

# The Role of Unbelief in the Theology of Yves Congar

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## I. Introduction

This article seeks to present and assess the ideas of Yves M.-J. Congar (1904–95) in light of their contribution to contemporary theology and the renewal of the Catholic Church. Its principal objective is to highlight certain findings of recent research,<sup>1</sup> namely, that Congar’s 1935 study, “Une Conclusion théologique à l’enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l’incroyance,”<sup>2</sup> published as a theological conclusion to a three-year investigation by the journal *La Vie intellectuelle* into the causes of unbelief, provides the inspiration for his major works on the Church and motivated him to institute a new ecclesiological series called *Unam Sanctam*.<sup>3</sup> In his theological treatise on unbelief, Congar argues that the Church could be for many a cause of unbelief. Essentially, he held that certain ideas of God and faith, together with a “wholly juridico-hierarchical”<sup>4</sup> image of the Church, were largely to blame for unbelief. It should be noted that Congar’s critique of the Church as a cause of unbelief may be best understood in the context of his approach to ecclesiology as influenced by affectivity.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I shall consider the reasons for unbelief, since unbelief poses a direct challenge to the validity of the Christian claim that salvation

<sup>1</sup> See Gabriel Flynn, *Yves Congar’s Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Yves Congar, “The Reasons for the Unbelief of our Time: A Theological Conclusion”, Part I, *Integration*, 2 (1938), 13–21 and Part II, *Integration*, 2 (1938), 10–26; also id., “Une Conclusion théologique à l’enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l’incroyance”, *La Vie intellectuelle*, 37 (1935), 214–249. Following the initial citation, the page numbers of works in the original language will be given in round brackets. Unless otherwise stated, translations from the French are mine throughout.

<sup>3</sup> See Congar, “The Council in the Age of Dialogue”, trans. by Barry N. Rigney, *Cross Currents*, 12 (1962), 144–151 (pp. 146–149), also id., “Voeux pour le concile: enquête parmi les chrétiens”, *Esprit*, 29 (1961), 691–700 (pp. 694–697). See further id., “Reflections on being a Theologian”, trans. by Marcus Lefebure, *New Blackfriars*, 62 (1981), 405–409 (p. 405); Patrick Granfield, *Theologians at Work* (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), pp. 251–253.

<sup>4</sup> Congar, “Letter from Father Yves Congar, O.P.”, trans. by Ronald John Zawilla, *Theology Digest*, 32 (1985), 213–216 (p. 213).

<sup>5</sup> See Flynn, “The Role of Affectivity in the Theology of Yves Congar”, *New Blackfriars*, 83 (2002), 347–364; also id., “Le rôle de l’affectivité dans la théologie de Yves Congar”, *La Vie spirituelle*, 157 (2003), 73–92.

is attainable in and through Christ. Another important question that must be asked concerns the nature of salvation and the possibility of salvation for unbelievers. An authentically ecclesial theology is missionary in nature and so cannot maintain its theses within the solidarity of the believing community. It must also listen to the questions of unbelievers.<sup>6</sup> It should be pointed out, of course, that the question of salvation in non-Christian religions, clearly germane to this article, is considered because of its significance in Congar's response to unbelief and because of his influence on the issue of a formulation of the means of salvation and the mission of the Church at Vatican II.<sup>7</sup> I shall discuss Congar's approach to the question of the salvation of unbelievers and compare his views with those of other leading modern theologians. In particular, I will refer to Karl Rahner's theory of the "anonymous Christian" because of its implications for faith and belief in Congar's vision of the Church. An essential reference point in our discussion of salvation and various related issues will be the teaching of the Catholic Church, with particular reference to its formulation at Vatican II.

The first point I wish to make is that Congar's analysis of the question of unbelief must be viewed in connection with his concern for the recovery of the true face of the Church. This, in turn, inspired his contribution to the renewal of ecclesiology. The immense distance between the true face of the Church and that which it presents to the world was a source of such great concern to Congar that, at an early stage in his career, he resolutely embarked on a search for that true face:

My God, who made me understand from 1929–1930 that if the Church changed her face [*visage*], if she simply assumed her true [*vrai*] face, if she was very simply the Church, all would become possible on the path of unity.<sup>8</sup>

Congar was aware that the juridical and defensive nature of the Church in France caused many of his contemporaries to distance themselves from the Church and is also a major contributory factor in the causes of modern unbelief. Congar's association with various movements for ecclesiological renewal in the first half of the twentieth century, including the return to the sources (*ressourcement*)<sup>9</sup> and the

<sup>6</sup> See Walter Kasper, *The Methods of Dogmatic Theology*, trans. by John Drury (Shannon: Ecclesia Press, 1969), pp. 30–31; also id., *Die Methoden der Dogmatik: Einheit und Vielheit* (Munich: Kösel, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> Congar, *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, ed. by Bernard Lauret, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM, 1988), pp. 14–16; also id., *Entretiens d'automne*, ed. by Bernard Lauret, 2nd edn (Paris: Cerf, 1987), pp. 22–25. See further id., *Mon journal du Concile*, ed. and annotated by Éric Mahieu, 2 vols (Paris: Cerf, 2002), II, p. 352 (29 March 1965). In Congar's view, the mission of the Church is directed towards those in situations of unbelief. A territorial notion of mission should, then, be situated within an anthropological definition, rather than in opposition to it.

<sup>8</sup> Congar, *Mon journal du Concile*, I, p. 257 (24 November 1962).

<sup>9</sup> See Roger Aubert, *La Théologie Catholique au milieu du XXe siècle* (Tournai: Casterman, 1954).

*nouvelle théologie*,<sup>10</sup> already documented elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> prepared the way for the articulation of a more positive relationship between the Church and the world at the Second Vatican Council.

