

HISTORICAL STUDIES, II

- Topic: Twentieth Century Prophets of Reform
 Convener: Joan M. Nuth, John Carroll University
 Moderator: Phyllis Zagano, Hofstra University
 Presenters: Christopher Ruddy, The Catholic University of America
 Jürgen Mettepenningen, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

In presenting his paper “Yves Congar: Prophetic, Patient Reformer,” Christopher Ruddy commented, “A sense of the possible, the human, the real, must complement the ideal.” This phrase sums up well the tone of the two papers read during this session and the subsequent conversation that ensued. Three giants of twentieth century theological reform were treated: Congar, Schillebeeckx, and Schoonenberg, but their reforming theological ideas were situated in the particular, unique story of each one’s life and personality. This made for a vibrant presentation that thoroughly captured the imagination of the audience, and led to a lively discussion, not only of these men’s ideas, but also of the lives they lived in promoting them, proving to this hearer, at least, the absolute importance of the historical as well as the theoretical for the pursuit of theology.

Ruddy’s paper on Congar proceeded in three parts: (1) Congar’s thought on church reform; (2) the record from Congar’s journals of how he and others lived out their theology of reform; and (3) a consideration of the relevance of Congar’s thought for today. The first section explicated Congar’s reform theory, particularly as seen in his book *True and False Reform in the Church*, published in 1950. Ruddy organized the massive material found here into four categories: Why reform? Who reforms? What can be reformed? How to reform? In his discussion of the last of these, Ruddy outlined four conditions Congar considered essential: (1) the primacy of charity and pastoral concerns over purely intellectual ones; (2) the importance of remaining in communion with the whole body of believers; (3) patience, which involves suffering – necessary because human life is “messy in a way that thought is not”; and (4) *ressourcement*, a return to the sources of tradition, which is a deeply evangelical movement: not some “restitution of the past,” but a search for the life and freshness which flow from “recentering on Christ in his paschal mystery.” In the second and most moving part of his paper, Ruddy demonstrated how Congar’s principles for authentic reform were tested in the trials and triumphs of his own life. Ruddy turned to the diaries, through which we gain firsthand accounts of Congar’s physical and mental suffering, his observations of prelates and theologians at Vatican II, his reservations about Hans Küng’s impatience, and his admiration of the Belgian theologians, particularly Gerard Philips. Finally, Ruddy put two questions to Congar. First, when can patience become a vice and prevent needed reforms? Second, is the role of tradition essentially life-giving (à la Gadamer), or can it become a “systematically-distorted communication” that perpetuates abusive authority (à la Habermas)? In other words, might not a hermeneutic of trust need to be balanced by a hermeneutic of suspicion? Congar, in his preference for the insider Belgians and his criti-

cism of Küng, seems to have preferred the former to the latter. Conversely, Ruddy suggested that Congar poses two questions to us today. First, are we sufficiently self-critical, or do we rather seek the reform only of our rivals? Second and most important: Where is the person of Christ in one's perceived reform? For Congar, all reform must be radically Christocentric, for Christ is after all the *Lumen gentium* from which Vatican II's Constitution on the Church takes its name and the Truth upon which Congar staked his life and theology.

Jürgen Mettepenningen's paper "Piet Schoonenberg SJ and Edward Schillebeeckx OP: Inheritors of the *Nouvelle Théologie*, Pioneers of a Theological *Aggiornamento*," also proceeded in three parts: (1) A brief summary of the *nouvelle théologie*; (2) Schillebeeckx and Schoonenberg as inheritors and representatives of *nouvelle théologie*; and (3) an assessment of their theology as prophetic of Vatican II. The three main characteristics of the *nouvelle théologie* were (1) the effort to repair the rupture between theology and the life of faith; (2) the repair of this rupture through *ressourcement*, a return to the living sources of faith found in the bible, liturgy and patristics; and (3) a movement beyond the deductive methodology of neoscholasticism to a more inductive one incorporating a turn to history and subjective human experience. After the Second World War, Schillebeeckx and Schoonenberg inherited the spirit and content of the *nouvelle théologie* from their teachers and mentors: Schillebeeckx from Marie-Dominique Chenu, Schoonenberg from Stanislas Lyonnet. Each of them subsequently made a great contribution to the internationalization of the movement. Schillebeeckx's early work on the sacraments is a clear example of this trajectory, as is his contribution to the Dutch theological dictionary, *Theologisch Woordenboek* (1952-58). Schoonenberg's dissertation of 1948 entitled "Theology as articulation of faith" clearly established him a proponent of the *nouvelle théologie*, so much so that he was forbidden to publish it. Like Schillebeeckx, Schoonenberg connected theology with the sacramental life in his four volume work *The Faith of Our Baptism*. Finally, Schoonenberg's discovery of the writings of Teilhard de Chardin put a new face on the *nouvelle théologie* for him, providing building blocks for the development of his own theology. Mettepenningen ended his paper by asking how we might consider these theologians as prophetic of Vatican II. In their focus on a theology of reality and daily life, they predated the council's interest in being responsive to the "signs of the times." Their interest in *ressourcement* is reflected in the council's dependence on scripture and tradition. Finally, Vatican II clearly rejected the methodology of neoscholasticism as the exclusive framework of orthodox Catholic theology.

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