

Le Saulchoir and *Chrétiens désunis*

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1 Introduction

In the very day he joined the Dominican Order, on Dec 8, 1926, after having completed his novitiate in Amiens, Yves (religious name: Marie-Joseph) Congar entered the convent school of Le Saulchoir. This Dominican school of the province of France had previously been moved to Belgium, to Kain-la-Tombe near Tournai, just over the border, following the expulsion of the religious congregations in the early 20th century. Le Saulchoir is the name of the estate in Kain-la-Tombe where the convent school had been set up.

What was the prevailing intellectual climate at Le Saulchoir in 1926 when Congar arrived there, and how did it evolve until the second half of the 1930s, when the Dominican held his famous conferences of January 1936 in Montmartre, which would form the basis of his first book, *Chrétiens désunis*?¹

Which theological development did Congar himself undergo during this period? What does this book contain? What significance does it have for the openness of Catholics, and of other Christians, to the desire for Christian unity?

These are the questions that will be addressed in the first three parts of this chapter, followed by a fourth part devoted to a few exemplary aspects of the reception of *Chrétiens désunis*.

¹ Marie-Joseph Congar, *Chrétiens désunis: Principes d'un "œcuménisme" catholique*, Paris, Cerf, 1937; ET: *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion*, trans. Muad A. Bousfield, London, Bles, 1939.

2 The Intellectual Climate at Le Saulchoir during the Years 1920–1930

Care must be taken not to present a mythological and oversimplified view of the history of Le Saulchoir, such as that which arose from a particular reception of the 1937 manifesto *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*,² according to which there would have been a joyous Saulchoir (that of the regency of Marie-Dominique Chenu, focused entirely on its return to France), then a sorrowful Saulchoir (that of the Roman sanctions decreed against Chenu's manifesto in 1942 and against the crisis of the worker-priests in 1954), and finally a glorious Saulchoir (that of the contribution of certain of its members, above all Congar, to the conciliar project).³ But what is it exactly about the years of Chenu's regency that concerns us here more directly?

Under the regency of Ambroise Gardeil, it became possible to attend two years of additional academic specialization after the institutional Dominican training in philosophy and theology. Although he himself was an advocate of the speculative approach, Gardeil did not discourage more

² Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*, Kain-lez-Tournai-Étiolles, Le Saulchoir, 1937; reissued in Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, Paris, Cerf, 1985, 91–173. For a more nuanced and sophisticated view of a certain theological diversity at the abbey in Kain, see Henry Donneaud, "Le Saulchoir: Une école, des théologies?" *Gregorianum* 83/3, 2002, 433–449.

³ According to the (not entirely humorless) characterization by Étienne Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté: La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II (1914–1962)*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1998, 125; see pages 126–148 (which I sometimes follow closely) for a strictly historical reassessment of this "type of myth behind which it is not easy to discern the truth" (125).

“positive” or “historical” orientations. Thus, Father Mannès Jacquin, who had been trained in the historical method in Leuven, launched the journal *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* in 1907 in cooperation with his fellow Dominican brothers Albert-Marie Blanche and Antoine Lemonnyer. In his book *Le donné révélé et la théologie*,⁴ Gardeil argues in favor of a theological apologetics with claims to objectivity, even though he is well aware that theology remains a human construct, homogeneous with the “revealed given” but at the same time distinct from it: theological conclusions cannot be absolutized. World War I led to the dispersal of this first Le Saulchoir team around Gardeil.

Antoine Lemonnyer, regent of the school from 1911, endeavored to gather a second team together as soon as the war ended, with the moral support of Pierre Mandonnet, an emeritus professor from Fribourg who, however, did not join Le Saulchoir until 1927, one year after the arrival of the professed novice Yves Congar. Long before that, Marie-Dominique Chenu had joined the team as early as 1920. As noted by Étienne Fouilloux, “the Lemonnyer-Mandonnet phase in Le Saulchoir can be described as the incursion of historical criticism into the very heart of the work that was being conducted by the house,” which thereby aligned itself with the method of biblical study applied by Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange in Jerusalem.⁵ At the Kain *studium*, the objective was to resituate Thomas Aquinas within his own historical context and in relation to his sources.

In an initial effort to promote this scholarly endeavor, the Institut d’Études Thomistes was founded in 1920–1921, with Chenu as its secretary. This was followed by the creation of the Bibliothèque Thomiste, which, in 1923, was taken over by the Société thomiste, itself established the previous year as a society that brought together members of the various Thomist currents of the

day. However, the society’s official organ, the *Bulletin thomiste*, proved so openly critical of the masters of the Dominican school that difficulties very soon began to arise between Le Saulchoir and Saint-Maximin, the Dominican *studium* of the province of Toulouse. As early as 1923, the Thomism of Le Saulchoir was accused “of sacrificing theology to philosophy, and above all to history.”⁶ The year 1925 witnessed the beginning of the publication of the *Somme théologique*, also known by the name *Revue des jeunes*, which was launched by Father Antonin-Dalmace Sertillanges in collaboration with the Kain convent school. At about the same time, Étienne Gilson became a regular visitor to Le Saulchoir and a friend of Chenu, whom he would assist, in 1931, in the creation of the Institute of Medieval Studies in Ottawa, similar to the one in Toronto.

Following the Saulchoir of Gardeil and the Saulchoir of Lemonnyer-Mandonnet, we now have Le Saulchoir of Chenu, who would succeed in combining the former’s speculative orientation and the latter’s medieval interests. Having arrived in Kain as early as 1920, he initially lectured on the patristic, Greek, and Latin sources of the *Doctor Angelicus*. The following year, he proceeded to teach a secondary course that enjoyed particular success among the students: that of the history of dogmas, renamed history of Christian doctrines. He not only demonstrated how orthodoxy had gradually emerged from deviations and heresies but also reconstructed the intellectual climate of the patristic and medieval discourses.⁷ Passionate and nonconformist, Chenu was the central figure of the medieval project at Le Saulchoir and worked tirelessly on the publications that related

4 Ambroise Gardeil, *Le donné révélé et la théologie*, Paris, J. Gabalda, 1910.

5 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 127.

6 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 129.

7 Congar would later write: “I still have the notes I took during his classes ... These pages hardly convey the wonderful feeling of reawakening, of being able to grasp the intelligence of what has been thought, of the dynamic development that I never ceased to experience while attending the classes of Father Chenu”; see Yves Congar, *Journal d’un théologien (1946–1956)*, ed. Étienne Fouilloux, Paris, Cerf, 2000, 58.

to it (bibliographical records, bulletins on the history of doctrines, lexicographical notes). However, he was “not a mere historian, and even less a philosopher,” but “first and foremost a theologian ...; his primary goal was [to provide] a better scholarly justification for a theology that would be worthy of the name”⁸ while seeking to prove that Aquinas was the first theologian to meet the requirements of Aristotelian science fully. This was Chenu, this was Le Saulchoir that Congar found upon his arrival in 1926.

In the early 1930s, Chenu’s theology, and through him that of Le Saulchoir, underwent noticeable changes when he became “the real ‘patron’ of the house.”⁹ Successively promoted, in 1932, to master in theology and regent by the master general Martin-Stanislas Gillet, Chenu secured remarkable advancements for his *studium*: the status of a canonical faculty for philosophy and theology in 1937 and the return of the school to France on the eve of the declaration of war. Not only was he able to fill the gaps left behind, for instance, by the premature death of Marie-Dominique Roland-Gosselin, the philosophical mind, in 1934, but he also secured the collaboration of prominent seniors, notably Sertillanges for moral theology from 1928 and the biblical scholar Ernest-Bernard Allo on the eve of World War II. Most importantly, he was also able to find, among the graduates of the 1920s, “the young pillars of a team that was tied to him through bonds of friendship as much as by a substantial number of shared views: Marie-Joseph Congar, Henri-Marie Féret, and Thomas Deman, among others.”¹⁰ This team “set the tone at Le Saulchoir as early as the late 1930s,”¹¹ even though there was no lack of differing views around it, as would be revealed by the crisis of 1942 concerning Chenu. Le Saulchoir nevertheless acquired a

certain reputation under Chenu’s regency, to the point that the school became convinced that it had become “an educational model for the order” and “the template for the only Thomistic revival worthy of that name.”¹² Then why not state this publicly? It was in this frame of mind that in 1937 Chenu wrote the booklet *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir*, which was initially intended for a limited distribution. However, it would ultimately unleash a storm of indignation, as it would come to be seen as “a sort of manifesto that presents the *studium*, and the theology developed by it, as exemplary models to the superiors and fellow brothers.”¹³

Chenu did not forsake the Middle Ages after 1930. He succeeded to Father Mandonnet at the Société thomiste and at the library of the same name, and inherited the responsibility for the *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* from Roland-Gosselin, which he held until Congar took over in 1936, the year of the latter’s conferences in Montmartre on the occasion of the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity. By the late 1920s, however, the focus of Chenu’s history classes shifted from the Middle Ages to the modern and contemporary periods (the problem of faith in the 19th century, the modernist crisis). Becoming aware of the implications of centuries of Catholic intransigence, and having now also taken an interest in history as such (taking the economic, social, political, and cultural context into consideration), he launched “his great offensive against what he termed ... ‘baroque theology,’” namely “the entire scholastic output, from the late Middle Ages to the dawn of the 20th century: five centuries ... in which the proliferation of commentaries only served to bury the thought of Saint Thomas or of great contemporaries under thousands of formalistic and withered pages.”¹⁴ He would be joined by Congar

8 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 131.