In the light of Congar's contribution to the renewal of ecclesiology, I proceed to a consideration of his proposals for a Church response to unbelief. The view that the Church is a cause of unbelief is crucial because, notwithstanding the possibility of belief in God outside of the Church through Judaism, Islam and reason, sources which provide the necessary minimum requirements for credence, the Church supplies – at least in a theological, if not in a statistically normative sense – the necessary context for all-faith divine salvation. Naturally, then, it was a priority for Congar to tackle those aspects of the present-day Church which could deflect members, either actual or potential, away from the Church.

## II. The Church: A Cause Of Unbelief?

Congar's 1935 study "Une Conclusion théologique à l'enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance" is important for a correct understanding of his most significant projects in ecclesiology. As I have indicated, it was precisely his findings regarding the causes of unbelief that moved him to initiate the *Unam Sanctam* collection, dedicated to the renewal of ecclesiology, and to write his most important works on the Church. The topics considered in these works concern the most significant issues in Congar's theology – namely, a renewal in ecclesiology, the reform of the Church, ecumenism, the role of the laity and the place of Mary in the Church. In an article written less than a year before the opening of Vatican II, Congar demonstrates that these issues are still uppermost in his mind:

When, in 1935, my co-workers at *Les Éditions du Cerf* asked me to draw up a theological Conclusion to the inquiry which they [*La Vie intellectuelle*] had been conducting for three years on the real causes of unbelief, I was led not only to formulate a unified interpretation, but to reflect on what could be done. It seemed to me that, *since the belief or unbelief of men [and women] depended so much on us*, the effort to be made was a renovation of ecclesiology. We must recover, in the ever-living sources of our profound tradition, a meaning and a face of the Church which will truly be that of the People of God-Body of Christ-Temple of the Holy Spirit. This conclusion led to the *Unam Sanctam* collection, (37 volumes to date) and the books which I have written myself: *Divided Christendom, Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église, Lay People in the Church, Christ, Mary and the Church, The Mystery of the Temple*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Gustave Weigel, "The Historical Background of the Encyclical *Humani Generis*", *Theological Studies*, 12 (1951), 208–230 (p. 217); Étienne Fouilloux, *La Collection "Sources Chrétiennes": éditer les Pères de l'Église au XXe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), pp. 115–116.

<sup>11</sup> See Flynn, "The Role of Affectivity in the Theology of Yves Congar", pp. 352–359 (pp. 80–88).

<sup>12</sup> Congar, "The Council in the Age of Dialogue", *Cross Currents*, 12 (1962), pp. 147–148 (p. 695).

This important statement shows that the results of Congar's study on unbelief provide the *raison d'être* of his programme of ecclesiological reform, as well as the inspiration for his major works of theology. In order to redress current causes of unbelief, Congar recognises the need to rediscover the true face of the Church in Scripture and tradition, thereby effecting a renewal in ecclesiology. It is possible, on the basis of his remarks, to identify a unity in his theological programme.

In 1967 Congar described the basic findings of his 1935 study "Une Conclusion théologique à l'enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance" in a way that brings us to the heart of the matter. He indicates that his view of the Church can be fully understood only in the light of his research on unbelief:

This [the study on unbelief by *La Vie intellectuelle*] led to the conclusion that as far as this unbelief depended on *us*, it was caused by a poor presentation of the Church. At that time, the Church was presented in a completely juridical way and sometimes even somewhat political.<sup>13</sup>

An important study, Congar's theological *exposé* on unbelief offers a critical assessment of unbelief and a positive presentation of the nature of belief in God. It finds that unbelief, like belief, affects a person's life in its entirety, touching his or her whole being, environment, and history. According to Congar, faith gives meaning, and therefore unity, to the totality of a person's life because faith is a total principle. He writes: "Faith is, of its nature, total [*totale*]; it arises within us in a movement which carries us whole and entire towards our Whole [*Tout*]."<sup>14</sup> To believe, therefore, is to experience a type of conversion whereby a person adopts a whole new scale of values on the psychological and moral plane.<sup>15</sup> He refers to St Thomas Aquinas who said that one would not believe unless one saw the necessity of belief.<sup>16</sup> Congar sees Catholicism, with its internal coherence and moral consciousness, as meeting the spiritual needs of human beings, thereby enabling them to live harmoniously in the faith and to transfigure and sanctify their lives and the world. The achievement of this harmony is, in his view, the essential motive for credibility among the faithful.

Congar identifies a decisive relationship between the human search for happiness in life, on the one hand, and on the other, the possibility of its fulfilment through faith in Christ:

Faith, and first of all the will or intention of believing, is rooted immediately in that fundamental desire for happiness and perfection. [...] My

<sup>13</sup> Granfield, *Theologians at Work*, p. 251.

<sup>14</sup> Congar, "The Reasons for the Unbelief of our Time", Part I, *Integration*, 2 (1938), p. 14 (p. 216).

<sup>15</sup> See Congar, *Priest and Layman*, trans. by P. F. Hepburne-Scott (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), p. 28; also id., *Sacerdoce et Laïcat devant leurs tâches d'évangélisation et de civilisation* (Paris: Cerf, 1962), pp. 40–41.

<sup>16</sup> Congar, "The Reasons for the Unbelief of our Time", Part I, *Integration*, 2 (1938), p. 19 (p. 222).

accession to faith, the concrete climax of my previous disposition to use the necessary means, whatever they may be, to realise my destiny, is thus effected under the pressure of my desire of the absolute Good to which the God of the Christian revelation is seen to conform. For me, to choose the Christian faith, is to choose to complete myself in Christ. Thus faith is, of its nature, rooted in the deepest dynamism which, dominating and unifying the totality of my existence, makes me adhere at once to that which is for *me* the *Whole*, my Whole, my satisfying, beatifying, total and last Good.<sup>17</sup>

To recognize that the search for happiness is realized in Christ, the total and last Good of humanity, is to recognize in Him the source of salvation.

