

**TRADITION AND TRADITIONS:
FROM A MODEL OF THE CHURCH
TO A MODEL OF SOCIETY –
A RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES IN THE BLACK SEA REGION**

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Abstract: It is a common perception that some of the most conservative institutions in the world are the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. As some say: *In 2.000 years, the Church has not changed anything.* On the one hand, the statement is true as regards the Tradition of the Church, that is, *all that was handed on by the Apostles and contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God (Dei Verbum 8).* On the other hand, *there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down (Dei Verbum 8).* In other words, the Church remains the same as regards her essence (this is preserved by Tradition), while she needs to change as regards her historical forms of life (these are traditions).

This conference will show the distinction between Tradition and traditions according to Yves Congar, one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century. His thesis is that the Church must preserve Tradition and reform traditions. To accomplish this goal, that is a true reform within Church without schisms, Congar proposes four conditions for an authentic reform.

This conference claims that this model of reform in the Church can be transferred to the present societies in the Black Sea Region. *Mutatis mutandis*, the four conditions of true reform are applicable to modern societies. Thus, distinguishing between Tradition and traditions, each society can preserve what is essential to its' own identity and ethos, while accepting the changes suggested by the present and future situations of life.

Keywords: Yves Congar, Tradition, traditions, reform, Church, structure and life, nostalgia for the past, preservation of the past, fear of the future, novelty in the Church.

1. What is Tradition? Between Preservation and Change

It is a common perception that some of the most conservative institutions in the world are the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. As a non-Catholic friend of mine says, half-jokingly: *In two thousands years, the Church has not changed anything.* Furthermore, when asked in ecumenical gatherings what they consider the most distinguishing

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feature of Orthodoxy, Orthodox theologians frequently refer to its changelessness¹; in other words, Orthodox theologians and ordinary people believe that what distinguishes the Orthodox Church from other churches is its loyalty to the past and desire to keep that past unchanged. Examples of this attitude are many, but I will refer here only to one, recent, instance. In Romania, during the pandemic, there was a great debate as to whether the priests should use a single spoon to give Holy Communion with the Precious Blood of Our Lord to the many believers who attended the Divine Liturgy during this period. As you can imagine, in a debate was heated and controversial, there were two positions. First, there were those who believed that the use of a single spoon posed the threat of infecting the whole congregation with the COVID-19 virus. The second were those that argued that the infection was impossible for various reasons. However, what is interesting for the topic of this article is that the supporters of the second position claimed with some determination:

Today's problems (even those concerning the sharing of the Holy Communion to the believers, but not only), which are not very different from those of any other period, more or less important in the life of the Church, should not concern us particularly, in the sense that it is not an absolute priority, but rather, *we should be concerned about how to remain completely faithful to the Tradition of our Church* in such circumstances².

As will have noticed, the most important priority was complete faithfulness to the Tradition.

This raises the question: what is Tradition? Both Orthodox and Catholic Churches share the same stance. For the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council—the most authoritative voice of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century—defines Tradition and states that all “what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes”³. Tradition, in other words, is the whole life of the Church that comes from Christ to the apostles and was transmitted to the present generation of believers. One Catholic theologian that studied the topic and provided a great contribution to the understanding of Tradition is Yves Congar.

¹ For example, Panagiotis BRATSIOTIS – George FLOROVSKY, *Orthodoxy: a Faith and Order Dialogue*, Geneva, 1960.

² Nicolae PREDA, “Împărtășirea credincioșilor de-a lungul timpului -între Tradiție și actualitate”, in *Revista Românească de Studii Axiologice* 2 (1/2020) 62. Emphasize mine.

³ THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum*, 8.

For Congar, tradition is a real, living self-communication of God. Its content is the whole Christian reality disclosed in Jesus Christ, including the implicit contents of that disclosure. The Holy Spirit is the transcendent subject of tradition, the whole Church is its bearer. Thus tradition is an essentially social and ecclesial reality, its locus is the Church as a communion. It is transmitted not only by written and spoken word but equally by prayer, sacramental worship and participation in the Church's life. Tradition, while consisting primarily in the process of transmission, is not sheer process⁴.

The Orthodox theologian Kalistos Ware⁵ states that when we talk about Tradition we approach two dimensions of the Church: preservation of the past and change according to the present situation. The preservation of the past is the essence of Orthodoxy, Kalistos Ware claims. The problems however appear when changes occur in the life of the Church because many orthodox people are extremely reluctant to change. "It is absolutely essential to question the past. In Byzantine and post-Byzantine times, Orthodox have often been far too uncritical in their attitude to the past, and the result has been stagnation. Today this uncritical attitude can no longer be maintained"⁶.

Yves Congar also stated in 1963: "Tradition is favored because it prevents change"⁷. It offers us as a safeguard against innovation, a defense against any dangerous novelty in the Church. So, many times we hear people saying "It has always been done this way." For the Catholic Church, Pope Francis declared on October 9, 2021, on the occasion of the opening of the Synod of Bishops on Sinodality, that these words "it has always been done this way" are "poison for the life of the Church." Pope Francis continued:

Those who think this way, perhaps without even realizing it, make the mistake of not taking seriously the times in which we are living. The danger, in the end, is to apply old solutions to new problems. A patch of rough cloth that ends up creating a worse tear (cf. Mt 9:16). It is important that the synodal process be exactly this: a process of becoming, a process that involves the local Churches,

⁴ Avery Cardinal DULLES, "Foreword", in Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, San Francisco, U.S.A., Ignatius Press, 2004, IX.

⁵ Kallistos WARE, also known as Timothy WARE, was a lecturer in Eastern Orthodox studies at the University of Oxford. He is one of the best-known contemporary Eastern Orthodox hierarchs and theologians. He also served as chairman of the board of directors of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge. Since 2007 he is the metropolitan of the Diocese of Diokleia in Phrygia.