9 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 132.

10 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 133. Elsewhere, Fouilloux would single out Chenu, Congar, and Féret as “the main trio of the school of theology”; see Congar, *Journal d’un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 54, note 186.

11 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 133.

12 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 133.

13 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 133.

14 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 135.

in this struggle.¹⁵ For the regent of Le Saulchoir, “a theology worthy of that name is a spirituality that has found the rational instruments that suited its religious experience.”¹⁶

It was above all during the 1930s, under Chenu, that history, in the sense of contemporary secular life, burst into Le Saulchoir with the arrival of the chaplains and leaders of the JOC: the economic and moral crisis, the rise of the fascist movement, the reaction of popular fronts, and so on. Looking at Christianity, at the world at work, the theologian discerns “‘lieux’ théologiques *en acte*”¹⁷ which the church should take seriously if it wishes to reconnect with the major concerns of its contemporaries. The manifesto of Le Saulchoir lists six such loci: a missionary expansion that has been freed from “outdated colonialism”; the splendors of the Christian East; the birth of the ecumenical movement (with particular emphasis on this “theological loci” and the preceding one); the rise of the specialized Catholic action; the “pluralism of human civilizations”; and the “social restlessness triggered by the access of the popular masses to public and conscious life,” in spite of the risk “of communist perversion.”¹⁸ For Chenu, these problems had become “far more important for the future of faith than many scholastic debates.”¹⁹

The Copernican Revolution, which led to a shift from a deductive theology (one deduced from logical and doctrinal principles) to an inductive theology (one induced from facts), implies a new set of instruments. Chenu probably owed his awareness of church evolution to his erudition in the field of history, “but even more to a series of interpretations stemming either from his personal

experience or from his intellectual insights.”²⁰ On this last point, the Dominican acknowledged his debt to the Tübingen School, which criticized “the abstract intellectualism of the *Aufklärung* and its indifference towards history,” and, by the same token, the modern scholasticism of textbooks and the growth of Catholic intransigence.²¹ In a Catholic way of thinking, which the regent of Le Saulchoir interpreted as a dialectic between formalism and realism, it was essential that the living theology of the 20th century follow in the footsteps of the German school and rediscover realism, which had succumbed to a withering formalism, by combating the epigones of the so-called baroque theology and by seeking out, in the lives of human beings and of the church, those “‘in act theological loci’ that nowadays constitute an obligatory waypoint for the understanding of faith.”²² It should be noted here that it was precisely Chenu who introduced Congar to the works of a prominent representative of the Tübingen School, Johann Adam Möhler. Moreover, it is well known that the latter became a key point of reference in his ecclesiological (and thus ecumenical) reflection. We shall return to this topic later on.

After *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* had been placed on the index in 1942, and following his banishment from the school,²³ the ex-regent no longer wielded any direct influence at Le Saulchoir. However, his two associates Yves Congar and Henri-Marie Féret, along with others, would continue to teach there in the spirit of “a school of theology” until their forced departure in 1954, in connection with the crisis of the worker priests.²⁴ Regarding the heirs to the legacy of Chenu, in particular his friend Congar, Fouilloux even goes

15 Féret should also be included. All three of them conceived “the project of a joint work: a History of Theology,” which failed to materialized due to their respective commitments; see Congar, *Journal d'un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 60–61.

16 Chenu, *Une école de théologie*, 75.

17 Chenu, *Une école de théologie*, 68 (italics original).

18 Chenu, *Une école de théologie*, 67–68.

19 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 137.

20 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 138–139.

21 Chenu, *Une école de théologie*, 66–67.

22 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 140.

23 See Robert Guelluy, “Les antécédents de l'encyclique ‘*Humani generis*’ dans les sanctions romaines de 1942: Chenu, Charlier, Draguet,” *RHE* 81/3, 1986, 421–497.

24 See Jean-Pierre Jossua, “Le Saulchoir: Une formation théologique remplacée dans son histoire,” *CrSt* 14/1, 1993, 99–124.

so far as to ask the following question: “Might it not, in fact, seem reasonable to suggest that the latter incarnates Le Saulchoir better than Chenu himself?”²⁵ In other words: a successful transmission. On this point, the disciple is said to have equaled, if not even surpassed, the teacher: a Dominican vocation linked to the study of Saint Thomas, amplified by history, then by apostolic experience.

Is this not how the intellectual climate of the years 1920–1930 at Le Saulchoir might be characterized, when Congar arrived there as a student and then assumed professorial and editorial duties? An understanding of history as a discipline and a method (applied, in particular, to the study of the *Doctor Angelicus*), a sense of history as the life of the contemporary world (notably through the apostolic experience of the JOC), an effort to bring clarity, the discernment of the formal aspect of a question, and the meticulous search for the truth which Congar would later associate with his study of Thomas Aquinas’s thought (in conjunction with the ecumenical dialogue)²⁶ – this is the backdrop against which Yves Congar was to follow his own path.

3 Yves Congar at Le Saulchoir, 1926–1939

The person who arrived at Le Saulchoir of Kain on Dec 8, 1926, upon completion of his novitiate in Amiens, was born on Apr 13, 1904, in Sedan (French Ardennes), one of the main centers of French Protestantism in the 16th and 17th centuries. In this confessionally mixed area, Congar’s parents had formed bonds of friendship with Reformed Protestants and Jews. As an adolescent, Yves would play with young Protestants and often had serious theological discussions with the pastor’s sons, especially as far as the issues of Mass

and of the Eucharist were concerned. Moreover, the Protestant pastor had placed a small chapel at the priests’ disposal after the Catholic church had been set on fire by the Germans in August 1914. The Dominican Friar would later attribute his ecumenical vocation to these circumstances.²⁷ During these war years and those that immediately followed, he also acquired, according to his own testimony, the basic foundations of a solid and authentic awareness of the church: thanks to the devout life of the small parochial community of Sedan, and especially to the sermons of his priest, which, to use a typically Congarian expression, were “so full of Catholic doctrine and spirit”;²⁸ thanks also to the influence of the Abbé Daniel Lallement, his mentor in Sedan, who introduced him to the reality of liturgy and religious life – by taking him, for the Vespers of the Transfiguration of Aug 5, 1919, to the French Benedictine monks of Saint-Wandrille, who had been living in exile in Conques (Belgian Ardennes), on the banks of the Semois, since 1904 –; and, finally, thanks to the inspiration he received from his mother, in whose library he had discovered *Le Mystère de l’Église* by Father Humbert Clérissac, a book that would greatly influence his thinking by introducing him to what he called “the poetry of Catholicism”²⁹ (it was also in his mother’s library that he would later

25 Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 141.

26 See Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar: *Une vie pour la vérité*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1975, 38–40. The eloquent subtitle of this long interview is noteworthy.

27 See Yves Congar, *Une passion: L’unité: Réflexions et souvenirs (1929–1973)*, Paris, Cerf, 1974, 10. For the biographical details mentioned here, see 9–35; see also Jean-Pierre Jossua, *Le Père Congar: La théologie au service du Peuple de Dieu*, Paris, Cerf, 1967, 13–26, 43–51, 65–74, and 99–100; Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar, 5–86; Étienne Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne du XIX^e au XX^e siècle: Itinéraires européens d’expression française*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1982, 209–221; Étienne Fouilloux, “Frère Yves, cardinal Congar, dominicain: Itinéraire d’un théologien,” *RSPT* 79/3, 1995, 379–388; Joseph Famerée, “Formation et ecclésiologie du ‘premier’ Congar,” in: André Vauchez, ed., *Cardinal Yves Congar, 1904–1995: Actes du colloque réuni à Rome les 3–4 juin 1996*, Paris, Cerf, 1999, 51–70, which I largely follow.

28 Congar, *Une passion: L’unité*, 13.

29 Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar, 74.

come upon the Assumptionist journal *L'Union des Églises*, which later became *L'Unité de l'Église*).

