

The Second Vatican Council

A 3-day course



Saturdays: 21, 28 October and 4 November, 10 am – 4.30 pm

at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge

led by Dr Peter Coughlan

Explore the history, teaching, reception and impact of the most significant event in the Roman Catholic Church in the last hundred years.

The Second Vatican Council is widely recognised not only as the most significant event in the Roman Catholic Church in the last hundred years or more, but even as the most significant religious event at a global level in these same years. Its impact was, and continues to be, enormous. Today, 55 years since the Council opened, we need to understand the nature of that impact and the reasons for it. This is necessary if we want to understand the profound currents of religious renewal to which the Council gave expression, setting in motion a process that is still under way in our own time.

Vatican II, as it is generally referred to, is characterised by a blend of continuity and discontinuity. The dimensions of continuity are found at its heart, corresponding to Pope John XXIII's call for a renewal in the Church's faith and life that would express its deepest identity and mission in full harmony with its origins. Discontinuity can be found in the many ways in which the Church readjusted the ways in which it regards and reaches out in our time towards 'the other' – its relationship with other Christian Churches, other religious traditions and movements, and with the many 'others' of the modern world.

Seen in this sense of 'discontinuity', the Church is evidently not regarded as an entity that floats above or outside human history. On the contrary, Vatican II recognised that while remaining faithful to the unique and divine reality that it embodies as the body of Christ and temple of the Spirit, the Church is deeply immersed in, and needs to respond in every age, to the changes and developments in the global human community. This recognition of the way in which the Church expresses its faith within and as part of history is one of the most profound developments in its 'self-understanding' and in the outward-looking worldview that characterises the 'post-conciliar' Church.

The course is a blend of lectures and discussion. **Day 1 (21 October)** will look at the background and context of the Council, reflecting also on the reasons that moved John XXIII to convene the Council. An important element in this section will be an analysis of the way the first session in the autumn of 1962 was decisive in setting new directions and in establishing an overall tone and style that few had expected at the outset.

Day 2 (28 October) will focus directly on the texts that the Council produced, singling out the themes and ideas and developments – the *leitmotifs* as it were – which play a central role in the texts. *Lumen Gentium*, the Constitution on the Church, will be at the core of this reflection since it can be considered as a hub from which the other 15 documents of the

Council spread out like spokes in a wheel. Particular attention will be given to the other three great constitutions, namely the Constitution on Divine Revelation and the Constitution on the Liturgy – documents concerned with the deepest inner realities of the Church - and the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, expressing the solidarity of the Church with the whole human family. Attention will also be given to other key texts that pointed towards new paths for the Church in its self-understanding within and alongside humanity in the pilgrimage through history.

Day 3 (4 November) will look at what is known as the ‘reception’ of the Council, i.e. the way in which the Council has been absorbed into the life and attitudes of the ecclesial community as a whole. A fourth and final section will lead on naturally from this, considering ways in which the Council remains ‘unfinished’ and looking towards possible future developments in a world that is changing ever more rapidly.

About the course leader

Having taught ecclesiology and ecumenism in recent years at Heythrop College, University of London, **Dr Peter Coughlan** is very familiar with the Second Vatican Council. However, his familiarity with the Council goes further back than that. He began his studies in theology in Rome a year before the Second Vatican Council opened in October, 1962. In August, 1965, shortly before the fourth and last session of the Council began, he was appointed to the first of the ‘post-conciliar bodies’, namely the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy, a body instituted by Pope Paul VI even before the Council ended.

In later years, after attending the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, the staff college for the Holy See’s diplomatic service, he was appointed to the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions (which now happily rejoices in the more positive title of Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue!), a body that came into being as a direct result of the Council’s deliberations. From 1980 to 1991 Peter Coughlan was Under-Secretary of another entity that resulted from Vatican II, namely the Pontifical Council for the Laity. During this period he was also a consultor of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and a member of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (headquartered in Geneva) – these bodies too were ‘fruits’ of the Council.

Venue: Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, 12 Grange Rd, Cambridge CB3 9DU

Fees: £210 or £70 per Saturday Some bursaries are available; please contact Dr Anna Abram, Principal (aa2008@cam.ac.uk) to find out whether you are eligible.

Tea and coffee will be provided. Please bring your lunch.

For more information about the above courses or to register please email Ela Wolbek ew263@cam.ac.uk.

Places are limited so please book as soon as possible to avoid disappointment