

Remembering St. John XXIII on his Feast Day and the 60th Anniversary of the Opening of the Second Vatican Council October 11, 1962 – October 11, 2022



Basilian Fathers

BICENTENNIAL • 2022

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October 11, 2022, marks the 60th Anniversary of the Opening of the Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII was the architect of the Council. On June 3, 1963, the feast of Pentecost, John died of stomach cancer at the age of 81 just as the Second Vatican Council was getting underway – a Council he himself convoked, carefully nurtured, and fervently prayed for. John was proclaimed Blessed by Pope John Paul II in 2000. An interesting point not known to many people is that Pope John Paul II assigned October 11 as the feast day of Blessed Pope John XXIII, and not his death day of June 3. John XXIII and the Council are forever linked together. Pope Francis canonized John XXIII together with Pope John Paul II in 2014. October 11, therefore, is a good opportunity to evoke Pope John's memory, his gift of the Second Vatican Council, and his legend that still brings smiles to so many people around the entire world.

McAuley
2014



Who was Roncalli? What made him tick? He came from Sotto il Monte, a northern Italian town near Bergamo. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was from a family of sharecroppers – farmer's stock – and he was no stranger to the rigors and rhythms of life on the land. The Roncalli family was very poor. When his very pious mother decided to encourage her son's vocation, she went among the Roncalli relatives in the hopes

of finding some financial help for the family's future priest. One day, when young Angelo came home from school, he found his mother at the kitchen table, crying. On the table were a few coins, amounting to no more than forty cents. He would have to get by on faith in Divine Providence and the love of his large family (of which he was the fourth of thirteen children). Angelo never forgot this and kept it in mind and heart wherever he went in life, right up to the day he entered the conclave that would elect him to the See of Peter.

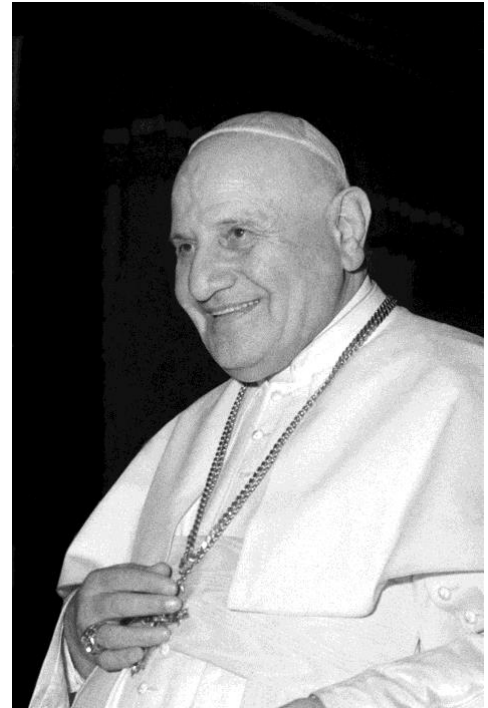
In 1958, at nearly 77 years old, Cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was elected Pope upon the death of Pope Pius XII. Roncalli chose as his episcopal motto: *Obedientia et Pax – Obedience and Peace*. These three words were the key to the

McAuley
2014



seminarian, the priest, the bishop, the cardinal, and the pope – and most importantly, to the human being underneath them all. He took the name of John and was expected by many to be a caretaker and transitional Pope, but he astonished the Church and the world with his energy and reforming spirit. Shortly after his election to the See of Peter, John wrote in his *“Journal of a Soul”* diary, *“Now more than ever, I see myself only as a humble and unworthy ‘Servant of God, and Servant of the servants of God.’ The whole world is my family.”*

On January 25, 1959, Pope John went to St. Paul’s Basilica in Rome for the commemoration of the Conversion of St. Paul. Following the ceremony in the basilica, he announced his desire to launch the idea of the Second Vatican Council. John knew, as a student of history that cultural changes in the aftermath of World War II called for a rethinking of Church practices. John referred to his desired Council as “a new Pentecost.” His closest collaborators were not thrilled with the idea of an Ecumenical Council and downplayed it as much as they could. He convoked the Council on Christmas day, 1961. A Vatican official told the Pope it would be “absolutely impossible” to open the Second Vatican Council by 1963. *“Fine, we’ll open it in 1962,”* he answered. And he did.