⁶ Timothy WARE (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia), *The Orthodox Church*, London, Penguin Books, 1993, reprinted with revisions 1993-1997, 197.

⁷ Yves CONGAR, *The Meaning of Tradition*, p. 1. The first English edition was published by Hawthorn Book, New York, in 1964 as *Tradition and the Life of the Church*. Originally published as *La Tradition et la vie de l'Église*, Paris, Cerf, 1963.

in different phases and from the bottom up, in an exciting and engaging effort that can forge a style of communion and participation directed to mission⁸.

So, one can see that the tradition has a dual dimension: it can preserve the past, but it can impede development. Somehow, we as a Church need to go forward. Therefore, as Yves Congar observed in Paul Claudel's comparison of tradition with a man walking. In order to move forward and make progress,

he must push off from the ground, with one foot raised and the other on the ground; if he kept both feet on the ground or lifted both in the air, he would be unable to advance. If tradition is a continuity that goes beyond conservatism, it is also a movement and a progress that goes beyond mere continuity, but only on condition that, going beyond conservation for its own sake, it includes and preserves the positive values gained, to allow a progress that is not simply a repetition of the past. Tradition is memory, and memory enriches experience. If we remembered nothing it would be impossible to advance; the same would be true if we were bound to a slavish imitation of the past. True tradition is not servility but fidelity⁹.

2. Four Conditions of a True Reform according to Yves Congar

Since the Church finds herself in need of preservation and also of progress, the main question is: Is it possible that we can make some changes in the Church and yet not lose our identity? What do we preserve in the Church and what do we change? Yves Congar responded to these questions in 1950, in his book "True and False Reform in the Church"¹⁰ where he distinguishes between the structure of the Church which is essential for the Church and, therefore, cannot be changed, and the life of the Church which is always in need of reform.

Indeed, his arguments relating to the 'dialectic of structure and life' had previously been inferred in his ecclesiology with the publication of his work *Chrétiens Désunis* (Divided Christendom) in 1937. [1] In this book, Congar asserts that the Church is *de Trinitate*, in *Christo*, and *ex hominibus*. This implied the presence of a structure given in Christ and also expressed

⁸ POPE FRANCIS, Address for the Opening of the Synod, 9 October 2021, see <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html> Last accessed on July 19, 2022.

⁹ YVES CONGAR, *The Meaning of Tradition*, p. 2.

¹⁰ YVES CONGAR, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. and introd. Paul Philibert from the second edition, 1968 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2011), originally published as *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1950). Congar offered conflicting dates regarding the time when he finished the draft: 1946 (in *Journal d'un théologien*, 317) and 1947 (in *Dialogue Between Christians*, 32).

in time in various forms of life, which are conditioned by the historical dimension of the Church.

Congar first made this dialectic explicit in “Vraie et fausse réforme dans l’Église” (“True and False Reform in the Church”). For Congar, the Church exists in two forms: as an institution or structure and as a community or congregatio fidelium.[1] This institution is founded in Christ through his incarnation. The Church exists already in Christ, because the Son of God assumed a human nature and, in a certain way, the whole human race. Due to the incarnation, the Church existed as a mystery already in Christ before she became the congregatio fidelium. [2] The institution is the complex assemblage of the means by which Christ unites his disciples with himself: the deposit of faith, the sacraments of grace, and the apostolic ministries. Christ gave structure to the Church by revealing the true faith, instituting the sacraments, and giving the prophetic, sacerdotal, and royal office. This structure precedes the Church as communion, because it generates and forms the various communities of believers¹¹.

The second term of Congar’s dialectical framework is life or community. The institution engenders and becomes a community; the Church is comprised of people¹². The Church is made up of people who receive salvation from the Trinity and are united with the Trinity in Christ¹³. The Church is the union of “the divine formal principle with the human material principle, [...] the divine-human reality which is formed by this union”¹⁴. This union takes place in Christ. In this early stage of his thinking, Congar claims that while the institution derives from Christ (*acta Christi in carne*), it is the Holy Spirit who introduces us into this reality and gives life to the Church.¹⁵ In his later writings, Congar held a more balanced position, but even at this early stage, structure and life function as a dialectic by which Congar describes the Church as a divine-human reality, visible and invisible, immutable and changeable, Christological and pneumatological.

An accurate evaluation of the category structure–life is difficult because it was used at different stages of Congar’s ecclesiology to respond to various

¹¹ CONGAR, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l’Église*, 96-97; *True and False Reform*, 86.

¹² CONGAR, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l’Église*, 97; *True and False Reform*, 88-89.

¹³ CONGAR, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l’Église*, 98-99; *True and False Reform*, 90.

¹⁴ CONGAR, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l’Église*, 100: “l’union du principe formel divin et du principe matériel humain, la réalité divino-humaine qui naît de cette union”; *True and False Reform*, 89.

¹⁵ Yves CONGAR, *The Mystery of the Church*. Translated by A. V. Littledale, Baltimore, Helicon Press, 1960, 151. This book is a translation of *Esquisses du Mystère de l’Église*, whose first edition was published in 1941 and the second in 1953. Therefore, it can be claimed that this pneumatological understanding is present in Congar’s ecclesiology at this time.

issues arising from the life of the Church, as he himself acknowledges¹⁶. In his earlier writings, in 1950, Congar insists on the precedence of structure over the life of the Church¹⁷. Some critics have observed that he restricted structure to the elements ecclesiology to respond to various issues arising from the life of the Church, as he himself acknowledges. constitutive of the Church (*jus divinum*), and they have pointed out that the life of the Church (the historical relative form) is also structured¹⁸. Congar himself admits that the emphasis on the primacy of structure has limits: for example, it defines the laity in relation to the hierarchy, as he did in *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (1953)¹⁹. Later, he stated that the hierarchy had to be defined in relationship to lay people. The vision in which the institution takes precedence over the community is close to a christomonism, which dominated ecclesiology until Vatican II²⁰. Congar, however, avoids christomonism by ascribing to the Holy Spirit the foundation, the progress, and the activity of the Church²¹.

