

‘WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE?’ VATICAN II FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF YVES CONGAR

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After being silenced as a theologian for many years, Yves Congar OP was summoned to be an expert at Vatican II, and played an important part in shaping many of the conciliar documents. His diary of the Council gives a frank and immediate account of his experiences, and is a valuable source of information for anyone who wants to get behind the documents and understand something of the workings of the Council. In particular we see the interplay between the natural conservatism of the Curia and the developing understanding of the Bishops for the ‘new theology’ represented by Congar and others among the experts.

At first Yves Congar thought that the Second Vatican Council had been called too early. ‘In twenty years time,’ he wrote in July 1960, ‘we might have had an episcopate comprised of men who had grown up in ideas rooted in the Bible and in tradition, in a realistic pastoral and missionary outlook. We have not reached that point yet. However, ... the very announcement of the Council, with its long-term ecumenical aim, in the more humane and more Christian climate of the pontificate of John XXIII might well accelerate this process.’ (*My Journal of the Council*, p.4.)¹ The ideas existed, but the theologians who had expressed them had at best been tolerated for the past twenty years. Some had been silenced.

To Congar’s joy, during the next few years Vatican II involved a kind of extended seminar for bishops; they had an opportunity to listen to those ideas, to discuss them with one another, to begin to understand them,

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¹ *My Journal of the Council*, Yves Congar (Adelaide, Australia: ATF Press; Dublin, Ireland: Dominican Publications; Collegetown, MA, USA: Liturgical Press, 2012), lx + 979; ISBN 978-0-8146-8029-2.

to embrace them. Many went through a conversion process; they changed their minds. 'Five years ago, who would have thought it was possible?' wrote Congar on 4 December 1995 (p.865). He had just come from the Service of the Word celebrated at St Paul-Outside-the-Walls by Pope Paul VI and the Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Observers who had faithfully followed the conciliar process from beginning to end, and by their presence had made no small contribution to its work.

The importance of Congar's diary of the Council, for those who want to get a sense of its day-to-day workings and to understand its significance, can hardly be overestimated. He was one of those theologians who had suffered ecclesiastical censure for many years before Pope John XXIII so unexpectedly on 25 January 1959 called a council to 'open the windows' of the Roman Catholic Church and to promote unity with other Christians. Theologians who had been under suspicion from the Holy Office for years were called in to help. Congar's journal begins in July 1960 when he was named a Consultor to the Preparatory Theological Commission of the Council. It gives a day-to-day account of the four conciliar sessions (1962-65) as well as relating his part in the preparations for the Council before it opened in the autumn of 1962, during the periods between the sessions and in the months following the Council. It ends in September 1966. Congar wrote frankly of his experiences, wanting to set down the truth of what happened as he saw it unfolding, and insisting that it should not be publicly available until the year 2000.

The French edition of the diary duly came out in two volumes in 2002; the English translation has appeared as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Council—a single volume, weighty in more ways than one. The translators were Mary John Ronayne OP and Mary Cecily Boulding OP, and the English translation editor Denis Minns OP. The French editor, Eric Mahieu, contributes an introduction, supplemented by Cecily Boulding. There are notes on every page, sometimes many of them, identifying the people Congar mentions in his daily entries. These are indispensable. (Although I noticed one note that attempted—wrongly—to correct Congar's identification of the Archbishop of Canterbury's representative in Rome: see n.2 on p.850.)

Following the diary itself there are some very useful sections to help the reader to cope with such a lengthy journal, left as far as possible in its original form. We are given Congar's own 'points of reference', chronological tables, Latin titles used by Congar, names he used for

Commissions, a glossary, Congar's principal works mentioned in the journal, a plan of Rome, an index of the council fathers, and an index of names. Alas, there is no subject index, but it seems churlish to ask for more.

Congar's ecumenical vocation

Christian unity was at the heart of Congar's vocation. As a young French Dominican he studied theology at Le Saulchoir (then in Belgium), where one of the professors, Marie-Dominique Chenu OP, not much older than himself, influenced his choice of ecclesiology in historical perspective as the abiding focus of his work. He decided on the unity of the Church as the subject of his lectorate thesis, and prepared for his ordination as a priest in 1930 by meditating on chapter 17 of John's gospel. It was the time when he recognised his vocation as ecumenical and ecclesiological, but he felt that its seeds had been planted in him much earlier, even during his childhood.

From 1932 he taught ecclesiology at Le Saulchoir, at the same time developing ecumenical contacts in Belgium, France and elsewhere. The two went together. Because his historical perspective took him back to a scriptural and patristic tradition of the Church which had sadly been overlaid by a more juridical and curial view in recent centuries, he was also able to understand much better the concerns of the Reformers. This was a dual perspective that led him in 1937 to found, with the Editions du Cerf, the collection of ecclesiological studies which he named 'Unam Sanctam', and to inaugurate the collection with his own book *Chrétiens désuni. Principes d'un 'oecuménisme' catholique*. It was his first major theological work, and it caused a sensation (the English translation appeared in 1939). Among other Christian bodies it aroused the hope that maybe the Roman Catholic Church might be able to join in the ecumenical movement. It no longer presented reunion in terms of a 'return' of non-Catholic Christians to the one true Church, but as a development in which the Roman Catholic Church too had its part to play. It needed to recognise elements of the Church in other churches, and to understand that these others had sometimes preserved or developed ecclesial values that had lain dormant within its own tradition. These startling ideas were a threat to the *status quo* and Congar came under suspicion in Rome, but he was not condemned, unlike Chenu, whose 1937 book on historical theology (*Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir*) was put on the Index.

