

The Role of Affectivity in the Theology of Yves Congar

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I. Introduction

Yves M.-J. Congar (1904-1995) was the foremost French theologian of the twentieth century. The severe trials to which he was subjected by Roman Catholic Church authorities,¹ notwithstanding, Congar loved the Church. As he explained to Jean Puyo in 1975: 'I am of the Church. I love the Church.'² This love is based on a simple yet profound truth that he recognised the Church as the Mother, the hearth and the homeland of his spiritual being.³ Congar's love for the Church, motivated by his love for Christ, is situated in the wider setting of his love for humankind.⁴ It is difficult to avoid an admiration for his shrewd insistence on the need to locate the maternal and fraternal dimensions of the Church's nature, seen as perfectly compatible, in a communion ecclesiology. A communitarian, ecclesial milieu is correctly identified as essential for the formation of Christians:

Maternal, the Church is also fraternal. It is a fraternity. The two qualities are perfectly compatible, evangelically speaking, because in the spiritual plan, they are united in communion: as in a text like Matthew 12. 50 (Mark 3. 35; Luke 8. 21). Better: it is the fraternity which exercises here a maternity, as it is said so often by Saint Augustine and many others. This does not take away anything from a particular paternity of priests and pastors who can say with Saint Paul: 'It is I who, through the gospel, begot you in Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 4. 15). This signifies that if, taken individually, we are sons of the Church, we form collectively or rather as a community, this ecclesial milieu which we have seen is the generator and educator of Christians.⁵

Congar's love for the Church informed and inspired all his theological projects.⁶ In every question regarding the Church, its mission in the world and its reform, the guiding principle is, so to speak, love. As Congar comments: 'But this [reform] must be done in love, not in indifferent disinterestedness neither in cold criticism (*critique froide*), nor in latent revolt (*fronde larvée*).'⁷

This article first describes the historical context of Congar's work and then highlights what seems to me to be the most important force in his life and thought, namely, an abiding love for the Church. Congar was a university professor and teacher, and while his works bear the impersonal and objective stamp of members of his profession, nonetheless, his strongly affective approach to ecclesiology helped to bring a freer outlook to the Catholic mind and contributed to the reform of the Catholic Church in the epoch. The article concludes with an illustration of the fruitfulness of Congar's affective approach in ecclesiology, through a study of his proposals for Church renewal by a return to the ancient sources. As regards the historical background to Congar's contribution to Catholic thought, I want to refer briefly to developments in Europe during the middle years of the twentieth century.

European society underwent a period of profound change and crisis from about 1930 to 1960. During this time, a broad intellectual and spiritual movement arose within the European Catholic community, largely in response to an atheistic secularism which lay at the heart of the crisis. The movement encompassed Belgium and Germany, but was most powerful in France, where it was led principally by Jesuits and Dominicans.⁸ The French revival included some of the greatest Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. Following the publication of Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* on 12 August 1950,⁹ the clouds began to gather over the Roman Catholic Church in France. By the summer of 1953, the question of the worker-priests (*prêtres-ouvriers*),¹⁰ which Congar had supported, was also known to be in the balance. In February 1954, Congar was summoned to Paris by the Master of the Dominican Order and, together with his colleagues Marie-Dominique Chenu, Henri-Marie Féret, and Pierre Boisselot, was dismissed from his post at Le Saulchoir. At his own suggestion, Congar went into exile in Jerusalem. Then, in November 1954, he was assigned to Blackfriars, Cambridge. In the midst of this crisis, when he and his closest *confrères* at Le Saulchoir, were forbidden to teach, Congar was heard to say: 'For the Church one cannot but give all!'¹¹ In *Cette Église que j'aime*, Congar attests unhesitatingly to what is most important in his life:

Do not man's words flow out of what fills his heart? The subjects dealt with here constitute the passion of my life. [...] May I be permitted to engrave in the front of this work on dogma and spirituality: Church, Laity, Priesthood, linking these three loves by a common relation to the Missions.¹²

The place of the Church in Congar's theology is best understood in the context of his utter dedication to its service and to the search for truth:

[I decided] to dedicate myself particularly to the Church and ecumenism. [...] I've consecrated my life to the service of truth. I've loved it and still love it in the way one loves a person. I've been like that from my very childhood, as if by some instinct and interior need. When I was a young Dominican, I took over the motto of St Hilary which St Thomas Aquinas had first made his own (*Contra Gentes* 1, 2) and which was reproduced on his statue, in the house of studies at Le Saulchoir: 'Ego hoc vel praecipuum vitae meae officium debere me Deo conscius sum, ut eum omnis sermo meus et sensus loquatur' (De Trin. I, 37; PL 1, 48 C).¹³

A defining feature of Congar's theology of the Church is its orientation towards the world.¹⁴ His ecclesiology, far from being ecclesio-centric, is for the world and at the service of all.¹⁵ Even a cursory reading of his works shows that Congar was not prepared to ignore the modern world or its history.¹⁶ Such a course would have had the inevitable consequence of rendering the Church, as presented in his theology, irrelevant to modern society. Congar's was a prophetic voice speaking as much for the benefit of the world and humanity as for that of the Church. His view of the relationship between the Church and the world is one of dependency:

At bottom, the Church and the world need one another. The Church means salvation for the world, but the world means health for the Church: without the world there would be danger of her becoming wrapped up in her own sacredness and uniqueness.¹⁷

In the conditions of a modern, secular, pluralist society, Congar argues that theology must exercise a critical function: 'Theology must, of course, be constructive, but also exercise a critical function, and if possible a prophetic function, too, towards a status quo which might be disregarding the actual state of things.'¹⁸

The key elements of Congar's theology include the following: the restoration of the genuine value of ecclesiology; ecumenism; a fresh consideration of the person and mission of the Holy Spirit; reform; the laity; a return to the sources and the application of the fecund resources of tradition to the current problems of the Church. The goals of his ecclesiological programme do not stand in isolation from each other. Congar indicates that the interior renewal of the Church and the realisation of Christian unity, for which he worked untiringly, are only attainable through action inspired by prayer:

When it is a matter of the renewal of the Church and the conversion of heart, prayer for unity, especially when made in common, and when it attains a certain level of sincerity and depth —as it is generally the case — makes us aware of the exigencies of Jesus Christ, and the indifference of the rest. It invites us to go inside ourselves and not to harden our hearts.¹⁹

Common prayer is, then, a source of conversion through which, in Congar's view, Christians become more Christian and more Catholic.

It was affectivity in his approach to the Church, together with his commitment to its reform, that inspired Congar's unflagging service at Vatican II. As we read in a letter by him:

I worked on many conciliar commissions. I do not think that I had more than two days rest in the four conciliar sessions of three months each. The work was enormous: I was on the theological commission presided over by Cardinal Ottaviani, where we laboured unceasingly, always in Latin; the Commission for the Missions, a great grace in my life; the Commission for the Clergy, for the decree on priests, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, in which I was responsible for not a few texts. With the Secretariat for Christian Unity I worked hard on the decree on ecumenism, on the declaration on religious freedom, which demanded a great deal from us, and on the text on non-Christian religions. I also had a part in other things, more or less, but in none more than in the famous *Gaudium et spes* (The Church in the Modern World) which issued simultaneously from the commissions on theology and the laity. It was an enormous structure, since each commission had thirty members and at least as many *periti*.²⁰

Congar may be numbered among those distinguished Roman Catholic theologians whose efforts contributed to the transformation of theology in the decades that preceded the Second Vatican Council.²¹ He provides an outline of some of the reasons for the renewal of the sense of the Church:

One does not have to deny the general influence exercised on the work of theologians by the development of sociological studies and the rebirth of the social sense. We have rediscovered, in social philosophy, the notion of wholeness (*tout*).²²

Congar believed, however, that the true causes of the renewal in ecclesiology were to be found in the religious domain. He was convinced that the most decisive element in the ecclesiological renewal in the period before the Council was a deepening in the interior life of the Church especially with regard to the person of Christ:

We are convinced that it is the attention directed, with great fervour, *towards Christ himself* which made his mystical body better understood. Is it not remarkable that one of the most read works since the war, one of those which contributed most to foster the beginnings of this ecclesiological renewal, was the work of Dom Marmion, so fully christological and liturgical?²³

