experts from all over the world have given their valuable contribution, is now nearing its end.

Trusting therefore in the help of the Divine Redeemer, the Beginning and the End of all things, in the help of His Most Excellent Mother and of St. Joseph--to whom We entrusted from the very beginning such a great event--it seems to Us that the time has come to convoke the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

After hearing therefore the opinion of our brothers the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, with the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and of Our own, we institute, announce and convoke for the forthcoming year 1962 the ecumenical and universal council, which will be held in the Vatican basilica, on days that will be established according to the opportunity which good Providence may deign to grant Us.

We consequently wish and order that to this ecumenical council, instituted by Us, there should come from all parts Our beloved sons the cardinals, the venerable brother patriarchs, and primates, archbishops, and bishops--both residential and titular--and also all those people who have the right and the duty to attend the council.

AN INVITATION TO PRAYER

And now We ask each individual member of the faithful and the entire Christian people to continue participating in most lively prayer that it may accompany, vivify and embellish the preparation of the forthcoming great event.

May this prayer be inspired by ardent and persevering faith. May it be accompanied by that Christian penance which makes it more acceptable to God and more efficacious. May it be strengthened by an effort of Christian life which may be an anticipated token of the decisions taken by each of the individual faithful to apply the teachings and the practical directives that will emerge from the council itself.

We address Our appeal both to the secular and regular clergy, spread throughout the world, to all categories of faithful. But in a very special way We entrust its success to the prayers of children, knowing well how powerful is the voice of innocence with God, and to the sick and to the suffering that their pains and life of sacrifice, by virtue of the Cross of Christ, may be transformed and rise in prayer, in redemption, in a source of life for the Church.

To this chorus of prayers We invite also all Christians of churches separated from Rome, that the council may be also to their advantage. We know that many of these sons are anxious for a return of unity and of peace, according to the teachings and the prayer of Christ to the Father. And We know also that the announcement of the council has been accepted by them not only with joy but also that not a few have already promised to offer their prayers for its success, and that they hope to send representatives of their communities to follow its work at close quarters. All this is for Us a reason of great comfort and of hope, and precisely for the purpose of facilitating these contacts We instituted some time ago the secretariat for this specific purpose.

May there be repeated thus in the Christian families the spectacle of the Apostles gathered together in Jerusalem after the Ascension of Jesus to heaven, when the newborn Church was completely united in communion of thought and of prayer with Peter and around Peter, the shepherd of the lambs and of the sheep. And may the Divine Spirit deign to answer in a most comforting manner the prayer that rises daily to Him from every corner of the earth:

“Renew Your wonders in our time, as though for a new Pentecost, and grant that the Holy Church, preserving unanimous and continuous prayer, together with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and also under the guidance of St. Peter, may increase the reign of the Divine Saviour, the reign of truth and justice, the reign of love and peace. Amen.”⁴

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, December 25, feast of the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, 1961, fourth year of Our pontificate.

I, John, Bishop of the Catholic Church.

4. A.A.S. VLI (1959), p. 832.

MOTU PROPRIO
ANNOUNCING OPENING DATE
of the
SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

On December 25, 1961, through the apostolic constitution, *Humanae Salutis*, We set the holding of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council for the current year, translating into action a decision that had matured in Our heart for a long time and satisfying at the same time the common expectation of the Catholic world.

At the present time, after careful consideration and to give participants in the council an opportunity to arrange everything in time, We have reached a decision to set the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council for the 11th day of October next. We have especially chosen this date because it links us with the memory of the great Council of Ephesus, which was of extreme importance in the history of the Church.

With the approach of such a solemn assembly, We can do no less than exhort once more all Our sons, together with all the clergy and the Christian people who await it with great anticipation, to intensify ever more their prayers to God for the happy success of this undertaking, in which We are engaged together with Our venerable brothers and beloved sons who are directly occupied in the preparatory work for the council itself.

The fruits which We ardently desire from this celebration are principally that the Church, Spouse of Christ, may strengthen still more her divine energies and extend her beneficial influence in still greater measure to the minds of men.

In this way there is further reason to hope that all people—especially those whom we so sorrowfully see suffering because of misfortunes, discords and mournful conflicts—turning their eyes more trustfully toward Christ, “a light of revelation to the gentiles” (*lumen ad revelationem gentium*), may finally achieve true peace in respect for mutual rights and duties.

After mature deliberation, and in virtue of Our apostolic authority, We therefore establish and decree that the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council will begin on the 11th day of October of the current year.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, February 2, 1962, the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the fourth year of Our pontificate.

John XXIII
Fp.

(Translation provided by NCWC News Service)

