

**The Story and Promise  
of Vatican II**  
*in Plain English*

Revised and Updated

Bill Huebsch

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## Introduction

History, as Pope John XXIII<sup>1</sup> once said, is the teacher of life. We cannot understand the present moment in which we live without understanding what has come before us. Pope John had been a teacher of history in the seminary in Bergamo, Italy, his home diocese, and he had a strong understanding of the history of the church. He had also lived in eastern Europe for a couple of decades—which gave him ecumenical and international experience. But it was while he served as papal nuncio to France after World War II that the idea of a council may have begun to gel for him. It was there—in France—where he met many of those who would later play a significant role in Vatican II. Paris then was a swirl of new approaches to theology, liturgy, history, ecumenism, and our understanding of the church. Likewise, nearby Belgium, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands had busy academic circles. Around the world, more and more bishops were well-trained theologians. Without anyone being consciously aware of it, the Holy Spirit in those days was preparing the church—and Angelo Roncalli—for the Second Vatican Council.

Many popes in the history of the church have been chosen from the leading families of Rome or Italy, but Roncalli came from humble, rural beginnings in the northern Italian village of Sotto il Monte. They were farmers, a close-knit and hard-working family. He remained tightly connected to this family throughout his life, and, at the time of his death, they were standing at his bedside.

It was said that, when asked about why a council was needed, Pope John responded with a historical reference. “It’s time,” he’s reported to have said, “to sweep the imperial dust off the throne of St. Peter, which has gathered there since Constantine.” Indeed, much of what the council did was to restore elements of the early church—the first three hundred or so years—and update them for the modern times. When Constantine brought the church into his political center and lavished privilege on its clergy in the early 300s, many elements that made the church vibrant and alive were lost.

The catechumenate, an early pathway into the faith, had been closed down since the Constantinian period. The diaconate, an

office in the early church organized to serve the poor, had likewise been lost. The participation by all the baptized in the Mass had been replaced with a clergy-centered liturgy while laypeople became spectators. Baptism itself, once the essential sacerdotal sacrament—that is, the sacrament which commissioned everyone as a pastoral minister—had become a sort of magical way to erase original sin. Baptisms were “performed” after Mass in the back of our churches while ordination had become the largest liturgical celebration of the diocese each year with fanfare and pomp galore. Baptism was thus an afterthought, and ordination was always in the foreground. Faith as a personal relationship with Jesus had been replaced with mere assent to a set of doctrinal propositions. The life of discipleship and the desire to follow the teachings of Jesus had been replaced with “minimum obligations” imposed under pain of mortal sin. The church itself, once a sign to the world of Jesus who is the Christ, a sacrament of his risen presence, of his love and mercy, had become an institution often mired in politics, armies, inquisitions, and rigidity. And on and on. Indeed, “the imperial dust of Constantine.”

Then along came this council, throwing open the windows of the church, inviting everyone to a renewed encounter with Jesus, opening itself to the world, welcoming guests from outside our walls, and seeking its way as a pilgrim. The church was restored in Jesus, who is the Christ. The story and promise of Vatican II point the way forward for us. They are the bedrock on which the current renewal of pastoral theology is firmly set.

Many of the characteristics of Vatican II set it apart from previous councils:

- The presence of non-Roman Catholic observers, including representatives of the Russian Church for the first time in hundreds of years, was a landmark. Present were representatives from Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, and Jewish churches.
- The sheer number of participants was staggering compared to past councils. Vatican I had 800 participants, Vatican II, nearly 2,500.
- The genuinely international flavor was also new for the church. Most bishops at Vatican I and all previous councils had been European, even those attending from other continents, but this was indeed a worldwide body of prelates.

- The presence of a press corps—even though not always well informed by the *official* press office—suggested a new openness and an awareness that the world was watching and listening.
- With all these people present, Vatican II was the largest such gathering in the history of the church.
- Vatican II was the first ecumenical council to have electricity, telephones, cars, airplanes, typewriters, and computerized voting.
- For the first time in history, a council of the whole church was meeting without the interference of any temporal government. It was the first since the eighth century to meet at a time when there was complete separation of church and state in Italy and south-central Europe. This gave the council a more pastoral tone. It removed past political tendencies and pointed to true renewal.
- And finally, this council's focus on animating the faith of Christians rather than defining doctrine or condemning heretics was also new.

