

Summary of Factors That Gave Rise to Vatican II



Factors which influenced the calling of this Council by Pope John XXIII.

1. The personality and sense of compassion for the world of Pope John XXIII, combined with his well developed understanding of a Church larger than Rome, combined to make it possible for him to overcome what others may have feared in calling a council. He was prepared for the difficulties he would face in organizing it by his long diplomatic career.
2. The pope had a magnificent awareness of the world of the 1950's and wanted the church's place in the international dialogue about social life, politics, economics, and religion to be loud and clear.
3. Pope John XXIII wanted to re-animate the world with a Christian spirit, to re-form the Church for that purpose.
4. Vatican I had failed to complete its work because it adjourned early due to the invading Italian national army. In the end, this may have been favorable because Vatican I was bent on re-statement of Catholic doctrine, not on reform.
5. Following Vatican I, the Modernism movement again challenged the Church and, although silenced by papal edict, remained a factor in the life of the Church until Vatican II.
6. The rigid application of the decrees of the Council of Trent had left the Church without any paradigm for change or reform.
7. There were certain leading theologians in the 20th century whose work precipitated a reassessment of Catholic theology. Unlike others before them, these theologians avoided complete silencing before they were heard. The 19th and 20th Centuries also had a plethora of secular thinkers, many of whom challenged the church and religion.

Adapted from Bill Huebsch, 2006.