

A changing mission with a choice: dinosaur, chameleon or giraffe?

It may be true the sentence that *"Italians do it better"* when it applies to food, wine, coffee and may be love, but I am not sure with certain Italian words that are difficult to express in its deep meaning when translating in other languages. Let us consider for example the word "aggiornamento", it is already funny the way is pronounced and then its possible explanation: "in the Roman Catholic Church the process of bringing up to date methods, ideas, etc".



It was a term that pope John XXII used when he was patriarch (archbishop) of Venice. In a letter to the people of Venice he wrote: *"You have already heard the word "aggiornamento" repeated so many times. You see, our Holy Church, forever young, takes the attitude of following the various twists and turns of the circumstances of life, in order to adapt, to correct, to improve and to become more fervent."*

Various twists and turns, which are evident in the changes everyone can observe all around; some people say we are living "an era of change", while others insist that we are rather witnessing "a change of era" (pope Francis).

Yes, we do know that the only things stable is the change, always present as expression of life and its internal law, yet we might get stuck in a theological ping-pong debate about creationism and evolutionism. In any case we like to believe that God's providence is leading us through the necessary changes within ourselves.

While I was absorbed by these thoughts, I came across some used toys that children used to play with in our migrant center. A dinosaur, a chameleon, and a giraffe... yes indeed they are illustrating the possible choices for an “aggiornamento” of the church!



Some among us would like to find a ***dinosaur*** egg, extract its DNA and bring back to life the dinosaur in its full stature, strong, powerful, impressive and...roaring... so much “nostalgia” (another Italian word) for what used to be, recreate a sort of Jurassic Park where we could experience once again the Church in magnificence with a proper liturgy and way of moving around before those changes brought in by the Vatican council. Well, you know what might happen then with such experiment...



There are some others who while recognizing the rapid change in society and all other sectors are inclined to adjust by trying to mingle with the current opinions and try to dance to the new music being played around. It is like the **chameleon** where the change is only superficial, it is only the skin that changes its color, to camouflage and so to survive. Many examples can be found in the teaching, moral and ordinary ways of living out our very faith.



Finally we have the **giraffe**, indeed a funny animal in its shape and, if you ever doubted, is a concrete proof that God has indeed a deep sense of humor. Well, it seems that the giraffe was not born the way looks nowadays, the long neck was her own "aggiornamento"! It appears obvious: the giraffe's neck, which can grow to as

much as two metres in length, has been selected because it gives its owner exclusive access to the topmost leaves of the trees, and no other animal can reach them. This, then, is an adaptation made when climatic changes were forcing the animal to find survival skills in the evolution process of nature.

What I have tried to say through children toys image, is what pope Francis has been saying while indicating the necessary changes we need to undergo as a church. *“Before the problems of the church it is not useful to search for solutions in conservatism or fundamentalism, in the restoration of obsolete conduct and forms that no longer have the capacity of being significant culturally. Christian doctrine is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, doubts, interrogatives — but is alive, knows being unsettled, enlivened. It has a face that is not rigid, it has a body that moves and grows, it has a soft flesh: it is called Jesus Christ. The reform of the church then, and the church is **semper reformanda** ... does not end in the umpteenth plan to change structures. It means instead grafting yourself to and rooting yourself in Christ, leaving yourself to be guided by the Spirit — so that all will be possible with genius and creativity.”* (pope Francis in Florence, 2015).

So, make your choice: dinosaur, chameleon, or giraffe?

I made mine and never mind if I could look a little funny, but I do prefer to have a longer vision!



Ps. Just an extra about animals teaching us the way; Bishop Stephen Chow Sau-yan of Hong Kong on the the coat of arms' one most notable features is not only the inclusion of a giraffe, but that the animal's long neck extends out beyond the bounds of the shield. For Chow, this long neck symbolizes being able to see the big picture. "Short-sightedness can cause fear in oneself. Looking with vision can help one calm down". Chow also noted that giraffes are known for having big hearts to pump enough blood to their heads, and can therefore be considered a symbol of generosity.