### Why this book?

Of course, much has already been written about the Second Vatican Council. The original documents are readily available in many languages today, online and in print. Numerous scholarly books in the market deal with the history and theology of the council. There is so much excellent material, in fact, that wading through it can be daunting for the average reader. Many people know the importance of understanding this remarkable religious event. They often pick up the council's final documents or its theology to get started but, after reading a few articles of one or the other, they put them back down again. Both the history and the documents can make for dense reading.

This volume takes its place among the Vatican II books in a unique space. It provides a brief telling of the story of the council in plain English, following an exciting chronological pathway from the beginning of the council to its final bell. Knowing the story is vital to understanding the documents and the newly established pastoral tone which Vatican II gave to the church. At the end of the chronology, each of the documents is summarized for the reader.

Following this opening section is a presentation in plain English of the four constitutions from the council. These constitutions remain the normative guiding documents for today's church. They were a significant source for the *Catechism*, cited more often there than any document other than Sacred Scripture. They have not been changed, reduced, or set aside in any way since the council ended in 1965. There are also a dozen other decrees and declarations from Vatican II, and these are also available to the reader online as full article-by-article paraphrases. Hence all sixteen council documents in plain English are an essential part of this project.

### Sources

The first credit in my research must go to a professor of history at the Catholic Theological Union of Chicago in 1980, Fr Ted Ross SJ. His courses on the Second Vatican Council provided treatments of all the primary sources that were then available on the council. His excellent lectures, faith, wit, and deep understanding of the council inspired me to adopt Vatican II as an area of great interest in my graduate studies and in the ministry work that followed for the next forty years.

Another primary source of inspiration and information for me was the late Bishop Ray Lucker of the Diocese of New Ulm in Minnesota. Ray was in Rome during the Second Vatican Council and was deeply moved and changed by it. Immediately after graduate school, I worked on the pastoral team in the New Ulm Diocese alongside him and other remarkable people and got a "second education" from that experience. The original idea for this project came from Ray Lucker. Here in part is how Ray felt about his time in Rome:

Twelve years after I was ordained, I was sent to Rome to study theology. I was there during the Second Vatican Council. It was the most profound experience of my life. I went through personal conversion. My faith became a personal relationship with God as well as an assent to the truths that God has revealed. The Council called the whole church to reform and renewal, for an active, informed and committed laity... and invited every member of the church to work for the transformation of society.... I saw in the Second Vatican Council a fulfillment of all of my dreams.<sup>2</sup>

I first went to work on this twenty-five years ago in the mid-1990s, working with Paul Thurmes, a brilliant scholar who is fluent in Italian. The first translation from Latin for most Roman documents was usually to Italian. In this revised edition, as in the original, I also consulted the primary sources considered trustworthy by everyone, including the final published documents from the council, both the English translations<sup>3</sup> as well as the original Latin<sup>4</sup>. I pored over and outlined the council based on the “Daybooks” of the council published in English.<sup>5</sup> The Daybooks are essentially the “minutes” of Vatican II and are filled with details on the speeches, voting, and related events that formed the council. They’re a rich source for understanding how the council unfolded in real time. I found and studied the reflections of the council’s participants, both the bishops and the theological experts who were present<sup>6</sup>. And I have read and re-read the history of this council<sup>7</sup>.

I also studied the accounts given by Xavier Rynne<sup>8</sup>, published first as a series of columns in *The New Yorker* and still an absolutely excellent telling of the story, and Bob Kaiser’s excellent coverage<sup>9</sup>, which appeared first in *Time* magazine, as well as many other commentaries, news articles, and theological texts.

I have also been participating in the liturgy of the church restored by the council. This is that place where—week after week—we experience firsthand the life we share together about which the council was so concerned.

