

Kierkegaard's Influence on "the Architects" of the Second Vatican Council

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Kierkegaard's influence on the leading theologians of the Second Vatican Council is an intriguing chapter in the history of ideas. Kierkegaard was a Protestant philosopher and religious thinker who had little first-hand exposure to Catholicism during his life. Although he drew inspiration from a number of Catholic sources he remained firmly rooted in a culture that was overwhelmingly Protestant. Kierkegaard's thought exerted little influence on the Catholic intellectual milieu in the 19th century, but this changed in the first decades of the 20th century. This was due to the activity of Theodor Haecker, a Protestant author and translator, who converted to Catholicism and promoted Kierkegaard's thought in Catholic intellectual circles. Haecker inspired the Kierkegaard reception of three theologians who played a central role at the Second Vatican Council: Johannes Oesterreicher, Yves Congar, and Henri de Lubac. The article traces the trajectory of their reception and identifies the Kierkegaardian motifs they deemed relevant for the renewal of modern Catholicism.

Keywords: Modern Catholicism, philosophy of existence, Kierkegaard Renaissance, Second Vatican Council, nouvelle théologie

Søren Kierkegaard's (1813 – 1855) influence on the leading theologians of the Second Vatican Council is an intriguing chapter in the history of ideas.¹ Kierkegaard was a Protestant philosopher and religious thinker who had little first-hand exposure to Catholicism during his life. He was a Lutheran

¹ The paper was produced at the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Trnava University as part of the grant project VEGA 1/0871/18.

theologian by training and the thinkers with whom he engaged in intellectual exchanges were almost exclusively Protestant. Although he drew inspiration from a number of Catholic sources he remained firmly rooted in a culture that was overwhelmingly Protestant. At the end of his life Kierkegaard initiated a public polemic with the Danish State Church aimed at its spiritual renewal. Although Kierkegaard's thought exerted little influence on the Catholic intellectual milieu in the 19th century this began to change dramatically in the first decades of the 20th century. A key figure in this development was Theodor Haecker, a Protestant author and translator, who converted to Catholicism and promoted Kierkegaard's thought among Catholic philosophers, theologians and writers. The Catholic reception of Kierkegaard inspired by Haecker comprises a number of influential authors including three theologians who played a central role at the Second Vatican Council: Johannes Oesterreicher, Yves Congar, and Henri de Lubac. The aim of the present paper is to determine the basic coordinates of the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard in the first half of the 20th century and to trace the trajectory of this reception from Haecker to the three "architects" of the Second Vatican Council. The presented analysis will provide the basics of a much larger picture and can serve as an impetus for further exploration. Since the scholarship devoted to the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard is still very limited, the provided points of orientation can be useful for future research.

1. Theodor Haecker and the German "Kierkegaard Renaissance"

Between 1909 – 1945 the German-speaking world experienced a phenomenon that received the name "the Kierkegaard Renaissance."² A large number of translations of Kierkegaard's works was published in Germany and leading figures of intellectual life claimed inspiration by him. Kierkegaard's philosophy was a point of debate in a broad spectrum of intellectual traditions. Philosophical and theological initiatives such as existential philosophy, dialectical theology, Neo-Marxism and dialogical philosophy referred to Kierkegaard as their source of inspiration. In the Catholic milieu it was especially the Hochland Circle – an intellectual platform connected to the journal *Hochland* – in which a lively reception of Kierkegaard took place. A central

2 This term was first used by Werner Elert. Cf. ELERT, W.: *Der Kampf um das Christentum. Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen dem evangelischen Christentum in Deutschland und dem allgemeinen Denken seit Schleiermacher und Hegel*. München : Beck, 1921, p. 432. For an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon see ŠAJDA, P.: *Kierkegaardovská renesancia. Filozofia, náboženstvo, politika*. Bratislava : Premedia, 2016.

figure of this circle was Theodor Haecker,³ who was also a key author of the entire Kierkegaard Renaissance.

Haecker converted to Catholicism in 1921 at the age of forty-two when he was already a well-known translator and commentator of Kierkegaard's work. He established his reputation as a Kierkegaard scholar in 1913 when he published his monograph *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Inwardness*⁴ which received substantial publicity. The book caught the attention of Ludwig von Ficker – the editor-in-chief of the journal *Der Brenner* – who offered Haecker space in the journal.⁵ Already the next year several issues of the journal included Haecker's articles on Kierkegaard, his translations of Kierkegaard's writings and a long review of his monograph by Carl Dallago.⁶ Haecker continued to publish translations of Kierkegaard's writings in the coming years and often accompanied them with detailed commentaries. Since *Der Brenner* was read by a large number of philosophers, theologians and writers Haecker's promotion of Kierkegaard's thought had a considerable impact on the intellectual community.

