

YVES CONGAR ECUMENICAL COLLOQUIUM

Topic: Forgetting as a Principle of Continuity in Tradition.
Convenor: Jaroslav Z. Skira, Regis College, Toronto
Moderator: Richard K. Eckley, Houghton College
Presenter: Joseph G. Mueller, Marquette University
Respondents: Ann K. Riggs, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
Jaroslav Z. Skira, Regis College, Toronto

At least since the advent of historical-critical exegesis and the beginning of the 19th- and 20th-century *ressourcement* movement, some Catholics have admitted that the church does not always pass on all that it is in its tradition. It leaves some things behind, at least until they are retrieved. The Church seems to fail to remember, or to take account of, some elements of its tradition that it has previously known and transmitted. Mueller's paper called such omission "forgetting" and developed a preliminary categorization that allowed for various shades intentional and unintentional forgetting.

Mueller claimed that the substantial unity of Christian tradition does not necessarily suffer when the Church forgets things about its essence, still less when its tradition leaves behind less substantial elements of Christian life. He drew illustrations of forgetting in Christian tradition from the history of the exegesis of Gospel passages portraying Jesus' weakness, the history of Christian teaching in ethics and ecclesiology, and the changes in Christian customs resulting from the migration of Catholics from rural to suburban areas in the twentieth century. He affirmed, too, that long-standing Christian divisions resulted from the forgetting of elements of tradition important for Christian communion.

Mueller then presented an interdisciplinary case for the claim that Christian tradition cannot avoid forgetting because the latter functions as a principle of continuity for the former. Yves Congar's theory of church reform led him to the claim that the Church, even in the process of reform, is a Church always forgetting something of its tradition. Mueller drew an analogy between the need for Christian tradition to forget and psychology's finding that normal individual memory function requires some forgetting. He drew a similar comparison to the homeostatic function of forgetting in oral culture discovered by social psychology and anthropology. Finally, he sought philosophical grounding for his position in Friedrich Nietzsche's essay *The Use and Abuse of History*.

Mueller next examined in turn Congar's, John Thiel's, and Kathryn Tanner's ideas on tradition, noting that taking account of forgetting's role in the continuity of tradition would have made their respective notions of tradition more complete. His paper ended with a brief mention of the consequences that the ideas in his paper might have. These ideas could renew the ecumenical discussion of the differences of doctrine or practice that in the past have accompanied efforts to show that one church's approach did or did not go back to the apostles. In addition, reformers who accept Mueller's argument will not try to overcome all forgetting in Church tradition and will recognize their need for the very people whose views or practices they wish to reform. Finally, the fragility of an always forgetting tradition makes

that tradition a fit site for God's own action to transmit divine revelation to all times and ages.

Both respondents referred to Yves Congar's *After Nine Hundred Years* (1954), and his depiction of the break in communion between East and West as an "estrangement," as an example of how two churches could "forget" each other. This was a "forgetting" which had unfortunate negative consequences. Nevertheless, both respondents also pointed out to how "intentional forgetting" in an ecclesial tradition can be beneficial insofar as it leads to a healing of past memories. A. Riggs cited as an example of this the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras' and Pope Paul VI's consigning to oblivion the long-standing mutual excommunications of 1054. Such ecumenical reconciliation could be expressed by the age-old adage, "To forgive and forget," where "forgetting" is not necessarily forgetting a particular event, but rather forgetting the hurt that such an event caused. Both respondents also referred to different examples from the realm of ecumenical dialogues to show how forgetting can function in moving towards growth in doctrinal agreement. In this context, J. Skira spoke of convergence in ecumenical dialogue as a process of "reception," or even of a "re-reception," of the faith.

This session marked the last year of the existence of the Congar Colloquium as a Continuing Group in the CTSA. The session ended with a business meeting, where participants discussed possible avenues for continuing the work of this ecumenical colloquium.

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