Such were the seeds of a calling that was not only ecumenical and ecclesiological but also, and simultaneously, priestly and religious, Dominican and Thomist. At least this is how Yves Congar would later look back on the consistency of his vocation.³⁰

Prior to entering the Dominican novitiate in 1925, the young student had been admitted to the university Carmes seminary in Paris and had attended philosophy classes for three years, notably those of a certain Jacques Maritain, at the Institut Catholique. This is where he was initiated into scholastic Thomism before embracing a different approach to Aquinas at Le Saulchoir. As stated above, when Congar arrived at the Kain convent school in December 1926, he came upon a school characterized by its historical training, under the influence of the fathers Antoine Lemonnyer, Pierre Mandonnet, Marie-Dominique Roland-Gosselin, and especially Marie-Dominique Chenu, who was still very young. Le Saulchoir intensified the study of the biblical and patristic sources of the *Divus Thomas* and endeavored to read him more in the context of his own time by means of the then rapidly developing discipline of medieval studies.³¹ This approach to Aquinas, replaced in his own time, could not but reinforce the down-to-earth realism and the love for a real, concrete life of our Ardennes-born student, not to mention the basis of his irresistible taste for history. A desire to return to the biblical and patristic sources and a feeling and concern for history. This already says everything about Congar.³²

It is also necessary to note elements of a more directly defining, more personal, and more intentional nature that gradually shaped his theological project, in other words: his ecclesiological and

ecumenical endeavor. The friar preacher thus prepared himself for the presbyteral ordination (Jul 25, 1930) by studying, on the one hand, the Gospel according to John along with the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas and Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange (as he would later confide, it was precisely while pondering chapter 17 of this Gospel, in 1929, at the age of 25, that he definitely felt a calling to work towards the union of the disciples of Christ)³³ and, on the other hand, the theology of the “Eucharistic sacrifice,” particularly in the book of the canon Eugène Masure, *Le sacrifice du chef*.³⁴ Prior to this, during his three years at the seminary and his four years of Dominican religious life, as he recalled, he had already, every day and to the best of his ability, offered himself to God to accomplish his will, under the very strong impression of a verse of the *Benedictus* at Lauds (it was “less said by me than said to me inwardly by Another”³⁵): *Et tu, puer, propheta Altissimi vocaberis ...* Nothing here suggests a sense of exceptional vocation, but rather an effort to dedicate himself every day, in fidelity, to the will of God: a readiness to “prepare the ways of the Lord” according to the needs of the church and of the world. He would also relate this verse to his efforts – and I would add: to

30 Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 13–14.

31 André Duval, “Aux origines de l’Institut historique d’études thomistes’ du Saulchoir (1920 et ss): Notes et documents,” *RSPT* 75/3, 1991, 423–448; Fouilloux, “Frère Yves, cardinal Congar,” 383–384.

32 Jossua, *Le Père Congar*, 13ff. and 166ff.

33 For the years 1929–1932, it is necessary to supplement, and sometimes correct, the recollections of *Une passion: L'unité* and the interview by Jean Puyo with “Mon témoignage,” a handwritten fragment of memoirs written between 1946 and 1949: “From that moment, I have firmly held on to the idea of dedicating myself to unity, and especially to the reunion of the French Protestants, our closest separated brethren” (here already, the expression “separated brethren”). Congar adds that Father Lemonnyer, his former regent, had “surprisingly understood, or even intuitively known and encouraged [this]”; Congar, *Journal d'un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 19–62, here 20–21. Must we understand this “surprisingly” as an indication that the orientation of our theologian was quite exceptional, and ultimately found little support in Le Saulchoir itself?

34 Eugène Masure, *Le sacrifice du chef*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1932; ET: *The Christian Sacrifice*, trans. By Dom Illyd Trethowan, London, Burns, Oates & Co., 1944.

35 Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 9.

his *pioneering* efforts – in ecumenical and ecclesiological matters.

As far as his more specifically intellectual formation is concerned, his lecturer's thesis (which concluded the cycle of Dominican studies) dealt with the unity of the church, a topic that he had chosen during the summer of 1928³⁶ and for which he had to "engage in intensive research and study," as "the topic was very vast," and also because he had never "been taught anything in this respect";³⁷ during the academic year 1928–1929, he also attended classes on the history of Christian doctrines, in which Father Chenu spoke to his students about the Faith and Order movement and its first ecumenical conference, which had convened in Lausanne in 1927 (as brother Congar noted, the professor hardly needed more than one hour a week to afford him new perspectives on a reality that had already existed in his mind).³⁸

³⁶ "As early as 1930," according to "Mon témoignage"; see Congar, *Journal d'un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 21.

³⁷ Congar, *Journal d'un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 21–22. Does not this lack of instruction on the unity of the church, which Congar deploras, corroborate the originality of his theological choice when compared to the prevailing interests of the study house of Kain? The title of his dissertation, "Amorces d'un traité de l'Unité de l'Église," is anticipatory and attests to the precociousness of his ecclesiological and ecumenical ventures. This lecturer's thesis (152 pages) can be consulted at APDF, v, 832 (Y. Congar), year 1931.

³⁸ See *Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar*, 75. In support of his ecumenical openness, Congar also mentions the apostolic endeavors of his Dominican province. A regular correspondence with the Norwegian mission was of particular interest to the future lecturer in theology and afforded him deep insights into the religious situation of that country. Likewise, the Russian seminary of Saint Basil in Lille was located very close to Le Saulchoir, having been entrusted by Pius XI to the French Dominicans for the training of Russian Catholic priests of Eastern rite (established by the fathers Henri-Jean Omez and Christophe Dumont, this seminary, in conjunction with the affiliated study center Istina, was held in high esteem at Le Saulchoir from 1927 onward: exchanges between Lille and Kain, introduction to Eastern theology and liturgy etc.). Lutheran Protestantism and Orthodoxy thus existed for the students of Le Saulchoir, their existence having

As already stated, it was at about the same time that Marie-Dominique Chenu brought Möhler to his attention: in the latter's works, the student in theology discovered the primary modern source that he needed; what the theologian from Tübingen had achieved in the 19th century would breathe life into his own work and become an ideal from which he would seek inspiration for his own reflection in the 20th century.³⁹

Early in 1930, the future professor had also asked for a copy of a page by Father Marie-Benoît Schwalm in which the latter outlined what ecclesiology should be. The page was taken from the article "Les deux théologies: La scholastique et la positive";⁴⁰ it speaks of the necessity to apply the Thomistic analysis of society to the church-society, "a social subject of a special and supernatural kind."⁴¹ The young theologian would be profoundly influenced by it for a time, although he soon realized that the Thomistic categories of society could not fully account for the ecclesial mystery; on the other hand, he drew lasting inspiration from other parts of Father Schwalm's text in which the latter expressed the desire that future ecclesiology might synthesize the scattered achievements of the centuries, finding inspiration in the thinking of the Fathers, popes, and theologians who elaborated this doctrine, and become "this treatise on

been communicated to them through fraternal testimonies; see Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 11; Jossua, *Le Père Congar*, 18; *Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar*, 74; Congar, *Journal d'un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 21. Although he does not entirely deny it, Fouilloux is personally inclined to downplay the ecumenical influence exerted by Congar through these essentially missionary endeavors of the province of France; see Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 214ff.

³⁹ *Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar*, 48. "Over time," as he noted in "Mon témoignage," "increasingly viewed Möhler as a prophetic man who had astonishingly guessed what the century needed most"; Congar, *Journal d'un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 60.

⁴⁰ Marie-Benoît Schwalm, "Les deux théologies: La scholastique et la positive," *RSPT* 2/4, 1908, 674–703; esp. the paragraph entitled "Traité de l'Église au point de vue scolastique," 686–691.

⁴¹ Schwalm, "Les deux théologies," 689.

the church, a treatise on the social aspects of the Son of God.”⁴² This idea would reappear, further elaborated, in the ecclesiological project that prompted Congar to launch the Unam Sanctam series in 1936–1937 with the publication of its first volume, *Chrétiens désunis*.

After passing his exams, in October 1931, the newly qualified lecturer had to begin teaching immediately in the first trimester of the academic year, acting as a substitute for Father Chenu, who had left for Canada in order to found the Institute of Medieval Studies in Ottawa. Hence, he had only six months of further studies, completed in Paris, from January to June 1932, by attending a few courses on rational sociology at the Institut Catholique (Abbé Lallement), those of Gabriel Le Bras and Étienne Gilson at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, and finally those of the pastors Auguste Lecerf (Reformed dogmatics) and André Jundt (Lutheran dogmatics) at the Faculty of Protestant Theology.⁴³ Convinced “that the mission of our generation was to press home, *within the church*, what was true about the demands and problems presented by Modernism,” Congar also hoped to be able to “attend a few classes by Loisy, who was in his final year at the Collège de France and whose *Mémoires* [he] had just read.” However, he was not permitted to do so by his provincial, Father Jourdain Padé, who, while he did authorize him to attend the courses of the Protestant faculty, did not see the point of doing so, estimating that “anything interesting which they might have to say

could be found in their books.” To which the young professor replied that his intention was “precisely to seek what cannot be found in the books,” and understood, “ever better, that in all fields, nothing can replace direct, physical, living contact.”⁴⁴

Having returned to Le Saulchoir, Congar prepared himself to teach apologetics in a spirit that was quite different from that of his predecessors: even before reading Pascal in captivity, he had been deeply Pascalian in this field, never having believed in a rational argumentation; he would also emphasize the problems of interconfessional apologetics and, more generally, contribute to the rise of said discipline to the status of a truly fundamental theology. As early as 1933, he succeeded in relegating the *De Ecclesia*, which had hitherto been included in the apologetics program, to theology. His desire to draw up a broad treatise on the church also goes back to this time. The point of view and the plan adopted by his course in 1932 reveal that under the influence of Fr. Schwalm’s article and of Abbé Lallement’s sociology courses, he set about pondering the mystery of the church by applying the Thomistic categories of society to it, although he would gradually come to realize that these categories were unable to fully account for ecclesial reality.⁴⁵

During his years of study and early professorship, the young Dominican had, as early as 1929, allegedly become keenly aware of his ecumenical vocation and had confided as much to his superiors, who did not voice any objections. Upon completion of his first ordination retreat, on Aug 14, 1930,

42 Schwalm, “Les deux théologies,” 689, see also Jossua, *Le Père Congar*, 20–24.

43 See Congar, *Une passion: L’unité*, 17f. For additional details on the Faculty of Theology at Boulevard Arago and on the crucial encounters that Congar had there (thus leading to the creation of an ecumenical branch of study), see Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne*, 218–220. The young Catholic theologian noted that: “No one at the faculty would tell me or ask me anything. I believe they viewed me with a certain sympathy, although they probably wondered what I was up to”; Congar, *Journal d’un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 27. Everything had yet to be done in the field of ecumenism...

