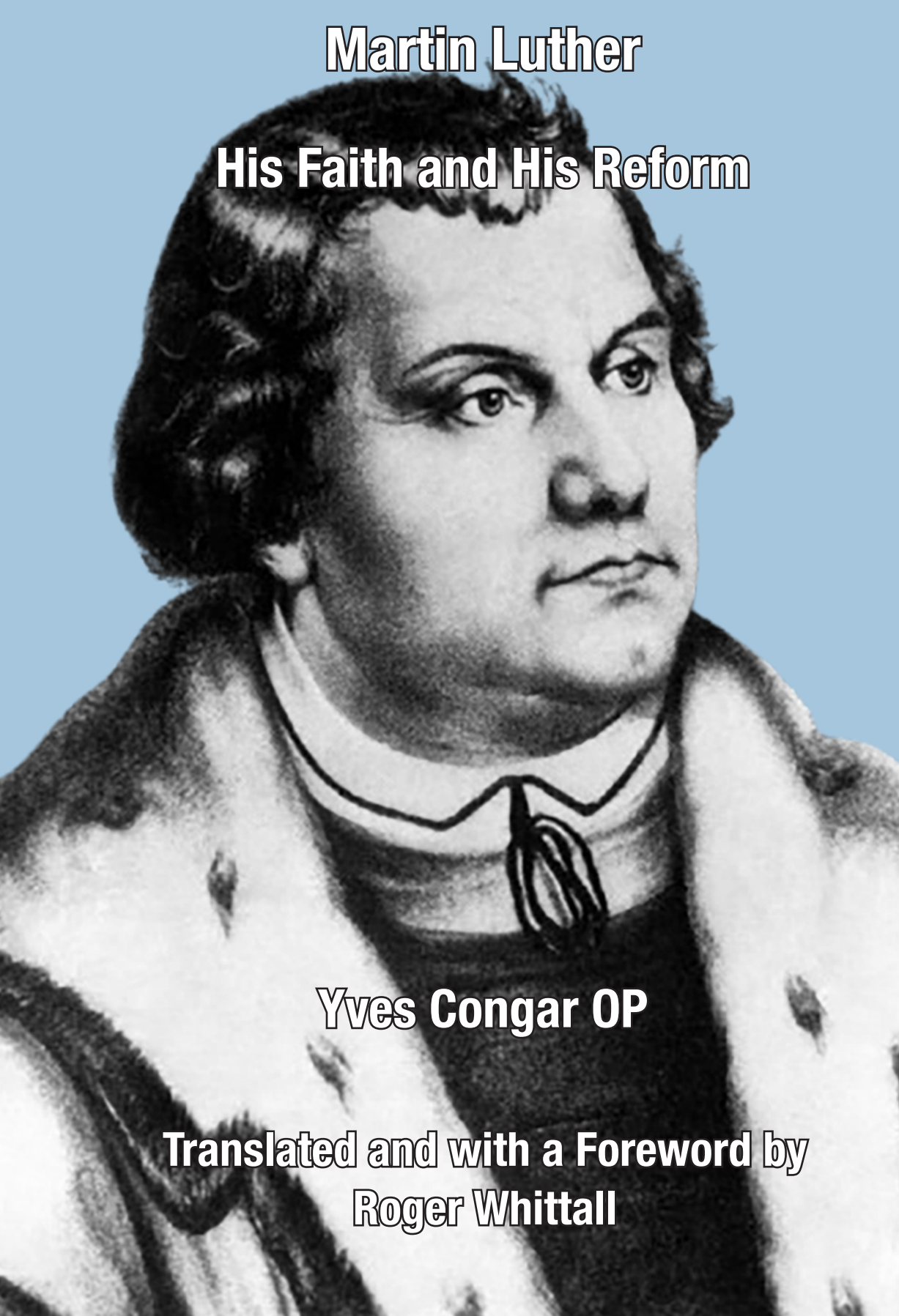
Martin Luther

His Faith and His Reform



Yves Congar OP

Translated and with a Foreword by
Roger Whittall

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Abbreviations

BC	*The Book of Concord*, Robert Kolb & Timothy J Wengert, editors (Philadelphia, 2000).
BK	*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen, 1952).
CR	*Corpus Reformatorum* (Berlin, 1863–1900).
DCT	*Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris, 1903–1950)
DSch	*Enchiridion symbolorum*, Heinrich Denzinger & Adolf Schönmetzer, editors, Editio XXXVI emendata, 1973.
ET	English translation
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus.* Latin JP Migne, editor (Paris, 1844–1890).
Sum. Theol.	Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*.
Vg	*Vulgate*
	MARTIN LUTHER'S WRITINGS
LW	*Luther's Works*, 'American Edition' (St Louis & Philadelphia: Concordia & Fortress Press, 1955–.)
WA	*D Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: Bohlau, 1883–.)
WABr	Briefwechsel (Letters)
WADB	Die Deutsche Bibel
WATr	Tischreden (Table Talk)

Editor's Foreword

In his recent biography of Father Yves Congar, Étienne Fouilloux introduces a comprehensive study of his life through the theme of Congar's 'Four Vocations'.[1] These callings were to the priesthood, to the order of St Dominic, to the study and teaching of ecclesiology, and to the life-long search for ecumenical understanding and the related task of dialogue between Christians. Considered together, these shaped and defined Congar's entire life and work, and stand as the foundations of its enduring substance and achievements. His ecclesiological and ecumenical vocations are especially significant for a consideration of his engagement with the legacy of the German reformer as we have it here in this translation of the collected writings in *Martin Luther, Sa Foi, Sa Réforme*.

Congar published this summary of his research in 1983, as one of the unfinished tasks of a lifetime of study and writing. It draws together his findings on the origins and effects of Luther's theology: his fervent rejection of scholasticism, the medieval sacramental system and the papacy, as well as his heightened awareness of the importance of personal faith that drew Luther into his role as the pre-eminent protestant reformer. He had also made a careful study of Luther's Christology, and his personal struggles, and these are also updated in the additional material in this volume.[2]

On the basis of an extensive reading of his works, Congar saw many positive aspects to Luther's theological enterprise, and admired his spiritual genius. But he also challenged Luther's approach to the

