

“The essays translated here are a treasure trove of theological reflection linking liturgy to ecclesiology. They are as fresh today as they were when Congar first wrote them. We are in Paul Philibert’s debt.”

—*John F. Baldwin, SJ*
Professor of Historical and Liturgical Theology
Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

“What a gift to the Church by translator and editor, Paul Philibert, as he makes these essays of Yves Congar available in English! The essays gathered here, although written decades ago, are totally applicable today as the Church continues to grapple with a key principle of the Second Vatican Council’s teaching that the whole local community of faith is the subject or agent of worship. Philibert gives us both accurate and readable translations of Congar’s French while also providing us with sound hermeneutical principles of interpretation in his brilliant Introduction and Conclusion sections. We owe him a great debt of thanks!”

—*Gerard Austin, OP*
Rice School for Pastoral Ministry
Arcadia, Florida

“These essays combine immense erudition with arguments that are accessible to the non-specialist. They offer a rare combination of passion and precision, and they are at least as relevant today as when they were first published.”

—*Timothy Radcliffe, OP*
Author of *What Is the Point of Being a Christian?*
and *Why Go to Church?: The Drama of the Eucharist*

“Congar may have written these chapters decades ago (even before the Council), but they read like they were written for us today. They are relevant, timely, and challenging for us now because they call us to be church, to exercise our common priesthood, to live what we celebrate.”

—*Joyce Ann Zimmerman, CPPS, PhD, STD*
Director of the Institute for Liturgical Ministry
Dayton, Ohio

AT THE HEART OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Liturgical Essays of Yves Congar

Translated and edited
by Paul Philibert

A PUEBLO BOOK

Liturgical Press Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

A Pueblo Book published by Liturgical Press

Cover design by David Manahan, O.S.B. Illustration by Frank Kacmarcik, Obl.S.B. Photo courtesy of photo.com.

This volume is a collection of essays first published in French: *L'Ecclesia ou communauté chrétienne, sujet intégral de l'action liturgique*, collection *Unam Sanctam*, n° 66; *Structure et sacerdoce chrétien*, collection *Unam Sanctam*, n° 41; *Situation du « sacré » en régime chrétien*, collection *Unam Sanctam*, n° 66; « Pour une liturgie et une prédication réelles », in *La Maison Dieu*, n° 16; « Présentation simple de l'idée essentielle du Dimanche », in *La Maison Dieu*, n° 13. © Les Éditions du Cerf.

Excerpts from the English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for use in the United States of America copyright © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana. English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* copyright © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with Permission.

© 2010 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Congar, Yves, 1904–1995.

[Selections. English. 2010]

At the heart of Christian worship : liturgical essays of Yves Congar ; translated and edited by Paul Philibert.

p. cm.

"A Pueblo book."

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-8146-6229-8 — ISBN 978-0-8146-6235-9 (e-book)

1. Liturgics. 2. Catholic Church—Liturgy. I. Philibert, Paul J. II. Title.

BX1970.C668 2010

264'.02—dc22

2009053884

Contents

Introduction vii

1 “Real” Liturgy, “Real” Preaching 1

2 The *Ecclesia* or Christian Community as a Whole
Celebrates the Liturgy 15

3 The Structure of Christian Priesthood 69

4 Where Does the “Sacred” Fit into a Christian Worldview? 107

5 What Is the Meaning of Sunday? 135

Conclusion: A World Sanctified by Grace 139

Acknowledgments 151

Index of Names 153

Index of Subjects 155

Introduction

The title of this book, *At the Heart of Christian Worship*, refers above all to the corporate life of the Christian faithful, who offer their lives to God as a living sacrifice at the same time as they bind themselves more deeply to their Lord and Savior. This movement of self-offering and identification with Christ is precisely what is at the heart of worship, as expressed both in ritual acts and in the daily living of the Christian faith. Summarizing the theological developments of the Second Vatican Council with reference to the participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains:

The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering. (CCC 1368)

This summary paragraph reflects in capsule form the fundamental argument of the essays in this book as well as the penetrating theological intuition that lies behind it. In the “age of the church,” as Yves Congar puts it, the risen Christ can never be thought of apart from his body; the head cannot be thought of apart from the members.

Like the Fathers of the Church centuries ago, Yves Congar appreciated the twofold consequence of this revealed truth. First, as baptized faithful, our real, our most authentic life is a life shrouded in mystery, yet nonetheless it affects and conditions the entirety of our human experience. To live in Christ, as St. Paul so often puts it, means to replicate in our spontaneous daily experience the patience of Christ in the face of undeserved suffering, on the one hand, and his confidence in the will and the power of his divine Father, on the other hand. His paschal journey of suffering, death, and resurrection is an anthropological

paradigm, a pattern for authentic living that both explains the point of life and offers the faithful the grace of moving from dying to rising.

Second, the solidarity of the Christian faithful with their divine head already draws them into the divine Son's singular relation with his Father. If the risen Christ is the unique priest of the new covenant, then the members of his body share in that priesthood. If the risen Christ presents as his priestly sacrifice the one perfect gift of his own self-offering, then the members of his body have the vocation to make this same self-oblation of themselves.

The biblical and conciliar theme of the People of God is, at root, the expression of this mystery which fulfills all the promises of the old covenant and inaugurates a new age, a new covenant of grace. The vocation of all those rooted in Christ by baptism and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit is to become a great, living sacrament—a holy sign that achieves what it signifies. They are meant to become the presence of God inserted into the midst of human life and culture by means of their graced actions as members of Christ's body.

In Congar's writings, as in the council's dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* (On the Church), the link between the theology of the People of God and the mystery of the Mystical Body is inseparable. As we shall see in the pages that follow, for Congar, this theme about the People of God could never imaginably be considered a claim to some sort of secularized social autonomy. It is precisely the expression of a spiritual rootedness so profound that its influence finds expression in the totality of the relationships and activities of the faithful.

I remember some forty years ago discussing with Father Congar the theme of incarnation and its pastoral expression in the years immediately after the council. As an inexperienced graduate student, I was suggesting that the church needed to stress "incarnationalism" as opposed to eschatology, so as to draw the faithful into a deeper involvement with their religious life. Congar became quite animated, insisting that Catholic theology can never lose its balance between the incarnational and the eschatological—that in sacramental and pastoral terms, "incarnation" means making visible, accessible, and palpable a mystery that is itself fully eschatological. Put more simply, in attending to the concerns of communicating with the present day, we can never lose focus on the mystery of Christ's heavenly priesthood. Contemporary human involvement in the liturgy and pastoral service must find its source and its energy in divine gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

At the Heart of Christian Worship

These pages provide plenty of evidence for the assured, authoritative theological balance that is so characteristic of Congar. He never lacked pastoral focus in his theological writing, but that never led him to compromise his exhaustive quest to articulate the most sure, the most ancient, and the most authentic biblical and theological tradition of the church. Like his Jesuit colleague Henri de Lubac, Congar was a skilled master of the theological method of *ressourcement*—reaching back into the most important sources of the Christian theological tradition to discover the genesis of ideas, the reasons for their development, and their present meaning within a continuous trajectory of faith and experience.