In June 1921 Haecker published in *Der Brenner* an article entitled *On Cardinal Newman's Philosophy of Faith*⁷ in which he reflected on the relation between faith and knowledge in the work of the theologian and convert to Catholicism John Henry Newman. In the article Haecker identifies with Newman's interpretation of Catholicism but what is more important – and represents a public manifestation of his conversion – he identifies with the Catholic faith itself. Haecker's reception of Kierkegaard is both positive and negative, but in a central passage Haecker highlights a striking antagonism between Kierkegaard and Newman. Kierkegaard "goes the way of the fiery youth," rejects religion based on logical probabilities and insists on a leap into

3 Haecker's overall reception of Kierkegaard is discussed in KLEINERT, M.: Theodor Haecker. The Mobilization of a Total Author. In: STEWART, J. (ed.): *Kierkegaard's Influence on Literature, Criticism and Art*. Tome I: *The Germanophone World (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception, Resources, vol. 12)*. Farnham : Ashgate, 2013, pp. 91 – 114. Complementary reflections on the German Catholic reception of Kierkegaard can be found in ŠAJDA, P. and BARNETT, C.: Catholicism. Finding Inspiration and Provocation in Kierkegaard. In: STEWART, J. (ed.): *A Companion to Kierkegaard*. Oxford : Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, pp. 237 – 250 (*Blackwell Companions to Philosophy*) and ŠAJDA, P.: Romano Guardini. Between Actualistic Personalism, Qualitative Dialectic and Kinetic Logic. In: STEWART, J. (ed.): *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology*. Tome III: *Catholic and Jewish Theology (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 10)*. Aldershot : Ashgate, 2012, pp. 45 – 74.

4 HAECKER, T.: *Sören Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit*. München : Schreiber, 1913.

5 Cf. JANIK, A.: Haecker, Kierkegaard and the Early Brenner. A Contribution to the History of the Reception of "Two Ages" in the German-Speaking World. In: CONWAY, D. W. and GOVER, K. E.: *Sören Kierkegaard. Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, vols. 1 – 4, London and New York : Routledge, 2002, vol. 4, p. 125.

6 See, for example, HAECKER, T.: F. Blei und Kierkegaard. In: *Der Brenner*, Heft 10, 1914, pp. 457 – 465; KIERKEGAARD, S.: Der Pfahl im Fleisch, trans. by T. HAECKER. In: *Der Brenner*, Heft 16, 1914, pp. 691–712 and Heft 17, 1914, pp. 797 – 814; KIERKEGAARD, S.: Kritik der Gegenwart, trans. by T. HAECKER. In: *Der Brenner*, Heft 19, 1914, pp. 815 – 849 and Heft 20, 1914, pp. 869 – 908; DALLAGO, C.: Über eine Schrift „Sören Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit.“ In: *Der Brenner*, Heft 11, 1914, pp. 468 – 478; Heft 12, 1914, pp. 515 – 531; Heft 13, 1914, pp. 565 – 578.

7 HAECKER, T.: Über Kardinal Newmans Glaubensphilosophie. In: *Der Brenner*, vol. 6, no. 10, 1921, pp. 772 – 790.

the non-rational sphere of the paradox. Newman “goes the way of the mature man,”⁸ makes use of probability as long as possible and only when absolutely necessary makes the transition into the sphere of the paradox. Haecker describes Newman’s path as normal and Kierkegaard’s path as exceptional, and warns against turning the latter into a standard approach to religion. Although Haecker sides with Newman on this decisive point he agrees with Kierkegaard on other issues and claims that the two great thinkers of the 19th century have a lot in common.

After his conversion Haecker’s view of Kierkegaard became more ambivalent but this did not prevent him from actively promoting Kierkegaard’s intellectual legacy. In the 1920s and early 1930s he published a number of minor pieces as well as three major works: the monographs *Christianity and Culture* and *The Concept of Truth in Søren Kierkegaard*, and the translation of Kierkegaard’s journals.⁹ The publication of the monumental selection of Kierkegaard’s journal entries was an unprecedented literary event.

