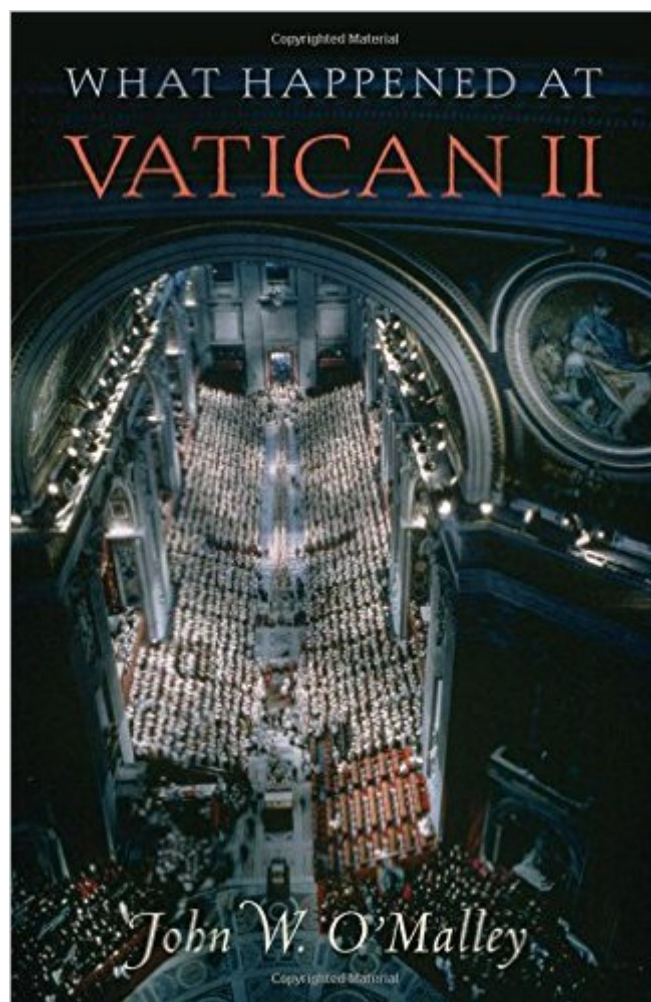


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# What Happened At Vatican II



## Synopsis

During four years in session, Vatican Council II held television audiences rapt with its elegant, magnificently choreographed public ceremonies, while its debates generated front-page news on a near-weekly basis. By virtually any assessment, it was the most important religious event of the twentieth century, with repercussions that reached far beyond the Catholic church. Remarkably enough, this is the first book, solidly based on official documentation, to give a brief, readable account of the council from the moment Pope John XXIII announced it on January 25, 1959, until its conclusion on December 8, 1965; and to locate the issues that emerge in this narrative in their contexts, large and small, historical and theological, thereby providing keys for grasping what the council hoped to accomplish. *What Happened at Vatican II* captures the drama of the council, depicting the colorful characters involved and their clashes with one another. The book also offers a new set of interpretive categories for understanding the council's dynamics—categories that move beyond the tired "progressive" and "conservative" labels. As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the calling of the council, this work reveals in a new way the spirit of Vatican II. A reliable, even-handed introduction to the council, the book is a critical resource for understanding the Catholic church today, including the pontificate of Benedict XVI.

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## Customer Reviews

If you are looking for the one book you will read on the meaning of the Second Vatican Council, search no further for you have found it in *What Happened at Vatican II*. Fr. O'Malley is both a church historian and an historian of culture, recognized as the best in his field. These two areas of

his expertise combine marvelously in this ground-breaking study of Vatican II. Whereas other historians of the Council catalogue its proceedings, Fr. O'Malley cogently and convincingly explains what the impact of those proceedings were for the history of the Roman Catholic Church. He deftly demonstrates how Vatican II diverged from previous councils in style as much as substance. By abandoning the language of the Roman Senate that had characterized previous Roman Catholic Church councils, Vatican II spoke to the People of God without condemnation and anathema. In this sense, the wishes of Pope John XXIII for a pastoral rather than a doctrinal council were realized. Fr. O'Malley's engaging writing style brings all of the major players of the Council to life. He eschews simplistic explanations and gets to the heart of the matter in each of the four periods that the Council met between 1962-1965. At a time when some in the Roman Catholic Church actually repudiate Vatican II and attempt to claim that nothing of import really happened at the Council, Fr. O'Malley presents a vibrant and vital portrayal of the reform that the Council intended for the Roman Catholic Church. One of his most poignant insights is that those who would downplay the significance of Vatican II for the history of the Roman Catholic Church actually do the Council a great disservice by denying it the greatness that it had hoped for in its reform of the Catholic Church. Fr.

What Happened at Vatican II (2008, Harvard) by John W. O'Malley is an interesting account of the developments that took place within the Catholic Church and Christianity as they occurred at the Second Vatican Council. The book considers the events of this council and the debates that followed showing contrasts between traditionalists, conservatives, and modernists, as well as the perspectives of the Eastern churches. The book explains many of the sweeping changes that were made as a result of this council and situates the council within its historical context. The book also explains the larger consequences of this council, including those for the Catholic church, but also those for all of Christianity and the relationship between the church and other religions as well as the modern world. The book relates this council through the pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI as well as the repercussions of the council into the pontificate of John Paul II and our present-day under Benedict XVI. The Second Vatican Council considered many important issues for the church and many have come to see it as an attempt by the church to meet the modern world. Others have remained more skeptical of the large changes they maintain evolved out of it and came to embrace traditionalism. Still others on the extreme left have maintained that the council did not go far enough. As such, the issue of Vatican II remains an important one for all Catholics today and this book provides a useful understanding of the events of that council. The book includes the following

chapters -Introduction - lays out the rationale for the council as it was convened by John XXIII on January 25, 1959. Explains the role of the council and some of the issues for the church taken up for the council.

Though I was in the seminary during Vatican II, and thus followed it as closely as I could, I found this book to be exceptionally valuable both as a history of the event (and its immensely important background) and as an interpretation of what happened there. Part of the beauty of this book is that O'Malley centers it around three themes: aggiornamento or resourcement, the tension between the center and the periphery, and the pastoral style that characterized the entire event. O'Malley chose to interpret every debate, every vote, and every document through each of these three lenses. Yet, underlining all three of these lenses O'Malley points to an even more foundational perspective, namely, the universal call to holiness. And by "universal," in the context of Vatican II, O'Malley perceives this "call to holiness" as extending not just to Catholics, or to bishops, or to priests (though certainly to all three of these groups) but to everyone be they religious or not. I want to emphasize, however, that this book reads like the very best mystery novels. Almost every page highlights surprises, conflicts and compromises, and the people that fill these pages are, at least to me, incredibly interesting. So you can read this book for pure enjoyment as much as for enlightenment. Finally, what for me as a Catholic makes this book so engaging is not simply the book itself, wonderful though it is, but also because of what has happened to the Catholic Church in America in the now almost 50 years since the close of Vatican II. In those 45 years, according to Pew Research, 30 million men and women who were raised as Catholics, no longer call themselves "Catholic." And another enormous number (I estimate to be another 30 million) are now "lapsed" Catholics.

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