In an interview in 1974, Congar accepts that salvation is possible without knowledge of God or of the Gospel. He also clearly states his objection to the expression, though not to the idea, of “anonymous Christians”:

I am fully convinced that people can be saved without knowing the Gospel and even without knowing God, when they are not to be blamed for this ignorance. [...] The period reaching from Abraham to the present is nothing in the history of the race. It is certain therefore that there was salvation outside of that time, but I do not like to speak of “anonymous Christians” in this connection. In my opinion this is a bad expression. To use the term “Christian” is to imply knowledge of Jesus Christ leading to baptism, and therefore the term “anonymous Christian” is contradictory. I criticise the expression but not the idea. I prefer to use the term “salvation of the non-evangelised.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 15–16 (ibid., p. 217).

<sup>18</sup> Congar, “Talking to Yves Congar: Interview by Tony Sheerin”, Part I, *Africa: St. Patrick’s Missions*, (1974), 6–8 (p. 7). See Karl Rahner, “Atheism and Implicit Christianity”, in *Theological Investigations*, (hereafter *TI*), trans. by Graham Harrison, 23 vols (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), IX, pp. 145–164; also id., *Schriften zur Theologie*, (hereafter *ST*), VIII (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1967), pp. 187–212. Here, Rahner presents an analysis of implicit Christianity or what he says could also be termed “anonymous Christianity”. See further, J.A. DiNoia, “Implicit Faith, General Revelation and the State of Non-Christians”, *Thomist*, 47 (1983), 209–241 (pp. 235, 240–241). DiNoia rejects the concept of implicit faith as the basis for general descriptions of the states of non-Christians and, in a markedly Biblical approach, argues that it is only on the grounds of their fidelity to their living Lord that Christians can confidently affirm the universality of salvation. Furthermore, in a sensitive ecumenical point, he criticizes those overly detailed accounts of how the divine universal salvific will is exercised in the lives of individual non-Christians as being “somewhat implausible and inappropriate in view of what such persons might be expected to say in the course of proposing their own doctrines and pursuing the aims commended by their communities”. See further, Peter F. Ryan, “How Can the Beatific Vision both Fulfill Human Nature and Be Utterly Gratuitous?”, *Gregorianum*, 83 (2002), 717–754 (pp. 744–754). Ryan, in an insightful analysis of a vexing theological problem, asks how Rahner can hold, with de Lubac, that concrete human beings have an unconditional desire for the beatific vision while denying, with the “pure-nature” theorists, that human nature is unconditionally ordered to it. For a renewed consideration of some of the explicit and implicit criticisms of Rahner’s theological vision and the foundations on which it is based, see Declan Marmion, “Rahner and his Critics: Revisiting the Dialogue”, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 68 (2003), 195–212.

Thus, while Congar is not opposed to the idea of salvation without explicit knowledge of God or of the Christian Gospel, it is clear that his use of the term Christian is, in this context, a qualified one. It implies knowledge of Christ that leads to baptism. Congar expresses his conditional acceptance of the idea of “anonymous Christians” in the following way:

Should we speak of “anonymous Christians”? That which K. Rahner wished to designate by these words is something authentic: it is the condition of men [or women] not evangelised and yet justified by the grace of Christ. I find it difficult to see how one can deny that such a condition exists. But the expression “anonymous *Christians*” is not a happy one, for “Christian” implies the profession of the Faith proclaimed and received, followed by baptism.<sup>19</sup>

Congar’s notion of salvation clearly upholds the place of the sacraments and the necessity of the missionary activity of the Church, since a profession of faith is possible only if it is preceded by a proclamation of the Gospel. There can be no complacency, therefore, in the mission of the Church to the world, a responsibility shared by all Christians.<sup>20</sup>

Rahner’s notion of the “anonymous Christian”,<sup>21</sup> however, was used to justify belief in the explicit offer of grace in the Church and in the “anonymous” offer of grace outside of it. According to Rahner, God dwells in all people, thus determining them to be made in the image of his Son who bestows on them a graced orientation towards the divine mysteries – mysteries which they may never be able to identify by name. To be an “anonymous Christian” requires an affirmation or acceptance of God’s grace.<sup>22</sup> Rahner held that, if the Church is defined as the People of God, then even the unbaptized could, by virtue of a *votum ecclesiae* (desire of the Church), be numbered among its members.<sup>23</sup> Congar criticizes Rahner’s understanding of the idea of People of God:

<sup>19</sup> Congar, “Non-Christian Religions and Christianity”, in *Evangelisation, Dialogue and Development: Selected Papers of the International Theological Conference, Nagpur (India) 1971*, ed. by Mariasusai Dhavamony, Documenta Missionalia, 5 (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1972), pp. 133–145 (p. 134).

<sup>20</sup> See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. by Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), pp. 240–241; also id., *Catholicism: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, 4th edn, Unam Sanctam, 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1947), pp. 200–202.

<sup>21</sup> See Rahner, “Anonymous Christians”, *TI*, trans. by Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), VI, pp. 390–398; also id., *ST* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965), VI, pp. 545–554. See further, Bernard Sesboüé, “Karl Rahner et les ‘Chrétiens anonymes’”, *Études*, 361 (1984), 521–535; Johannes Baptist Metz, “Unbelief as a Theological Problem”, trans. by Tarcisius Rattler, *Concilium*, 6 (1965), 32–42 (p. 40).

<sup>22</sup> Rahner, “Anonymous Christians”, p. 398 (p. 554). See also id., “Observations on the Problem of the ‘Anonymous Christian’”, *TI*, trans. by David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), XIV, pp. 280–294 (p. 283); also id., *ST* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1976), X.

<sup>23</sup> See Rahner, “Observations on the Problem of the ‘Anonymous Christian’”, pp. 283–284 (*ST*, X); id., “Membership of the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII’s Encyclical ‘Mystici Corporis Christi’”, *TI*, trans. by Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963), II, pp. 1–88 (pp. 83–85); also id., *ST* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1960) II, pp. 7–94 (pp. 89–91).

