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THE EVOLUTION OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY IN THE WORK OF YVES CONGAR, KARL RAHNER, HANS KÜNG, AND EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

IMPLICATIONS FOR CO-RESPONSIBILITY IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

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SUMMARY — The first draft of the pre-conciliar *De Ecclesia* stressed the mutual relations between the laity and the ordained rather than their differences, while asserting the role of the laity in the Church and world in a chapter drafted by the Louvain *peritus* Gérard Philips. During the last revision of the chapter on the laity in *Lumen gentium*, the suggestion of Belgian Cardinal Suenens was accepted to grant the laity the possibility of assuming tasks of a spiritual nature in the Church. Some of these ideas were also found in publications on this theme that four Catholic theologians and Council *periti* – Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, and Edward Schillebeeckx – had written since the 1959 announcement of the Council.

The theologies on the laity of Congar, Rahner, and Schillebeeckx definitely changed in this period. By 1962, Schillebeeckx had given up his initial conviction of a distinct mission of the laity and the ordained. Until 1966, Rahner defended his thesis of the unique secular orientation of the laity. Congar discovered only in 1971 that he had denied the laity any role at the level of the structure of the Church. From his 1962 book *Structures of the Church* forward, Küng defended the universal priesthood of all believers as a whole from the basic structure of the Church. Finally, following the synthesis report *A Synodal Church in Mission* of the first session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops from start to finish, I will highlight lines of thought that can be traced to the works of Congar, Rahner, Schillebeeckx, and Küng.

RÉSUMÉ — La première version préconciliaire du *De Ecclesia* mettait l'accent sur les relations mutuelles entre laïcs et ordonnés plutôt que sur leurs différences, tout en affirmant le rôle des laïcs dans l'Église et dans le

monde dans un chapitre rédigé par le *peritus* de Louvain Gérard Philips. Lors de la dernière révision du chapitre sur les laïcs dans *Lumen gentium*, la suggestion du cardinal belge Suenens a été acceptée pour accorder aux laïcs la possibilité d'assumer des tâches de nature spirituelle dans l'Église. Certaines de ces idées ont également été reprises dans les publications sur ce thème que quatre théologiens catholiques et *periti* du Concile – Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng et Edward Schillebeeckx – ont écrites depuis l'annonce du Concile en 1959.

Les théologies sur les laïcs de Congar, Rahner et Schillebeeckx ont définitivement changé au cours de cette période. En 1962, Schillebeeckx avait abandonné sa conviction initiale d'une mission distincte des laïcs et des ordonnés. Jusqu'en 1966, Rahner a défendu sa thèse de l'orientation séculière unique des laïcs. Congar n'a découvert qu'en 1971 qu'il avait dénié aux laïcs tout rôle au niveau de la structure de l'Église. À partir de son livre *Structures de l'Église*, publié en 1962, Küng a défendu le sacerdoce universel de tous les croyants en tant qu'ensemble de la structure de base de l'Église. Enfin, en suivant de bout en bout le rapport de synthèse Rapport de synthèse Une Église synodale en mission de la première session de la seizième Assemblée générale ordinaire du Synode des évêques, je mettrai en lumière les lignes de pensée qui peuvent être rattachées aux travaux de Congar, Rahner, Schillebeeckx et Küng.

Introduction

After a brief rehearsal of Vatican II's doctrine on the laity, I will consider publications on this theme from four Catholic theologians and Council *periti* – Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, and Edward Schillebeeckx – after the announcement of the Council in 1959. While following the synthesis report *A Synodal Church in Mission* of the first session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops from start to finish, I will highlight some themes that were addressed in these works.

1 — *Attention to the Cooperation of the Laity and the Ordained within the People of God in the Redaction History of Lumen Gentium*

On the basis of earlier research,[1] I first summarize the evolution of the teaching of Vatican II on the laity and their relationship to the ordained in

[1] A more extensive discussion of this redaction history is given in Peter De Mey, "Sharing in the Threefold Office of Christ, a Different Matter for Laity and Priests? The *tria munera*

several drafts of the Constitution on the Church. These are found in the chapter on the laity in the pre-conciliar draft of *De Ecclesia*; the chapter on the People of God, especially the laity, in the revised draft of the first intersession; and the additions made to the second and fourth chapters during the second intersession and third session.

1.1 — The Chapter on the Laity in the Pre-conciliar *De Ecclesia*

A promising chapter on the laity drafted by the Louvain theologian Gérard Philips is in the pre-conciliar *De Ecclesia*.[2] The chapter contains an early version of the teaching of *LG* 10 which, in the main clause, points to the interrelatedness of "the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood," while accepting in a subordinate clause that "they differ in essence and not simply in degree."[3] The notion of the *tria munera* is applied to the laity, since "in their own way they were made sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal office."[4] Stronger than in the final version of *LG* 31 – stating that the laity "play their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world" – one reads in the first draft that "lay people in the Church are not deputed solely for temporal affairs, but also perform a very precious activity in the Church."[5] In the *Relatio*, this activity is called "not merely occasional and supplementary, but ordinary and regular."[6]

in *Lumen Gentium*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Ad Gentes*," in Annemarie MAYER (ed.), *The Letter and the Spirit: On the Forgotten Documents of Vatican II*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 297, Leuven, Peeters, 2018, 155-179; and "Searching for Traces of an Accountable Church during the Long Preparation of the Conciliar Documents," in *StC*, 56 (2022), 471-491.

2 He likely was asked to work on this chapter because he had written a small monograph on the laity. See Gérard PHILIPS, *De leek in de Kerk*, Leuven, Davidsfonds, 1952. English translation *The Role of the Laity in the Church*, Notre Dame, Fides, 1956. Given the absence of further writings on the laity, he is not included among the theologians discussed in the next section of this article.

3 *AS* I/4, 39 (§ 21).

4 Ibid., 40: "Ita de munere Christi sacerdotali, prophetico et regali suo modo participes facti…" (§ 23). This line was repeated in *LG* 31.

5 Ibid., 41: "Laici proinde in Ecclesia non exclusive curis temporalibus deputantur, sed pretiosissimam actionem in eam exercant" (§ 24).

6 Ibid., 46: "Quae activitas non est mere occasionalis et suppletiva, sed ordinaria et regularis." According to Philips' commentary, this description remains valid for the final version of *Lumen gentium*. Cf. Gérard PHILIPS, *L'Église et son mystère au IIe Concile du Vatican. Histoire, texte et commentaire de la Constitution Lumen gentium*, Tome II, Paris, Desclée, 1968, 27: "Cette participation active à la mission même de l'Église n'est donc pas simplement occasionnelle ni supplétive, de façon que les laïcs soient mobilisés dans les circonstances où le clergé serait déficient en nombre ou manquerait de possibilités. La mission des

1.2 — The Chapter on the People of God, Especially the Laity Revised Draft: First Intersession

In the Spring of 1963, the so-called Schema Philips was accepted as the basis of the new draft for a dogmatic constitution and, as the new vice-secretary of the Theological Commission, Philips coordinated the drafting process. The reflection on the laity forms part of chapter III, *De populo Dei et speciatim de laicis* (§§ 22-27). The Theological Commission dedicates § 24 to a discussion of "the universal priesthood, the sensus fidei and the charisms of the faithful." This chapter was not yet structured along the pattern of the *tria munera*, so Congar made an unsuccessful request to include a reference to the royal priesthood.[7] It is only due to an intervention by Rahner that the language that the Spirit offers his gifts "also to the laity" was corrected.[8] Only § 24 mentions the distinction and interrelatedness of the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood. In the previous § 23, which refers to "the equality and inequality of the members in Christ's Church," a similar idea was inserted, which in its final version in *LG* 32 reads: "For the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the people of God brings with it a connection between them, since pastors and the other faithful are bound together by a common bond."[9]

laïcs décrite ici, est leur tâche normale et universelle, puisqu'en leur qualité de membres, ils 'sont' l'Église." However, he restricts this participation to their secular vocation: "La considération s'applique en particulier à la caractéristique spécifique qui qualifie tous les laïcs : il leur incombe de rendre effective surplace la présence de l'Église, là où sans eux, elle ne saurait s'acquitter de sa mission."

