The Opening of the Council
Assembly of a Truly ‘Global’ Church

The worldwide episcopate converges in Rome; public attention centers on the Vatican

Impressions of the opening ceremony: Cardinal Lercaro, Melkite Patriarch Maximos IV

Pope John XXIII’s allocution Gaudet mater ecclesia sets the definitive tone for the Council

In continuity with Councils past; bringing the Church up to date; to improve the life of all peoples of the world; a focus on Christ and his gospel; a new pastoral way of teaching

Initial difficulties:

- Attitudes of the bishops - Rome will tell us what to do...
- Lack of experience in democratic process & collaboration
- Latin as the only acceptable language of the Council
- Procedural challenges
- Emerging conciliar consciousness: the 13 October meeting
Christ is the ‘Light of the nations’ whom the Church reflects; the Church is the means of salvation for all through its union with God; it has the nature of a sacrament (#1)

- Recovery of Church as Mystery, as well as People of God (ch.1-2)

- Equality of dignity through baptism; a more expansive view of membership of the Church. Distinction between ‘Church of Christ’ and ‘Catholic Church’ (#8)

- Degrees of communion possible in the Church; wider acknowledgement of God’s action beyond the Catholic Church (#14-16)
Lumen gentium
Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

- Distinction between common and ministerial priesthood, but originating from the same source (#10)
- Infallibility is rooted in the entire community’s sense of faith (#12)
- Ordained ministry is seen as service to the People of God (#18, pm.)
- Pope & Bishops; collegiality at all levels of the hierarchy (#18-28)
- Restoration of the permanent diaconate (#29)
- Through baptism, lay people share in the mission of Christ to witness the gospel through their involvement in the temporal sphere (ch. 4)

The entire Church is called to holiness, each according to one’s endowment of ‘power’ by God and state of life (#33, ch. 5)
- Religious members serve as signs of radical discipleship to the whole community (ch. 6)
- Together with the ‘Church in heaven’ the Church on earth moves toward the fulfilment of God’s Kingdom as a pilgrim (ch. 7)
- Doctrine on Mary is situated within the understanding of the Church (ch. 8)

1962 Dec 1-7: Debate on the preparatory schema
1963 Sep 30-Oct 30: Debate on the four chapters of the revised schema
1964 Sep 15-18: Debate on two new chapters; Mary & eschatology
1964 Oct 19-20, 29: First votes on chapters for eschatology, and Mary
1964 Oct 30-Nov 18: Voting on the amendments for the entire schema
1964 Nov 21: Solemn final vote and promulgation