

Franciscan Missionary Union
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Dear Friend of the Missions

I am so sorry that this is late. It is still October (just barely), we have celebrated the feast of St. Francis and we, Franciscans, have renewed our enthusiasm for the mission that St. Francis has left us. I hope that you have also received new inspiration from St. Francis and renewed blessing from all the prayers that the friars have offered for you and your loved ones. We blessed animals, remembered to care for creation, committed ourselves to a better following of the Gospel and renewed fraternal life. God shows us how to be creative each Fall with the beautiful change of leaves, one of God's many wonderful works of art.

On October 11, the Church remembered Blessed John XXIII. His feast day is assigned to the day that he opened the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Can you believe that it was 49 years ago?? The pope has declared a Year of faith for 2012/13 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of that Council and the 20th anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Thank you for all your help and support. Please continue to pray for the missions and trust that all of us pray for you. May the Lord bless you and keep you and your loved ones. Our prayers for all who are affected by Hurricane Sandy.

A Kind of Big Bang Theory–Vatican II

–Fr. Russell Becker, O.F.M.

There is a version of the Big Bang theory that posits that the universe is forever contracting and expanding. The initial unfolding of the universe from what is believed to be a point of intense heat and energy that has been expanding, evolving, making choices, trying and rejecting, responding to circumstances and has continued to keep expanding. Some theorists believe it will keep expanding and eventually—well who knows. Another is that the universe will contract and expand, spreading out and then contracting to these points of intense heat and energy, and then unfold again. Maybe this theory can help to explain the conciliar history of the Church.

The Tradition of the Church continues to incarnate itself in every age, a little differently than in the age before. When people try to manage it, control it or say “we never did it that way before” perhaps the Tradition begins to contract to these points of high energy and heat, waiting to be let loose. Then a council happens and the Tradition continues to empower a new generation or age. I think the Second Vatican Council was just such an event. Since the 19th century the Church was trying to hold back the rush of modernism, managing the Tradition and trying to keep everything the same. *Ecclesia semper idem*. At the same time, the Tradition, was trying to exert some force. Intense energy and heat were being built up under the pressure to all that was going on in the world and often suppressed in the Church. *Ecclesia semper reformanda*.

In our time we were blessed with people who were looking forward and hoping the Tradition would have a chance in that future. One of those was Blessed John XXIII. He called a council and then had the courage not to stop the new unfolding of the Tradition. His opening address at the Council began with the words *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*. His words were filled with hope and challenge. It was apparent that he believed that the Church could be better that it had been in the recent past, and could rediscover the vibrancy of the Tradition that is handed on. John XXIII probably with a little bit of vision, empowered all the people at the Council. What he said meant more to those who heard him, than perhaps even he himself had thought. The Council started and then it all began to develop. Like what happened after the big bang, the Spirit-inspired unfolding has brought us to today with all its joys and hopes, trials and failures, dreams and visions still seeking for ways to be the Church that God calls us to be, still looking to the future and finding ways to be that Church and passing the vision that will enable those who follow after us to be the Church of the ages to come.

The Council began to look at the Church, quickly the bishops rejected the canned agenda that was presented to them and they went with the mission they had from Pope John XXIII. It was amazing what happened. There was talk of a New Pentecost. Trusting in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Council began to look in directions, not anticipated by either those who prepared for the Council and those who came to be part of it. The agenda found new direction and proposed new ways of being Church, being in the Church and the Church being in the world. There was talk of things that had often been discouraged: vernacular liturgy, new images of Church, collegiality, ecumenism, religious liberty, the role of family, the role of the laity, to name a few. The outlook was more peaceful, respectful and the resulting documents inspired and encouraged and did not condemn. The Tradition was allowed to speak again.

There was a new methodology for how the Council did its work. They looked at issues, studied them and tried to bring together the vectors the power of the past, the present and the future. In effect, they discovered the vibrancy of the Tradition, let it dialogue with present circumstances and lead us toward the Reign of God. The process can be summed up by *ressourcement* (past), *aggiornamento* (present) and development (future).

Ressourcement. This French word means to go back to the sources, to look at the Church in its beginnings, prompted by the Holy Spirit, seeing what they had the courage to do in the face of great difficulty and even persecution. Looking at the times when the Tradition was life-giving and vibrant and not a bunch of simplistic and non-historical formulas. Study of the sources enabled the Council to call for the restoration the catechumenate, the permanent diaconate, the use of the vernacular in worship

and the possibility of cultural adaptation in many different areas of the Church's life. It does not take much to see that collegiality was a prominent part of the Church's life in the early times. After the Council, the renewal of the Church's worship and institutions was nourished by the sources. It gave our rich and vibrant past a voice in our age.

