

# Ecumenical Formation: Yves Congar's Personal Testimony

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*There is no better ecumenical learning or formation nowadays than to seek direct encounter with someone of a high ecumenical calibre and related life-long experience. This paper intends to highlight and appraise some aspects of the French ecumenist Yves Congar's theological endeavour in the light of his personal testimony, and their relevance for today's ecumenical learning. Since the theological productivity of Congar (1904-1995) is massive, more than 1,800 books, articles, and translations, there shall be no attempt of a comprehensive assessment of his work. Instead, this paper presents seven fundamental points in the French Dominican's ecumenical learning experience. These include his willingness: (i) to abide by a strong faith and to testify an attitude of openness towards any other, (ii) to consolidate a mutual deepening of one's traditions, (iii) to carry out personal sacrifices as a commitment towards Christian unity, (iv) to be 'aware of' and to show 'concern towards' others, (v) to insist on the 'fullness' and the 'purity' of the Church, (vi) to exercise a careful re-reading of other traditions, and (vii) to enhance creativity in the development of ecumenical thought. In view of these main ideas, this article concludes that ecumenical formation and learning implies and testifies to nothing else except fidelity and faithfulness.*

## A. Ecumenism: Formation and Experience

*Non scholae, sed vitae discimus.*<sup>1</sup> The French ecumenist Yves Congar would unquestionably agree with Seneca that 'we learn, not for school, but for life'. In other words, education is more than just learning (or teaching). Education, in the words of the World Council of Churches (WCC), is about 'daring to know, do,

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1. Seneca minor, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, epistula CVI. I must say that I am indebted to Vladimir Fedorov who uses this Latin adage as the heading of his article appearing in *The Ecumenical Review* 57 (2005) 42-49.

relate, and become'.<sup>2</sup> In this light, therefore, not only is this old Latin maxim very applicable and relevant to the ecumenical sphere today, but it is also a challenge to the 'formation' being provided and delivered nowadays. Furthermore, while the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed decisive historic ecumenical agreements,<sup>3</sup> issues like awareness, formation and commitment in the ecumenical field should never be taken for granted. It may be the case, unfortunately, that whatever inspired, motivated and informed previous generations is no longer widely known or valued.<sup>4</sup> Many ecumenists, in fact, are in common agreement that it is becoming more evident that there is an ongoing need for what can be called "ecumenical education" or "ecumenical formation".<sup>5</sup>

This paper addresses the theme of ecumenical formation by referring to Congar's testimony, contribution and involvement in ecumenism and identifying the various stages of ecumenical learning throughout his related life-long experience. Certainly,

2. Cf. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/education/index-e.html>.
3. In 1982, after fifty years of effort, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches proposed to the churches a common statement on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Then, Pope John Paul II issued *Ut Unum Sint* in 1996, a far-reaching document full of vision and hope that all Christian people and all their respective churches and ecclesial communities indeed might be one. In 1999, Lutherans and Roman Catholics signed a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, coming to essential agreement on the fundamental issue that divided them nearly 500 years ago. In the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has entered into full communion with the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, the Moravian Church, with dialogues that will hopefully lead to full communion in progress with the United Methodist Church and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
4. Simon Oxley argues that nowadays "ecumenical formation" rather than being "yet another module to be added to the theological education curriculum, the training course or the Christian education programme", it is a "necessity". He continues, "it is, therefore, vital that ecumenical formation permeate all our learning – formal and informal". Cf. Simon Oxley, "Editorial", in *The Ecumenical Review* 57 (2005) 1-2.
5. The idea of 'ecumenical formation' (or 'education') appeared for the first time in a joint document entitled the *Gazzada statement* issued by the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the World Council of churches (WCC) in 1965. Initially, the topic of formation was discussed in Catholic fora organised by the Catholic Action on the initiatives of Pope Pius XII. These, in turn, resulted in three large world congresses on the lay apostolate held in Rome (1951, 1957 and 1967). In this light, the 1965 Gazzada statement is hailed as an ecumenical landmark promoting "laity formation", hence placing formation in relation to the lay apostolate. For the text of the Gazzada statement, see *The Laity Today: Bulletin of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*, no. 19-20, 1975, 101-103. One can also consult the report of a 1974 ecumenical consultation on "New Trends in Laity Formation" (Assisi) and the "Note on Semantics", appearing in the same Bulletin.

