

Spring 2005

Review: 'Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit'

Dennis M. (Dennis Michael) Doyle
University of Dayton, ddoyle1@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel_fac_pub



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

eCommons Citation

Doyle, Dennis M. (Dennis Michael), "Review: 'Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit'" (2005). *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. Paper 1.
http://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel_fac_pub/1

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Religious Studies at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit. By Elizabeth Teresa Groppe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. ix + 262 pages. \$55.00.

Congar's contributions to Catholic theology are immense, although many of his writings were occasional and lacked an overall systematic plan. As he grounded Catholic thought in historical context, his own thinking shifted. In recent years, a few noteworthy studies have appeared that trace Congar's development on particular issues and then draw out the overall coherence and significance of his work. These include works by Joseph Famerée (in French), Cornelius Th. M. Van Vliet (German), Raimundo Pellitero (Spanish), and Gabriel Flynn (English). Groppe's well-focused study of the role that Congar's treatment of the Holy Spirit played within the overall context of his theology is a welcome and worthy member of this small but growing assemblage.

Groppe draws frequently upon Van Vliet's historical categories and judgments for laying out the progress of Congar's work. One of her own contributions lies in the systematic depth and in the penetrating insights yielded by her painstaking focus on Congar's integration of spirituality and theology. The third and fourth of the five chapters present the heart of her analysis of how Congar came to blend a pneumatological anthropology and a pneumatological ecclesiology ever more integrally and smoothly. She examines the deepening of this integration as Congar's main focus shifts from conceiving of the Church as the Body of Christ, to the People of God, and finally to the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The pneumatic element grows throughout these developments and proves most advantageous for recontextualizing contemporary questions by overcoming modern dichotomies between individual faith and organized community.

Chapter One places the entire study within the context of Congar's overall life and work. Chapter Two places Congar's synthesis within the context of his approach to trinitarian theology. The final chapter examines the contemporary relevance of Congar's contribution for three specific questions: to what extent can the Church be ordered as a democracy? In what way is the Church both a spiritual communion and a human organization? And how can one speak of the role of the Holy Spirit in ways that respect both the oneness of God and the Spirit's distinct personhood? For each question, Groppe argues that Congar's work lends itself to a mediating vision that addresses concerns on various sides of the contemporary theological divides.

An interesting comparison could be drawn between Groppe's work, which posits a fairly continuous trajectory in Congar's development, and that of Pellitero, who identifies two distinct postconciliar phases, one entailing a reworking of earlier positions, and a second characterized by simplification and a return to the core of his earlier thought.

The book is a revision of Groppe's doctoral dissertation done at The University of Notre Dame, with all of the advantages of such a study and few if any of the drawbacks. Though not for the non-specialist, it is so well-written as to be available to many. Its bibliography and notes give access to a wealth of

materials unavailable in English. It is suitable secondary reading for upper-level religious studies majors and graduate students. I could envision using this text in conjunction with some primary source selections by Congar as one segment of an ecclesiology course. It belongs in all libraries with a serious focus on Catholic theology.

University of Dayton

DENNIS M. DOYLE

In the Beginning . . . Creativity. By Gordon D. Kaufman. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004. xv + 152 pages. \$19.00 (paper).

For the past thirty years, Gordon Kaufman has been struggling with the effort to formulate an intellectually coherent and viable understanding of the Christian God that still might remain convincing for postmodern Western culture. Starting this journey from the verdant pastures of a Barthian theological legacy, he was drawn into the desert of the utter incomprehensibility of God. This encounter with the mystery of God led him to envision the task of the theologian as an imaginative construction whose aim is to create a conceptualization of God appropriate for today. Given the understanding of the cosmos derived from modern science and the place of humans within it, Kaufman has proposed that we conceive of God as "serendipitous creativity." This work is a refinement of his proposal, and it includes some helpful background information for situating his effort.

One important feature for understanding Kaufman's work is the recognition that he is attempting to explore the way in which the concept "God" has functioned, and might continue to do so, in Western culture. One of his conclusions is that the concept of God understood as a personal being existing "beyond" the universe in some sense is no longer intellectually meaningful. He recognizes, of course, that this is a basic premise of the biblical image of God, but he contends that the more important features of this image are those that limit it, thereby pointing toward the incomprehensibility of God. This appreciation of negative theology alerts us to the inadequacy of all human language about God. Since the religious and cultural traditions of the West expressed the concept of God in terms of its dynamic relationship with humanity, Kaufman attempts to explore a way in which this symbolic polarity might be captured. For this he turns to contemporary scientific conceptualizations of the cosmos, particularly the place of humanity in the evolutionary process. It is in this context that he suggests the formulation of serendipitous creativity as an appropriate expression for what we mean by God.

Kaufman is careful to emphasize that this conceptualization must not be understood as some sort of "force" operative in the universe. This would be another form of reductive anthropomorphism that fails to acknowledge the distinction between creativity (God) and the created order. When he tries to express more clearly what he does mean by this concept, Kaufman has recourse to three distinctive features of creativity: (1) the initial coming to be of the universe, (2) ongoing trajectories of complex novel realities, and (3) human