

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*In 1958 I began to serve at the altar for the traditional Mass in Latin. I lived through the liturgical changes in the following years.*

*In 1992 I was ordained a priest, and continue to celebrate the Mass of Paul VI.*

*I am a priest in the pews. I do not hear rejection of the council from anyone. Some do reject the implementation of the council and the centralization of power by the current pontiff to control the faithful.*

*With the attacks on faithful Catholics, particularly from Pope Francis, that they reject the council because in part they love the traditional Mass, the following article merits some time for reading.*

*Dr. R. Jared Staudt addresses Liturgy, Conscience, and Synodality, and where these may have detoured from the council's original intention: **“John XXIII called Vatican II to layout a new pastoral program for engaging the modern world. It was not a particular crisis but a general one, focused on finding a new way of conveying the Christian life in the modern world.”***

**article follows below**

# What does it mean to reject Vatican II?

*The continued battle over Vatican II seems to be more about an idea of the Council and its implementation, rather than focusing on its actual legitimacy.*

[July 7, 2022 Dr. R. Jared Staudt The Dispatch](#)  
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*Pope John XXIII leads the opening session of the Second Vatican Council in St. Peter's Basilica Oct. 11, 1962. (CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano)*

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) was a unique ecumenical council. The previous twenty were assembled to address particular doctrinal or ecclesial crises, while **John XXIII called Vatican II to layout a new pastoral program for engaging the modern world. It was not a particular crisis but a general one, focused on finding a new way of conveying the Christian life in the modern world.**

In the aftermath of the Council, both progressive and traditional wings viewed it as revolutionary, a sharp break from the previous practice of the Church. It did not help that the 1960s were a period of great cultural turmoil, adding fuel to the fire of confusion and disaffiliation that occurred in the Church.

Pope Benedict XVI, who as a peritus or theological expert at the Council had helped draft some of the documents as part of the progressive party, looked back with concern and identified two major ways of interpreting the Council: a hermeneutic of “discontinuity and rupture” and one of “reform” in continuity with the tradition. The “Spirit of Vatican II” belonged to the former interpretation and came to stand for a whole new way of thinking, praying, teaching, and living as a Catholic in the modern world, marked by a much greater openness to the world and aversion to traditional Catholic practices.

It seemed that the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI were steering the Church toward continuity, although Pope Francis has led a reemergence of the progressive camp.

Francis has repeatedly called attention to what he views as a growing rejection of the Second Vatican Council. Speaking to editors of European Jesuit journals on May 19, he related this view: “It is very difficult to see spiritual renewal using old-fashioned criteria. We need to renew our way of seeing reality, of evaluating it. . . . Restorationism has come to gag the Council. The number of groups of ‘restorers’ – for

example, in the United States there are many – is significant. . . .They had never accepted the Council.”

[Commenting on these remarks](#), Ed Condon at *The Pillar* made an important clarification: “Vatican II is more of a feeling, or state of mind, than an historical event that produced tangible documents.” **An outright rejection of the Council is rare, although many people have questioned the effectiveness of the pastoral and liturgical approach that sought to implement the Council’s vision.**

The continued battle over Vatican II seems to be more about an idea of the Council and its implementation, rather than focusing on its actual legitimacy. Does Vatican II have to remain a “super Council” that guides all aspects of the Church’s life and approach? As a pastoral Council, has its approach failed and is it time to move on to the next phase of the Church’s life? Can we even have this debate or is it off limits according to some churchmen? If Vatican II a “feeling, or state of mind” then to what does it refer?

I think we can actually get clarity about this “idea.” Following the debates for years, **I would identify three major areas: liturgy, conscience, and synodality as three particularly relevant points of disagreement over the legacy of Vatican II.**

### **1) Liturgy**

Pope Francis’s move to limit the traditional Latin Mass in his motu proprio *Traditiones custodes* focused largely on the legacy of Vatican II: “Art. 3. The bishop of the diocese in which until now there exist one or more

groups that celebrate according to the Missal antecedent to the reform of 1970: § 1. is to determine that these groups do not deny the validity and the legitimacy of the liturgical reform, dictated by Vatican Council II and the Magisterium of the Supreme Pontiffs.”