Congar also points to the impulse given to eucharistic piety by Pope Pius X (1903-1914), which united Christians more closely with Christ, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the Church. Congar asserted, therefore, that if his evaluation of the ecclesiological renewal was correct, his assessment would allow an appreciation of the soundness of Christian instinct and of the sense of tradition both of which were born of the same renewal.²⁴

Congar's initial contribution to the transformation of Roman Catholic theology was in the area of the renewal of the Church. He knew that such a renewal was essential in order to overcome unbelief:

It is necessary to restore fully to the mystery of the Church its human and divine dimensions. Its whole divine dimension by showing and stressing its inner connection with Christ, the decisive and ever present role of the Holy Spirit, and the primacy of grace; its entire human dimension by showing to advantage the activity of the entire community of believers, its liturgical and apostolic role, its reality as fully ecclesial.²⁵

Thus, Congar's proposals for the renewal of the Church recognise the centrality of Christ and of the Holy Spirit while, at the same time, emphasising the Church's human dimension. His renewal programme is a prophetic call for the full involvement of the entire ecclesial community in the apostolic activity of the Church. The extent of human co-operation in salvation is crucially important for Congar, not only in ecclesiology but also in Mariology and Christology. The profound nature of his own affective approach to the mystery of the Church sensitises Congar to the manner in which the Church, on its human side, is a co-operative participation in divine activity.

Congar's *Le Christ, Marie et l'Église*,²⁶ published on the occasion of the 15th centenary of the Council of Chalcedon, takes up again, from an ecumenical perspective, the points of friction between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches. An important work, it shows that disagreement concerning the role of the Church and of Mary in the plan of salvation inevitably leads to disagreement concerning the role of Christ. The Council of Chalcedon (451) is recognised by all the Churches as is the definition of the Church as the community of

believers. The Churches are divided, however, on the question of what unites the Church to God.²⁷ Essentially, Protestants favour an ecclesiology that is vertical, in which God is seen as the sole author of salvation.²⁸ Catholics, on the other hand, prefer a more horizontal ecclesiology that recognises the role of man, the Church and Mary in the salvation of humanity.²⁹

Congar's stress on the divine-human nature of the Church and on its saving activity cannot be overemphasised.³⁰ He is sharply critical of Luther's frequently repeated view of salvation as an *opus Dei*,³¹ a work of God, not of humanity and, therefore, of God only:

But if neither the human race as such, nor the Church nor Our Lady has any active part in the work of salvation the question cannot but occur what of the co-operation of Christ's human nature? If we disagree about the Church and Our Lady for the same reason as we do about the idea of a pure *opus Dei* in which God alone is active in the work of salvation, this third problem must be faced. Are we not also in disagreement about the part played by Christ's humanity in that same work? [...] For if salvation is wholly an *opus Dei*, the *sole* act of God, what becomes of the part played by Christ's humanity itself, since our own part, and the parts of Our Lady and the Church are held to have no place. God, according to Luther, does our works in us. Faith, the one thing that should respond in us to God's action is, in his view, itself the work of God.³²

The crux of the argument in Christology, as well as in ecclesiology and Mariology, concerns the nature and extent of human co-operation with the Creator. Congar points out that in Roman Catholic theology the intimate connection between the three subjects of Christ, Mary, and the Church is determined by a single principle, applied with due qualification in each case, and which he defines as follows: 'Human nature plays its part in the work of salvation, yet equally clearly the total power of effecting that salvation is from God.'³³ Congar thus emphasises the human dimension of the Church without in any way understating its divine dimension, thereby avoiding the monophysite heresy in ecclesiology.³⁴

II. Affectivity and the Movement for the Return to the Sources (*ressourcement*)

Congar, moved by a deep love for the Church, urged a return to the great wealth of the whole previous Christian tradition in order to retrieve it for the enrichment of the present-day Church,³⁵ and to counteract its hostile image, itself a cause of unbelief:

Our contribution obviating these reasons for unbelief [a poor presentation of the Church] would be a truly traditional presentation of the life of the Church, one based on the great inspirations of the first centuries ... i.e., on the sources. You see at once that my theology, to the extent one can speak of my theology, is linked specifically to a study of the sources, with a great reliance on those sources: ... scripture, the fathers, the liturgy, the great councils, and the very life of the Church, the Christian community.³⁶

