

## DEVELOPING GROUPS

### YVES CONGAR ECUMENICAL COLLOQUIUM

Topic:	Congar's Developing Understanding of the Mission of the Laity
Convener:	Mark E. Ginter, Saint Meinrad School of Theology
Moderator:	Michael Hoonhout, Catholic University of America
Presenter:	Ramiro Pellitero, University of Navarre, Spain
Respondents:	Richard K. Eckley, Houghton College Paul Waisanen, St. Herman Orthodox Church, Oxnard

Following the custom of this Colloquium, the first paper, by Ramiro Pellitero, presented a Catholic perspective on Congar's developing understanding of the role of the laity. Two non-Catholic responses were presented then. A Protestant response, from the Methodist tradition, was offered by Richard K. Eckley. An Eastern Orthodox response was offered by Paul Waisanen. After these responses, the floor was opened to a discussion among all of the participants.

Pellitero's presentation consisted in a theological and chronological narrative describing Congar's thought regarding the laity. It focuses on two aspects of Congar's vision: (a) the relationship between the Church and the world and (b) the deepening of his insights on the threefold structure of the Church (consecrated ministers, laity and religious). Though there is not a linear evolution in his work, several stages may be distinguished.

In "Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat" (1953), this prominent theologian tried to define the position of the laity in relation to the priest and saw the lay mission as developing within earthly realities. But the lay faithful remained too "lay" and not "faithful" enough. At the beginning of the 1970s, he emphasized the ministerial dimension of the Church. As a result, he accentuated the coresponsibility of all Christians in the Church's mission. Nevertheless, in the so-called "theology of ministries," some problems remained to be discussed (for example, the relationship of both the priest and the religious with the world).

At the end of his life, Congar resumed secularity as the theological characteristic of the lay faithful.

At the end, Pellitero offered some suggestions for clarifying the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in an ecclesiology of communion: the universal call to sanctity, the Christian meaning of professional work, and the theology of charisms.

Eckley found Congar in dialogue with John Wesley on the elevation of the laity's role in ministry. Wesley collapsed the role of the religious into the laity, much like Vatican II's *Perfectae Caritatis*, encouraging holiness as a way of life and social/public faith as a norm for modern Christianity.

Waisanen's response focused upon the particular use of the word "secular" and how the Christian layman and woman can be "in the world but not of the world." More specifically, the primary issue was the notion of "autonomy." How is the modern Christian "autonomous" in a positive way without being independent from God? Waisanen's answer drew upon the thought of St. Maximus the Confessor as presented in works by John Meyendorff and Alexander Schmemmann.

Where Congar distinguishes between the double-sense of the process of secularization begun in the Middle Ages, Waisanen observes that this affirmation of the autonomy of earthly realities in the positive sense cannot avoid the slide into complete unbelief in God in the negative sense. In recapturing the eucharistic sense of the entire natural world, the clergy focuses on providing a parish life of communion with God so that the layman can go to Church and participate in the most holy Tradition of the sacramental life and enter into corporate commitment of their world to God and to receive it back from Him as a loan to be used for His work and glory.

Pellitero briefly offered some comments in light of the two respondents. Then, when the discussion was opened to the rest of the Colloquium participants, questions and comments focused on three areas. First, the question was raised as to what the next step in a theology of the laity should be. Concretely, there is a need to explore further the demands of the life of the laity and the need to develop an authentic spirituality which is not the spirituality of clergy and religious. Also, a more thorough theology of work needs to be developed which would shed light upon a larger theology of the laity. Second, the question was raised about the relationship between Congar's theology of the laity and Pellitero's membership in Opus Dei as a particular expression of a lay movement in the Church. Third, a connection was drawn between John Haughey's plenary address on the need to explore further a theology of charisms and Congar's desire to do the same.

As one of the earliest members of the Congar Group, the presence of Fredrick M. Jelly, O.P., was missed. In March, he fell asleep in the Lord. In 1999, he had received the Dominican's *Sacrae Theologiae Magister* and was the Catholic presenter in this Colloquium. That paper was published in the summer/fall 1999 issue of the *Josephinum Journal of Theology*. That journal plans to dedicate an issue to the memory of Friar Fred, hopefully including the paper and responses of this year's Colloquium.

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