while such a formation usually takes place in universities, academies, churches and throughout various ecumenical events, probably *contextual* and *experiential* education is superior. In this regard, therefore, *formal* education is not productive unless complemented by down-to-earth life-experiences. Ecumenism, therefore, is not much an affair of leaders in church, but rather the dissemination of ecumenical ideas to the masses and the actual involvement of the laity.<sup>6</sup>

Some do, in fact, speak of “two very different worlds of ecumenism”, that of *institutional* ecumenism and that of *experiential* ecumenism.<sup>7</sup> While the former is expressed through formal relationships directly between churches and the activities of ecumenical bodies, the latter is expressed by those who, individually or collectively, undergo some powerful learning experiences which call for and raise in them both commitment and consciousness in the ecumenical sphere. Interestingly enough, Congar deliberately uses the word ‘passion’ for his life-time commitment to the Christian unity.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, even though Congar participated in international ecumenical events and liturgical services, he certainly belongs to the sphere of *experiential* ecumenism. Indeed, the sharing of one’s personal experience is considered as the best testimony of how Christians should be animated by the ecumenical spirit, whatever their particular mission and task in the world and in society.<sup>9</sup>

When we speak of ‘ecumenical formation’, we necessarily imply “the whole process of equipping, enabling, raising awareness, shaping or transforming attitudes and values”.<sup>10</sup> In other words, it does not simply consist in learning about ecumenism, but also fostering enthusiasm and passion. Here, one cannot fail to mention the Bossey Ecumenical Institute founded in 1946, two years prior to the foundation of the WCC, to provide lay formation in ecumenism through academic learning,

6. Cf. Stephen Neill, “Epilogue”, in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, Vol. I 1517-1948, edited by Ruth Rouse & Stephen Neill, SPCK, London 1954, 730.

7. Cf. Simon Oxley, “Forming a movement: Origins and Opportunities”, in *The Ecumenical Review* 57 (2005) 19-26; 22.

8. Congar also uses this term as a title to one of his main works on ecumenism: *Une Passion: L’Unité. Réflexions et souvenirs, 1929-1973*, Foi vivante 156, Cerf, Paris 1974.

9. Cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Diversity for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, US Catholic Conference, Washington DC 1993, 39.

10. Konrad Raiser, “Fifty Years of Ecumenical Formation”, in *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (1996) 440-451; 440.

worship and lived experiential participation.<sup>11</sup> It is clearly evident, then, that theory and practice are productive in as much as they are in a mutual relationship and embedded in each other. This idea is also manifested in the Constitution of the first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, where it says that one of its functions was “to promote the growth of ecumenical consciousness in the members of all the churches”.<sup>12</sup>

In this light, therefore, not only does experience go hand in hand with academic training and programmes of instruction, but it actually complements and justifies their *raison d’être*. This brings us to a concrete definition of ecumenical formation as “an ongoing process of learning within the various local churches and world communions, aimed at informing and guiding people in the movement which – inspired by the Holy Spirit – serves the visible unity of Christians”.<sup>13</sup>

### **B. Congar’s Passion: Christian Unity and Ecumenical Formation**

The name of the French Dominican Yves Congar will be remembered as that indefatigable ecumenist whose vigorous contribution to the ecumenical movement was exceptional. Not only should his personal testimony of theological learning and ecumenical formation be noticed, but also be highlighted and appraised. Definitely, this figure stands out as being more relevant for today’s ecumenical formation than ever before.

Some might have come across his series of ecclesiological studies, entitled *Unam Sanctam*, whose first volume is his theological milestone *Chrétiens désunis*;

11. Ecumenists speak of various contemporary models of ecumenical formation. However, one of the most prominent centres of ecumenical formation is certainly that of Bossey in Switzerland. Through its teaching, this institute emphasises ecumenical consciousness under three headings: the academic study and research, life in community and shared spirituality. See the article by Ioan Sauca, the present director of the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey and a priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church, entitled “Ecumenical Formation in Bossey”, in *The Ecumenical Review* 57 (2005) 66-81.
12. Willem A. Visser ‘t Hooft, *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Harper, New York 1949, 10.
13. Joint Working Group between the RCC and the WCC, *Ecumenical Formation: Ecumenical Reflections and suggestions*, 1993, para. 9. Cf. *The Ecumenical Review* 45 (1993) 490-494.

