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SCRIPTURE LIVING IN THE CHURCH: THE ECUMENICAL RELEVANCE OF  
YVES CONGAR'S ECCLESIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO *SOLA SCRIPTURA*

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Paul Robert Mueller

May 2021

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Paul Robert Mueller

2021

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By

Paul Robert Mueller

Approved March 29, 2021

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## ABSTRACT

# SCRIPTURE LIVING IN THE CHURCH: THE ECUMENICAL RELEVANCE OF YVES CONGAR'S ECCLESIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO *SOLA SCRIPTURA*

By

Paul Robert Mueller

May 2021

Dissertation supervised by Father Radu Bordeianu

Yves Congar was quite possibly the greatest Catholic ecclesialogist of the twentieth century. His lifelong passion for ecumenism and ecclesiology were contained in his prodigious work on the sources of revelation, Scripture and Tradition. Congar explained the frequently misinterpreted Catholic concept of Tradition clearly, which could be helpful in easing any tensions on this topic between Catholics and Protestants. This dissertation intends to show how Congar understood Tradition and to show how that can be a potential aid in ecumenical dialogue. Congar's efforts in the composition of numerous documents from Vatican II gave him the knowledge of the Catholic position on this topic, which eminently qualified him for this work.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the two most supportive people in my studies. The first one is naturally my wife, Gloria. She patiently endured my days of concentration on my studies, and she pushed me, sometimes gently, sometimes not so gently, to continue in my work to finish my degree here at Duquesne.

The other person was my professor at Lourdes University in Sylvania, Ohio, Sister Shannon Schrein, who put the idea of graduate school into my head when I took my first theology class from her. Her unwavering faith in me has continually acted as an impetus to finish my degree in order to show her my gratitude.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge the role that Dr. Ben Brown has played in my studies. Ben pushed me, despite my persistent objections, to continue working on a book review of a particularly extreme Protestant author. Although I truly disliked the book, Ben forced me to look at it in a scholarly manner, considering any positive points I could extract. That experience of wrestling with a radically fundamentalist position forced me to wonder how there could ever be common ground between most Catholic theologians, and that extreme stance. That made me question how and if ecumenical discussions could ever succeed between people of such widely different versions of Christianity.

My good friend Dr. Peter Sibilio kept me upbeat during the long days of study which seemed to go on forever. By telling me his stories, Peter let me know that many people encounter periods when things seem to mount to become an insurmountable barrier.

I would also like to acknowledge all of my instructors at both Duquesne University and Lourdes University. They pushed me to learn in ways I had not encountered before taking classes from them. It has been their encouragement and faith in me that has propelled me to continue to finish my terminal degree.

Last, I must also acknowledge my dissertation director, Father Radu Bordeianu, who showed tremendous patience with me during the process of the writing of this dissertation. His gentle guidance led me to make my writing more direct and precise, and he encouraged me in the direction of voicing my opinions regarding the role of the laity in the church.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

50Y	<i>Fifty Years of Catholic Theology</i> (1988)
900Y	<i>After Nine Hundred Years</i> (1959)
BPC	<i>Blessed is the Peace of my Church</i> (1973)
CD	<i>Chrétiens désunis</i> (1964), ET is DBC
CL	<i>Called to Life</i> (1987)
DBC	<i>Dialogue Between Christians</i> (1966)
DC	<i>Diversity and Communion</i> (1985)
DV	<i>Dei verbum</i> (1965)
EA	<i>Entretiens d'automne</i> (1987)
ECT	“Evangelicals and Catholics Together”
EFC	<i>Ecumenism and the Future of the Church</i> (1967)
FSL	<i>Faith and Spiritual Life</i> (1968)
FT	<i>La foi et la théologie</i> (1962)
GS	<i>Gaudium et spes</i> (1965)
HCW	<i>At the Heart of Christian Worship</i> (2010)
HSx	<i>I Believe in the Holy Spirit</i> , vol. no. (1983)
JC	<i>My Journal of the Council</i> (2012)
JP	Jean Puyo, <i>Jean Puyo interroge le Père Yves Congar</i> (1975)
JSC	<i>Jesus Christ</i> (1966)
JT	<i>Journal d'un théologien: 1946-1956</i> (2000)
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> (1964)

LPC	<i>Lay People in the Church</i> (1965)
MA	<i>Mortalium Animos</i> (1928)
MC	<i>The Mystery of the Church</i> (1965)
MCPG	Rose M. Beal, <i>Mystery of the Church, People of God</i> (2014)
ML	<i>Martin Luther, sa foi, sa réforme</i> (1983)
MO	<i>Au milieu des orages</i> (1969)
MT	<i>The Meaning of Tradition</i> (1964)
MYT	<i>The Mystery of the Temple</i> (1962)
ODCC	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i>
PPC	<i>Power and Poverty in the Church</i> (1965)
RG	<i>The Revelation of God</i> (1968)
SE	<i>Sainte Église</i> (1963)
ST	<i>Situations et taches présentes de la théologie</i> (1967)
TC	<i>This Church that I Love</i> (1969)
THS	Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, <i>Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit</i> (2004)
T&t	<i>Tradition and Traditions</i> (1966)
UPU	<i>Une passion: L'unité</i> (1974)
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> (1964)
VFR	<i>Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église</i> (1950); ET – <i>True and False Reform in the Church</i> (2011)
VM	<i>Vaste Monde, ma Paroisse</i> (1959)
WS	<i>The Word and the Spirit</i> (1986)

## **Introduction**

Former U. S. President Harry S. Truman is reported to have once said, “It is understanding that gives us an ability to have peace. When we understand the other fellow’s viewpoint, and he understands ours, then we can sit down and work out our differences.” Although Truman was speaking of politics, his succinct statement also can be considered the foundation for ecumenical dialogue. Ecumenism and ecclesiology were the major lifelong interests of Yves Congar, and the intention of this dissertation is to investigate Congar and examine how his concepts may benefit ecumenical, which also necessarily leads into ecclesiological, discussions.

Jesus Christ traditionally founded “The Church” in Matthew’s Gospel (Mt 16:18<sup>1</sup>), when He said to Peter, “you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.” In John’s Gospel, Jesus prays: “Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me; so that they may be one just as we are” (Jn 17:11). Jesus desired that His Church remain one. Unfortunately, His Church has splintered. Early in its history, heresies caused schisms, which led to break-away sects.

### **Statement of the Theological Question**

The Roman Catholic Church has encouraged ecumenical dialogue with our separated Christian brethren since the mid-twentieth century, driven especially by the Second Vatican Council. Both officially, through Rome, and unofficially, through individual or organizational contacts, Roman Catholics have engaged more and more

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the Bible, unless otherwise noted, will be from the *New American Bible Revised Edition*.

frequently in ecumenical dialogue with our Christian co-religionists since the end of Vatican II in 1965. These contacts and meetings normally deal with various specific points of general agreement and disagreement, or they deal with issues between Roman Catholicism and a particular denomination or church. We must remember, however, that not all ecumenical discussions center around the Catholic Church. Ecumenical discussions also take place among Protestant churches, as well as the Orthodox with the various Protestant churches. Peter Leithart spoke of the fact that Protestants have much to lament since Protestantism has splintered into so many churches, pointing out in his book, *The End of Protestantism*, that “we are doctrinally divided. Virtually every church has added to the early creeds and made those additions fundamental to the church.”<sup>2</sup> As examples of added doctrinal material, Leithart pointed to the Westminster Confession for the Reformed and the Formula of Concord for Lutherans. The World Council of Churches is based upon ecumenical contacts: “All WCC programmes aim to support the member churches and ecumenical partners to journey together, promoting justice and peace in our world as an expression of faith in the Triune God.”<sup>3</sup>

Among those with whom Roman Catholics have established meetings are Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, and Evangelicals. These encounters include Bible scholars, systematic theologians, apologists, and occasionally ecclesiologists, who have been brought together to discuss the points of disagreement. Progress has been made toward bringing the two sides closer. The issues discussed in

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<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 2. All spellings in quotations will remain as original; obvious typographical errors will be corrected; italics will be assumed to be in the original, unless otherwise stated in the footnote.

<sup>3</sup> “What We Do,” World Council of Churches, accessed February 25, 2021, <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do>.

these dialogues also have generated an extensive literature on all sides of the questions covered, some favoring the agreements reached therein, some condemning the same agreements. With few exceptions, authors commenting on the issues upon which we do not agree seldom use the ecclesiology of Yves Congar; this happens with both Catholics and Protestants, but it is most especially evident in the work of Protestant authors.<sup>4</sup> As the Wesleyan scholar Douglas Koskela stated:

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<sup>4</sup> See: Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), cited Congar four times; Thaddeus D. Horgan, ed., *Walking Together: Roman Catholics and Ecumenism Twenty-five Years After Vatican II* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), also mentioned Congar four times in the various essays; William G. Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception: Its Challenge and Opportunity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), mentioned him three times; Mark E. Powell, *Papal Infallibility: A Protestant Evaluation of an Ecumenical Issue* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009) mentioned him three times; Avery Dulles, “The Unity for Which We Hope,” in Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), made two references to Congar (although the ECT Statement, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium” did not cite him at all), as did D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999). Two of Congar’s books are in the bibliography of Gregory Baum, *Progress and Perspectives: The Catholic Quest for Christian Unity* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962). Citing Congar once: Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Church Unity and the Papal Office: An Ecumenical Dialogue on John Paul’s Encyclical Ut Unum Sint* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001); Jeffrey Gros, Eamon McManus, and Ann Riggs, eds., *Introduction to Ecumenism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998); one reference – Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); one reference to Congar without citing his work; one reference – William G. Rusch, *Reception: An Ecumenical Opportunity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); Kenneth D. Whitehead, *The New Ecumenism: How the Catholic Church After Vatican II Took Over the Leadership of the World Ecumenical Movement* (New York: Alba House, 2009); Ronald D. Witherup, *Scripture: Dei Verbum* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006). The following books about ecumenism and/ or *sola scriptura* made no mention in their Index whatsoever of Congar: Gregg Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014); Gregg Allison and Chris Catalano, *The Unfinished Reformation: What Unites and Divides Catholics and Protestants After 500 Years* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016); John Armstrong, gen. ed., *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994); Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996); David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Delwin Brown, *Boundaries of our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994); Kenneth J. Collins and Jerry L. Walls, *Roman but not Catholic: What Remains at Stake 500 Years After the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017); James S. Cutsinger, ed., *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox in Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: 1997); Keith A. Fournier with William D. Watkins, *A House United? Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A Winning Alliance for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1994); Don Kistler, gen. ed., *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995) – which has a chapter by Sinclair Ferguson titled “Scripture and Tradition;” Leithart, *The End of Protestantism*, Matthew Levering with a response by Kevin



in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the ecumenical movement finds itself at an impasse. Despite its considerable gains over the course of the last century, the movement appears to many to have lost its momentum. In the words of Jon Nilson, ‘the ecumenical winter’ has arrived. Not least among the differences is the fact that the partners in 20<sup>th</sup> century ecumenical dialogues often brought to the table fundamentally different ecclesiological visions.<sup>5</sup>

Koskela wrote about Congar, admitting that “despite Congar’s ecumenical sensitivities, the majority of Congar scholarship has emerged from within the Roman Catholic tradition.”<sup>6</sup> For example, even though Protestant theologian Frederick Norris, in his book *The Apostolic Faith: Protestants and Roman Catholics*, extensively discussed the concept of Tradition, he took absolutely no note of Congar whatsoever, although he

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J. Vanhoozer, *Was the Reformation a Mistake? Why Catholic Doctrine is not Unbiblical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017); Alister McGrath, Mark A. Noll and James Turner, *The Future of Christian Learning: An Evangelical and Catholic Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008); Frederick W. Norris, *The Apostolic Faith: Protestants and Roman Catholics* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992); Charles O’Neill, ed., *Ecumenism and Vatican II* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1964); John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016); Mark P. Shea, *By What Authority? An Evangelical Discovers Catholic Tradition* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996); R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005); George H. Tavad, *Holy Writ or Holy Church: The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016); Anton C. Vrame and Cory Dixon, eds., *Essays on Ecumenism* (Berkeley, CA: InterOrthodox Press, 2003). Books with consideration of Congar: Avery Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity* (Washington, DC: Corpus Instrumentorum, 1968); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015); Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: Before and After Vatican II 1878-1993* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994). Ernest L. Unterkoefler and Andrew Harsanyi, eds., *The Unity We Seek: A Statement by the Roman Catholic/Presbyterian/Reformed Consultation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), cited Congar once in the document and Eugene M. Burke’s background paper mentions him three times.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas M. Koskela, *Ecclesiality and Ecumenism: Yves Congar and the Road to Unity* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Koskela, *Ecclesiality*, 19; Koskela in his footnote to the above quote, notes that “[e]xceptions include Canavaris, ‘The Ecclesiology of Yves Congar,’ Eckley, ‘Pneumatology in the Wesleyan Tradition and Yves Congar,’ and Stoneburner, ‘Doctrine of the Church in the Theology of Yves Congar, O.P.’”

gave a positive assessment of Tradition in a manner of which Congar would have approved. Could Norris's very good argument have been strengthened by including Congar? I believe so, and this will be considered.

As can also be seen from the list of theologians in note 3 who have written on ecumenism and ecclesiology, some Catholic theologians also either forget Congar entirely or mention him in passing. There are some exceptions, most notably Richard R. Gaillardetz, who has regularly given Congar adequate consideration in his writings, as has Gregory Baum. Yet Richard McBrien called Congar "the most important ecclesiologist in the twentieth century and probably in the history of the Church. No theologian contributed more to the success of the Second Vatican Council."<sup>7</sup> Congar had a hand in most of the documents of Vatican II that impact ecumenical, theological dialogue. He was probably the most important person missing or under-appreciated from serious, frequent consideration in these ecumenical encounters. For someone of such stature, one could expect greater consideration of his works.

As Koskela noted above, many ecumenists now recognize ecclesiology as a significant factor when considering the differences between Roman Catholics and their Protestant brethren, particularly in regard to the interpretation of Scripture, which has always been one of the flashpoints of disagreement between the two, ever since the beginning of the Reformation. Protestant theologian, Keith Mathison, also took note of this fact, stating that, "[i]n order for us to have a proper understanding of the authority of Scripture, we must also have a proper understanding of the authority of the Church."<sup>8</sup> Although he was not making a positive statement on the church, and therefore

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<sup>7</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 140.

<sup>8</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 267.

ecclesiology, Charles Colson offered the following statement: “on the critical issue of truth, evangelicals tend to rely on the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*. Our authority in matters of truth is Scripture alone.”<sup>9</sup> Many, possibly most, Protestants do not see any reason for involvement of the church at all in scriptural hermeneutics. They believe that any individual possesses the ability to derive proper conclusions from Scripture.

Matthew Levering, a Catholic theologian who did not cite Congar in his recent book on the Reformation, noted that the disagreements of the sixteenth century generally centered on doctrinal questions, “raised by Martin Luther at the outset of the Reformation that continue to divide Catholics and Protestants.”<sup>10</sup> Congar’s account in *A History of Theology*, offered a more detailed analysis, pointing out the roots of the problems in the theologies which emerged from the Middle Ages, although he would support Levering’s above-cited comment; yet Levering made no use of Congar.<sup>11</sup> The debates on Scripture at the time of the great split generally provided as much heat as light, and any modern, genuine agreement on the interpretation of Scripture appears to be distant. However, those disagreements also offer great possibilities for uncovering potential areas of, if not genuine agreement, then at least greater understanding. Much has been done to make this problem shrink, but much needs yet to be discussed before it will go away, and here the ecclesiology of Congar may provide some aid, if it were brought into thoughtful consideration.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Colson, “The Common Cultural Task: The Culture War from a Protestant Perspective,” in Colson and Niehaus, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Levering, *Was the Reformation a Mistake?* 16.

<sup>11</sup> Congar dealt more extensively and more precisely with the Middle Ages in *History of Theology* than he did in *Tradition and Traditions*; in HT, he divided the period into three separate time frames, titling his chapters as follows (chapter number is from the book): 2. “From the Sixth Century to the Twelfth Century;” 3. “The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century;” 4. “The Golden Age of Scholasticism.”

Congar's great contribution to the ecumenical dialogue comes from his work on the Roman Catholic concept of Tradition, which is addressed directly in the titles to two of his works: *Tradition and Traditions* (originals 1960, 1963)<sup>12</sup> and *The Meaning of Tradition* (original 1963).<sup>13</sup> As one of the authors of the document *Dei Verbum*, from Vatican II, he was in a superb position to authoritatively discuss this sensitive, ecumenical issue. One can plainly see that this concept must have occupied an elevated position in his thinking. Congar began his concentrated work on Tradition in his 1960 volume of *Tradition et les traditions: Essai historique*, through rigorous analysis of the works which compose the history of the concept, detailing its development from the Fathers of the Church, through the Medieval period to the Reformation and on to almost the time of his writing. Although he remained in the midst of all his work for the ongoing Second Vatican Council at the time, he continued with the second volume of this work, *Tradition et les traditions: Essai théologique*, which was published in 1963. Yet he also brought out *La Tradition et la vie de l'Église* in the same year, illustrating his prodigious capacity for writing. These works offer an extensive defense of his concept of Tradition as being complementary to Scripture, not parallel to it. He makes it very clear that this problem of Tradition "has held an important place in the controversy aroused by the Protestant Reformation; it holds an equally important one in the criticism levelled at the Protestant principle of *Scriptura sola*, Scripture alone."<sup>14</sup> A bit later in the same book, he offered the following definition of Tradition:

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<sup>12</sup> Yves Congar, *Tradition et les traditions: Essai historique* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1960); *Tradition et les traditions: Essai théologique* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1963); ET: *Tradition and Traditions: The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (San Diego: Basilica Press, 1966). (T&t).

<sup>13</sup> Yves Congar, *La Tradition et la vie de l'Église* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1963); ET: *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1964). (MT)

<sup>14</sup> T&t, 36.

I spoke first of all of Tradition as the transmission of the reality that is Christianity; this is really *the* Tradition. It is apostolic by origin, then ecclesiastical by its actual transmission. I then spoke of apostolic traditions; these are also apostolic by origin. There exist, likewise, numerous traditions which are ecclesiastical by origin, having been laid down by the Church during her historical existence: institutions, rites, customs, discipline.<sup>15</sup>

One must note here that Congar stated that Tradition is “ecclesiastical by its actual transmission.” Plainly, he established that the question rests on ecclesiology. Congar assumed a stubborn position in refusing to establish one, final definition of Tradition: “it must be made clear that the word has, in fact, different meanings, and only on reaching the end of this book will the reader realize all that the word implies.”<sup>16</sup>

Patrick Madrid, in his Introduction to the English translation of *Tradition and Traditions* stated, “Tradition is widely misunderstood and widely vilified. Catholics venerate it as authoritative and binding, but are hazy on what exactly it is and are usually at a loss to give concrete examples of it. Most evangelical Protestants reject it out of hand as something alien to Scripture, purely human, and therefore incompatible with the ‘pure gospel.’”<sup>17</sup> Congar made the point that Tradition has always been a part of Roman Catholic biblical interpretation, but that the Church has always placed the Bible as the centerpiece of revelation. However, he stated: “[e]ven though recognized as the supreme rule, Scripture has never been considered ‘sufficient,’ and consequently exclusive. To govern the faith of the Church according to apostolic norm it is necessary to read

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<sup>15</sup> T&t, 46.

<sup>16</sup> T&t, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Madrid, “Introduction,” in T&t, N.P.

Scripture within the tradition of the apostles, handed on by and living in the Church.”<sup>18</sup> A little later, he added, “[t]here is no separation between Scripture and tradition.”<sup>19</sup> While remaining in the chapter covering the early Church, Congar clarified that, “‘Tradition,’ which had indicated essentially *deposit* tends to become communication and development in time. It is important to identify the origin of this process in the classical period of the Fathers.”<sup>20</sup> Summarizing the historical work of that chapter, Congar said, “Tradition is not a second source, alongside Scripture, from which comes a *part*, not contained in Scripture, of the truths of the faith, but another and complementary way of handing on these truths.”<sup>21</sup> This statement formed a crucial component of Congar’s argument, which many Protestants need to hear, since he countered many arguments which have been leveled at the Catholic Church claiming that the Catholic Church established two sources of revelation, tradition and the Scriptures. Typical of this belief are Gregg Allison and Chris Cataldo. They stated that, “Protestants, following the Reformation principle of sola Scriptura, affirm that Scripture, and Scripture alone, is the ultimate authority. Catholics reject this principle and insist that divine revelation is transmitted by a twofold pattern of *written Scripture and oral Tradition*.”<sup>22</sup> It is exactly in discussions which assume this definition that Congar can be most helpful, since he offered a much different definition of Tradition than many Protestants, such as Allison and Cataldo, assume.

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<sup>18</sup> T&t, 41.

<sup>19</sup> T&t, 44.

<sup>20</sup> T&t, 50.

<sup>21</sup> T&t, 64.

<sup>22</sup> Allison and Cataldo, *Unfinished Reformation*, 50-1.

Returning to Congar's *Tradition and Traditions*, as he finished a section on the "sapiential approach" to Scripture, he offered the prospectus for discussion with Protestants:

If the Fathers formed a tradition that goes beyond Scripture, and if the Middle Ages lived it, it is *a basically biblical tradition*. ... It is sapiential in form and founded on a double conviction: First, everything is the work of the Word or Wisdom of God; second, God does not manifest and communicate himself in words alone, and so ultimately in ideas, but in realities. The sixteenth-century Reformation, on the contrary, tended to reduce the manifestation of God to Scripture and make it the intermediary for every communication of God.

Protestant thought, at least as expressed most coherently by Karl Barth, tends to forbid itself any access to the Logos – and this means any knowledge of the world as a word surely pronounced by God – which is not a Christological knowledge contained in the knowledge of salvation given to the sinner in Jesus Christ; *theologia crucis* opposed to a sapiential outlook.<sup>23</sup>

Congar's language often appeared to be quite compatible with the Protestant understanding of *sola scriptura*, and several Protestant theologians, who appear to be open to listening to Congarian ecclesiology, may find him an interesting and useful source upon which to build bridges in ecumenical discussion.<sup>24</sup> D. H. Williams explained the Protestant problem with Tradition:

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<sup>23</sup> T&t, 67.

<sup>24</sup> Specifically, Frederick W. Norris and D. H. Williams, who, while being firmly evangelical Baptists, appear to think of Tradition along the lines of Congar's thought. Their intent, per Williams, is to open Protestant scholarship to a more in-depth understanding of Tradition.

The church's "tradition" carries little authority for most Evangelicals because it is associated with the institution and sacramental structure of the Roman Catholic Church from which Protestants supposedly broke away. In other words, "tradition" has been generally understood as (1) an artificial product of hierarchical Catholicism and therefore a corruption of the apostolic faith, and (2) antithetical to the absolute authority of the Bible. ...

Related to the second point is the longstanding and prevalent conception that the scriptural principle of sola scriptura is compromised by any acceptance of extracanonical authority. Too often it is assumed that to embrace the church's ancient Tradition must necessarily entail a denial of the Bible's unique revelatory status.<sup>25</sup>

Williams remained firmly Baptist, but one can sense that he understood Tradition in Congar's manner, at least sufficiently to enable reasonable ecumenical discussion, possibly due to Williams' position at Loyola University of Chicago.

### **Thesis Statement**

In 1956, Oscar Cullmann said in his book *The Early Church*, "[o]n the old problem of 'scripture and tradition' (sic) everything possible would seem to have been written."<sup>26</sup> He had yet to see his friend Yves Congar publish his two-volume work, *Tradition and Traditions*, which offered a wealth of information on the subject of Cullmann's remark. *Tradition and Traditions* harbors a gold mine of information on the Catholic concept of Tradition, before, during, and after the Council of Trent, as well as its

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<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 18-9.

<sup>26</sup> *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins, trans. A. J. B. Higgins and S. Godman (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 59.



handling at the Second Vatican Council, in which Congar played a major part, as already stated.

The Catholic position on the place of Tradition in regard to revelation has been a point of ignition in the fiery battles that have occurred since Luther's time. I believe that a good deal of the conflict occurred due to the character of the individuals involved; obstinate people meeting other obstinate people does not normally lead to a copacetic resolution. However, I also believe that some of the spillover from these early battles continue to plague the discussions through prejudices which have been handed down through the centuries, still visible in some of the language that occasionally continues to be applied. The conflicts still rage, having now spilled over into the topic of *sola scriptura*, which people tend to defend or denigrate strongly, often emotionally. While the corporate ecumenical discussions with many churches appear to be moving closer to agreement on these issues, this particular issue remains a difficult sticking point with many Protestants and especially with Evangelicals. While those involved with the discussions themselves move closer to agreement, a lingering question as to the reception of these concepts remains. Successful ecumenical discussion results ultimately through the work of the Holy Spirit, and the same applies to the general acceptance of the agreements which emanate from these conferences: "[t]he Spirit allows human beings to receive the good news of God's love for creation. Thus reception in this setting is an effect and sign of the Spirit's presence; no mere legal category, it is a theological process that is constitutive of the life of the Church."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception*, 7.

Baptist Timothy George, one of the signatories of the ecumenical document “Evangelicals and Catholics Together III,” which was published in 2002, stated that he “is not overly optimistic that evangelicals and Catholics can come together on the subject. Differences about Scripture and tradition have hardened.”<sup>28</sup> Following on this remark, one would have to question the general reception of any agreements made. Progress in official, ecumenical dialogue has occurred; however, from much Protestant material on the topic of *sola scriptura*, one must question whether any agreements made will gain genuine reception among the Protestant faithful. I believe that a more general inquiry into Congar’s work and its use in support of the language understood at the dialogues could potentially yield a broader acceptance and understanding of the Catholic concept of Tradition. His explanations and detailed work in defining Tradition may help in the understanding and reception of the Catholic idea of Tradition, as he laid it out. Congar very clearly laid out his concept of the Church’s role in the preservation and handing on of Tradition. In language that should help put Protestants more at ease with the role of Scripture in the Roman Catholic consideration of Scripture and Tradition, he stated, “[t]he Church lives on the deposit; the Magisterium only receives the assistance to keep and explain the deposit. Neither the Church nor the Magisterium has the slightest autonomy with regard to the deposit, and it is to it alone that they owe their life and existence even.”<sup>29</sup> Many Protestant theologians fully understand that from the “differences between Catholics and Evangelicals arise not so much two views of

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<sup>28</sup> Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* 165.

<sup>29</sup> MT, 140-1.

Scripture as two conceptions of the church.”<sup>30</sup> From this comment, one can see how important ecclesiology is to the concepts which cause problems between Protestants and Catholics. In commenting on the ecumenical dialogues that have taken place, Noll and Nystrom observed “that Catholics view all of theology through the lens of the church.”<sup>31</sup> For Protestants, this presents a different approach, and Catholics must be aware of the challenge this poses for ecumenical dialogue. Noll and Nystrom continued: “The difference between a corporate and an individual approach to faith colors how Protestants and Catholics read Scripture and interpret theology. Most importantly, it shapes how they define the nature and function of the church. Thus, ecclesiology was always central in the dialogues.”<sup>32</sup>

The importance of ecclesiology to ecumenical dialogue thus can be seen to hold an important position. Noll and Nystrom go on to consider ecclesiology:

At various Catholic-Evangelical discussions that have taken place in recent years, irreverent Evangelicals have grown accustomed to repeating the same witticism: “The main difference between us and the Catholics is ecclesiology. They have one and we don’t.” While the joke is not entirely true (Evangelicals do in fact have strong views, however, informal, concerning the church), like many jokes, it is funny because it is at least partially true.<sup>33</sup>

Later in the same discussion, they added that, “ecclesiology represents the crucial difference between Evangelicals and Catholics.”<sup>34</sup> If ecclesiology genuinely “represents

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy George, “An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition,” in Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, *Your Word is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, 9-34 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 29.

<sup>31</sup> Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* 83.

<sup>32</sup> Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* 84.

<sup>33</sup> Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* 145.

<sup>34</sup> Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* 147.

the crucial difference between evangelicals and Catholics,” then Congar certainly has something to offer. As a matter of fact, they do bring Congar into the conversation through a section in Timothy George’s contribution to Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus’s *Your Word is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, in which George cites Congar.<sup>35</sup> George cited Congar five times in his short article. As can be seen from his considerations of Tradition and the documents from Trent, Congar demonstrated a sensitivity to Protestant perceptions in ecumenical issues, and he exercised care in framing Catholic positions in language that softens their meaning to Protestants.

Congar’s ecclesiology revolves around the influence of the Holy Spirit on the Church, but it also includes his concept on biblical interpretation, which focuses largely on his concept of Tradition. In this area, Congar wrote his major work, *Tradition and Traditions*, in which he offered a lucid explanation of the Catholic concept of Tradition (capital T), separating that from the idea of traditions (small t). Shortly after the publication of *Tradition and Traditions* (published in two volumes, subtitled “Historical Essay” (1960) and “Theological Essay” (1963)), he followed with a shorter book titled *The Meaning of Tradition*, which essentially synthesizes much of the content of *Tradition and Traditions*. As he stated early in this latter volume, “[a]t the outset, it must be made clear that the word tradition has, in fact, different meanings, and only on reaching the end of the book will the reader realize all that the word implies.”<sup>36</sup> He went on to say:

Taken from its basic, exact, and completely general sense, tradition or transmission is the very principle of the whole economy of salvation. Tradition, in

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<sup>35</sup> George, “Evangelical Reflection,” 13.

<sup>36</sup> MT, 14.

this sense, encloses and dominates it completely, from its very beginning, which is none other than God; God as the word is understood in the New Testament, referring to the Father, the absolute Origin, the uncreated Principle, the primordial Source, not only of the Son and the Spirit, by procession. God (the Father) then gives his Son to the world, he *delivers* him to the world.

Thus the economy begins by a *divine* transmission; it is continued in and by the men chosen and sent out by God for that purpose. The sending of Christ and of the Spirit is the foundation of the Church, bringing her into existence as an extension of themselves.<sup>37</sup>

From the discussion of the origin of Tradition with the Trinity, Congar moved on to discuss the handing on (from the Latin – *tradere*), as he stated that “[t]radition is the sharing of a treasure which itself remains unchanging ... The reality which it communicates is primarily a doctrine, but not exclusively so.”<sup>38</sup> Here, he went further in explaining how he viewed the totality of Tradition:

if ‘tradition’ is taken in its basic, strict sense, signifying transmission, or delivery, it includes the *whole* communication, excluding nothing. If, then, we consider the *content* of what is offered, tradition comprises equally the holy Scriptures, and besides these, not only doctrines but things: the sacraments, ecclesiastical institutions, the powers of the ministry, customs and liturgical rites, in fact, all the Christian realities themselves.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> MT, 15.

<sup>38</sup> MT, 17.

<sup>39</sup> MT, 17-18.

The intent of this work is to apply the ecclesiology and ecumenism of Yves Congar to the dialogues between Roman Catholics and Protestants which focus on the Reformation concept which became known as *sola scriptura*, in order to express a better understanding of the Catholic positions which Congar has so clearly and extensively elucidated. It is hoped that the employment of Congar can make these dialogues smoother, enabling both sides to reach a greater common understanding of the questions at hand. If his works were to be considered more broadly, I believe that the reception of agreements resulting from ecumenical discussions may find a greater reception among the faithful. My position is that the consideration of Congar's ecclesiology, especially his work on the Catholic view on Tradition in relation to Scripture, can offer more avenues for ecumenical agreement between Roman Catholics and Protestants, possibly leading to generation of common ground on the very heated and sensitive topic surrounding biblical interpretation and the concept of *sola scriptura*.

### **Methodology**

The issue to be analyzed requires the summarizing of Congar's positions on Tradition and the position of the authority of the Church regarding scriptural interpretation. The analysis will consider the sourcing of the concepts in the theologies that had developed at his home institution of Le Saulchoir in Belgium and in his life, most notably his time as prisoner-of-war in Germany. At Le Saulchoir, Congar regularly interacted with several experts in the fields of church history, ecclesiology, and ecumenism; the information he gleaned was organized into valuable concepts which he applied to his ecumenical efforts.

Congar considered the Church in two constructs, that of the Church as communion and that of the institution which is the Church and its magisterium.<sup>40</sup> Rose M. Beal traces his desire to write a definitive treatise on ecclesiology that never was completed, although much of the concept was finished and waiting for him to put it together. She noted, however that, “Congar’s aspiration for a total ecclesiology was achieved by the work of the council.”<sup>41</sup> It is truly in the documents of Vatican II that Congar’s efforts can be seen. His views of the Church impacted his considerations of Tradition, as well as his firm conviction that the Holy Spirit guides the Church at all times. As a necessary corollary to this belief, Congar delved deeply into the theology of the Spirit, but that will not be considered extensively in this study. The dissertation will be limited, as much as possible, to dealing with Congar’s concepts of Tradition and tradition, as well as his work on the authority of the Church in the interpretation of Scripture, both of which flow together. Since it impinges extensively on Congar’s theology as well as on the concept of the church, Congar’s theology of the laity will also be examined for its contribution. These will then be compared and contrasted to information on Protestant biblical interpretation, naturally concentrating on *sola scriptura* and the development of this doctrine since Martin Luther. The history of *sola scriptura* will not constitute a major part of the work, but a brief consideration will be required in order to set the stage for the use, or misuse, of this doctrine in modern times.

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<sup>40</sup> See Alain Nisus, *L’Église comme communion et comme institution: Une lecture de l’écclésiologie du cardinal Congar à partir de la tradition des Églises de professants* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> Rose M. Beal, *Mystery of the Church, People of God: Yves Congar’s Total Ecclesiology as a Path to Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic university of America Press, 2014), 210, (MCPG).

Patrick Madrid has written a book in a similar vein as this work intends to present.<sup>42</sup> However, Madrid is an apologist, which lent that viewpoint to his project, made evident as he often staunchly defended the Catholic positions from a strictly Catholic viewpoint, rather than employing a more ecumenical, dialogical approach with a more thorough inspection of the Protestant and Evangelical side.<sup>43</sup> While he took some note of Protestant and Evangelical positions, they only received short analyses, with minimal in-depth attention. My intent is to employ Madrid as a valuable resource, but to offer a move beyond him, showing where Congar's arguments and positions can aid in ecumenical dialogue.

Congar's works which treat topics of potential use in ecumenical dialogue may deal principally with ecumenism, or they may concentrate on his work in the area of Tradition. These include *Tradition and Traditions*, *The Meaning of Tradition*, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, and *True and False Reform in the Church*. Others of his works will also be included, but this dissertation will focus mainly on the concepts upon which these books concentrate.

Ecumenism naturally impinges on these studies, and as far as necessary, it will be brought into play, with brief examination of both the Catholic and Protestant positions. Since Congar had a passion for ecumenism, it must be taken into consideration in order to give full consideration to his work and thought.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Patrick Madrid, *Scripture and Tradition in the Church: Yves Congar, O.P.'s Theology of Revelation and Critique of the Protestant Principle of Sola Scriptura* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Madrid's website, <https://patrickmadrid.com>, states, "Patrick has published numerous popular articles on Scripture, Church history, patristics, apologetics, and evangelization in various Catholic and Protestant periodicals, and has contributed scholarly articles on apologetics in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*."

<sup>44</sup> Per Jean-Pierre Jossua, "it was during the young deacon's preparation for his ordination, while meditating on the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, that he recognized his vocation to work for Christian unity." Jean-Pierre Jossua, *Yves Congar: Theology in the Service of God's People*, trans. by Mary Jocelyn (Chicago: Priory Press, 1968), 58.



The Orthodox and other Eastern faiths will not be taken into consideration, because, with some notable exceptions, such as papal infallibility and the major role of the Curia in Roman Catholic approaches, they generally agree with the Roman Catholic Church on the fundamental relation between Scripture and Tradition, which stands at the core of so many Roman Catholic-Protestant disputes. The dissertation will concentrate on the churches of the Reformation and their descendants, since they employ the *sola* concepts as fundamental to their positions. Also, because they seldom have any interest in ecumenical dialogue, this work will not deal extensively with Protestant Fundamentalists or any other communities with no desire for interaction, but Evangelicals will be brought into play, at least those who have demonstrated a genuine interest in working toward at least a closer cooperation, if not full, sacramental, and/ or corporate unity. The Roman Catholic Church has entered into dialogue with a number of its Christian co-religionists, and all with whom she has conducted serious dialogue may enter into the work.

### **Contribution**

Since the end of Vatican II, the Catholic Church has been in regular dialogue with most of the major Christian churches. The reporting of this work, at least the bulk of that available, appears to show little consideration of Congar's personal input into these discussions.<sup>45</sup> While one would think that any corporate discussion participants would have a full understanding of Congar's ecclesiology and his associated concepts such as Tradition, his ideas, as independent points, do not appear to have struck any chords.

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<sup>45</sup> In a private communication with William M. Wright, a participant in Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, he stated that, "Congar as such doesn't come up. However, his contributions to *Dei Verbum* (which is considerable) really do have an impact."

While Congar may have some influence indirectly, his specific concepts surrounding some of the most difficult issues may be able to create greater understanding of the Catholic positions on Scripture and Tradition, as well as ecclesiology. It is possible that he has been taken into account, but that his ideas have become so widely employed that direct reference to him may be awkwardly lacking. The most significant contribution his work can make may exist with Protestant theologians, where his work, as noted above, on page 2, has not been extensively employed. Possibly, Protestant theologians may find his concepts uncomfortable, especially in the area of *sola scriptura*, but this issue may show potential for some further agreement or at least more complete understanding, using Congar's concepts of Tradition.

The significance of Congar may also apply to Protestant reception of ecumenical agreements. A good deal of hostility remains, evidencing itself in the repercussions which the signatories of "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" I (ECT I) endured.<sup>46</sup> While the animosity of some may never be overcome, at least some minimal consideration of the Catholic side as explained by Congar, may potentially lead Evangelical Christians to better understand the concepts regarding ecclesiology to which their leaders agreed. In the case of ECT I, several of the signatories were later bullied into revoking their signatures and changing their positions.<sup>47</sup>

This work intends to shine a spotlight on Congar's views on topics which could possibly aid in mutual understanding between the Roman Catholic Church and its discussion partners. I believe that Congar offers excellent analysis of the ecclesiological topics of Tradition and revelation, as well as objective analysis of the Church's

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<sup>46</sup> See Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* pp. 156-8.

<sup>47</sup> Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* 156-8.

institutional authority in the interpretation of Scripture. Congar's ecclesiology lends important support to the treatment of Scripture. He stated that Tradition, "[t]aken in its basic, exact, and completely general sense, ... is the very principle of the whole economy of salvation."<sup>48</sup> As he noted later in the same work, "Scriptures do not express everything entrusted by Christ to the Church for us to live by, even though ... they contain all the truths necessary for salvation."<sup>49</sup> This Tradition, is conserved and passed on through the Church. He offered a significant explanation:

The Church lives on the deposit; the Magisterium *only* receives the assistance to keep and explain the *deposit*. Neither the Church nor the Magisterium has the slightest autonomy with regard to the deposit, and it is to it alone that they owe their life and existence even. But the deposit itself, exactly like the Revelation, whose name refers to the same reality but from its aspect of knowledge, is not reduced to *statements*, or formal expressions, as the scholastics would say; it also comprises *realities*, which form part of the Church's historical life.<sup>50</sup>

The Church has the responsibility of preserving, and updating when necessary, the deposit of the faith that has been handed down to it, yet Congar ensures that Scripture maintains the highest status in that which is handed down. Tradition, "was seen to occupy a central position in the Church. In a sense it is her life itself, or if you prefer, the nourishment of that life, as such it is received. Everything in the Church comes from elsewhere. ... Christianity is essentially an inheritance, passed down by our Fathers of the faith."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> MT, 15.

<sup>49</sup> MT, 129.

<sup>50</sup> MT, 140-1.

<sup>51</sup> MT, 144.

Since the goal of ecumenical dialogue is stated as the enhancement of mutual understanding, especially on such crucial doctrines as these, Congar's contributions should enhance the understanding of both sides in giving them better definition and background on the Catholic views on the above-named topics, as well as better arming them for subsequent discussions that would lead to reception of their work.

## Chapter One: Yves Congar and Tradition

In order to fully understand and appreciate Yves Congar and his effects on ecumenical discussions and relations, one needs to know about the factors which influenced his life and impacted his theologies. This chapter will examine the life of the great ecclesialogist and then attempt to outline Congar's definition and approach to the concept of Tradition within the Catholic Church, intending to present this from the ecumenical perspective which Congar always employed.

### Le Saulchoir

Established in 1904, the year of Congar's birth, at the former Cistercian abbey of Le Saulchoir, near Kain-la-Tombe, in Belgium, Le Saulchoir was the Dominican school of study.<sup>1</sup> Of note, Congar chose not to enter the diocesan seminary, because he did not wish to become a diocesan priest; the life did not appeal to him, although he did not state why.<sup>2</sup> By the time Congar entered the Order of Preachers, Marie-Dominique Chenu had become the prior of the school, serving in this capacity from 1932 to 1942, when he was removed from that post by Roman decree. Under Chenu, the students at Le Saulchoir combined history with the study of theology. Joseph Komonchak noted that Chenu bewailed the fact that "from having been at the centre of intellectual life at thirteenth-century universities, Dominicans had increasingly emigrated to the margins of cultural life. In place of the emphasis St. Thomas had put on *inventio*, they had become content, as had theologians in general, with adding a few more conclusions ;to a system of

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<sup>1</sup> This information is taken from Jean Puyo, *Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar: une vie pour la vérité: les interviews* (Paris: Centurion, 1975), 28-31.

<sup>2</sup> JP, 17.

sylogisms.”<sup>3</sup> Chenu was proud of the fact that, “[a]t Le Saulchoir, as opposed to many institutions, philosophical and theological studies were alive and fresh, respecting the autonomy of the necessary disciplines, drawing immediately upon spiritual participation in the mystery of God, and alert and present to the needs of the day.”<sup>4</sup> The school would ultimately “secure a place in historical method, especially in the field of scholarly research.”<sup>5</sup> This focus on history also served to focus Congar’s thinking on Tradition and traditions.

According to Jean-Pierre Jossua, in order to fully appreciate Congar’s background, “emphasis must be given to the influence of Father Chenu. ... Father Chenu was extraordinary in awakening in others the vocation of the historian – historians like himself would be attentive to the actuality of the past and to its repeated interrogation by the present.”<sup>6</sup> Obviously, Chenu struck a nerve in Congar in regard to history, and the younger man took eagerly to that path. Chenu pointed him in the direction of the proper ancient sources: “[w]ith a documentation that often enough was infinitesimal, the genial intuition of Father Chenu enabled him to mine some of the richest veins in the past or in the present history of the Church.”<sup>7</sup>

### *Nouvelle Théologie*

Before tracing in a more complete manner Congar’s biography, I believe it will be helpful to have in mind the foundation of his thinking, which also led to the onset of his problems with the Magisterium. This section will offer some insights into the movement

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<sup>3</sup> Komonchak, Joseph A. “*Humani Generis* and *Nouvelle Théologie*,” in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 139.

<sup>4</sup> Komonchak, “*Humani* and *Nouvelle*,” 139.

<sup>5</sup> Jossua, *Congar*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Jossua, *Congar*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Jossua, *Congar*, 17.

which began his career. It was affected by his upbringing, and the basic concepts of his thought process will be helpful.

Leading up to *nouvelle théologie*, Modernism had occupied the theological world. Roger Aubert stated that “Modernism, in the strict theological sense, is a general term for the manifold crisis in the doctrine and discipline of the Church at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In its extreme forms it was the occasion of the condemnation pronounced by Pius X in 1907, in the decree *Lamentabili* and the encyclical *Pascendi*.”<sup>8</sup> J. J. Heaney more precisely called Modernism “the ideological effort by a number of RC intellectuals to reinterpret the Christian faith in terms of contemporary historical, psychological, and philosophical positions that led to conclusions considered by the Church Magisterium as unorthodox and destructive of the faith.”<sup>9</sup> It came to be known as Modernism because it employed the tools that had been developed in the modern era to approach the Bible and further the exegetical processes that had been developed by nineteenth-century theologians such as Adolph von Harnack.

Rose Beal stated that, “[t]he era of modernism opened in 1893 when the French, Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel introduced a new philosophical method of immanence in his book *L’Action*.”<sup>10</sup> This book marked Blondel as a modernist, coming under Rome’s microscope early in the crisis. Blondel also supported the use of history in biblical exegesis and demanded the free use of it in biblical studies.<sup>11</sup> He formed a certain concept of revelation which required the concurrent use of early interpreters: “To

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<sup>8</sup> Roger Aubert, “Modernism,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner et al. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> J. J. Heaney, “Modernism (Roman Catholic),” in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion*, ed. Paul Kevin Meagher, Thomas C. O’Brien, and Consuelo Maria Aherne (Washington, DC: Corpus Publications, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> MCPG, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Johannes Bunnenberg, *Lebendige Treue zum Ursprung: Das Traditionsverständnis Yves Congars* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1989), 27.

Blondel, the very idea of such a special revelation – whose content must inevitably transcend common human perception, or it would not be worth revealing – implies that the earliest witnesses cannot be the only interpreters whose voice is to count. Such a revelation will be assimilated gradually.”<sup>12</sup> Blondel explained “that to interpret Jesus by the touchstone of the most primitive documents is necessarily insufficient, and gravely so.”<sup>13</sup> Nichols explained: “Blondel was concerned with the proper epistemology for a Christian investigation of Christian origins. ... he put forward a concept of tradition which threw light not only on the genesis of dogma, but its subsequent development as well.”<sup>14</sup>

Jürgen Mettepenningen called *nouvelle théologie*, the “inheritor of modernism,” in the subtitle of his book, *Nouvelle Théologie-New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*.<sup>15</sup> This time of troubles shaped the behavior of the Roman Catholic Church from the late nineteenth century to the mid-to-late-twentieth century, as new interpretive sciences were applied to biblical interpretation. For a full understanding of the situation, one must consider the late nineteenth century condition of the Church. Hermann Pottmeyer gave a concise overview of the situation in his book, *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, in which he noted that the First Vatican Council suffered from its contextual situation, in which the Church endured three traumas in the nineteenth century: (1) the tension within the Roman Catholic Church over the locus of control, as seen in Gallicanism, which tried to place control within the local churches, with varying

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<sup>12</sup> Aidan Nichols, *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development From the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 144.

<sup>13</sup> Nichols, *From Newman*, 144.

<sup>14</sup> Nichols, *From Newman*, 145.

<sup>15</sup> London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010.



borders, (2) the struggle between the Church and the efforts of the European states to control the Church and churches within their boundaries, and (3) the rise of liberalism and rationalism.<sup>16</sup> With the third point, Pottmeyer noted that “items of knowledge in the natural sciences and history that questioned the authority of the Bible and its interpretation by the church” developed during that century, as well as bringing “[a] new self-understanding of human beings ... People claimed autonomy, and this for the activity both of their reason and of their freedom, understood as the power of self-determination. People also subjected all the previously prevailing traditions and authorities to their criticism.”<sup>17</sup> This last issue produced the Modernist movement. By then, the two sides had become entrenched in their thinking, acting as much in opposition to their opponents as in support of what they thought correct.<sup>18</sup> As Pottmeyer further noted, the Church, in the form of the organizing First Vatican Council, “was put on the defensive,” believing “the threat to Christianity ... had taken on almost apocalyptic dimensions.”<sup>19</sup>

With the dawn of the twentieth century, Pope St. Pius X became the main antagonist of the movement, calling the Modernists “enemies of the cross of Christ,”<sup>20</sup> ultimately naming it “the synthesis of all heresies.”<sup>21</sup> Pius accused the Modernists of agnosticism,<sup>22</sup> as well as offering a scathing discussion of historical criticism,<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I and II*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 37-47.

<sup>17</sup> Pottmeyer, *Papacy*, 45-6.

<sup>18</sup> Pottmeyer, *Papacy*, 46-8.

<sup>19</sup> Pottmeyer, *Papacy*, 48.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*: Encyclical of Pope Pius X on the Doctrines of the Modernists. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_19070908\\_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Pius X, *Pascendi*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Pius X, *Pascendi*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Pius X, *Pascendi*, 9, 16.

ultimately calling Modernism “the synthesis of all heresies.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Pius excoriated those who use science in examining the faith, since faith should only serve the faith, rather than be an independent realm of study.<sup>25</sup> Pius saw Modernism as the invasion of the modern world into the realm of religion, being placed in a role which made that world the judge over the faith.

In the Modernist movement a growing area of science and study in the areas of literary criticism was welcomed into theological considerations, yielding a freer, more liberal approach to biblical hermeneutics, in a direction that distanced itself from the control of any religious authorities. The theologians of the time asserted their academic freedom, attempting to insulate themselves from the oversight of the church. However, as Mettepenningen pointed out, “[t]he Modernists . . . were not interested in attacking the magisterium’s claim to authority, in spite of the fact that the ecclesial hierarchy perceived, described, and condemned their efforts as such.”<sup>26</sup> In the beginning of the development of their concepts, Modernists merely attempted to improve the level of Bible study by employing the most recent tools that science made available; Mettepenningen also noted that these “so-called Modernists were in reality intellectuals who had tried to integrate the historical-critical method into their scientific research.”<sup>27</sup> These theologians intended to assert their rights to study Scripture with the best means available, while not attempting to undermine the position of the Catholic Church’s

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<sup>24</sup> Pius X, *Pascendi*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Pius X, *Pascendi*, 16-8.

<sup>26</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 21.

hierarchy. They did not see themselves as guilty of any of the actions which the Magisterium condemned.<sup>28</sup>

The magisterial bureaucrats, however, saw the Modernists as revolutionaries, who appeared to be continuing the assault of the modern world on Rome, an assault that had begun in earnest with the revolutions of 1848 which had continued the “French disease.”<sup>29</sup> The uprisings which swept Europe in that year were spurred on in Italy by Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi,<sup>30</sup> causing Pius IX to grudgingly make concessions in Rome, as the nationalists gradually succeeded in the formation of a unified government in Italy in 1860.<sup>31</sup> Pius IX had attacked this modern world with his Syllabus of Errors in 1864, and the Roman bureaucracy followed in that reactionary path after his death. Congar described the Roman response to the disturbances as, “the habitual reflex ... to assume an attitude of self-defense, of security.”<sup>32</sup> Congar stated that the severity of this crisis, which began with revolution and developed with Modernism, approached that of the Reformation, and he accused the circle of advisors around Pius X, who directly confronted Modernism, of excessive rigidity in their responses to Alfred Loisy’s application of the critical sciences to biblical exegesis as well as to the others in his movement.<sup>33</sup> Loisy was a Catholic priest who took advantage of the modern sciences of critique, applying them to biblical study; these methods yielded results that were objectionable to the Magisterium, as they ended up questioning some issues in the Bible, such as the cosmologies. Mettepenningen summed up the situation, stating that “the Modernists set out to bring Catholic thought up to date,

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<sup>28</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Mike Rappaport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 17.

<sup>30</sup> Rappaport, *1848*, 18-21.

<sup>31</sup> Rappaport, *1848*, 253, 257.

<sup>32</sup> JP, 37.

<sup>33</sup> JP, 36-7.

while the magisterium considered it its duty to condemn any mindset that posed a threat to the continued existence of the doctrine of the faith. The magisterium, however, did not give the ideas of the Modernists the chance to develop.”<sup>34</sup> The complex situation in the Vatican in the nineteenth century was neatly summarized by Pottmeyer, who offered not only his assessment of the powers in Rome, but also showed the historical background which gave context to the defensive actions in Rome. Much was happening in and to Rome, both politically and internally, and the reaction by the central authorities became a simple barricading behind the battlements, with a hardening of positions with regard to Modernism as well as to the church’s attitude toward the rumbling situation regarding the burgeoning growth of power of the pope and the Magisterium.<sup>35</sup>

The Modernist movement continued into the early twentieth century, in spite of the Roman wish that it would evaporate, and the anti-modernists continued to wage their form of war on those they perceived to be sustaining the work which the movement had lauded.

One positive outcome of the Modernist crisis saw the creation in 1902 of the Pontifical Biblical Commission by Pope Leo XIII.<sup>36</sup> The authority of this commission grew until its proclamations received mandatory consent.<sup>37</sup> It has since taken the lead in promoting the use of the best tools in the exegesis of biblical passages.

One of the major lights in the Dominican firmament at the turn of the century was Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance, who had been Chenu’s doctoral advisor. Garrigou-Lagrance supported and expounded upon a use of Thomism that intended to take the teachings of Thomas and advance them through the use of reason, resulting in a neo-

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<sup>34</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Pottmeyer, *Papacy*, 36-50.

<sup>36</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 23.

thomism.<sup>38</sup> Chenu disagreed with his dissertation director on this path for Thomistic study, which aggravated Garrigou-Lagrange. Chenu's work, however, sufficiently impressed the older man to accept the dissertation and grant Chenu his doctorate. So impressed was Garrigou-Lagrange that he offered Chenu a teaching position at the Angelicum, where Chenu had studied. The young man declined, which angered the eminent theologian and possibly led, directly or indirectly, to the troubles which Chenu and his students and colleagues at Le Saulchoir later suffered at the hands of Rome, undoubtedly with the input of the spurned Angelicum professor.<sup>39</sup> Chenu later took a position at Le Saulchoir, eventually leading his students along the path he saw as the genuine methodology for the pursuit of Thomism. They learned to incorporate a historical sense into Thomas, returning to his original works and examining them in relation to other contemporary literature in the same area.<sup>40</sup> This formed the common basis for the efforts of the group of theologians gathered at Le Saulchoir in the early 1930's.

Mettepenningen described *nouvelle théologie* as “a technical designation for the theological movement associated with the period between c. 1935 and 1960.”<sup>41</sup> Since *nouvelle théologie* was a movement lasting a number of years with a number of participants, it defies definition, probably yielding only to an understanding of the main points. Congar made that point in *Situations et tâches présentes de la théologie*, comparing the difficulty of defining the movement to the same situation that prevailed in

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<sup>38</sup> Much of the information in the following section is taken from Janette Gray, “Marie-Dominique Chenu and Le Saulchoir: A Stream of Catholic Renewal,” in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 207-8.

<sup>39</sup> JT, 112=3.

<sup>40</sup> JP, 38.

<sup>41</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 3-4.

Modernism.<sup>42</sup> Mettepenningen cited four characteristics of the movement: 1) it occurred mainly in French-speaking countries; 2) it employed history in its work; 3) it investigated the historical origin of Christianity; and 4) it assumed a negative attitude toward neo-scholasticism.<sup>43</sup> As a participant in theological discussion during those years when he was permitted to publish, Congar was thought by Mettepenningen to be “the creator of the preliminary programme of the *nouvelle théologie*.”<sup>44</sup>

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange openly disliked the *nouvelle théologie*, against which he wrote an article in 1946, when Congar was newly returned home from the war. In his article, “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?” Garrigou lamented the fact that those who espoused the *nouvelle théologie* had abandoned Aristotelian thought.<sup>45</sup> His great concern expressed in this article lay with his understanding that the *nouvelle théologie* intended to update what was considered to be truth.<sup>46</sup> Garrigou based his critique on a Thomistic foundation, naturally. In his conclusion, he stated that he feared that the *nouvelle théologie* “was returning to Modernism.”<sup>47</sup>

With the description of the situation into which Congar grew, and which one may call the central, determining issue in his life, we can now examine how he arrived at Le Saulchoir and became a leader in the movement, finally leading to his influential participation in the Second Vatican Council and his life of celebrity beyond the council.

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<sup>42</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 7; JP, 99; ST, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 10-1.

<sup>44</sup> Mettepenningen, *New Theology*, 41.

<sup>45</sup> R. P. Garrigou-Lagrange, “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?” *Revue Angelicum* XXIII (1946), 126-145.

<sup>46</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, “nouvelle théologie,” 128.

<sup>47</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, “nouvelle théologie,” 144.

## Biography of Yves Congar<sup>48</sup>

As stated earlier, Yves Congar's convoluted life played a huge role in the formation of his thinking. As Georges Famerée and Gilles Routhier noted: “[t]o really grasp Congar, it is not enough to delve into his work, one must also research his life, which is so rich in experiences, in constant plunges into new worlds, which allowed him ‘to be born anew’ and to widen his horizons.”<sup>49</sup> This brief biography will attempt to bring out the points of his life that impacted his writings and thought.

### Early Life Before Entering the Seminary

Yves Congar was born on April 13, 1904 to Lucie Desoye Congar and Georges Congar in the northern French town of Sedan in the Ardennes Forest, not far from Belgium. Yves was the fourth child, having two older brothers and an older sister, and they lived a happy family life. He proudly claimed to be a genuine “Celt of the Ardennes,” quite serious in demeanor, very closed to others, with few smiles given.<sup>50</sup> He grew up in the culture of both the wooded surroundings of his home and the spiritual environment provided by the French Catholic Church. He was inculcated with the rich history of France and his own Ardennes Forest, particularly that of French Catholicism, along with an appreciation for the situations of the Protestants and Jews with whom he associated. He attributed his life-long love and appreciation of history to that early education.

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<sup>48</sup> The general information in this section has been taken from the following sources: Beal, MCPG; Yves Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians*, trans. Philip Lorez (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1966); Yves Congar, *Journal d'un théologien 1946-1956*, ed. Étienne Fouilloux (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000); Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, *Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Jossua, *Yves Congar*; Aidan Nichols, *Yves Congar* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989); Puyo, JP. Direct quotations are attributed as given.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Famerée and Gilles Routhier, *Yves Congar: Leben-Denken-Werk*, trans. Marcel Oswald (Freiburg: Herder, 2018), 19.

<sup>50</sup> Jossua, *Congar*, 38.

During his childhood, he experienced the horrors of war as Sedan was captured by the German forces, with the associated embarrassments thrust upon the citizenry by their overlords. His mother had urged him to keep a journal of his life during that war, which he did. He remembered that the children received little mercy in school; they were treated as small adults, in part, with little concern from the teachers for their psychological welfare. Although he considered his life at the time to have been harsh, he appreciated the fact that before the war at least, it gave them stability, which the war enabled him to appreciate.<sup>51</sup>

He recalled that the family did not live in riches, but they also were not destitute by any means. As he grew, he played with neighboring children of varying religious communities, which exposed him to their cultural situations, also convincing him that people of different beliefs should be appreciated for their differences. This provided the initial basis for his later interest in ecumenism.

The young Yves had a close, strong relationship with his mother, although he admitted to not confiding much in her, calling that very “*sedannais*.”<sup>52</sup> Besides his mother and father, there were essentially no close relatives for Yves, which drew them much closer among themselves. His entry into the seminary also cut short his opportunities to continue and develop the relationship with his mother, but he said that he thought of her every day of his life.

Congar recalled much of his education, which was made more difficult by the war, naturally. He attended public school for only half the day, but at least school

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<sup>51</sup> JP, 7.

<sup>52</sup> JP, 25.



continued as the war boiled around them. His father was taken hostage and sent to Lithuania, so the family lived in difficulty as well as fear.

Early in the war, the Catholic church in Sedan was burned by the German invaders; the local Protestant pastor allowed the Catholics to worship in a small chapel near his parents' home. He would pray often in that small building during and after the war, and he believed that his Catholic faith grew significantly during that time; he also felt gratitude to the Protestants for their act of compassion in helping the Catholic residents of Sedan through their difficult situation until they finally had a new church in which to worship.<sup>53</sup>

### **Early Religious Life**

In his earlier childhood, Yves had wanted to become a doctor, due to the influence of a neighboring Protestant man. The young man took note of who in the village belonged to which church. Sedan had once been independent from France, which gave the area a tolerance of various styles of religious worship. Its rulers had become Protestant in the sixteenth century, although they still permitted the Catholics to remain and practice their faith all the way to their incorporation into France in 1642. At that point, the Catholics returned the favor toward the Protestants, generating a culture of broadmindedness in the city and surrounding area. That mixture of the faiths continued to permeate Sedan into Congar's life there.

During the later period of the Great War, his calling shifted to that of the clergy, with a specific feeling that he was called to preach. Although the Dominicans are the Order of Preachers, he had not felt the specific call to the order at that time. During the

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<sup>53</sup> DBC, 4.

war he met Father Daniel Lallement, who would have a great influence on Congar's life. Congar said that Lallement's vision of an "exacting, rigorous, and even austere view of Catholicism, of spiritual life, and of the clerical vocation profoundly marked me."<sup>54</sup> His ardennais background prepared him for just such a life that the older man described and lived. Congar also credited Lallement with leading him to the study of Thomas Aquinas, which also must have helped direct him toward the Dominicans.

At the suggestion of Lallement, Congar entered the minor seminary in Reims in October of 1919. Upon completion of his studies there, he changed directions away from that of a parish priest and decided to study at the *Institut catholique*, in Paris, leading him to enroll in *Les Carmes*, the seminary of the Carmelites. He remained there for three years, studying philosophy, although he later bewailed a lack of philosophical knowledge. Congar vividly remembered the effect that the presence of the returned war veterans had on the seminary; he felt that they added maturity and seriousness to the institution.

During his time at the *Institut catholique*, through his class studies but more importantly through Lallement, Congar got to know "the rising philosophical star Jacques Maritain (1882-1973)."<sup>55</sup> Lallement brought Congar to participate in Maritain's monthly philosophy discussion group. Although he enjoyed the camaraderie, especially that of the elite group of Maritain's friends, Congar had ambivalent feelings about the great philosopher; Congar sensed a Maritain caught up in anti-modernism, which very possibly originated with "Maritain's theological mentor, the Dominican Reginald Garrigou-

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<sup>54</sup> JP, 16.

<sup>55</sup> Nichols, *Congar*, 2.

Lagrange.”<sup>56</sup> Maritain disdained any philosophy that strayed too far from that of Thomas Aquinas, again likely a result of his being in the tutelage of Garrigou-Lagrange.<sup>57</sup> Congar’s acquaintance with Garrigou-Lagrange would prove no shield for him in later confrontations, which caused Congar grief.<sup>58</sup> His expectation of help from Garrigou-Lagrange may have been ill-placed, since Congar knew of Garrigou’s hostility to Congar’s positions, in spite of Garrigou’s former participation in the development of the ideas at Le Saulchoir.<sup>59</sup> Non-Catholic or non-Christian philosophers were at best ignored, or more often held in contempt in Maritain’s group, leading to Congar’s conclusion that he never received the genuine philosophical basis that he so desired.

From his studies on Thomas, Congar became “inspired and learned from him to always be on the search.”<sup>60</sup> This also led him to become adept at argument, presenting his case in logical sequence, with a cultivated willingness to consider all sides of a question.