Congar spent 1940-45 as a prisoner of war, and then returned to teach at Le Saulchoir, now re-established in France, near Paris. In 1950 he published *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*, volume 20 in the 'Unam Sanctam' collection, and in 1953 *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*. These books, together with *Chrétiens désunis*, were to have a great influence on the Council. In 1952 Congar participated in the creation of the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions, quietly called together by the Dutch professor Jan Willebrands so that those few Catholic theologians who had begun to study ecumenical matters had a forum in which to share their views and experiences.

However, in 1954 Congar was banned from teaching and publishing, and was summoned to Rome by the Holy Office, though never formally condemned. In 1956 he was exiled to Cambridge, but at the end of the year was able to return to France, living in the Dominican priory in Strasbourg. He was not allowed to teach, but Bishop Weber supported him and he was able to resume publishing and editing, as well as preaching. Before the Council opened, the Bishop of Strasbourg chose Congar as his personal expert. Even after he was recognised as an official Council expert, however, Congar wrote sadly after a discussion with Cardinal Ottaviani, head of the Holy Office, in December 1962: 'I perceive that I am once and for all and for ever under suspicion' (p.222). A year later he wrote: 'Since 1938, I have been UNCEASINGLY under suspicion, pursued, reprimanded, limited, crushed' (p.370). By 1963 he had every reason to think that he was fully rehabilitated. His work was appreciated both by Pope John XXIII and by Paul VI. He was in constant demand to lecture to bishops. The Master General of the Dominicans asked to see him 'to say some nice things to me: the first time in my life that a superior has summoned me for such a purpose' (p.281). He was declared a Master of Theology in the Dominican Order. Yet even in 1964 he could write: 'Personally, I have never been, I am still not, free of the fears attached to a man who is suspect, sanctioned, judged, discriminated against'.

'Prefabricated in Rome'

'The great risk is that the Council will prove to have been prefabricated in Rome or under Roman direction', wrote Congar at the beginning of his journal (p.8). His work on the history of ecclesiology had convinced him that for fifteen centuries Rome had tried to monopolise all the lines of direction and control in the Church. It had largely succeeded. So it

was not surprising that the 'old guard' in the Roman Curia saw the prospect of a Council as a threat to its own power and authority, and sought to minimise the danger. Congar was even afraid that there would be a kind of Council by correspondence—texts prepared by the Curia to which the bishops would be asked to respond in writing; they would only meet together briefly to give final approval to texts to which they had themselves made little contribution. As a theologian, Congar believed that this would not be a Council at all. Only an 'assembled episcopate', an 'effective meeting of the bishops, involving free discussion and decision-making' could be a genuine Council. Whereas 'dispersed', the bishops 'can only express isolated, unplanned reactions, which will be received and doctored by a Roman commission' ... they 'will not even realise they have been tricked' (pp.8-9).

So right at the beginning of the diary, the reader is drawn into an understanding of how much was at stake. Would Pope John XXIII be able to defend the infant Council he had called, and keep true to his original inspiration? Congar was determined to do what he could. In 1959 he had prepared a draft reply for Mgr Weber to the request sent to all bishops asking for topics to be discussed at the Council, and another paper for Mgr Elchinger, Coadjutor Bishop of Strasbourg. But when it turned out in June 1960 that the result of this preliminary consultation was the setting up of ten preparatory commissions, with the President of each commission being the cardinal in charge of the corresponding Roman congregation, Congar was depressed. The one bright spot was the Secretariat for Christian Unity—'a new creation uncluttered by precedent'. But for the rest 'the machine which Rome had so carefully put together was taking into its iron grip this tiny infant Council which had only just been born. ... Within these arms of steel it would not be allowed to move, speak or even breathe except as [the Curia] directed' (p.11).

In a couple of published letters, Congar wrote in very careful terms of his anxieties, for 'experience and history have taught me that one must ALWAYS protest when one feels in conscience or by conviction that there are grounds for doing so' (p.12). In July he heard that he had been appointed as consultor of the Theological Commission, and accepted with hesitation and in deep depression, not knowing whether the consultors would ever be consulted, and feeling that the secrecy required from them would isolate them. The commission was slanted in a thoroughly conservative direction. In fact Congar wondered if he and

Henri de Lubac (a Jesuit from Lyons who had also been discredited and forbidden to teach by the Roman authorities between 1950 and 1958) had been included among the consultors 'as a form of WINDOW DRESSING?' Later he was told that the two nominations had come personally from the Pope. Congar was determined not to collaborate with the *Unitas* Centre run by Charles Boyer SJ in Rome—it espoused the 'return' mentality current under Pope Pius XII. 'If I found myself being asked to do something that contradicted ecumenism, I would have to resign', he mused (p.16).

On the other hand, 'I must do my duty'. Congar's great desire was to serve 'loyally and humbly' the great enterprise of the Council opened up by Pope John XXIII under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. 'I pray every day that I may offer myself in this way, that God will not allow lying men or power-seekers to hijack it, and that he will safeguard and strengthen Pope John. ... I wish to serve the truth' (p.17). It was in this spirit that Congar committed himself to the work of the Preparatory Theological Commission.

From November 1960 he was back and forth to Rome four times for commission meetings. It was not an encouraging period. He was not even informed of one meeting, and speculating about the reason 'puts me in the dumps: it seems quite clear to me that I would not be able to make my voice heard' (p.38). The consultors were not given much work to do, and the memoranda they wrote received little attention from the commission members. They were rarely invited to the sub-commissions, where the real work was done, and they were not allowed to express or defend their views verbally. They only 'managed to secure a few small improvements by deletions, additions or changes'. Later Congar upbraided himself for being 'too timid' during this period (p.186). He had intervened on the question of Tradition, both against the idea of the two sources, and also against the attribution of the preservation of the Tradition by the Magisterium alone. (Congar's *La Tradition et les traditions* was published in 1960, and *La Tradition et la vie de l'Église* in 1963.) These interventions fared no better than his memoranda on bishops or ecumenism. Later he thought he should have argued more, but at the time it seemed useless.