1. Étienne Fouilloux, *Yves Congar : A Life : 1904–1995.* Translated by Patricia Kelly (Adelaide, Australia : ATF Press, 2023).
2. Yves Congar, *Martin Luther. Sa Foi, Sa Réforme. Études de théologie historique* (Paris: Cerf, 1983).

life and teaching of the Church and its reform as representing an 'insufficient' theology based on a too narrow understanding of the sources of Christian faith and practice. Both Congar's admiration and his reservations serve to make this volume a fascinating addition to the wide world of 'Luther Studies'.

Congar's Own Enduring Significance[3]

It is well established that Father Yves Congar, OP (1904–1995), ranks as one of the most important theologians of the mid to late twentieth century. As a key figure in the modern development of Roman Catholic theology, he was an ecclesiologist and advocate for ecumenical engagement with both the protestant and the orthodox Churches. His approach to theological research linked the Scriptures, the established tradition of the Fathers, and the Church's liturgical heritage to contemporary pastoral challenges. His extensive writings, and his active participation in Second Vatican Council had a major influence on the formulations of the Council.[4] Congar's personal experience of war and conflict, his deep commitment to the Roman Catholic Church, and his passion for the ecumenical movement despite the disapproval of the Church's hierarchy, also provide the setting for his extensive engagement with Luther's theology.

The Context for Congar's 'Vocations'[5]

Congar was born in Sedan in 1904, and was living with his family in this region of eastern France when it was invaded by Germany

3. In addition to Fouilloux's biography, see (for example): Aidan Nichols, *Yves Congar*, Outstanding Christian Thinkers (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 1–13; Flynn, Gabriel, editor, *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, New and expanded edition (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2018). Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, *Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Each of these contain further references for the study of Congar's life and work.
4. Gabriel Flynn, 'Yves Congar and Catholic Church Reform', in Flynn, editor *Yves Congar*, 97–131; Timothy Radcliffe, *Congar and Chenu: Friend, Teacher, Brother* (Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF Theology, 2017).
5. Fouilloux, *Yves Congar,* 1–24, reveals in some detail the circumstances and the many people influencing and guiding Congar through his early years. Yet, at each stage, it appears that he is making his own prayerful decision as to the pathways into which he is being led. Likewise, it was his personal choice to pursue the study of Martin Luther.

