

# Augustinus Bea Biography

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# Biography

The German cardinal and scholar Augustinus Bea (1881-1968) was a key figure at the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965. A Jesuit, he was noted for his piety, scholarship, and progressive posture.

Augustinus Bea was born on May 28, 1881, in Riedböhringen, the son of a carpenter. He studied theology, philosophy, and philology at universities in Germany and Holland. In 1902 he entered the Society of Jesus and began his long career as an Old Testament scholar. His special interests were Oriental languages, archeology, and the doctrine of inspiration in the light of modern historical criticism. From 1924 to 1959 Bea worked at the Pontifical Biblical Institute at Rome. He was increasingly recognized as an eminent scholar, and in 1943 he decisively advised Pope Pius XII on a positive attitude toward the historical critical interpretation of the Bible.

In 1959 Pope John XXIII elevated Bea to the rank of cardinal. In 1960 he made him president of the newly created Secretariate for Promoting Christian Unity for the forthcoming Second Vatican Council. Christian unity was one of Bea's special interests, and as early as 1935 he had attended a congress of Protestant Old Testament scholars. Throughout the Council, Bea contributed much to such areas as the sources of revelation, eschatology, missions, mariology, celibacy, the life of religious orders, and liturgy. His biblical and historical arguments tended to supplant the juridical view of the Church, which is static and restrictive, with the biblical view, which is dynamic and positive. He played an important role in articulating and making credible the spirit of the *aggiornamento* (modernization). He also helped to provide a viable basis for ecumenical dialogue on the scholarly, as well as on the nonscholarly, level.

While holding that Roman Catholicism was the one true religion, Bea believed that from a biblical viewpoint man can attain salvation not only through Catholicism, Protestantism, or the Eastern churches, but also through Judaism or any other non-Christian religion. He stressed that religious liberty must be the necessary and comprehensive mode of coexistence among all faiths. Observers agree that the adoption of the landmark declaration on the Jewish people was the special concern of Bea. He died at the age of 87 on Nov. 23, 1968, in Rome.