The concrete form that affectivity took in Congar's approach to ecclesiology was a demanding search for the sources of authentic ecclesiology and their deployment according to a principle of Christological recentring. The return to the sources (*ressourcement*) was part of a lively movement for reform in French theology, dating from the early part of the twentieth century, that effected a renewal in Scripture, patristics, and liturgy. Congar defines *ressourcement* as 'a new examination (*réinterrogation*) of the permanent sources of theology: the Bible, liturgy, the Fathers (Latins and Greeks)'.³⁷ The return to the sources was not just an archaistic reproduction of the early Church; rather, it concerned the understanding of the Fathers in their own context and the application of the pure and full vision of Christianity, expounded by them, to the Church in the modern era. Congar considers the Fathers of the Church as the normal spiritual *milieu* of the theologian:

Most often, the Fathers remain exterior to the thought of modern theologians: they are invoked from the outside. [...] For Möhler, the knowledge of the Fathers is a means of being united with their spirit, and this communion itself is not properly speaking a *means*, because it is the communion with Christianity in its concrete, purest and fullest reality. Like the company of parents and of brothers in the bosom of the family, the company of the Fathers is more than a means, it is a spiritual *milieu*, the milieu of the normal life of the theologian.³⁸

Roger Aubert, an historian of Roman Catholic thought and theology, provides the most comprehensive account of the *ressourcement*. Writing during the pontificate of Pope Pius XII and soon after the publication of *Humani Generis* (1950), Aubert states that his aim is to discern the predominant trends of present-day theology that indicate the orientations of theology in the years to come. He acknowledges his debt to two studies, one by Congar and the other by Jean Daniélou,³⁹ both of which consider the same question of the present orientations in religious thought.

The *ressourcement* passed through various stages of

development. The biblical renewal, which began in Germany in the course of the inter-war period, spread progressively to the rest of the Catholic world and even to what may be considered the less progressive countries. In France, youth movements, most notably the young Catholic workers' movement, *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* (*J.O.C.*) as it came to be known, from their inception gave an important place to meditation on the gospel while Dom Columba Marmion led many priests and laity to a rediscovery of the scriptures.⁴⁰ The liturgical renewal is older than the biblical renewal. Although known in France from before the First World War, and its first intense period of activity was linked with the name of Dom Lambert Beauduin, it was in Germany during the inter-war period that the liturgical renewal blossomed when the Church was forced, especially during the Nazi era, to renounce social action and focused instead on the lively celebration of the divine mysteries.⁴¹ The liturgical renewal, which was not limited to Germany and France, could count on the active goodwill of the Holy See.⁴² The biblical renewal and the liturgical movement were, very naturally, completed by a patristic renaissance.⁴³ The movement towards fuller contact with patristic thought is perhaps the most interesting and challenging of the various currents of renewal in theology in the early part of the twentieth century, as it provides an authentic witness to the faith in a way that is sensitive to the ever changing needs of humanity.⁴⁴ The characteristic feature of the patristic renewal, according to Aubert, was that it no longer solely concerned, as it did a half century earlier, the study of the works of the Fathers for apologetic arguments to prove the antiquity of professed doctrines or practices in use in the Roman Catholic Church. Its aim was, rather, to recover that which had been forgotten or neglected in the course of history.⁴⁵

The *ressourcement* reached a dramatic high-point in French theology in the period during and following the second world war.⁴⁶ In the 1940's and 1950's, the *ressourcement* helped to liberate Protestants from tired liberalism or oppressive fundamentalism, while also freeing Catholics from neoscholasticism.⁴⁷ Protestant neo-orthodox theologians, most notably Karl Barth, who called for a return to the Bible, also contributed to the Catholic *ressourcement* by showing Roman Catholics that it is possible to read the Bible in ways which are faithful both to the historic faith and to the methods of historical criticism.⁴⁸ The power of the movement for a return to the sources was, however, most evident on the Roman Catholic side, with Congar as its pre-eminent practitioner. Congar provides a clear expression of his line of thought on the importance of the return to the sources:

In everything I have always been concerned to recover the sources, the roots. I am firmly convinced: a tree strikes deep roots and cannot rise to heaven except to the extent those roots hold firmly to the soil of the earth.⁴⁹

Congar worked consistently for a reform of the Church that would proceed by way of a return to the sources. In his view, however, *ressourcement* could only be accomplished by way of a *recentrement* (re-centring on Christ), thereby effecting 'a return to the essential, to Jesus Christ, especially in the central mystery of Easter'.⁵⁰ The combination of *ressourcement* and *recentrement* was critically important in Congar's ecclesiology. It provided the insight which enabled him to deal with the important though difficult question of the relationship between the Church and the world — a relationship that Congar defined in such a way as to avoid the dangerous error of either being subordinate to the other.

Congar borrowed the idea of a return to the sources from the poet and social critic Charles Péguy (1873-1914),⁵¹ as well as from the liturgical changes inaugurated by Pope Pius X (1903-1914).⁵² He was also influenced by Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) whom Congar praises for his efforts to live as perfectly as possible in communion with the spirit of the Fathers: 'But Möhler does not *use* the Fathers in order to *prove conclusions*; he seeks to *live* and, by communion with their spirit, to find as perfect as possible a communion with their thought and with their life.'⁵³ The path of Church reform by way of a return to the biblical and patristic roots was pursued not only by Congar, but also by Henri de Lubac, Daniélou, Joseph Ratzinger, and Karl Rahner, to mention the most important theologians. The achievement of these scholars, seen by the Lutheran George Lindbeck as 'tradition-minded but not traditionalist renewers of theology',⁵⁴ was made possible by their deep knowledge of Scripture and the Fathers and by their abiding respect for and appeal to traditions earlier than those of the Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation.

The origins of the programme of reform and renewal that was at the heart of the *ressourcement* may be traced to certain elements in Roman Catholic Modernism.⁵⁵ An ambivalent term, 'Modernism', was first used by its Roman opponents to describe an extreme that should be avoided, a crisis, and ultimately a condemned position. It refers to a definite movement of thought within the Roman Catholic Church that began about 1900 and ended soon after its condemnation in 1907.⁵⁶ It would, of course, be misleading to refer to Modernism as a single coherent doctrine.⁵⁷ The most important factors in the rise of the Modernist movement in France were the introduction and use of the

results and methods of biblical criticism, as well as new philosophical ferments.⁵⁸ Congar defines Modernism briefly as 'the introduction into the Church of historical critical methods, their application to the religious sciences, with often insufficient philosophical foundations'.⁵⁹ He views the response of the Church to Modernism as shallow and 'purely negative'.⁶⁰ A question raised by the Modernist crisis concerns the acceptance within traditional theology, and ultimately by the Church, of progress in historical science and its application to faith.

Congar acknowledges that Modernism stimulated debate among Roman Catholic thinkers on the problems of revelation, the nature and method of theology, and the precise nature of tradition. He also refers to certain difficulties which are seen by him as a direct result of Modernism.⁶¹ One of the factors that gave rise to the Modernist crisis was the lack of complete correspondence between the Church's doctrines and the historical and critical study of the documentation used as their basis. It was this factor, according to Congar, which led to an erroneous distinction, and indeed an opposition between dogma and history. Modernist thinkers claimed the right to treat the conclusions drawn from the historical study of the documentary sources of Christianity independently from the dogmatic statements of the magisterium. Congar, like Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), views the separation of dogma from history as unnecessary:

To oppose the data of history and the statements of dogma was to make an unwarranted separation between the two elements of a single reality with an essentially religious nature. It amounted to judging this reality by inadequate criteria, without doing justice to its nature and its demands.⁶²

The manner in which distinctions were made by the Modernist theologians gave rise to other difficulties which Congar describes as follows:

One of the misfortunes of the Modernists was that they did not know how to distinguish theology and dogma. Certainly at that time the distinction for all practical purposes was not as clear as it is today. This was one of the benefits of the Modernist crisis.⁶³

Congar further elucidates this somewhat obscure but important point by arguing that the Modernists, in their legitimate efforts to avoid any confusion between the absolute of faith or Revelation and the theology of St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), or the theology of the thirteenth century in general, wrongly separated Revelation and dogma from all

properly speculative content on which theology lives and without which it no longer exists as theology.⁶⁴

