



## An Introduction to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65)

### Popes of the Council:

#### Pope John XXIII 1958-1963

1. Who was Angelo Roncalli/Pope John XXIII?
2. What led him to call for a Council?
3. What was his purpose?

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1. Born 25 Nov 1881, Angelo Giuseppe RONCALLI in Bergamo, Lombardi to a family of poor peasant sharecroppers who worked but did not own the land. The third of 13 children.  
Spotted by priest as bright, he taken to the next town to be educated.  
Ordained to priesthood 10 Aug 1904  
Obtained degrees and always retained an interest in History.

Diplomatic Service:

- 1925-31 Official to Bulgaria
- 1931-34 Apostolic Delegate to Bulgaria (9 yrs)
- 1934-44 Apostolic Delegate to Greece and to Turkey (10 yrs)
- 1944-53 Apostolic Nuncio in Paris, France (9yrs)

In 1953 (12 Jan) created Cardinal-Priest of Santa Prisca and Patriarch of Venice by Pius XII

In 1958 (28 Oct) after 11 ballots unexpectedly elected pope aged 76. Seen as 'caretaker' pope after the long reign of Pius XII until a successor could be found.

In 1959, 25 Jan, feast of St Paul, surprised everyone by announcing a Council in his basilica, Outside the Walls against the advice of some Cardinals who didn't see the need for it.

Died 03 June 1963, after only one Session of the Council.

2. Let us look again at Roncalli's diplomatic service:
  - Bulgaria for 9 years;
  - Greece and Turkey for 10 years;
  - Paris, France for 9 years.

This was a time of great suffering in all those places, and he was far from immune to it.

In Bulgaria, he came in direct contact with the 'Jewish question' and their persecution; between 1930-40, he acted repeatedly in their favour. He rescued many by issuing baptismal and immigration certificates to Jews in Hungary, and went to the train station himself to prevent their transportation to the concentration camps. He recognised the pastoral need for a homeland for the Jews. In 2011, Israel acclaimed him "Righteous Among the Nations".

He was in Turkey during the secularist reign of Attaturk, President from 1923-37 and witnessed the influence of political power on religious practice; and in Greece at a time of famine, where he came into direct contact with the members of the Orthodox Church with whom he had excellent relations.

His time in France is perhaps the most significant. Since it was the bijoux of nunciatures. Roncalli was far from the first choice for Nuncio. In 1944, General De Gaulle (not yet President, but a man of immense prestige) wanted the residing Nuncio, Valeri, dismissed for his support of the Vichy Regime during the war. Affronted, Pius XII said (to the effect): 'In that case, you can have the little fat man from Bulgaria'... In Paris, Roncalli's first charge was to dismiss 33 'collaborator bishops'; he argued for a judicial enquiry into their guilt, and in the end only 3 had to resign. He came into direct contact with reforms already underway in liturgy and biblical studies in France, Belgium and Germany; in 1958, in Lourdes, he opened the newly designed underground church (capacity 25,000) - very much the fruit of these reforms. He read the works of theologians (dissatisfied with Cajetan and Suarez's use of Thomism); faced with the growing challenge of rationalism and materialism, these scholars suggested a return to the Fathers of the Church as a new approach to presenting the faith (*la nouvelle théologie; ressourcement* +/- 1935-60). Roncalli read and appreciated the works of Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac who in 1950 was 'silenced' by his Order as his teaching on the mystery of the Church and atheism were considered problematic; de Lubac took his new found freedom as an opportunity to go to India where he lived in a Christian ashram with his friend Fr Jules Monchanan for 10 years; there; he discovered the spiritual dimensions of Buddhism.

Roncalli brought all of these experiences (and more) to the papacy. They found their echo in his acts with regarding the Orthodox and non-Christian religions, and perhaps especially the Jews. One recalls the change to the Good Friday prayer, with the removal of the reference to the 'perfidious Jews'....

Always interested in history, Roncalli had a habit of listening to people. He would walk the streets wherever he was, encountering the locals. In 1953, named Patriarch of Venice and governing a large diocese for the first time, he summoned it to a synod.

On becoming Pope, he welcomed many bishops who raised pastoral issues with him, and within a few days had already written 'Council?' on his note pad, which his secretary studiously ignored!

One of his first decisions was to call de Lubac to be a *peritus* at the Council –the latter discovered on reading it in a French newspaper! As the Portuguese proverb says: 'God writes straight with crooked lines'.

3. He himself stated his aim in calling the Council: (headings included in his own text)

***"Transmitting the Truth Fearlessly"***

(The council's)intention is to give to the world the whole of that doctrine which, notwithstanding every difficulty and contradiction, has become the common heritage of mankind—to transmit it in all its purity, undiluted, undistorted. It is a treasure of incalculable worth, not indeed coveted by all, but available to all men of good will.

And our duty is not just to guard this treasure, as though it were some museum-piece and we the curators, but earnestly and fearlessly to dedicate ourselves to the work that needs to be done in this modern age of ours, pursuing the path which the Church has followed for almost twenty centuries.

Nor are we here primarily to discuss certain fundamentals of Catholic doctrine, or to restate in greater detail the traditional teaching of the Fathers and of early and more recent theologians. We presume that these things are sufficiently well known and familiar to you all.

***"A Fresh Approach"***

There was no need to call a council merely to hold discussions of that nature. What is needed at the present time is a new enthusiasm, a new joy and serenity of mind in the unreserved acceptance by all of the entire Christian faith, without forfeiting that accuracy and precision in its presentation which characterized the proceedings of the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council.

What is needed, and what everyone imbued with a truly Christian, Catholic and apostolic spirit craves today, is that this doctrine shall be more widely known, more deeply understood, and more penetrating in its effects on men's moral lives.

What is needed is that this certain and immutable doctrine, to which the faithful owe obedience, be studied afresh and reformulated in contemporary terms.

For this deposit of faith, or truths which are contained in our time-honoured teaching is one thing; the manner in which these truths are set forth (with their meaning preserved intact) is something else."

4. What John XXIII wanted was **the new evangelisation** as defined later by Pope John Paul II: A new or re-evangelisation of the 'old churches', mainly in Europe and the West. For this what was required was: he pleaded with the Holy Spirit for a New Pentecost to give : New ardour, New methods, New expressions to the mission of the Church.

As we can see, it was not his intention to change any settled teaching of the Church.

He wanted the Church to explore her essential mystery, nature, and mission, in order to rediscover a new missionary impetus in her relations with the contemporary world.

He believed firmly that the world was waiting for a new proclamation of the Good News!