Haecker’s activist approach had a profound impact on the Catholic intellectual community which he joined after his conversion. His influence was greatest in the Hochland Circle and in 1925 he published in the journal *Hochland* a long essay in which he outlined his overall interpretation of Kierkegaard’s philosophy.¹⁰ In the coming years several philosophers and theologians associated with the Hochland Circle followed in his footsteps and published works in which they discussed Kierkegaard’s thought. These included Romano Guardini’s *Der Ausgangspunkt der Denkbewegung Søren Kierkegaards* (1927), Alois Dempf’s *Kierkegaards Folgen* (1935), and Peter Wust’s *Die Dialektik des Geistes* (1928), all of which attracted considerable attention outside the borders of the Catholic community.

2. Johannes Oesterreicher

Haecker’s contributions in *Der Brenner* in the early 1920s were intensively read by Johannes Oesterreicher, a young Jewish student at the University of Vienna.¹¹ Oesterreicher moved to Vienna from Czechoslovakia in 1922 and soon came in touch with Haecker’s texts including his translations of Kierkegaard. Oesterreicher had a lively interest in Christianity and examined closely what Kierkegaard, Newman and Haecker had to say about it. He was intrigued by

8 Ibid., p. 785. See also ŠAJDA, P. and BARNETT, C.: Catholicism. Finding Inspiration and Provocation in Kierkegaard, pp. 239 – 241.

9 HAECKER, T.: *Christentum und Kultur*. München : Kösel, 1927; HAECKER, T.: *Der Begriff der Wahrheit bei Søren Kierkegaard*. Innsbruck : Brenner, 1932; KIERKEGAARD, S.: *Die Tagebücher*, vols. 1 – 2, trans. and ed. by T. HAECKER. Innsbruck : Brenner-Verlag, 1923.

10 HAECKER, T.: Søren Kierkegaard. In: *Hochland*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1925, pp. 188 – 212.

11 RECKER, D.: *Die Wegbereiter der Judenerklärung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*. Paderborn : Bonifatius, 2007, p. 312.

Haecker's recent conversion and the effect it had on his view of Christianity. At this time he also encountered a group of young Jewish intellectuals who had converted to Catholicism.¹² In 1924, at the age of twenty Oesterreicher followed Haecker's example and was received into the Catholic Church. When he commented on his spiritual journey in retrospect – speaking of himself in the third person—he claimed that “[t]ogether with Søren Kierkegaard and John Henry Cardinal Newman – whom he also discovered through the ‘Brenner’ – Ebner and Haecker caused a decisive turn in his life.”¹³

After his conversion Oesterreicher terminated his studies of medicine, went on to study Catholic theology in Graz and in 1927 was ordained priest. His Jewish roots became an issue in the 1930s when anti-Semitism and Nazism began to spread throughout the German-speaking world. Oesterreicher realized that a joint action of Jews and Christians was needed and founded the journal *Die Erfüllung*, whose mission was to make Jews and Christians aware of each other's concerns.¹⁴ In 1938 he was interrogated by the Nazis and shortly after emigrated to France and later to the United States. In exile he published the work *Rassenhaß ist Christushaß*¹⁵ which appeared both in French and English.

After the war Oesterreicher remained in the United States and continued his work in the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue. In 1953 he founded the Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies at the Catholic Seton Hall University. Due to his extensive experience he was invited to participate in the preparatory committee of the Second Vatican Council which drafted the *Decree on the Jews* that proposed a new vision for the Church's relation to the Jewish people. This document was later incorporated into the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, also known as the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions*, which was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965. *Nostra Aetate* laid the foundation for a new era of Catholic-Jewish dialogue and helped foster numerous initiatives aimed at better understanding between the two religious communities.

Kierkegaard's and Haecker's influences on the late Oesterreicher are yet to be determined on the basis of his *Nachlass* which is preserved in the Johannes Oesterreicher Archive at the Seton Hall University.

12 JANIK, A.: Three Moravian Cosmopolitans: Paul Engelmann, Friedrich Pater, Johannes Oesterreicher. In: MITTELMANN, H. and WALLAS, A. A. (eds.): *Österreich-Konzeptionen und jüdisches Selbstverständnis*. Tübingen : Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001, p. 166.

13 OESTERREICHER, J.: Die Tränen Gottes. Ein theologischer Versuch. In: METHLAGL, W., SAUERMANN, E., SCHEICHL, S. P. (eds.): *Untersuchungen zum “Brenner.”* Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1981, p. 513.

