

THE CONTRIBUTION OF YVES CONGAR'S THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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[The author highlights one of the primary contributions of Yves Congar's pneumatology. In contrast to early-20th-century Roman Catholic theology that divorced reflection on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the human person from a systematic ecclesiology, Congar developed a theology of personal indwelling that was inseparable from a theology of the Church. The author then illustrates the fruitfulness of Congar's approach by using his theology constructively to address the postconciliar discussion as to whether the Catholic Church is a hierarchy or a democracy.]

FRENCH DOMINICAN YVES CONGAR (1904–1995) expressed a desire to be an Aeolian harp upon which the Spirit of God would blow, releasing harmonious melodies.¹ His life of dedicated prayer, service, and scholarship were all signs of his fidelity to this calling. Indeed, Congar was not only an instrument of the Spirit of God, but also a theologian of the Spirit. Years before pneumatology became a prominent topic in Roman Catholic theology, he was addressing the theology of the Holy Spirit in many of his books and articles.² This work culminated in the three volume *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* and the subsequent monograph *The Word and the Spirit*.³ Congar believed that it is more important to live in the Spirit than to try to

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¹ Yves M.-J. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983) 1.x.

² A complete bibliography of Congar's books and articles totals over 1700 entries. See P. Quattrocchi, "Bibliographie générale du Père Yves M.-J. Congar," in Jean-Pierre Jossua, *Le Père Congar: La théologie au service du Peuple de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1967) 213–72; Aidan Nichols, "An Yves Congar Bibliography 1967–1987," *Angelicum* 66 (1989) 422–66.

³ *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint*, 3 vols. (Paris: Cerf, 1979–80); English translation (ET): *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols., trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983; Crossroad, 1997); *La Parole et le Souffle* (Paris: Desclée, 1984); ET: *The Word and the Spirit*, trans. David Smith (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986).

articulate the Spirit's mystery, and he stressed that our theologies of the Spirit will inevitably be inadequate.⁴ Nonetheless, he maintained that we must not underestimate the importance of theological efforts, and he himself has left a significant theological legacy. This article first describes the historical context of Congar's work and then highlights one of the primary contributions of his theology of the Holy Spirit: the reintegration of pneumatology, ecclesiology, and theological anthropology. My article concludes with an illustration of the fruitfulness of Congar's approach, using the paradigm he provided to reflect on the current discussion as to whether the Church should be a hierarchy or a democracy.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The magnitude of Congar's accomplishment stands out with particular force when his theology of the Holy Spirit is read in contrast to the late-19th and early-20th-century Roman Catholic theology that he inherited. The ecclesiology of this period paid minimal attention to pneumatology. This is clearly evident in the neo-Scholastic theological manuals used in seminaries in the decades prior to the Second Vatican Council. In some purely juridical ecclesiologies of this genre, Congar observed with chagrin, "the Holy Spirit is not even mentioned."⁵ Those *de Ecclesia* treatises that did mention the Spirit did so in limited fashion. Typically they discussed the activity of the Spirit only as the guarantee of the authenticity of the tradition and the authority of the acts of the magisterium. The widely used *Brevior synopsis theologiae dogmaticae* by Adolphe Tanquerey, for example, contains only four references to the Holy Spirit in the section of the manual entitled "On the Church of Christ"; the Spirit is mentioned twice in the sub-section "On the Infallibility of the Apostolic College and the Gathered Episcopacy," once under the heading "The Infallibility of Peter and the Roman Pontiff," and once in the article "On the Exceptional Holiness and Inexhaustible Fecundity of the Catholic Church."⁶ Tanquerey's manual, like other neo-Scholastic ecclesiologies, did not provide a sustained and systematic reflection on the activity of the Holy Spirit in the

⁴ Congar, *I Believe* 2.92.

⁵ "The Council as an Assembly and the Church as Essentially Conciliar," in *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Studies on the Nature and Role of the Church in the Modern World*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 44–88, at 45. "In the domain of the thematized, systematized thought," Congar wrote elsewhere in conclusion to a survey of Catholic ecclesiology in recent centuries, "there was not a pneumatological ecclesiology" ("Pneumatology Today," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 167 [1973] 435–49, at 439).

⁶ Adolphe Tanquerey, *Brevior synopsis theologiae dogmaticae* (Paris: Desclée, 1952; orig. ed. 1931) 103–4, 115, and 123.

sacraments, life, and mission of the entire Church.⁷ “In the domain of thematized, systematized thought,” Congar commented, “there was not a pneumatological ecclesiology.”⁸

This is not to say that the Roman Catholic theology of this period had no operative pneumatology at all. From the 1880s through the 1950s, Catholic theology devoted much attention to the indwelling of the Spirit in the human soul. Professional theological journals carried on extensive deliberations about the divine indwelling and the theology of appropriations, while neo-Scholastic theological manuals discussed the indwelling of the Spirit in the human person and the consequent bestowal of spiritual gifts and fruits.⁹ In Tanquerey’s *Brevior synopsis theologiae dogmaticae*, for example, references to the Spirit are much more prominent in the treatise on grace than in the section “On the Church of Christ.” In *de Gratia*, Tanquerey explains that the Spirit is poured forth and inheres in the hearts of the justified, regenerates and renovates the soul, makes us adopted children of God and temples of the Holy Spirit, is present to varying degrees in different persons, bestows the gifts of the Spirit, and illumines the intellect.¹⁰ Notably, however, this theology of the indwelling Spirit has no evident bearing on the preceding treatise on the Church.

This separation of a theology of personal indwelling from systematic ecclesiology was characteristic not only of neo-Scholastic theological manuals but also of more popular spiritual writings. Britain’s Cardinal Henry Edward Manning (1808–1892), known for his devotion to the Holy Spirit, wrote in the *Internal Mission of the Holy Ghost* (1875):

Now God the Holy Ghost has the office of our sanctification; and the office of the Sanctifier is twofold. There is the work of the Holy Ghost in every individual soul from the beginning of the world; and that work of sanctification in each individual soul will continue to the end of the world. There is also the work of the Holy Ghost in the Mystical Body of Christ, that is His Church, which office began from the day of Pentecost, and will continue to the second advent of the Son of God.¹¹

⁷ The most common reference to the Holy Spirit in the neo-Scholastic treatises *de Ecclesia* was the description of the Spirit as the soul of the Mystical Body of Christ. There was little reflection, however, as to what this means concretely in the life, structure, and mission of the Church.

⁸ Congar, “Pneumatology Today” 439.

⁹ For bibliography on divine indwelling and the theology of appropriations, see Peter F. Chirico, *The Divine Indwelling and Distinct Relations to the Indwelling Persons in Modern Theological Discussion* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1960).

¹⁰ Tanquerey, *Brevior synopsis* 516–17 and 510. Tanquerey also addressed these and other related topics in his widely used *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, trans. Herman Branderis (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1930).

¹¹ Manning, *The Internal Mission of the Holy Ghost* (London: Burns and Oates, 1875) 2–3.

Manning's purpose in this book, he continued, was not to speak of the second or corporate office of the Spirit but only of his operation "in the souls of men, one by one."¹² Hence he undertook a lengthy exposition of the Spirit as source of grace and of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity; of the bequest of divine filiation; of the seven gifts of fear, piety, fortitude, knowledge, counsel, understanding, and wisdom; of the fruits celebrated by Paul in Galatians 5:22; and of perfection in the Beatitudes. True to his intent to consider only the work of the Spirit in the souls of individual persons, Manning did not explicate the ecclesiological implications of the Spirit's graces, gifts, and fruits. He reserved his discussion of the Spirit in the Church for *The Temporal Mission of the Holy Ghost* (1865) where he described the Spirit primarily as the sanctifier of the Church and the guarantor that the Church can "never err in enunciating or declaring the revealed knowledge which it possesses."¹³ Manning did not draw upon his analysis of the work of the Spirit in the human soul to elaborate a more complete ecclesiology.

Manning's work, in Congar's judgment, "does not constitute a pneumatology."¹⁴ It lacked a developed account of the activity of the Spirit in the Church in all its manifold dimensions. Manning's approach, nonetheless, was representative of most Roman Catholic pneumatology in the late-19th and early-20th century.¹⁵ The elaboration of a detailed account of the indwelling of the Spirit in the human soul, divorced from a systematic ecclesiology, is found not only in Manning's *Internal Mission of the Holy Ghost* but also in other popular spiritual writings of this period. Barthélemy Froget's *De l'inhabitation du S. Esprit dans les âmes justes* (1890) is another prominent example. This popular work, which drew heavily on Thomas Aquinas, went through numerous editions in French and was also translated into English.¹⁶ Froget's emphasis was the activity of the Spirit in the individual soul; like Manning, he addressed issues of grace, divine filiation,

¹² Ibid. 2.

