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## Yves Congar as a Precursor to Catholic Principles of Ecumenism

**Abstract:** The author analyzes the work *Chrétiens désunis. Principes d'un «œcuménisme» catholique* by Yves Congar (1937) and shows why the French Dominican can be considered a precursor of ecumenism in the Roman Catholic Church. The argument is based on defining the nature of the reunification process, its starting point, the goal of the reunification, and the way in which the relationship between Catholicism and ecumenism is framed. In lieu of the then valid concept of conversion on the basis of the Catholic Church, or the simple absorption of individuals by the fully formed Church, the French theologian proposes a complement or integration into the unity of the Church. As a result of this process, the united Church would be no other body than the present Catholic Church but it would be richer and more complete.

**Keywords:** Yves Congar, ecumenism, Catholicism, precursor, principles

### Introduction

As Yves M. Congar remarks, the publication of *Chrétiens désunis. Principes d'un «œcuménisme» catholique*<sup>1</sup> was the first effort to theologically define (or at least situate) the problem of “ecumenism” in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> It naturally assumed a distinctive and external viewpoint on ecumenism. Indeed, it was perceived by the Roman Catholics in that era as a new and hence suspicious phenomenon, whereas in

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<sup>1</sup> Paris 1961. This edition is identical to the first publication of the work in 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Y. CONGAR: *Une passion: l'unité. Réflexions et souvenirs 1929—1973*. Paris 1974, p. 50.

Protestant communities, it has been officially developed since the 1910 Edinburgh Conference.<sup>3</sup>

The subtitle of *Chrétiens désunis* speaks of the principles of Catholic “ecumenism.” The French Dominican asks what this ecumenism should be like. He does it nearly a quarter of a century before the Second Vatican Council, anticipating the encyclical of John Paul II *Ut unum sint*. He may therefore be considered its precursor. In this article, I will introduce Congar’s definition of the nature of Christian reunification by describing its starting point and the goal towards which this process is headed. Then I will try to take a closer look at the relation of Catholicism-ecumenism and to specify how Congar, as a Catholic, explains the problems of reunification posed by our separated brethren.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. The nature of the reunification process

While considering the goals of the unification movement, Congar strongly emphasizes that unity already exists. “The Church of Jesus Christ is presently really catholic.”<sup>5</sup> As he writes in his later, post-conciliar work, “we do not want [...] to make a new Church, or even, strictly speaking, to make the Church: for although we should work to build it, we are not to make it: it is given to us and we build ourselves up in it. We are to discover it, not to invent it. It is even wonderful to see how, in this matter, the more we conform to what exists, the more we discover, the more we obey, and the more we learn.”<sup>6</sup> The Church Congar speaks of is Fullness. Indeed, she is “the body of him who, having fullness in him, can also ‘fill everything in every way’.”<sup>7</sup> Then it is the presence of Christ in the Church

<sup>3</sup> Most ecumenists (including S. Nagy, K. Karski, and S. C. Napiórkowski) consider this conference, and therefore the date of 1910, to be the birth of ecumenism. L. Górka and J. Budniak shift this date of birth to 1907, because it was then that the first unification congress took place in Welehrad. For, unlike Edinburgh, where only representatives of Protestant communities participated, Welehrad also hosted Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church representatives. Cf. J. BUDNIAK: *Jednoczenie w różnorodności. Tradycja cyrylo-metodiańska jako paradygmat procesu pojednania Kościołów, kultur i narodów*. Katowice 2009, passim.

<sup>4</sup> Y. CONGAR: *Sainte Église. Études et approches ecclésiologiques*. Paris 1963, p. 516.

<sup>5</sup> IDEM: *Chrétiens désunis...*, p. 315: “l’Église de Jésus Christ est, présentement, réellement catholique.”

<sup>6</sup> IDEM: “Je crois en la Sainte Église.” In: *Sainte Église...*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> IDEM: *Chrétiens désunis...*, p. 314: “[...] le corps de Celui qui, ayant en lui la plénitude, peut aussi ‘remplir tout en tous’.”

that determines her fullness. Christ's power brings about this unity. We encounter a mystery here. It is, as Congar states, "the proper secret of this perfect unity [...] which can take up diversity without divisions."<sup>8</sup> The Church needs special powers for this fulfillment of everything to happen in everyone. "These energies of the Second Adam, this grace of Christ the Head [...] rest in the Church."<sup>9</sup> Congar speaks here of "the fullness of God's energies capable of sanctifying, bringing God in unity, and finally incorporating all that is of living humanity in man."<sup>10</sup>

As we can see, there is a unifying power or, we should say, a power of reconciliation in the Church. This power, the ability to reconcile, is what Congar considers to be the catholicism of the Church. It makes her a living being whose form of life represents wholeness. The presence of the above-mentioned fullness of divine energies in the Church is followed by what Congar describes as the possibility of universal expansion.

