

Church as authentic liberation from the master-slave ethos. Their arguments require a rephrasing of both the biological naturalist's identification of sex and gender, and the postmodern sex-gender distinction: as Beatriz Vollmer Coles has it (I think), gender transcendence means creatively making a spiritual and moral use of one's given sex ("New Feminism: A Sex Gender Reunion"). There must be 'men' and 'women' as 'real universals' for this defence of male-female complementarity to bear out.

Since it was John Paul II who revived the term *new feminism* in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the Schumacher team take their cue from this theological *datum* and from the realist phenomenology the Pope espoused as a young philosopher. So Edith Stein's reflections on the nature of 'woman' are heavily rehearsed in *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*. Though the essays are delightfully intricate, I was left wondering whether phenomenological 'essentialism' translates into an Anglo-Saxon context. But then, going on to the second book, I read Janet Martin's Soskice's piece, in which, reminding us of the Patristic and mediaeval devotions to Jesus as bleeding mother, she contends that it "is by no means clear that Christ is always and everywhere in the symbolic order a 'male' figure. There is abundant sense in seeing Christ as our mother, and his blood as the source of new life" (Soskice/Lipton, p. 337). There's a 'British Museum religion' feel to this apparent common sense: it may be a personal predilection, but I do not want Jesus to be my mummy. Perhaps, analogously, fewer people want their father to be their metaphorical mother than the older feminists hope; they want him to be *up for it* some of the time; but the miraculously lactating Bernard of Clairvaux would be a better paradigm of mediaeval gender-bender if he hadn't provoked a pogrom in the wake of the First Crusade, and caused Abelard such unnecessary misfortune. Merely on the basis of experiential centrality, the 'New Feminists' are today the more theologically engaging, with their analogy of "God and Israel who, through the grace of love, encounter each other face-to-face, as man and woman in their original state of awe (Gen. 2)" (Pelletier, in Schumacher, p. 236).

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**YVES CONGAR'S VISION OF THE CHURCH IN A WORLD OF UNBELIEF** by Gabriel Flynn, *Ashgate, Aldershot/Burlington, 2004, Pp. 280, £49.95 hbk.*

Cardinal Yves Congar OP is first and foremost associated with Catholic ecumenism. His passionate vision of the Church as the true unifier of humankind triumphed when the Church accepted ecumenism at Vatican II. Apart from his deep faith, love of the Church and 'active patience', as he called it (Congar spent much of the 1950s under censure), a major factor in his success was the breadth and solidity of his scholarship. Congar's more 'suspect' ideas, particularly his notion that doctrine was not coterminous with any one mode of expression, were shown to be founded solidly on Scripture and Patristics. In other words, what was supposedly new was actually traditional, and much older than the supposedly 'traditional' formulae which went back only to the Scholastics or Trent. This method of *ressourcement*, or going back to the sources, is employed by Gabriel Flynn in studying Congar himself, and results in a surprising discovery: Congar was not driven primarily by a passion for ecumenism, but by the recognition that even in the 1930s Europe was a society of unbelief. Indeed, secularisation, he argued, had begun in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, with the rise of lay power, which developed into individualist spiritualities and rationalist humanism. At the same time division between Christians and religious war caused scandal, and the Church's defensive response to criticism and negative attitude to social change contributed to the sundering of religion from the reality of people's lives. Some of these factors are still relevant to our own time, which is the impetus for Flynn's analysis of Congar's theology.

Congar's output was massive (some eighty books and over a hundred articles) and not systematic. This was due not just to his lack of philosophical inclination, but also the nature of his project. Concerned that 'Baroque theology' had reduced Catholicism to narrow formulae and rigid systems which were simply alien to many people, he sought to draw out all the riches of Scripture and Tradition to help the Church appeal to the widest audience possible. So Congar uses many models and concepts for the Church: the Body of Christ, People of God, Sacrament of Universal Salvation, 'the world believing in Christ', Communion, *Koinonia* . . . He shifts continually from one concept to another, and all in an intellectual but passionate style redolent of the Fathers, which makes it difficult to treat his work systematically. This is perhaps why, although the main body of Flynn's work is divided into three chapters (Congar's vision of the Church, the shape of the Church and the reform of the Church), he tends towards repetition.

For all that, Flynn's study is a valuable treatment of some of the implied tensions – between Tradition and traditions, unity and diversity, baptised and ordained priesthood, and so on. Importantly, he reveals Congar as a theologian who cannot be 'claimed' by either 'liberals' or 'conservatives': Congar severely criticised the 'integralists' who would fossilize every formula and practice and refuse to recognise the Church's failings; but he had no more time for real Modernists, who he felt were intellectual theologians with no priestly or pastoral sense of the Church. Flynn highlights a few times Congar's seeming replacement of the demand for full visible unity between Christians with (by 1980) an idea of 'reconciled diversities'. Regrettably he does not discuss this in more detail, nor Congar's apparent rejection of the urgency of evangelisation.

The chapter on reform and tradition is of special value, much of it analysing Congar's untranslated *Vraie et Fausse Réforme de l'Église* (1950). Flynn gives a fine exposition of Congar's considered response to protestant and liberal criticisms: precisely *because* the essential structures of the Church (sacraments and ordained ministries) are divinely given, their celebration must reveal rather than deform their reality. The source for reform is Scripture and Tradition, in which liturgy plays a central role as the cosmic sacrifice, the offering of the whole world to God.

But given that Congar's programme for reform was adopted pretty much in its totality at Vatican II, why has the Church not been more successful in the modern world? Flynn returns to his original issue, and attempts to set some parameters for an enquiry into unbelief now. While recognising the effect of the collapse in social structures, he considers that Congar's demand for a reconnection of religion and life needs to be heeded properly. He also implies that Congar's emphasis on the laity has (unintentionally) lessened the status of ordained ministry, and that the impetus for evangelisation has been lost just at a time when a message of hope is most needed. Flynn perceives too a retreat into authoritarian statements and the safety of the presbytery, although he does not expand on this.

It is hard to disagree though that the real causes of unbelief need to be addressed honestly. But this does not require yet another round of breast-beating which reduces apologetics to saying sorry. Rather, just as Congar looked at the tradition of the Church of his time in its historical context, we need to do the same now. Freed as we now are from the absolutism of any theological system, we can search in the great riches of the Church's tradition for new ways of preaching the Gospel – be that from the Fathers, the Counter-Reform, Vatican II or the modern Charismatics. Congar offers us sound principles, and Flynn's balanced presentation will get us off to a good start.

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