*Principes d'un 'œcuménisme' catholique* published in Paris, in 1937.<sup>14</sup> Certainly, one cannot miss other early monumental studies such as *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Eglise*<sup>15</sup> and *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*,<sup>16</sup> on the renewal and reform in the Church and on theology of the laity respectively. Lately, Cardinal Walter Kasper commented that although the prospects of ecumenism have changed since Congar's pioneering works in ecumenism, nevertheless they are the classics of ecumenical theology, based on the solid ground of dogma, and not on a liberal ecumenism simply based on the subjective experience or practice.<sup>17</sup> Further still, some others, perhaps, might remember Congar as one of the four towering intellectual giants all of whom were born in the year 1904.<sup>18</sup> With Jesuit companions, like Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou, and Dominican confrères, like Marie Dominique Chenu and Henri-Marie Féret, Congar contributed mightily to the theological renewal in France after World War II as well as to the theological sphere at large.

Referred to as the leading Catholic ecumenical theologian of the 20th century, undoubtedly, Congar was one of the most influential contributors to the Second Vatican Council. It was said, in fact, that "no modern theologian's spirit was accorded

14. With *Chrétiens désunis: principes d'un "œcuménisme" catholique*, Yves Congar sought, by surveying the different conceptions of the Church and its unity among Protestants, Anglicans, and the Orthodox, to work out a viable Roman Catholic way of participating in ecumenism. This was translated as *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion*, Centenary Press, London 1939.
15. In *Vraie et fausse réforme dans L'Eglise* (Cerf, Paris, 1950; not translated yet), a book which many Catholics at the time found deeply shocking, Congar distinguished the senses in which the Church must be holy (thanks to her divine origination) yet could be sinful (owing to her human composition), pleading for reform not of abuses (for there were few) but of the structures of the Church, because of their perceived lack of relevance in the world to which she preaches. Its translation is being carried out by The Catholic Theological Society of America. See *CTSA Proceedings* 59 (2004) 121-123.
16. In his next major book, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (Cerf, Paris 1953), Congar strove to develop a theology of the laity, to whom the ministry of mediating between Church and world primarily belongs. They are not simply objects of the ministrations of the clergy, as was customarily supposed, but are, in virtue of their baptism and confirmation, agents in their own right in Christ's threefold office as priest, prophet, and king. This work is translated as *Lay People in the Church: A Study for the Theology of the Laity*, Newman Press, Westminster, MD 1965.
17. Cf. Walter Kasper, "La Théologie œcuménique d'Y.-M. Congar et la situation actuelle de l'œcuménisme", in *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 106 (2005) 5-20 ; 7.
18. The four theologians include the French Dominican Yves Congar (d. 1995), the German Jesuit Karl Rahner (d. 1984), the Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan (d. 1984) and American priest John Courtney Murray (d. 1967).

fuller play in the documents of Vatican II than Congar's.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Avery Dulles commented that "Vatican II could almost be called Congar's council".<sup>20</sup> Thus, it stands to reason that John XXIII, in his days as nuncio at Paris, may have taken from Congar the idea, fundamental to the council, that inner-Catholic renewal and ecumenism were intrinsically connected.

This French Dominican, described by Peter Steinfels as "one of a handful of scholars who utterly changed Roman Catholicism"<sup>21</sup> is not simply to be known, read and remembered, but also to be re-appreciated, re-evaluated and imitated in his theological and ecumenical vocation lived with so much passion for unity and truth. His ecumenical venture proves to be one of the best testimonies of ecumenical learning in a multi-religious context. Certainly, Joseph Ratzinger's comment finds in Congar the best example of someone who truly dedicated his life for the Church:

"What the Church needs today, as always, are not adulators to extol the status quo, but men [*sic*] whose humility and obedience are no less than their passion for truth: men who brave every misunderstanding and attack as they bear witness; men who, in a word, love the Church more than ease and the unruffled course of their personal identity".<sup>22</sup>