The Dominican is aware of the painful fact of a split in the Church. The existence of divided Christian communities is determined by their specific values, which are positive and for the most part genuinely Christian and Catholic. To support this thesis, the author points to a large number of people who remain outside the Church.

Nevertheless, not only the exclusion of multitudes around the world makes the Church incompletely catholic. It is also about the consequences of this state of affairs. Namely, some authentically human values "found their Christian form and expressed themselves religiously outside the Church."<sup>11</sup> Congar specifically indicates the absence of the Russian-speaking and Scandinavian world in the area of the Catholic Church.

For here "what is pure in Protestant or Orthodox piety, or in *Pietas Anglicana*, which gives Anglicanism its real continuity, is what the Church lacks,"<sup>12</sup> says Congar. He will develop this idea in a text published shortly after the release of *Chrétiens désunis*. The author was delighted with what he had discovered in separated communities: "Russian mysticality, Anglo-Saxon respect for freedom, vital and personal intimacy with the Bible

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem: "le mystère propre de cette unité parfaite [...] qui peut ainsi assumer sans division la diversité."

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 314: "Ces énergies du Second Adam, cette grâce du Christ-chef [...] reposent dans l'Église."

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem: "la plénitude des énergies divines capables de sanctifier, de ramener à Dieu dans l'unité, et finalement de s'incorporer tout ce qu'il y a d'humanité vivante dans l'homme."

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 316: "[...] ont trouvé leur forme de christianisme et se sont exprimées religieusement, en dehors de l'Église."

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 319: "Ce qu'il y a de pur dans la piété protestante ou orthodoxe, ou dans cette *Pietas anglicana* qui donne à l'anglicanisme sa continuité réelle, manque à l'Église catholique."

which we find in many Protestant communities — let us think about the what the real presence and cooperation of these values in one Church would bring to the improvement [...] of Catholicism.”<sup>13</sup>

“So many ideas and points of view which have developed in detached theologies and which, while not being completely absent from us, constitute a certain lack of the real fullness and total catholicity of our Church.”<sup>14</sup> As you can see, Congar directs his admiration not only towards the well-known religious features of individual groups of separated brethren, such as mysticality or attitude to the Scriptures, but also points to the ideas and theological points of view that have developed in separated communities.

In such a way Congar acknowledges the real presence and importance of the values guarded and fostered by the separated brethren. As J. Famerée observes, “when a Dominican theologian finds that non-Catholics (individuals and groups of people) also have the truth [...] he clearly makes a certain opening.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, these otherwise authentic qualities existing in the communities of separated brethren could contribute with an improvement in “our” Catholicism. Catholicism can be improved — that is a novelty resulting from the Congar’s concept. This approach developed, let us add, in the context of distrust towards any attempts to undermine the status of wholeness that belongs to the Catholic Church.

Congar’s bold thesis concerning the values present in the separated communities is accompanied by an extremely important remark. In the Catholic Church, values exist and develop in communion with all others, whereas the development of values constituting the deposit of separated communities is *isolated*. Congar emphasizes that such a development of values, which are genuinely catholic in their original positive inspiration, has become “the real principle of the persistence of numerous, distorted forms of Christianity.”<sup>16</sup> Naturally, this development was also influenced by “contradictions, exclusivities, political, racial, and ethnic factors.”<sup>17</sup>

Congar thus arrives at a great paradox. It emerges that “the affirmation of these values is at the very root of the division.”<sup>18</sup> Their improper development, the development of certain values in isolation from oth-

<sup>13</sup> Y. CONGAR: *Chronique...*, p. 517.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> J. FAMERÉE: “*Chrétiens désunis* du P. Congar 50 ans après.” *Nouvelle revue théologique*, vol. 110 (1988), p. 678.

<sup>16</sup> Y. CONGAR: *Chrétiens désunis...*, p. 312: “le principe réel de consistance de multiples formes aberrantes de christianisme.”