7 Sebastian TROMP, "Acta commissionis de doctrina fidei et morum 13 mart. – 30 sept. 1963," 32 : "R.P. Congar deplorat nihil dici de charactere regali." In his diary, Congar only mentions the easy discussion of this chapter: "Le chapitre est bon et le tout se passe bien" (25.5.1963). Cf. the important comments by Ormond RUSH, "The Offices of Christ, *Lumen Gentium* and the People's Sense of the Faith," in *Pacifica*, 16 (2003), 137-152, 139: "Initially in the drafting process, the principle that all the baptized faithful share fully in the mission of the church finds expression through the rubric of the common and ministerial priesthood, which enables the drafters to outline the commonality and difference between hierarchy, priests and laity. But this focus on Christ the Priest and priesthood widens to include another, one could say, more expansive rubric, the three *munera* of Christ as priest, prophet and king. (…) As we shall see, it will take over two years for the council to fully adopt the second rubric, while still retaining the first."

8 TROMP, "Acta commissionis," 32: "Rahner rogat ut in verbis quod "Spiritus Sanctus sua dona dat fidelibus, etiam laicis," tollantur ultima verba: "etiam laicis"."

9 See also the article by Rafael LUCIANI, "Reconfiguring the Identities and Relationships of the Ecclesial Subjects in a Church as People of God: Rediscovering the Generative Bond of All *Christifideles*," in this issue.

1.3 — Additions to the Second and Fourth Chapters Second Intersession and Third Session

While the Council fathers were discussing the revised *De Ecclesia* in October 1963, the Theological Commission had begun dividing the chapter *De populo Dei et speciatim de laicis* into two, so that chapter two of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church would treat the People of God and chapter four would focus on the laity. The Theological Commission appreciated the request of Cardinal Silva Henriquez of Santiago de Chile – made in the name of eighty Latin American bishops – that the new chapter would "speak about the prophetic, priestly and kingly people."[10] However, the *Relatio* of the next draft explains the solution "to speak about the priestly office in § 10 and § 11, about the prophetic office of the people in § 12, and about the kingly office in the chapter on the laity, § 36."[11] For the composition of the paragraphs dealing with the laity's share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office in *LG* 34-36, one could rely on a speech by Bishop De Smedt of Bruges, who was responsible for the sub-commission *De sacerdotio fidelium et de officiis laicorum* of the Secretariat for Christian Unity during the preparatory period.[12]

The description of specific forms of lay apostolate in *LG* 33 was added in the Spring of 1964. Apart from their general engagement in the world, laity "can also be called in various ways to a more immediate cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy." The Relatio explained that the second way was the result of "a mandate," although that term was not used. Whereas Pope Pius XI had spoken about "participation" and Pope Pius XII and John XXIII about "collaboration," the sub-commission opted for "cooperation" to remain close to the language of the Pauline literature. The Theological Commission also accepted the inclusion of an idea Cardinal Suenens had added in his proposal for a new order of chapters. "They may also be appointed by the hierarchy to carry out certain ecclesiastical offices which have a spiritual aim in view."[13] This enrichment of the conciliar theology of the laity was enthusiastically welcomed in an early commentary.

[10] AS II/1, 366.

[11] AS III/1, 196.

[12] AS II/3, 101-106. *LG* 34-36 thus finds its origin in the pre-conciliar work of a subcommission of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, even if the Theological Commission may not have been aware of this. The earlier document was published in English as Emiel-Joseph De Smedt, *The Priesthood of the Faithful*, New York, Paulist, 1962.

[13] "Haec idea complementaria de muneribus ecclesiasticis a laicis exercendis desumitur ex laudata Propositione E.mi Suenens."

> In conclusion, the Council speaks of a still more intimate service that laymen render the hierarchy in "certain church functions (*quaedam munera ecclesiastica*) for a spiritual purpose," in short, directly involved with the proper mission of the Church which Jesus gave her. We ought not to think, then, of a bishop's domestic help or of his chauffeur, but of people who do truly spiritual work, connected with the liturgy, preaching, other aspects of the ministry or ecclesiastical administration, the works of mercy, and the whole range of the apostolate. Here laymen take over apostolic work and responsibilities which in themselves belong to the hierarchy but which can be entrusted to laymen because neither the power of order nor the power of jurisdiction (of divine right, that is) is required. More is involved than the general mandate of which we have already spoken. This is a special mandate, rather like the *missio canonica*, whereby people are appointed to the major offices in Catholic Action, for instance, or women and girls are appointed to help the parish priest with catechetics, visiting, and so forth.[14]

However, a successful modus submitted by one Council father regarding *LG* 33 shows that the Council continued to make clear distinctions between the laity and the ordained. The last version states: "every lay person, because of the gifts received, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the church's mission 'according to the measure of Christ's gift' (Eph 4:7)." The change from *totius missionis Ecclesiae* to *missionis ipsius Ecclesiae* served as a reminder that the most important (*principaliora*) acts in the Church can only be accomplished by the clergy.[15] The Council held that, "from this familiar relationship between laity and pastors many advantages for the Church can be expected" (*LG* 37), but the condition was that the boundaries between them had to remain intact.

During the Council, theologians assisted the commissions as experts or *periti*.[16] They expressed their own ideas on the theology of the laity in public lectures and publications. In what follows, the evolution of their thought from the announcement of the Council until *Ministeria quaedam* will be described.[17]

[14] Ferdinand KLOSTERMANN, "The Laity," in Herbert VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1, New York, Herder and Herder, 1967, 231-252, 242-243.

[15] Modus 16 (n° 33): "Laicus enim non potest esse testis totius missionis Ecclesiae, siquidem non potest peragere ea quae sunt in Ecclesia principaliora."

[16] Cf. Peter DE MEY, "The Role of Non-Voting Participants in the Preparation and Conduct of the Council," in Richard R. GAILLARDETZ (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, 78-93.

[17] A profound analysis of this 1972 motu proprio by Paul VI in light of the current views on ministries in the Catholic Church is that of Serena NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers: Reflections on Ministers and *Potestas* in the Horizon of Pluri-ministeriality," in this issue.

2 — *Yves Congar*
"The Church is not walls but the faithful."

Although French Dominican Yves Congar had written his classical study on the laity in 1953,[18] he remained interested in the subject in subsequent decades. We will follow the evolution of his thought until his 1971 *retractatio* in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale*.[19]

In 1959, Congar published three lectures on the laity that contain several references to his 1953 monograph *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*.[20] In the first lecture on the Holy Spirit, Congar took pains to reconfirm the duality between the Church as "hierarchical institution" and the Church as *congregatio fidelium*. Therefore, the laity can be considered "objects made by the Church" and "subjects who make the Church,"[21] just as a bishop can, with Augustine's famous words, be "bishop over you and Christian with you."[22] At the same time, the institutional element is relativized: "The Church is not walls, or barriers either, but people, the faithful."[23] "Such a community of men on this earth needs rules and regulations, an authority. (…) But all that is to minister to and help the spiritual life of persons, and it must not weigh too heavily or be excessive."[24] In other lectures, Congar adds that the laity's subjecthood implies their being "the responsible person."[25] Contrary to Karl Rahner, he argues that the mission of the laity is not only inner-worldly but a real apostolate that is situated "in the Church."[26] With

[18] Yves CONGAR, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*, Unam Sanctam, 8, Paris, Cerf, 1953. English translation: *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity*, Westminster, Newman, 1967.

[19] A.N. WILLIAMS, "Congar's Theology of the Laity," in Gabriel FLYNN (ed.), *Yves Congar, Theologian of the Church, New and Expanded Edition*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs, 45, Leuven, Peeters, 2018, 133-157, analyses the developments in Congar's studies on this theme till the trilogy *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. See also the chapter "Un cheminement dans la théologie du ministère," in Joseph FAMERÉE and Gilles ROUTHIER, *Yves Congar*, Paris, Cerf, 2008, 99-116.

[20] CONGAR, *Si vous êtes mes témoins. Trois conférences sur laïcat, Église et monde*, Paris, Cerf, 1959. We quote from the English translation *Laity, Church and World*, Baltimore, Maryland, Helicon Press, 1960.

[21] Ibid., 22.

[22] Ibid., 33.

[23] Ibid., 31. Cf. Yves CONGAR, "L'Église ce ne sont pas les murs, mais les fidèles," in *La Maison-Dieu*, 70 (1962), 105-114, where he explains the Patristic use of this metaphor.

[24] Ibid., 33.

[25] Ibid., 43.