44 Congar, *Journal d’un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 24, 26–27. Congar would often return to the legitimate demands of Modernism: “The goal was to give back theology its historical dimension and its dimension of a living religious knowledge”; Congar, *Journal d’un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 60; see also 59.

45 See APDF, 832, 40: *Cours d’ecclésiologie 1932–1933*, Congar explicitly distances himself from them by adopting an apologetic approach (21). He wishes to draw up a theological treatise on the church (26) while remaining dependent on the Thomistic categories of causality (33ff.: final causes, material causes, efficient causes, formal causes); Jossua, *Le Père Congar*, 23f.

he had the opportunity to visit the Dominican priory in Düsseldorf, where he discovered *Die Hochkirche*,⁴⁶ the journal that would soon be directed by Friedrich Heiler. At this time, the periodical placed greater emphasis on the Hochkirche movement, which sought to develop a “catholicizing” tendency within German Protestantism, than on ecumenism. Upon coming into contact with the Germanism, the French Dominican immediately realized that “even though he knew very little about it, there was something very profound to understand and discover in Luther.”⁴⁷ The following summer, he visited the academic centers of Berlin⁴⁸ and “experienced the fascination of the historic sites of Lutheranism”:⁴⁹ the Wartburg, Erfurt, Wittenberg. During the first semester of 1932, which he spent in Paris, he not only attended classes on Luther and Calvin but also frequented the Franco-Russian circle,⁵⁰ a meeting point for Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and Catholics where it was possible to mingle with Jacques Maritain, Nicholas Berdyaev, Sergius Bulgakov, Lev Gillet, and Emmanuel Mounier.⁵¹

At the Institut Catholique, the Dominican ecclesiologist also made the acquaintance of the abbé Albert Gratieux, who held classes on Aleksey Stepanovich Khomyakov and the Slavophile movement. At about the same time,⁵² he paid a visit to Dom Lambert Beauduin, then “exiled” in France, and confessed his aspirations and projects to him: nothing less than the desire to “embark on a renewal of ecclesiology in conjunction with a broad participation in unionist activities,” as it was formulated in the language of the time.⁵³

The theologian from Le Saulchoir then proceeded to put his idea into practice and acquainted himself with the terrain, so to speak, by visiting Amay-sur-Meuse (near Liège in Belgium) in late July and early August 1932. It is in this priory, which had been established by Dom Beauduin⁵⁴ in 1925 and relocated to Chevetogne in 1939, and at which the Latin and the Eastern (Slavonic) rites were celebrated simultaneously in two separate chapels, that Father Congar met abbé Paul Couturier. It was also at this very moment, during his stay at Amay, as the Dominican ecumenist would later learn, that the priest from Lyon received the inspiration to dedicate himself to the cause of unity and decided to promote his famous Universal Week

46 He was able to borrow a few fascicles of this journal “from the library, even though some considered this strange or even dangerous, or expressed doubts about the seriousness of this movement.” He later subscribed to the journal of this Lutheran “High Church,” on which he wrote his first article concerning an ecumenical topic (in the Assumptionist journal *L’Unité de l’Église*, January–February 1931, 398–403). “I believe,” as Congar also wrote, “that the articles read in late August and especially in early September 1930, in Düsseldorf, afforded me the first breath of ecumenical air”; Congar, *Journal d’un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 22–23.

47 Congar, *Une passion: L’unité*, 17.

48 He had some contacts with Protestants, notably when he paid a visit to Adolf Deissmann, professor of New Testament studies, then rector of the University of Berlin, who dedicated a book on *Una Sancta* to him; Congar, *Journal d’un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 23.

49 Citing the felicitous formulation of Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne*, 217.

50 It is, in fact, the seat of the RSCM (placed at the latter’s disposal by the YMCA) at 10 Boulevard Montparnasse.

51 See Congar, *Une passion: L’unité*, 18f.; *Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar*, 76. Regarding these acquaintances, Congar makes enlightening comments about the

“ecumenical” atmosphere of the time: “The father provincial [Jourdain Padé] told me that it was wrong of me to seek such contacts, that certain fathers of the monastery [of Faubourg-Saint-Honoré] (Father Chauvin) criticized me for this and had said to the father provincial: ‘You are casting Father Congar into apostasy’”; Congar, *Journal d’un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 28.

52 While the first meeting with Dom Beauduin did indeed take place in Corneilles-en-Parisis, Congar’s dating of this meeting to April 1932 (Congar, *Une passion: L’unité*, 20–21) is problematical: following a brief stay in Strasbourg, the exiled monk of Amay left for En-Calcat on Apr 22, 1932, and did not arrive in Corneilles until the spring of 1934, having left En-Calcat on Apr 4; see Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne*, 221, note 74; Congar, *Journal d’un théologien*, ed. Fouilloux, 28, note 56.

53 Congar, *Une passion: L’unité*, 21.

54 On Beauduin and the monastery of Chevetogne, see the chapter by André Haquin in the first volume of this work.

of Prayer for Christian Unity in order to infuse an entirely new spirit into the very Catholic Solemn Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity;⁵⁵ in the same spirit, in 1937, he would enter into a theological dialogue with a number of Protestant pastors, thus establishing the basis of what would come to be known as the Dombes Group.⁵⁶ In some way, and in anticipation of future developments, it was thus in the Benedictine priory of Amay that Catholic “doctrinal ecumenism” and “spiritual ecumenism” first crossed paths.

“With regard to the difficult 1930s, as the historian of contemporary French-speaking European ecumenism would write, there is absolutely no doubt that they bear the mark of Father Congar.”⁵⁷ It is true, of course, that the latter was first and foremost professor at Le Saulchoir. “There, following the path laid out by his teacher, Father Chenu, he pursued his studies of medieval history and theology. However, the bulk of his ‘external’ activities and much of his already abundant output is, in one way or another, concerned with ecumenical issues.”⁵⁸ The French Dominican became the main Catholic discussion partner in the ecumenical dialogue. From 1935, his initiatives, which he had to reconcile with his teaching obligations, succeeded each other “at a frightening pace,” leading him “to the brink of physical and nervous exhaustion.”⁵⁹

The same year witnessed the birth of the *Cahiers pour le Protestantisme* (following a plan elaborated by Congar, the French publisher Éditions du Cerf, then at Juvisy, collected various pieces on Protestantism that had appeared in *La vie intellectuelle* and published them in small pamphlets): the ecumenist, who bore the sole responsibility for this vast enterprise, and also frequently complained about it, wished to provide a much deeper understanding of contemporary “Protestant awareness” and to present it through the actions of a number of “prominent personalities.”⁶⁰ Fouilloux concludes:

The *Cahiers*, play a decisive role in the ecumenical career of Father Congar: it is they that accredit him – or make him appear suspicious – in different places; it is their publication that multiply the requests for collaboration. No less decisive is their role in the evolution of interconfessional relations in France: exactly contemporary with the first article of the Abbé Couturier, they raise the same topics – charity, objectivity – and attest, like him, to the rise of ecumenism in the Catholic context.⁶¹

Still in 1935, the Dominican was asked to participate in the “Franco-Russian retreats,” gatherings that took place during the weekend of Pentecost and mainly brought together students of various confessions, Protestant, Orthodox, and, more recently, Catholic. The ecumenist from Le Saulchoir was thus not the inventor of these “retreats,” although he did infuse them with a greater spirit of trust and frankness. He also endeavored to “provide a supporting framework” for the Catholic participants by launching a Parisian circle of theological studies that sketched the contours of “plenary Catholicism” (this circle would become the Fernand Portal group, named after one of the main protagonists of the Malines Conversations between Catholics

55 Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 21–23.

56 See Étienne Fouilloux's contribution on Couturier and Catherine Clifford's contribution on the Dombes Group further below in this volume.

57 Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 207. For the following pages of this chapter, see Joseph Famerée, *L'ecclésiologie d'Yves Congar avant Vatican II: Histoire et Église: Analyse et reprise critique*, Leuven, Peeters, 1992, 33–35 and 401–402, on which I sometimes draw extensively.

58 Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 207.

