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## Reform and Periphery of the Holy People of God: from Yves Congar to Pope Francis

Reforma i peryferie Świętego Ludu Bożego.  
Od Yves'a Congara do papieża Franciszka

**ABSTRACT:** Key to Pope Francis's reading of the Church is undoubtedly the missionary option, which entails questions about reform and about the place and importance of the periphery in the life and self-understanding of God's people. When for the roots of Francis's perspective, we find its Congarian references. While their different starting points at the question about possible reform in the Church mean that Pope Francis and Congar present both poles of the Church – the periphery and the centre – in different contexts, comparing both authors is valuable when attempting to answer the question about the place and the role of mission-mindedness as part of the Church's essence.

**KEYWORDS:** Pope Francis, Yves Congar, missionary option, reform, periphery, centre

**ABSTRAKT:** Kluczowa dla Franciszkowego odczytywania Kościoła jest bez wątpienia opcja misyjna, która pociąga za sobą pytanie o reformę oraz o miejsce i znaczenie peryferii w życiu i samorozumieniu się Ludu Bożego. Poszukując korzeni Franciszkowego spojrzenia, odnajdujemy jego Congarowe odniesienia. Chociaż odmienny punkt wyjścia pytania o możliwą reformę w Kościele sprawia, że oba „bieguny” Kościoła: peryferie-centrum są przedstawiane przez nich w innym kontekście, to jednak ich porównanie okazuje się cenne w poszukiwaniu odpowiedzi na pytanie o miejsce i rolę misyjności przynależącej do istoty Kościoła.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Papież Franciszek, Yves Congar, opcja misyjna, reforma, peryferie, centrum

**A**nalysing Pope Francis's documents, speeches and gestures, we can advance a thesis that the postulate of the missionary option becomes crucial for understanding his pontificate. In the program document of the Exhortation

*Evangelii gaudium* we read: “I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (EG 27).<sup>1</sup> This demand is accompanied by the question of reform in the Church and of the place and importance of the periphery.<sup>2</sup> The first to ask the question about the place and importance of the periphery in the perspective of the ongoing reform in the Church was Father Yves Congar.<sup>3</sup> Is this just a coincidence? Neither in a 2010 interview, known to the Polish reader as *Jezuita. Papież Franciszek* (Jesuit. Pope Francis),<sup>4</sup> nor in the interview conducted by Fr. Antonio

<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, English text available at: <http://w2.vatican.va>, documents [access: 1.05.2020].

<sup>2</sup> The Pope chose the outskirts of the city as the place of the first meeting during his pilgrimage to Milan and the reason he offered for it was: “I know that the Madonna at the top of the Cathedral welcomes me to Milan; but thanks to your gift, Our Lady already welcomes me here, at the entrance. And this is important, because it reminds me of Mary’s care, as she hastened to meet Elizabeth. It is the care, the solicitude of the Church, which does not remain at the centre, waiting, but goes to meet everyone, in the peripheries; she also goes to meet non-Christians, also non-believers; and she leads everyone to Jesus, who is God’s love made flesh, who gives meaning to our life and saves it from evil.” Greeting of the Holy Father to residents of the Forlanini Quarter, 25.03.2017, *The Holly See – Vatican*, <http://w2.vatican.va>, documents [access: 1.05.2020]. At the meeting with the consecrated persons, he added: “I would not dare say to you to which existential peripheries you must address your mission, because normally the Spirit inspired charisms for the peripheries, to go to places and corners that are usually abandoned. I don’t believe that the Pope can tell you: concern yourselves with this or that. What the Pope must tell you is this: there are few of you, but the few of you there are, go to the peripheries, go to the boundaries and encounter the Lord there, to renew the mission of origins, to the Galilee of the first encounter, return to the Galilee of the first encounter! (...) Choose the peripheries, reawaken processes, ignite the spent and weakened hope of a society that has become insensible to the pain of others. In our fragility as congregations we can make ourselves more attentive to the many forms of frailty that surround us, and transform them into a space of blessing. It will be the moment that the Lord will tell you, ‘Stop, there is a ram here. Do not sacrifice your only son.’ Go and take the ‘anointment’ of Christ, go forth. I am not sending you away! I merely say, go forth and bear the mission of Christ, your charism,” Meetings with priests and consecrated persons in the Cathedral of Milan, 25.03.2017, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/03/25/170325c.html> [access: 1.05.2020].

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Y. Congar, *Prawdziwa i fałszywa reforma w Kościele*, transl. A. Ziernicki, Krakow 2001. This is a translation of the second, revised edition, which appeared in 1968. The first was published in 1950; cf. Y. Congar, *True and false Reform in the Church*, transl. P. Philibert, Collegeville, 2011 (both Polish and English translations will be consulted).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. Ambrogetti, S. Rubin, *Jezuita. Papież Franciszek. Wywiad rzeka z Jorge Bergoglio*, transl. A. Fijałkowska-Żydok, Krakow 2013.