[26] Ibid., 46 and 68.

this book, Congar wanted to promote the "organic co-operation" between priests and laity.[27]

The systematic theological study on the mission of the laity that Congar wrote in 1961 but republished in 1965 pays separate attention to the "morphology" of the laity – their place in the structure of the Church – and to their "physiology" – their participation in the life and mission of the Church.[28] As to the first aspect, the laity are distinguished from clergy and religious.[29] At the level of the Christian life, all the faithful enjoy a priestly, kingly, and prophetic dignity as members of the body of Christ. When explaining the different roles of priests and laity within the social structure of the Church, Congar makes a difference between "all" and "some": "*All* are virtually and personally living members of Christ the King, Priest and Prophet; *some* are elected and ordained into the Body for the use of all."[30] Out of respect for the world as "a separate order of holiness," the laity are distinguished from religious.[31] If the laity were not forgotten in the section on morphology,[32] Congar insists in the section on physiology that the laity accomplish both "the first and foremost mission of the Church" – living their royal priesthood individually and in their families and "taking on their share of the apostolic and evangelizing mission of

[27] Ibid., 57-59.

[28] Originally published in the monthly bulletin of the Cercle St Jean-Baptiste, a lay movement under the spiritual guidance of Jean Daniélou S.J., the chapters "Vocabulaire et histoire du laïcat" and "Les laïcs dans l'Église" were included in *Les laïcs et la mission de l'Église. Études et documents du Cercle St Jean-Baptiste* présentés par Jean Daniélou, Paris, Centurion, 1962, 11-21 and 22-38. Congar offered the same text for the chapter "Laïc" in *Encyclopédie de la foi*, Cogitatio Fidei, 16, Paris, Cerf, 1965, 436-456. When asked by the secretary of the pre-conciliar Theological Commission, Sebastian Tromp S.J., to write a chapter on the laity for the first *De Ecclesia*, he made a summary in Latin of the second chapter. Unfortunately, his chapter was not discussed by the commission, since the same request had been made to the Louvain theologian Philips. Cf. *Votum de laicis eorumque loco in Ecclesia*, KU Leuven, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies (F Philips, 0155), a document dated 27/02/1961, and for further background on this experience for Congar, see Peter De Mey, "Searching for Traces of an Accountable Church during the Long Preparation of the Conciliar Documents," in *StC*, 56 (2022), 471-491, 474.

[29] Not, however, in the version offered to the Theological Commission.

[30] *Les laïcs et la mission de l'Église*, 26. The specific role of "some" makes no sense outside the mission of "all." Cf. Congar, *Sacerdoce et laïcat devant leurs tâches d'évangélisation et de civilisation*, Paris, Cerf, 1962, 291: "Ce qui, dans l'Église, est structure juridique, se situe réellement, et doit être vu, à l'intérieur de la réalité de l'existence chrétienne ou du christianisme. (…) Il faut poser d'abord le christianisme, ensuite le fait d'autorité en lui."

[31] *Les laïcs et la mission de l'Église*, 27-31.

[32] See also the section titles: "Laïcs, moines et clercs," "Laïcat et cléricature ou sacerdoce hiérarchique," and "Laïcat et état monastique ou religieux."

the Church" – as well as "the second mission of the Church," the transformation of the world in service to the kingdom of God. The latter task, in which the hierarchy is included, may be exercised privately or by being engaged in Catholic Action.[33] This article culminates in a reflection on "the relations between lay people and priests in public worship."[34] The laity should be aware of their subordinate place in the Church but they also need to receive ample opportunity to collaborate with priests so that the priesthood and the laity form a perfect couple:[35] "The pair is both a community and a hierarchy, a friendship and a legal structure, diversity and complementarity."[36]

After the second session of the Council, Congar began to write about lay ministries.[37] The most important decision the Council had taken in its reflection on the laity was to elaborate a chapter on the People of God,[38] placed before the one on the hierarchy.[39] The Council fathers first spoke about the Church as "the 'we' of the Christians," who as a result of their baptism enjoy the same priestly, kingly and prophetic dignity and "are open to the charisms of the Holy Spirit."[40] To describe the mission that the laity exercises in the Church, Congar now uses the term "lay ministries."[41]

[33] Ibid., 31-37.

[34] Ibid., 37.

[35] Ibid., 37-38: "Les laïcs certes, sont et doivent être subordonnés (Pie XII, discours pour la canonisation de Pie X, 3.V.1954). Mais il est clair que tout ce qu'il y a à dire sur les rapports entre laïcs et sacerdoce hiérarchique ne s'épuise pas dans cette obligation de soumission. (…) Il faut, au besoin, créer des structures permettant à tous d'être actifs dans le respect de la situation de chacun. Mais les structures ne créent rien toutes seules, elles doivent jaillir de la vie et lui servir de réceptacle. Ce qu'il faut, c'est un certain esprit. Il faut que les clercs sachent que l'Église, ce sont les chrétiens, et qu'ils quittent certaines attitudes inconscientes de caste et de paternalisme. Il faut tendre à réaliser le 'couple' sacerdoce-laïcat." The Latin paper by Congar hoped for a *unio sacerdotis et plebis* as well as the *conspiratio omnum suorum membrorum* but lacked the strong words of the French chapter. Cf. *Votum de laicis eorumque loco in Ecclesia*, 6.

[36] CONGAR, *Sacerdoce et laïcat*, 285.

[37] Cf. "Ministères et laïcat dans les recherches actuelles de la théologie catholique romaine," in *Verbum Caro*, 71 (1964), 127-148 and "Laïcat et ministères institués dans le schéma du Concile sur l'Église," in *Le concile au jour le jour. Troisième session*, Paris, Cerf, 1965, 133-142. These are transcriptions of conferences held in the Spring-Summer of 1964.

[38] Cf. CONGAR, "The Church: The People of God," in *Concilium* (1965/1), 11-37.

[39] "Laïcat et ministères institués," 136: "Par rapport à cette valeur première de l'existence chrétienne, la valeur 'hiérarchie' apparaît comme *seconde*: je ne dis pas 'secondaire', c'est-à-dire moins importante, mais seconde."

[40] Ibid., 137.

[41] "Ministères et laïcat," 128-135: 'Quelques recherches particulières concernant des ministères laïcs (des ministères d'Église donnés à des laïcs).'

He discusses the planned restauration of the permanent diaconate, ministries in the fields of catechesis and the liturgy (to avoid "the clericalization of the laity," he found new consecrations unnecessary[42]), and the rise of secular institutions. A second way of participating in the priestly, kingly, and prophetic authority of Christ, that of the divine institution of priesthood, remains necessary in the Church. The key biblical passage to describe the role of ordained ministers in the Church is Ephesians 4:11. Their task is "to organise the saints for the work of a ministry that is common to all."[43]

After the Council, Congar continued to publish on ministries in the Church, including in the book *Ministères et communion ecclésiale*.[44] The term "ministry" had been used by the Council.[45] In view of the "declericalization" of the theology of ministries, Congar attaches great importance to *AA* 2: "In the Church, there is diversity in ministry but unity in mission."[46] Instead of continuing to defend the strict distinction between two ways of participating in the *tria munera Christi* and coupling the terms "priesthood/laity," Congar now couples "ministries/modes of community service."[47] The diversity of ministries in the Church is the will of Christ. "Jesus has instituted a structured community which is entirely holy, priestly, prophetic, missionary, apostolic; it has ministries at the heart of its life, some freely raised up the Spirit, others linked by the imposition of hands to the institution and mission of the Twelve."[48]

In Congar's schematic representation, ministries enrich the community, but there is also an arrow starting from the community in the direction

[42] Ibid., 133: "Mais je crains l'archéologisme, je crains aussi le ritualisme et enfin, par-dessus tout et comme la peste, la cléricalisation du laïcat. J'estime que le laïcat a dans son baptême, dans sa confirmation, tout ce qu'il faut pour remplir toutes les fonctions d'Église en-deça des célébrations strictement liturgiques et surtout de la célébration eucharistique, et donc il n'y a pas lieu de chercher de nouvelles consécrations particulières. Mais évidemment, la question reste ouverte."

[43] Ibid., 143.