in late August 1914 and occupied until 1918. Further early contact with Germany, its people, and the protestant faith came during his compulsory military service in the French-occupied Rhineland in 1924–25. Called to the priesthood, he studied as a seminarian in Paris from 1921 and in 1925 he joined the Dominicans, studying in Belgium at Le Saulchoir. In 1930 Congar was ordained priest, and in 1931 completed his doctorate on 'the unity of the Church', lecturing in ecclesiology from 1932–39, and publishing *Chrétiens désunis* in 1937.[6] During these years, Congar began to support the work of lay chaplaincy groups, including *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* ('Young Christian Workers'), and argued the case for 'worker priests'.[7]

Congar served as a military chaplain in the Second World War, including as a prisoner of war: after defying a camp commandant's order not to preach he was imprisoned at Colditz. Returning to teaching after the war, his theological output increased, as did the level of Vatican censure and control of the theologians at Le Saulchoir, who were accused of promoting *nouvelle théologie*.[8] Congar's major work, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme Dans l'Église* (1950), was regarded negatively, and this led to severe restrictions being placed on his publishing activity, which intensified after the publication of his theology of the laity in 1951. In 1954 Congar was forbidden to teach or publish. He had to leave France, and spent the next two years under supervision as he studied privately in Jerusalem, Rome, and Cambridge.[9]

However, he was not without supporters in the hierarchy. In 1956 he was able to return to teaching in Strasbourg, and in 1960, recently-elected Pope John XXIII invited him to participate in preparatory commission for Second Vatican Council. From 1962–1965 Congar

6. Yves Congar, *Chrétiens désunis. Principes d'un 'oecuménisme' catholique* (Paris: Cerf, 1937) = *Divided Christendom*, translated by M Bousfield (London: Geofrey Bles, 1939).
7. Through his contact with Joseph Cardijn, the founder of *JOC*, Congar became involved in the range of lay movements known as 'Specialised Catholic Action'. See Stefan Robert Gigacz, 'Cardijn and Congar at Vatican II', *Interface Theology,* 3/1 (2017): 31–67. See also Fouilloux, *Yves Congar*, 101–102.
8. Jürgen Mettepenningen, 'Yves Congar and the "Monster" of *Nouvelle Théologie*' (*Horizons*, 37, 52–71, 2010).
9. For his own account of these difficult years, see: Yves Congar, *Journal d'un théologien, 1946–1956*, (Paris: Cerf, 2001) = *Journal of a Theologian (1946–56)*, translated by Dennis Minns (Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF Theology, 2015).

served as *peritus* ('expert') to the Council, which instituted major reforms and renewal in the Church.[10]

In 1965, Congar was appointed to the bilateral Catholic-Lutheran commission, and from 1969–1985, he also served as a member of the Church's *International Theological Commission.* He continued to write and lecture prolifically, and his later work on the Holy Spirit is a major expression of his mature theology.[11]

Congar's Ecclesiology[12]

Yves Congar produced no single, unified work of systematic theology, nor a single, definitive study of ecclesiology to summarise his many books, articles, sermons and lectures. In this he resembles Luther, but the significance of neither theologian is diminished by it. Both wrote and taught prolifically, to promote the reform of the Church and what they understood to be its authentic message. Their thought, as Christian teaching formed by their life-long vocations of active engagement with the life of the Church, commands its own authenticity.

The principles that Congar sets out for Church reform provide significant background to his evaluation of Luther as a reformer, and it is helpful to summarise elements of his own ecclesiology that relate to Luther's teaching. Consistently, Congar taught that the Church is to be considered in its two aspects, that is, as an apostolic institution and as community. In *Vrai et Fausse Réforme Dans l'Église*, he wrote

> [The Church] precedes us by faith, by the sacraments of the faith, and by the exercise of the apostolic authority received from Christ (*cf* Matthew 28:19). Before existing as a community of the faithful [*communauté des fidèles*], the Church exists as an institution [*au titre d'institution*]. That is, it exists first as that ensemble of means by which Christ willed to animate and unite the faithful. These means, which

10. Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2012).
11. Yves Congar, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint,* 3 volumes., (Paris: Cerf, 1979) = *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, translated David Smith (New York: Seabury Press; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983).
12. In addition to the works cited above, this summary draws on Gabriel Flynn, 'Yves Congar', in the *Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, edited by Paul Avis (2018), 382–408.