Spadaro's<sup>5</sup> after Jorge Mario Bergoglio's election to the Holy See, does he mention the name of the French Dominican. Instead, we find other European inspirations of the Argentinean Pope, such as that of R. Guardini about whose theology Jorge Bergoglio wanted to write his doctoral thesis,<sup>6</sup> or that of H. de Lubac, his reflection on the danger of spiritual worldliness contained in his *Méditation sur l'Église (The Splendor of the Church)*.<sup>7</sup>

However, when we reach for A. Ivereight's *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, we come across an interesting trail. In *Note on Sources* we find *Bergoglio's bookshelf: a selection*, where the book by Father Congar comes first: the *True and False Reform in the Church*.<sup>8</sup> At the very beginning, the author, a former deputy editor-in-chief of "The Tablet," puts forward a thesis that the pontificate of Pope Francis should be read in the light of this fundamental position in the work of the French Dominican:

[This is a book] of a church leader who from an early age felt called to be a reformer, and was given the authority to do so. This is a story not just of the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Spadaro, Interview with Pope Francis; English text available at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html) [access: 1.05.2020].

<sup>6</sup> The starting point for working on R. Guardini was to solve the dilemma of choosing "between heteronomy (placing authority [...] in another human being or institution) and autonomy (placing authority in oneself)" towards theonomy – man in relationships: "I-thou" becomes "a whole person." J. Bergoglio wanted to relate R. Guardini to J.A. Möhler, showing the meeting of "contrasting points" as creative, as long as they do not become contradictions "when they fall out of the unity of the whole," cf. A. Ivereight, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, New York 2014, p. 198; A. Ivereight, *Prorok. Biografia Franciszka, papieża radykalnego*, transl. M. Masny, Bytom 2015, pp. 238–239, 439.

<sup>7</sup> "(...) the greatest danger we are to the Church, the most subversive temptation, the one that is ever and insidiously reborn when all the rest are overcome, (...) is what Abbot Vonier called the temptation to 'worldliness of the mind (...) the practical relinquishing of other-worldliness, so that moral and even spiritual standards should be based, not on the glory of the Lord, but on what is the profit of man; an entirely anthropocentric outlook would be exactly what we mean by worldliness. Even if men were filled with every spiritual perfection, but if such perfections were not referred to God (suppose this hypothesis to be possible) it would be unredeemed worldliness.' If this spiritual worldliness were to invade the Church and set to work to corrupt her by attacking her very principle, it would be something infinitely more disastrous than any worldliness of the purely moral order," cf. H. de Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, New York 1956; idem, *Medytacje o Kościele*, transl. I. Białkowska-Cichoń, Krakow 1997, p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> A. Ivereight, *Prorok*, op. cit., p. 492. It should be added that in the Polish version Fr. Congar is not included in the index of persons, even though he is repeatedly quoted in the text, always in the context of the reform: pp. 14, 120, 150, 175, 239, 302, 436, 440, 492.

man but his three reforms: of the Argentine Jesuit province, of the Argentine Church, and now of the universal Church. His lodestars have been two French theologians, Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac, who taught him how to unite God's People by a radical reform that will lead them to holiness. If the reader comes to see that thread and understand this papacy better as a result, the book's purpose will have been accomplished.<sup>9</sup>

In this article we want to investigate how Father Congar and Pope Francis view the reform and then analyse what is the role and place of the periphery in this process. Ultimately, this raises the question about the key to their interpretation of the mystery of the Church. This article is therefore an attempt to show one of the possible ecclesiological inspirations of Pope Francis, outlining the horizon of his pastoral commitment.<sup>10</sup>

## Congar's sources of the question about the reform in the Church

Father Congar's diaries from the period before the Second Vatican Council was convened, translated not so long ago, in the Polish version bear the title *Teolog na wygnaniu* (The Theologian in Exile), although the original version has a less attractive title of *Journal d'un théologien*.<sup>11</sup> This may seem like a marketing strategy, and probably it is, but it reveals a deep intuition. If we ask ourselves which path of the Dominican of Saulchoir was the corner stone of his theology, it was the experience of exile. We do not mean the 1950s, when Y. Congar experienced his theological and ecclesiological exile from Jerusalem, Rome, Cambridge, until finally through Strasbourg, he could return as a theologian in the service of God's people, but a fundamental experience that would shape his ecclesiological perspective once and for all. We therefore have in mind not so much the experience of the theologian's exile as his experience of the Church in exile, which can be presented on three levels: social, theological and ecumenical.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 14; idem, *The Great Reformer*, p. XV.

<sup>10</sup> M. Faggioli wrote: "The notion of 'periphery' in relations to the mission of the church has become one of the key ideas by which to understand the pontificate of Pope Francis," *Vatican II and the Church of the Margins*, "Theological Studies" 74 (2013), p. 817.

<sup>11</sup> Y. Congar, *Teolog na wygnaniu*. *Dziennik 1952–1956*, transl. M. Romanek, Poznań 2008; original version: idem, *Journal d'un théologien. 1946–1956*, Édité et présenté par Étienne Fouilloux, Paris 2001; English version: idem, *Journal of a Theologian (1946–1956)*, transl. D. Minns, Adelaide 2015.