59 Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 221; see Jean Puyo *interroge le Père Congar*, 78, 153. During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity of January 1936 at Sacré-Cœur Basilica in Paris, “an incredible fatigue of the nervous system forced me to preach while holding on to the edge of the pulpit”; Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 35. It is well known that these conferences would furnish the basis of *Chrétiens désunis*.

60 See Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 27–29; Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 221–227.

61 Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 226–227.

and Anglicans from 1921 onward).⁶² Entirely produced in Belgium, *Au service de l'unité* was its liaison organ.⁶³ Father Congar sought to convene skills and good intentions. He tirelessly performed the "task of a reawakening and reunifying" in the service of unity.⁶⁴

In late 1935, the chaplains of the Sacré-Cœur Basilica of Montmartre invited the Dominican to preach the Solemn Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity from Jan 18 to 25.⁶⁵ "There, on each day, following the very solemn celebration of vespers in the different rites of the Catholic Church, and usually under the supervision of a bishop, a sermon is delivered, which is followed by the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament."⁶⁶

Leaving spirituality aside and focusing on theological reflection, "in eight sessions that had more to do with lecturing than with homily," Congar outlined "a Catholic synthesis of the problem of unity that prefigured *Chrétiens désunis*," turning a traditional ceremony into "an event that provoked various reactions," while his name attracted 800 to 2,000 people depending on the day. At the close of the conferences, the Orthodox and the Protestants would then drive him to exhaustion in the course of heated debates held at the Institute

de théologie orthodoxe Saint-Serge or at the Federation of Protestant Students. Subsequently taken up in various cities, the response evoked by these conferences was at least as strong as that of the *Cahiers pour le protestantisme*.⁶⁷

At about the same time, Congar became the theological advisor of L'Amitié. This association had arisen out of the comradeship of former students of the École Normale Supérieure and was, according to its statutes, restricted to members of the three orders of public or private education. It had recently opted for a confessional and ecumenical orientation. From 1936 to 1938, as Fouilloux was able to ascertain, the Dominican friar would go there to debate major doctrinal issues with the pastor Pierre Lestringant "in front of about fifty passionate listeners." Similar discussions took place in Douai. The Catholic participants asked him to organize special training. From then on, Congar was very much in demand, also by officials from the ecumenical movement, even if he was unable to respond to all requests.⁶⁸

The experience of "the Englishman, of English culture, and of Anglican religion," which the French ecumenist still lacked, dates from the summer of 1936, when he decided to cross the Channel for the first time. He thus learned to appreciate the Anglican Church "for its admirable legacy, its worship, [and] its religious as well as humanistic ethos, which was both respectful and free."⁶⁹

The previous year, Congar had agreed to provide a theological conclusion for the study which the journal *La vie intellectuelle* had conducted on the current reasons for unbelief (Jul 31, 1935). The results of this study shocked him and convinced him of the necessity to restore "the true appearance of Catholicism."⁷⁰ In the wake of the "theological conclusion," the outlines of the French

62 On this undertaking, see the chapter by Bernard Barlow and Martin Browne in the first volume of this work.

63 All issues of this liaison organ can be consulted in the Congar papers, see APDF, 832, 52, Groupe Portal.

64 See Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 29–32; Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 227–230.

65 The "initiative to dedicate the days that link the two feasts of the Chair of Saint Peter in Rome and the conversion of Saint Paul to the prayer for unity" was born in 1907 in the Anglican world, at the instigation of Father Paul James Francis Wattson, an Episcopalian minister, and of Rev. Spencer Jones, a "pro-papal" Anglican; it was approved as early as 1909 by Pope Pious x. Such is the explanation provided by Congar himself in the book that he wrote on the basis of his experiences at the conferences of Montmartre, *Chrétiens désunis*, ix–x; Ruth Rouse, "Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate," in: *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, vol. 1, Ruth Rouse & Stephen Charles Neill, eds., 1517–1948, London, SPCK, 1954, 309–349, here 348–349.

66 As described by Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, xi.

67 See Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 230–231.

68 See Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 32–33; Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 231–232.

69 See Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 33–35; Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 232–233.

70 Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 238–239.

Dominican's original ecclesiological project gradually begin to emerge, in close connection, as we have already seen, with a strong ecumenical awareness.

It seemed to him that unbelief was, on the one hand, a consequence

of the fact that the church showed people a face that betrayed, rather than expressed, its true nature, [which is] in conformity with the Gospel and with its own deep-rooted tradition. The proper answer, the positive conclusion, would consist in renewing our presentation [of ourselves] and, to this end, primarily our own vision of the church by moving beyond appearances and the juridical vision that were then, and have long been, predominant.⁷¹

With great lucidity, in the course of the 1930s, the ecclesiologist thus diagnosed a “deficit of incarnation and catholicity” on the part of the church: while the rest of the modern world, a humanistic and atheistic spiritual totality that is at odds with Christian totality, “pursues its own evolution and applies itself to resolving renewed problems, the church secludes itself and focuses inward on itself, forming a world apart, [one that is] strictly conservative [and] intent on guarding the deposit” of faith.⁷²

Hence, a huge portion of human activity, an entire growth of humanity, of human flesh – modern life with its science, its woes, its splendors – has not had in itself the incarnation of the Word; the church has not given its soul to this expanding body that was meant, like every human value, to receive the communication of the Spirit of Christ in order to become his body and give glory to God.⁷³

⁷¹ Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 44–45.

⁷² See Yves Congar, “Une conclusion théologique à l'Enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance,” *VInt* 37, 1935, 214–249, esp. 238ff., 3rd part.

⁷³ Congar, “Une conclusion théologique,” 241.

Indeed, every expansion of the human in any one of the realms of creation must be met by a growth of the church, an incorporation of faith, a humanization of God. Such is the definition of ecclesial catholicity. The church is the universe as transfigured by grace into the image of God.⁷⁴

Soon afterwards, as he launched the series *Unam Sanctam*, Congar specified his ecclesiological objective in the following manner: “To impart knowledge of the nature or, if you will, of the mystery of the church” by conveying “a notion of the large, rich, living church, full of biblical and traditional vigor.”⁷⁵

The fact that the series was launched with *Chrétiens désunis: Principe d'un “œcuménisme” catholique* was mainly due to the difficulties encountered in the translation of Möhler's *Die Einheit in der Kirche*,⁷⁶ which had been intended to symbolically inaugurate *Unam Sanctam*, but also a consequence of Congar's growing ecumenical commitment between 1935 and 1937.⁷⁷ By a happy coincidence, the title of the series quite accurately describes the “ecumenical” aim of its first volume: to work towards the unity of the church, which is one (*unam*) and must become so once again

⁷⁴ See Congar, “Une conclusion théologique,” 242: this is already evocative of the qualitative conception of catholicity that would be further developed two years later in *Chrétiens désunis*.

⁷⁵ According to the wording of the prospectus announcing the launching of *Unam Sanctam* (see APDF, v, 832, 43), quoted in Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 46–47. In this regard, it should be noted that from the very beginning, the French theologian had discerned the close bonds of solidarity that linked ecumenism, ecclesiological research, pastoral renewal, as well as the biblical and liturgical movements (see Congar, *Une passion: L'unité*, 41).

⁷⁶ Johann Adam Möhler, *Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus: Dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der drei ersten Jahrhunderte*, Tübingen, Laupp, 1825; ET: *Unity in the Church, or, the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, trans. Peter C. Erb, Washington DC, Catholic University of America Press, 1996.

⁷⁷ Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, 239.

in a wholly visible manner, and which is holy (*sanctam*).

What a work, indeed! *Chrétiens désunis*, the first comprehensive overview of the topic in French, was a standard reference book for over 15 years, as it “laid the theological groundwork for a status of ecumenism in a Catholic context,” thus marking a crucial milestone in the field of doctrine, as Amay had been in the field of action and as the Abbé Couturier was in the process of becoming in the field of spirituality.⁷⁸ This doctrinal initiative would also generate a properly theological – and no longer merely corporate or juridical – approach to church unity, as well as a qualitative – and no longer strictly quantitative, temporal, and geographical – perception of catholicity, to the point of expanding the notion of church to the very limits of the universe thanks to the original notion of ecumenicity. This undertaking represented a fundamental reform of the still dominant apologetic and juridical approach of the time.⁷⁹

4 *Chrétiens désunis*

In his foreword, Congar states that the “speeches delivered by me on this occasion [the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity at the Sacré-Cœur Basilica of Montmartre] in January 1936, having been re-elaborated and technically improved, form the basis of the present volume.”⁸⁰ As specified by the subtitle of the work, the purpose of these speeches was to set forth the “principles of a Catholic ‘ecumenism’” (note the quotation marks that enclose the word ecumenism, thereby

signaling the particular meaning that is assigned to it). Precisely this topic is elaborated upon by Congar, again in the foreword: “This movement, which prompts the Christian churches to conceive the desire to restore the lost unity and, to this end, to understand themselves better and to understand one another, is the ecumenical movement.”⁸¹ The goal of the latter is

to prepare the reunion not only of the Christians but [also] of the various currently existing churches within a new unity. ... It is not the wish or the attempt to unite, into a single church, regarded as the only true one, Christian groups that are considered to be dissidents. It begins with the idea that no single Christian confession, in its present state, possesses the plenitude of Christianity; that even if one of them is true, it is nevertheless not, taken as a confession, in possession of the whole truth, but that other Christian values exist outside of it, not only among the Christians that are confessionally separated from it but in the other confessions or the other churches *as* confessions or *as* churches.⁸²

The Dominican’s open-minded approach and his effort to grasp, in a nuanced manner, the specific outlook of the ecumenism of his time are truly remarkable. As a Catholic, however, he could not accept that all existing Christian denominations had failed in some way or another and that each of them held only part of the truth, and that they thus needed to “unite in professing what is common to them in Christianity, in respect of their differences”: if this is ecumenism, he maintains, then “there cannot be a Catholic ecumenism.”⁸³ But, on the other hand,

⁷⁸ Roger Aubert, ed., *Nouvelle Histoire de l’Église*, vol. 5, *L’Église dans le monde moderne: 1848 à nos jours*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1975, 653; Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne*, 207.