One cannot apply the idea [of anonymous *Christians*] to *all* men [and women] without distinction because of the fact that they are in an *objective* situation of salvation, on the basis of which K. Rahner uses also, wrongly in my opinion, the expression “people of God”.<sup>24</sup>

There are two important consequences of Congar’s understanding of salvation to which I want to refer briefly. First, Congar notes that, although missionary activity for the salvation of souls which might otherwise be lost cannot be accepted as a motive for the urgency of evangelization, it does not follow, in his opinion, that “the proclamation of the Gospel, the obedience of Faith, and the active presence of the Church are without importance for the salvation of men [and women]”.<sup>25</sup> But this view, although it acknowledges the active role of the Church in the salvation of humanity, nonetheless gives rise to a problem. Since the precise reason for the missionary activity of the Church is the salvation of souls, Congar’s rejection of the urgency of the Church’s mission to souls which, without it, would be lost, constitutes a serious weakness in his theology of mission which is, in this respect, different from that of Vatican II.<sup>26</sup> In *Cette Église que j’aime*, Congar outlines his understanding of the essential role of the Church in human salvation:

If above and beyond the rescue of the individual, salvation consists in the realisation of the truth of His being, the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation. From the point of view of individual salvation, the reality (*res* in the sense of classical analysis in sacramental theology) is sometimes bestowed independently of the *sacramentum*. But this unity of mankind, *as God wants it*, cannot be accomplished outside the Church, which is its sacrament.<sup>27</sup>

The second consequence of Congar’s view of salvation concerns his insistence on the distinction between the objective value of non-Christian religions, which he accepts,<sup>28</sup> and the salvation of the non-evangelized:

One cannot *directly* affirm the salvific value of these religions on the basis of the fact that their adherents can obtain from God grace and salvation

<sup>24</sup> Congar, “Non-Christian Religions and Christianity”, p. 134.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*”, 21 November 1964 (hereafter *LG*), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. by Austin Flannery, 7th edn, 2 vols (New York: Costello, 1984), I, para. 17. “Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity: Vatican II, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*”, 7 December 1965, (hereafter *AG*), in *Vatican Council II*, ed. by Flannery, I, paras 5–8. See also The Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, *Instruction on Missionary Co-operation: Cooperatio Missionalis* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1999), para. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Congar, *This Church That I Love*, trans. by Lucien Delafuente (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1969), p. 59; also *id.*, *Cette Église que j’aime*, Foi Vivante, 70 (Paris: Cerf, 1968), p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> Congar, “Non-Christian Religions and Christianity”, p. 143.

without being converted to the Gospel. Very frequently theologians go from the idea of the salvation which is possible for these men [or women] to that of the salvific value of the religions which are theirs. It is true that there is a link between these two things, but the inference is not immediate.<sup>29</sup>

Congar's response to the challenge of non-Christian religions is to propose a *via media* which recognizes authentic values in these religions. Thus, he accepts that the non-Christian religions are a preparation for the Gospel – a solution which he says is not peculiar to himself but is, rather, in substantial agreement with Henri de Lubac and Jean-Pierre Jossua, and is accepted also by missionaries such as Jacques Dournes and Henri Maurier.<sup>30</sup>

Congar maintains that there are elements of the mystical body outside the Church:

The Church includes members who appear to be outside her. They belong, invisibly and incompletely, but they really belong. They belong to the Church in so far as they belong to Christ. [...] The existence of this element apart from and outside the Church is indeed abnormal and untoward, for of its very nature it calls for integration in the one body of Christ, at once visible and invisible, which is the Catholic Church.<sup>31</sup>

Congar's position on the question of the salvation of unbelievers is closer to that of de Lubac,<sup>32</sup> who also insists on the place of the Church and on the active co-operation of humanity in its own salvation, than to that of Rahner. It is true to say, of course, and Rahner makes the point, that while de Lubac rejects the concept of "anonymous Christianity", he has no objections to the term "anonymous Christian".<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, de Lubac was aware of the dangers associated with such a problematic concept. I shall present his remarks in full regarding possible deleterious consequences of "the anonymous Christians" for our understanding of the Church's mission because they provide a precise remedy for the dangers he describes:

On the fringe, completely on the fringe of the conciliar *aggiornamento* (which would have made him [Teilhard de Chardin] so happy), certain generalities about "the overture to the world," about "the service of the world" (the expression is Père Teilhard's) or about "implicit Christianity," about "the anonymous Christians," about "the spirit of dialogue," about

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 134. See also Leo Scheffczyk, "On the Absoluteness of Christianity", trans. by Adrian Walker, *Communio*, 24 (1997), 245–258 (pp. 257–258).

<sup>30</sup> See Congar, "Non-Christian Religions and Christianity", p. 143.

<sup>31</sup> Congar, *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion* (London: Centenary Press, 1939), pp. 234–235; also id., *Chrétiens désunis: principes d'un "oecuménisme" catholique*, Unam Sanctam, 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1937), p. 292.

<sup>32</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, p. 226 (pp. 187–188).

<sup>33</sup> Rahner, "Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church", *TI*, trans. by David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), XII, pp. 161–178 (p. 162); also id., *ST* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1974), IX.



“the comprehension of atheism” are sometimes stripped of the excellent meaning they can – and indeed often do – have. They thus become a pretext for venturesome speculations in which we can no longer clearly discern what the missionary is to bring to the Gentiles – nor even what remains of the treasure entrusted to him [or her]. Père Teilhard was a true believer. He was fully aware of the *unique* reality of the Incarnation, and the *unique* freshness of the Christian message, and the “*unique* power of divinization” placed by the Spirit of Christ in his *unique* Church – hence he avoided this danger. In his eyes, it was “the Christian Mystique,” and not some other, which was to become “the universal and essential Mystique of the future.”<sup>34</sup>

As regards Congar’s view of the relation between salvation and mission, it is evidently not unproblematic. The weakness in his view of the Church’s mission exposes his entire ecclesiology to the charge of relativism, seen as a serious threat to “the Church’s constant missionary proclamation”.<sup>35</sup> There is one further point that can briefly be alluded to. Since Congar’s vision of the Church’s mission is a nuanced one, it is important to bear in mind that his assertion of the transcendence of the Gospel does not disavow the need for religious and cultural dialogue.<sup>36</sup>