Editing in 1935 the summary of a three-year survey on the current causes of disbelief, Fr. Congar, who only began his theological vocation, noted that the Christian world was no longer the only one imaginable, since a new, secular world had emerged which understood itself as total and self-sufficient, being an explanation for itself. In this way, the believer was torn between his allegiance to the new secular community and to the community of faith. As a result, faith became separated from all areas of human activity and shown as something private, something outside, cut off from life.<sup>12</sup> The then young Dominican observed that the Church's reaction to this situation was an ever greater concentration on herself: "The Church closes herself up and concentrates on herself, creating her own purely conservative world, where she has a task of keeping a deposit and where people, separated from the life that progresses, repeat their own problems in their own language..."<sup>13</sup>

This is how we reach the second dimension of exile, which Fr. Congar finds in the very theology marked by the weight of the polemical legacy. At the end of the same 1935, he announced a new series of *Unam Sanctam* publications and so justified its launching:

I decided to create a publishing series that will serve to renew ecclesiology. *Unam Sanctam* aims at helping us to learn more deeply about the nature or – if you will – the mystery of the Church; we are going to publish historical works, studies on the liturgy and mission, and those dedicated to separate Christians and the question of reunification in so far as they contribute to a deeper and richer knowledge of the Church in her inner nature and the mystery of her life. And since theology, according to its own law, lives only through intimate and organic contact with its data, an important part of our efforts will be to study the sources from which we can draw an authentic knowledge of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> For more, cf. M. Jagielski, *O aktualnych przyczynach niewiary i o wymaganiach, jakie stawia nam bycie Kościołem w świecie; w świecie, który Kościołem nie jest*, [in:] *Wychowanie to dzieło Miłości. Ogólnopolskie Nauczycielskie warsztaty w Drodze. Zielona Góra – Jasna Góra 31 lipca–13 sierpnia 2009 r.*, Zielona Góra 2009, pp. 92–102.

<sup>13</sup> Y. Congar, *Une Conclusion théologique à l'Enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance*, "Vie Intellectuelle" 37 (1935), p. 241. If not indicated otherwise, translations into English are by WTR.

<sup>14</sup> Y. Congar, *Appel et cheminement 1929–1963*, [in:] idem, *Chrétiens en dialogue. Contributions catholiques à l'Œcuménisme*, Paris 1964, p. 34, note 1; cf. S.C. Napiórkowski, *Unam Sanctam*, [in:] *Yves Congar 1904–1995*, S.C. Napiórkowski, A. Czaja, K. Pek (eds.), pp. 61–75.

Here we find Congar's fundamental postulate known as *ressourcement* – rediscovering the sources. Theology, coming back to its sources, will return from the expulsion of ready-made conclusions, which he described as “baroque theology.”<sup>15</sup>

The third dimension of exile is found in Congar's vocation to commit himself to Christian unity. In his book *After Nine Hundred Years*, referring to the event of the division of Christianity in 1054, he wrote:

The aim of these pages is to suggest to theologians a few elements of an interpretation of the historical reality of the “Oriental schism.” Briefly, the “schism” appears to us as the acceptance of a situation by which each part of Christendom lives, behaves and judges without taking notice one of the other. We may call it geographical remoteness, provincialism, lack of contact, a “state of reciprocal ignorance,” alienation, or by the German word “Entfremdung.” The English word “estrangement” expresses all this quite admirably.<sup>16</sup>

Looking for a common denominator for these three planes of the Church's exile, which shape Fr. Congar's sensitivity and the way he asks questions, we can say that it is the lack of presence, the lack of meeting, which leads to closing in on oneself and running away into impoverished self-sufficiency. It seems that without taking this experience into account, we will not understand the importance of the postulate of reform, which is a bridge between both ecclesiological perspectives.

### Jorge Bergoglio's starting point in the question of the reform of the Church

When in 1971 Fr. Bergoglio became novice master and in 1973 Jesuit provincial, replacing Fr. O'Farrell, he with the group of Fr. M.A. Fiorito, Dean of Philosophy and pioneer of Jesuit spiritual renewal in the Argentinean Province, postulates a return to the sources of the authentic Jesuit charism; a return to the original method of carrying out exercises as individual retreats in which the novices could become aware of the inner spiritual movements during their

<sup>15</sup> In Fr. Congar's archives we can find a briefcase from the period between World War I and World War II with an inscription “liquidation of Baroque theology.”

<sup>16</sup> Y. Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years*, New York 1959, p. 5. Cf. original version: idem, *Neuf cents ans apres. Notes sur le „Schisme oriental,”* Chevetogne 1954, pp. 7–8.

intense apostolate among the poor.<sup>17</sup> This discernment was to become the key to renewal and reform. It was related to the question of the Order's presence among the people, with the theology of liberation emerging in Latin America as a point of reference. As a cardinal, in an interview with F. Ambrogetti and S. Rubin, J. Bergoglio said:

If a local church limits itself to managing the various tasks of the parish and lives closed in its community, the same thing happens to it as to a closed person: it succumbs to physical and mental atrophy or begins to decay like a locked room where mould and moisture spreads. The same thing happens to the self-centred Church as to the self-centred man: she is affected by a kind of paranoia, autism. It is true that when a man goes out on the street, he may have an accident. But I prefer the Church damaged by an accident a hundred times more than the Church suffers from an illness. In other words, I think that a Church that limits herself to administrative matters, to the maintenance of her small flock, is a Church that becomes sick after a while. The shepherd who closes up is not a real shepherd; she is a kind of hairdresser: she makes beautiful curls in the sheep's hair instead of looking for others.<sup>18</sup>

Although the context of the two paths is different, a fundamental intuition based on the experience of not meeting and the call to presence, and therefore the postulated reform in the Church, deeply links the French Dominican and the Argentinean Jesuit. Asking about the reform, Fr. Congar's first juxtaposed the periphery with the centre, which would be so important for Francis' description of the mission option.