Although he is not characteristically classified as a liturgical theologian, in fact, Congar made a signal contribution to the development of the liturgical movement, especially in France. The essays collected here provide examples of his theological instincts. For him, liturgy is ecclesiology in action, or more simply, Christian worship is the visible manifestation of the church's spiritual reality.

Some of his essays, for example, the first given here, constitute a kind of working agenda for liturgical theology in the years leading up to the council. Other essays, especially chapters 2 and 3, provide the historical and theological background needed to appreciate the full significance of the constitutions and decrees of the council. Even as Congar shows himself to be patient and dispassionate in sifting through an astonishing mass of documentary evidence, he remains nonetheless passionate in pressing for an appreciation of the pastoral significance of the church's living tradition.

He even uses Tradition with a capital *T* when he wants to signify the continuous authoritative voice that arises in the Scriptures, that is celebrated in the church's liturgy, that is refracted through the wisdom of the Fathers of the Church and the theologians of the High Middle Ages, leading to such contemporary church teaching as Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* and the documents of the council.

Throughout his career as a theologian (he died in 1995) Congar was aware of the dangers of limiting a liturgical point of view to baroque Catholicism or to nostalgia for the customs and protocols of the nineteenth century. The true glory of Congar's vision is its profound biblical rooting and its erudite grasp of the coherence of the church's twenty centuries of life and witness. This is why his voice is so important for the present moment, when not a few Catholics are concerned

to drink from the purest wells of tradition and to be in touch with the most authentic teaching of an ancient church.

The Essays Gathered Here

Congar's essays, presented here in translation, provide a solid ground for understanding the liturgical theology of the Second Vatican Council. In the essay "'Real' Liturgy, 'Real' Preaching," Congar develops an interpretation of the word "real" that is linked to the Latin word *res*. In this way he is able to show how, in the view of both Augustine and Aquinas, what is most *real* about the Eucharist, namely, its transformation of the faithful by deepening their insertion in the Body of Christ through Holy Communion and self-offering, is also what is most *real* about contemporary Christian life. This notion of the *real* weaves its way through all the essays in this book. For this reason I placed this clear and compelling essay first, so that it could provide the groundwork for later developments.

In chapter 2, in order to explain how the Christian community as a whole celebrates the Eucharist, Congar retrieves in a remarkable way the continuity within the church of the New Testament perspective on the spiritual sacrifices of all the faithful, united in the Eucharist to the Lord's own redeeming self-sacrifice. While doing so Congar points out the significant shifts brought about by key moments in history, including the movement from ancient to medieval ideas of authority and jurisdiction, the impact of the Reformation, and the church's alienation from secular society in the modern period.

Despite all these social and cultural transformations, the guiding principle for understanding the role of the faithful in liturgy has remained the affirmation in the rite of the Eucharist itself of the self-offering of the baptized as members sacramentally linked to their divine Victim and Priest. This second chapter has immense practical importance for today's church. The faithful's profound involvement in the central action of the Eucharist could be surprising news for many of them.

In chapter 3, discussing the structure of Christian priesthood, Congar sheds light on a topic of the greatest importance for which, in recent years, many pastors have almost never provided an adequate catechesis. Here, the stepping stones to a proper understanding of the church's theological tradition are the radical distinction between Hebrew and Christian priesthood (so radical as to be the basis for the shift from an *old* covenant to a *new* covenant), the theology of the Letter to the Hebrews that affirms Christ himself as the unique priest

At the Heart of Christian Worship

of the new covenant, and the revelation (especially in 1 Peter) of the character of the faithful as members of a royal priesthood. Completely lucid about the necessity and importance of ordained ministry within the great tradition, Congar proceeds to illuminate the pastoral significance of the priestly quality of the baptized, who offer themselves and the world as a living sacrifice to God, along with the sacrifice of Christ.

At first glance, chapter 4, about the role of the sacred in a Christian worldview, may not immediately seem to fit into the same trajectory as the essays that go before it. However, it soon becomes apparent that this essay too is an exploration of the genuine meaning of what is *real* (in the sense of *res*, as we have explained). Drawing upon the contrast between old and new covenants traced in the previous chapter, Congar demonstrates that a facile or inappropriate contrast between sacred and profane ultimately saps the Christian life of its capacity to be a transforming agent in the very heart of society. This is a fascinating essay, counterintuitive to the sentimental piety of some nineteenth-century writers or to Jansenist spirituality but definitely challenging in terms of the demands that it makes upon Christian spirituality today.

The final essay is very brief and, I think, very timely. It was written in 1945 for the French liturgical review *La Maison-Dieu* as an outline of possible points to emphasize in developing a catechesis of the meaning of Sunday. Here, perhaps more than elsewhere, Congar's own deep piety shows itself. Likewise, we discover here his impatience to find ways to communicate to the faithful—and their families and neighborhoods—the beauty and value of their Catholic identity.

These lines challenge us (as Congar himself intended) to discover our own agenda or points of development for a catechesis of Sunday. Sixty years have passed since these lines were first written. So in *our* world and circumstances, how can *we* speak of the meaning of Sunday today? I think that his somewhat dated contribution can definitely still help us to rise to the occasion.

Congar's Extraordinary Life

Born in April 1904 in the northeastern French city of Sedan, Yves Congar was the youngest of four children. His young life was deeply marked by the First World War (1914–1918). Encouraged by his mother to write of his experiences, he kept the first of his many journals in order to record his account of the war. By the end of the war Congar was already thinking about a priestly vocation.

After three years in a diocesan seminary (Les Carmes in Paris) he entered the novitiate for the Dominican Province of France in the fall

of 1925. He was ordained a priest in July 1930. This was a defining moment for him because during his ordination retreat, while reflecting on the words of Christ in John's Gospel, "May all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21), he received what he called his ecumenical vocation. As he put it, "I clearly recognized my vocation to work for the unity of all who believe in Christ."

In the 1930s Congar taught theology in the Dominican seminary Le Saulchoir, which was at that point in exile in Belgium. Two important influences marked his life there: the harmonious blend of hard work, liturgical prayer, and community life in a large and creative Dominican priory; and the ethos of a school of theology where biblical studies and history were the context within which dogmatic theology (including St. Thomas Aquinas) was read and interpreted.