Congar arguments continued to evolve as his writings began to emphasize the second term of the dialectical category as—the life of the Church²². He stressed the importance of the Holy Spirit and charisms in the ecclesial life. In *Le Saint Esprit et le Corps apostolique, réalisateurs de l'oeuvre du Christ* (1953), while using the categories of structure and life, he affirmed that the role of the Holy Spirit, as the soul of the Church, is to animate what Christ has instituted²³. Here, however, he goes further than his earlier works and now attributes a certain freedom or autonomy to the Holy Spirit which shows itself in charisms and through unpredictable events.²⁴

¹⁶ Timothy I. MACDONALD, *The Ecclesiology of Yves Congar: Foundational Themes*, New York: University Press of America, 1984, xxii.

¹⁷ CONGAR, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*, 95-96.

¹⁸ Joseph FAMERÉE, *L'ecclésiologie d' Yves Congar avant Vatican II: Histoire et Église*, Leuven: University Press, 1992, 112; MacDonald, *The Ecclesiology of Yves Congar*, 280.

¹⁹ Yves CONGAR, *Entretiens d'automne*, présentés par Bernard Lauret, Paris: Cerf, 1987, 81-87. English edition *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, ed. and introd. Bernard Lauret, trans. John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

²⁰ Yves CONGAR, *Le Concile de Vatican II: Son Église: peuple de Dieu et corps du Christ*, *Théologie historique*, no. 71, Paris, Beuchesne, 1984, 164.

²¹ CONGAR, *Chrétiens désunis*, 68.

²² MacDonald says that for Congar in some sense “life as fundamentally expressive of the relationship in praxis of human beings with God is the source of structure within the Christian community” (*The Ecclesiology of Yves Congar*, 284). Famerée disagrees with MacDonald (*L'ecclésiologie d'Yves Congar*, 112, n. 306). The present author agrees with Famerée's position.

²³ Yves CONGAR, *Le Saint Esprit et le Corps apostolique, réalisateurs de l'oeuvre du Christ*, in *Esquisses du mystère de l'Église*. Unam Sanctam 8, 2nd ed. (Paris: Cerf, 1953), translated as *The Mystery of the Church*, 168 and p. 170.

²⁴ CONGAR, *The Mystery of the Church*, 174-176.

Congar recognizes that the use of the gifts of the Spirit is under the rule of the ‘apostolicity of doctrine’ and the ‘apostolicity of ministry’ because these charisms are given for the unity of the Church. Yet, he points out that the Holy Spirit intervenes directly both in the missionary activity of the apostles by indicating to them where to preach, and also in other people’s lives (Philip, Cornelius) through interior inspiration²⁵.

To summarize, Congar emphasized at different times both the structure and the life of the Church. Yet, while he originally distinguished and tended to contrast them, ultimately he saw them as distinct but interlocking elements of the mystery of the Church. This correct and complete evaluation of his view can be found through an analysis of his last works. In *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, he recognizes that he had made too radical a distinction between the institution which derives from Christ and the charisms which are the work of the free interventions of the Holy Spirit²⁶. In his last major work, *The Word and the Spirit*, Congar states: “It is a mistake to think, as I did in 1953 that a kind of ‘free sector’ reserved for the Holy Spirit exists alongside the operation of the instituted structures and means of grace”²⁷. Congar’s final position is well balanced²⁸. Both institution and charisms have their own place in building up the unity of the Church which is the Body of the glorified Christ. Both the Word and the Spirit are present in the structure and the life of the Church. The charisms, as interventions of the Holy Spirit, may be new elements in history, but they are always related to the work of Christ. The guarding and development of the teaching of Jesus is assured by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, particularly through the magisterium. Both the continuity of Church teaching with the apostolic deposit and the development of tradition are accomplished by the magisterium, especially in councils under the guidance of the Holy Spirit²⁹.

However, in *True and False Reform* (1950), Congar proposes four necessary conditions for a renewal so that the Reform may not become a schism.

²⁵ Ibid., 178-179.

²⁶ Yves CONGAR, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith, 3 vols, New York, Crossroad Publishing, 1997, vol. 2, 11. Originally published as *Je crois en l’Esprit Saint*, 3 vols., Paris, Cerf, 1979-1980.

²⁷ Yves CONGAR, *The Word and the Spirit*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1986, 61. Originally published as *La Parole et le Souffle*, Paris, Desclée, 1984. The article that Congar refers to is *Le Saint Esprit et le Corps apostolique, réalisateurs de l’oeuvre du Christ*.

²⁸ Lucian PĂULEȚ, *The Holy Spirit as the Principle of Ecclesial Unity, Catholicity, Apostolicity And Holiness in the Thought of Yves Congar*, Iași, Sapientia, 2019, 76-77.

²⁹ Yves CONGAR, *Tradition and Traditions: The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition*, San Diego, Basilica Press and Simon & Schuster, 1966, 343-46.