Texts on ecumenism were written without any consultation with Cardinal Bea's Secretariat for Unity, although Congar had thought it would be essential. 'Always the same atomising and separating structure', he commented (p.34). In July 1961 Congar wrote to the Pope,

to express his 'anguish and suffering' at the way in which the Secretariat had been totally ignored by the Theological Commission. And yet the Pope himself had said that the Council 'ought to be aiming at, and arranging everything in such a way as ultimately to serve the cause of Christian unity' (p.45).

The texts prepared and defended in Rome were 'very scholastic' with 'no trace of an ecumenical perspective or concern', and 'Scripture is almost never quoted except as a kind of ornamentation' (p.48). Doctrine was seen as a set of propositions, practically unrelated to pastoral or ecumenical questions. Papal encyclicals took precedence over Scripture. 'These Rome-based theologians have no respect for the Tradition. All they can see are papal utterances. That is where the great battle will continue to be waged. The truth will prevail' (p.58). 'We are stuck with a Denziger point of view: one of the deadliest of books in spite of its usefulness' (p.63).

Yet even before the Council opened in October 1962, there were hopeful signs. In the various Commissions there was beginning to be a split between the bishops from outside Rome and those who were members of the Roman Congregations. 'The bishops are beginning to like seeing one another, talking to one another', said Mgr Marty, Archbishop of Rheims (p.44). And back in Rome in March 1962, Congar found 'a very different climate from what it was a year ago' (p.70). The consultants could intervene; discussion was free and fruitful. One of the fascinating things about a diary is that it shows its author fluctuating between pessimism and optimism on a daily basis.

'Dead tired'

The diary also shows how very unwell Congar felt during the whole period of the Council. The first evening he was in Rome in November 1960 he recorded that he was 'extremely tired'. He later added to his typescript that he remembered being at the end of his tether as he dragged his case from the bus station to Saint-Louis. 'I am convinced that my hemiplegic-type neurological disease was already developing', he wrote (p.22). In fact it was in 1936 when he was preaching in Paris during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity that he had the first symptoms of a neurological illness that causes a form of sclerosis. After decades of remission, these symptoms resurfaced in 1960, becoming increasingly severe and restricting his movement, gradually paralysing

his entire right side. He used a walking-stick during the Council, and a year or two later was confined to a wheelchair.

He was acutely aware of his limitations. 'The problem is that my extreme physical weakness means that I have not the energy to be indignant and to react', he wrote in November 1961 (p.64). And in March 1962: 'Wherever I go, I arrive dead tired and worn out whenever I have had to walk a little' (p.78). The day after the Council opened Congar 'dragged myself over to the Procure de St Sulpice in order to see Mgr Weber and Mgr Marty, "my" bishops ... I went back almost on my hands and knees.' Someone who saw him that day wrote in his own diary: 'Went to the Angelicum where we met Fr Congar, as serene as he was exhausted by his illness' (n.5, p.89). It was a little easier when he moved from the Angelicum to a more central location, but sometimes he could 'only just stand on my feet and hold a pencil or a fork' (p.374). The doctors he saw did not agree on a diagnosis, and left him 'very perplexed' (p.409). When travelling by train between Strasbourg and Milan he met Mgr Elchinger's brother, who had multiple sclerosis (paraplegia), and noted that they had remarkably similar symptoms. He felt unable to follow the medical advice to 'stop and rest when tired'; 'I told myself that it is useless to expect any improvement as long as I have so much correspondence every day, so many requests, difficult letters which take several hours to answer' (p.488). 'Year by year I lose a little more', he wrote in April 1964 (p.522). And a year later: 'I feel so ill! I cannot lift my right leg more than three centimetres; I slide it along the ground. And I have developed very painful neuralgia in my shoulder and right arm. I have seldom been as low as this' (p.737). 'No strength left', he recorded in May 1965, 'and every day I must go on as if I had some' (p.763). 'I envy those who are able to come and go, walk, be alive to the questions of others with enthusiasm and vigour. I haven't the strength' (p.778). Yet all the time he was having an effective influence in the Council, as he himself recognised: 'There is no movement in my right leg. I am always, and every day, without vitality and strength: like a tree struck by lightning, no longer alive, exhausted, except by a centimetre of bark and wood by means of which a minimum of sap rises. All the same, it produces some apples or some plums. Oh, but it's hard!!!' (p.801).

Congar was something of a workaholic, and laboured incredibly hard both in the pre-conciliar period and throughout the four years of the Council itself. As an official peritus of the Council, he attended endless meetings and drafted innumerable texts. At the same time he was trying

to pursue his own theological research, writing and editing, convinced that for the Council and for the post-conciliar period this was essential work. He was increasingly in demand by groups of bishops wanting to understand the issues at stake in the texts they had to vote upon, and he had tremendous influence in this way. Italian bishops wanted him to lecture to their seminarians, and he was glad to do this, as well as to influence the Italian Dominicans as far as he could, knowing how much influence Italians had in the Church, and how 'curial' many of them were. 'In my opinion everything that is done with a view to converting Italy to the Gospel from political, ecclesiological or devotional ultramontism, is that much gained for the universal Church as well', he wrote (p.247). He was assiduous in explaining to the Observers what was going on in the Council debates, and how these linked up with their own concerns and with ecumenical progress. He continued to advise individual students.