More recently, I have been teaching courses on the council and the resulting pastoral theology in the Institute for Pastoral Studies at the Loyola University of Chicago. Likewise, I have been lecturing to groups in the U.S., Canada, and England on this remarkable event, the most important religious event of the last century. Lately, my teaching texts have been two secondary sources: *What Happened at Vatican II?* by Jesuit John W. O’Malley<sup>10</sup> along with *Keys to the Council* by Richard Gaillardetz and Catherine Clifford<sup>11</sup>. Both of these texts are absolutely top-notch. I also ask my students to read the documents in this plain English version as a way to help them understand the actual texts themselves.

Because I have been immersed in so many primary sources—and I have hundreds of pages of my own notes, reflections, observations, and insights—much of that from my original research more than twenty-five years ago, a lot of it handwritten or typed,

some of it from Paul Thurmes, Ted Ross or Ray Lucker—I cite specific sources in this revision only when I actually quote other scholars or lift an idea directly from them. This text was substantially written in the 1990s and is being updated here only where new research has provided further information or insights. My original version is still remarkably accurate. The endnotes also form the bibliography. My thanks go to the very competent staff of the John Ireland Library at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, for their help in this project.

### **My Purposes**

Again, the goal of this project, building on all the work that has been done by others, is to (1) provide in plain English a brief explanation of the story of the council by following its events in chronological order, and (2) to help the reader see the promise of the council in the texts of the documents themselves. The story is told in standard paragraph form set within a chronology. The documents are presented here as a poetic paraphrased summary using sense lines instead of sentences (as they were in the 1996 edition), inviting the reader to go to the original text to have a first-hand, primary source. I have retained the article numbers from those original texts to help students and readers find their way. The poetic sense lines allow for the juxtaposition of ideas and the isolation of critical thoughts and phrases. They're meant to inspire and edify the reader at the level of the heart and soul, as well as the mind and intellect.

### **How we read church documents**

Church documents have authority based on both (1) where they fall in “the hierarchy of papal pronouncements” as well as (2) how they are “received” by the faithful. There are, in total, some fifty different types of papal or Roman documents. Among them, decretal letters and constitutions rank very high, especially constitutions from an ecumenical council. A decretal letter may be used to declare an infallible doctrine or to pronounce the canonization of a saint. A constitution may be used to declare a teaching which is of a substantial nature, one that is central to the entire church. No decretal letters but four important constitutions were promulgated at Vatican II addressing (1) the church as such (or *ad intra*), (2) the liturgy, (3) divine revelation, and (4) the church’s relationship

to the modern world (or *ad extra*).

Also at a high rank are papal bulls, *motu proprio*, and encyclicals. A papal bull, named after its red seal, or *bull* in Italian, is a very solemn pronouncement. One was issued to convoke Vatican II, for example. A *motu proprio* is a more personal papal decree, written by the pope himself, signed in his own hand. One was used to declare the rules and procedures for the council, for example. An encyclical is somewhat lower in rank, used to declare the social and moral teachings of the church. There were no encyclicals issued as official documents of Vatican II.

Significantly lower in rank are addresses or allocutions and papal speeches used to give the opinion of the pope or to make an announcement. At about that same rank are decrees and declarations, of which there were a total of twelve at Vatican II. A decree gives a significant teaching but one that requires further discussion while a declaration usually addresses an area that may be, by its nature, controversial or in need of further doctrinal development. Close in rank to these are instructions that are used to amplify other documents and give specific steps to carry them out. Below these at various levels of rank are documents giving the opinions of the Roman Curia and other prelates.

Documents published by a council are considered very authoritative because they're prepared by such a broad consultation among bishops and the pope and because they reflect the thinking of the church. But another factor in measuring their relative authority is how the men and women of the church *receive* them and understand them. This "doctrine of reception" is how the church has always allowed for the Holy Spirit to speak through all the baptized. "The canonical doctrine of reception, broadly stated, asserts that for a law or rule to be an effective guide for the believing community, it must be accepted by that community."<sup>12</sup>

**A Chronological & Annotated Outline  
of the Major Events  
of the Second Vatican Council**

SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE

# The Period Before the Council

October 1959 to September 1962

October 9, 1958 ► **Pope Pius XII** died.

October 28, 1958 ► **Angelo Roncalli** was elected pope and took the name of John XXIII.