¹³ Manning, *The Temporal Mission of the Holy Ghost* (London: Burns and Oates, 1909; orig. ed. 1865) 3.

¹⁴ Congar, *I Believe* 1.156.

¹⁵ Ibid. 1.155–57. See also Congar, "Actualité de la pneumatologie," in *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, ed. P. José Saraiva Martins (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983) 15–28, at 15. On the influence of Manning in North America, see Joseph P. Chinnici, O.F.M., *Devotion to the Holy Spirit in American Catholicism* (New York: Paulist, 1985) 16–34.

¹⁶ Barthélemy Froget, *De l'inhabitation du S. Esprit dans les âmes justes* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1890). Bede Jarret published a summary of Froget's work as *The Abiding Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Soul* (New York: Cathedral Library Association, 1918; Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957). Sydney Raemers later published the complete translation *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just* (Baltimore: Carroll, 1950).

the infused virtues, and the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. There are references to the sacraments, and heaven is described as a feast; an ecclesial context is thus clearly presumed. Nonetheless, as the title of his work suggests, Froget's concern is the indwelling of the Spirit in the individual souls of the just, and it is assumed that this indwelling has no major implications for the organization and mission of the Church. This presumption is also characteristic of writings by subsequent authors such as G. F. Holden, *The Holy Ghost the Comforter* (1907); Edward Leen, *The Holy Ghost and His Work in Souls* (1937); *El Espiritu Santo* by Luis M. Martínez (1939); James Carroll, *God the Holy Ghost* (1940); and Hugh Francis Blunt, *Life with the Holy Ghost: Thoughts on the Gifts of the Holy Ghost* (1943).¹⁷

These were "years of famine," wrote Congar, in which "spiritual anthropology now seems to have been drawn off from ecclesiology; the legal structure is all-sufficient with its guaranteed administrative charisms."¹⁸ In this time of want, Congar found sustenance in his study of Scripture, the early Church, the theology of Thomas Aquinas, and the Orthodox tradition. These sources provided him with an alternative vision. The divorce of spiritual anthropology and ecclesiology that was customary in early-20th-century Roman Catholic theology was not characteristic of these other dimensions of the Christian tradition.

"In St. Paul's thought," Congar noted, "there is no opposition, no systematic and exclusive priority between the Church and the individual believer. Each needs the other and in them both the Holy Spirit is the principle of life."¹⁹ In Paul's letters, each person and the Church as a whole are a "Temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 2:19–22). In like vein, Congar's historical research uncovered no separation of spiritual anthropology and ecclesiology in the patristic period. He reflected:

Perhaps the greatest difference between ancient patristic ecclesiology and modern ecclesiology is that the former included anthropology, while the latter is merely the theory of a system, a book of public law; one may ask if the system requires men

¹⁷ G.F. Holden, *The Holy Ghost the Comforter* (London: Longmans, Green, 1907); Edward Leen, *The Holy Ghost and His Work in Souls* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937); Luis M. Martínez, *El Espiritu Santo* (Mexico City, 1939); ET: *The Sanctifier*, trans. M. Aquinas (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild, 1957); James Carroll, *God the Holy Ghost* (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1940); Hugh Francis Blunt, *Life with the Holy Ghost: Thoughts on the Gifts of the Holy Ghost* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1943).

¹⁸ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (London: Burns and Oates, 1966) 397.

¹⁹ Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple*, trans. Reginald Trevett (London: Burns and Oates, 1962) 153.

of a certain quality, or if it considers them interchangeable. The anthropology of patristic ecclesiology is that of a human communion, which finds its full authenticity in and through that communion, because in this way it rediscovers a resemblance to God. This is the meeting place of the anthropology and the ecclesiology, and it is this 'communicating humanity' which is the subject of the Church's actions and attributes. A tradition exists on this question that should one day be restored and infused with new life.²⁰

This synthetic quality of patristic theology was also characteristic of the work of Thomas Aquinas. Congar surmised as early in his own career as 1939 that Aquinas had acted deliberately when he wrote no separate treatise on the Church, for his ecclesiology was constituted precisely by his pneumatological anthropology and his Christology.²¹ Aquinas's pneumatology was not a theology of the third Person per se but rather "a certain dimension of ecclesiology in so far as this calls for or assumes a certain anthropology."²²

The seamless character of ecclesiology, theological anthropology and pneumatology that had been neglected by the Roman Catholic tradition was not forgotten by the Eastern Orthodox. In October 1963 as the schema on the Church was being prepared at the Second Vatican Council, Congar dined with Orthodox theologians Nikos Nissiotis and Alexander Schmemmann. "If we were to prepare a treatise *De Ecclesia*," they commented in the context of a discussion on the Council proceedings, "we would draft a chapter on the Holy Spirit, to which we would add a second chapter on Christian anthropology, and that would be all."²³ Congar was very impressed by this comment and recounted this story repeatedly.²⁴

Congar's ecumenical outreach and theological research gave him a vision that provided an alternative to the dominant forms of late-19th and early-20th-century Roman Catholic pneumatology. In both the theological manuals used in seminaries and in more popular works of spirituality, spiritual anthropology and ecclesiology had been disjoined. In ecumenical dialogue and historical scholarship, by contrast, Congar discovered a tra-

²⁰ Congar, "The Council as Assembly and the Church as Essentially Conciliar" 59. On this point, see also Congar's *Power and Poverty in the Church*, trans. Jennifer Nicholson (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964) 97.

²¹ Congar, "The Idea of the Church in St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 1 (1939) 331-59, at 348. See also 339 and 358.

²² Congar, "Le Saint-Esprit dans la théologie thomiste de l'agir moral," in *L'agire morale: Atti del Congresso internazionale: Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo Settimo Centenario* (Naples: Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1974) 5.9-19, at 5.16.

²³ Congar, *I Believe* 2.66.

²⁴ See Congar, "The Church: The People of God," *The Church and Mankind, Concilium* 1 (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist, 1964) 11-37, at 22 n. 13; "Preface" to Ignace de la Potterie and Stanislas Lyonnet, *La vie selon l'Esprit* (Paris: Cerf, 1965) 11; "Pneumatology Today" 435.

dition in which pneumatology was at once a theological anthropology and a theology of the Church. He firmly believed that this was a theological legacy that “should one day be restored and infused with new life.”²⁵

CONGAR’S THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Over the course of his lifetime and most notably within the books and articles written in the last decades of his life, Congar developed a contemporary Roman Catholic theology of the Holy Spirit that—like the theology of Paul, the patristic theologians, Aquinas, and the Orthodox—did not separate ecclesiology from spiritual anthropology. In contrast to the Roman Catholic theology that was dominant in his youth, Congar developed what he termed a “pneumatological anthropology” that was inseparable from what he called a “pneumatological ecclesiology.”²⁶ This accomplishment is one of the most significant contributions of his theology of the Holy Spirit. Congar’s prolific writings as a whole are known more for their historical breadth than for a rigorous systematization, and his work on the Holy Spirit is no exception. A reader, however, can systematically cull from his work the elements of the pneumatological anthropology and pneumatological ecclesiology that he advocated. Reflection on these two dimensions of his theology of the Holy Spirit demonstrates their inseparability.

Congar’s Pneumatological Anthropology

Congar grounded his anthropology in the biblical testimony that God made humankind in the divine image (Genesis 1:26). In his appropriation of this tradition, he emphasized the profoundly relational character of our human existence. The God in whose image we are made eternally begets the Word and spirates the Spirit of love. The divine persons exist with, through, and for one another.²⁷ Human persons made in the *imago Dei* exist likewise in a “being-toward” (*être-à*) one another and find fulfillment only in communion. We are destined to go beyond self in knowledge and love of another; most foundationally, we have an “in-built capacity to being

²⁵ Congar, “The Council as Assembly and the Church as Essentially Conciliar” 59.

²⁶ Congar used the term “pneumatological anthropology” in *The Word and Spirit* 122. He noted here that this phrase was also used by Nikos Nissiotis. Congar spoke of “pneumatological ecclesiology” (*une ecclésiologie pneumatologique*) in numerous essays; see “Actualité d’une pneumatologie,” *Proche orient chrétien* 23 (1973) 121–32, at 124. He also used the expression “*une pneumatologie ecclésiologique*.” See “Pneumatologie dogmatique,” in *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie*, ed. Bernard Lauret and François Refoulé (Paris: Cerf, 1982) 2.485–516, at 493.

²⁷ Congar, “La tri-unité de Dieu et l’Église,” *Vie spirituelle* 128 (1974) 687–703, at 693.

called by God.”²⁸ Hence Congar rejected the existentialist philosophies of Sartre and Camus who in his estimation failed to account for humanity’s creaturely dependence and transcendent openness toward God.²⁹ He contested the “mystique of sincerity” of Rousseau or Gide and Descartes’s reduction of the person to self-consciousness.³⁰ He was also critical of the individualism of some forms of Christian theology.³¹ A relational emphasis colors all of Congar’s anthropology.

