Its purpose was to renew the Church, to evangelise, and to engage with the world rather than to excoriate it. There were shortcomings and unintended consequences, but 60 years on, Vatican II's achievements can be seen ever more clearly.

There is a story that sometime in the 1950s, Archbishop Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, picked up Yves Congar’s work on the Second Vatican Council. Roncalli had a vision of this French scholar-priest, but had to ask himself: “A reform of the Church: is such a thing really possible?”
One way to discover if something is or is not possible is to try it (and getting elected pope greatly expands the ... have a go at). By convening the Second Vatican Council, a bold reform of the Church is exactly what Roncalli attempted.

What hopes did John XXIII have for the Council? The go-to source for understanding his vision is usually the speech he ... "back to the sources"; that is, Scripture, the Church fathers, etc.) the method of "new theologians" such as Congar.

Pope John rebuked the "prophets of doom" in the Church who always "forecast disaster". Though he recognised that such ... often forgotten that he was also a serious student of Church history, as his comment about "the teacher of life" implies.

As a young priest in northern Italy, Roncalli found inspiration in Charles Borromeo, a hero of the Council of Trent. ... in 1959 – then the best way to reform the entire Church was through a Church-wide synod; that is, an ecumenical council.

Such background to Pope John's own understanding of true reform complicates the unhelpful binaries of "continuity" and ... to have taken as their point of departure Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

Lumen Gentium, the great "ecclesiological" manifesto, is also a candidate, given that Vatican II was the first ecumenical ... key for understanding Vatican II (I'm biased, I return constantly to both texts for theological and historical reasons).

But recently, especially in the wake of Pope Francis' bombshell Traditionis Custodes, which restored many restrictions to ... inevitable; even less to argue something similar regarding post-conciliar Catholic theology and magisterial teaching.

However, there is an irresistible logic to Pope Francis' assertion that acceptance or rejection of the Novus Ordo Mass – ... II texts such as Dignitatis Humanae on religious liberty and Nostra Aetate on the Jewish people and world religions.

It has become ever clearer during Pope Francis' pontificate that liturgical agendas often correlate with views on Vatican ... internal renewal with ecumenism and evangelisation, undergirded by the principles of aggiornamento and ressourcement.

Sixty years on, how far has Vatican II achieved these goals? We should be realistic about the shortcomings and unintended ... the well-intentioned rush to make the parish Mass, the reading of Scripture and Christo-centrism the main show in town.

Some of those discarded CREDs had connected the generations, marked rites of passage, and allowed for both communal ... for centuries as opportunities for "fully conscious and active participation" (Sacrosanctum Concilium 14) were lost.

The successes of the Council, however, have been manifold. Three particularly stand out for me. Vatican II's first ... and respect (see Gaudium et Spes 19–21, which Ratzinger called "among the most important pronouncements of Vatican II").

Those who lived through the revolution in attitudes towards Protestants and members of non-Christian religions ... not frivolous ones. Like all things, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, when conducted badly, can lead to trouble.

Nevertheless, the transition from a triumphalistic attitude regarding "heretics and schismatics" towards dialogue and ... Church. And every pope since the Council has robustly defended the change in Church teaching regarding religious freedom.

These shifts are closely connected. As the Italian theologian Pietro Pavan explained when commenting on the debates ... of the Catholic Church towards non-Catholics has had profound repercussions far beyond issues of Church-state relations.

A second achievement is the profound biblical renewal that has occurred in many quarters of the Church. Taking off ... Verbum from the cautious and even prohibitive policies that were common from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

The 1713 bull Unigenitus of Pope Clement XI, for example, condemned ideas on Scripture and liturgy that look identical to ... in some places, work hard to sign up as many people in the pews as possible for Bible studies that are often lay-led.

For much of 2021, the most downloaded podcast on iTunes was a Catholic priest reading through the Bible in a year. The ... scriptural renewal at every level was not, ultimately, devotional. It was about being a Church "under the Word of God".

A third achievement lies in the intellectual life of the Church. Vatican II helped the Church transition from a classical ... in Dei Verbum, and in a manner that shifted from a syllogistic neo-scholastic approach toward historical consciousness.

Development, the Council taught, is a means by which "the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine ... with a doctrinal development that contained a clear reversal of priorly-held teaching concerning religious freedom.

It is for this reason that the debate over Dignitatis Humanae was arguably the most fraught of the Council, and that it ... by Vatican II that Pope Francis could say early in his papacy: "Today, thanks be to God, the Church knows how to repent."

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