

## The “Interference” between *Nouvelle Théologie* and Catholic Practice in Church and Society

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### I. INTRODUCTION: “INTERFERENCES” ON THE WAY FROM DESINCARNATION TO INCARNATION<sup>1</sup>

In his *Conclusion théologique à l'Enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance*<sup>2</sup> of 1935, French Dominican Yves Congar states that the reasons for contemporary atheism are – in a complex interpenetration – both theological and social. In the French society of the 1930s, Congar diagnosed a laicisation of the “milieux de la vie”<sup>3</sup>, where several particular milieus were completely alienated from Christian faith. Vice versa, the Church “milieu” was alienated from the cultural and philosophical, political and social life of the society. The conclusion of this “shock”<sup>4</sup> article was that of a “foi désincarnée”<sup>5</sup>. Pushing further his socio-historical research of the reasons for the religious situation, Congar observed a growing gap between a secular and a Christian perceiving of the world since the Middle Ages<sup>6</sup>. Insofar as the Christian faith implies a “wholistic” view and tends to a “whole”<sup>7</sup>, this separation leads to an opposition between a Christian and a secular “whole”<sup>8</sup>. In

1. An earlier version of this text was read as a contribution to the workshop *Nouvelle théologie and Catholic Renewal in the 1950s and 1970s*, KADOC, Leuven, 12 May 2010. I would like to thank Sofia Pedrana for her linguistic help on the publication.

2. Y. CONGAR, *Une conclusion théologique à l'Enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance*, in *La Vie Intellectuelle* 37 (1935) 214-249.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

4. J. FAMERÉE – G. ROUTHIER, *Yves Congar (Initiation aux théologiens)*, Paris, Cerf, 2007, p. 58.

5. CONGAR, *Une conclusion théologique* (n. 2), p. 243.

6. It cannot be further developed in this article which is the relation of this analysis of an opposition between Church and society on the one hand and the conception of “Christendom” (“chrétienté”), designated to explain a certain way of the Church’s self-expression with respect to a Christian society. See also the common “projet d’une histoire de la théologie” of Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar and Henri-Marie Féret (M. QUISINSKY, *Geschichtlicher Glaube in einer geschichtlichen Welt: Der Beitrag von M.-D. Chenu, Y. Congar und H.-M. Féret zum II. Vatikanum* [Dogma und Geschichte, 6], Münster, Lit, 2007, esp. pp. 45-112).

7. CONGAR, *Une conclusion théologique* (n. 2), pp. 218-222.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

order to become credible once again, Christian faith, which continued to (and for its very message has to) offer a “wholistic” view, could no longer maintain and express this view without ignoring and criticizing most of the elements of the secular “wholistic” view. Congar’s diagnosis was a starting point for the Dominican theologian himself, but also for various other theologians, pastors, and lay people, to consider the “Incarnation” as an epistemological and practical model to conceive of Catholic practice in Church and Society<sup>9</sup>. One of the most important protagonists of this search to “incarnate” Christian faith in modern society (a search that became a major process in French Catholicism and that had strong repercussions both on academic theology and Christian practice) was Marie-Dominique Chenu, Congar’s teacher and Dominican brother<sup>10</sup>. Without denying differences in method, style and theological argumentation, their living and thinking in *Le Saulchoir* in the 1930s, together with Henri-Marie Féret and other Dominicans, can be described as “teamwork” which inspires their entire theological development<sup>11</sup>. Among Chenu’s numerous contributions – published widely in various theological, historical and pastoral publications – his article entitled

9. Following B. BESRET, *Incarnation ou eschatologie? Contribution à l'histoire du vocabulaire religieux contemporain 1935-1955*. Préface de M.-D. CHENU, Paris, Cerf, 1964, pp. 23ss., this article had a big impact in the history of French Catholicism, and this at the meeting point of Christian thinking and living. Yet it was no “solitaire”: Y. TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques d'abord: Approches du mouvement catholique en France (XIX<sup>e</sup> – XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris, Éditions Ouvrières, 1988, pp. 122ss., offers an instructive survey of contemporary publications. Congar comments his own article in 1963 (quoted after Y. CONGAR, *Appels et cheminements*, in ID., *Écrits réformateurs: Choisis et présentés par Jean-Pierre Jossua*, Paris, Cerf, 1995, 263-304) and explains how his view widened from a more ecclesiological approach to a more radical questioning of the nature of faith: “La vraie réponse, la conclusion positive consisteraient à renouveler notre présentation et pour cela, d’abord, notre propre vision de l’Église en allant au-delà des présentations et de la vision juridique alors et depuis longtemps prédominantes”. This is the reason for Congar’s work of ecclesiological renewal, materialized in the collection “Unam Sanctam” since 1937. He continues as follows “J’irais aujourd’hui plus loin pour désigner ce qu’il faudrait mieux voir et présenter. Plus radicalement que l’Église, c’est la notion même de foi, et celle, corrélatrice, de révélation; c’est l’idée de Dieu comme Dieu vivant; c’est le lien indissoluble, dans la Révélation judéo-chrétienne, entre la théologie, l’anthropologie et la cosmologie, le Dieu vivant, l’homme et le monde!” (*ibid.*, p. 283 for both quotations). As to the role of the theology of Incarnation in this development, see also the pondered appreciation by J.-P. JOSSUA, *Avant-propos*, in *ibid.*, 9-15, p. 9.

10. See now the outstanding and highly instructive study of C. BAUER, *Ortswechsel der Theologie: M.-Dominique Chenu im Kontext seiner Programmschrift “Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir”* (Tübinger Perspektiven zur Pastoraltheologie und Religionspädagogik, 42), Münster, Lit, 2010. Bauer also elucidates how Chenu’s thinking is and can be made fruitful for contemporary pastoral and theology.

11. M. QUINSKY, *Congar avec Chenu et Féret au Saulchoir des années 1930*, in *Transversalités. Revue de l’Institut Catholique de Paris* 98, 2006, 3-35 (also published in <http://www.catho-theo.net/spip.php?article116>); ID., *Geschichtlicher Glaube in einer geschichtlichen Welt* (n. 6).

*Dimension nouvelle de la chrétienté*<sup>12</sup> can be read as an outstanding example regarding the theological work of the two Dominican brothers as complementary<sup>13</sup>. Chenu shared Congar's historical diagnosis, pointing out that contemporary atheism is not a phenomenon of dechristianisation or apostasy, but is rather the result of a complete absence of christianisation, for which the Church too shares responsibility<sup>14</sup>. Actually, Chenu completed Congar's analysis of some deep reaching deficits in what became a theological and pastoral program, adopting more and more the language of incarnation<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, the theological task was nothing less than to think together the great theorems of Christian doctrine with Christian life in a non-Christian society. This also is the background that Chenu, in his manifest *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* (drafted as early as 1936) develops under the term of "signs of the times" at the time of Vatican II<sup>16</sup>.

My thesis is that Chenu and Congar are outstanding examples of an interference between the "nouvelle théologie" (before an overall definition of this varying movement) and the Catholic practice in Church and society. Thereby, the question what is meant by "interference" arises. Two concrete sentences may introduce this notion: on the one hand, according to Joseph Cardijn and Georges Guérin (respectively founder

12. M.-D. CHENU, *Dimension nouvelle de la chrétienté*, in *La Vie intellectuelle* 53 (1937) 325-351, also in ID., *La Parole de Dieu*, t. 2: *L'Évangile dans le temps* (Cogitatio Fidei, 11), Paris, Cerf, 1964, 87-107.

13. Y. CONGAR, *Mon cheminement dans la théologie du laïc et des ministères*, in ID., *Écrits réformateurs* (n. 9), 123-140, p. 125, attributes to Chenu the clarification of some ambiguities of the motif of "incarnation" in the 1930s.

14. M.-D. CHENU, *Déchristianisation ou non-christianisation?*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu*, t. 2 (n. 12), 247-253.