> build and structure the Church, are: the deposit of faith (and principally the revelation of the Holy Trinity); the sacraments of the faith, instituted by Jesus Christ, as the means for being united to the mystery of his passage to the Father; and, finally, the ministries or apostolic powers. These are the elements, we discover, that can generate and form communities to be the Church—as we see in Acts [2:42] and in, for example, Tertullian.[13]

Some of this is close to Luther's understanding of the Church as a community gathered by the Spirit through the Gospel, created and nurtured by the word and the sacraments of grace.[14] Congar also stressed the importance of the Church as communion, and the people of God gathered as a holy community, as an essential aspect of the mystical body of Christ. In *Jalons Pour Une Théologie Du Laïcat*, he was developing what he described as a 'total ecclesiology': a focus on the Church as the whole people of God in Christ Jesus. He writes,

> [A]n entirely clerical Church [*une Église cléricale*] . . . would not be the people of God in the fullness of its truth. Fundamentally, there can be only one sound and sufficient theology of laity, and that is a 'total ecclesiology' [*une ecclésiologie totale*].[15]

But Congar's emphases on apostolic authority (*pouvoirs apostoliques*), 'structure', and tradition suggests that he goes far beyond what Luther believes is essential to the life of the Church. This marks a key divergence in their thought.

Congar was committed to the Roman Catholic Church as divinely instituted; governed and taught by its apostolic hierarchy of priests, bishops, and the pope. Congar's complex understanding of the Church as Christ's 'mystical body' means that this Church becomes

13. Yves Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme Dans l'Église*, 95–96 = *True and False Reform in the Church*, rev. ed., trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 70–71.
14. BK 511–512, BC 355–356 (Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, The Apostles' Creed: Third Article).
15. Yves Congar, *Jalons Pour Une Théologie Du Laïcat,* 13 = *Lay People in the Church*, revised edition, translated by Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), xvi (translation altered).

the 'sacrament of salvation' for the world.[16] As shall be seen, Congar criticises Luther for failing to appreciate the role that this genuine, living tradition continues to play in the structured development of the Church, both in its sacramental core and also for the purpose of its mission to the world. Tradition determines how Scripture, with its interpretation by the Fathers of the Church, is read and applied. For Congar, and his co-workers at Le Saulchoir, this *ressourcement*—the return to the sources—was a key aspect of their revitalisation of Catholic theology.[17]

As with the duality in Congar's approach to the Church's structure and its life, he works similarly to identify the 'true reform' of the Church that also affirms the role of tradition, which provides the sources and the substance of the Church's teaching and life. In *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, Congar argues that true reform can only be initiated by the prophetic voices that remain within the Church, not those who attack it from the outside. Luther, he writes, falls into that error.[18]

Congar sets out four principles that underpin his approach. The first is the 'Primacy of Charity, and of Pastoral Concerns'.[19] This is the spirit in which reform must be proposed and enacted. Second, the true reformer seeks to 'Remain in Communion with the Whole Church', since reform can never be an end in and of itself, but is always looking to build up the Church in its existing life and structure.[20] True reform is not schismatic, but remains catholic: only in this way can the full truth be grasped, with the 'Centre' having a responsibility to listen to the 'Periphery'. Third, the reformer must 'Have Patience with Delays'.[21] Luther is very much in Congar's sights here![22] Although the prophet/reformer may appear to be persecuted, it is not their place to issue the Church with ultimatums. Neither, however, should Church leaders be 'too patient' with regard to the implementation of necessary reforms. Fourth, Congar proposes that 'Genuine Renewal'

16. Flynn, 'Yves Congar', *OHE*, 395–396.
17. See: Groppe, *Yves Congar's Theology*, 20–21. Also: Flynn, 'Yves Congar', 383–386.
18. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, 241–247 = *True and False Reform*, 160–163.
19. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, 248 = *True and False Reform*, 165.
20. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, 264–265 = *True and False Reform*, 175.
21. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, 306–307 = *True and False Reform*, 201.
22. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, 310–13 =*True and False Reform*, 203–204.