At night he was always trying to keep up with his voluminous correspondence, 'my cross', he called it (p.681). 'A crushing load of work to clear away my backlog of correspondence (I finished the letters typing with one finger, because my right hand can't do any more) and correction of proofs. There is no end to them!!!' (p.863). He very occasionally took a half-day off when invited to go on an excursion away from Rome. When he did he thoroughly enjoyed it, always responsive to the quality of light in the Italian countryside. 'What a joy to see trees again, and breathe air that didn't stink of petrol!!! The light was beautiful, and the trees had autumn tints of such a soft brightness that my old love for them became wholly joyful' (p.833). Much of the time he was weighed down with all that had to be done. Yet right at the end of the Council, on a Sunday when he had 'worked without stopping on the writing of the paper on dialogue for the Joint Committee of the WCC-Catholic Church, in between visitors and telephone calls—all about invitations, appointments, requests to visit, lectures, ceremonies ... it could not have been done better if the intention had been to KILL someone'—he went in the evening to a performance given by the French seminarians for the Council fathers. 'Despite my incredible overload of work, I went to it, remembering our own feelings when we were young and our lecturers did, or did not, come to things like this' (pp.865-7).

Congar's contribution to the Council

Was all the effort worth it? Sometimes it seemed that he was drafting and re-drafting texts to no purpose—they were overtaken even before they were seen. Interventions were prepared for bishops who did not present them in the end, so that the commissions had no basis for introducing the thinking they contained. 'So much work has come to nothing! I could have written three volumes in the time I have spent on works that have fallen into the abyss of nothingness!' (p.831). And 'our texts, in the end, are pretty banal. So much effort, so much time spent, to achieve middling declarations.' But all the same 'the opening up of dialogue, the gaining of liberty, are of an incomparable value ... I have just re-read the whole of the *De Ecclesia* ... there is, after all, MUCH that is very good; sometimes a great density of dogmatic thought, and throughout, openings, seeds. I believe in seeds' (pp.522-3). Congar had suffered a lot in the pre-conciliar period, from the 'Machiavellian and depressing secrecy', 'obtained and sanctioned by oath, which Rome imposes on all who work with her ... It is contrary to human nature and to the nature of intelligence, which is DIALOGICAL.' But once the bishops had arrived in Rome and started talking to one another, 'the Church has been placed in a state of dialogue, at least internally ... feeling alive from the fact of the enriching contact with others and with an environment vowed to free discussion, marked by the seal of questioning and of freedom' (p.116).

All his working life Congar had been trying, apparently in vain, to open up dialogue within the Church and between the churches; now he was able to take part in it at the highest level. He was clearly on one side in the great struggle which he saw as 'a battle between the almighty reign of the "Holy Office" and the Church, which is alive and is in apostolic contact with the world' (p.205). But he was always fair; it was never a case of winning, but of seeking the truth. Early on Hans Küng, Swiss priest and theologian, professor at the University of Tübingen, wanted to hold a meeting of theologians in Rome, to see how they could influence the Council. Congar advised against it, 'saying that for my part I would not attend such a meeting, or that I would at least insist that theologians of an integrist cast should also take part' (p.82). (A third introductory essay to the Journal, by Paul Philibert OP, explains what Congar meant by 'intégristes' – ultramontane, authoritarian, clericalised

ecclesiastics who wanted to control everything, so that it remained as they had always known it to be.)

Congar wanted people to change through dialogue, not through manipulation. He was always respectful of the views of the traditionalists, if they were argued intelligently and with a real desire to seek the truth; he appreciated how they sometimes forced the 'progressives' to refine their thinking and revise the way in which they expressed their ideas. What angered him was the underhand, manipulative and dishonest way in which the Curia tried to suppress thinking of which they did not approve. There was always the danger of last-minute changes—one could never be quite sure that a text agreed by the Council fathers would actually get through 'until AFTER its solemn promulgation' (p.862).

At the end of the Council Congar summed up his personal contribution to its documents, after the session of 7 December 1965 when the lifting of the anathemas between Rome and Constantinople was announced, to his great joy, and finally the texts on religious liberty and the Church in the modern world were promulgated. He came out from St Peter's 'slowly and with difficulty, barely able to stand. A great many bishops congratulated me, thanked me. To a good extent, it was my work, they said.' 'Yes', he reflected, 'I did a great deal to prepare for the Council, elaborating and diffusing the ideas that the Council consecrated.' He had worked hard at the Council itself, too timidly at first, doing what was asked of him, but taking too few initiatives himself. But God 'gifted me profusely, infinitely beyond my non-existent merits'. He listed all the contributions he had made to the conciliar constitutions and decrees—on the Church, revelation, ecumenism, non-Christian religions, the Church in the modern world, the missions, religious liberty, the priesthood (pp.870-1). It was an objective corrective to his self-critical and self-deprecating attitude, often found in his diary. 'Pretty feeble, like everything else I do', he commented on an article he had written (p.678), and he spoke of feeling crushed 'by the consciousness of the mediocrity of my life and my work' (p.781). It was not the assessment that others made, either at the time, or since.

Popes and papacy

Congar's thinking had undoubtedly influenced both Pope John XXII and Pope Paul VI, who succeeded him in July 1963. He was pleased to be told that Roncalli (later Pope John) had been reading *Vraie et fausse réforme*

in 1952. He learned that Roncalli had said: 'Can one speak of the reform of the Church, can the Church, or ought it, reform itself? However, the author of this book is a good theologian and historian ...' (p.816). The seed had been sown.