15. See, e.g., M.-D. CHENU, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir. Avec les études de Giuseppe Alberigo, Étienne Fouilloux, Jean Ladrière et Jean-Pierre Jossua* (Théologies), Paris, Cerf, 1985, pp. 136-137. On the Incarnation in the thought of Chenu see most notably F.A. EYABI, *La "loi d'incarnation" de Marie-Dominique Chenu: Histoire des "victoires humaines" ou de la "vie menacée"*, Roma, Urbaniana, 2000; C. GEFFRÉ, *Le réalisme de l'Incarnation dans la théologie du Père Marie-Dominique Chenu*, in *RSPT* 69 (1985) 389-399; ID., *Théologie de l'Incarnation et théologie des signes des temps chez le Père Chenu*, in CENTRE D'ÉTUDES DU SAULCHOIR (ed.), *Marie-Dominique Chenu: Moyen Âge et modernité* (Cahiers du Saulchoir, 5), Paris, Cerf, 1997, 131-154; C.F. POTWOROWSKI, *History and Incarnation in Marie-Dominique Chenu*, in *Science et Esprit* 42 (1990) 237-265; ID., *Dechristianization, Socialization and Incarnation in Marie-Dominique Chenu*, in *Science et Esprit* 43 (1991) 17-54; ID., *La théologie de l'Incarnation derrière l'inculturation: Les signes des temps chez Marie-Dominique Chenu*, in C. MÉNARD – F. VILLENEUVE (eds.), *Pluralisme culturel et foi chrétienne: Actes du Congrès de la Société canadienne de théologie*, Montréal, Fides, 1993, 69-85; ID., *Contemplation and Incarnation: The Theology of Marie-Dominique Chenu*, Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.

16. M.-D. CHENU, *Les signes des temps – réflexion théologique*, in Y. CONGAR – M. PEUCHMAURD (eds.), *L'Église dans le monde de ce temps: Constitution pastorale "Gaudium et spes"*, t. 2: *Commentaires* (Unam Sanctam – Série Vatican II, 65), Paris, Cerf, 1967, 205-225.

and leading figure of the *JOC*) the Dominicans of *Le Saulchoir*, and above all Chenu, gave them “l’intelligence de ce que nous faisons”<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, Chenu’s activity as theological adviser for the worker-priests could be characterized by the fact that first of all, he listened to them<sup>18</sup>. So, interference means a twofold interpenetration of teaching and learning, of theory and praxis. In a certain way, my question is thus not how much we should conceive of “nouvelle théologie”<sup>19</sup>, but in which way two theologians dealt with the challenge common to the known and unknown protagonists of this multifold movement; indeed the reconciliation between faith and life. In this article, I will try to disclose a specific “interference” of theology and practice, otherwise stated, a constitutive interference of thinking and living of faith. As Dominicans, Chenu and Congar went to preach the Gospel in many places and contexts. If their Dominican spirituality is also an intellectual one, their preaching activity is not limited to the level of university. Rather, the very specific character of their scientific work was in touch with multifold preaching activities in various circumstances and among a diverse public. Yet this preaching was not merely a one-way affair: it was a “theology at the service of the people of God”<sup>20</sup>, a theology able to “awake”, nourish and express the faith of many<sup>21</sup>. Above all, this service was exercised through dialogue, even if we must notice that dialogue as a theological category had to be further explained by Vatican II. In general, this dialogue was more theoretical and critically discerning for Congar<sup>22</sup> and, without lacking the theoretical dimension, more practical and enthusiastically motivating for Chenu<sup>23</sup>. Especially

17. J.-P. JOSSUA, *Le Père Congar: La théologie au service du peuple de Dieu* (Chrétien de tous les temps, 20), Paris, Cerf, 1967, p. 26.

18. Y. TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques et communistes: La crise du progressisme chrétien (1950-1955)* (L’histoire à vif), Paris, Cerf, 2000, p. 290.

19. J. METTEPENNINGEN, *Nouvelle théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*, London, Continuum, 2010, esp. pp. 4-13. In my paper, I use the term “nouvelle théologie” as a helping term expressing the theological request for a reconciliation between history, contemporary life and faith; not that much as a description of a clearly delimited or defined movement.

20. JOSSUA, *Le Père Congar* (n. 17).

21. For the expression “éveilleur” see J. DORÉ, *Un itinéraire-témoin: Marie-Dominique Chenu*, in P. COLIN (ed.), *Les catholiques français et l’héritage de 1789: D’un centenaire à l’autre. 1889-1989: Actes du colloque de l’Institut Catholique de Paris, 9-11 mars 1989* (Bibliothèque Beauchesne, 17), Paris, Beauchesne, 1989, 313-339, p. 339.

22. JOSSUA, *Le Père Congar* (n. 17), pp. 52s.

23. É. FOUILLOUX, *Un théologien dans l’Église du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in *BLE* 106 (2005) 21-38, pp. 30-32, evaluates Congar’s multifold “practical” engagements in order to “serve” the people of God: one has to underline his judgement that a closer examination of his 487 conferences given between 1946 and 1953 should be underdone. Despite the diverse public, one has to notice as Fouilloux did that Congar, unlike Chenu and Henri-Marie Féret, “ne suit pas régulièrement quelques groupes auxquels il servirait de guide” (31). See also J. ESPITALIER, *Une théologie du laïc: L’apport du Père Congar*, in *BLE* 56 (2005) 195-208, p. 198.

for Chenu's charismatic personality, many testimonies exist which illuminate the way his "presence" impressed and motivated contemporaries far beyond the "treizième"<sup>24</sup>, whether Christian or non-Christian<sup>25</sup>.

With respect to Vatican II and its interpretation, it should be said that we cannot understand the evolution of Chenu and Congar between 1950 and 1970 without considering the 1930s and 1940s, since the publications of the later period are rooted both in a continuity of the evolution of a theological epistemology and a discontinuity of questions and stimuli. As to a makeshift yet expedient periodisation of a theological evolution which is both coherent and flexible, we can state a first phase from the 1930s up to 1942: while Congar was already war prisoner, Chenu's *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* was placed on the Index. A second phase can be attributed to the interdiction of worker-priests in 1954 when Chenu, Congar and Féret were exiled from *Le Saulchoir* and Paris. The nomination of Congar as a consultant for the preparatory commission of Vatican II in 1959 can be understood as a turning point, even if there was only a slow improvement in his situation and that of his Dominican brothers after the beginning of Vatican II in 1962. The decade leading up to 1968 is part of what Étienne Fouilloux describes as the "glorious" phase of *Le Saulchoir*<sup>26</sup>. After 1968, Chenu and Congar were attentive observers of the radical changes in society and what these changes implied for the reception of Vatican II, yet in contrast to conciliar theologians such as de Lubac or Ratzinger, they did not become critical about Vatican II<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, the period between 1950

24. As to Chenu's theology, one has to consider that in a certain way there is not only an interference of pastoral and systematic dimension, but also an interference between (questions of) history and present – on this point, he teased himself that he lives "dans le treizième" (in the life of the 13<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris as well as in the history of theology of the 13<sup>th</sup> century), but that there is only one Chenu (see M.-D. CHENU, *Regard sur cinquante ans de vie religieuse*, in *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu* [Théologies], Paris, Cerf, 1990, 259-268, p. 259). On his activities in the 13<sup>th</sup> arrondissement see also a description of the "chrétiens du XIII<sup>e</sup>", in F. LEPRIEUR, *Quand Rome condamne: Dominicains et prêtres-ouvriers* (Cerf Histoire), Paris, Cerf, 1989, p. 24 and the chapter *Un groupe d'influence: Les chrétiens du XIII<sup>e</sup> (1945-1954)*, in TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques et communistes* (n. 18), 267-287. Following Tranvouez, this group is important for being a "carrefour" and a "premier croisement significatif du courant progressiste et du mouvement missionnaire" (*ibid.*, pp. 267s.).

25. I refer only to some examples: J. BONIFACE – J. BONIFACE, *Les "petits foyers" du Père Chenu*, in *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu* (n. 24), 145-147; *Entretien avec M. et Mme Thénier: Spiritualité de la vie quotidienne*, in *ibid.*, 148-153; *Un groupe de cadres et leurs femmes: Contemporains du futur*, in *ibid.*, 154-159; see further testimonies in LEPRIEUR, *Quand Rome condamne* (n. 24), pp. 114-116.

26. É. FOUILLOUX, *Une Église en quête de liberté: La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II (1914-1962)*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1999, p. 125.