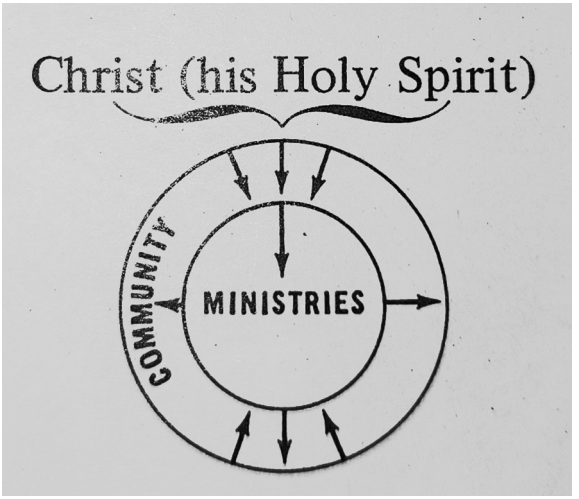
[44] Cf. CONGAR, "Ministères et structuration de l'Église," in *La Maison-Dieu*, 102 (1970), 7-20; also in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale*, Paris, Cerf, 1971, 31-49, and "Mon cheminement dans la théologie du laïcat et des ministères," ibid., 9-30. We quote from the English translation, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," in *J*, 32 (1972), 169-188.

[45] *LG* 7, *DV* 25, *SC* 29, *AG* 15, 17, 19, 40, *AA* 2 and *PC* 8. Cf. ibid., 43 no. 20.

[46] Cf. Congar, "L'apostolat des laïcs d'après le Décret du Concile," in *Vie Spirituelle* (February 1967), 129-160, 145.

[47] "My Path-Findings," 176.

[48] Ibid., 178.



of ministries. For example, he ponders whether the community should be consulted before a new priest is ordained.[49] The theology of ministries allows for a greater involvement of women in the mission of the Church without changing the tradition of male priesthood.[50] When he enumerates different categories of ministries, he moves from occasional to more permanent services and includes the ordained ministries of deacons, presbyters, and bishops in the same list.[51]

In hindsight, there was a clear evolution in Congar's reflection on the laity from his pre-conciliar views on the laity and his time as a Council peritus until *Ministères et communion ecclésiale*. In 1971, the laity were no longer called "objects." At the same time, there was no radical discontinuity, since Congar was supporting lay participation in the life of the Church in all fields throughout this period.

[49] Ibid., 179: "Is vocation a controlled, personal attraction, verified by superiors and then consecrated, or is it not rather the recognition, by the community and its head, of gifts which mark someone out for the receipt of a mission consecrated by the hands of the bishop? And is not that the case for the bishops themselves?"

[50] Ibid., 183.

[51] CONGAR, "Ministères et structuration de l'Église," 43-46. Regarding the third level, he adds this warning: "On ne doit pas séparer le nouveau don de grâce qu'est l'ordination sacramentelle et ces premiers dons qui le précèdent, l'accompagnent et le complètent" (ibid., 46).

3 — *Karl Rahner*
"Where are the tongues of fire talking of God and his love?"

When comparing the chapter on the laity in the second (1955) and seventh (1966) volume of Rahner's *Schriften zur Theologie*, one sees a substantial change of views. He prepared the Council's definition of the laity by distinguishing the laity from the ordained and religious.[52] Rahner insists that the laity have received charisms to prepare them to exercise their Christian vocation "towards the world and in the world."[53] Their engagement often is organized by student associations or youth groups with "a profane, civic, mundane, cultural, human content."[54] On the contrary, priests exercise their ministry "in the Church and for the Church."[55] The latter may invite the laity to cooperate "to a limited extent" in their apostolic task,[56] but Rahner insists that one should not turn this into a permanent appointment, since then they would "no longer, properly speaking, be lay persons."[57]

In continuity with the position he defended before the Council, Rahner remained convinced in 1966 that "in normal cases the baptized layman continues in that secular sphere of life which he previously occupied in the world before he was baptized."[58] Through baptism, the Christian receives "the responsibility of being a sign in the world and to the world of the eternal reality of salvation."[59] Confirmation "is a sacrament of witness to the faith, of charismatic fulness, of the Holy Spirit, the sacrament in which those sealed with the Spirit are sent into the world to bear witness in order that the world may be made subject to the dominion of God."[60] The new element, influenced by Vatican II, is that "every Christian in the Church has been authorised and empowered for the task of actively co-operating in the work of the Church both interiorly and exteriorly."[61] The reference to the "interior life" was

[52] Karl RAHNER, "Über das Laienapostolat," in *Schriften zur Theologie*, 2 (1955), 339-373. English translation: "Notes on the Lay Apostolate," in *Theological Investigations*, 2 (1963), 319-352, here 319-322.

[53] Ibid., 323.

[54] Ibid., 345.

[55] Ibid., 330.

[56] Ibid., 344.

[57] Ibid., 320, 343-344.

[58] "Sakramentale Grundlegung des Laienstandes in der Kirche," in *Schriften zur Theologie*, 7 (1966), 330-350. English translation: "The Sacramental Basis for the Role of the Layman in the Church," in *Theological Investigations*, 8 (1971), 51-74.

[59] Ibid., 63.

[60] Ibid., 68.

[61] Ibid., 54, 71-72.

added "because all of us as Christians must constantly be re-discovering and reliving our Christian state anew."[62]

In three articles published after the Council, Rahner clarified the role of the laity in the Church in reference to their charisms. In 1966, Rahner ended a contribution on the theology of ministry with a reflection about the point when it may no longer be possible to defend the hierarchy.[63] As a result of the changes from traditional Catholicism to a pluralistic society, bishops can only exercise power if they find believers willing to obey them and if they understand their ministry as service.[64] The hierarchy should also appreciate the existence of other charisms in the Church.[65] Only when the relation between the laity and the hierarchy has the outlook of a family will the laity will better understand the function of the hierarchy.[66]

In May 1968, Rahner was invited to address the student parish in Freiburg in Breisgau about democracy in the Church.[67] Since it belongs to the essence of the Church to create room for the free development of charisms and to understand ordained ministry as a service of these charisms, there are many parallels between the Church and a democracy,[68] even if "according to Catholic ecclesiology the basic structure of the Church is of divine right and thus unchangeable."[69] In the second part of his article, Rahner explored how the Church could become more democratic. He welcomed the rise of parish councils in the Catholic Church and insisted that legislation be developed to grant the laity the "right of co-determination" with regard to the orientation of the Church.[70] For the future, he deemed it possible that a representative group of the laity could become involved in the selection of a priest and that,

62 Ibid., 73.

63 *Vom Sinn des kirchlichen Amtes*, Freiburg, Herder, 1966, quoted from *Priesterliche Existenz. Beiträg zum Amt in der Kirche*, Sämtliche Werke, 20, Freiburg, Herder, 2010, 3-25. Ibid., 15: "Wir nehmen wieder den eingangs unserer Überlegungen gewählten Standort ein und fragen nach den Grenzen der Bedeutung der Hierarchie."

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., 18.

66 Ibid., 24.

67 "Demokratie in der Kirche?" in *Gnade als Freiheit. Kleine theologische Beiträge*, Herder, Freiburg, 1968, 113-130, quoted from *Das Konzil in der Ortskirche: Schriften zur Struktur und gesellschaftlichem Auftrag der Kirche*, Sämtliche Werke, 24/1, Freiburg, Herder, 2011, 134-149.

68 Ibid., 136-137.

69 Ibid., 139.

70 Ibid., 144: "Bei all diesen Laienvertretungen wird es darauf ankommen, daß sie, unbeschadet der Eigentümlichkeit des bischöflichen Amtes, ein echtes Mitbestimmungsrecht in der Kirche erhalten und daß sie so von unten her gebildet werden, dass sie eine echte und selbständige Repräsentanz der Laien in der Kirche darstellen."

especially if the diaspora situation of the Church continued, new communities would be formed in which the bishop would be asked to ordain the person assuming the leadership of the community.[71]

Reflecting on the teaching of Vatican II on charisms, Rahner held that the Council could have said more "with regard to the relationship between the charismatic and the institutional elements and their mutual interplay."[72] Despite the change of order of chapters two and three in *Lumen gentium*, "the Church of officialdom still continues constantly to occupy the centre of the ecclesiological stage."[73] In Rahner's opinion, it would be legitimate and scriptural to regard the Church primarily as the historical concretization of the charismatic as brought about by the Spirit of Christ, and to regard the specifically institutional element in her as one of the regulating factors (albeit a necessary one) for this charismatic element.[74] As to "the question of the interplay between official institution and free charisma as it exists in the concrete," this requires "striking the right balance in the concrete between personal initiative and obedient fulfilment of the directives from above."[75]

In 1972, Rahner attempted to write a vision for the Würzburg synod, in which he participated as a synod father.[76] The final part of this book, *How Can a Church of the Future Be Conceived*, has much in common with Pope Francis' teaching on synodality.[77] In a short first part, Rahner tries to characterize the Catholic Church in Western Germany. He does not

[71] Ibid., 146-148.