The idea of the “anonymous Christian” has been rejected by theologians other than Congar primarily because it is un-biblical.<sup>37</sup> Rahner’s claim that the incarnation is the means of forming the People of God has been criticized as being unconnected with the biblical notion of the People of God. It also contributes to a diminution of the Gospel mandate to proclaim the Good News.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Rahner’s efforts to bridge the gap between those inside and outside the Church are considered to be at the expense of the Church itself. The idea that salvation is possible outside the Church has, therefore, been criticized as having rendered the Church superfluous.<sup>39</sup> Richard Lennan points out, however, that Rahner does not follow the path of ecclesiological relativism – a course he specifically rejected.<sup>40</sup>

The teaching of the Catholic Church on the possibility of salvation for unbelievers is controversial since it raises the difficult question of the development of doctrine.<sup>41</sup> Pope Pius IX’s encyclical *Quanto*

<sup>34</sup> De Lubac, *Teilhard Explained*, trans. by Anthony Buono (New York: Paulist Press, 1968), p. 34; also id., *Teilhard, Missionaire et Apologiste* (Toulouse: Prière et Vie, 1966).

<sup>35</sup> See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Dominus Iesus*” *On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2000), paras 4–5.

<sup>36</sup> Congar, “Non-Christian Religions and Christianity”, p. 145.

<sup>37</sup> See Richard Lennan, *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 39, footnote 105.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew 28. 19.

<sup>39</sup> See Richard Lennan, op. cit., p. 43, footnote 120.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 147–148.

<sup>41</sup> See Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), p. 10.

*conficiamur moerore* (1863)<sup>42</sup> allowed theologians to teach that people who are invincibly ignorant of the Christian faith, but who nevertheless cooperate with divine grace, can attain eternal life. The encyclical, however, also reaffirmed the established Catholic dogma *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.<sup>43</sup> The weakness of subsequent Church pronouncements – namely Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943)<sup>44</sup> and the letter of the Holy Office to Archbishop Richard J. Cushing of Boston (1949), in response to the famous Leonard Feeney case<sup>45</sup> – was their failure to acknowledge that Christians, by virtue of their baptism, have a sacramental relationship to the Church not enjoyed by non-Christians.<sup>46</sup>

According to the Second Vatican Council, “[t]hose who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart [...] those too may achieve eternal salvation.”<sup>47</sup> The Council also states, however, that the Church is necessary for salvation.<sup>48</sup> While Vatican II affirms that it is only in the Catholic Church that the fullness of the means of salvation is to be found, nevertheless, the Council also recognizes that other Christian communities are used by God as instruments of salvation for their own members.<sup>49</sup> In the light of the teaching of the Council, the old dogma *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is, in Francis A. Sullivan’s view, “no longer a problem for Catholic theology as far as the salvation of other Christians is concerned”.<sup>50</sup>

The most complete discussion of the mission of the Church that is to be found anywhere in the official teaching of the Catholic Church is contained in the Second Vatican Council. The *Decree on the*

<sup>42</sup> Pius IX, “Quanto Conficiamur Moerore: Encyclical of Pope Pius IX on Promotion of False Doctrines August 10, 1863”, in *The Papal Encyclicals 1740–1878*, ed. by Claudia Carlen, 5 vols (Raleigh: Pierian, 1990), I, pp. 369–373.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 8. See also Congar, *This Church That I Love*, pp. 59–61 (pp. 61–63).

<sup>44</sup> Pius XII, *Encyclical Letter (Mystici Corporis Christi): On the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ and Our Union With Christ Therein* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1960), trans. by George D. Smith from the Latin text as published in the *Osservatore Romano*, 4 July 1943.

<sup>45</sup> Leonard Feeney was an American Jesuit who publicly accused Archbishop Richard J. Cushing of Boston of being a heretic for allowing that there is salvation outside the Catholic Church. Feeney was dismissed from the Society of Jesus and subsequently was excommunicated but he was, however, reconciled to the Church before his death.

<sup>46</sup> See Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>47</sup> *LG*, para. 16.

<sup>48</sup> See *Ibid.*, para. 14. See also *AG*, para. 7; Gérard Philips, *L’Église et son mystère au IIe Concile du Vatican: histoire, texte et commentaire de la constitution Lumen gentium*, 2 vols (Paris: Desclée, 1967), I, pp. 185–219.

<sup>49</sup> *LG*, para. 8. See also Avery Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology”, *Theological Studies*, 50 (1989), 419–442 (p. 430); *id.*, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 138–141.

<sup>50</sup> See Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 149. See also *Catéchisme de l’Église catholique* (Paris: Mame/Plon, 1992), paras 846–847.

*Church's Missionary Activity* presents the Council's view of mission in plain parlance:

It is clear, therefore, that missionary activity flows immediately from the very nature of the Church. Missionary activity extends the saving faith of the Church, it expands and perfects its catholic unity, it is sustained by its apostolicity, it activates the collegiate sense of its hierarchy, and bears witness to its sanctity which it both extends and promotes.<sup>51</sup>

Congar rejects the view that Vatican II led to a devaluation of Christian salvation – a lapse from the specific mission of the Church to a religious relativism. In response to such claims, he calls for the continued proclamation of Jesus Christ while also recognizing the need for ongoing dialogue:

I worked on two conciliar texts on this question [of Vatican II's interpretation of the famous saying "Outside the Church there is no salvation"], *Lumen Gentium* no. 17 and no. 7 of the *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*. Taking part in this commission on missions was one of the great blessings of my life. [...] Now it is clear that for individuals, the culture in which they live and the religion associated with it are the ordinary ways of salvation, in the sense that "ordinary" usually has in almost all cases. [...] At all events, whatever position one holds it is inseparable from the dialogue which is characteristic of the Council and the Church which has emerged from the Council. [...] Beyond question, we must still proclaim Jesus Christ. In the conciliar *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions* there is a passage which says this very well. It was composed on the insistence of Fr Daniélou, but of course with unanimous support. To proclaim Jesus Christ it is not always necessary to speak of him or to preach him explicitly.<sup>52</sup>

The Church can never accept a relative universality based on the view that the same grace is equally effective outside the Church as it is within. The Church is missionary by its very nature. If it were otherwise, it would cease to be the Church, and would become a merely human institution alienated from the mission entrusted to it by Christ.<sup>53</sup> In order to be faithful to that mission, the Church must seek to lead all men and women into the fullness of particular saving history, a history that is realized only when human beings receive baptism and participate actively in the life and witness of the Church.<sup>54</sup> The mission of the Church is essential, therefore, in order to provide the opportunity to all

<sup>51</sup> *AG*, para. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Congar, *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology*, pp. 14–16 (pp. 22–25).

