



What Happened at Vatican II

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During four years in session, Vatican Council II held television audiences rapt with its elegant, magnificently choreographed public ceremonies, while its debates generated front-page news on a near-weekly basis. By virtually any assessment, it was the most important religious event of the twentieth century, with repercussions that reached far beyond the Catholic church. Remarkably enough, this is the first book, solidly based on official documentation, to give a brief, readable account of the council from the moment Pope John XXIII announced it on January 25, 1959, until its conclusion on December 8, 1965; and to locate the issues that emerge in this narrative in their contexts, large and small, historical and theological, thereby providing keys for grasping what the council hoped to accomplish.

"What Happened at Vatican II" captures the drama of the council, depicting the colorful characters involved and their clashes with one another. The book also offers a new set of interpretive categories for understanding the council's dynamics--categories that move beyond the tired "progressive" and "conservative" labels. As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the calling of the council, this work reveals in a new way the spirit of Vatican II. A reliable, even-handed introduction to the council, the book is a critical resource for understanding the Catholic church today, including the pontificate of Benedict XVI.

What Happened at Vatican II Details

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From Reader Review What Happened at Vatican II for online ebook

Nathanial says

Day by day, blow by blow account of "the biggest meeting in history"--upwards of three thousand participants, journalists, international observers gathering for two or three months a year, over a period of five years. Why? Because the Catholic Church had become, well, the Catholic Church, and someone had to do something about it.

O'Malley identifies three main 'themes' in the Council documents: style (anyone who's been to Mass knows Catholics got 'style', but by this he means approach to tone and language), the relationship between the center and the periphery (i.e., the Curia vis-a-vis bishops), and how the Church deals with change.

Includes historical background on previous councils (especially Trent and Vatican I), summary of the previous centuries' response and/or reaction to liberal revolutions, modernism, and nationalisms, plus speculations on effects: what the Council did and did not achieve.

Daniel Carr says

This book was a run-down of the main events, people, and circumstances of Vatican II.

I liked it a lot, and learned much about what happened there. I don't believe that I'll retain much because I didn't know many of the names or documents at all, so it was difficult to remember which documents were highly disputed. It was also a bit dry, especially at the beginning. It was worth my time to read once, but I likely won't read it again.

Ben Larson says

Otto von Bismark said "No one should see how laws or sausages are made. To retain respect for sausages and laws, one must not watch them in the making. The making of laws like the making of sausages, is not a pretty sight."

So also the making of church laws and policy is not a pretty sight, but John O'Malley did an excellent job of boiling down the four years of Vatican II to an understandable text.

Nick says

O'Malley's history sheds light not only on what happened at the Vatican II Council but what happened in decades before it (much of the first part of the book is not about the Council at all but about events and trends beginning sometimes centuries before it) and on the ongoing debate in the Church about what happened and what it means.

Jackson says

This is a thoroughly engaging popular history of the complicated story that is Vatican II. O'Malley reads the events of the council as groundbreaking in Catholic history. In its style of discourse and efforts of updating, the council reversed a trend in Catholicism, since at least the early 19th century, of reverting into itself and disengaging from the world which the Popes had increasingly described as perverse in its modernism. The Council Fathers instead engaged the world in dialogue in such important documents as "The Church in the Modern World." Moreover, the Catholic Church began at Vatican II an emphasis in ecumenical dialogue amongst the Church and, what it calls, her separated brethren (viz. Orthodox and Protestant believers). While I am not too familiar on scholarship on Vatican II, I believe the prevailing trend is to interpret the council as thoroughly in line with previous councils. O'Malley offers a different take which I think is vitally important to remembering the legacy of the council. A great read for anyone interested in the Church or twentieth century history.

Lee says

This book went into a lot of detail about the ins and outs of the discussions, and the themes underlying the votes and debates. Too much detail for me, though, and I ended up skimming the second half.

Theresa says

The logistics alone involved in bringing together about 3,000 people from a world-wide institution with a 2,000 year tradition to express its understanding of itself are, to say the least, impressive. The documents of Vatican II reveal a remarkable reorientation of the Catholic Church. In his lively narrative, O'Malley aims to devise a hermeneutic which gets beyond the documents to the spirit of the Council, in order to show what happened and didn't happen at Vatican II. It's a helpful account to understanding the Catholic Church today.

Nick Black says

Saw in this (excellent) article: <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.d...>

Mary Helene says

This is JUST the kind of book I've been wanting for years - a popular history of Vatican II - what happened, with lots of juicy bits, and enough historical background for it all to make sense, and not pushing a particular agenda - just the facts, with enough storyline to make it a joy to read, which it was.

Scott says

Pretty good though a little long winded at times. The chapter on the “long 19th century” was especially good.

Brian says

A little overlong and at times too dense, it is still a good overview of the council.

Andrew Doohan says

Yet as this book has shown, it is possible to move beyond specific issues, to move beyond proof-texting techniques that lift sentences or paragraphs out of context, to move beyond loaded labels like conservative/reactionary and progressive/liberal, which are the ways the council has until now consistently been approached and interpreted. I have tried to show that it is possible to move beyond those approaches to arrive at generalizations about the council grounded in its narrative contexts and in the vast expanse of the documentation it has left behind. In order to arrive at such generalizations, I devised out of the same narrative and documentation some categories of analysis and interpretation, a hermeneutic, and much of the burden of the book has been to validate those categories.

That is the scope and burden of this book. I hope that it has rendered persuasive both the generalizations and the categories through which I have arrived at them. I hope, more fundamentally, that the accomplishment of the book has been to render a little clearer what happened – and what did not happen – at the Second Vatican Council. (p 313)

With these words John O’Malley brings his book, *What Happened at Vatican II*, to a close, having sketched through the preparations and deliberations of the Second Vatican Council, the “biggest meeting ever held”, that has left an indelible mark on the life of the Catholic Church not only through the sixteen documents that came from it but also from the style of Church that it sought to bring to reality.

O’Malley insightful and eminently readable book is written in an engaging style which unfolds the narrative of the council, some of the personalities of the major participants, the complexities and intrigue that marked the council’s deliberations in such a way that the reader is left with a very clear understanding of the significance of this watershed event in the life of the Catholic Church.

I strongly recommend this book for anyone wanting to achieve an understanding of just what happened at Vatican II.

Michael Ortiz says

Well written, but superficial take on the Council and its effects on the Church. I would recommend only to those who have a solid grounding in the issues.

Jeff Raymond says

I liked this book, it's a wealth of information and a good inside look at the Vatican council process, but dear god did I labor through it. It's very dry at times, and the only thing that kept me going was the information.

Alan says

Absolutely invaluable. The only readable account of the events of the Second Vatican Council that is available in English. The author sets the scene with the basic history of the 1800s and 1900s. The author then describes the four sessions of the council, with just enough detail to present a coherent story, while avoiding becoming an encyclopedia. Many Catholics today know Vatican II as simply the council that allowed the mass to be said in the vernacular instead of in Latin. Reading this book will shatter that image. The Council did so much more.