⁷⁹ This did not fail to alarm the Roman authorities, who saw Congar as suspect from then on; see Congar, *Une passion: L’unité*, 54ff.; Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar, 100ff.

⁸⁰ Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, xi.

⁸¹ Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, xi–xii.

⁸² Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, xii.

⁸³ Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, xii–xiii.

if “ecumenism” – and this defines it as a specific movement of thought and action – is merely an awareness that there actually is a problem of church reunion, that this problem is not exhausted, or even fully addressed, by the exclusive pursuit of individual “conversions,” but that there are good grounds to make a theological assessment of the dissident Christianities as Christianities, of the relationships of the dissident churches, as churches, to the true church (the *Catholica*) and to its unity – then indeed can there be, and we even believe that there ought to be and that there is: a Catholic “ecumenism.”⁸⁴

This is precisely what *Chrétien désunis* endeavored to do, namely to define the basis, the nature, and the conditions of a Catholic ecumenism.

While he fully endorsed the doctrines of the Roman magisterium on ecclesial unity and dissidence, Congar nonetheless noted in a very astute manner, like Dom Théodore Belpaire (*Irénikon*, March 1930), that not all is said in these official documents: these define the ideal objective that must be reached, but “they have very little to say with regard to the concrete starting point and to the possibilities of moving towards this objective.”⁸⁵ There is thus room for reflection on the “possible paths of a movement for the reintegration of dissident Christianities into the unity.” It is the theologian’s task “to define the limits, to establish the broad directions and the main reference points,” and “to develop the notion of Christian reality as seen under the very conditions of its incarnation in humankind.”⁸⁶ It is in this spirit that the French theologian’s work must be understood, as a theology of the possible, moving along a fine line between the official stances of the Catholic

hierarchy and the positive appraisal of the other Christians.⁸⁷

Accordingly, the work was divided into four broad approaches:⁸⁸

- (1) an examination of the contemporary divisions: seeing and analyzing the facts in an objective manner; understanding the *theological* significance of these divisions beyond their mere description and documentation (chapter 1).
- (2) An in-depth, positive, serene, and irenic theological (theological) presentation on the *one* church, viewed under its two major aspects of unity (chapter 2) and catholicity (chapter 3).
- (3) A presentation and critique of the main theories on the unity of the church that are found outside the Catholic Church: the liberal ideology of Stockholm (Life and Work) and the ideology of the “Ecumenical movement” (chapter 4); the Anglo-Catholic conception (chapter 5); an Orthodox ecclesiology inspired from Slavophile theology (chapter 6).
- (4) A concluding examination of the concrete problem of a Catholic “ecumenism”: what Christians dissidents and dissident Christianities are from the perspective of the one and only church (chapter 7); the broad lines of a concrete agenda of Catholic “ecumenism” (chapter 8).

From a strategic point of view, this first book by Congar may be said to have contributed to the loosening and, as far as possible, to the opening up of the Catholic ecclesiological exclusivism of the

⁸⁴ Congar, *Chrétien désunis*, xiii.

⁸⁵ Congar, *Chrétien désunis*, xiii.

⁸⁶ Congar, *Chrétien désunis*, xiv.

⁸⁷ Following a remarkably well-documented analysis, Fouilloux is able to conclude that: “Father Congar did not tread a high road but a narrow, sinuous, and uneven path, in the middle of which he attempted to reconcile his desire to move forward and his concern that he might be cut off from the rear”; *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne*, 268.

⁸⁸ See Congar, *Chrétien désunis*, xiv–xv.

time, or, at the very least, to its breaching.⁸⁹ This is borne out both by the method employed and by the thereby elaborated, doctrinal content.

4.1 Method

The method, which is also “a concrete action program,” pursues a threefold objective: a kind of psychological approach in the mutual relations with other Christians; a return to the roots and to the profound life of Christianity; the enablement of a reintegration into catholicity.⁹⁰

(1) A psychological attitude that involves the abandoning of mutual prejudices and resentment; the carrying out of serious information work on one another; embracing charity for the purpose of procuring the maximum good for others; acting in a gentle and humble manner; being perfectly loyal and true; in short, being evangelical, fraternal, amicable.⁹¹ This “irenic” method had also been elaborated, since 1925, at the abbey which Dom Lambert Beauduin had founded that same year at Amay-sur-Meuse (relocated to Chevetogne in 1939), where Congar had spent some time in 1932, at the same time as the Abbé Couturier; significantly, the journal of the union monks, launched in 1926, bore the Greek title *Irénikon*. This attitude, which would lead to great difficulties for the founder of this abbey, stood in stark contrast to that of the majority of Catholics. Ultimately, it also opened up the possibility of allowing oneself to be challenged by the elements of truth found among other Christians, precisely in view of a deeper

and more comprehensive truth,⁹² and thus of an enrichment, or even of a reform of the Catholic Church itself.

(2) A return to the roots and to the profound life of Christianity in which Christians are “truly less disunited,” and “thereby rediscovering the external forms of unity.”⁹³ This implies going beyond the letter and the system that are specific to each Christian confession, going back *together* to the deep roots, prior to the disunion, and, having arrived at this level of shared depth, rediscovering the expressions of unity. While Congar was not the only one to practice the *reditus ad fontes* at the time, it was to become his trademark, a truly methodological reflex that was meant to provide a basis for all ecclesiological and ecumenical reflection.

(3) The enablement of a reintegration into catholicity by means of a double effort of irenic and critical explication with regard to the separated brothers (this serene and peaceful explication being the best form of clarification in the eyes of Congar), but also by means of an intensified effort to increase the effectiveness of the catholicity of the Catholic Church itself, that is, its ability to assimilate any authentic spiritual query (this being the most crucial ecumenical work, the life of the church itself, more faithful to the grace of its catholicity). This points to an ecumenical methodology that includes ecclesial reform as an intrinsic element: not only should one strive to explain (and thus already to reformulate, up to a certain point) the Catholic doctrine to the separated brothers but also to reform the Catholic Church itself so that it might respond more faithfully and more fully “to the inner law and to the grace of its catholicity.”⁹⁴

(4) Concurrently with this “ecumenical” method, Congar is also convinced that the “reunion” of the churches is above all an “object of

89 According to the assessment of Fouilloux “Father Congar, less than ten years after *Mortalium animos*, achieved a major result that he generously ascribed to the Malines Conversations: ‘showing that Rome was possible’ [*Chrétiens désunis*, 212]”; *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne*, 268

90 See Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 325–341, 402; Joseph Famerée, “Originalité de l’ecclésiologie du Père Congar,” *BLE* 106/1, 2005, 89–112, esp. 99–101, on which I largely base myself.

91 “Irenicism,” “loyalty,” “comparativism,” and “catholicity,” these are the terms employed by Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne*, 246–268 to describe this method.

92 “Obedience to truth was originally a law for us”; Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, xvi.

93 Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 402.

94 Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 402; see also 339–340.

theological hope and prayer”:⁹⁵ a radically spiritual dimension underlies every ecumenical endeavor. In short, Congar lays down the principles of a method of “ecumenism” that is more specifically theological or doctrinal: an irenic and loyal attitude that banishes polemics; a serene, mutual discovery of the different Christian traditions, albeit without erasing doctrinal differences, in intellectual honesty; a comparison of the respective doctrines, but also the ability to criticize one another, in truth and fraternity.

4.2 Doctrinal Content

From a strictly theological point of view, what is new is the conception of catholicity that emerges here, which was to enable a first opening of the Catholic Church to “ecumenism”: indeed, Congar endeavors to effect the transition from a strictly quantitative, temporal, and geographical notion of catholicity (“always widely present throughout the world”), which is also juridical and apologetic (only the Catholic Church is truly catholic, in the sense of this spatial-temporal universality), to a *qualitative* notion (catholicity is the church’s ability to provide an incarnation of the Word for every human, cultural reality).⁹⁶ Every expansion of the human must be met by a growth of the church, a humanization of God. The church must even become the universe, transfigured by the grace of God. In this regard, Congar would speak of the ecumenicity of the church.