January 25, 1959 ► **Pope John XXIII announced his intention to call the council.** He announced three initiatives: (1) his plan to convene the council, (2) his decision to hold a synod in the Diocese of Rome, and (3) his plan to revise the code of canon law. His announcement was met with little support from the leaders of the Roman Curia.

## Background

Why, after 400 years of living out the decrees and rubrics of the Council of Trent and the post-Tridentine church, did Vatican II occur? How did the modern church succeed in initiating such sweeping reforms? Why now? Why these particular reforms?

### **How did all this start?**

On the one hand, the answer is plain: nothing less than the entire history of the church set the stage on which this council unfolded. All the previous twenty worldwide councils. All the other regional and local councils and synods over the centuries—literally, hundreds of them. All the theologians, reformers, popes, and leaders throughout the ages. All the saints. All the scandals and corruption. All the faithful people, hungering for the deposit of Christian faith. All of it—the people and events of the church's history—formed the backdrop of this council. Nothing less.

**History is like that.** It unfolds at its own speed like a great, centuries-long conversation, offering people in every age the opportunity to contribute in their own day. Lucky the ones who speak up when their turn arrives for they become the force that molds the world.

On the other hand, the answer might also have been simply that some minor event within the Vatican itself moved Pope John

XXIII to decide for reform. Perhaps some petty rule was broken, which resulted in a quarrel among the members of the curia. Or maybe some rubric was not followed, causing a scrupulous rubricist to ask the pope's forgiveness. Pope John may have said to himself at any such moment that *something* had to be done about such pettiness, *someone* had to clean out the closets of a Vatican too long without reform.

Nonetheless, the extraordinary announcement that a worldwide council of the Roman Catholic Church would be held was a surprise to everyone, including, it seems, Pope John himself. But the origin of the idea in Pope John's own mind is not complicated. He was simply struck by a strong intuition that the time for such a council was now. He became convinced in a moment of certainty that the Holy Spirit was about to hover over the church, stirring it up, rising like daybreak, forerunning a most splendid light.

He told this story in his opening speech at the council. Speaking of the origin of the idea itself, he said he wished to record for history his own personal account "of the first sudden bringing up in our heart and lips of the simple words, 'ecumenical council.'... It was completely unexpected," he said, "like a flash of heavenly light, shedding sweetness in eyes and hearts. And at the same time, it gave rise to a great fervor throughout the world in expectation of the holding of the council."

His decision to go forward with this impulse, interestingly, did not result from a "Vatican self-study" performed by consultants and processed through endless committees, lugging ring-bound photocopies of plans, budgets, and opinion polls around the Vatican.

Instead, it resulted from his personal attention to that "flash of heavenly light," which arose in his soul and breast. It resulted from his trust in the Holy Spirit. And he did not hesitate. He had been pope only a couple of months when this happened, scarcely time to find one's way through the labyrinthine corridors of the Vatican. Then, speaking to 17 cardinals at the Basilica of St. Paul-Outside-the-Walls in Rome on this date, the feast of St. Paul, January 25, 1959, he announced his intention to hold Vatican II.

**Ecumenical.** It should be noted that the term *ecumenical council*, as it is used in reference to Vatican II, does not mean that it would be an "interfaith council." The term *ecumenical* used in this context

simply means “worldwide.” When used in most other settings in today’s church, it means interreligious, especially between Protestants and Catholics, Anglicans and Catholics, or Eastern Orthodox and Catholics. But even though this would not be an interfaith council of Christians as such, Pope John did make clear his intention to invite all of these “separated brethren” to be present as guests.

Let’s take a look at his remarks, presented here in summary form as a paraphrase in sense lines.

**Pope John XXIII’s Announcement of Vatican II**  
Made at the Basilica of St. Paul-Outside-the-Walls  
January 25, 1959

I am prompted to open my mind and heart to you,  
here on this feast of the Conversion of St. Paul.

I want to tell you frankly about several points  
of planned pastoral activity  
which have emerged in my thoughts  
during my brief three months here  
within these church circles in Rome.

In doing so, I am thinking of the care of the souls  
of the faithful in these modern times.