Congar also accentuated the eminently active character of the human person. He was schooled in the thought of Thomas Aquinas who spoke of God as pure act and attributed to human creatures made in the *imago Dei* a share in God’s activity and causality.³² Congar expressed Aquinas’s insight with the repeated affirmation that persons are subjects who are gifted with freedom. He emphasized that we are subjects not to exalt an individual subjectivity, but to affirm that authentic and active relation with others requires recognition that human persons are not mere objects but active “centers of emotion and projects.”³³ Human freedom is not simply an individual freedom of choice but rather freedom for true relationships of mutuality and communion, relationships of active invitation to others and active receptivity to God.³⁴

Congar was acutely aware that sinfulness has obscured the divine image in which humanity was created. He disagreed with Luther’s severe account of human depravity, but did believe that sinfulness has distorted our existence. In his assessment, we have obstructed God’s desire for communion with us by turning to self rather than to God. All our relationships are consequently breached by conflict, contradiction, and separation.³⁵ We have abused our capacity for action and distorted our freedom, creating an opaque and tragic human society. Congar’s reflections on the fallen human

²⁸ Congar, “L’homme est capable d’être appelé,” *Vie spirituelle* 120 (1969) 377–84, at 391.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Congar, *The Wide World My Parish* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961) 140–41.

³¹ On individualism in Christian spirituality and ethics, see Congar, *Wide World My Parish* 6; “Interview,” in *The Crucial Questions on Problems Facing the Church Today*, ed. Frank Fehmers (New York: Newman, 1969) 10.

³² Aquinas discussed the participation of all creatures in God’s activity in *Summa contra gentiles* 3, chap. 69.14 and *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*) 1, q. 22, a. 3, c. He addressed the specifically human share in God’s causality in *ST* 2–2, Prologue.

³³ Congar, *Esprit de l’homme, Esprit de Dieu, Foi Vivante* 206 (Paris: Cerf, 1983) 38.

³⁴ See Congar, “L’homme est capable d’être appelé” 377.

³⁵ See Congar, *Wide World My Parish* 42 and 76. See also Congar’s lecture given at the meeting of the Responsables de la Fédération Française des Étudiants Catholiques, October 1958, “Religious Belief and the Life of the World,” in Congar, *Faith and Spiritual Life*, trans. A. Manson and L. C. Sheppard (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) 164–93, at 175.

condition, it should be noted, were not simply academic speculation but rather an articulation of his own life experience. As a child, he lived through the German invasion of France in World War I and as an adult he was held as a prisoner by the Germans for five years during World War II. Both experiences had a formative influence on his life-course and theology.³⁶

Congar believed that God desires to heal the fissures of our splintered humanity through the divine missions of the Word and the Holy Spirit. God not only desires to heal us but also invites us to partake of a divine life that exceeds all the capacities of human nature even in its most pristine form. Grace “sweeps on to [nature’s] perfection, a perfection beyond its intrinsic possibilities but not beyond its inefficacious desire.”³⁷ Our healing from sin and our perfection in grace require cleansing, conversion, and conformity to Jesus Christ in whom we become daughters and sons of God, a divine filiation that is adoptive but nonetheless a “real state.”³⁸ The same Holy Spirit who anointed Jesus in the waters of the Jordan sanctifies and deifies us. This, Congar believed, radicalizes our human capacity for knowledge and love, our relational orientation to God and others, and our activity and freedom. The Holy Spirit is, as Aquinas wrote, a “new life principle” who graces us with a supra-human participation in the activity of God. When the Spirit dwells in our hearts, we love God with the very love with which God loves us. This enables an absolute orientation to God that Congar described as holiness.³⁹ The Holy Spirit perfects our freedom such that there is a total coincidence of our own desire and will with that of God and we may cooperate in disciplined synergy with God’s grace.⁴⁰ We exercise the theological virtues and receive a panoply of spiritual gifts and fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). The Spirit binds us to God and to one an-

³⁶ See Congar, *Journal de la Guerre 1914–1918* (Paris: Cerf, 1997); Jean-Marie Le Guillou, “Yves Congar,” in *Bilan de la théologie du XXe siècle*, ed. Robert Vander Gucht and Herbert Vorgrimler (Paris: Casterman, 1970) 2.791–805, at 2.797; Jean Puyo, *Une vie pour la vérité: Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar* (Paris: Centurion, 1975) 7 and 15.

³⁷ Congar, “The Church: Seed of Unity and Hope for the Human Race,” *Chicago Studies* 5 (1966) 25–39, at 30.

³⁸ Congar, *I Believe* 2.125. See also 2.217.

³⁹ On the love of God, see Congar, *I Believe* 2.59; “Pneumatologie dogmatique” 486 and 486, n. 2; “Aimer Dieu et les hommes par l’amour dont Dieu aime?” *Revue des études augustiniennes* 28 (1982) 86–99. On holiness as orientation to God, see Congar, *L’Église une, sainte, catholique et apostolique*, *Mysterium Salutis* 15 (Paris: Cerf, 1970) 125.

⁴⁰ Congar appropriated the term “synergy” from the Christian tradition of the East; he thought it expressed well the Western theology of human cooperation with grace. See Congar, *Esprit de l’homme* 21; *I Believe* 2.121.

other, fostering a communion in which we are truly members one of another.⁴¹ In the Spirit, even our corporeality is transformed.⁴² Ultimately, our divinization in the Spirit is an eschatological mystery, but even now as we live in expectation and longing, “the Spirit who dwells in our hearts is there himself as prayer, supplication and praise.”⁴³

Congar’s Pneumatological Ecclesiology

The eschatological mystery of our divinization, Congar emphasized, is inseparable from the mystery of the Church. Ecclesial life is both an expression of our new life in the Spirit and a means toward our transfiguration, for our fulfillment as creatures made in the divine image can be found only in communion with God and with others. In both the Gospel of John and the Epistles of Paul, he noted, the Spirit is promised and given to the Church.⁴⁴ “The Father will give *you* [plural] the Spirit” (John 14 and 16), Jesus promised, while Paul proclaimed that “the love of God is poured forth in *our* hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to *us*” (Romans 5:1–11).⁴⁵ For Congar, a pneumatological anthropology was inconceivable apart from a pneumatological ecclesiology—an account of the action of the Spirit in the ecclesial communion. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit is operative only within the life of the Church. To the contrary, Congar affirmed, the Holy Spirit is present wherever there is truth.⁴⁶ Baptized and professed Christians, however, must reflect on the gift of the Spirit in the context of a theology of the Church; an adequate theology of the Holy Spirit demands precisely the ecclesiological dimension that had been lacking in turn-of-the-century Roman Catholic theology. Congar insisted:

By pneumatology I mean something other than a simple dogmatic theology of the third Person. I also mean something more than, and in this sense different from, a profound analysis of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in individual souls and his sanctifying activity there. Pneumatology should, I believe, describe the impact, in the context of a vision of the Church, of the fact that the Spirit distributes his gifts as he wills and in this way builds up the Church. A study of this kind involves not simply a consideration of those gifts or charisms, but a theology of the Church.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Congar, “Pneumatologie dogmatique” 498. Reference is to Ephesians 4:25.

⁴² See Congar, *I Believe* 2.82.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 2.17.

⁴⁴ Congar, “Pneumatologie dogmatique” 496.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 496–97. Emphasis original.

⁴⁶ Congar, *I Believe* 2.219 with reference to Ambrose of Milan. Congar believed that the theological principle *extra Ecclesiam, nulla salus* does not limit the activity of the Spirit to the domain of the Church but rather affirms that the Church has an indispensable role to play in God’s plan of salvation. See his *Wide World My Parish* 93–154.

⁴⁷ Congar, *I Believe* 1.156.

Accordingly, Congar elaborated a “pneumatological ecclesiology,” a term he first used in 1973. This ecclesiology emphasizes that it is the Holy Spirit who together with Jesus Christ co-institutes the Church, empowers the Church’s sacraments and doxology, builds up the Church with charisms, and makes the Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

By the 1980s, Congar had moved from his former portrayal of the Spirit as the animator of the ecclesial structures established by Jesus Christ to the position that the Spirit is not simply the animator but also the co-institutor of the Church.⁴⁸ His conviction that the Church is co-instituted by the Spirit was a consequence of his growing emphasis on the non-duality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and a component of his pneumatological Christology.⁴⁹ He explained: “A pneumatological ecclesiology presupposes a pneumatological Christology, that is to say an appreciation of the role of the Spirit in the messianic life of Jesus, in the resurrection and glorification that have made him Lord and have caused the humanity hypostatically united to the eternal Son to pass from the *forma servi* to the *forma Dei*.”⁵⁰ Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit act inseparably to establish what Congar termed the ecclesial means of grace—the Word, the sacraments, and the apostolic ministry. The institution of these essential ecclesial elements occurred gradually throughout the apostolic era, and over the course of Christian history the Church is built upon this foundation through the assistance of the Spirit of the glorified Lord and the cooperation of the Christian faithful.⁵¹ Cooperation of the faithful is essential, for the Spirit

⁴⁸ On this point, see Joseph Famerée, *L’ecclésiologie d’Yves Congar avant Vatican II: Histoire et Église: Analyse et reprise critique* (Leuven: Leuven University, 1992) 451–52.