27. J. A. KOMONCHAK, *Le valutazione sulla Gaudium et spes: Chenu, Dossetti, Ratzinger*, in J. DORÉ – A. MELLONI (eds.), *Volti di fine concilio: Studi di storia e teologia sulla conclusione del Vaticano II* (Testi e ricerche di scienze religiose, 27), Bologna, Mulino,

and 1970 is not at all a homogenous one, but is rather a bridge period full of ongoing, but often divergent evolutions. In this preconciliar and conciliar period, however, both Congar and Chenu had several occasions to return to the theological-pastoral evolutions since the 1930s. In fact, this period was not only a time of growing vivacity of new pastoral initiatives and spiritual and theological insights in French Catholicism. But as a consequence of the developments going along with it, it was also a time of heavy conflicts between French Catholics and the Vatican<sup>28</sup>. Among the various texts of Chenu and Congar in which the two evaluate the theological evolutions, one can mention Chenu's preface to the thesis of Bernard Besret in 1964. There he claims that for theology, the "praxis" became one of its "règles de la pensée et de ses expressions"<sup>29</sup>. Congar, around the same time showed that the theological interest in the concrete situation of the French society as well as the openness for the questions of the people lead straight to a rethinking of both the very central topics of Christian faith and of the epistemological framework handling these topics<sup>30</sup>.

Concretely, I want to proceed in two phases. In a first phase, I shall present some examples of Catholic practice in Church and Society supported and inspired by theological reflection. In the second phase, I want to ask in which way this very Catholic practice in Church and Society influenced vice versa theology, and more precisely the theology as a human science of God. As I claim an interference between "nouvelle théologie" and Catholic practice in Church and Society, the two main chapters differ first of all in their perspective of one single process, not in every aspect by the contents of this process. In doing so, I also want to contribute to a hermeneutics of Vatican II, showing that the interference between the "pastoral" and the "doctrinal" aspect of Christian faith is, in its magisterial expression, in "continuity" with the Christian living and thinking especially since the 1930s. By the same token, this kind of "continuity" includes historical, epistemological and practical "discontinuities" all together.

2000, 115-153; M. QUINSINSKY, *Aggiornamento – aber wie? Die Konzilstheologen Henri de Lubac SJ und Yves Congar OP zwischen "nouvelle théologie" und Konzilsrezeption*, in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 58 (2011) 5-33.

28. See among a rich literature É. FOUILLOUX, *Bewahrende Kräfte und Neuerfahrungen im Christentum Frankreichs*, in M. GRESCHAT – J.-M. MAYEUR (eds.), *Die Geschichte des Christentums, t. 12: Erster und Zweiter Weltkrieg, Demokratien und totalitäre Systeme*, Freiburg, Herder 1994, 552-631.

29. M.-D. CHENU, *Préface: Le théologien et son vocabulaire*, in BESRET, *Incarnation ou eschatologie?* (n. 9), 11-16, p. 13.

30. Y. CONGAR, 1945-1965: *La recherche théologique*, in ID., *Situation et tâches présentes de la théologie* (Cogitatio fidei, 27), Paris, Cerf, 1967, 26-40, esp. pp. 30s.

## II. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION INFLUENCED CATHOLIC PRACTICE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

### 1. *JOC and Action Catholique*

The *Catholic Working Youth (JOC)*, founded by the Belgian priest Joseph Cardijn, offered new perspectives of living and thinking to a great number of young Catholics. In *Le Saulchoir*, Chenu and Congar received Joseph Cardijn, Georges Guérin and together with them many *JOC* members for retreats in the Dominican study convent beginning in the early 1930s<sup>31</sup>. At this moment, however, what was to become the renewing potential of Chenu's and Congar's theology was not yet developed at its final level. Rather, Chenu was a medievalist, interested in Thomas Aquinas and his time, while teaching also other eras of the history of doctrines. So he introduced his then student Congar to the thought of Johann Adam Möhler and spoke about the ecumenical initiative *Faith and Order* of 1927<sup>32</sup>. While his approach to Thomas Aquinas, methodically influenced by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre's school of the *Annales*, made him more and more sensitive to the psychological and contemplative as well as the social and institutional condition of faith, he also conceived of theology as *fides in statu scientiae* – otherwise conceived of as a spirituality – became science. So if Chenu and Congar, within a Dominican “pléiade de rénovateurs”<sup>33</sup> – welcomed Cardijn and Guérin in *Le Saulchoir* and sympathised with them, this is surely due to the spirituality of the Order of Preachers but it was – besides human qualities which are all but to be neglected – the fermentation of a specific type of Thomistic framework that allowed Chenu's and Congar's preaching to be helpful. In Chenu's preaching activity, theological framework on the one hand and historical and sociological approaches on the other could interfere because Chenu followed the model of a historically situated Thomas Aquinas. More precisely, once historical thinking acknowledged both as method and dimension in theology, it became a linking point between theology or preaching

31. The best interpretation by Chenu himself are the autobiographical sketches in *Un théologien en liberté: Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu*, Paris, Centurion, 1975, pp. 57s.136s. See also M.-D. CHENU, *La JOC au Saulchoir*, in *Id.*, *La Parole de Dieu*, t. 2 (n. 12), 271-274; J. CARDIJN, *Théologie du travail, théologie pour l'homme*, in *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu* (n. 24), 19-21; G. GUÉRIN, *Un théologien à la JOC*, in *ibid.*, 22-24; see also LEPRIEUR, *Quand Rome condamne* (n. 24), pp. 22-24. As to Congar, the frequency of encounters is e.g. documented in Congar's list of his predications: see *Fr. Congar – Prédications faites* (APF, Fonds Congar, Carton 1 Autobiographie 22: Répertoire autographe. Sermons et conférences février 1930 – janvier 1956). While he mentions the *JOC* retreats at *Le Saulchoir* only shortly in *Mon cheminement* (n. 13), p. 123, he speaks some lines further about his experiences as soldier and war prisoner that deeply marked him.

32. References in QUINSINSKY, *Geschichtlicher Glaube* (n. 6), p. 156 and *Id.*, *Congar avec Chenu et Féret au Saulchoir* (n. 11), p. 12.

33. P. PIERRARD, *Georges Guérin: Une vie pour la JOC*, Paris, Atelier, 1997, p. 226.

and practice as well as a creative precedent for the integration of other epistemological methods such as the social sciences in theological thinking.

The ongoing harmonization in Chenu's work of spiritual and theological thinking on the one hand and historical and later on sociological analysis on the other side was intuitively at work already in young Chenu's thinking and became the longer the more a characteristic aspect of his theological epistemology. For the "intuitions" underlying this epistemology, Chenu became one of the earliest supporters of new movements in the Church since the late 1920s. As rector of *Le Saulchoir*, he dedicated his article "Dimension nouvelle de la chrétienté", published after the famous meeting of the *JOC* in the Parc des princes in 1937, to the *JOC* chaplains<sup>34</sup>. We find here an outstanding example of a combination of theological beliefs with a historical and sociological analysis and, resulting from this, pastoral encouragements. Following his sociological and historical analysis, Chenu was a fervent adherent of the apostolic practice of the *JOC*. He endorsed the idea of an "apostolat du milieu par le milieu"<sup>35</sup> because he saw in it a way to surmount both practically and theoretically a long-reigning separation between faith and concrete milieu of life. In fact, with this analysis Chenu accepted a relatively original clear definition of "milieu" such as the working class, reflecting by this a rather corporatist structure of society<sup>36</sup>. At the same time, he granted much attention to the "masses", attributing to this social phenomenon a growing importance<sup>37</sup>. With respect to the situation of the *JOC* members, Chenu encouraged them to a Christian practice not despite being members of the

34. This is outlined by M.-J. MOSSAND, *Présence du Père Chenu à l'Action catholique ouvrière*, in *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu* (n. 24), 45-51, p. 50. Chenu situates this article in his theological evolution in *Un théologien en liberté* (n. 31), pp. 84s: "[...] si le Père Cardijn, le fondateur de la J.O.C. a repris ce texte dans une brochure, ce n'est pas par hasard, c'est parce qu'il posait la question du blocage de l'Église avec un certain type de chrétienté occidentale" (see for this republication: M.-D. CHENU, *Dimension nouvelle de la chrétienté: Préface du Chanoine Cardijn*, Paris, 1938). For a contextualisation see also R. WATTEBLED, *Stratégies catholiques en monde ouvrier dans la France d'après-guerre: Préface de Jean-Marie Mayeur*, Paris, Atelier, 1990, pp. 22-24.