These four conditions are as following: a. the primacy of charity and of pastoral concern; b. remaining in communion with the whole church; c. having patience with delays and d. genuine renewal through a return to the principle of tradition (not through the forced introduction of some “novelty”).

a. First Condition: The Primacy of Charity and of Pastoral Concern

While Congar questions elements within the Church, he states that he cannot question the Church. One can seek to purify the church, but not to make an ideology out of „purity.” While Congar begins with a “return to sources” (*ressourcement*) that involves a process of intelligent reflection, he does not afford this process to arrive at an abstract program devoid of roots in the land of tradition or devoid of living energy. He does not allow himself to deviate from tradition, only away from intellectual creativity. He is aware that intelligence guides us and that rules, even if they come from elsewhere, must be judged intelligently. Congar will show later (in the fourth condition) that good theology, nourished by springs and especially by good ecclesiology, is one of the most effective guarantees of a faithful reformist effort. But the intellectual effort without charity easily leads to the non-recognition of the concrete reality and the given quality of the Church. On the contrary, the reforms that have succeeded in the Church are those that have been made with care for the concrete need of souls, in a pastoral outline, aiming at holiness³⁰.

The model of such reforms can be found in the actions of St. Bernard or St. Francis of Assisi. When we compare St. Nicholas of Flue’s letter to the people of Bern or Savonarola’s letters to Christian princes – the Emperor, the French king and the king and queen of Spain, we can see the difference between a reform aimed at holiness and a reform aimed at criticism. The contrast is easy to see and the analysis has already been made of the Reformers, on the one hand, and the Catholic saints who were reformers, on the other³¹. The latter, consenting to the authority of the church, sought to strive and perfect themselves, to commit themselves, and to perfect others in the Christian faith, and to improve the Church through the Church³².

Congar quotes Pius XI to make the distinction between personal desires of reformers and the call to holiness of the saints:

Every true and lasting reform, in the last analysis had its point of departure in holiness, in persons who were inflamed and impelled by the love of God and

³⁰ CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, pp. 218-219.

³¹ Cf. K. GERMANUS, *Reformatorenbilder: Historische Vorträge über katholische Reformatoren und Martin Luther*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1883.

³² CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, p. 219.

neighbor. Generous, ready to listen to every call from God and to respond immediately within themselves, and yet sure of themselves because sure of their vocation, they grew to become true lights and sources of renewal for their time. By contrast, where the zeal of the reformer did not arise from personal purity, but was the expression and the outburst of passion, it was a source of disturbance rather than illumination, destructive rather than constructive, and more than once the source of distortions more damaging than the evils to which they claimed to bring a remedy³³.

According to Congar, a certain absence of the concrete meaning of the Church and, more precisely, of its apostolic and pastoral meaning is remarkable among several reformers who eventually left the church. Renan, Döllinger, and Loisy, for example, were intellectuals rather than priests, perhaps related to their vocation as teachers, but they also showed a lack of pastoral concern and a kind of fear of the apostolic calling³⁴. This is the reason for which, in Congar's opinion, that Père Portal, speaking to young priests who were headed for graduate studies in religion, counseled them always to stay involved in some pastoral ministry³⁵.

On the contrary, the apostolic and pastoral concern puts us at the center of the church, making fruitful thinking and planning regarding practical measures that can avoid fantasies, excesses or the concrete unilateralism of personal enthusiasms, as well as avoid a fixation on a single case. The same pastoral preoccupation is manifested in the realism of the points of view that tend towards balance or equilibrium. These are measures that spontaneously develop both an orientation towards real life, in relation to common daily needs, and a sense of responsibility and concrete consequences for the choices made. Intellectuals, believers who do not have a concrete apostolic mission or who do not have a direct pastoral care, can easily be bolder and more original than priests charged with pastoral responsibilities. There will certainly be a difference between the initiatives of the former and the latter, experienced by both with a certain discomfort³⁶.

Origen expressions are different to those of St. Irenaeus, who was a bishop; and Tertullian's in a way different to those of St. Cyprian. It is said that Zwingli, as a preacher and pastor, spoke of the sacraments more positively than Zwingli as a systematic theologian and polemicist. It is also apparent that Luther spoke in a more Catholic way about faith and works

³³ POPE PIUS XI, Encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (March 14, 1937), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1937), p. 154. "If, instead of resting in the heart, purity rises to the head, it creates sectarians and heretics" (Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme integral*, 265).

³⁴ Congar, *True and False Reform*, 220.

³⁵ Cf. H. HEMMER, *M. Portal, prêtre de la mission*, Paris, 1948, 110.

³⁶ CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, 221.

when he was speaking from a pastoral point of view³⁷. St. Augustine speaks differently in his speculative treatises, especially on polemical topics, than in his homilies. In the homilies he no longer has the same sharpness that we find in his speculative statements: Unknown to himself, his audience influences him and results in a more balanced path. Congar observes, with a little bit of characteristic humor, that in theology one should be Predestinarian and in pastoral care Pelagian. One of the reasons for which scholasticism developed an increasing subtlety was that it had become essentially the activity of religious and university professors. The authentic prophetic spirit needs pastoral care³⁸.

In what we call the Counter-Reformation, we find two quite different things. On the one hand, there is first an enormous effort on apologetics and theology following the challenge of the Reformation; on the other hand, there is a second great effort to achieve a pastoral and religious renewal that aims at holiness. This second effort, which began long before the breakup with Luther, continued during and after the Council of Trent. It fueled the authentic reformation of the church and prepared the spiritual flowering of the seventeenth century in France. However, when we look at the genuine reform initiatives of Olier or St. Vincent de Paul, we see that their source is not in a critical point of view or in an idea, but rather in their pastoral and missionary experience. M. Olier's experience came from the Cévennes, Nantes and Brittany, while Vincent de Paul's experience, shaped by different areas of the Gondi region (Picardy, Châtillon, etc.), spread throughout France³⁹. Blessed John of Avila, whose reformist ideas still seem remarkable today, would have preferred to go as a missionary to evangelize America and, in fact, did missionary work in Andalusia and Extremadura⁴⁰.