⁴⁹ Congar’s reflections on the relation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit merit an article of their own. For present purposes, I note only that there were significant changes in Congar’s conceptualization of this relation over the course of his lifetime. As Famerée observes, there is no dramatic “Copernican turn” in Congar’s theology but nonetheless a definitive movement from the Christocentrism of his preconciliar works toward the development of an integrated pneumatology and Christology (*L’ecclésiologie d’Yves Congar* 408, 418, 429). In *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (1979–80), Congar looked back critically at his *Tradition and Traditions* (1960–1963) and commented that in this publication “the pneumatological aspect, although it is very important, has been rather overshadowed by the Christological aspect” (*I Believe* 2.23, n. 16). Congar’s postconciliar writings advocate a pneumatological Christology to remedy this problem and to account for what Congar terms the “non-duality” of Christ and the Spirit. Critics nonetheless maintain that even Congar’s latter writings do not adequately develop a Spirit Christology. See for example Isaac Kizhakkeparampil, *The Invocation of the Holy Spirit as Constitutive of the Sacraments according to Cardinal Yves Congar* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1995) 147.

⁵⁰ Congar, “Pneumatologie dogmatique” 495–96.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 496.

does not violate but rather elevates our existence as free and active subjects. Hence Congar emphasized the centrality of initiative and renewal in a Church in which the Spirit and the human person act together in liberty.⁵² He stressed the importance of conciliar life and collegiality, and described reception as an active process of Church members who are not passive objects but persons in communion through the Holy Spirit of God.⁵³

The ongoing divine activity that builds up the Church is preeminently evident in the Church's sacramental and liturgical life. In the liturgy, Jesus Christ's redemptive actions are not simply historical deeds but presently efficacious events.⁵⁴ Through the sacraments, mortal human persons and earthly material elements are transformed into Christ's Body through the power of the Holy Spirit:

What we have here is an absolutely supernatural work that is both divine and deifying. The Church can be sure that God works in it, but, because it is God and not the Church that is the principle of this holy activity, the Church has to pray earnestly for his intervention as a grace. . . . [T]he Church does not in itself have any assurance that it is doing work that will 'well up to eternal life'; it has to pray for the grace of the one who is uncreated Grace, that is, the absolute Gift, the Breath of the Father and the Word. . . . 'I believe the holy Church' is conditioned by the absolute 'I believe in the Holy Spirit.' This dogma means that the life and activity of the Church can be seen totally as an epiclesis.⁵⁵

Hence Congar insisted: "Every action performed by the ministry calls for an epiclesis. Orthodox Christians are right when they say that the life of the Church is entirely epicletic."⁵⁶ The Church implores the Spirit of Christ in the prayer of epiclesis, and in gratitude the Church voices its praise and thanksgiving to God, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. All the eucharistic prayers in today's Roman Rite, Congar noted, end with this doxology: "Through him, with him, in him, *in the unity of the Holy Spirit*, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever."⁵⁷

The Church grows and thrives through the charisms of the Spirit given to

⁵² See Congar, "La tri-unité de Dieu" 695 and 698–99. Elsewhere Congar described the Church as a result of the synergy of the grace of God and the free activity of humanity (Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*, Unam Sanctam 72 [2nd ed.; Paris: Cerf, 1968] 97).

⁵³ On the pneumatological basis of conciliarity and collegiality see Congar, "Pneumatologie dogmatique" 500–501. On "reception" as an active process, see Congar, "La tri-unité de Dieu" 698; "La 'reception' comme réalité ecclésiologique," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 56 (1973) 369–403.

⁵⁴ See Congar, *I Believe* 3.271.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 2.46. On the importance of the epiclesis, see also Congar, "Le troisième article du Symbole," in *Dieu, Église, Société*, ed. Joseph Doré (Paris: Cerf, 1985) 287–301, at 300; *I Believe* 2.228–49 and 2.267–74.

⁵⁷ Congar, *I Believe* 2.224. Emphasis original.

the members of the ecclesial body. Charisms, Congar explained, are gifts of nature and of grace given for the fulfillment of the mission of the Church.⁵⁸ The Spirit awakens natural human talents—gifts for teaching, preaching, artistry, music, healing, justice advocacy, reconciliation, peace-making, and so forth—and elevates them to a new level of orientation toward God in the love and service of others. Charisms are given to all members of the Church and take many different forms. “The Church receives the fullness of the Spirit only in the totality of the gifts made by all Her members,” Congar wrote. “She is not a pyramid whose passive base receives everything from the apex.”⁵⁹ In the decades prior to Vatican II, charisms played little or no role in most Roman Catholic ecclesiology.⁶⁰ If theologians mentioned the charisms at all, they were considered only in terms of their contribution to personal spirituality and were not attributed any ecclesiological importance or value.⁶¹ Congar emphasized, to the contrary, that charisms are a contribution to the Church’s very constitution. As Gotthold Hasenhüttl explained, the charisms are an *Ordnungsprinzip* of the Church—a principle of ecclesial order and construction⁶²—a position Congar accepted with the qualification that Hasenhüttl’s theology must be placed in the proper context of the sacrament of orders and given christological balance.⁶³ Charisms contribute to the very constitution of the Church and consequently they do not, as is often presumed, stand in polar opposition to the ecclesial institution.⁶⁴

The Church’s many charisms are brought into communion by the power of the Holy Spirit who makes the Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. This communion, Congar explained, takes living roots in each person in a “strictly original and personal” way for the Spirit “penetrates all things without violating or doing violence to them.”⁶⁵ Indeed, the Holy Spirit

⁵⁸ Ibid. 2.26. Congar was critical of the use of the term “charism” within the charismatic movement where its meaning was limited to extraordinary gifts. See *I Believe* 2.612–63.

⁵⁹ Congar, “Pneumatology Today” 443. See also his, “Renewed Actuality of the Holy Spirit,” *Lumen* 28 (1973) 13–30, at 17–18.

⁶⁰ On Vatican II’s treatment of charisms, see Congar, “Renewed Actuality of the Holy Spirit” 16.

⁶¹ Congar “Pneumatology Today” 439.

⁶² Gotthold Hasenhüttl, *Charisma, Ordnungsprinzip der Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970). For Congar’s discussion of Hasenhüttl see “Pneumatology Today” 445; “Renewed Actuality of the Holy Spirit” 19; *Word and Spirit* 78–84.

⁶³ Congar, “Renewed Actuality of the Holy Spirit” 19; “Pneumatology Today” 445.

⁶⁴ On charism and institution, see Congar, *I Believe* 2.11.

⁶⁵ Yves Congar, “Unité, diversités, et divisions,” presentation for the Semaine des Intellectuels Catholiques, November 8, 1961, reprinted in Congar, *Sainte Église, Unam Sanctam* 41 (Paris: Cerf, 1963) 105–30, at 113. See also *I Believe* 2.17.

fosters communion among persons “by respecting and even stimulating their diversity.”⁶⁶ The communion of the Spirit is manifest in this rich catholicity, and Congar celebrated what he termed the quantitative catholicity evident in the Church’s geographic extension and the qualitative catholicity of the Church’s diversity of rites, prayers, languages, and theology. All members of this catholic communion are in continual need of post-baptismal purification and they struggle forward as the holy Church of sinners.⁶⁷ The true vocation of the entire people of God, nonetheless, is to be a hagiography, a sign of communion with God that discloses God’s holiness and reveals the reality and presence of another world.⁶⁸ This holiness is not an individual but rather an ecclesial reality, for there is an intercommunion of spiritual life that is the basis of the prayers for the departed, the baptism of infants, and the communion of saints.⁶⁹ Apostolicity, in like vein, is an ecclesial commission. Only within the apostolicity of the entire Church, Congar insisted, can “‘apostolic succession’ in the strict sense of the term, in other words, the succession of the bishops” take place.⁷⁰ Apostolic fidelity concerns not simply the office of the bishop but also the operation of the indwelling Spirit throughout the whole ecclesial body, the Body of Christ called to service, witness, suffering, and struggle.⁷¹ This fidelity is not only a faithfulness to a first-century origin but also a fidelity with a forward-looking sense and thrust, for apostolicity is conformity to Christ who is both Alpha and eschatological Omega.⁷²

The Inseparability of Pneumatological Anthropology and Pneumatological Ecclesiology

Clearly for Congar pneumatological anthropology and pneumatological ecclesiology are two closely interrelated dimensions of his theology of the Holy Spirit. Congar has not simply adopted an existing theology of divine indwelling and added to this a once neglected account of the Spirit’s activity in the Church. Rather, his spiritual anthropology is developed in the context of his theology of the Church, and his theology of the Church is

⁶⁶ Congar, *I Believe* 2.17.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 2.57; *L’Église*, 135. See also Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l’Église*; “Comment l’Église sainte doit se renouveler sans cesse,” *Irénikon* 34 (1961) 322–45; *Pour une Église servante et pauvre* (Paris: Cerf, 1963); “L’application à l’Église comme telle des exigences évangéliques concernant la pauvreté,” in *Église et pauvreté*, Unam Sanctam 57 (Paris: Cerf, 1965) 135–55; and “Péché et misères dans l’Église,” in *L’Église* 136–44.