### Yves Congar: periphery and centre in the context of "hierarchology"

In 1935, Y. Congar postulated the need to respond to what he described as the "deficit of the incarnation" – the absence of faith in the many spaces of human life and, consequently, the need to penetrate all its elements with the Gospel.<sup>19</sup> Then the spirituality of Catholic Action, referring to the mystery of the Incarnation, becomes a response. All members of the Mystical Body of Christ

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Ivereight, *Prorok*, op. cit., pp. 119 and 131.

<sup>18</sup> F. Ambrogetti, S. Rubin, *Jezuita. Papież Franciszek*, op. cit., pp. 86–87.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Y. Congar, *Une Conclusion théologique*, op. cit., pp. 241–242.

continue in their places of work and life the mystery of the Incarnation. Written in the second half of the 1940s, *True and False Reform in the Church*, available in Francis' library, is a continuation of this search. This pioneering sketch is the fruit of both Congar's experience of the interwar period and his encounter with the "other" world during his four years in a POW camp, and an analysis of the dynamic renewal of the French Church in the second half of the 1940s. The Dominican of Saulchoir is aware, although the word itself raises general objections, that "The Church has always tried to reform itself"<sup>20</sup> and he adds, referring to his first ecumenical sketches that: "The Church has always tried to reform itself; she lives only because she is reforming, and the intensity of her reforming effort is at a given moment a measure of the effectiveness of her vital strength."<sup>21</sup> The objections to the presence of reforms in the Church stems from the fact that some of them have led to its renewal while others to divisions that still exist. As a positive conclusion Congar presents four conditions for a possible reform without a schism. These are: the primacy of charity and of the pastoral factor; remaining in communion with the whole; patience and allowance for the time of ripening; and finally, true renewal is achieved by returning to the principle of tradition rather than by some mechanical adaptation.<sup>22</sup>

It is in discussing the second of the conditions for genuine reform that the French Dominican introduces a reflection on what he describes as the periphery. This is an important clue for us because when writing about the periphery, Congar sees it in the perspective of an ongoing reform. Starting from the thoughts of his 19<sup>th</sup> century inspirer J.A. Möhler, he emphasizes that the conditions for the Holy Spirit to act are by nature communal. It is about a certain way of life:

the feeling of not being alone, of being part of one single body, leading one single life, pursuing one single enterprise with all other Catholics. It means not considering yourself to be the "whole," not acting or thinking as if your own issues are self-sufficient.<sup>23</sup>

This is the postulate he finds in Cajetan's writings. Congar uses the concept of periphery in the context of the relationship between the reformer and the whole community.

<sup>20</sup> Idem, *True and False Reform in the Church*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Idem, *Chrétiens désunis. Principes d'un „Ecuménisme” catholique*, Paris 1937, p. 339.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. idem, *Prawdziwa i fałszywa reforma w Kościele*, op. cit., p. 239–357, cf. idem, *True and False Reform in the Church*, pp. 296–305.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, *True and False Reform in the Church*, p. 235.

Remaining with the topic at hand, I will consider only the most characteristic aspect of the relation between the initiative of a reformer and the hierarchy, when the reformer desires to remain in communion with the whole. A fitting title for this paragraph might be *The Periphery and the Center* or somewhat less poetically, as we will see, *Structure and life*.<sup>24</sup>

Here manifests itself in a representative way Congar's method to transcend the then commonly accepted model used during the pre-Conciliar period, which in the reflection on the reform proved insufficient. To the constitutive element for the ecclesiology of *societas perfecta* Congar adds the one that results from the analysis of the Church's life, which is becoming an important *locus theologicus* in his eyes. In this methodological key we must read both the formula "structure and life" and the already reversed formula "periphery and centre." It is not the question of the role of the centre that is new in ecclesiological reflection, but the question of the role and importance of the periphery in the formation and building of the Church through a constant reform. It can be said that in this way Congar, by accepting the accepted ecclesiological heritage, shows its inadequacy and even the danger of its one-sidedness. The dialectic "and" becomes the key to propose a new solution: besides the ecclesiology of structure (hierarchology) there is the need for an ecclesiology of "life" within the search for ecclesiological realism.<sup>25</sup> The difficulty, as he himself later pointed out, could consist precisely in this "besides" suggesting the existence of both elements as if "independently" of each other.<sup>26</sup> However, the introduction of the "periphery" allows for a different view of the centre, which in itself does not exhaust the reflection on the mystery of the Church. Precisely because throughout the Church initiatives start at the periphery, at its margins or, as he put it differently: from below rather than above.<sup>27</sup>

This broadening of the ecclesiological perspective allows the French Dominican to read both peripheral and central poles in the light of the question of a genuine reform in the Church. This "centre" – the other pole of this binominal – identified with the hierarchy, is endowed with a charisma that ensures apostolicity. It has the task of preserving the essential structure of the Church.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 237.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. M. Jagielski, *L'Église dans le temps. Yves Congar: La quête d'un réalisme ecclésiologique*, Paris 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Y. Congar, *My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries*, "Jurist" 32 (1972), pp. 169–188. Polish version: Y. Congar, *Moja droga w teologii laikatu i posługiwań*, [in:] *Chrześcijańska odpowiedź na pytania człowieka*, J. Badeni (ed.), Poznań 1974, pp. 223–242.