Pastoral ministry is a great teacher of what is true. I am not the only one who notices that Protestant pastors are often removed from us in their way of thinking, but very close in the practice of personal religious life and pastoral ministry. Others, who were inclined to liberalism during university, returned to doctrinal orthodoxy insofar as they felt in their ministry the need to provide authentic food for souls. Everything that is great and fertile in the Barthian position came from this question that Karl Barth asked himself as a young pastor: "what should I preach and how should I preach to the faithful on Sunday?"⁴¹

³⁷ cf. H. GRISAR, *Martin Luther*, French trans, Mazoyer, Paris, 1930, 96.

³⁸ CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, 221-222.

³⁹ CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, 221-222.

⁴⁰ Cf. André DUVAL, «Quelques idées du Bx. Jean d'Avila sur le ministère pastoral et la formation du clergé,» *La Vie Spirituelle. Supplément* (Aug. 1948), 121-153.

⁴¹ Cf. Karl BARTH, *Parole de Dieu et parole humaine*, Paris, 1933, 128-129.

Congar compares Lammenais and Lacordaire. Both are geniuses, both pioneers and creative spirits, the first more in the order of intellectual intuitions, the second more in the order of living religious movements. After the condemnation of their diary, *L'Avenir*, Lammenais clung to his ideas and quickly broke off with the Church. Lacordaire accepted the Church as it was. In December 1833, Lammenais completed in his heart a final break with the Church, while in early 1834, Lacordaire began the lectures of *Stanislaus College*, the seed of his Notre Dame lectures which themselves became the germ of so many fruitful results. Lacordaire follows a pastoral and apostolic trajectory, taking the path of reform through holiness and conversion. Instinctively, he first practiced the rule established by Möhler: "The Christian must not try to perfect Christianity, but rather want to perfect himself in Christianity"⁴².

There is the same difference between Lammenais and Lacordaire that exists between a systematic mentality adopted towards and against all others (which becomes strengthened by the opposition they face), on the one hand, and a concrete priestly point of view, docile to authority and looking for opportunities to introduce the most good possible, on the other hand⁴³.

In 1968, in the second edition of *True and False Reform*, Congar wrote:

[T]he great good fortune of contemporary reforming tendencies is that they have been born out of the concrete experience of the church, out of the needs of pastoral life and above all of the Christian apostolate. [...] Our present experience of a successful reform is extremely clarifying. Vatican II has not betrayed these principles. It has been at once both a pastoral council and a council of reform⁴⁴.

b. Remain in Communion with the Whole Church

The second condition for a true reform without schism is, in Congar's view, staying in communion with the whole Church. However, there is a positive development here, a clarification about the idea of communion. It is the connecting element with the whole, the idea that in order to avoid deviation in the fulfillment of a prophetic mission or reform activity, you must remain in living contact with the whole body of the Church.

⁴² Johann Adam MÖHLER, *L'unité dans l'Église ou le principe du catholicisme d'après l'esprit des Pères des trois premiers siècles de l'Église*, Unam Sanctam 2, Paris, Cerf, 1938, trans. André de Lilienfeld, § 39, 123. Originally published as *Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*. Tübingen: Heinrich Laupp, 1825. Compare this with what Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa said as the papal legate of Pope Nicholas V to the emperor, when he was sent to promote Church reform: "It doesn't pertain to men to change religion; rather, it is religion's job to change men" (cited by L. PASTOR, *Histoire des papes*, vol. II, 3rd ed., 1907, 100).

⁴³ CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, 223-224.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 224.

The Whole Truth Is Grasped Only in Communion with the Whole Church

As a great admirer of Möhler, Congar considers that some important perspectives in Möhler's thinking help to substantiate, build and develop this idea. Möhler's key idea is that of vital faith, like vital human experience, depends on the action of the Holy Spirit in us. Moreover, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love and brotherly communion whose task is not, strictly speaking, to clarify this or that issue. The work of the Spirit is to enliven and actualize the Body of Christ. Moreover, the conditions for the gifts of the Spirit (we could even say for the work of the Spirit) are essentially communal. The Spirit operates in the mutual love of the faithful as a Spirit of brotherly love and communion. True faith does not exist without brotherly communion⁴⁵.

What gives rise to the Church, as Möhler says, is that "no one can live a Christian life or be at home in his religion without the influence of the community of faithful enlightened by the Holy Spirit"⁴⁶. Möhler was pleased to show that the apostles received the Holy Spirit only when they were "gathered in the same place, with one heart forming a single gathering of brothers"⁴⁷. He drew the implications of this idea, using a formula that shows how great minds always have a drop of poetry: "As part of an organic whole, believers are shielded from deception only when thinking and desiring in accordance with the mind and the heart of all"⁴⁸.

Only through communion with the whole body, which is subject to the guidance of the magisterium, can one understand a truth in its entirety. It is clearly impossible for individuals to know and confess the whole truth by themselves. Someone would have perceived this or that element of truth, but not another. Someone might have been struck by one aspect, but did not see all the implications and consequences of what he discovered and began to promote. However, what they do not know on their own, they can know through others. When we are in communion with the whole body, we have the benefit of the corrections, clarifications and fullness that the whole body offers us effortlessly, simply by virtue and under the influence

⁴⁵ Ibid., 229-230.

⁴⁶ MÖHLER, *L'unité dans l'Église*, p. 18. Möhler's view corresponds exactly to the ancient meaning of the word *catholic* according to which the Catholic is essentially someone who belongs to the one Church that extends throughout the world.

