

Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P. (1904-1995)

The following brief biography by Joseph A. Komonchak appears in the commemoration booklet.

Yves Congar was born April 13, 1904, in the city of Sedan, in northeast France. As a child, he regularly associated with Protestants and Jews. Sedan's proximity to Germany also helped Congar develop an interest in Luther and his heritage. While preparing for his ordination, which took place on July 25, 1930, Congar writes: "It was while meditating upon the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel that I clearly recognized my vocation to work for the unity of all who believe in Jesus Christ." No progress would be made toward Christian unity, he realized, unless a renewal took place both in Catholic church life and in ecclesiology.

To serve this goal, Congar established a theological series in ecclesiology, *Unam sanctam*, inaugurated in 1937 by his volume, *Chrétiens désunis: Principes d'un «oecuménisme» catholique*, [ET: *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion* (1939)]. Since he stated that Protestants may have preserved aspects of Christian life more vitally than the Catholic Church, Vatican authorities became suspicious for the first time. Then, with World War II, Congar's near six-year detention in Nazi camps contributed its own lessons in ecumenism as he shared the same awful experiences as Protestants.

In 1950, he published one of his greatest works, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*. Vatican authorities gave Congar difficulties for the second time by forbidding translations of it. When Pope Pius XII's encyclical, *Humani generis*, criticized a 'false eirenicism,' almost everyone thought that Congar was the one of the chief targets.

In 1954, Congar was one of three French Dominicans who were removed from their posts while Vatican authorities sought to bring under control those who were defending the worker-priest experiment. In exile, first in Jerusalem, then in England, and then in Strasbourg, Congar could not publish anything until it had been reviewed and approved by censors in Rome. Nevertheless, he continued to write essays that had ecclesiological and ecumenical significance; by means of the exploration of the great figures and great moments in the history of ecclesiology, he was able to present options in ecclesiology that he would not have been allowed to publish as his own thoughts. It was during this period that he wrote two more major works: *Lay People in the Church* and *Tradition and Traditions*.

In July 1960, the cloud over his head began to dissipate when he was appointed consultant to the Preparatory Theological Commission for Vatican II. He participated actively in the work of the commission although without much effect upon the orientation or content of the drafts prepared. After the *coup d'Église* of the first session of the Council, he played an active role in the drafting of major texts of the Council: *Lumen gentium*, *Dei verbum*, *Dignitatis humanae*, *Gaudium et spes*, *Ad gentes*, and *Presbyterorum ordinis*.

After the Council Congar continued to write important essays, many of them collected and published as books, among them *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. The worldwide esteem in which he now was held was confirmed when he was named

a Cardinal in November 1994. He died some months later, on June 22, 1995.

Ginter: [In introducing Congar to the banquet attendees, Ginter continued:] "Alphabetically by last name, we begin with Congar. The following video clip is from an interview conducted in 1964 at the Dominican Convent in Strasbourg, France. The entire 25 minute interview *Trente ans de souvenirs (30 Years of Memories)* is one episode of a Sunday Morning television series produced by the Dominican Province of France called *Le Jour du Seigneur (Day of the Lord)*. We offer much thanks to Fr. Joseph Mueller, S.J., who brought this video back from France for this very commemoration." The following is a three and one-half-minute clip from the interview with Congar in French. The video footage also includes scenes from a session of the Council. The following is Mueller's interpretive paraphrase.

Video

[Congar.] Events at the Council took an unforeseeable turn. The 1959 reports to John XXIII in preparation for the Council would be very different if written today by the bishops. Bishops changed their way of seeing things by the fact of being in an authentic assembly, a grand, prestigious, exceptionally noble assembly. Each one is elevated and transcends himself by the effect of the others' free and frank interventions. Thus, there is a great distance between what was said before the Council and what was being said in the year after it opened. The result is an openness within the Church to dialogue at and between all levels and with the outside world, especially with other Christians, thanks to John XXIII's initiative. This conciliar phenomenon translated into a great change in the Church's general climate. Although the concrete changes in the old and relatively dead structures of the Church are still modest, the Church is going from the dominance of a closed, hierarchical model to being more open to the world, more a people of God. Seeds planted today will give their fruit later, in thirty to fifty years.