Congar’s interests drew him to some of the more recent Catholic philosophers of France, such as Blondel, Laberthonnière, and Maréchal, who he felt were lesser known and often scorned. From Blondel in particular, Congar learned about the concept of what Blondel termed the “Holy Tradition.”<sup>61</sup> Blondel had much to say about Tradition, and that must certainly have impacted Congar’s thinking.

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<sup>56</sup> Nichols, *Congar*, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Nichols, *Congar*, 2.

<sup>58</sup> JP, 99.

<sup>59</sup> JT, 111, n256; 112-3. Of note, Congar believed that Garrigou-Lagrange had protected Le Saulchoir from more severe reprimands from Rome in its punishments leveled in 1942, while Congar was a POW – see note 256, letter of Paul Phillippe, which may have led him to believe he would receive some help from Garrigou-Lagrange in his time of trouble.

<sup>60</sup> Famerée and Routhier, *Yves Congar*, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Nichols, *From Newman*, 148. Also, see T&t, 215.

Congar's France rebounded from the Great War with a fresh realization that the Catholics of the land also participated in the patriotic efforts to fend off the invaders. Early in the century, France had suffered from an anticlericalism that deeply affected the Church. By the post-war period, that prejudice had not fully subsided, but it certainly became less evident.

After graduating from the *Institut catholique*, Congar entered the military to fulfill his obligations. His performance earned him the opportunity to choose the unit in which he would serve; he chose the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the infantry, which took him to the Rhine River town of Bingen. The beautiful area at the base of the romantic Middle Rhine impressed him deeply. During his six months in Bingen, he took the time to reconsider his vocation to the priesthood. He did that "far from any influences, from any advice, in the solitude of my thoughts."<sup>62</sup> He found his vocation to have been confirmed. With that decision behind him, he then considered whether to enter the Benedictines or the Dominicans. As he said in his journal, "I was isolated, without any counsel, without any priest near me. I found that very hard to bear (again alone, always alone. I would be alone all my life)."<sup>63</sup> Congar would repeat his wail of loneliness a number of times in his life.

Upon leaving the army, Congar again considered his options. After consulting with Lallement, as usual, he decided to enter the Dominican order, which he did near the end of November, 1925. He professed his vows a year later, whereupon he entered Le Saulchoir. When he began his time there, the abbey still breathed the spirit of Father Jean-Baptiste Henri-Dominique Lacordaire,<sup>64</sup> the man who reestablished the Dominican

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<sup>62</sup> JP, 21.

<sup>63</sup> JT, 37.

<sup>64</sup> JP, 30.

order in France in 1843 after it had been repressed during the French Revolution in 1790.<sup>65</sup> The faculty at Le Saulchoir focused on the study of Thomas Aquinas, which Congar had also studied in Paris. However, “his was not entirely the same Thomism he was going to find at the Saulchoir. ... without ceasing to identify itself essentially with St. Thomas, the Saulchoir was to strengthen the study of biblical and patristic sources and of Greek philosophy. It took care to situate St. Thomas in his period, thanks to a study of medieval life.”<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, the location and character of the school left it rather isolated, with little direct contact with the academy outside of its own walls, which may have protected it from Roman intervention for a while, at least until the Dominican residents began their prolific output of books.

Early in his time at Le Saulchoir, Congar met a number of Russian Orthodox theologians through the contacts which his institution had with a nearby Russian seminary, giving him his first taste of Orthodoxy, which he came to love. He remained enthusiastic about Orthodoxy throughout his life, a factor which influenced much of his thinking, in particular regarding the Russian concept of *sobornost*, which indicates a community bound by faith in a closeness that epitomizes the Christian life.

Congar was ordained a priest on July 25, 1930. In his preparations for the priesthood, he took up the study of the Gospel of John, particularly Chapter Seventeen, in which Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples. He “clearly recognized my vocation to work for the unity of all who believe in Jesus Christ.”<sup>67</sup> His studies on this were directed by Father Lagrange, who guided him through Thomas’s writings on this subject, using

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<sup>65</sup> ODCC, s.v., Lacordaire, Henri-Dominique.

<sup>66</sup> Jossua, *Congar*, 15-6.

<sup>67</sup> DBC, 3.

the commentaries on John written by Thomas and Lagrange.<sup>68</sup> He “lost no time acquainting my superiors with my desire to work for unity, a desire predominantly expressed in an urge to work among Protestants.”<sup>69</sup>

### **Congar and Luther**

Shortly after the conferment of his orders, the Dominicans sent Congar to a monastery in Düsseldorf for two months: “it gave me a presentiment of the benefit the mind of a Frenchman could derive from contact with Germany. Latinity helps a German to clarify the ferment in his thought; Germanism reveals to a Latin a certain dimension of reality transcending formal order and the classification of ideas.”<sup>70</sup> He already realized how distinctively Latin the Roman Church had become.<sup>71</sup>

At that time, he encountered Martin Luther, and he “realized that there were depths in Luther which demanded investigation and understanding.”<sup>72</sup> During a visit to Berlin, he took the opportunity to go to the towns important in Luther’s life, particularly Wittenberg, where he accessed the materials in the library. Congar later stated that Luther “exerted a strong influence on my research.”<sup>73</sup> And, in spite of the fact that Luther began a major split within the Church, Congar regarded him as “one of the greatest religious geniuses in all of history. I place him, in this regard, on the same level as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, or Pascal. In a certain way, he was greater.”<sup>74</sup> Further, “Luther was a man of the Church, he had a theological education, he knew a catholic, spiritual

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<sup>68</sup> Jossua, *Congar*, 18.

<sup>69</sup> DBC, 5.

<sup>70</sup> DBC, 6.

<sup>71</sup> DBC, 6n4.

<sup>72</sup> DBC, 6.

<sup>73</sup> JP, 59.

<sup>74</sup> JP, 59.

experience that was very profound.”<sup>75</sup> Congar studied Luther for much of his life, finally writing a book on the man, *Martin Luther, Sa Foi, Sa Réforme: Études de théologie historique*.<sup>76</sup> Somehow, the Reformer had exercised a magnetic attraction to him, possibly because at that point in his life, Congar could appreciate that the two of them had formed similar opinions on the Church regarding its way of thinking through Thomism, as it had developed in the later Middle Ages.

Much of the Church’s history since Aquinas can be seen as a struggle over the interpretation of his Thomism. Congar stated that “I understand that scholasticism can be a prison for the spirit, and that it has diminished, in my Church, the possibilities for the acquisition of certain truths.”<sup>77</sup> He lamented that this very thing had happened to him personally.<sup>78</sup> He made a statement about scholasticism that he likely could not have made before his rejuvenation as a theologian: “that is precisely what Luther rejected. He had the conviction, as well as the evidence, that one could not be Christian without leaving, intellectually and existentially, the scholastic, canonical, hierarchical system of the old Church.”<sup>79</sup> While acknowledging that Luther made mistakes, Congar remained fixed on the genius of the man. His appreciation of Luther’s thought affected his thinking, as he assimilated Luther’s desire for reform; Congar spent a great deal of time trying to determine how a true reformation of the Church could occur.

Congar recognized that the true source of Luther’s vision of the Church centered around the figure of Jesus Christ as presented in the Gospels: “the Gospel, that was it:

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<sup>75</sup> JP, 59.

<sup>76</sup> The English title is *Martin Luther, His Faith, His Reform: Studies in Historical Theology*. The original edition was published in Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1983. (ML).

<sup>77</sup> ML, 9.

<sup>78</sup> ML, 9.

<sup>79</sup> ML, 9.

through faith, Christ in me, my salvation, my justice. ... Since then, it is Christ who is my justice, thanks to faith: justice that is not from me ... from outside, not from us. This is the discovery which commands all of the others.”<sup>80</sup> Congar’s basic disagreement with Luther would be made plain in *True and False Reform*, in which Congar called for, as his second condition for reform without schism, remaining in communion with the Church.<sup>81</sup>

Congar recognized Luther as the key character in the Reformation, without whom that movement may have never begun: “he is at the origin of a religious act of great importance.”<sup>82</sup> Following this, he summarized Luther’s thinking:

He envisages man essentially – I repeat his expression – *coram Deo*, before God. This is a profound biblical vision. Man in relation to God, outside of which he cannot comprehend himself nor be comprehended. Luther did not concern himself with man according to his nature, but with the person considered philosophically as a reasonable animal.

The second expression that I believe is very important to comprehend the thought of Luther: *Unverfügbarkeit Gottes*, one may not have God at his disposal. God is always supreme. It is He who has the initiative. One can say along with Barth: God is always the subject, never the object. He is not a reality that we have the power to seize by whatever means. He has the total initiative, which is to say: He gives us whatever we need in order to come to Him. This is a thought eminently evangelical and can be seen through the writings of St. Paul.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> ML, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 229ff. (VFR).

<sup>82</sup> JP, 60.

<sup>83</sup> JP, 60.



In spite of his in-depth grasp of the thoughts of Luther, Congar shrank from any assumption that he understood Luther completely; he kept in mind that the man was a giant, and Congar believed that Luther was beyond his full comprehension; but Congar continued to study the writings of the great Reformer.

Unlike many Catholic writers and theologians, Congar refused to see the man as the evil perpetrator of a terrible, unfounded rebellion against the righteous Roman nobility. His dedication to the Saulchoir program of *ressourcement* is evident in his careful reading and sympathetic portrayal of Luther, while still maintaining a degree of objectivity in evaluating the mistakes the man made.

Congar's perusal of all the Luther materials always held with it an ecumenical slant. Among his materials from his first time in Germany as a Dominican, Congar later discovered a prayer he had written, one line of which states: "My God, enlarge our hearts! Grant that men may understand us and we may understand men, all men!"<sup>84</sup> He proceeded to pray for church unity: "The union of the Churches! My God why has your Church, which is holy and is one, unique, holy, and true, why has she so often such an austere and forbidding face when in reality she is full of youth and life?"<sup>85</sup> One can see the developing love for the church and for the union of Christian churches to reconstitute the church as one.

### **Return to Le Saulchoir**

After returning to Le Saulchoir from Germany, Congar took courses in Paris at the *Institut catholique*, and at the secular *Hautes-Études*, where he attended courses

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<sup>84</sup> DBC, 6n4.

<sup>85</sup> DBC, 7n5; see also Yves Congar, *This Church that I Love*, trans. Lucien Delafuente (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1969), 8-9. (CL).

offered by the Protestant faculty. There, he encountered the Protestant “tendency to return to the Reformers,” giving him insight into how that process can help in clarifying the thinking in the current age.<sup>86</sup> However, as he expanded his contacts within the ecumenical community, he “was well aware, and noted it from then on, that all those who concerned themselves with the cause of union had been more or less disowned.”<sup>87</sup>

Ecumenism became for him the central focus of his studies, stating that, “[i]t very soon occurred to me that ecumenism is not a specialty and that it presupposes a movement of conversion and reform coextensive with the whole life of all the communions.”<sup>88</sup> He had already determined that Christian unity could not be effected by advocating that Protestants “return” to the Catholic Church, but that efforts and prayers needed to be refocused on “the unity of Christians.”<sup>89</sup> His close contacts with those Christian brethren that he had experienced during his life showed him the problems that the Catholic Church created, or aggravated, when it emphasized that it alone possessed the essence of the universal Church.<sup>90</sup>

As his consciousness of ecumenism and his persistent desire for reunification grew, he put to use the contacts he had made and “decided to start a series of works devoted to the renewal of ecclesiology.”<sup>91</sup> The series, to be called *Unam Sanctam*, which he said was “taken verbatim from the *Credo*,” was intended to encourage the concepts which had been developing within the church that stressed his ecumenical interests.<sup>92</sup> He

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<sup>86</sup> DBC, 7.

<sup>87</sup> DBC, 10.

<sup>88</sup> DBC, 21; PU, 41-2.

<sup>89</sup> DBC, 20.

<sup>90</sup> Yves Congar, *Une passion: l'unité: Réflexions et souvenirs 1929-1973* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1974), 33, 59 (UPU); for Protestant comments, see chaps. 4 and 5 in Collins and Walls, *Roman but Not Catholic*.

<sup>91</sup> DBC, 23.

<sup>92</sup> DBC, 23-4.

wrote *Chrétien désunis, Principe d'un Oecumenisme catholique* to begin the series in 1937, which influenced the ecumenical movements which were under way in the forms of the Life and Work and the Faith and Order groups, which sold the book at their meetings in 1937 shortly after its appearance.<sup>93</sup> He later regretted the stance which that first work took, looking at ecumenism through a lens which he called “Catholic ecumenism.” Through his subsequent work, Congar learned that “there is only *one* ecumenism, a single ecumenical movement even if those who participate in it conceive of it differently.”<sup>94</sup> At that later point in his life, Congar had come to the realization that, “[t]he threshold of ecumenism can only be crossed on one’s knees.”<sup>95</sup>

Congar also organized ecumenical meetings, which brought people who shared an interest in Christian unity together “in order to initiate and promote, by means of friendly discussion, a common awareness and a concerted activity.”<sup>96</sup> Early in his ecumenical career, Congar first felt the hammer of Rome: “[i]n 1937, Cardinal Pacelli, then Secretary of State to Pius XI, had refused Father Congar authorization to participate as an observer in the Oxford Conference which he had helped prepare with some Protestant participants.”<sup>97</sup> After he became Pope Pius XII, Pacelli continued to cause problems for Congar.

### **Captivity**

Congar’s work began to grow in volume as well as importance, but that was all put aside with the onset of the next war. As a lieutenant, Congar was sent by the army to

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<sup>93</sup> Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1937; ET, *Divided Christendom*, trans. M. A. Bousefield (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1939). (CD).

<sup>94</sup> DBC, 26.

<sup>95</sup> DBC, 130.

<sup>96</sup> DBC, 27.

<sup>97</sup> Jossua, *Congar*, 69.

run a fuel depot in northern Alsace, in charge of a hundred men.<sup>98</sup> His unit was captured early in the war after two days of combat, and he was sent initially to Mayence, then for a short time to a camp near Berlin, before being shipped to the fortress of Colditz. He naturally ended up as the chaplain whenever he was permitted to perform those duties. After Colditz and several unsuccessful escape attempts, he ended up at Lübeck, where he and his comrades were ordered by Hitler to be liquidated, but the Red Cross intervened to save them.

During his imprisonment, Congar conducted conferences, preached, and continually demonstrated his dislike of the Nazis, which earned for him the title “*Deutschfeindlicher*,” meaning “German enemy,” and tended to place him in precarious situations.<sup>99</sup> However, he never compromised his principles. Some of his conferences brought him into contact with various radicals, socialists, and even Marxists. During this time, he also met with Jews in several of the locations, where he witnessed anti-Semitism among the French officers and soldiers, besides that from the Germans.

Congar also learned what it was like to be one of the crowd rather than the obvious cleric in the group; his fellow prisoners treated him like one of them, giving him an appreciation and love for those lay people, from whom he had been separated since his entry into the seminary. They treated him as an equal, yet they never forgot that he was a priest and an educated priest, at that. One must understand this situation in order to appreciate his sympathy for the *Action Française*, as well as his interest in the role of the laity. In this, he may have overestimated the depth of his understanding of the laity, but he remained concerned over how the laity can be optimally integrated into the life of the

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<sup>98</sup> The information on Congar’s captivity is mainly taken from the chapter on the subject in JP, 87-97.

<sup>99</sup> JP, 89.

church.<sup>100</sup> This bore fruit in his *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*, which entered the *Unam Sanctam* series in 1953. He noted no direct anticlericalism among his numerous acquaintances in captivity, including those who were involved in movements which promoted a negative view of Catholic priests, such as the socialists, communists, Marxists, and other radicals. However, he recognized that their situation in common peril also demanded that those differences be set aside for the good of the group.

During his captivity, Congar had his ecumenical leaning both challenged and strengthened through his extensive contacts with the non-Catholics with whom he was incarcerated. He learned that “[i]t is impossible to become hardened into military opposition and at the same time to remain open, loving and relaxed, or at any rate it is very difficult.”<sup>101</sup> In spite of these difficulties, he did his best to maintain an attitude of openness and friendship toward those non-Catholics with whom he suffered. Ultimately, he learned to maximize the points of agreement that the Protestants, Anglicans, and others together enjoyed with him. After the war, he maintained contact with certain of his comrades-in-arms.

Near the end of the war, in May, 1945, Congar’s camp was liberated, and he was mustered out just in time to return to Le Saulchoir for the general Dominican retreat in July, 1945.<sup>102</sup>

### **Post-War Life**

Upon his return to freedom, Congar, as well as his fellow prisoners, felt that although France seemed much the same as when they had last seen it, it had passed them

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<sup>100</sup> This issue will be discussed at greater length later in this work.

<sup>101</sup> DBC, 30.

<sup>102</sup> MCPG, 8.

by. It took him “several months to recover the contact with the new mentalities of French Catholicism.”<sup>103</sup> His next several years were termed, “the dark years.”<sup>104</sup> Strangely enough, though, in a later book, he called the immediate post-war period, “one of the finest moments in the life of the Church.”<sup>105</sup> He recognized that troubles for him were personal and not necessarily an indicator of the conditions within the general Church. For this ten-year period, during which he kept a journal (1946-1956), Congar repeatedly flirted with disaster in the form of censorship by the Roman authorities, with whom he frequently clashed. Since he only kept journals during times of great import, he must have recognized early on that the stage of his life that he was going through was a momentous time.<sup>106</sup> He wrote some of his major works in those years, the classic *Vraie et fausse réforme dans L'Église (True and False Reform in the Church)* in 1950, among others.<sup>107</sup> In this book, he took up the daunting project of defining a genuine, proper reform in the Church, “which was not without its dangers but which was radically healthy in its objectives. While making my own contributions to it, I applied myself to the study of its underlying principles and of the conditions under which it had happily developed.”<sup>108</sup> *True and False Reform* would prove to have a great and lasting influence on the Church:

According to Dominican Fr. Paul Philibert, a Vatican II expert, that book [*True and False Reform*], ‘which may claim to being Pope John's inspiration for convoking the council,’ deserves study today, since many of the problems Congar

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<sup>103</sup> JP, 97.

<sup>104</sup> JP, title to chapter 5 – “Les années sombres.”

<sup>105</sup> DBC, 32.

<sup>106</sup> DBC, 2.

<sup>107</sup> VFR.

<sup>108</sup> DBC, 32.

diagnosed in 1950 still plague the church. Congar concluded his study by declaring that the surest way to bring about real reform in the church was through an ecumenical council.<sup>109</sup>

Robert McClory felt that its concepts remain valid today: “I believe a second or third look at Congar's book [*True and False Reform*] might provide church leaders, especially Pope Francis, and other interested Catholics with insight into the direction Congar (and Pope John) were hoping to move the church.”<sup>110</sup> *True and False Reform* ruffled many feathers in the Curia, which also caused reconsideration of his first book, *Chrétien Désunis*.

Even after the war, the Catholic Church had not fully emerged from the sense of crisis that had enveloped it since the nineteenth century under Pope Pius IX, possibly even since the Reformation. The natural response to threats is to defend oneself, and the church, through both the pope and the Curia, tended to assume a defensive stance whenever threats were perceived. The Syllabus of Errors of Pius IX in 1854 is a prime example of the recoil that occurred when Rome felt an outside power posed a potential problem.

Congar's life under the Roman microscope never caused him to deviate from his beliefs or from his loyalties to his good friends and to his church. During his time in captivity, Congar learned that Féret and Chenu had been sanctioned by Rome for their activities, which had been judged to be Modernistic. This distressed Congar tremendously, because he felt that his friends had been placed under sanction for

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<sup>109</sup> Robert McClory, “Why Yves Congar is relevant today,” in *The National Catholic Reporter*, June 6, 2013.

<sup>110</sup> McClory, “Yves Congar relevant.”

insufficient reasons, as well as the fact that he had escaped the problems due to his incarceration; “[t]he ground I trod, however, had trembled and the tremors were to continue for many long years.”<sup>111</sup>

As he became more active in his ecumenical efforts, he interacted with numerous priests and some Protestant representatives. Among those, he specifically named Cardinal De Jongh of Utrecht and Willem Visser t’Hooft, with whom he worked to prepare for the 1948 meeting in Amsterdam that brought together the groups (the Faith and Order and Life and Work Movements) that eventually formed the basis for the World Council of Churches. He knew that the Catholic Church would not join such an organization, but he had intended to attend as an observer. During the preparations for Amsterdam, he functioned as an advisor, informing the Geneva offices of the organizers which people may be sent by Rome as observers. Naturally, Congar expected that he would attend the meeting he had worked to prepare. As he normally did, he notified the local diocese in Holland that he would be in their area for the meeting. Unfortunately, the Dutch episcopate looked to Rome for advice and support, but the Roman office which had been consulted denied permission for anyone to attend, which disappointed Geneva, as well as Congar. This denial affected Congar greatly, most especially when, after the meeting, he read in *Le Figaro* that a Catholic priest from the Gregorian had been in attendance at the meeting in Amsterdam.<sup>112</sup> He realized then that his issues with Rome had grown from annoyances to genuine problems.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> DBC, 29.

<sup>112</sup> JT, 148.

<sup>113</sup> Information in this paragraph has been taken from JT, 143ff., and JP, 99ff.



Beginning in 1952, Congar was forced to send all of his work to Rome for review before publication, which he did beginning in February of that year, submitting everything, “down to the smallest review” under “the incredible narrowness of the censorship.”<sup>114</sup> This intense restriction on his work “became more mistrustful and narrow after February, 1954.”<sup>115</sup>

## **Exile**

Finally, the intense scrutiny resulted in his being removed from teaching and from Le Saulchoir. On the eighth of February, 1954, he was called to appear in front of Father General Suarez of the Dominicans, where he also met Chenu, Albert-Marie Avril, and Father Boisselot, who were to be disciplined as well.<sup>116</sup> In spite of the discipline, Congar held Suarez in high esteem. Congar was told that he would have to leave his beloved monastery and that his future writings would be placed under censure by Rome before they could be published. He requested to be allowed to go to Jerusalem, to the *École biblique*, which under normal conditions would have been considered a boon. Congar’s journal reflected his reaction: he called Rome “the police, autocratic, totalitarian, and cretin.”<sup>117</sup> His emotions rose, yet he did not rebel against the orders given to him; at all times, he remained faithful to the procedures he had outlined in *True and False Reform* – he would seek reform within the Church. In his journal, he expressed his anger with the French bishops, with anyone in Rome he thought might be involved with his restraints, and with anyone within the Dominican order who would not protect him. His view of the

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<sup>114</sup> DBC, 40.

<sup>115</sup> DBC, 40.

<sup>116</sup> JP, 108. Avril was a Provincial Superior who was removed from office. Boisselot had been affiliated with Les Éditions du Cerf, and his affiliation was severed.

<sup>117</sup> JT, 233; “policier, autocratique, totalitaire, crétin.”

Holy Office, including the pope and the Curia, was extremely harsh, as he called them “the Gestapo, supreme, inflexible, with whom one may not argue about their decisions. ... there is the Church, which is the pope and his congregations [Curia] «*sibi subjectae*», the rest can only stand when the pope or the ‘Holy Office’ raises their finger and sit back down when it is lowered.”<sup>118</sup> He deeply resented the starkly hierarchical tone and structure which Rome seemed to promote. He complained that “[a]s far as I myself am concerned, from the beginning of 1947 to the end of 1956, I knew nothing from that quarter but an uninterrupted series of denunciations, warnings, restrictive or discriminatory measures and mistrustful interventions.”<sup>119</sup> His distaste for Rome grew; yet he was called the “Apostle of Patience,” by Robert Nugent in his book, *Silence Speaks*.<sup>120</sup>

Congar left for Jerusalem on the fifth of April. He felt once again completely alone, like an orphan. During his time in Jerusalem, he took courses at the *École biblique*, he toured the surrounding sights, and he wrote his book, *The Mystery of the Temple*, for which seven censors were assigned, delaying its publication by three years.<sup>121</sup> He spent seven months in Jerusalem before returning home.

Congar arrived from Jerusalem on September 19, 1954, to Étioilles, just southeast of Paris, where Le Saulchoir had moved just before he left for the war. Later in the year, he was called to Rome, where he would be allowed to work. He found no joy in the Eternal City: “Rome lives in a world of its own, a world where all are obedient .... The

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<sup>118</sup> JT, 242.

<sup>119</sup> DBC, 34.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Nugent, *Silence Speaks: Teilhard de Chardin, Yves Congar, John Courtney Murray, and Thomas Merton* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011), 33-48.

<sup>121</sup> JP, 109; DBC, 42. *The Mystery of the Temple: Or The Manner of God's Presence to His Creatures from Genesis to the Apocalypse*, trans. Reginald F. Trevett (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1962). (MYT).

world and the truth of its questions do not exist for her.”<sup>122</sup> He enjoyed the city of Rome for its charm and the beauty and history that lay behind it, in spite of the constant reminder of the central ecclesiastical power. In his journal, Congar obsessed about the authorities that he felt were smothering his work, all the way up to the pope. Along with that was the perpetual confrontation with the ubiquitous, overboard marian devotion, which repelled him. His concern lay mainly with the impediment that this growing zeal toward the Blessed Mother might produce toward any attempts at reunification with separated Christian churches.

He fully appreciated at the time that his stances on various topics had shifted to occasionally be at variance with some of the teachings from Rome.<sup>123</sup> The variance of which he spoke centered on marian doctrines and titles. His disenchantment grew to the point where he even dared to mention in the journal that there might possibly be a route that could lead to his leaving the Catholic Church.<sup>124</sup> If that were to ever happen, he wanted to prepare the exit route; his internal deliberations convinced him that he would be happiest if he were to then become Orthodox, but he felt that Rome had certain characteristics which he felt were apostolic, although the Orthodox did not agree.<sup>125</sup> After brief consideration, he also decided against leaving the priesthood. His cogitations led him back to his Dominican home, forcing him to abandon the speculative separation from Rome.

While in Rome, he also discovered from Father Gagnebet that the Roman authorities appeared to be changing their hyper-critical view of some of his positions

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<sup>122</sup> JT, 293.

<sup>123</sup> JT, 302.

<sup>124</sup> JT, 305.

<sup>125</sup> JT, 305-6.

regarding the separated Christian churches.<sup>126</sup> This may have played a role in his later appointments for Vatican II, although that likely remained the work of John XXIII, who, as Angelo Roncalli, had been the apostolic nuncio to France from 1944 to 1953; during that time, with all the controversies surrounding it, Roncalli must have become familiar with Congar's work.

Through his entire time in Rome, Congar never felt comfortable; he disliked the fact that the Curia was composed of around five hundred people, "where everybody knows everybody, where news is spread, is murmured. They eat breakfast together, they visit each other, they drink together."<sup>127</sup> He did not place all the guilt for the situation at the feet of the pope; "there is the Roman milieu, and there is the pope; the two do not always coincide."<sup>128</sup> At the beginning of 1955, he assessed his situation: "I have been reduced to almost zero: to a total powerlessness."<sup>129</sup>

On the fifteenth of February, he received news that he could leave Rome and return to Le Saulchoir. He had realized that his problems with Rome stemmed from his view of the church. He noted in his journal that tensions marked ecclesiology from its beginning, sometimes having mild effects and sometimes dealing with major issues that would impact the Church and leave its mark on it throughout history.<sup>130</sup>

Congar returned briefly to Rome for the election of the next Father General of the order. While there, he tried to defend the book he had written while in Jerusalem; one of the difficulties which he encountered with one of his censors centered on his

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<sup>126</sup> JT, 315-6.

<sup>127</sup> JP, 103.

<sup>128</sup> JP, 104.

<sup>129</sup> JT, 349.

<sup>130</sup> JT, 362-3.

interpretation of the sources of revelation, which would later become a major topic in his masterful *Tradition and Traditions*. He treated Tradition not as a second source of revelation, as some in Rome interpreted the tridentine declarations, which the editor of Congar's journal, Étienne Fouilloux, called a "very nice nuancing of the tridentine theology."<sup>131</sup> He felt that he had again been abandoned to his fate by his superiors, who done nothing to help his writing pass the censors.<sup>132</sup>

On the thirteenth of November, 1955, he received a note informing him that he had been assigned to Cambridge, England. Once more, he felt beaten down by Rome, since the transfer removed him from his endeavors in the direction of ecumenical contacts that he had begun to establish; "I have been reduced to *nothing*, except for my soul, I have nothing more."<sup>133</sup> Years later in *Dialogue Between Christians*, he admitted "that I could say with equal truth that I had been nothing but a nuisance to my superiors."<sup>134</sup> One of the harshest strictures imposed upon him was a constraint to avoid contacts with Anglicans while at Cambridge; he made some contacts in as inconspicuous a manner as possible. The best part of his stay was his contacts with Anglicans, which extended his ecumenical network. He retained "the level of human sanity, by complete resignation to the cross and to reduction to insignificance."<sup>135</sup>

The new Father General of the Dominicans was Michael Browne, whose intellectual orientation was, per Congar, quite different from that of his Saulchoir colleagues.<sup>136</sup> Browne would become, during Vatican II, a leading voice on the

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<sup>131</sup> Étienne Fouilloux, in JT, 388n93.

<sup>132</sup> JT, 389.

<sup>133</sup> JT, 401.

<sup>134</sup> DBC, 43.

<sup>135</sup> DBC, 43.

<sup>136</sup> JT, 410.

conservative side.<sup>137</sup> In a meeting with Browne on the ninth of December, 1955, Congar told his superior that Rome's organization had no group in place which had people with the necessary competence to deal with the questions that would arise in ecumenical discussions. He pointed out that Italy, with its overwhelming Catholic influence, did not give the Italians sufficient experience to be able to satisfactorily work through ecumenical issues.<sup>138</sup> Browne's answer surprised him; Browne also felt that a new Commission or Committee was necessary for that, but the terminology Browne used frightened Congar when Browne said that the Commission needed the proper people in order to "direct" (*diriger*) the ecumenical affairs, where *only* the Holy Office would be permitted to correct mistakes - an indicator of Browne's Roman, centralist orientation. Congar noted then that his work would probably die before it was truly born, if that were to come to pass. He mentioned to Browne his writings which remained in need of Rome's approval, and Browne indicated that they would be excellent, since they would bring an elevated status to the Dominicans through their erudition and insight into the developing area of ecumenism. Congar was not looking for personal glory, and he let Browne know that the intention was to improve relations with the separated communions, not elevate either his or the order's reputation.<sup>139</sup> Browne replied that Congar was "not easy;" Congar confirmed that evaluation.<sup>140</sup>

After Congar spent ten months in Cambridge, he was transferred to Strasbourg at the request of that see's Archbishop Jean-Julien Weber. Congar's time in Strasbourg gave

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<sup>137</sup> Browne aligned with Cardinals Ottaviani and Ruffini in desiring a doctrinal, rather than a pastoral, council. He was "named second-in-charge (vice-president) of the Doctrinal Commission." John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 110.

<sup>138</sup> JT, 413.

<sup>139</sup> JT, 414.

<sup>140</sup> JT, 414.

him more freedom under the protection of Weber. There, his theological work saw him “[m]ore and more ... combining theology with history,” which showed in his ecclesiology.<sup>141</sup> Congar had begun to understand the reforms the Catholic Church would need to implement in order to modernize it and bring it to a state that would allow closer, more profitable ecumenical discussions, which would profit from a study of the history of ecclesiology. He knew that the critical assessment of the situation would be hampered by the Holy Office, which had hounded him for all those long years. His criticisms of Rome, contained in a letter to his mother, dated 10 September, 1956, registered a shrill alarm, characterizing Pope Pius XII as someone who permits people within the Church “to not think at all, to not speak otherwise: He is a pope who does all the thinking, who says all that may be said, and for whom the essential quality of a Catholic is obedience. ... It is evident to me that Rome has never sought and doesn’t seek anything except for one thing: affirmation of its authority.”<sup>142</sup> His bitterness toward Rome grew considerably during this time; he repeated his sorrowful lament: “I have been reduced to nothing, and, at the same time, I have been destroyed.”<sup>143</sup> The last notes in that journal are dated 27 September, 1956.

One must understand and evaluate the general tenor of Congar’s attitude during this time of his life, since it colored so much of his writings. In spite of constantly expressing his loneliness and feeling of abandonment, he had determined to remain in the church. It is important to keep in mind the concepts he included in his landmark work, *True and False Reform*, which indicated his mindset during his troubles. One of the basic

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<sup>141</sup> DBC, 43-4.

<sup>142</sup> JT, 425-6.

<sup>143</sup> JT, 427.

conditions for true reform which he laid down was covered in *True and False Reform* in Part Two, titled “Conditions for Authentic Reform Without Schism;” the second condition upon which he insisted was “Remain in Communion with the Whole Church.” Congar was a man deeply committed to his personal principles; he adhered to those principles, in spite of the hardships that these may have imposed on him.

### **The Years of the Council**

Congar had not personally met Angelo Roncalli when the latter was the apostolic nuncio in Paris. In his interview with Puyo Congar told the story of Roncalli having read his book, VFR and having scribbled therein: “a reform of the Church, is that possible?”<sup>144</sup> Congar clarified his language on that point to emphasize his true intention: “I did not write reform *of* the Church, but ... reform *in* the Church.”<sup>145</sup> As noted above, this guided his actions throughout his life. For Congar, the election of Roncalli resulted in a change that he found difficult to comprehend.

Pius XII had encouraged both the biblical and liturgical movements, but “[h]e ... regarded ecumenism with distrust.”<sup>146</sup> This distrust had caused Congar, and any involved with the ecumenical movement, to tread cautiously in ventures into contact with those outside the walls of the Vatican. When Roncalli was elected pope, this situation changed dramatically. Lawrence Elliott noted that Roncalli had served in several different places and had to deal with several sensitive situations in dealing with other churches, leading him to better understand and appreciate the positions others may have. Elliott reported about Roncalli, that, although somewhat conservative, “[h]e did not believe that God

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<sup>144</sup> JP, 117.

<sup>145</sup> JP, 117.

<sup>146</sup> DBC, 48.



penalized anyone for not being Catholic. He even went so far as to include non-believers in his prayers. ... All this may have something to do with his relatively low standing in the Roman Curia, where he was lightly held and sometimes dismissed as ‘our good Roncalli.’”<sup>147</sup> E. E. Y. Hales noted that Roncalli followed in the line of thinking of his predecessors, with the exception that Roncalli brought a positive view toward the world to his position.<sup>148</sup> Within three months of his election, the new Pope John XXIII shocked the Roman Catholic world by calling for a new Vatican Council.

Congar was in Sedan visiting his family shortly after he had returned from his extended banishment, when he received telegrams from friends congratulating him on his appointment to council commissions and his being named a council peritus, or expert, at the Second Vatican Council.<sup>149</sup> He briefly hesitated to take the offered assignment, coming as it did from an office that had so recently treated him so badly; he was concerned that they would continue that during the meetings. He finally accepted the position, considering that he had nothing to lose.

The new Vatican Council offered Congar tremendous opportunities to vigorously promote the ecumenism which he so dearly loved, and which had been so suspect under the previous administration. He moved eagerly, yet cautiously, forward, ultimately assuming a prominent position in the work of the Council. Pope John XXIII’s intended objectives for the council “quite directly extended a hand in friendship to the other Christian churches, and they did so, it seemed, without strings attached.”<sup>150</sup> In this, he

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<sup>147</sup> Lawrence Elliott, *I Will be Called John: A Biography of Pope John XXIII* (New York: Readers Digest Press, 1973), 196.

<sup>148</sup> E. E. Y. Hales, *Pope John and his Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 37-8.

<sup>149</sup> The majority of the following information is from JP, chap. 6.

<sup>150</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened*, 18.

could see progress in moving the monolithic Catholic Church in a conciliatory direction with the separated ecclesial communions.

As a consultant, however, Congar found that he was not often consulted, being relegated to the periphery, generally pushed aside in the Preparatory Theological Commission. He was distressed by the manner in which the preparations proceeded. The problem for him was, “the theologians could speak only if questioned. It was possible of course to arrange to be questioned by a friendly bishop, but Father Congar is a relatively shy man and to put himself forward in such a way was distasteful to him.”<sup>151</sup> Sebastian Tromp, a Jesuit professor at the Gregorian University and a member of the curial staff, caused Congar considerable concern, as his apparent goal for the council was the confirmation of the policies of Pius XII which emphasized the character of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, “to the exclusion of the other Christian churches. Thus, a Protestant, or an Orthodox, possessing faith and charity and who love God do not form a part of the Mystical Body! Unbelievable!”<sup>152</sup> The last exclamation is Congar’s. Tromp and Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani pushed their view for the council, which centered on the confirmation of the hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church apparatus.<sup>153</sup> They saw the council as a rubber stamp for their ideas, possibly requiring a month or so to pass the over seventy documents that had been prepared.<sup>154</sup> They never envisioned that any bishop, much less a peritus or theologian, would question anything they presented. Richard Gaillardetz commented that, “[l]ike most bureaucratic structures, the curia has proven

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<sup>151</sup> Jossua, *Yves Congar*, 161. See also Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, trans. Mary John Ronayne and Mary Cecily Boulding (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 21012), xi, 50, 55. (JC).

<sup>152</sup> JP, 126-7.

<sup>153</sup> Gaillardetz, *Church in the Making*, 6-8.

<sup>154</sup> Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber: A History of Vatican II* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1978), 13.

itself over the centuries to be remarkably resistant to reform;”<sup>155</sup> or to challenge. The initial meetings in preparation for the council were controlled by Ottaviani and his associates in the Curia, with little input permitted from those who might have presented different positions. The Curia had reason to feel its positions would ultimately triumph, since they, quite naturally, had done the majority of the preparatory work. The reasons for this were somewhat understandable, since the Curia were present in Rome and most easily assembled for the required meetings and work.<sup>156</sup> However, their approach caused many problems in the ecumenical world, since they always reduced the acceptable group to the Catholic Church, only grudgingly accepting the eastern churches in communion with Rome.

In spite of the problems with the Preparatory Commissions, once the council began, Congar found himself “an almost ubiquitously influential *peritus*.”<sup>157</sup> During his interviews with Jean Puyo, Congar expressed a degree of satisfaction with how things finally turned out for him, as he became busier and busier with his direct work for the council commissions as well as in conducting meetings and seminars for the instruction of the Council Fathers. He perfectly well understood how important these instructional sessions with the bishops were; they had garnered the attention of the conservative minority, who attempted to stop the instructional sessions, since they realized that those meetings generally worked against their positions.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium of the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 285.

<sup>156</sup> For fuller discussions of the situation in the preparation of the Council, see O’Malley, *What Happened*, and Karim Schelkens, *Catholic Theology of Revelation on the Eve of Vatican II: A Redaction History of the Schema De fontibus revelationis (1960-1962)* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010).

<sup>157</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened*, 121-2.

<sup>158</sup> JP, 130-1. See also, Gaillardetz, *Church in the Making*, 6-14.

The most significant contributions which Congar supplied came in the Dogmatic Constitutions *Dei Verbum* and *Lumen Gentium*. According to Nichols, Congar contributed to the following conciliar documents:

*Dei Verbum* (the ‘Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation’), *Lumen Gentium* (the ‘Dogmatic Constitution on the Church’), *Gaudium et Spes* (the ‘Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’), *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (the ‘Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity’), *Unitatis Redintegratio* (the ‘Decree on Ecumenism’), *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (the ‘Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests’), and *Dignitatis Humanae* (the ‘Declaration on Religious Freedom’).<sup>159</sup>

Famerée and Routhier also included *Nostra Aetate* (the “Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions”) among the documents upon which he worked.<sup>160</sup>

Avery Dulles recognized the influence of Congar by calling Vatican II, “Congar’s Council.”<sup>161</sup>

Even during the council, he had other duties assigned to him, as well as aggressively writing some of his most respected and influential works, including *Tradition et les traditions*, volumes concentrating on the historical and theological significance of Tradition, as well as the smaller *Meaning of Tradition*. In 1965, Pope Paul VI, recognizing the theologian’s expertise in ecumenism, appointed Congar to the Catholic delegation for “the official Catholic-Lutheran commission of dialogue.”<sup>162</sup>

Additionally, in 1969, “Paul VI added his name to the newly-founded Pontifical International Theological Commission, which had been brought into existence to lend a

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<sup>159</sup> Nichols, *Yves Congar*, 8.

<sup>160</sup> Famerée and Routhier, *Yves Congar*, 48 and 48n104.

<sup>161</sup> Avery Dulles, “Yves Congar: In Appreciation,” *America* 173, no. 2 (1995): 6.

<sup>162</sup> Nichols, *Congar*, 8.

broader expertise and vision to the work of the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.”<sup>163</sup>

### **After the Council**

The end of the council only signaled the beginning of the next phase of Congar’s life. Upon returning to Paris, he took up residence in the *Couvent St.-Jacques* in Paris, since Le Saulchoir had been dissolved. He had originally been diagnosed with sclerosis in 1935, which caused him a great deal of pain at times, growing worse to the point where he had to use a cane during Vatican II. However, he continued writing, putting out a prodigious amount of work after the council. By 1984, the disease had progressed to the point that he became paraplegic, making it difficult for him to remain in the *Couvent St.-Jacques*; his writing of necessity stopped. He was admitted to the *Hôtel des Invalides*, where he could be cared for in the manner which he required.<sup>164</sup> His disease gradually worsened, finally taking him home on June 22, 1995.

### **Tradition**

Congar’s explanations and definitions of Tradition, properly interpreted, may be able to form the basis for a bridge with Protestants to come to a common understanding of this term. Congar came to work on this concept because he always had a “passion” for “the *ecclesia*,” and his passion extended from ecclesiology to ecumenism.<sup>165</sup> Congar’s view of Tradition always remained within his concept of ecclesiology.

Congar’s attitude toward the church was remarkable. Even after having endured the many hardships which that church, in the form of the Roman hierarchy, had imposed

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<sup>163</sup> Nichols, *Congar*, 8.

<sup>164</sup> Nichols, *Congar*, 8-9.

<sup>165</sup> Brother Émile of Taizé, *Faithful to the Future: Listening to Yves Congar*, trans. Karen Scott and Brother Émile (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), xiv.

upon him, he always obeyed the orders which he received, no matter how difficult, no matter how humiliating, no matter how unjust he felt them to be. But this does not mean that he enjoyed those punishments, merely that he understood that their source remained the structure of the church he loved. These were simply regarded as a cross that he had to bear. Congar disliked the hierarchical organization as it had become because it did not correspond to Jesus' desires for his church; Jesus wanted his church to be an organization of service to the people rather than an edifice that ruled over subjects. Congar abhorred the "system" that the central church organization had become, one for which its central concern was its own welfare over that of the community.<sup>166</sup> Brother Émile of Taizé recognized the unique ability Congar possessed to separate his personal feelings from his appreciation for the necessities of an institution such as the Roman Catholic Church. Without understanding his perspicuity in this area, the complexity of the many approaches of Yves Congar may not be fully appreciated.

Congar's love for the Church and for history drove him to a deep appreciation for Tradition, which he recognized as having both positive and negative aspects. Brother Émile of Taizé commented that Congar "spoke of the great river of Tradition that transports the water necessary for life, and which can carry many other things as well: as he put it, '*tree trunks, dead rats.*'"<sup>167</sup> Congar recognized the pros and cons of Tradition that can arise with its use in discussions, also recognizing the potential morass one enters when covering this topic. In his Introduction to the English translation of *Tradition and Traditions*, Patrick Madrid stated, "Tradition is widely misunderstood and widely vilified. Catholics venerate it as authoritative and binding but are hazy on what exactly it

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<sup>166</sup> Émile of Taizé, *Faithful*, 2.

<sup>167</sup> Émile, *Faithful*, xvii.

is and are usually at a loss to give concrete examples of it. Most Evangelical Protestants reject it out of hand as something alien to Scripture, purely human, and therefore incompatible with the ‘pure gospel.’”<sup>168</sup>

### **Definitions of Tradition**

The definition of Tradition is quite complex; Congar would agree that the definition of Traditions has been a product of the history of the use of the term within the church over the centuries. I will try to separate the definitions from the history, but the task is difficult.

Tradition has several common meanings, with a common usage meaning something that has always been done; or that which has been handed down. These meanings are correct, but they barely scratch the surface of tradition, as used by Congar and the Catholic Church. Congar spent more time describing how tradition works than he did defining it.

In *The Meaning of Tradition*, a book written shortly after *Tradition and Traditions*, but also during the council, Congar delved into the meaning of what he regarded as Tradition.<sup>169</sup> Congar’s ideas on Tradition are contained in both works, and a full consideration of Tradition requires a look at both. In *Meaning of Tradition*, after offering a common dictionary-style definition, he explained: “traditions, which enshrine and safeguard a certain spirit, should comprise external forms and customs in such perfect harmony with this spirit that they mould it, surround it, embody and clothe it, so to speak, without stifling its natural spontaneity, or checking its innate strength and

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<sup>168</sup> Patrick Madrid, “Introduction,” in T&t, xix.

<sup>169</sup> *Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1964).

freedom.”<sup>170</sup> This form of tradition is a means of conserving an existing way of behaving or conducting business, but further preserves the way the tradition is treated within the community.<sup>171</sup>

Congar then injected a definition to indicate his concept of Tradition, with a capital T, which he took from “[a] sociologist . . . : ‘Tradition, in the true sense of the word, implies a spontaneous assimilation of the past in understanding the present, without a break in the continuity of a society’s life, and without considering the past as outmoded.’”<sup>172</sup> Now, without separating it from its little brother, Congar continued: “In its different forms, Tradition is like the conscience of a group or the principle of identity which links one generation with another; it enables them to remain the same human race, and same people as they go forward throughout history, which transforms all things.”<sup>173</sup> Unsurprisingly, he latched onto a definition which incorporated history into its explanation of Tradition. He then, without differentiating between the types of tradition that would become key to his work, further explicated his view: “it is also a movement and a *progress* that goes beyond mere continuity, but only on condition that, going beyond conservation for its own sake, it includes and preserves the positive values gained, to allow a progress that is not simply a repetition of the past. Tradition is memory, and memory enriches experience.”<sup>174</sup>

He added that the concept of Tradition included a development that came from applying things learned from others to forward the intellectual processes that yield

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<sup>170</sup> MT, 7-8.

<sup>171</sup> MT, 8; also 14-5; RG, 156.

<sup>172</sup> MT, 8. The sociologist was not named.

<sup>173</sup> MT, 8.

<sup>174</sup> MT, 8. Emphasis added.



progress while still maintaining “the youthfulness and the promise which it originally possessed.”<sup>175</sup> One sees here his effort to surround his view of Tradition in a manner that can be profitably used in discussions with non-Catholics; he separated the traditional, ordinary usage of the word from a meaning which he obviously intended to bulk up in his preferred direction. As he took up the more specialized, theological definition of Tradition, he explained that Tradition should have some recognition in the fact that it was commonly known to be an issue “between Catholics and Protestants – the latter claiming the authority of Scripture alone, the former adding to it “Tradition.”<sup>176</sup> With this, Congar segregated the two meanings he employed and which he had used in the more extensive work *Tradition and Traditions*. In explaining the differences between the Catholic and Protestant theological interpretations of the word, he explained: “The Catholic lives on something else besides, even at those times and in those acts when he lives on the holy Scriptures. This something else is the Church, it is Tradition.”<sup>177</sup> He made plain that his concern with Tradition and with the Protestant interpretation of the word is focused upon the church.

Congar discussed the varying meanings which have been ascribed to tradition: “Taken in its basic, exact, and completely general sense, tradition or transmission is the very principle of the whole economy of salvation. Tradition, in this sense, encloses and dominates it completely, from its very beginning, which is none other than God.”<sup>178</sup>

Congar pointed to the fact that revelation must be accepted as coming from God,

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<sup>175</sup> MT, 9. Note: the first word in the citation from which this is taken is the beginning of a sentence, which means that we cannot know for sure based on capitalization whether Congar was separating Tradition from tradition, or not. My feeling, since he explained this in the next block quote, is that he had not yet made that move. Congar also discussed living tradition in the following: EA, 15; MT, 75; T&t, 189ff.

<sup>176</sup> MT, 9.

<sup>177</sup> MT, 10.

<sup>178</sup> MT, 15.

although it proceeds from the Almighty through the means of human intermediaries.<sup>179</sup>

The concepts upon which the Church was founded were passed on from hand to hand, so to speak. Congar summarized his point: “Tradition is the sharing of a treasure which itself remains unchanging; it represents a victory over time and its transience, over space and the separation caused by distance.”<sup>180</sup>

Congar then shifted his focus to the content of tradition, which he explained contains more than simply doctrine, “it includes the *whole* communication, excluding nothing. If then, we consider the *content* of what is offered, tradition comprises equally the holy Scriptures and, besides these, not only doctrines but things: the sacraments, ecclesiastical institutions, the powers of the ministry, customs, and liturgical rites, in fact, all the Christian realities themselves.”<sup>181</sup>

He then narrowed down his topic, stating that “[i]n this stricter sense tradition signifies transmission by some means other than writing.”<sup>182</sup> Referring back to the origin of tradition:

Christianity was not transmitted otherwise, at first, except that it claimed to be the true fulfilment of the Scriptures: it was the fact or reality spoken of by Moses and the prophets. During roughly one hundred and fifty years, what was called ‘the Scriptures’ meant the Old Testament; as for the Gospel, it was preached ‘in conformity with the Scriptures’, and based on them. Yet after that time, there existed apostolic writings, gospel accounts and epistles, all recognized as such.

But in the earliest years of the Church, at a time when she was never more truly

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<sup>179</sup> MT, 15.

<sup>180</sup> MT, 15.

<sup>181</sup> MT, 17-8.

<sup>182</sup> MT, 19.

herself, there were neither letters by the apostles, nor written accounts of what Christ had said and done. The Gospel was preached, and the Christian faith was handed on simply by ‘tradition’.<sup>183</sup>

Congar stressed the verbal handing down of the items of tradition, especially emphasizing the time before any New Testament documents had been written, in order to place a spotlight on the absolute need for the non-written transmission of information before anything had been set down in writing. In his contribution to the Concilium volume, *Scripture: The Dynamism of Biblical Tradition*, Pierre Grelot tried to get people to understand that Scripture came from the Tradition, and evolved within the environment of Tradition, it did not suddenly appear as a finished document.<sup>184</sup>

When referring to the form of tradition involved in the passing on of the stories and histories of Jesus and the Disciples, Congar explained that, “Catholics believe that this method of communication is the one most essential to the Church, and that it would suffice if it alone existed.”<sup>185</sup> He buttressed his argument by citing Irenaeus: “If the apostles themselves had left us no Scripture, would it not be necessary to follow ‘the order of Tradition’ that they have transmitted to those to whom they entrusted the churches?”<sup>186</sup> Congar mentioned that Irenaeus “knew that after *preaching* the Gospel, the apostles, ‘by God’s will, have transmitted it to us in the Scriptures, so that it may become the foundation and pillar of our faith.’ In fact, the economy, which expresses God’s will, includes both tradition and Scripture.”<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> MT, 20.

<sup>184</sup> Pierre Grelot, “Tradition as Source and Environment of Scripture,” in *Scripture: The Dynamism of Biblical Tradition*, Pierre Benoit, Roland E. Murphy, and Bastiaan Van Hersel, eds. Concilium, vol. 20, Marcel Vanhengel, exec. secy. (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), 7-28.

<sup>185</sup> MT, 23.

<sup>186</sup> MT, 23

<sup>187</sup> MT, 23.

Within the writings of Maurice Blondel, Congar found a treatment of tradition which he called “profound,” and which offered great “clarity” to the issue.<sup>188</sup> Blondel held a definition of Tradition that gave it a place alongside Scripture, adding to the insight which has grown around Scripture since the early church.<sup>189</sup> Taking this idea and pushing it along, Congar commented: “Blondel considered that a living fidelity would be more likely to keep the reality of the deposit intact right from the beginning than would a conscious and explicit record.”<sup>190</sup> This sounds a bit strange, to consider that a tradition, likely meant to have been in the form of an oral transmission of the faith, would be more reliable than a written exemplar of the same. However, there is argument to be made regarding the accuracy of oral traditions, which depends on the fact that oral history was likely transmitted socially, in group venues, permitting the correction of the stories by the audience, preventing errors.<sup>191</sup> In the same vein of thought, written material can no longer be openly challenged by the reader, making it, therefore, less reliable.

### **History of Tradition**

Congar began his historical study in *Tradition and Traditions* with Tradition before Jesus, examining it in Israel. He noted that, “‘Tradition,’ as it existed in Israel,” existed in “three forms”:

- (1) *An original oral tradition ...* (2) *Precision ...* The earlier event gave meaning to the later event, which in turn threw light on the earlier experience. ... (3) Interpretation ... this accumulated wisdom of many generations, though originally

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<sup>188</sup> JP, 38.

<sup>189</sup> MT, 30-1.

<sup>190</sup> MT, 31.

<sup>191</sup> As an example, see Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960, 2000).

completely dependent on Scripture, had a value of its own. It was held to come from God no less than Scripture itself and was treated with the same respect.<sup>192</sup> Congar then took up the situation existing at the very beginning of Christianity, comparing this to the situation as it had existed within Judaism.<sup>193</sup> He credited the *formgeschichtlich* approach to biblical exegesis for emphasizing this process of Scripture formation, bringing Scripture and Tradition together in a historical reality, under the umbrella of the only group that possessed the power to do so, the church.

Congar considered the origin of Tradition, taken as the beginning of the process which remains in operation, which had its origin with the twelve Apostles.<sup>194</sup> As Congar noted, “When the idea of tradition first takes the form of a considered doctrine, in St. Irenaeus, it is a part of his teaching on apostolicity.”<sup>195</sup> He made a very interesting, possibly controversial, statement: “The affirmations of the ante-Nicene Fathers on tradition are based on a lively awareness of the fact that Christianity in its entirety is a *transmission*, from its starting point with Christ and the apostles, of a spiritual reality which remains the same through time as well as through space, and which since it is only the propagation of its source, is essentially apostolic.”<sup>196</sup> Here lies the crux of the matter, in determining what may be transmitted in a genuine passing on of tradition. Congar explained his position on this through the rest of *Tradition and Traditions*.

On the Protestant side, Congar cited Oscar Cullmann, who endeavored to show that the importance and usefulness of tradition ended early in church history: “In

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<sup>192</sup> T&t, 1-5.

<sup>193</sup> This section is taken from T&t, 5-6.

<sup>194</sup> This section is taken from T&t, 24-30.

<sup>195</sup> T&t, 24.

<sup>196</sup> T&t, 25.

establishing the *principle* of a canon, the Church recognized that *from that moment onward* tradition was no longer a criterion of truth.”<sup>197</sup> Cullmann’s position was cited by Congar as an example of the Reformation project of setting the terms of Scripture, Tradition, and Church in opposition to one another. Congar offered his own position as follows: “Tradition is an interpretation of Scripture, which was originally the Old Testament. There are many sects which propose their own interpretations; tradition, however, is that interpretation of Scripture which is the interpretation of the *Church*. Its criterion is the apostolicity of that Church, guaranteed by the succession of hierarchical ministers.”<sup>198</sup>

Cullmann attempted to prove that Scripture had, with the act of canonization, which he appeared to treat as a single action rather than a process, suddenly eliminated tradition in the process of protecting the deposit of faith by providing what Cullmann called “‘a control,’” which now became “‘the apostolic tradition fixed in writing.’”<sup>199</sup> Congar argued against this concept, pointing out several weaknesses in Cullmann’s thesis. The first issue which Congar took up with Cullmann’s position regarded Cullmann’s, as well as the Reformation’s, setting aside of the church’s part in the canonization process.<sup>200</sup> Cullmann granted that the church, as a hierarchical institution, has the divinely given power to acknowledge what area possesses greater authority. Congar took issue with Cullmann’s statement that, “[t]o fix a canon was to say: henceforth we give up regarding as a norm other traditions that are *not fixed by the*

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<sup>197</sup> T&t, 38.

<sup>198</sup> T&t, 38

<sup>199</sup> T&t, 38.

<sup>200</sup> T&t, 39.

*apostles in writing.*”<sup>201</sup> Congar noted, without citing them, that numerous early patristic texts do not go as far as Cullmann’s statement: “Cullmann postulates a rigorous identity between the apostolic norm or source and the apostolic writings.... that is to say, he interprets the fact of having professed the principle of a canon as equivalent to the theological principle of *Scriptura sola*.”<sup>202</sup> Congar criticized Cullmann’s position as leaning excessively on the concept of a canon without taking sufficient account of the history surrounding the lengthy event. My personal opinion on Cullmann’s statement is that it seems to award a supreme position to anything in writing; the fact that Cullmann made that statement does not make it correct. In order for his position to have some gravitas, Cullmann needed to buttress that statement with patristic support, since he purported to speak for the Fathers. Congar agreed with this through noting Cullmann’s lack of historical perspective.<sup>203</sup> Congar cited three points missed by Cullmann: 1) the issue of apostolicity for the writings of the New Testament depended not only on the ability to trace the source of a document back to an apostle, it also depended on the reception of that document as such by the Christian faithful; 2) “Scripture has never been considered ‘sufficient’, and consequently exclusive;” the faith transmitted by the apostles has never been considered to be completely encompassed within the New Testament; 3) the faith handed down “is said to be maintained by the succession of presbyters or bishops.”<sup>204</sup> Congar claimed full support of the Church Fathers in his statements, which he doubted about the statements of Cullmann.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> T&t, 39.

<sup>202</sup> T&t, 40.

<sup>203</sup> T&t, 40.

<sup>204</sup> T&t, 40-2.

<sup>205</sup> T&t, 42.

In the Patristic era, tradition began to be associated with oral tradition, and several of the Church Fathers wrote about orally transmitted actions or beliefs which were widely believed or practiced, such as “infant baptism” (Origen), “the keeping of Sunday” (St. Dionysius of Alexandria), “the celebration, as liturgical feasts, of the Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost” (St. Augustine), and “the institution of the sacraments, the adoration of the Cross” (St. John Damascene), among others. Some of these constitute part of the liturgy, while others are part of Christian practices which endure to this day. In his entire argument, Congar maintained Christ as the central point around which all others revolve. He also retained revelation in its central place, much in accord with Protestant belief, denying in the process that Tradition could be considered a separate conduit for divine revelation.<sup>206</sup> Although a very Catholic position, later confirmed in the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation from Vatican II, this could be a good starting point for ecumenical discussions on the subject of Tradition and *sola scriptura*.

Regarding the view toward oral tradition in the Middle Ages, Congar stated “that many things, *plura, multa*, were held and observed by the Church, which were not to be found in Scripture; 2 Thess 2.14 (15); I Cor 11.34; Acts 16.4 were cited as examples.”<sup>207</sup> The Church in the Middle Ages had grown in authority, but it had lost its appreciation for its history: “In Congar’s books, lectures and essays it is always the same event that constitutes the ‘turning point,’ the most important turning point that Catholic ecclesiology has ever known: the Gregorian Reform. For him, this determined everything that

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<sup>206</sup> T&t, 64.

<sup>207</sup> T&t, 87.



followed.”<sup>208</sup> This reform set the path for the rest of the Middle Ages, with power having shifted in Europe from the political rulers to the pope.

Congar discussed the problem of tradition in the Middle Ages, noting that during that period, people seemed uninterested in history in the manner in which we know it today, rather, he said they “naively” accepted statements from those they felt had the authority to make such statements. The church’s authority tended to be accepted without question.<sup>209</sup> During this era, the authority in the Church had been ceded to the Magisterium, since the widely spread local churches had few centers of learning to lean on for information, and there were few, even in the clergy, who were well educated. Within the Church, writers appeared in many places. As to their interpretation of the Bible, Congar stated that “[m]edieval writers had no difficulty finding everything in Scripture, since their principles of exegesis provided them with the necessary means.”<sup>210</sup> This situation obtained until the thirteenth century, when theological criticism began to take hold, led by Thomas Aquinas and the great theologians of his age, such as Scotus, Ockham, Henry of Ghent, followed by Wycliffe and Hus.<sup>211</sup> By the fifteenth century, “a gradual moving away from the traditional position began: from holding that all the truths of faith are connected in some way with Scripture, to a position the newness of which is characterized by the facility with which it admits the existence of truths of faith not found in Scripture.”<sup>212</sup> Here is where the concept appeared to go off course. As Congar pointed out, the battle at that point took the form of Scripture versus the Church, as begun by

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<sup>208</sup> Émile of Taizé, *Faithful*, 3.

<sup>209</sup> T&t, 89.

<sup>210</sup> T&t, 113. The “principles of exegesis” can be explained through the citation in note 193.

<sup>211</sup> T&t, 94.

<sup>212</sup> T&t, 98.

Henry of Ghent, and it was built upon the unfortunate concept of Augustine’s “Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental”: “For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church.”<sup>213</sup> The issue that this concept stirred up was the question of who represents “the authority of the Catholic Church”? One need not delve deeply to see where this took the theology of the time, ultimately leading to the Reformation.

In the east, the Orthodox Church did not face the same challenges. As Congar saw it, “Orthodoxy took on the guise of a victory over error, and of a conservation of tradition; it is the Church of the Fathers, the Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils,” adding later that “the Orthodox Church not only remained the Church of tradition and the Fathers, but maintained this mystical, absolute attachment to these references, and in so doing projected an image of immobility. This was to some extent a fiction.”<sup>214</sup> He modified that constricted view shortly thereafter, noting that “in modern times – indeed, in our own day – Orthodox theologians, the Russians especially, have presented a much more comprehensive and dynamic conception of tradition.”<sup>215</sup> He especially appreciated the concept that “Tradition can only be understood as the work of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church in the plenitude of truth.”<sup>216</sup> Interestingly, Congar did not deal extensively with the Eastern Churches, with the exception of his book written for the nine

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<sup>213</sup> T&t, 98-9. Augustine, Chap. 5; quote taken from Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4. Congar quoted the Latin, “*Ego evangelio non crederem nisi me cahtolicae Ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas.*”

<sup>214</sup> T&t, 103.

<sup>215</sup> T&t, 104. In *After Nine Hundred Years*, Congar took to task the Western Church of the time of the Crusades for exhibiting an attitude that placed their own traditions and all associated with them to be the genuine tradition passed on by the apostles, simultaneously ignoring all associated with the Eastern Church, Yves Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years: The Background Between the Schism of the Eastern and Western Churches* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1959), 26. (900Y).