I know that everyone is watching me  
as the new pope,  
wondering what kind of time this will be  
for the church.

I am gradually settling into my new role  
and beginning to see how it will fit  
into the overall history of the church.

As you know, I have a double responsibility  
as both bishop of the Diocese of Rome  
and Shepherd of the universal church.

I am paying attention to both of these as I should.

First, let me reflect on the City of Rome.  
It is much changed since my own youth  
and is now a bustling city with rapid growth,  
especially in the suburbs,

struggling at times to be a united community.

I have been briefed on the spiritual condition  
of the people in Rome  
and I am pleased with the wonderful efforts  
of the cardinal vicar,  
who handles the day-to-day activities  
of this local diocese.

He and his staff have been vigilant and zealous  
in providing for the local needs.

But, on the other hand,  
I remember the story in the Gospels  
when the great crowds called on Jesus  
to help them find nourishment and grace.

It touches my heart as I think of it:  
a few loaves, a few fish,  
“what are these among so many?!”

This says it all: an increase in energies  
and a more coordinated effort will, with God’s help,  
produce great fruits!

I fervently desire this more fruitful  
and profoundly spiritual life for the church.

It is a happy thing to see the grace of Jesus  
multiplied throughout the world  
and providing guidance and blessing for everyone.

But I am saddened when people forget  
the place of God in their lives  
and pursue earthly goods,  
as though they were an end in themselves.

I think, in fact, that this blind pursuit  
of the things of this world  
emerges from the power of darkness,  
not from the light of the Gospels,  
and it is enabled by technology.

All of this weakens the energy of the Spirit  
and generally, leads to divisions,  
spiritual decline,  
and moral failure.

As a priest, and now as the shepherd of the church,  
I am troubled and aroused  
by this tendency in modern life  
and this makes me determined  
to recall certain ancient practices of the church  
in order to remedy this.

Throughout the history of the church,  
such renewal has always yielded results.  
It produces greater clarity of thought,  
the solidarity of religious unity,  
and abundant spiritual riches in people's lives.

So now, trembling a bit with emotion,  
I announce to you my intention  
to hold a twofold event:  
a diocesan-wide meeting for this city  
and an ecumenical council  
for the universal church.

And this will also lead to a bringing up-to-date  
of the code of canon law,  
which will accompany and crown  
these other two events.

For the moment, my announcement to you  
is sufficiently made,  
and I will also announce this myself  
to the rest of the cardinals of the world.

I would be happy to hear your opinion of this  
and also grateful for your suggestions  
as to how to best carry out this triple plan.

In moving forward like this,  
I am trusting in God's grace,  
as well as the protection and intercession  
of Mary and the saints.

I beg them for blessings on this work:  
a good beginning,  
a blessed continuation,  
and a happy outcome.

We think this will produce a great enlightenment  
for all Christian people

as well as a renewed invitation  
to our separated sisters and brothers  
so that all may follow us  
in this search for unity and grace.

In closing, let me recite the blessing  
of St. Leo the Great,  
which is so fitting for this moment in time:  
“You are my crown and my joy if your faith,  
which, from the beginning of the Gospels,  
is preached throughout the world,  
perseveres in sweetness and holiness.”

Oh! What a greeting this is,  
wholly worthy of our spiritual family.  
I bless you in the name of the Father  
and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**After he concluded this short allocution** to the cardinals at St. Paul’s, he paused and waited. Silence followed. No one spoke. Not one of the cardinals expressed a single thought. Pope John wrote about this in his journal later. “Humanly, I could have expected that the cardinals, after hearing my announcement, might have crowded around to express approval and good wishes...Instead, there was a devout and impressive silence.”<sup>13</sup> Pope John never lost his sense of humor.

Not only were the cardinals silent that day in St. Paul’s, but many of them were alarmed. Here was this new pope, an old man when he was elected, announcing an ecumenical council, the first since 1870. Was he out of his mind? They may have wondered. Did he know what he was saying? But John was indeed in his right mind, and he knew exactly what he was saying. He proved this to them one by one as time went on and the preparations for Vatican II got underway in earnest.