<sup>27</sup> Idem, *Prawdziwa i fałszywa reforma w Kościele*, op. cit., p. 284.

The centre is therefore the guardian of the structure, of continuity with the apostolic sources and of communion in space. However, reforms undertaken only from above, without the wider participation of grassroots, peripheral and popular factors, are ineffective.<sup>28</sup> What is necessary, therefore, is to combine ecclesial reform with the synodal principle. Only this combination can allow the peripheral reform to build unity. If the majority of initiatives come from the periphery and if the reforms can only come about if they are based on broad apostolic currents, then both can implement a reform in the Church without causing disunity; i.e. only if they are accepted by the Church, if they are incorporated into her unity. This is done in practice by the recognition and approval of the central authorities, by the blessing which the apostolicity grants to prophetism. It is the centre that gives the initiative from the periphery recognition and confirmation of unity.<sup>29</sup>

The novelty that we find in *True and False Reform in the Church* is the abandonment of an apologetic interpretation of the reform and a theological analysis of the place and role of the periphery in the process of reform in the Church. One and the same Spirit animates the Church and guides her in her centre and her periphery, among her superiors and in her whole body. The Spirit of Christ enlivens the whole Church and each part of her according to what she is and according to the role she is to play in the whole, so that the whole may live and grow in unity.<sup>30</sup> Tension persists, however. How, then, can unity be maintained? Through obedience to the Spirit in the relationship between the two poles which are equally necessary. Obedience “only achieves its whole truth when it embraces the two poles and fills the space between them. These poles are the peripheral initiative and the blessing of the centre.”<sup>31</sup> For Congar, as P. Philibert notes, neither the centre nor the periphery can be themselves if they are far apart.<sup>32</sup>

We see, therefore, that the periphery becomes a topic of theological reflection when the life of the Church becomes a fully-fledged *locus theologicus* as a result of the action of the Holy Spirit. In the face of the universally accepted theology of the Church as a perfect community, Congar, by introducing the history of the Church to theology, can pose the question about the role of the periphery in a positive way. The periphery is the place where the Holy Spirit inspires initiatives in the Church. It is the place of impetus and the place of

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 286.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, pp. 290–291.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, pp. 293–294.

<sup>31</sup> Idem, *True and False Reform in the Church*, p. 240.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. P. Philibert, *When Not in Rome: Lessons from the peripheries of the church*, “America. The Jesuit Review,” 24 March 2014, <http://bit.ly/2ra1xFf> [access: 18.10.2019].

greatest vitality, perhaps precisely because there are no ready-made solutions and therefore, by being a challenge, the periphery can become a special place of growth. It is therefore seen to some extent as a prophetic place:

They say that history develops at its margins and that's right. The margin is closer to the periphery than the centre. Further, the centre, with its vocation to oversee *structure*, prefers something *defined* to something that is searching and striving for expression. Yet a spiritual organism is more likely to *grow* out of the elements searching and striving for expression.<sup>33</sup>

### Pope Francis: periphery and centre in the context of the missionary option

Analysing the statements of the biographers and commentators of Pope Francis, we do not always find such an unambiguous position regarding the influence of Fr. Congar's reflection on Francis' perspective, as is the case with A. Ivereigh.<sup>34</sup> We note, however, that with the responsibility for the formation of Jesuits at first and then for the entire Argentinean Province, the future Pope begins his commitment to reform. Starting from the revision of the study curriculum, and postulating mingling with the local people in conjunction with the aforementioned deepened Ignatian spirituality, J. Bergoglio begins a reform that is to enable the Jesuits to listen genuinely to the needs of the People of God, without succumbing to the political ideologization associated with the influence of Marxist philosophy or the temptation of the primacy of the elitist Church.<sup>35</sup> In 1974, speaking to the Provincial Congregation about the need for reform, J. Bergoglio pointed out three principles to guide it: unity surpassing disputes, the whole surpassing the part and time surpassing space. In 1980 he added a fourth one: reality surpassing ideas.<sup>36</sup> Discussing these issues as Pope,

<sup>33</sup> Y. Congar, *Prawdziwa i fałszywa reforma w Kościele*, op. cit., p. 286.

<sup>34</sup> For example Hyuntaek Han writes: "It seems that this insight has its foundations from Congar, who also believes that, the place where creative ecclesial initiative occurs is rarely at the centre of the Church but rather at its periphery," [in:] idem, *Some ecclesiological concepts of Pope Francis*, English text available at: Academia, <https://www.academia.edu/> [access: 19.04.2017].

<sup>35</sup> Cf. A. Tornielli, *Franciszek. Biografia papieża*, transl. K. Kozak, Z. Pająk, K. Stopa, Kielce 2013, p. 118.