<sup>216</sup> T&t, 105.

hundredth year anniversary of the schism in spite of the fact that he implied above that the East provides important insights into a rich understanding of Tradition both as represented in Patristic literature and in its interpretation in present times. He also granted that the East followed tradition faithfully in the Middle Ages, when the West took the road in the direction of Scholasticism, which resulted in deep questioning of all that constituted tradition.<sup>217</sup> Congar stated that “the East remained foreign to the three influences that shaped modern Catholicism.”<sup>218</sup> Ultimately, per Congar, this led to a perceived need in the West to define the components of its faith, while the East felt no such need, leading to further difficulties in the method of discussion between the two churches.<sup>219</sup>

The later Middle Ages, however, had endeavored to slip the reins which the increasing *auctoritas* of the Church imposed. Numerous movements put forth an effort to restrain the Roman centralizing tendencies, attempting to get “*less of the Church and more of Christ.*”<sup>220</sup> Luther joined in the row over Scripture’s place. Obviously, he favored Scripture strongly, ultimately “push[ing] the sovereignty of Scripture to an extreme, to make it *exclusive.*”<sup>221</sup> Building on that base, he began to root out any Catholic practice that he could not find directly in Scripture.<sup>222</sup> Taking Luther’s position on Scripture further, other Reformers chimed in, ultimately structuring their arguments to set Scripture over against the Church, leading them to claim that they would obey God, in the form of Scripture, rather than human authorities, in the form of the Church.<sup>223</sup> These opinions

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<sup>217</sup> 900Y, 40.

<sup>218</sup> 900Y, 41. Those three influences were Scholasticism, the Reformation, and rationalism.

<sup>219</sup> 900Y, 42-3.

<sup>220</sup> T&t, 138.

<sup>221</sup> T&t, 140

<sup>222</sup> T&t, 141.

<sup>223</sup> T&t, 142.

remain in effect in today's Protestant communions; Paul Althaus defended Luther's concept that Scripture held supreme authority over all facets of the faith, stating that "[n]either the church . . . nor any of her representatives, not even the councils, have the authority to establish new articles of faith or new commandments."<sup>224</sup> The entire Reformation movement built on Luther's placement of God at the pinnacle, the sovereign God. Much Protestant argument reverts to that principle to explain any number of things. The Lutheran position on tradition also sank an attempt by Philip Melanchthon to come to agreement with the Orthodox Churches "because of the insufficient value he put on tradition."<sup>225</sup>

Many of the Catholic responses to the Protestant doctrinal challenges initially took the form of defensive measures and preemptive strikes. Unfortunately, emotions impinged on the thinking of both sides of the debate, leaving solid reasoning in the background at times. The Counter-Reformation began rather slowly in response to the early Reformers, but it came to its apex at the Council of Trent, from 1545 to 1563. Christopher Ruddy stated that "Trent, according to Jedin, aimed to 'strengthen those who had remained faithful to the Catholic Church and to clarify and reaffirm their faith, not win the Protestants over.'"<sup>226</sup> The concept of moderation and discussion had expired by 1545.

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<sup>224</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 5-6.

<sup>225</sup> T&t, 144.

<sup>226</sup> Christopher Ruddy, "Ressourcement and the Enduring Legacy of Post-Tridentine Theology," in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 200.

## Tradition as Viewed by Protestants

The main issue with Trent that still causes both Catholics and Protestants a high level of anxiety is the wording of Trent in their document on Scripture and Tradition, which, in its first submission, presented a concept which placed “the unwritten traditions and Scripture as two independent and parallel sources of the rule of truth which is the Gospel.”<sup>227</sup> The initial schema presented to the council contained “[t]he expression *partim ... partim*,”<sup>228</sup> which indicates that scriptural truth is to be seen as coming partially from Scripture and partially from unwritten tradition. However (this quote is very important and requires its full length here):

the final text of the decree did not include the *partim ... partim ...*, and presented the Gospel, promulgated by Jesus Christ and entrusted by him to the apostles, no longer as the *regula*, but as the *fons* of all saving truth and moral conduct; it did not say of this Gospel that it is contained both in the written books *and* in the (apostolic) traditions transmitted from hand to hand.

The correction is an important one: *partim ... partim ...* was replaced by the conjunction *et. ...* Faced with two opposing currents of opinion among the Catholic theologians – the one, perhaps the stronger, in favour of *partim ... partim ...*; the other in favour of the sufficiency of Scripture – the council, seeing no adequate solution and ever careful to express itself only where Catholics were in agreement, contented itself with affirming, by juxtaposition and with no precision of their interrelation, the two *forms* under which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is communicated, in its plenitude and purity, as the source of all saving

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<sup>227</sup> T&t, 164.

<sup>228</sup> T&t, 164.

truth and of Christian discipline. This is also why the council insisted that the two forms should be received *pari pietatis affectu*.

It is possible that *partim ... partim ...* really expressed the thought of the Council Fathers, for they were concerned to reaffirm that truths existed which had not been formulated in Scripture. At this time when an exclusively biblicist tendency was threatening the integrity of the principles according to which the Church had always lived, quite a few Catholic apologists presented Scripture and tradition as two complementary principles. It is, moreover, certain that the controversialists who wrote on the subject after the council generally did so along the lines of the *partim ... partim ...* direction. This was so right into the nineteenth century, and indeed up to our own day. ... However, it is a fact that the Tridentine decree itself avoided such a presentation. Doubtless the Fathers of Trent did not see, in the option they took, what we can see; that option was, by God's grace, to affirm the existence not of two parallel and partial sources, but of two ways or forms by which the one source of the Gospel is communicated to us in all its purity and plenitude, from Jesus Christ onwards. It seems right to say that we may think ... that the *totality of faith*, or, if preferred, the truth of the spiritual or religious relationship as a whole, is communicated to us under each of two forms, each according to its own modalities, and that the plenitude of this communication calls for nothing less than this duality.<sup>229</sup>

This statement forms the core of Congar's argument, in other words, that the entirety of the faith that was handed down from the apostles comes to us in various forms, including

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<sup>229</sup> T&t, 165-6.

the Scriptures and traditions which can be traced back to the origin of the church. Within that complex of Tradition, Congar inevitably yielded all to Scripture; what he most explicitly disavowed was that there are two sources of the content of the faith: “There were, therefore, grounds for believing – and fearing – that the council might proceed to present the unwritten traditions and Scripture as two independent and parallel sources of the rule of truth which is the Gospel.”<sup>230</sup> With this language (“and fearing”), Congar cannot be perceived as supporting a two source theory.

The main point which Congar wanted to make was that the Council shied away from the *partim ... partim ...* wording, possibly on the recommendation of Angelo Agostino Bonucci, who was the General of the Servites.<sup>231</sup> The intention of the Council Fathers in the end *was* to move away from absolutely defining a certain two source theory, in spite of the thinking of a number of the Fathers. When the council declined to define two sources of revelation, could this possibly show the Holy Spirit in action, refusing to pin the church down to a difficult, at best, formulation of the doctrine?

Regarding the concept of Scripture and tradition, Heiko Oberman confirmed that “[t]here is in our time a convergence of scholarly opinion that Scripture and tradition are for the early Church fathers in no sense mutually exclusive: kerygma, Scripture and tradition coincide entirely.”<sup>232</sup> Oberman put forth in his book a theory of tradition, from Protestant eyes. He analyzed in detail how the thought from the thirteenth century led to the Reformation, ending with a concept that he developed, in which he labelled different approaches to Tradition as “Tradition I,” which he called “the single exegetical tradition

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<sup>230</sup> T&t, 164.

<sup>231</sup> T&t, 165.

<sup>232</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 270.

of interpreted scripture,” meaning that there is only one source, revelation; followed by “Tradition II,” as “the two-sources theory which allows for an extra-biblical oral tradition.”<sup>233</sup> He critiqued the Council of Trent, stating that since the later Middle Ages, canon law has assumed the premier position of power within the Catholic Church, and the lawyers have developed the two-source theory, although by the Reformation, “it appears that the scholastic doctors of scripture develop the oral tradition in a more subtle way.”<sup>234</sup> Oberman seemed at this point to be concerned that the theologians were sneaking something into the documents that the rest of the church did not believe. In his argument he stated in a round-about way, however, that “the very foundation of Luther’s theology is the *sola scriptura* principle. We have seen that this principle does not necessarily imply a rejection of the so-called co-inherence of Church and Scripture. It indicates, however, that Luther’s theological enterprise does not move within the context of Tradition II, but in that of Tradition I.”<sup>235</sup> Oberman, in his construction of Tradition I, did not take a strict position on *sola scriptura*; he accepted the writings of the Fathers and of the early councils to add to exegetical knowledge, providing that they subordinated themselves to the Bible. He traced the development of Tradition II to the Scholastic Age; he placed the blame on the exegetes of that age: “[w]hen then finally the two propositions – ‘Holy Scripture implicitly says’ and ‘Holy Scripture silently says’ – are equated, the exegetical concept of Tradition I has fully developed into what we called Tradition II.”<sup>236</sup>

Oberman carefully analyzed the position of J. R. Geiselman, which Congar also used in T&t. Oberman engaged only Geiselman, leaving Congar out of the discussion

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<sup>233</sup> Oberman, *Dawn*, 280.

<sup>234</sup> Oberman, *Dawn*, 281.

<sup>235</sup> Oberman, *Dawn*, 283.

<sup>236</sup> Oberman, *Dawn*, 282.



completely.<sup>237</sup> Oberman rejected Geiselman's contention that Trent actually intended to promote a formula of tradition that would conform to his Tradition I, which he seemed to reserve for Protestants alone. Congar presented some issues that Oberman may have found difficult to refute: 1) the denial that oral tradition could possibly have been successfully handed down for centuries without being written in some form; 2) the fact that a concept of tradition in line with Tradition I may have simply been lost by theologians since Trent; and 3) "It is best to extricate oneself from the far too narrow and rather polemical question of *Scriptura sola*."<sup>238</sup>

Both Mathison and Oberman separated themselves from a strict, fundamentalistic approach to the Bible, with a completely inerrant view. Mathison called this literalistic view "Tradition 0."<sup>239</sup> Mathison also issued a disapproval of modern Roman Catholic interpretations of tradition, claiming that "this view of tradition is a virtual declaration of autonomy on the part of the Roman church, and when it is combined with the doctrine of papal infallibility, it amounts to a Church for whom Scripture and tradition are essentially irrelevant."<sup>240</sup>

On the other hand, D. H. Williams, an Evangelical professor, has written about tradition in a more positive fashion. Williams was very much like Congar when he stated: "if contemporary evangelicalism aims to be doctrinally orthodox and exegetically faithful to Scripture, it cannot do so without recourse to and integration of the foundational tradition of the early church."<sup>241</sup> He believed that "[t]hese are matters that deserve the

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<sup>237</sup> Oberman, *Dawn*, discussed Geiselman, 286-9; Congar discussed the same issues in T&t, 166-9.

<sup>238</sup> T&t, 167-8.

<sup>239</sup> Mathison, *Shape*, 128.

<sup>240</sup> Mathison, *Shape*, 135; the capitalization is original.

<sup>241</sup> D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 18.

Christian believer's time and effort. They are neither purely academic nor intellectual fodder for sustaining the ecumenical agenda. At stake here is what doctrinal faithfulness looks like and how it was initially defined, a critical issue for Christian churches in our post-Christian and postfoundational culture."<sup>242</sup> Williams addressed a concept that may make some of his adherents a bit nervous – doctrinal development: "Development, therefore, is not the introduction of changes but a response to discovering how the deposit of faith should function as a resource for the needs of the present."<sup>243</sup> Williams also discounted the Evangelical conception of biblical inerrancy, citing Frederick Norris: "The Fathers' sense of trustworthy character of Scripture can have them speak about its lack of errors, but they never protect the Bible with the doctrine of inerrancy that was developed in seventeenth-century Protestantism."<sup>244</sup> Williams criticized Protestant theology for changing itself into a tool for battling against Catholicism, rather than performing the task that the early Fathers had done, namely, bringing people closer to Christ. He reasonably brought into his *sola scriptura* discussion the idea that there must be an institution to judge the interpretation of Scripture: "Magisterial reformers such as Luther and Calvin did not think of *sola scriptura* as something that could be properly understood apart from the church or the foundational tradition of the church, even while they were opposing some institutions of the church."<sup>245</sup>

Williams may be one of only a few Protestant theologians who seem to be moving closer to a Catholic understanding of Tradition, but however many there are, these appear to be excellent partners for ecumenical discussions. Williams conceded numerous points

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<sup>242</sup> Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*, 14.

<sup>243</sup> Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*, 35.

<sup>244</sup> Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*, 91.

<sup>245</sup> Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*, 97.

to Catholics in his book, as the above citations indicate, and he did not shy away from confronting Protestant doctrines in the area of Tradition. While he did not bring Congar into his discussion, he certainly seemed to understand the great ecclesiologist's concepts.

### **Conclusion**

Yves Congar lived for his church; he expressed his three loves as: “Church, Laity, Priesthood.”<sup>246</sup> Yet, Congar also had another passion, ecumenism; he said that his “vocation has always been at one and the same time and for the same reason priestly and religious, Dominican and thomistic, ecumenical and ecclesiological.”<sup>247</sup> As was seen in his life, Congar spent a great deal of time concerning himself with ecumenism and the reunification of the splintered Christian churches. In doing this, he focused on several items; the one which will occupy center stage in this work is his concept of Tradition, because I believe that Congar went to great lengths to make the concept of Catholic Tradition understandable and palatable for our Christian brethren, with a willingness to listen to his discussion partners. He remained faithful to the Catholic concept of Tradition, although he did his utmost at all levels and in many venues to bring the thinking of the Catholic Church to align more closely with the concept that he felt offered the best route to reconciliation for Roman Catholicism with Christian churches. One of his most important discussions was taken up in *Tradition and Traditions*, in his discussion of the Council of Trent's document on Scripture and Tradition, which many Protestant theologians have found particularly difficult. In this chapter, Congar's argument, that the originally presented wording which emphasized two sources of

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<sup>246</sup> Yves Congar, *This Church that I Love*, trans. Lucien Delafuente (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1969), 7. (TC).

<sup>247</sup> DBC, 5.

revelation but was not taken ultimately left in the document as promulgated, was presented along with some Protestant reaction to both his argument and the concept in general; these will be the basis for the discussions in this dissertation. One issue which will be investigated later in this work is the continuing focus of Protestant theologians on the original wording and the treatment of the issue at Trent.

## Chapter Two: The Magisterium, the Curia, and Tradition

Chapter Two will concern itself with the Magisterium and the curial powers in Rome, and their development over time, along with the impact of those ecclesial authorities on Congar's work, particularly the doctrine regarding the source of revelation, which includes the concept of Tradition. The Magisterium and the Curia have impacted the doctrine of the source of revelation, which is the reason for the examination of the source of magisterial and curial power. We will investigate how power in the Church grew to become so concentrated in the bureaucrats surrounding the pope; the concentration of power led to the general attitude of the bureaucrats themselves to their positions and work. That attitude would affect how doctrinal decisions came to be made, including some of those involving Congar. The major point of this work, Tradition as it is looked upon by Congar, will be taken up; having determined how so much power ended up in the Roman bureaucracy, we will examine how the Church, and the Curia, has treated Tradition through history considering especially Congar's views of Tradition and tradition. The impact of the Reformation on the doctrine of the source of revelation will be taken into account, since this doctrine remains a significant point of contention in ecumenical dialogue. The treatment of Tradition during and after Vatican II will be taken up in a later chapter. As a caution, it must be remembered that much of the information in this chapter comes from Congar. His views of the Magisterium may show occasional negative perspectives, which stem from his early confrontations with the Magisterium and magisterial officials. These views softened after Vatican II, but the early bitterness remained in place, if possibly only as an echo of the strident statements from his *Journal of a Theologian*.

## Background

Yves Congar believed that, “[t]he entire development of faith is linked to Revelation, which is transmitted, proposed, conserved, and explained by the living Apostolic preaching in the Church.”<sup>1</sup> Explaining the centrality of this concept, he stated that, “[t]he object of positive theology then is the knowledge of what the Church teaches and delivers to our faith; which is practically the same as saying that the object is *tradition*, in the sense which recent studies have restored this term.”<sup>2</sup> This is the tradition which occupied Congar, and this illustrates his own definition of the concept, although this was not the only definition he applied, as we shall see.

As noted in Chapter One, Congar held history in very high regard: “I believe that everything can be approached historically.”<sup>3</sup> He was convinced that since Christianity is a historical religion, all Christian theology is historically based, which must be taken into account in all consideration of the Christian faith. This historical leaning brought him to delve into the causes and effects of the key events that shaped theological thought in his specialties.

As Andrew Meszaros put it, “Congar’s exploration of history is guided by his interest in how the historical discipline modifies the practice of theology.”<sup>4</sup> Congar recognized that history significantly impacted theology in many ways; to truly understand, rather than simply know, theology, one must appreciate the sources of theological thinking, as well as the influence of politics and culture on that thought. The

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<sup>1</sup> Yves Congar, *A History of Theology*, trans. Hunter Guthrie (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 228. (HT)

<sup>2</sup> HT, 230.

<sup>3</sup> JP, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Meszaros, *The Prophetic Church: History and Development in John Henry Newman and Yves Congar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 129.

Son of God was a historical person, and God’s choice of time in history impacted the writings we treasure in the Holy Scriptures. In part, this appreciation for the “modernistic” approach to biblical exegesis led Congar into difficulties with the Roman authorities who rejected historical criticism. Congar held that learning the full kerygma of the early church required a full study of the prevailing historical situations which surrounded the early exegetical works of the Church Fathers; only by careful study could one appreciate the fullness of the kerygma, which included the Tradition that accompanied it.<sup>5</sup> Meszaros explained the process by which historical understanding and analysis aids Christian theology in, as he termed it, “the larger task of distilling the absolute from that which is relative in the Church’s teaching.”<sup>6</sup> Congar valued the benefits that the expansion of theological knowledge brought to the study of Scripture, but he was keenly aware that certain theological insights may possess the coloration of their historical era, which may encroach on the results which that era obtained.

Meszaros quoted from the third volume of Congar’s, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, which indicated what damage a lack of historical sensitivity can do: “Ecumenism consists to a very great extent of repairing the damage that has been done in the past. If this task is to be done properly, a knowledge of the history of the period is incomparably useful.”<sup>7</sup> Congar saw doctrine as not completely unchangeable, but rather, as impacted by history. Meszaros gave his own evaluation: “To understand Congar’s theory of development and history’s role in it, it is helpful to view history as that which both *conditions* doctrine and that which *propels* doctrinal change. In other words, history not only conditions doctrine,

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<sup>5</sup> Meszaros, *Prophetic*, 129.

<sup>6</sup> Meszaros, *Prophetic*, 130.

<sup>7</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith, vol. 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1983 (1979)), 205. (HS3)

but is also a real cause of doctrinal *development*, or change of the already conditioned teaching.”<sup>8</sup>

Congar studied the means by which history impacted Christian doctrine; Meszaros distilled Congar’s ideas, saying that: “[d]octrinal development, for Congar, is the process whereby what is implicit in the gospels is made explicit by means of four motors: (1) theological reflection, (2) living a Christian life of grace, (3) opposition or heresy, and (4) external historical pressure and movements.”<sup>9</sup> These all prod Christians to better explain, expand upon, refine, or reword their doctrines to make them more meaningful to the church. Since the very beginning, doctrine went through these processes, sometimes in high pressure environments of heresy or schism. Without these processes, doctrine would not have advanced, and as history moved forward, doctrine would have ultimately lost intellectual contact with the surrounding world. Meszaros’s critique seemed to ignore the crucible in which Congar’s thought formed; Congar had been under intense scrutiny by the Roman hierarchy for nearly two decades. Congar’s thinking changed after he began his work with the Council’s Theological Preparatory Commission as he realized that the shadow under which he had worked for so long had been lifted through his appointment as *peritus* to that exalted committee. Congar quickly came to understand the significance and position in which he suddenly found himself; he had just emerged from the shroud of his censoring and exile by Rome, now finding himself in meetings with the very people who had sent him into exile. I believe that in order to exert influence within those committees, he, of necessity, modified his approach to the problems which former antagonists of his posed. His writing gradually lost the

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<sup>8</sup> Meszaros, *Prophetic*, 164.

<sup>9</sup> Meszaros, *Prophetic*, 183.



sharp edge that one could see in his journal and writings since his troubles began, as he sought a path on which his ideas might find acceptance among his former opponents. Congar, through working with the Curia and their staff, began to appreciate, or at least to see, some of the views which the conservative curial officials held. Meszaros saw this as Congar's "anxious effort to perceive the homogeneity between the Church's contemporary teaching and what preceded it."<sup>10</sup> I prefer to see it as Congar's adjustment of his approach to pave the way for a cooperative effort in the structuring of the documents of Vatican II.

Thomas O'Meara certainly understood Congar's initial perplexity at the council, especially at the beginning of his work:

He arrived at the council wounded by years of attacks on his view of the church, a figure still under suspicion. Despite the opposition of theologians like Sebastian Tromp and the pessimism of Henri de Lubac, he sensed that the council was producing its own dynamic, its own force for the Church, 'a pastoral climate, a climate of freedom and dialogue and openness.'<sup>11</sup>

Congar realized that the council would follow along the path John XXIII had intended it to take, but that path was not the one the Curia wanted. The Roman hierarchy generally saw no need for a council; for them, all had been solved with the declaration of papal infallibility in 1870.

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<sup>10</sup> Meszaros, *Prophetic*, 194

<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. O'Meara and Paul Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times: French Dominicans in the Twentieth Century* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2013), 48-9.

## The Magisterium and the Curia

The Magisterium caused Congar problems long before the Second Vatican Council. His interest in ecumenism caused suspicions to arise in a very cautious Rome rather early in his life. His first book, *Chrétiens Désunis*, came under scrutiny by the curial authorities in 1939.<sup>12</sup> The initial curial questioning did not stop him from writing, and in 1950 he published one of his major works, *True and False Reform in the Church*, which naturally also caught the attention of Rome. This was followed in 1953 by another major effort that garnered unwanted attention in Rome, *Lay People in the Church*. As the volume of his work mounted, his curial antagonists found more and more to critique. The curial inquiries increased from the time of his return from the Second World War, finally culminating in February, 1954, with his removal from Le Saulchoir and his exile to Jerusalem.

### Definitions

**The Magisterium.** Before discussing the power of the Magisterium and the Curia, we must understand what these terms mean.<sup>13</sup> The definition of the term, “magisterium,” changed over the centuries since it was first coined. Congar wrote in essays which a current expert on authority in the Roman Catholic Church, Richard Gaillardetz, called “classic,”<sup>14</sup> that “the word *magisterium*, ... has not been, indeed has fallen far short of being the only expression of the reality which we now describe in that

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<sup>12</sup> DBC, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Per the “*Theological Studies Spelling and Abbreviations Guide*” of 2017, the words “magisterium” and “curia” will be capitalized when referring to the groups of people normally referred to as *the* Magisterium and *the* Curia. This does not apply to quotations.

<sup>14</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 149n1, Chap 4.

term.”<sup>15</sup> The meaning of magisterium changed, showing the shifting understanding of how the church used the word regarding such things as the offices of those considered endowed with magisterium, the breadth of the tasks of those possessing magisterium, and the degree of power assigned to the Magisterium. Congar’s discussion of the evolution of the definition of the word “magisterium” showed that, over time, the term became inextricably intertwined with the concept of the power assigned to *the* Magisterium. The general reception of these definitions indicated the acceptance of that meaning by those concerned who may be affected by the concepts included in the definition.

First, Congar clarified the source of the word magisterium: “[*m*]agister comes from *magis* (*major*), as *minister*, which is often coupled with it, comes from *minor*. Antiquity and the Middle Ages knew innumerable applications of the title *magister*, which described the principal or leader in all sorts of activities and areas.”<sup>16</sup> Congar indicated that, “[*m*]agisterium, the dignity or office of a *magister*, served to describe, first, all leadership positions: ‘munus, officium praefecti, rectoris, moderatoris.’”<sup>17</sup> The concept existed early in the church, and it gained a Christian usage as “a general sense of authority, with special references to teaching, until, from the official and even hierarchical function of teaching, the word comes to define the body of priests with authority to exercise this function, *the* magisterium. But this meaning, now current, seems not to have appeared before the nineteenth century.”<sup>18</sup> From this, it is important to understand that in reading source material on the Magisterium, the time frame of the

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<sup>15</sup> Yves Congar, “A Semantic History of the Term ‘Magisterium’” in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 3: The Magisterium and Morality*, Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, eds., 297-313 (New York: Paulist, 1982), 297.

<sup>16</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 298.

<sup>17</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 298; the Latin words at the end of the quote are cited to be from a Latin thesaurus (310n1); no italics in the original.

<sup>18</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 298.

material must be known as well as the meaning that was assigned to the word *magisterium* at the time.

Congar traced the meanings of the word through several Church Fathers, notably Augustine. “Magisterium means first of all the position and authority of the man in charge, *magister*. It kept this sense for quite a long time. Applied to Christ or to priests of the Church, *magisterium* means the ‘power’ conferred on them so that they may be ministers of salvation.”<sup>19</sup> This was the beginning of the application of the *concept* of the power of individuals to the word *magisterium*.<sup>20</sup> However, Gaillardetz disagreed when looking for the sources and residences of power in the first few centuries of the church’s existence, stating that “[t]he fact is that nowhere do we find a comprehensive and systematic account of ecclesial authority in early church writings.”<sup>21</sup>

Congar reviewed in detail the history of the development of the meaning assigned to the word *magisterium* by popes through the centuries, stating that “[i]t was natural that, having first described a position of authority or command, *magisterium* should have been applied to a teacher’s role. Texts with this meaning abound.”<sup>22</sup> An important example of these texts include Maximus of Turin (d. 465) declaring that Peter was given the keys to power, and as successor to Peter, the pope inherits this key. This concept has, over time, been used to support the infallibility of the Magisterium.

In the early Middle Ages, the term still meant that *magisterium* was “the dignity and responsibility of the master,” who was the person in charge of an organization.<sup>23</sup> By

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<sup>19</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 299.

<sup>20</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 299.

<sup>21</sup> Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, 131.

<sup>22</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 301-2. Congar cited texts from Augustine, Celestine I, St. Maximus of Turin, St. Peter Chrysologus, St. Gregory, Fulbert of Chartres, Peter Damian, and Abelard.

<sup>23</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 300.

this time, the definition had not evolved far beyond the concept of Augustine. Congar selected Pope Alexander II, the immediate predecessor to Gregory VII, as an example of how change to the meaning of magisterium crept in; Alexander defined magisterium to include his own power “to judge and decide” but extended the meaning to include his power, as given to his legate, notably transferring authority to another for the first time.<sup>24</sup>

Congar noted that Thomas Aquinas segregated the two functions of administrator, who has the duties of a “prelate,” based on the authority of the office, from the functions of a learned teacher in theological areas.<sup>25</sup> Aquinas, by separating the functions indicated by the word into the two areas of administration and teaching, helped to prepare the ground for the addition of other modifications of meaning under the classifications he established. Once the word was employed to mean the function of teaching, it again expanded to include the matter being taught, constituting another step in the evolution of the word magisterium to its present meaning and away from being limited to only mean the head of the organization.<sup>26</sup>

By the end of the thirteenth century, not only did the authority of the Magisterium increase, it at least touched the greatest possible level of authority, that of infallibility.<sup>27</sup> Now, Congar noted that, “[i]f the Church is ruled by the *magisterium* of the Holy Ghost, it enjoys the Spirit’s *instinctus*. The problem is to know who is the person, who is the subject of this charisma? Tradition was very definite; it is the *Ecclesia* itself.”<sup>28</sup> Congar

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<sup>24</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 300.

<sup>25</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 303.

<sup>26</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 304.

<sup>27</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 305.

<sup>28</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 305.

thereby brought the church into the discussion, with Tradition being infused with the influence of the Holy Spirit.

At another inflection point in the development of the meaning of the term magisterium, Congar observed that, “[a]t the beginning and toward the middle of the eighteenth century a distinction was made between the instructing Church and the instructed Church, and the first was said to possess active infallibility and the second passive infallibility.”<sup>29</sup> Here, the laity assumed the position of “the instructed Church.” With the “passive infallibility” of “the instructed Church,” Congar pointed out that “the instructed Church” possessed only an inactive role, consigned to following the guidance of their leaders at all times. This assignment of the roles of the teacher and the people being taught referred to the roles of the clergy and the laity. Given the time period to which the quote referred, one could think of the example of the tridentine Mass, which took place along the same lines, with the priest performing rituals (and instructing), with the people in the pews simply attending (and being instructed), having no participation in the celebration of the Mass; this view of the Catholic Church was to change with Vatican II, due in great part to Congar’s contribution. Congar cautioned, however, that “[t]his [the instructing Church] is still not exactly what we now call ‘the magisterium,’ that is, a definite hierarchical body; it is a question of the function of teaching of ‘the Church’ (for human beings!), exercised with an authority which represents God before men, but we are very close to that meaning.”<sup>30</sup>

Congar stated that “[t]he expression ‘the magisterium’ in its current usage was introduced by eighteenth-century theology but especially German canonists at the

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<sup>29</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 306.

<sup>30</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 306.

beginning of the nineteenth century.”<sup>31</sup> A new way of looking at the jurisdictional authority of the upper level of clergy in Rome was brought out by F. Walter, who in 1823 introduced a “tripartite distinction of the ‘powers’ in the Church into a ‘potestas magisterii’ beside a ‘potestas ministerii sive ordinis’ and a ‘potestas iurisdictionis sive ecclesiastica in specie.’”<sup>32</sup> With that, Congar brought the definition of magisterium almost to the usage of the present time. The last stage in the development of the meaning to the one we commonly use was provided by Pope Pius IX, a promoter of power within the Vatican.

Preparing for the final step in fully awarding the Magisterium the highest power within the Roman Catholic Church, Congar quoted Pius IX’s encyclical *Nostis et nobiscum*, regarding the authority of the Holy See: “One cannot rebel against the Catholic faith without at the same time rejecting the authority of the Roman Church, in which dwells *fidei irreformabile magisterium*.”<sup>33</sup> In that encyclical, Pius also noted that the final word on interpretation of Scripture resides in the Catholic Church:

no man, relying on his own wisdom, is able to claim the privilege of rashly twisting the scriptures to his own meaning in opposition to the meaning which holy mother Church holds and has held. It was the Church alone that Christ commissioned to guard the deposit of the faith and to decide the true meaning and interpretation of the divine pronouncements.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 306.

<sup>32</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 306. The Latin was not italicized in the original.

<sup>33</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 307. The quote is from Pope Pius IX, *Nostis et Nobiscum*, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9nostis.htm>, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Pope Pius IX, *Nostis et Nobiscum*, 14.

Pius IX first employed the term, “magisterium Ecclesiae,” the Magisterium of the Church when he wrote to the archbishop of Munich.<sup>35</sup> The usage proliferated; and by Vatican I, it found itself scattered through several of the schemata presented to the Council Fathers. Congar noted that the fullest and most defining usage of the word magisterium occurred in Chapter IV of *Pastor aeternus*, titled, “On the Infallible Teaching of the Roman Pontiff,” in which the council used the word twice, yielding two different meanings in the text, those of the formal office of the Magisterium and the exercise of teaching.<sup>36</sup>

Congar noted that Pius XII gave the current meaning to the term magisterium when he defined it as “at once the function or the hierarchical activity of teaching and the body of pastors who are responsible for it.”<sup>37</sup> Pius XII used the term several times in speeches and documents, confirming its meaning as given in the above quote. Congar mentioned that the Second Vatican Council used the term magisterium in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*): “the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant.”<sup>38</sup> Looking back at the definition as used by Augustine, the meaning has shifted away from what was shown above as “the position and authority of the man in charge,” to the *function* of the person in charge, namely the

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<sup>35</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 307. The specific document was a letter to the archbishop of Munich titled *Tuas libenter*, “criticizing the theological congress presided over by Döllinger, of December 21, 1863.”

<sup>36</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 308. The title of Chapter IV in Latin is “De Romani Pontificis Infallibili Magisterio.” See <http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/constitutio-dogmatica-pastor-aeternus-18-iulii-1870.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Congar, “Semantic,” 308.

<sup>38</sup> Congar’s quote is from “Semantic,” 308; the quote from *Dei Verbum* is from paragraph 10.



teaching of the hierarchy, as well as an expansion of the object of the definition, “the man in charge,” to include “the body of pastors who are responsible” for that teaching.

During the period since the modern usage began, which Congar defined as the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, the magisterium of “the man in charge” received the assignment of performing two tasks: “preserving and defining” doctrine of which “the second has been privileged.”<sup>39</sup> The word also described two situations: “The distinction between ordinary magisterium and extraordinary magisterium is classical. Vatican I introduced the category of ‘ordinary and universal magisterium’ ... already used by Pius IX to indicate the magisterium of the scattered college of bishops.”<sup>40</sup>

Richard Gaillardetz, who has taken church authority as a major area of study, defined the:

three distinct modes in which the Church’s teaching office exercises its authority:

- (1) *the ordinary magisterium* refers to the more common exercises of the pope and bishops’ teaching authority when they teach either individually or in groups;
- (2) *the extraordinary magisterium* refers to the more rare exercise of the Church’s teaching office in the form of a solemn definition by either the pope or an ecumenical council;
- (3) *the ordinary universal magisterium* refers to the common judgment of the whole college of bishops (in union with the bishop of Rome) that a teaching is to be held as definitive.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Yves Congar, “A Brief History of the Forms of the Magisterium and its Relations with Scholars,” in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 3: The Magisterium and Morality*, Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, eds., 314-331 (New York: Paulist, 1982), 323-4.

<sup>40</sup> Congar, “Forms,” 324.

<sup>41</sup> Gaillardetz, *What Authority?* 75. For further information, see chapters 6 and 7 of Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*.

Gaillardetz elaborated: (1) *the ordinary magisterium* may be exercised by an individual bishop, by groupings of bishops, or by the Bishop of Rome; all these are non-infallible; (2) the extraordinary magisterium may be exercised by the College of Bishops issuing a solemn definition while gathered in an Ecumenical Council, or by the Bishop of Rome (as Head of the College of Bishops) issuing a solemn definition *Ex Cathedra*; both of these are infallible; (3) the ordinary universal magisterium may be exercised by the whole college of bishops dispersed throughout the world when united in judgment that a teaching is to be held as definitive; this is infallible.<sup>42</sup> Gaillardetz noted in *Teaching with Authority* that “[i]n the Roman Catholic Church, the bishops have the principal responsibility for authoritatively teaching Catholic doctrine.”<sup>43</sup> Gaillardetz’s main concern in this book was the Magisterium as it exists now, with the current understanding of the Magisterium, with the teaching function clearly shifted to the bishops.

Congar believed that the church, including the Magisterium, needed reform. He listed the following areas he saw in need of reform: “the style of ... preaching ... the formation of the clergy, in the external forms of worship, in the public face of parishes, and in the way in which the church presents itself publicly (sometimes scandalous, outdated pomposity).”<sup>44</sup> Some of these reforms were addressed at the Second Vatican Council, such as modernizing the styles of preaching and catechesis, the introduction of the vernacular into the liturgies, and a more open approach to the world that has been undertaken by the popes since the council.

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<sup>42</sup> Gaillardetz, *What Authority*, 75. The terminology on the modes and examples in the next sentence are taken directly from the chart on p. 75.

<sup>43</sup> Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, 31.

<sup>44</sup> VFR, 51.

Congar could not have foreseen the situation in the Catholic Church of today when he stated: “It’s not a question of reforming abuses – there are hardly any to reform. It is rather a question of renewing structures.”<sup>45</sup> One can only wonder how he would respond to the abuses which have piled up in recent decades, ranging from monetary mismanagement to the pervasive sex scandals that continue to plague the Roman Catholic Church today.

**The Roman Curia.** John Allen, who covered the Vatican for sixteen years as a reporter for the *National Catholic Reporter*, offered his definition of the Roman Curia: the Roman Curia “is the bureaucratic instrument through which the Pope administers the Holy See and carries out the function both of supreme governor of the Catholic Church and as a sovereign diplomatic actor.”<sup>46</sup> Bernard Lambert stated that the Curia developed after the Great Schism of 1054.<sup>47</sup> Lambert said that “[i]t dates ... from the time when the papacy was at Avignon,” although it was significantly enlarged in the late sixteenth century by Sixtus V.<sup>48</sup> In relative terms, the Curia is not an ancient institution, formed in its later structure after the dawn of the Reformation. John O’Malley confirmed this when, in an article in *America*, he commented that, “[i]n the Council of Trent, the Roman Curia played no role, which is altogether different from its major role in both the First Vatican Council and Vatican II.”<sup>49</sup> As with the Magisterium, it is important to know the historical

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<sup>45</sup> VFR, 52.

<sup>46</sup> John L. Allen, Jr., *All the Pope’s Men: The Inside Story of how the Vatican Really Thinks* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 28.

<sup>47</sup> Bernard Lambert, *Ecumenism: Theology and History*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 439.

<sup>48</sup> Lambert, *Ecumenism*, 439.

<sup>49</sup> John W. O’Malley, “Who Governs the Church? History Chews that Authority in the Church has Taken Many Forms,” *America*, November, 2020, 42.

period under consideration in order to understand what role the Curia may have played, if any.

Allen listed the current organization of the Curia: “it currently consists of the Secretariat of State, nine congregations, three tribunals, eleven councils, and a complex of offices that administer church affairs ... Examined on a flow chart, the structure of the Roman Curia would seem rather straightforward, with lots of different offices reporting more or less independently to the Pope.”<sup>50</sup> The dicastery, or department, that most concerned Congar was “The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ... traditionally known as *la suprema*, ‘the supreme’ congregation ... [which] retains a kind of gatekeeper role it plays on doctrinal questions. Any document or decision with doctrinal implications, which covers a great deal of what the Roman Curia does, has to be cleared with this congregation.”<sup>51</sup> Allen continued, saying that the congregation “determines the official teaching of the Church and investigates theologians who deviate from it.”<sup>52</sup> It was this congregation which investigated Congar for deviation from church teaching.

Now that we have defined the Magisterium and seen how it functions, we need to examine how the Magisterium has treated tradition.

### **Medieval Growth in Dominance of the Magisterium**

Yves Congar held a special interest in the Middle Ages, stemming, undoubtedly, from his Thomistic education. His time at Le Saulchoir taught him that he needed to have a substantial understanding of the historical contextual situation in which Thomas Aquinas wrote: “I am persuaded that many of the deficiencies in our concrete

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<sup>50</sup> Allen, *Pope's Men*, 28.

<sup>51</sup> Allen, *Pope's Men*, 29.

<sup>52</sup> Allen, *Pope's Men*, 32.

ecclesiology will not be discovered and overcome, many points of deadlock will not be removed, before we have made a thorough historical study of situations, doctrines and patterns of behavior which have become habitual, not only to us but to others also.”<sup>53</sup>

During this same time period, the laity’s position became clarified as the lower segment of the hierocratic pyramid, a concept which developed a bit later in the era. The association of the laity with the temporal powers affected the church as well as the lay people themselves, and this caused the struggle at the top of that pyramid, in both spheres of life, temporal and spiritual, to play out dramatically during the Middle Ages. The princes of the age were often considered by the clergy to be the heads of the laity, placing them below their spiritual, clerical overlords. We continue to see that historical context plays an important part in properly situating our understanding of events.

Congar understood the growth of power in Rome to stem from before the Middle Ages, from as long ago as the second century, attributing that accumulation of power to the fact that Rome was the capital of the empire, logically extending that status to the church.<sup>54</sup> Congar granted that some of the early popes, notably Gregory the Great, conceived of their power as spiritual in character. The mode of religious deliberation changed over this period, as the church that theologians examined changed in character with the onset and development of political power, beginning with the Constantinian victory. With the absence of the temporal Roman power since the capital had been moved to Constantinople, the western church filled the void, gradually gaining power in the sight

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<sup>53</sup> DBC, 44.

<sup>54</sup> Yves Congar, *Entretiens d’Automne*, édition seconde (Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 60ff. The next two paragraphs are taken from this source.

of the people, most especially under the reign of Gregory the Great, at the end of the sixth and beginning of the seventh centuries.

The Middle Ages saw many advances in theology; one is immediately drawn to Thomas Aquinas, but there were also the earlier accomplishments of Bede and Alcuin, Anselm, Ambrose, Peter Lombard, and others who examined the church in depth, seeking to define the characteristics which it must possess to be a true follower in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Historian Will Durant titled his authoritative volume on this period, *The Age of Faith*; he defined the time period as being from A.D. 325 to 1300.<sup>55</sup>

Congar stated that the power of the papacy developed in response to the surrounding world, resisting the efforts of the surrounding potentates to exercise their power over Italy. He saw that situation as the trigger for the Investiture Controversy between Pope Gregory VII and the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV. Congar noted particularly that Henry possessed northern and lower Italy, with only the Papal States preventing Italy from being annexed to the Holy Roman Empire and later to the nascent Italian nation, this situation endured until the Lateran Pact which Pope Pius XI signed with Mussolini in 1929, finally ceding the Papal States to Italy in return for recognition of the Vatican as an independent state. This resistance to Henry IV increased the power Gregory possessed as the primate of the church, although the effect of Gregory's actions was intended to limit Henry's actions in the religious sphere.

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<sup>55</sup> Will Durant, *The Age of Faith: A History of Medieval Civilization – Christian, Islamic, and Judaic – From Constantine to Dante: A.D. 325 – 1300*, *The Story of Civilization: Part IV* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950).

The medieval period witnessed terrible degradation in the morality of the Roman central authorities, as absolute power certainly did corrupt absolutely, resulting in many abuses, including “simony (the buying and selling of spiritual goods and church offices), nepotism, violations of clerical celibacy, and the interference of lay princes in the appointment and installation of bishops and abbots (‘lay investiture’).”<sup>56</sup> With no check on the power of the Roman central authorities, the abuses grew in seriousness. At the same time, the church continued its battle with the temporal powers of the world, the struggle between the spiritual sword and the temporal sword. I want to make clear that the discussion of the Middle Ages is not intended to be reductionist; a period of over eight hundred years cannot be reduced to these statements. The great span of years included in the analysis comes from Congar’s own treatment of the topic, in *Tradition and Traditions*.

The papacy centralized and accumulated power in Rome from the eleventh century to the thirteenth century, organizing itself along the lines of the royal courts of the great European powers of The Holy Roman Empire, and the French and English kingdoms.<sup>57</sup> Congar noted that during this era, all power was thought to be associated with territorial possessions, including spiritual power.<sup>58</sup> Congar cited John XXIII on this topic, calling the accumulated power, “imperial power,” which Congar stated has still not completely disappeared.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Richard McBrien, *Lives of the Popes: The Pontiffs from St. Peter to John Paul II* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 181.

<sup>57</sup> For an extended review of this centralization of power, see Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968).

<sup>58</sup> EA, 62.

<sup>59</sup> EA, 62.

During the Middle Ages, the Curia was created to perform the work of the church, and it gradually assumed much of the ecclesiastical power in Rome, although as noted above in the quote by O'Malley, the Curia did not immediately possess the power it later accumulated.<sup>60</sup>

The Lutheran theologian Jaroslav Pelikan wrote that during this period, “[t]he reality of the church as an institution was more impressive than was the doctrine of the church as an object of faith during the thirteenth century.”<sup>61</sup> Especially in the later Middle Ages, the church as an institution developed, its power also waxing with the increased emphasis on the organizational aspect of church. Speaking of the same era, Rosalind and Christopher Brooke stated that one of the great events of the period 1100 A.D. to 1300 A.D. was “the rise of the papal monarchy.”<sup>62</sup> They described the church as relatively unified in the West until 1000, when a few short-lived heresies arose, including the Waldensian heresy, giving birth to a long-lasting group which Brooke and Brooke called “the oldest surviving Protestant communion.”<sup>63</sup>

In the thirteenth century, Aquinas stepped in, his writings exercising enormous influence over Christendom, at times shifting the thinking of the entire Church. On the subject of the battle of the temporal and spiritual swords wielded respectively by the European monarchs and the pope,<sup>64</sup> Thomas navigated a very Aristotelian middle road, as

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<sup>60</sup> See Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy*, 95-101, for a fuller discussion.

<sup>61</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 3, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 269.

<sup>62</sup> Rosalind and Christopher Brooke, *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages: Western Europe 1000-1300* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 47.

<sup>63</sup> Brooke, *Popular Religion*, 99.

<sup>64</sup> This concept stemmed from the 494 A.D. letter of Pope Gelasius to the Emperor Anastasius I Dicorus.



“[h]e believed the church, under some circumstances, could depose a ruler and free his subjects from allegiance to him, but he also believed that the king was God’s anointed.”<sup>65</sup>

By the end of the thirteenth century, the Holy See possessed enormous power, over not only the church and its operational arms, but also over the political arena in Europe. Possibly the two most powerful temptations and forces in human history, money and power, combined in this situation, expanding the significance of the actions of Rome, as, along with temporal power, the control of episcopal benefices added greed to the common clerical vices of the time.

Once the Investiture Controversy had been settled in Rome's favor (although it remained controversial throughout history), those in Rome failed to exercise control over themselves, extending their locus of power by increasing their control over local dioceses. Congar noted that this tendency occurred only in the West after the split of 1054.<sup>66</sup> Barraclough focused on this when he stated that, “[t]he trouble was that at no time did the popes stop to ask themselves how far they should go in controlling the bishops and the churches of Europe; no pope tried to draw a line between necessary centralization, which was beneficial, and centralization for its own sake, which was detrimental.”<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, the excessive intervention by Rome into local issues led to problems throughout the church, with the populace perplexed as to who held sway, their local priest and bishop, or the Roman bureaucracy. Within the clergy, the reduction of the power that the local bishops wielded in their own dioceses led to the situation that the

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<sup>65</sup> Frederick B. Artz, *The Mind of the Middle Ages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 290.

<sup>66</sup> 900Y, 65.

<sup>67</sup> Barraclough, *Papacy*, 124.

ordinary clergy could always appeal to the pope if there were issues with his bishop.<sup>68</sup>

The result of this intervention into local issues also increased the power of the central authority, as the people began to recognize that the final word inevitably came from Rome, especially in the most important areas of dispute; both spiritual and temporal power accumulated in Rome.

The laity also were affected by the centralization of power that occurred during these centuries. Congar stated that during the late Middle Ages, following the scheme of Hugh of St. Victor, the church was represented in documents as being composed of two groups of people: the first, and more important, group was the clergy, with the pope as their head, while the laity composed the remainder, with the temporal rulers at their head.<sup>69</sup> This classification led to the consideration of the clergy as the wielders of the spiritual sword, leaving the laity associated with the temporal rulers of the land who wielded the temporal sword, so when power moved toward the center of the church, the laity's position within the temporal realm followed, leading to the Protestant disregard of the clergy and placement of power with the laity as the people of God. Congar held that the problem lay with the hierocratic view of the church that developed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a view opposed by William of Ockham, who opposed the concept of a hierarchy, "in the name of a philosophy of freedom and of the individual."<sup>70</sup> The hierocratic view led in the direction of the Reformation: "If Luther calls Ockham his beloved teacher, it is probably because he was the first, in the name of

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<sup>68</sup> Barraclough, *Papacy*, 124.

<sup>69</sup> Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater, rev. ed. (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1965), 14. (LPC). Congar mentioned documents preserved in the *Exultet*-rolls in the British Museum and the Barberini MSS in the Vatican Library. The following sentences on this topic are from the same source.

<sup>70</sup> Yves Congar, *Blessed is the Peace of my Church*, trans. Salvator Atanasio (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1973), 66. (BPC).

the individual person and of Christian freedom to overthrow or contest the whole hierocratic and papal order imposing itself as law.”<sup>71</sup> Not only was power centralizing in Rome, but the hierarchy began to involve itself with papal power, and it was the central hierarchy which ultimately brought Congar under suspicion.

Brooke described the relationship of the medieval people to the clerical leadership as a church that appeared to be an institution that “impinged on the lives of the ordinary folk. Then, as now, it was perhaps most immediate to them at the central events of life, birth, marriage and death.”<sup>72</sup> Significantly, although a number of people could read, the majority of the masses had little education upon which to base any deeper consideration of the church’s precepts, but the church always remained present in their daily lives. The liturgy of the Mass also changed from a gathering of the *ekklesia* commemorating the passion of Christ into:

a far more priestly ceremony at which the laity were present, only in a minimal sense participating. So rare had communion become that at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 it was thought necessary to insist that layfolk communicate at least once a year; whereas attendance at mass was expected every Sunday and on all important festivals. ... The Latin of the mass was unintelligible to most people, and it had become increasingly a dialogue between the priest and his maker.<sup>73</sup>

Brooke mentioned that “there were masses specially arranged in which layfolk were expected to be present, commonly solemn celebrations with singing and ceremonial in the larger churches, and in principle at least the laity were instructed how to follow these

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<sup>71</sup> BPC, 66.

<sup>72</sup> Brooke, *Popular Religion*, 104.

<sup>73</sup> Brooke, *Popular Religion*, 115-6.

masses.”<sup>74</sup> Notably, regarding the Eucharist, “[w]hen they communicated, it was still sometimes in both kinds, partaking of the wine as well as the bread; but this practice was dying out.”<sup>75</sup> The Eucharist gradually was becoming a liturgy of the celebrant, with the laity as mere attendees and a sort of audience, with no concern for the fact that the masses had no genuine idea of what was happening on the altar.<sup>76</sup> All of this left those in control of the central sacrament of the Church, the Eucharist, in a position of knowledge, and knowledge is power. All of this would return to bedevil the Church during the Reformation.

### **Centralization of Power From The Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century**

We will return to discuss the theology of the Middle Ages after the historical situation in the church into the twentieth century is briefly covered, in order to complete the story, and to show the consequences of the accumulation of power at the center.

With the dawn of the Enlightenment, trouble began to brew in the area of philosophy as well; “[b]y championing the autonomy of human reason, the Enlightenment appeared to call into question the legitimacy of any kind of revealed knowledge. The Bible, church tradition, and the legitimacy of an authoritative church teaching office were all challenged during the age of reason.”<sup>77</sup> Gaillardetz stated that he attributed the growth of neo-scholasticism to a reaction to Enlightenment thinking.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Brooke, *Popular Religion*, 116.

<sup>75</sup> Brooke, *Popular Religion*, 116.

<sup>76</sup> In the many conversations that I have had with older adults who remember the Latin Mass, they all, with the exception of those who were servers at the time, report that they had no idea what was really happening on the altar, in spite of the fact that they followed along in their *St. Joseph Daily Missal*; to them, it was a mystery of the Church.

<sup>77</sup> Gaillardetz, *Church in the Making*, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Gaillardetz, *Church in the Making*, 3.

The organizational structure, with its growing power, that had developed in the Middle Ages remained until the nineteenth century, when the centralization of power in Rome reached its peak. In 1848, much of Europe erupted in revolution, including Italy and the Papal States. The relatively newly elected Pius IX, who had begun as a reformer and a liberal, literally came under physical attack and left Rome. Feeling his life threatened, Pius retraced his previous liberal and reforming steps and began to retrench, standing firm behind his temporal powers as the Papal States were being wrested away from him. “He had steadily refused to separate his spiritual from his temporal sovereignty. The States of the Church were the Patrimony of Saint Peter, the material means given to the Papacy by God to defend its spiritual independence.”<sup>79</sup> Pius’ stance continued to crust over, and he gradually, but steadily, retreated into “Fortress Rome.” With his temporal power stripped from him, the power of his ecclesial office became more important to him to compensate for his humiliation in the political arena. As Mark Powell elaborated, “Pius IX fought for his temporal powers until his death, even after Victor Emmanuel II ... conquered the Papal State during the First Vatican Council.”<sup>80</sup>

The Vatican Council which Pius Nono called for 1869 served as the pinnacle to the process of sweeping power in toward the Roman center. Pius “wanted to declare unambiguously the pope as the highest judge and decision maker in the church.”<sup>81</sup> The council placed supreme power over the church in the papacy. Many people felt that the Vatican Council would be the last ever needed, since any remnants of conciliarism had

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<sup>79</sup> E. E. Y. Hales, *Pio Nono: A Study in European Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1954), 110. Much of the information on Pius IX comes from this book.

<sup>80</sup> Powell, *Papal Infallibility*, 26.

<sup>81</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils: A History of the Twenty-One Church Councils from Nicaea to Vatican II* (New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002), 119.

now been extinguished (this will be covered in the next section).<sup>82</sup> Gaillardetz explained the situation:

The impulse toward stronger papal authority found expression in the First Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution, *Pastor Aeternus*, which solemnly defined the dogmas of papal primacy (already taught at the Council of Florence-Ferrara) and papal infallibility. Although these teachings on the papacy were carefully circumscribed, the ultramontane climate in which the teachings were received led to a much more expansive attribution of authority to the papacy than Vatican I had ever intended.<sup>83</sup>

Gaillardetz took the position that Vatican I had not wanted papal infallibility to be so broadly interpreted, opening up later discussions that debated what and to what extent papal pronouncements must be accepted as infallible.

Through the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the power of the papacy continued to concentrate in Rome. The election of Pope St. John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council sent hopes of reform of the papacy soaring. The results of the council were initially gratifying, but the popes between John and Francis have returned power to Rome.

It was the centralized power in Rome that Congar had to deal with for much of his early life in the church. Once he had come under scrutiny, Congar declined to criticize the powers in Rome, but it was too late. His opinions which had been condemned by Rome centered around the view of ecclesiology that Congar espoused.<sup>84</sup> Congar

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<sup>82</sup> O'Malley, "Who Governs the Church?" 43.

<sup>83</sup> Gaillardetz, *Church in the Making*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> JP, 102-3. The next sentences also stem from this source.

differentiated between the Holy See and the pope, and he respected the pope personally. However, he had little good to say about the bureaucracy that composed the Curia.

These questions of the papacy and the centralization of power remain problems in ecumenical discussions. The power and organization of the Holy See have caused problems for the Reformers since 1517. Peter Leithart called the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation “an overly juridical and monarchical organization.”<sup>85</sup> This problem must be understood and frankly addressed in ecumenical discussions in the future for any genuine progress to be realized.

### **Conciliarism**

The counterpoint to the growth of papal power was conciliarism, which, according to Christopher Bellitto, is “[t]he doctrine that supreme authority in the Church lies with a General Council,”<sup>86</sup> although Bellitto noted that “[c]onciliarism was not one solid, undisputed concept.”<sup>87</sup> Conciliarism rose to its zenith in the Great Western Schism, and the Councils of Constance, Basel-Ferrara-Florence-Rome, and Lateran V, which extended the debate over the locus of ecclesiastical authority. The Council of Trent resolved this, situating the foundation for the papal power that Congar had to deal with.

As the central power of the church grew, it led to problems which then led the way to conciliarism. In response to the growth of the papal monarchy, areas in the main body of the church began to look to reform the more egregious aspects of that structure. With the onset of the Avignon papacy and the internal struggles over the papacy, people began to consider potential solutions. One solution that had been suggested before

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<sup>85</sup> Leithart, *End of Protestantism*, 41.

<sup>86</sup> ODCC, s.v. conciliar theory.

<sup>87</sup> Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 82.

Avignon looked to the calling of an ecumenical council to overrule the actions of a pope.<sup>88</sup> Conciliarism appeared in many shapes, but the common thread running through the various forms all agreed that the Church had a necessary hierarchical form, but the papal monarchy as it had developed stood outside the concepts that the conciliarists considered acceptable. They believed that those affected by a law had the right to comment on the structure and enforcement of that law. Additionally, there were concerns about actions that may need to be taken in the case of a bad, or rogue, pope. Almost universally, this example led to the conclusion that a council could take action in that case and depose the reigning pontiff.

Most conciliarists considered that the supreme power in the church lay not with the pope but with the councils, with or without the head of the church. Some took the example of monasteries as the model for the church, with the head office being filled by the elected abbot, but with any major questions being discussed and decided in a general meeting, with all members voting and able to voice their views. Others also looked to the first of the ecumenical councils for guidance, since the popes did not attend the first councils, eliciting from this fact the idea that popes and councils were separate foci of authority.

As Gaillardetz acknowledged, “the resolution of the crisis occurred without any substantive papal participation, leading canonists to develop alternative accounts of the authority of councils, vis-à-vis the authority of the pope. ... The Council of Florence-Ferrara ultimately condemned, rather indiscriminately, all forms of conciliarism.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> The information in the next three paragraphs comes from Bellitto, *The General Councils*, 82ff. Notably, Bellitto mentioned very few individuals in his evaluation of conciliarism.

<sup>89</sup> Gaillardetz, “Noncompetitive,” 12-13.



Throughout this battle, though, Artz noted that “none proposed to destroy all the monarchical power in the office of pope.”<sup>90</sup> The end result of this struggle “was a competitive theology of the church in which power was distributed in a zero-sum game between two different and opposed ecclesiastical entities: the papacy on the one side and the council/bishops on the other.”<sup>91</sup>

One residue from conciliarism occurred with the election of Pope St. John XXIII, who took the name of a pope deposed during the conciliarist conflicts. John’s name was intended as a tribute to his father, to the church in which his family was baptized, and to the many churches by that name throughout the world. Peter Hebblethwaite added that Angelo Roncalli’s intent “was the deliberate retrieval of an *evangelical* name from the rascallions who had dishonored it and the anti-Pope John XXIII who had, so it was believed, made it unusable. Baldassare Cossa, the last claimant to the name, was an ex-pirate who had massacred, cheated, and perjured his way to the papacy.”<sup>92</sup>

Congar himself could in no way be called a true conciliarist. He remained dedicated to his church and to the hierarchical structure which he simultaneously loathed and accepted as a necessary characteristic of a church the size of the Roman Catholic Church. Later in his life, in a talk given at the Concilium Colloquium – Cambridge in 1981, Congar summarized his general outlook: “I am in communion with John Paul II and today’s Church, but also with Newman and Möhler, with Thomas Aquinas and Anselm, with Augustine and Athanasius.”<sup>93</sup> Conciliarism has died down within the

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<sup>90</sup> Artz, *Mind*, 303.

<sup>91</sup> Gaillardetz, “Noncompetitive,” 13.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII: Shepherd of the Modern World* (Garden City NY: Image Books, 1987), 286; the information on the name was also cited in McBrien, *Lives of the Popes*, 371.

<sup>93</sup> Yves Congar, “Reflections on Being a Theologian,” trans. Marcus Lefébure, *New Blackfriars* 62:736 (October 1981), 407.

Catholic Church; had Congar wished to advocate for genuine conciliarism, his entire corpus of writing would likely have been quite different.

### **The Medieval Concept of Tradition and its Relationship to Biblical Hermeneutics**

Jaroslav Pelikan, in his highly detailed series on the history of Christian theology, described the Middle Ages as “The Age of Faith.”<sup>94</sup> Pelikan made an important statement regarding the development of doctrine in medieval theology, noting that, “[i]n the Latin West, no less than in the Greek or the Syriac East, the seventh and eighth centuries were a time when the definition of Christian doctrine was set by the authority of tradition.”<sup>95</sup> Tradition, formally existing long before the Middle Ages, consisted, among others, of the writings of the Church Fathers, as well as the major creeds, the liturgical life of the Church, the lived experience of the faithful, iconography and architecture.

The purpose of medieval theology was not so much academic as pastoral, for there was no academy to speak of in the early part of this era, and the people of God needed a high level of pastoral care, due to their lack of education. Definitions were simpler; formulations could be more poetic; faith was an unsophisticated concept: “‘faith’ could be defined as ‘that by which we truly believe that which we are completely incapable of seeing.’”<sup>96</sup> While Christianity, and Catholic Christianity in particular, was the general faith of much of the southern and western European population, unity was not complete. As in any era, challenges to the faith in the form of heresies came forth, and those were dealt with by the theologians of the time, people such as Bede (d. 735) and Alcuin (d. 804). Tradition during that time was the means by which the faith was handed

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<sup>94</sup> Pelikan, *Medieval Theology*, 3. Some of the ideas in this section have been taken from this chapter in Pelikan.

<sup>95</sup> Pelikan, *Medieval Theology*, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Pelikan, *Medieval Theology*, 12.

on. Pelikan commented that, “[t]he quality that marked Augustine and the other orthodox fathers was their loyalty to the received tradition.”<sup>97</sup> The existence of heresies forced the church into the formulation of more precise forms of its traditional beliefs. Reason continued to be used and was promoted to a high place, especially with the Scholasticism of Aquinas, but the formulations that reason reached were based on the philosophies which existed, with a heavy reliance on the Greek philosophers, principally Plato and, especially with Aquinas, Aristotle.

Since Origen, the study of the Bible had developed in coordination with the use of philosophy. Already with Augustine, theologians began to question the literal interpretation of the Bible. The idea that the most significant reading of the Bible would bring out its message developed. Concepts that later developed into doctrine grew during the early Middle Ages; Pelikan cited the issue of the Marian dogmas, which developed during that era, reaching a recognizable state by the fourteenth century.<sup>98</sup> These dogmas have caused problems in ecumenical circles for years.

Congar stated that, “[t]heological activity is simply an effort to penetrate the meaning and contents of Scripture which is the work of God. The principle of sufficiency of the Bible is the first legacy of the fathers. This principle will be maintained and concretely observed by the Middle Ages without extenuation.”<sup>99</sup> This same principle also guided Martin Luther, who was known to be more of a medieval man than a

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<sup>97</sup> Pelikan *Medieval Theology*, 17.

<sup>98</sup> Pelikan, *Medieval Theology*, 42. Pelikan offered a thorough discussion of the development of Marian dogmas from page 38-50.

<sup>99</sup> HT, 51.

progressive.<sup>100</sup> The Bible generally guided the actions of the medieval European peoples, as Congar observed:

The men of the Middle Ages lived in the Bible and by the Bible. They believed that the book of Scripture could be read in the light of what was written in the book of the world and the book of the soul; but even more so, that the book of Scripture was alone capable of bringing out the full significance of the other two. The world, man, salvation, the communion of saints, formed a harmonious whole, all of them the work of the same divine Wisdom. Or it was a hierarchy, with Scripture as its summit. There was a desire to bring all this together into a single work of knowledge, expression, and praise (Summas, cathedrals, and the encyclopaedic programme of the twelfth century), but also to regulate everything according to the sacred text.<sup>101</sup>

The theologians of the Middle Ages leaned heavily on the Bible, as did the general populace, who remained largely illiterate, receiving much of their learning by attending Mass on Sundays. Congar continued, showing how the Bible was used:

Everything was found in Scripture, all the more easily because the processes of interpretation included the use of symbolism, obligingly accommodating to all needs; and also, more seriously, because extending by reasoned argument the field of application of a statement was not looked upon as overstepping the limits of the original statement. It was generally held that Scripture contained all the truths of faith necessary for salvation. If a question was put concerning a non-

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<sup>100</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1950), 6.