Congar studied the Modernist thinkers as part of his preparations to teach an introductory course in theology at Le Saulchoir.⁶⁵ Congar was concerned that his generation should rescue for the Church whatever was of value in Modernism. He wanted Roman Catholic theology to benefit, firstly, from the application of the historical critical method to Christian data and, secondly, that it should give greater attention to the concerns of the experiencing subject. Congar also recognised the aspiration in the Modernist movement that Roman Catholic theology remain closely connected to its sources:

Modernism with considerable acuteness set before Catholic theology the twofold problem, first, of its homogeneity, when taken in its scientific and rational form, with Revelation, and second, of its relation to its positive sources, henceforth subject to historical and critical methods, viz., the Bible, ancient and progressively developing traditions and institutions.⁶⁶

In Congar's view, the *ressourcement* contributed to overcoming certain dissociations between theology and spirituality. The central issue for Congar, however, concerns the construction of a complete theology capable of synthesising the contributions and inspirations of all the research associated with the *ressourcement* and combining it with a rediscovery of the decisive elements of the traditional treasure: the doctrine of the mystical Body; the theology of the Mass and of the liturgical mystery; eschatology, *agapè*. A complete theology of this nature, with its new techniques of research, exegesis and criticism should, in Congar's view, 'be at the service of openness, of contact with the world of *Others*: missiology; ecumenism; pastoral [theology]'.⁶⁷ It would also, in his opinion, include some of the most lively aspects of the work of theology: faith, the Word, the Church, and anthropology.

The condemnation of Modernism was quite effective. On 3 July 1907, the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition issued the decree *Lamentabili sane exitu* which listed the errors that were believed to be threatening the Church. On 8 September of the same year, Pope Pius X published the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* which presented a systematic account of the new errors and the measures to be taken against those who held them. The repressive enforcement of *Pascendi* in seminaries and throughout the Roman Catholic world, by means of the anti-Modernist oath, effectively brought the whole Modernist movement to a halt within a few years.⁶⁸ Legitimate dissatisfaction in

the theological world did not disappear, however, simply because it could not be openly expressed. In fact, it grew as many theologians viewed all Roman orientations as a function of the fear of Modernism. Future generations of Roman Catholic theologians would take up again the challenge of modernity, the question of the relationship of the gospel to the world, and the task of reclaiming the sources of the Christian faith. One of the developments in French theology in the period following the condemnation of Modernism and before the publication of *Humani Generis* was the widespread portrayal of the Church as a theandric union of all Catholics with Christ.⁶⁹ Although this new view of the Church did not entail a denial of the juridical model, nevertheless, by the end of the 1930's, a new militancy emerged in favour of the spread of what has been described as 'vitalism'. This was due, in part, to the description of the Church as the Mystical Body in the 1920's and to the influence of certain French theologians who became convinced, as a result of their contact with non-believers through the resistance movement, that the only way to attract non-Catholics into the Church was through its presentation in terms of the vital and organic.⁷⁰

In an effort to redefine the relationship between the Church and the world; to re-establish contact with the young generation; and to make the Church more attractive to non-Catholics, a new movement arose in French theology that came to be known as the *nouvelle théologie*.⁷¹ Subjects that had already emerged in the Modernist debate constituted important aims of the *nouvelle théologie*, including the call for theological renewal; the need to move beyond Scholasticism; the necessity of closer links with the contemporary world; a concern for a return to the Fathers of the Church; and a clarification of the link between nature and grace. There were also political and psychological elements involved in the debate. As Giacomo Martina notes, however, the discussion remained on the theological plane, and never descended to other levels.⁷² The epithet *nouvelle théologie* corresponds to a theology that is concerned to know the tradition, as opposed to a purely scholastic and repetitive theology. The conception of tradition proposed by the *nouvelle théologie*, far from being traditionalist, in the sense of a repetition of the recent past, is concerned rather with the unity of the ever living tradition. This is precisely Congar's position.⁷³

Two groups of French theologians, one Jesuit and the other Dominican, became synonymous with the *nouvelle théologie*.⁷⁴ They were the Jesuit trio: Daniélou, de Lubac and Henri Bouillard and a corresponding Dominican trio: Chenu, Congar and André Marie