Komanchak: "I cannot say that I knew Fr. Yves Congar very well personally. The first time I ever saw him was in 1962, at a symposium in Rome celebrating the 1900th anniversary of the arrival of St. Paul in Rome, when I was pleased to find that the French I had taught myself was good enough that I could understand most of his talk. Much later I was able to meet him several times at the Couvent saint Jacques in Paris and even at Les Invalides where he spent his last years, receiving medical care he had earned by his military service during World War II, most of which he spent in a German prison camp. He was always very kind to me, although for some reason he very early began to use the adjective '*méchant*' when he referred to me. He listened patiently to my questions about the preparation of Vatican II and allowed me full access to his papers, in particular to his conciliar journal which has since been published.

"He could be moody, I was told, and I was once warned that if he was abrupt with me, I should not take it personally. (I once asked him for his blessing, and he said, 'No!' and muttered something about Lacordaire that I didn't catch.) He certainly could be passionate as anyone will learn who reads

his two great journals, the one on his troubles from 1946 to 1956, the other on the six years of his participation in Vatican II. Those who cannot have the privilege of having met him, will get to know him personally—sometimes you may be tempted to say, *too* personally—by reading these journals. I hope you can get some sense of the man by a few extracts from his journals and other autobiographical comments.

“Here are comments he wrote down about the last working day of the Second Vatican Council.”

I go out, slowly and with difficulty, barely able to stand. A very large number of bishops congratulate me, thank me. “It’s in good part your work,” they tell me.

Looking at things objectively, I’ve done a lot to prepare for the Council, to work out and to spread ideas which the Council has consecrated. At the Council itself, I did a lot of work. I could almost say: “More than others have I worked,” but this no doubt would not be true. I emerged from a long period of suspicion and difficulties. In fact, I have spent my whole life in the line and the spirit of John the Baptist, the friend of the Bridegroom. I have always thought that one should never grab at anything but to be happy *with what one has been given*. It is this that, for everyone, is his “*logike latreia*,” his spiritual sacrifice, his way of sanctification. I have, therefore, taken what was given me; I have always striven to do well what has been asked of me. I have taken few initiatives—too few, I believe. God has fulfilled me. He has given me, in profusion, infinitely more than my literally nonexistent merits. At the Council itself, I have been involved in a lot of the work, besides a general influence of presence and speech. The following texts are from me [he proceeds to list in detail what he did for *Lumen gentium*; for *De Revelatione*; for *De oecumenismo*; for *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions*; for *Schema XIII*; for *De Missionibus*; for *De libertate religiosa*; for *De Presbyteris*.] So that, this morning, what was read was in very large part written by me.

Servi inutiles sumus.”

Komonchak: “But his conciliar journal reveals, also, another side of him.”

I am keeping this journal as a testimony. I don’t mix into it the expression of my intimate feelings. That’s why I will simply note here my departure for Sedan at noon today. Last night I telephoned to Sedan at 8:20. My mother was still alive but without a doubt would not last the night. At 12:40, I received a telephone call from Sedan: “She is with *le Bon Dieu*.” If one were to write a mystical history of the Council, my mother would play a large part. Throughout years of suffering, she never stopped praying for the Council, for my own work. The Council has been borne by the offering of many prayers and sufferings. But who knows, who could write this history?

¹Yves Congar, *Mon journal du Concile II*:510-11. “We are useless servants,” of course, are the words that Jesus tells his disciples to say when they have simply done their duty (see Lk. 17:10).

Dom Rousseau underwent a very serious operation the very day that the discussion of the schema on ecumenism began. . . . My own wearying health, the total exhaustion that accompanies me during these two months, are these not also some part of the invisible and mystical history of the Council? I believe so strongly in the Gospel words: "He who loses gains." I believe so strongly in the word of St. Paul, "When I am weak, then am I strong."²

Komonchak: "Behind such sentiments lay the Christian spirituality that enabled him to bear the years during which he lay under Roman suspicion."