35. CHENU, *Dimension nouvelle de la chrétienté* (n. 34), pp. 96ss.

36. Chenu was one of the first theologians to integrate sociological insights in theological epistemology. As a pioneer, Chenu could obviously over- or underestimate several aspects of this proceeding as well as several concrete aspects of the analysis. This does not limit the groundbreaking merits of his methodology. See M.-D. CHENU, *Sociologie de la connaissance et théologie de la foi*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu, t. 1: La foi dans l'intelligence* (Cogitatio fidei, 10), Paris, Cerf, 1964, 63-68; ID., *Vie conciliaire de l'Église et sociologie de la foi*, in *ibid.*, 371-383; ID., *La ville: Notes de sociologie apostolique*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu, t. 2* (n. 12), 515-536.

37. See e.g. his conference on mysticism in Christian history at the session of Lisieux in 1944, resumed by É. POULAT, *Les prêtres-ouvriers: Naissance et fin* (Petits Cerf Histoire), Paris, Cerf, 1999, p. 101. See also M.-D. CHENU, *La révolution communautaire et l'apostolat*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu, t. 2* (n. 12), 361-378, pp. 374s.; Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu (n. 31), p. 68, where Chenu refers also to the contemporary totalitarian regimes pocketing the "phénomène des masses", and *ibid.*, p. 71.



working class, but *as* members of it. In 1944, he writes about the novelty of the specialised movements of *Catholic Action* such as the *JOC*: “Cette nouveauté, c’est l’insertion de la grâce dans les milieux de vie, dans les ‘communautés’ humaines comme telles”<sup>38</sup>. As this quotation shows, Chenu transcends in a certain way the sociological categories he refers to as an intellectually indispensable way to conceive of reality. What matters for him is the human reality since, in its Thomistic-Aristotelian epistemology, nature is both seen with all its historical contingency, and also in a perspective of grace. Therefore, in this quotation we can find a kind of gradual generalisation of the term “milieu” – beyond its initially rather corporatist dimension – and its implicitly possible application to various “milieux de vie”. In the 1950s, conflicts about the ideological and practical impact of the *JOC* surged<sup>39</sup>. As to the ecclesiastical behavior with respect to the social milieus of the workers, the value of work and its theological implications, this period is marked by a complex relationship between the insights that the Church “lost” the working class and an often rather nervous and perhaps even jealous Catholic reaction against what was to be considered communism, a phenomenon which absorbed both philosophical and practical dimensions and which was intensified with the rise of the Cold War<sup>40</sup>. In contrast to some tendencies in the *JOC*, Congar and even Chenu within his use of characteristic vocabulary transcended a restriction of the Christian worldview through the eyes of the milieu of the workers. As an outstanding example, Chenu’s introductory speech of a meeting in 1953, attended by 300 readers of *La Quinzaine* – a leading review called by Congar “porte-parole” and “conseiller” for numerous Christian militants<sup>41</sup> clearly shows the difficulties risen once a faith-inspired practice in society becomes politically concrete: “Vous récusez tout cléricanisme, y compris celui de gauche; mais non plus vous ne voulez pas vivre en pièces détachées. Votre foi aussi vous entraîne dans l’histoire profane du monde

38. CHENU, *La révolution communautaire et l’apostolat* (n. 37), p. 378.

39. The dense survey concerning the evolution of the *JOC* in M. ALBERT, *Die katholische Kirche in Frankreich in der vierten und fünften Republik*, Freiburg, Herder, 1999, pp. 66ss. is as instructive as the whole book.

40. So what does it mean for the Church if for spiritual and theological reasons Catholics express their faith by concrete practices which are also characteristic for non-Christians, e.g. institutionalised acts of workers solidarity within the trade unions? What is the impact of Christian faith on the environment, what is the impact of environment on Christian faith? In fact, an engagement for the working class could reveal, at least in the long term, that there can be some Christian-rooted elements in communist doctrines, even if they turned out into a rather anti-Christian (or anti-Church) expression, and vice versa, some common motivations may be discovered resulting from generally antagonistic Christian and communist doctrines. On this subject see TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques et communistes* (n. 18). This problematic should indeed not be restrained at a so-called “progressisme chrétien” or at the relationship between Catholics and communists, the latter being rather an outstanding example of a more general question.

41. TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques et communistes* (n. 18), p. 204 (from a letter addressed by Congar to the review in 1953).

[...] non pas, certes, pour y dicter des *solutions* déduites d'un Évangile, mais pour y porter des *exigences*. [...] Mais à ce moment même où l'Évangile vous presse intérieurement, vous ne consentez aucunement à escamoter les motifs *politiques*, qui sont la règle *immédiate* de votre action, et le lieu de votre rencontre avec les autres hommes. Tel est l'équilibre de votre pensée et de votre action"<sup>42</sup>. All of the aforementioned examples show that Chenu was, for his very theology, a fervent adherent of the notion of "témoignage"<sup>43</sup>. Although his theology could lead to optimism and equilibrium – and we will come to see the reasons for this later on – not all protagonists of what can be called a movement of reconciliation between faith and practice succeeded in this challenge.

Far beyond the *JOC*, during the pontificate of Pius XI (1922-1939), *Catholic Action* became an important factor of Catholic practice in Church and Society within its organised and structured form<sup>44</sup>. Chenu and Congar were among the leading theological advisors of the different branches of *Catholic Action* and many of the articles they published since the 1930s – "les belles années de l'Action Catholique"<sup>45</sup> – emanated from speeches given to *Catholic Action* members<sup>46</sup>. Following their historical

42. Quoted after TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques et communistes* (n. 18), p. 187. In this context, it could also be mentioned that Congar and Chenu themselves differed in their political sensibility. While Chenu introduced lessons about Marx in the curriculum of *Le Saulchoir* since the 1930s (see Jacques Duquesne *interroge le Père Chenu* [n. 31], p. 66) and integrates the analysis of Marx explicitly in his theology of work (M.-D. CHENU, *Pour une théologie du travail*, Paris, Seuil, 1955, pp. 54ss.), Congar remained more reluctant about the capacity of Marx' epistemology. At the beginning of the war, he even made a very "conservative" judgment about the pre-war evolution of politics and society (É. FOUILLOUX, *Theologen mit "Amt und Mandat" in Vichy-Frankreich*, in L. SCHERZBERG [ed.], *Vergangenheitsbewältigung im französischen Katholizismus und deutschen Protestantismus*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2008, 17-39, pp. 20-21) which can be (anachronistically!) compared with Chenu's evaluation of the same time in *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (n. 31), pp. 67s.

43. TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques et communistes* (n. 18), p. 191.

44. For an introduction see G.-R. HORN, *Western European Liberation Theology: The First Wave (1924-1959)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, chapter 1.