Dubarle. Like Modernism and liberation theology, the *nouvelle théologie* attracted considerable attention beyond those directly concerned with it. In the period 1945-1950, a lively debate ensued between the Jesuit and Dominican proponents of the *nouvelle théologie* and some of the most outstanding theologians of the Angelicum in Rome.⁷⁵ As early as 1946, Pope Pius XII had expressed his concerns regarding the *nouvelle théologie* to representatives of both the Dominicans and the Jesuits warning against an attack on the fundamental tenets of Roman Catholic doctrine. In an atmosphere of suspicion and controversy, Pius XII rejected the *nouvelle théologie* in 1950 with the publication of the encyclical *Humani Generis*.⁷⁶ Congar read *Humani Generis* very attentively, having been advised by Emmanuel Suarez, then Master of the Dominican Order, that there were things in it which concerned himself. Congar denies, however, that either he or anyone in his ecumenical milieu ever practised a bad 'irenicism'.⁷⁷ The clash between the defenders of traditionalism and the innovators continued to characterise theology in the pre-conciliar period and was a part of the preparations for Vatican II. The *nouvelle théologie* has been linked with Modernism because of its presumed downplaying of the supernatural order and of the magisterium.⁷⁸ Unlike their predecessors in the Modernist movement, however, some of the practitioners of the *nouvelle théologie* served as *periti* at Vatican II or as members of the new Theological Commission established by Pope Paul VI.

In this article, I have attempted to provide an insight into Congar's character through a consideration of his own affective approach to the Church and his role in the various movements for ecclesiological reform in the first half of the twentieth century. We have seen that the primary purpose of Congar's theology is to contribute towards the realisation of a renewed Church. In order to ensure the success of this goal, Congar formulated a vision for ecclesial renewal concerned to address specific problems in the Roman Catholic Church that were a cause of unbelief. The actualisation of his vision for the Church depended on a thoroughgoing reform of the Church and a return to traditional sources. Congar's critique of the Church as a cause of unbelief may be best understood in the context of his approach to ecclesiology as influenced by affectivity. Naturally, in an ecclesiology undertaken for such strongly affectivity-coloured reasons, it was a priority for Congar to tackle those aspects of the present-day Church that could lead present or potential members away from the Church. Whatever the difficulties of the past or fears for the future, the Church is the

cornerstone of Congar's whole theological edifice. In the final analysis, he views the Church as the sign and instrument of God's plan of grace for the world,⁷⁹ and, even more important, as the place and means of conversion to the gospel.⁸⁰ It was his love for the Church and concern to ensure the accomplishment of its New Testament mission that inspired all of Congar's endeavours in theology, including the call for a return to the sources.

- 1 See Yves M.-J. Congar, *Dialogue between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism*, trans. by Philip Loretz (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), p. 43. *Chrétiens en dialogue: contributions catholiques à l'oecuménisme*, Unam Sanctam, 50 (Paris: Cerf, 1964), p. LV. Following the initial citation, the page numbers of works in the original language will be given in round brackets.
- 2 Jean Puyo, *Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar: 'une vie pour la vérité'* (Paris: Centurion, 1975), p. 185.
- 3 Congar, 'Pourquoi j'aime l'Église', *Communion: Verbum Caro*, 24 (1970), 23-30 (p. 23).
- 4 Congar, 'Pourquoi j'aime l'Église', p. 25.
- 5 Congar, 'Pourquoi j'aime l'Église', p. 26.
- 6 M.-J. Le Guillou, 'Yves Congar', in *Bilan de la théologie du XXe siècle*, ed. by Robert Vander Gucht and Herbert Vorgrimler, 2 vols (Paris: Casterman, 1970), II, pp. 791-805 (p. 792).
- 7 Congar, 'Pourquoi j'aime l'Église', p. 30.
- 8 See Gustave Weigel, 'The Historical Background of the Encyclical *Humani Generis*', *Theological Studies*, 12 (1951), 208-230 (p. 217).
- 9 Pius XII, *False Trends In Modern Teaching: Encyclical Letter (Humani Generis)*, trans. by Ronald A. Knox, rev. edn (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1959).
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