January 24–31, 1960 ► **The synod in the Diocese of Rome**, which he announced in the speech you just read was indeed held. Called by the pope, this synod was intended to renew the faith of the people of Rome.

**Briefly Annotated Summary<sup>30</sup>  
of the Documents of Vatican II**

SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE

## Foundational Documents

### Constitutions on Liturgy and Revelation

#### Dogmatic Constitution on DIVINE REVELATION

In Latin: *Dei Verbum*. Approved on Nov 18, 1965. Vote: 2,344 to 6.

#### Here are some key points:

- God has chosen to reveal himself to us and to speak with us as friends.
- Revelation is complete in Jesus who is the Christ, but what the Scriptures demand of us is still being revealed each and every day. Jesus is the source of all revelation. The Scriptures, therefore, are the foundation of divine revelation and tradition elaborates the meaning of the Scriptures for each generation.
- Doctrine and dogma are expressed in different words for different generations. But the eternal truths do not change.
- Dated routine changes, but authentic tradition remains always with us.
- Our response to God's revelation is faith. Through faith, we entrust our whole selves to God. This faith is handed on to all generations through living traditions.
- There is a close link between Scripture, Tradition, and the teaching authority of the Church.
- Revelation is handed on to us by the Church.
- God wants us to know him fully!
- God reveals the inner life of the Trinity to us, communicating God's own self to us. This is known to us as grace.
- Over time, there is growth in our understanding of what God desires
- This growth in understanding is expressed in our sacred Tradition. So, Tradition and Scripture have a very close connection and flow from the same divine well.

## **Constitution on SACRED LITURGY**

In Latin: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Approved on Dec 4, 1963.

Vote: 2,147 to 4.

### **Here are some key points:**

- The bishops wanted to give vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt what is changeable to the needs of today, to promote union among all who believe in Jesus who is the Christ, and to strengthen the church's mission to all human-kind.
- This document established that the Mass (liturgy) is the source and summit of the Christian life.
- It said that, for the liturgy to be effective, the faithful must be well disposed, know what they are doing, and participate.
- It established that some elements are changeable (language, books, prayers, music, persons, and places), and some aren't (Scripture, bread, wine, offertory, consecration, communion).
- It allowed for the use of the vernacular in worship. Latin was retained officially, but for full participation to become a reality, the language of the people would be needed.
- It restored the Eucharist as an act rather than a static devotional object. This meant a downplaying of devotions outside of Mass (rosary, benediction, and so forth) to focus on the liturgical year and rites.
- It established Baptism and Eucharist with primacy among the sacraments.
- It called for the full, active, conscious participation of all the faithful as the aim to be considered before all others.
- It reminds us it is never enough to simply follow the "letter of the law," making sure we are correct and proper.
- It allowed for the removal of elements that are "out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy."
- It proposed a list of reforms, including simpler rites, more use of the Bible, the prayer of the faithful, roles for the laity, and others.

# **Comprehensive Summaries of the Four Constitutions**

Liturgy

Church

Revelation

Church in the Modern World

# The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

from the Second Vatican Council  
promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963

*Sacrosanctum Concilium*

## Introduction

1 We who are the participants in this,  
The Second Vatican Council,  
have a sense of both hope and urgency  
for the Church.

We desire much for the world and believe that the Church  
has much to offer to all people.

Therefore, in all the work that is set out before us,  
we intend to adhere to  
the following ideals:

First, the Christian life is to be lived with vigor.  
Our hope is that through the reform of this council,  
Christians may embrace the Christian faith  
more profoundly each day.

Second, our world has changed substantially in recent years.  
Where it is both possible and beneficial,  
we want the Church to change as well  
to serve the needs of our day more graciously.

Third, presently, Christians are not fully united.  
We want to nurture and promote everything  
that will help to bring about greater understanding  
and more authentic unity among all Christian people.

Fourth, the Church has much to offer humankind.  
We want to strengthen those elements of the Church  
which allow people to experience  
the deep love of God  
and the challenging call of Jesus.

Given these ideals  
and the reform that is already happening

in the Church,  
we believe that now is the right time  
to bring about reform  
in the way we worship and pray.