For Congar, the bedrock of catholicity thus lies in the plenitude of the grace of Christ: the principles of church unity have the capacity to extend the communication of divine life to all mankind and the ability to assimilate every human value. “The thus understood catholicity of the church is thus essentially Trinitarian and Christological.”⁹⁷

it is in the Christ Jesus, the principle of salvation, and in his body, which is the church, that the relationship which exists between the unity of God and the multiplicity of the creature is founded. The church is a theandric reality in which all human reality redeemed by Christ is realized in him.⁹⁸ This catholicity of Christ is the principle of the church’s catholicity. It is therefore “this capacity, which its principles of unity possess, to reach, transfigure, save, fulfill, and restore to unity all of humanity throughout the world, all that receives or can receive a human animation in the world.”⁹⁹ This capacity is not only the constitutive law of the church, it is also a summons and an intrinsic requirement. One may thus speak of a dynamic universality of the divine truth of faith, of the baptismal incorporation into Christ, of sacramental graces, of the ecclesial life of mutual charity.¹⁰⁰

Because its spiritual reality is incarnate, “all the principles of the unity of the church, whose catholicity is dynamic universality, have an external form, a face and an instrument of inner unity: catholicity is apostolic, corporate, and hierarchical, as is unity.”¹⁰¹ This external constitution was laid down either by the Lord or by the apostles and cannot be changed. There is no such thing as a “non-Roman catholicity”: throughout history, the papacy has been the sole organ of unity and of the universal assumption of the many into one unity, and can indeed still be so.¹⁰² Simultaneously, the church must adapt to the full diversity of the human substance that it must incorporate into the unity. Divine logic is the communication of life through assumption into the unity; human logic is the communication of life through division and dispersion, the burden of sin weighing down

95 Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 402.

96 See Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 115–148 (chapter 3, “La catholicité de l’Église une”); see also Joseph Famerée & Gilles Routhier, *Yves Congar*, Paris, Cerf, 2008, 57–71, which I often follow closely, and Famerée, *Lecclesiologie d’Yves Congar avant Vatican II*, 42–53.

97 Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 117.

98 See Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 119, 121.

99 Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 121–122.

100 See Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 122–123.

101 Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 125.

102 See Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 126, note 1. In spite of the renewal of the notion of catholicity proposed by *Chrétiens désunis*, Congar’s argumentation with regard to the papacy, in this particular case, remains dependent on standard post-Tridentine apologetics.

on and corrupting these natural accretions. Within the church, these two logics are articulated as the synergy of the “gift” of divine life (in Christ) and of the “activity” or active input of human beings.¹⁰³

An extension of unity, ecclesial catholicity guarantees the respect and the fulfillment of human diversity while purifying it, not by way of denaturalization but through supra-naturalization. A great diversity of ways to lead a Christian life is legitimate and even necessary for the church.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, catholicity purifies the human diversities and lets them die in the face of their excessive particularism in order to let them enter the overarching unity of the whole. The Holy Spirit is the bond of both catholicity and unity.¹⁰⁵

The Catholic Church is certain that it holds and represents the fullness of truth, in which the partial and antinomic conceptions – antinomic because they are partial – are reconciled in unity. The Catholic Church cannot accept “ecumenism” if it implies that the Church of Christ does not currently exist in the world. “The one church, Catholic and visible, exists in its unity, its catholicity, and its visibility,” even if “its catholicity is imperfect,” inasmuch as it “is initially only given as a dynamic potentiality.”¹⁰⁶

Indeed, “is there really no reason for us to admit that [the Church of Jesus Christ] is not yet fully Catholic?”¹⁰⁷ Under the aspect of its present realization, the catholicity of the church, though inalienable, “has its positive and negative sides, and it can be stated *a priori* that it is not currently perfect and probably never will be.”¹⁰⁸ The Roman Church, fully Catholic from the point of view of the dynamic possibilities of its living substance, explicitly only realizes this catholicity in an imperfect manner, and in this imperfection, the division

of Christianity plays a role.¹⁰⁹ There is some truth and a share of inalienable Christian values in all confessions, in spite of their separation, but this calls for a reintegration into catholicity. To this end, the church can only remain one if it proves Catholic with a more fully effective catholicity. It must engage “in a continuous reform of itself.” Ecumenicity is the church itself, the church inasmuch as it develops its ecumenical worth.¹¹⁰

Catholic ecumenism, according to Congar, thus begins and is able to develop when the Catholic Church recognizes that it currently only realizes its catholicity in an imperfect manner, that it must therefore continuously reform itself in order to be Catholic with a catholicity that is increasingly perfect, comprehensive, open, and receptive to the inalienable Christian values of the other confessions, precisely in order to reintegrate them into the catholicity. This was only a first expression of openness to other Christians (nonetheless crucial for the development of Catholicism and quite audacious for the period),¹¹¹ although this openness could intensify itself over time. Congar even offers a spur of the moment justification of his position in a letter to Father Maurice Villain: “What I have written and said may perhaps appear half-hearted in the near future. [But] at the time when I wrote and said it, this was not so.”¹¹²

Having said this, let us examine how the “ecumenical” proposals of *Chrétiens désunis* were received at the time.

103 See Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 130.

104 See Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 137–142.

105 See Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 145.

106 Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 239.

107 Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 315.

108 Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 315–316.

109 A similar statement is found 27 years later in decree on ecumenism issued by Vatican II, *Unitatis redintegratio* § 4.

110 See Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 339–341.

111 In the context of an acute tension between loyalty to the Catholic tradition and the inner urge to recognize the ecumenical movement: an “irresolvable contradiction,” as stated by Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne*, 246.

112 Y. Congar to M. Villain, May 13, 1939, copy, cited in: Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l’unité chrétienne*, 247.

5 The Reception of *Chrétien désunis*

This is the short description of *Chrétien désunis* that can be found on the back cover of the Unam Sanctam prospectus announcing the fourth volume in the series, *Cathedra Petri* by Pierre Battifol, in 1938: “Bordin Prize of the Académie Française for 1938. Eight chapters outlining a positive theology of the church, of its unity, and of its catholicity, and confronting this theology with the doctrine of the Christian denominations that are separated from the Roman Church.”¹¹³ Even though this advertisement text is the work of those who conceived the series, it is nevertheless worth noting that *Chrétien désunis* had already attracted the attention of the Académie Française, an institution whose primary interest is not theology. One should also mention that the prospectus announcing this volume was printed in 8,000 copies in French and 1,200 copies in English (to be sent to the ecumenical conferences of 1938).¹¹⁴ An Italian version of the prospectus also exists.¹¹⁵ All this conveys a certain idea of the effort to publicize the new series and its first volume.

Strictly by way of example, only two contemporary academic reviews of *Chrétien désunis* will be discussed here: one published by Abbé Gustave Thils, doctor and *maître* in theology at Leuven, in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*;¹¹⁶ the other by a fellow Dominican brother of Congar, Vincent-Marie Pollet, in the journal *Angelicum* of the Dominican university of the same name in Rome.¹¹⁷

The review published by Thils singles out the main points in the Congarian argument: the

divisions among Christians can only disappear if the spiritual intuition from which they arose is discerned; the divergences are maintained by the particular way in which each church conceives the unity of the universal church; the dissidents must be integrated into the *Una Catholica*, but a Catholic unity which, far from rejecting them, assumes all true values, as the catholicity of the church will thus be enriched by the visible expressions that it lacks. The conclusion is laudatory:

This brief overview ... will at least give an idea of the scope of the overall conception. ... One could quote many passages that disclose the anguish of this apostle of union, his effort to highlight what the divergent ecclesiologies have in common, his loyalty to the defense of truth. In short, these “principles of a Catholic ecumenism” are a fine achievement, and one that will stand out in the context of unionist literature.¹¹⁸

A mirror of his time, Thils speaks of unionism and only uses the word ecumenism to cite the subtitle of Congar’s book, not even mentioning the quotation marks in which the latter enclosed the word, thereby limiting the impact of his audacity.

Pollet, on the other hand, who was well-disposed towards his fellow Dominican brother and did not fail to mention “his usual brilliance,” nevertheless expressed a far more restrictive view of Catholic “ecumenism” and of catholicity. In the opinion of the reviewer, who criticized Congar for having “perhaps” placed too much trust in the piety and the mysticism of the dissident Christians, the authentic values that persist among them are also found among the Catholics of the same cultural milieu. “A reunion would therefore only serve to manifest better, in Roman Catholicism, the values that are already inherent in it.” The Catholicism of the Roman Church would only benefit from it insofar as it depends, in order to express itself, on numbers, divergences of temperament, of culture,

¹¹³ APDF, V, 832, 43.

¹¹⁴ An English translation of *Chrétien désunis* was soon available in 1939: Congar, *Divided Christendom*.

¹¹⁵ See APDF, V, 832, 43; handwritten note by Congar in connection with the printed prospectus of Unam Sanctam and of *Chrétien désunis*.

¹¹⁶ See Gustave Thils, review of Yves Congar’s *Chrétien désunis*, *ETL* 14, 1937, 684–686.

¹¹⁷ See Vincent-Marie Pollet, review of Yves Congar’s *Chrétien désunis*, *Angelicum* 15, 1938, 300–301.