It is impossible to understand the Council today apart from John’s historic, opening address on October 11, 1962. In that address, Pope John said,

“In the everyday exercise of our pastoral ministry, greatly to our sorrow we sometimes have to listen to those who, although consumed with zeal, do not have very much judgment or balance. To them the modern world is nothing but betrayal and ruination. They claim that this age is far worse than previous ages and they go on as though they had learned nothing from history – and yet history is the great teacher of life. They behave as though the first five centuries saw a complete vindication of the Christian idea and the Christian cause, and as though religious liberty was never put in jeopardy in the past. We feel bound to disagree with these prophets of misfortune who are forever forecasting calamity – as though the end of the world is imminent. Our task is not merely to hoard this



precious treasure of doctrine, as though obsessed with the past, but to give ourselves eagerly and without fear to the task that this present age demands of us – and in doing so we will be faithful to what the Church has done in the past 20 centuries."

In a series of sessions from 1962 to 1965, later to be known as the Second Vatican Council – the bishops of the world sought to update and renew [*Aggionamento*] the life of the Catholic Church. A second, related goal of the Council was “the restoration of unity among all Christians” [*Ecumenism*]. Pope John had no official strategy for reform. What he wanted for the Council was dialogue, conversation, and a fresh look by the Catholic bishops of the world at their Church in the world. John made a point of inviting many non-Catholic observers to the Council. More than 150 non-Catholic observers attended the Council.

Becker
2002



The Council’s decrees went far beyond the hopes and expectations of those directly involved in preparing for the Council. In *Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, the recovery of the doctrine on ‘the common priesthood of the faithful’ (LG §10)



made it possible not only to re-evaluate the importance of the laity, but also to specify the role and mission of religious men and women in the life of the Church. The Second Vatican Council represented a revolution for consecrated life. *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Vatican II document ‘on the adaptation and renewal of religious life’, was promulgated on October 28, 1965.

Vatican II, which is to date the most authoritative magisterial body of teaching, stated clearly that, “*the Church has but one sole purpose – that the Kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may be accomplished.*” (GS § 45) The Council articulated the dynamic nature of the Gospel and the Christian faith clearly and beautifully in the opening line of *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* with those memorable words:

“The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.”

In the Council’s **Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis Humanae*** which was a highly contentious document at the time because it basically reversed centuries old attitudes *against* religious liberty, the Council Fathers said, *“In the life of the people of God on its pilgrimage, through the vicissitudes of human history, there have at times appeared patterns of behavior which were not in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel, and were even opposed to it.”* (DH §12)

The Pope emphasized dialogue as the mission of the Council, and one of the first things he did was to create the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity. The Council’s **Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*** received an overwhelming majority vote despite having previously been the object of many heated and considerable debates. In view of the strong language of previous centuries against schism and heresy, it is not surprising that the decree was hotly debated, with many unwilling to break radically from the traditional language. In the end, the Decree accepts that Catholics must take their share of blame for the divisions among Christians and that the living cannot be blamed for the sins of their ancestors. Other Christians are spoken of as "brothers and sisters," and the unity that already exists is emphasized.

The decree recognizes however, that obstacles remain to full communion, and it urges Catholics to do their best to overcome them. In preparing this newsletter, I discovered an interesting Canadian and Basilian connection to the discussions that resulted in *UR*. One of the Fathers of Vatican II was Canadian Archbishop George Flahiff, CSB, our former Basilian Superior General and Archbishop of Winnipeg. Archbishop Flahiff attended every session of Vatican II, participated actively in conciliar discussions and was member of the pre-conciliar Commission on Religious Life. Flahiff contributed to the writing of *Perfectae Caritatis*, Vatican II’s Decree on the Renewal

of Religious Life. He spoke only once to the full assembly of bishops gathered in Council in St. Peter’s Basilica. His intervention on October 2, 1964, addressed a draft document or schema, which led to Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism that

Vatican Radio 2014, with text from Tanner 2001



Fr. Rosica in 2015: "In doing re-search for this address, I discovered an interesting "Canadian" connection to the discussions that resulted in UR. One of the Fathers of Vatican II was[...]"