45. CONGAR, *Mon cheminement* (n. 13), p. 125.

46. These conferences and articles had a big influence not only on the accountable people (see e.g. L. AUGROS, *Le Père Chenu et la Mission de France*, in *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu* [n. 24], 25-35, p. 26), but also on the numerous militants in search for spiritual nutrition. See above note 31 for Congar's predications within the *Action Catholique* circles. Among his publications, one can refer to his contributions for the Dominican *Revue des Jeunes* and *La Vie intellectuelle* in the 1930s and *Témoignage chrétien* in the 1940s. In these articles, Congar develops thoughts exposed in his ground-breaking monographs and collections of articles. As to Chenu's publications, he participated also in the publication of *Masses ouvrières*: MOSSAND, *Présence du Père Chenu à l'Action catholique ouvrière* (n. 34), p. 47. For this publication see P. PIERRARD, *Un siècle de l'Église de France (1900-2000)*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2000, pp. 145s. Chenu offers a survey of his numerous activities for different apostolic publications in *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (n. 31), pp. 86-102. For his contribution in this important pastoral activity via publications see also C. GEFFRÉ, *Introduction*, in *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu* (n. 24), v-xi, p. viii;

and sociological analysis, Congar and Chenu started their support to *Catholic Action* with a special attachment to *Catholic Action*'s principle of creating specialised branches ("Action Catholique spécialisée"), thus displaying an openness toward social changes occurring over time. In the fifth chapter of his *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* of 1953, Congar resumes his theological evaluation of *Catholic Action*. In fact, there were some crucial theological problems to resolve: for example the question of the "mandat", questioning more deeply the relationship between lay-people and the hierarchy<sup>47</sup>. Whereas this implied important ecclesiological questions both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, Congar showed that first of all, behind the different approaches, the foundation of Catholic practice in Church and society are baptism and confirmation<sup>48</sup>. In fact, Congar resumed the entire field of Church-world-relationship by developing a far-reaching theological interpretation of Christian life and adopting the threefold scheme "king, priest, prophet" to the Church as a whole. By that, the Catholic's every-day life can be considered as "Catholic practice in Church and society", as it was described and encouraged by Congar: "[...] il est de la mission de l'Église et de la vocation des chrétiens de philosopher et de soigner des malades, ou aussi bien d'être ouvrier, militant syndical, magistrat, homme politique, etc."<sup>49</sup>. To put this in evidence was without any question a major contribution to Catholic life by the new theology, which itself was inspired by Christian's every-day life. Actually, the consequences of these kinds of theological encouragement and support, lead to personal faith stories, as documented by Jeanne Aubert in her monograph, of which the title incidentally echoes John Paul II's question "France, que fais-tu de ton baptême?"<sup>50</sup>.

As to Vatican II, chronologically in the period between 1950 and 1970, the multifold experiences and the reflections resulting from collaborations between theologians and pastoral activists within *Catholic Action*

G. MONTARON, *Théologien avec les journalistes*, in *ibid.*, 126-131; J. CHATAGNER, *Confirmés dans la foi*, in *ibid.*, 132-139. See also TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques et communistes* (n. 18), pp. 119, 154, 171 *et al.* for Chenu's activity for *La Quinzaine* in the early 1950s, where he was "conseiller théologique officiellement reconnu par la Hiérarchie" and signed numerous articles as "Apostolus".

47. H. LEGRAND, *Yves Congar. Leidenschaft für die Einheit: Einige Anmerkungen zu seinen Einsichten und seiner Hermeneutik*, in *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 113 (2004) 223-246, p. 238, shows that *Jalons* constituted only an intermediate step in the development of Congar's theology of ministry.

48. Y. CONGAR, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (Unam Sanctam, 23), Paris, Cerf, 1961, p. 516.

49. CONGAR, *Jalons* (n. 48), p. 543.

50. J. AUBERT, *JOC, qu'as-tu fait de nos vies? La jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne féminine 1928-1945*, Paris, Atelier, 1990; JEAN PAUL II, *France, que fais-tu de ton baptême? Les textes prononcés par le pape au cours de son voyage en France, du 30 mai au 2 juin 1980, présentés par les cardinaux F. Marty, R. Etchegaray, Mgr G. Gilson, les PP. G. Defois et J. David*, Paris, Centurion, 1980. see also H. DENIS, *Église, qu'as-tu fait de ton Concile?*, Paris, Centurion, 1985.

influenced the conciliar documents. An outstanding example is the Lay decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, where Congar's contribution must be outlined<sup>51</sup>. It goes without saying that *Apostolicam actuositatem*, which reflects the heavy discussions about *Catholic Action* since the 1930s, cannot be interpreted without taking into account in the same time the other conciliar documents and especially *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*. For our context, it seems to be important, that the structure of interference, which requires an ongoing deepening after Vatican II, can be found in this decree<sup>52</sup>.

## 2. *Mission de France* / *prêtres-ouvriers*

Following the foundation of the *Mission de France* in 1941 and the *Mission de Paris* in 1943 by Cardinal Suhard and the publication in 1943 of *La France – pays de mission?*<sup>53</sup>, the missionary dimension of the Church, which in the same process was deepened and enlarged, entered more and more the consciousness of Catholics<sup>54</sup>. The evolution occurred between the 1930s and the post-war situation also has to be mentioned, for it led to a shift in the basics of Catholic practice from the rather organised *Catholic Action* to the ideal of the “levain dans la pâte”<sup>55</sup>. Whereas in *Catholic Action* there were mostly lay-people involved, the *Mission de France* is first of all a major step toward a renewed conception of priests<sup>56</sup>. If both were milestones of a deep ecclesiological renewal, one should not forget – beyond some common sources underlined by André

51. For the influence of Congar's and Chenu's theology in their far-reaching dimensions see e.g. G. BAUSENHART, *Theologischer Kommentar zum Dekret über das Apostolat der Laien Apostolicam actuositatem*, in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil* 4 (2005) 1-123, pp. 61s.

52. M. QUISINSKY, *Inkarnation: Jesus Christus – Ermöglichung und Herausforderung christlichen Lebens und Denkens*, in H.A.-M. MOONEY – K. RUHSTORFER – V. TENGE-WOLF (eds.), *Theologie aus dem Geist des Humanismus: Festschrift für Peter Walter*, Freiburg, Herder, 2010, 292-331; ID., *Can Tradition (Not) Change? Truth in the History between God and Humanity*, in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 86 (2010) 107-136; ID., *Spiritualität nach Apostolicam actuositatem: Konkretionen christlicher Weite – Weite christlicher Konkretionen*, in K. GALLEGOS SÁNCHEZ – B. HENZE – T. HERKERT – M. QUISINSKY (eds.), *Aggiornamento im Erzbistum Freiburg: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil in Erinnerung und Dialog* (Tagungsberichte der Katholischen Akademie der Erzdiözese Freiburg), Freiburg, Katholische Akademie, 2011, 367-372.

53. H. GODIN – Y. DANIEL, *La France: Pays de mission?*, Lyon, Cerf, 1943.

54. During the annual meetings of worker-priests since 1945, the speeches of theologians such as Chenu, Congar, Liégé, Féret and others were important instruments of reflection, see J. VINATIER, *Le cardinal Suhard: L'évêque du renouveau missionnaire en France (1874-1949)*, Paris, Centurion, 1983, p. 246.

55. *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (n. 31), pp. 133s.

56. It goes without saying that this renewed conception of priests was not developed without the participation of laypeople, who were by the way included in the work of the *Mission de France* (see T. CAVALIN – N. VIET-DEPAULE, *Une histoire de la Mission de France: La riposte missionnaire 1941-2002*, Paris, Karthala, 2007, pp. 65-66).

Depierre<sup>57</sup> – some important differences of approach which could sometimes lead to disagreements and misunderstandings between *Catholic Action* activists and worker-priests<sup>58</sup>. Especially, the relationship between the established Church and non-Christian society has to be mentioned, but also the issue regarding what kind of community-building one can witness faith in<sup>59</sup>.

As to Chenu, he considers himself a witness and actor of the “préhistoire”<sup>60</sup> of the worker-priests. Specifically, Chenu was convinced that there are not only single experiences to be lived but that there is a necessity of a certain project which combines spiritual and theological evaluations. So, he participates enthusiastically in the meetings of the first groups of worker-priests<sup>61</sup>. This transformation was taking place while the post-Second-World-War situation led to a new understanding of European society in the sense that there was a new civilisation to be built<sup>62</sup>. For theological-practical reflections, this led to a shift from the ideal of “reconquest” (expressed also by several references to the “Christ

57. A. DEPIERRE, *Les fenêtres de l'espérance*, in *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu* (n. 24), 38-44.

58. On the one hand, the phenomenon of worker-priests is, in comparison to *Catholic Action*, a novel one (E. GERARD – G.R. HORN, *Introduction*, in ID. [eds.], *Left Catholicism [1943-1955]: Catholics and Society in Western Europe at the Point of Liberation*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2001, 7-12, p. 10). Yet on the other hand, and just with respect to the theology of Incarnation mentioned by Gerard and Horn, there is at least a continuity between *Catholic Action* and the worker-priests as to the reasons for the support of theologians such as Chenu and Congar, but also because of the ongoing evolution of theological epistemology. In this sense it can be read the statement of Congar (“tout cela est étroitement lié”: Y. CONGAR, *La crise de 1954*, in ID., *Journal d'un théologien [1946-1956]*. Édité et présenté par Étienne Fouilloux [Unam Sanctam. NS], Paris, Cerf, 2001, 223-283, p. 237), commenting the measures of 1954 in a wider horizon and who opposes for this very wider theological and historical horizon an “infantile” official ecclesiology with an evangelical inspiration of Chenu, Féret, Congar and the worker-priests.