⁴⁷ Johann Adam MÖHLER, *La Symbolique, Ou Exposition Des Contrariétés Dogmatiques Entre Les Catholiques Et Les Protestants D'après Leurs Confessions De Foi Publiques*, trans. Lachat, § 37, vol. II, 9. Originally published as *Symbolik oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften*, Mainz 1832.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 11.

of communion. Because of the unity of the body, what others have, but I do not, it belongs also to me and works for my benefit. What I can neither understand, nor realize, nor even explicitly formulate or retain by myself, I can subscribe to in the whole body with which I am in communion. St. Augustine says that every Christian speaks all languages, as they are in union with the Church that speaks them all⁴⁹. The fullness of truth is found only in the whole body. Further, in communion with the whole body, people have an understanding of the truth that is superior to what they might think personally by themselves. We could interpret *Ephesians* 3:18-19 in this sense⁵⁰.

Two days before he died, Luther wrote these lines, the last writing we have from him, in which the same idea is remarkably exposed:

Nobody can understand Virgil's *Bucolics* without being a pastor for five years; nobody can understand his *Georgics* without being laborer for five years, nobody can understand what Cicero wrote in his *Letters* without being involved in running a country for twenty years. Let nobody think that they grasp the Holy Scriptures as they should, if they have not governed the churches for a hundred years with Elijah and Elisha, with John the Baptist, Christ and the Apostles...⁵¹

Congar commented that Luther's analysis was correct and Luther, who spoke against the sacraments, would have profited more closely following this scrutiny. How can a man, even a great religious genius, completely rethink Christianity all by himself? That is impossible. You cannot understand the Scriptures as you should, you cannot understand the precise truth and especially in its fullness (it affects another), unless you are the contemporary, the disciple, the companion of Jesus Christ, the prophets and the apostles, that is, if you are not in the community with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church⁵².

c. *Having Patience with Delays*

The third condition for a reform without a schism is having patience with delays. In all reform movements, impatience threatens to spoil everything making an ambivalent initial inspiration evolve into a sectarian movement. The innovator, whose reform turns into schism, lacks patience. He does not respect the slowness of either God or the Church, or the delays

⁴⁹ ST. AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 267, no. 4, PL 38:1231.

⁵⁰ CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, 230-231.

⁵¹ MARTIN LUTHER, Feb. 16, 1546: *Briefwechsel*, ed. Enders, vol. XVII, cited by Congar in *True and False Reform*, 231.

⁵² CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, 231.

that come in everyone's life. He moves with a kind of obstinate and exasperated logic toward "all or nothing" solutions, in which viable possibilities are rejected along with the problems. For a time, the reformer asks the Church to grant his requests immediately or he will leave. The heretical innovator does not know how to wait for an idea to mature; rather he launches his idea, pushing it right away and inflexibly to its consequences. By doing so, such people not only run the risk of failing to achieve the change they seek, but spoil for others the possibilities of change that might have occurred. So many times impatience or excess has seriously damaged causes in the Church which, in themselves, were perfectly appropriate. For example, in the history of the granting of Communion under both types in Bohemia, the impatience of the *Utraquists* and their exaggerations made a favorable result more difficult⁵³.

The nature of patience and its role

If the spirit of reform is to remain in the Church, then it must be patient. By this Congar means much more than the passage of time or an attitude of timing. It takes a spiritual and mental disposition to understand the meaning and necessity of delays. This is a kind of spiritual humility and flexibility that is aware of imperfections and even deadly compromises. Jean Guitton believed that he could characterize Catholic and Protestant attitudes to the reform, respectively, by a sense of fullness, on the one hand, and a search for purity, on the other.⁵⁴ Congar assesses the assertion as correct regarding a phenomenology of behavior. However, he believes that something more remains to be explained.

Congar willingly accepts that the Catholic Church and the Reformation, in terms of the content of their claims, represent a wisdom perspective on the one hand, and a voluntarist or personalist-existential idea of God on the other. They are temperamentally opposed to how their believers receive or find their religion. On the one hand, it is a religion of life in its fullness, and on the other, a religion that seeks purity. In this way, Protestantism is more intellectual than Catholicism. An idea can be pure, but reality and life cannot be. So it is clear that this condition of patience is related to the first of the conditions outlined above – the submission of the intellectual and systematic point of view to the pastoral⁵⁵.

⁵³ Ibid. 265-266.

⁵⁴ Jean GUITTON, *Difficultés de croire*, Paris, 1948, pp. 230f.

⁵⁵ CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, p. 266.

The Church leaders are responsible not to be too patient

Congar, widely acknowledged as a great historian of the Church, claims that from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there was an evolving awareness that the Church was lost if it would not reform herself. Everything possible has been said to excuse the popes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This is not the place to judge them or judge the importance of their apologies. Catholic historians – people like Pastor and Baudrillart – have argued extenuating circumstances existed for them: the fifteenth century popes felt pressed for time. They were to strengthen the internal constitution of the Church, shaken by the great schism and conciliar theories, to warn of the danger from the Turks, to check the independence of the Holy See by strengthening the pontifical state, and to welcome both moderate humanism and the renaissance of the arts... There is much truth in all this. But what significance can ‘extenuating circumstances’ have when the popes did nothing decisive to avoid the tragedy? All this cannot and must not distract from the salutary lesson to be learned from the facts⁵⁶.

Those in charge of running an organization do not like things being questioned. Novelty always seems dangerous to them, and reformers inopportune, indeed troublesome. In fact, the impatience of the reformers quite often risks ruining everything. The impatience of the reformers does not take into account the delays necessary for the transformation to take place, not mechanically or externally, but arising from the deep energies of a founding principle in order that the organism may not destroy itself. Popular wisdom, however, knows that the best can be the enemy of the good. The Church is determined in favor of good, and does not receive good unless it builds up more than it risks tearing down. But it is also necessary to understand the impatience of those who find themselves employed on the front lines, where the Church is in contact with a terribly demanding world. They feel that time is running out and that it is not they who are ahead of their time, but their time is ahead of the Church⁵⁷.