[72] "Bemerkungen über das charismatische in der Kirche," in *Geist und Leben*, 42 (1969), 251-262. English translation: "Observations on the Factor of the Charismatic in the Church," in *Theological Investigations*, 12 (1974), 81-97.

[73] Ibid., 85.

[74] Ibid., 85-86.

[75] Ibid., 94-96.

[76] *Strukturwandel der Kirche als Aufgabe und Chance*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Herder, 1972. English translation: *The Shape of the Church to Come*, London, SPCK, 1974.

[77] Cf. Andreas BATLOGG, "Karl Rahners 'Strukturwandel der Kirche': Zur Neuauflage eines Klassikers," in *Geist & Leben*, 92 (2019), 429-433, 431. See also Michael SEEWALD, "Karl Rahners Reformprogramm für die katholische Kirche in Deutschland. Eine kritische Würdigung," in RAHNER, *Strukturwandel der Kirche als Aufgabe und Chance*, mit einer Einleitung von Michael Seewald, Freiburg im Breisgau, Herder, 2019, 7-24. Seewald points to an important desideratum of Rahner that will probably remain wishful thinking in the time of Pope Francis (ibid., 24): "Während unter Papst Franziskus die Diskussion über verheiratete Männer als mögliche Kandidaten für die Priesterweihe ein wenig an Fahrt gewonnen hat und die Kirche die kommenden Jahre beschäftigen könnte, wird immer noch mit allen Mitteln – Überwachtung, Denunziation und Zensur – versucht, die notwendige Diskussion über die Rechte von Frauen in den Kirchen zu unterbinden. Angesichts dieser diskursiven Enge, die einem schier die Luft zum Atmen raubt, wirkt Rahners Buch über den Strukturwandel befreiend."

understand why there is so much opposition at this synod about preaching by the laity. If the evolution towards a diaspora Church continues, one will beg the laity to assume such responsibilities.[78] In his *status quaestionis*, he deplores that, in his local Church, there is no longer a legitimate diversity of opinions but a clash of ecclesial groups not on speaking terms with one another.[79]

Rahner starts his wish list for the Catholic Church in Germany with an appeal to allow the Spirit to inspire the Church as he wills.[80] Further de-clericalization is necessary so "the charismatic element is just as necessary as office to the Church."[81] In his plea for a Church "serving everyone, even those who are ready to accept their services but nevertheless despise and oppose them; the poor too, the old, the sick, those who have come down in the world, the people on the edge of society, all those who have no power themselves and can bring no increase of power to the Church," Rahner anticipates Pope Francis's pleas for a missionary Church which is especially found in the periphery. Rahner also misses "real spirituality" in the Church and asks: "Where are the tongues of fire talking of God and his love?"[82]

In part three, the future role of the laity – especially in his local Church – is discussed in the chapters dealing with a "Church from the roots" and a "democratized Church."[83] Rahner deems it likely that the number of basic communities, which the faithful have freely chosen to join, will grow. In such communities, lay people can more easily practice their "right of co-determination," even if this should be the case in ordinary parishes as well.[84] Since Rahner believes it essential "that the ordained leader of the eucharistic celebration and the community leader" are "one and the same person," the practice should be introduced to present this leader to the bishop to receive a "relative ordination."[85] Rahner had no theological difficulties with women priests, even if he held that more discussion on the

[78] *The Shape of the Church to Come*, 27.
[79] Ibid., 38.
[80] Ibid., 51.
[81] Ibid., 57.
[82] Ibid., 85.
[83] Ibid., 108-122. In other chapters, Rahner pleads for an open Church that, for example, is willing to reconsider the legislation regarding those in a second marriage. He also criticized the stagnation within the ecumenical movement and hoped that German Catholics would be stronger in their socio-critical commitment.
[84] Ibid., 111.
[85] Ibid., 110-111.

topic was needed.[86] Yet, even in basic communities, the community leader should not decide everything alone but be a leader who respects "the existence in the congregation of strong charismatic personalities."[87] In parishes and at the level of the diocese, an evolution towards a "democratized Church" is needed. Rahner was convinced that "the pastor should remain a pastor, but this should not mean that he is to treat his flock as if they really were sheep."[88] He had a constructive proposal for a "synodal" Church: "There must today also be a right on the part of priests and lay people to co-operate in varying degrees and in forms appropriate to the matter in hand, in a deliberative and not merely consultative way in the Church's decisions."[89]

Rahner received considerable opposition to his early conviction of the secular location of the laity. Yet, by 1968, he also made radical pleas for the "right of co-determination" of the laity, while remaining convinced that he was writing in view of the needs of his local Church.

4 — *Hans Küng*
"A ministry in the midst of other ministries."

During the Council, the Tübingen theologian and Swiss priest Hans Küng was publishing books and giving lectures around the world. Shortly after the announcement of the Council, his book, *The Council: Reform and Reunion*, was published.[90] The opening of the Council was for Küng an occasion to reflect on *Structures of the Church*.[91] This book went further than the last version of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. For example, the chapter on "The Church as an Ecumenical Council" precedes the one on "Church, Council, and Laity." Only later is attention given to "Council and Ecclesiastical Offices" and "The Petrine Office in the Church and in Council." At the start of the short chapter on the laity, Küng shows his willingness to learn from Protestant criticism on the abuse of papal power. On the basis of the "universal priesthood of all believers," he asserts that the entire body of

[86] Ibid., 113-114.
[87] Ibid., 113.
[88] Ibid., 121.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Hans KÜNG, *Konzil und Wiedervereinigung. Erneuerung als Ruf in die Einheit*, Freiburg i. Br., Herder, 1960. English translation: *The Council, Reform and Reunion: Renewal as a Call to Unity*, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1961.
[91] KÜNG, *Strukturen der Kirche*, Freiburg, Herder, 1962. English translation: *Structures of the Church*, London, Nelson, 1964.

the faithful has the right to convene a universal Council.[92] From Congar's *magnum opus* on the laity, however, he had learned that lay participation in the history of the Councils was limited. The chapter ends with a plea not to repeat this error during the Second Vatican Council, out of respect for Pius XII's recognition during the Second World Congress of the Laity in 1957 that the laity "are the Church."[93] At a minimum, the laity should be invited to participate in commissions dealing with the laity, but Küng argued for more. "Up to now no one has convincingly proved that lay persons cannot be accorded a final vote on the grounds either of canon or of divine law."[94]

Immediately after the Council, Küng chose to publish his own ecclesiological synthesis – *The Church* – almost exclusively based on Scriptural grounds.[95] The three Pauline images for the Church – "The Church as the People of God," "The Church as the Creation of the Spirit," and "The Church as the Body of Christ" – constitute "The Fundamental Structure of the Church." Above all, this is true for "the new people of God, which constitutes the *basic structure* of the Church," for which Küng finds support in *LG* 2 and *LG* 9.[96] The decision of the Council to first discuss the laity, since they are also part of God's people, is for him self-evident. Küng was dissatisfied with the additional discussion of the laity in chapter four. "If the Church is the true people of God, it is impossible to differentiate between "Church" and "laity", as though the laity were not in a very real sense '*laos*'."[97] The chapter contains a strong criticism of Congar's restriction of the laity's role to the life of the Church.[98]

As he had done in *Structures of the Church*, only in the last instance did Küng treat "The Offices of the Church." He first addressed "The Priesthood of All Believers," then "Ecclesiastical Office as Ministry." Küng argued that, in the course of Church history, the idea of the priesthood of all believers had fallen into oblivion because "priesthood" was a term

92 Ibid., 66.

93 Ibid., 86.

94 Ibid., 93. The reception of Küng's ecclesiological views was not universally positive. Because of concerns within the Holy Office at the end of the second session, Küng had to appear before a small commission presided over by Cardinal Bea and answer eight questions. Cf. KÜNG, *Memoirs*. 2. *Disputed Truth*, London, Continuum, 2008, 67.

95 KÜNG, *Die Kirche*, Ökumenische Forschungen, 1, Freiburg, Herder, 1967. English Translation: *The Church*, London, Burns and Oates, 1967.

