

The Role and Function of Charism in the Theology of Yves Congar

Bearbeitet von
Johnson Mudavassery

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The Role and Function of Charism in the Theology of Yves Congar



PETER LANG
EDITION

General Introduction

0.1 Rationale of the Study

Fifty years ago, cardinal Joseph Suenens made the following statement in his Councilliar speech, which marks a doctrinal contribution to the theology of charism:

The remarks made about the charism of the Christian people are so few that one could get the impression that charismata are nothing more than a peripheral and unessential phenomenon in the life of the Church. Now, the vital importance of these charismata for building up of the Mystical Body must be presented with greater clarity and consequently at greater length.¹

Certainly the situation has improved after the II Vatican Council, and the terms ‘charism’ or ‘charismatic’, have been made familiar by scholarly and popular writings. However, the sky-rending noises, strange ecstatic phenomena and visions have dislodged an adequate understanding of a person as ‘charismatic’ with specific roles and functions in the Church. The expression ‘Charismatic Renewal’ (*Renouveau charismatique*), considered a misnomer by Yves Congar, contributes to the deflection of the meaning and application of the term.²

The term charism is nowadays clarified from the pneumatological perspective but the ecclesiological values that are affixed to it need to be affirmed in the present context of the growing values of personalism and rising of new movements in the Church. The lack of an adequate ecclesiological concern is revealed by a recent observation by Stephen Annan: “It seems as if the term ‘catholic church’ and ‘charismatic’ are mutually exclusive”.³ This is partly because of the false opposition between charism and institution constructed in the past. The present context of overthrowing a pyramidal

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- 1 Léon Suenens, “The Charismatic Dimension of the Church,” in *Council Speeches of Vatican II*, eds., Yves Congar, Hans Küng and Daniel O’hanlon (London: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 18. [Hereafter cited as “Charismatic Dimension”].
 - 2 See chapter 3 section 3.4.
 - 3 Stephen Ebo Annan, “‘Do not Stifle the Spirit’: The Vision of Yves Congar for Charismatic Ecclesiology,” *New Blackfriars* 95, no. 1058 (2013): 446. [Hereafter cited as “Do not Stifle”].

view of the Church through the images of the Church rediscovered by the II Vatican Council and the increasing values of personalism in the society and the Church, necessitate our research so that charisms are explained within the web of pneumatology, christology and ecclesiology to offer a rich and unique view of a person in the Church. Moreover, since Congar makes a significant contribution to the theology of the laity by attending to their charisms and expresses the need for ‘a total ecclesiology’ (*une ecclésiologie totale*), his theology can shed light on addressing the present needs of the Church, without neglecting the values of their vocation.⁴

Congar’s long years of ecclesiological reflection, which towards the end travelled through pneumatology, render us with a field of research to adequately respond to the present theological need. He achieved his objective of remedying the insufficiency of pneumatology in Roman Catholic ecclesiology; and argued for equilibrium between christology and pneumatology. In his theology, since the Spirit is the co-institutor (*co-instituant*) of the Church, charisms receive a sure ecclesiological presentation without losing their vitality to renew and re-evangelize the Church. This is further affirmed by *EG*, the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis I. It considers charisms as gifts of the Spirit woven into the body of the Church and gravitating towards Christ, the center of the Church; and then used as an evangelizing force.⁵ Therefore, we select Congar’s theological works in a search for a charismatic ecclesiology, which has the foundation of christological principles.

0.2 Methodology of the Research

The method followed in this dissertation is a composite one; it is analytical, expository and critical. To adequately understand Congar, we first describe his life, the influential factors therein, his important works and the other authors who critically analyze him. A lexical and scriptural semantic consideration of the term *charisma* is included in the second chapter, which

4 Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman press, 1965), xvi; Yves Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1953), 13. [Hereafter cited as *Lay People* and *Jalons pour* respectively].