⁶⁸ Congar, *I Believe* 2.58.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 2.59–61.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 2.45.

⁷¹ Congar, “Pneumatologie dogmatique” 500–501; *I Believe* 2.45.

⁷² Congar, *I Believe* 2.39.

dependent upon his spiritual anthropology. Congar's emphasis on the relational character of human existence, for example, unites his anthropology and his ecclesiology. Human persons exist in a being-toward one another and hence the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a necessarily interpersonal and ecclesial mystery. Human persons, in like vein, are created by God to be free and active subjects—not passive objects—and therefore an account of human activity and freedom must be incorporated into both a spirituality of divine indwelling and a theology of the Church. The inseparability of anthropology and ecclesiology in Congar's theology of the Holy Spirit is further evident in his frequent use of the term "communion" to describe the activity of the Spirit—an emphasis that is another mark of Congar's distinction from the pneumatology of some of his most immediate Roman Catholic predecessors. God has created and redeemed us as persons in communion, a mystery of divine indwelling that is fulfilled through the ecclesial body in the *koinōnia* of the Holy Spirit. Congar's synthetic vision is also manifest in his extensive use of the biblical concepts of the people of God, the Mystical Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. These biblical motifs that shape much of Congar's theology are simultaneously ecclesiological, anthropological, and pneumatological in character.⁷³ The result of this synthetic approach is a theology that is both ecclesologically sophisticated and spiritually rich. As Dennis Doyle observes, Congar's ecclesiology is a spirituality.⁷⁴

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CONGAR'S THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: ONE ILLUSTRATION

Yves Congar identified a serious weakness in Roman Catholic pneumatology—the divorce of spiritual anthropology from ecclesiology—and he drew from biblical, historical, and ecumenical sources to develop a theology of the Holy Spirit that could overcome this deficiency through the integration of what he termed a pneumatological anthropology and a pneumatological ecclesiology. His contribution brought new life to Roman Catholicism's theology of the Holy Spirit and, as such, contributes to a number of ongoing discussions in contemporary systematic theology. The

⁷³ See "The Mystical Body of Christ," in Congar, *The Mystery of the Church* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1960) 118–27; "L'Église Corps mystique du Christ," *Vie spirituelle* 64 (1941) 242–54; "The Church: The People of God," *Concilium* 1 (1964) 11–37; "Richesse et vérité d'une vision de l'Église comme 'peuple de Dieu'," *Les quatre fleuves* 4 (1975) 46–54; Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple*, trans. Reginald Trevett (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1962).

⁷⁴ Dennis Doyle, "Journet, Congar, and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997) 461–79, at 475; *Communion Ecclesiology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000) 51.

framework Congar has provided can help shape a contemporary Christian spirituality that is personal but not privatized—a spirituality of personal indwelling that is inseparable from the liturgical life of the Church and the mission of the Church to make manifest the presence of the kingdom of God in the world. Congar's theology of the Holy Spirit can also contribute to contemporary ecumenical dialogue and to a variety of discussions within Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Here I offer one illustration of the manner in which this theology of the Holy Spirit can be used constructively. Congar's reintegration of pneumatology, ecclesiology, and spiritual anthropology, I argue, can contribute to the ongoing discussion as to whether the Church is a "hierarchy" or a "democracy."

In the decades subsequent to the Second Vatican Council, discussion has ensued as to whether the Church should be democratically or hierarchically governed. Joseph Ratzinger believes that some persons have taken *Lumen gentium's* theology of the people of God too far. He is critical of programs of reform that "in place of all hierarchical tutelage will at long last introduce democratic self-determination into the Church."⁷⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar also critiques the idea that the Church is a democracy, and Walter Kasper stresses that if the Church is to be a trinitarian *communio* it must be hierarchically structured.⁷⁶ Other theologians, in contrast, hold that a full *aggiornamento* of the Church requires the implementation of precisely non-hierarchical forms of governance. Leonard Swidler advocates the establishment of democratic forms of government in the Catholic Church and the formulation of a Catholic Constitution.⁷⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is highly critical of ecclesial hierarchy and advocates instead a Church structured as a "discipleship of equals."⁷⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx, for his part, observes that throughout history the Church has adapted to the structures of the society in which it finds itself; the organization of the Church by gradations of power is one example of the cultural influence of the Roman Empire, feudalism, and Neoplatonic cosmologies on Catholicism, and such cultural influences and societal structures are not normative for the Church whose criterion is the life of Jesus Christ. According to the Gospels, there should be no structure of lordship amongst the disciples

⁷⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996) 139.

⁷⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Christology and Ecclesial Obedience," in *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995) 162; Walter Kasper, "The Church As Sacrament of Unity," *Communio* 14 (1987) 4–11, at 10–11.

⁷⁷ Leonard Swidler, *Toward a Catholic Constitution* (New York: Crossroad, 1996).

⁷⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

(Matthew 20:25–26; Mark 10:42–43; Luke 22:25). Although there is necessarily authority and leadership in the Church, Schillebeeckx comments, it is a historical misunderstanding to maintain that the Church has a divinely-willed hierarchy. He is not opposed to continued use of the term “hierarchy” as a designation for those who exercise authority and leadership but emphasizes that hierarchy properly understood “in no way excludes *a priori* a democratic church government.”⁷⁹ This call for ecclesial democracy comes not only from theologians, but also from a variety of Catholic organizations. In April 1994, for example, the Plenary Assembly of the *Bund der deutschen katholischen Jugend* (BDKJ, the Association of German Catholic Youth), an official ecclesial organization with over one-half million members, approved a “Plan to Promote Democracy in the Catholic Church.”⁸⁰

In the context of this ongoing discussion as to whether the Church is a hierarchy or a democracy, it is important to determine precisely what is meant when someone uses these terms and to consider how the apparent conflict of views might be reconciled. Both the language of ecclesial “democracy” and that of ecclesial “hierarchy” have limitations and can be subject to misinterpretation. Congar’s theology of the Holy Spirit can contribute to a clarification of this terminology. His pneumatology, furthermore, can provide a mediating position. It can be used to construct a common ground that incorporates some of the concerns of both those who advocate “hierarchy” and those who call for “democracy.”

In order to discuss Congar’s contribution to this conversation, it is instructive to bear in mind not only the above synopsis of his pneumatological anthropology and pneumatological ecclesiology but also his explicit reflections on ecclesial hierarchy. Congar’s theology of the ecclesial hierarchy cannot be comprehensively summarized here, but it is important to make note at least of some of the main features of his thought in this regard and to do so with awareness of the changes and development his own ecclesiology underwent in the 1970s and 1980s as he elaborated his theology of the Holy Spirit. In this postconciliar period, Congar’s appreciation for the remarkable growth of lay initiatives in the Church and his emphasis on pneumatology provided the foundation for an ecclesiology that differed

⁷⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 188. He notes: “However, in all official documents of the Roman Catholic church ‘hierarchy’ is used specifically as an argument for rejecting any democratic exercise of authority and thus democratic participation in the government of the church by the people of God on the basis of ‘divine law’ ” (ibid. 217).

⁸⁰ Leonard Swidler, *Toward a Catholic Constitution* 100–101 with reference to *Macht teilen, Gleichheit anerkennen. Ein Demokratieförderplan für die katholische Kirche in Deutschland* (Düsseldorf: DKJ-Bundesstelle, 1994).

in some significant respects from that of his earlier works.⁸¹ The changes in Congar's theology are gradual. Some of the ideas most characteristic of his postconciliar writings are present in earlier works, while important components of his earlier ecclesiology perdure in his later writings. Nonetheless, there are some noteworthy developments in various dimensions of Congar's theology including his reflections on ecclesial organization and structure.⁸² In 1971 when Congar was 67 years old, he professed, "I now see many things differently and, I hope, better in comparison with forty years ago. . . . I have gradually corrected my vision which at first was principally and spontaneously clerical."⁸³

Congar's Reflections on Ecclesial Hierarchy: 1937–1968 and 1969–1991⁸⁴

From at least as early as 1947, Congar critiqued what he termed the "hierarchology" of the dominant neo-Scholastic *de Ecclesia* treatises. He faulted Catholic ecclesiology for attending solely to the Church's hierarchical principle and for neglecting what he termed the Church's "principle of collective life."⁸⁵ Yet his critique of hierarchology was by no means a

⁸¹ On Congar's appreciation of the growth of myriad forms of new initiatives in the postconciliar Church, see his "Pneumatology Today" 440; "Le troisième article du Symbole" 295.

