

DEVELOPING GROUPS

YVES CONGAR ECUMENICAL COLLOQUIUM

- Topic: Yves Congar on *Missio ad Gentes*
Convener: Mark E. Ginter, Saint Meinrad School of Theology
Moderator: Ernest R. Falardeau, Archdiocese of Santa Fe
Presenter: Thomas Raymond Potvin,
Collège dominican de philosophie et de théologie
Respondents: Paul D. Lehninger, Wisconsin Lutheran College
Hieromonk Alexander (Golitzin), Marquette University

Following the custom of this Colloquium, the first paper, by Friar Thomas, presented a Catholic perspective on Congar's understanding of *Missio ad Gentes*. Then, two non-Catholic responses were presented. A Protestant response, from confessional Lutheranism, was offered by Pastor Paul D. Lehninger. An Eastern Orthodox response was offered by Hieromonk Alexander. After these responses, the floor was opened to a discussion among all of the participants.

The purpose of Friar Thomas's paper is to present Yves Congar's (1904-1995) position on the salvation of those who are outside of the Catholic Church, and more specifically, as concerns the adherents of non-Christian or nonbiblical Religions. In his evaluation of these Religions, Congar tried to steer a middle course between an "optimistic and large" and a "negative and strict" solution. Thus, he does not recognize such Religions as authentic instruments of God's universal plan of salvation. Yet, he is of the opinion that their followers can, under certain circumstances, benefit from salvation, but not specifically through the "instrumentality" of their religion.

Congar's stance is motivated by his desire to recognize, respect, and honor the Father's Plan of Salvation as revealed and realized by the Incarnate Son, in the Holy Spirit. Consequently, only that for which the Triune God has specifically assumed responsibility can be considered an effective means, a sign and cause, a sacrament of salvation.

According to Pastor Lehninger's response, Congar asserts that non-Christians possess partial salvific knowledge of the true God because the Holy Spirit works among them. Nevertheless, mission work among non-Christians is valid because it offers them the fullness that they possess only in part. Confessional Lutheranism rejects the notion of the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit apart from the means of grace (the Word and Sacraments) as the ordinary means of the Spirit's operation. In addition, the human person is regarded as more radically

fallen, without the innate capacity to cooperate in spiritual matters. However, there is great value in Congar's approach to mission work because it is constructive, emphasizing healing and perfecting—rather than destroying—whatever of good is found in non-Christian cultures.

In response, Hieromonk Alexander summarizes his paper:

My expertise, such as it is, lies neither in contemporary theology nor, more broadly, Western Christian thought, but instead in the asceticomystical literature of Eastern Christian antiquity. In responding to Br. Thomas's paper, I have therefore elected to draw on those sources nearest and dearest to me in order to offer a few thoughts which I hope may serve somewhat to illuminate the question of salvation or, as I choose to see it, holiness in non-Christian religions. My remarks focus chiefly on the nature of the Church, and of the Christian saint, as related to a term which appears often in Br. Thomas's essay, "structure," or, again as I prefer, for reasons shortly to be disclosed, "pattern." I touch, all too briefly, on the Scriptures and subsequent writings of Christian antiquity, arguing that the liturgy and the saint are linked phenomena, and that this linkage comprises a fundamental element of the revelation in Christ, one which I do not think is duplicated outside of the "Israel of God."

As the discussion was opened to the rest of the Colloquium participants, questions and comments touched on several areas. One question asked was: is Irenaeus a source for finding convergence? Another comment observed the Augustinian basis of confessional Lutheranism, and suggested that Catholicism goes beyond Augustine. Concerning the Orthodox proposal that "the saint" may be a place of commonality, one participant suggested that Congar's *The Mystery of the Temple* might be a work worth further investigating.

The paper from the 2000 Colloquium by Ramiro Pellitero appears in the July 2001 issue of *The Thomist*. Friar Thomas's paper and responses are scheduled to appear in a future issue of *Esprit et Science*.

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