The declaration of war in September 1939 uprooted Congar from his scholarly life. Lieutenant Congar was mobilized for the war, then captured and imprisoned in 1940. He then spent five years (until 1945) behind barbed wire in the German camps of Colditz and Lübeck. For the rest of his life Congar lamented this break in the momentum of his scholarly work. However, he returned to Le Saulchoir in 1945 and remained there until 1954, when he was exiled in disgrace for having been judged by Vatican officials as a troublemaker. (Although he sought for the rest of his life to discover the exact accusations which had been lodged against him, he never succeeded in doing so.)

Two of his decisive books, *True and False Reform in the Church* (1950) and *Lay People in the Church* (1953), came from this period.¹ Both of them include immense dossiers of references to Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and the teachings of the magisterium. Congar's ideas in these writings in large part would be vindicated by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council but were "premature" in 1954. Consequently, he was exiled from Paris and spent a number of years in official disfavor, forbidden even to reside in Paris.

In 1959, however, a new pope, John XXIII, announced the preparation of an ecumenical council. Congar was pleasantly and joyously surprised by this initiative, but nothing less than astounded

¹ Yves Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme dans l'Eglise* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1950); *idem*, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1953), revised edition with addenda by author published in 1964. English translation: *Lay People in the Church*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959), revised edition with addenda by the author published in 1965.

to discover that the new pope had appointed him a member of the preparatory theological commission for the council. Only later, with the opening of the council in the fall of 1962, did Congar begin to appreciate the significant role he would play as a theological expert in this largest and most diverse ecumenical council in the history of the church.

Yves Congar performed backbreaking work in helping to create the conciliar documents. It is generally agreed that Congar seems to have been the one who contributed most to the formation of the council's texts. Often, as he acknowledged in his voluminous journals of the council, he was led to accept solutions that he considered the least disagreeable or perhaps the most productive among those possible at a given moment. For him, the texts of the council represented the best of what was available, given the context and conditions of the time. He would say later, "The entire work of the council is a way station toward a better future."²

Already in the 1960s Congar's health began to decline seriously because of a chronic neurological disease—a form of muscular sclerosis. His captivity during the war certainly had not helped things, but his exhausting efforts during the council and his equally draining attempts to disseminate the council's teaching through talks and conferences later on only added to his physical burden. By the 1970s he was most frequently confined to a wheelchair, and by the 1980s he was forced to take refuge in a rest home where, however, he never stopped working. His huge, three-volume work, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, was produced during years of serious illness.³

With respect to the present work translated here, perhaps the most cogent observation about Congar is that he was a man of destiny, shaped by his heritage and background, his formation and his constant study, his ecumenical relationships and his telling presence at the Second Vatican Council. This council, fashioned by Pope John XXIII who convoked it, chose as its path to be a council not of condemnations but of affirmations and clarifications, a council not with a metaphysical or defensive agenda but one seeking a new voice for biblical and pastoral catechesis. Congar, with his extraordinary knowledge of history and

² *Une vie pour la vérité, Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar* (Paris: Centurion, 1975), 149.

³ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad-Herder, 1983)

tradition and his passion for unity, often became the most sought-after adviser in the theological commissions preparing the council's documents, precisely because he became known as someone with a sure grasp of both Catholic tradition and contemporary pastoral sensitivities. These essays are excellent examples of the fruitfulness of his gifts.

The Context for the Present Essays

The chapters presented in this collection come mostly from an earlier period of Congar's work. Even chapters 3 and 4, although published in their present form in the 1960s, are a reworking of materials originally produced in the 1950s, before the council. In several places we meet theological anachronisms because Congar wrote these pieces for the most part before the introduction of the vernacular in Roman Catholic liturgies and before the postconciliar reforms of the liturgy simplified and clarified the rites.

We might say that these essays allow us to dip into the theological imagination of the author such as it was before his long and grueling labors over the council documents. That being so, it is worth observing here some of his pastoral preoccupations during that preconciliar period.

Congar was aware of the alienation of the working class from the life of the church, especially in the postwar period. He recognized that new patterns of urban crowding, industrialization, mechanized labor, and economic hardship had a role to play in casting a pall of seeming unreality over the ritual life of the church. In successful parishes community life could be an oasis of social refreshment. But in the crowded inner city, priests were scarce and overworked and largely out of touch with the working-class culture. He was more than aware of the challenge.

Congar had met the pastoral movements of Father Joseph Cardijn in the 1930s in Belgium, where Cardijn had founded the organizations known as Young Christian Workers and Young Christian Students. Congar recognized the pastoral fruitfulness of the small-group methodology (observe, judge, and act) of YCW and YCS. These phenomena nourished his optimism that with effective catechesis the masses of Christian faithful might find a genuinely theological spiritual life within the context of everything that was ordinary in their world. Further, as a result of these movements, he saw even more clearly the critical role of the lay faithful themselves in evangelizing society. A byword of the French catechetical movement, after all, was "like to like"—evangelization within the context of neighborhood, workplace, society, and culture by those who live there.

At the Heart of Christian Worship

Congar's French Dominican colleagues were, like himself, frequently called upon to serve as advisers or even chaplains of small gatherings of committed Catholics. Like these colleagues of his, Congar was profoundly interested in developments in biblical studies, the liturgical movement, and adult catechesis. He had many opportunities to work pastorally in the laboratory of extended catechesis and conversation inside such groups. There was a spirit of vitality and optimism in the post-World War II French church, and Congar's writings reflect this.

In the 1940s Congar responded with enthusiasm to the theological possibilities opened up by the two great encyclicals of Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* (1943) and *Mediator Dei* (1947). In chapter 3, especially, we can observe his meticulous study of these texts and their pastoral significance for a preconciliar Catholic Church. Congar's own theology, as will be clear to readers of this volume, is consumed with the significance of the theological mystery of the Body of Christ. The author's exacting study and exegesis of these encyclicals of Pius XII demonstrate, as nothing else, his loyalty and deference to the teaching authority of the church's ordinary magisterium. Here, as elsewhere, Congar—despite all the struggles in his life and all the obstacles placed in his way—shows himself (almost inexplicably) a determined optimist.

These observations make it clear that the conciliar theology of Vatican II did not just drop from the heavens as a complete surprise. The pastoral vision of the council was, at least in part, a testimony to the experience of pastors in European countries where the traditional, rural context for parish life was no longer dominant. Many of the most influential theological experts at the Second Vatican Council were scholars who, like Congar, were concerned to address the growing distance between ecclesiastical culture and an increasingly technological and morally autonomous society.