59. In *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (n. 31), pp. 144s.150, he mentions a difference between “communautés naturelles” and rather established forms of Church communities. Incidentally, this seems to be one of the most crucial problems for a Church in a non-Christian society, as the heavy discussions around pastoral options show also after Vatican II.

60. *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (n. 31), p. 144.

61. “Il y avait un projet! Nous passions ensemble les soirées du lundi, rue Ganneron, dans le petit logement du Père Godin. Ils étaient douze ou quinze et, avec beaucoup d'attention, ils faisaient une mensuration attentive de leurs menues expériences quotidiennes. Et la mise en commun – c'est l'une de mes convictions – décuplait la lucidité sur ces expériences” (*Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* [n. 31], p. 144).

62. See Congar's famous statement: “Qui n'a pas vécu les années 1946-1947 du catholicisme français a manqué l'un des plus beaux moments de la vie de l'Église. À travers une lente sortie de la misère, on cherchait, dans la grande liberté d'une fidélité aussi profonde que la vie, à rejoindre évangéliquement un monde auquel on venait d'être mêlé comme on ne l'avait pas été depuis des siècles. Que l'avenir de l'Église soit lié à l'avenir du monde, nous l'avons redécouvert depuis, mais c'était alors une évidence donnée dans l'expérience elle-même” (CONGAR, *Appels et cheminements* [n. 9], p. 292).

the King”-motif propagated during the pontificate of Pius XI), implicated in the term “nouvelle chrétienté”, towards an ideal of “testimony” of a “missionary” Church<sup>63</sup>, more and more conscious of its “serving” dimension<sup>64</sup>. The theology of Incarnation, as it was proposed by Chenu and Congar, favored this shift and also pushed the *Mission de France* to an extension of the understanding of “mission”, especially since the constitutional session in July 1947<sup>65</sup>: the Church as a whole was now considered to be “in the state of mission”. As to the renewed understanding of the priests, their role could actually no longer be restrained on a cultic service within a form of society called “Christendom”<sup>66</sup>. Theologians such as Congar and Chenu gave a theological expression to the charisma of *Mission de France* priests. These priests lived a missionary conception of the priest, more and more in touch with life outside the Church walls. Chenu’s famous article *Le sacerdoce des prêtres-ouvriers*<sup>67</sup> summarises his conferences<sup>68</sup> and his engagements, for it results from many activities and reflections with worker-priests<sup>69</sup>. At the same time, it was written to encourage worker-priests in a time of conflict. Congar diagnosed a lack of theology and of theologians in the worker-priest movement, but at the same time he affirms that he would have been honored to be more directly in the doctrinal service of them<sup>70</sup>. Yet our question is not that much about the conflict, even if it has repercussions on theological thinking of Chenu and Congar. The issue is rather the theological evolution far beyond temporary hard difficulties. So, as some of Congar’s contributions show, the developments lead on the one hand to numerous concrete questions as to the specific role of lay people and ministries in Church<sup>71</sup> – and beyond that appeared by the same token fundamental issues concerning the very

63. M.-D. CHENU, *Corps de l’Église et structures sociales*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu*, t. 2 (n. 12), 159-169, p. 168. This interpretation is adopted and historically situated by TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques d’abord* (n. 9), pp. 130, 176.

64. Y. CONGAR, *Pour une Église servante et pauvre* (L’Église aux cent visages, 8), Paris, Cerf, 1963.

65. See CAVALIN – VIET-DEPAULE, *Une histoire de la Mission de France* (n. 56), p. 65 for the impact of Congar’s *Conclusion à l’Enquête* and Chenu’s theology of Incarnation.

66. See above note 6 for the problematisation of this term in our context.

67. M.-D. CHENU, *Le sacerdoce des prêtres-ouvriers*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu*, t. 2 (n. 12), 275-281. On Chenu’s article and its reception see LEPRIEUR, *Quand Rome condamne* (n. 24), pp. 217-221.233.393. See also Y. CONGAR, *L’avenir des prêtres-ouvriers*, in *Témoignage chrétien*, 25 September 1953, where he claims that one can condemn a solution but not a problem. Incidentally, the development of Congar’s theology of ministry is a good example of the ecclesiological challenges of the nouvelle theology in its theoretical and practical dimension (see LEGRAND, *Yves Congar* [n. 47], p. 238).

68. See e.g. WATTEBLED, *Stratégies catholiques* (n. 34), pp. 178s.

69. LEPRIEUR, *Quand Rome condamne* (n. 24), p. 392.

70. CONGAR, *Journal d’un théologien (1946-1956)* (n. 58), p. 318.

71. See e.g. Congar’s rather critical evaluation of the position of the worker-priests for not resolving the problem of their relationship with lay engagement at the *Mission de France* 1952 meeting in Limoges, resumed by WATTEBLED, *Stratégies catholiques* (n. 34), pp. 210s.

conception and scope of ecclesiology, once it is radically replaced in history. On the other hand, for Chenu, the main issue is first of all that priests at work, as well as lay people in every context of life, express a “presence” of the Gospel in society<sup>72</sup>. It was such presence that was for him, as well as for the worker-priests, a “locus theologicus”. What can be concluded right now is that Christian practice in Church and society had an inherent ongoing dynamic of personal involvement as well as of theological reflection. But can theology claim a personal engagement in matters of faith while conceiving of this faith in an absolutely static epistemology? As for Catholic practice of lay people in Church and society, it is very difficult to measure the impact of the “grass-roots-phenomenon”<sup>73</sup> of worker-priests in industrial enterprises or other domains of engagement. Their testimony of solidarity and charity could be perceived by working colleagues without appearing in any official statistics or evaluation. In lack of a sufficient epistemology – can there be one? – integrating historical, sociological, spiritual, theological and other aspects, it could be a challenge of Christian anthropology to always consider concrete persons rather than only abstract data. In fact, in 1952, only 0,7% of French priests (280 of 40 000) were incardinated in the *Mission de France*<sup>74</sup>. Rather than its impact on concrete every-day life of many French people<sup>75</sup>, the interferences between “nouvelle théologie” and Catholic practice in Church and society can be analyzed – and in the present context of research this implies an entire research program – through the worker-priests’ character as a kind of highly regarded and symbolic laboratory<sup>76</sup>. Actually, this laboratory should not be examined without situating the worker-priests in a complex togetherness of other expressions of Catholic faith<sup>77</sup>.

72. On this presence, see CHENU, *Le sacerdoce des prêtres-ouvriers* (n. 67), p. 280: “Une présence, ce n’est certes pas encore un ‘enseignement’ (didachè), ni un sacrement. Mais c’est la condition de la parole, y compris de la Parole de Dieu. C’est, dans toute la force du terme (et l’émotion populaire devant la mise en question des prêtres-ouvriers le prouve), un témoignage efficace de la foi. C’est la première expression, souvent silencieuse en mots, mais toujours *en acte*, d’une vraie évangélisation, et du visage alors visible de l’Église”.

73. O. COLE-ARNAL, *The Testimonies of the Worker-Priests: Contextual Layers of the Pioneer Epoch (1941-1955)*, in GERARD – HORN (eds.), *Left Catholicism (1943-1955)* (n. 58), 118-141, p. 136.

74. CAVALIN – VIET-DEPAULE, *Une histoire de la Mission de France* (n. 56), p. 71.

75. There is also a difference to be mentioned as to the generations of worker-priests: whereas the first generation (before 1954) conceived of their lives as an active apostolate, there was a tendency to a rather discrete and silent presence after 1954 (C. SUAUD – N. VIET-DEPAULE, *Prêtres et ouvriers: Une double fidélité mise à l’épreuve [1944-1969]*, Paris, Karthala, 2004, p. 72).

76. See also the critical evaluation M.-D. CHENU, *Le sacerdoce des prêtres-ouvriers*, in *La lettre* n° 305-306, mars-avril 1984, republished in SUAUD – VIET-DEPAULE, *Prêtres et ouvriers* (n. 75), 500-502.

