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## ANNOTATION

Beal, Rose M. *Mystery of the Church, People of God: Yves Congar's Total Ecclesiology as a Path to Vatican II*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press, 2014.

The relevance and importance of this book for Lasallian higher education is threefold. It provides: 1) rich insight into the deep roots of the Communion-People of God ecclesiology underlying Lasallian Catholic identity as currently lived in the network [cf. here Judith Schaefer's "Straining toward Communion: Implications of Communion Theology" in *AXIS*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2011]; 2) appreciation of the nuanced ecclesiology of the laity as articulated by Congar and appropriated by Brother Michel Sauvage in his 1962 seminal Lasallian study *Catechesis and the Laity* [cf. here the more than six dozen citations]; and 3) another resource for understanding the Second Vatican Council and the complex relationship of laity and hierarchy [cf. here *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*] in Catholic ecclesiology.

Rose Beal, who with this publication begins to make available to scholars and theology students the fruits of her doctoral dissertation, demonstrates that the "aspirations for theological synthesis [about the mystery of the church] that [Yves Congar] expressed numerous times in his published writings from 1931 to 1954 was accomplished by substantial unpublished efforts to develop a comprehensive treatise that would accomplish this aim." (4)

While in the second chapter of the book, Beal "introduces the unpublished papers in which Congar developed his treatise *De Ecclesia*" (57-104), she considers the published as well as the unpublished texts "in light of one another" in the fourth chapter (169-200). In the third chapter, she "explores the development of his progressive implementation of the method of synthesis" in his attempt to "integrate speculative and biblical theology in his treatise." (104-168) ["Congar did not fully achieve his goal of an integrated ecclesiology" (105-106)]. Finally in the concluding chapter, "the outcome of his pursuit of a total ecclesiology" is "considered in light of his assessment of the achievements of the Second Vatican Council" (201-215).

Congar in *Lay People in the Church* (1953) "contrasted the 'clerical Church' with 'the people of God in the fullness of its truth.' In his judgment, the dominant Catholic ecclesiology of the day equated the church with its hierarchical institution and with the members of the hierarchy." (14-15) However, this is only one of numerous "dialectal poles" (ecclesial structure and life) proposed by Congar as dimensions of church requiring better synthesis. (21-22)

Quite interesting are the various contexts Beal presents for understanding the evolving thought of Congar: a young professor "confronted by the unanswered questions of modernism" (29); significant ecumenical contacts during his preparation for ordination as a Dominican priest (32-33); scholarly engagement with the movement for ecclesiological renewal ["one of the essential ecclesiological insights that Congar valued in the renewal movement was the revival of the notion of the church as community as well as institution"] (35); a period of captivity in the German concentration camps (43); and following the war, "a whirlwind of engagements that

brought him into close contact with the dynamic pastoral realities of French Catholicism” (43). Life shaped his thinking and teaching. A cohesiveness existed “between his teaching and his writing.” (57) “For Congar, who understood the catholicity of the church as the capacity for the integration of multiplicity within unity, the new emphasis on the hierarchical (that is, the structural) dimension of catholicity and the imposition of uniformity were no doubt seen as troubling developments in the life of the church.” (74)

In 1948, Congar adopted “the church as the People of God-Body of Christ” as the framework of his treatise *De Ecclesia*; and “while this was not his first mention of the church as people of God, it was his first use of the image as part of an organizing paradigm for ecclesiology.” (94) “In the final section of the introduction to his 1948 treatise, Congar briefly explored various meanings of the word ‘church.’ He took as his basic definition of church ‘the community of those who have faith, who believe’” (100-101). “Congar’s integration of the final causality of the church with the biblical notion of *koinonia* led him to an important insight: the final cause of the church is not the divine life as a static, objective common good to be obtained, but rather the active communication of and participation in the divine life as communion.” (149)

“As Congar revised his thesis, however, he was not satisfied with the explanation he gave of the efficient cause. In particular he found he had inadequately accounted for the spiritual gifts of the faithful and the powers of the hierarchy . . . He feared that he had risked being too individualistic: ‘As Möhler remarked [cf. 39-43], the priesthood of all, if it did not have the hierarchical priesthood, would be a principle of individualism, of a purely individual religious life.’” (151) “Congar ultimately resolved the problem by returning to and further developing his earlier notion of a double mission of the Holy Spirit and of the apostolic body.” (153) “His attempts at methodological integration did not fully achieve the eschatological synthesis he sought. They did, nevertheless, allow him to begin to establish a well-founded framework for that synthesis. For Congar, the biblical images of the church as the people of God and the body of Christ (to which at some point in drafting his treatise he added the image of the temple of the Holy Spirit) came to serve as a shorthand for that eschatological synthesis.” (161) It was, asserts Beal, “in straining against the challenges of articulating his vision of the church using the language and structures of neoscholasticism that Congar achieved major breakthroughs, such as the church’s eschatological status in ecclesiology.” (168)

Beal notes that the “fate of Congar’s project to write a new treatise *De Ecclesia* was finally determined by events in his life and in the life of the Catholic Church.” (167) Silenced for a time from teaching and writing, he was eventually named in 1960 “to the preparatory commission for the Second Vatican Council, at which point his fortunes began to change.” (167, 202)

“The paradigm shift initiated by the council was, however, only the beginning. Near the end of his career, Congar reflected that ‘the Council left to the historians and the theologians the task of developing a theology of the Church.’” (214) “Examples of specific dimensions of the church requiring further development included: the active participation and responsibility of the laity in the church; the idea of communion and community, incorporating the Eastern notion of *sobornost*, applied both to the episcopal college and to the church community as a whole; anthropology; pneumatology; ministry, ecumenism, and mission; the local and the universal church; and the question of primacy.” (214)