<sup>36</sup> A. Ivereigh, *Prorok*, op. cit., p. 175. These four principles are quoted in the programmatic exhortation of Pope Francis as the principles "which can guide the development of life

he will say that the first one protects us from the fragmentation of reality, which occurs as a result of the narrowing of the horizon marked by the dispute (EG 226). The second, stressing that the whole is more than a part and more than a simple sum, warns at the same time that the search for the greater good must not lead to uprooting (EG 235). The third principle allows us to work in the long term without being obsessed with immediate results. It is more about starting processes than having space (EG 223). And finally, the fourth, referring to the Incarnation of the Word, warns us against the Gnosticisms that make the Gospel dynamism barren (EG 233).

This reformist commitment is reflected in a new expression with the assumption of the ministry of Bishop of Buenos Aires, which culminates in a document that is the fruit of the CELAM meeting in Aparecida in 2007. When, as Pope at the 2013 meeting with the Bishops of Latin America, Francis refers to what he calls the “fraternal legacy” of Aparecida, stating that “we are lagging somewhat as far as Pastoral Conversion is concerned,” he means a continental mission that is not only programmatic but also paradigmatic. It is a question of placing in the missionary scheme not only the strictly “missionary” dimensions of the Church’s life, but of placing in this scheme the whole “ordinary” activity of particular Churches. It is a call for an authentic pastoral conversion of the whole Latin American Church. Addressing the bishops of this continent, Francis emphasizes that “Pastoral Conversion is chiefly concerned with attitudes and reforming our lives. A change of attitudes is necessarily something ongoing: ‘it is a process,’ and it can only be kept on track with the help of guidance and discernment.” Missionary activities are therefore a call for reform, including a change of structures, but:

The “change of structures” (from obsolete ones to new ones) will not be the result of reviewing an organizational flow chart, which would lead to a static re-organization; rather it will result from the very dynamics of mission. What makes obsolete structures pass away, what leads to a change of heart in Christians, is precisely missionary spirit. Hence the importance of the paradigmatic mission.

If, therefore, the reform is inscribed in the dynamics of the Church, then it is a call to constant listening and discernment within the community of faith, within the People of God: “It is important always to keep in mind that the compass preventing us from going astray is that of Catholic identity, understood

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in society and the building of a people where differences are harmonized within a shared pursuit” (EG 221).

as membership in the Church.”<sup>37</sup> We could expect the “periphery” of the Franciscan *Aparecida* to appear in this listening, but paradoxically we find it only once in point 56 when it describes the situation of the people on the outskirts of the great cities.<sup>38</sup> And yet, without the key paradigm of mission in this document, it is not possible to read the Franciscan periphery because it is the postulate of missionary conversion that makes Congar’s “periphery” interpreted again by Pope Francis.<sup>39</sup>

The Church shown in the programmatic exhortation of Pope Francis is a missionary Church, that is, a Church in constant centrifugal movement. Theologians such as R.R. Gaillardetz<sup>40</sup> and perhaps also Hyuntaek Han<sup>41</sup> speak of the *Centrifugal Church*. A church that is inherently called upon to move away from the centre. If the Church remains in the centre then – says the Pope – it shows a symptom of having adopted world spirituality, the greatest threat and the greatest temptation that the Church faces. At the Congregation of Bishops preceding the conclave J. Bergoglio explained this in his speech, quoted by Cardinal Ortega:

When the Church is self-referential, inadvertently, she believes she has her own light; she ceases to be the *mysterium lunae* [Latin, “mystery of the moon,” i.e., reflecting the light of Christ the way the moon reflects the light of the sun] and gives way to that very serious evil, spiritual worldliness (which according to de Lubac, is the worst evil that can befall the Church). It lives to give glory only to one another. Put simply, there are two images of the Church: Church which evangelizes and comes out of herself, the *Dei Verbum* *religiose audiens et fidente proclamans* [Latin, “Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith”]; and the worldly Church, living within herself, of herself, for herself. This should shed light on the possible changes and reforms which must be done for the salvation of souls.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis’ Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting, 28.07.2013, Rio de Janeiro, English text available at: <http://w2.vatican.va>, documents [access: 1.05.2020].

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Aparecida. V Ogólna Konferencja Episkopatów Ameryki Łacińskiej i Karaibów. Dokument Końcowy. Jesteśmy uczniami i misjonarzami Jezusa Chrystusa, aby nasze narody miały w Nim życie*, transl. K. Zabawa, K. Łukoszczyk, Gubin 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. R.R. Gaillardetz, *The ‘Francis Moment’, a new Kairos for catholic Ecclesiology*, “CTSA Proceedings” 69 (2014), <http://bit.ly/2siWoRf> [access: 18.10.2019], pp. 63–80.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> H. Han, *Some ecclesiological concepts of Pope Francis*, op. cit.

<sup>42</sup> Homily of Cardinal J. Bergoglio during the Congregation of Bishops before the Conclave, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/the-4-minute-speech-that-got-pope-francis-elected> [access: 10.05.202].

