

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
VATICAN II

This *Companion* provides an accessible guide for those seeking to comprehend the significance of Vatican II for Catholicism today. It offers a thorough overview of the Second Vatican Council, the most significant event in the history of Roman Catholicism since the Protestant Reformation. Almost six decades since the close of the council, its teaching remains what one pope referred to as a “sure compass” for guiding today’s church. The first part of the volume examines the historical, theological, and ecclesial contexts for comprehending the significance of the council. It also presents the key processes as well as the participants who were central to the actual conduct of the council. The second part identifies and explores the central themes embedded in the council documents. The volume concludes with a unique appendix intended to guide students wishing to pursue more advanced research in Vatican II studies.

RICHARD R. GAILLARDETZ is the Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology at Boston College. He has published numerous articles and authored or edited fourteen books, most recently, a newly revised and expanded edition of his popular book, *By What Authority? Foundations for Understanding Authority in the Church* (2018). He has also published *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism* (2015). Dr. Gaillardetz received the Sophia Award from the Washington Theological Union in 2000 for theological excellence in service of ministry and the Yves Congar Award for theological excellence from Barry University in 2018. He served as president of the Catholic Theological Society of America in 2013–14.

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
VATICAN II

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Richard R. Gaillardetz
Boston College, Massachusetts

With the assistance of
Elyse J. Raby



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*In memory of Gerard Mannion,
our esteemed colleague*

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Abbreviations of Conciliar Documents

- AA *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.
- AG *Ad Gentes*. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.
- CD *Christus Dominus*. Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church.
- DH *Dignitatis Humanae*. Declaration on Religious Liberty.
- DV *Dei Verbum*. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.
- GE *Gravissimum Educationis*. Declaration on Christian Education.
- GS *Gaudium et Spes*. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.
- IM *Inter Mirifica*. Decree on the Mass Media.
- LG *Lumen Gentium*. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.
- NA *Nostra Aetate*. Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.
- OE *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches.
- OT *Optatam Totius*. Decree on the Training of Priests.
- PC *Perfectae Caritatis*. Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life.
- PO *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests.
- SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.
- UR *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Decree on Ecumenism.

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Preface

RICHARD R. GAILLARDETZ

The Second Vatican Council was the most significant event in the history of Catholicism since the Protestant Reformation. Yet an accurate and comprehensive grasp of the council's abiding significance for contemporary Catholicism can be illusive. Many Catholics have only the vaguest sense of what Vatican II accomplished. For Catholic clergy, lay ministers, church activists, theologians, and church commentators, the situation may be somewhat different. They often have a working Vatican II lexicon populated by key phrases: a theology of the laity, collegiality, liturgical participation, the sense of the faithful, the church as leaven in the world. Yet too often, these phrases are wielded with little regard for their antecedents in the Catholic tradition and with little appreciation for the debates and compromises that lay behind the council's distinctive redeployment and development of these terms and concepts.

Efforts to comprehend the enduring significance of the council for the church today have been plagued by a Catholic version of the "culture wars." Those belonging to the Catholic "right" have cautiously acknowledged the council's contribution but not without considerable handwringing regarding its proper interpretation. They admit to legitimate theological developments but insist that the council effected no real change at the level of doctrine. For them, the council's primary contribution was limited to its change in pastoral tone, an emphasis on spiritual (rather than structural) renewal, and an empowerment of the laity in the secular order. Others belonging to the Catholic "left" may be tempted to simply impose on the council teaching their own agenda for church reform. They often struggle between two impulses: gratitude for the gift of the council and discouragement at the extent to which important conciliar teachings have, in their view, yet to be fully implemented.