<sup>101</sup> T&t, 86.

scriptural doctrinal formulation, attempts were made to provide some scriptural reference which was at least equivalent or indirect.<sup>102</sup>

In his *History of Theology*, Congar later confirmed this, bringing in Thomas Aquinas, saying, “[t]he theological thought of St. Thomas, as of the Middle Ages, at least up to his time, was based essentially on the Bible and tradition. We can never stress too much the fact that in those days theological teaching was profoundly biblical.”<sup>103</sup> Congar, as he often did, brought in the great medieval theologian to support his position. The Middle Ages felt that Scripture and the apostolic writings contained all doctrine.<sup>104</sup>

Unfortunately, much theological work after Aquinas did not include study of the original work of the Scholastics, using “extracts and a regime of excerpts and collected quotations,” a practice which Congar lamented continues to plague Scholastic study to the present.<sup>105</sup> With the end of Scholasticism, Congar noted that theologians “established the scientific character of theology,” simultaneously losing their direct contact with the patristic and scriptural literature.<sup>106</sup> Following along this path, “the object of *sacra doctrina* risks becoming no longer things essentially religious but more or less rational propositions. It will be absolutely against this that humanism will react and so will Martin Luther.”<sup>107</sup>

As noted above, the Bible was held in highest regard in the Middle Ages, and all beliefs could be retrieved from it by examining the writings in search of the implicit meanings which would confirm that which was to be believed; the Bible had to be

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<sup>102</sup> T&t, 87, 113.

<sup>103</sup> HT, 113-4.

<sup>104</sup> Yves Congar, *La foi et la théologie* (Tournai, Belgium: Desclée, 1962), 94 (FT); T&t, 87.

<sup>105</sup> HT, 140.

<sup>106</sup> HT, 140.

<sup>107</sup> HT, 141.

accepted because it came from the very highest authority. There was little work done in the early Middle Ages in relation to unwritten tradition; however, a number of concepts, liturgical and otherwise, were honored without having explicit biblical support including, according to Congar, the sacraments of confirmation and anointing of the sick.<sup>108</sup>

Congar explained the medieval understanding of biblical authorities, or *auctoritates*: “There was clearly only one true *auctor*, one absolute *auctoritatis*, God, but all that to which God gave the gift of being true, as expressing the truth and his will, became an *auctoritatis* whose exact position in time there was no need to plot with exactitude; the essential thing was that part of the divine truth that it incorporated for us.”<sup>109</sup> In a footnote, Congar elaborated:

The *auctor* is not the author in the literary sense of the term we use today. He would then have been called an *editor*. The author is the one responsible, the subject to whom should be attributed the credit for the value of something: Christ is the *auctor* of grace, of the sacraments; the Holy Spirit (God) is the *auctor* of all truths; it is in this sense, primarily, that he is the *auctor* of the canonical books, and only secondarily in the sense of a form of literal dictation of words. *Auctor* indicates the origin more in its qualitative and spiritual aspect than in its genetic aspect as an event.<sup>110</sup>

The importance here is that the central Roman power laid claim to many forms of authority, most significantly that of officially interpreting the Bible. Interpretation of

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<sup>108</sup> T&t, 87-8.

<sup>109</sup> T&t, 90.

<sup>110</sup> T&t, 89-90n3.

Scripture, which transmits temporally the concepts that God wished to convey, must come through an authoritative temporal source, the church.

One can see here the medieval concern with authority; the church concerned itself with proving that it legally possessed authority over its members, and the popes concerned themselves with demonstrating their authority over both the church and the temporal sphere within their reach: “the communication or manifestation to men of the thoughts and wishes of God continues via a human cooperation which is coextensive with the duration of the Church, and which devolves principally on the *majores*: the doctors and leaders constituted as heads of the Churches.”<sup>111</sup> In order to ensure that all that is transmitted is the truth, the Holy Spirit was invoked as the support for the truth of the official teaching of the church.<sup>112</sup> Congar proceeded with his analysis of medieval considerations of authority: “It is a much-quoted principle in the Middle Ages, that Scripture must be explained under the guidance of that same Spirit who dictated it.”<sup>113</sup> And the Spirit is present to those in the church who bear the responsibility for the scriptural hermeneutics, as well as having exercised influence over the “the patristic texts, and those of the councils, popes and theologians, which ... were only produced as an explanation of Scripture.”<sup>114</sup> Here one can see the source of the problem for the Reformers - with the growing authority of the hierarchy and the growth of the concept of authority within the Church, the Curia had begun to establish their authority over biblical interpretation, which served as another flashpoint for Luther.

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<sup>111</sup> T&t, 90.

<sup>112</sup> T&t, 91.

<sup>113</sup> T&t, 91.

<sup>114</sup> T&t, 93.

The medieval development of biblical studies had earlier reached a crux in the form of the challenges posed by John Wycliffe (d. 1384) and Jan Hus (d. 1415).<sup>115</sup> These two posed questions regarding the accumulating tradition that surrounded the Bible. They intended to return biblical exegesis to a concentration on the Bible itself, shedding the more recent *traditiones humanae*, as Wycliffe called them. He wanted to see an interpretive methodology that would today be recognized as *sola scriptura*, in order to slough off the concepts that he felt came from human, rather than divine, sources; only the Bible may be used to interpret the Bible. Once he introduced the essence of *sola scriptura*, he removed the church from the interpretative role, which naturally upset the central powers in Rome. In reaction, “his orthodox critics felt obliged to defend the unwritten traditions *by arguing from the insufficiency of Scripture, and therefore, to a certain extent, by opposing them to it* – something which we can only regret, while recognizing that it was more or less inevitable.”<sup>116</sup> One may recognize this repeated, radical reaction to any substantial challenge to the authority of the central church hierarchy. Here, Congar said that “a gradual moving away from the traditional position began: from holding that all the truths of faith are connected in some way with Scripture, to a position the newness of which is characterized by the facility with which it admits the essence of truths of faith not found in Scripture.”<sup>117</sup>

The next step in the process of centralization of authority involved asking the central question of which had the final word, Scripture or church; this originated with Henry of Ghent, who “pos[ed] the question in these terms: Must we believe the

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<sup>115</sup> This section is based on T&t, 97ff.

<sup>116</sup> T&t, 98.

<sup>117</sup> T&t, 98.



*auctoritates* (= the *dicta*, the texts) of sacred Scripture rather than those of the Church, or *vice versa*?"<sup>118</sup> Henry pointed back to Augustine's statement which said that he would not believe Scripture without the authority of the church behind it.<sup>119</sup> All this occurred during the Avignon papacy, so struggles over authority were foremost in the minds of Catholics everywhere.

Anthony Oelrich noted that the questioning of the locus of ultimate authority began with the spiritual movements of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries which protested against the hierarchical authority of the church and led to the movements of not only Hus and Wycliffe, but also the Franciscans.<sup>120</sup> These finally came to provide the seeds for "a totally new understanding of the relationship between the *regula fidei*, most concretely Sacred Scripture and the church."<sup>121</sup>

Congar lamented the fact that the prickly question of choosing whether the church had authority over Scripture or whether Scripture stood as the ultimate authority caused such difficulty, especially, "when the time came for the outbreak of the Reformation, the question was often posed in terms of this false alternative, which ought to have been rejected, but which was seized upon by the Reformers: Is the Church above Scripture, or Scripture above the Church?"<sup>122</sup> The concept of authority permeated the thinking that led up to the Reformation, so much so that the Reformation may possibly be framed in terms of a dispute over the question of authority. Paul Althaus gave Luther's position: "All his

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<sup>118</sup> T&t, 99.

<sup>119</sup> T&t, 99. Congar quoted the Latin of Augustine's statement: "Ego evangelio non crederem nisi me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas."

<sup>120</sup> Anthony Oelrich, *A Church Fully Engaged: Yves Congar's Vision of Ecclesial Authority* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 24.

<sup>121</sup> Oelrich, *Church Fully Engaged*, 26. Oelrich here was commenting on the section of T&t (98) that was analyzed above.

<sup>122</sup> T&t, 99.

theological work presupposes the authority of Scripture and the derived authority of the genuine tradition of the Church. ... His theology is nothing more than an attempt to interpret the Scripture.”<sup>123</sup> Althaus continued to emphasize Luther’s basic concepts on authority:

Since the apostles are the foundation of the church, their authority is basic. No other authority in the church can be equal to theirs. Every other authority in the church is derived from following the teaching of the apostles and is validated by its conformity to their teaching. This means that only Scripture can establish and substantiate articles of faith. The Scripture offers all that is necessary to salvation.<sup>124</sup>

Althaus stated that Luther saw the church as a human institution, completely subordinate to Scripture, which meant that “[n]either the church ... nor any of her representatives, not even the councils, have the authority to establish new articles of faith or new commandments.”<sup>125</sup> According to Congar, Luther believed the Bible contained all that was necessary for salvation: “[f]or Luther Scripture was self-explanatory and made Christ the saviour recognized; but in order to do this, it required the activity or the witness of the Spirit in men’s hearts.”<sup>126</sup> These concepts were formulated by Luther after 1517, and they appear to be the result of his more developed thinking.

With the onset of the Reformation, both Luther and the Roman authorities hardened their positions, defining their own beliefs over against those of the opponent. The atmosphere of conflict haunted and dampened discussions between Catholics and

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<sup>123</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 3.

<sup>124</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 5.

<sup>125</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 6.

<sup>126</sup> HS1, 140.

Protestants until after Vatican II and into today, with, of course, some exceptions such as Congar. In an important note, Congar gave the details of early disputations, finding that indeed, Roman official representatives made statements which verify the hardening of positions, when he noted that, “the officially delegated Defensor of the Catholic tradition, Dominic de Montbousson, said, ‘The Church takes priority over, and is of greater authority than, Scripture.’”<sup>127</sup> De Montbousson was not alone, unfortunately: “Many subordinated Scripture to the Church: even Nicholas of Cusa said of Scripture: ... Christ set up the Church sine littera.”<sup>128</sup> This thinking was supported by the general conception of the Church that had grown during the previous two centuries, placing ever greater authority in the church, resulting in “a fideism under whose influence many drew the conclusion that at least one article stood firm ... : the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, could not be deceived in what related directly to salvation.”<sup>129</sup> One can hear the echo of *Dei Verbum* in Congar’s language regarding the fact that the Spirit guided infallibly *in matters of salvation*.<sup>130</sup>

It is important to understand the construction of the edifice of thinking in which Martin Luther was educated and immersed to better appreciate Luther and his actions. Quite significantly, Congar included Calvin in his discussion, with an important statement on the question of the authority of the church versus the authority of Scripture, noting that Calvin:

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<sup>127</sup> T&t, 100n8 (continued from p. 99).

<sup>128</sup> T&t, 99-100.

<sup>129</sup> T&t, 100.

<sup>130</sup> The sentence in *Dei Verbum* to which this refers is the key phrase in Paragraph 11: “all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.”

also had to oppose what he believed to be the Roman position (which was not and still is not that position, even though certain statements made by the Church give the impression that it is), namely that the authority of Scripture is granted by the Church. He was concerned – and rightly concerned – to attribute the authority of Scripture not to the Church but exclusively to God and therefore to attribute (re)cognition of Scripture to God’s activity in us. This was, in his opinion, necessary so that certainty of faith should be totally based on God.<sup>131</sup>

Here lay a major point in Congar’s ecumenical argument, with special emphasis on the phrase in parentheses, “which was not and still is not that position, even though statements made by the Church give the impression that it is.” In this statement, Congar showed disagreement with the statement from DeMontbousson which is cited above and which states that “The Church takes priority over, and is of greater authority than, Scripture.” Since DeMontbousson was an official delegate to the early disputes during the Reformation, his statements could easily be taken as official positions of the church, in the manner that Congar indicated in his above cited statement. Congar took his stand abjuring statements such as DeMontbousson’s, since, although DeMontbousson was an officially delegated representative of Rome to the disputations, his statements may not be considered official doctrinal pronouncements by the church; he was not representing the official doctrinal position.

The situation for Luther, as described by Pelikan, also included the earlier confrontations of Jan Hus with the concepts of the church as written in Boniface VIII’s 1302 bull, *Unam Sanctam*:

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<sup>131</sup> HS1, 140.

In 1302 Pope Boniface opened his most famous bull, *Unam Sanctam*, with the words: “By the requirement of the faith we are obliged to believe and hold one, holy, catholic, and indeed apostolic church”; in 1413 John Hus, the Czech Reformer, opened his most famous treatise, *The Church*, with the words: “Every pilgrim ought faithfully to believe the holy, catholic church.” But Boniface was referring to the church whose visible head was “the Roman pontiff, (to whom) every human creature must be subject to be saved,” as his closing words declared, while Hus was referring to “the totality of all who have been predestined,” as he went on to explain a few paragraphs later.<sup>132</sup>

Here we see a perfect example of what may look to the observer at first glance being agreement, but when conflicting definitions collided, the debate frequently came to a standstill. One of the first requirements in a civil debate is to ensure that all participants use the same definitions of key words. Pelikan went on to describe the issue with the definitions of “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” as follows: “Hus’s nemesis at the Council of Constance, Gerson, ... quoted the formula of the Nicene Creed, from which both Boniface and Hus were also quoting, as proof against Hus and Wycliffe that a church council had the right to condemn ... doctrinal aberrations.”<sup>133</sup> Unfortunately, definitions of key words such as “one,” “holy,” catholic,” “apostolic,” as well as others such as “justification,” “works,” and “imputation” did not receive agreement between Luther and the Roman delegates, and some of the acrimonious debates roared on, until,

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<sup>132</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, vol. 4, The Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984), 69.

<sup>133</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 69.

after centuries, cooler participants have largely damped the fires, in some cases actually reaching agreement.<sup>134</sup>

Within the minds of both sides, absolutely no doubt existed as to the correctness of their beliefs; the Catholic side definitely believed that the Holy Spirit guided the Church in a manner that rendered it completely infallible in matters of salvation; on this subject, Luther agreed that the Holy Spirit guided the councils, but he denied that the Spirit's guidance led to the infallibility of a council.<sup>135</sup> Luther consented to the early creeds, "not because they had been adopted by councils (that does not guarantee their orthodoxy), but because he was convinced that they conform to Scripture."<sup>136</sup> The creeds which he accepted (the Apostles Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Nicene Creed) formed the basis of Lutheran confessions. Following Luther, essentially all the Reformers were equally convinced that the authority of the church could only be from human sources, therefore subject to the authority of the divinely inspired Scriptures.

Congar's views of Luther's theology were summarized in *The History of Theology*. Congar laid out Luther's position as consisting of: "(a) Christianity is purely a question of salvation."<sup>137</sup> All that comprises Christian doctrine and thought have the goal of converting us to Christ; "Philosophy is the science of our world, and theology, or Christian doctrine, is the science of salvation."<sup>138</sup> (b) Sin prevents us from being able to employ Christian doctrine to bring nature to salvation; only by turning away from things of the world can we be saved, through faith alone, *sola fide*.<sup>139</sup> (c) Luther found no

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<sup>134</sup> See the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

<sup>135</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 6n7. See also, HS1, 138-41.

<sup>136</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 7.

<sup>137</sup> HT, 150. On these points, see also DC, 109-14.

<sup>138</sup> HT, 151.

<sup>139</sup> HT, 151.

benefit from the study of philosophy (“he wanted to leave the study of philosophy for that of theology” in 1509), rather preferring to abjure questioning, and simply adhering to the dictates of the Bible.<sup>140</sup>

Pelikan stated that during the time from Aquinas to the eighteenth century, “Western Christianity experienced fundamental and far-reaching changes in the interpretation – indeed, in the very definition – of church and dogma.”<sup>141</sup> This time period must have held, for Congar, a deep sorrow in the splintering of the Church into so many communities, each proceeding off into dogmatic tracks that have ensured the maintenance of the splits to the present time.<sup>142</sup> Pelikan recognized that, “it is to the conflicts of the sixteenth century that most Christian denominations in the West, not least Roman Catholicism, must trace the origins of their present doctrinal positions.”<sup>143</sup> Pelikan here confirmed the statement above that positions hardened at that time. Congar would have appreciated Pelikan’s stance when Pelikan generalized, saying that people from any of the “doctrinal traditions coming out of this period” need to appreciate that, although each tradition may have its own “church fathers,” the events of the Reformation “are only a part of a total history going back to the fathers of the entire church catholic; and it is within the total history that the ‘church fathers’ of a particular confession or denomination are to be understood.”<sup>144</sup> Pelikan appeared to be advocating a position similar to that of Congar and his colleagues at Le Saulchoir.

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<sup>140</sup> HT, 152.

<sup>141</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation*, 1.

<sup>142</sup> DBC, 251-4; Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984), (DC), 2, 109-18; HT, 144-7; Yves Congar, *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, ed. Bernard Lauret, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 40-7. (50Y).

<sup>143</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation*, 1.

<sup>144</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation*, 1-2.

Although Congar may have felt that the great turning point in church history was the Gregorian Reform, that turn shifted the direction of the church toward the Reformation, as the challenges that have been noted above matured into stances which Martin Luther and his followers could no longer abide. In order to fully participate in ecumenical discussions, one must be sufficiently well-versed in the Reformation and its causes to be able to place any discussion in a historical context.

### **Tradition and Traditions**

We have discussed the concept of the Magisterium, and now we return to the definitions of tradition given by Congar, as well as by others (the difference between Congar's definition of tradition and Tradition will be discussed shortly). This discussion will shine a different light on these definitions, as well as having more of a descriptive focus, also considering some of the impacts the varying nuances have had on the use of the word.

In all that Congar did, he always saw Tradition in relation not only to Scripture, but also inevitably toward the church. Aidan Nichols brought this out in his book on Congar, when he stated that, "Congar seeks to show two things: first, that the concept of Tradition has a firm foothold in Scripture; and secondly, that it is wider and deeper than that version of it sometimes entertained in the heat of polemics, by both Protestant and Catholic authors alike."<sup>145</sup> Nichols aptly called Tradition "the river of which the Gospel is the source."<sup>146</sup> Nichols stressed that we learn everything from another, and that includes our faith, which we receive from others who received it from others as well. The ultimate source of Tradition is God the Father, who is also the subject of Tradition; the "Church is

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<sup>145</sup> Nichols, *Congar*, 27 The information from Nichols stems from this source, pps. 27-33.

<sup>146</sup> Nichols, *Congar*, 27.



the immanent subject of Tradition, just as the Spirit is the transcendent subject. Faith, that is, has an essentially ecclesial character.”<sup>147</sup> Tradition in Congar was always funneled through the church as the profane receiver of sacred Tradition.

Congar’s definitions of Tradition were covered in Chapter One, so this discussion will not go into great depth. In short summations, Congar defined tradition (capital T versus small T) in various writings of his as follows: (1) “Tradition is essentially the continuity of development arising from the initial gift of the church, and it integrates into unity all the forms that this development has taken and that it actually manifests;”<sup>148</sup> (2) “By tradition we mean the successive communication of one and the same object to others, a single possessor being the first term in the series;”<sup>149</sup> (3) “There exists a transmission of the whole of Christianity which bears upon its factually determined dimensions, and this can be called ‘tradition.’”<sup>150</sup> (4) “Tradition means, in itself, a transmission from person to person. It thus implies a living subject. From this point of view of its content, tradition in this most primitive and general sense requires merely a deposit of some sort. This deposit can include writings, as well as words, actions, rules of conduct and institutions;”<sup>151</sup> (5) “Tradition is an offering by which the Father’s gift is communicated to a great number of people throughout the world, and down the successive generations, so that a multitude of people physically separated from it by space and time, are incorporated in the same, unique, identical reality, which is the Father’s gift, and above all the saving truth;”<sup>152</sup> (6) not Congar’s own, but cited by him

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<sup>147</sup> Nichols, *Congar*, 31.

<sup>148</sup> VFR, 294.

<sup>149</sup> T&t, 240.

<sup>150</sup> T&t, 283.

<sup>151</sup> T&t, 296.

<sup>152</sup> MT, 17.

in a footnote, Congar gave a definition from the Russian Orthodox *Long Catechism*: “By the word Tradition is meant the teaching of the faith, the law of God, the sacraments and the liturgical rites, as handed on by word and example from one man to another and from generation to generation.”<sup>153</sup> The above list is a sampling of Congar’s definitions of tradition, along with one he found “interesting.” In the above definitions, numbers (2), (3), and (4) are from *Tradition and Traditions*. They vary slightly while still maintaining a common theme of handing on, or communicating, a gift or deposit from the Father intended for humanity; definition (3) stands out due to its specific mention that tradition involves the “transmission of the whole of Christianity.” In this statement, Congar made clear that he held that the entire faith is handed on through tradition; in definition (4), he identified the components of Christianity – “writings, as well as words, actions, rules of conduct and institutions.” He made clear that the concept of tradition has many meanings which may be applied in various ways to accommodate varying situations.<sup>154</sup> However, Congar did not attempt to structure these meanings in an amoeba-like form, squeezing them into places where they do not belong; he ensured that the definitions he applied belonged in the circumstance in which they were used. Congar delved into this manifold meaning to offer definitions in a variety of circumstances.

In his Foreword to “A Theological Essay” of T&t (the second portion), which was written three years after the first volume, subtitled “A Historical Essay,” Congar wrote that “what theology means by Tradition is something other than a mere human factor of moral inheritance or social cohesion.”<sup>155</sup> He then cautioned against expectations for a

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<sup>153</sup> T&t, 296n1.

<sup>154</sup> MT, 14. In the same vein, see Chapter 2 of “A Theological Essay” in T&t.

<sup>155</sup> T&t, 234.

concise definition of the term: “Even in its restricted dogmatic sense, ‘tradition’ designates a reality which is too large, a concept too dense, to be formulable in a concise definition.”<sup>156</sup> Congar credited Jacques Bossuet (1627-1704) with providing an earlier description of: “Tradition as ‘the ever manifest succession of doctrine left to and carried on by the Church,’” but Congar then cautioned that Bossuet provided only one view of the meaning carried by Tradition.<sup>157</sup> Congar remained focused on Tradition and its relation to both the church and Scripture.

Later in the Foreword, Congar stated clearly that he did not espouse a two-source concept of the source of revelation, when he said:

It is no longer a matter of particular truths which are to be found only in Tradition (nowadays this way of setting off Tradition against Scripture seems much too narrow), but of trying to discover in what precisely Tradition’s originality can be said to consist and what place it has in the life of a Church seen not just as a system or an organization but as a whole life, lived by people who are committed to Christ.<sup>158</sup>

In this quotation, one can see not only Congar’s position on Tradition and Scripture, which he says should not be placed in competition with each other, but also the close connection between Tradition and the church, which he viewed as our entire existence as a people. Congar later stated that “we must rid ourselves of the preoccupation which held far too large a place in the sixteenth-century controversy.”<sup>159</sup> He continued, striving to ease the way for constructive future ecumenical dialogue: “The present state of the

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<sup>156</sup> T&t, 234.

<sup>157</sup> T&t, 234.

<sup>158</sup> T&t, 235. See also T&t, 193; HT, 230-40.

<sup>159</sup> T&t, 377.

ecumenical dialogue demands this disengagement: not from falsely eirenic motives which might want to conceal differences, but in an endeavour to go beyond the old state of controversy and approach the problem in a more positive way.”<sup>160</sup>

On the other side, Patrick Madrid pointed out that Congar’s position also called for Catholics to follow the Protestant lead and make a return to the Scriptures central to the faith, to correct the problems that entered into Catholic Bible hermeneutics during and after the Protestant Reformation.<sup>161</sup>

As noted above, in *Tradition and Traditions*, Congar separated tradition with and without capitalization, assigning different meanings to the two: “A certain distinction and usage are tending to become normal or classical in Catholic theology: the distinction between Tradition and traditions.”<sup>162</sup> Shortly thereafter, he offered (due to the significance of these terms, most of a long quotation will be cited here):

the following distinctions:

*The traditions:* these are determinations, normative in conditions which we shall have to examine and not contained formally in the canon of Scripture. They may originate with Jesus, the apostles, or the Church, and thus may be respectively divine, apostolic, or ecclesiastical. They may be permanent or temporary in character. We may infer that, without prejudice to their dogmatic implications, their principal concern is worship and discipline. ...

*Tradition:* this presents three ... aspects or meanings:

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<sup>160</sup> T&t, 377.

<sup>161</sup> Madrid, *Scripture and Tradition*, 13.

<sup>162</sup> T&t, 286.

- (i) The transmission of the whole Gospel, that is, the whole Christian mystery, in any form: Scripture, the (spoken) word, confessions of faith, sacraments and acts of worship, customs, and prescriptions – all these, together with the reality which they convey or produce. This transmission may further be taken either in its objective sense as the content transmitted, or as the act of transmitting.
- (ii) In the content thus transmitted, which is the truth of the Christian mystery or of the covenant in Jesus Christ, we may distinguish between things as such (Scripture, sacraments, and institutions; but especially Scripture) and their interpretation or meaning. In this sense, Tradition is the interpretation or meaning given to realities transmitted within the group to which they have been committed, a community living and sharing them.

With reference to Scripture, Tradition is a certain usage and reading of it made from the viewpoint of the Christian mystery, which is at one and the same time christological, ecclesiological, and anagogic or eschatological, according to the analogy of faith.

...

- (iii) This interpretation or reading of Scripture was developed and expressed in a whole series of fixed testimonies, whether in writings or monuments: institutions, liturgy, art, customs, etc. When viewed as a whole, these expressions are often called “Tradition”. ... A certain spirit or living understanding in the

Christian community (*ecclesia*) may be recognized as the origin of such monuments, just as one argues that there exists a certain spirit behind the cultural manifestations of a people, or a certain ethos in a family. Tradition is thus that Catholic sense which the Church possesses as the supra-individual and living subject of a series of testimonies in which is expressed its interpretation of what it transmits and what it lives by.<sup>163</sup>

These distinctions occupy a significant portion of the Theological Essay section of *Tradition and Traditions*. Congar carefully expounded on the significance of Scripture and apostolic origins to Tradition; he never released this theme as he proceeded. Congar also remained committed to the primacy of Scripture.

Congar included in the above definition the function of Tradition as a hermeneutical tool in the understanding of Scripture. In response to the claim that Scripture is self-explanatory, Congar noted that heretics have always employed Scripture in the explanation of their off-center notions,<sup>164</sup> which brings into question the idea that Scripture is so clear that no additional interpretation is necessary. This concept also reminded Congar of the “medieval saying that *auctoritates* have wax noses, which could be bent to right or left as preferred.”<sup>165</sup> Congar summarized J. R. Geiselman to explain the relationship between Scripture and Tradition: “Scripture contains all the truths it is necessary to believe; but it can only be read and understood properly in and with the Church’s Tradition. This Tradition consists in the genuine understanding of Scripture.

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<sup>163</sup> T&t, 287-8. See also MT, 150-2.

<sup>164</sup> T&t, 382.

<sup>165</sup> T&t, 385.

There exist also unwritten traditions.”<sup>166</sup> The unfortunate part of Geiselmann’s position was that, without explanation of the last sentence, of which Congar made no note, it can leave the impression that a two-source theory may be viable. I have made clear above that Congar did not hold the two-source theory as a defensible position.

Madrid noted that Congar considered Scripture and Tradition to be inextricably combined, and both are necessary for a full understanding of the Christian faith.<sup>167</sup> As Madrid stated, Congar did not see only Tradition as having a divine source, while traditions originate from human sources; rather, he stated that both Scripture and Tradition contain both divine and human elements.<sup>168</sup> One important point from Congar is that Scripture and Tradition should not be considered in the same way; the difference being that “Scriptures have an absolute value which Tradition has not.”<sup>169</sup>

We return briefly to the discussion of the Council of Trent, regarding the Decree on the Canonical Scriptures; the topic of the wording of the decree was discussed in Chapter One, so it will not be considered here. Congar said that:

It was concerned to *conserve in the Church the essential elements of the Gospel in all their purity*. This Gospel had been promised by the prophets, then promulgated by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had charged his apostles with the task of preaching it to every creature as *the source of all saving truth and of all moral discipline*. Thus the council affirms first and foremost that there is but one source

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<sup>166</sup> T&t, 377.

<sup>167</sup> Madrid, *Scripture and Tradition*, 47-9. See also MT, 100, 155.

<sup>168</sup> Madrid, *Scripture and Tradition*, 48. Madrid mis-cited the page for the source of his information; he cited MT, 99, while the quote is on 93.

<sup>169</sup> MT, 94. Also cited in Madrid, *Scripture and Tradition*, 56.

and that the Gospel as that source has full and complete value. The fountain-head of this vital force is Jesus, the Son of God.<sup>170</sup>

Adherence to the teachings of the apostles stands clearly in the center of Congar's consideration of Tradition. Similarly, he pointed out that:

in the decree of Trent on Scripture and traditions, fidelity to the unwritten apostolic traditions is placed within the framework of *complete* fidelity to the apostolic inheritance. As soon as the Church found itself confronted with a claim which admitted Scripture *alone*, it trembled at the prospect of losing any part of that which had been handed down by the apostles.<sup>171</sup>

This issue remains a problematic point for Protestant opponents of the concept of doctrinal Tradition, who employ the originally submitted schema presented at Trent to support their contention that Trent supported a two-source theory of Revelation. Congar addressed this:

It is in fact, possible that theologians at the time of the Council and after it did understand the distinction between Scripture and apostolic traditions as a distinction between two groups of objects; but *that* is not what the text of the decree mentions. It declares that to reject or despise the apostolic traditions amounts to neglect of one of the two ways or modes by which the apostolic inheritance comes to us in its fullness.<sup>172</sup>

If the original intention of the Council was to establish a two-source concept regarding Scripture and Tradition, the fact that the document in its final form did not fully support a

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<sup>170</sup> T&t, 157.

<sup>171</sup> T&t, 290-1.

<sup>172</sup> T&t, 291. The Protestant positions on this topic will be covered in Chapter Four.



two-source concept in spite of personal opinions favoring the two sources,<sup>173</sup> demonstrated that the Holy Spirit actually took a quite significant part in the final wording of the document. This example, in my opinion, supports the work of the Spirit in preserving for the church a concept which could be properly addressed in later centuries and councils.

Congar defended the tridentine document in this quotation, but he also took note of the position that the Reformers assumed in response to the concept of Tradition: “The attitude of the Reformers to Tradition was one of polemic, opposition, and refusal; it is even debatable whether they really tackled the question of *the* Tradition.”<sup>174</sup> In a rather unusual move for Congar, he criticized the early Reformers, but he pointed to the important failure of the disputants of the time to come to fundamental agreement on the terms which were being debated. Congar continued: “In the Middle Ages it [the question of *the* Tradition] was scarcely considered in itself, and the Church justified those points of doctrine, and especially of liturgy and discipline, that she considered obligatory and that lacked explicit scriptural foundation, by a fairly vague appeal to unwritten traditions and above all by an appeal to her own authority, given by God and assisted by his Spirit. The whole of this was known as *traditiones*.”<sup>175</sup> Of interest here is the reaction of Protestant theologian Douglas Koskela, in his book, *Ecclesiality and Ecumenism: Yves Congar and the Road to Unity*. Koskela referred, in a chapter devoted to Tradition, that “caution is in order.”<sup>176</sup> Koskela’s caution referred to the above cited concept that the

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<sup>173</sup> Congar cited Cardinals del Monte and Cervini as supporters of the two-source wording; Angelo Agostino Bonucci was cited as the person likely responsible for avoiding that wording in the final draft (T&t, 164-5).

<sup>174</sup> MT, 150.

<sup>175</sup> MT, 150-1.

<sup>176</sup> Koskela, *Ecclesiality and Ecumenism*, 100.

definition of Tradition is dense, which led him to conclude that it was the density which caused Congar to segregate the meanings of Tradition and tradition. Koskela mentioned three characteristics that he saw in Tradition: Tradition is the handing on of the faith; Tradition is the interpretation of the faith; and Tradition is handed on via, what Congar called, “monuments” of Tradition.<sup>177</sup> Perhaps most interesting of Koskela’s observations was his statement that, “[i]t is precisely its role in bearing Tradition, in fact, that gives the church its identity and crucial place within the economy of salvation.”<sup>178</sup> From his Protestant viewpoint, Koskela showed a genuine appreciation of Congar’s views toward Tradition and the church.

Rose Beal noticed Congar’s emphasis on Scripture as the most important component of Tradition. Beal, in her book which detailed the development and content of Congar’s unpublished course on ecclesiology, pointed out that “[h]is method, being theological, would take ‘as [its] *rule* the *donné* .... This rule is the tradition of the Church: *id quod traditur*; that is to say the reality.’ In a separate note, she explained that by the *donné*, Congar referred principally to scripture, but also to ‘the “Tradition” of the Church handed on by its magisterium *and its life*.’”<sup>179</sup> However, Beal earlier cited Congar with a slightly different definition of the *donné*, which included not only Scripture and Tradition, but also the other parts of Tradition which Congar included in the definition he gave in T&t as cited above, namely the church in all its actuality.<sup>180</sup> From this, one can

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<sup>177</sup> Koskela, *Ecclesiality and Ecumenism*, 101.

<sup>178</sup> Koskela, *Ecclesiality and Ecumenism*, 102.

<sup>179</sup> MCPG, 84. The bracketed word “[its]” is original. Beal’s work was based on Congar’s unpublished papers, dating from 1931-1954, which she researched. They were written in preparation for a treatise that was to be titled *De Ecclesia*.

<sup>180</sup> MCPG, 83.

see that Congar had a view of Tradition already when he developed his college courses on the church in the 1930's.

Observing the section headings in his Chapter One of the Theological Essay of *Tradition and Traditions* can be informative: “Tradition as Transmission,” “Tradition as History and Development,” “The Gospel: The Source of Apostolic Tradition,” and “Tradition, Scripture, Traditions: The Dignity of Scripture.” Congar considered Tradition to be not only a process of transmission but also the content of the deposit transmitted, which first existed in the form of tradition: “Jesus gave everything to his apostles, but nothing in writing. The apostles themselves at first built up the Church by the completest possible communication of the Gospel, by words and actions, preaching and example, by the exercise of authority and by organization, not by writing.”<sup>181</sup> Congar made his case that Tradition came before the composition of the Gospels, arguing from this point to deflect the Protestant insistence on *sola scriptura*: “the Gospel existed in its fullness before the individual gospels and epistles were written down.”<sup>182</sup> This concept found resonance among Protestant theologians such as D. H. Williams, who fully accepted the existence of oral tradition before the existence of written documents; Williams cited Congar twice to this end.<sup>183</sup>

### **Tradition and the Magisterium**

In *Tradition and Traditions*, Congar traced the history of the involvement of the Magisterium with tradition from the early Church to Trent; he began quite early: “In the Church of the second and third centuries there existed a duality, and at the same time a

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<sup>181</sup> T&t, 284.

<sup>182</sup> T&t, 284.

<sup>183</sup> Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 42-46; citations of Congar are on pgs. 42n1 and 46n11. This point will also be covered further in Chapter Four.

close contact between the *paradosis*, the content of the faith received by the Church at its origin, and the hierarchical ministry. The emphasis was on the objective deposit of truth.”<sup>184</sup> Congar frequently employed historical settings to explain his understanding of Tradition: “The ante-Nicene Fathers called the ‘rule of faith’, or, more often, ‘the rule of truth’, *that which* the apostles, having received it from Jesus Christ, have handed down and that which the Church, receiving it from them, continues to transmit *because this is normative for faith*.”<sup>185</sup> Taking the term from the early Fathers, he noted that this was the *regula fidei*, which, “for the writers of this period, means not the action of the teaching authority, nor a criterion of true belief other than the doctrine itself, but this doctrine handed down to the Church.”<sup>186</sup> Confirming his belief in the hierarchical ministry of the Catholic Church, Congar stated: “for ten centuries, popes, bishops, councils, canonists and theologians never ceased to affirm that the role of the members of the hierarchy is to guard and apply the rules received and handed on: the deposit of faith, the dogmas and canons of the councils, the tradition received from the Fathers.”<sup>187</sup>

However, Congar saw the role of the Magisterium as preservation rather than definition, as it had later developed:

We can observe too that, if the faith of the Roman Church has always been the model for the whole Catholic communion, the apostolic see, until modern times, rarely exercised the active magisterium of dogmatic definition and constant formulation of Catholic doctrine in the way it has been exercised since the

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<sup>184</sup> T&t, 177. It must be remembered that this work was written before and during Vatican II, yielding some of the more negative views of the Magisterium, which subsequently softened in Congar’s later life.

<sup>185</sup> T&t, 26-7.

<sup>186</sup> T&t, 177.

<sup>187</sup> T&t, 178.

pontificate of Gregory XVI and especially since that of Pius IX. In the early Church it functioned as a supreme judiciary in a Church in which the assemblies of bishops usually formulated the rules of life, and in the Middle Ages as a moderator or sovereign judge of Christendom, in continual collaboration or conflict with the secular rulers ..., in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Doctrinal disputes were launched, developed, and concluded by immediate reference to Scripture and to a series of patristic, conciliar or canonical texts, in short, a kind of magisterium of tradition itself.<sup>188</sup>

He seemed here to indicate a form of a magisterium which he considered ideal, in the role of moderator, rather than the later assumption of the task of expanding concepts contained in the Scriptures. He reiterated his emphasis on the Gregorian Reform as a turning point in this conception of the magisterial duties and responsibilities, stating that this reform “in my view supports and conditions all that followed.”<sup>189</sup> This reform exercised great influence throughout the western world, affecting secular affairs as well as ecclesiastical, in their view of authority.<sup>190</sup> He noted that after the Gregorian Reform, the concepts of Roman absolute rule began to creep into the administrative legal systems being adopted in Europe. Roman law was developed by the state to maintain the power of the state, and that factor certainly crept into the systems which the medieval princes instituted.

When this law began to infiltrate Christian thought, the bent of the Roman state began to influence the canonists in their formulation of the tenets which would guide

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<sup>188</sup> T&t, 178.

<sup>189</sup> T&t, 179.

<sup>190</sup> T&t, 179-80.

power toward the center. Part of the problem could be attributed to the infusion of the belief that Church law and actions would be guided by divine intervention, adding an aura of infallibility to the mystery that was the Church. The conclusions which the Church administration reached gradually began to take on that infallibility: “these determinations have the absolute value of truths which it is necessary to believe for salvation, *because* the Church (the magisterium), which so defines them, is guided and infallible.”<sup>191</sup> The magisterial members themselves naturally began to believe these confirmations of their mission and their exalted positions.

Congar discussed Trent’s position regarding tradition: “The council had defined the existence of traditions and the obligation of respecting them, but had hardly made precise the nature of tradition.”<sup>192</sup> He noted that the council came to a crux, changing the approach to tradition:

moving away from a conception of tradition as content and deposit received from the apostles, to one of tradition considered from the point of view of the transmitting organism, seen as residing above all in the magisterium of the Church. The Fathers and the early canons are considered less inspired *organs* of tradition themselves than as *witnesses* to a tradition which consists in the present teaching of the magisterium.<sup>193</sup>

Congar’s comment is true, but he did not note that this shift in emphasis on tradition could have actually worked against the Roman position vis-à-vis the Reformers; what this did was offer confirmation to the Reformers that the church placed itself above Scripture

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<sup>191</sup> T&t, 181.

<sup>192</sup> T&t, 182.

<sup>193</sup> T&t, 182.

– the church was “the transmitting organism,” to which “the Fathers and early canons are considered ... [merely] *witnesses* to a tradition which consists in the present teaching of the magisterium.” The insertion is mine to emphasize the place to which the Fathers had been consigned. Power and authority moved toward the center of the Church, with more decisions being brought to the inchoate Magisterium and the pope.

In Congar’s time, since the Church safeguards the deposit of faith, the means through which that is accomplished can only be the Magisterium, since it is tasked, through one of its dicasteries, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the preservation of that faith: “Art. 48 — The proper duty of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) is to promote and safeguard the doctrine on faith and morals in the whole Catholic world; so it has competence in things that touch this matter in any way.”<sup>194</sup> As this section has shown, Congar spent a good deal of time investigating how it was that the Magisterium had come to possess such almost dictatorial powers, resulting in the understanding of the process which he detailed in minute fashion in *Tradition and Traditions*. His encounters with the magisterial powers did not end well for him, which gave him sufficient motive to write an excoriating evaluation of the centralized, magisterial powers, yet for the public he kept his writing in a moderate fashion. Partly, the moderation must certainly have been due to his experience during the council, which was the time during which *Tradition and Traditions* was written, but a lingering fear of reprisal remained with him, as was evidenced by the fact that he forbade the publishing of

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<sup>194</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, “*Pastor bonus*,” 28 June, 1988, trans. Francis C. C. F. Kelly, James H. Provost, and Michel Thériault, (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998). [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apc\\_19880628\\_pastor-bonus.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_19880628_pastor-bonus.pdf).

his *My Journal of the Council* until after he died, but that also combined with a sensitivity for propriety in intra-ecclesial disagreements.

### The “Living Tradition”

As always within Congar’s life, one can see the impact of historical studies on his work. Congar grasped from Newman that Catholic doctrine changes over time, although not the basic concept, but rather the means of expression and the interpretation placed within any contemporary context. Congar latched on to the concept of “living tradition” and “living Gospel,” which had been used in the Counter Reformation to combat some of the positions taken by Luther and others.<sup>195</sup> Earlier in his work, Congar recognized that things doctrinal do not remain static. In *True and False Reform*, he stated: “A ‘return to tradition’ does not necessarily mean binding today’s Catholic to the literal acceptance of a contingent expression of Christian thought or life from some moment in the past ... Such an expression is not identified with the essential structure of the church and in fact remains (in its material expression) something *outdated* and belongs to the past.”<sup>196</sup>

Congar, like many Catholic theologians since Newman, tended to point to doctrinal development as a necessity for the growth of the church. As Congar stated, “This tradition is living because it is not a thing exterior in living souls vivified by the Spirit, but the same vital understanding of Christianity and the faith which they have in them and which is common to them and to the whole Church today and in all times.”<sup>197</sup>

Congar showed how the church treated tradition as a living thing, into the nineteenth century, noting how Möhler stepped into the discussions on tradition. As one

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<sup>195</sup> The concepts in this section come mainly from T&t, 189-221.

<sup>196</sup> VFR, 294.

<sup>197</sup> T&t, 194.



of Congar's distant teachers, Möhler took his own position on the long, tridentine *partim* – *partim* discussion; as Congar explained it, “[h]e [Möhler] criticizes in particular the idea of a revelation handed on *partly* in texts and *partly* by oral tradition. Tradition for him is a mode of communication which covers the whole of Christianity and encompasses Scripture.”<sup>198</sup> Congar also believed that the *partim* ... *partim* position was the Catholic response to the Protestant distancing of Scripture and tradition. His conclusion is valuable: “Tradition contains and preserves everything, it is the Gospel living in the Church.”<sup>199</sup>

Part of the concept of a living tradition includes a living, morphing set of definitions, which develop in conjunction with the times, as well as being affected by the times; this development is the living tradition: “the idea of dogmatic development has found an assured place in religious thought.”<sup>200</sup> This concept itself has also undergone modification, as the source of development no longer resides exclusively with the Magisterium but has been understood to also reside within the entire church, “together with its pastors,”<sup>201</sup> what we call the *sensus fidei*, which depends on the understanding that the Holy Spirit has guided the church through the ages. Congar especially invoked this later in his life, as his personal pneumatology developed.

### **Effects of Newman**

Congar followed St. John Henry Newman closely, gaining deeper understanding of the concept of doctrinal development that Newman proposed in his *An Essay in the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Studying history, he came to understand that history

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<sup>198</sup> T&t, 193.

<sup>199</sup> T&t, 193.

<sup>200</sup> T&t, 203.

<sup>201</sup> T&t, 203.

affected theology and the Church, e.g., the Gregorian Reform. Johannes Bunnenberg saw Congar learning from Möhler and his Tübingen colleagues, bringing Möhler into discussion with the concepts of Newman and other important Catholic thinkers, mentioning Newman along with Möhler as Congar's main inspirations.<sup>202</sup> Congar admired Newman because he saw a similar inclination toward the pursuit of historical context in Newman as he had learned from Chenu at Le Saulchoir.

Before he became Catholic, Newman had taken up the pen in defense of the position of the Anglican Church against the intrusions of the materialists of his day, showing why the organizational power of the Church was quite reasonable.<sup>203</sup> The main issue which Newman had with the Catholic Church was that, "the Roman Church was wrong to assume the role of *judge* instead of simply that of *witness*."<sup>204</sup> Newman's viewpoint on this resonated with Congar's opinions regarding the Roman authorities. In the words of Meszaros: "Congar sees Newman as already exemplifying the Catholic ecclesiological principles of a teaching Church that, at the very least, witnesses in the faith as it has been developed in the first five centuries, which is why Congar also moves with Newman on the implications which this idea has on the position of Scripture relative to the Church."<sup>205</sup> Congar also appreciated Newman's approach to the *sensus fidei*, as Newman also saw the body of the Church as an important means of transmission of the deposit of the faith, in line with the concept of St. Vincent of Lérins, that the faith is that which has been held by all for all time.

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<sup>202</sup> Bunnenberg, *Lebendige*, 49-50; 77, 79.

<sup>203</sup> The information in this section is taken from T&t, 209-13.

<sup>204</sup> T&t, 210.

<sup>205</sup> Meszaros, *Prophetic*, 64.

As Congar studied Newman, he learned much from the Englishman, not least from the Anglican background that Newman possessed and evidenced. From that non-Catholic background, Newman had the ability to understand things in ways that enlightened Congar. Both of them saw the Fathers with a similar eye, and they both saw that their concepts of the Fathers did not correspond with those of Luther.<sup>206</sup> They both realized that the growth of Christian thought, and most especially of Catholic thought, requires the development of doctrine, adjusting the approach to Scripture and Tradition, sharpening the views of them to, not conform to, but to align with the needs of the times, emphasizing what each era must extract from doctrine, and expressing it in a manner that can be absorbed by each period in history. Gustave Weigel saw that Newman recognized a constancy within church doctrine over the millennia: “instead of trying to find the Church growing in history by relying exclusively on historical method, he decided to go about it another way. Given the hypothesis that the one identical Church was alive from the year 40 to 1840, how would one expect that Church to look in the different periods of change?”<sup>207</sup> The first principle which Newman erected in his observation of that question was that “identity in change preserves its form throughout all the changes.”<sup>208</sup> Newman added six more principles to the examination of change, but the first one must always hold. He also built upon a foundation which understood that the Church which the apostles left behind practiced the genuine Christian religion as it had been passed down to them by the witnesses of Jesus the Christ.<sup>209</sup> In his studies of the work on doctrinal

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<sup>206</sup> Madrid, *Scripture and Tradition*, 174-5.

<sup>207</sup> Gustave Weigel, “Foreword,” in John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 12.

<sup>208</sup> Weigel, “Foreword,” 12.

<sup>209</sup> Newman, *Development*, 32-3.

development by Möhler and Newman, especially Newman due to his Anglican background, Congar came to understand, most significantly in regard to the ecumenism which drove him, “that the Church cannot be understood except from within and that history is powerless to provide an adequate critical justification of the developed forms of belief.”<sup>210</sup> This would drive Congar’s later efforts in ecumenical dialogue, always realizing that he would not be able to fully understand the positions of others, and that they would not be able to fully understand his position, due to the fact that neither one actually participated in and worked in the theologies which their dialogue partners would discuss. But that realization had to make him see the need for full attention and a true attending to the others. In the end, Congar needed Newman’s concepts to fulfill his own concepts of doctrinal development, especially as it played out in Church reform.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout his life, Congar remained dedicated to the Catholic Church, even in the face of what he considered to be unfair criticisms of his work and punishment by the Roman authorities. Although he seriously critiqued the Magisterium, he obeyed it, quietly accepting his exiles to Jerusalem and then to England. Once he became liberated from the heavy hand of the curial authorities and was invited into meetings with the very people who he felt had wronged him, he criticized them openly, while not going all out in his public criticisms. It seems that his closer contact with some of the people in Rome led him to a better understanding of their positions, in spite of the fact that he remained in disagreement. Congar appreciated the Roman hierarchy’s structure as a necessary component of an organization as complex and extensive as the Catholic Church, and his

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<sup>210</sup> T&t, 217-8.

writings offered support to the continuation of the structure, if not the modes of exercise of the authority. Congar well understood how the authority had been funneled into Rome, which he detailed in *Tradition and Traditions*. Congar seemed to take a less supportive stance toward the centralization of the ultimate power of the papacy, sounding cries for a more collegial organization of the bishops.

Within the structure of the Catholic Church as Congar described, he also traced the development of the concept of Tradition within the church. Congar always placed Tradition in service to Scripture, although he always indicated the need of Scripture for Tradition as an explanatory supplement. The two were to remain intertwined, with Scripture always playing the superior role. Significantly, although Congar offered a number of definitions of Traditions, as enumerated above, he accepted the fact that a definition of Tradition would be, of needs, dense and complex. Yet, he never released its essential role in completing the understanding of the Bible for all Christians. It was this essential role that Congar assigned to Tradition that would guide him in his later work and would help him in his ecumenical discussions. It remains important to understand that Congar never supported a two-source concept of Revelation, always placing Scripture in the unassailable position of the superior. We will continue to see how Congar formed this more to help in his mission to unify the Christian churches that had splintered over the centuries.

## Chapter Three: The Laity and the Holy Spirit

As Congar worked through the concepts which he saw as required for genuine ecumenical dialogue and faithful interpretation of Scripture, he realized that two things needed to be included: the lay people of the Church, but most of all, the inspiration and aid of the Holy Spirit. This chapter will begin by discussing Congar's consideration of the Holy Spirit's involvement with the church, then moving to his discussion of the concept of the priesthood of the faithful and how this caused Martin Luther to question the structure of the Roman Catholic Church. The originally divisive concept of the priesthood of the faithful has ended with Vatican II's approval and incorporation of the idea into possibly its most significant document, *Lumen Gentium*, in the writing of which Congar played a substantial part. Following these issues, Congar's concepts of the role of the laity in the Church and their relationship to the clergy and the hierarchy will be investigated, focusing on the laity's place in the hierarchy of the church, especially after Vatican II. Congar's methodology in his placement of the laity within the church will be assessed within these sections.

### The Holy Spirit in the Church

Once it had been established by Jesus Christ (Mt 16:18), the church was subsequently formed by the activities of the apostles and their followers, perpetually under the watch of the Holy Spirit, as that organization grew through the efforts of the members.<sup>1</sup> In *The Mystery of the Church*, Congar specifically cited Ac 9:31, as a succinct description of this process:<sup>2</sup> "It [the church] ... was being built up and was making

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<sup>1</sup> *The Mystery of the Church: Studies by Yves Congar*, trans. A. V. Littledale, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1965), 119.

<sup>2</sup> MC, 119.

steady progress in the fear of the Lord; at the same time it enjoyed the increased consolation of the Holy Spirit.” Congar clarified the language regarding the Holy Spirit in this verse, noting that, “we might equally well translate, ‘by the invocation of the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>3</sup> From the very beginning, then, the Spirit played his part in guiding the church, but, being in this world, the guidance had to be done through the efforts of the human beings who had naturally, gradually assumed positions of leadership within the fledgling organization;<sup>4</sup> Congar stated, in his work *Sainte Église*, that, “we believe the Holy Spirit inhabits and operates in the Church.”<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Teresa Groppe pointed out that Congar felt so strongly about this that he titled the last chapter in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 3, “The Life of the Church as One Long Epiclesis.”<sup>6</sup> Throughout that chapter, Congar demonstrated the intertwining of Christology with Pneumatology.<sup>7</sup>

The important role of the Spirit can be seen in Ac 15:28, when, in a letter being sent to the community in Antioch, “the apostles and presbyters” offer the reasons for their sending the representatives whom they have chosen, saying, “[i]t is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and ours too, not to lay on you any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary ...” The first section of this pericope also shows that, in the very early church, an inchoate hierarchy had already been set in place, as it mentions the position of not only the apostles and presbyters, but also calls those being sent, Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas, “leaders among the brothers” (Ac 15:22). Congar understood that the membership of the early church sorted itself into the leaders and the general populace of

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<sup>3</sup> MC, 119.

<sup>4</sup> MC, 185.

<sup>5</sup> *Sainte Église: études et approches ecclesiologique* (Paris: Cerf, 1963), 77; (SE).

<sup>6</sup> THS, 146; HS3, 3: 267-74.

<sup>7</sup> HS3, 271.

the organization, for it was already an organization.<sup>8</sup> Congar naturally included the Holy Spirit in the guidance of these early actions which formed the structure of the church, including the hierarchy.<sup>9</sup>

In *Power and Poverty in the Church*, Congar noted the various sources which confirm the primitive hierarchical composition of the Church, including “the epistles, the Acts, the letters of St. Clement of Rome, and of St. Ignatius of Antioch (‘Theophorus’), the Epistle and the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, finally the *Didache*.”<sup>10</sup> Rose Beal goes so far as to state that he “assigned both formal and efficient causality to both the Holy Spirit and the hierarchy.”<sup>11</sup> Congar assigned these two as “instrumental efficient causes,” placed in that role by “the principal efficient cause,” Christ.<sup>12</sup> Beal stated that “Congar organized his course explicitly according to the four causes of Aristotle (final, material, efficient, and formal).”<sup>13</sup> The material on the causes came primarily from Aristotle, with Thomas Aquinas supplying the theological support. Beal offered no definition of these causes, but *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* gave the following: “The final cause is the end or purpose for the sake of which” something was done, or made; “the efficient cause is that which initiates the process of change and so is its primary source.”<sup>14</sup> Congar leaned upon the concept of the Mystical Body of Christ in his course *De Ecclesia*, employing its allegory of the church being the actual body of Christ in one sense and

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<sup>8</sup> MC, 184.

<sup>9</sup> MC, 184. Congar points to Acts “9:31; 20:28 taken with 14:22; 13:1-4; 5:2 taken with 5:3; 15:28.” Congar cited additional biblical references in which the activity of the Spirit is mentioned, including 2 Cor 3:2-3, Jn 15:26-7, Heb 2:3-4, Lk 24:48-9; Ac 1:8, 31-3; 16:14 Jn 3:5; 20:22-3.

<sup>10</sup> *Power and Poverty in the Church*, trans. Jennifer Nicholson (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 113-4; (PPC).

<sup>11</sup> MCPG, 125.

<sup>12</sup> MCPG, 125. This was based on the notes from Congar’s *Cours d’Écclesiologie*, taught in 1932-33.

<sup>13</sup> MCPG, 119. All information on the causes comes from 119-32.

<sup>14</sup> G. B. Kerferd, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. one, Paul Edwards, ed. in chief (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1967), s.v. “Aristotle.”



Christ as the head of the body in another in order to offer dual views of Christ in relation to the church. The inclusion of the hierarchy as an efficient cause for the church seems to me to be a bit on the edge, since it would seem logical that a church must be somewhat in place, or at least the conceptual and initial doctrinal underpinnings must have existed before the recognition of a true hierarchy could have actually led to further development of the church. However, as Congar showed, the hierarchy became recognized quite early in the church's history, which permits some inclusion of the hierarchy in the position of an efficient cause.

Congar confirmed that, “[i]t is clear from all this that the Church is built up essentially by the co-operation of the Holy Spirit sent by Christ with the apostolic ministry he established.”<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Teresa Groppe stated that for Congar, the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit „, is inseparable from the mystery of the church.”<sup>16</sup> She continued, speaking of the founding of the church: “[t]hrough the Spirit, Jesus Christ laid the foundations of the church during his earthly life; and the Spirit of the glorified Lord carries the church forward throughout human history.”<sup>17</sup> Groppe stressed the interrelationship of Jesus and the Spirit as found in Congar's writings, particularly his later ones.<sup>18</sup> Groppe makes it clear that Congar, in his later life, took the Spirit seriously in his co-establishment of the church with Jesus. She also noted that Congar himself lamented his earlier Christocentric approach to the church and its founding.<sup>19</sup> In a later article, Groppe stressed that Congar's concept of church showed his concept of church as

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<sup>15</sup> MC, 185.

<sup>16</sup> THS, 9.

<sup>17</sup> THS, 9.

<sup>18</sup> THS, 73-5.

<sup>19</sup> THS, 74.

being given to us “from on high.”<sup>20</sup> In the same article, Groppe pointed to a quote from *Lay People* in which Congar gave his view of the church and seems to me to be quite compelling: “She was and is an institution formed from on high, hierarchically built.”<sup>21</sup> Congar conceived of the church as hierarchically built! One must remember that this quote came from a book he wrote before the scrutiny from the Roman hierarchy intensified to the point of affecting his writing. Beal credited the influence of Möhler on Congar for the belief that the Spirit is the Person who supports the church.<sup>22</sup>

The building up of that church did not occur strictly through the efforts of the hierarchy, however; it also received, and required, the support of the laity, those outside of the developing “inner circle.”<sup>23</sup> Congar specifically pointed to the laypersons who comprised a significant part of the gathering when the Spirit descended upon them; the gifts brought by the Spirit were not limited to the apostles and other early leaders, they were given to all of the disciples, with no regard to position within the group.<sup>24</sup> In this distribution of the gifts, the Spirit blessed the entire assembly, the *ekklesia*, equally, with several verses in Acts supporting the togetherness of the group.<sup>25</sup> Congar’s focus on the unity of the fledgling church almost certainly stemmed from his reading and appreciation for Möhler’s *Unity in the Church* (1825).

John’s Gospel assured the disciples that, “the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I

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<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, “The Contribution of Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 475.

<sup>21</sup> Groppe, “Contribution,” 475. The quote itself is from LPC, 34.

<sup>22</sup> MCPG, 41.

<sup>23</sup> *The Revelation of God*, trans. A. Manson and L. C. Sheppard (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 149; (RG).

<sup>24</sup> RG, 149.

<sup>25</sup> In RG, 149, Congar specifically mentioned Ac 1:15; 2:1, 44, and 47.

told you.” (Jn 14:26); also, “being the Spirit of truth he will guide you to all truth.” (Jn 16:13).<sup>26</sup>

Beal reported that Congar’s notes from his course on ecclesiology in 1932-3, “described the Holy Spirit as the soul of the Church.”<sup>27</sup> Congar pointed out in *The Revelation of God* that the Spirit is in the church in a manner that differs from his actions as reported in the Bible; the Spirit was with the founders of the church as reported in the gospels “through a special grace of revelation,” but he remains with the church in a supportive manner, which “is not the grace of new revelation, but of permanency in the faith of the apostles and of exact definition of the faith which cannot remain in her inert and sterile.”<sup>28</sup> The faith that the apostles received came from revelation, which ceased upon their deaths. Their faith needed the assurance of support in the sustenance of it in its pure form as it was later passed on, and this was the function of the Holy Spirit in his mission to the early church; the Spirit also bore responsibility for the maintenance of consistency in the faith as it developed. This is what Congar meant when he called the Holy Spirit “the soul of the church,” as Beal described.

In *The Mystery of the Church*, Congar clearly stated that, “[w]hat makes the Church is our faith and the sacraments in which it takes visible form. The Church is, of its essence, sacramental.”<sup>29</sup> Congar devoted an entire section of volume 3 of his work, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, to “The Holy Spirit and the Sacraments.”<sup>30</sup> On the second last

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<sup>26</sup> Congar also cites these verses in RG, 155. Congar concerned himself greatly with the concept of truth, to the point where William Henn credited Congar with being the source of the Vatican II concept of the hierarchy of truths, found in *Unitatis redintegratio*; William Henn, *The Hierarchy of Truths According to Yves Congar* (Rome: Gregorian Pontifical University Press, 1987), 89.

<sup>27</sup> MCPG, 126n91.

<sup>28</sup> RG, 157.

<sup>29</sup> MC, 34-5.

<sup>30</sup> HS3, 217-74.

page of the entire work, Congar stated, “[t]he Church as a whole is sacramental in its nature.”<sup>31</sup> The Holy Spirit is linked intimately with the sacraments of the church, and in these he guides the church in its mission.

The Holy Spirit has accompanied the church since it was formed; on a daily level, he continues to guide the church through its sacramental life.<sup>32</sup> Congar stated in *Called to Life* that his Dominican background inclined him toward the liturgy and taught him a genuine appreciation of it.<sup>33</sup> Congar believed that the Holy Spirit guided the church through its sacraments, as well as through the Scriptures, whose writing the Spirit presided over. It would be far too lengthy a project to go into detail on Congar’s complete consideration of the Holy Spirit’s full role in guiding the church.

### **Priesthood of All the Faithful**

As relayed in Chapter One, during his first sojourn in Germany as a young priest, Congar discovered German writing; he later, in *Dialogue Between Christians*, related what he found interesting in the Germans: he learned “of the benefit the mind of a Frenchman could derive from contact with Germany. Latinity helps a German to clarify the ferment of his thought; Germanism reveals to a Latin a certain dimension of reality transcending formal order and the classification of ideas.”<sup>34</sup> Before reading the writings of Martin Luther, he became intrigued with the profound ideas which Friedrich Heiler had found in his review of Luther’s *Die Hochkirche*.<sup>35</sup> Congar subsequently dove into Luther’s writings after he recognized that Luther’s thought had been essential for the

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<sup>31</sup> HS3, 271

<sup>32</sup> RG, 159-60; HS3, 267-72; SE-12-4.

<sup>33</sup> *Called to Life*, trans. William Burrige (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 3; (CL).

<sup>34</sup> DBC, 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> DBC, 5-6.

Reformation, saying about Luther, that, “in my view Catholics can make no serious approach to Protestantism unless they do him justice by really trying to understand him or the motives which inspired his theology.”<sup>36</sup> During Congar’s second extended visit in Germany in 1931 in which he was based in Berlin, he spent time studying Luther’s writings. Additionally, he visited several of the major sights of Luther’s life, such as Wittenberg, Erfurt, and the Wartburg castle; he returned to Wittenberg twice.<sup>37</sup>

In the Introduction of his book on Luther, *Martin Luther, sa foi, sa réforme*, Congar gave the reason for his deep attraction to the Reformer; he confessed that it went back to his own desire to learn the truth, a desire which he apparently felt he shared with the Great Reformer. Congar was convinced that one truth could not contradict another truth, regardless of where each originated. He therefore scrutinized Luther’s writings and concluded that the Reformer sincerely believed in the correctness of his side of the dispute. Congar then occupied himself with reconciling the ideas in Luther’s writings with those of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>38</sup>

Congar recognized that Luther’s denunciation of the church and its organization at the time had a basis in Luther’s rejection of Thomas Aquinas’ Scholasticism;<sup>39</sup> at the later point in Congar’s life in which he wrote *Martin Luther* (1969), he recognized that his own personal immersion in the study of Thomism had restricted his access to the truth in some instances.<sup>40</sup> Congar saw that Luther comprehended the limitations which

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<sup>36</sup> DBC, 62.