His love for the Church and his deeper appreciation of the passion for truth which guided him throughout his life, shaped his exercise of the theological vocation and sustained him through years of tribulation, are clearly attested in the posthumous personal diaries, *Journal d'un théologien 1946-1956* and *Mon Journal du Concile*.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, one can get to know Congar through some interviews and conversations, particularly that with Jean Puyo, whereby Congar defines himself as 'a man rooted in the Church' as well as one working for twelve

19. Richard McBrien, "Church and Ministry: The Achievement of Yves Congar", in *Theology Digest* 32 (1985) 203-211; 203.

20. Avery Dulles, "Yves Congar - In appreciation", in *America* 173 (2:1995) 6-7; 6.

21. Peter Steinfels, *New York Times* 144 (12 August 1995) 9.

22. Joseph Ratzinger, "Free expression and Obedience in the Church", in *The Church: Readings in theology*, edited by Albert LaPierre – Bernard Verkamp – Edward Wetterer – John Zeitler, P.J. Kenedy, New York 1963, 212.

23. Cf. Yves Congar, *Journal d'un théologien 1946-1956*, edited and annotated by Etienne Fouilloux, Cerf, Paris 2000; and *Mon Journal du Concile*, 2 vols., edited and annotated by Eric Mahieu, Cerf, Paris 2002.

or thirteen hours a day, according to his gifts, his means, his vocation, which are, as he says, those "of a Christian who prays and of a theologian who reads a lot and who takes many notes".<sup>24</sup> One should bear in mind that his theological productivity was massive: more than 1,800 books, articles, and translations.<sup>25</sup> Having stated all this, one realises that there is no better ecumenical learning or formation nowadays than to seek direct encounter with someone of a high ecumenical profile and related life-long experience such as this French Dominican.

### ***1. Ecumenism implies faith and openness to other faiths***

The first two qualities in his ecumenical vocation which are to be underlined are his strong faith and his attitude of being open towards any other. Congar, as a young boy, had already learnt to form friendships with Protestant and Jewish children. In August 1914, when he was 10 years old, his parish Church near Sedan, France, was gutted by an incendiary bomb. Then, for the next 6 years, the Catholic Community worshipped in a neighbouring Protestant chapel at the kind invitation of the Pastor. At the age of 13, he had theological discussions about the meaning of the Mass with the son of the Protestant pastor. Then, as if to make some return to the ecumenical world, especially to the Protestants for all he had received from them, at the age of 21, he decided to become a priest, and in 1925 entered the Dominican Order.<sup>26</sup> There, while preparing for ordination, the meditations on the seventeenth chapter of St. John, which includes the priestly prayer of Jesus, created in Congar an interest in the ecumenical movement.<sup>27</sup> From then on, his burning desire to bring the separated Christians together dominated his scholarly and pastoral work. Besides, life experiences set his course on a path toward Christian unity, quite unusual for Catholics of his era.

24. Andre Duval, "Yves Congar: A Life for the Truth", in *The Thomist* 48 (1984) 505-511; 511.

25. For Yves Congar's bibliography, see Pietro Quatrocchi, "Bibliographie générale du Père Yves Congar," in Jean-Pierre Jossua, *Le Père Congar: la théologie au service du peuple de Dieu*, *Chrétientés de tous les temps* 20, Cerf, Paris 1967, 213-272; and Aidan Nichols, "An Yves Congar Bibliography 1967-1987," in *Angelicum* 66 (1989) 422-466.

26. Cf. James J. Bacik, *Contemporary Theologians*, Triumph Books, New York 1989, 40.

27. Cf. Yves Congar, "Ecumenical experience and conversion: A Personal Testimony", in *The Sufficiency of God*, 71-87; 71.

## 2. *Mutual deepening of one's traditions*

To be ecumenical, explains Congar, contrary to early fears, does not mean to lose one's tradition and identity, but to deepen it by complementing it with other Christian theologies. Ecumenism, therefore, is not a high level dialogue about superficial differences, but a meeting between Christians of different churches. This is how he describes his experience when asked to reflect about his friendship with Willem A. Visser 't Hooft and his involvement in the ecumenical movement:

“The ecumenical dialogue has, in the first place, obliged me and helped me to renew the Christian man within me. It has, as it were, compelled me to become more Christian and more catholic. The questions put to me, the witness I have had to bear, the obligation I have been under to attain a certain level of truth, all this has shaken me from a comfortable and commonplace conformity and made me re-examine many matters in depth”.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, ecumenism involves the broadening and strengthening of certain convictions. On this whole process of ecumenical learning, Congar comments that

“the discovery of another spiritual world does not uproot us from our own, but changes the way we look at many things. For myself, I remain a [Latin] Catholic, a fact I do not hide from myself or from others, but ecumenism has freed me from a certain narrowness of outlook, characteristics of the Latin and of the Mediterranean man by bringing me into touch with Eastern Christians, Scandinavians, Anglo-Saxons and with their respective traditions. I have kept my Latin anthropological make-up, but have looked critically upon its limitations”.<sup>29</sup>

Here, therefore, Congar testifies and emphasises that Church union would occur not with the surrender of the separated traditions, but with and through their mutual understanding and cross-fertilization. Notwithstanding this, Congar's ecumenical enthusiasm and his historical approach to theology soon came to be under suspicion

28. *Ibid.*

29. Yves Congar, “Ecumenical experience and Conversion: a Personal Testimony”, 72-73.



in the neo-Thomist Roman circles of theology. He was then forbidden to teach and was eventually exiled. Between 1954 and 1956, Congar endured three periods of exile, which took him first to Jerusalem, then Rome and finally Cambridge, England, before being given a fixed assignment at Strasbourg from 1956-1968. "My resistance can only consist in this", he writes during the exile of 1954, "to *never* slacken, but to continue and intensify even more my service of the Truth".<sup>30</sup>

### 3. *Ecumenism involves self-sacrifice*

Like Chenu, Congar suffered ecclesial censure and fraternal betrayal as a result of his critical commitment to *ressourcement* and to the Worker Priest Movement. In a letter to his mother, written in 1956 which however was published posthumously, Congar expresses his anguish after being silenced for saying things still under suspicion by Roman authorities and his Superiors. He states that he has been persecuted and reduced to silence because he has been one of those Dominicans who have had a certain freedom of thought, initiative and expression<sup>31</sup>:

"What I am blamed for is usually very little. Most of the time, whatever problem is raised about an idea in my work is explained in the preceding line in that same work. What has put me in the wrong (in their eyes) is not having said false things, but having said things that they do not like to have said ... Practically speaking, they have destroyed me as far as it was possible for them. Everything I believed and had worked on has been taken away: ecumenism, teaching, conferences, working with priests, writing for *Témoignage Chrétien*, involvement in conventions, etc. They have not, of course, hurt my body; nor have they touched my soul or forced me to do anything. But a person is not limited to his skin and his soul. Above all when someone is a doctrinal apostle, he is his action, he is his friendships, he is his relationships, he is his social outreach; they have taken all that away from me. All that is now at a standstill, and in that way I have been profoundly wounded. They have reduced me to nothing and so they have for all practical purposes destroyed me. When,

30. Yves Congar, *Journal d'un théologien 1946-1956*, 271.

31. The full text of Congar's letter to his mother appears in *La Vie Spirituelle* 154 (2000) 135-144. Some excerpts of it are translated and included in John L. Allen, "Congar vindicated at Vatican II", in *National Catholic Reporter* 36 (issue 31: 2 June 2000) 20-21.

at certain times, I look back on everything I had hoped to be and to do, on what I had begun to do, I am overtaken by an immense heartsickness."<sup>32</sup>

Only years later was Congar rehabilitated and vindicated at the Second Vatican Council. Etienne Fouilloux remarks that Congar's chronicle of the painful years of censure and exile did not simply consist in "a record of his ideas and actions",<sup>33</sup> rather, it was "a journal of the soul", "the journal of a soul inconsolably wounded".<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, with its wide knowledge and amazing capabilities, Congar has had a lasting influence on many documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) such as the two constitutions on the Church and that on the Divine revelation, as well as on the decrees on ecumenism, the lay apostolate and the missionary activity of the Church.

Evidently, Congar's faithfulness to his ecumenical vocation depended on the virtue of patience, prayer and solid faith. Can it be that the basis of ecumenism is contemplation after all? Once, when speaking about Church renewal and Christian unity, Congar expressed a striking thought: "it is not our idea and our presentation of the Church which must be renewed in its source, it is our idea of a God as a *living* God, and in the light of this, our idea of Faith". Thus, in Congar's case, his lifelong passion for Christian unity rested on the contemplative base of his Dominican theological vocation.