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*: “des oppositions, des exclusivismes, des facteurs politiques, raciaux, ethniques.”

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 311: “l’affirmation de ces valeurs est à l’origine même de la séparation.”

ers, may be the basis of the later schism.<sup>19</sup> For here “the separated Christians, although genuinely incorporated through Baptism into the Catholic Church, the Body that contains the fullness of Christ, [...] in order to develop the seed of Christian life deposited in them through Baptism, found only a smaller or larger, more or less distorted part of the goods of the New Covenant, which are Christ’s inheritance and a dowry to His Church.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, the life of separated communities offers the chance to find only a part of Christ’s inheritance.

As a result, “the seed of faith living in them, even if they preserved it, could meet only some of its objects, most of them deformed.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, “the seed of love living in them [...] could meet only a small part of the mysteries where it feeds and [...] is deprived of Catholic communion and that internal regulation dependent on the hierarchy, which is the last principle of typically ecclesial unity.”<sup>22</sup>

The significance of these shortcomings lies in the fact that the values and realities guarded by the separated brethren are by nature destined to develop in communion with all other values and realities in full unity. Meanwhile, as a result of divisions, this development proceeds in detachment and isolation. As a result, these values “are isolated and therefore always incomplete, often distorted and wounded, temporary and imperfect.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Congar explains the mechanism of the heresy in an interesting way. Namely, heresy is “exactly the fruit of the mind which has betrayed the law of fraternal communion and which, taking up the selfish freedom of its movement, has developed the elements of Christianity on a purely intellectual plane and in purely logical ways. In this way we come to the philosophy of Christ, which is no longer true faith in Christ, to an ecclesiological system which is no longer the true meaning of the Church” — in original French: “L’hérésie est précisément le fruit d’un esprit qui a trahi la loi de la communion fraternelle, et qui, reprenant la liberté égoïste de son mouvement, développe à un plan purement intellectuel, et par des voies purement logiques, les éléments du christianisme. On aboutit ainsi à une philosophie du Christ qui n’est plus la vraie foi au Christ, à un système ecclésiologique qui n’est plus le vrai sens de l’Église” (*Je crois en la Sainte Église...*, p. 13).

<sup>20</sup> Y. CONGAR: *Chrétiens désunis...*, p. 313: “incorporés authentiquement par leur baptême à l’Église catholique, au corps qui a en lui la plénitude du Christ, [...] pour développer le germe de vie chrétienne mis en eux par le baptême, qu’une partie plus ou moins grande et plus ou moins dévié des biens de la nouvelle.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem: “Le germe de la foi, vivant en eux, même s’ils l’ont gardé n’a pu rencontrer qu’une partie de ses objets la plupart déformés d’ailleurs.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem: “le germe de la charité vivant en eux, [...] n’a pu rencontrer, dans les communautés protestantes, qu’une petite partie des mystères ou il se nourrit et, [...] il reste privé de la pleine communion catholique et de cette régulation intérieure dépendante de la hiérarchie, qui est le principe dernier de l’unité proprement ecclésiastique.”

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 314: “sont chez eux isolées, et donc toujours incomplètes, souvent déviées et blessées, précaires et imparfaites.”

However, it is also true that the Church, which is a living organism, has not yet realized all the virtues/possibilities of her life form, Congar states. Moreover, he claims that “everything leads us to think that the Church is still at her beginnings.”<sup>24</sup> Being at the outset and the simultaneous emphasis on the fullness of the Church seem to be contradictory.

## 2. The goal of the reunification

The implications of Congar’s concept of Catholicism proved to be very significant. Due to its dynamic ability, it could be said that catholicity is not complete and perfect, as has been assumed so far. Congar has precisely defined the scope in which it is possible to accept the thesis that the catholicity of the Church is incomplete: it is given to us as a dynamic ability, and as such, it has not yet developed all of its effects.

The Dominican makes a distinction between the fullness of Catholicism (from the point of view of its dynamic possibilities) and the actualization of Catholicism. The implementation is not complete: the Church “clearly realizes this catholicity? only incompletely.”<sup>25</sup> The above distinction allows Congar to extract Catholicism in the aspect of its realization and specific expression. This is a visible, or a noticeable catholicity. It is because the only Church is affected by imperfection. It is worth emphasizing once again that the shortcomings of Catholicism in question concern only its real and actual implementation.