<sup>37</sup> *Une Passion, l’unité: Réflexions et souvenirs, 1929-1973* (Paris: Cerf, 1974), 17; (UPU).

<sup>38</sup> ML.

<sup>39</sup> See Martin Luther, “Disputation Against Scholastic Theology,” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 13-20; (MLBT). Also available in Martin Luther, *Luther’s Early Theological Works*, ed. and trans. James Atkinson, vol. XVI of *The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), as well as in WA, I, 221-228.

<sup>40</sup> ML, 9.

Thomism, as well as the church structures of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, placed upon the thinking of church members.

Luther moved in the direction of Humanism, which encouraged an emphasis on the individual as the measure of all things. Maurice Blondel, one of the great influences in Congar's life,<sup>41</sup> had commented on Luther's move toward individual interpretation, "the development of *private judgment*," to subvert the position which reason had assumed in Thomistic thought in the Middle Ages.<sup>42</sup> Blondel commented that Luther intended to keep reasoning away from Christianity.<sup>43</sup> Joseph Lortz said that Erasmus was doing the same thing; Luther likely followed the path taken by his former friend.<sup>44</sup> Immersed in a Europe which showed great enthusiasm over the new humanistic approach, Luther included the more human-centered approach in at least one of his concepts, that of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>45</sup>

Luther was not a systematic theologian; the Anglican church historian Diarmaid MacCulloch said that Luther "felt his theology before he began with logical questions and answers about God, which resulted in a theology full of paradoxes or downright contradictions."<sup>46</sup> An example of Luther's paradoxes can be found in his "Disputation

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<sup>41</sup> JP, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 175.

<sup>43</sup> Blondel, *Letter on Apologetics*, 175.

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, vol. 2, trans. Ronald Walls (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 245.

<sup>45</sup> More complete treatments of Humanism and its effects on Luther and the Reformation can be found in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 109-15; Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 373-5; Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: Part VI: The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 122-5; 320-5, 425-7; Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century*, vol. 3, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 21-30; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 73-84, 87-90, 92-104, 109-14; Pelikan, *Reformation*, 19-22, 306-13.

<sup>46</sup> MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 112. See also Timothy F. Lull, "Introduction," in *MLBT*, 1, who calls Luther "an occasional theologian."

Against Scholastic Theology” (1517), which is a numbered compendium of his thoughts: “7. ... without the grace of God, the will produces an act that is perverse and evil. 8. It does not, however, follow that the will is by nature evil. ... 9. It is nevertheless innately and inevitably evil and corrupt.”<sup>47</sup> These views would lead to disputes with Erasmus. Luther’s concern was more pastoral, showing concern for the welfare of the people, a direction which attracted Congar, who noted that Luther considered the Christian faith as more than simply the acceptance of a “historical faith,” which meant a conformance to a “purely objective and neutral fact.”<sup>48</sup> Luther received much of his education from the Augustinian Eremites in Erfurt, imbibing the thought of not only Augustine, naturally, but also of the humanistic teaching that he received at that school.<sup>49</sup> Being a true Augustinian, which thereby included a suspicion of the material world, Luther never really became a true Humanist, although his methodology in his lectures and writings reflected his Erfurt education.<sup>50</sup>

Paul Althaus showed that Luther emphasized the Lutheran faith as a faith for each individual:

The word authenticates itself to me .... Now however, we must also emphasize as Luther does, that it authenticates itself to *me*. There is therefore within a man something to which the Word bears witness that it is God’s word. The word is something different from man’s own inner life; it stands over against him; it speaks to him from the outside. It must be heard – no one can speak it to himself.

When it is heard, however, it enters into a man in such a way that it moves his

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<sup>47</sup> MLBT, 13-14.

<sup>48</sup> ML, 29.

<sup>49</sup> MacCulloch, *The Reformation*. 112.

<sup>50</sup> Cooke, *Ministry to Word*, 374; MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 113-4.

innermost being; it convinces, convicts, and thereby proves to him that it is God's own truth. ... It is here that the certainty of faith exists.<sup>51</sup>

Luther here demonstrated that he had no intention of relinquishing the privilege of personally doing his own hermeneutics on the Bible. Lortz commented that for Luther, Christianity centered around the small, ecclesial group, which could judge all things theological, by using the Scriptures.<sup>52</sup> With the onset of the Renaissance and Humanism in Europe, the concentration of responsibility within the individual person rather than in any outside institution, such as the church, had begun to be spread through the Humanists, most especially by the most famous and most well-travelled of the Humanists, Erasmus.<sup>53</sup> Luther especially appreciated Erasmus' investigations of the Bible, which came to demonstrate some problems with translations that had been in use.<sup>54</sup> The two men were well acquainted, and Erasmus initially defended Luther in disputes with the Roman Church, although what he actually defended was the man Luther and Luther's right to voice his ideas, but Erasmus did not necessarily defend Luther's concepts.<sup>55</sup>

The Humanists believed that the human being should completely control humanity's destiny, by bringing all aspects of life into the realm of human thought, which could employ reason to conquer all problems. The Humanists engaged in battle with the scholastic theologians of the time, as did Luther's Reformation.<sup>56</sup> Humanism did not conflict with the Roman Church directly; however, Luther enlisted the aid of the

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<sup>51</sup> Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 53.

<sup>52</sup> Lortz, *Reformation in Germany*, II, 24.

<sup>53</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 109-11. Except where noted, the following discussion comes from these pages.

<sup>54</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 112.

<sup>55</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 114-5.

<sup>56</sup> MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 82.



Humanist program to try to wrestle away from the institutional church the authority to interpret the Bible.

Erasmus disagreed most vehemently with Luther over human free will and the use of reason, and this led to a degradation of their relationship.<sup>57</sup> Luther's essay, "The Bondage of the Will" (1525), was addressed from Luther to Erasmus, and it listed Luther's position on the character of the free will.<sup>58</sup> Humanists, in general, shifted the emphasis away from consideration of the supernatural as the source of action and ideas to the human being as the subject, centered within the mind, which Humanists claimed possessed the capability to reason out anything.<sup>59</sup> This concentration of the hub of control of action with the human being followed along the lines of ancient Greek philosophy, locating the central locus within the earthly realm, rather than leaving the world in God's hands, as the Middle Ages had done.<sup>60</sup>

At the direction of his Augustinian vicar at Wittenberg, Luther became a student of the Bible, beginning with courses he taught on the Psalms in 1514 and 1515.<sup>61</sup> During his studies, he developed a number of ideas that ultimately conflicted with the authoritative Roman Catholic doctrine. One of the concepts that ended up in controversy was the idea of the priesthood of all believers.

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<sup>57</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 146-7. From the same location we get more detail on their disagreements: "One particular point of disagreement between the two men occurred over their interpretation of the result of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Luther took a pessimistic view on the depraved situation of humanity after the Fall; Erasmus, on the other hand, believed that human reason survived the Fall, not having been fully corrupted."

<sup>58</sup> MLBT, 173-226.

<sup>59</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 109.

<sup>60</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 109-10.

<sup>61</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 114.

In 1520, Luther had begun defending the positions which had developed during what MacCulloch called his “Accidental Revolution.”<sup>62</sup> Luther’s original concerns stemmed from his views on the church, which led him early on to work out his ideas on an ecclesiology which, in his eyes, would follow along the lines of that described in the Bible and in the teachings of the earliest Christian writers, the most important of which crystallized in his concept of the priesthood of all the faithful.<sup>63</sup> His ecclesiology was based on the concept of the church as the communion of saints, meaning that all were equal.<sup>64</sup> Luther did not originate this idea; it lies in 1Pt 2:9, and centuries before Luther, it was generally taken up in the arguments of the Union Bohemian Brethren with the Utraquists.<sup>65</sup> Pelikan also cited Jan Hus in this regard, quoting the early reformer: “every good Christian is a priest, but not every priest is a good Christian.”<sup>66</sup> Luther may not have fully appreciated the difficulty he faced in shifting views in Rome; Lortz stated that Luther’s “universal, spiritual principles did not possess the power to remove the deeply rooted ecclesiastical legal system without friction, and erect in its place a new and lasting order.”<sup>67</sup>

Congar, in *Sainte Église*, pointed out that the concept of a universal priestly function of offering sacrifice existed already very early in the Old Testament, but gradually this universal priestly function became compressed into the office of one individual, the high priest.<sup>68</sup> Congar briefly traced the progress of the priestly office,

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<sup>62</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 119. The term comes from the title of a section in MacCulloch’s chapter on Luther.

<sup>63</sup> González, *Christian Thought*, 63.

<sup>64</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 313-4. See also Lortz, *Reformation in Germany*, II, 24.

<sup>65</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 36-7; Pelikan, *Reformation*, 94.

<sup>66</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation*, 94.

<sup>67</sup> Lortz, *Reformation in Germany*, 25.

<sup>68</sup> SE, 246-7.

pointing especially to Lv 16 and Hb, especially 8:1 to 10:18.<sup>69</sup> In Hebrews, the office of the priest was authoritatively assumed by Jesus, the great high priest. Althaus dealt with Luther's approach to that point, clarifying the progressive movement from Christ as priest to the priesthood of all believers, stating that: "[t]he church is founded on Christ's priesthood. Its inner structure is the priesthood of Christians for each other. The priesthood of Christians flows from the priesthood of Christ."<sup>70</sup> In a footnote, Althaus quoted Luther: "Through baptism we have all been ordained as priests."<sup>71</sup> In Luther's thinking, individual Christians were all priests of the religion, with the offices of the priest invested in each of the faithful through baptism, which has a very Augustinian ring to it.<sup>72</sup> Althaus made a point of softening the individualism of Luther's position on the personal interpretation of the Bible: "The universal priesthood expresses not religious individualism but its exact opposite, the reality of the congregation as a community."<sup>73</sup>

Some components of Luther's ecclesiological concepts, such as the priesthood of all believers, ran into problems with the Roman perception at the time; González stated that this concept constituted an "attack on the sacramental system," originally included by Luther in his *Address to the German Nobility*.<sup>74</sup> The Roman Catholic position accepted that the priesthood of all includes a mandate to preach the word of God, but the Romans carefully separated the offices of the consecrated, sacramental, or sacerdotal priest from the priesthood of the people.<sup>75</sup> Bernard Cooke goes further, noting that "the Catholic tradition did not, then, shift from emphasis on the notion of 'priest' in the post-

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<sup>69</sup> SE, 247.

<sup>70</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 313-5. Much of the following discussion comes from this source.

<sup>71</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 314n86. Currently, I have no access to a library to verify this.

<sup>72</sup> Compare this to Augustine's notion that original sin is transmitted through concupiscence.

<sup>73</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 314.

<sup>74</sup> González, *Christian Thought*, 39.

<sup>75</sup> Cooke, *Ministry to Word*, 289.

Reformation years; if anything, it concentrated even more on this identification of the ordained minister.”<sup>76</sup> Catholics before Vatican II did not generally believe in the priesthood of the faithful; Léon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, in his book, *Memories and Hopes*, made the following statement, which indicated that he certainly did not espouse the concept: “Our separated brethren accuse the Church of being far too clerical and of stifling the laity. They believe in ‘the priesthood of the faithful,’ to whom they assign an important role.”<sup>77</sup> From the wording of the comment, one sees that the notion of the priesthood of all believers was foreign to this prelate of the Catholic Church, who otherwise would be regarded by most as a very progressive man.

Luther’s priesthood of all believers did not include a clerical or sacramental aspect to it; that clerical office went to the person designated as a minister, whose main purpose was the proclamation of God’s word, as opposed to the individual, who lacked the training to generally undertake this specialized task within a formal, ecclesiastical structure.<sup>78</sup>

Congar’s writings often stressed the institutional nature of the church, and that is the aspect of the church which Luther most adamantly rejected. Both Congar and Luther appreciated the community and communion side of the church. Luther’s position on the optimum method for the correction of the faults of the Roman Church ran counter to that which Congar much later developed; Congar firmly believed that any genuine reform of the Church had to come from within; he refused to leave the church in spite of his

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<sup>76</sup> Cooke, *Ministry to Word*, 289.

<sup>77</sup> Léon-Joseph Suenens, *Memories and Hopes*, trans. Elena French (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1992), 95.

<sup>78</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation*, 175.

troubles with Rome.<sup>79</sup> Leaving the Church could not reform the Church, in his mind, since reform cannot be achieved from outside.<sup>80</sup> Luther, however, felt that he could no longer live within the constrictions that Rome had in place: “By the time Luther presented himself to the [Roman] legate at Augsburg, he already had clear and solid convictions: a reform of the Church depended on the substitution of one theology for another, more precisely, on the norms of thought and discipline for the norms then in use.”<sup>81</sup> Luther must have known that the likelihood of this happening was essentially nonexistent. As soon as he took the ultimate decision to leave the Church, he gave up any possibility of reforming the Roman Catholic Church; one can be fairly certain that Congar came to his conclusion, which he stressed as a condition for reform in his *True and False Reform in the Church*, published in 1950, after observing Luther and his actions in detail.

Congar critiqued many of Luther’s positions, including among them the idea that the human being is a despicable creation; he cited Luther, who wrote in “a commentary from 1532, ... ‘the proper subject of theology is man, guilty of sin and lost, and God who justifies and saves the sinner.’”<sup>82</sup> Here, Luther takes his Augustinian education and focuses on the most severe position of Augustine, that of the *massa damnata*, which indicated that humanity, on their own, will end up in hell. The Catholic Church teaches that the human being possesses a basic goodness. Calvin accepted Luther’s point and took it further, changing it into the concept of total depravity of the human being, left

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<sup>79</sup> Remaining within the church is Congar’s second condition for reform in VFR.

<sup>80</sup> VFR, 229f.

<sup>81</sup> ML, 38.

<sup>82</sup> ML, 41.

with no free will.<sup>83</sup> The positive regard of the Catholic Church for the human being was set aside by both of the classical Reformers.

Congar, in his *Lay People in the Church* related the lay situation vis-a-vis the church always through the function of the clergy and the hierarchy, which never could have suited Luther. Althaus offered his opinion that Luther believed that the church had allowed, even encouraged, worship to deteriorate into a demonstration of rituals which brought out the worst in the priests, accusing them of “encouraging presumptuous human pride, idolatry, and contradicting genuine fear of God,” who had refused this sort of ritual.<sup>84</sup> Luther denied the value of sacramental rituals, thereby denying the need for an ordained priest to perform them.

Althaus believed that there are also two significant “manifestations of the priest, which must be addressed to completely understand the concept: (1) that of preaching: “The priesthood of all believers means that they have the right and duty to confess, to teach, and to spread God’s word;” (2) the pardoning of sins, which can be considered to be an extension of the duty of preaching: “I believe that the forgiveness of sins is to be found in this community and nowhere else.”<sup>85</sup> All believers, through their membership in the *ekklesia*, possessed the ability to declare the pardon of their fellow believers’ sins, an ability that Luther declared to be one of the most significant characteristics of the community.<sup>86</sup> He believed that individual, confidential penance among the congregants formed an essential part of the life of the group.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 111 (1, 15, 8); Book 2, chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>84</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 128.

<sup>85</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 315-6.

<sup>86</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 316.

<sup>87</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 316-7.

As seen above, Luther strongly believed that the human will leads to evil; he emphasized this again in “The Bondage of the Will:” in discussing Ro 3:10ff, in which Paul said that everyone is under sin, Luther stated that “his whole concern here is to make grace necessary for all men.”<sup>88</sup> The Reformer was known to confess frequently: “Luther endeavored unremittingly to avail himself of this signal mercy. Without confession, he testified, the Devil would have devoured him long ago.”<sup>89</sup> This sacrament remained for him an important part of his Catholic faith which he carried with him after he had left the Roman Church: “Nevertheless, I will allow no man to take private confession away from me, and I would not give it up for all the treasure of the world, since I know what comfort and strength it has given me.”<sup>90</sup> The sacrament became a part of his Tradition, one may say with some support, however, as Althaus pointed out, “Luther rejects the ecclesiastical rule which requires confession,”<sup>91</sup> believing that it “is an indispensable form of the gospel,” leaning on Mt 16:19 and 18:8 for biblical support.<sup>92</sup>

According to Bainton, Luther believed that the most important part of Christianity was the Word of God as preached.<sup>93</sup> Althaus agreed with Bainton, describing Luther’s concept: “All of his theological work presupposes the authority of Scripture and the derived authority of the genuine tradition of the church.”<sup>94</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan also stated that Luther concerned himself foremost with the content of the gospel; “The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> MLBT, 186.

<sup>89</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 35.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Althaus, *Luther*, 317n103.

<sup>91</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 317.

<sup>92</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 317. The Gospel citations are from 316.

<sup>93</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 223.

<sup>94</sup> Althaus, *Luther*, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation*, 128.

Althaus spoke of Luther's "work presuppose[ing] the authority of Scripture and the derived authority of the genuine tradition of the church," which offers hope that some of the differences between Catholics and Protestants regarding the roles of Scripture and Tradition may be rooted in different understandings of the word "tradition," with or without the capital T. By approaching each other through this portal, it is possible that agreement, or progress toward a coming together, can be reached through dialogue, similar to that reached on the concept of justification by faith alone.

The early Catholic attitudes toward Luther were described above; these came from a reactionary position which recoiled from any position that Luther took. However, by the time the Council of Trent began to take up the issues which had divided the two sides, some reconciliation and understanding for Luther's position on the priesthood of the faithful had taken place within the Catholic council. Although the idea was not taken up directly by the council, it appeared in *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, in which the idea of the priesthood of all believers is referred to as the "internal priesthood," as opposed to the "external priesthood," which refers "only to certain men who have been ordained and consecrated to God by the lawful imposition of hands and by the solemn ceremonies of holy Church."<sup>96</sup> Whether Luther agreed with this formulation is not known. The concept was also included in *Lumen Gentium*, through the recommendation of Cardinal Ritter, of St. Louis, MO.<sup>97</sup> The fact is that the idea of the priesthood of the

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<sup>96</sup> That the concept had never appeared in council documents before LG, see Gerard Philips, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: History of the Constitution," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 1:120. The citation in the catechism: *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests: Issued by Order of Pope Pius V*, trans. John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1982), 330. The catechism states: "Regarding the internal priesthood, all the faithful are said to be priests, once they have been washed in the saving waters of baptism."

<sup>97</sup> Philips, "History of the Constitution," 109.



faithful has always been accepted within the Catholic Church, although it has developed considerably through the centuries, mainly through the impetus provided by Martin Luther.

From a time between Trent and Vatican I, one of Congar's main influences, Johann Adam Möhler, discussed the "Participation of All Christians in the Priestly Vocation," which he used as the title of his "Addendum 13" to the book which Congar held most dear, *Unity in the Church, Or the Principle of Catholicism*.<sup>98</sup> Möhler, in his 1825 book, stated: "I have said that in the early Church a general priesthood of all Christians was acknowledged. One must marvel at the meanings that were found in this concept and now arise again."<sup>99</sup> Möhler began with these sentences a discussion of the issue discussed regarding the universal priesthood as a concentration on the immediate contact between God and the individual believer. Möhler argued that the proper interpretation of the concept does not permit this view of the independent believer. He referred to the Fathers of the first three centuries, pointing out that those writers promoted the view of communion within the assembly, which was certainly not in accord with the individualist interpretation.<sup>100</sup> Congar imbibed Möhler's thinking, crediting Möhler with inspiring him.<sup>101</sup>

Congar was influenced along the direction indicated by the nineteenth century theologian, which evidenced itself in *Lumen Gentium*. At the Second Vatican Council, Congar was named to a sub-commission to rewrite the original text of the document titled

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<sup>98</sup> Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church, Or, The Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, trans. Peter C. Erb (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1996). That Congar held this book most dear is found in JP, 47-8.

<sup>99</sup> Möhler, *Unity in the Church*, 321.

<sup>100</sup> Möhler, *Unity in the Church*, 321.

<sup>101</sup> JP, 48. "Il m'a donné un souffle."

*De Ecclesia*. While Gerard Philips took the lead in drafting the new document, Congar certainly had input; Cardinal Suenens acknowledged Congar's contribution in his memoir, saying that "a French theologian, Fr. Congar, OP, worked closely with our team of experts at the Belgian College."<sup>102</sup> Congar and Philips interacted frequently, which actually caused Congar to move to the Belgian College in Rome.<sup>103</sup> The continuing interaction between Philips and Congar leads one to understand that their ideas had been extensively exchanged. Here lay the conduit for Congar's concepts and ideas finding their way into certain portions of *Lumen Gentium* that he had not himself written, notably the second chapter, which was written by Philips under the management of Suenens, who had been assigned to oversee both *Lumen Gentium* and the document which ultimately became *Gaudium et spes*.<sup>104</sup> Within *Lumen Gentium*, the mention of the priesthood of the faithful lies in paragraph 10: "Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered to one another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ." One can only ponder what Luther would have thought about this wording.

At Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* "became the foundational document of the Council."<sup>105</sup> Aloys Grillmeier explained the philosophy behind the priesthood of all believers in his commentary contribution:

The new relationship to God is most fully expressed in the common priesthood of the faithful, which is based on the re-birth from God and the bestowal of the Holy

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<sup>102</sup> Suenens, *Memories and Hopes*, 74.

<sup>103</sup> JC, 22, 264, 267.

<sup>104</sup> JC, 251 and Suenens, *Memories and Hopes*, 89-99, 106-7, 131-9.

<sup>105</sup> Mary Cecily Boulding, "Congar at the Second Vatican Council," in JC, xl. See also Suenens, *Memories and Hope*, 89-96.

Spirit. Without baptism and the Spirit given in baptism there is no true worship of God. But God is known, confessed and glorified in the acceptance of faith. This is the foundation of Christian worship which every baptized person offers to God. No doubt this priesthood is realized primarily in the Church as a whole, and hence the connection with the notion of building or temple. As a community, the Church is the place of the true worship of God, of public testimony to the wonderful works of God, to redemption in Christ and the eternal vocation. But the whole life of each individual is also priestly, in an active sense, even in the ‘reception’ of the sacraments, which are the proper acts of Church life.<sup>106</sup>

Whether the ideas on the universal priesthood of the faithful came from Congar or not, is never explicitly stated, but Congar and Grillmeier had such significant interactions on the schema that one could reasonably attribute the origin of the idea to Congar or to both of them.

With Vatican II and *Lumen Gentium*, the Catholic Church fully accepted a concept that had initially divided Lutherans and Catholics. Similar to the essentially now-resolved issue of the meaning of justification, we can see that at least the Catholic and Lutheran communities have used reasoned discussion to agree that the issue that Luther raised was correct.

Congar’s discussed his own position on the priesthood of the laity in *Lay People in the Church*. At the beginning of his chapter titled, “The Laity and the Church’s Priestly Function,” Congar noted that “Holy Writ itself bears witness to the existence of a natural priesthood. Each man was his own priest, or, more usually, a man was priest of a group,

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<sup>106</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, “Chapter II, The People of God,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 1:157.

in which he ranked as head.”<sup>107</sup> The term used here, “natural priesthood,” showed up in several other places in the chapter. Although the above quotation appears intended at the start to point to a priesthood of all the faithful, Congar ended up by citing the development of a hierarchical priesthood, a concept from which he did not escape in the chapter.

He began his later examination of the priesthood of all the faithful with the statement that, “a priest, a bishop, a pope is first of all a layman.”<sup>108</sup> Congar then separated those offices from the laity, stating that, “[t]he hierarchical priests are alone able to celebrate the sacramental ‘beginning anew’ ... of *Christ’s* worship, *in persona Christi*.”<sup>109</sup> This point, he stated, “gives value to all the rest.”<sup>110</sup> The layperson has the duty, the same as a priest, to live a Christian life, and be an exemplar of a member of the church; however, differences remain, in his mind: “the priest has a higher value of ecclesial capability, i.e. of competence and gifts for the building up of the Church.”<sup>111</sup> Having effectively segregated the laity from the clergy, Congar proceeded to relate instances in which small ecclesial groups, such as POW camps, communities behind the Iron Curtain, and others, have survived for years without the aid of a hierarchical priest. He discussed the work of laypeople as missionaries, but at the end of the discussion, he apparently felt compelled to remind the reader that these missionaries cannot perform their ministries without the clergy, who are required for the true establishment of the small communities to perform the sacraments.<sup>112</sup> Congar then referred back to the

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<sup>107</sup> LPC, 121.

<sup>108</sup> LPC, 181.

<sup>109</sup> LPC, 181.

<sup>110</sup> LPC, 181.

<sup>111</sup> LPC, 182.

<sup>112</sup> LPC, 184.

Reformation positions, noting that it was “Caspar Schatzgeyer [who] in 1522 formulated the distinction (perhaps for the first time) that was popular at the time of the Council of Trent and was to be used in the *Catechismus ad parochos* of 1566.”<sup>113</sup> The laity during the time of Trent were considered to possess “a ‘metaphorical’ as opposed to a ‘proper’ priesthood.”<sup>114</sup> Congar did not appear to appreciate the terminology of the sixteenth century.

Congar, later in the same chapter, related the history of the Catholic Church’s official stance on reading the Bible by the laity.<sup>115</sup> The discussion centered strictly on the reading of the Bible, with no explicit consideration of hermeneutics, although Congar included exhortations to study the Bible which were issued by church officials over the centuries. In *Tradition and Traditions*, Congar explained his position on biblical interpretation. First, he noted the “Scripture does not yield its meaning entirely by itself. Text must be complemented by interpretation, as is evidenced by the numerous interpretations to which any one text may be subject.”<sup>116</sup> Congar stated that “for Luther, Scripture was self-explanatory and made Christ the savior recognized.”<sup>117</sup> My opinion is that Congar could not have agreed with Luther on the degree to which an individual has the authority to make decisions on biblical interpretation; Congar wanted the church included as the ultimate interpreter.<sup>118</sup> Luther, however, did not hold strictly to the concept that each individual has the full authority to interpret the Bible in their own manner; he recognized that there existed “unfounded (wilde) interpretations and prefaces,

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<sup>113</sup> LPC, 185.

<sup>114</sup> LPC, 186.

<sup>115</sup> LPC, 312-23.

<sup>116</sup> T&t, 400.

<sup>117</sup> HS1, 140.

<sup>118</sup> See

[which] have scattered the thought of Christians to a point where no one any longer knows what is gospel or law.”<sup>119</sup> Luther proceeded to offer guidelines for the reading of the Bible, in short essays, one each for the Old and New Testaments.

Congar “added that some recent writers speak of an inceptive or undeveloped priesthood of the faithful: this has the advantage of marking the coherence and relative continuity of the priestly quality in the Church, but perhaps it marks it too much.”<sup>120</sup> The hierarchical priesthood seemed to be so deeply inculcated in him that he had trouble escaping that basic concept, in spite of the fact that he sincerely wanted to appreciate the position of the laity.

Having examined the concept of the priesthood of all the faithful, we now look at Congar’s view on the theology of the laity, which occupied quite a bit of his time. This issue of the laity was one of three which Congar specifically informed Cardinal Ottaviani<sup>121</sup> was among his strengths, and it had long been one of his interests.<sup>122</sup>

### **Place of the Laity in the Roman Catholic Church**

As we have seen a number of times, one of the underlying spirits that motivated Congar was ecumenism, as evidenced by the fact that his first major work, in 1937, was *Chrétiens Désunis*. One of the significant points which highlighted Beal’s study was Congar’s concept of a “total ecclesiology;” Congar fully understood that any “total” concept had to include all segments of the Mystical Body of Christ, of which the laity made up the greatest part, in number. Congar noted, in his Introduction to *Lay People*,

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<sup>119</sup> “Prefaces to the New Testament,” in MLBT, 112.

<sup>120</sup> LPC, 186.

<sup>121</sup> Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani was head of the Holy Office of the Curia and President of the Preparatory Theological Commission for Vatican II.

<sup>122</sup> JC, 17n1.

that, “[i]t is not just a matter of adding a paragraph or a chapter to an ecclesiological exposition which from beginning to end ignores the principle on which a ‘laicology’ really depends. ... At bottom there can be only one sound and sufficient theology of laity, and that is a ‘total ecclesiology.’”<sup>123</sup> Per Beal, Congar’s progression toward these theological realizations helped explain the thinking behind his expanding work on the value and needs of the lay people during his life. However, in spite of Congar’s genuine intention to provide support for the laity and to elevate their status in the church, there are shortcomings in Congar’s approach, which I believe stem from his position within the clergy, isolated from regular, genuine contact with the average lay person.

Beal showed how Congar’s works published during the earlier portion of his life reflected the planned content of *De Ecclesia*, as the great ecclesologist continued to work doggedly in his areas of interest.<sup>124</sup> His workload prevented him from making any substantial progress in the writing of *De Ecclesia*, although he maintained that he would write this up until his health declined to the point at which he no longer could properly function for its completion.<sup>125</sup> Through his work on the Church, he came to understand the importance of the laity in the great scheme of the Catholic Church, and he intended to bring the laity up to a more significant participation in the functioning of the Church. Congar’s thought revolved around his foundational interest in ecclesial unity, but that interest included a rather wide-ranging set of topics, of which the laity is one, as a necessary component of a total ecclesiology.

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<sup>123</sup> LPC, xvi. Beal cites a longer section of this quote in her book, MCPG, 14.

<sup>124</sup> MCPG, 169. Chap. 4 discusses the relationship between Congar’s plan for *De Ecclesia* and his major works.

<sup>125</sup> MCPG, 2-3.

Beal pointed out at the very beginning of her book that Congar expressed his need for a good theology of the laity in order to proceed with his lifelong project on ecclesiology.<sup>126</sup> *Lay People* was written (1953) during a time when the laity was largely regarded as the *ecclesia discens*, or “learning church,” whose function was to be taught by the members of the *ecclesia docens*, or “teaching church.”<sup>127</sup> In the same book, Congar set the groundwork for his later contribution on the laity to the documents of Vatican II, notably *Lumen Gentium*, but also the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam actuositatem*. He took great pride in the fact that the sub-commission writing *Lumen Gentium*, of which he was a member, ensured that the chapter, “The People of God,” be placed second, behind only the chapter “The Mystery of the Church.”<sup>128</sup> Having the discussion of the People of God placed ahead of the chapter on the hierarchical church recognized that the church is largely composed of the laity which has the right to a greater degree of participation in the operation of the church than was permitted at that time. He lamented the fact that “[t]he laity’s place in the Church’s law is not so slight as some people allege, but it is little enough.”<sup>129</sup> This position was also taken by Edward Schillebeeckx, in his book, *Church*, when he offered similar positions to Congar’s in his section titled, “The church as a pyramidal hierarchy.”<sup>130</sup> While Congar himself did not routinely enjoy an extensive contact with the laity in the conduct of their daily lives, he tried to bring the lay people into the Church’s operations to a greater

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<sup>126</sup> MCPG, 1.

<sup>127</sup> These terms were used a number of times in interventions during Vatican II.

<sup>128</sup> MCPG, 203n7, 211; Yves Congar, *Au Milieu des Orages: L’Église affronte aujourd’hui son avenir* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1969), 71, 85; Suenens, *Memories and Hopes*, 132-4, in a section titled, “A ‘Copernican revolution.’”

<sup>129</sup> LPC, xiv.

<sup>130</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad Books, 1990), 198-9.



extent. However, even in the promulgated version of *Lumen Gentium*, the laity is assigned a position inferior to that of the clergy: “Incorporated in the Church through baptism, the faithful are destined by the baptismal character for the worship of the Christian religion; reborn as sons of God they must confess before men the faith which they have received from God through the Church.”<sup>131</sup> This goes beyond the old concept of pay, pray, and obey, but not terribly far. The pyramidal hierarchy also showed itself later in *Lumen Gentium*: “The bonds which bind men to the Church in a visible way are profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government and communion.”<sup>132</sup> So, “ecclesiastical government” bonds the laity to the church.

Beal, when commenting on Congar’s handling of the laity, took notice of his view that a theology of the laity had not previously been sufficiently considered within the church to develop adequate structure to permit proper treatment.<sup>133</sup> Without some structure to the concept of the lay vocation, contact and conversation with the hierarchy experienced problems, which Congar chose to resolve by segmenting his consideration of the lay component to his total ecclesiology. He opted to use the lens provided by the Letter to the Hebrews, matching a lay characteristic to that of the clergy’s alignment with the characteristics of Christ as priest, prophet, and king.

In the first chapter of *Lay People*, Congar explained the source of the term “people of God” in the Old Testament, in which “λαός is often opposed to τὰ ἔθνη, and expressly designates the people of God, distinct from the gentiles (the *goim*). Our word ‘lay,’ then, is connected with a word that for Jews, and then for Christians, properly

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<sup>131</sup> LG, 11.

<sup>132</sup> LG, 14.

<sup>133</sup> MCPG, 14.

meant the sacred people in opposition to the peoples who were not consecrated.”<sup>134</sup> To give the term “lay” a properly Christian sense, Congar finally defined it thus: “the fact remains that ‘layman’ is a Christian term, and moreover one that is used by the Church. It designates the simple, not specially qualified, members *among God’s* people, the whole of whom are consecrated.”<sup>135</sup> Here one can see an undercurrent that goes back to the priesthood of the faithful, as mention is made of the “people of God” as a consecrated people. The term “lay” does not appear in the New Testament, where “there is no distinction between ‘lay people’ and ‘clerics.’”<sup>136</sup> While the New Testament sometimes mixes the specially consecrated people, or those in the office that developed into that of the cleric, with the concept of the laypeople, the term became finally used to place the laity over against the priest in Clement’s Letter to the Corinthians.<sup>137</sup> Clement was a contemporary of the apostles, so his language is certainly of importance.

Congar traced the history of the usage of the word “layman” and its concept through Church history. In the East, the concept can be found in Clement of Alexandria and in Origen.<sup>138</sup> As a landmark in the study of the Church, Congar noted that Cyprian constructed the first concept of the theology of the Church, the initial ecclesiology which interested itself with the Church rather than using the stories of the life of Jesus and the Apostles to convey the message.<sup>139</sup> Early in the church’s history, there was no formal separation of clergy and laity; they were all the priestly people of God, but this communitarian view of the church was gradually lost, and the focus ultimately fell on the

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<sup>134</sup> LPC, 3, italics original.

<sup>135</sup> LPC, 4; italics original.

<sup>136</sup> LPC, 4.

<sup>137</sup> LPC, 4.

<sup>138</sup> LPC, 7.

<sup>139</sup> LPC, 7-8.

clergy. The layperson became a topic for discussion later in history. By the twelfth century, the laypeople gained sufficient status to merit consideration.<sup>140</sup> In the first millennium, laypeople were intended to have no involvement with the sacred, which was the exclusive domain of the clergy and religious.<sup>141</sup> To some degree, this remained the attitude toward the laity until Vatican II. After the turn of the millennium, these two groups became segregated: “Already in the eleventh century . . . , and more frequently in the fifteenth and sixteenth, the Church is represented according to Hugh of St. Victor’s scheme, under the form of two peoples. One, behind the pope, is made up of bishops, priests and monks; the other, behind the emperor, of princes, knights, peasants, men and women.”<sup>142</sup> This view fed into the dispute that had raged for centuries, generally referred to in the concept of the spiritual sword and the temporal sword, referred to earlier, in Chapter One, having come to its peak in the crucial moment of the Gregorian Reform.

Congar saw Luther recognizing in this struggle a foundational confusion, as Congar commented that “while some tended to see the Church actualized as a priesthood without people, others came to see it as a people without a priesthood.”<sup>143</sup> Congar saw the results of the Reformation as a removal of the clergy from the people of God, with which he could not live; even in the days of his greatest anger with Rome, Congar never permitted his thoughts to exclude the hierarchy of the Church; for him, the fact that the Church showed itself as both institution and as communion never was to be forgotten.<sup>144</sup> I believe this is a point of weakness in Congar’s consideration of the laypeople; he never

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<sup>140</sup> LPC, 11-2.

<sup>141</sup> LPC, 13.

<sup>142</sup> LPC, 14.

<sup>143</sup> LPC, 15.

<sup>144</sup> LPC, 15; see also Nisus, *L’Église*, Section 3.3. There are numerous examples of Congar referring to hierarchical issues within the church; as examples see PPC, 12, 113; BPC, 66-7; JP, 102, 150; SE, 47; MO, 78-81.

separated the laity from the watchful umbrella of the clergy; throughout his work, the laypeople are dealt with only in their relationship to the clergy, never as an independent entity working together with the clergy toward the mutual salvation of both groups. Incorrectly, he tended to place the clergy as the established center which Christ left as the core of his church; what Jesus left behind was a core group of believers, most of whom would not become leaders within the group. One may attribute this to the fact that he never experienced the lay vocation as an adult, with the exception of his time in captivity.

Congar recognized that the views of the laity before the Reformation placed them in a rather negative light, which, to his great credit, Congar wished to remove. Early in *Lay People*, he offered the following:

There is no need to suppose that the distinction between laymen and clerics (canonical view), coincides with a distinction between people who have only a secular field of action and people who have a sacred or holy field of action. Lay people too exercise sacred activities. Not for a moment may we entertain any idea of them that is inconsistent with their membership in the people of God to which the very etymology of their name bears witness.<sup>145</sup>

Congar here sounded a note which stressed the fact that the laity engages in “sacred activities.” However, Congar did not say that the laity have rights that exist without reference to the clergy; Congar’s overall view of the laity is at odds with Protestant thought, which places the individual in immediate contact with God; this must be prudently kept in mind when one wishes to enter ecumenical dialogue. Congar described the Protestant scheme as such: “God transcendent in heaven → faithful → Church,

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<sup>145</sup> LPC, 18.

assembly of the faithful.”<sup>146</sup> Congar here depicted a Protestant Church that supersedes all of the smaller ecclesia which may have been formed in various places, acting as a sort of umbrella organization, without any temporal formal, or hierarchical structure, which does exist in many of the Reformation churches. Non-denominational churches, on the other hand, frequently have no external affiliation beyond their congregation.

Congar’s concept of the Church was that God opted, through kenosis, to take on human form, which offered God the opportunity to meet the human being on the genuinely human level, rather than communicating his will through strictly supernatural means, and he did this through the institution that he, in Jesus the Christ, founded within human time. Through the institution of the church, God offered to humanity a means of salvation in the form of an earthly institution; Congar designated the church as a sacrament of the reality of salvation.<sup>147</sup> In Congar’s view, it was through the church as an intermediary which entered into the chain of communication between God and human being, whereas, in the Protestant *Gestalt*, each believer possesses direct access to God, obviating the need for an intermediary. According to Jakob Laubach, “[t]he Reformers hold that redemption is independent of man ... The Church as an institution has no efficient part in the redemption – the Church is merely the result of Christ’s action in the souls of men.”<sup>148</sup> I cautiously agree with Laubach’s position.

Congar understood that the Catholic Church responded to the Reformation by defending herself and attempting to conserve her basic concepts, a tactic which can result in a retrenchment into naturally conservative principles. The centralized papal power

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<sup>146</sup> LPC, 30; italics original.

<sup>147</sup> LPC, 32; JP, 45.

<sup>148</sup> Jakob Laubach, “Yves Congar,” in *Theologians of our Time*, ed. Leonhard Reinisch (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 174.

again came to the fore, since Luther aggressively attacked the pope and anything associated with Rome; one might actually say that Luther's Reformation dealt with his view of the church and the situation within it at the time. Luther developed an ecclesiology which stood at loggerheads with the Roman conception of church: "I now know for certain that the papacy is the kingdom of Babylon and the power of Nimrod, the mighty hunter."<sup>149</sup>

Congar stated that the Roman theology that dominated after the Reformation "was polemical, anti-Gallican and anti-Protestant throughout."<sup>150</sup> The arguments centered around the worldly function of the church: "Essentially it is a question of the authority of the Church as rule of faith, of hierarchical powers and very particularly of the papal primacy, and of the visibility of the Church and her members."<sup>151</sup> Congar showed, through the documents of the time, that the intent was to always portray the church as the "perfect society."<sup>152</sup> The writers of those documents tried to show the church fending off the authority of the state, reverting to the organizational and institutional aspects, which God gave the church upon its founding, as the source of its authority. To demonstrate the viability of the church as a temporal institution, the documents placed the institution in the forefront, to negate the Protestant arguments that the church was a supernatural organization, as opposed to temporal, invisible as opposed to visible. The Catholic Church stressed its temporal reality, functioning as the intermediary in converse with God, showing it as "the machinery of the means of grace," which offers to humanity

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<sup>149</sup> "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *MLBT*, 268.

<sup>150</sup> *LPC*, 44. See also, Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 1.

<sup>151</sup> *LPC*, 45; *PPC*, 12, 98, 113.

<sup>152</sup> *LPC*, 45; the remainder of this argument stems from the same source.

“the means to salvation.”<sup>153</sup> Catholic ecclesiology then tended to focus on the material, juridical aspects, downplaying consideration of the spiritual aspects of the church’s mission and function, and, most especially grievous for Congar, the work of the Holy Spirit within the church.<sup>154</sup> But Congar pointed out that Protestants also tended to develop hierarchical structures, having become “in practice almost as clericalized as the Catholic Church.”<sup>155</sup>

Throughout his construction and defense of a theology of the laity, Congar never released his hold on the need for a hierarchical institution: “the ecclesiological and, especially, pastoral importance of a certain overweighting of the institution is considerable. It is one of the principles of our ecclesiology that the hierarchy is an element of the Church’s being and structure.”<sup>156</sup> He referred to Cyprian’s dictum: “*Ecclesia est in episcopo*,” showing the need for a hierarchical structure to have a church.<sup>157</sup> Congar took care in this part of his discussion to argue for the value of the laity when, completing the above thought, he stated, “if theology *de Ecclesia* be practically reduced to a ‘hierarchology’ or, more generally, be made a theology only of the Church’s structure, without reference to her life, there is a risk of the laity being regarded as simply an accident, an appendage of the Church, at most necessary to her *bene esse*.”<sup>158</sup> Congar needed to have the church presented as both hierarchy and communion.

Richard Gaillardetz agreed with Congar’s assessment of the hardening of the institutional aspects of the Church during the period between Trent and Vatican II.

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<sup>153</sup> LPC, 45.

<sup>154</sup> LPC, 46-7; SE, 13.

<sup>155</sup> LPC, 51.

<sup>156</sup> LPC, 50-1; see also JP, 102, 150.

<sup>157</sup> LPC, 50-1.

<sup>158</sup> LPC, 51.

Gaillardetz pointed out the “Protestant attacks,” one of which was against “the ministerial priesthood.”<sup>159</sup> Gaillardetz summarized by saying, “the Roman Catholic church of the 1950s (sic) could be characterized as a church in which a still dominant stance of reflexive defensiveness was being cautiously challenged by countervailing movements of reform and renewal percolating just below the surface of church life.”<sup>160</sup>

Gaillardetz’s book, *The Church in the Making*, covered the development of the document at Vatican II which concerned itself most directly with the laity, *Lumen Gentium*, with which Congar had a great deal to do. The bishops at the council made known their displeasure with the originally submitted schemas, of which *De Ecclesia* was not one, however.<sup>161</sup> Congar was of the strong opinion that the preparation for the Council fell under the “domination – not just the influence, but the domination – of the men of the Curia and the Holy Office.”<sup>162</sup> The schema on the church was not one of the original schemata distributed and rejected by many bishops, due to the fact that, during the writing process, the document needed extensive revision and modification, and the sub-commission charged with the writing and editing of the schema ended up missing the deadline for the inclusion in the first set of schemata that were distributed.<sup>163</sup>

The initial schema on the church, *De Ecclesia*, reflected the influence of several of the curial insiders; Gaillardetz said that “[t]he schema was a blend of the neo-scholastic ecclesiology being taught in seminaries and the teaching of Pope Pius XII in his encyclicals, *Mystici Corporis* and *Humani Generis*.” Jossua agreed, saying that,

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<sup>159</sup> Dealt with in the section on the Priesthood of all the Faithful.

<sup>160</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 6.

<sup>161</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 7. See also, Wiltgen, *Rhine Flows into the Tiber*, 17-8.

<sup>162</sup> JP, 140.

<sup>163</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened*, 153.



“Congar had practically nothing to do with the [original] prepared texts,” meaning those from the preparatory commissions.<sup>164</sup> Pius XII’s encyclicals *Humani Generis* and *Mystici Corporis*, were strongly incorporated in the initial schema. These two encyclicals encapsulated many of Pius XII’s ideas through much of his reign. One concept from *Mystici Corporis* which caused significant ecumenical problems was the concept that the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ and only the Catholic Church may make that claim; membership in the Catholic Church was required to be considered a member of the Mystical Body.

Gaillardetz examined the writing process for *Lumen Gentium*, which Congar detailed extensively in his *Journal of the Council*. The initially submitted schema *De Ecclesia*, showed a structure which reinforced the view of the Church as an exclusive, hierarchical organization, following along the lines which stretch back to the Council of Trent at least. Congar later lamented the fact that he had “been too timid” while engaged with the preliminary commission on that document.<sup>165</sup> The spine of the original document concerned itself with the hierarchy of the institution, basing everything on the clergy, who received a mission that placed them in the position of being merely branch offices of the Holy See.<sup>166</sup>

Gaillardetz also pointed out that in the proposed chapter on “The States of Evangelical Perfection,” the text dealt almost exclusively with the clergy and religious: “There was virtually no consideration of the other 99+ percent of the church who were not called to professed religious life. Indeed, implicit in the chapter is the assumption that

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<sup>164</sup> Jossua, *Yves Congar*, 161.

<sup>165</sup> JC, 369.

<sup>166</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 8-9.

those who do not pursue these counsels have accepted the more pedestrian path to holiness.”<sup>167</sup> This language never saw any reception into the final presentation of the schema to the Council. On a positive note, Gaillardetz remarked that the chapter which concerned itself with the laity “offered a quite positive presentation of a theology of the laity that represented a genuine step forward in church teaching. [Strikingly,] [i]t began with a reflection on the priesthood of all believers in which all believers participate by virtue of their baptism.”<sup>168</sup>

Unfortunately, in subsequent chapters, the schema reverted to the papal teachings, even expanding on some of them, such as papal infallibility.<sup>169</sup> A comment on the function of theologians was taken from *Humani Generis*, which stated that “Pius IX, teaching that the most noble office of theology is to show how a doctrine defined by the Church is contained in the sources of revelation, added these words, and with very good reason: ‘in that sense in which it has been defined by the Church.’”<sup>170</sup> Theologians were to be servants of the wishes of the hierarchy. In Chapter Eight of *De Ecclesia*, the title itself, “Authority and Obedience in the Church,” alerted the reader to an objectionable treatise. Aside from its title, the chapter equated the authority of the church with the authority of God.<sup>171</sup> Reverting to medieval language, “[a]uthority was presented as the exercise of power by ‘superiors’ over ‘subjects.’”<sup>172</sup> The tenor of that sort of language was incredibly insensitive regarding not only the clergy, starting with the episcopacy,

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<sup>167</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 10.

<sup>168</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 10.

<sup>169</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 10.

<sup>170</sup> Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, 21.

<sup>171</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 11.

<sup>172</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 11.

proceeding to the lower “subjects,” the parish priests, and down to the essentially powerless and fully demeaned laity.

The final chapter of *De Ecclesia* concerned itself with ecumenism, which added some confirmation to the Catholic Church’s cautious reaching out to other Christian churches. Gaillardetz noted that the chapter proceeded in its considerations beyond the concepts put forth in Pope Pius XI’s encyclical *Mortalium Annos*, published in 1928, in which, Pius XI had called for a return to the Catholic Church by all other communions, confirming Cyprian’s concept of “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.” *De Ecclesia* proceeded beyond that approach and recognized that other Christian churches do indeed possess some knowledge that aids in salvation.<sup>173</sup>

Congar, due certainly to his ecumenical and ecclesiological inclination, found the sub-commission for the writing of *De Ecclesia* quite interesting, with a mix of Council Fathers from varying points on the spectrum of openness to change.<sup>174</sup> His assessment of the work done at the Council was positive, but he felt that some work was left in mid-stream, and notably, one of those topics was “the role of the laity,” as well as the general topic of ecumenism.<sup>175</sup> Congar certainly recognized the dramatic nature of the events taking place in the meeting rooms as well as in the aula of St. Peter’s. On November 6, 1963, Congar recorded in his journal his assessment of the disputes over the ultimate *Lumen Gentium*: “We are observing a confrontation between two ecclesiologies: The after-effects of the pontificate of Pius XII are being challenged. And beyond them, the

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<sup>173</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 11.

<sup>174</sup> Jossua, *Yves Congar*, 161, explains that “At the beginning the 198 experts were not attached to any particular commission.” However, Congar had been “called to the theological commission.” See also his views scattered widely throughout *JC*.

<sup>175</sup> *JP*, 131.

regime that has prevailed since the Gregorian Reform, on the basis of the identification of the Roman Church with the universal Catholic Church.”<sup>176</sup> From the viewpoint of an interested non-participant, Melvin Michalski commented that, “[t]hrough their contact and dialogue with one another, and as a result of the atmosphere of the Council with its critical and challenging theological exchange, the bishops arrived at a more profound understanding of Church.”<sup>177</sup>

The original schema *De Ecclesia* was submitted for first discussion on December 1, 1962, and it was remitted to the sub-commission; the document was finally promulgated, as the Doctrinal Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, on November 21, 1964.

One must examine all of Congar’s work at the Second Vatican Council in order to see how his view of the laity within the Catholic Church became a part of the very fiber of the documents and even of the culture of Catholicism that emerged from that important event. Congar provided evidence of this in his interviews with Jean Puyo. His descriptions of the discussions within the commissions at Vatican II showed the problem, especially notable in his journal. In general, Congar’s efforts bolstered the position of the laity within the Church, while, conforming to the conditions for reform that he outlined in *True and False Reform in the Church* and his approach to the theology of the laity in *Lay People*, he always maintained that the laity must function within the structures of the

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<sup>176</sup> JC, 415.

<sup>177</sup> Melvin Michalski, *The Relationship Between the Universal Priesthood of the Baptized and the Ministerial Priesthood of the Ordained in Vatican II and in Subsequent Theology: Understanding “Essentia et non Gradu Tantum,” Lumen Gentium No. 10* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen University Press, 1996), 30.

Church as institution, which resulted in him referring back to the authority of the hierarchical apparatus of the Roman Church as the governing body.

However, no matter how often Congar appeared to be attempting to pull the laity out of the “hierarchical fire,” one must remember that he put them there in the first place. While the fact always remains when discussing ecclesiology that the hierarchy and clergy have essential roles, Congar never seemed to accept that the laity may have any essential role independent of the clergy in any area; all must funnel through the structure of the professional organization which governs the Church. In recent years, with a growing problem of shortage of clergy, there finally has arisen a genuine concern for the accomplishment of the tasks which the laity has the ability to accomplish without the oversight and/ or guidance of a clergy member. But Congar spent little effort in thinking about the abilities and benefits which the laity may bring to the functioning of an effective ecclesia, except as related to serving the clergy’s requirements. While I have no intention of moving to a view which places the clergy in a supplemental position or that shoves the entire hierarchy to the side, the laity certainly possesses great capabilities which remain available to be tapped, to engender a profitable, cooperative, not always subordinate, effort in conjunction with the clergy. The laity has the ability to see the goals of the people of God without the constant oversight of some hierarchical functionary. There may even be areas, especially within Roman Catholicism, where the laity has a superior expertise; two easily brought to mind as examples are the areas of matrimony and women’s rights, although there are many defenders of women’s rights within the orders of women religious, but unfortunately, few in Rome. Congar never acknowledged the particular charisms the laity possesses independently of the clergy, charisms which

the laity applies to their mission within the church on a daily basis. These charisms are evidenced in the communal functioning of the church in small groups, the promotion of church in Bible study, in small group gatherings focused on faith and its functioning in the world. In some of these forms of ecclesia, the presence of the clergy can be detrimental; the laypeople in the church desire to show and enrich their faith in their own way. Congar never appreciated how isolated he was; he did not have the ability to pose questions that would feature the charisms of the laity.

As a general critique, Congar was quite adamant about defending the position of the laity within the Church, yet I question how much insight he actually had into the situation of the normal layperson, especially the average Catholic who may sit in the pew, hoping to not be noticed. Congar's life, with the exception of his captivity in Germany, was spent in the academic world, which would include contact with college or older students, but little exposure to the daily life of the average Catholic; he led a very insulated life in that regard, having entered the seminary at the age of fifteen, and finally ending up in academia, having less direct contact with the laity than a parish priest experiences.<sup>178</sup> At the beginning of his religious life, Congar wanted to be a parish priest, which ultimately led him to join the Order of Preachers in the first place, but his interest in his studies led him into the academic area. In the autumn of his life, Congar admitted his shortcoming regarding the laity, when, in his talk, "Reflections on Being a Theologian," he admitted as much, noting that, "Jean-Pierre Jossua said that we have the theology of our way of life. How true this is!"<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> JP, 16; MCPG, 4.

<sup>179</sup> Congar, "Reflections," 408.

In *Lay People*, Congar traced the very idea of the laity from its beginning in early Christianity into the Middle Ages, where it encountered the concentration of curial power that was outlined in Chapter Two of this treatise, and which was finally being employed in the struggles with the Reformers in the sixteenth century. One significant point in this section has been the different views of Church that grew during the Reformation. One could frame the Reformation within the ecclesiological views that developed with Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. In reaction to this Protestant position, the Catholic Church devalued the status of the laity to battle Luther's concept of the priesthood of the faithful. That low regard of the lay faithful remained until Vatican II offered a new view. Now that we have seen Congar's view of the place of the laity within the Catholic Church, we will examine his views on how the laity interacts with the clergy.

### **Lay Participation in the Priestly Function of the Church**

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*:

The term 'priest' is etymologically a contraction of 'presbyter' (Gk. πρεσβύτερος, 'elder'), but while the AV [Authorized Version] and RV [Revised Version] of the NT regularly render πρεσβύτερος by 'elder', they keep 'priest' and 'priesthood' for the purely sacerdotal terms ἱερεύς and ἱεράτευμα (Lat. *sacerdos* and *sacerdotum*). The latter words are never used in the NT specifically of Christian ministers, though they are applied to the Christian body as a whole (1Pt 2:5 and 9; Rv 5:10).<sup>180</sup>

The final Bible verses cited in the above definition are the ones cited by Luther to support his concept of the priesthood of all the faithful. Congar already saw this in the Old

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<sup>180</sup> ODCC, s.v., "priest."

Testament: “there is something priestly about all Israel.”<sup>181</sup> He cited in support of this Ex 19:6, “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.” Congar added that, “[p]riesthood in Israel is at the same time both a collective quality and an office in which a few men are mediators for all the rest.”<sup>182</sup> He kept in mind this universal aspect of priesthood as he discussed the office of the priesthood, which installed a hierarchical structure into Israel. The hierarchy was completed with the appointment of Aaron as the high priest, at the top of the hierarchical, institutional pyramid. Yet God specifically decried sacrifices, asking instead for the worship of each individual: “What God wants offered is nothing but the man himself,”<sup>183</sup> and He wants each of those individuals to offer themselves to Him in their totality (Hs 6:6; Ps 51:18-19).

After the testimony of the OT was considered, the content of the New came under discussion. Here, Congar shifted to focus on Jesus and his role as priest. Congar noted that the origin of the NT priesthood, which differs from that of the OT in that sacrifices at the Jerusalem temple are no longer required, lay exclusively in our Savior.<sup>184</sup> Jesus then handed to the infant Church the function of priest in the new manner of priesthood, which involved each member of the church in worship. In Jesus, we find a reiteration of the message from the OT: the priesthood which each individual exercises according to God’s instructions becomes gathered into the order of the true priesthood of the great High Priest, who now sacrifices himself for our salvation, in a one-time offering that will suffice for all.

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<sup>181</sup> LPC, 122.

<sup>182</sup> LPC, 124.

<sup>183</sup> LPC, 126.

<sup>184</sup> LPC, 128. The remainder of this paragraph comes from the same source.



Congar had Jesus represent the Temple itself; the offering was not made within the confines of the Temple, rather it occurred at whatever location Jesus of Nazareth occupied at the time of his death. The earthly body which Jesus gave up in sacrifice was fashioned by God the Father and now forms the same Mystical Body in which we take part.<sup>185</sup> Congar considered that “we” to include all of humanity when he discussed the actual membership of this People of God, who form the Mystical Body.<sup>186</sup> Jesus’ redemptive act had the intention of saving all human beings, even if the offer of redemption was not accepted by all of humanity.<sup>187</sup> Congar rhetorically asked whether or not all people have been subsumed under the definitions of the People of God, which normally includes those who adhere to the laws which he gave to our ancestors; Congar stressed his leaning, when he asked whether or not “*every man* carries within himself a certain share of the sacrament of Christ, or of salvation? ... is not every man, in a sense, an encounter with Christ?”<sup>188</sup> Congar supported his belief on this by referring to Mt 25:35: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink;” Jesus here brought all of humanity into His consideration.<sup>189</sup>

Especially in the Gospel of John, with its high Christology, Jesus presided over his own sacrifice on the cross, which placed him in the position of the high priest; Jesus presided as high priest over the sacrifice of Jesus the victim. To accept Jesus is to accept

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<sup>185</sup> LPC, 128-9.

<sup>186</sup> TC, 53.

<sup>187</sup> Yves Congar, *This Church That I Love*, trans. Lucien Delafuente (Denville, NJ: Dimensions Books, 1969), 53, (TC); consider also LG, 9, which limits the People of God to those who have been, or wish to be, baptized. The point Congar made in TC conflicts with LG 9, in the composition of which Congar also had a huge role.

<sup>188</sup> TC, 54.

<sup>189</sup> *Vaste monde, ma paroisse: Verité et dimensions du salut* (NP: Témoignage Chrétien, 1959), 139; (VM). Congar also intended for this to apply to another area with which he became involved at Vatican II, namely religious liberty. Congar analyzed here the Feeney case in the US, which revolved around religious freedom, leading to my conclusion above.

his sacrifice personally, as a part of the Church certainly, but also, and even more importantly, individually for each of us as well, all of us forming together the Body of Christ.

Congar warned that, “[t]he New Testament texts are easily got at, but their import must be kept well in mind. They apply the terms ‘priest’ and ‘priesthood’ to Christ ... and also to Christians as such.”<sup>190</sup> As examples of when the word “priest” is actually used in regard to the faithful, Congar cited 1Pt 2:4-5, 9-10, offering a possibility of the same in Lk 1:75; Rv 1:5-6, 5:9-10, 20:6, and 22:3-5.<sup>191</sup> Following this, he cited several verses from Paul (Ep 2:18-22, Rm 12:1 and 6:13) along with citations from Hb, 13:15-6, 12:28, in which the terms ‘priest’ or ‘priesthood’ are implied, but are not explicitly used.<sup>192</sup> Using the concepts from Hebrews, he pointed out that the office of priest for the Hebrews was associated with the Temple, either expressed or implied.<sup>193</sup> The Hebrew priests of Jesus’ time needed the Temple in order to carry out their duties, which made the association natural for the NT writers to use. Congar then stated that in the NT, the priesthood of the Christian faithful always joins with the concept of the kingly role of the people. 1Pt gives to the office of NT priest the function of leading the people in praise of God; sacrifice is not mentioned. Congar stressed that although there may be some nuanced differences in the approaches of Judaism and Christianity to the priesthood, there was a continuity assured in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> LPC, 130.

<sup>191</sup> LPC, 130.

<sup>192</sup> LPC, 130-1.

<sup>193</sup> LPC, 130.

<sup>194</sup> LPC, 122.

Without sacrifices to perform, the office of the NT priests would have to be, as Congar (based on Hebrews) noted, of a spiritual nature.<sup>195</sup> With this aspect of the office of priest, ritual and worship must also be brought into play, placing the priest again in the spiritual sense.<sup>196</sup> The Christian priest was not intended to be the same as the priests of the OT, with responsibilities for the temporal duties of sacrifice; per Congar, the Christian priesthood includes the senses of both the priesthood of all the faithful, as well as “the priesthood of the hierarchical ministers.”<sup>197</sup>

Before approaching the complete priesthood of the faithful, Congar analyzed the differences that were developed by the leading Protestant theologians, who established a rather important branching within the priestly office between the hierarchical aspect, which yielded the office of presbyter or elder, and the office of the what could be termed “the sacrificer,” or the person assigned to the performance of the ritual in the OT.<sup>198</sup> Here, within the NT, “the names denoting *sacerdotal rank*, ἱερεύς and ἀρχιερεύς, are reserved for Christ on one side, to Christians (the faithful) on the other; and in such a way that it cannot be overlooked that the usage was intentional.”<sup>199</sup> At the same time, the altar represented either Jesus or a person or group of people, with only occasional reference to the altar as a slab of stone for use during worship. Congar traced the shifting use of the word “priest,” as it moved from the original Hebrew meaning of the “sacrificer” to the meaning which took hold within the Reformation, that of the minister of the worship service.<sup>200</sup> In these characteristics which subsequently became assigned to Christians in

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<sup>195</sup> LPC, 131.

<sup>196</sup> LPC, 131.

<sup>197</sup> LPC, 132.

<sup>198</sup> LPC, 133.

<sup>199</sup> LPC, 133.

<sup>200</sup> LPC, 133.

general, Congar brought the reader back to the concept that Christ Himself is the absolute reality<sup>201</sup> of all temporal things such as the temple and the altar; the Christian faithful are included in these offices through their relationship to Christ, and certainly not without Him.<sup>202</sup>

The priesthood of the faithful possesses certain aspects of the function of the people during worship: “the worship and sacrifice of the faithful, and therefore their corresponding priesthood, are essentially those of a holy life, an apostolic life of religion, prayer, dedication, charity, compassion. ... The offering and priesthood of the faithful are *spiritual*.”<sup>203</sup> Here, Congar latched on to the theme which Paul expresses clearly in Rm 12:1: “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.” In their spirituality, they comport to permit the passing on of this functionality through Tradition, necessarily through this Tradition, which is the deposit of the faith. Congar added that, “if we keep to the New Testament and originating texts we have to recognize that the worship and priesthood of the faithful belong to the order of Christian life and cannot be *defined* as properly liturgical things.”<sup>204</sup> Bringing this back to its practical application, Congar reminded us that, “the priesthood of the faithful corresponds to the spiritual worship that the offering of a good life is.”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> The term “absolute reality” used here has the meaning that is used in Eastern religions, which have no other equivalent to the concept of the western God, as the three great western monotheisms do.