Parish religious life could no longer afford to be a mere parenthesis in the life of busy working people but had to become relevant to the increasingly hectic, urban hustle where most of the faithful lived and made their professional contributions. Therefore, as we read Congar's extensive reviews of the historical trajectory of Catholic theology through the centuries, we should keep in mind that this is the work of someone who is not at home in an ivory tower but continually in dialogue with the most creative pastoral movements of his day.

A Few Notes about Methodology and Terminology

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are important pieces of research, densely interspersed with footnotes. These texts are clear and understandable, accessible to readers without a high scholarly formation. Their message touches upon very real questions in contemporary pastoral life and contains information about matters terribly relevant for understanding church practices in this period of transition and renewal following the Second Vatican Council.

The heavy scholarly apparatus in these three articles illustrates Congar's methodology of reviewing an immense breadth of materials demonstrating the biblical, patristic, and theological tradition of the church. Congar's bibliography shows us his use of Latin and Greek sources, his familiarity with all the great scholarly theological dictionaries and encyclopedias, and his study of penetrating books and periodicals in French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, and even Latin. The credibility of his argument is founded upon this immense erudition; it shows his broad but also penetrating reading of sources.

One of the great influences on Congar's work was the library at Le Saulchoir, the Dominican seminary near Paris. Books and periodicals from all the European languages arrived at this library, where Congar was able to consult them and remain aware of both the latest editions of ancient sources and the most notable new contributions to Christian history and theology. (His exile from Paris in 1954 was so dramatic and painful for him in no small part because it separated him from this tremendous resource for his theological research and his personal scholarly growth.)

I am perfectly aware that for many readers of this book, the majority of these footnotes, many with arcane abbreviations, will appear to be as incomprehensible as hieroglyphics. Some readers, I am sure, will be able to (and will want to) profit from the information provided there. But, in any case, it would be unthinkable to produce an edition of these works lacking this scholarly apparatus.

For the non-scholarly reader: do not be intimidated, please, by the presence of all this highly technical information. You may look upon it as a testimony to the laborious effort of the author to produce as dependable an account as possible of a Catholic understanding of the theology in question. It is one of the reasons why Congar was later so highly esteemed by the council's two popes, its bishops, and his theological colleagues.

I will mention here as well a few theological terms used by Congar in these essays that are not common currency in North American

At the Heart of Christian Worship

theological writing. Congar was greatly influenced by ecumenical discussions and, in particular, by Orthodox ecclesiology. But most of his more unusual expressions are due principally to a continental and French vocabulary which is a bit different from our own. At this point I will explain four terms he uses that require a bit of commentary.

economy: a term used especially in Orthodox theology, taken from the Greek word *oikonomia*, meaning “management” or “dispensation.” The Fathers of the Church distinguished “economy” from “theology,” economy having to do with the external manifestation of God’s purposes, while theology refers to the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. Congar uses the term more loosely to express the interface of divine interaction with human persons and the resulting dialogue of grace and obedience. For readers of these texts, I suggest that they translate “economy” roughly as the graced context of God’s initiatives in the lives of the faithful.⁴

messianic, messianism: a term denoting Christ as Messiah and evoking these two important themes linked to the Messiah: (1) the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament and (2) the one *anointed* by God. The literal meaning of the term—*Christos* in Greek, *Masiah* in Hebrew—is “anointed one.” Jesus proclaimed the imminent coming of God’s kingdom, and so messianism always has a note of prophetic urgency. Here, for Congar, *messianism* or *messianic* indicates above all the role of Christ as the one who fulfills the ancient promises of the Old Testament and who, once returned to the right hand of the Father, pours out his Spirit upon his people. The term evokes fulfillment, urgency, and spiritual generativity.

sacrament: Congar explains that the Latin word *sacramentum* is the translation of the Greek word *mysterion*; both refer to a palpable material sign of an invisible spiritual reality. In a manner that is consistent with the biblical evidence and with the theology of the Fathers of the Church, he broadens considerably the meaning of sacrament beyond its use for the seven sacramental rites in Roman Catholic liturgy. As the Second Vatican Council itself did in its documents, Congar, going beyond the sacramental rites, applies the category of sacrament to the physical body of Christ, then to the church as the social visibility of Christ in his members, and finally to the faithful themselves insofar as they bear a living witness to this solidarity as members of the Body of Christ.

⁴ See “Economy,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 171f.

prophet, prophetic principle: For Congar, the prophetic principle in the life of the church is essentially the ministry of the word, including the incarnation of the Divine Word in the manifestation of Christ in his words and actions. Just as there are two tables of the Eucharist—the table of the word and the table of the sacrificial meal—so there are always two dynamics at work in the pastoral ministry of the church, the prophetic and the priestly. As will be clear, especially in chapter 3, Congar sees the prophetic principle as applicable to the life of all the faithful in the exercise of their baptismal priesthood.

There are also a few other places where I have placed a translator's note in the text to explain Congar's use of language. In most cases, if readers are patient, they will find that the author explains himself as he goes along.*

Congar's Legacy

A great many of Congar's writings have been translated into English already. However, at present, I consider the absence of a translation for especially chapters 2, 3, and 4 a real lacuna or lack in our pastoral literature. These essays represent a rich legacy of theological reflection, the more important because de facto they reflect the development of the resources from which the theology of Vatican II was harvested.

These essays do help us reach into the heart of Christian worship, allowing us to see both the radical transformation of believers through Christian sacramental life and the evangelizing resonance of a people who live in solidarity with their divine head. Like the breathing in and breathing out of a living being, these two dynamics were always present to the mind of Congar, who held his mystical and his pastoral instincts in the closest communication.

As we saw, Congar's historical destiny, despite bitter previous disappointments, was to bring his exhaustive and exacting ecclesiological research to fruition in the midst of a council whose great mission was to redefine the church from the bottom up. In 1994 his role as one of the principal theologians of Vatican II was acknowledged by

* In addition to Congar's scholarly apparatus and continental and French vocabulary, he frequently uses ellipsis points at the end of a phrase, perhaps to indicate that more could be said on a particular point. Though this may be unconventional in English usage, the ellipses have been retained in this translation.

Pope John Paul II, who brought Congar into the College of Cardinals. By that time, he was in the last year of his life and very ill. The same patience that had sustained his years of indefatigable work also sustained him in his suffering.

I will conclude this introduction with some lines of Congar, written in the last decade of his life, that reveal his charisma of love of the church and love of truth:

Withdrawn from active life, I am united to the mystical body of the Lord Jesus of which I have often spoken. I am united to it, day and night, by the prayer of one who has known his share of suffering.

I have a keen awareness of the vast dimensions of the mystical body. By and in the Holy Spirit I am present to its members, known and unknown. Ecumenism obviously plays a part in this. It is intercession, consolation, thanksgiving, as the Lord wills.⁵

In order to allow readers to reach more deeply into Congar's thought—and thereby into the heart of Christian worship—questions for individual reflection and group discussion have been added at the end of each chapter.