77. See SUAUD – VIET-DEPAULE, *Prêtres et ouvriers* (n. 75), p. 494.

As to Vatican II, Chenu's and Congar's "rehabilitation"<sup>78</sup> during and after the council implies not only rather practical questions. Notwithstanding some unresolved or newly appeared systematical-theological questions, it can theologially be read as an official approbation of the claimed "interference" between "nouvelle théologie" and Catholic practice in Church and society<sup>79</sup>.

### III. CATHOLIC PRACTICE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY INFLUENCED THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

While the "nouvelle théologie" could nourish personal engagement of Catholics in Church and society, their practice was more and more considered to have an intrinsic systematic-theological interest. In fact, within the inherent dynamic of Chenu's theological approach, it is not possible to plead for a Christian-inspired engagement in a static way which would consider the various forms of engagement only as an application of theological ideas<sup>80</sup>. Rather, Christian practice questions and enlarges for its very theological dimension the theological theories by which they are stimulated or explained. This is true for more classical forms of Christian practice as the parish life<sup>81</sup>, incidentally despite their often classic structures they were also a place of some promising initiatives and faith experiences<sup>82</sup>. By that, Catholic practice brings new insights to theological reflection. While it was very difficult to precisely establish the influence of new theology on Christian practice in Church and society, the opposite direction of examination seems

78. O. FUCHS – P. HÜNERMANN, *Theologischer Kommentar zum Dekret über den Dienst und das Leben der Presbyter* "Presbyterorum ordinis", in B.P. HÜNERMANN – B.J. HILBERTH (eds.), *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Bd. 4, Freiburg, Herder, 2005, 337-580, pp. 464-465.

79. See *ibid.*, p. 464: "Vor allem Marie-Dominique Chenu hat sich mit seiner Theologie und mit seinem Engagement (mit den Arbeiterpriestern, MQ) solidarisiert, hat er doch in seinem Ortswechsel der Theologie die Selbstrekonstruktion von Theologie und Kirche in den Horizont ihrer proexistenten Verbindung mit einer aus der Perspektive des Evangeliums wahrzunehmenden 'Umwelt', besser 'Inwelt', und damit in den Horizont einer zeitempfindlichen Pastoral gestellt".

80. On this "inductif" approach of the *Catholic Action* since the 1920s see *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (n. 31), pp. 58s. As to Chenu himself, he declares: "Sans m'en rendre toujours compte, j'ai pratiqué cela toute ma vie; j'en fais maintenant un énoncé de principe" (p. 58).

81. TRANVOUEZ, *Catholiques d'abord* (n. 9), p. 190, speaks of "modernisme pratique" of the "paroissiens ordinaires", claiming thus that a depreaching questioning is also at work within the Church milieu and is therefore not only motivated by the experience of unbelief or non-Christianisation.

82. Y. CONGAR, *Die Sendung der Pfarrer*, in *Id.*, *Priester und Laien am Dienst am Evangelium*, Freiburg, Herder, 1965, 161-190; for the "dynamic" resulting from a renewed theology of the parish see also M. QUISINSKY, *Die Pfarrei zwischen Ekklesiologie und Gesellschaft: Historische und theologische Perspektiven auf das Werk von Constantin Noppel SJ (1883-1945)*, in *Freiburger Diözesan-Archiv* 126 (2006) 163-193.



to be easier. If only, because of the sources we can examine how the writings of theologians of the “new theology” reflect directly and indirectly experiences resulting from Catholic practice in Church and society. As a prominent example, one can refer to the manifesto *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*, where Chenu named theological insights generated by an interference of practical and intellectual dimension of Christian life within a world that is no longer a merely Christian one: the missionary expansion, the pluralism of human civilizations, the greatness of the Orient (including a new regard on Islam), the ecumenical movement, the existence of a mass society, and last but not least a new pastoral dynamic of the Church assuming all of these aspects. More precisely, he called this points “‘lieux’ théologiques en actes, pour la doctrine de la grâce, de l’incarnation, de la rédemption”<sup>83</sup>. Looking back at the 1930s, Chenu himself says: “C’est à ce moment qu’a commencé à s’élaborer ma théologie: dans des expériences humaines pas toujours conscientes, mais très déterminantes”<sup>84</sup>. This means not only the actual subjects of a kind of pastoral theology, but it also concerns the very foundations of Christian theology. To exemplify this with one of the mentioned loci: Chenu, the theologian of the Incarnation, was impressed of a directly *christological* dimension in the very practice of Georges Guérin<sup>85</sup>. In a certain way, the learning process resulting of these interferences could surely be described as an ecclesiological one. In fact, the practice of lay people and priests could not stay without deep repercussions on the understanding of baptism and ministry, on the togetherness of all Catholics within the Church and on the relationship between the Church and the world. For as the Church does not exist for itself, ecclesiology always implicates a certain understanding of God and his relationship to Mankind which cannot be limited to the Church.

### 1. Catholic Practice and Theological Reflection

#### a) The Impact of Catholic Practice in Church and Society on Theological Epistemology

For Chenu and Congar, Catholic practice in Church and society became a constitutive dimension of theology, as it leads to theological productivity. Writing about the retreats of *JOC* members in *Le Saulchoir*, Chenu stated in 1936 that these are “pour des ‘théologiens’ un admirable critère et une savoureuse complaisance de se sentir immédiatement ouverts à la religieuse intelligence de pareils mouvements de chrétienté”. He also states that these encounters offer “une intelligence profonde et ardente du vrai régime apostolique de la chrétienté contemporaine, de ses mouvements

83. CHENU, *Une école de théologie* (n. 15), p. 142.

84. *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (n. 31), p. 67.

85. See the quotations of Chenu in PIERRARD, *Georges Guérin* (n. 33), p. 173.

de masse, de sa technique des milieux, de ses procédés de conquête, de son véritable organisme humain et surnaturel”<sup>86</sup>. This can be read as an example of Chenu’s already mentioned belief that life of the Church is a *locus theologicus* “*in actu*”, so that there resurge “les concepts d’une théologie qui n’est pas un savoir tombé du ciel [...] mais qui est immergée dans la vie du peuple de Dieu lié au monde”<sup>87</sup>. As to Congar, who follows the same intuitions, one can observe that he considered the longer the more the life of the Church – in its most complex historical and socio-logical contexts – as the very entry door to theology<sup>88</sup>. While evaluating this approach during Vatican II, Congar and Chenu explained in which way this attitude of interest in concrete people – both inside and outside the Church – generated together with other factors a profound change of theological epistemology<sup>89</sup>. For him, the multiseular challenge which consists in integrating human experiences and knowledge into theological work requires a shift from apologetics to fundamental theology. This also means that theology is not just another way to express what Christian practice experiences. Rather, the speculative theological thinking, because it is part of human possibilities, has also its own value even if it cannot be separated from other *loci theologici*.

#### b) The Systematic-theological Impact of Catholic Practice in Church and Society on Theology

The consideration of the practice of faith as a *locus theologicus* also had repercussions on the understanding of the very object of theology: God.

86. CHENU, *La J.O.C. au Saulchoir*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu*, t. 2 (n. 12), 271-274, pp. 273-274.

87. Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu (n. 31), p. 68. See also *ibid.*, p. 69: “Les lignes de la Parole de Dieu se trouvent dans le tissu concret de l’Église, dans la vie de l’Église”.

88. See FAMERÉE – ROUTHIER, *Yves Congar* (n. 4), pp. 242ss.

89. The following quotation resumes Congar’s position which is detailed in many other publications: “Dix-neuf siècles de christianisme se sont intéressés presque uniquement à Dieu. Aujourd’hui, nous connaissons le monde, et celui-ci s’impose tellement à nous que certaines affirmations chrétiennes semblent, sinon vaciller, du moins être surclassées par les évidences qui nous viennent des choses. En toute hypothèse, la réflexion chrétienne, qui est le principe de tout travail théologique, doit désormais tenir compte de ce que les hommes ont découvert sur le monde et sur l’homme lui-même. La réflexion théologique a été marquée durant les vingt dernières années par une acceptation de l’homme et de ses questions. Souvent, autrefois, la théologie proposait des thèses élaborées dans les écoles, transmises par les manuels et qui ne tenaient guère compte des réalités humaines ni des faits concrets de l’histoire ou de l’expérience; ceux-ci étaient apportés plutôt en objection: on y répondait, on les réfutait, on justifiait contre eux la thèse victorieuse. Il existait et l’on maintenait ainsi une position standard du bloc catholique; le rapport entre ce bloc et les multiples courants de la créativité humaine et de la vie était souvent défensif et apologetique. Le dernier quart de siècle a été marqué par une ouverture aux courants de la créativité humaine et de la vie, et, si l’on osait dire, par une acceptation de l’homme” (CONGAR, 1945-1965: *La recherche théologique* [n. 30], p. 29).