<sup>53</sup> See Mark 16. 15–16.

<sup>54</sup> Johannes Feiner, "Particular and universal saving history", in *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic: Studies in the nature and role of the Church in the modern world*, ed. by Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. by Edward Quinn and Alain Woodrow (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), pp. 163–206 (p. 182).

who desire it to enter into the new Christian order in which humankind is united to God through the love and grace of Christ.<sup>55</sup>

In the period since Vatican II, Catholic theology has continued to debate the question of the necessity of the Church for salvation and the related issue of the Church's attitude towards missionary endeavours. Various Catholic theologians have argued that the Church is not the means of salvation but rather a sign of the Kingdom of God.<sup>56</sup> Careful examination of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, however, shows that such views are incompatible with the conciliar texts.<sup>57</sup> The claims of some theologians that action on behalf of social justice is on the same plane as the Church's mission of evangelization must also be rejected as a false interpretation of Vatican II.<sup>58</sup> It cannot be denied, however, that since the Second Vatican Council the missionary endeavours of the Church have been seriously weakened. Against these difficulties, it may, nonetheless, be observed that the indigenous Churches in various parts of the world have become stronger and so are less dependent on missionaries.

Rahner acknowledges that his thesis of the "anonymous Christian" was opposed by de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar, and that even Edward Schillebeeckx expressed objections to it.<sup>59</sup> Avery Dulles points out that Vatican II did not follow Rahner's very broad conception of the People of God or his understanding of the Church as sinful.<sup>60</sup> While it was not Rahner's intention to propose "anonymous Christianity" as sufficient in itself or in opposition to the call of the Gospel to evangelization, nevertheless the notion of the "anonymous Christian" is subject to misunderstanding.<sup>61</sup> In its intended sense, it has major implications for the role of the Church, of Christ and of the Christian sacraments in the salvation of humankind.<sup>62</sup> On all these key matters and on the critical issue of mission,

<sup>55</sup> James Dupuis, "The Salvific Value of Non-Christian Religions", in *Evangelisation, Dialogue and Development*, ed. by Mariasusai Dhavamony, pp. 169–193 (p. 189). See also Synod of Bishops, "The Final Report", *Origins*, 15 (1985), 444–450 (pp. 449–450); Dulles, "A Half Century of Ecclesiology", *Theological Studies*, 50 (1989), pp. 441–442.

<sup>56</sup> See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the books Jesus & Christ*, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM, 1980), pp. 122–124; also id., *Tussentijds verhaal over twee Jezus boeken* (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1978).

<sup>57</sup> See Dulles, "Vatican II and the church's purpose", *Theology Digest*, 32 (1985), 341–352 (pp. 344–345).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 348–349.

<sup>59</sup> Rahner, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'", pp. 280–281 (*ST*, X). See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cordula ou l'épreuve décisive* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1968), pp. 80–89; Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Église* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967), pp. 153–156; Kasper, *Faith and the Future*, trans. by Robert Nowell (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1985), p. 81.

<sup>60</sup> Dulles, "A Half Century of Ecclesiology", *Theological Studies*, 50 (1989), p. 432.

<sup>61</sup> John P. Galvin, "Questions Centered on Vatican II" in "A Changing Ecclesiology in a Changing Church: A Symposium on Development in the Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner", ed. by Leo J. O'Donovan, *Theological Studies*, 38 (1977), 736–762 (p. 753).

<sup>62</sup> Rahner, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'", p. 292 (*ST*, X). Rahner calls for further discussion of "the question already mentioned above as to the meaning and necessity of the mission of Christianity, a question in the light of which it is very often believed that this theory should be rejected".

Rahner's view of the Church stands in contrast with that of Congar. We may consider how Congar, whose theology is biblically rooted and Christ-centred, proposes to construct a Church that is more in the image of the human Christ. In Congar's view, only such a Church will be able to bear more credible witness to its founder in the modern world that is increasingly defined by unbelief and indifference to the Christian religion.

In "Une Conclusion théologique à l'enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance", Congar identifies two causes of contemporary unbelief. The first of these causes is the substitution of a Christian way of life by a purely human spirituality. This was part of the movement towards the secularization of society which began in the fourteenth century with the passing of culture into the hands of the laity, and spread inexorably, affecting the professions and social life, as the disintegration of Christendom gained momentum. All human activities were gradually reconstituted outside of the Church and independent of the Christian faith. The second reason that Congar identifies for contemporary unbelief concerns the response of the Church to secularization and its own changed status. In the face of the new, secular-human spirituality, the Church was reduced to a fenced off, special and anti-progressive group. As Congar notes:

The separation which exists between faith and life appears to us to be at once the most specific reason for the present state of unbelief and a fact which, in the most literal meaning of the words, does violence to the nature of faith and constitutes a mortal poison, the worst of abortives for it.<sup>63</sup>

This is a crucial observation. The failure or inability of the Church, its members and in particular its leaders, to respond in a positive manner to the problem of the separation of faith and life is an important factor in explaining the phenomenon of continued widespread unbelief in present-day society. The challenge is to unite faith and life and to show that this faith offers the possibility of attaining a degree of understanding of the true meaning of life. This is precisely what Congar was attempting to achieve by linking faith in Christ to the human search for happiness and meaning in life.