⁵ *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, ed. and introduced by Bernard Lauret (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 86–87.

“Real” Liturgy, “Real” Preaching

Translator’s observations: *This article was first published in 1948. In his introductory note to the article, however, Congar revealed that he had first formulated these ideas in 1943, when he was still a prisoner of war in the German camp at Colditz. His article was offered to La Maison-Dieu (16 [1948]: 75–87) as a contribution to the task of articulating the mission of the Centre de Pastorale Liturgique in Paris. Patrick Prétot, O.S.B., director of the Institut Supérieur de Liturgie, brought these pages to my attention recently. They are as fresh today as they were sixty years ago.*

The central point in this piece is the retrieval of the idea of the “real” as it was understood in the theology of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Congar was aware of the powerful rhetorical impact of the almost exclusive use of the phrase “real presence” for the eucharistic species, the consecrated bread and wine. By explaining how the eucharistic Body of Christ has the function of a means toward the creation of the mystical body (or toward the intensification of the mystical body’s identification with its Head), the author provides an avenue that allows the faithful to repossess the traditional teaching about the end of the eucharistic celebration, namely, a People of God sanctified and on mission.

There are a number of anachronisms in this text, written some fifteen years before the Second Vatican Council. Some of Congar’s complaints about the remoteness and inaccessibility of liturgical rites can be attributed to the fact that Latin was the only language for liturgical celebration in the Roman rite at that time. He would surely have changed his assessment, I think, based upon the intelligibility of the rites as they have been reformed in the years following the council. I have to wonder, however, whether the proposed new translation of the Missal in English will not end up reinstating in our present-day context many of the problems Congar raised here.

As to preaching, Congar complains of preachers in his day giving dry, technical, dogmatic homilies that did not connect with the life experience of the faithful. I would say that our situation today is almost

the reverse. I hear few doctrinal homilies from the pulpit these days. Most Sunday homilies tend to be too personal and anecdotal and without a doctrinal focus. Would that the key problem today were doctrinal preaching that was too technical!

As to the failure of seminaries to prepare preachers to preach, much improvement has come about because of the insistence of the Program for Priestly Formation upon the effective training of preachers in seminaries. Nonetheless, although much has improved in the interim, Congar's pastoral objectives here remain compelling. Here is a piece of pastoral wisdom that is, in effect, ageless.

What is the meaning of "real" liturgy and "real" preaching? To plead for the "real" is not to discount the "intellectual." There are real ideas, even abstract expressions that are real. Neither am I creating an opposition to the word "notional." Notions or intuitions can be interpretations of personal knowing and of human experience. Nor do I mean "real" in the sense of literary realism or realistic painting. In calling for preaching that is real, I am not asking for slices of life representing the fads of the moment, even less for a coarse or vulgar style of speaking. The realism I have in mind, which I want to apply to both liturgy and preaching, can't be restricted to a question of literary form. Compared to the "real" that I want to describe, all these other meanings of the word, interesting though they may be, remain rather superficial.

When theology talks about the *res* of the sacraments, that gives us a clue to a meaning of the word "real" that has great amplitude and great precision, and one that is attuned exactly to the point of my present remarks. This is a way of discussing what is "real" in terms of doctrines that are both central and profoundly important in classical Catholic theology. I trust that my explanations here will justify my understanding of "real" liturgy and "real" preaching as that which is genuinely able to bear fruit in the understanding and the lives of our contemporaries. Since it won't be a waste of time to explain this idea, which at first might seem both vague and maybe even enigmatic, I intend to explore how this question of "real" liturgy and "real" preaching is linked to the deepest vein of God's revelation and to the meaning of the church itself.

God's plan, as the Bible reveals it to us, can be considered as a process that moves from outside to inside, from symbols accessible to the senses toward another reality that becomes rooted in the very person. The Fathers of the Church adopted a theological structure which is the

At the Heart of Christian Worship

same for both Christian iconography and for the liturgy, and (before either of these) for the structure of the New Testament as well. According to this structure, what is to be found in the Old Testament has the character of figure, promise, or sketch of what is to come. The real meaning of the Old Testament is to be found beyond its pages. *Sacramenta Veteris Testamenti* (the sacraments of the Old Testament) was the Fathers' expression of this idea.¹

More precisely, the idea is this: what is found by way of preparation and prophecy in the Old Testament is still an *extrinsic* reality which, under the new and definitive covenant, must be internalized within believers to become spiritual and interior to the person. The Epistle to the Hebrews gives us the perfect example when it confronts the law, priesthood, sacrifice, the temple, or even the presence of God as they are found in the Old Testament with their status in the New. For the present, let's pursue further the idea of sacrifice.

From one end of the Bible to the other, God requires rituals and sacrifices. In the Old Covenant, worship and sacrifice were prescribed by law and were executed according to precisely defined rituals. In particular, the Old Testament prescribed animal sacrifice. However, we find that the prophets bitterly railed against these sacrifices and even claimed that God detested them. Some historians have been so carried away with this idea that they have imagined that this meant a condemnation of all rituals as such.² Yet the fact is that the same prophets who condemned sacrifice went on to call people to a perfect sacrifice that the old law was impotent to achieve. As Hebrews 7:19 tells us, the old law was unable to lead religion to its perfection.

Louis Bouyer's *Le Mystère pascal* and even the Anglican theologian Gabriel Hebert³ describe clearly how, under the old covenant, God

¹ To get at the meaning of this idea of sacrament in the larger sense, nothing is more helpful than Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum* (Paris: Aubier, 1944). English translation: *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages—an Historical Survey*, tr. Gemma Simmonds et al. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

² For example, see Adolphe Lods, *Les Prophètes d'Israël et les débuts du judaïsme* (Paris, 1935), 74ff. (for Amos, 95; for Hosea, 106).

³ Louis Bouyer, *Le Mystère pascal* (Paris: Cerf, 1945), 273f., 456f. (his translation of a text of Augustine is cited below); Gabriel Hebert, *The Throne of David* (London, 1941), 111–122 (this is a rich contribution—a French translation is needed).

simultaneously demanded sacrifices and yet proclaimed that he does not want them. This is a typical example of the prophetic function in the divine economy. The prophets, charged both with developing and maintaining religious institutions and also with realizing God's plan, ended up saying at one and the same time: That's what must be done; but no, perhaps not. God wants it; no, God doesn't want it. God wants sacrifice but not as you imagine it and practice it. God wants it, but in another form, of another sort, going beyond what you are presently used to . . .