These front-line prophets must feel the truth of Hezekiah’s prophetic message to Isaiah, saying, “Children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth” (2 Kgs 19:3; Is 37:2; cf. Is 26:17-18). We can only urge reformers not to be too impatient if we ask the guardians of tradition not to be too impatient with them! We must ask the overseers to be aware of the pressure of the people’s demands, which threaten to explode one day because they have been held in check for too long. We need to ask them to confront their procrastination with people’s sense of urgency

⁵⁶ Ibid., 288.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

about the needs, with an understanding of the signs of the times; not to support lies, mediocrity or routine practices that scandalize believers. Saint Paul's warning: "Fathers, do not be angry with your children" (Eph 6:4), is addressed to all those who have received, for whatever reason, the responsibility and name of "fathers".

*d. Genuine Renewal through a Return to the Principle of Tradition
(Not through the Forced Introduction of Some "Novelty")*

In Congar's opinion there are only two possible ways to accomplish the renewal or updating⁵⁸. You can either make normative the new element you want to present, or take as normative the existing reality that needs to be updated or renewed. In both cases, it means bringing an existing reality together with a new element that you want to emphasize to achieve some kind of unity.

For example, this could mean joining Catholic doctrine with an idea brought to light by human effort, it could also mean the linking of the liturgy inherited from the past to certain new forms required by present needs, or it could mean the union of Catholicism with the inculturation (*mentalité indigène*) necessary for a new Christendom. In these different cases you may devote your energies chiefly to the new element which remains external, at least for the time being; or you can focus on the reality of the Church you seek to update. Depending on the choice made, you will end up with either a mechanical update, that risks becoming both a "novelty" and a schismatic reform, or a true "renewal" (a true "development") which is a reform *in and of* the Church – a reform without schism⁵⁹.

Another way of saying this is to refer to the "twice-born" category. The second birth of the "prophet" or reformer must take place *in the Church*. Whatever the source of the motivating shock that causes the need to change (usually it comes from the world, that is from outside of the Church), when we look for principles and criteria in the stage of integration, we must study the Catholic Tradition and not turn back to masters outside of Tradition. This was the case both for liberalism, which the Church condemned, and for modernism. In fact, what modernism took as its principle (which it inherited from the 18th century) was not so much *development*, but rather "the perfectibility of Christianity," that is, its progressive transformation

⁵⁸ The same idea is supported by J. GUITTON, *La pensée moderne et le catholicisme*, vol. III: *La pensée de M. Loisy*, Aix 1936, 57-59. However Congar arrived at this idea by another route, namely, reflection on the problem of ecumenism. Cf. *True and False Reform*, 291, n. 193.

⁵⁹ CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, 292. Emphasize Congar's.

thanks to additions from outside its given nature. It is something totally different from development⁶⁰.

Critical Evaluation of Congar's proposal for Reform

Gabriel Flynn and Jean-Pierre Jossua consider *Vraie et fausse réforme* (*True and False Reform*) as Congar's "most original book and the most important."⁶¹ Flynn also thinks that Congar's program for reform "is consonant with a renewal of the Spirit"⁶². However, Flynn and Jossua carefully avoid saying that the theology of reform is the most important or the all-comprehensive theme in Congar's ecclesiology. Their claims are well founded since the theme of reform and the dialectic of structure-life used by Congar needs to be interpreted in a specific context and as a response to specific issues that Congar had in mind when he wrote the book. He himself said that he used the dialectic of structure-life only occasionally and "essentially and primarily to respond to the problem of true and false reform"⁶³. One should not try, therefore, to present Congar's ecclesiology only on the basis of structure and life.

Congar himself clarifies this: "By structure-life I meant, ultimately, *jus divinum*/relative historical forms. But I did not think that I was denying grace and spiritual animation to what I called «structure»"⁶⁴. This constitutes the hermeneutical key for a correct understanding of Congar's theology of reform. The question, to which the dialectic of structure and life responds, is not whether the structure includes charisms and other forms of ministry, but rather what is and what is not reformable in the Church.

With this hermeneutical key in mind, one can assess the dialectic of structure and life from a pneumatological perspective. In other words, the questions asked are what can and what cannot be said regarding the role of the Spirit. First, the structure is irreformable precisely because of the Holy Spirit's habitual dwelling in the Church. It is the Spirit together with Christ that guarantees efficacy and holiness to the Church's structure. Second, what does not belong strictly to the structure is fallible and reformable, but even in this case an invocation of the Spirit is needed for a true renewal. Flynn synthesizes this pneumatological dimension of reform saying that "[b]y making the Holy Spirit the fundamental criterion for

⁶⁰ Ibid., 292-293.

⁶¹ Gabriel FLYNN, *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 32, Louvain, Peeters Press; Dudley, MA: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005, 133, n. 113. J.-P. Jossua's words are quoted from a personal letter to G. Flynn.

⁶² Ibid., 101 and 133.

⁶³ Yves CONGAR, Forward [sic], in MacDonald, *Ecclesiology of Yves Congar*, XXII.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

reform, Congar gives his most adequate statement of what is required for a legitimate Church reform”⁶⁵.

The role of the Spirit is to make the Church holy with regard to her formal principles but also through his call for reform in the life of the Church affected by sin and failures. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is the principle of reform in the Church, meaning that it is the Spirit’s work to keep the community of believers in communion with the whole Church. “The Spirit’s work is to enliven and actualize the Body of Christ. Further, the conditions for the Spirit’s gifts (we might even say for the Spirit’s work) are essentially communal”⁶⁶.