Schmidt 2011



Schmidt 2012



would be promulgated by Pope Paul VI a little over two months later, on November 21, 1964. Archbishop Flahiff's speech on "the schema on ecumenism" that became *Unitatis Redintegratio* was remarkable for his assessment of the purifying role of intra-Christian divisions. Flahiff lamented the many divisions between Christian ecclesial communities and polarization within the Catholic Church itself. He recognized these realities as a countersign to God's kingdom. He told the assembled bishops that **"schisms can remind the Church that she is not yet as holy as she should be and not yet perfectly obedient to her vocation to be catholic."** Flahiff also highlighted the vital role of the Holy Spirit in ecumenical activities: **"The Spirit of God himself brings forth the varied fruit he wishes and leads all Christians to greater fidelity to the will of God."** We can see the impact of Archbishop Flahiff's words in UR §4. On inter-Christian and intra-Catholic divisions and the role of the Holy Spirit, the decree states:

"For although the Catholic Church has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all means of grace, yet its members fail to live by them with all the fervor that they should, so that the radiance of the Church's image is less clear in the eyes of our separated brethren and of the world at large, and the growth of God's kingdom is delayed... The divisions among Christians prevent the Church from attaining the fullness of catholicity proper to her, in those of her sons and daughters who, though attached to her by Baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her."

"Nor should we forget that anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can be a help to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian is never contrary to what genuinely belongs to the faith; indeed, it can always bring a deeper realization of the mystery of Christ and the Church."

The best summary of Vatican II that I have ever read comes from the late Jesuit historian, Fr. John O'Malley, who recently died in the USA in September of this year. In his book *What Happened at Vatican II* [Harvard University Press, 2010 p. 307], O'Malley wrote that the uniqueness of the Council's dynamic was:

"from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from definition to mystery, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from rivalry to partnership, from suspicion to trust, from static to ongoing, from passive



NB : the two copying errors from O'Malley are the same two made in Martin 2022.["acceptances" should be "acceptance"; "principles" should be "principled"]

acceptances to active engagement, from fault-finding to appreciation, from prescriptive to principles, from behavior modification to inner appropriation.

In 2014 and 2015, I spent several days in Pope John's birthplace, Sotto il Monte in northern Italy. They were wonderful, unforgettable experiences to meet the members of the Roncalli family as well as Pope John's very lucid and energetic personal secretary, Loris Capovilla, who was 99 years old at the time! Capovilla had just been named a Cardinal by Pope Francis prior to my visit with our Salt and Light television crew. During my interview with Cardinal Capovilla in 2015, he highlighted how rather than cultivate nostalgia about his former boss now turned saint, we must look to the future. Pope John always looked towards the future. Capovilla used John's own words with me in a very moving, personal interview. The newly created elderly Cardinal said to me:



NB : stated date of 2015

Vatican Radio June 3, 2014 (Scarisbrick)



"We are not custodians of a shrine, a reliquary or a museum. We are called to cultivate a garden where the seed of the Word Incarnate is set in an effort to foster the Advent of a New Pentecost, a new Easter, a new Spring. Not just for our personal happiness but for the happiness of all of humanity. It's a long journey, we are far from our final destination – one that is not there merely to safeguard but to share with the people of the world".

NB: Could Vatican Radio be reporting Rosica's 2014's interview?