The expression of his concern regarding the consequences of the process of secularization which gives rise to a humanist spirituality is also a manifestation of Congar's acuity:

Hence the gravest thing to our mind is not the substitution of a secularist for a Christian framework, but the constitution of a purely human spirituality outside Christianity. It is this latter which gave to the former all its anti-Christian virulence.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Congar, "The Reasons for the Unbelief of our Time", Part I, *Integration*, 2 (1938), p. 14 (p. 216).

<sup>64</sup> Congar, "The Reasons for the Unbelief of our Time", Part II, *Integration*, 2 (1938), p. 12 (pp. 228–229).

In effect, this means that one spiritual whole, a Christian one, was replaced by another that was secular-humanist in nature and that was guided not by faith, but by reason. According to Congar, the movement towards secularization was sustained and animated by a certain human, or what he prefers to describe as humanist mysticism. It was precisely this mysticism which, in his view, made the transfer from one spiritual whole to another possible. Congar depicts it in this way:

This mysticism is characterised by the principle of immanence implying the sufficiency of reason and the possibility of an indefinite progress within the world. The world of these thinkers is a closed world in which everything is given, in which everything is intelligible. [...] It follows that progress consists in conversion to *mind*, to which everything is immanent and that there is not, there never will be, any other light than that of reason. An external and transcendent assistance, revelation and grace as we understand them, is an impossible thing. [...] It is a feeling of the perfect mastery of man [or woman] in a world whose key he [or she] can possess.<sup>65</sup>

In the secular system that has just been described, the individual forgets his or her true and greatest value which is to be and to live. Instead, he or she becomes enclosed “within the infernal logic of activism and productivism”.<sup>66</sup> Thus, there are two worlds: the modern spiritual world governed by faith in progress and the Christian world of the Church. Nevertheless, Congar’s description of the world of the Church offers an outline of some key problems. He describes the Christian world as one that is “engaged in the traditional forms of Catholicism, with all its regime of dogmatism, authority, submission, conservatism”.<sup>67</sup> These two worlds are separated by an inextinguishable opposition. In the world of productivism and activism, religion is relegated to the private sphere, the Church is isolated and its ministers are, as it were, confined to the sacristy. Religion is nonetheless present in the secularized, profane world. In light of the present discussion, it may be worth noting that an important challenge facing theologians is to demonstrate the rationality of faith.<sup>68</sup> But I leave aside this question important as it is, in order not to interrupt the line of thought.

The Church, although of the kingdom of God and not of the world, cannot, however, be divorced from the world. Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard’s pastoral letter addressed to the Archdiocese of Paris, on 11 February 1947, in which he restates traditional Christian

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14 (pp. 230–231).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16 (p. 234).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19 (p. 238).

<sup>68</sup> See Kasper, “Is God Obsolete?: On the possibility and necessity of thinking about God”, trans. by Eamonn Breslin, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 55 (1989), 85–98 (p. 94).

teaching, warned of the danger of the Church adapting itself to the world.<sup>69</sup> The perennial challenge for the Church is to define a right relationship with the world which respects all cultures without compromising that which is immutable in its own nature. Congar's theology responds to this challenge by presenting a carefully considered and finely balanced understanding of the relationship between Church and world:

That, although the Church remains always the same in her evangelical substance, she cannot be a Church of yesterday in a world of today and tomorrow. Her own future demands that she be present to the future of the world in order to direct it towards the future of God.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, Congar praises the Church for its moral courage in the face of the onslaught of modernity:

One may think that the doctrinal action of the Church was too exclusively negative and condemnatory; but it was her greatness not to have compromised, whilst this new world was developing, the least particle of her spiritual patrimony. It was thus that of old the Fathers of Nicea, Ephesus and Chalcedon had acted each in their turn.<sup>71</sup>

This was not to deny a very real problem of a Church that had failed to take root and become incarnate in the modern world. And so Congar arrives at an important conclusion:

We do not think that we have betrayed either the truth or the answers made to the enquiry when we see the most general reason for the unbelief of today in a certain hiatus between faith and life, a hiatus that attacks faith in what is one of its essential properties and which determines collective conditions unfavourable to belief. The constitution of a spiritual and even religious world, of a *whole*, of human life outside Christianity, on the one hand; the contraction of the Church, her falling back upon herself into a special world and the fatal attitudes of defence that she has taken up: these are two major and correlative facts which have concurred to create this hiatus between faith and life.<sup>72</sup>

Congar identifies the construction of a spiritual whole, outside of and independent of Christianity, and the defensive reaction of the Church, as the main reasons for the hiatus between faith and life in the world – the principal cause of unbelief. As a result of the separation of faith and life, Catholicism appears as only a part of the world or even, in the opinion of some, as a sect. In 1964, with the publication of *Chrétiens en dialogue*, Congar points to an important development

<sup>69</sup> Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard, *Growth or Decline?: The Church Today*, trans by James A. Corbett (Montreal: Fides, 1948), p. 9; also id., *Essor ou déclin de l'Église: lettre pastorale Carême de l'an de grâce 1947* ("[Paris]": Lahure, 1947), p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> Congar, *Église catholique et France moderne* (Paris: Hachette, 1978), p. 53.