3. The four conditions for authentic reform are transferable to the peoples of the Black Sea Region in their historical development

It is common knowledge in theology that, beginning with Augustine and especially with the Second Vatican Council, the Church perceives herself as a people, more precisely, the People of God⁶⁷. As a people the Church has her own culture, Tradition and traditions, institutions and beliefs. But these are constitutive elements for peoples. Therefore, since there is a resemblance between the People of God and other peoples, it is my opinion that four conditions necessary for the Church in her search of reform without a schism can be transferred to other peoples, including the peoples from the Black Sea Region, in their historical development.

My only expertise is in the field of theology. Therefore, my limits impede me to see the concrete applications in the fields of sociology, politics, diplomacy etc. However, it is my conviction that by explaining the conditions of a true reform in the Church, this article could lay the bases for changes in present societies around the Black Sea. I believe that the reader can draw his or her own conclusions that could go far more beyond the limits of my applications.

The first condition, expressed by Congar, is the primacy of charity and of pastoral concern. For the peoples in the Black Sea region it would be very helpful if, in their social development and in the present challenging situation, they would focus their humanity. The changes that are desired in order to improve their situations should not focus only on a change of

⁶⁵ FLYNN, *Yves Congar’s Vision of the Church*, p. 172.

⁶⁶ CONGAR, *True and False Reform*, 229-30. Cf. PAULET, *The Holy Spirit as the Principle of Ecclesial Unity, Catholicity, Apostolicity And Holiness in the Thought of Yves Congar*, 234-235.

⁶⁷ THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, Chapter Two.

society and institutions, but on attention to the value of human dignity. The citizens living in this region should be aware that criticism for the sake of criticism itself is not helpful nor productive, but rather criticism should have as aim the improvement of society. When we focus on the common good of people rather than on criticism, chances for a real progress are increasing.

The second condition of a true reform is to remain in communion with the whole Church. Communication between individual parts of the Church and the whole Church is a key to a true reform. This principle can be applied to the peoples around the Black Sea and it goes in two directions. First, giving attention to a more cosmopolitan or universal civilization would challenge the peoples to reconsider their approach to others. For instance, in Romania, particularly in rural areas, there are still wide scale prejudice against foreigners. When Romanians are exposed to a more pluralistic experience through traveling, through encounters with foreigners, through education and communication of ideas, then they will hopefully revise these in-built prejudices and consider the foreigners as equal to themselves. Or, even more,—I dare to hope—we could think of foreign presence in our country as an enrichment to Romanian society and culture.

The second direction of the principle of communion with the whole is the fact that the center could and should learn from periphery. This principle is very dear to Pope Francis. That is the reason for which, for example, he creates cardinals from nations that are smaller in numbers and traditionally they have never had a cardinal from their people. The message is that we should be attentive to people who live in peripheries and as minorities because, due to their difficult situations, they learned valuable lessons which can be very useful to the whole Church or the whole of society. Again, I have a dream that larger and powerful nations will pay attention to smaller (but not insignificant) nations and, by doing so, they will learn important lessons for a better and peaceful cohabitation.

The third condition is having patience with delays. This is true in the sense that new ideas need time to mature and be assimilated in a deep and true way by the Church. However, I would like to call attention rather to the second part of this principle: the Church leaders are responsible not to be too patient. So are the leaders of nations when basic human rights are in danger. No list can be exhaustive here. Therefore, only a few examples will be provided. When there is still domestic violence, corruption to all levels but especially among the people in government, physical punishments of students in schools, violation of women's right and of religious rights (including equal treatment of all religions within a society), then the need for immediate and effective measures is urgent. Delays in these circumstances

should no longer be excused. However, attention should be given to avoid excesses of zeal in the correction of these abuses so that we should not replace one abuse with another.

Finally, the fourth condition for reform is that genuine renewal takes place through a return to the principle of tradition (not through the forced introduction of some “novelty”). Here, we are dealing with the fear that many people might face losing their own identity if any change occurs. Out of this anxiety people can confuse Tradition with traditions. As Yves Congar explained, when we confuse the means with the goal, we definitely are in need of reform.

I would like to return now to the example used in the beginning of this article: the use of the spoon for Holy Communion. Nicolae Preda claims that the use of the spoon for Communion is part of the Tradition, therefore it cannot be changed⁶⁸ even though he recognizes that this practice “appeared in the 8th-9th centuries, first in Antioch and Jerusalem, and thereafter became widespread, in the 11th – 12th centuries, throughout the Orthodox East”⁶⁹. In my opinion this is a clear instance when a practice that belongs to the life of the Church (a tradition or a venerable custom) is considered as part of the structure of the Church (Tradition). It is a situation in which the means (the spoon) are confused with the goals (the Holy Communion). In conclusion, the main reason for keeping the spoon for the Holy Communion could be the fear of losing the Eastern Orthodox identity.

But fear damages the truth, impedes the true development and kills the spirit. The only reasonable and sound solution is renewal, reform, according to the four conditions for a genuine reform presented by Congar. Keeping the Tradition and changing the traditions (the customs) is a healthier path to follow recommended to us by common sense and faith. The result will be a communion between people, a society governed by understanding and peace between people and nations.

As Christians and also as citizens of the Black Sea Region we should make great efforts, pray and hope that God may free us from the nostalgia for the past and the fear of the future.

⁶⁸ Nicolae PREDĂ, “Împărtășirea credincioșilor de-a lungul timpului -între Tradiție și actualitate”, in *Revista Românească de Studii Axiologice* 2, Anul 1 (2020) 71.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.