14 RECKER, D.: Johannes M. Oesterreicher (1904 – 1993) – und das Dokument *Nostra Aetate* des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. In: BSTEH, P. and PROKSCH, B. (eds.): *Wegbereiter des interreligiösen Dialogs*. Vienna and Berlin : LIT, 2012, p. 113.

15 JANIK: Three Moravian Cosmopolitans, p. 167.

3. From Haecker to Congar and Lubac

Haecker's influence on the French Catholic reception of Kierkegaard was both direct and indirect. More important was the indirect influence through his friend Erik Peterson who converted to Catholicism in 1930. Peterson was previously a professor of Protestant theology at the University of Bonn and a colleague of Karl Barth and Karl Ludwig Schmidt. He was well-acquainted with Haecker's spiritual journey and his vision of the Catholic intellectual mission in modern Europe. He was also familiar with Haecker's work on Kierkegaard and Newman. When Peterson later reflected on his conversion he referred to Kierkegaard as a decisive influence.¹⁶

Both Haecker's and Peterson's conversions attracted the attention of the French Catholic theologian Yves Congar who would later become one of the masterminds of the Second Vatican Council. In September 1931 Congar published the article *The Conversion of Erik Peterson* in the influential Catholic monthly *La Vie Intellectuelle*.¹⁷ He described Peterson as "one of the best Protestant theologians in Germany" and pointed out that *La Vie Intellectuelle* had promoted his work even before his conversion.¹⁸ He also quoted a longer passage from a letter addressed to Barth and Schmidt in which Peterson outlined his motives for converting to Catholicism. Although Congar's later texts confirm that he was aware of Kierkegaard's influence on Peterson's decision in this article he does not mention it.

In 1933 and 1934 Congar wrote two texts for *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* both of which were entitled *Kierkegaard*.¹⁹ He explored in them the intensive debate about Kierkegaard in Germany and its impact on France. He expresses his amazement at the "Kierkegaard Renaissance" pointing out the signs of its vitality: every year about twenty books on Kierkegaard are published in German, most of Kierkegaard's works have been translated and both philosophical and theological journals publish supplements dedicated to his thought. Even more importantly, movements of "great spiritual significance" – such as the dialectical theology – claim to be inspired by his ideas.²⁰

Congar explains that the German reception is characterized by a broad variety of approaches. Some authors interpret Kierkegaard's philosophy primarily as a reaction to Hegel and speculative idealism. Others see Kierkegaard as a link between Luther and modern Protestant theologies, yet others study him from a psychological and clinical point of view. Finally, authors like Emanuel Hirsch aim to provide a *Ganzheitsbild*, integrating different perspectives into

16 PETERSON, E.: *Theological Tractates*. Stanford : University Press, 2011, p. 193.

17 CONGAR, Y.: Conversion d'Erik Peterson. In: *La Vie Intellectuelle*, vol. 12, nos. 2 – 3, 1931, pp. 211 – 212.

18 Ibid.

19 CONGAR, Y.: Kierkegaard. In: *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1933, pp. 551 – 552. CONGAR, Y.: Kierkegaard. In: *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1934, pp. 512 – 513.

20 CONGAR, Y.: Kierkegaard, 1933, p. 551.

a comprehensive picture of Kierkegaard's life and work, taking into account their inner evolution.²¹

Congar explains how the German debate has influenced French intellectual life. A new Kierkegaard-inspired movement of French Barthianism has emerged and the periodicals *Foi et Vie* and *Hic et Nunc* claim to follow both Barth's and Kierkegaard's spirit. There is philosophical reception by Jean Wahl and new translations by Jean-Jacques Gateau and Paul-Henri Tisseau.²²

In 1934 Congar published the essay *L'Actualité de Kierkegaard* which contains his most detailed treatment of Kierkegaard. It begins – as the previous essays – with a reference to the contemporary debates. Congar repeats the claim that the “Kierkegaard Renaissance” has spread from Germany to France. He underlines the fact that Kierkegaard has attracted the attention of a very diverse group of authors and argues that alongside philosophical and literary reception there is also a theological one which sees in Kierkegaard a thinker “who helps to find the meaning of Christianity.”²³ Congar points to three prominent theologians representing Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism and states the following:

The most interesting theological movement of contemporary Protestantism is undoubtedly the one connected to Karl Barth. Now, if we ask Barth, who are his sources – right after the Reformers he names Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky.