So, God wanted a sacrifice, but not the one that the old law with its imperfections prescribed, that is, the sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats. God wanted a sacrifice, but he wanted none other than the sacrifice of the very person. What God seeks in worship is neither ceremonies nor the offering of gifts—nothing extrinsic to the person who offers, nothing other than the opening up, the conversion and the gift of the hearts of believers themselves.

Here as elsewhere, Jesus' fulfillment of the law did not consist in adding to the law of Moses some new demand, some legal improvement, some new (perhaps rigorous) obligation. Rather Jesus fulfilled the law by identifying and reaffirming the original and pure meaning of the law according to God's intention, namely, the perfection of love. Jesus fulfilled the law by bringing about the full development of God's plan that gradually manifested itself in the twists and turns of the history of salvation.⁴ Sacrifice is fulfilled not in the offering of anything external but rather in believers' offering their very selves. That is what was inaugurated in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and following him and thanks to him, that is what we are able to do in union with him.

This idea is at the heart of a text of St. Augustine whose depth and beauty would be hard to surpass. (Louis Bouyer has translated this text in his *Mystère pascal*.⁵) There St. Augustine develops the theme that I have just evoked. He develops the idea to the point that it will become central to his theological program: conversion to the deepest Reality is a movement of conversion from the outside to the inside, from sense experience to spiritual reality, from signs to the Truth itself. This schema, already equivalently present in the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian, is the source of Augustine's famous analysis

⁴ To understand this meaning of the fulfillment of the law, see (Protestant) Wilhelm Vischer (Zürich: Zollikon, 1943), *Das Christuszeugniss des Alten Testaments*, t. I (6th edition), 309ff.

⁵ Cf. pp. 456f. (the text comes from *De Civitate Dei*, bk. X, chs. v and vi).

At the Heart of Christian Worship

of the sacraments that Scholasticism will systematize in the categories of *sacramentum* (the ritual of the sacraments, the exterior sign), *res et sacramentum* (the effect produced that is *not*, however, the complete fruition, *not* the ultimate reality which the sacred action of the sacramental rite intends), and finally the *res tantum* (that which is the complete fruition of the sacrament, the spiritual reality signified by the sacred ritual and brought about in mystery by the rite).

The analysis was not formulated by Augustine with this degree of definition. He was content to analyze the *sacramentum* as belonging to the category of *sign*, as a reality within the order of signification, and thus to claim that every sacred sign has reference to a *res* (a spiritual reality) that will be its fulfillment. The *res* [complete fulfillment] of all *sacramenta* [sacred signs] is Christ himself. Augustine does not himself apply this analysis to the question of the efficacy of the ritual of the sacraments.⁶ But later, when the scholastics proceed to analyze the rites, they quite naturally identify the *res* of the sacraments with the reality of grace produced by them in the souls of the faithful.

This analysis allows us to grasp the deep meaning of God's plan revealed in the Scriptures. It becomes systematized for the scholastics in the following formula: every "sacrament" exists for the sake of its *res*, which is a spiritual reality *in the believer*. Therefore liturgy, rituals, and the church, which is itself the Great Sacrament, have to find their fulfillment and their verification *in the persons who live out their meaning*. So to be "real," then, means to arrive at this reality, to become one's true self—a reality and a truth which have become a spiritual fruition in believers themselves. Put another way, for sacraments to be "real" means for them to achieve their *res*, the fulfillment of their spiritual reality, which is light and grace in the consciousness of a spiritual person.

Application to the Liturgy

The liturgy is not a *thing*. The worship of God doesn't just happen because there is a celebration, even a good one, using the rites of the sacraments. It doesn't happen until the *res* (the spiritual reality) of the liturgy is achieved in the believers who celebrate. This is the deeper meaning of the axiom, *sacramenta propter homines*. Sacraments are for people not only with respect to their *purpose*, which governs and guides

⁶ See the article of Henri-Marie Feret, "*Sacramentum-res*, dans la langue théologique de saint Augustin," *Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques* (1940): 218–243.

the logic of their “administration,” but also with respect to their *reality*, with respect to the true efficacy of the spiritual action which they are intended to bring about. Once this is understood it becomes clear that no liturgy is worth the effort it takes unless it achieves its spiritual impact in the understanding and the hearts of believers. St. Paul said that he would prefer to speak five words with understanding than ten thousand words in tongues (1 Cor 14:19). He also spoke of “spiritual” worship, which means precisely the offering of oneself (Rom 12:1).

A living liturgy does not consist in the impeccable performance of ceremonies or in a restoration of all the external niceties of the rites, but rather in their spiritual perfection. All of that might contribute, by way of its pedagogical value, to restoring to liturgical action its full truthfulness or “reality.” Neither does a living liturgy consist in the spiritual initiation of a handful of people in the midst of a general (and intractable) disinterest on the part of the majority. A liturgy that can only succeed in becoming “real” for a chapel of “oblates,” that is, for those who have undertaken a long and sophisticated special education in liturgical expression, is not what we are after. A “real” liturgy is one adapted to being internalized, to producing its *res*—its spiritual effect—in the souls of the faithful, to being received and personalized in people’s awareness. As long as what occurs is merely *something special happening* that remains exterior to the hearts of the faithful, what we still have are sacrifices of the kind criticized by the prophets, worship that continues the rites of the synagogue.

The essential objective here, quite distinct from liturgical antiquarianism or ritualism, is to discover a liturgy that can readily be received directly into the hearts of the faithful. By *faithful* here, I mean those who live normal lives in our own time and culture, and not just people living in a fixed, closed agricultural economy as did our ancestors at the time that our liturgical forms were being created. The type of humanity structured and conditioned by the life of those times possessed characteristics which are not at all like those of a humanity shaped and conditioned by industrial labor, mechanical standardization, urban crowding, intense and rapid commercial exchanges, and the harshness and competition of struggling for a livelihood. Neither can today’s liturgy be received and internalized under the conditions that prevailed at the end of the Roman Empire or during the feudal system of the Carolingian period. The psychological and moral characteristics of that kind of humanity could only continue to exist exclusively in some kind of specialized environment that would have to be both protected and closed.

At the Heart of Christian Worship

The difficulty for a liturgical movement that hopes to be both popular and fully pastoral will always be a temptation toward ritualism. Its job, after all, is to give new meaning to texts and to gestures whose essential sense is symbolic. These texts and rites were created at a fixed moment in the past, drawing from a system of ideas and symbols that were reasonable then—even understood by the great majority of people at that time. Now, however, that system of ideas and symbols is today either forgotten or at least terribly remote.

