

Reviews

DIVERSITY AND COMMUNION, by Yves Congar, OP. SCM Press, London. 1984. Pp. viii + 232. £8.50.

Fr Congar states on the first page of his book that "at present the ecumenical situation seems to be at an impasse" (p. 1). With respect for this great Dominican apostle (one might truly say "confessor") of ecumenism, I dissent from this judgment. It seems to me that the ecumenical stillness of the churches is at least partly that of a runner poised on the starting-blocks. They are faced with decisions of enormous moment concerning the reception of the ecumenical agreements reached by their representatives: notably the Final Report of ARCIC and the document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* produced by the Faith and Order Commission. But in which direction will the athlete run? Away from the agreements on the grounds that they do not reflect accurately enough the traditions of each church? Or towards them, on the understanding that one's own tradition is not the only form in which Christian truth can be faithfully expressed?

Congar is convinced that many of the obstacles to reunion are removed once it is realised that the ecumenical goal is not a monochrome Church, but a "pluralist unity". The churches' verdicts on ARCIC and BEM can be fruitful only if this principle is kept in mind. This book, then, which is derived from a seminar held in Paris in 1980, demonstrates with massive success that the full communion which we seek is one in which, within a fundamental agreement of faith, diversities flourish.

Following a method which he describes as "documentary" and "largely historical", the author examines a wide range of writings on the subject of diversity within unity. His method might also be described as inductive: in the process of a critical exposition of the ideas of other writers, he allows his own convictions to emerge, though sometimes contenting himself with a question rather than an affirmation. Moreover, in the last two chapters, he offers modestly his own "reflections which arise out of more than half a century of study, experience and prayer" (p. 161).

The main section of the book examines various ways in which, through the course of history, the ideal of diversity within unity has been expounded. In the first part, entitled "Diversity in Time and Space", Congar investigates the pluriformity and unity which existed at the time of the New Testament and the early Church. Diversity of dogmatic terms, he argues, "did not prevent people from living, as a church, by the reality of Christ and his spirit" (p. 20). It is "simplistic" to speak of "rediscovering" a unity which is supposed to have been "lost" (p. 21). The need for pluralism follows from two facts: from the fact that God transcends human language—St Thomas recognised that a dogma can only "tend towards" the truth (p. 40)—and from each person's need to express the Christian realities in the terms of his own culture and problems.

In the second part of the work Congar studies various Orthodox concepts which imply diversity within unity: *adiaphora*, i.e. "indifferent" teachings, as opposed to those which are "necessary"; *theologoumena* (those theological opinions of the Fathers of the undivided Church which are not matters of fundamental faith); and *economy*, which denotes "accommodation" as opposed to literal exactness or *akribeia*. The author compares the characteristics of the Eastern and Western churches and

believes he can recognise in them a complementarity rather than an opposition. A chapter is devoted to the *filioque*. Congar traces the development of the term "rite" to the point where it comes to mean, not just a liturgical celebration, but, in the words of I. -H. Dalmais, "the hieratic expression of an entire conception of Christian life" (p. 84). Similar applications are contained in Cardinal Willebrand's use of the term *typos*. Preaching at Cambridge in 1970 Willebrands explained that

We find the reality of a *typos* in the existence of a long and coherent tradition, inspiring love and loyalty in men and women, forming and maintaining an organic and harmonious totality of complementary elements, each of which supports and reinforces the other.

(These words are quoted in the book, not by Congar, however, but by Harding Meyer, who contributes an excursus on "Reconciled Diversity".)

In analysing the term "sister church", Congar is no doubt right in arguing that when Paul VI applied it to the Anglican Communion in 1970, he cannot have intended it in the same sense in which it is applied to the churches of the East. For the Anglican Communion does not claim an apostolic origin independent from that of Rome, as the Eastern Churches do; nor does Rome recognise Anglican ministry and Eucharist, as she does the ministry and Eucharist of the Orthodox. But I cannot agree with Congar that Paul VI was only looking forward to the time when the Anglican Communion would *become* a sister. Do you call one who is not yet your sister your "ever-beloved sister"? Moreover, the explanations of the expression that the Pope gave in private indicated that he regarded the Anglican Communion as already a sister. This was such a revolutionary thing to say that neither he nor his successors as far as I know have repeated it. It is surprising that the quotation in the book includes one or two strange variations from the official text, which cannot be put down to problems of translation, as Paul VI delivered this part of his address in English. (Is the translator retranslating a French version?) What the Pope said was not "if the Roman Catholic church...could embrace its ever-beloved sister", but "when the Roman Catholic church...is able to embrace..."