<sup>202</sup> LPC, 133.

<sup>203</sup> LPC, 136.

<sup>204</sup> LPC, 136.

<sup>205</sup> LPC, 137.

## Lay Participation in the Prophetic Function of the Church

*Lumen Gentium*,<sup>12</sup> states that “[t]he holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office.” Congar connected the laity to this function, which is also mentioned in Hebrews, and which Congar took in a very broad sense.<sup>206</sup> The concept of prophet must first be understood, in order to understand how the laity can actually perform in a prophetic manner. The prophet, according to Congar, operates in the manner of teaching, which he likened to the function of the Magisterium, although he made it clear that his intent was to work with a significantly broader definition of the role of prophecy, and so in discussing the laity, he limited his consideration to the involvement of the laity “in the Church’s teaching function.”<sup>207</sup> Congar also clarified the function of the prophet, saying that the prophet has an understanding of the things of God and a knowledge of God’s design.<sup>208</sup>

As he did with the priestly role of the laity, he referred naturally to Scripture, beginning with the OT. The first quotation was taken from Je 31:31, 33-4, which was quoted in Hb 8:10-12:

But this is the covenant I will establish with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds and I will write them upon their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his fellow citizen and kinsman, saying “Know the Lord,” for all shall

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<sup>206</sup> LPC, 271.

<sup>207</sup> LPC, 271.

<sup>208</sup> “Sur la Trilogie: Prophète-Roi-Prêtre,” in *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologique*,” January 1983, vol. 67:1, 103.

know me, from least to greatest. For I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sins no more.<sup>209</sup>

In this quote, the important point regarding the laity comes when Jeremiah speaks of God putting his “laws in their minds and I will write them upon their hearts.” This did not single out the priests, but rather, God indicated that all people were recipients of his law. Congar added four more citations, all of which stem from the OT and are cited in the NT.<sup>210</sup> The citations all refer to God’s will to place his teaching in the hearts of all the faithful. Congar summarized: “all the faithful receive light and are active, but this is *through the knowledge received from the apostolic word and set in order by the apostolic authority.*”<sup>211</sup>

Several additional occasions occur in the NT which offer the same sense; Congar cited a number of these occasions.<sup>212</sup> In the cited instances, the church, continuing to pass on the apostolic instructions, employed the people as teachers, particularly as the church expanded.<sup>213</sup> Harkening to one of his most dear concepts, Congar also mentioned the role which tradition played in this process, especially during the ante-Nicene period, saying that, “[t]he witness of tradition becomes ever more strong as we go backwards in the Church before Nicaea: from Cyprian to Irenaeus, from Irenaeus to Ignatius, from Ignatius to Clement.”<sup>214</sup> Congar also mentioned the Protestant “telescoping the order of

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<sup>209</sup> The quote cited here is that from Hb.

<sup>210</sup> Is 54:13, and Jn 6:45; Is 60:19, and Rv 21:23; Ez 36:23-7, and 1Jn 3:24, 4:13, and 1Jn 1:5-7, 2:6, 9-11, 2:3-5, 3:23 and 2:29 (John quoted Ez in certain verses, not in the order Ez gave, accounting for the differences); and Jo 2:28-9 and Ac 2:17ff.

<sup>211</sup> LPC, 274.

<sup>212</sup> Jn 14:16-7, 25-6, 16:13-4, 17:26, 3:19; 1 Jn 2:20, 27; 1 Th 4:9; 1 Co 12:13, 1:4-5; Ep 4:14; Cl 1:4-9; 1 Jn 2:20, 27; Jn 10:4; 1 Jn 4:6, 2:18-27, 4:1-6; 1 Co 2:10-6. Congar, speaking of the founding of the mission of the church, also cites Mt 16:19, 18:18, 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-6; Ac 2:42, 4:35, 37, 5:12-5, 6:1ff, 8:14-9, 10:44-8, 11:15-8, 19:5-6.

<sup>213</sup> LPC, 275.

<sup>214</sup> LPC, 275.

ecclesial means of grace,” by which he referred to the removal of the institutional church as a necessary component of the process of exegesis, leaving this to the individual Christian, which then prevented the development of any genuine theology of church within the breakaway communities.<sup>215</sup> As always, Congar brought in the institutional church: “if - as we must – we see the Church also as institution or aggregate of means of grace, then there are differences of ministry among the members, and these differences affect their position in the social body of the Church.”<sup>216</sup> Since each person has received their ministry, the church has been constructed according to God’s plan, as in 1 Co 3:5-18; 7:17-24; 12:12-26; all of these indicate Paul’s instructions that each person has received an assigned place within God’s church and must perform the job assigned to their role as best they can. Congar showed some sensitivity to the disparity in the roles of the laity and the clergy, when he added a footnote to this section, quoting Émile Mersch: “The inequality produced by the duty of some to command and others to obey does not affect the equality of them all before the one Shepherd whose sheep they are.”<sup>217</sup>

Beal noted that after Congar’s return from the war, he worked on developing “a laicology to counterbalance the dominant hierarchology of neoscholasticism.”<sup>218</sup> Beal traced the development of Congar’s treatment of the laity as he moved toward the writing of *Lay People*. She noted that he worked to offset the dominance of the church’s emphasis on hierarchy, which under the reign of Pius XII had become quite strong.<sup>219</sup>

According to Beal, “specific theological questions about the role of the laity in the church

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<sup>215</sup> LPC, 275.

<sup>216</sup> LPC, 276.

<sup>217</sup> LPC, 276n1.

<sup>218</sup> MCPG, 52.

<sup>219</sup> MCPG, 52; JC, 415, 549. Congar was generally critical of Pius XII’s reign, since it involved consolidation of power in Rome; it must also be kept in mind that Congar’s exile occurred under Pius XII.

can be answered properly only within an adequately articulated ecclesiological framework – a framework that in Congar’s judgment was lacking.”<sup>220</sup> Congar did much work on the construction of the total ecclesiology that Beal wrote about before he published *Lay People* in 1953. As she stated, Congar tried to offset the hierarchical concentration of the church.<sup>221</sup> By building a genuine laicology which fit within the church, in *Lay People* Congar built up the functions of the individual, among which was the distribution of the faculties of priest, prophet, and king to the laity, rather than leaving those functions concentrated within the privileged sector of the clergy.

Congar concerned himself with a number of issues which confronted the church during his lifetime. In his discussions of worship, he worried about the laity’s reception of the liturgy.<sup>222</sup> In an article that was originally published in 1948 reprinted in a later compendium, *At the Heart of Christian Worship*, he dealt with the reality of the liturgy, voicing his issue with the Latin mass, since the laity did not understand the Latin. Congar offered his assessment of the liturgy:

The liturgy is not a *thing*. The worship of God doesn’t just happen because there is a celebration, even a good one, using the rites of the sacraments. It doesn’t happen until the *res* (the spiritual reality) of the liturgy is achieved in the believers who celebrate. ... Sacraments are for people not only with respect to their *purpose*, which governs and guides the logic of their “administration,” but also

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<sup>220</sup> MCPG, 14.

<sup>221</sup> MCPG, 15.

<sup>222</sup> *At the Heart of Christian Worship: Liturgical Essays by Yves Congar*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 5-9; (HCW).



with respect to the true efficacy of the spiritual action which they are intended to bring about.<sup>223</sup>

Here, one sees the source of Congar's concern for the liturgy, which he saw as the interface between God and the people. The chapter in *At the Heart of Christian Worship* from which that quote was taken is titled "'Real' Liturgy, 'Real' Preaching." The thrust of the article was to bring the Order of Preachers to understand that they needed to be better preachers. He worried that excessive concern with the rituals of the liturgy may take the focus away from the *intent* of the liturgy, which was to bring the people, the laity, to a deep, spiritual meeting with God. In the discussion, he pleaded with his readers to bring what he termed "the *prophetic* element – the word" to the people in the pews with a preaching that would meet them, "touching the concrete realities of the faithful as real, contemporary persons."<sup>224</sup>

Congar expressed a genuine desire to place more decision-making power in the hands of the faithful, although never completely independently of the clergy. He saw in the faithful a degree of sophistication that those interested in the centralization of power never could accept, if they saw it at all. One of the concepts which Congar espoused was that of the *sensus fidelium*, or the common belief of the church. He defined this as follows:

there is a gift of God (of the Holy Spirit) which relates to the twofold reality, objective and subjective, of faith (*fides quæ creditor; fides qua creditor*), which is given to the hierarchy and the whole body of faithful together ... and which ensures an indefectible faith to the Church. This gift we say, relates to the

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<sup>223</sup> HCW, 5-6. Italics original.

<sup>224</sup> HCW, 9. Italics original.

objective reality of faith, that is, the deposit of notions and *of realities* which constitutes tradition (*id quod traditur Ecclesiae; id quod tradi Ecclesia*); correlatively, it relates to subjective reality, that is, to the grace of faith in the *fidelis*, or religious subject, the quasi-instinctive ability that faith has to see and adhere to its object (at least within certain limits).<sup>225</sup>

In this “quasi-instinctive ability that faith has to see and adhere to its object,” all the faithful are included. This function corresponds to Congar’s concept of the laity performing their prophetic role; it hearkens back to the quote of Vincent of Lérins, that the Christian faith is that which has been believed always and everywhere, by everyone. Congar cautioned that this should not be taken to extremes, however, since both faithful and clergy have been known to err in certain areas, leading them into heresy or schism.<sup>226</sup> This concept places the laity together with the hierarchy in the acceptance of issues of the faith that all agree upon; the laity participate in the infallible declaration of Catholic belief.<sup>227</sup>

The concept of the *sensus fidei* occurs in Chapter II of *Lumen Gentium*, titled “The People of God.” Paragraph 12 dealt with this concept, giving an official statement: “The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples’ supernatural discernment in matters of faith when ‘from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful’ they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That

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<sup>225</sup> LPC, 288.

<sup>226</sup> LPC, 288.

<sup>227</sup> LPC, 290. For a more extensive explanation of the *sensus fidei*, as well as other terms affiliated with this term, see Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York/Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 21-3.

discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth.” Congar did not write this section, but he certainly had input into its content; he listed the portions he wrote in his journal: “the first draft of several numbers of Chapter I and Numbers 9, 13, 16, and 17 of Chapter II, plus some particular passages.”<sup>228</sup> Considerable resistance to a treatment of the laity as anything but subordinate to the hierarchy showed itself through a number of discussions and official council interventions which Congar noted in his journal.<sup>229</sup> Yet, despite curial resistance, much of Congar’s program can be seen in the documents of Vatican II, particularly in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

Part of the prophetic function which Congar covered included the teaching function, which he extended to the laity, but in doing so, he strictly limited the privilege of teaching by lay people.<sup>230</sup> After having shown that the teaching function lies within the duties of a bishop, he allowed that function to be delegated to members of the clergy who are involved with teaching: “Authority for the public teaching of the Christian revelation belongs by right to the apostolical body, whose charisms are inherited by the episcopal body, at least in part. ... This authority cannot be delegated, but up to a point it can be participated in.”<sup>231</sup> Priests and deacons participate in this function through preaching, which must be in line with the thinking of the bishop and the church. This is the sort of line of communication which Avery Dulles termed “hierarchical or institutional” in his

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<sup>228</sup> JC, 871.

<sup>229</sup> Some examples in JC: 293, 297, 323, 337, 356, 357, 379, 381, 391 (statement by Cardinal Siri requesting the laity be treated in the following manner in the schema *De Ecclesia*, which would end up as LG: “the definition of the laity should include their submission to the hierarchy ... there is too much of a desire to say things that will please the laity.” Siri also commented, regarding the *sensus fidei*: “everything depends on the teaching Church.”

<sup>230</sup> LPC, 294ff.

<sup>231</sup> LPC, 295.

book, *The Reshaping of Catholicism*.<sup>232</sup> To extend that participation to the laity, Congar stated that, “lay people can receive a still more tenuous participation in this authority.”<sup>233</sup> However, he never permitted the laity to wander far from the watchful eye of the clergy: “The tradition is that the laity should be joined with the hierarchy for information, advice, and so on.”<sup>234</sup>

Proceeding to a discussion of more significant contributions to the structure and beliefs of the church which have come from lay people, Congar, at this point in his career, retained a short leash: “their contribution, however striking and fruitful, draws all its worth from its conformity with the apostolic rule of teaching, and its subordination to and co-operation with hierarchical teaching, even when it exceeds the latter in depth.”<sup>235</sup> Later, in 1971, in “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” Congar offered a sort of corrective to his earlier writings, as he critiqued the beliefs he had held and written about during his earlier years, stating that “I now see things differently.”<sup>236</sup> In that article, he offered some modifications to his previous thinking, beginning with a short synopsis of Catholic ecclesiology at the time of his studies, which naturally influenced his thought processes at the time.<sup>237</sup> If there was a sort of theology of the laity at the time, it had the tenor of Pius X’s encyclical, “*Vehementer Nos*,” which he quoted in the article, and which is required for clarity:

It follows that the Church is essentially an *unequal* society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy

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<sup>232</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 112-3.

<sup>233</sup> LPC, 295.

<sup>234</sup> LPC, 296.

<sup>235</sup> LPC, 298.

<sup>236</sup> Yves Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *Jurist* 32 (1972): 169-88.

<sup>237</sup> Congar, “Path-Findings,” 170-2.

a rank in different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of society and directing all its members toward that end; the duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors.<sup>238</sup>

Congar offered more examples of the official Catholic position vis-à-vis the laity at the time, bringing the Catholic definition of the laity up to Vatican II. He observed in the same article that his thinking had been in line with that he had learned in his Thomistic education, concentrating on the ministerial priesthood as the baseline for all considerations.<sup>239</sup> As the article described it, he had used the ministerial priesthood as his entry point in his discussion of the laity, rather than using the more appropriate entry point of community.<sup>240</sup> His focus had become, over the years, one that had gained the viewpoint of the church as both a community and a hierarchy, but in later years, he could appreciate the fact that all formed the community, with the laity and the priests comprising two parts of the same community, without the requirement for a hierarchical imposition of powers and authorities on the laypeople.<sup>241</sup> Congar's modification of his position in "Path-Findings" struck a more moderate tone, but I still believe that he never fully understood the laity. In that article, Congar gave a redefinition of the laity: "The layman is properly that Christian whose service of God is exercised from within his insertion into the structures and the activity of the world, . . . . I have always insisted on

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<sup>238</sup> Pope Pius X, "*Vehementer Nos*," February 11, 1906, 8. This quotation was taken directly from <http://Vatican.va>, rather than whichever source Congar, or his translator, quoted in his article.

<sup>239</sup> Congar, "Path-Findings," 174.

<sup>240</sup> Congar, "Path-Findings," 177.

<sup>241</sup> Regarding his focus on the church as both communion and institution, see Alain Nisus' book which has been cited above. For the concept of both groups being a part of the one church, see Congar, "Path-Findings," 177.

the part that laymen may rightfully take in the Church insofar as it is a positive, divine institution.”<sup>242</sup> This was not a retraction of his earlier views from *Lay People*; he left unsaid his feelings on the need of direction of the laity by the clergy. However, Congar does refine his views of the church in the same article: “The Church is no merely juridical institution founded at a single point in history and subsisting by the simple interplay of structures in the institution, without the Savior actively and incessantly intervening.”<sup>243</sup> I believe that Congar modified his views more regarding the institutional church than he did the position of the laity within the church. Congar always recognized that the bulk of the church is the laity; the one thing that he never seemed able to grasp is the fact that the laity actually has people within it that have charisms which can contribute to the health of the church without needing to report to the pastor on any decisions taken. Naturally, the parish pastor must be informed of those decisions, but not necessarily in the manner of requesting or needing permission. One point that Congar granted is the ability of the laity to contribute to theology. In *Path-Findings*, he himself referred to information he wrote in *Lay People*, but that quote again smacks of control:

Theology properly so-called is pre-eminently a clerical, priestly, learning.

Extensive lay activity in matters of religious thought is very desirable; but rather than in the domain of theological science, it should be exerted in the immense field of that lies between the Church’s dogmatic and man’s most actual problems, a field wherein the cause of faith and the good of Christian understanding alike require that mediations should be actively undertaken. By mediations we do not at all mean compromises, but endeavours to restate ‘the Christian thing,’ to apply it

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<sup>242</sup> Congar, “Path-Findings,” 173.

<sup>243</sup> Congar, “Path-Findings,” 175.

to secular problems, to present Catholicity as climate or atmosphere, to seek a new cultural creativeness rooted in Christian faith and experience; and all this without neglecting work on theology's auxiliary sciences – philosophy, history, and the rest – for which there can never be too many good workers. In this great field, placed like the laity itself at the juncture of the Church and the world, lay thinkers ... ought to be and feel more free than the clergy, who are dedicated to theology proper.<sup>244</sup>

By confirming this earlier viewpoint in the later Path-Finding article, Congar showed that he still believed that there were certain areas which should remain off-limits to the laity; we should have no say in any deeply theological and doctrinal issues, those should be reserved to the clergy. In Path-Findings, he offered modifications to the above statements, noting that, "I cannot be accused of claiming to reserve theology to priests, ten pages of my 1953 book expressly say the contrary."<sup>245</sup> His writing does not seem to confirm this; he wrote, later on the same page as the above long quote: "the laity's place in Catholic thinking is considerable: engaged in all the life of the world, they can bring a rich harvest of problems and thought to the Church. On the other hand, no attempt should be made to put them in the clergy's place and turn them into doctors of divinity."<sup>246</sup> Congar apparently could not see his own hierarchology operating.

To summarize, in his article, Congar confirmed that he favored lay participation in the study of theology, but he never retracted his views of *Lay People*, in which he

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<sup>244</sup> LPC, 310-1.

<sup>245</sup> Congar, "Path-Findings," 182.

<sup>246</sup> LPC, 311.

certainly expected lay participants to come under clerical supervision, because the laity have outside influences which may affect their work.<sup>247</sup>

Congar's views on the laity in their function as prophets covered a great range of issues, but one thing which always returned was his devotion to the church as an institution, which resulted in his subordination of the laity to the hierarchy, at whichever level it impinged upon the laity's work. Congar never seemed to be able to escape his reliance on the same hierarchy which had caused him such severe trouble during his life. The entry into the priesthood at an early age certainly limited his experience as a layperson, and the seclusion from the outside world into which the young man was thrown left him with a large gap in his abilities to truly appreciate fully the situation of the layperson as an independent entity. In his article, Congar never retracted his thinking on this topic, which indicates that he must still have held that position. In the next section, we will take up Congar's concepts on the laity's function within the life of the church.

### **Lay Participation in the Kingly Function of the Church**

I chose to leave the lay participation in the kingly function until last because many of the critiques in the above two sections will naturally apply also to this section, which will be brief. One must imagine that Congar did not invite the laity into a participation in the hierarchical life of the institutional church.

Congar's first aspect of kingship gave a description of a personal kingship, that of the person over the body. The next aspect dealt with the individual Christian's obligation to further the arrival of the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>248</sup> In clarifying Christian kingship,

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<sup>247</sup> LPC, 311.

<sup>248</sup> LPC, 237.



Congar noted that “power and holiness do not meet in this world.”<sup>249</sup> The Christian must exercise mercy and understanding in any position of authority in the world, in contrast to the attitudes of many worldly rulers; a good Christian possesses a spiritual kingship, “however lowly he may be.”<sup>250</sup> In spiritual Christian kingship, love is owed to our world.

Congar next addressed the issue of authority in the church and the place of the laity. One of the main topics concerned the election of bishops, which was taken away from the people due to issues of corruption.<sup>251</sup> He completed this thought by explaining that, “it is in fact abundantly clear that the lay people’s part has never been looked on as giving the Church her structure as Church, as constituting the hierarchy by instituting the bishop in the powers of his office.”<sup>252</sup>

The next aspect of the laity’s kingly function is reception of the documents, specifically from councils.<sup>253</sup> Congar emphasized that the documents of a council are not presented to the laity in a totalitarian fashion, yet the reception by the laity “does not bring about the validity of the hierarchical action.”<sup>254</sup> The laity’s place, then, is to take conciliar decisions to heart; they have no veto power whatsoever.

Congar noted that the reformers “by eliminating the Church as institution and as aggregate of the mediations of grace, practically reduced the idea of the Church to that of a faithful people under the true law of faith; the Church was to be once more God’s people in a given land.”<sup>255</sup> Congar’s deep respect and concern for the institutional church

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<sup>249</sup> LPC, 238.

<sup>250</sup> LPC, 238.

<sup>251</sup> LPC, 245-6.

<sup>252</sup> LPC, 246.

<sup>253</sup> LPC, 250.

<sup>254</sup> LPC, 250.

<sup>255</sup> LPC, 253.

could never have allowed him to accept that lack of structure that he saw in the Protestant churches.

Congar came to the following conclusion:

We can now perhaps understand better the relationship of the laity to the Church's function, how they are active and really co-operating, without having any *powers* properly speaking, or very few. ... theirs is not the activity of constituted leaders, but of members whose directive functions are really solidary within a body whose members are given life and use it."<sup>256</sup>

Although we must keep in mind that this book was published in 1953, before the Vatican Council which affected Congar's views so deeply, we can see how Congar put the laity in their place, which involves no aspect of leadership of the institution of the church; that must be reserved to the clergy. Later in life, however, his views changed to give greater freedom and respect to the laity, but the basic distinctions from *Lay People* remained fixed in his mind.

### **Lay Participation in the Church's Communal Life**

As shown in *Lumen Gentium* 10, the community of the church is comprised of all the baptized, who all participate in the "priesthood of the faithful." All are expected to participate in the life of the church, pursuing "sanctity."<sup>257</sup> The laity helps to build up the church, in a manner different than that of the clergy and religious; the laity bring to the church the charism of community. Jesus founded the church not just for the apostles and their successors, rather, he founded it to save the people, who would then form the body of the church, the Body of Christ, in one of Paul's favorite metaphors.

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<sup>256</sup> LPC, 264.

<sup>257</sup> LG, 32.

Congar said that “[t]he writings of the Apostles and of the Apostolic Fathers show the Church being built up by the weft as well as by the warp.”<sup>258</sup> Congar detailed the various descriptions from Paul that list the charisms and gifts which contributed to the completion of the structure of the church as the Body of Christ.<sup>259</sup> Paul’s lists give a wide range of gifts and means for the building up of the church, which Congar indicated was important in the laity’s contribution to the life of the church.<sup>260</sup> Congar, long before he wrote his treatise on the Holy Spirit, stated that the Spirit was the key to the infusion of these gifts into the laity to aid in the construction of the church that would be satisfactory for the work it was assigned.<sup>261</sup>

Congar appreciated the laity and its contribution to the life of the church, which he said was the reason for including this chapter in *Lay People*; he believed that all of the People of God could contribute.<sup>262</sup> His personal experience must have helped to form his opinion that sometimes the church itself got in the way of progress by being too cumbersome a structure.<sup>263</sup> The progress of the laity, especially in the small communities that form within parishes or areas, impressed Congar; his goal was to encourage their development, for which an improved and receptive reaction of the clergy was required.<sup>264</sup> However, he also carefully noted the potential problems that could happen within too loose a structure, which allowed the laity to organize too far without clerical “guidance;” he also showed concern for the laity having any decision regarding the priest who they

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<sup>258</sup> LPC, 333.

<sup>259</sup> LPC, 334-6. The verses cited, in order of citation, are: Ro 12:4-8; 1 Co 12:4-14; Ep 4: 7-16; Cl 3:16; 2 Co 1:3-4; He 10:24-5; Ga 5:13, 6:1-2; 1 Pe 4:10; 1 Tm 6:18; Ro 15:25-7; Ac 2:42, 46; Ro 15:6, 30; Ro 12:10, 13, 16:1-2; 1 Pe 4:9; He 13:2; 1 Tm 3:2; Tt 1:8.

<sup>260</sup> LPC, 337.

<sup>261</sup> LPC, 339.

<sup>262</sup> LPC, 339.

<sup>263</sup> LPC, 339.

<sup>264</sup> LPC, 340.

wished to lead them.<sup>265</sup> As always, Congar insisted that the clergy direct, or at least have jurisdiction over, any efforts within the church, including the determination of which of the clergy would lead, or direct, the laity. He conformed somewhat to the older view of the laity as being at the periphery, which he showed in his statement that, “[t]he more the Church’s periphery expands, the more she has to strengthen her centres.”<sup>266</sup>

To summarize, Congar highly regarded the laity, yet he never seemed able to extract himself from the requirement that the mechanisms of the church oversee, possibly to the degree of interfering, in the work of the laity. For Congar, the church always remained an instrument in the hands of the hierarchy, and although he showed great love for the laity, his trust in the actions of the laity lagged behind his love.

### **Relationship of the Laity to the Hierarchical Functions of the Church**

Congar once took a view contrary to his longstanding position regarding the need for the hierarchy. Anthony Oelrich noted Congar’s position that placed the initial version of the church, as shown in 1Co 9:19 and 2Co 4:5, the apostles served the other disciples rather than, as he put it, “domineering” over them.<sup>267</sup> The same essential concept is mentioned by Schillebeeckx, as he stated that “the norm in the church is not the formal authority of the ministry, but the *paratheke*, i.e. ‘the entrusted pledge’ (1Ti 6:20 2Ti 1:14), namely the gospel (1Ti 1:11; 2Ti 2:8).”<sup>268</sup> Schillebeeckx concludes that, “there may be no master-servant relationships in the church.”<sup>269</sup> With these concepts, there would be no pyramidal structure in the church. My personal experience as a manager

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<sup>265</sup> LPC, 343-4.

<sup>266</sup> LPC, 346.

<sup>267</sup> Oelrich, *Church Fully Engaged*, 16. Oelrich quotes from Congar’s article, “Historical Development.”

<sup>268</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 216.

<sup>269</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 216.

leads me to understand that the manager who accepts the mission of making the jobs of those who report to them easier rather than assigning jobs to those under them which are intended to make the manager's own job easier manage best. This principle can also be applied to the relationship between clergy and laity.

The Cambridge theologian A. N. Williams understood Congar's view of the laity as being "at the forefront of the church's apostolate."<sup>270</sup> The laity, forming the vast majority of the church, must be at the forefront, or at the tip, of the church in its mission to the world.<sup>271</sup> Following the words of St. Paul, Congar focused on the laity's vocation being not of the world but in the world, in a way that is different from the lives of the clergy.<sup>272</sup> Williams stated that Congar aimed to get away from defining the laity "as not-priests and not-monks."<sup>273</sup> Congar himself retracted his earlier definitions of the laity in negative terms in his "Path-Findings." In this article he specifically stated the opposite: "The layman is not characterized in a purely negative fashion as one who is neither cleric nor religious."<sup>274</sup> Yet Williams also recognized that Congar never seemed to be able to extract himself from placing the laity in a position below that of the hierarchy.<sup>275</sup> Williams brought out an important point in a footnote to that concept, where she cogently stated that Congar's defense of a hierarchical position of superiority could not stem from having been censored by the hierarchy, since *Lay People* had not been published when he had been censored, although it was already at the publisher.<sup>276</sup> However, Williams seems

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<sup>270</sup> A. N. Williams, "Congar's Theology of the Laity," in *Yves Congar Theologian of the Church*, ed. Gabriel Flynn (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2005), 141.

<sup>271</sup> LPC, 18-9.

<sup>272</sup> Yves Congar, *Faith and Spiritual Life*, trans. A. C. Manson and L. C. Sheppard (London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1969), 137 (FSL); LPC, Chapter IX, titled "In the World, not of the World."

<sup>273</sup> Williams, "Congar's Theology," 138. Williams referenced LPC, 25.

<sup>274</sup> Congar, "Path-Findings," 172-3.

<sup>275</sup> Williams, "Congar's Theology," 138.

<sup>276</sup> Williams, "Congar's Theology," 138n15.

to have forgotten that Congar had been reprimanded several times prior, to the point where he titled a chapter in his *Journal d'un théologien* "Premieres alarmes, 1946-1950;" Congar certainly had already received enough of a taste of the hierarchy that he would not have needed the complete censure and exile to put him in mind of the constant supervision of those above him. Congar also stated in "Path-Findings" that his concepts of the definition of the laity had originated in 1946 and 1948, from his experiences at meetings and things he had written at the time.<sup>277</sup> On this point of the origin of Congar's thoughts, I believe Williams is wrong, based on the content of "Path-Findings," which she never cited in her chapter. However, I agree with her as to Congar's subordination of the laity to the hierarchy, which Congar never really retracted in "Path-Findings."

Williams also referred to Congar's positions in *Priest and Layman* that the laity requires the clergy, but the clergy also requires the laity for the genuine interaction of the church with the secular world, with which the laity are bound.<sup>278</sup> In *Lay People's* Chapter IX, titled "In the World, but not of the World," Congar traced a lengthy history of the involvement of the church with the secular world and how it changed through history, especially as the concept of Christendom rose and fell, as a result of the rise and fall of the temporal power of the church in the world.<sup>279</sup> Christendom became quite important to the church, and especially to certain popes, such as St. Gregory VII, who encouraged the laity to engage with the secular world in order for the church to be able to exert a greater projection of power in the cultures of the time.<sup>280</sup> So Congar viewed the laity of the time

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<sup>277</sup> Congar, "Path-Findings," 172.

<sup>278</sup> Williams, "Congar's Theology," 141.

<sup>279</sup> My definition of the term "Christendom" is that Christendom is the conjunction of the rule of the church with the temporal rule of the nations of the Christian world, which gave essentially a joint sense of authority over that world, with some intertwining of one form of authority in the other.

<sup>280</sup> LPC, 408.

as a tool of the church, sometimes through the military arts which were promoted in the eleventh century through the canonization of several military people as saints.<sup>281</sup>

The separation of the clergy and the secular world in the West became even more pronounced as the West moved further and further from the East, notably in the prohibition of marriage to the clergy, which inhibited the Western hierarchy from a more genuine interaction with the laity as remained the case in the East with a frequently married clergy, which kept those people immersed in the affairs of the secular world.<sup>282</sup>

As Williams noted, Congar constantly ensured that most authority and power were ascribed to the hierarchy, leaving the laity in the almost perpetually subordinate position.<sup>283</sup> Congar must have truly believed in the reasonableness of that proposition, since it figured so prominently in his work. It seems that he must not have seen his own position as undermining that of the laity, since his support of the laity at the same time shows repeatedly, as has been shown in this chapter. Congar wholeheartedly supported the laity as a crucial component of the church; he wanted to see the laity with a more significant place in the work of the church, but he never seemed to be able to fully escape his regard for the position of the laity as subordinate to that of the clergy. Williams also saw the problem of duplicity in some of Congar's thinking.<sup>284</sup>

### **Conclusion**

We have examined Congar's various approaches to the laity, generally taken in a rather positive manner, while also noting the areas where he continually left the laity under the constant jurisdiction of the hierarchy. Whenever he discussed the laity, the

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<sup>281</sup> LPC, 409.

<sup>282</sup> LPC, 411; see also FT, 233-7.

<sup>283</sup> Williams, "Congar's Theology," 143-4.

<sup>284</sup> Williams, "Congar's Theology," 145-6.

position of the people always ended as subservient to the clergy. What I believe Congar missed was the dialectical tension that occurs between the clergy and the laity, a tension that exists but does not necessarily negatively affect the working relationship between the two groups. For the most part, the laity accepts its role, generally regarding the clergy with a degree of respect which accrues to their position.

Much of this chapter was based on *Lay People in the Church*, in which the majority of Congar's concepts on the laity were laid out. Luther's role in the controversy over treatment of the laity came through, as he acted against the Roman church structures that were in place in the early sixteenth century. Luther also tried to throw off the rigid scholasticism that had enveloped the church. In the discussion on the priesthood of all the faithful, it was shown that Luther's concept, although initially rejected by the Roman church, quickly became accepted as early as in the catechism of the Council of Trent, before being essentially set aside and ignored until *Lumen Gentium* brought it again to the forefront of Catholic thought. The concept of the priesthood of all believers called for all Christians to participate in worship, teaching, and governing functions of the church, rather than merely being present at the liturgy, listening, and obeying.

Congar based a large part of his examination of the laity in the church on The Letter to the Hebrews, looking at the laity's roles in the three functions of priest, prophet, and king. The discussions looked at the functions of priest, prophet, and king, that of priest basing much of its emphasis on the previously discussed priesthood of all the faithful. The laity's position is differentiated from that of the hierarchy through their functions in the performance of the sacraments, with the laity assuming the position of the "common" priests, as participants in the sacramental rites, with the sacerdotal priests



entrusted with the administration of the sacraments taking the lead. Congar had some difficulty in maintaining the dignity of the laity in relation to the sacramental priesthood, due certainly in part to his education, which had occurred during a time when the hierarchical principles which had accumulated within the Magisterium since the latter part of the first millennium reached a high point. Later in his life, Congar reconsidered some of his positions in *Lay People* and modified them in his article "Path-Findings."

The role of prophet centered on teaching in the church; in this area, some of the tensions between the hierarchy and the laity can become emphasized when the hierarchy places too great a stress on the pyramidal structure which stemmed from feudal times and before. The church is composed of human beings, who are also subject to vices such as pride, which lay behind a good deal of the fortification of the hierarchical pyramid. While he had suffered at the hands of the hierarchy himself, Congar never called for its dismantling or disempowering; he stubbornly remained faithful to the Roman Catholic Church as it stood. Congar played a large role in the conduct of Vatican II, although one may question what long term effect that council has had on the basic thinking of the Catholic Church. The impetus of the power of the Magisterium remained in place after all the bishops and periti returned home, as can be seen in the history of the church since that council.

The kingly function centered on Congar's concept of spiritual kingship, in which the laity exercises their charism of community to help spread the gospel, rather than participating in the governance of the institutional church.

The laity's place in the church has improved following Vatican II, but one could not say that the laity has been awarded an equal place at the table with the hierarchy; that

may not even have been Congar's intention, as was shown in some of his writings, and it may not be the proper place for the people. One must acknowledge that Congar worked on behalf of the laity in working to have their voices recognized; this would help to bring the Catholic Church into better accord with the separated Christians, who have placed greater emphasis on the roles of the laity in the development of their liturgical schemes. In the next chapter, we will move into an examination of the role of Scripture in ecumenical work. The laity must be considered in these discussions as well, given the work of the Spirit in the teaching function of the entire Church, clergy and laity alike.

## Chapter Four: Is there a Way to Unity?

After having discussed the many aspects of Congar's theology, especially as it relates to ecumenism, the question must be asked – is there a way to unity? This question will be addressed from my increasingly pessimistic point of view. In order to achieve unity, there must be a desire on both sides to unite; the question is, does that desire exist? Even if that question is answered in the negative, however, that is insufficient reason to abandon ecumenical discussions, which inevitably enrich the participants and the churches which they represent.

### *Sola Scriptura, Tradition, and Ecumenical Dialogue*

This chapter will open with a consideration of what Christian unity should look like; if unity is desired, all participants must work out what shape that unity will take and what impact it will have on them and on their faith. The unity that was in the past expected by the Catholic Church does not correspond with a unity that other Christian churches can accept.<sup>1</sup> Congar, in *Diversity and Communion*, discussed unity, along with the various conceptions of how unity should look. He covered some of the issues at the root of the ecumenical discussions which have, are and will take place between Catholics and the other churches or Christian ecclesial communities.<sup>2</sup> The considerations he mentioned cover a wide range of issues which are well beyond the scope of this work which will concentrate on one issue which divides Catholics and Protestants, that of the treatment of Scripture and Tradition. Congar treated this issue in depth in several works which will be

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<sup>1</sup> See below Pius XI's *Mortalium animos* for a description of the Catholic position pre-Vatican II.

<sup>2</sup> DC, 1-2; see also DC, 2, especially 134, 168ff; Yves Congar, *Ecumenism and the Future of the Church*, trans. John C. Guinness and Geraldine F. McIntosh (Chicago: The Priory Press, 1967), 112 (EFC); HS1, 23; HS3, 272; PPC, 38-40; RG, 28; SE, 129; TC, 49, 78; UPU, 103-5; VM, 36.

examined to extract his positions, which appear to be misunderstood in some circles; I believe that a better understanding and recognition of his concepts on Scripture and Tradition can help to resolve differences which exist in these areas.<sup>3</sup>

The next section will review the current positions of Protestants and Roman Catholics regarding *sola scriptura*, which have been a bone of contention between the two groups. One can find in the literature many, mainly Protestant, books for and against *sola scriptura*, but these tend to be apologetic, although there are some even-handed considerations of both facets of the discussion.<sup>4</sup> I will offer representative positions closest to agreement between Protestants and Catholics in order to show a path forward.

Congar's positions on Tradition and on ecclesial authority as applied to scriptural hermeneutics will then be summarized. These will be compared with current Protestant positions within the classical Reformation Protestant churches and with the positions of Evangelical Protestants, who may be less inclined to engage in ecumenical discussions.

Some Evangelical Protestant theologians, among them D. H. Williams, Frederick Norris, and Mark Noll, have shifted toward a view of Tradition which accepts much of the Catholic position, yet "issues concerning the church define the most serious continued

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<sup>3</sup> See 900Y, DBC, DC, EFC, ML, MT, UPU, and T&t for major treatments, but Congar also deals with ecumenism and unity in many of his other works.

<sup>4</sup> For some of these works, see: Dave Armstrong, *100 Biblical Arguments Against Sola Scriptura* (San Diego, CA: Catholic Answers Press, 2012); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010); David T. King and William Webster, eds., *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith, Vol. III: The Writings of the Church Fathers Affirming the Reformation Principle of Sola Scriptura* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 2001); Kistler, *Sola Scriptura*; Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*; Peckham, *Canonical Theology*; Sproul, *Scripture Alone*; Robert A. Sungenis, ed., *Not by Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1997); William Webster, *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of our Faith, Volume II: An Historical Defense of the Reformation Principle of Sola Scriptura* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 2001).

differences between evangelicals and Catholics. ... J. I. Packer cited the nature of the church as the key remaining difference and the one most likely to impede future unity.”<sup>5</sup>

Congar’s essays on Tradition in *Tradition and Traditions* may help to reduce disagreement, although bringing dialogue partners to full agreement remains problematic. His explanations of the tridentine concept of Tradition have assuaged George somewhat, although George did refer to the stream of interpretation assumed by Congar, along with those of Josef Rupert Geiselmann and Joseph Ratzinger, as a “revisionist interpretation of Trent.”<sup>6</sup>

The more flexible positions Congar assumed in *Diversity and Communion* may bring new entry points into play, as he offered conciliatory views which he believed could open the discussions to more ecclesial communions. Some of these points may offer themselves as departures in a direction of reconciliation with our currently separated Christian brethren.

Several Protestant authors will be taken up, ranging from Protestants such as Mathison and Oberman, to a brief consideration of more radical Evangelicals who espouse the extreme position that Mathison called *solo scriptura*. This concept assumes that nothing outside the Bible qualifies as a competent hermeneutical authority; the Bible alone may interpret itself. The counterarguments to this position, employing logic and basic philosophy will be used briefly to refute the thinking leading to this, I believe erroneous, stance. This will be considered briefly before moving to a deeper and more thoughtful consideration of the positions espoused by Mathison, Oberman, Williams,

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<sup>5</sup> Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* 182; Packer is one of the signatories to the documents entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together.”

<sup>6</sup> George, “Evangelical Reflection,” in Colson and Neuhaus, *Your Word is Truth*, 24.

Norris, George, Noll, Cullmann, McGrath, and Barth, all of whom hold positions within which Congar may help to encourage agreement.

Finally, Congar's ecumenism will be brought into this discussion. His work on Tradition and ecclesiology all had as its telos the object of Church unity. Since Congar's approach changed during his life, not much time will be spent on his first book, *Chrétiens Désunis* (1937), since *Diversity and Communion* (1982) is more representative of his later views.

### **Unity and the Church**

Many people discuss Christian unity, yet not many define what unity means to them or to the community they represent. When attempting to define the meaning of unity, one must also consider definitions of "the church," since that concept is the subject of the unity. Congar offered a number of definitions of the church in various works.<sup>7</sup> In possibly his most significant book, *True and False Reform in the Church*, Congar listed four ways of looking at the church: 1) the church as the conglomeration of the concepts which it was established to safeguard and pass on; 2) the group of people who comprise the community of the church; 3) the institution of the church, more specifically the hierarchy; and 4) the intersection of the sacred and the profane within the hearts of the believers.<sup>8</sup> Congar favored the last description because it brought out the true characteristic of the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Matthew Levering, in his book, *An Introduction to Vatican II as an Ongoing Theological Event*, pointed to Congar's view of the role of the church as the intermediary

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<sup>7</sup> See 50Y-43; 900, 80; EA, 58-9; JC, 105; JP, 165-6; MC, 17, 83, 144; PPC, 137; SE, 10, 21-44, 46, 71-2; TC-84; VM, 29-30, 153-7.

<sup>8</sup> VFR, 88-90.

<sup>9</sup> VFR, 90.

between the world and the heavenly realm, which simultaneously places it in the role of purifier and guide.<sup>10</sup> Congar viewed the church as both an institution and a community, which is the subject of Alain Nisus' book, *L'Église comme communion et comme institution*; Nisus discussed the following descriptions of the church by Congar: 1) the church as a mystery of faith, 2) the church as the Mystical Body of Christ, 3) the church as the continuation of the Incarnation and Christ's redemption, and 4) the church as sacrament; each of these warranted a section in Nisus' book.<sup>11</sup> Within all of Congar's definitions and descriptions of the church, one finds the presence of the Holy Spirit not far removed; Congar frequently mentioned the guidance of the Spirit in the life of the church.<sup>12</sup>

The Roman Catholic concept of unity that Congar learned in the seminary was set forth by the popes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Congar discussed the failed efforts of Pope Pius IX in the year before the First Vatican Council; Pius made a unilateral effort to bring Christian communities together, but all was framed in the form of a return to Rome, as he wrote to the Orthodox that they had "lost the fruits of Christianity."<sup>13</sup> Similar language was used in his invitation to the Protestant churches, questioning them as to whether they were on a proper route to salvation. Naturally, none of the invitees accepted the rather questionable request to meet with Pius in Rome.

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Levering, *An Introduction to Vatican II as an Ongoing Theological Event* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2017), 92.

<sup>11</sup> Nisus, *L'Église*, 503.

<sup>12</sup> Some instances include: CL, 65; MC, 58, 105ff, 135; RG, 148ff; and the first section of HS2.

<sup>13</sup> SE, 320-4. The quote on the lost fruits is on 320; the information on Pius IX in this section is from the same source.

Pope Pius XI in his January 6, 1928 encyclical, *Mortalium Animos*, defined the Catholic Church as the One, True Church, from which many have strayed.<sup>14</sup> Pius spoke of the ecumenical movement being promoted by mainly Protestants at the time:

For since they hold it for certain that men destitute of all religious sense are very rarely to be found, they seem to have founded on that belief a hope that the nations, although they differ among themselves in certain religious matters, will without much difficulty come to agree as brethren in professing certain doctrines, which form as it were a common basis of the spiritual life. For which reason conventions, meetings and addresses are frequently arranged by these persons, at which a large number of listeners are present, and at which all without distinction are invited to join in the discussion, both infidels of every kind, and Christians, even those who have unhappily fallen away from Christ or who with obstinacy and pertinacity deny His divine nature and mission. Certainly such attempts can nowise be approved by Catholics, founded as they are on that false opinion which considers all religions to be more or less good and praiseworthy, since they all in different ways manifest and signify that sense which is inborn in us all, and by which we are led to God and to the obedient acknowledgment of His rule. Not only are those who hold this opinion in error and deceived, but also in distorting the idea of true religion they reject it, and little by little, turn aside to naturalism and atheism, as it is called; from which it clearly follows that one who supports those who hold these theories and attempt to realize them, is altogether abandoning the divinely revealed religion.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Mortalium Animos*, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Mortalium Animos*, 2.



Pius called the people driving the unification movement at the time, “pan-Christians,” which term became a theme in the encyclical.<sup>16</sup> The language in the encyclical is also triumphalist and somewhat condescending: “the union of Christians can only be promoted by promoting the return to the one true Church of Christ of those who are separated from it, for in the past they have unhappily left it;”<sup>17</sup> followed by the plea: “[I]et, therefore, the separated children draw nigh to the Apostolic See, set up in the City which Peter and Paul, the Princes of the Apostles, consecrated by their blood.”<sup>18</sup> Pius stated that the Roman church will not “cast aside the integrity of the faith and tolerate errors, but, on the contrary, [insist] that they themselves [those separated from Rome] submit to its teaching and government.”<sup>19</sup>

In *Dialogue Between Christians*, Congar said that he had written a paper on unity several months after *Mortalium Animos* was promulgated;<sup>20</sup> he wrote that his decision to vigorously pursue a vocation in ecumenism occurred shortly thereafter.<sup>21</sup> It will help to remember the conditions under which Congar took on his vocation in ecumenism.

Congar’s love of ecumenism led him naturally to consider the telos of ecumenism, unity, of which he spoke often, beginning early in his career: “I lost no time in acquainting my superiors with my desire to work for unity.”<sup>22</sup> But what did he mean by the word, “unity?” Did he mean the same thing that the Catholic Church of the time said unity was? Congar approached this problem in 1963 in *Sainte Église*, when he said

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<sup>16</sup> *Mortalium Animos*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Mortalium Animos*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Mortalium Animos*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Mortalium Animos*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> DBC, 2. This is his first mention of his ecumenical vocation, so one may presume that this may have been his first significant paper on the subject.

<sup>21</sup> DBC, 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> DBC, 5.

that “there is not only one Catholic Unity, but a unity of Catholics, not one unity *of* the church, but unity *in* the church, without an impoverishing and levelling uniformity.”<sup>23</sup> With this, he offered a different perspective for unity. Not only did Congar seek to bring all Christians under one roof, but he also looked internally at his own Catholic Church, to examine how the largest Christian community in the world could reform its approach to this perennially prickly problem. Congar wanted a different sort of unity than the Catholic Church of his time wanted. The quote directly above showed his rejection of the concept Pius XI proffered in his encyclical; Congar desired genuine unity on a more equal basis, as opposed to the return insisted upon by the popes in the documents cited earlier.

Congar, in 1982, presented the issue of unity on the first page of *Diversity and Communion*, in which he would outline possible paths to a united church which may look different from the way the Catholic Church looked at the time: “can one find a foundation for a ‘pluralist unity’ or a ‘reconciled diversity’, which might be the form in which communion is re-established, in the idea of ‘fundamental articles’?”<sup>24</sup> Congar quoted an unnamed French Protestant, who was asked to comment on their view of the Catholic Church at the time: “‘Since Vatican II, your church has put into practice everything possible in the perspective of unity which she has allowed herself. It seems that at present she cannot go any further. Might that not be a sign that your conception of unity is not broad enough, and that in particular it cannot recognize differences?’”<sup>25</sup> Looking at the rather stagnated situation in which he felt ecumenism found itself at that time, Congar

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<sup>23</sup> SE, 129.

<sup>24</sup> DC, 1.

<sup>25</sup> DC, 2. The rest of this paragraph is from the same source.

wondered how things could move forward; each group's positions had been elucidated and examined, yet nothing substantial had happened, leading him to pose the valid question, "But have they really *listened*?" Congar lamented the lack of meaningful movement from any ecclesial group; he stated that the Catholic Church had taken some steps forward, while admitting that it undoubtedly had farther to go along the ecumenical path than the others.

Congar bemoaned the state of ecumenical dialogue in the Introduction to *Diversity and Communion*; he felt that the forward trajectory of ecumenism had been halted as the discussions ran into difficulties which threw up tremendously difficult obstacles to unity, centering on governmental issues, rather than issues of definition of the faith. As he worked through the situation, he showed his appreciation for a concept which came from the World Lutheran Federation's June, 1977 meeting, at which they coined the term, "reconciled diversity," which apparently attracted Congar. He quoted Harding Meyer's elucidation of the concept:

The defence of change and renewal implied in the concept of reconciled diversity relates rather to a process which one could describe as a redefinition of confessions by dialogue. This redefinition would have a twofold aspect. It would be a matter of eliminating the elements which have disfigured, narrowed and exaggerated the confessional traditions and which, superimposing themselves on the legitimate and authentic form of these traditions, have transformed the diversity of confessions into differences separating the churches. It is precisely by this process of change and renewal that the confessions must rediscover their authentic features in dialogue and can mutually recognize and affirm themselves

as legitimate expressions of faith, witness and Christian life. That is the way in which reconciliation of differences will come about.<sup>26</sup>

Congar appreciated this concept as a workable blueprint from which to work in developing further concepts that would lead to the action of reunification that he so desired. *Diversity and Communion* was built around the idea that unity does not require uniformity, and that a qualified diversity within certain limits would add to the knowledge and understanding of the churches involved. Congar's concept that emerged from this involved the idea that the Catholic Church should virtually erect a large tent in which there would be sufficient room for any community which could pass a simple test for acceptability as Christians, a test that would not include a requirement for acceptance of every single Catholic doctrine for entry. The groups would hammer out together what they recognized as the minimum of belief that would qualify a person as Christian; once a community signaled acceptance of these standard requirements, they would be welcomed into the tent and allowed to establish their own corner in which they could expound on other details which may not be in agreement with the others in the tent, but which satisfy the basic faith needs.<sup>27</sup> The Catholic Church would have difficulty with determining the limits of its latitude, and the others would also encounter problems with the determination of their doctrinal limits. The other problem with this is that it would be a Catholic tent; others may not want to enter that organizational structure.<sup>28</sup>

A point that Congar mentioned in *After Nine Hundred Years* may be an important point for discussion in ecumenical circles. Congar discussed the development of doctrine,

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<sup>26</sup> DC, 5.

<sup>27</sup> DC, 145-58.

<sup>28</sup> DC, 220n3.

specifically in this case with regard to the Orthodox churches. Congar stated that he and his Orthodox dialogue partners had experienced some difficulties resolving different views on certain doctrinal definitions:

when we examined more closely the theological points that are the stumbling blocks, we saw that they crystallized in their present forms in the West particularly from the end of this Eleventh Century, in which the estrangement became a complete separation. Many of these points have since been the subject of dogmatic definitions in the West which only increases the difficulty. A dogmatic definition is not merely a juridical fact, but it is a reality touching the conscience of the Church, implying a maturing of that consciousness and determining its content in a way which has profound repercussions. When a dogmatic definition is made without the participation of a portion of Christendom, an occasion for estrangement is created which may never be adjusted.<sup>29</sup>

This issue applies also to Protestants, who had no part in the declaration of certain doctrines and dogmas which were promulgated after the Reformation. Unfortunately, Congar did not address this issue further in *After Nine Hundred Years*; one would have expected him to call for meetings in which those post-schism doctrines may be hashed out and accepted, adjusted, or discarded. In describing how to move forward for the reunion of the East and West, Congar emphasized that “the reunion, which should be the cure for the schism, can only be the result of a resumption of contacts full of esteem and sympathy – two words that really stand for charity.”<sup>30</sup> No matter how the issue of

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<sup>29</sup> 900Y, 76.

<sup>30</sup> 900Y, 88.

doctrinal development is addressed, it must be met head on for successful reunion in any fashion.

Congar's concept of unity became much more open later in his life after he had engaged in numerous ecumenical dialogues and listened to the other Christians with whom he met. In *Diversity and Communion*, Congar pointed to the fact that the NT shows that divisions have always existed within Christianity, but as long as the factions retained their focus on Christ as their savior, they remained acceptable to the Christian leadership.<sup>31</sup> Per Congar, the move toward uniformity began in 314 at the Council at Arles, when the disputed date for the celebration of Easter was resolved and imposed upon all churches by Pope Sylvester; as Congar said about the enforced date, "Unity called for uniformity."<sup>32</sup> Congar pointed to the Vatican II document, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, which states: "the heritage handed down by the apostles was received differently and in different forms, so that from the very beginnings of the Church its development varied from region to region and also because of differing mentalities and ways of life."<sup>33</sup>

This shows that the council recognized differences between Christian communities that can be traced back to differing interpretations of concepts stemming directly from the apostles.<sup>34</sup> Congar referred to positions taken by "Protestant theologians" (although he cited only two, E. Wolf<sup>35</sup> and W. Bauer) who questioned the

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<sup>31</sup> DC, 11-2.

<sup>32</sup> DC, 16. This is the source for all the information surrounding this council and its workings. The issue in question was the dating of Easter.

<sup>33</sup> UR, 14.

<sup>34</sup> DC, 19.

<sup>35</sup> DC, 184, n18.

historical existence of a completely undivided church.<sup>36</sup> Congar showed that division had always existed in the church, continuing to this day.<sup>37</sup>

To summarize, Congar looked at unity as a coming together, with various proposals having been considered. He settled on the concept of reconciled diversity: “The idea of reconciled diversity could be extended and become the formula for ecumenism, even between the Lutheran Church and the Catholic Church.”<sup>38</sup> Congar assessed the situation at the writing of *Diversity and Communion*: “we would have to say that the Catholic church has ceased to see and above all to commend union purely in terms of ‘return’ or conversion to itself, it has learnt something; it has become converted to ecumenism.”<sup>39</sup> One notices in *Unitatis Redintegratio* the absence of such ‘return’ language, with the more modern terminology discussing unity: “almost everyone, though in different ways, longs for the one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Definition of *Sola Scriptura***

God’s church is based upon the word of God, as recorded in Scripture. Essentially all Christians agree on this concept, but their approach to the scriptures vary, forming a fundamental point of contention between the various churches. Congar took a very firm position on the use of Scripture, clearly stating that “Scripture contains, at least in the form of suggestion or principle, the entire treasury of truths which it is necessary to

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<sup>36</sup> DC, 19.

<sup>37</sup> DC, 19.

<sup>38</sup> DC, 149. Bishop Daniel Beaudoin, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church’s Northwestern Ohio Synod, stated in a speech at Lourdes University, Sylvania, Ohio, in the spring of 2017, that he believed that during his lifetime, the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches would unite.

<sup>39</sup> DC, 161.

<sup>40</sup> UR, 1.

believe in order to be saved.”<sup>41</sup> Congar understood the Bible as an implement for unity, although it had developed into the crux of the separation of the churches in the Reformation.<sup>42</sup> He titled a chapter in *Revelation of God*, “The Bible, the Book of Reconciliation Among Christians?” He posed that as a question since the Bible has often been the source of division among Christians, rather than a point of unity. Congar saw that, “a problem does exist and a difficult one.”<sup>43</sup> He was not alone in this judgment. Avery Dulles, in his book *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, said that, “[u]ntil recently the majority of Catholics and Protestants would perhaps have agreed that the formula *sola Scriptura*, as aptly as any other, epitomizes the ultimate parting of the ways.”<sup>44</sup> Dulles continued: “It is often called the ‘formal principle’ of Reformation Christianity, as contrasted with justification by faith, which is called the ‘material principle.’”<sup>45</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan also agreed: “The sole authority of the Bible stood as the line of demarcation between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism;”<sup>46</sup> and Keith Mathison, in his book, *The*

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<sup>41</sup> T&t, 116.b. Congar’s qualification regarding the fact that Scripture contains all truths necessary to be saved sounds very similar to the almost identical wording of Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> RG, 34. See also T&t, 116.

<sup>43</sup> RG, 40.

<sup>44</sup> Dulles, *Revelation*, 65.

<sup>45</sup> Dulles, *Revelation*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It?* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 166. For other Protestant views, see also Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 76; Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 2; Colson and Neuhaus, *Evangelicals and Catholics*, xxi; Durant, *The Reformation*, 349; G. R. Evans, *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), i, 74, 241-271; Frame, *Word of God*, 2010), 223; Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 178-9; W. Robert Godfrey, “What Really Caused the Great Divide?” in *Roman Catholicism*, Armstrong, gen. ed., 69; W. Robert Godfrey, “What Do We Mean by *Sola Scriptura*?” in *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible*, Don Kistler, gen. ed. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), 1-2; Michael Graves, *The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture: What the Early Church Can Teach Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 39; Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Vol. I God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations* (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1976); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Vol. II God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part One* (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1976); Peter Kreeft, *Catholics and Protestants: What Can We Learn From*



*Shape of Sola Scriptura* stated that, “[t]he doctrine of sola scriptura, ‘by Scripture alone,’ has been the focal point of intense disagreement between Roman Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation of the sixteenth century.”<sup>47</sup>

Martin Luther was a reluctant reformer, although a very willing debater;<sup>48</sup> he held the gospel, including the life and acts of Jesus and not simply the content of the canonical Gospels, to be the cornerstone of his beliefs.<sup>49</sup> Althaus noted that Luther saw Scripture as central, while accepting that the gospel of which he so often spoke was not comprised exclusively of the information that has been recorded in the Bible, residing also in the kerygma of the early church and in the sacraments, a concept in line with the Catholic position on Tradition.<sup>50</sup> Luther himself defined the word “gospel” as:

nothing but the preaching about Christ, the Son of God and of David, true God and true man, who by his death and resurrection has overcome for us the sin, death, and hell of all men who believe in him. Thus the gospel can be either a brief or a lengthy message; one person can write of it briefly, another at length.

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*Each Other?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 36-9; MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 123; Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 13, 84; Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 199-201; Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995); Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 96-7; Oberman, *Dawn*, 270; J. I. Packer, “Fundamentalism” and the Word of God (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1958); J. I. Packer, “‘Sola Scriptura’ in History and Today,” in John W. Montgomery, ed., *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 44-5; Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 1; William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 105, 126; Sproul, *Scripture Alone*, 15-6; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 315; Benjamin B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991 [1927]), 33. The degree of *sola scriptura* adhered to also causes divisions among Protestant churches and groups; the central expression of this situation began with Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2008 [1976]).

<sup>47</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Durant, *Reformation*, 349.

<sup>49</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation*, 167.

<sup>50</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 223.

He writes of it at length who writes about many words and works of Christ, as do the four evangelists. He writes of it briefly, however, who does not tell of Christ's works, but indicates briefly how by his death at and resurrection he has overcome sin, death, and hell for those who believe in him.<sup>51</sup>

As is evident from this quote and noted above, Luther accepted all information which could be considered revelation to be the gospel of Jesus the Christ.

Luther followed along the path established in the Middle Ages, which regarded the Bible as the source of all knowledge.<sup>52</sup> Bainton confirmed that Luther believed strongly in the gospel, which Bainton termed, “the *Word*, ... [which] is not to be equated with Scripture nor with the sacraments, yet it operates through them and not apart from them.”<sup>53</sup> From this statement, it appears that Luther accepted Tradition, in the form he described. Bainton continued, saying that Luther considered that the gospel that must be followed consisted of more than just the books of the Bible but included Jesus' kerygmatic message; the message comes from the Holy Spirit, who instills it in us. Showing Luther's own concept of his belief system, Owen Chadwick quoted a letter written by Luther, which stated that “my theology ... is the theology of the Bible, of St. Augustine, and of all true theologians of the Church.”<sup>54</sup> Chadwick noted that Luther “cared little for the correct texts of ancient documents,” making Luther's occasional,

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<sup>51</sup> MLBT, 115.

<sup>52</sup> T&t, 112, 113.

<sup>53</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 223. The next sentence also comes from this source. Kern Trembath downplayed this view, emphasizing rather the reception of revelation as the key step. See Kern R. Trembath, *Divine Revelation: Our Moral Relation with God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 64-5.

<sup>54</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*, vol. 3 of *The Pelican History of the Church*, Owen Chadwick, ed. (Middlesex, England, 1976), 46. Also see David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 20-1, 24. Chadwick mentioned that Erasmus also “sometimes altered [the Vulgate] without sufficient reason.” *Reformation*, 38. See also MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 130, as in note 51 below.

disordered treatment of the Bible plausible.<sup>55</sup> Althaus stated that Luther's theology "presupposes the authority of Scripture," as his primary building block.<sup>56</sup> Luther also accepted the three early "ecumenical creeds" of the church, the Apostles, Athanasian, and Nicene Creeds; Luther considered these to be in line with Scripture, certifying their authenticity and acceptability.<sup>57</sup> Bainton stressed Luther's reliance on the significance of the preaching of the Word from the pulpit. Luther was first of all a Bible scholar, but, according to MacCulloch, Luther "could treat the text in a startlingly proprietary way."<sup>58</sup> MacCulloch cited examples of Luther changing or adding words in his translation of the Bible in an effort to suit his means.<sup>59</sup> These issues demonstrate that Luther, while respecting the Bible greatly, also had the audacity to push its contents in the direction that he felt was needed to support his theology. Through all of this runs the commonality of Scripture as foundational to Luther and his community, in spite of his treatment of the text. The Reformation followed Luther, proceeding along the same lines.

Seeing the centrality of Scripture for Luther, it is necessary to examine his position on *sola scriptura*. In his contribution to a joint work between Evangelicals and Catholics, Timothy George cited Luther: "'Scripture alone ... is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men's books and human

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<sup>55</sup> Chadwick, *Reformation*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Althaus, *Theology of Luther*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Althaus, *Theology of Luther*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 130.

<sup>59</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 130. MacCulloch cited the following from Luther's translation of the Bible into German: changing "life" to "eternal life;" "mercy" to "grace;" "the deliverer of Israel" to "the savior" and the only one in which he gave a general citation, Ro 3: "man is justified ... by faith", to which Luther inserted, "only faith."

teachers.”<sup>60</sup> God’s word always held the prime position for the Reformer: “[f]or Luther the word is first and last the spoken word,” which Jesus first delivered to the apostles, who were then assigned to spread the message throughout the world.<sup>61</sup> The word always deals with Christ, handing on his story and law through the gospel message, which was delivered in the form of a written word in order to prevent deterioration of the message, yet also present in the fact of the life of Jesus the Christ. Althaus also presented Luther’s concept that the Bible is its own interpreter, which finds resonance in much Protestant writing on the subject.<sup>62</sup>

Luther found additional differences in this matter with Rome, which insisted that the church is, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the interpreter of Scripture.<sup>63</sup> At that point Luther drew the line on scriptural hermeneutics, insisting that no one can set themselves above Scripture by claiming to draw inspiration directly from the Spirit. This was made possible by Luther’s basic assumption that the Scriptures are comprehensible without resort to external guides; he disagreed with the Catholic position that required education in those who interpret the Scriptures due to their complexity. What Luther insisted was that the Spirit enter in and that the Spirit be preached, because the Spirit interprets Scripture.<sup>64</sup> For Luther, Scripture formed the basis for the kerygma.