Cardinal Capovilla also revealed to me the behind-the-scenes story of Pope John's legendary Moonlight Address on the night of October 11, 1962 – the night of the Opening of the Second Vatican Council. On that night, the elderly, ailing Pope was exhausted after the momentous opening ceremonies earlier that day. His body was filled with cancer. He had gone to bed early that warm October night and left the windows open in the papal apartment upstairs in the Apostolic Palace. Capovilla told me that John heard the singing and chanting of several hundred thousand young people who, carrying torches, had streamed to St. Peter's Square from various parts of Rome. It was a spontaneous World Youth Day long before such major events began! The young people flowed into the square because their parishes encouraged them to celebrate what began that morning. Pope John told his priest secretary: ***"I must greet them and speak with them!"*** Capovilla told

him: *“Holy Father, you are tired. You don’t have anything prepared to say to them. It’s better if you simply rest! It’s been a long day!”*

John got up from bed and appeared at his window in answer to the chanting and singing below from a crowd estimated at several hundred thousand young people assembled in St. Peter's square. The Pope requested a microphone. His impromptu window speech that night is now part of Rome's legends.



In a high-pitched voice, the ailing pontiff said: *“Dearest children, I hear your voice.”* In the simplest language, he told them about his hopes for the Council. He pointed out that *“the moon, up there, was observing the spectacle.”* *“My voice is an isolated one,”* he said, *“but it echoes the voice of the whole world. Here, in effect, the whole world is represented.”* He concluded: *“As you go back home, you will find your children: and give them a hug and say, ‘this is a hug from the Pope.’ You will find some tears that need to be dried: speak a good word: The Pope is with us, especially in times of sadness and bitterness.” And then all together let us encourage one another: singing, breathing, weeping, but always full of faith in Christ who helps us and who listens to us, let us continue on our journey.”*

On that first night of the Second Vatican Council, a new era had begun for the Church – an era that continues to bear fruit to this very day. For all the lofty words, words, words and texts that went into the Council, the historic gathering of young people on the night of October 11, 1962 was infused with the deep and stirring humanity of its author and architect.

At the end of my interview with him, Cardinal Capovilla told me that Pope John was asked why he had convened the Council. The Pope responded: *“To make the human sojourn on earth less sad.”* Capovilla then said: *“The Pope did not just create a new way, or launch a rocket to the cosmos; he created an opening in the thick wall of division and fighting. The Spirit passed through that opening. Now I know God’s Word will be fulfilled.”*

As I left his study, Capovilla told me: *“to describe Papa Giovanni, all you need are four words: two eyes, a smile, innocence and goodness”.*

NCR
2002
(Roberts
with
Hebble-
waite)



Vatican
Radio June
3, 2014
(Scarbrick)



On his deathbed in early June 1963, Pope John said: *"It is not that the Gospel has changed; it is that we have begun to understand it better. Those who have lived as long as I have ... were enabled to compare different cultures and traditions and know that the moment has come to discern the signs of the times, to seize the opportunity and to look far ahead."*

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was a human being concerned with his faithfulness more than his image, more concerned with those around him than with his own desires. **With an infectious warmth and vision, he stressed the relevance of the Church in a rapidly changing society and made the Church's deepest truths evident in the modern world. Saint John XXIII has gone down in history as the ordinary man who astonished the world, by launching the Catholic Church into one of its most momentous epochs by calling the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. He left an indelible imprint upon the church and in the pages of history.**

The philosopher George Santayana wrote: *"Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."* That is why remembering this great patriarch and leader, and the 60th Anniversary of the Opening of Vatican II, is not only a pleasant thing to do, it is a necessity. As we remember John XXIII on his feast day, and behold his bold, daring vision for the Church and for humanity, let us beg his intercession each day

for Pope Francis, for the Church and especially for Congregation of St. Basil as we celebrate our 200 years of existence.

Let us beg St. John XXIII and our confrère, Cardinal George Flahiff, now reunited with "good Pope John" to intercede for us. **For all the lofty words, documents and texts that flowed from the historic, worldwide gathering that was Vatican II, let us pray that they be first infused with the deep and stirring humanity of John XXIII who revived the Church from her historical and ecclesial slumber at a moment when no one really expected it. ✠**



Origins
1999

Vatican
Radio June
3, 2014
(Scarisbric)



McAuley
2014



NCR
2002
(Roberts
with
Hebble-
waite)