96 Ibid., 130.

97 Ibid., 125.

98 Ibid., 130: "It is right to distinguish between the 'structure' and the 'life' of the Church, but wrong to assign to 'structure' faith, sacraments and offices, and endow them with a particular importance as spiritual riches, while we pigeonhole the fellowship of believers under 'life.'"

restricted to the ordained. He argued that this "rapidly increasing clericalization of the Church"[99] could only be overcome "if every member of the community can and really does exercise priestly rights and functions."[100] The teaching of Paul on charismatic ministries (especially in 1 Corinthians) forms the blueprint for the Church's reflection on the ecclesiastical office as ministry, which Küng identifies as "the general and fundamental charismatic structure of the Church."[101] He sees this confirmed in *LG* 18: "For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in His Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body."[102] Küng deplores the evolution towards a particular ministry at the end of the biblical period and towards the three-tiered hierarchical structure of bishop, presbyters, and deacons in the second century. "The fellowship of believers, the collegiality of all believers, of all those who had charisms and fulfilled their own ministries, the collegiality of the whole Church, in short, gave place to the *collegiality of a special ministry* within the community; the collegiality of the leaders of the community, the *episkopoi* or elders, who increasingly began to see themselves as distinct from the community, from the 'people'; this is where the division between 'clergy' and 'laity' begins."[103] The view of the Church Küng wants to maintain is that "the pastorate and the community with all its special gifts and ministries, belong together and yet can be distinguished."[104]

The publication of this book was followed by extensive, often critical, reviews by other theologians.[105] For example, Congar praised the originality of Küng's attempt to present a systematic reflection on the Church based on the theology and terminology of the New Testament, but he questioned whether this was sufficient for a Catholic ecclesiology.[106] He noted that ecclesiological themes needing further discussion after the Council were being omitted, especially the relationship between primacy and collegiality.

[99] Ibid., 383.

[100] Ibid., 372.

[101] Ibid., 394. See also KÜNG, "The Charismatic Structure of the Church," in *Concilium* (1965/1), 23-33.

[102] In the third chapter of *LG*, this serves as biblical foundation of a reflection on the episcopate.

[103] Ibid., 410.

[104] Ibid., 438.

[105] A selection of these have been translated into German and edited as Hermann HÄRING and Josef NOLTE (eds.), *Diskussion um Hans Küng, Die Kirche*, Ökumenische Forschungen, 5, Freiburg, Herder, 1971.

[106] See his review in *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 53 (1969), 693-706. He is appreciative of Küng's criticism on his distinction between life and structure. Ibid., 701: "La question ainsi posée est délicate et importante."

However, according to Congar, Küng's theological reflections on charisms and ministries were highly needed in post-conciliar ecclesiology, since it is important "to situate authority not *above*, but *in* the Church."[107] Congar critiqued the lack of attention to Acts and the Pastoral Letters, as well as the role of tradition in the Church, especially in light of the defense of the circular relationship of Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium in *Dei verbum*.[108] In his interpretation of *Lumen gentium*, Küng had no sympathy for the rediscovery of the notion of Church as sacrament, despite the work done in this regard by German theologians Rahner and Semmelroth.[109] Nonetheless, Congar was convinced that Küng's book would bear fruit for ecumenical relations with Protestants.[110] Küng honoured Congar's attention to his work in a more than thirty-page reaction.[111]

Another book by Küng which is worth rereading in this era of synodality is *Why Priests? A Proposal for a New Church Ministry*. Küng wrote it in 1971 to offer theological support to fellow priests in a period of crisis in the Church. It is relevant that Küng never isolates the priests from their relationship to the communities they serve.[112] After rehearsing the "New Testament Foundations" for the Church, Küng holds that *Lumen gentium* incorporated a number of them. "(1) The Church is before all else the people of God and the community of believers; (2) the character of Church ministry as service and its collegiality are therefore stressed; (3) the universal priesthood is strongly emphasized; (4) the charismatic dimension of the Church is recognized and clearly presented; (5) the local church receives due regard."[113]

The last chapter of the book, "The Shape of the Church's Ministry of Leadership," enumerates a number of characteristics that Küng holds are "variables in the Church's ministry of leadership." In his opinion, the Church's ministry of leadership "does not have to be a full-time ministry,"

[107] Ibid., 694.

[108] Ibid., 698. Similar points were raised by George H. TAVARD, "Option für das Ursprüngliche?" in *Diskussion um Hans Küng*, 84-91.

[109] Ibid., 702.

[110] Ibid., 706. Küng's former promoter Louis Bouyer is doubtful on this point, since Küng never engages in dialogue with the Orthodox, and contemporary Protestant theologians have rediscovered the value of tradition. Cf. *Diskussion um Hans Küng*, 44 and 47.

[111] "L'Église selon l'Évangile: Réponse à Yves Congar," in *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 55 (1971), 193-230.

[112] KÜNG, *Wozu Priester? Eine Hilfe*, Einsiedeln, Benziger, 1971. English translation: *Why Priests? A Proposal for a New Church Ministry*, Garden City, Doubleday, 1972.

[113] Ibid., 58.

"does not have to be based on rank,"[114] "does not have to be celibate," and "does not have to be exclusively male."[115] The essential characteristics of the Church's ministry of leadership have been identified by Küng in relation to the community; it should "not be a form of domination but a service to the community," "not an autocratic authority absorbing all other functions, but one ministry in the midst of a multiplicity of other charisms and functions: a stimulating, coordinating and integrating ministry to the congregation and the other ministries," "not a rigid and uniform system, but a ministry in the midst of other ministries … that is flexible, mobile, pluriform according to the time and place," "not under the arbitrary control of men … but a calling which must be examined by the community."[116]

In order to concretize these principles, he enumerates the following desiderata – "particularly in democratic structures"[117] – for the cooperation between congregations and their leaders. Because of the remarkable similarity to reflections on synodality in the Catholic Church today, we end the discussion on Küng's book by quoting them:

> 1) *Collegial responsibility of all members of the Church*. The sharing of concern and the cooperation expected today at all levels – local, regional, universal Church – presupposes appropriate consultation and participation in decision making. (…) 2) *Election of the Church's leaders by the congregation* or – at elections on a higher level, for instance, of a bishop – through its representatives. The above-mentioned collegial decision-making bodies could cooperate in this. (…); 3) *Publicity in the Church*. In the Church too there must be sufficient transparency to assure all members of the Church, at least potentially, a look into the important activities of the Church and its leadership. To this belongs not least – since financial and pastoral decisions are often closely linked – open budgeting and accountability for the use of Church funds at the local, regional and world-wide levels. (…) Plurality of opinions, criticism and opposition have their legitimate place here. 4) *Relative autonomy of the congregations*. Since the local congregations are not merely parts of the Church, but are themselves Church (manifestations of the one Church), they have a right to autonomy, just as the regional and national churches have a right to autonomy over against the universal Church. (…) The community should exercise a subsidiary function in

[114] In his opinion, the image of the priest as *alter Christus* "contradicts the New Testament conception of the universal priesthood: All believers share in the priesthood of Christ and all are set apart from the world by faith and baptism in order to live according to the gospel for the world and for their fellow men" (ibid., 78).

[115] Ibid., 75-82.

[116] Ibid., 82-87.

[117] Ibid., 99.

> regard to the individual, and the superordinate community in regard to the subordinate. This is the meaning of the principle of subsidiarity, which permits as much freedom as possible, as much restriction as necessary.[118]

Küng's reflections on the mission of the laity in relation to the ordained reflects a remarkable continuity. From *Structures of the Church* till *Why Priests*, Küng always gives priority to the mission of the entire people of God. The Church for him has a charismatic structure in which different ministries complement one another.

5 — *Edward Schillebeeckx*
"Communion with the living God in Christ."

The final theological giant whose ideas on the theology of the laity we will consider is Flemish Dominican Edward Schillebeeckx, who published his dream on the future of ordained ministry long after *Ministeria quaedam*.[119] It also makes sense to discuss his ideas alongside Küng, since the first investigation of their work by the Holy Office dates back to the same time.[120]

In 1959, Schillebeeckx wrote "The Layman in the Church," an article which anticipated many ideas presented in *Lumen gentium*.[121] When studying the etymology of the term "laity," Schillebeeckx points out their membership in the People of God,[122] while enjoying "a characteristic position in the world."[123] Therefore, their sharing in the "apostolate or mission of the Church" is different from the "mission or apostolate of the hierarchy." His warning is reminiscent of the early position of Rahner: "Recognition of the role played by the laity in the Church can never, therefore, acquire the sense that the layman is now to have a part in what formerly pertained exclusively to the clergy."[124] However, in opposition to Rahner, Schillebeeckx found it legitimate that the laity become even full-time cooperators of the hierarchy, as long as they "dedicate their secular skills" to their "immediate

[118] Ibid., 99-101.