That Vatican II called for a liturgical reform is beyond dispute, as it laid out principles for renewal in its first document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Having taught the documents of the Council many times, I can attest that an introductory reading of the document made it clear to my own students that **the Mass of Paul VI is not an exact implementation of the Council’s wishes. Pointing this out does not reject the legitimacy of the new Mass**, even if it sees it as a loose interpretation of the Council’s vision. In his book *The Feast of Faith*, Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, pointed out that **“it is simply a fact that the Council was pushed aside” in liturgical reform (84).**

**Is it a rejection of the Council to point out this discrepancy?**

## **2) Conscience**

A Salesian missionary to Korea, who was a young priest during the Council, told me with all sincerity that the purpose of Vatican II was to allow people to decide for themselves what was right and wrong. Conscience became a predominant flash point immediately following the Council in the overwhelming dissent of clergy and laity against Paul VI’s encyclical on contraception, *Humanae Vitae*. John Paul II sought to steer the Church back to the

objective reality of right and wrong in his own encyclical on moral theology, *Veritatis Splendor*.

It has been widely noted, however, that Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, contradicts *Veritatis*, including its teaching on the nature of conscience: "We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations" (37). Francis wrote this in relation to difficulties in marriage and sexuality, although **the Second Vatican Council clearly taught that in this sphere "spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50). Vatican II requires upholding the role of authority in guiding conscience.**

### **3) Synodality**

Vatican II is often seen as balancing the First Vatican Council's teaching on papal infallibility by emphasizing the authority of the whole college of bishops: "Just as in the Gospel, the Lord so disposing, St. Peter and the other apostles constitute one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the

bishops, the successors of the apostles, are joined together” (*Lumen Gentium*, 22).

In order to make this reality more prominent in the Church, the Council called for more frequent synods: “This sacred ecumenical synod earnestly desires that the venerable institution of synods and councils flourish with fresh vigor. In such a way faith will be deepened and discipline preserved more fittingly and efficaciously in the various churches, as the needs of the times require” (*Christus Dominus*, 36). This led to the establishment of regular synods in Rome and the encouragement of synods throughout the world.

Francis’s current push for synodality must be seen as a key element of his own vision of implementing the Council. **His seemingly contradictory centralizing moves (whether related to the liturgy or the approval of new religious communities) appear ordered toward controlling the narrative on Vatican II, ensuring that bishops are not allowing reactionary groups to form and flourish throughout the world.** Although Francis speaks of the rejection of the Council by reactionary groups, **synodality has been used by others, especially in Germany, as a pretext for rejecting the very faith upheld by Vatican II and all previous councils.**

**Syndolity, however, cannot trump the Church’s magisterial teaching, but should rather finds way of communicating it more effectively in the modern world, which was the stated goal of the Second Vatican Council.**

## **Conclusion: What Do We Need for the Next Sixty Years?**

Although much more could be said about the fight over the legacy of Vatican II, these three issues appear as major flashpoints. In the end, the Church will have to discern whether or not the vision of Vatican II is adequate for leading the Church to the renewal in mission so desperately needed as she continues to decline throughout most of the world. Beyond rejecting the legitimacy of Vatican II and its teaching, it is a different matter to question the effectiveness of its pastoral strategy and its continued relevance for pointing the Church toward the future.

Stephen Bullivant, in his book *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II* (Oxford, 2019), related the following conclusion to his own sociological study:

It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the Council's reforms are *not* causally related to the very significant decline in Mass-going among British and American Catholics—and ultimately, to the high and growing levels of Catholic disaffiliation. The beginning of this decline coincided, more-or-less exactly, with the beginning of a sustained period of far-reaching changes, first to the Mass, and then to many other aspects of Catholic life. This inconvenient fact is most easily explained by the hypothesis that the reforms, as actually

enacted and experienced, did not achieve what the Council evidently hoped that they would. (256).

We need an honest assessment of the last sixty years, including what has worked and what has not. It should not surprise us if the next sixty years requires a pivot in pastoral approach. In this ongoing discernment, we cannot allow rhetoric to inflame division within the Church by insisting upon only one interpretation of the Council. It is absurd to claim that thinking in light of the Church's entire tradition within a hermeneutic of continuity constitutes a rejection of the Council.

**It will be more helpful to shift the conversation away from debating the last sixty years to what is now needed for the changing landscape of the Church and world. No solution is worthy of consideration unless it puts God in the center, unlike much recent ecclesial reflection, and enables the Church to fulfill the true goal of Vatican II: the more effective transmission of the Gospel to the world.**