Marie-Dominique Chenu and the Basic Institutions Of His Theology



Edited by Hilary Regan

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Editorial

Hilary D Regan

We return again to study the work of Marie-Dominique Chenu OP (1895–2000). In 2021 we published a volume on his 'theological project', and in this volume we continue in that line by examining the basic intuitions of his theology.[1] Some of the authors are the same, Ulrich Engel OP and Janette Gray RSM but in addition there are two articles by Fergus Kerr OP (who studied under Chenu) and a translation of the article by Pietro Parente from 1942 where he refers to Chenu and the 'new theology'. This descriptive became widely used in describing writers such as Chenu, Congar and other French Dominican writers after 1942.

Having studied in Rome under Garrigou-Lagrange, in 1920 chenu was appointed Professor of the History of Dogma at Le Saulchoir. He began to develop his theological perspective replacing the non-historical approach to Thomism that he had learned from Garrigou-Lagrange at the *Angelicum* with an historicist reading of Aquinas. At *Le Saulchoir* he was the teacher of Dominicans Yves Congar and Edward Schillebeeckx and others.

His 1937 book *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* brought him into the centre of an investigation by Rome into his theology and in 1942 this book was placed on the Index of forbidden books.[2] He was also involved with the Young Christian Work movements and the worker priest movement during his life.

1. *A Coming of God into Time and History: The Theological Project of M-D Chenu OP* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2021).
2. For more see Joseph Komonchak and Mary Kate Homan, *A School of Theology—Le Saulchoir* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2023).

Ulrich Engel's article in the present volume argues that according to 'Pierre Jossua in an overview of Chenu's life pointed out that he had never really been rehabilitated by those ecclesiastical authorities'.

For Engel 'The five guiding intuitions of Chenu [and his theology] are the economy of salvation, the incarnational structure of his theological thinking, an understanding of pastoral theology and work as places of ecclesial discourse, attention to the signs of the time, and a high estimation of contemplation.'

His article unpacks these guiding intuitions. The other articles provide a context, historical and theological, for the intuitions and develop other themes to assist in understanding Chenu's contribution to theology.

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Marie-Dominique Chenu and the Basic Intuitions of His Theology[1]

Ulrich Engel OP

'Dogmatic formulas express a truth that is absolute and unchanging' ('*Formulae dogmaticae enuntiant veritatem absolutam et immutabilem*'). This thesis spotlights the central disputed point in one of the important controversies for theology in the twentieth century. In February, 1938, the French Dominican theologian Marie-Dominique Chenu was called to Rome: the purpose was to get him to sign a paper with ten theses: these concerned the signer's own theology, although they were not yet written on the paper. This enterprise was staged as an act of capitulation: Chenu needed to prove his orthodoxy. The thesis given above began the list.[2]

More than twenty-five years later, on the occasion of Chenu's seventieth birthday, Cardinal Maurice Feltin (1883–1975), Archbishop of Paris, had the occasion to mention anew this Roman discipline: he singled out Chenu's obedience towards ecclesiastical authority. Chenu recalled this event later: 'I was standing, and without thinking much about it, I responded with a certain boldness: "Eminence, my dear Father, the cause was not obedience—for obedience is a virtue of average value. It was because I believed the word of God. The

1. Ulrich Engel, 'Theologale Mystik im Konflikt. Marie-Dominique Chenu und die Grundintuitionen seiner Theologie; in *Gott der Menschen. Wegmarken dominikanischer Th*eologie (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünewald, 2010), 145–165. Translation into English by Thomas F O'Meara OP.
2. The original text in Latin is given in its facsimile form as an addendum by G Alberigo, 'Christianisme en tant qu' histoire et "Théologie confessante"', in M-D Chenu, *Une École de théologie : le Saulchoir* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 35. This edition has essays by Alberigo, É Fouiloux, J Ladrière, and J-P Jossua.