In the third part Congar considers diversity within unity from the point of view of the Churches of the reformation. Luther distinguished between articles of doctrine necessary for salvation and those which are free and unnecessary. For him even Scripture is the word of God only in so far as it speaks of Christ as one's Saviour. Calvin spoke of "fundamental articles" as opposed to those about which there can be disagreement without the destruction of the unity of the faith. Anglicans used the Greek word *adiaphora* to denote these non-fundamental truths. To establish the essential truths, continental Reformers and Anglicans appealed to the councils of the first five centuries. They invoked Vincent of Lerins' principle *quod unicum, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*; but Congar reminds the reader of Vincent's other principle, according to which the faith had to develop.

We are given a very helpful chapter on the hierarchy of truths, a theory the seeds of which Congar discerns in St. Thomas. There is also a section on ecumenical agreements, and another on the possibility of Catholic acceptance of the Augsburg Confession.

If the book had been written a year or two later Congar would presumably have alluded to Cardinal Ratzinger's remarks in *Insight* about the hermeneutics of unity and the lack of balance in the theological statements of any church which fails to take account of the beliefs of the churches separated from it. But the author could have referred to the SCDF's bold statement in 1973 that many dogmas are historically conditioned, so that they need to be supplemented by later formulations.

The translator, John Bowden, is experienced at his trade, and worked wonders with his translation of Grillmeier's great work on Christology. But in translating Congar he was not in his best form. I have not been able to refer to the original French, but there are a number of passages where the logic does not sound quite right in English.

On pp. 33 and 41 two different translations are given for the same passage from an address of John Paul II. The date 1620 for the Synod of Moscow's declaration that William Palmer's baptism was invalid cannot be right.

I read this book with absorption and even with excitement. It should be in the hands of everyone engaged in ecumenical discussions.

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LIBERTÉ ET LOI DANS L'ÉGLISE. *Les quatre fleuves* 18, Paris, 1983. pp 152 65 francs.

When our own national Canon Law Society gathered to celebrate its silver jubilee in 1982, its President noted how in the beginning those pioneering canonists met more or less clandestinely, under the auspices of another organisation and not in their own name. Why? It seems so as not to pose too much of a threat to the hierarchy. Those in authority have not always welcomed lawyers and legal procedures, and the relationship of law to freedom is not simply that of opposition. This French collection of essays explores the 1983 Code on its own terms and in the light of its antecedents. It must be admitted that there is no obvious unifying theme, certainly not that of law and freedom, and that the nine essays appear to contain whatever their distinguished writers chose to include. Mgr. Charles Lefebvre, learned man that he is, missed a huge opportunity by largely limiting himself to a bare chronicle of canon law from the 12th to the 15th century. This is history as lists.

The pieces by Jean Gaudemet and Vincenzo Fagiolo are particularly stimulating. Gaudemet takes up a critical stance in outlining the operation of the 1917 Code, and canon law generally, up to John XXIII. The canon law of that period, as practised and studied, is found seriously wanting despite the early promise of a single, coherent Code with a full apparatus of authoritative sources. Bereft of history, comparative law and sociology on its academic side, remote and over-clerical in its Latin language, the study of canon law did not yield spectacular results; and the creation of new law was centralised and limited. By now, however, the defects of that style of doing canon law are well-known and Gaudemet does not try to list them all. Fagiolo concentrates on the 1983 Code in his excellent contribution. Contemporary canon law has been reformulated not only in detail but also in its whole self-understanding and its relationship to other sources of christian living; it is more pastoral, conscious of rights, favourable to subsidiarity and decentralisation. Basically it is the end-product of another ecclesiology, the last document of Vatican II as the present Pope likes to say.

The merits and potential of the new Code are undoubtedly great, and these essays give assorted if uncoordinated examples. Yet even in these early days one has reservations. The 1983 Code may not be that perfectly aligned to Vatican II; the restrictions in ecumenical matters and in certain areas of sacramental life will soon be out of step; religious will not feel wholly free; the active protection and vindication of rights needs to be taken further. And it does not end there. Canon 1399 still provides too much uncertainty when it comes to punishing offences, whilst canon 1321(3) may stack the odds too much against the innocent. Elsewhere, canons 285 and 287 limit political/social activity too much for too many, and the need for a mandate to teach theological subjects in any Catholic institute of higher studies is not necessarily the best way to ensure responsible freedom. The renewed vigour of law-making agencies, other than Rome, is well brought out by Passicos and de Lanversin in their essays. Yet canon 19 will either stifle judicial creativity or soon become a dead-letter, at least in part. That canon gives due influence to the jurisprudence and practice of the Roman Curia but not to other tribunals. This is rigid, timid and even ironic given the important contribution made by several tribunals, not least those in the English-speaking world, to advances in matrimonial law.

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