

YVES CONGAR, O.P.: LEGACY AND
FUTURE DIRECTIONS—INTEREST GROUP

Topic:	<i>Sensus Fidelium</i>
Conveners:	Julia Brumbaugh, Regis University (Colorado) Rose Beal, St. Mary's University of Minnesota
Moderator:	Kathryn Lilla Cox, College of St. Benedict/St. John University
Presenter:	Rose Beal, St. Mary's University of Minnesota
Respondents:	Amanda Osheim, Loras College Colt Anderson, Fordham University

This second meeting of the Yves Congar Interest Group took up the convention theme of the *Sensus Fidelium* through the lens of the work of Yves Congar. Rose Beal opened this session with her paper, "Sense and Sensibility: From Total Ecclesiology to *Sensus Fidelium* by way of the *Munera Christi*." She traced how Congar's efforts to develop what he called a total ecclesiology (an effort he never successfully completed) always strove for a vision and sense of the church as living, as he found that most ecclesiology had attended to the church's structure to the neglect of its life. By using dialectical pairs, particularly "structure" and "life," Congar was able to explore the ways lay people, together with the hierarchy, live what it means to be the body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit while affirming the traditional claims of ecclesiology. For Beal, understanding the *sensus fidelium* in Congar's work entails understanding how the living body of the faithful, the *congregatio fidelium*, receive the faith and live it. It is in this living of the faith that the people of God contribute to the development of tradition, and bring the leaven of the gospel to the world. In this work, the people share in the holiness of the whole church, a holiness which belongs to the church by virtue of its union with Christ.

In her response to Beal's paper, Amanda Osheim examined Congar's use of the dialect. She focused on the pairs of "internal" and "external," and of the "objective" and "subjective," both pairings that play prominently in Congar's efforts to describe the interactions of lay people, the subject of the *sensus fidelium*, in church and world. Osheim questions the sustainability of the internal/external pairing when applied to the reality of the church. Using the example of Dorothy Day as a lay person whose prophetic work rang through the inside of the church, and Blessed Oscar Romero as an episcopal voice ringing outside the cathedral walls, Osheim makes the point that this inside/outside division for the Christian vocation, whether lay or ordained, is inadequate. Regarding the second pair, Osheim considers how the faith subjectively lived (*fides qua*) and the faith objectively taught (*fides quae*) may also be a limited pairing. The limit she finds here involves the false perception that the "objective" faith of the magisterium is empty of human subjectivity, rather than being always historically mediated. Similarly, if the faith of the people, the *sensus fidelium*, is to be engaged seriously as a theological source, something of the elusive, subjective faith of the people must be made objective. As a way through the problems illuminated by Congar's use of these two binaries, Osheim proposes a consideration of the role of the lay theologian, who by virtue of his or her vocation can inhabit a both church and world in a way that brings to flower a deeper engagement with the *sensus fidelium*.

Colt Anderson's response to both Beal and Osheim emerged from his experience working in a seminary environment. How, Anderson, asked, is Congar's work on the

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Church influenced by the difficult environment he worked in, an environment symbolized by the necessity of taking the Anti-Modernist Oath? This context, Anderson argued, was notably suspicious of anything subjective, and therefore of anything historical and living. Anderson then considered the possibility that Congar's use of the dialect of structure and life may be an example of a rhetorical device that allowed him to affirm concisely the kinds of things expected in ecclesiology in the early 1950s while giving him space then to elaborate on what he wanted to write about, namely the Church's life. Regarding the *sensus fidelium*, Anderson asked whether its elusiveness is not really a mark of its limitations for theologically considering the faith of the people of God. Not that the faith of the people of God should be neglected, but that there are better ways of considering and including it, ways which, importantly steer clear of claims of infallibility. Congar, as Beal had pointed out, gives very few pages in his work to the theme of the *sensus fidelium*, preferring other categories for considering the role of people of God.

The discussion following threaded through Congar's use of the image Body of Christ, a further elaboration of the effect his time at POW camps had on Congar's theology, and a discussion of the limits and possibilities of Anderson's observation about the impact that the context of working in narrow institutional constraints might have had on Congar's writing. There was also an interesting question and discussion of the role of sin in Congar's vision of the Church. This led to a recognition that, where there is an strong emphasis on ahistorical images of the Church, such as the Body of Christ as conceived by anti-Modernists, there is a limited ability to talk about how sin influences the Church structurally. And, so it was for Congar.

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