One of the most respected figures of the Russian Orthodoxy today is Nikolai Berdyaev – the weight of his words is felt throughout the Christian world. When he reflects on those who have awakened his religious consciousness he names two: Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard. And when at the end of an intensive spiritual quest, one of the most reflected and critical German Protestant theologians – Erik Peterson – enters the fold of the Catholic Church, whose influence... does he point to? That of Kierkegaard.²⁴

After the presentation of the current debates Congar provides an account of Kierkegaard's life and work, but most intriguing is the final part of the article in which he outlines how Kierkegaard can inspire Catholics in the 20th century.

Congar does not find Kierkegaard inspirational in the fields of philosophy and dogmatic theology. In the former Kierkegaard places an excessive emphasis on subjectivity and in the latter Kierkegaard himself does not intend to contribute with anything substantial. His thought is, however, rich in edifying

21 CONGAR, Y.: Kierkegaard, 1934, p. 512.

22 CONGAR, Y.: Kierkegaard, 1933, p. 551 – 552.

23 CONGAR, Y.: *L'Actualité de Kierkegaard*. In: *La Vie Intellectuelle*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1934, p. 9. I am drawing here on the ideas I presented in ŠAJDA, P. and BARNETT, C.: Catholicism. Finding Inspiration and Provocation in Kierkegaard, pp. 242 – 244.

24 CONGAR, Y.: *L'Actualité de Kierkegaard*, pp. 9 – 10.

motifs and these need to be taken seriously by modern Catholics who wish to contribute to the renewal of their Church.²⁵

Congar highlights the fact that Kierkegaard inspired a process of renewal in modern Protestantism and suggests that his work can be used for the same purpose in Catholicism. If the Catholic Church is to practice true catholicity – i.e. if it is to be truly universal – it must follow attentively the spiritual renewals of other Christian communities. Kierkegaard's ideas are thus a legitimate object of study. As Congar puts it: "How could the one who awakened the faith among our separated brethren be indifferent to us?"²⁶

Congar identifies four ways in which modern Catholicism can strive for renewal with the help of Kierkegaard.

First, Kierkegaard's promotion of the values of sincerity and concreteness is relevant for an age, in which people are weary of elaborate rational systems in which everything is clear and certain. The current generation refuses to live according to pre-established patterns, rejects conformism and cultivates a kind of mysticism of sincerity. Congar welcomes these developments and claims that they can give rise to "a young, holistic, open and fresh Catholicism like the one which inebriated the Apostles."²⁷ Kierkegaard's prophetic message is to be studied, since he anticipated and inspired the atmosphere of the present age.

Second, Kierkegaard's radical presentation of Christianity can serve as a shock which prompts complacent Catholics to realize that religion is not just the last hope and the last resort after one has lived his life according to completely different principles. Kierkegaard insists on the absolute earnestness of faith and situates it in the very centre of one's life. Everyone has to turn either to the right or to the left, a choice must be made. Christianity is the opposite of mediocrity, it is a scandal and a conflict, not an easy religion based on routines. It is not one of many kinds of humanism, but a religion of the crucified God.²⁸

Third, Kierkegaard warns against Christianity becoming simply a matter of culture. Christians are to be aware of the transcendent and divine character of their religion and should not confuse it with the so-called Christian civilization. Catholicism cannot be understood merely as a formative cultural influence on the Latin West. It musn't be reduced to its cultural achievements.²⁹

And fourth, twentieth-century Catholic priests should listen carefully to Kierkegaard's criticism of nineteenth-century Protestant clergy. Now as before, it is easy to turn the vocation of a priest into a vocation of an instructor of religion and morality. Mere instruction, however, fails to disturb people's

25 Ibid., p. 34.

26 Ibid., p. 31.

27 Ibid., p. 32.

28 Ibid., p. 32 – 33.

29 Ibid., p. 33.

conscience. For this the authority of a witness is needed. It is the *lived truth* – one's existential stance – that inspires renewal.³⁰

Congar closes with the remark that if one intends to comprehend the present age, one should learn from the thinker who has made such a profound impact on it. Finally he draws the readers' attention to new publications on Kierkegaard in French and highlights a book by Haecker, who "just like Erik Peterson converted to Catholicism under Kierkegaard's influence."³¹

One of the readers of Congar's essay was the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac who joined the French debate on Kierkegaard in 1944 with his work *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*. This work includes a chapter on Kierkegaard³² in which Lubac examines some of the issues that were previously discussed by Haecker and Congar.