Aggiornamento. This Italian word is most associated with Pope John XXIII, it means updating. The Council members were convinced that the presentation of the Church is meant to speak to the age, that it has to take the tradition, engage it, enhance it and pass it on for the future. This modernization was applied to many things in the Church: language, spirituality, penitential acts, to name a few. Especially in the Council, it was appropriate for the Church to adapt to the modern world, a whole document affirmed that. New life was instilled in the Church and there was a renewed enthusiasm for the realization of its possibilities. Greater attention was given to thought that was developing outside of the Church: human psychology, physics, evolution, historical-critical thought. What others were discovering affected the way the Church dealt with issues. A more wholesome view of the Church as the People of God stretched people's imaginations and balance the image that was prevalent at the time. (Many people still speak of the Church meaning the institution and not seeing themselves as a part of the Church, though more and more people see themselves as part of the communion, responsible members and not outside it.)

Development. Blessed John Newman discovered that *to live is to change and that to live well is to change often*. He was one of the people who pointed out in the 19th century that development of dogmas was not a bad thing but a good thing and very obvious. St. Paul spoke to the Ephesians, especially slaves that they should be good to their masters and vice versa. Does anyone still believe that the Church finds slavery tolerable? For centuries, the Church taught that error has no rights and all contact with those who left the Church was forbidden. Remember before the Council, we were not allowed to enter a non-catholic worship place even for the wedding or funeral of a relative? The Council began to reach out, speak of separated brethren and common bonds as children of God. No one has a problem with the development of papal authority, but there was suspicion of the dynamism of the Tradition that might begin to embrace religious freedom, the role of the laity, new approaches to religious life and ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. The Constitution on Divine Revelation sums it up: *The Tradition that comes to us from the apostles makes progress in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are passed on* [8]. This dynamism continues to enhance the Tradition is being passed on to those who follow after us. A remarkable gift!

These three processes spiraled through the work of the Council. Seventeen Documents were developed and published as the acts of the council. No anathemas, no condemnations but a remarkable unfolding that still has more to contribute. They are words that explode and continue to unleash the dynamism of the Tradition. Perhaps only the most visionary of the people at the Council could catch a glimmer of what their work has begun.

Fifty Years Later. We live at a time where many feel that the agenda of the Council is an unfinished one and others who feel that the Council went too far or that others went too far in the name of the Council. Reform the reform they say—basically go back to the time before the unfolding of this new way of being Church. If you seriously read the texts you will discover that they are pushing us for more not less. People are trying to pull back everything to the simplistic and non-historical formulas. There are people who are saying regularly *ressourcement*, *aggiornamento* and development to not mean what we think. They are much more modest approaches. In 1969, I went to a religious contest with the theme of Revolution. Every speaker began by saying that “revolution” did not mean what we think it means. It was something much more innocuous. That is what people even in leadership are doing now: “that is not what the Council meant!” is the admonition. Well here is the challenge: if this is said when people try to say what the Council said was just like what was said before the Council, the admonition is correct; if it is said when people are noticing Council called for more and has not been realized the admonition is wrong. Everyone should reread Pope John's opening address. Remember that dynamic Tradition will not let us down, contained or diminished. ***Gaudet Mater Ecclesia! A Kind of Big Bang***

Reflection Questions

1. Think of some things that are part of the legacy of Vatican II?
2. What do you think is an important effect of Vatican II?
3. What do you think might be part of the unfinished agenda of the Council?
4. Have you ever read any of the documents of the Council?

Good book for background: *What Happened at Vatican II* by John W. O'Malley.

Please remember our missionaries who are celebrating their birthdays:

Oct. 1: Fr. Joseph Ehrhardt, O.F.M. (Africa)

Oct. 6: Fr. Paul Breslin, O.F.M. (Peru)

Oct. 7: Fr. Mariano Gagnon, O.F.M. (Peru)

Oct. 9: Fr. Alfonso Guzman, O.F.M. (Caribbean) and
Fr. Khoa Nguyen, O.F.M. (Home Missions)

May the Lord bless them all with peace and energy to continue the mission of the Gospel!

Please remember our former missionaries who are ill:
May God grant them health, peace and happiness!

Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)

Please remember +Fr. Flavian Walsh, O.F.M. (Japan) who died on October 12, 2012. May he rest in peace!