Debates regarding Vatican II's fundamental continuity or discontinuity with the church's broader, more ancient tradition have not been particularly helpful. A living ecclesial tradition will always bear marks

of both continuity and discontinuity with what came before. Without any acknowledgment of the discernible continuity of the Christian faith across time, the very notion of a “tradition” dissolves. Without the recognition of a certain discontinuity – genuine shifts and even breaks with what had come before – we cannot speak of this tradition as “living.” As Pope John XXIII himself noted in his opening address at the council, there was really no need to call for an ecumenical council if such a council were to do no more than repeat what had always been taught. Yet clearly Pope John believed that the council must remain true to the church’s apostolic faith. He convened Vatican II because he feared that the church’s penchant for clinging to its eternal truths risked ignoring pressing challenges in both the church and the world. It was in this sense that Vatican II was to be a “pastoral” council.

The challenge of acquiring an adequate, comprehensive grasp of the council’s teaching is daunting, if for no other reason than that the amount of material produced by Vatican II dwarfs that of all other councils. If one considers all twenty-one ecumenical councils together, they produced 37,727 lines of text. Vatican II alone provides 12,179 lines (approximately 32 percent), whereas the Council of Trent provided 5,637 lines. This does not include the volumes of archival material related to the council speeches, commission notes, participant memoirs, etc. Yet the difficulties attendant on the study of the council go well beyond that presented by the voluminous documentation. It has now become a commonplace to note that Vatican II represents more than a collection of sixteen documents; Vatican II was an ecclesial “event,” a dramatic irruption of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church at a particular point in the church’s history. To understand the full contours of this “event” one must know something about the modern history of Catholicism leading up to the council. What were some of the ordinary experiences of Catholics “on the ground” in the decades leading up to the council? What key ecclesial movements, church leaders, and influential theological voices helped pave the way for the council? And what of the council itself? To appreciate the full import of the council we must have at least a rudimentary appreciation for the rules governing the preparation for and conduct of the council and the key players who contributed to the work of the council. Finally, we must acquire an adequate hermeneutics or theory of interpretation to guide us in our study of the council’s teaching.

This explains why this volume is divided into two parts. Part I includes six chapters that provide the crucial historical, pastoral, and theological context necessary for appreciating the work of the council.

Part II offers the reader a set of twelve chapters exploring themes fundamental to the council's teaching. A conscious decision was made *not* to simply offer commentaries on each of the council's documents. Rather, the chapters invite the reader to "connect the dots," identifying thematic links across the various documents. These chapters offer the reader a sense of how a particular theme was developed over the course of the council, how it was variously treated in different texts, and how that conciliar theme has been received and developed in the post-conciliar period. Each chapter ends with some limited suggestions for further reading. The volume concludes with a helpful Appendix introducing students of the council to the various scholarly instruments and resources available to them.

The volume is intended, as the title suggests, as a "companion" text. It does not substitute for the council documents themselves, but offers a set of complementary readings that can help the reader plumb the riches of the council documents more profitably. There are a number of helpful English translations to the council documents that are now available but, unless indicated otherwise, the contributors to this volume will be using the revised, inclusive-language, Flannery translation of the Vatican II documents.

I want to thank Beatrice Rehl of Cambridge University Press for initially approaching me about undertaking this project and for expertly guiding it to completion. The contributors to this volume were chosen because of their international reputation and acknowledged expertise in Vatican II studies. I have learned much from them over the years and feel fortunate that they were willing to take time from their busy schedules to participate in this project.

I have benefited from the diligence and keen eye of my research assistant, Elyse Raby, who kept track of the progress of each chapter from preliminary draft to final submission. She demonstrated extraordinary skills as a copyeditor, often bringing her own theological expertise to bear with gentle suggestions for further edits. She also undertook the difficult work of producing the index for this volume. She fulfilled these and other tasks with a grace and professionalism that marks the beginning of a promising career as a theologian.

I would like to thank my colleagues at Boston College for their support for me and my work, and my students who have shared a passion for the study of Vatican II. Finally, I want to express my immeasurable gratitude to my wife, Diana, and our sons, Andrew, David, Brian, and Greg – my most cherished companions on the journey.

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