First, he explores the relation between faith and knowledge that dominated Haecker's comparative analysis of Kierkegaard and Newman. Lubac's position is more moderate than Haecker's as he sees in Kierkegaard a thinker whose philosophy of transcendence assigns an important place to reason and objective knowledge. Kierkegaard aims to delimit the spheres of the rational and the non-rational and sometimes formulates concepts that are reminiscent of Catholic theology. Lubac points to the concepts of *paradox* and *the improbable* which correspond to the Catholic concepts of *mystery* and *the miraculous*.³³ With the help of these Kierkegaard makes important distinctions between cataphatic and apophatic theology.

Lubac, however, agrees with Haecker that certain doctrines in Kierkegaard have strong fideist undertones and lack the necessary balance. Their radicality is helpful when they are used as antidotes to the overly rationalistic tendencies of the present age, but they cannot represent the sole spiritual nourishment of the individual Christian.³⁴

Second, Lubac affirms Congar's claim that Kierkegaard's thought can provide inspiration for modern Catholicism. In contrast to Congar he does not limit Kierkegaard's relevance to edification. He sees in him a powerful and original apologist whose philosophical and theological argumentation needs to be taken seriously. Kierkegaard is a herald of transcendence in an age trapped in immanentism and presents the greatness of faith to a world that has become insensitive to it. But it is true that his ultimate goal is existential: to recognize the true meaning of Christianity and to become its witness.³⁵

Interestingly, Lubac rejects the claim that Kierkegaard was moving closer to Catholicism in the later stages of his life.³⁶ Lubac is also aware that both Catholic and non-Catholic authors have advanced the claim that "if

30 Ibid., pp. 33 – 34.

31 Ibid., p. 35.

32 LUBAC, H. de: *Le drame de l'humanisme athée*. Paris : Spes, 1959, pp. 96 – 113.

33 Ibid., pp. 104 – 108; p. 112.

34 Ibid., p. 111.

35 Ibid., p. 113.

36 Ibid., p. 112 – 113.

Kierkegaard had been born later he would have been a Catholic."³⁷ Lubac declares, however, that he does not see any clear indications of *anonymous Catholicism* in Kierkegaard and considers him a genuinely Protestant thinker.

Both Congar and Lubac personally attended the Second Vatican Council and played a vital role in formulating its theological vision. As representatives of the so-called *nouvelle théologie*³⁸ they were the counterbalance to neo-Scholasticism and their reform-oriented agenda ultimately prevailed. Congar was instrumental in drafting a key document on ecumenism entitled *Unitatis redintegratio*, which became a cornerstone for modern Catholic involvement in the efforts aimed at the restoration of Christian unity. Both Congar and Lubac exerted strong influence on the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* which dealt with the nature of the Church and defined its mission in the modern world.

4. Conclusion

Theodor Haecker's conversion to Catholicism represents a symbolic milestone in the Catholic reception of Kierkegaard's thought. Haecker instigated a lively debate on Kierkegaard in the German Catholic circles which resulted in the active participation of Catholic thinkers in the German "Kierkegaard Renaissance." Haecker influenced both directly and indirectly the French Catholic milieu, whose leading representatives paid close attention to Kierkegaard's philosophical, theological and spiritual message. They also explored Kierkegaard's potential contribution to the renewal of the Catholic Church.

It is most interesting that among the Catholic authors who were influenced by the "Kierkegaard Renaissance" of the 1920s and the 1930s were three theologians who later actively shaped the vision of the Second Vatican Council. These theologians helped formulate the most dialogical documents of the Council that substantially affected the communication of the Catholic Church with other Christian Churches, with the Jewish community and with the wider world. Although their perspectives on Kierkegaard differ markedly, all of them take Kierkegaard seriously as a source inspiration for the renewal of modern Christianity. Their interpretations of Kierkegaard emphasize different aspects of his confrontation with modernity highlighting the usefulness of his insights for both pastoral care and theology. They see Kierkegaard's existential focus on the single individual as prophetic, since modern Christianity has to tackle the challenges of both individualism and collectivism. Moreover, Kierkegaard's earnest confrontation with the *zeitgeist* of modernity can be an example for the Church as it struggles with new problems and searches for answers to new

³⁷ Ibid., p. 113.

³⁸ Cf. FLYNN, G. and MURRAY, P.D. (eds.): *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 219 – 249.

questions. It is a task for further research to determine what role Kierkegaard played in the later oeuvre of Oesterreicher, Congar and Lubac and whether his ideas had a direct impact on the theological views they presented at the Second Vatican Council.

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