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<sup>60</sup> Timothy George, “An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition,” in *Your Word is Truth*, Colson and Neuhaus, 14. George cited from “Defense and Explanation of All the Articles Which Were Rejected by the Roman Bull,” from *WA* 7:317.1-9; *LW* 32:11-12. Timothy R. Schmeling cited information from a research paper that investigated Luther’s use of the three *solas*; the research found that Luther used the concept *sola scriptura* twenty times in his Latin works. Schmeling also pointed out that “Aquinas employed *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola Christi* in his writings.” “*Sola Scriptura*: The *Solas* and Martin Luther,” *Logia* 27, no. 4 (2018): 15-22.

<sup>61</sup> Althaus, *Theology of Luther*, 72.

<sup>62</sup> Althaus, *Theology of Luther*, 76.

<sup>63</sup> Althaus, *Theology of Luther*, 76. The next two sentences also come from this source.

<sup>64</sup> MLBT, 90-1.

As seen above, external guides which are in conformance with Scripture may be accepted. Luther, in “Concerning the Letter and the Spirit,” said that the Spirit desires that the gospel be preached, so that the people may be enlightened by the meaning of Scripture.<sup>65</sup> One of the major themes of this document is the proper preaching of the gospel, which is the product of proper scriptural interpretation.

In order to understand the concept of *sola scriptura*, it is important to understand that Martin Luther would be unlikely to agree with the definition of *sola scriptura* as it has evolved within Protestantism during the last century and a half; his concepts are described above, while the more common definition has morphed into a stricter interpretation of what Scripture alone means.<sup>66</sup> Protestant theologians have taken Luther’s position and framed it without taking into account Luther’s consideration of the validity of the Tradition and the centrality of the gospel as preached in the kerygma of the early church, concentrating instead on his focus on the vitality of the word as it has been presented to us. In a measured discussion of Catholics and Protestants, Frederick W. Norris gave his view of the positions of modern Catholics and Protestants regarding Scripture and Tradition. Norris has taught at John Carroll University in Cleveland and has a rather clear view of Catholicism. He cautiously stated that, “[i]t is possible to be a pious Roman Catholic and humbly suggest that faith can be seen primarily in what Scripture entails.”<sup>67</sup> Norris added, “Protestant Fundamentalists and Evangelicals have followed the lead of the sixteenth-century Reformation and argued sharply for *sola scriptura*.” Norris tried to get both groups to understand their own positions in relation to the other,

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<sup>65</sup> MLBT, 84-5.

<sup>66</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 14-5.

<sup>67</sup> Norris, *The Apostolic Faith*, 129. This book is a presentation of Norris’s lectures given at John Carroll University in the fall of 1988 as a Visiting Professor.

mentioning that Catholics need to appreciate the fact that the Bible is a universal book with a message for all, while encouraging Protestants to “concede that the Great Church recognized and preserved our Scripture.”<sup>68</sup> Norris’s viewpoint reflected his own self-described conservative, Protestant background, yet he was open to the Catholic Tradition, always searching for areas of agreement. He recognized that some Protestants, especially more Evangelical Protestants, tend to not want to dialogue with Catholics, yet he stated that “[i]t may appear bothersome to think of Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics needing each other in order for the Church to be herself, but it is unavoidable.”<sup>69</sup> Although Norris and Congar never met, they would likely have agreed on much.

As has been shown, there are differences between the ways that Evangelicals see *sola scriptura* from the ways that the classical Protestant churches view the concept. The Cambridge historian Gillian Evans stated that the Reformers believed that the Roman Church had added to Scripture with its declarations on biblical matters, inventing new ceremonies and then stating that the individual had to conform to and/or perform these to be saved.<sup>70</sup> Evans noted that many of the Reformers had not called for an abandonment of all the work of the Church Fathers in order to focus exclusively on the Bible; they used the writings of the Fathers as a foundation for their work, then employing Aquinas, whose work especially called for a knowledge of the Scriptures as a means for salvation: “The Word saves by making known to the mind of man the end for which he was created; it brings man to God through the knowledge of truth. *Tota hominis salus*, he says,

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<sup>68</sup> Norris, *Apostolic Faith*, 129.

<sup>69</sup> Norris, *Apostolic Faith*, 130.

<sup>70</sup> Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 74.

depends (*dependet*) on the knowledge of the truth (*a veritatis cognitione*).”<sup>71</sup> She noted that this concept that all the truth required for salvation is contained in the Bible attracted the Reformers in their effort to escape the jurisdiction of Rome, which took the Thomistic position that human reason could determine further doctrines by examining the Scriptures and coming to reasonable conclusions, which then could be considered by the Roman Church as binding; the Reformers adamantly insisted that nothing could be added to Scripture in any fashion.<sup>72</sup> Per Evans, Calvin expressed the fear that Rome would in this manner twist the Scriptures to suit their needs: “They were willing to describe Scripture as a ‘nose of wax,’ mere raw material (*rudis materia*) to be shaped by theologians in formulating statements of doctrine,” which statement Calvin claimed was frequently heard in Rome.<sup>73</sup> Evans stated that the Reformers saw the Catholic Church treating the Scriptures as though they were merely tools for the church to manipulate.<sup>74</sup>

John M. Frame presented the Reformed view of *sola scriptura*, offering his concern that a thin line exists between the use of the concept of *sola scriptura* and a reversion to biblicism,<sup>75</sup> which he defined as:

commonly applied to the views of (1) someone who has no appreciation for the importance of extrabiblical truth in theology, who denies the value of general or natural revelation; (2) those suspected of believing that Scripture is a “textbook” of science, or philosophy, politics, ethics, economics, aesthetics, church government, and so forth; (3) those who have no respect for confessions, creeds,

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<sup>71</sup> Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 75.

<sup>72</sup> Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 75.

<sup>73</sup> Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 76.

<sup>74</sup> Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 76.

<sup>75</sup> Frame, *Word of God*, 571ff.

and past theologians, who insist on ignoring these and going back to the Bible to build up their doctrinal formulations from scratch; (4) those who employ a ‘proof-texting’ method, rather than trying to see Scripture texts in their historical, cultural, logical, and literary contexts.<sup>76</sup>

Frame then gave a short definition of *sola scriptura*: “the doctrine that Scripture, and only Scripture, has the final word on everything, all our doctrine, and all our life.”<sup>77</sup>

Frame’s approach is a scholarly study which rejected extreme views, pointing at the biblicism which he defined above and detected in certain areas of Protestantism. Frame found great difficulty in separating biblicism from *sola scriptura*, even granting that Roman Catholic critique of *sola scriptura* correctly calls Protestants to task when they too closely approach the border between the two.<sup>78</sup>

The concept of Scripture alone remains the Protestant approach to Scripture study and hermeneutics; the current situation will be discussed later in this chapter. Congar covered the approaches to Scripture and Tradition through history in *Tradition and Traditions*. As he showed, the Bible, or the components of the NT before it had been assembled and placed in general use, was used in the early church to provide the basis for Christian doctrine and defend the faith against the attacks and inroads of heretical concepts which spread through the communities of the time.<sup>79</sup> Heretics also provided reasons for the crystallization of the content of the Bible, which some, most notably Marcion in the second century, attempted to rearrange. Congar covered several of the Fathers in his discussion, including, among others, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Theophilus of

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<sup>76</sup> Frame, *Word of God*, 571.

<sup>77</sup> Frame, *Word of God*, 571.

<sup>78</sup> Frame, *Word of God*, 574.

<sup>79</sup> T&t, 107-11.



Antioch, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian, mentioning that truth entered into the approach and analysis of these Fathers as they analyzed the writings which became the Bible.<sup>80</sup>

By the Middle Ages, the Bible was generally regarded as the source of truth, which again constituted a foundational consideration in biblical exegesis. As Congar described it, “[m]edieval writers had no difficulty finding everything in Scripture, since their principles of exegesis provided them with the necessary means.”<sup>81</sup> Naturally, Congar invoked Thomas Aquinas and his treatment of Scripture: “Scripture is the rule of faith, to which nothing can be added, from which nothing can be deleted.”<sup>82</sup> Modern Protestant theologians of today would appreciate Thomas’ approach, since it echoes what generally is their view.

*Tradition and Traditions* was written before and during Vatican II, and the words of *Dei Verbum* 11 (“Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scripture”) can be heard in Congar’s evaluation of Thomas, when he noted that, “Scripture contains all the truths necessary for salvation,”<sup>83</sup> which he also saw in the writings of Kaspar Schatzgeyer, who added the proviso that the Scripture must be interpreted within the organized church.

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<sup>80</sup> T&t, 108-11. The complete list of Fathers cited include the above-named, as well as Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Theophilus of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandrai, Augustine, Vincent of Lérins, and Gregory.

<sup>81</sup> T&t, 113.

<sup>82</sup> T&t, 114.

<sup>83</sup> T&t, 114.

Congar stated that Protestants, to show the Roman view of Scripture as it existed at the time of the Reformation, use many of the same texts Schatzgeyer employed.<sup>84</sup>

Luther himself intended to leave the determination of scriptural hermeneutics to the church,<sup>85</sup> while Calvin preferred a personal hermeneutics because “Scripture is self-authenticated; hence it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit.”<sup>86</sup>

Mathison laid a great deal of emphasis on the concept that the *sola scriptura* of the classical Reformers was that which was espoused by the early, post-apostolic church, until the first mention of tradition, which he stated was in the fourth century.<sup>87</sup>

Mathison’s problem lies in the fact that the canon of the Bible was not established for quite some time; Allert pointed this out, particularly showing that Benjamin Warfield espoused a peculiar position: “We say that this immediate placing of the new [Testament] books – given the church under the seal of apostolic authority – among the Scriptures already established as such, was inevitable.”<sup>88</sup> Warfield promoted the concept that the New Testament books were written by their authors as a known part of the canon, that they were accepted from their initial publication, and that the “the New Testament books from the very beginning [were regarded] as Scripture.”<sup>89</sup> Warfield held the idea that there were no debates or discussions on the content of the canon; once the New Testament books were written, they were instantaneously received as part of the canon, because the church recognized them as inspired and “*consciously* adding these writings to the

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<sup>84</sup> T&t, 116.

<sup>85</sup> Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 78.

<sup>86</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 256.

<sup>88</sup> Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 452.

<sup>89</sup> Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 452.

growing, yet closed, canon of the New Testament until it was naturally complete and closed at the time of the writing of the final document – as if when the number twenty-seven was reached a closing of the canon was obvious.”<sup>90</sup> Warfield stated that, “they received new book after new book from the apostolic circle, as equally ‘Scripture’ with the old books, and added them one by one to the collection of old books as additional Scriptures, until at length the new books thus added were numerous enough to be looked upon as another *section* of the Scriptures.”<sup>91</sup> As Allert pointed out, Warfield’s position played a role in the current position of Evangelicals regarding Scripture, which sees no problems with the establishment of the canon. Warfield also took a short time frame for the writing of the New Testament, claiming that 2 Pt was written in 68 AD.<sup>92</sup> Allert termed Warfield’s position “A Typical Evangelical View,” in the title of the section dealing with this.<sup>93</sup> It is important to understand what different groups understand as the Bible and Scripture in order to be able to speak with them intelligently.

Next, we will examine the Protestant approaches to some more of the views of modern theologians, from varying versions of the Reformation faith, ranging from those in the classical Protestant churches to those in Evangelical groups.<sup>94</sup> Protestant beliefs on *sola scriptura*, as well as on most doctrines, range in a continuum from one end to the other.

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<sup>90</sup> Allert, *High View*, 39.

<sup>91</sup> Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 453.

<sup>92</sup> Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 452.

<sup>93</sup> Allert, *High View*, 38.

<sup>94</sup> Norris, *Apostolic Faith*, mentioned the five fundamentals which all fundamentalists must espouse. For Liberty University, these five, to which every professor must sign a statement of agreement, include: “(1) The inspiration and infallibility of Scripture (2) The deity of Christ (including his virgin birth) (3) The substitutionary atonement of Christ’s death (4) The literal resurrection of Christ from the dead (5) The literal return of Christ in the Second Advent.” Many other conservative Christian universities require similar agreements from all their faculty.

### **Mathison's View on *Sola Scriptura***

Keith Mathison, a Reformed theologian, defended the Protestant concept of *sola scriptura* in his book *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, using a historical approach, not unlike that of Congar's in *Tradition and Traditions*. After tracing the historical treatment by the Church Fathers of the Bible and what he described as the early employment of *sola scriptura*, Mathison dealt with the approaches of Luther and Calvin. Most notably, Mathison summarized their position as follows: "Like the ancient fathers before them, they asserted the Scripture as the sole source of revelation and denied the existence of equally authoritative extra-scriptural revelation." This emphasized the Protestant objection to the concept of Tradition, but Mathison backed off when he continued, by stating that the ancient fathers, "asserted that Scripture was to be interpreted in and by the Church and that it was to be interpreted according to the ancient apostolic teaching of the Church – the *regula fidei*."<sup>95</sup> In defining his position, Mathison stated, "The classical Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura* is not a novel doctrine of scriptural authority," having shown what he believed was a direct continuity between the Fathers and church doctrine regarding the interpretation of Scripture all the way to the Reformation.<sup>96</sup>

It seems proper to interject here another statement that *sola scriptura* did not originate with the Reformers of the sixteenth century; this was confirmed by Timothy R. Schmeling in his article "Sola Scriptura: The Solas and Martin Luther." Schmeling pointed to "contemporary Tübingen church history professor Volker Leppitt [who] shows that the Latin solas can even be found in the theology of the High and Late Middle

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<sup>95</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 120.

<sup>96</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 120.

Ages.”<sup>97</sup> Notably, Schmeling cited Thomas Aquinas as having “employed *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *solo Christo* in his writings.”<sup>98</sup> Schmeling explained: “Even if the medieval use of them lacked a good deal of precision, their medieval presence shows Martin Luther ... was not a revolutionary, but rather a reformer par excellence who reasserted the catholic (universal) faith of the Sacred Scriptures.”<sup>99</sup> The solas came from earlier authors.

Returning to Mathison, he enlisted the aid of Heiko Oberman’s discussion of Tradition in Oberman’s book, *The Dawn of the Reformation*. In the final chapter, titled “*Quo Vadis Petre? Tradition from Irenaeus to Humani Generis*,” Oberman addressed the Catholic Church, proposing a classification of Tradition that designated with names the views of Tradition which he covered within his history of the church. He defined Tradition I as “the single exegetical tradition of interpreted Scripture,” as opposed to Tradition II, which Oberman classified as the Catholic approach, which includes not only the handing on of the traditions, but also “allows for an extra-biblical oral tradition.”<sup>100</sup> Both of these two forms of Tradition can be found in medieval times.<sup>101</sup> Oberman’s discussion of the advance of the two concepts showed his Tradition I slowly being defended and accepted gradually by the forerunners of the Reformation, such as Hus and Wycliffe, while he contended that Tradition II became the favored concept of the Catholic Church.<sup>102</sup> These are both concepts which impact one’s definition of *sola*

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<sup>97</sup> Schmeling, “Sola Scriptura,” 15.

<sup>98</sup> Schmeling, “Sola Scriptura,” 15. The citations from Aquinas are from: *Super Ioannem*, c.21.1.6; Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, II, d.26, q.1, a. 5; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.8, a. 6 (11:134). Thomas Aquinas, *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia*, ed. *Order of Preachers* (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1882-).

<sup>99</sup> Schmeling, “Sola Scriptura,” 15.

<sup>100</sup> Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 280. Oberman was a Protestant observer at Vatican II.

<sup>101</sup> Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 280.

<sup>102</sup> Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 282-3.

*scriptura*, since they affect how much one will accept in the way of unwritten and extrabiblical information, or traditions, that have been handed on. Mathison took Oberman's classification and appended to it a concept of Tradition 0, which came from Alister McGrath, who did not espouse Tradition 0 himself.<sup>103</sup> In Tradition 0, all tradition is rejected, leaving only the Bible available for use in interpretation. This concept was not that of Luther or Calvin, leaving it to the more radical of the reformers, such as Thomas Muntzer and Kaspar Schwenkfeld.<sup>104</sup> Mathison, following Douglas Jones, termed this approach to Scripture as *solo scriptura*; followers of this concept have limited all scriptural interpretation to the level of the individual, ruling out consideration of even the Church Fathers.<sup>105</sup> Mathison castigated the groups within Evangelicalism who have degraded *sola scriptura* to *solo scriptura*: "So much time and effort has been spent guarding the doctrine of *sola fide* against any perversion or change that many do not seem to have noticed that the classical and foundational Reformed doctrine of *sola scriptura* has been so altered that it is virtually unrecognizable. In its place Evangelicals have substituted an entirely different doctrine."<sup>106</sup> Mathison traced this concept back to its origin with the Anabaptists;<sup>107</sup> in this model, "[t]radition is not allowed in any sense; the ecumenical creeds are virtually dismissed; and the Church is denied any real

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<sup>103</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 126. McGrath's position on Scripture will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>104</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 126-7.

<sup>105</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 127. The reference to Douglas Jones is from 238. The same concept is described as *nuda scriptura* by Timothy George in, "Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology," in *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?* ed. Thomas P. Rausch (New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 140, when he stated that, "*sola Scriptura* is not *nuda Scriptura*. Evangelicals cannot accept the idea of tradition as a coequal or supplementary source of revelation, but neither can we ignore the rich exegetical tradition of early Christian writers whose insight is vastly superior to the latest word from today's guilded (sic? – gilded?) scholars."

<sup>106</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 238.

<sup>107</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 126-8.

authority.”<sup>108</sup> Modern Evangelicals who espouse this concept have in great part rejected theological association with the Catholic Church. Mathison described the modern situation which would result from *solo scriptura* when confronted with a problem of scriptural interpretation:

The typical modern Evangelical solution to this problem is to tell the inquirer to examine the arguments on both sides and decide which of them is closest to the teaching of Scripture. He is told that this is what *sola scriptura* means – to individually evaluate all doctrines according to the only authority, the Scripture. Yet in reality, all that occurs is that one Christian measures the scriptural interpretations of other Christians against the standard of his own scriptural interpretation. ... The result is the relativism, subjectivism, and theological chaos we see in modern Evangelicalism today.<sup>109</sup>

Mathison noted that the intent was to deny authority to any church or author.<sup>110</sup> He finally ascribed this concept to all Evangelicals, saying that it “is dishonestly presented as if it were the Reformation position,” calling it “unbiblical, illogical, and unworkable.”<sup>111</sup> Mathison argued for reference to the church as the final interpreter, as “adherents of *solo scriptura* rip the Scripture out of its ecclesiastical and traditional hermeneutical context, leaving it in a relativistic vacuum.”<sup>112</sup> What this ultimately leads to is additional difficulty in conducting dialogue with proponents of *sola scriptura*, in that the fringe, or radical, groups who espouse *solo scriptura* could never be brought into the same conversation,

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<sup>108</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 238.

<sup>109</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 240.

<sup>110</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 240-4.

<sup>111</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 244-5.

<sup>112</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 246.

since their approach is so phenomenally distant from any reading which the mainstream churches espouse.

Mathison proceeded to show that the individual interpretation of the Bible is not the historical position of the church.<sup>113</sup> He pointed out that most of the believers in *solo scriptura* have no issue with ignoring the lines of the early church, which alleviates them from concern over the historical practice of *solo scriptura*. Mathison noted the fact that the vast majority of the early church was illiterate, requiring the church to provide the Scriptures to them as well as to interpret them, showing that the ecclesial authorities provided a needed service to those centuries of Christians.

In practical terms, Mathison cited *solo scriptura* for offering the opportunity for fragmentation, as has happened. Any small group using *solo scriptura* can claim to be the only true church, breaking away from all others: “using Scripture alone, it cannot tell us what ‘Scripture’ is or what it means.”<sup>114</sup>

The concept of *solo scriptura* which Keith Mathison addressed has become somewhat ubiquitous in modern North America. Most “Bible-based,” especially independent, churches base their belief system on a *solo scriptura* concept, which Mathison, as well as other more mainstream authors decry for the reasons listed by Mathison. Yet, in spite of the problems inherent in the belief system, it maintains many adherents today.

### **Strict Inerrancy**

Another qualification to the reading of Scripture which must, of necessity, disturb serious ecumenical dialogue is the concept of strict inerrancy, as espoused by many Evangelicals. In the concept of strict inerrancy as defined by Harold Lindsell, the Bible is

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<sup>113</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 247.

<sup>114</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 250-1.



taken to be “[w]holly trustworthy in matters of history and doctrine.”<sup>115</sup> The authors, although fully human, were guided by the Holy Spirit in their writing, yielding error-free information, not only in areas of faith and morals: “The very nature of inspiration renders the Bible infallible, which means that it cannot deceive us. It is inerrant in that it is not false, mistaken, or defective.”<sup>116</sup> Lindsell’s definition of inerrancy shows how far away from the initial reformational concept modern Evangelicalism has come, although, just as with many of the beliefs examined in this work, one may not ascribe any one belief system to Evangelicals; their beliefs on this range across a wide spectrum.

Strict inerrancy is a hallmark of all churches and schools that would consider themselves Evangelical. In October of 1978, a group of inerrantist theologians met in Chicago and composed the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.”<sup>117</sup> This document outlines the stance which the signers take regarding Scriptural interpretation: “Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.”<sup>118</sup>

A normal requirement for any instructor at an Evangelical college or university is the signing of a document that verifies that the instructor adheres to strict inerrancy, as the school defines it, which normally aligns with the Chicago Statement.<sup>119</sup> Not only

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<sup>115</sup> Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 34. Lindsell speaks from a rather far end of the spectrum favoring strict inerrancy.

<sup>116</sup> Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 34.

<sup>117</sup> The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is contained in full in Appendix C.

<sup>118</sup> Chicago Statement, Short Statement, 4.

<sup>119</sup> For examples of these policies, see Appendices A and B, which have been cut and pasted from two Evangelical schools, Trinity International University and Fuller Theological Seminary. I found similar policies at all Evangelical seminaries and universities I researched.

must the instructors adhere to the policy themselves, but at least at Fuller Theological Seminary, they are to take action, employing biblical tactics, against any colleague who they may feel has violated the policy. Anyone who refuses to retract their variance from the official policy is expected to resign. These actions by Fuller illustrate the seriousness with which they take commitment to their ideals.

Turn of the twentieth century Princeton theologian Benjamin B. Warfield complimented those who place extreme trust in the truth of the Bible, asserting that people have given complete faith in the truth of the Bible since the ancient church.<sup>120</sup> Warfield claimed that the Scriptures are true in all phases because they are the subject of plenary inspiration, which indicates that all of the Bible is inspired.<sup>121</sup> Warfield repeatedly used the Bible as the reference point, describing one's treatment of the Bible as the definition of inspiration.<sup>122</sup> It was Warfield who held the peculiar concept that the NT books were immediately accepted into the NT canon as soon as they had been written (see above). Concepts such as Warfield's personal inspiration were distorted by later leaders who placed these ideas in the straitjacket that yielded definitions such as that of Lindsell, claiming simultaneously too much and too little for the concept of inerrancy as well as for *sola scriptura*; too much in its call for the verity of every single word, phrase, and concept in the Bible, too little in segregating the individual from ecclesial guidance. Warfield went astray in his assertions about the significance of the Bible, when he stated that, "it is to the Bible that you and I owe it that we have a Christ."<sup>123</sup> Here, Warfield appears to have crossed the line that concerned Frame, espousing a form of biblicism; at a

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<sup>120</sup> Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 53.

<sup>121</sup> Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 60ff.

<sup>122</sup> Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 53.

<sup>123</sup> Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 73.

minimum, Warfield credited the Bible with significantly more weight than Scripture is capable of bearing; Warfield himself would undoubtedly claim that Scripture can bear any weight. Warfield's place as a highly revered theologian led numerous followers down the same path, although Frame did not mention Warfield in this regard.<sup>124</sup> Frame noted that the dispute over the Bible "has virtually defined American evangelicalism from the time of B. B. Warfield until very recently."<sup>125</sup> The struggle began with Warfield, who tried to ward off liberal questioning of the truth and historical accuracy of the Bible as it had developed during the First Quest for the Historical Jesus in the nineteenth century, a struggle which Frame stated has not yet been resolved.<sup>126</sup>

In an anthology titled, *Inerrancy*, J. Barton Payne, a Presbyterian pastor and professor at several Evangelical schools, notably Wheaton College and Bob Jones University, offered his view on higher criticism of the Bible:

Higher criticism is the art of seeing literature exactly as it is and of estimating it accordingly. It becomes negative criticism, often described as "the historical-critical method," when it assumes the right to pass rationalistic judgment on Scripture's own claims about its composition and historicity. Such a method necessarily presupposes the Bible's claims are not inerrant. It thus disqualifies itself as truly scientific criticism, since it refuses to view the object being analyzed according to its proper (divine) character.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Warfield is cited thirty-one times in the Index to Frame's book, so Frame was naturally quite familiar with him.

<sup>125</sup> Frame, *Word of God*, 607.

<sup>126</sup> Frame, *Word of God*, 607-8.

<sup>127</sup> J. Barton Payne, "Higher Criticism and Biblical Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Gesiler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 84.

Payne showed a common approach to inerrancy, which classifies all else through the strict lens of inerrancy; the Bible may never be judged. All else must naturally be subordinated to that basic, fundamental concept.<sup>128</sup>

As more of a moderate, Mathison that the gospel had been preached for a number of years before anything that we have was written.<sup>129</sup> Allert also stressed this point in his book on the Bible, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*.<sup>130</sup> Mathison indicated that Evangelicals will be difficult groups for Catholics to engage in dialogue, stating that: “[m]odern Evangelical doctrine of Scripture essentially destroys the real authority of ministers of the Word and the Church as a whole.”<sup>131</sup> With a different concept of church, some Evangelicals can make difficult dialogue partners, since there is no way to dialogue with official representatives of a larger group. In spite of this, dialogues have taken place between Catholics and Evangelicals, which have already yielded a document of agreement<sup>132</sup> (see Appendix D).

### **Current State of the Protestant Concept of *Sola Scriptura***

Since Protestants tend to interpret *sola scriptura* differently in the varying groups of people and churches, the situation needs to be separated to accurately represent what is happening in both segments. I have divided the Protestant churches into the classical Reformation Protestant churches and the Evangelicals. It must be kept in mind that there

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<sup>128</sup> The word, “fundamental” was used intentionally because the concept described is one of the five fundamentals for Fundamentalists.

<sup>129</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 245.

<sup>130</sup> Allert, *High View*. Allert made this a major point in his study. He lamented that “Most evangelicals ... have what I call a ‘dropped out of the sky’ understanding of the Bible.” He further explained that most evangelicals simply believe that the Bible has always existed in the form we have it. For further information, see the section below titled, “Current State of *Sola Scriptura*,” Allert, *High View*, 10.

<sup>131</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 245.

<sup>132</sup>

is no strict border between them; there are Evangelicals within the classical Protestant churches.

### **In the Classical Reformation Protestant Churches**

There is movement among both the classical Reformation churches and Evangelicals who may be members of the classical churches, in the direction of consideration of the concepts of Tradition and tradition which Congar so extensively presented in *Tradition and Traditions*. We have seen that Mathison and Allert both appear to be receptive toward a more Congarian conception of Tradition, with the understanding that Tradition stands in support of Scripture, rather than instead of Scripture.

As a representative of the classical Protestant churches, I have chosen Oscar Cullmann, because of my great respect for him as well as the fact that he was a friend of Congar. Cullmann gave a concise summary of his position on revelation:

we come to the nature of the *transmission* of this message. The divine revelation was given form for us at a definite moment in history and by means of men who belonged to their own age, and who used a human language which was spoken in that age. This transmission – human as it is – partakes, precisely in its temporal and humanly imperfect nature, of the essence of the great biblical truth. In revealing himself to men, God became flesh. The process by which were shaped the particular books of the Bible, and later on, the canonical collections of the Old and New Testaments, was an ordinary historic process and yet is itself an element of revelation. Indeed in its very ordinariness it is part of the divine revelation.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 9.

Cullmann demonstrated here that he espoused more of a Tradition I approach, close to that of the original Reformers. Cullmann also praised the work on the historical-critical approach of the nineteenth century, a position seen (above; see also below, in the following section) to ruffle people who hold to a more literal view of Scripture.<sup>134</sup>

Cullmann accepted an original tradition which involved the oral handing on of traditions through the apostles.<sup>135</sup> Congar held Cullmann in very high regard, calling him extremely loyal to his own intellectual, religious background, yielding nothing to Catholicism.<sup>136</sup>

Michael Graves pointed out what he called “two corollaries of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, (1) that Scripture takes precedence over church traditions, and (2) that the Scriptures are sufficiently clear in essential matters, so that no ‘official’ interpreter is needed.”<sup>137</sup> While Congar would agree with corollary (1), on (2) the formulator of the corollary has the obligation of defending this position in the face of the myriad schisms and formations of sects, especially since the Reformation.<sup>138</sup> Graves addressed the troublesome corollary, although he did not clear up its meaning. In a chapter entitled, “Mode of Expression,” Graves delved more deeply into the language of the Bible, calling the first section “Riddles and Enigmas,” in which he noted that some sections of Scripture are indeed puzzling and difficult.<sup>139</sup> He granted that the original language employed in the Bible contains much more complex and difficult wording than the modern translations have yielded, which shows the work that the translators have done to

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<sup>134</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 5-16.

<sup>135</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 73.

<sup>136</sup> JP, 146.

<sup>137</sup> Graves, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 39.

<sup>138</sup> See also RG, 40-1, for Congar’s view; his Chapter Four in RG is entitled, “The Bible, the Book of Reconciliation Among Christians?” he explains his intentional use of the question mark at the beginning of that chapter, on p. 34.

<sup>139</sup> Graves, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 64. The remainder of this discussion is sourced from this reference.

clarify these difficulties, where possible. In contrast to his earlier statement of Protestant consideration of Scripture, Graves stated clearly that “many texts in Scripture are genuinely unclear.” From this, one can see that this corollary could not be considered a reasonable standard Protestant position.

### **Among Evangelicals**

The current state of the doctrine of *sola scriptura* among Evangelicals differs to some degree with that of classical Protestantism in many ways that have already been pointed out. Defining what makes a person Evangelical is a daunting task, one on which the Gallup Poll gave up in 1986.<sup>140</sup> McGrath also abandoned the effort, finally exclaiming that, “[i]t is a simple matter of fact that any theologically rigorous definition of evangelicalism tends to end up excluding an embarrassingly large number of people who regard themselves, and are regarded as others, as evangelicals.”<sup>141</sup> McGrath finally offered the “six controlling convictions” common to Evangelicals:

1. The supreme authority of Scripture as a source of knowledge of God and a guide to Christian living.
2. The majesty of Jesus Christ, both as incarnate God and Lord and the Savior of sinful humanity.
3. The lordship of the Holy Spirit.
4. The need for personal conversion.
5. The priority of evangelism for both individual Christians and the church as a whole.

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<sup>140</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future*, 53.

<sup>141</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future*, 54.

6. The importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship, and growth.<sup>142</sup>

McGrath noted later that Evangelicals consider these convictions to constitute “historical Christian orthodoxy.”<sup>143</sup> The first condition is the one that concerns us here. McGrath spoke of the practical application of that conviction, saying that, “[f]or evangelicals, the unique authority of Scripture rests on the activity of the revealing God, both in relation to the biblical material itself and in the subsequent process of interpretation and inward appropriation by the reader.”<sup>144</sup>

For McGrath, the “human element” plays a role in Scripture; McGrath used J. I. Packer to confirm this; Packer denied the dictation theory of Scripture, citing Calvin, who agreed that a human element exists in the Bible.<sup>145</sup> Packer, in the book cited, made the statement that the problem in defining Evangelicalism essentially boils down to the issue of authority, referring to the Bible; Packer stated that “the problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church ever faces.”<sup>146</sup> Returning to McGrath, he also focused on authority, noting that “Scripture remains authoritative for evangelicals whether its subjective dimension is appreciated or not.”<sup>147</sup> McGrath recognized the danger noted by Frame, although he denied any biblicism by Evangelicals; one would assume that McGrath does not include among true Evangelicals those such as Lindsell, who adhere to the views excoriated by Frame.<sup>148</sup> For a current

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<sup>142</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future*, 55-6.

<sup>143</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future*, 56.

<sup>144</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future*, 59.

<sup>145</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future*, 60. The Packer information came from his book, *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God*, 78-9.

<sup>146</sup> Packer, *Word of God*, 42.

<sup>147</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future*, 61.

<sup>148</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future*, 61.



faith statement from a mainly Evangelical church, see Appendix C for the “Southern Baptist Convention Baptist Faith and Message, 2000.”

Many Evangelicals espouse strict inerrancy and tend to restrict any use of tradition to a bare minimum. Evangelicals exist across a broad spectrum of beliefs, ranging from Evangelicals who remain members of classical Protestant denominations, such as McGrath and Packer, to those who claim no affiliation with any particular ecclesial community, such as John MacArthur. Evangelicals also range from the more liberal, or progressive, among whom are Craig Allert, Tremper Longman, and Kern Robert Trembath, to the very conservative fundamentalists, such as Harold Lindell and Bernard Ramm.

Kathleen C. Boone stated that fundamentalism’s “central claim – the sole authority of the Bible, is both true and false.”<sup>149</sup> Their views of *sola scriptura* range over the spectrum of views from a strict, fundamentalist view which aligns with Tradition 0,<sup>150</sup> to a position quite similar to the Roman Catholic view, in that it welcomes the use of Tradition in the interpretation of the Bible.<sup>151</sup> In her consideration of fundamentalism, Boone stated that “Fundamentalists Anonymous, a self-help group for ex-fundamentalists, regards fundamentalists’ use of the Bible as a smoke screen.”<sup>152</sup> Bernard Ramm offered a clear statement on fundamentalist hermeneutics: “conservative Protestantism takes *only* the Bible as authoritative, there is no secondary means of

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<sup>149</sup> Boone, *Tells Them So*, 2.

<sup>150</sup> Boone, *Tells Them So*, 13. Boone synopsised the fundamentalist position as follows: “The fundamentalist believes the Bible is wholly without error, whether doctrinal, historical, scientific, grammatical, or clerical. If the text is not inerrant, fundamentalists believe, it cannot be trusted – and if the text is untrustworthy, one has no grounds for believing *anything* it says.” This is commonly known as the “slippery slope” - allow one error and who knows how many errors have been allowed.

<sup>151</sup> Allert, *A High View of Scripture*.

<sup>152</sup> Boone, *Tells Them So*, 7.

making clear the meaning of the Bible.”<sup>153</sup> Ramm’s intent was to offer an intellectual method for fundamentalist Protestant biblical study.<sup>154</sup> Fundamentalism also creeps beyond simple religious convictions and into any subject which may be found within the Bible; Boone cited Martin Marty’s view that “Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic fundamentalists share with their Protestant brethren a common ‘mindset,’ one characterized as ‘authoritarian, intolerant, and compulsive about control.’”<sup>155</sup>

Mark Powell addressed the problem of *sola scriptura*, as it appeared in the Councils of Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II. Stating the Protestant position, Powell said that, “[f]or Protestants, religious truth was secured by the plain sense of scripture as interpreted by the individual under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>156</sup> Powell brought up the topic of errors within the text; which “led conservative Protestants to buttress the epistemic doctrine of biblical inerrancy. These defenders of *sola scriptura* offered ingenious explanations for the purported errors and contradictions in scripture and warned that rejecting the epistemic doctrine of biblical inerrancy was the first step to denying the Christian faith as a whole.”<sup>157</sup> This is the slippery slope argument; Powell then explained that, “[i]n response to the Protestant challenge, Catholics *rightly* argued that scripture alone is inadequate for religious certainty.”<sup>158</sup> Much of Powell’s Introduction covered the issues of the control of the epistemic approach to the Bible.

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<sup>153</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 1. Ramm later takes a position in direct opposition to that of John Frame which was discussed above, as he stated that “the position of the evangelical is that only a *full-fledged, intelligent Biblicism is adequate to the present situation in science, philosophy, psychology, and religion*,” 95.

<sup>154</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, ix, 95. In supporting a form of biblical criticism, Ramm scolds other conservative Protestants who “have unenlightened opinions as to the nature and purpose of criticism, but anti-criticism is not part of the necessary structure of evangelicalism,” 95.

<sup>155</sup> Boone, *Tells Them So*, 7.

<sup>156</sup> Powell, *Papal Infallibility*, 2.

<sup>157</sup> Powell, *Papal Infallibility*, 2.

<sup>158</sup> Powell, *Papal Infallibility*, 2; emphasis mine.

From Trent to Vatican II, Powell discussed the development of the doctrines relating to scriptural hermeneutics. Powell pointed out that the Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility has always posed significant problems for Protestants.<sup>159</sup> Powell stated that Protestants have moved away from inerrancy, which they have found easier than it has been for Catholics. Powell proceeded to deal with issues of splitting factions within Protestantism, many of which came from a search for certainty in interpretation of the Scriptures. Powell brought George Lindbeck into his discussion, noting that Lindbeck wanted to establish ground rules for the acceptance of doctrines within the Christian faith, similar to Congar's approach in *Diversity and Communion*. Both Lindbeck and Congar aimed to set boundaries within which doctrines must fall in order to be considered Christian. Both saw the need for certain infallible dogmas, "without which it [the Christian faith] would not be itself."<sup>160</sup> Congar cited Luther's ideas which were listed in a similar vein to Lindbeck's.<sup>161</sup> Tied up with the concept was the hierarchy of truth, which took certain truths to be core truths, with others not possessing the same gravitas in doctrinal considerations.<sup>162</sup> Congar noted that the concept of a hierarchy of truths within Catholic doctrine came from Msgr. André Pangrazio, who requested that the Catholic doctrinal truths be listed in an order of importance to allow ecumenical discussions to find areas of agreement with the dialogue partners. Quoting from Pangrazio's intervention at the Council on 25 November, 1963, the intent was clear: "The doctrinal differences between Christians are concerned less with the primordial truths

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<sup>159</sup> Powell, *Papal Infallibility*, 3. The remainder of this discussion comes from the same source, 3-19.

<sup>160</sup> Powell, *Papal Infallibility*, 7, citing Lindbeck.

<sup>161</sup> DC, 108-25.

<sup>162</sup> DC, 126-34, in a chapter titled "The 'Hierarchy of Truths.'" The term, "hierarchy of truth," comes from *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11.

[foundational truths – Trinity, incarnation, etc.], the final order, than with these last, related to the order of means [sacraments, hierarchical form of the church, etc.], and without a doubt, subordinate to the former.”<sup>163</sup> Pangrazio showed a remarkable sensitivity for the needs of ecumenical discussion in searching first for agreement before discussing conflicting beliefs.

Returning to Powell, he continued with his descriptions of truth and the means of discovering the truth. As to Scripture, in discussing William Abraham’s views on dealing with scripture, Powell offered a practical way of regarding the Bible, “[a]n appeal to scripture, then, is better viewed as an appeal to divine revelation rather than an appeal to an inerrant criterion.”<sup>164</sup> Powell’s central concern was with the personal need for epistemic certainty in foundational religious issues. As a counter to the Protestant use of biblical inerrancy, he pointed to the Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility serving the same purpose in attaining certainty regarding scriptural hermeneutics.<sup>165</sup>

Given the positions of true fundamentalists, who search for certainty through a literal, inerrant view of Scripture which “looks on the Bible as *sola fidei regula* and not just *prima fidei regula*,”<sup>166</sup> there appears to be little prospect for genuine, ecumenical dialogue aimed at reaching agreement leading to a form of reunification, so fundamentalists (as opposed to Evangelicals, of whom fundamentalists form one sector) will not be considered further.

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<sup>163</sup> DC, 127.

<sup>164</sup> Powell, *Papal Infallibility*, 13.

<sup>165</sup> Powell called papal infallibility “a remarkable epistemic proposal whose complexity and subtlety is often underestimated,” 19.

<sup>166</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 1. See also the Harold J. Ockenga, “Foreword,” in Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, n.p., which noted that one essential component of fundamentalism was separatism.

Frederick Norris noted that the treatment of Scripture has become a flashpoint among Protestants.<sup>167</sup> As an example, he cited the arguments among the Southern Baptists; the Fundamentalists<sup>168</sup> within that group have tried to rid the entire community of leaders who do not espouse strict biblical inerrancy, leading essentially to their Fundamentalist position as the standard of the SBC, and with that, rejection of any consideration of tradition as a matter for consideration. To place this in terms previously used in this paper, the Fundamentalists in the Southern Baptist Convention have attempted to have the church uniformly espouse Tradition 0, or *solo scriptura*. Norris noted three Bible passages which have been used by the Southern Baptist fundamentalist wing to defend their position on this,<sup>169</sup> although Evangelical theologian, Norman Geisler claimed that this very method of citing the Bible to verify its inerrancy is fallacious; specifically citing arguments employing 2 Ti 3:16 as internal proof of the Bible's inerrancy<sup>170</sup> Geisler called attention to the fact that this is an example of begging the question.<sup>171</sup> Geisler showed that "[t]his is an argument where the conclusion is sneaked into the premises." Further, he showed that, "the very question being asked is given the desired answer before any reasoning is done." Showing the circularity of the argument,

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<sup>167</sup> Norris, *Apostolic Faith*, 18-9. The discussion is taken from this source.

<sup>168</sup> Norris's word, not mine.

<sup>169</sup> Norris, *Apostolic Faith*, 19-21. The three passages are Jn 10:34-6 ("Jesus answered: 'Is it not written in your law, 'I have said, You are gods'? If it calls these men gods to whom God's word was addressed – and Scripture cannot lose its force – do you claim that I blasphemed when, as he whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, I said 'I am God's Son?'" ), 2Pt 1:20-1 ("First you must understand this: there is no prophecy contained in Scripture which is a personal interpretation. Prophecy has never been put forward by man's willing it. It is rather that men impelled by the Holy Spirit have spoken under God's influence."), 2Ti 3:16 ("All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching – for reproof, correction, and training in holiness").

<sup>170</sup> Norris remarked that "the are very few, if any, classical Liberals among Southern Baptists." 18.

<sup>171</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *Come Let Us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 100. Geisler is a prolific Evangelical writer who received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Loyola University in Chicago. The following argument stems from this source.

Geisler stated that, “[b]y referring to the Bible as proof, there is an implicit assumption that the Bible has divine authority. But that is the very question being asked! You can’t just say that the Bible says it came from God; so does the Koran. The assumed premise restates the conclusion and begs the question.” Given the logic from Geisler, the many arguments to prove the inerrancy of the Bible by using the Bible as proof tend to be weakened. Incidentally, Geisler is an inerrantist. Yet the arguments remain, with numerous theologians employing the same basic thread of logic; Norris showed this very thing in his book.<sup>172</sup> Norris also argued against the use of these passages as proof of inerrancy by using a different logic, claiming that the arguments employ syllogistic propositions which have been so arranged to deliver the answer intended, similar to Geisler’s contention.<sup>173</sup> Norris believed that the propositional method ignores the various forms of Scripture, some of which may not be usable within that system.<sup>174</sup>

A problem that one encounters in some of the Protestant literature, especially in Evangelical works, is the propensity of the authors to cite older Roman Catholic declarations and documents in order to set up a strawman opponent that may be more easily attacked by the author’s position.<sup>175</sup> The impression this leaves is that the authors who employ this tactic are not looking for agreement; on the contrary, they seem to be searching for disagreement, almost in an apologetic fashion. I feel that if the tenor can be

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<sup>172</sup> Norris, *Apostolic Faith*, 19-23.

<sup>173</sup> Norris, *Apostolic Faith*, 23-4.

<sup>174</sup> Norris, *Apostolic Faith*, 24.

<sup>175</sup> Some examples are from: Mathison, *Sola Scriptura* – covered below; further examples of this are strewn through numerous publications, with the majority choosing to attack statements from the Councils of Trent and Vatican I. An example of a similar, yet more egregious example of this, directly in line with our topic of tradition, is seen in W. Robert Godfrey’s chapter in the book, *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible*: “The Roman church has declared that we Protestants are accursed (‘anathematized’) for taking away the Word of God in tradition. We Protestants have declared that the Roman church is a false church for adding human traditions to the Word of God,” 2.

brought forward to at least discuss current situations rather than focusing on outdated terminology and wording obtained from sometimes centuries-old documents, greater contributions to ecumenical understanding can be reached.

An example of attacking an old Catholic document occurred in the Mathison book cited above, when he tried to support his argument, which had proceeded along the same lines as Oberman's regarding tradition, by drawing upon Congar's discussion in *Tradition and Traditions* of the proceedings of the Council of Trent which led to the promulgation on 8 April, 1546, of the "Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures." (The arguments presented were discussed above, so many of the particulars of the debate are here omitted.) Although Mathison cited the final version of the document, he concentrated his discussion on the earlier, subsequently modified, versions of the schema, which called for a two-source consideration of revelation, stating that revelation can be found equally in tradition and Scripture. For full context, it is important to remember that in the promulgated document, the *partim ... partim* wording was removed. Mathison mistook, if not misrepresented, as a confirmation and approval by Congar of the existence of the words, "*partim ... partim*" in the preliminary document, when it referred to the supposed two equal, *partial* sources of revelation.<sup>176</sup> In its full context, Congar's cited text continued with his discussion of this topic in *Tradition and Traditions* in sections that further explained his view on Tradition, which Mathison ignored. Not far before the quotations which Mathison extracted, Congar explained, "Doubtless the Fathers of Trent did not see, in the option they took, what we can see; that option was, by God's grace, to affirm the existence, not of two parallel and partial sources, but of two

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<sup>176</sup> Mathison, *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 130, referring to T&T, 166-7.

ways or forms by which the one source of the Gospel is communicated to us in all its purity and plenitude, from Jesus Christ onwards.”<sup>177</sup> Immediately ahead of the section Mathison cited, Congar stated: “One can still hold ... after the Council of Trent, the thesis, itself traditional, according to which all the truths necessary for salvation, are, in one form or another, contained in Scripture.”<sup>178</sup> In *Tradition and Traditions*, Congar argued that the Holy Spirit actually led the Fathers of the Council of Trent to alter the wording to a version that more accurately shows the intent of the Catholic Church as subsequently expressed in *Dei Verbum*. Significant here was Congar’s comment that the Fathers placed “no particular significance” on the change in wording.<sup>179</sup> Oberman, who led Mathison into extracting this section from Congar, stated: “The energetic protest against the ‘partly-partly’ formulation which Geiselmann cited as the cause for the alleged change proved to be limited to two representatives, Bonacci and Nacchianti.”<sup>180</sup> What Oberman and Mathison apparently chose to ignore was that, although the recommendation may have come from only “two representatives,” the entire council voted on, and approved, the document, significantly meaning that acceptance of that wording was, “by God’s grace,” not limited to those two.<sup>181</sup> Congar stressed the “fact that the Tridentine decree avoided” the two-source wording;<sup>182</sup> pointing out that “the council, seeing no adequate solution and ever careful to express itself only where Catholics were

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<sup>177</sup> T&t, 166.

<sup>178</sup> T&t, 166. Note also the concept which appears later in DV, 11: “all the truths necessary for salvation.”

<sup>179</sup> T&t, 168-9.

<sup>180</sup> Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 288. A possibly more accurate view of the motives behind the formulation of the document came from George Tavard, in his book, *Holy Writ or Holy Church*, in which he stated that the bishops “agreed on one common aim. Pietro Bertano, Bishop of Fano, expressed it, ‘to formulate a dogma which would be directly contrary to the dogma of the Lutherans’ whereby the Church’s traditions are excluded ... . They were all concerned with keeping the doctrine rather than with theological niceties. Yet they sharply differed in matters of importance,” 196.

<sup>181</sup> T&t, 166.

<sup>182</sup> T&t, 166.



in agreement, contented itself with affirming, by juxtaposition and with no precision of their interrelation, the two forms under which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is communicated, in its plenitude and purity, as the source of all saving truth and of Christian discipline.”<sup>183</sup> Regardless of whether individuals, either at the council or subsequent to it, wished that the two-source theory had been enshrined in the decree is ultimately insignificant; the fact remains that it was not.

I have intended to present Congar’s position here very clearly, possibly even repetitively, because his stance on this matter is tremendously significant for reaching a full understanding of his view of the Catholic position on the question of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. In a concluding word to the section on the Decree from Trent, Congar made the following, important observation:

It is undoubtedly true that that a text of the Magisterium ought to be interpreted according to the intentions of its author or authors, but it is also true that we are bound by the divine intention of the Holy Spirit and not by the human intention of men. The latter can in fact be transcended by the former, whose instrument it is and which, on the whole, it expresses.<sup>184</sup>

I agree with Congar that the Holy Spirit was active in the Council of Trent, permitting the final wording to be passed, allowing the church to later (at Vatican II) present a more acceptable view of Tradition for the non-Catholic churches.

For another view on the subject of the meaning of a text or document, one may consider the positions put forward by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, in his examination of the application of modern literary criticism to the Bible, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* In

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<sup>183</sup> T&t, 165.

<sup>184</sup> T&t, 168-9.

his thought-provoking, detailed work, Vanhoozer followed some of the theories on literary criticism of Stanley Fish, who claimed that “there is no such thing as a meaning ‘in’ the text ‘outside’ the reader. Meaning is not prior to, but a product of, the reader’s activity.”<sup>185</sup> Vanhoozer raised the problem of meaning in its relation to the intention of the author, finally deciding that, “[t]he metaphysics of authorship is related ... to the doctrine of creation and the *imago Dei*. Human authorship, that is, grounded in God’s ability to communicate himself through the acts of Incarnation and revelation.”<sup>186</sup>

Vanhoozer took into account many aspects in literary criticism which may impact the derivation of meaning from the Bible. Through his work, he detailed the impacts which literary criticism may imply for the interpretation of the Bible, in the ways that he saw that Catholics and Protestants term interpretation. In coming to conclusions, Vanhoozer believed that the Catholic Church adheres to Fish’s concepts regarding the need for the reader’s interpretation, and that this interpretation requires the work of an authorized authority in interpretation, while Protestant approaches still claimed the clarity of Scripture, to which Vanhoozer asked, “for whom – the scholar? The poor? The Spirit-led believing community? Who, if anyone, is qualified to determine the literal meaning of the text?”<sup>187</sup> Vanhoozer considered the answers to his questions, leading him to further attention to the problems raised. He supported the Reformation idea that the Scriptures are generally clear enough for any Christian to be able to interpret them. With this point, Vanhoozer committed a mistake, in my opinion, with an extensive defense of the Protestant concept of biblical clarity. Ramm, whom Vanhoozer called on for support of

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<sup>185</sup> Vanhoozer, *A Meaning*, 24. Vanhoozer is currently on the faculty at Trinity International University.

<sup>186</sup> Vanhoozer, *A Meaning*, 26.

<sup>187</sup> Vanhoozer, *A Meaning*, 314.

his argument, said he used the “philological method,” which “[s]ometimes ... is called the historical method, or the grammatical method, or the historico-grammatical method, and sometimes the literal method where it is contrasted with the allegorical or mystical methods.”<sup>188</sup> Vanhoozer called on Ramm for support, but the tenor of Ramm’s above comment seems to indicate that his method is not the paragon of clarity which inevitably leads to easy interpretations; Ramm’s comments lead one to understand that the method may be employed only by the more erudite Christian, and certainly not by simply anyone in the pews, leading one to question exactly how clear the Bible truly is. The difference between Vanhoozer’s and Congar’s concepts lies in the authority approved for interpretation – Protestant academia or the Catholic Magisterium. This choice ultimately leads to the same conclusion, since the Magisterium also depends upon theologians to develop the hermeneutics for the consideration of those within the group formally assigned to generate authentic and authoritative biblical interpretation. For Vanhoozer, Protestant academia performs the function of the Catholic Magisterium, although with no claim of infallibility.

In conclusion, the current Protestant position on *sola scriptura* has been shown to be quite varied, ranging from stances that approach the Roman Catholic position, to those which claim to reject any interpretive literature outside of the Bible itself. Within Protestantism, agreement appears to be far off, if achievable at all. Now that the Protestant views on Scripture and Tradition have been examined, we shall bring Congar back to examine his positions, with the major expression of his views having been located in *Tradition and Traditions*.

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<sup>188</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 114.

## Bringing Congar to Bear on Ecumenical Dialogue

As we have seen over and over, Congar certainly took ecumenism to heart; his intention was to bring all Christians together to share their views and learn from each other. One item which Congar felt strongly about was the need for the Catholic Church to engage the other Christian churches in dialogue, as a first step to establishing relations.<sup>189</sup> Dialogue was significant enough for him to write an entire book about it and to return to this theme throughout most of his works. The question that one may ask when considering dialogue between Roman Catholics and other Christians concerns the prospects for success, or at a minimum, defining success in dialogue. Catholics and Lutherans have dialogued and come to significant agreements, one in which agreement was reached in 1999 on the meaning of justification by faith alone, “*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*,” and others regarding various additional matters on which the two groups have come to joint understanding.<sup>190</sup> Additionally, the Lutheran-Roman Catholic *Joint Declaration* “has also been signed by the World Methodist Council in 2006, and ... by the World Communion of Reformed Churches. On this very day [October 31, 2017] it is being welcomed and received by the Anglican Communion in a solemn ceremony in Westminster Abbey.”<sup>191</sup> Another rather well-known set of agreements came from the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, or ARCIC, which has generated three detailed agreements on issues between the two churches, as well as several other important documents. With specific reference to the

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<sup>189</sup> CD, chapter 8; JP, 41-2; DBC, 152-3; EFC, 16-38, 137; EA, 45; RG, 114.

<sup>190</sup> The several agreements are listed in Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2015), xi-xiii.

<sup>191</sup> Holy See Press Office, “Joint Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on the conclusion of the year of the common commemoration of the Reformation, 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2017, 31.10.2017.”

subject of Scripture and Tradition, one document resulting from ARCIC in 1998 was titled “The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III,” which stated that, “[w]ithin Tradition the Scriptures occupy a unique and normative place.”<sup>192</sup> The results of this document were also evident in the report ARCIC II, published in 2016. In the chapter on “The Themes in the Agreed Statements of ARCIC II,” the following was given: “Anglicans and Roman Catholics alike receive the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the divinely inspired ‘word of God written.’”<sup>193</sup> The United States Council of Catholic Bishops’ website lists ecumenical agreements between Catholics and Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Orthodox, and Southern Baptists.<sup>194</sup>

These agreements have seen great success in bringing the established, Reformation Protestant Churches closer in agreement with the Roman Catholic Church on several doctrinal issues, yet much work remains to be done, especially in bringing many of the Evangelical communions closer to agreement. Evangelicalism, by its very nature, should include a tolerance for those of other communions, in spite of deep disagreements among them, so that should lead to profitable discussions between Evangelicals and Catholics, and so it has, resulting in the document, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,” which can be read in full in Appendix E.<sup>195</sup> This document listed the areas of agreement between

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<sup>192</sup> Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, “The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III,” 19. [https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/105245/ARCIC\\_II\\_The\\_Gift\\_of\\_Authority.pdf](https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/105245/ARCIC_II_The_Gift_of_Authority.pdf).

<sup>193</sup> Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Looking Towards a Church fully reconciled: The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission 1983-2005 (ARCIC II)*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2016), 271.

<sup>194</sup> United States Council of Catholic Bishops. (accessed February 23, 2021). [https://www.usccb.org/resources/library?key=ecumenical+agreements&created=&created\\_1=&items\\_per\\_page=20](https://www.usccb.org/resources/library?key=ecumenical+agreements&created=&created_1=&items_per_page=20).

<sup>195</sup> George, “Evangelical Ecclesiology,” 123-4; Gerald Bray, “Evangelicals, Salvation, and Church History,” in *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?* ed. Thomas P. Rausch, 79, 82-

Evangelicals and Catholics: 1) Jesus Christ is Lord, 2) we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ, 3) all who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ, and 4) Christians are to teach and live in obedience to the divinely inspired Scriptures, which are the infallible Word of God.<sup>196</sup>

Congar was not directly involved in any dialogues with Evangelicals, due in part that most of them were largely centered in the United States; also, by the time these dialogues came to fruition, Congar had already been limited by his progressing disease, finally being confined to the hospital in Paris. Also, most of Congar's contacts were among those of the classical Reformation churches. Yet Congar had eagerly sought dialogue with all Christians, at first intending to bring them back into communion with Roman Catholicism, along the concepts outlined by Pius XI in *Mortalium Animos*, although he later admitted that he had been mistaken in this area early in his career.<sup>197</sup> He had also come to the conclusion "that ecumenism is not a specialty and that it presupposes a movement of conversion and reform coextensive with the whole life of all communions."<sup>198</sup>

### **Congar's Concept of Tradition and Scripture**

#### **in Conversation with Classical Protestants' Views on that Topic**

Reviewing Congar's concepts of Tradition that were discussed in the previous section (and in more detail in previous chapters), one can see that Congar's views are not

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3. Rausch's contribution to his book, titled "Catholic-Evangelical Relations: Signs of Progress," lists a number of dialogues and publications which resulted from them; several of these have been cited in this dissertation.

<sup>196</sup> Various, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things*, May, 1994, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1994/05/evangelicals-catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium>. All points noted are direct quotes from the document. This agreement is not listed in the USCCB website as being an official ecumenical agreement.

<sup>197</sup> DBC, 24-5.

<sup>198</sup> DBC, 21.

widely apart from what most classical Protestant theologians and historians of religion saw in Martin Luther's thought. Luther espoused a view that held Scripture in the prime position of authority within church doctrine, as did Congar. In his two main books on Tradition, Congar did his best to demonstrate that Scripture plays the central role in the determination of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic faith, while also clarifying the historical background to the classic dispute between Rome and Protestantism on this topic. Although it would be impossible to examine all Protestant and Catholic opinions on Scripture and Tradition, some have been selected to see how they could blend profitably with Congar's concepts.

We return to Congar's friend and interlocutor, Oscar Cullmann.<sup>199</sup> In his work, *The Early Church*, Cullmann wrote a chapter entitled "The Tradition," in which Cullmann wrote: "On the old problem of 'scripture and tradition' everything possible would seem to have been said. ... I wish to show that the New Testament speaks very positively of a tradition, namely, the tradition of the apostles, while it resolutely rejects the so-called explanatory tradition which the rabbis placed alongside and even above the Old Testament scriptures."<sup>200</sup> Here, one can readily see that Cullmann would not accept Congar's concept of Tradition, since he rejected any form of tradition that did not stem from the apostles themselves. Cullmann accepted the basic understanding that the Gospels originated from oral tradition, but he constantly kept in mind the parallel traditions that came from the Jewish rabbis of the first century.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> According to the Index, Congar in T&t mentions Cullmann 22 times, which is only one less than he cites Martin Luther.

<sup>200</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 59. Cullmann may have erred in assuming that the apostles recognized a competing oral tradition in Judaism, but David Brown stated that the Jews developed their oral tradition to combat what they considered the Christian heresy, placing the Jewish reaction posterior to the apostolic tradition. Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*.

<sup>201</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 60.

Additionally, Cullmann accepted the fact that “Jesus and the early Church lived in an atmosphere entirely permeated with the concept of tradition.”<sup>202</sup> The tradition of which Paul spoke indicated that he meant that the tradition was information which had been transmitted orally, and that “the very essence of traditions is that it forms a chain.”<sup>203</sup> This concept of a chain would have been quite acceptable to Congar, who understood tradition in the terms used by “Clement, Ignatius of Antioch, Serapion of Antioch, and Tertullian,” which resulted in “a communication descending like a cascade from God through Christ and the apostles.”<sup>204</sup>

Cullmann emphasized the apostolic origin of tradition, stating that the information in the tradition originating with Jesus had to be handed on directly through the apostles, negating the possibility of any legitimate transmission by any other path.<sup>205</sup> He completed his analysis by noting that “[t]he Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles, and will continue to be built upon this foundation as long as it exists,” with the exception that certifiable sources of the apostolic tradition no longer come into the situation.<sup>206</sup> At the time when Cullmann wrote his book (1956), he showed full confidence that “Catholic theology will always oppose the affirmation of the superiority of scripture to tradition by the argument that the former *needs to be interpreted*.”<sup>207</sup> His issue with the position of the Catholic Church at the time focused on the idea that the Magisterium applied infallibility to some of its official, dogmatic, scriptural interpretations, which was, and remains, completely unacceptable to non-Catholics. Cullmann conceded, though, that Protestants

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<sup>202</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 63. This discussion of Cullmann’s covers Paul’s statement in 1 Co 11:23 that Paul received the tradition from the Lord.

<sup>203</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 63.

<sup>204</sup> MT, 16.

<sup>205</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 72.

<sup>206</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 77.

<sup>207</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 85.



have gotten away from the use of any church group or mechanism that can help its members in the correct interpretation of Scripture; however, he stopped short of allowing for any sense or form of infallibility within or through that organization, in spite of any possible guidance which may accrue from the presence of the Holy Spirit within the church.<sup>208</sup>

The human element remained for Cullmann the key issue in rejecting infallibility when human beings become involved in any church operation, and in this, he included the apostles in their original formation of the earliest kerygma.<sup>209</sup> Cullmann allowed for an infallible initial handing on of the apostolic tradition in the earliest church, but he limited that concept to the apostles and to the situation which obtained strictly during the lives of the eyewitnesses.<sup>210</sup> Cullmann seemed to become trapped in his own concepts when he made the statement that, “[t]he Holy Spirit interprets scripture, but is at the same time controlled by it.”<sup>211</sup> He placed the Third Person of God under the authority of the Scriptures, setting up the Bible as not simply as the word of God, but as controlling God, which appears to border upon blasphemy, illustrating at least a leaning in the direction of bibliolatry. It may, on the other hand, be that Cullmann meant that the Holy Spirit remained in conformance with edicts that he had provided earlier.

Alister McGrath pointed out the unfortunate situation within Protestantism regarding its attitude toward the concept of tradition, stating that, “[t]here is genuine disagreement within Protestantism over the relation of the Bible and tradition.”<sup>212</sup> This

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<sup>208</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 85.

<sup>209</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 85-6.

<sup>210</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 86.

<sup>211</sup> Cullmann, *Early Church*, 87.