Admittedly, the most important of these symbols are still valid, but they are sometimes difficult to understand. They now require a special preparation that the faithful no longer have. Some of them are simple and linked to the most common human experiences. A great number of ritual actions or of key texts taken from the Bible are like this. In themselves, they are infinitely rich; they arise from a providential divine pedagogy. But now they need to be explained. And even when they are grasped and internalized, they require an intellectual effort to keep them in mind and to apply them to experience.

Other gestures or formulas are excessively subtle. They do not make sense without a historical explanation that requires a lot of erudition. For example, we may do this or that because in the past the pope or the emperor on certain days performed this ritual whose historical antecedent is such and such . . . It should be clear that certain subtle symbols and almost all those ritual gestures that require a complicated historical explanation in order to make sense are not adapted to the spiritual needs of our contemporaries. These are symbols that can be meaningful and nourishing only for those who have the special education or the necessary leisure to understand them and to apply them to their own experience.

Interpreting symbols is fascinating and even entrancing. Discovering relationships, correspondences, and the logic that links words, symbols, and texts is both engaging and enriching. I have thrown myself into this work and gained enough from it to be able to understand how much it can mean. However, the pastoral problem is not that of specialists placed in conditions that offer the historical culture necessary for understanding liturgical symbols and for finding profit in them. There will always be people who withdraw from the mainstream because their social condition or their personal tastes allow them to abstract themselves from the spirit of the age, which is technological and non-contemplative.

Indeed, one might even wonder if the formation which priests receive for their apostolic ministry, formation immersed in a world of pretechnological ideas, doesn't contribute to cutting them off inevitably from those for whom they are supposed to be a spiritual leaven. Maybe

the concrete conditions of the church require such seclusion so as to assure the continuity of the tradition, which we cannot afford to neglect. Maybe adaptations to the changing conditions of the world are the business of the laity . . . Who knows? But the key question here is the fate of the masses—the majority of the faithful to whom our ceremonies mean less and less. On the whole, they don't understand what's going on in the liturgy, and they can't get beyond that.

Take as an example the liturgy of Palm Sunday. (I began writing these pages after presiding on Palm Sunday in a parish church jammed with people.) This is one of the days of the year (and in some places this is *the* day) when the largest number of people come to church. The prayers for the blessing of the palms are beautiful. However, nobody in the assembly understands them and almost nobody wants to be bothered to try to follow them.⁷ So what are we doing then? What is our objective here; who are we doing this for? *Whose* worship, *whose* prayer is this? Is it even *somebody's* prayer?

It's the church's prayer, you might say; and that's true. You could never get me to say otherwise. But can't we admit also that the church that prays is in fact this very community of faithful gathered here today? Often when I take part in liturgical functions in the parishes, or when I reflect on problems like these, I think spontaneously of an anecdote told me by a Dominican confrere. In a little town in eastern France, about 1927 or 1928, Father B. was preaching for Lent, giving one after the other the parish retreat for men, followed by the one for women. Finally there was the retreat for the domestic servants of the parish's families. The old pastor told the preacher, "Your sermons will be at 5:00 p.m. But I can tell you now, you won't have much of a crowd. That's an hour when these people just can't get away . . ."

It seems to me at times that in commissioning priests to minister the word and the sacraments of Jesus Christ for the people of God, we might just as well tell them, "You can perform these rites according to the rubrics, even chant the epistle and gospel in Latin, if you like. But I can tell you now, you won't have much of anyone there. These are things that these people just don't understand . . ."

As a faithful minister of Christ in the holy Roman Catholic Church, when I celebrate the sacred mysteries (not just the Mass) according to the prescribed rubrics, I can't get out of my mind the Lord's phrase in

⁷ Translator's note: keep in mind that Congar wrote this article when the Roman Catholic liturgy was still celebrated exclusively in Latin.

the gospel: “You have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves did not enter and you stopped others trying to enter” (Luke 11:52). In many of our ceremonies, isn’t there in fact an element of the unreal—an obstacle that impedes their bearing spiritual fruit in the lives of the faithful for whom they were created?

Whatever the case may be, we need to strive for a liturgical “realism” that can emerge within the existing norms imposed by the church. Nothing said previously is meant to underestimate the immense value and priceless heritage of this treasure. Liturgical “realism” is the internalization of worship by the faithful, the development in their hearts of the fruitfulness of their prayer and their love. Therefore we have to enrich and make telling for them the liturgical action itself, not only by providing a good explanation of the symbols, but also by explaining the meaning that worship can have for their lives in the context of the problems and circumstances that they must live with.

Generally, liturgists hardly ever develop this kind of catechesis. Sometimes I get the impression that liturgists are working for the liturgy itself, rather than for the people. That’s why they may fail to have a pastoral impact. By contrast, it is essential that the liturgical renewal get beyond focusing on the liturgy for its own sake and that it become absorbed (obsessed, I might even say) by the concern of being in touch with ordinary people and leading them to a “spiritual” worship lived out in their daily lives.

This won’t happen, however, unless the *prophetic* element—the word—is incessantly at play to help internalize and personalize the sacramental celebration. The rite will have to be explained not just in historical and biblical terms or in terms of symbols from the past; it must also be presented in a way that integrates human attitudes and life options, touching the concrete realities of the faithful as real, contemporary persons. To take another example, how could the exorcisms of the rite of baptism represent something “real” for the people today with whom they are used, unless they are explained and, further, explained in terms of their actual experiences, their problems and their needs? Only by such an effort can they achieve the kind of internalization of meaning that is essential.

This discussion shows us how “real” liturgy is linked to preaching and, more precisely, to a sort of preaching that is equally “real.”

Application to Preaching

Almost everywhere, the more demanding members of the faithful are somewhat critical of our preaching. They complain that our

sermons sound prefabricated. It's not a question of their rejecting the Christian doctrine which is the revealed deposit of the faith, the dogma of the church which comes to us from the apostles. That is not being called into question—which makes this critique quite different from the complaints of modernism at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Christian people of our time genuinely want to be put into meaningful contact with the apostolic and patristic sources of Catholic teaching. However, they complain that preachers are too bookish in their expressions, that they are overly concerned to use canonical formulas or to pass on passages of official documents (where they often betray a merely superficial reading). Therefore they find the doctrine offered them from the pulpit out of touch with their personal needs and their own spontaneous questions.

They complain that preachers too seldom speak like persons with a genuine spiritual life of their own who are living the things that they preach. This is a question not so much of moral witness but of the way they think. Preachers propose a kind of teaching whose doctrine is orthodox enough; the complaint is not there. But they talk like licensed dealers of orthodox formulas that sound impersonal and fixed. In fact, as fathers of souls who need the example and the nourishment of their pastors for living their Christian lives, preachers should be showing them what it looks like to live this Christian teaching.