At this point, it would be useful to make reference to the remarks devoted to Congar’s concept of Catholicism. Due to this vision of current and virtual reality, the author is allowed to say: “The Church of Christ, our Church, fully catholic from the point of view of the dynamic possibilities of its vital substance,”<sup>26</sup> clearly realizes this catholicity only imperfectly. As for the issue of the catholic fullness of the Church, Congar states: “it can be said *a priori* that, undoubtedly, it is not and will never be perfect.”<sup>27</sup>

One of the most controversial statements that would soon have serious consequences for the author concerns the shape of the united Church. It reads as follows: “We do not think that the ‘united’ Church will

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 316: “tout porte à penser que l’Église est encore à ses débuts.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem: “ne réalise explicitement cette catholicité que d’une manière imparfaite.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem: “l’Église du Christ, notre Église, pleinement catholique au point de vue des possibilités dynamiques de sa substance vivante.”

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 315: “on peut dire a priori qu’elle n’est pas présentement parfaite et ne le sera sans doute jamais.”

form, strictly speaking, a new whole: for in my opinion the Church already exists; but I believe [...] that a ‘united’ Church will form a whole more richer than any existing Christian body, including the Catholic Church.”<sup>28</sup>

Immediately after this statement, the Dominican theologian very clearly spells out the scope of his thesis about a “richer” Church, which might yet arise from reunification. The conviction about such a Church is formulated by the author only from “the perspective of a clear and effective realization of the Catholic Church.”<sup>29</sup> He stipulates that “this could not be said either about his unity, which cannot be gained or lost, or about his catholicity, understood in its substance or principle.”<sup>30</sup>

Congar admits that unification aspirations must be associated with the necessity of certain sacrifices on the part of separated brethren. Nevertheless, neither the Protestants nor the Orthodox have to give up what is evangelical and Christian. It is not so much an “act of ‘submission’ to a certain authority as entering into the fullness and communion of all the goods of the New Covenant, into the Father’s House.”<sup>31</sup> As a result, the return no longer has the marks of renunciation or submission to the Catholic Church.

“O my separated brethren,” says Congar in the form of an invocation, “we call you to come to us not to triumph over you, but to enter together into full communion, into our Christ [...] so that we may live together with all the treasures of our Father. [...] We absolutely do not wish to be right against you, but that you may be right with us, that we may be right together, that we may realize together, hand in hand, one another’s sustained and necessary, the catholicity of all that belongs to Christ.”<sup>32</sup> As we see, Congar encourages not to convert, but rather to complement.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 321: “nous ne pensons pas que l’Église «réunie» formera un tout, à proprement parler, nouveau: car l’Église, selon nous, existe déjà; mais nous croyons, [...] que l’Église «réunie» formera un tout plus riche qu’aucun corps chrétien actuellement existant, y compris l’Église catholique.”

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem: “au point de vue de la réalisation explicite et effective de la catholicité de l’Église.”

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem: “cela ne pourrait être dit ni de son unité, laquelle ne peut gagner ou perdre, ni de sa catholicité considérée dans sa substance ou son principe.”

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 323: “un acte de «soumission» à une autorité, que par une entrée dans la plénitude et la communion de tous les biens de la Nouvelle Alliance, en la Maison du Père.”

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem: “O mes frères séparés, ce n’est pas pour triompher de vous que nous vous appelons à nous; c’est pour entrer ensemble dans la plénitude de la communion, en notre Christ [...], c’est pour que nous vivions ensemble de tous les trésors de Notre Père. [...] Nous ne désirons absolument pas avoir raison contre vous, mais que vous ayez raison avec nous, que nous ayons raison ensemble, que nous réalisions ensemble, au coude à coude, les uns aux autres appuyés et nécessaires, la catholicité de tout ce qui est du Christ.”

The applicable concept of unification in Catholicism was convertism. The hallmarks of this concept are borne to a large extent by Congar's position, when he states directly: "for us the Catholic Church is purely and simply *the* Church [*l'Église*]; so, in a sense, we believe that union is a certain 'return' to this Church."<sup>33</sup> This return, however, does not mean to be a simple absorption and it is another novelty of the Congar's concept.