⁸² Joseph Famerée has published very extensive studies of both the continuities and developments in Congar's thought. One can rightly speak of a preconciliar and postconciliar Congar, he explains, but there is no "second Congar" in the sense of a rupture with the first. Rather, "all is profound continuity and continual evolution, an openness to change and revision in fidelity with the original vein." "Y.M.-J. Congar: Un théologien de la catholicité" in *Le Christianisme nuée de témoins—beauté du témoignage*, ed. Guido Vergauwen, O.P. (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1998) 15–31, at 15. See also Famerée's "L'ecclésiologie du Père Yves Congar: Essai de synthèse critique," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 76 (1992) 377–419; *L'ecclésiologie d'Yves Congar avant Vatican II: Histoire et Église: Analyse et reprise critique* (Leuven: Leuven University, 1992); "Aux origines de Vatican II. La démarche théologique d'Yves Congar," *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 71 (1995) 121–38.

⁸³ Congar, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972) 169–88, at 169 and 181.

⁸⁴ The distinction between these two time spans reflects the periodizations of Congar's prolific writings provided by Joseph Famerée and Cornelis van Vliet. Both scholars note qualitative changes in Congar's theology of the Holy Spirit in the later stage of his life. See Joseph Famerée, *L'ecclésiologie d'Yves Congar avant Vatican II*; Cornelis van Vliet, *Communio sacramentalis: Das Kirchenverständnis von Yves Congar—genetisch und systematisch betrachtet* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1994).

⁸⁵ Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1965) 35. See also 38.

critique of hierarchy per se. On the contrary, from 1931 through roughly 1968, Congar described the ecclesial hierarchy—the diaconate, presbyterate, and episcopacy—as a divinely instituted means of grace that has both ontological and temporal precedence to the faithful and mediates the authority and salvific power of Jesus Christ. In terms that were once in widespread use in Catholic theology, Congar described the hierarchy as the formal cause of the Church and the members as the material cause.⁸⁶ The hierarchy's precedence over the baptized assures that the Church is not simply a congregation of human beings but rather a divine institution from above (*d'en haut*). The Church finds its foundation, authority, and salvific power not in the decision of like-minded human beings to gather, congregate, and organize a structure of common life. Rather, the Church's origin and foundation is the Incarnate Word and the offices that Jesus Christ established to mediate the mystery of Incarnation in the aftermath of his death and Resurrection. The relationship between hierarchy and laity is, accordingly, a relationship of superior to subordinate, for the hierarchy mediates not a human mandate to govern but the divine authority of Jesus Christ. "Hierarchical persons," as Congar termed the holders of ecclesial office, are equal to the laity insofar as the clergy themselves are also baptized members of the one Body of Christ, but insofar as clergy exercise hierarchical powers they are superior to those who do not. In 1951, Congar stated in his Introduction to *Lay People in the Church* (a landmark book that affirmed the importance of the laity in ecclesial life) that "lay people will always be a subordinate order in the Church."⁸⁷ He insisted that hierarchical superiority must be exercised in a mode of service—undertaken in the spirit of Jesus Christ's humble foot washing of the apostles (John 13:1–17) and his silencing of James and John who desired to sit at his right and left hands (Mark 10:42–5; Matthew 20:25–8). We must not let the Church be "ruined by the spirit of domination" nor mired by the weight of glory, power, and prestige;⁸⁸ a hierarchy that dominates rather than serves is not exercising its office in fidelity to the intention, teaching, and example of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, the hierarchy's mission to serve the Church exists within the context of the fundamental religious relation of superior to subordinate.

In the postconciliar era Congar's advocacy of a pneumatological ecclesiology as well as developments in his theology of the relationship between Christ and the Spirit served as theological grounds for ecclesiological re-

⁸⁶ Ibid. 52. See also *Lay People* 47 and *Vraie et fausse réforme* 95.

⁸⁷ Congar, *Lay People* xi.

⁸⁸ Congar, *Power and Poverty* 95; *Vraie et fausse réforme* 56; see also "Titles and Honours in the Church," in *Power and Poverty* 111–31.

formulations.⁸⁹ The origins of the Church, Congar now emphasized, cannot be adequately explained with reference only to the acts of the historical Jesus. Rather, in light of a pneumatological Christology, we must recognize the Holy Spirit as the Church's co-institutor.⁹⁰ The Holy Spirit guided Jesus' earthly acts, raised him from the dead, and fostered the growth of the Church after Pentecost through the inspiration and assistance given to the apostles. Throughout the centuries, the Spirit continues to build up the Church in a process that is ultimately eschatological in scope.⁹¹ "The Church is not ready-made. . . . She is not prefabricated and placed in a frame which has already been prepared."⁹² The Spirit of the glorified Christ indwells each of the faithful and fosters the Church's on-going organic growth. God, Jesus had said, will give *you* the Spirit, will send the Spirit to *you*; the Spirit will teach *you*, lead *you*, reveal to *you* (John 14 and 16). In his interpretation of these Johannine passages, Congar noted that "you" refers both to each particular believer and to the ecclesial body as a whole.⁹³ "The Church," he stated emphatically, "receives the fullness of the Spirit only in the totality of the gifts made by all Her members. She is not a pyramid whose passive base receives everything from the apex."⁹⁴ The very same Spirit who is in Christ is given to all the Church's members—*unus numero in Christo et in omnibus*⁹⁵—and this divine indwelling has ecclesiological consequences.

Congar's evolving pneumatology and his attendant rejection of a pyramidal ecclesiological structure led to a reformulation of his theology of ordained ministry. In a 1971 article entitled "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," he critiqued his earlier reflections on the hierarchy's ontological and temporal precedence above the body of the faithful as a whole. "The risk I ran," he explained, "was to define the ministerial priesthood purely in itself, along a line of thought which extended the Scholasticism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."⁹⁶ This, he

⁸⁹ On the change in Congar's understanding of the relation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, see Famerée, *L'ecclésiologie d'Yves Congar* 451–52.

⁹⁰ Congar, "Pneumatologie dogmatique" 496. See also *I Believe* 2.5–14. In the former article Congar noted that he has come to understand the Spirit as "co-institutor" in an even broader sense than expressed in *I Believe*.

⁹¹ See Congar, "Pneumatology Today" 447.

⁹² *Ibid.* 443.

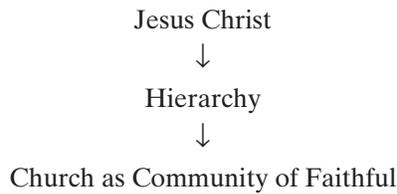
⁹³ Congar, "Pneumatologie dogmatique" 496–97 (Emphasis original); see also Congar, *I Believe* 2.16.

⁹⁴ Congar, "Pneumatology Today" 443.

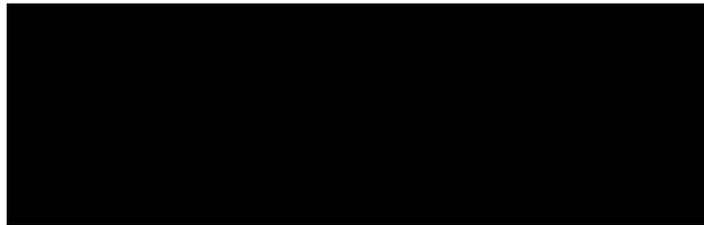
⁹⁵ See Congar *I Believe* 2.19 and "Pneumatologie dogmatique" 498, n. 31 with reference to Aquinas, *In III Sent.* d. 13, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2; *De verit.* q. 29, a. 4; *In Ioan.* c. 1, lect. 9 et 10; *ST* 1–2, q. 183, a. 3, ad 3; Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* nos. 54 and 77; Vatican II, *Lumen gentium* no. 7.