[119] Edward SCHILLEBEECKX, *Kerkelijk ambt*, Bloemendaal, Nelissen, 1980. English translation: *Ministry: A Case for Change*, London, SCM, 1981.

[120] See also DE MEY, "The Role of Non-voting Participants," 84-86.

[121] SCHILLEBEECKX, "De leek in de kerk," *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven*, 15 (1959), 669-694. The English translation was published in 1961 in *Doctrine and Life*, but here we quote from the chapter on "The Layman in the Church," in *Vatican II: The Struggle of Mind and Other Essays*, Dublin, Gill, 1964, 33-60.

[122] Ibid., 38.

[123] Ibid., 50.

[124] Ibid., 39.

service."[125] Hence, he and the Council could conclude: "So we see that the Christian layman bears responsibility both towards the Church and towards the world, and that his apostolic secular involvement is at the service of both Church and world."[126]

In 1962, months before the start of the Council, Schillebeeckx had come to appreciate that there are many activities at the level of "the Christian life" that precede the distinctions between priests and laity and are based on the sacraments of baptism and confirmation common to all Catholics.[127] With an appeal to the expression of Augustine, "*Vobis* sum episcopus, *vobiscum* christianus," he concluded that "the whole Church as such is neither clerical nor laical."[128] The term "cleric" only points to that dimension of the priestly existence that makes the ordained represent Christ before the community; the term "laity" points to their obedience to Christ through the ordained.[129] Schillebeeckx also corrected his previous view that secularity is part of the definition of the lay person.[130] The *consecratio mundi* and the call to holiness are the common task of all Christians and precede their being lay or cleric;[131] it is part of "the universal priesthood of the people of God."[132]

In a lecture given in the same year, Schillebeeckx repeated "that Christians cannot and should not be into two groups – clergy and laity," but what matters is the "communication between priests and lay people."[133] The definition of priesthood as an office includes the idea that the priest exercises his tasks "in the service of the community of the Church."[134] Priesthood is also "a charismatic ministry," since the priest "must be a living example of

[125] Ibid., 56.

[126] Ibid., 56-57.

[127] SCHILLEBEECKX, "Dogmatiek van ambt en lekestaat," in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, 2 (1962), 258-292, esp. 260 and 265. The Flemish Dominican may have been inspired by Congar for this emphasis on the Christian life.

[128] Ibid., 267.

[129] Ibid. Only in this sense is it legitimate to assume an essential difference between clergy and laity. Schillebeeckx adds that this difference "is the foundation of the essential interrelatedness of the ordained and the people of God in a real partnership." One has the impression that Schillebeeckx was alluding to the 1954 allocution by Pius XII that would appear in the chapter on the laity of the pre-conciliar *De Ecclesia* and in *LG* 10.

[130] Ibid., 268.

[131] Ibid., 270.

[132] Ibid., 278.

[133] "Communicatie tussen priester en leek," in *Nederlandse Katholieke Stemmen*, 59 (1963), 210-222. English translation: "Communication between Priests and Lay People," in *The Mission of the Church*, Theological Soundings, 4, London, Sheed and Ward, 1974, 171-187.

[134] Ibid., 175.

Christian life for his people."[135] The office of a priest, for Schillebeeckx, includes creating room for the laity. "In tending to take over the part played by lay people, [priests] would be misunderstanding their special apostolic power and witness."[136] At the end of his article, the Flemish Dominican emphasizes the sacramental dimension of communication between priests and lay people. "Above all it should not be forgotten that this new 'spiritual' communication is not simply communication between people, but is also a communion with the living God in Christ."[137]

In 1966 Schillebeeckx was invited to contribute to an international commentary on the documents of Vatican II with a chapter on the way the Council defined the laity.[138] At the end of a detailed exegesis of the different versions of chapter IV of *Lumen gentium*, the first peculiarity Schillebeeckx highlights pertains to the attention of the Council not only "to the essential difference in function in the Church between the clergy and the laity," but also to "the life and activity which are common to both as the one people of God."[139] If the secular engagement of the laity is mentioned, the goal of this endeavor is a religious one, "orienting this process of humanization towards salvation."[140]

In another chapter of the same book, Schillebeeckx continued his research on the typology of the laity by focusing on the other documents of Vatican II. In view of the teaching of the Council on "the rights of lay people with regard to their priests and about the dialogue and co-operation between priests and lay people," Schillebeeckx concluded that "the whole of the Second Vatican Council may in fact be regarded as a declericalization of the Catholic Church."[141]

[135] Ibid., 176.

[136] Ibid., 180. At this point, he anticipates Rahner's 1972 reflections on relative ordination and his own 1980 book on ministry: "It is, for example, possible to ask whether the time has not come for certain 'natural group leaders' to be ordained priests in some circumstances" (ibid., 183).

[137] Ibid., 187.

[138] "La définition typologique du laïc chrétien selon Vatican II," in *L'Église de Vatican II. Études autour de la Constitution conciliaire sur l'Église*, t. III, Unam Sanctam, 51-c, in Guilherme BARÁÚNA (ed.), Paris, Cerf, 1966, 1013-1033. English translation: "The Typological Definition of the Christian Layman according to Vatican II," in *The Mission of the Church*, 90-131.

[139] Ibid., 102.

[140] Ibid., 105.

[141] "Un nouveau type de laïc," in Bernard LAMBERT (ed.), *La nouvelle image de l'église. Bilan du concile Vatican II*, Tours, Mame, 1967, 172-185. English translation: "A New Type of Layman," in *The Mission of the Church*, 117-125.

These publications by Schillebeeckx form the basis for his 1980 book on ministry, in which "the mutual relationship between community and ministry" seems to be the only norm for the Church. If the community no longer has a presider, she may ordain one.[142] In his analysis of the "essential difference" of *LG* 10, he points to a middle way between an ontological and a functional view on ministry. "The tension between an ontological-sacerdotalist view of the ministry on the one hand and a purely functionalist view on the other must therefore be resolved by a theological view on the church's ministry as a charismatic office, the service of leading the community, and therefore as an ecclesial function within the community and accepted by the community. Precisely in this way it is a gift of God."[143]

Schillebeeckx dedicated a long section of his book to an analysis of the 1971 Synod of Bishops on ministry. Against the minority which asked for renewed attention to the ontological character of priesthood, he was convinced that the character of the priesthood can be nothing else than "the charisma of the ministry itself." "The charisma of ministry is given as a function of a service to the community, a service which in fact requires complete personal dedication from the one who is called through 'the community of God'."[144]

Schillebeeckx only changed his mind on the relationship between priests and laity between 1959 and 1962. He first distinguished their mission; later, he identified a broad range of activities which the people of God assume, prior to their distinction as laity and ordained. What really matters in the Church is the communication between priests and laity or the relationship between the community and its ministers. He combines a sacramental ecclesiology with a charismatic view on ministry.

Conclusion

The first draft of the pre-conciliar *De Ecclesia* gave priority to the mutual relations between laity and the ordained, rather than to their differences, and the laity obtained a role in the Church and the world. The chapter was drafted by the Louvain peritus Gérard Philips. During the last revision of the chapter on the laity in *Lumen gentium*, the suggestion of the Belgian Cardinal Suenens was accepted to grant the laity the possibility of assuming

[142] *Ministry: a Case for Change*, 40-41.
[143] Ibid., 70.
[144] Ibid., 105-130; quotation on 127.

tasks of a spiritual nature in the Church. Some of these ideas of Vatican II's doctrine on the laity are also found in the publications on this theme that four Catholic theologians and Council *periti* – Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx – wrote after the announcement of the Council in 1959.

The theologies of the laity of Congar, Rahner, and Schillebeeckx changed over this period. By 1962, Schillebeeckx abandoned his initial conviction of a distinct mission of the laity and the ordained. Until 1966, Rahner defended the unique secular orientation of the laity. Congar discovered only in 1971 that he had denied the laity any role at the level of the structure of the Church. From his 1962 book *Structures of the Church* onwards, Küng defended the notion that the People of God as a whole form the basic structure of the Church.