The theologian also made a beautiful comparison of when exactly the unification would take place. Now he compared its advent to the realization of Lord's Parousia. "God himself knows its time and the desire to fix its day or define its way would be vain."<sup>34</sup> About us, overwhelmed by the difficulties on the way to unity and doubting its realization, Congar says: "We begin to ask, like holy women carrying spices: Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"<sup>35</sup> Concluding his reflections, the father of Catholic ecumenism pours into our hearts hope by stating: "But perhaps God's angels have received a mission that we do not suspect [...]."<sup>36</sup>

### 3. The relationship between Catholicism and ecumenism

As stated above, the concept of Catholicism is instrumental in Congar's attempt to define ecumenism theologically. At this point, it is appropriate to briefly characterize the relationship that exists between it and ecumenism. In particular, it will be a question of defining what it means to explain the problems of unification in terms of Catholicism. Such an explanation is, according to Congar, the main thesis of his work. In one of his articles he explicitly states that "the very rich concept of Catholicism also brings to the problem of reunification some elements of positive solutions, and even [...] a solution."<sup>37</sup>

Congar's view that the problem of ecumenism is essentially a problem of Catholicism may suggest a certain interchangeability of the two con-

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 320: "Pour nous, l'Église catholique est, purement et simplement l'Église, et donc, en un sens, la réunion est selon nous un retour à cette Église."

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 344: "Dieu seul en connaît le temps, et vouloir en fixer le jour ou en déterminer le mode serait vain."

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 345: "nous nous prenons à demander, comme les saintes femmes porteuses d'aromates: 'Qui nous enlèvera la pierre à l'entrée du sépulcre?'"

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem: "Mais déjà, peut être, les Anges de Dieu ont reçu des missions que nous ne prévoyons pas."

<sup>37</sup> Y. CONGAR: *Chronique...* p. 517.



cepts. However, it is not so. Congar speaks directly of “the great difference of values, logics and requirements between ecumenism and Catholicism.”<sup>38</sup> Catholicity is the “elevation of the multiple to a previously given unity.”<sup>39</sup> The opposite is true of ecumenism. Namely, it constitutes “introducing a certain unity into a previously given diversity.”<sup>40</sup> These statements allow us to grasp the fact that the concepts of Catholicism and ecumenism are realities with completely different starting points. Although both concern directly the issue of unity, Congar clearly differentiates between them.

With regard to Catholicism, unity is a previously given reality. Catholicism presupposes a strictly ecclesial, that is, communal reality of unity. Hence, it can be described by Congar as “unity assimilating multiplicity.”<sup>41</sup> Catholicity is the extension of unity (*extensio unitatis*<sup>42</sup>) or the universal capacity for unity (*universalis capacitas unitatis*<sup>43</sup>). By contrast, the starting point for ecumenism is diversity. To define it, Congar quotes at this point a statement by the Lutheran bishop, N. Söderblom, who was committed to ecumenism, and who described it as “unity in multiplicity.”<sup>44</sup>

The basis for Congar’s distinctions between Catholicism and ecumenism is also their relation to the external or human form of unity, for the reason that the Church, apart from being “a unity of the spiritual life”<sup>45</sup>, also has “the unchangeable organ of her unity.”<sup>46</sup> “Without respecting this human form of unity, there can be ecumenism, but there can be no true Catholicism.”<sup>47</sup> Like unity, catholicity has its “external constitution.”<sup>48</sup> “Like unity, it is apostolic, communal, and hierarchical.”<sup>49</sup>

Ecumenism, on the other hand, is an illusion of Catholicism.<sup>50</sup> All those who “do not recognize among the existing Churches (*les Églises*) the Church (*l’Église*) of Jesus Christ, his Bride, visibly the one

<sup>38</sup> Y. CONGAR: *Chrétiens desunis...*, p. 180: “la grande différence de valeur, de logique et d’exigence qu’il y a entre l’«œcuménisme» et la catholicité”.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p.125: “l’assomption du multiple dans une unité antérieurement donnée.”

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem: “l’introduction d’une certaine unité dans une diversité antérieurement donnée.”

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 180: “l’unité assimilant la multiplicité.”

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 125: “die Einheit der Mannigfaltigkeit.”

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 124: “unité de la vie spirituelle.”

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem: “un organ immuable de son unité.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 125: “Hors le respect de cette forme humaine d’unité, il pourra y avoir «œcuménisme», il ne pourra y avoir vraiment catholicité.”

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem: “constitution extérieure.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem: “est apostolique, sociétaire et hiérarchique, comme l’unité.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem: “le mirage de catholicité.”

visible unity that Christ willed and prepared for her”,<sup>51</sup> succumb to this illusion.