<sup>71</sup> Congar, "The Reasons for the Unbelief of our Time", Part II, p. 20 (p. 241).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26 (pp. 248–249).

in his thought in the period since 1935. Essentially, he had come to realize that the most effective answer to the causes of modern unbelief lay in a restoration of the biblical notion of God as the living God and, in the light of this, a credible demonstration of the link between faith in God and life in the world:

Today I should go still further in suggesting what we should see and present to others. Even more radical than the idea of the Church is the very notion of faith and the correlative idea of revelation. It is the idea of God as the living God which is the indissoluble link in Judaeo-Christian revelation between theology, anthropology and cosmology, the living God, man [or woman] and the world! The greatest obstacle which men [and women] encounter today on the road to faith is in fact the lack of any credibly demonstrable connection between faith in God and the prospect of his reign on one hand, and man [or woman] and terrestrial creation on the other. There is a pressing need for a clear vision and demonstration of the intimate connection which these realities have with one another as the most effective answer to the reasons for modern unbelief.<sup>73</sup>

It was precisely in response to the situation of the separation of Church and world, to the loss of the totality of the Catholic Christian heritage, and to the poor presentation of the “face” of the Church, that Congar embarked on an ambitious programme of theological renewal:

I wanted to remedy this state of affairs. I decided to start a series of theological works that would examine a number of ecclesiological themes that were profoundly traditional, but had become more or less overlooked as the formal *De Ecclesia* tract developed. I sought to restore the genuine value of ecclesiology by viewing, as far as possible, the totality of Catholic doctrine and by using the rich resources of tradition and applying it to the current problems in the Church.<sup>74</sup>

The Unam Sanctam series founded in 1935, which helped to prepare for the Council and contributed towards its reception in the Church, was Congar’s original contribution to the renewal of ecclesiology. In the preface to *Chrétien en dialogue*, the fiftieth volume of the Unam Sanctam series, he outlines his original intentions for the new series:

In 1935, however, I was preoccupied with the ecclesiological aspect of the matter [i.e. of unbelief]. I decided to start a series of works devoted to the renewal of ecclesiology. After some hesitations both about the publisher and the title, *La Vie intellectuelle* of 25 November 1935 announced the formation, in conjunction with Éditions du Cerf, of

<sup>73</sup> Congar, *Dialogue between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism*, trans. by Philip Loretz (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), p. 23; also id., *Chrétien en dialogue: contributions catholiques à l’œcuménisme*, Unam Sanctam, 50 (Paris: Cerf, 1964), p. xxxiii.

<sup>74</sup> Granfield, op. cit., pp. 251–252. Congar’s reflections are recorded here many years after these events.



the series “Unam Sanctam”, the title being taken verbatim from the *Credo*. The series was designed to promote the revival and restoration to the commerce of ideas of a number of profoundly traditional ecclesiological themes and considerations which the development of a special treatise on the Church had caused to become forgotten or to be submerged under other themes of less depth and of less importance in tradition. Another objective was to restore as far as possible the *whole* [totalité] of the Catholic heritage and to exploit its resources for the elucidation of some of the present-day problems of the Church. The sources would be re-examined with a view to using them to nourish current thought.<sup>75</sup>

Unam Sanctam would not, then, be directly concerned either with pure history, apologetics, current affairs, liturgy, missiology or practical ecumenism, except to the extent that all these provide a richer and more profound knowledge of the mystery of the Church.<sup>76</sup> It was hoped that the new series would meet a genuine need and provide a solid theological foundation for a movement that had begun under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Writing in 1939, soon after the foundation of the new series, and echoing the sentiments of the prospectus introducing Unam Sanctam, Congar comments: “Very naturally, the desire was born to contribute to this renewal of the Church and to place oneself at the service of a movement [to return to the sources] evidently created by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>77</sup>

To sum up, I have been suggesting that Congar’s programme for ecclesiological renewal, founded on an essentially sacramental understanding of the Church,<sup>78</sup> facilitates reform which contributes to a more adequate demonstration of the relationship between faith and life. His renewed ecclesiology helped to eliminate many of the causes of unbelief which had long impeded the Church’s mission. In particular, it was essential to transcend the juridical idea of the Church that had been dominant for so long. The Church, nonetheless, continues to be affected by serious obstacles to belief, and so remains, to varying degrees, a stumbling block for the unbeliever. To conclude, it seems that the general observer, let alone the theologian or historian, will agree with Congar that a failure to redress the internal causes of unbelief results in the Church becoming an ally of powerful external

<sup>75</sup> Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians*, pp. 23–24 (pp. xxxiii–xxxiv).

<sup>76</sup> Congar, *Chrétiens en dialogue*, p. xxxiv, footnote 11. Only the original French edition provides a detailed statement of the prospectus for the launch of Unam Sanctam. See Congar, *Une passion: l’unité, Foi Vivante*, 156 (Paris: Cerf, 1974), p. 47. This is a republication of the preface to *Dialogue Between Christians* except for the last chapter which provides an update of his reflections to 1973.

<sup>77</sup> Congar, “Autour du renouveau de l’ecclésiologie: La collection ‘Unam Sanctam’”, *La Vie intellectuelle*, 51 (1939), 9–32 (p. 11).

<sup>78</sup> Congar, *This Church That I Love*, p. 59 (p. 61). Congar writes: “What is the role of the new formula, ‘the Church, universal sacrament of salvation,’ in our theology? It seems to us that this formula replaces the old formula, ‘Outside the Church there is no salvation.’”

forces that naturally militate against belief. One such antagonistic element in modern western society is complacency, born of wealth and prosperity, which inevitably contributes to an increasingly aggressive atheism. More than sixty years after Congar's study, it appears that the principal cause of unbelief is not so much the way in which the Church is viewed but rather a negative attitude towards the Gospel message and a rejection of many of its fundamental tenets. The inexorable march towards secular humanism in the Western world has resulted in a sequential rejection of the Church, the Christian gospel and the transcendent. Confronted with widespread indifference which affects society and individuals, for whom the religious question does not even arise, the Church urgently needs to rethink its traditional image, as part of a renewed response to the modern crisis of faith. In view of significant developments in the nature of unbelief since the publication of Congar's 1935 treatise, notwithstanding recent research,<sup>79</sup> what is needed is a new multi-disciplinary study to establish once again the precise causes of unbelief in the Church and in the world. I conclude with a comment which is perhaps most likely to present itself to the reader's mind. The real threat to the Church, the West, and to the world in our age of incredulity is those who want Christians to retreat from the original goal of their pilgrimage.

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<sup>79</sup> See Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith-and-Culture* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997); id., *Dive Deeper: The Human Poetry of Faith* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2001); John Habgood, *Varieties of Unbelief* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000); Robert McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); *Concilium*, 165 (1983); *Lumen Vitae*, 38 (1983); *Lumière et Vie*, 12 (1953).