

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

Topic: Justice and Mercy in Yves Congar's Ecclesiology  
Convener: Julia Brumbaugh, Regis University  
Moderator: Rose M. Beal, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota  
Presenters: Laurie Johnston, Emmanuel College  
Eric Dart, Gannon University  
Christian Raab, O.S.B., Saint Meinrad Seminary  
and School of Theology

In this third and final year of the Yves Congar Interest Group, three presenters explored connections between Congar's theology, particularly that of the church, and current issues of theological concern related to questions of justice and mercy. The presenting scholars reflected on both the content of Congar's theology and his theological method, recognizing opportunities to extend his thought today.

Laurie Johnston, in her paper "'The Blows of Realities and Events': Congar as a Model for Responding with Justice and Mercy to Contemporary Challenges to the Church," argued that Congar's oft-stated commitment to the pursuit of *truth* was informed by the pneumatological principle that the Holy Spirit is the purity and fullness of truth. Thus, for Congar, a purely defensive response to "the blows of realities and events" that challenge the church (a phrase he used in the first edition of *True and False Reform* to describe the *integritisme* he saw in the Roman Catholic Church) may be a barrier to encountering the "partial realizations" of truth, wherever they may be found. The pursuit of truth must be open to the work of the Spirit through the voices of others. Johnston then illuminated several incidents from Congar's post-Vatican II experience that demonstrate that the love of truth is related not only to justice, but also to mercy: his response to the Lefebvrites; his review of Gustavo Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation*; and his response to the 1968 student protests. In each case, Congar's pursuit of truth led him to listen carefully, practice patience, and encourage dialogue, no matter how difficult—all to allow room to recognize the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

Eric Dart began his paper, "No Justice without Mercy; No Mercy without Justice: A Paradigm for Understanding *Koinonia*," with an exploration of Pope Francis' understanding of the hermeneutical relationship between justice and mercy, as seen in *Misericordiae Vultus* and other texts. Fundamentally, Francis sees divine justice and mercy as mutually informing: justice rooted in mercy, all directed toward love. Where human justice can be legalistic and arrogant, "mercy demands a reorientation of human categories of thought in light of the gospel's call to bring God's tender and loving offer of God's gracious salvation to expression." Thus, mercy "transforms justice into a gift that is lovingly offered without demands or expectations." Quoting *Misericordiae Vultus*, "Mercy is not opposed to justice but rather expresses God's way of reaching out to the sinner, offering him a new chance to look at himself, convert, and believe." Dart suggested that the hermeneutical relationship between justice and mercy proposed by Francis has important ecumenical applications that become all the more apparent when Francis' thought is considered in light of Congar's ecumenical practice. Two points, in particular, emerge: reframing current "ecumenical impatience" with delays in achieving full

visible unity and challenging “the ecumenical paradigm that is dominated by a sense of Justice, especially in relation to legalistic interpretations of separated Christians.” Concern for both justice and mercy shift the focus from orthodoxy to orthopraxis, engaging the common life of the Christian communities in light of God’s love.

Christian Raab, O.S.B., explored the relationship between laity and secularity in his paper, “*Christifidelis Sine Additio* or *Indoles Saecularis?* Yves Congar’s Description of the Laity in Dialogue with Contemporary Trends,” noting that recent statements by Pope Francis about the laity and the world have been interpreted as emphasizing the aspect of Vatican II teaching that refers to the secular character of the laity. Reviewing the development of Congar’s theology of the laity, Raab noted that in *Lay People in the Church*, “the laity stand uniquely at the point where Church and world converge,” and offered types of association whereby Congar related laity and secularity: existential, psychological, missiological, jurisdictional, and ecclesiological. For Congar, these associations allowed him to attempt a positive description of the lay person, rather than defining laity in contradistinction to the priesthood. After Vatican II, Congar acknowledged “that the lines between Church and world were more permeable” than previously stated and developed new ways of describing the unity of the church (for example, he came to see the laity as participating in the structure of the church through the sacraments of initiation), while continuing to articulate distinctions between the lay, religious, and ordained states. Raab proposed two ways that Congar’s theological argument for the association of laity and secularity could be strengthened: first, per Jacques Servais, by incorporating “a more explicit account of analogy,” corresponding to trinitarian appropriation, as a way to broaden the meaning of participation in vocation; and second, by introducing Hans Urs von Balthazar’s insight “that at every level the Church is as an event of communion between God and the world,” so as not to marginalize the laity when emphasizing their secular association.

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