Summary

This thesis analyses the development of the theology of the Holy Spirit in the work of 20th century French Catholic theologian Yves Congar focusing on the relation God-world. Yves Congar’s life-work, both in his early and later years, has left a significant mark in the discussions he participated in. This thesis brings his early and later work together. His early work addressed the rifts between Christian spirituality, theology and practice; theological view of divisions in Christianity, reform, laity and tradition were its highlights. His life-work concluded with the theology of the Holy Spirit. His engaged life of theological service to the church in turbulent times brings a continuity between the two periods and invites to analyze the development, maturation of his work, and rifts in it. The thesis builds on the initial observation that his early concerns remained throughout and were given adequate space and achieved maturity with the theology of the Holy Spirit. Such development has not been hereto researched by Congar’s scholars and presents a way to appreciate Congar’s work as a whole in the light of his early concerns. This it reiterates his vision of the theology, which binds together living God-world-humanity vis-à-vis the unbelieving world which is still relevant now.

Such analysis, however, had to overcome several challenges. The role of the Holy Spirit in the relation God-world, especially if the “world” is viewed as extra-ecclesial, is not obvious in Congar’s work. He is most known as an ecclesiologist. But why did he eventually produce a Pneumatology and not an ecclesiology? Furthermore, as a theologian Congar was not primarily known as a system-builder, rather a theologian of tradition, who sought to renew theological themes by looking at them historically. To address these challenges a close reading of Congar’s work was provided, settings his predominant theological concern as a starting point. This was the need to address the perceived rift between the spirituality and the theology, with a desire to engage an unbelieving culture with a focus on the ecclesial practices. In this way the implicit relation of theology of the Spirit and the reality of the world was situated precisely in his being a theologian of tradition. The analysis of the changing ecclesial situation, a look at theological problems in their historical development and in the light of human subjectivity, all presuppose the reality of the world. Then, a focus on renewal in the church presumes the role of the Spirit when invoked by a theologian who was on-the-go engaged in the life of the church in the world.

This required an attentive historical-theological reading of Congar’s work. Historical reading was important, as the history was where theology for Congar was located. Yet to bring forth the role of the Holy Spirit in the relation God-world this was not sufficient, but it showed the way. In Congar’s approach, the milieu, that is the ecclesial life, the method, that is the theology of tradition, and theological themes, like incarnation and the Holy Spirit interwove. This has helped to show that when Congar addressed contemporary issues by theologically returning to the sources, this was also a return to the Source of faith. In this way, fundamental theological themes, like Christology and Pneumatology played an organizing role already in his early work. This, and Congar’s approach to theology as wisdom, allowed to discern an abiding picture, connecting God-world-humanity. This theological vision, binding God-world-humanity by means of the theology of two divine missions, allowed discerning how theology of the Spirit developed alongside that of the Son. The growing appreciation of the role of the Holy Spirit allowed to better understand, give space and interweave the world and humanity in the tripartite dialogue God-world-humanity.
To discern the tensions between development and continuity in Congar’s attempt to engage the unbelieving world by a vision of intimate relation God-world, certain concepts play a crucial role. In his view of participation, the divine activity is mediated through Incarnation and its effects, the immediacy and ascent of creation to God was associated with the role of the Spirit. And yet Congar primarily views the two divine missions of the Son and of the Spirit in and through concrete ecclesial human-divine activity. This invited to assess the metaphysical framework Congar uses in the light of his desire for a more direct and immediate participation of God in the world and the world in God. Identifying with this desire to address the unbelieving world, this sets a way to evaluate Congar on his own terms and imagine how to extend his spirit to contemporary scene.

Thesis develops in six chapters. The first chapter begins from Congar’s anxiety that faith is disincarnate in the culture, and that theology is separate from spirituality. It looks at how he addresses the situation by invoking concepts of Incarnation and Catholicity. This situates the view of participation of God in the world by Thomas Aquinas, which Congar uses. While it guards the continuity of the ecclesial teaching, it also allows to incorporate a development and human subjectivity. The latter has a clear Pneumatological rationale, looking at the reality of the Spirit in the church, and is inspired by Johann Adam Möhler.

The second chapter follows Congar into the different movements of ecclesial renewal of after-war years and focuses on the issue of reform and human-divine synergy. It looks at how Congar seeks to address the dynamic view of the concrete reality of the church, while reiterating the structure of Aquinas. The Christological emphasis on continuing Incarnation is juxtaposed with attention to concrete reality of the church and a clear emphasis on the proper role of the Holy Spirit. A hint towards Pneumatological Christology ensues.

The third chapter concludes his early programme with the look at his theology of laity. The reality of the world gets its proper treatment in the relation God-world beside a reality of the church. This sets the issue of the participation clearly in the world. Congar’s attempt of rapprochement between the evolution of the world and eschatology by means of two divine missions is presented. The Pneumatological potential of Congar’s view of the world as a theandric temple and its limits are presented and analyzed.

The fourth chapter signals a major revisioning. The issue of the world emerges as a theme in its own right with a distinct contribution of the world, and Congar turns to the theology of a living God to engage the unbelieving world. It is noted how in these developments the theology of two divine missions comes to light and how in conversation with Orthodox theologians Congar begins focusing of theology of the Holy Spirit. In the relation God-world, the world emerges as the domain of the Spirit’s work.

The fifth chapter follows from the fourth as Congar’s focus moves from the church to tradition. Congar’s pneumatic notion of tradition is presented in the divine plan of self-communication, as interweaving the three books, the Scriptures, the books of the world and human soul. But is the integrity and freedom of the book of the world fully maintained and is it fully interwoven? Congar’s view of the church as the sacrament of salvation of the world and the scope of Congar’s Pneumatological re-assessment look promising in this respect.

In the sixth chapter the implications of this Pneumatological revisioning are analyzed. It is noted that Congar re-enters the ecclesial situation with the developed theology of the Spirit. Thus, what was earlier attributed to Incarnation is permeated by the Spirit, presenting Pneumatological Christology with a focus on human-divine interaction. Furthermore, it is shown that with the developed role of the Spirit in the Trinitarian
theology, the role of humanity and the world is better integrated and interwoven with the divine activity. And yet the limits due to Congar’s use of metaphysical framework are also identified, and it is shown how they might preclude further intimacy and directness.

This has led to a conclusion, that thanks to the activity of the Spirit, human and free activity in the world might be viewed at the same time as the activity of God. But without a pronounced and affirmed view of the Spirit’s activity in the world as such, while present, this theology is insufficient. However, Congar’s lead to achieve greater intimacy and integrity, and more intimately reconnect God and the world vis-à-vis the unbelieving world and to engage it, has to be followed. It is necessary to assess him on his own terms and ask how that could be further extended into contemporary times. For this some dominating metaphysical assumptions have to be addressed by explicitly beginning one’s theological reflection from contingent and worldly historical situation. This dynamic picture, to which the theology of the Spirit is better attuned, not only permeates what derives from Christ, but gives a way to affirm the incorporation of the world into God. This would allow to further extend the engagement while going deeper to the sources, addressing socio-cultural world and focusing on how to draw creation more immediately into the divine life.