As soon as Pope John XXIII made his momentous announcement, Congar wrote that 'a number of us saw in the Council an opening for the cause, not only of unionism, but also of ecclesiology—the recovery of the values of episcopacy and *Ecclesia*. ... After the stifling regime of Pius XII, the windows were at last being opened; one could breathe. The Church was being given its chance ... becoming open to dialogue' (pp.4-5). After his consecration the Pope had said 'some very incredible, even downright heretical, things to him', Roger Schutz, Prior of Taizé, told Congar, 'such as: the Catholic Church does not possess the whole truth; we should search together ...' (p.7). It was not long, however, before Congar had the impression—'confirmed by people coming from Rome with the latest gossip from that "miserable court"—that in Rome a whole team of people was applying itself to sabotaging the Pope's project' (p.5). Pope John's 'human style was warm and friendly, Christian.' However, all the 'old guard' were still in charge in the Curia. Would the Pope be strong enough? There were indications that he knew what was happening, and that he was determined not to give in to pressure.

Once the bishops arrived in Rome and the Council began, there was a counter-balance to the power of the curia. During the first session the Pope allowed the bishops to reject the preparatory papers and elect their own commissions to prepare new ones. It was clear that he wanted the Council to be truly conciliar, and had no intention of dominating it himself nor of allowing the curia to do so. There was a real hope that his *adjournamento* and Congar's *resourcement* could come together and create something new. Yet there were backward steps too. In November 1962 the Pope inserted St Joseph's name into the Canon of the Mass on his own authority, without consulting the Council, although the bishops were discussing the liturgy at the time. The French bishops were unhappy; the Observers were appalled. 'Good John XXIII keeps on combining some lovely gestures with others that are regrettable or retrograde' (p.165). But a little later, when the Pope was said to be very ill, and had stopped giving audiences, Congar wrote: 'God preserve him for us, or give us Elisha after Elijah!' (p.218) He was pleased in the

following spring when Mgr Marty told him that the Pope had spoken to him of the good work of Fr Congar (p.303).

In July, when Pope John died, Congar paid tribute to the 'immense impact this extraordinary man has had ... He did not operate by great expositions of ideas, but by gestures and a certain personal style. He did not speak in the name of the system, of its legitimacy, of its authority, but simply in the name of the intuitions and the movement of a heart which, on the one hand, was obedient to God and on the other loved by all people' (p.304).

He believed that Cardinal Montini (Paul VI), 'extremely intelligent and well-informed', who 'creates a deep impression of holiness' would 'take up John XXIII's programme, but not in the same way.' 'He will be much more Roman; like Pius XII he will want to decide things on the basis of ideas, and not simply let things evolve by themselves from openings created by a movement of the heart. He will love the world as much, but more by way of solicitude' (p.305).

Later Congar appreciated Paul VI's openness, but regretted that he did not have the theology it called for, that 'he does not have the ecclesiology that goes with his grand ecumenical gestures' (p.679). Sometimes he did not realise what the effect would be when he tried even-handedly to make a gesture to the traditionalists—as in the small modifications made on the Pope's authority in the Decree on Ecumenism at the end of the Third Session. Congar was as upset as anyone as events unfolded, but tried hard 'to get things back into proportion'. Certainly, 'what took place is VERY serious ... THE SEPARATED BRETHERN HAVE GONE BACK TO HAVING DOUBTS ABOUT US. On the other hand, I tell myself, without this sowing of enemy seed among the wheat of our hope, OUR victory would have been too complete ... a victory of one group over the other. The Pope, who is the man for all, wanted to give satisfaction to all. But in doing this he has come to appear like someone who cannot be fully trusted' (p.697).

Congar disliked intensely the papal pomp and ceremony in Rome. He always recorded his approval when the Pope *walked* into St Peter's rather than being carried in. Above all, it was wrong that the Pope should have such influence. This was what the Curia was determined to preserve: 'The difficulties raised by the Romans all amount exclusively to a SINGLE absolutely unique point (they are quite obsessed): to give as little as possible, and even to give nothing at all either to the bishops or

to the Church!!! There is only the pope, one principle or one source: the pope' (p.282). What the Pope wanted was so important. Congar appreciated the fact that the Pope did not want Mary's 'mediation' spoken of; this was a 'considerable support'. However, 'I am uneasy that such an important point should hang on the opinion or position of ONE person. If it had been Pius XII or Pius XI ... pressure could have been applied in a maximising mariological direction! ... the Church would be dragged along in this direction. That is not right!' (p.476). Neither Mary nor the Pope should be seen as 'above' the Church, but as within and part of it.

Paul VI certainly appreciated Congar's work. In September 1963 he spontaneously told the Dominican General that he held Congar in great esteem and had read his books (p.314). A month later he told the French ambassador how highly he thought of Congar and de Lubac (p.338). Congar was pleased to be given a private audience with Pope Paul VI in June 1964 (pp.556-8), but wryly realised that some people changed their behaviour towards him because of it. 'Rome is a court, where favour from on high is decisive' (p.613).

At the final ceremony in St Peter's Square on 8 December 1965 (which Congar watched on Italian TV because he could not stand) he 'felt some unease' because 'the Pope got all the attention. He sat enthroned as a sovereign. He did not appear to be so much IN the Church, as above it' (p.874).

The Observers

The Journal shows Congar's delight that Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Observers were officially part of the Council, and the importance of their participation in its work. He records that some people found that Pope John XXIII's speech of welcome to them when he received them in audience at the beginning of the Council was inadequate. 'That is not my opinion', Congar wrote. 'He was cordial, very simple, Christian. The monumental fact is that a speech was made, that there are Observers, that the Pope has received them, that there is a Council. Who would have thought that all this would have happened before I reach my sixtieth year?' (p.94). The next day he attended a reception organised by the Secretariat for Unity in honour of the Observers. 'It has HAPPENED', he wrote. "They" are in Rome, and have been received by a cardinal and an organisation dedicated to dialogue; and *Chrétien désunis* appeared twenty-five years ago' (p.94). At the

opening of the Second Session of the Council Congar greeted all the Observers individually. 'Like last year, there were tears in my eyes. What a happening! How God has been at work in the world!' (p.321).