Staying in the centre is a form of ecclesial and spiritual narcissism in the Pope's eyes:

When the Church does not come out of herself to evangelize, she becomes self-referential and then gets sick (cf. The deformed woman of the Gospel [Luke 13:10-17]). The evils that, over time, happen in ecclesial institutions have their root in self-referentiality and a kind of theological narcissism.<sup>43</sup>

In the same year, in his capacity of Pope, addressing priests and consecrated persons in Assisi, Francis returns to this perspective of reading the relationship between the Church and her centre:

The Church is an institution, but when she makes herself a "centre," she becomes merely functional, and slowly but surely turns into a kind of NGO. The Church then claims to have a light of her own, and she stops being that "mysterium lunae" of which the Church Fathers spoke.<sup>44</sup>

For Francis, the missionary or "centrifugal" movement is fundamental for the Church. The Church, being missionary, is therefore, by her very nature, constantly moving away from the centre. Only in this way does she remain a Church of disciples and missionaries. When the Church remains in the centre, she loses both her capacity for discipleship and her vocation to be missionary. It is not the centre that is the natural place for disciples, but the periphery:

the position of missionary disciples is not in the centre but at the periphery: they live poised towards the peripheries... including the peripheries of eternity, in the encounter with Jesus Christ. In the preaching of the Gospel, to speak of "existential peripheries" decentralizes things; as a rule, we are afraid to leave the centre. The missionary disciple is someone "off centre:" the centre is Jesus Christ, who calls us and sends us forth. The disciple is sent to the existential peripheries.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> Pope Francis' Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting, op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem. The same perspective can be found in the speech of Pope Francis at the opening of the international catechetical congress on September 28, 2013: "Because when we put Christ at the centre of our life, we ourselves don't become the centre! The more that you unite yourself to Christ and he becomes the centre of your life, the more he leads you out of yourself, leads you from making yourself the centre and opens you to others. This is the

In this way, the periphery is also reread in the mission key. It is not the introduction of the theology of life into the theology of structure; rather, the Church puts her missionary nature – her being sent – in the centre. In this light, the Church is called to a continuous reading of the periphery. The periphery is a personal space which, because of its poverty, becomes a space excluded from the world and when the Church is touched by world spirituality, it is also excluded from the Church. In the already quoted homily before the conclave, J. Bergoglio said:

Evangelizing Implies Apostolic Zeal. Evangelizing pre-supposes a desire in the Church to come out of herself. The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, already as Pope, he defines the periphery at the meeting with consecrated persons in Assisi: “which are places, but which are primarily people living in particular situations in life.”<sup>47</sup> It is the poor, the periphery, who become in the missionary key of the centre as the reality to which we are sent.<sup>48</sup>

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true dynamism of love, this is the movement of God himself! God is the centre, but he is always self-gift, relationship, love that gives itself away (...) and this is what we will become if we remain united to Christ. He will draw us into this dynamism of love. Where there is true life in Christ, there follows an openness to others, and so a going out from oneself to encounter others in the name of Christ,” English text available at: <http://w2.vatican.va>, documents [access: 1.05.2020].

<sup>46</sup> Homily of Cardinal J. Bergoglio during the Congregation of Bishops before the Conclave, op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> And he continues with his testimony: “This was true in my former diocese, that of Buenos Aires. The outskirts which hurt me a great deal was to find children in middle class families who didn’t know how to make the Sign of the Cross. But you see, this is an outskirts! And I ask you, here in this diocese, are there children who do not know how to make the Sign of the Cross? Think about it. These are true outskirts of existence where God is absent. In one sense, the outskirts of this diocese, for example, are the areas of the diocese that risk being left on the margins, beyond the street lights. But they are also people and human realities that are marginalized and despised. They are people who perhaps live physically close to the ‘centre’ but who spiritually are very far away,” Pope Francis’ address at the meeting with the clergy, consecrated people and members of diocesan pastoral councils, Cathedral of San Rufino, Assisi, 4 October 2013, English text available at: <http://w2.vatican.va>, documents [access: 1.05.2020].

<sup>48</sup> Being responsible for the Jesuit formation, J. Bergoglio said: “We have the poor, and because they are poor, they rely on faith, and because they have faith, they are the centre

When we analyse in this key the programmatic document *Evangelii Gaudium*, we can see that the peripheral-centre division is no longer marked by Congar's transgression of "hierarchology," but by the missionary option. The whole Church is called to leave the centre and go to the periphery: "all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel." It is therefore difficult to see the Church in a missionary perspective and to remain in the centre, because going out into the periphery is inscribed in the missionary nature of the Church:

Its joy in communicating Jesus Christ is expressed both by a concern to preach him to areas in greater need and in constantly going forth to the outskirts of its own territory or towards new sociocultural settings.[32] Wherever the need for the light and the life of the Risen Christ is greatest, it will want to be there.[33] To make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful, I encourage each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform (EG 30).<sup>49</sup>

Missionary activities are therefore an essential part of ecclesialism. Hence the negligence in taking up the activities, by remaining at the centre, strikes at the very essence of the Church:

My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an "extra" or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. All around us we begin to see nurses with soul, teachers with soul, politicians with soul, people who

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for us. Their faith, their culture, their way of expressing their faith – this is what we must value," according to Rossi; cf. A. Ivèreight, *Prorok*, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>49</sup> Analysing not only the context of the entire exhortation of Pope Francis, but also the individual passages recalling the two poles of the Church, we can see that *Evangelii Gaudium* links the periphery with a culture of rejection that can be overcome by accompanying people in their periphery (EG 59). The periphery is also a place where the temptation of immediate solutions, which can be overcome precisely through accompaniment, is particularly evident (EG 63). Salvation itself is shown as taking place on the periphery: "Salvation came to us from the 'yes' uttered by a lowly maiden from a small town on the fringes of a great empire" (EG 197).

have chosen deep down to be with others and for others. But once we separate our work from our private lives, everything turns grey and we will always be seeking recognition or asserting our needs. We stop being a people (EG 273).