We, therefore, want to reform the liturgy  
and increase our fervor for it.

2 The essential work of redemption  
is accomplished mainly through the liturgy,  
especially the Eucharist.  
This is true because it is through participation in the liturgy  
that we are given everything that we need  
to understand the mystery  
of our relationship with Jesus, the Christ.  
We are given the strength we need  
to witness to the reality of Jesus in our lives  
and in the life of the Church.

3 Jesus who is the Christ is intimately knowable  
and is, at the same time, a mystery.  
Hence, the Church is also at the same time  
both understandable and incomprehensible.  
The Church is both human and divine,  
visible and invisible,  
eager to act and intent on contemplation,  
present in the world yet not entirely at home here.  
The liturgy helps us to live with this tension  
and thus, enter fully into a life of faith.  
It is the liturgy which builds up those who are present  
and is also a sign to those who are not.  
The liturgy is an expression of our life in the Spirit  
and a sign to the world of ultimate unity.  
It enables those who participate  
to reach full and conscious Christian maturity

4 We are, therefore, setting forth some ideals  
under which the liturgy should be reformed  
and by which it can be embraced fully  
by the faithful.  
We intend to outline the essential principles of liturgy  
which should always be followed.  
We will also establish some practical norms,

meant mainly for the Roman Rite  
but also intended to be applied to the whole church when  
appropriate.

The rites of the Catholic Church hold a particular dignity  
and we want to preserve them.

We also want to revise these rites  
so that, when celebrated with greater vigor,  
they are better able to address the circumstances  
of modern times.

**Chapter I:  
General Principles for Restoration and Promotion  
of Sacred Liturgy**

*I. The Nature of the Sacred Liturgy and Its Importance  
in the Church's Life*

5 We believe that Jesus is the Christ,  
which is to say, "the Anointed One of God."

So tangible was eternity in the person of Jesus  
that those who encountered him  
found themselves completely healed,  
fully forgiven and totally united with God  
and with each other.

It was as though they had crossed the threshold of eternity:  
no longer slaves to the disappointments of time  
but free to discover at every moment  
the thread of eternity which holds all of life together.

They found that in this community of believers  
there existed a new way of being in the world.

Freely reconciled in Jesus who is the Christ,  
they were thus free to bring  
their entire selves to the throne of God  
and worship God in absolute humility and dignity.

All that Jesus gave to the human race  
was principally achieved  
through the Paschal Mystery.

When we speak of the Paschal Mystery  
we refer to Jesus' profound death and burial,  
his resurrection and sending of the apostles  
to the world.

The Gospel of John gives us a vivid image  
of the magnitude of this paschal mystery.

The Gospel writer tells how a spear was driven deep  
into Christ's heart as he waited upon the Cross.

From this noble heart,

God's very life gushed forth upon the world: Eternity!  
Christ's life drenched the whole earth that Friday afternoon.  
And like soft rain, it gave new life to the parched soil  
of humanity's heart.

This, we might say, is really when the Church was born.

6 For Jesus who is the Christ did not pour out his life for us  
just to leave us abandoned.

Instead, Jesus the Christ sent the Holy Spirit  
to fill the lives of the first apostles and disciples  
and to stir up in them the desire  
to live at the table of God's gracious love.

Thus, the first followers of Jesus  
were empowered to preach the good news

And God also gave those first disciples  
everything they would need  
to remain fully attentive to the mystery  
that they had experienced  
during Jesus' lifetime.

Thus, did they baptize those who came to believe  
in Jesus who is the Christ  
and in the saving power of his life and death.

Thus, too, did they share together the Eucharist,  
the full celebration of the presence of Jesus.

It was both in their loving actions and in their worship  
that the first disciples came to know  
their profound call to "be Church."

From that very first day until now  
we have never stopped announcing the Word,  
baptizing those who believe,  
and celebrating the Eucharist.

The early writings of Christians,  
contained mainly in our Bible,  
demonstrate this clearly.

The second chapter of *Acts of the Apostles*  
tells explicitly how those  
who believed the words of St. Peter were baptized.

They also continued steadfastly, the text tells us,