Anyone who is acquainted with me knows that I am impatient in little things. I am incapable of waiting for a bus! I believe, however, that in big things I am patient in an active way about which I would like to say a word here. This is something quite different from an empty waiting, merely marking time. It is a quality of mind, or, better, of the heart, which is rooted in the profound, existential conviction, firstly that God is in charge and accomplishes his gracious design through us, and secondly that, in all great things, delay is necessary for their maturation. One can only escape the servitude of time in a time which is not void but in which something is happening, something whose seeds have been confided to the earth and are ripening there. It is the profound patience of the sower who knows that "something will spring up" (cf. Zech. 3:8; 6:12). I have often thought of the words of St. Paul, "Patience breeds hope" (Rom 5:4). One would have thought that it was just the reverse, that one could wait patiently because he had hope in his heart. In a certain sense this is true, but the order in which St. Paul puts it reveals a more profound truth. Those who do not know how to suffer do not know how to hope either. People who are in too much of a hurry, who wish to grasp the object of their desires immediately, are also incapable of it. The patient sower, who entrusts his seed to the earth and the sun, is also the man of hope. . . .

If this patience is that of the sower, it is necessarily accompanied by a cross. "Those who sow in sorrow, reap to shouts of joy" (Ps 126:5), but sometimes they do not reap at all, for "one sows and another reaps" (Jn 4:37). The cross is the condition of every holy work. God himself is at work in what to us is a cross. Only by its means do our lives acquire a certain genuineness and depth. Nothing is meant wholly seriously unless we are prepared to pay the price it demands. "It is one of those places in our poor hearts which do not even exist until suffering has entered in." (L. Bloy) Only when a man has suffered for his convictions does he attain in them a certain force, a certain quality of the undeniable and, at the same time, the right to be respected and to be heard. O crux benedicta!³

Komonchak: "My favorite personal memory of Fr. Congar, however, goes back to the international symposium on pneumatology that was held at the Urbaniana

²Congar, *Mon journal du Concile* I:573. The Gospel passage is from Mt 10:39, and the word of St. Paul is from 2 Cor 12:10.

³Yves Congar, "The Call and the Quest (1920-1963)," in *Dialogue between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism* (Westminster MD: Newman Press, 1966) 44-45; translation slightly altered.

in March 1982. Congar lectured there on «L'actualité de la pneumatologie.» His back problems kept him confined to a wheelchair, and his ill-health perhaps made him more emotional than when he was younger. His voice broke as he spoke of how painful it had been for him, in the aftermath of Vatican II, to watch the decline and even disappearance of so many of the movements for theological and pastoral renewal in which he had participated or which he had encouraged in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. These were for him the embodiment (or 'incarnation,' a word he loved) of the 'true reform' in the Church which he had defended in his great book and which had made Vatican II possible, a realization of dreams beyond his hopes.

"But, whereas other theologians at the time were content with this lament, Congar went on: 'But,' he said, his voice again cracking, 'But I see so many signs of the Spirit in movements and developments since the Council.' And he used a metaphor that has never left me since. He compared the Holy Spirit to an aquifer, a source of fresh water lying hidden beneath the ground until here or there, so often unexpectedly, from it bubbles up a spring to water the earth again and make it fruitful in new places. Everyone who heard it understood it as a great testimony of faith."

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Bernard Lonergan, S.J. (1904-1984)

The following brief biography by Robert M. Doran, S.J., appears in the commemoration booklet.

Bernard Lonergan was born in Buckingham, Quebec, Canada, on 17 December 1904, the first of three boys. His father was of Irish extraction, while his mother came from a Loyalist British family. He went first to the local school, then at the age of thirteen to Loyola High School and College in Montreal. He joined the Jesuits at the age of seventeen, and went to Guelph, Ontario, for two years of novitiate and two more in the study of the humanities. From 1926 to 1930 he studied philosophy at Heythrop College, England, and also earned a B.A. as an external student of the University of London. He returned to Canada and taught at the same Loyola where he had been a student. In the fall of 1933 he began his study of theology in the Jesuit school of theology in Montreal, but was almost immediately reassigned to do his theology studies at the Gregorian University in Rome. With his four years of basic theology completed, and now an ordained priest (1936), he spent a year at Amiens in France in the study and exercise of the spiritual life, and then in 1938 returned to Rome for two years of doctoral studies in theology. He came back to Canada in 1940, barely escaping the seething cauldron that Europe had become.

For thirteen years, evenly divided between Montreal and Toronto, he taught theology in Canada. During the Montreal years, he edited his doctoral dissertation on *gratia operans* in the thought of Thomas Aquinas into four articles that appeared in *Theological Studies* in 1941-1942, and then turned his attention to