¹¹⁸ Thils, review, 686.

etc.”¹¹⁹ Pollet falls short of embracing Congar’s qualitative understanding of catholicity, according to which the reunion of the Christians will usher in a truly new reality compared to the current Roman Catholic Church, not to mention the fact that, in the eyes of the reviewer, the reunion is merely a “return to the church,” even if it were an “achievement” and not a renunciation. And for the Thomist Pollet, even if this consideration is true with regard to individual souls, it is only so “per accidens” with regard to “their confessions themselves, which constitute communions, wholes that no longer communicate, or only in a distant or imperfect manner, with the *Una Sancta*.” Noting that “it is even dangerous to insist too much on the unilateral character of the dogma and of Catholic theology from a defensive position” and pointing out various flaws (hasty generalizations, unhappy formulations, disputable judgments), the reviewer nevertheless recognizes that these “are merely the price to be paid for the author’s unquestionable talent, which manifests itself (fully) in this brilliant essay.” And concluding in a far less “ecumenical” manner than his fellow brother from Le Saulchoir: “Let us hope that the author will find emulators, and this time at least, let us rejoice that a Catholic has rekindled the flame on the altar upon which the dissidents, enamored of unity, will come to immolate their prejudices and make sacrifice of their divisions.”¹²⁰

Apart from this Catholic theological reception,¹²¹ it is important to note how the work was perceived among the leading officeholders

of the Catholic Church, here the master general of the Dominican order, Martin-Stanislas Gillet, echoes the misgivings of Rome. The following quotation represents the best part of a confidential letter which he addressed to Father Chenu, the regent of Le Saulchoir, on Jan 17, 1939:

I must speak to you about the book by Father Congar, whose great merits no one disputes, but who has shown a talent to stir certain otherwise sympathetic minds. If I write to you about it, it is because I have been entrusted with the mission to do so and to forestall and mitigate certain warnings that might be issued in high places, if at all, under the pressure of certain theologians who, I repeat, recognize the exceptional merits of this book but deplore the *confusion* of certain pages that would gain from being corrected by the author (this concerns the pages 34, 35/50, 52, 316, 319, 320, 330). What Fr. Congar is mostly criticized for is that he relies more on *religious experience* for the control of the faith than on the definitions of the church and the dogmatic formulas. Here appended, you will find a synopsis of similar thoughts taken from recent works.

In my opinion, this is what Fr. Congar should do. He should write me a letter in which he states that he has taken cognizance of the criticism that some have leveled at him in connection with certain pages of his book, especially those in which he talks about *religious experience*; that in his thinking, he has never desired to cast doubt on or contradict the magisterium of the church in any way; that, when addressing himself especially to our separated brothers, he placed the emphasis on what was most likely to convince them; that if he was wrong, he deeply regrets it and is ready, for a new edition, to make the corrections that he is asked to make. With this letter, which would be like a lightning rod for me, I would ward off the thunderbolt if ever it threatened this beautiful monument.

119 Pollet, review, 301.

120 Pollet, review, 301.

121 One might also cite the short, positive appraisal by the historian Léon Halkin from the University of Liège in Belgium: “I have not yet told you how highly I have thought of your book *Chrétiens désunis*, a truly remarkable work, utterly free of all compromise, and also of all vanity. I also admired the call for charity that you repeated in the most recent issue of *Vie Intellectuelle*. This will please Mounier, and do good to so many others!”; L. Halkin to Y. Congar, Dec 15, 1937, in: APDF, 832, 53, Groupe Portal.

I believe that this should only be discussed *with Father Congar* and with no one else. It is safer for him, for us, for me, for the *convent school*, which is a faculty. I repeat that I have no knowledge of anything official or even unofficial; however, I thought I *sensed* some concerns; this is why I am taking the initiative.

There is no cause for alarm, but there is reason to be cautious.

This is why this letter is that of a *father*, a *friend*, and not that of a *judge*. On this note, I embrace Father Congar and you, and assure you once again of my fatherly affection in St. Dom.¹²²

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It is the recourse of *Chrétien désunis* to “religious experience” that gave cause for concern. Some suspected it of propagating what had been regarded as the subjectivism of Catholic modernist theologians in the early 20th century: the religious feeling of the subject, which eludes the abstraction of the dogmatic formulas and the control of the magisterium. Far removed from any subjectivism and relativism, Congar’s taking into account of religious experience was precisely what enabled him to recognize, respect, and appreciate the experience and the authentic Christian values of the “separated brothers.” The request that Father Congar write a letter in which he would express his total submission to the magisterium of the church and his regret for eventual errors is somewhat surprising in the light of the fact that he had already clearly said all this in the foreword to *Chrétien désunis*.¹²³ The letter would have no doubt given Congar an opportunity to clarify his intentions, but it would have mostly served as a tactical instrument in the hands of his superior general, as a “lightning rod” in case any threats materialized. Such prudence on the part of the master of

the order says much about the diffuse atmosphere of distrust that reigned in Rome when it came to ecumenical issues.¹²⁴

Ten years later, a letter which Congar had prepared but never sent, in this form, to the *socius* of the master of the order for the French-speaking realm testifies to the success and the resonance of *Chrétien désunis* both among Catholics and in ecumenical circles.¹²⁵ However, the French Dominican would never obtain the authorization of the order’s master, Father Emmanuel Suarez, to publish a second revised and expanded edition, which had been planned for 1949,¹²⁶ the first edition having been out of print since 1941. The word of caution that he personally wrote for this second edition at Le Saulchoir (in Étioilles)¹²⁷ on the feast of Saint Dominic of 1948 is revealing with regard to how he viewed his own work ten years after its first publication, taking into account the criticism that had been leveled against him. In this text, he recalls that as a prisoner in Colditz in 1941, he had refused to approve a second edition. He had

the feeling that many things, in this book, were no longer up to date; that even my ideas had evolved; that I viewed the issue partly in a new way: more imbued with history, psychology, and thus, I believe, in a more genuine way. Even with the excuse that the circumstances made it impossible for me to engage in this type of work, it seemed to me dishonest to reissue a text that predated the most recent developments of the ecumenical movement and the valuable intellectual strides that I have made. It was also my desire,

¹²² S.-M. Gillet to M.-D. Chenu, Jan 17, 1939 (copied, type-written text), in: APDF, V, 832, 400.

¹²³ Congar, *Chrétien désunis*, xvi.

¹²⁴ From his three-page “answer” to “Rme Père” Gillet, let me simply quote Congar’s assessment of Luther, which was quite daring at the time: “in Brother Martin Luther, there was, *before he became a Lutheran*, a spiritual quest and an authentic spiritual feeling”; Y. Congar to S.-M. Gillet, Jan 26, 1939, in: APDF, V, 832, 400.

¹²⁵ Y. Congar to A. Giraud, Mar 28, 1949, in: APDF, V, 832, 400, 3, document 4.

¹²⁶ The manuscript of this hoped-for edition may be found at APDF, V, 832, 108.

¹²⁷ In the vicinity of Paris, since 1939.

in an eventual reedition, to take account of some of the critiques which, in the midst of an exceptionally favorable reception, had nevertheless been directed at me: either to respond to them or to benefit from them.

He then goes on to say that:

Had I entirely followed the current flow of my thought, I would have had to write a book that would, in many ways, have been new, structured along different lines, with historical considerations that are only insufficiently sketched out here. Owing to a lack of time, I could not imagine writing such a book. Nor could I bring myself to reissue this text as it had been in 1937, with only a few corrections and additions. Between the ideal but impractical solution and the insufficient, and thus unacceptable, solution, I chose a middle course which, without satisfying me, could appease my strongest scruples. I made a certain number of additions, some of them considerable; everywhere I could, I did my best to mention, in the appropriate places, at least the most notable publications that had appeared since 1937; I corrected many flaws and clarified more than one point; finally, I rewrote all of chapter 4 and more than half of chapter 8 in an entirely new manner. ... Due to these partial revisions, this already poorly written book, the result of a simple editing of speeches, is more unbalanced than ever. But why be surprised? It is the fruit of a compromise.¹²⁸

And finally: "With regard to the ecumenical movement, I have the feeling that I have become, over the years, both more sympathetic and stricter; perhaps, in sum, more genuine."¹²⁹

This retrospective view illustrates both the lucidity and the dynamism of the French theologian's ecumenical reflection, a manner of thinking that was constantly evolving and undergoing changes depending on the new facts that presented themselves to him: never contenting himself with the achievements of the past, always in search of a more complete and exact truth. It heralded Congar's increasingly pertinent and rigorous commitment to the desire and the quest for the unity of Christians, in spite of all the constraints and sanctions that he was to endure until his improbable rehabilitation soon after the announcement of an "ecumenical" council on Jan 25, 1959.

Translated from French to English by Robert Meyer.

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¹²⁸ Y. Congar to S.-M. Gillet, Jan 26, 1939, in: APDF, V, 832, 400, 1.

¹²⁹ Y. Congar to S.-M. Gillet, Jan 26, 1939, in: APDF, V, 832, 400, 3.

Author Query:

- AQ 1: De Ecclesia -Doit-il être compris comme sujet ecclésiologique ou comme traité/ouvrage particulier? Please verify - 1st col.
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