

Yves Congar

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tionship to the secular world — all of these subjects and more came under the study of the late theologian's scholarly eye.

In fact, phrases that have become commonplace definitions of the church in the post-conciliar era — "People of God" and "pilgrim church" — are directly attributable to Cardinal Congar's writings, Father Hart said, noting the late theologian's influence on "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church."

But even more important than creating catch phrases, Cardinal Congar moved the Catholic Church to embrace ecumenism, devoting himself to its cause early in his priesthood, Father Hart and other experts noted.

According to John Bacik's 1987 profile of the late priest, "Contemporary Theologians," Cardinal Congar grew up among many Protestant and Jewish friends. One incident, in particular, inspired him to seek the sources of Christian unity, Bacik wrote.

"In 1914, when (Cardinal Congar) was 10 years old, his parish church near Sedan, France, burned down. For the next six years, the Catholic community worshiped in a neighboring Protestant

chapel at the kind invitation of the pastor. This gesture fired (Cardinal) Congar with a desire to make some return to the Protestants for all he had received from them," Bacik concluded.

Cardinal Congar was ordained at age 26 following seminary studies in Paris and Belgium.

In 1937 he published his first book, "Christians Disunited, Principles for Ecumenism," which was followed by works on church reform and the laity.

Bacik noted that Cardinal Congar authored many other important ecumenical works, including his historical study of the split between eastern and western churches, "After Nine Hundred Years," published in 1959. Indeed, toward the end of his life, "after 50 years of careful study, he was convinced that at the sacramental level the East and West are the same church," Bacik explained.

To the late cardinal, the divisions between Catholic, Anglican, Protestant and Orthodox Christians were unacceptable for a church called by Christ to be one in the 17th chapter of St. John's Gospel.

"(Cardinal) Congar insisted that when we behave as though the divisions in the Christian world are inevitable, we become co-responsible for the continuing separation ...," Bacik wrote. "Continued separation creates a psychological outlook or false consciousness in which we

no longer sense the terrible sin and scandal involved and simply accept divisions as normal.

Furthermore, Cardinal Congar insisted that "this creates a climate in which prejudice can flourish unchecked by personal interaction and genuine dialogue," Bacik continued. "The whole church suffers, because the various traditions undergo a distinct historical development without benefit of the corrective provided by other traditions, and without being able to contribute their new insights and practices to the collective consciousness of the larger faith community."

Cardinal Congar's decision to work for Christian unity and church renewal turned him into a controversial figure after World War II, when he was prominent in the French worker-priest movement.

He wrote an influential report in the 1930s about the spreading de-Christianization of France, which provided part of the intellectual underpinnings a decade later for the start of the movement.

During the war, the French Catholic hierarchy had sent priests to minister to deported French workers. The idea was adopted after the liberation by a small group of radical priests, most of them Dominicans, supported by Cardinal Maurice Feltin and other members of the French hierarchy.

But the idea of sending missionaries to evangelize children of "the eldest daughter of the church," as France is called, shocked conservative Catholics and troubled the Vatican. It reacted with increasing severity to rumors that the worker-priests were closet-Marxists.

Dominican Father François Leprieur, a nurse in a hospital at Lille, said in a book about the Dominicans' involvement in the movement that the Holy Office, the former name of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was concerned that the worker-priests placed too much stress on the Gospel, rather than on papal pronouncements.

Furthermore, Father Leprieur said the Vatican was worried that the worker-priests, by removing themselves from the church's parochial and hierarchical structures, were creating a new and potential heretical form of ministry.

In 1953, the papal nuncio assembled the French hierarchy to tell them that the Vatican had decided the worker-priest experiment had to be ended and that, despite warnings that it would appear as though the church was siding with capitalism, "the measures should appear as if they came from you."

Pope Pius XII sharply curtailed the activities of the movement the following year.

Father Leprieur said the Holy Office subjected Father Congar, his mentor, Father Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Father Henri-Marie Feret — all Dominicans — to a severe inquisition in which they were never told the exact nature of the charges against them.

Father Congar went into virtual exile in Rome, Jerusalem and Cambridge, England. His period of official disgrace came to an end with Pope John XXIII, who made him responsible for part of

the preparations for Vatican II.

Despite continuing suspicion among conservative churchmen, Father Congar found favor and influence at the council, where he was an expert on the theological commission and an intense promoter of ecumenism. He contributed to Vatican texts on the church, on revelation, on missionary activities and on the ministry.

At Vatican II, the future cardinal worked closely with a future pope — Polish Bishop Karol Wojtyla.

"I am particularly indebted to Father Yves Congar," the pope wrote in 1994. The two men worked together on the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, one of the council's most important documents.

Indeed, observers could point to the pope's most recent encyclical on ecumenism "Ut Unum Sint" ("That They May Be One") as one of the fruits of the cardinal's relationship with the pontiff, Father Hart said. In the encyclical, the pope issued a call to all Christians to discuss even such thorny issues as the role of the Holy Father in a spirit of unity.

Furthermore, the encyclical urges that legitimate differences between Christians be seen as sources of mutual enrichment rather than obstacles to full communion. Such thinking marked Cardinal Congar's own approach to ecumenism, Father Hart remarked, pointing out that the theologian extensively researched Christian tradition before Christendom's splits began so as to find common grounds for dialogue between today's divided denominations.

After the Second Vatican Council, one of Cardinal Congar's books was a critical edition of the Vatican II texts, translations and commentaries. He was also one of the founders of the international theological review, *Concilium*, dedicated to the diffusion and greater understanding of council texts.

After the council, he returned to Paris to teach at the Dominican seminary, Le Saulchoir.

Writing of his life in *Le Monde*, the theologian Jean-Pierre Jossua said Father Congar was serene and without bitterness, but troubled by what he saw as a hardening of attitudes and a certain closing of positions in the modern church.

In statements following the cardinal's death, Pope John Paul II praised the late Dominican's life and work, particularly his contributions to the ecumenical movement. Then-Father Congar was named to the College of Cardinals as a sign of papal recognition last November.

The pope called him "an ardent servant of the church even during his many trying years," an apparent reference to Cardinal Congar's difficulties with the Vatican during the 1950s.

Of such difficulties, the cardinal seemed to muse in his work "Dialogue Between Christians," when he stated: "I have lived the drama of disunion and the promise of unity intensely in my heart and my prayer."

But, despite his reputation as an innovator, Cardinal Congar once said he never liked being labeled a progressive.

"That is totally absurd. I am completely in favor of tradition," he said in 1993.

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Crime

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homes."

"Our own nation has become one of the most violent and fragmented on earth," the statement continued. "Nuclear arms are being reduced, yet violence and weapons of violence have become a growing threat to peace and security. Personal violence in our homes and neighborhood, together with the violence of injustice, racism, poverty and oppression, are threatening to destroy the fabric of society."

Citing the Old Testament injunction against killing, and Christ's gospel state-

ment that He had come so "that you may have life" as their mandate, the religious pledged themselves to the following actions: fasting one day per week; praying daily the World Prayer for Peace; studying and educating themselves about violence's root causes; public actions against violence, and letter-writing to legislators; making their lives, homes and ministries "places of peace where violence in any form will not be tolerated;" and opening convents and homes to victims of domestic violence whenever possible.

As part of the June 10 ceremony, a "Peace Pole" was placed on the mother-house grounds. A statement on the pole — written in four languages — reads "May peace prevail on Earth."