#### 4. 'Awareness of' and 'concern for' others

What the Dominican André Duval wrote some 24 years ago is still valid. "Father Congar is one of those whom we have to thank for the fact that ecumenism has become less and less the somewhat speciality of only a few and that it has become, rather, a dimension of theology and a permanent pastoral concern".<sup>35</sup> In other words, ecumenism for Congar was not something purely intellectual. On the contrary, ecumenism necessitates relationships between persons and movements as well as dialogue. He explains that dialogue should be carried out in the same fashion of those faithful to Jesus Christ, his gospel, and the Church, remaining aware of their

32. Yves Congar, «Lettre à sa mère», in *La Vie Spirituelle* 154 (2000) 139.

33. Yves Congar, *Journal d'un théologien 1946-1956*, 11 and 25.

34. Etienne Fouilloux, "Commentary", in *Journal d'un théologien 1946-1956*, 15 and 399.

35. André Duval, "Yves Congar: A Life for the Truth", in *The Thomist* 48 (1984) 505-511; 509.

mutual responsibility of ecumenical grace and their future. Thus, put simply, people involved in the ecumenical sphere *must* be connected and concerned with and for others. In this sense, one must be aware of the other.

In particular, during his life, Congar not only valued and cherished his personal relationships and frequent contacts in the different churches with Protestant and Orthodox believers, but also esteemed the fruitfulness of his discovery of the great theologians such Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Johann Adam Möhler, of whom Yves Congar became an advocate, a channel and a theological amplifier – all on a large scale, and the twentieth century theologian Karl Barth, to name just a few. In this sense, therefore, ecumenism encourages everyone to engage in reciprocal dialogue. Consequently, a sound ecumenism is possible only in so far as one knows the other, and that the two are in acquaintance.

“In such a dialogue, on the one hand, by listening to the other person, I am led to rediscover in the depth and fullness of my own tradition that portion of truth that he rightly seeks to honour and that I was in danger of overlooking. On the other hand, in setting before him my convictions, I tend to present them and consequently to conceive and live them, so that they embrace what is valid in the standpoint of the other. It is not that I give in on principle to his point of view. On the contrary, I criticise it”.<sup>36</sup>

### 5. *‘Fullness’ and ‘purity’ of the Church*

The genius of Congar lies in having reintroduced and brought ideas of different theologians into the ecumenical sphere through his publications and preaching. He insists that what he wishes to be enhanced are ‘fullness’ and ‘purity’:

“Ecumenism is in no sense the syncretised product of Luther plus Calvin plus St Thomas Aquinas, or of St Gregory of Palamas plus St Augustine. But envisaged from the theological point of view, [...] ecumenism implies a striving after two aspects of Christian truth which sometimes seem in opposition, but which should be jointly arrived at and kept together”.<sup>37</sup>

36. Yves Congar, “Ecumenical experience and conversion: A Personal Testimony”, in *The Sufficiency of God*, 71-87; 75.

37. *Ibid.*, 76.

Congar explains that as such, there is only one ecumenism, a single ecumenical movement, even if those who participate in it conceive it differently. He adds that while history attests to a concatenation of ruptures which have occurred, still there is one effort to promote Christian unity. Thus, ecumenism depends in some sort on solidarity. This was confirmed by a Greek Melchite at the Second Vatican Council in a second session speech when he commented that: "if ecumenism really is a movement of all Christians towards a greater unity, it cannot strictly be called Catholic, Orthodox or Anglican, or by any other such name. But it is possible to speak of Catholic, Orthodox or Anglican principles of the same ecumenism."<sup>38</sup>

### 6. *A careful re-reading of other traditions*

For Congar, ecumenism could never bear fruit if not marked by respectful re-reading of each other's different traditions. This idea, in fact, is not only dominant in his various ecumenical works but also presented as somewhat obligatory. One example will suffice here. Till his very last days, Congar expressed sympathy and appreciation towards Luther and the other reformers. As he kindled this ecumenical sensibility, he kept asking the same question: "What can we accept from Luther's theology? What can we think about Luther's work today?"<sup>39</sup> Congar suggests that in ecumenism, our framework of mind should be conditioned by the word "with" instead of the words "in spite of". Thus, if truly Congar was after a complete and full ecumenical spirit, he had to be sensible towards other traditions. He felt that the most urgent thing to do was to recognise exactly and freely what Luther wanted to do.