Several theological positions are defended by more than one of these theologians. Attention to charisms is found with all four theologians. Congar highlights the charismatic gifts of the Spirit to all the faithful, Rahner the charisms of the laity, Schillebeeckx the charismatic ministry of priesthood, Küng the charismatic structure of the Church. Rahner has his article on "Observations on the Factor of the Charismatic in the Church"; Küng has one on "The Charismatic Structure of the Church." The idea – that one does better not to couple laity and priests but the ministries and the community – is found with Congar and Schillebeeckx. Rahner, Schillebeeckx, and Küng speak about the clericalization of the Church; Congar, Rahner, and Schillebeeckx about the necessary de-clericalization of the Church; Congar and Schillebeeckx warn against the clericalization of the laity. Augustine's expression "*Vobis* sum episcopus, *vobiscum* christianus" is quoted by Congar and Schillebeeckx. Three of the four theologians wrote radical proposals on the future of the ordained ministry with implications for their view on the laity: Küng's *Why Priests? A Proposal for a New Church Ministry*; Rahner's *The Shape of the Church to Come*; and Schillebeeckx's *Ministry: A Case for Change*. Among the ideas defended by at least two theologians were Küng's plaidoyer for the deliberative power of the laity and Rahner's "right of co-determination"; introducing consultation of the laity before the ordination of a priest was suggested by Congar, Küng, and Schillebeeckx; Rahner and Schillebeeckx deemed it possible that, in the future, the community would propose a leader to be ordained. However, the theologians did not always agree. Rahner's initial orientation of the laity towards the world was criticized by Congar and Schillebeeckx; Küng was critical about Congar's limitation of the role of the laity to the life of the Church and received criticism by Congar on his monograph about the Church.

Finally, by following the synthesis report *A Synodal Church in Mission* of the first session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops from start to finish, I will highlight lines that were addressed in the theology of the laity of Congar, Rahner, Schillebeeckx, and Küng in the 1960s and 1970s, while being aware that the Synod also broke new ground.

In the first paragraph of "Part I. The Face of the Synodal Church," the synthesis report mentions "the concern expressed by some that the Synod may become a body of majority deliberation denuded of its ecclesial and spiritual character, so jeopardizing the hierarchical nature of the Church" (1g). For Congar, the stress on the hierarchical nature of the Church must be balanced by the image of the Church as *congregatio fidelium*. Rahner was aware that the hierarchy can only exercise their power if believers are willing to obey, but he was critical that "the Church of officialdom still continues constantly to occupy the centre of the ecclesiological stage."

The next paragraph contains an image that is found in the work of Congar: "The Father, through the mission of the Son and the gift of the Spirit, involves us in a dynamism of communion and mission that moves us from the "I" to the "we" and places us at the service of the world" (2a). Congar commented in 1965 that the Council fathers first spoke about the Church as "the 'we' of the Christians."

In the same paragraph, there is similarity with the thought of Schillebeeckx: "The renewal of the Christian community is possible only by recognizing the primacy of grace. (…) to experience how reciprocal relationships are the place and form of an authentic encounter with God" (2c). By 1963, Schillebeeckx was pleading for a "new," "spiritual" communication between ordained and laity, which "is not simply communication between people, but is also a communion with the living God in Christ" (2g).

The third paragraph discusses "Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation." "Before any distinction of charisms and ministries, 'we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body' (1 Cor. 12:13). Therefore, among all the baptized, there is a genuine equality of dignity and a common responsibility for mission, according to the vocation of each" (3c). The same insight helped Schillebeeckx to overcome his initially sharp distinctions between laity and clergy in 1962. Other paragraphs in this section emphasize Confirmation and the gifts of the Spirit that prepare the faithful for mission. "Ways to make the preparation and celebration of this Sacrament more fruitful should be considered, to awaken in all the faithful the call to community building, mission in the world and witness to the faith" (3i). Rahner discussed Confirmation in 1965 when considering "The Sacramental Basis for the Role of the Layman in the Church."

"The celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sunday, is the first and fundamental form by which the holy people of God gather and meet" (3e). Schillebeeckx and Rahner were so convinced of the importance of the celebration of the Eucharist for the life of the Church that they would permit the lay leader of the community to be ordained.

Paragraph 5 discusses "A Church 'out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation'." An important line reads: "We need to cultivate a greater sensitivity towards the riches of our diverse expressions of being Church. This requires a search for a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local rootedness, between respect for the bond of Church unity and the risk of homogenization that stifles variety. Meanings and priorities vary among different contexts, and this requires identifying and fostering forms of decentralization" (5g). Rahner tried to understand his own local context and thought the Würzburg Synod had to embrace the *Laienpredigt*. Perhaps "the right to co-determination" is typical for the Catholic Church in Germany but not necessarily elsewhere. In his country, it may be necessary to opt for "relative ordination" of leaders of base communities. In 1971, Küng was pleading for the "relative autonomy of the local congregations" and for greater freedom for regional and national Churches. The tensions between Rome and the German synod show that achieving this dynamic balance is difficult.

The first paragraph of Part II, "All disciples, all missionaries," introduces the theme of "Church is mission": "Rather than saying that the Church has a mission, we affirm that Church 'is' mission" (8a). This is a key insight of Congar: the community which Christ has inaugurated is "entirely missionary."

On the basis of the sacraments of initiation, all Catholics receive "the responsibility for the mission of the church" (8b). In 1959, Congar referred to the laity as "responsible persons" with a mission in the Church. In 8d and 8e, the missionary activity of the laity in the world and in the Church is described. The examples given transcend occasional service and resemble more the "ecclesiastical offices which have a spiritual aim in view" mentioned in *LG* 33. The synthesis report warns, however, against priests doing everything themselves and laity who replace priests to the point "that the lay character of their apostolate risks being diminished" (3f). In the latter situation, there is a real danger of a clericalization of the laity. Why did the report only mention this danger and not the need for a further de-clericalization of the Church, as Schillebeeckx had done when he was criticizing the same problem? Without defining "the lay character of their apostolate," the report could appear to reintroduce the laity's primordial orientation to the world. A later paragraph, however, states: "The proper recognition of the laity

for mission in the world cannot become a pretext for assigning the care of the Christian community to bishops and priests alone" (18b).

Further reflection is needed on "the relationships between charisms and ministries" (8i). Rahner asked for this in 1969, but does this formulation not give the impression that there are ministries that escape the "charismatic structure of the Church" (Küng)? Does the synthesis report reintroduce the world-Church dualism, whereas, according to Congar's beloved *AA* 2, "in the Church, there is diversity in ministry but unity in mission"?

In the section on "Women in the Life and Mission of the Church," the report calls it an urgent desideratum for women to participate in decision-making processes (9m). In 1971, Congar pleaded for a greater involvement of women in the mission of the Church. Rahner asked for deliberative power and even asserted a "right of co-determination" for the laity as a whole.

"In a synodal Church, ordained ministers are called to live their service to the People of God in a disposition of proximity to people, welcoming and listening to all, while cultivating a deep personal spirituality and a life of prayer" (11b). Indeed, as Küng wrote in 1971, theirs is a "stimulating, coordinating and integrating ministry." In 11c, the document criticizes the clericalist attitude and also calls it the refusal of "accountability" (see also 11k and 18i), a virtue called for by Hans Küng.

The synthesis report of the first phase also repeats an idea that is influential in Catholic reflections on synodality since the 2018 document of the International Theological Commission. A synodal process at the level of the local Church requires the mutuality "between all, some, and one. The "one" episcopal ministry values the participation of "all" the faithful, through the contribution of "some" who are more directly involved in discernment and decision-making processes" (12c). This model is applicable to all levels of decision-making in the Church. "Synodality articulates symphonically the communal ("all"), collegial ("some") and personal ("one") dimensions of the church at the local, regional and universal levels" (13a). Congar already was making the distinction between the role of "all" and of "some" in the Church at the start of the Council.

Paragraph 15, "A Synodal Approach to Formation," forms part of "Part III. Weaving Bonds, Building Communities." According to the synthesis report, "the Holy People of God is not only the object but is first and foremost the co-responsible subject of formation" (14c). Congar progressed from considering the laity subjects and objects to solely defending their subjecthood. Rahner's plea – to concentrate missionary activities "to those who have no power themselves and can bring no increase of power to the Church"

– finds echoes in the reference of the final report to "the world and its peripheries" (18d) and its suggestion that bodies of participation should avoid the "worldly logics of power" (18a). If the synthesis report only encourages small Christian communities in the emerging Churches to continue gathering around the Eucharist (18e), then Rahner gave in 1972 a more realistic account and asked for the ordination of the leaders of the community.

Reading *A Synodal Church in Mission* together with the reflections on the laity of Congar, Schillebeeckx, Rahner, and Küng has revealed that the Catholic Church under Pope Francis firmly reaffirms the conciliar and post-conciliar ecclesiology of the people of God. When subtle differences were noticed, the Synod of Bishops is invited to return to the courageous line of thought of the great theologians of the past.