## The realization of the postulate of the missionary option as a necessary experience for the self-understanding of the Church in today's world

The above analysis was not so much an attempt to describe the influence that Fr. Yves Congar had on the ecclesiological perspective of Pope Francis, but, starting from A. Ivireight's suggestion, to describe how both are trying, when asking about the reform in the Church, to read in its perspective the relationship between the centre and the periphery. We could see that the question about the periphery comes with the question about a possible reform. For Y. Congar, thanks to the theological analysis of the experience of the Church in history, the periphery takes on a positive meaning as the prophetic voice of the Church and the place of action of the Holy Spirit. In this way he inscribed the reflection on the periphery into a broader process of exiting ecclesiology reduced to "hierarchology." For Pope Francis, the periphery is the proper place for the presence of the Church as the People of God, for whom missionary activities belong to her essence, and therefore being at the centre is not so much done for the sake of the Church as for the sake of the Sender, that is, for Christ. This perspective of understanding the periphery is part of the fundamental key of the missionary option for Francis' reading of the Church. In this key, the People of God, being the Church of disciples – i.e., placing Christ at the centre – is called to become the Church of missionaries – i.e. those constantly sent by Christ to the periphery.<sup>50</sup> This missionary dynamic, in the light of which we can read Francis' call to conversion and reform, evokes yet another thought of Fr. Congar which we would like to propose as a summary of the above analysis.

In 1937, Y. Congar wrote article *Vie de l'Église et conscience de la catholicité* (*The Life of the Church and Awareness of Its Catholicity*). Starting from Peter's

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<sup>50</sup> We can therefore repeat after R.R. Gaillardetz that Pope Francis in his gestures and words reads the legacy of the Second Vatican Council in the light of *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church. Ad gentes*, who is seen by some ecclesialogists as the most mature fruit of the Council's thought. Cf. R.R. Gaillardetz, *Francis wishes to release Vatican II's bold vision from captivity*, "National Catholic Reporter," 25.09.2013, <https://bit.ly/2SURRQJ> [access: 3.01.2020].

meeting with Cornelius, Congar notes that the Apostle baptizes Cornelius under the pressure of events of which he becomes a participant. It took the experience of giving the pagan the Holy Spirit to make Peter read the universalism of the Good News. This experience then extends as a hermeneutical paradigm to the whole history of the Church, to her whole life:

Can we say that we really know the Catholicity of the grace of Christ and of the Church until we grasp it in its actuality, in the experience of being included in the unity of values or realities that were or seemed foreign to it at the beginning? (...) Each time by actualising, the Church makes herself clear to herself, she becomes aware of herself.<sup>51</sup>

It is significant that in the introduction to the first edition of 1942, Congar does not devote any in-depth reflection to this article, but ten years later, it is this article that takes up half the *Foreword* to the second edition. The French Dominican notes that something that at first seemed not so important to him is beginning to take on increasing importance in his understanding:

It must be justified that this is due to the very nature of things, that the reality of the Church goes beyond the consciousness we have of her, beyond the expressions with which we define her, even if they are inspired; that there are realities which truly belong to the essence of the Church and which are not found in the texts, or rather which have not previously been seen in them. It is necessary to show that it is not so much the text that explains reality as the reality that explains and allows us to understand the text, and thus the life of the Church to some extent completes our entrance into the revelation of her mystery; that the Church is fully understood only by those who look not at her from within, but ultimately by those who live in her.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Y. Congar, *Vie de l'Église et conscience de la catholicité*, [in:] idem, *Esquisses du mystère de l'Église*, Paris 1953, pp. 122–123.

<sup>52</sup> Idem, *Avertissement*, [in:] *Esquisses du mystère de l'Église*, Paris 1953, p. 8. G. Routhier, a Canadian theologian, also draws attention to this: "Il y a donc un lien étroit entre son expérience historique et la conscience (autocompréhension) qu'elle a acquise d'elle-même. Ce rapport entre la vie de l'Église, son expérience historique, et la théologie qu'elle élabore, qui représente en fait une reprise au plan conceptuel de cette expérience, est développé à quelques reprises par Congar," *Vatican II. Herméneutique et réception*, Montreal 2006, p. 153.

We believe that it is in this context that we should read the Franciscan call for all communities to take up the missionary option so that they can experience being the Church more fully. In the Exhortation of *Evangelii Gaudium*, which has been cited many times here, we read:

God's word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mk 4:26-29). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking (EG 22).

It is the Word that reveals itself in the life of the Church: it reveals its strength and content in preaching. It seems that it is precisely today that we need to experience anew the presence of the periphery; we need to name it in order to experience the power that is Christ, who is constantly at the centre of the Church. It is also the Church on the periphery that becomes readable to a world dominated by a culture of exclusion. The Church is still ahead of us.

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