Congar writes that neither Luther nor the other reformers wanted to bring about a new Church in the sense of another church. They wanted to reform the Catholic Church, the Church of the apostles, the martyrs, and the fathers. This implies, contends Congar, that the abuses and errors – even at the doctrinal level which Luther and the reformers sought to correct – are in the category of *historical facts*.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the reformation is bound not to seek for an autonomous life based on

38. Yves Congar – Hans Küng – Daniel O'Hanlon, *Council Speeches of Vatican II*, Paulist Press, Glen Rock N.J. 1964. At the Second Vatican council the 1963 preparatory Schema, Chapter 1, was entitled: 'Principles of Catholic Ecumenism'. This was changed to 'Catholic Principles of Ecumenism'. Cardinal Augustin Bea at the time made the point that it was the separated brethren who gave the first impulse to the modern unitive movement.

39. Yves Congar, "Church Reform and Luther's Reformation 1517-1967", in *Lutheran World* 14 (1967) 351-9; 357.

40. Cf. *Ibid.*, 353.

its own principles, but to hold to the traditional Catholic Church, which has been reformed from certain abuses that developed historically. In a similar vein, while John XXIII did not perceive all the *theological* implications of the *aggiornamento*, still he insisted on its spiritual dimension. Thus, he recovered the ancient idea of the anthropological *reformation*. The more the Church becomes purely itself, the more the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation appears provisional, bound to a historical moment. Therefore, through reading Luther, Congar learnt that people of God must constantly strive for a renewal or reform of the Church based on a healthy and a clear dependence, on evangelical and biblical sources. Moreover, Congar realised that ecumenical dialogue should be characterised not simply by theology, but also by other elements, such as history, exegesis and the flame of the living evangelical inspiration.<sup>41</sup>

### 7. Creativity in developing ecumenical thought

Although Luther seemed to have been a close partner to Congar, the latter also shared a common interest in the Orthodox tradition. Let me refer to just one simple fact to evidence Congar's profundity and creativity when it comes to ecumenical sensibility. Although at present, to speak of the Church as having "two lungs" has become common (*koinos topos*) in ecclesiastical parlance, especially during the pontificate of John Paul II, it was Congar who in a lecture on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1952 entitled *La personne et la liberté humaine dans l'anthropologie orientale* reconstructed the beginning of the use of this metaphor. This lecture, however, was published only many years later in 1964.<sup>42</sup>

41. Furthermore, although Luther and Congar completely excluded the idea of a new Church, they nevertheless refused to absolutise the reality "Church". They hold that one cannot identify the Catholic Church with its norm. Congar explains that while the Church is not its own rule and that Scripture is such a rule, this is not to say that the Scriptures can be established as a rule *completely* independent of the Church. In other words, Congar agrees with Luther that scripture is the rule of faith, however, he does not identify this rule with scripture *alone* and in isolation, for Scripture is not the reality established by god so that his people will live in truth.

Congar became sensible that the autumn of the Middle Ages was characterised by the exaggeration of all the traits of precisely the medieval period. These traits can be traced back to three characteristic elements: papacy and clergy, piety and scholastic theology. To respond to these elements, Congar, thus, insists that there should be more consciousness of the necessity and value of the Papacy as a religious reality, to heed the persistent call of reformers to free religion from all excess baggage and instead choose a religious relationship determined by God rather than by external practices.

42. Cf. Yves Congar, *Chrétiens en dialogue: contributions catholiques à l'œcuménisme*, Unam Sanctam 50, Cerf, Paris 1964, 273-288.