5 Pope Francis I, *EG* 130, in *AAS* (105): 1074.

helps us to compliment and complete Congar's theological exposition of the concept. Congar analyses the concept of charism mainly in his three volumes *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint*, *La Parole et le Souffle* and *Jalons pour une Théologie du Laïcat* and his articles *Actualité renouvelée du Saint-Esprit* and *Actualité d'une pneumatologie*. The references to these works are given from the original along with the translations. Where the translation requires further clarity, the quotation from the original is given in the footnote. The important theological concepts that Congar uses are entered into the text of the dissertation in parenthesis in their original French terminology when they appear for the first time. The use of inverted comma for quotations differs according to the language.

0.3 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation comprises four chapters. The first chapter fulfills the task of leading us to the research area and is by nature expository. The first section introduces the life of Congar by dividing it into four periods to understand the background of his faith-life and the circumstances of his theological endeavor. Then we deal with the chief influencing factors in his theological formation *viz.* his growth in the Thomistic tradition and his way to a historical approach towards theology through Marie-Dominique Chenu who introduced him to Johann Adam Möhler's ecclesiological views, which would find a significant place in his ecclesiology. The next section exposes Congar's selected works in order to grasp his major theological themes and how they progressively developed and undergo change. In the following part, we take up a literary review of the scholars on Congar, whose themes are related to our research. With this background, in section four we construct a theological frame work within which we study Congar's concept of charism. It includes his theological methodology and his basic notions of the Church. We then enter the proximate field of our research *viz.* Congar's pneumatological ecclesiology. This is followed by a treatment of the essential unity between christology and pneumatology to which Congar strongly adhered as he moved towards the final development of his theology.

The second chapter treats of the history and the theology of charism, since Congar does not sufficiently cover these areas; and it gives us an

opportunity to consult other experts on the scriptural, theological and historical aspects of charism. The first section brings out the lexical meaning of the term; and then it considers its semantic sense by going through its occurrences in the Scripture. In the course of history the conception of the term undergoes fluctuations in its importance and its usage. We present them in the second section on historical aspects under the subdivisions of Apostolic Fathers, Greek Christian Fathers and Latin Christian Fathers. Towards the end of this section, we also mention the heresies of Montanism and Messalianism. We then explain that the term charism receives a new name with Thomas Aquinas. The last part of the second section explains how the II Vatican Council approaches the concept giving a renewed consideration to its ecclesiological values. The third and final section of this chapter exposes the theological characteristics of charisms.

Having set the stage through the first two chapters, our third chapter analyzes Congar's concept of charism. The first section explains that the Corinthian situation that Paul describes in his epistle is significant for Congar to understand charisms. Then we explain the three ways in which Congar understands (*comprehensions ou extensions*) the term; and this is followed by an elaboration of charisms as ecclesial principles, and their christological basis. The second section deals with Congar's historical understanding of charisms and their liturgical importance. The third part discusses how Congar critiques the view of Hasenöhrtl defending the conciliar view of charisms and his suggestions to balance Hasenöhrtl's position. The fourth section explains Congar's approach towards Renewal Movement and ecumenism. Those charisms which Congar in detail explains in his works such as prophecy, glossolalia and healings are presented in the fifth section. The sixth and seventh sections deal with charism's relationship with talent and institution respectively and the final section of the chapter considers the freedom of the Spirit in the institutional Church.

The fourth chapter fulfills the objective of our study. The first section elucidates that Congar constructs his theology of charism upon his Trinitarian view of the Church. In the subsection, the conception of Christ and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father, by which Congar harmonizes the institutional and the charismatic aspects of the Church are treated. This further leads us to explain charism in its proximate research field of

pneumatological ecclesiology. The sections from two to nine display the role and function of charism in the pneumatological ecclesiology of Congar.

0.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This dissertation has a limitation in maintaining terminological precision. The term χάρισμα (plural χαρίσματα), and its transliteration in singular and plural appear in our lexical and scriptural analysis and the study of the Greek Fathers. Since in dogmatic theology the term charism is also expressed as ‘gift of the Spirit’ and the theologians do not maintain terminological precision, we use them variably. The historical development and controversies regarding the term charism fall outside the scope of this study. They receive consideration only in so far as they are helpful to achieving our purpose or as part of Congar’s elaborations.