The question of the relationship between the Church of Christ and other Churches, and in particular the question of its visible unity, underlies another distinction between Catholicism and ecumenism. Denial of visible unity seems to exclude catholicity. “Without this unity,” Congar states, “it is not really Catholicism that needs to be talked about, because it is a universal capacity of unity: it is rather ecumenism which, conversely, is a capacity of unity hidden in the diversity of Christian groups.”<sup>52</sup>

According to Congar, ecumenism appears as a kind of common denominator. “We will tend, of course, to enrich and increase as much as possible, but in any case we cannot consider that ‘catholicity’, unless we take the problem exactly the other way around.”<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusions

We dealt with the issue of Congar’s concept of Catholicism relating to the problem of ecumenism. Catholicity, present in its substance from the beginning of the Church, excludes an understanding of ecumenism which would assume that the Church is a reality yet to be constituted. For the Church *is* catholic in her unity.

The same catholicity, by virtue of its dynamic character, served Congar to give a new status to the idea of unification. In place of the current concept of conversion, valid on the basis of the Catholic Church, or the simple absorption of individuals by the fully formed Church, the French theologian proposes a *complement* or *integration* into the unity of the Church.

As a result of this process, the united Church will be no other body than the present Catholic Church, but it will be richer and more complete. This seems to be the meaning of the idea of Catholic “ecumenism”.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibidem: “ne reconnaissent pas, parmi «les Églises» existantes, l’Église de Jésus-Christ, son Épouse, visiblement une de l’unité visible que le Christ a voulue et préparée pour elle.”

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 126: “sans cette unité, en vérité, ce n’est pas de *catholicité* qu’il faut parler, puisqu’elle est la capacité universelle de l’unité latente en la diversité des groupes chrétiens.”

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem: “l’on tendra, certes, à enrichir et à accroître le plus possible, mais qu’en tout état de cause on ne saurait considérer comme une «catholicité», à moins de prendre le problème exactement à l’envers.”

Practical actions proposed by the author lead to its implementation. They are aimed at deepening the understanding of the grace of Catholicism and removing obstacles in the way of its realization. This would be the subject of a separate study, as well as the attempt to define the further development of the theological search for unity by the French Dominican, who was undoubtedly the father of Catholic ecumenism.

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### Yves Congar — précurseur des principes catholiques de l'œcuménisme

#### Résumé

L'auteur de l'article analyse l'œuvre d'Yves Congar *Chrétiens désunis. Principes d'un «œcuménisme» catholique* (Paris 1937) et montre pourquoi le dominicain français peut être considéré comme un précurseur de l'œcuménisme au sein de l'Église catholique romaine. L'argumentation s'appuie sur la définition de la nature du processus d'unification des chrétiens, du point de départ, du but vers lequel se dirige le processus d'unification, ainsi que de la manière de concevoir le rapport entre catholicité et œcuménisme. Au lieu d'une conception fondée sur la conversion, actuellement valable dans l'Église catholique, c'est-à-dire d'une simple absorption des individus par l'Église pleinement formée, le théologien français propose une idée d'agrégation ou d'intégration dans l'unité de l'Église. À la suite de ce processus, l'Église unie ne sera pas différente de l'Église catholique actuelle, mais elle sera plus riche et plus complète.

**Mots-clés:** Yves Congar, œcuménisme, dialogue, catholicisme, précurseur, principe

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Yves Congar —  
precursore dei principi cattolici dell'ecumenismo

Abstract

L'autore dell'articolo analizza l'opera di Yves Congar *Cristiani disuniti. Principi di un «ecumenismo» cattolico* (Paris 1937) e mostra perché il domenicano francese può essere considerato il precursore dell'ecumenismo all'interno della Chiesa cattolica romana. L'argomentazione si basa sulla definizione della natura del processo di unificazione dei cristiani, del punto di partenza, della meta verso cui si dirige il processo di unificazione, nonché del modo di presentare il rapporto tra cattolicità ed ecumenismo. Invece della concezione della conversione, valida nella Chiesa cattolica, vale a dire di un semplice assorbimento degli individui da parte della Chiesa pienamente formata, il teologo francese propone un'idea di aggregazione o di integrazione nell'unità dalla Chiesa. Come risultato di questo processo, la Chiesa unita non sarà diversa dalla Chiesa cattolica attuale, ma sarà più ricca e completa.

**Parole chiave:** Yves Congar, ecumenismo, dialogo, cattolicesimo, precursore, principio