⁹⁶ Congar, "My Path-Findings" 174.

continued: “translates into a linear scheme of this type: Christ makes the hierarchy and the hierarchy makes the Church as community of faithful. Such a scheme, even if it contains a part of the truth, presents inconveniences. At least in temporal priority it places the ministerial priest before and outside the community. Put into actuality, it would in fact reduce the building of the community to the action of the hierarchical ministry. Pastoral reality as well as the New Testament presses on us a much richer view. It is God, it is Christ who by his Holy Spirit does not cease building up his Church.”⁹⁷ Congar now emphasized that the hierarchical ministries do not exist apart from or before or above the members of the Church but rather within the ecclesial communion. He schematized his earlier ecclesiology as follows:



In contrast, he offered two alternative ecclesiological models that were developed in ecumenical consultations:⁹⁸



Notably, these latter diagrams include the Holy Spirit, whereas the Spirit was not explicitly mentioned in the earlier ecclesiological model. In these new schemata, it is rather the term “hierarchy” which does not appear at all. “As to terminology,” Congar said of the revised approach, “it is worth noticing that the decisive coupling is not ‘priesthood/laity,’ as I used it in *Jalons*, but rather ‘ministries/modes of community service.’”⁹⁹ He empha-

⁹⁷ Ibid. 175.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 178. See also Congar’s “Ministères et structuration de l’Église,” in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Cerf, 1971) 31–49, at 38.

⁹⁹ Congar, “My Path-Findings” 176. See also “The Liturgical Assembly” in Congar, *Called to Life*, trans. William Burridge (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 110–29, at 115.

sized that the term “ministries” takes the plural form, for the Church is built up by a multitude of ministries, some ordained and some lay.¹⁰⁰ “There is not a purely vertical descent,” he commented elsewhere, “as would be the case within a purely christological logic of the ‘valid’ succession of the apostles: there is rather the operation of the entire body in which the Spirit dwells and acts.”¹⁰¹

In his publications from 1969 to 1991, Congar continued to affirm, as he had done in his earlier writings, that the ordained ministries of the Church are a means of grace with an essential soteriological function. Clearly, however, there are some important differences in his explication of the manner in which the ordained exercise this office. First, he emphasized that the capacity of the ordained ministers to mediate grace is dependent not only on the institution of their ecclesial office by Jesus Christ but also on the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit. “Every action performed by the ministry,” he wrote, “calls for an epiclesis. Orthodox Christians are right when they say that the life of the Church is entirely epiclesis.”¹⁰² Secondly, Congar underscored that the activity of the Spirit in response to the prayer of epiclesis is an activity that is not mediated by the ordained minister alone but rather by the ordained minister *in relation to the ecclesial body as a whole* in whom the Spirit dwells and through whom the Spirit works. The priest who acts *in persona Christi* can do so only because he stands also *in persona ecclesiae*:

[I]f, on the other hand, the pneumatological aspect is emphasized, as the Eastern tradition loves to do, the *in persona Christi* is more easily seen as situated within the *in persona Ecclesiae*. There is no denial here of the fact that the priest has received, through his ordination, the ‘power’ to celebrate the Eucharist and therefore to consecrate the bread and wine . . . but this does not mean that he can do it alone, that is, when he remains alone. He does not, in other words, consecrate the elements by virtue of a power that is inherent in him and which he has, in this sense, within his control. It is rather by virtue of the grace for which he asks God and which is operative, and even ensured, through him *in the Church*.¹⁰³

As is evident in this passage and in the ecclesiological diagrams reproduced above, Congar’s publications from 1969 to 1991 emphasize not the ontological and temporal precedence of ordained ministers over the baptized but rather the unique role of the ordained ministries who stand in a relation of mutuality and communion together with the baptized. An ordained

¹⁰⁰ Congar, “My Path-Findings” 176. On the importance of the plural ministries, see also “The Liturgical Assembly” 116; “Pneumatologie dogmatique” 501.

¹⁰¹ Congar, “Pneumatologie dogmatique” 501; see also “Pneumatology Today” 446.

¹⁰² Congar, *I Believe* 2.46. On the importance of the epiclesis, see also “Le troisième article du Symbole” 300; *I Believe* 2.228–49 and 2.267–74.

¹⁰³ Congar, *I Believe* 3.236.

minister cannot be a priestly mediator of the grace of Christ apart from the communion of the baptized on whose behalf the priest stands *in persona ecclesiae*. Nor can the ministerial office be efficacious without the activity of the Holy Spirit who acts not only through this office but also through the ecclesial body as a whole. This ecclesiological reformulation leads Congar to question his earlier portrayal of the relationship of hierarchy and laity as a relation of superiority and subordination. “I now wonder,” he pondered in 1971, “whether this is a happy mode of procedure.”¹⁰⁴ It is noteworthy, furthermore, that in Congar’s later pneumatological writings references to the Church as “hierarchy” decrease sharply in frequency as compared with his language usage in earlier ecclesiological works.¹⁰⁵

Is the Church a Hierarchy or a Democracy?

What, then, of the current discussion as to whether the Church should be a “hierarchy” or a “democracy”? In speaking to this issue, it is important, first of all, to clarify what is signified by these terms. In common contemporary parlance, the term hierarchy refers to a social body organized by gradations of rank and authority; the word often connotes inequality and the dominance of those in superior positions over those who are subordinate.¹⁰⁶ The same connotations are commonly found in ecclesiastical discourse.¹⁰⁷ Hierarchy and inequality were parallel terms in the dominant preconciliar theology that described the Church as a *societas inaequalis, hierarchica*.¹⁰⁸ The term democracy, in contrast, is commonly understood

¹⁰⁴ Congar, “My Path-Findings” 174.

¹⁰⁵ In the first 64 pages of Congar’s *Lay People in the Church* (1957) the word “hierarchy” appears 36 times. The most explicitly ecclesiological portion of *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, a 64-page section of volume 2 entitled “The Spirit Animates the Church,” employs the term “hierarchy” only once and the adjective “hierarchical” only twice. In *I Believe*, moreover, Congar places these terms in quotation marks and discontinues his former practice of capitalizing the nominative form.

¹⁰⁶ Gerald W. Creed and Barbara Ching note that anthropologists studying rural populations “have paid almost no attention to cultural hierarchies . . . [and] they have generally failed to recognize the systematic *devaluation* of the rustic as a source of identity” (*Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy*, ed. Ching and Creed [New York: Routledge, 1997] vii). Sociologist James Schubert contrasts the dynamics of small groups that demonstrate democratic qualities with those of groups that function as a “dominance hierarchy” (Schubert, “Hierarchy, Democracy and Decision Making in Small Groups,” in *Hierarchy and Democracy*, ed. Albert Somit and Rudolf Wildenmann [Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University, 1991] 79–101).

¹⁰⁷ Michael Richards, for example, notes that clergymen once hoped to climb to the top of a pyramid for “the Church . . . was a hierarchy. There were ranks and grades” (“Hierarchy and Priesthood,” *Priests and People* 7 [1993] 228–32, at 228).

to mean precisely the opposite: a relation of governance among people who are all of equal stature and have equal voice. The term furthermore implies that “people are the origin of all just power” (Hume) or that “power is inherent in the people” (Jefferson).¹⁰⁹

From the perspective of Congar’s theology of the Holy Spirit, the Church is neither a hierarchy nor a democracy in the most common contemporary understanding of these terms. The Church is not a “hierarchy” if by this one means a social body structured by relationships of superiority and subordination. Those who hold ministerial office in the Church are not superior to those who do not. Even in their capacity as mediators of grace and voices of authority and leadership, the ecclesial ministers stand with the baptized in a relation of mutuality and communion to one another and a relation of dependence upon the indwelling Spirit of Christ. As Congar’s pneumatological ecclesiology expresses, the ordained minister cannot exercise priestly office apart from the community as a whole, nor can the ordained act as a mediator of grace apart from the activity of the Holy Spirit whose empowerment of priestly ministry is distinct from but nonetheless inseparable from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the entire ecclesial communion. The ordained minister has a unique role in the mediation of grace but acts in communion with the other members of the Church rather than in superiority over them. Hervé-Marie Legrand, O.P., Congar’s student and colleague, now a prominent French ecclesialologist in his own right, notes in a reflection on the Holy Spirit as principal agent in the sacrament of ordination, “. . . one can see how all Christians are equal within the variety established by the Spirit, and why a hierarchical understanding of the ordained ministry is inadequate.”¹¹⁰

This does not mean, however, that the Church is a democracy in the sense of an organization of equals in which power is inherent in the people. The power of the Church is not inherent in the people but rather comes from the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God. The Church, as Congar said, is completely dependent on its co-institution by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and the ongoing activity of the Spirit of the glorified Christ in the ecclesial body. As Catherine LaCugna wrote, “The church makes a claim that civil governments do not: that it is the people of God, Body of Christ, and Temple of the Holy Spirit. The life of the church is to be animated by

¹⁰⁸ Congar, “R. Sohm nous interroge encore,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 57 (1973) 263–94, at 281; “Pneumatologie dogmatique” 495.