Such a hard worker himself, Congar was impressed by the way the Observers threw themselves into their task at the Council. 'I admire the attention of the Observers, who are really WORKING (p.329). After a discussion on *De Ecclesia*, he commented: 'The quality of this meeting was exceptional. It is fantastic: one discusses dogmatic texts with the Others, and in such a way that they feel that these texts concern them, and that we feel they have something to tell us' (p.331). And after an informal discussion in a small group with some Protestant Observers, he commented: 'When conversing with the Observers, one reaches immediately a level of problems behind the system, whereas among ourselves we easily remain at the level of improvements within the system. Basically, without ecumenical dialogue, there can be no complete renewal through a recovery of the sources' (p.347). After a day talking to some Orthodox Observers, followed by an evening with Melkite and Maronite bishops, he reflected: 'I realised once again to what an extent the Catholic Church is Latin, to what extent she deceives herself, in good faith, by believing herself to be "Catholic". She is nothing of the sort. Romanism, Italianism, Latinism, scholasticism, the analytical spirit, have swallowed up everything and have almost established themselves as a dogma!' (p.383).

On the day that discussion on *De Œcumenismo* was to begin, Congar went to sit 'at the Mass with the Observers, in order to be united in prayer with them. They clearly felt it' (p.427). At the end of the Council, Congar was particularly keen to be present at the 'historic moment ... a reversal of history' when in public session the ceremony of the lifting of excommunications between Rome and Constantinople was to take place. He found it difficult to find anywhere to sit in a packed St Peter's, so he was delighted when the Observers made room for him to sit with them. 'Thanks to God and my friends, I had a seat with the Observers' (p.869).

He did not go to St Peter's on 4 December 1965 because of 'a crushing load of work', but records that the French bishops returned very moved by a letter from the Observers to the Council Fathers 'of great nobility and lofty religious feeling'. 'A bishop told me that an Italian bishop beside him was weeping with emotion. For myself, I would not have been able to restrain myself, for these things move me deeply' (p.864).

He went that evening to the celebration at St Paul-Outside-the-Walls, and 'noted down there and then the change of the form of the address from "Sirs" to "Brothers"', and many other points from the Pope's speech: 'Your departure will create around us a solitude we used not to be aware of before the Council'; 'Through your persons, we have entered into contact with Christian communities who pray, act in the name of Christ ... with some treasures of great value.' 'The Observers have been "associated" with the Council's work right up to the formulation of doctrinal and disciplinary expressions.' 'We have begun again to love one another.' He learned from the Secretariat that the Pope had written his address himself; the staff only learned its contents when they heard it. Congar found the ceremony 'almost natural', yet at the same time almost unbelievable. Afterwards he stopped at the tomb of St Paul, remembering Luther's re-affirmation of 'the Gospel' for which Paul had struggled, and praying that after the Council he would 'guide the Pope and ALL OF US' (pp.864-5).

Personal assessments and comments

It is of great interest to read Congar's reactions to his friends, colleagues, council fathers and others as he entrusted them to his diary. I can indicate only a few. Hans Küng was 'full of intelligence, health, youth and insistent demands ... extremely critical ... charges at things, he goes straight ahead like an arrow'. In comparison Congar realised 'the fairly horrifying degree to which I have been too timid', but also that 'some time-lags are necessary and an active patience has strength' (pp.369-70). He reported that Pope Paul VI had hoped that Küng could be a theological leader for the future, but that 'he is without love and would not be able to do that'. Congar comments: 'I find this remark profound. Küng is critical. He loves the truth, but has he any mercy for human beings? Has he the warmth and the measure of love?' (p.733). And later, after Küng had organised an 'interesting and congenial' meeting intended to 'anticipate theologically the period after the Council': 'Schillebeeckx and Ratzinger made some relevant and subtle comments, but Küng is always very radical. He says some true things, but in which the critical research into what is true is not sufficiently tempered by concern for concrete situations' (p.861).

Of Joseph Ratzinger from Münster (now Benedict XVI), Congar wrote: 'Fortunately, Ratzinger is there. He is reasonable, modest, disinterested, a great help.' (p.748). They clearly worked closely together. When

Congar had to leave the Commission on Missions to go to one on *De Presbyteris*, 'in the evening Ratzinger telephoned me to say that everything had gone well and had been finalised' (p.844).

As for Karl Rahner SJ, from Innsbruck, 'he is magnificent, he is brave, he is clear-sighted and deep, but, in the end, he is indiscreet' (p.302). Sometimes Congar felt that Rahner tended to monopolise a discussion (pp.302, 393). But he spoke with 'the forcefulness and candour that demands to be heard' (p.537), was 'so intellectually honest' (p.815), and had 'A DEPTH of thought, of HUMANITY of speech, of courage and of fairness. He is truly a gentlemen' (p.888).

When Congar first went to Rome in November 1960 and visited the Holy Office to do some background reading on the *Postulata* sent in by the bishops, he recorded that he did this 'stupidly, that is to say, from the beginning. *Anglia*' (p.24). 'Almost no doctrinal horizon', he commented, 'but practical questions'. However, he was appreciative of an early intervention by Abbot Butler of Downside in November 1962, speaking as an exegete, and asking for a small group, representing both schools of thought, to produce a schema that would please everyone. 'A really excellent intervention', he commented. 'Unfortunately the English accent will have made it difficult for many ears to understand. This very English idea of a *Joint Committee*' (p.178). Later he appreciated very much Butler's intervention in the Theological Commission, against re-introducing the title *Mater Ecclesiae* into the text on Mary. Ottaviani said it was the Pope's wish, but Butler challenged the relevance or cogency of this. 'Dom Butler made an important intervention. We have not been given the task of echoing all the words of the Pope: *habet curiam suam* [he has got his own curia]. We are a Commission of the Council' (pp.532-3). Congar was at first 'very disappointed' in John Heenan, then Archbishop of Liverpool (p.196); in the Council 'he spoke at length to say little. HE SPOKE IN TERMS OF A RETURN. Sentimentality and apologetic. Praise for the Pope' (p.221). However, a year later, in November 1963, Congar was delighted by the welcome given by Heenan, then Archbishop of Westminster, to the schema on ecumenism. 'I find that declaration SENSATIONAL', he wrote, 'it is an official declaration of conversion to ecumenism and to dialogue on the part of the English hierarchy. I did not dare to expect that' (p.438). He made it his business to thank Heenan next day for this 'HISTORIC act' (p.441). He was not so pleased later by the 'extremely violent'