Edward Farrugia, a Maltese Jesuit and ecumenist, however, refers to a different opinion. Farrugia comments that although Congar might have used the term, this image was used for the first time by the Russian poet Vjacieslav Ivanov (1866-1949).<sup>43</sup> Ivanov came to adopt this term after admitting that it was not possible for him to breathe anymore “with one lung alone”.<sup>44</sup> In fact, desiring to belong to the fullness of the Church, he adhered to the Catholic Church in 1926, without abandoning, however, the spiritual riches of the Orthodox Church. Ivanov made use of this expression in his letter to Charles Du Bos in 1930.<sup>45</sup>

Nonetheless, it is uncertain whether Congar knew about this letter and whether he drew inspiration from it. For Congar, however, this metaphor refers to the reality of “sister Churches” and the theological foundation of its application to the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The two Churches are sisters not only because Catholics and Orthodox are brethren, that is, “children of the same Father, in Jesus Christ”, but also because on the sacramental level they have in common, in addition to baptism, “the priesthood, the apostolic succession and the Eucharist”.<sup>46</sup> Evidently, here, a sign of maturation in the thought of Congar is noticeable. He moves from a *theology* of two lungs to a *Church* with two lungs. It now expresses the conviction that the Orthodox Church and the Roman Church are the same Church in two different forms. It is one of the ways to say that the duality between the East and the West articulates the unity of the Church.<sup>47</sup> Congar goes on to say that “between the East and the West all the essential is identical and different. It is the identical that is different: the differences must be recognized and respected, they are differences in profound identity”.<sup>48</sup>

43. Cf. Edward G. Farrugia, “Ivanov, Vjacieslav Ivanovic (1866-1949)”, in *Dizionario Enciclopedico dell’Oriente Cristiano*, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome 2000, 404-406; 405.

44. *Ibid.*, 405.

45. Cf. Vjacieslav Ivanov, *Corrispondenza da un angolo all’altro*, Matriona, Milano 1976, 113.

46. Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, SCM, London 1984, 89.

47. Congar writes in a sculptural way: “Between East and Catholic West everything is similar and yet it is all different, even what is essentially the same thing”. To him, The Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are the same Church “according to two different traditions”. Thus, what sets the problem about the meaning of the qualification of the Roman Church as *mater et magistra* is the affirmation of the sorority (sisterhood) of the two Churches founded upon the common apostolic origin.

48. Roger Etchegaray, “In the footsteps of Benedict XVI in Turkey”, in *30Days* No.11 Year XXIV - November 2006.

## *Conclusion*

Since its beginning, the movement towards Christian unity has always been characterised by an ongoing need for ecumenical education and formation. In today's rapidly changing world, ecumenists prefer to speak of 'commitment' and 'ecumenical consciousness' in addition to the formal ecumenical engagements. Powerful ecumenical learning experiences are preferred to habitual academic teaching. Moreover, ecumenical efforts on a global level must be both complemented by an *experiential* ecumenism, as well as consolidated by personal testimonies of ecumenical learning and formation.

This paper sought to present Yves Congar as one of the best examples of a person who by his strong faith and his attitude of openness towards any other respond concretely to Jesus' prayer that all may be one. More than ever before, the ecumenical movement needs people like Congar who dared to deepen their tradition and identity by complementing them with those of other Christian theologies. Thus, all those engaged in ecumenism ought not simply to inform and teach, but also to ecumenically inspire, awaken and motivate today's generation.

Not only is one struck by Congar's passion for ecumenism and its future, but also is encouraged to commit oneself decidedly for the cause of Christian unity. It is evidently clear that *contextual* and *experiential* education finds in Congar's personal testimony an excellent example of both fervour and a life-time commitment to the Christian unity within a multi-religious context. Hence, his ecumenical effort is not merely relevant, but also one that should be re-appreciated, re-evaluated and imitated. Congar's testimony is nothing less than an open invitation to kindle an ecumenical sensibility through a respectful re-reading of each other's different traditions.

While ecumenism remains a permanent pastoral concern for many people, with Congar let us acknowledge and appreciate all efforts that constitute 'one' ecumenism. The French Dominican reminds us that even if those who participate in it conceive it differently, still there is a *single* ecumenical movement. Lastly, the most important lesson which Congar teaches us is the certainty that all ecumenical contribution necessitates both fidelity and faithfulness. In this regard, Congar had one clear aim in addressing the unity of the Church: to let "the true face of the Church" assume its full reality.<sup>49</sup>

49. Yves Congar, *Une Passion: L'Unité. Réflexions et souvenirs, 1929-1973*, Foi vivante 156, Cerf, Paris 1974, 15.

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