is only achieved 'through a Return to the Principle of Tradition'.[23] This involves adaptation rather than innovation or 'novelty': *ressourcement* means that the Church lives in contact with its 'deepest tradition'. From these principles, Congar is able to evaluate the success or failure of various reform movements in the Church's history.[24] They will also come to reflect his own experience as a theologian–reformer in the Catholic Church, and especially his encounters with the opponents of reform in his Church's hierarchy.[25]

Then, in his revised edition (1968), this evaluation also included a brief look at the reforming work of the Second Vatican Council, which was, in effect, Congar's own reform.[26] The English translation (2011) omitted the section in which Congar analysed the theology of the Protestant reformers in detail.[27] But Congar's evaluation of Luther in relation to his four principles for reform and in his final conclusions was retained. Congar continued to contrast his own, measured approach to what he saw as the violent methods of reformers like Luther, which tore apart the fabric of the Church. In this respect, Congar's work can be distinguished from other, less critical, Catholic evaluations of Luther.[28] But, as will be seen, he based his judgment—both negative and positive—on an extensive reading of Luther's works, and because of this Congar deserves a careful consideration.

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23. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, 333–335 = *True and False Reform*, 218.
24. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, 537576 = *True and False Reform*, 228–251 ('Conclusion').
25. Fouilloux, *Yves Congar,* 117–145. The chapter is titled 'A Second Imprisonment?' and describes the circumstances surrounding his censure by Rome and his time of 'exile'.
26. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, second edition (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968), 515–521 = *True and False Reform*, 252–56. This 'Postface' was written in the aftermath of the protests that swept through Paris in May–June 1968.
27. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme*, 353–536: 'Réforme et Protestantisme'.
28. For a useful survey of Catholic responses to Luther, see Richard Stauffer, *Luther as* Seen *by Catholics* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967). For an entirely positive study of Luther by a pupil of Congar, see Daniel Olivier, *La foi de Luther. La cause de l'Évangile dans l'É'glise* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1978) = *Luther's Faith: The Cause of the Gospel in the Church*, translated by John Tonkin, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982). See also: John Murray Todd, *Martin Luther: A Biographical Study* (Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1964); Walter Kasper, *Martin Luther: An Ecumenical Perspective* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016).

Congar on Luther

Martin Luther, Sa Foi, Sa Réforme: Introduction

Published in 1983, the quincentenary of Luther's birth, Congar's book gathered the fruits of fifty years of research and gave a Catholic perspective on Luther's continuing ecumenical significance.[29] In it, he revisited his previous work on Luther as a theologian, and his integrity as a reformer.

A balanced approach to Luther was by no means certain, given Congar's background. But his commitment to ecumenical relations and his early fascination with Luther's story led him to seek a more positive direction. The image of Luther as a deeply flawed heretic continued to colour French Catholic perceptions into the early to mid–twentieth century, reflecting the work of writers such as Heinrich Denifle (1844–1905), Hartmann Grisar (1845–1932), and the philosopher, Jacques Maritain (1882–1973). Congar notes that they characterised Luther's personality in terms of mediocrity and subjectivity, marked by pathological tendencies.[30] Congar studied under Maritain and certainly retained reservations regarding Luther's psychology. But he also acknowledges his debt to Joseph Lortz (1887–1975), and others, for a more open response to the challenges presented by Luther.[31] He reflects on his own training in scholastic theology, in the school of Aquinas, and how strongly Luther had rejected a canonical, hierarchical view of the Church and its teaching.[32]

Congar mentions how his early visits to German towns associated with Luther sparked his interest in his life and theology. The first stages of his exploration came to fruition in *Vraie et Fausse Réforme Dans l'Église*, which firmly rejected the approach of Luther, Calvin, and the other Protestant reformers. He felt that they had not only

29. Congar, *Martin Luther,* 6–11, Introduction. For an informed Catholic account of Congar's work on Luther, see Joseph Famerée, 'Yves Congar, lecteur de Luther' in *En 500 Après Martin Luther. Reception et conflits d'interpretation (1517–2017),* edited Stéphane-Marie Morgain (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2018), 189–201. Famerée summarises this book and also *Vraie et Fausse Réforme* in relation to Luther. He emphasises Congar's positive ecumenical conclusions.
30. Congar, *Martin Luther*, 7. Page references in these notes are to the original French edition.
31. Congar, *Martin Luther*, 8. Joseph Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland*, third edition (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1949).
32. Congar, *Martin Luther*, 9.