

## YVES CONGAR ECUMENICAL COLLOQUIUM

- Topic: Congar on Discerning the Mission of the Spirit  
in the Signs of the Times
- Convener: Mark E. Ginter, Saint Meinrad School of Theology
- Moderator: Richard K. Eckley, Houghton College
- Presenter: Eileen Burke-Sullivan, Weston School of Theology
- Respondents: R. William Franklin, Episcopal Diocese of New York  
Michael Prokurat, University of St. Thomas School of Theology

Following the custom of this Colloquium, the first paper, by Eileen Burke-Sullivan, presented a Catholic perspective concerned with reflecting on the "signs of the times" and the Mission of the Spirit in the context of the theological insights of Yves Congar. Then, two non-Catholic responses were presented. An Anglican response was provided in writing by R. William Franklin and read by Mark E. Ginter. An Eastern Orthodox response was offered by Fr. Michael Prokurat. After these responses, the floor was opened to a discussion among all of the participants.

According to Burke-Sullivan, Congar developed an appreciation for the centrality of the Spirit's role as the binding force in the ongoing covenantal union established between the Triune God and the disciples of Jesus Christ. Christianity is lived out in a tensive dialectic between the given (*datum*) of "God's Kingdom come" and its realization (*agi*) "on earth." By reading the signs of the times, the Church responds to the Spirit's guidance to realize the *datum* in practical ways. The dialectic is illustrated in Congar's work on Tradition (*Datum*) and traditions (*agi*), in which he illustrates that reception of the *datum* and the means for accomplishing the *agi* are subject to resistance and sin. The consequences of thus stifling the Spirit's work are manifest in failures of the Church's realization of the four creedal marks: unity, catholicity, holiness and apostolicity. Eucharist is a primary medium of the *datum*, but we suffer continued failure to source and witness ecclesial unity at the Lord's banquet with the result that many in the Roman Communion are deprived of weekly Eucharist for lack of ministry. Congar rejected the notion that solutions are strictly eschatological. Calling such hopelessness "ecclesiastical docetism," he proposed a series of principles for realizing the Spirit's presence and its consequent unity. Labor on behalf of the fruition of the *datum* "on earth as it is in heaven" is a moral imperative of the Christian Church.

In Franklin's words, Congar has been for Anglicans one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians of our day because of his positive contributions to a theological convergence in Anglican and Roman Catholic theology in the twentieth century. For Franklin the great contribution of Burke-Sullivan's paper is that she shows more clearly than ever how Congar's theology of the Holy Spirit contributed to the work of this ecumenical breakthrough that

has allowed Anglican-Roman Catholic convergence on understanding aspects of authority. Her precise analysis illuminates why Congar's impact on Vatican II and on Anglican theologians in the period 1954-1980 could lead to the positive ecumenical advances experienced by our two churches in the last decades. Missing from the paper is a historical dimension applied to the understanding of Congar as historical being and European intellectual of the twentieth century. Also, an intellectual biography of the relationship of the definition of tradition to the Holy Spirit in recent Roman Catholic thought would make the paper fuller. How do we account for the striking similarity between Congar's understanding of tradition and the modern Anglican articulation of Christian authority? The paper rightly now calls us in this century to take significant practical steps to achieve unity between our two churches—first in moves toward Eucharistic hospitality, which Anglicans will heartily applaud. Such steps would fulfill the hope of Congar himself expressed at the age of 80: "Whatever we have to... say as sublime as it is, it is really not worth much unless it is accomplished by a praxis, by real action, by concrete service and love."

Fr. Prokurat thanked Burke-Sullivan for her paper, especially the balanced selection of topics and her synthesis of them. In the section entitled "Signs of the Times," she asserts with Fr. Congar that discernment of the times was not only important for Jesus, but is important for us. To her examples Prokurat adds another, regarding Gnosticism. In "The Mission of the Spirit" one might point out that Congar signifies the relationship between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Church as ecclesiological, and that divisions are not primarily theological. In the remainder of the paper Burke-Sullivan elucidates Congar's dialectical categories of "*datum*" and "*agi*," drawing practical conclusions. Congar matures over time in explicating this dialectic, describing the subject of Holy Tradition as the Spirit of God.

During the open discussion, questions and comments touched on several areas. To Burke-Sullivan, the question was asked about Eucharistic hospitality: in which direction should the Catholic Church go—towards the restrictiveness of the Orthodox, stay as we are, or move to the open table of the Anglicans? The ensuing discussion focused on the issues raised by the intercommunion between Episcopalians and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and between the latter and the Reformed Church in America. What are the consequences for understanding ministry? What is the meaning of Eucharist among these different bodies? What is the sign of apostolicity? Does it necessarily require apostolic succession, and the laying on of hands?

MARK E. GINTER

*Saint Meinrad School of Theology  
St. Meinrad, Indiana*