¹⁰⁹ See Thomas Jefferson’s letter to W. J. Cartwright in *Thomas Jefferson on Democracy*, ed. Paul K. Padover (New York: New American Library, 1939) 33. The Hume citation also comes from this letter of Jefferson.

¹¹⁰ Hervé Legrand, “Theology and the Election of Bishops in the Early Church,” in *Election and Consensus in the Church*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Anton Weiler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 31–42, at 38.

the life of God; the church is to embody in the world the presence of the risen Christ, showing by its preaching and by its own form of life that sin and death have been overcome by Jesus Christ.”¹¹¹ The terminology we use to describe the Church should express the Church’s unique character and mission and emphasize the Church’s absolute dependence on the Spirit of God. Conciliarity, synodality, reception, and other processes by which the Church governs and organizes its life do bear resemblance to the processes of democratic societies. Nonetheless, it is more precise to speak of the Church as a communion in the Spirit of Christ than as a democracy.¹¹²

Even as one questions the ecclesiological usage of the terms hierarchy and democracy in our contemporary context, however, one also needs to affirm the truth that underlies the positions of the proponents of both of these two forms of ecclesiology. Although “hierarchy” has connoted a relation of superiority and subordination in ecclesiological discourse, this is not the only meaning of the term. Congar’s emphasis on the hierarchical character of the Church in his 1937–1968 publications stemmed from an important conviction that continues to shape his ecclesiology even in his later works: the Church does not come “*d’en bas*” (from below) but rather “*d’en haut*” (from on high). The Church, he wrote in 1953, is not just an association of people in the manner of a pagan *collegium* but rather an institution with a divine origin—“she was and is an institution formed from on high, hierarchically built.”¹¹³ Congar’s ecclesiology of this period, as indicated above, expressed the Church’s divine origin by emphasizing the ontological and temporal precedence of the ecclesial hierarchy over the members of the Church to whom the ordained relate as superiors to subordinates. Within a pneumatological ecclesiology it is more appropriate to speak of relations of communion and mutuality rather than relations of ontological precedence and superiority, yet one must still preserve Congar’s original conviction that the Church comes “from on high.” Indeed, one could argue that *it is precisely this mystery of the Church’s divine origin* rather than the institution of relations of superiority and subordination that is ultimately at the heart and core of the term “hierarchy.” The term comes from the Greek prefix “*hier*” which means “sacred” and from the Greek noun “*archē*” meaning “origin,” “principle” or “rule.”¹¹⁴ In this etymological sense, the Church is most certainly a *hier-archē*, for sacred origin and

¹¹¹ Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991) 401.

¹¹² On this point, see Legrand, “Theology and the Election of Bishops” 40–41.

¹¹³ Congar, *Lay People* 34.

¹¹⁴ In early Christianity, the term *archē* became theologically important in part because of the LXX translation of Gen 1:1: “*en archē ho theos ton ouranon kai ten gen . . .*” Origen had used an allegorical method to interpret “*archē*” in Gen 1:1 as

sacred rule are ecclesiological *sine qua non*. Hierarchical language, however, has connoted social inequality and subordination for so long that it is very difficult to purge this terminology of these connotations.¹¹⁵ The development of alternative forms of expression of the Church's sacred origin and divine rule (i.e. its nature as hierarchical) is thus imperative to the formulation of a contemporary ecclesiology that can forthrightly communicate what *hier-archē* authentically means. It is notable, indeed, that the pneumatological ecclesiology that Congar developed in the 1970s and 1980s expresses the sacred origin and divine rule of the Church not primarily with the language of ecclesiastical hierarchy but rather with an accentuation on Christology, sacramental theology, and the epiclesis of the Holy Spirit. In 1979 in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, he continues to hold as he did in 1953 that the Church "comes from on high" but he has found a new way to express this mystery: "The life of the Church," he emphasizes repeatedly, "is one long epiclesis."¹¹⁶

From the perspective of Congar's theology of the Holy Spirit, then, there is an important truth underlying the position of those who advocate ecclesial hierarchy insofar as these persons use this term to express the Church's divine origin. From the perspective of Congar's pneumatology, however, there is also an important truth underlying the position of those who advocate ecclesial democracy. Proponents of this form of ecclesiology surely do not intend to reduce the Church to a human political organization. Rather they seek to express a reality that is rooted in the mystery of baptism and the Church's eucharistic and communitarian life. As Congar's theology of the Holy Spirit expresses so well, the Spirit of Christ actively indwells all of the faithful. Even when the ordained ministers mediate grace, they do so not apart from the faithful but in a relation of mutuality and communion with them. If we are to take seriously Congar's advocacy of a pneumatological ecclesiology and pneumatological anthropology, we

a reference to the Logos in light of John 1 ("*en archē én ho logos . . .*") According to Basil of Caesarea's influential commentary on Genesis, "*archē*" in Gen 1:1 means "beginning" in the sense of a "beginning of movement"; beginning as "first foundation"; beginning as "principle" or "form"; and beginning in the sense of "goal" (Basil, *In Hexaem*, I.6). See J.C.M. van Winden, "Frühchristliche Bibelexegese. 'Der Anfang,'" in *ARCHE: A Collection of Patristic Studies by J.C.M. van Winden*, ed. J. Den Boeft and D. T. Runia (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 3–36; and his "In the Beginning: Early Christian Exegesis of the Term *archē* in Genesis 1:1," in *ARCHE* 78–93. For a contemporary discussion of the significance of the term "*archē*" in trinitarian theology, see LaCugna, *God for Us* 388–400.

¹¹⁵ For an example of an ecclesiology that redefines hierarchy, see Terence Nichols, *That All May Be One: Hierarchy and Participation in the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1997).

¹¹⁶ This is the title of the last chapter of Congar's three volume *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*; see "The Life of the Church as One Long Epiclesis" *I Believe* 2.267–74.

cannot conceive of the activity of the Spirit in the Church apart from the personal indwelling of the Spirit in all of the baptized, for the mediation of the Spirit by the ordained ministers of the Church is distinct from but nonetheless inseparable from the indwelling of the Spirit in the entire Body of Christ. Those who advocate ecclesial democracy call our attention to the presence of the Holy Spirit in each and every person. They ask that we take seriously the consequences of this presence for the life, structure and mission of the Church. We may—as Congar himself did—criticize the ecclesiological use of the language of “democracy” insofar as this term does not of itself express the divine origin and divine rule of the Church.¹¹⁷ From the perspective of Congar’s theology, however, we must also recognize the truth underlying the position of the proponents of ecclesial “democracy” even as we give this a more pneumatological expression: the Holy Spirit indwells all of the faithful and this personal indwelling has important implications for the life, structure, and mission of the Church. The postconciliar Church need not be divided on the issue of hierarchical vs. democratic modes of governance. Rather, our common responsibility is the continuation of the reform of the Church such that ecclesial practices and structures faithfully express the Church’s sacred rule and origin (*hierarchē*) and the communion of all members in the one indwelling Spirit of Christ.¹¹⁸ Congar’s theology of the Holy Spirit makes a significant contribution to this end.

CONCLUSION

In 1995 the Church mourned the death of a Dominican priest who was a pioneering ecumenist, a prisoner of Colditz and Lübeck during World War II, a scholar who persevered in his mission despite periods of silencing, a major contributor to the Second Vatican Council, a cardinal of the Church, and also a theologian of the Holy Spirit. Congar’s historical and ecumenical scholarship uncovered a tradition in which ecclesiology was indivisible from pneumatology and theological anthropology. Congar reinvigorated this theological heritage. In contrast to early-20th-century Roman Catholic theology that divorced reflection on the indwelling of the

¹¹⁷ Congar, *Challenge to the Church: The Case of Archbishop Lefebvre*, trans. Paul Inwood (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1976) 39.

¹¹⁸ Avery Dulles noted the important influence of Congar at the council. He wrote: “Vatican II could almost be called Congar’s Council” (“Yves Congar: In Appreciation,” *America* 173 [15 July 1995] 6). Congar believed that the council was not an end in itself but only the beginning of the Church to come. In many respects, as he told Jean Puyo, the council had only gone half-way (Jean Puyo, *Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar: Une vie pour la vérité* [Paris: Centurion, 1975] 131–32). Congar, as I have shown, continued to develop his own theology after the council.

Holy Spirit in the human person from a systematic ecclesiology, Congar developed a pneumatological anthropology that was inseparable from a pneumatological ecclesiology. In so doing, he made a crucial contribution to a contemporary Roman Catholic theology of the Holy Spirit and his work can contribute constructively to a variety of discussions in contemporary systematic theology. Here I have offered one illustration of the significance and fruitfulness of Congar's approach. His writings, I have argued, bring a pneumatological perspective to bear on the current discussion as to whether the Church is a hierarchy or a democracy, and they enable us to recognize both the limitations of this language and the underlying truths in these two seemingly opposing positions.