Pastors are ordained to be the head of the local community and supposedly in communion with their people. Yet, from the pulpit, in the sacristy, or at the altar, pastors "administer" more than they "live" their ministry of God's word. That word should be both a life-giving response to the questions of the people as well as nourishment for their hearts. Behaving this way, preachers continue to represent a religious system *that exists in and for itself* but which in fact is not really in touch with the religious realities of human life. Religion has to be transcendent, of course; but should it be transcendent *in that kind of way*? Can it afford to manifest transcendence as something extrinsic, as a completely distinct order of things which is less the vertical dimension of human life than a world apart, a world juxtaposed to the world of ordinary human experience?

In the end, the complaint about our preaching boils down to this: too often it is itself little more than a ritual. It is more or less impressive talk about what we are expected to say in this special setting of the parish church, typical of things uttered from a pulpit in the course of a ceremony that is artificial and uses language that is uncommon. One day, during a confirmation, I heard the preacher talk about the "Sevenfold

At the Heart of Christian Worship

Spirit.” What is that supposed to say to the lay faithful? As a priest and a theologian, of course, this expression means a lot. But for the laity who have never undergone a specialized initiation into the clerical world, it means strictly nothing. It’s part of the ritual, that’s all.

As Abbé Georges Michonneau pointed out from experience, when something has become nothing more than a ritual, it adds nothing and changes nothing even in the lives of those who still practice it.⁸ In our preaching, the things we say are generally correct—that’s not the problem. They are *sacramenta* where everything is just fine from the perspective of the validity of the *sacramentum*. But they don’t succeed at producing their *res*, and can hardly hope to do so. The *res* is the spiritual fruit in the awareness and consciences of the faithful which I have described earlier in these pages. The words of the preaching remain too much on the order of *ritual* and don’t arrive at the spiritual fulfillment that the ritual was created for, without which it no longer has any point. Reflect on this: if the sacraments were made for the benefit of the people, what must we say about the purpose of the word?

What I understand as “real” preaching is never going to be non-intellectual, nor should it always necessarily be expressed without some complicated ideas. But “real” preaching does have to have these characteristics:

1. It deals with real problems and gives real nourishment to the souls of the faithful.
2. It is directed to an audience of people who earn a living, who are married and have a family, who have real responsibilities and live in a society of initiative and cooperation. It is preaching addressed in such a way as to be understood by just such people, talking about what is true in such a way as to say it, eye to eye, to an ordinary person—and not just to a church full of almost exclusively women, or to a group of children, or to a community of nuns.
3. It is preaching that is likely to produce its effect, its *res*, in the mind, the conscience, and the heart of just such people.

This topic is endless. I could go on and on. But I think that I have explained my idea. I need to add this, however. The normal condition for producing “real” preaching is “real” study. At present, many

⁸ It is worth rereading pages 257ff. in Georges Michonneau, *Paroisse, communauté missionnaire: Conclusions de cinq ans d’expérience en milieu populaire* (Paris: Cerf, 1946).

priests who want to preach in the way I have described are more or less obliged to repeat the parts of their theological studies that provide a foundation for their preaching. That shouldn't be necessary.

I don't imagine that seminary education is able or ought to prepare students immediately to go out and preach after each course. To impose that, to put into place a purely practical or pragmatic orientation for clerical studies, would be to frustrate something essential and irreplaceable for the pastoral objectives at hand. Pastoral theology still has need for a thoughtful distancing, a disinterested reflectiveness. These are the foundation for any true culture, and for a scientific seriousness and a judicious approach to the truth.

So I don't think that clerical studies, in order to be better adapted for pastoral success, ought to become less intellectual. But in the criticism often made of Scholasticism, there is, I believe, a genuine and a profound problem—sensed rather than articulated by many (and sometimes trivialized by those who don't get the point). What we need is not less intellectual or less scientific, less rigorous or less traditional academic formation. What we need, however, are studies that focus on thinking about reality, that respond to the real needs of real persons and don't just focus on manipulating a conventional vocabulary with flair or brilliance. That kind of scholastic theology gives us only mere *sacramenta* and so only mere ritual.

Pay attention to reality, then, to real questions, without losing touch with the centuries-long heritage of great Christian thought. Real questions deserve real answers of a kind that real people struggling to live in today's world can take to heart and live. This can't mean concentrating only on modern philosophy, politics, economics, or literature. The responses needed from the pulpit are God's answers, the Gospel's—the answers of the apostolic tradition that lives on in the church. We are ministers of the word of God, not agents of contemporary civilization. However, the word of God and the doctrine of the church in which this word is applied and developed ought to be studied in order to be handed on to the faithful, so as to give them spiritual nourishment capable of changing their lives.

Linked with the celebration of the liturgy, the ministry of the word has to focus on producing its *res*—its spiritual fruit in the consciousness of the faithful. This is the meaning, both precise and rich, of "real" liturgy and "real" preaching.



Agenda for Personal and Group Reflections

Questions for the Individual Reader

1. On the basis of his retrieval of the classic theological tradition, Congar's use of the word "real" points to a transformation in the believer. Do you personally recognize in your own life what he means by the "realized mystery" (the *res*) of the Eucharist as a present-day overflow of sacramental grace? What examples might you give of what you have experienced?

2. Can you think of things in the pastoral preaching and in the liturgical celebrations of your parish that would help you to arrive at a deeper appreciation of the transformation that sacramental life offers to you?

3. Congar speaks of a movement in Catholic spirituality that goes from externals to interiorization, we might say from rites and things to experience. For him the *interior* is always *corporeal*, rooted in the Body of Christ. How does this help you to refocus your understanding of the Eucharist and what it asks of you?

4. If you were to share some key ideas that you have taken away from reading this chapter, what two or three points would you emphasize? What struck you the most?

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Congar sees the church and its ritual life as the fulfillment of an ages-long preparation in the Old Testament. Does this insight help you look at the Lectionary readings from the Old Testament with new understanding? How, for example, does the church interiorize and deepen the great Old Testament theme of the People of God through the celebration of the Eucharist?

2. Can you explain how understanding the eucharistic bread and wine as a *means* ("Take and eat," says the Lord) deepens and makes even more urgent the eucharistic reality of the church that has as its vocation to become itself a great sacrament of God's presence?

3. Congar insists that in the new covenant there is only one sacrifice, the self-offering of Christ (and, with him, of the members of his body). Do we have to *unlearn* old habits of seeing liturgical actions as supernatural substitution sacrifices of which we are unworthy to be a part? How do you bring yourself to understand the awesome truth that you give yourself along with your Lord in solidarity as a self-offering accepted with delight by God the Father?

4. Congar fears that sometimes the complicated nature of liturgical rituals turns people off. Have you had experiences like that? What are they? How do they get in the way of your fully understanding the church's liturgical action?