intervention by Heenan against schema XIII: 'the English bishops do not want to hear mention at the Council of the pill or the bomb' (p.639).

Congar enjoyed very much being invited to the American College. 'I feel very much at ease with these simple men who, encountered in their American setting, are authentic. My lecture went well' (p.629). Invited out to dinner with four American priests, he recorded that they 'were simple, direct, sane, full of longing and openness. My poor writings are much read among them. They questioned me as though I were a prophet about everything' (p.828). The American Jesuit John Courtney Murray, who had been silenced by Rome in 1955 on account of his position on religious freedom, was appointed a Council expert in 1963, and worked hard towards what became the conciliar Decree on Religious Liberty. Congar wrote of him: 'He certainly has a lovely ability to make welcome the questions of others, which implies an interior humility and an authentic intellectual code of ethics. He also brings to his response a serenity characterised by a composure and a courteous distinction more British, even Oxonian, than American' (p.736).

When Congar first met Cardinal Bea, head of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, in the spring of 1962, he felt that he 'was back in an open world where one could breathe' (p.72). He was sometimes critical of Bea, particularly over his support for the 'two source' theory, but he was always full of praise for the Secretary, his second in command. 'I have great admiration for Mgr Willebrands, who has a presence, a precision, a respect for ideas and nuances, that are truly extraordinary', he wrote (p.805). Cardinal Ottaviani, head of the Holy Office, represented the opposition to what the Secretariat and Congar stood for. Congar could not but be glad at the decline of his influence as the Council proceeded, but he had a real sympathy for him. Ottaviani compared himself in an interview to an old, blind policeman who had all his life seen to it that certain laws were observed, and now those laws are changed. It will be difficult for him, he admits, but he will give himself to seeing that the new rules are observed. 'There is in this', says Congar, 'a certain nobility of the faithful old servant' (p.830).

'The Council of Louvain held in Rome'

It is very rare that Congar refers in his diary to an awareness that he is writing for history. The fact that he does so in relation to his assessment of the Belgian influence at the Council indicates the importance of the subject for him (p.508). From the beginning Congar was appreciative of

the work of Gérard Philips, Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Louvain, as a member of the Preparatory Theological Commission. At first the Commission was dominated by its secretary, Sebastian Tromp, a Dutch Jesuit who was Professor of Theology at the Gregorian and consultor at the Holy Office—a henchmen of Cardinal Ottaviani. Tromp had no sense of ‘the concrete and historical reality of things’ (p.67). Often he did not allow Congar to speak. Mgr Philips, said Congar, was one of the few who ‘astutely and delicately secure the best hearing for good ideas or, without seeming to do so, tone down the formulae to the point of making them inoffensive. We owe them a great deal’ (p.67). In March 1962, after a meeting on *De Laicis*, Congar spoke of Philips’ ‘admirable temperament’, his ‘perfect command of Latin’. ‘He is very gracious, extremely affable, based on an interior respect for others and for the truth. If everyone were in his image, how well everything would go!’ (p.75).

In January 1963 Congar was invited to Louvain by Canon Gustave Thils, Professor of Fundamental Theology at Louvain and a member of the Secretariat for Unity. He was to help Thils and Émile De Smedt, Bishop of Bruges (a member and later Vice-President of the Secretariat) to work out an ecclesiological plan which would take account of the concerns of the Secretariat, and which Cardinal Suenens would defend. They were also to suggest further improvements to Philips for his revised *De Ecclesia*. They concluded that the outline should start with the mystery and mission of the Church, continue with the Bishops and collegiality, go on to the laity, and then integrate the Blessed Virgin Mary within the Church (rather than devoting a separate document to her, as many wanted). ‘A tiring journey, but a fruitful one’ commented Congar (p.252). Back in Rome in March, ‘practically speaking, the work is being done at the Belgian College, centred on Philips and Thils’, reported Congar (p.261). He worked there on *De Ecclesia* mainly with Philips, Charles Moeller, Professor of Theology at Louvain, and also Karl Rahner SJ, from Innsbruck. ‘Mgr Philips can get things done, and is given things to get done. Undoubtedly, our little group is homogenous; there is no problem at this level’ (p.265). He noted that the Rector of the Belgian College, Albert Prignon, was also working, typing the texts, and keeping Cardinal Suenens informed of what was going on. On 5 March Congar moved into the Belgian College to facilitate the work, and found it a congenial place to live. In the Theological Commission Philips was ‘marvellously lucid, imposing and focused, prompt to explain and to

assuage ... Poor Fr Tromp hardly counts at all now' (p.278). Philips had 'gained the CONFIDENCE of Cardinal Ottaviani' (p.282).