<sup>212</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 212.

situation renders broad-based agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant ecclesial communities to be quite difficult. McGrath restated the position assumed by most theologians from the classical Protestant churches, that “[t]he mainline reformers, such as Luther and Calvin, held that upholding the supreme authority of the Bible did not mean rejecting the church’s past history of biblical reflection as a God-given resource to help with its present-day interpretation.”<sup>213</sup> McGrath pointed to the fact that Luther followed much of Augustine’s thinking, which is a natural conclusion when one considers that Luther was an Augustinian monk. McGrath stressed that the classical reformers fully realized that the patristic writings offered much of value for later work in biblical studies, which caused strife with some of the early radical reformers who intended to eliminate patristics from consideration.<sup>214</sup> McGrath then referred back to the Council of Trent, claiming that Trent stated that “Protestantism had lost its theological moorings.”<sup>215</sup> Here, McGrath took the method of employing Trent to set up an argument which borders on setting up a strawman. However, when he further stated that Trent declared that Protestantism “failed to recognize that the church possessed unwritten traditions, passed down from one generation to the next, on central themes of the Christian faith,” he went beyond what appears in the actual documentary statements regarding the content of Tradition.<sup>216</sup> McGrath’s book was written over forty years after Vatican II, which should serve as a more accurate gauge of the position of the Roman Catholic Church.

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<sup>213</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 212.

<sup>214</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 212; see also, Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 142.

<sup>215</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 213,

<sup>216</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 213.

Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*, with Congar's crucial input, intended to bring the Catholic Church in the direction of a closer interpretation of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition to that of the classical Protestant churches, as was shown above, namely, giving definitive priority to Scripture over Tradition. Work since the promulgation of *Dei Verbum* has confirmed that position time and again. Congar wrote in defense of that position.<sup>217</sup> When ecumenical agreement is the goal, it is difficult to understand the persistent use of Trent as a target.<sup>218</sup>

An example of agreement between mainline Protestants and Catholics shows how dialogue can help bring the churches together; the "Statement on Revelation, Scripture and Tradition," which resulted from Presbyterian and Reformed dialogue with Roman Catholics stated that, "[s]ome stereotypes were broken down and some common problems identified."<sup>219</sup> They agreed "that the one divine source and substance of revelation is God in Christ. In the view of each, He communicates Himself or is transmitted both through our common Holy Scripture and through the continuing teaching and preaching (the tradition) of the Church."<sup>220</sup>

Lutherans and Catholics came together, producing what has been called "The Malta Report," titled "The Gospel and the Church." This meeting led from the initial meetings that began immediately after the end of Vatican II, aimed at producing maximum agreement between the two churches. The Malta Report dealt with the Gospel as Lutherans and Catholics view it: "[b]oth delegations were convinced that the

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<sup>217</sup> For Congar's views over time, see 50Y, 7-8; CL, 96-7; FT, 144-5; HT, 12-3, 230; JP, 129; MC, 118-9; MT, 8-9, 36ff, 78, 81-118, RG, 31-3, 156; ST, 126; T&t, 116.

<sup>218</sup> See also McGrath's earlier work, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 176, where he again targeted the Council of Trent's documents as serving as a flashpoint between Catholics and Protestants.

<sup>219</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Statement on Revelation, Scripture and Tradition." <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Statement-on-Revelation-Scripture-and-Tradition>.

<sup>220</sup> USCCB, "Statement on Revelation, Scripture and Tradition."

traditionally disputed theological issues between Catholics and Lutherans are still of importance but that these appear in a different light ‘through the emergence of the modern world’ and because of new insights in the natural, social and historical sciences and in biblical theology.”<sup>221</sup> The commission chose to begin its work with biblical exegesis because “it could be anticipated, on the basis of general experience in interconfessional encounters, especially between Protestant and Catholic theologians, that the chances of agreement would be particularly great in biblical-exegetical discussions.”<sup>222</sup> At the celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, Catholic University held a conference to celebrate, resulting in a document titled, “Martin Luther’s Reformation and the Unity of the Church: A Catholic Perspective in Light of the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue.”<sup>223</sup> The report outlines a favorable evaluation of Martin Luther, offering new perspectives from the Catholic point of view that liberate the Catholic Church from the weight of polemical statements that were made in direct response to Luther and may have been hasty in their formulation. The document recognized the service that Luther did for the church in pointing it back toward an intensive focus on Scripture as the governing document for all Christian doctrine. The Malta Report stated that there was agreement on “the theological understanding of the gospel of its basic and normative importance for the church.”<sup>224</sup> Regarding Scripture and Tradition, the document stated that “Scripture can no longer be exclusively contrasted

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<sup>221</sup> The Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, “The Gospel and the Church:” 1972, 2; [christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/en4.html](http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/en4.html).

<sup>222</sup> Gospel and Church, 4.

<sup>223</sup> Martin Luther’s Reformation and the Unity of the Church: A Catholic Perspective in Light of the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue.” <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/cardinal-koch/2017/conferenze/conference-on-the-500th-anniversary-of-martin-luthers-posting-of0.html>.

<sup>224</sup> Gospel and Church, 8.

with tradition, because the New Testament itself is the product of primitive tradition. Yet as the witness to the fundamental tradition, Scripture has a normative role for the entire later tradition of the church.”<sup>225</sup> The statement conforms to Congar’s views on the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, confirming that his views are normative for the Catholic position.

McGrath stated that “Protestant attitudes to tradition are deeply revealing about the movement’s self-understanding. Mainline Protestantism was emphatic that it was not a new church brought into existence by the circumstances of the sixteenth century.”<sup>226</sup> He stated that mainline Protestantism never intended to form a new church, but rather, constituted an effort to return Christianity to the form which Luther and Calvin believed it possessed in the early years before it strayed away from the principles upon which Jesus founded the institution.<sup>227</sup>

McGrath granted that biblical hermeneutics forms the very kernel of the Protestant belief system, also noting that in any argument which may occur among Protestant believers, all sides involved inevitably refer to the Bible for the basis of their position. Unfortunately, “[t]he outcome is a range of interpretations of the Bible.”<sup>228</sup> McGrath offered a generalized Protestant view on biblical interpretation, commenting that Protestants prefer to leave their biblical hermeneutics to arrive at multiple conclusions, confirming the early Reformation precept that the Bible may be individually interpreted, which has historically yielded a multiplicity of conclusions within Protestantism, aside from which, there has never existed any agency that Protestants

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<sup>225</sup> Gospel and Church, 17.

<sup>226</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 213.

<sup>227</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 213.

<sup>228</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 218.

agree may speak for all of them.<sup>229</sup> In part, this attitude displays the Protestant reaction to the Roman Catholic position that the Bible may be infallibly interpreted by the Magisterium; given this Catholic position, the classic Reformers adopted the opposite, that no interpretation can be infallible, since it is done by human beings.<sup>230</sup>

To sum up McGrath's views, he adhered to the classical Protestant positions, yet he understood the implications regarding the fractured status of biblical interpretation as it existed in Protestantism. His view regarding tradition also retained some of the complications which still exist in Protestantism, due to the fractionation which Protestantism underwent since its inception.

The next Protestant theologian to be examined is Karl Barth, perhaps the most notable theologian of the first part of the twentieth century. This will offer a glance at the Protestant positions with which Congar dealt during his work in ecumenical relations.

Barth demonstrated a deep understanding of the Protestant position regarding tradition, within the context of the rift between Catholicism and Protestantism of his time. As hostile as the Catholic Church displayed itself, Barth returned the feeling with a general negativity, as opposed to hostility, but he offered a rather soft position in reference to Catholicism in a talk he gave to Reformed ministers in 1922.<sup>231</sup> After noting that the Reformers' position centered on the Bible, Barth cautioned his listeners that "[w]e have absolutely no occasion, however, to curl our lip at the sense of certainty displayed by Catholics."<sup>232</sup> He showed his appreciation of Catholicism for its "rich

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<sup>229</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 220.

<sup>230</sup> McGrath, *Dangerous Idea*, 221.

<sup>231</sup> Illustrative of this attitude was a statement made during a speech given to the General Assembly of the Union of Reformed Churches, in September, 1923, when he spoke "of actualizing our community of interest against 'Rome' and modern unbelief;" Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1957), 219.

<sup>232</sup> Barth, *Word of God*, 112.

services,”<sup>233</sup> but he remained a committed Protestant, stating that, “it is very clear that the Reformation wished to see something better substituted for the mass it abolished, and that it expected that that thing would be – our preaching of the Word.”<sup>234</sup> Barth demonstrated the ability to accept the Catholic material he saw as correct while still maintaining his Reformed church criticism of the points which separate the two groups. His position regarding the Catholic Church softened a bit more before he died, as evidenced in a book he wrote after a 1966 visit to meet with some of the upper echelon of Catholic prelates in Rome including Pope Paul VI, *Ad Limina Apostolorum: An Appraisal of Vatican II*.<sup>235</sup>

In his magnum opus, *Church Dogmatics*, Barth offered a lengthy and in-depth analysis of Catholic tradition from his Reformed view. His analysis showed that he agreed with the Catholic positions that 1) Scripture originated from an oral tradition, 2) an authoritative, unwritten tradition existed beginning with the apostles, 3) the Church Fathers accepted the existence of an authoritative, unwritten tradition, 4) the tradition is necessary in helping provide authoritative interpretations of Scripture, and 5) the Protestant churches also employed unwritten traditions in their systems. Barth followed the history of the unwritten tradition in a manner roughly similar to Congar’s documentation of the history of Tradition in his historical essay of *Tradition and Traditions*. Barth acknowledged that the Bible acts as a witness to revelation, although

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<sup>233</sup> Barth, *Word of God*, 113.

<sup>234</sup> Barth, *Word of God*, 114.

<sup>235</sup> Karl Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum: An Appraisal of Vatican II*, trans. Keith R. Crim (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968).

“the Bible is not distinguished from revelation.”<sup>236</sup> Barth focused on Vincent of Lérins, explaining that:

He derived the one *corpus* of the *depositum* from the unexplained combination of Scripture on the one hand, with its need of exposition and development, and tradition on the other, which does expound and develop Scripture. ... When we remember Vincent, we cannot say of the counter-Reformation decision of the Tridentinum that it was hurried and exaggerated. Rather, the fathers of Trent, with perhaps too much sobriety and moderation, raised to the dignity of a confession a perception which had had a long life in the Popish Church and which it might have confessed much earlier, if it had not been restrained by what is (in the light of more recent developments) a puzzling timidity.<sup>237</sup>

Barth came to the conclusion that, “[t]he proclamation of the truth by the Reformation was needed for the lie to come to fruition even in the measure in which it did so at Trent.”<sup>238</sup> Barth accepted the document with little trepidation about its contents, analyzing it carefully to extract what he perceived as its intent, about which he claimed: “[w]hat was really intended was the identification of Scripture, Church and revelation.”<sup>239</sup>

In *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, Barth briefly detailed his 1966 visit to Rome, which he sought in order to obtain answers to his own questions on Vatican II.<sup>240</sup> Possibly the most significant portion of the book was an essay which he had written “in response to a

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<sup>236</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1, 2:463

<sup>237</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.2:551.

<sup>238</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.2:551.

<sup>239</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.2:551.

<sup>240</sup> Barth, *Ad Limina*, 10. Barth had been invited to attend Vatican II as an observer but had to decline due to ill health (9).



request from Yves Congar, O.P., who had been in Rome at the same time, for a gathering he organized in Strasbourg to discuss the Constitution on Divine Revelation.”<sup>241</sup> His evaluation of *Dei Verbum* revealed a very positive appraisal with the exception of his opinion regarding Chapter II, which he felt came up short in having a positive stance. It was unfortunate that Barth never contacted Congar directly in Strasbourg to ask questions about several of the documents, since Congar had personal experience with the composition of several of the ones which had Barth’s curiosity.

Barth’s main issue concerned tradition as a source of revelation.<sup>242</sup> Barth welcomed *Dei Verbum*’s attitude toward the Scriptures, placing them as the premier source of revelation, but he also stated that tradition is a necessary component to facilitate proper understanding, noting that the Protestants had also employed tradition at the time of the Reformation when they accepted the teachings of the early councils of the church.<sup>243</sup>

Barth’s visit to Rome left him quite impressed with Vatican II and the movement of the Roman Church in a more progressive direction. However, his view of Rome and the attitude of the Catholic Church since Vatican II toward ecumenism and contact with the “separated brethren” may have left him most affected.

Now we will examine Congar’s work in bringing the Catholic Church toward the ecumenical dialogue which Barth felt strongly was needed.

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<sup>241</sup> Barth, *Ad Limina*, 18. The essay is in a separate section, 41-55.

<sup>242</sup> Barth, *Ad Limina*, 46, 49-50.

<sup>243</sup> Barth, *Ad Limina*, 49.

## Potential Impact of Congar's Work in Promotion of Dialogue with Evangelicals

Congar felt that Protestant theologians had misinterpreted the Catholic concept of Tradition, which led him to do as much as possible to explain the Catholic approach. With receptive dialogue partners, genuine progress was made in improving the understanding of the Catholic position vis-à-vis the Protestant conceptions which often shifted in the direction of *sola scriptura*, with the intent of eliminating Tradition as an acceptable means of revelation.

Congar's work showed that Catholic Tradition, as he interpreted it, should find reception among Protestants, since it largely conforms to the Protestant mainstream concepts regarding revelation, which could also be seen within Barth's book, *Ad Limina*. Congar emphasized the following aspects of Tradition: 1) Tradition is an essential part of the Christian faith;<sup>244</sup> 2) Tradition existed before Scripture;<sup>245</sup> 3) Scripture is not itself revelation but is a "witness to a revelation that has been made";<sup>246</sup> 4) Tradition is the handmaiden of, and subservient to, Scripture.<sup>247</sup> 5) Tradition serves in the interpretation of Scripture,<sup>248</sup> 6) Tradition is a living concept, which develops as it continues to pass on its information,<sup>249</sup> but 7) neither the Catholic Church nor Tradition adds anything foreign to the revelation given in Scripture.<sup>250</sup> These assessments are not the same as Congar's evaluation of Scripture and Tradition in *Tradition and Traditions* but are a compilation of

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<sup>244</sup> Anthony Fisher, "Foreword," in Patrick Madrid, *Scripture and Tradition in the Church: Yves Congar, O.P.'s Theology of Revelation and Critique of the Protestant Principle of Sola Scriptura* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2014), x; T&t, 283, 412-3.

<sup>245</sup> T&t, 284 – Tradition in the form of the Gospel. See also 1Co 15:1, 19-20.

<sup>246</sup> T&t, 401.

<sup>247</sup> MT, 80; T&t, 117.

<sup>248</sup> MT, 82; RG, 32; T&t, 117.

<sup>249</sup> 50Y, 8; HT, 12-3; MT, 8-9, 14-5; RG, 156.

<sup>250</sup> HT, 231.

the concepts that Congar employed during his life.<sup>251</sup> In Chapter 5 of the Theological Essay of Tradition and Traditions, Congar listed seven concepts which have been applied to Tradition in relation to Scripture from the Fathers through the Middle Ages; the issues listed there are: “(i) Scripture is self-sufficient ...; (ii) Scripture is not self-explanatory ...; (iii) The meaning of Scripture must be communicated by the Spirit of God in a revelatory action whose fruit in us is Christian knowledge, ‘gnosis’ ...; (iv) The content of this understanding or gnosis is the Christian mystery as the key to unity of the two Testaments, in whole or in part alike ...; (v) The ‘locus’ of God’s self-revelatory action and of his communication of the understanding of the Word, is the Church, made up of men who have been converted to Christ ...; (vi) The unanimous consensus of the Fathers or of the Ecclesia clearly indicates a ‘locus’ of the divine action ...; (vii) The sense in which Tradition represents something distinct from Scripture ... .”<sup>252</sup> Madrid offered what I consider a rather triumphalistic, apologetic tone regarding Congar’s position on Tradition, when he commented that, “Congar seeks to vindicate Tradition and rebut the principle of the formal sufficiency of Scripture because doing so successfully will demonstrate to Protestants that, by their adherence to the principle of *sola scriptura*, they are missing a *sine qua non* element of Divine Revelation.”<sup>253</sup> His position gave a rather presumptuous view, which he justified by saying that, “[t]his is because ‘the doctrinal content of Tradition, in so far as it is distinct from Scripture, is the meaning of Scripture.’”<sup>254</sup> There may be some Protestant theologians who may agree with him on this point, but that would include only those already more inclined to the Catholic view

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<sup>251</sup> T&t, *Theological Essay*, Chapter 5, 379ff.

<sup>252</sup> T&t, 379ff;

<sup>253</sup> Madrid, *Scripture and Tradition*, 52.

<sup>254</sup> Madrid, *Scripture and Tradition*, 52.

on Tradition. I believe that none of the concepts listed above should find great problems with an ecumenical Protestant theology willing to listen and understand the Catholic position, since these concepts move more closely in the direction of the Protestant understanding as outlined through the Protestant theologians mentioned above. Congar moved the view of the Catholic Church actually in a direction that aligns with Protestant concepts.

### **Conclusion**

Congar helped to open the Catholic Church up to ecumenism, which formed one of the continuous strands of thinking that he pursued through his life. The question that needs to be answered is, where does ecumenical dialogue stand now, and how can Congar's views and concepts be employed to further the balky process of Christian unification. Ultimately, one must question whether there is any possibility for genuine unification at all; if there is the possibility for unification, then unification with whom. If any possibility exists to resolve the disagreements on the role of Tradition and tradition in ecclesial situations, I firmly believe that Congar's work must be thoroughly considered.

We have seen that unification of the Christian churches was one of Congar's main concerns, noting as well that Congar modified his view of what that means in relation to the Catholic Church's definition during Congar's early life. His altered position on unity was considered within his article titled "My Path-Findings," but most in depth in *Diversity and Communion*, in which he laid out a more open approach for discussion with non-Catholic churches. In this book, Congar accepted concepts outlined by Harding Meyer, mainly the one Meyer termed "reconciled diversity," which would have limits placed on central dogmas, beyond which a reconciled member would not go; however,

much latitude would be allowed within the borders established by the agreed upon dogmas.

The concept of *sola scriptura* was examined, primarily from the Protestant viewpoint, in order to better appreciate how that was originally understood and how it is now understood within various Protestant groups. From those examinations, one can see that there are a number of areas of Tradition with which a good portion of Protestants may be able to come to agreement with the Catholic position as formulated by Congar. At a minimum, this offers an opening toward agreement with those groups, mainly the classical Protestant churches. The Protestant theologians offered some interesting forms of cooperative language that indicated that agreement is possible, most notably from Craig Allert, D. H. Williams, Alister McGrath, Oscar Cullmann, and Karl Barth – at least the later Karl Barth after his visit to Rome when he learned considerably more about Catholic approaches to doctrine.

Finally, we examined Congar's concepts on Tradition again, giving a summary of his general lines of approach to the topic. The discussion will continue in the concluding chapter, as we delve into what could be expected with the inclusion of Congar's work into ecumenical discussions.

## CONCLUSION

Yves Congar's contribution to both ecclesiology and ecumenism was immense. In this work, I have tried to sketch out Congar's positions on these topics, while also bringing into play the historical backgrounds behind his thinking, a process of which Congar would approve. My own opinion agrees with that of Congar and Chenu: the history of the development of a concept must be considered in order to fully understand how that concept arrived at the stage at which it now stands. After briefly summarizing Congar's positions on the sources of revelation, I will examine the Protestant positions to see if and where Congar's positions may have the opportunity to provide some clarity in ecumenical discussions. Although I believe the Congar views could provide tremendous aid to the clarification of the Catholic positions regarding Scripture and Tradition, quite honestly, the chance that ecumenism will be changed is not great. Regardless, in the face of making little impact, I want to try to offer a small contribution which possibly could affect discussions in some way, possibly major, possibly minor, but almost certainly positive. I will attempt to discover possible entry points in Protestant positions which could provide additional areas of agreement to help move ecumenical discussions forward. At this point, I would like to review the concepts and positions of Congar relevant to the concept of Tradition and its relationship to Scripture.

### Summary

One may note that, as Congar became more interested in and involved with ecumenism, his overall theology became more focused on certain theological issues which have arisen between Catholics and Protestants; one of the major issues he tackled was the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, the focus of this dissertation.

In order to fully understand Congar, one must know some of his background. Congar felt the influence of his native Sedan throughout his life; it made him somewhat stoic in his approach, although he did not use that term. At an early age, Congar decided to become a priest, entering the seminary at the age of fifteen, not long after the end of the First World War. During his studies, he decided that he had no interest in becoming a parish priest; this may have been due to his shyness. His studies led him to work with the Gospel of John, and he became enthralled with Chapter 17 of that Gospel, in which Jesus asks the Father to “make them one.” This encounter with John drove him to a concentration on ecumenism, which he pursued for the rest of his life. He took courses at various institutions in Paris, even taking courses from Protestant professors.

Congar learned to appreciate Martin Luther during his assignments in Germany, which gave Congar additional knowledge for his later ecumenical pursuits. After being captured during the Second World War, Congar returned home and continued his theological work, publishing profusely. He came under scrutiny by the Roman Curia rather early in his life, having been scolded for his first work, *Chrétiens Désunis*, with claims that it was too modernistic. Further fallout was delayed by his absence during the war, but soon after he returned, he ran afoul of the Curia again, ultimately being exiled to Jerusalem in 1954.

Congar received an appointment from Pope St. John XXIII to work on the preparatory commissions for the Second Vatican Council. Through his input, he influenced a number of documents at Vatican II, most notably the constitutions *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Dei Verbum*. His contributions caused the Catholic

Church to move in the direction he sought, regarding ecumenism and the doctrine of Tradition.

Congar's main thrust in service of his two foci of ecumenism and ecclesiology was Tradition, with which this dissertation is concerned. He made numerous efforts to define Tradition, and several of these have value in providing a better understanding of what the Catholic Church means when it talks about Tradition. This issue has caused some rifts between Catholics and Protestants, and Congar traced the history of the concept of Tradition from the earliest church. At its core, the concept of Tradition deals with revelation; it is concerned with the manner of God's revelation of himself to us and how this revelation came to be expressed to us. Congar stressed the fact that Tradition existed within the church before the Scriptures were written. At no time did Congar place Tradition above or equal to Scripture; Scripture always held the highest position, with Tradition thereby functioning in service to Scripture. Congar vehemently denied that the Catholic Church espoused or espouses a two-source theory of revelation, which holds that revelation is contained in two sources, Scripture and Tradition, both of which are equal in authority.

In the discussion of the history of Tradition, Congar spent a good deal of time dealing with the Council of Trent and its Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures, in which the sources of revelation are briefly mentioned. A number of Protestant theologians seem to want to place on the Catholic Church the burden of the wording in a preliminary schema of the document which stated "truth and discipline are contained partially in the written books and partially in the unwritten traditions." This debate remains unresolved and will be discussed later.



Protestant views of Tradition were considered, taking into account three positions on Tradition: Tradition I for the *sola scriptura* interpretation and Tradition II for a two-source theory, to which was added Tradition 0, which is a strict *sola scriptura*, disallowing anything but the Bible as revelation. The range of Protestant positions on this vary from very free interpretations to very strict, literal readings.

The major events of Congar's life which can be credited with having had major impacts on him and his work are his entrance into the Dominican order and acquaintance with Chenu, his capture and time as a prisoner-of-war, the censoring he received followed by his exiles in Jerusalem and England, and his participation in the Second Vatican Council.

The development of power within the central Catholic Church showed a slow and variable process, which can be related with simultaneous struggles between the spiritual and temporal powers. Rome brought authority to the central apparatus at times to give itself sufficient power to enable it to deal with the growing power of the European princes. The consolidated authority naturally also affected the spiritual side of the church, with decisions gradually moving in the direction of the Magisterium, which then began to influence much more of the Christian faith. The transfer of power had a great effect on matters that flow together with Tradition. Tradition formed the core of the Christian faith, which it has passed on consistently since Jesus walked the earth. The function of the Magisterium and the Curia developed into being the custodians and guardians of the deposit of faith. In certain circumscribed situations, as described by Richard Gaillardetz, certain of the Magisterium's teachings now possess the character of infallibility. Congar

saw that the concept of the Magisterium needed reform, but he was not able to see through any solutions to that problem.

Throughout Congar's writings, one finds a paradoxical attitude toward the hierarchical structure of the church; he hated their treatment of him, but he always submitted, even to the demands that most hurt him. In the end, Congar considered the hierarchy to be a necessary evil in order to allow the church to function properly.

Congar worked to improve the theology of the laity within Catholic academia, hoping also to thereby influence the church to see the laity in his view. He considered the priesthood of all the faithful as a matter dealing with the laity. Congar approached the laity's position in *Lay People in the Church* by comparing it to that of the clergy. Through analyses of the laity's role as priest, prophet, and king, he constantly referred to the laity via the clergy. The problem that this pointed out to me was that Congar's laicology, as he called it, remained permanently hierarchical. I believe that Congar never could truly identify with the laypeople because he had lived most of his life isolated from the people.

Congar encouraged lay participation in the church community; he especially encouraged the laity to take part in small groups and communities which form in local areas and parishes. Naturally, Congar cautioned that all these actions needed to be done under the watchful eye of the clergy. Later in his life, Congar confessed to finally realizing that his laicology suffered from lack of true understanding of the laity, and he retracted several of the positions.

After Vatican II, Congar broadened his concept of how Christian churches may come together, ultimately favoring the position advocated by Harding Meyer, reconciled

diversity. In this concept, the Christian church would provide membership to any who would agree to a minimum of dogmas, mainly enthroned in the three creeds, Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian. Truths lower in the hierarchy of truths could then be dealt with as each communion wished.

As a major part of this dissertation, *sola scriptura* was scrutinized, starting with Luther and his views on the value of Scripture and how it may properly be interpreted. Luther accepted the writings of the Fathers and other explanatory works, which many modern Protestants reject, so the meaning of *sola scriptura* has changed somewhat over the centuries.

The discussion of *sola scriptura* delved into the various Protestant views on this doctrine, ranging from strict inerrantists to people essentially aligned with Congar's view. After a lengthy review of Protestant attitudes toward *sola scriptura*, one must conclude that there is no one Protestant stance on the doctrine, which makes arriving at agreements with broad impact quite difficult. A number of ecumenical documents have been signed by the Catholic Church and various Orthodox and Protestant churches. Congar's work could potentially release any logjam that has been caused by problems regarding the Catholic position on Scripture and its interpretation.

Congar's treatment of the laity provided an interesting study in the clergy's regard for the laypeople. As much as Congar castigated the hierarchy, he never lost sight of it in his treatment of the laity. I believe this simply reflected the conditions under which he lived. He admitted as much in a talk he gave late in his life at Cambridge.

## How Can Congar's Concepts Help in Ecumenical Dialogue?

Congar obviously offers some helpful information that could prove useful in ecumenical dialogue. His concepts on Tradition prove clear, and they resolve many of the trepidations which plague Protestant dialogue partners. Properly read, Congar may put to rest issues which many Protestants have regarding a concern with the Catholic position on the relationship between Scripture and Tradition as forms of revelation, which has often been viewed as holding that Tradition competes with the Bible as a source of revelation, or that the church's interpretations of the Bible take precedence over the content of Scripture. Congar worked at Vatican II in places where he could test his concepts and ensure that they conform with Catholic doctrine, which lends to his position a great deal of weight.

One thing that Congar always spoke of in relation to ecumenical meetings was the perpetual need for prayer. Congar firmly believed, as many documents and participants have agreed, that the ecumenical movement itself is of God. One of his most profound statements was that “[t]he threshold of ecumenism can only be crossed on one's knees.”<sup>1</sup> Another of Congar's observations to remember is his discussion of doctrinal development in *After Nine Hundred Years*. He made the point that separated churches have each unilaterally made doctrinal developments during the time of separation. These developments must be addressed and reconciled or set aside and accepted by both sides allowing the other to retain their own doctrine without change.

One of Congar's principles that he came to learn well was that good ecumenical work involves coming to a reasonable, logical position on points of contention.<sup>2</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup> DBC, 130.

<sup>2</sup> EFC, 50-3.

believed that ecumenical work needed to be directed inward, within each church or ecclesial communion. That understanding provided him with additional motivation to reform the Catholic Church; through his ecumenical endeavors, he recognized that his church needed to bring itself into the modern world and to look carefully at itself when trying to resolve conflicts between Catholics and other Christians.<sup>3</sup>

Ecumenical dialogue ideally seeks to find points of agreement among the participants. Loaded down with historical disagreements, interpretations of the partners' positions can sometimes be difficult to sort out. Congar offered copious analyses of historical problems and solutions to many of these issues. His answers to arguments which have arisen over the years can be profitably interjected into good dialogue in cases where they might apply, possibly relieving some of the tensions which the arguments have caused.

Congar called Protestants people of the book; since Martin Luther, Protestantism has placed faith in the Bible at the pinnacle of beliefs.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on the Bible has been both a strength and a weakness for Protestants; a strength when properly used, but a weakness when the faith in the Bible becomes bibliolatry. The principle of *sola scriptura* was seen in the Middle Ages, and even in Thomas Aquinas. Catholics and many Protestants may find agreement on the interpretation of this concept, but others, some of whom will have no truck with Catholicism, could never come to agreement.

As an example of an area where Congar's work may be helpful, I have selected a document from the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity from 2017, titled,

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<sup>3</sup> EFC, 50-1. See also his comment at EFC, 73: "Finding ourselves in St. Peter's Square, we wonder if we are still under the pontificate of Pius VI!"

<sup>4</sup> CL, 98; RG, 24-6; T&t, 153-5.

*From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017.*<sup>5</sup> Although this document is one of agreement, one can possibly see some points that could be clarified using Congar's theology. The areas of interest both have to do with Scripture.

The first unresolved issue can be found in the section titled, "The Authority of Scripture." The document stated that:

At the beginning of the struggle, the theological authorities of Scripture, the church fathers, and the canonical tradition represented a unity for Luther. In the course of the conflict, this unity broke apart when Luther concluded that the canons as interpreted by Roman officials conflicted with Scripture. From the Catholic side, the argument was not so much about the supremacy of Scripture, with which Catholics agreed, but rather the proper interpretation of Scripture.<sup>6</sup> As of this point in the document, there is no great problem with the Catholic position, but no agreement was reached, as the explanation fails to offer any statement to that effect. The issue in this passage must be inferred to be a problem of authority; who has the authority to interpret Scripture? This issue lay at the heart of Luther's original objections; if the church interprets Scripture, that organization is composed of humans, so, in his mind, the church has no greater insight than he might, being a Bible scholar himself. Congar logically steered the reader in a discussion of the authority of Tradition in *Tradition and Traditions.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> *Conflict to Communion*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> T&t, 169-75.

The second point of potential friction to which Congar might apply the lubrication is in the section titled, "Scripture and Tradition." The problem that arose lay with official Catholic responses to Luther which did not display the official Roman Catholic position. The document detailed the answer given by Sylvester Prierias, when he stated, "Whoever does not hold to the teaching of the Roman church and the pope as an infallible rule of faith from which Holy Scripture also derives its power and authority: he is a heretic."<sup>8</sup> Congar answered issues such as this, which was covered in the dissertation. Using Congar's information, one can determine that Prierias did not quote official Catholic doctrine, but rather, incorporated information of his own.

The document also cited Johann Eck: "The Scripture is not authentic without the authority of the church."<sup>9</sup> This should receive the same treatment as the above quote, although these were cited without negative comment, however, the context indicates a dissatisfaction with the two responses. Keeping in mind that the publishing group was a Lutheran house, they accepted the responses by the two Roman officials to be official statements of the position of the Catholic Church. Both of the responses to Luther reflect the attitude of the writers – it seems they would write what was necessary to oppose Luther. Both responses were off the mark, and the Lutheran commentary might be different if Congar's concepts had been brought to bear.

As I mentioned above, Protestant theologians have a tendency to focus on the occurrences at the Council of Trent in arguing against the Catholic position on the sources of revelation. This does not mean that all Evangelicals take that position. An

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<sup>8</sup> *Conflict to Communion*, 72.

<sup>9</sup> *Conflict to Communion*, 72.

article by Charles Horne from not long after Vatican II offered a rather balanced view.<sup>10</sup> Horne analyzed the decree at Trent and even discussed the *partim...partim* formulation of the initial schema. Horne took *Dei Verbum* seriously in its statement that it was, “[f]ollowing ... in the [foot]steps of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I” (DV, 1).<sup>11</sup> He researched the documents emanating from both councils on the sources of revelation. He spent most time on Trent; the outcome of his work surprised me. Horne cited much of the argument that was dealt with above, including that between Geiselman and Lennerz, which was quoted at length in *Tradition and Traditions*. After taking many positions into consideration, Horne concluded that the intention of Trent could not be ascertained for certain. The lack of definition led him to take Trent and the Catholic Church to task for not delineating the unwritten traditions, but he never attempted to focus on the initial schema at Trent to claim the council intended to point to a two-source theory of revelation. Horne cited Congar’s *Meaning of Tradition* in the Bibliography (surprisingly omitting *Tradition and Traditions*, with its lengthy discussion of Trent), but he never employed any of Congar’s concepts to clarify the result as Congar did; regarding the two-source theory of revelation, Congar stated clearly that “the Tridentine decree itself avoided such a presentation.”<sup>12</sup> In *The Meaning of Tradition*, Congar affirmed his position on this controversy: “it remains permissible after the Council of Trent, as it was before, to maintain that the saving Gospel is contained entirely in the Scriptures, as it is also contained entirely in Tradition.”<sup>13</sup> Had Horne chosen to use Congar, his positions

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<sup>10</sup> Charles M. Horne, “A Major Ecumenical Problem: Revelation, Tradition and Church” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 12:2 (Spring 1969): 93-106.

<sup>11</sup> Horne used the Abbott translation of the documents of Vatican II, while I have the Flannery version; hence the bracketed [foot] which appeared in Abbott but not in Flannery.

<sup>12</sup> T&t, 166.

<sup>13</sup> MT, 43



may have been profitably included in the discussion of the Tridentine arguments, leading to a conclusion that may have been more acceptable for his Evangelical readers.

The first example was from a rather friendly encounter between Lutherans and Catholics, the second from an open-minded Evangelical theologian. For the next example, I cite a more challenging agreement, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium” (ECT – see Appendix E). The ECT statement was issued in March, 1994, and is the result of a long-term, although unofficial ecumenical dialogue that was initiated in September, 1992, by John Richard Neuhaus, a Catholic priest, formerly a Lutheran minister, and Charles Colson, a prison minister, also famous for his participation in the Watergate coverup, which is how he learned about the needs of the incarcerated. These two men gathered together a group of seven Catholics and eight Evangelicals.<sup>14</sup> They fully understood that unity was not the goal of their group; their intention was merely to initiate discussions which have begun. They stated that they were very proud “that a conversation has been started, and that conversation bears the promise of multiplying the power of gospel proclamation.”<sup>15</sup>

Indications of remaining disagreement abound throughout the text, but that must be expected. Early in the document, it says, “[w]e reject any appearance of harmony that is purchased at the price of truth.”<sup>16</sup> In a list of disagreements, ECT includes, “[t]he sole authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) or Scripture as authoritatively interpreted in the church.”<sup>17</sup> Subsequently commenting on this passage, the document states that:

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<sup>14</sup> Colson and Neuhaus, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, xi.

<sup>15</sup> *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, ix.

<sup>16</sup> *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, xvii.

<sup>17</sup> *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, xxi.

Evangelicals hold that the Catholic Church has gone beyond Scripture, adding teachings and practices that detract from or compromise the Gospel of God's saving grace in Christ. Catholics, in turn, hold that such teachings and practices are grounded in Scripture and belong to the fullness of God's revelation. Their rejection, Catholics say, results in a truncated and reduced understanding of the Christian reality."<sup>18</sup>

In addressing the issues mentioned here, it must be admitted that Congar would almost certainly step lightly; he had doubts about many of the ardent proponents of the Marian dogmas, which made him not particularly enthralled with the Marian declarations.<sup>19</sup>

However, Congar's position on unwritten tradition is contained mainly in the liturgy and rituals, which would give some relief to Protestants.

Congar's concepts certainly could be useful in increasing the understanding of the Evangelical dialogue partners in this instance. Many Evangelicals tend to espouse a form of tradition that at least approaches Tradition 0. In a later article in the book, Colson offered a sort of olive branch when he said of their ecumenical dialogue, "Conservative evangelicals and Catholics understand and maintain the distinctives of their religion. At the same time, they take united stand on the common ground of Scripture and the ancient confessions – what C. S. Lewis called 'mere Christianity.'"<sup>20</sup>

Entry points for the insertion of Congar into discussions would be in areas of difficulty in which the non-Catholic participants may have gotten the message

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<sup>18</sup> *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, xxii.

<sup>19</sup> For Congar's positions on the Marian dogmas, see 50Y, 63; DBC, 39, 407, 421, 427, 429; FT, 118; UPU, 72-5; T&t, 218-21

<sup>20</sup> *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, 2. The quote here is accurate; I am not sure whether Colson wanted to place "a" before united stand, so I have left the quote as it stands in the book.

incorrectly. Congar gave examples of official-looking and sounding documents which do not carry the pedigree of official Catholic doctrine, such as the responses to Luther and some documents from theologians between Trent and Vatican II, including from Melchior Cano, St. Peter Canisius, and St. Robert Bellarmine, express improper theories of revelation.<sup>21</sup> This issue can be quite problematic, because some of the writings have a very official appearance to them, but their existence also offers the chance to discuss the differences between official doctrine and theological writings and opinions.

### **Potential for Improving Protestant-Catholic Dialogue**

Some of the comments made in the above section already show that Congar's input could be helpful in ecumenical dialogue, by clearing up the Catholic positions on the interpretation of Scripture and the subjugation of all to the premier position of Scripture as *the* source of revelation par-excellence.

The first chapter of Congar's *Ecumenism and the Future of the Church* is titled "Stages of the Ecumenical Dialogue," which described his own dialogue experiences, giving advice to address the issues with which he had been confronted.

Additionally, Congar may be useful for providing general guidelines for the employment of Catholic doctrine generally. In discussions which center on the hierarchical organization of the Catholic Church, his concepts that were offered in *Lay People in the Church* can be quite helpful, combined with his later article, "Path-Findings," which clarifies some of his positions in *Lay People*. Congar clearly, and painfully, recognized the problems that the state of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church

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<sup>21</sup> MT, 43.

can cause, along with the excessive centralization of power which has occurred over the centuries.

Many Protestants would like to see some changes made within the Catholic Church, to make it more easily approachable in ecumenical discussions which may intend to advance concepts of reunion in some form. Reference in these discussions to Congar's program that he outlined in *True and False Reform in the Church* could provide discussion points. But Congar's position in *After Nine Hundred Years* regarding how to address developments in doctrine within the discussion partners, will almost certainly help promote further dialogue. In Congar's vast writings (he thought he had written 1630 or 1640),<sup>22</sup> he addressed a wide array of issues with an ecumenical view to them.

In discussing the value of Catholic-Evangelical dialogue later in the same volume, the Evangelical Mark Noll stated:

On specific theological issues, the ecumenical dialogues promoted by the Second Vatican Council have gone a considerable distance toward clarifying the difference between mistaken religious stereotypes and genuine theological disagreements. All of the Catholic dialogues with Protestant groups have highlighted areas of continuing disagreement. But these same dialogues have also cast some historic standoffs into a startlingly new light.<sup>23</sup>

The indication here is that the dialogues have been working to dispel misunderstandings. Injecting Congar into these discussions would likely lubricate the talks when they reach difficult situations such as this. Congar's clarification of the Catholic position that

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<sup>22</sup> Yves Congar, "Reflections on Being a Theologian," 405.

<sup>23</sup> *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, 96.

Scripture is the source of revelation to which all others must bow brings this closer to the position which Protestants wish to see from the Catholic Church.

It would appear that the authors who contributed to the book accompanying ECT mostly represent more moderate Evangelicals. There is no need to give examples of anti-Catholic positions, because it is almost certain that they would never involve themselves in serious discussions with the “popish” church.

To summarize, Congar’s concepts can be useful to any group engaged in ecumenical dialogue, because they tend to clearly explain the official positions of the Catholic Church, although it must be admitted, that Congar’s declarations are also not *the* official doctrines of the Catholic Church.

In all ecumenical contacts, one can remember Congar’s comment “that many things which are thought of as dividing us now are capable of being explained in such a way that the possibility of maintaining or re-establishing communion would become apparent.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Reflection**

After working on this project for some time, it has become clear to me that my original concept, that Congar’s presentation of the doctrine of Tradition, properly apprehended, would aid in bringing Protestants and Catholics into a greater degree of agreement, was somewhat ambitious, at best.

Congar taught me that the object of ecumenism is not to change the minds of the ecumenical dialogue partners, rather, it is to work with those of one’s own faith.<sup>25</sup> What he himself learned was that “each individual’s ecumenical task lay in the first place at

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<sup>24</sup> EFC, 49.

<sup>25</sup> DBC, 21.

home among his own people. Our business was to rotate the Catholic Church through a few degrees on its own axis in the direction of convergence towards others and a possible unanimity with them, in accordance with a deeper and closer fidelity to our unique source or our common sources.”<sup>26</sup> This was written in 1964, in *Dialogue Between Christians*, during a period in which he was particularly fruitful in his writings. Congar, later in the same work, wrote a chapter he entitled, “The Ecumenical Approach.”<sup>27</sup> In discussing the mission of ecumenism, Congar stated that there are two types of labor that are required “for the work of unification: dialogue and a return to the sources.”<sup>28</sup> On the first point, he elaborated on how dialogue should proceed:

it presupposes an exchange and that one takes one’s ‘opponent’ seriously. It has the immense advantage of dissipating prejudices and correcting false interpretations. Furthermore, by exposing us to the questions of others, it provides us with an unequalled opportunity of deepening our own positions. In addition, dialogue has an effect which is something like the action of prayer: you do not always get what you asked for, but you yourself are always the better for it.<sup>29</sup>

Congar dedicated himself to a life focused on ecumenism and ecclesiology; this reflected his motto, which he took from Thomas Aquinas, who got it from St. Hilary: “For my own part, I know that the chief duty of my life is that all I say and all that I feel speaks God.”<sup>30</sup> His motto can be recognized in the same section of *Dialogue Between Christians* as the quote above, when he stated that, “all my work which, in accordance

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<sup>26</sup> DBC, 21.

<sup>27</sup> DBC, 116-31.

<sup>28</sup> DBC, 129.

<sup>29</sup> DBC, 129.

<sup>30</sup> Congar, “Reflections,” 406.

with my station in life and my vocation, I have presented from a purely intellectual point of view, must be something more than *work*, pure and simple; it must become a manifestation of our *life in Christ*.” He followed this statement with a sentence, cited above, that struck me deeply: “The threshold of ecumenism can only be crossed on one’s knees. Ecumenical work must be animated by a life of incessant prayer.”<sup>31</sup> Congar placed ecumenism in proper perspective with this statement; ecumenism can only succeed through the aid of the Holy Spirit, who must be approached through “incessant prayer.”

Congar had great confidence in the possibility of success in ecumenical efforts; he was “convinced that many things that are thought of as dividing us now are capable of being explained in such a way that the possibility of maintaining or re-establishing communion would become apparent.”<sup>32</sup>

His approach to the ecumenical effort modified itself during his life as he gained more experience with the work. Congar gave a final analysis and position statement in his *Diversity and Communion*, originally published in 1982. In that book, Congar praised the concept of reconciled diversity, which “would allow ... confessional existence to be retained within a rediscovered communion.”<sup>33</sup> The concept of reconciled diversity entails a Christian ‘big tent,’ in which all would be welcome, provided they accepted a set of minimal doctrinal statements that can be agreed as necessary to the Christian faith. Within that virtual tent, particularities that do not abrogate the basic beliefs are welcome, so that Catholics can occupy one section, holding on to their particular doctrines, such as the Marian dogmas, papal infallibility, transubstantiation, and all the rest of that level of

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<sup>31</sup> DBC, 130.

<sup>32</sup> EFC, 49.

<sup>33</sup> DC, 149.

doctrine. This would then harken back to the Vatican II concept of the hierarchy of truth. Orthodox could retain their ecclesiology and discard, or ignore, the *filioque*, Lutherans would be able to maintain their belief in consubstantiation, in justification, and in other doctrines which may be particular to their faith; the same applies to any ecclesial communion which passed the minimal test of doctrine for entry into the great tent.

My research into the various Protestant positions on ecumenism, especially concentrating on the Evangelical view, has made me somewhat pessimistic on the universal success of the ecumenical project. The churches of the Reformation have established themselves over long centuries, and more and more splintering has occurred over the years, so that the 2019 estimate from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary of the number of Christian denominations in the world is 45,000.<sup>34</sup> According to *Christianity Today*, that number, reported by the same organization, was 33,830 in 2001.<sup>35</sup> The prospects for complete reunification look quite bleak, given that information. Additionally, many churches have no interest in joining with the Catholic Church, or any other church, for that matter, they treasure their independence, which leaves them unfettered by any hierarchy and the rules that come with large organizations. We must also remember that there has been division within the church, from the beginning.

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<sup>34</sup> Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, “Frequently Asked Questions,” accessed February 20, 2021. <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/research/quick-facts/>. Important for this information is the definition of denomination which they use: “an organized Christian church, tradition, religious group, community of people, aggregate of worship centre, usually within a specific country, whose component congregations and members are called by the same name in different areas, regarding themselves as an autonomous Christian church distinct from other churches and traditions.” By their definition, Catholicism in each country is a separate denomination, also being increased by the different rites present in the various countries.

<sup>35</sup> *Christianity Today*, “Denominations,” accessed February 20, 2021. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/d/denominations/>.



So where are we going? If the only goal for ecumenism is the organic reunification of all Christians, one must appreciate that that form of reunification will not happen to any great degree. What type of structure would attract the majority of those communions? As noted above, many want no structure, preferring their own form of ecclesia. So why continue? I have decided that the reason to continue working and praying for the success of the ecumenical work in the church is the same one that Congar used: the Gospel of John calls for us to work for unity, “that they may be one” (Jn 17:22).<sup>36</sup> Better understanding among the various communions will promote a better Christianity.

Yves Congar was one of the premier ecclesiologists of the twentieth century; a driving force for him was his desire for the reunification of Christianity. Congar expended incredible effort in trying to best explain the Roman Catholic views of ecclesiology, while at the same time trying to ensure that the Catholic view of the topics he considered was fully and clearly understood within his own church. As he knew, in ecumenical dialogue, the only thing that each participant can control is their own views. When I began this dissertation, I intended to show how Congar’s work could be employed to change the minds of ecumenical dialogue partners, but after full consideration of Congar’s work, I can see that Congar’s view in this direction would have me pulling back and simply ensuring that I have a full and clear understanding of what he meant to put across in his studies. The expression of those concepts in ecumenical discussions remains for me to determine.

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<sup>36</sup> DBC, 3.

I have tried to concentrate on Congar's expression of the Catholic concept of Tradition in relation to Scripture. Congar's, and my, view on *sola scriptura* only has effect when Congar's Tradition is placed alongside *sola scriptura* in an effort to point out differences, but more importantly, to show where Congar's position and the more prominent Protestant positions on *sola scriptura* coincide. After reviewing the numerous positions which Protestant authors have offered on these points, it has become obvious to me that there will not in the foreseeable future be a complete reconciliation of the differences between the Catholic Church and the many Protestant representatives who espouse their concept of *sola scriptura*, some quite firmly, some with quite willing open minds which also search for common ground.

Yves Congar, in his talk later in his life at the Concilium Colloquium in Cambridge in 1981, offered some reflections on his life as a theologian, in spite of the fact that he opened his talk with a comment that he is "not given to self-reflection."<sup>37</sup> That corresponded with his comments that admitted to having the cold and severe characteristics of the Ardennes.<sup>38</sup> In his talk at Cambridge, Congar harkened back to what were the two great pursuits of his life, the church and ecumenism.<sup>39</sup> This was to be done, in conjunction with his comrades, Chenu and Feret, through their effort to eradicate "baroque theology," which had carried over from the nineteenth century. Congar gave the following summarization of his view on theology:

For me theology is the unfolding, the defense, the deployment of the confession of the apostolic faith within a communion that is fully catholic, in the service of

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<sup>37</sup> Congar, "Reflections," 405.

<sup>38</sup> JP, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Congar, "Reflections," 405.

people of today. This communion is a lived one. It does, of course, have its content of ideas, but for me an essential part of it is that it is celebrated doxologically in the liturgy. I don't just study the mysteries, I celebrate them, and this celebration is also a source of understanding of the faith. It's what gives it its solidity, its warmth. Theology is a matter not only of ourselves, but of the *pneuma*.<sup>40</sup>

Congar here revealed a good deal about himself. His main goal was to properly express the faith, naturally, but that expression of the faith was for the people of the time in which he wrote. Yet his writing continues to have tremendous value and can speak to us today; his writing will not become antiquated for some time, in my opinion.

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<sup>40</sup> Congar, "Reflection," 406.

## APPENDIX A

### **Fuller Theological Seminary**

#### **INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS <sup>1</sup>**

#### **FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IS COMMITTED TO THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:**

##### **ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

In the pursuit of truth before God, faculty members are free to express, in their writing, speaking, teaching, and activities, their individual positions. While free to develop, change, and accept any academic position, the unique task of the institution requires that the ultimate positions of faculty members not be at variance with the basic theological stance of the community as set forth in the Statement of Faith and other official statements derived from it and approved by vote of the faculty and board. Fuller recognizes that as its faculty members pursue their respective disciplines, scholarship will create a healthy and dynamic tension which Fuller must encourage.

Therefore:

Faculty members are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results within their fields of academic competence. Faculty members are entitled to freedom in their classrooms to address matters within the general subject area implied by the course title and description.

Faculty members are free as individuals and as citizens to speak and write about matters, whether or not the matters are directly related to theology. While Fuller will not limit individual expression in any respect, faculty members should avoid the impression that they are speaking for the seminary.

Faculty members have the freedom to entertain positions which stand in an uncertain relationship to our community's Statement of Faith, but each member must realize that the faculty as a whole, and not its individual faculty members, has the task of interpreting the Statement of Faith.

If the community finds that a given position is consonant with the Statement of Faith, the community has a responsibility to protect the academic freedom of the individuals involved against any attacks from the public or from some segment of the seminary constituency.

If a faculty member believes that a peer has separated from the theological community at Fuller by publicly advocating a position clearly at variance with the Statement of Faith and Fuller's unique academic task, the faculty member should

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<sup>1</sup> Fuller Theological Seminary, "Institutional Commitments," accessed June 20, 2018, <https://www.fuller.edu/about/institutional-commitments/>. Reprinted with permission.

first approach that colleague directly and privately for clarification. If this attempt is not successful, then the two faculty members should request the aid of their dean(s) within the community to attempt such clarification. If after faculty discussion a faculty member remains convinced that a position is correct, even though it is at variance with Fuller's theological stance, that member has the right to attempt to change the Statement of Faith. The process of change must follow the procedures established for that purpose in the seminary's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws.

If attempts for such changes do not receive the community's support, however, Fuller expects that a faculty member will act with integrity and leave the community rather than act in opposition to the community's confessional stance. Any faculty colleague, however, does have the right to a full hearing and investigation by the Board of Trustees, according to the procedures stated in the seminary's Bylaws and Faculty Handbook, with the understanding that the outcome of such a process may still require a severance of the relationship for the sake and interests of both parties.

Students are not required to subscribe to the Statement of Faith and are free to learn and to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in the Fuller community. In their public expressions students and student organizations should make clear that they speak only for themselves.

Faculty members are responsible for safeguarding the academic freedom of their students to learn by encouraging free inquiry into controversial issues, presenting alternative viewpoints, refraining from undue influence of the process of learning, taking dissenting student opinion seriously, and offering a forum for discussion.

## STATEMENT OF FAITH<sup>2</sup>

Under God, and subject to biblical authority, the faculty, managers/administrators, and trustees of Fuller Theological Seminary bear concerted witness to the following articles, to which they subscribe, which they hold to be essential to their ministry, and which are the foundation upon which the seminary is based.

I. God has revealed himself to be the living and true God, perfect in love and righteous in all his ways, one in essence, existing eternally in the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

II. God, who discloses himself to humankind through his creation, has savingly spoken in the words and events of redemptive history. This history is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, who is made known to us by the Holy Spirit in sacred Scripture.

III. Scripture is an essential part and trustworthy record of this divine self-disclosure. All the books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, are the written word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. They are to be interpreted according to their context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through them in living power.

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<sup>2</sup> Fuller Theological Seminary, "Statement of Faith," accessed June 20, 2018, <https://www.fuller.edu/about/mission-and-values/statement-of-faith/>.

IV. God, by his word and for his glory, freely created the world out of nothing. He made man and woman in his own image, as the crown of creation, that they might have fellowship with him. Tempted by Satan, they rebelled against God. Being estranged from their Maker, yet responsible to him, they became subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and, apart from grace, incapable of returning to God.

V. The only mediator between God and humankind is Christ Jesus our Lord, God's eternal son, who, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, fully shared and fulfilled our humanity in a life of perfect obedience. By his death in our stead, he revealed the divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, the third day he rose bodily from the grave, victorious over death and the powers of darkness. He ascended into heaven where, at God's right hand, he intercedes for his people and rules as Lord over all.

VI. The Holy Spirit, through the proclamation of the gospel, renews our hearts, persuading us to repent of our sins and confess Jesus as Lord. By the same Spirit we are led to trust in divine mercy, whereby we are forgiven all our sins, justified by faith alone through the merit of Christ our Savior, and granted the free gift of eternal life.

VII. God graciously adopts us into his family and enables us to call him Father. As we are led by the Spirit, we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping his commandments and endeavoring so to live in the world that all may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

VIII. God, by his Word and Spirit creates the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, calling sinners out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's Body. By the same Word and Spirit, he guides and preserves for eternity that new, redeemed humanity, which, being formed in every culture, is spiritually one with the people of God in all ages.

IX. The Church is summoned by Christ to offer acceptable worship to God and to serve him by preaching the gospel and making disciples of all nations, by tending the flock through the ministry of the word and sacraments and through daily pastoral care, by striving for social justice, and by relieving human distress and need.

X. God's redemptive purpose will be consummated by the return of Christ to raise the dead, to judge all people according to the deeds done in the Body, and to establish his glorious kingdom. The wicked shall be separated from God's presence, but the righteous, in glorious bodies, shall live and reign with him forever. Then shall the eager expectation of the creation be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.

## APPENDIX B

### **The Southern Baptist Convention Baptist Faith and Message 2000**

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

*Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.*

## APPENDIX C

### THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY<sup>3</sup>

#### **Preface**

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large.

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful.

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<sup>3</sup> International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. accessed August 10, 2018, [https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI\\_1.pdf](https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf). From the library of the Dallas Theological Seminary. A notice at the bottom of each page indicates that, "The original document is located in the Dallas Theological Seminary Archives." All punctuation and emphasis is original. Reprinted with permission.



## **A SHORT STATEMENT**

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

## **ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL**

### **Article I**

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God. We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

### **Article II**

We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture. We deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

### **Article III**

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God. We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

### **Article IV**

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

### **Article V**

We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

### **Article VI**

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

### **Article VII**

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

### **Article VIII**

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

### **Article IX**

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

### **Article X**

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

### **Article XI**

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

### **Article XII**

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

### **Article XIII**

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

### **Article XIV**

We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

### **Article XV**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

### **Article XVI**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

### **Article XVII**

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

### **Article XVIII**

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

### **Article XIX**

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ. We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.

## **THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY**

### **Exposition**

Our understanding of the doctrine of inerrancy must be set in the context of the broader teachings of the Scripture concerning itself. This exposition gives an account of the outline of doctrine from which our summary statement and articles are drawn.

### **Creation, Revelation and Inspiration**

The Triune God, who formed all things by his creative utterances and governs all things by His Word of decree, made mankind in His own image for a life of communion with Himself, on the model of the eternal fellowship of loving communication within the Godhead. As God's image-bearer, man was to hear God's Word addressed to him and to respond in the joy of adoring obedience. Over and above God's self-disclosure in the created order and the sequence of events within it, human beings from Adam on have received verbal messages from Him, either directly, as stated in Scripture, or indirectly in the form of part or all of Scripture itself.

When Adam fell, the Creator did not abandon mankind to final judgment but promised salvation and began to reveal Himself as Redeemer in a sequence of historical events centering on Abraham's family and culminating in the life, death, resurrection, present heavenly ministry, and promised return of Jesus Christ. Within this frame God has from time to time spoken specific words of judgment and mercy, promise and command, to sinful human beings so drawing them into a covenant relation of mutual commitment between Him and them in which He blesses them with gifts of grace and they bless Him in responsive adoration. Moses, whom God used as mediator to carry His words to His people at the time of the Exodus, stands at the head of a long line of prophets in whose mouths and writings God put His words for delivery to Israel. God's purpose in this succession of messages was to maintain His covenant by causing His people to know His Name - that is, His nature - and His will both of precept and purpose in the present and for the future. This line of prophetic spokesmen from God came to completion in Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Word, who was Himself a prophet - more than a prophet, but not less - and in the apostles and prophets of the first Christian generation. When God's final and climactic message, His word to the world concerning Jesus Christ, had been spoken and elucidated by those in the apostolic circle, the

sequence of revealed messages ceased. Henceforth the Church was to live and know God by what He had already said, and said for all time.

At Sinai God wrote the terms of His covenant on tables of stone, as His enduring witness and for lasting accessibility: and throughout the period of prophetic and apostolic revelation He prompted men to write the messages given to and through them, along with celebratory records of His dealings with His people, plus moral reflections on covenant life and forms of praise and prayer for covenant mercy. The theological reality of inspiration in the producing of Biblical documents corresponds to that of spoken prophecies: although the human writers' personalities were expressed in what they wrote, the words were divinely constituted. Thus, what Scripture says, God says; its authority is His authority, for He is its ultimate Author, having given it through the minds and words of chosen and prepared men who in freedom and faithfulness "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1 Pet.1:21). Holy Scripture must be acknowledged as the Word of God by virtue of its divine origin.

#### AUTHORITY: CHRIST AND THE BIBLE

Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is the Word made flesh, our Prophet, Priest, and King, is the ultimate Mediator of God's communication to man, as He is of all God's gifts of grace. The revelation He gave was more than verbal; He revealed the Father by His presence and His deeds as well. Yet His words were crucially important; for He was God, He spoke from the Father, and His words will judge all men at the last day.

As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus Christ is the central theme of Scripture. The Old Testament looked ahead to Him; the New Testament looks back to His first coming and on to His second. Canonical Scripture is the divinely inspired and therefore normative witness to Christ. No hermeneutic, therefore, of which the historical Christ is not the focal point is acceptable. Holy Scripture must be treated as what it essentially is - the witness of the Father to the incarnate Son.

It appears that the Old Testament canon had been fixed by the time of Jesus. The New Testament canon is likewise now closed inasmuch as no new apostolic witness to the historical Christ can now be borne. No new revelation (as distinct from Spirit-given understanding of existing revelation) will be given until Christ comes again. The canon was created in principle by divine inspiration. The Church's part was to discern the canon which God had created, not to devise one of its own.

The word *canon*, signifying a rule or standard, is a pointer to authority, which means the right to rule and control. Authority in Christianity belongs to God in His revelation, which means, on the one hand, Jesus Christ, the living Word, and, on the other hand, Holy Scripture, the written Word. But the authority of Christ and that of Scripture are one. As our Prophet, Christ testified that Scripture cannot be broken. As our Priest and King, He devoted His earthly life to fulfilling the law and the prophets, even dying in obedience to the words of Messianic prophecy. Thus, as He saw Scripture attesting Him and His authority, so by His own submission to Scripture He attested its authority. As He bowed to His Father's instruction given in His Bible (our Old Testament), so He requires His disciples to do -- not, however, in isolation but in conjunction with the apostolic witness to Himself which He undertook to inspire by His gift of the Holy Spirit. So Christians show themselves faithful servants of their Lord by bowing to the divine

instruction given in the prophetic and apostolic writings which together make up our Bible.

By authenticating each other's authority, Christ and Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority. The Biblically-interpreted Christ and the Christ-centered, Christ-proclaiming Bible are from this standpoint one. As from the fact of inspiration we infer that what Scripture says, God says, so from the revealed relation between Jesus Christ and Scripture we may equally declare that what Scripture says, Christ says.

#### INFALLIBILITY, INERRANCY, INTERPRETATION

Holy Scripture, as the inspired Word of God witnessing authoritatively to Jesus Christ, may properly be called *infallible* and *inerrant*. These negative terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard crucial positive truths.

*Infallible* signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters.

Similarly, *inerrant* signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.

We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However, in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage, we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as a human production. In inspiration, God utilized the culture and conventions of his penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise.

So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.

The truthfulness of Scripture is not negated by the appearance in it of irregularities of grammar or spelling, phenomenal descriptions of nature, reports of false statements (e.g., the lies of Satan), or seeming discrepancies between one passage and another. It is not right to set the so-called "phenomena" of Scripture against the teaching of Scripture about itself. Apparent inconsistencies should not be ignored. Solution of them, where this can be convincingly achieved, will encourage our faith, and where for the present no convincing solution is at hand we shall significantly honor God by trusting His assurance that His Word is true, despite these appearances, and by maintaining our confidence that one day they will be seen to have been illusions.

Inasmuch as all Scripture is the product of a single divine mind, interpretation must stay within the bounds of the analogy of Scripture and eschew hypotheses that

would correct one Biblical passage by another, whether in the name of progressive revelation or of the imperfect enlightenment of the inspired writer's mind.

Although Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional views of a particular period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a different sort of action.

### SKEPTICISM AND CRITICISM

Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, world-views have been developed which involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets. Such are the agnosticism which denies that God is knowable, the rationalism which denies that He is incomprehensible, the idealism which denies that He is transcendent, and the existentialism which denies rationality in His relationships with us. When these un- and anti-biblical principles seep into men's theologies at presuppositional level, as today they frequently do, faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture becomes impossible.

### TRANSMISSION AND TRANSLATION

Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free.

Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the *autographa*. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit's constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2Tim.3:15).

### INERRANCY AND AUTHORITY

In our affirmation of the authority of Scripture as involving its total truth, we are consciously standing with Christ and His apostles, indeed with the whole Bible and with the main stream of Church history from the first days until very recently. We are concerned at the casual, inadvertent, and seemingly thoughtless way in which a belief of such far-reaching importance has been given up by so many in our day.

We are conscious too that great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the total truth of the Bible whose authority one professes to acknowledge. The result of taking this step is that the Bible which God gave loses its authority, and what has authority instead is a Bible reduced in content according to the demands of one's critical reasonings and in principle reducible still further once one has started. This means that at

bottom independent reason now has authority, as opposed to Scriptural teaching. If this is not seen and if for the time being basic evangelical doctrines are still held, persons denying the full truth of Scripture may claim an evangelical identity while methodologically they have moved away from the evangelical principle of knowledge to an unstable subjectivism, and will find it hard not to move further.

We affirm that what Scripture says, God says. May He be glorified. Amen and Amen.



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