Back again in Rome in May, he worked with Philips and Moeller on the report that Cardinal Suenens was to give on schema XVII (later schema XIII, which became the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). Later in the year, after the death of Pope John XXIII, he was invited to Malines by Cardinal Suenens to work with a small team on a slight revision of *De Ecclesia* and a thorough re-working of schema XVII along the lines that Congar had suggested in May. Along with Philips, Thils, Moeller, Prignon, the two Belgian exegetes Lucien Cerfaux and Beda Rigaux, and Albert Dondeyne, also of Louvain, with the Belgian moral theologian Philippe Delhaye, were Rahner and Roberto Tucci, editor of *Civiltà Cattolica*. 'We were very relaxed, and could work well', commented Congar (p.313). Philips had 'an astonishing art of integrating everything into a text', and Cardinal Suenens was 'very open to the suggestions that are made to him' (p.316).

During the Second Session of the Council, in November, Congar recorded that Philips had 'virtually replaced' Tromp. 'A year ago, the schema [*De Ecclesia*] produced by the Preparatory Commission held sway. Without creating problems, and imperceptibly, Philips has taken over everything. HE ALONE COULD HAVE DONE THAT' (p.436). In December Congar mused that 'to some extent Cardinal Suenens is directing the Council and the little Belgian group is practically running things' (p.456). At the end of January he was back in Rome from Strasbourg, and found himself once again 'in the climate of "the Council of Louvain held in Rome" ... it is clear that the Belgians are, to a great extent, the "drivers"' (p.473). 'But what have OUR Faculties of Theology done?', he asked himself.

Returning to Strasbourg in March he 'set down his testimony', covering several pages in explaining how the Belgians had become so important. They were not numerous, but 'they are EVERYWHERE.' They come from Louvain, and most have been students there together. They trust one another's competence. They organise themselves. They are very effective. Everyone comes to the Belgian College to try to influence this or that. 'Without any doubt, Mgr Philips is the architect no.1 of the theological work of the Council.' The Belgians (Cerfaux and Rigaux, with Bishops Heuschen and Charue) 'hold all the stakes in the "biblical sub-commission" which exercises a final monitoring of the texts and can thus modify them. They are militant, pro-active; they

intervene, they mobilise their friends until they have got what they want. There are none who stick together as much, apart from the Chileans, and to some extent the Germans'. 'The Belgians DARE'; they do not feel they are under surveillance, as the French do. 'They are CONCRETE, they have an instinct for effective action.' The bishops and experts work together as equals, on the level of ex-students of Louvain, whereas most of the French experts are religious, so there is a slight barrier. The Belgian experts are diocesan priests, except for the Franciscan Rigaux, but 'his being an ex-student of Louvain makes up for the defect' (pp.508-10).

Congar keeps returning to this theme. Again there is an unusual reference to writing for history. 'Since I am recording here what I know of the minor history with respect to the greater, I want to record an appreciation of Mgr Prignon.' The Belgians could not have played the part they did without his personality. He had a theological sense, a practical sense, and a sense of tactics. He followed everything in conjunction with Cardinal Suenens, also with Charue, Philips, Moeller, Cerfaux, very well-informed. He had a talent for making people welcome at the Belgian College, as 'a man of the gospel, entirely DEDICATED, very oblivious of self, who has made the service of others a sort of absolute rule for his own conduct'. Without him, the Belgians could not have done what they did (p.523). Congar continued to compare the French bishops with the Belgians. In October 1964 he commented on the atmosphere at table among the French bishops, 'different in the extreme from that of the Belgians and at the Belgian College. The French bishops are much more calm, peaceable, kindly, much less passionate; much less actively engaged in conciliar strategy ... In fact, they have hardly played an active part in the Council ... The French bishops have little (too little) of the "irascible"' (p.617). And in February 1965 he wrote: 'We are once again in a complete shambles. The French team is still, in a way, in the dark. This certainly would not have happened with a Belgian team' (p.723).

Congar's admiration for Philips never wavered. Back at the end of September for the Fourth Session, he wrote: 'Tired as I am, I am here again. I realised this evening that, basically, I love the work and the atmosphere of the Theological Commission. But everything (or a lot!) depends on Philips, on his clarity, his presence of mind, his obvious fairness. He has created and continues to create the climate of the Commission' (p.793). Philips left Rome, ill, in November 'rather sad to

go, but serene. So much is owed to him! Without him, the Theological Commission would never have functioned as it did function, nor would it have produced the fine texts that it did produce' (p.835).

As for Moeller, after the Council Congar rejoiced to hear that he had been appointed Under-Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which replaced the Holy Office. 'With Moeller, what we have is 100% ecumenism, what we have is openness to humankind, interest in human searchings, in culture, what we have is dialogue. ... What a change! Here is the spiritual son of Dom Beauduin, the man of all the dialogues of Chevetogne, the man of all the schemas at the Council, installed in a house where he will not be spied on ... It is a marvellous harbinger of the springtime of reform. It will also be a support for the three Secretariats (Unity, Religions, Non-Believers)' (p.878).

The beginning of a process

This is a happy note on which to end. With hindsight we see that spring does not last for ever, but that winter has to come before a new spring returns. It is like the fairy tales that end with the wedding of the prince and the princess. We know that the hard work of love only *begins* with the wedding, that a life-time of fidelity must follow, and the way will not always be smooth. The Council's 'laboriously slow but progressive victory of the *Ecclesia* over the Curia' (p.543) was not a once-for-all event, but the beginning of a process in which there would be inevitable set-backs. Congar unfailingly sought the truth and pursued unity. He often accused himself of timidity, and admired courage in others. But though fearful by nature, he was courageous through grace, constantly 'reviving [his] courage and attention, motivating them by the spirit of obedience to God in the service of truth and of my brothers', even though the work was sometimes 'very dull and very trying' (p.791). In the end, like Congar, we can never entirely lose heart. One closes this book with a sense of enormous gratitude for all that Vatican II has meant, still means, and will mean in the future life of the Church and in the coming together of the churches, encouraged to follow on in the same direction.