In his *Dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus* of 1959, an article he calls a theological meditation, Congar states that a theology of the “terrestrial realities” is both kenotic-incarnational and paschal-eschatological, whereby the Incarnation itself is rooted in the plan of God, otherwise said in the ultimate reason and sense of history which is God himself<sup>90</sup>. At the end of this theological meditation, Congar refers to his thesis previously mentioned in his *Conclusion à l’Enquête*, claiming that a godless world is a result of the longtime preaching of a worldless God. Echoing in a certain way his analysis in the “Enquête” of 1935, Congar claims that atheism could only conceive of humans without God because faith representatives conceived of God without humans. Nevertheless, the solution is not to search in what Congar calls an “overreaching interest”<sup>91</sup> to world and humans, but in a conversion to the true God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Yet this very conversion implicates an adequate perceiving of the respective situation of humans<sup>92</sup>. Congar’s analysis implies that the renewal of Christian self-understanding concerns the whole dimension of faith, described as “totalitaire” in Congar’s “Enquête”. Obviously, for Congar, this meant not only some minor changes in pastoral or ecclesiastical strategy but a profound renewal of Christian faith. This renewal begins with the question of the credibility of faith, in other words the question of how to perceive of the Revelation<sup>93</sup>. In fact, Congar’s allusion to the modernist crisis made in this context stands for the various temptations of 20<sup>th</sup> century theology to answer positively the numerous philosophical, social and other challenges. If the theological topics of Creation and Revelation show the most far-reaching dimension of Christian faith in history, this history has its center in Jesus Christ<sup>94</sup>. Actually, the “nouvelle théologie” had to reconsider nothing less than the mystery of God, the Creator and Saviour, who revealed himself in his Son. Becoming more and more attentive to the biblical testimony, Congar states that one cannot think and speak about God without thinking and speaking about humans<sup>95</sup>. To remedy the complex estrangement between faith and world in history

90. Y. CONGAR, *Dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus*, in *Maison Dieu* 59 (1959) 132-161 and in ID., *Wege des lebendigen Gottes: Glaube und geistliches Leben*, Freiburg, Herder, 1964, 65-98, p. 79.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

92. As one of the numerous examples in Congar’s writings for this judgement the following can be quoted: “Du même mouvement par lequel le laïc chrétien trouvait son plein statut d’Église, il demandait une théologie qui lui expliquât sa place et son rôle dans le monde: pas seulement dans la société, mais dans l’immense histoire humaine, commencée peut-être il y a un million d’années, et, dans toute la création, vue elle-même non statiquement comme faite, mais dynamiquement dans le temps et dans un immense processus cosmique” (CONGAR, 1945-1965: *La recherche théologique* [n. 30], p. 33).

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 28ss. See also CONGAR, *La théologie depuis 1939*, in ID., *Situation et tâches présentes de la théologie* (n. 30), 11-23, p. 16.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 28.38.

from within a Bible-inspired attitude, Congar refers to the Church Fathers, according to whom God became human so that humans might become God, also proving that for him the new openness for the contemporary society goes hand in hand with a new openness for the richness of Tradition<sup>96</sup>. Correspondingly to his analysis that since the modernism crisis the Christian understanding Revelation is the real question, Congar states that Christian anthropology is the real answer<sup>97</sup>. Thus, it should be clear that this is not a merely world-immanent anthropology, but that Christian anthropology implies theo-logy and vice versa.

## 2. "Nouvelle théologie" or a Renewed Theology? At the Crossroad of the Mystery of God and the Mystery of Humans

### a) Intimacy and Sociability of Christian Spirituality

As theology of Incarnation, Chenu's theo-logy was rooted both in a spiritual and scientific ideal. Its ideals were developed by Chenu in his theological-historical approach to Thomas Aquinas, and it is not a rather accidental coincidence that his studies about Aquinas in 1950 and 1959 (but also about the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century in 1957) were published in a decade of strong pastoral engagement (incidentally suspicious for the hierarchy)<sup>98</sup>. They could appear rather abstract, at first sight they could deny our thesis that Catholic practice in Church and society constitutes a source of new theology. Yet, they are just the intellectual framework which allowed Chenu to theologially express what Catholics inspired by guides such as Cardijn and Guérin experienced spiritually. As to God, Chenu identifies his being with truth, resuming thus the biblical message of God's self-Revelation from the Exodus to the Apocalypse<sup>99</sup>. This self-Revelation

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 39s.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

98. M.-D. CHENU, *Introduction à l'étude de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris, Vrin, 1950; ID., *St Thomas d'Aquin et la théologie*, Paris, Seuil, 1959 (incidentally a very personal book, testifying of Chenu's spirituality which is an important aspect in his pastoral activities!); ID., *La théologie au douzième siècle: Préface d'Étienne Gilson de l'Académie Française* (Études de philosophie médiévale, 45), Paris, Vrin, 1957; ID., *La théologie comme science au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Vrin, <sup>3</sup>1957 (the first edition is dated 1927, the second 1943; the third is a very much extended and completed revision). For the evolution as to the theological epistemology and the role in Chenu's thinking see my review of the German translation in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 56 (2009) 544-547 and QUINSINSKY, *Geschichtlicher Glaube* (n. 6), 130-135.220-227.

99. M.-D. CHENU, *Lecture de la Bible et philosophie au Moyen Âge*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu, t. 1* (n. 36), 187-200, pp. 190s. In this article, Chenu examines how the medieval scholars referred to the biblical message for their "systematic theology", in order to compare this procedure with a reversed methodology (exegesis refers to systematic theology) in his own time. What he develops from studying medieval authors determines to a large part the systematical background of his theology of the "presence" of faith (see the conclusion in *ibid.*, p. 200).

culminates in Jesus Christ, “path, truth and life” and by that deploying a messianic dynamic<sup>100</sup>, incidentally a theological and practical dimension of faith mentioned in Vatican II thanks to Chenu and Congar<sup>101</sup>. As to the human, his faith engages its inmost center of personality and relies it at the content and object of faith, God<sup>102</sup>. Yet, just because of this graceful relationship, faith is also entirely human, as Chenu states with Thomas Aquinas: “Cognita sunt in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis [...] Si vraiment l’homme connaît Dieu, il le connaîtra humainement”<sup>103</sup>. Thus, faith is constructed in humans “spirituellement, intellectuellement, théologiquement, sociologiquement, selon les structures de l’homme, en quel elle s’incarne”<sup>104</sup>. Being both contemplation and science, theology becomes *fides in statu scientiae*<sup>105</sup> and as such is psychologically, sociologically and historically conditioned by the incarnational structure of faith. Resulting from this structure, a Christian engaged in Church and society can integrate the experiences of the individual and social conditions of his practice in the very heart of his faith, but also in the theological expression of this inmost presence of God in his life<sup>106</sup>. In this sense, theology is not just the matter of some scientists in an ivory tower, but the intelligence of faith by every Christian, whatever his or her intellectual possibilities may be. In his 1957 book *La théologie est-elle une science?*, Chenu answers his own question: “De la théologie? mais vous en faites sans le savoir”<sup>107</sup>, thus concluding an impressive list of theology-producing aspects of everyday life<sup>108</sup> with a surprising allusion to Molière: “Vous faites de la

100. CHENU, *Lecture de la Bible et philosophie au Moyen Âge* (n. 99), p. 191.

101. See QUINSKY, *Geschichtlicher Glaube* (n. 9), pp. 355-367.

102. See the very dense passage *Structure humaine de la foi* of M.-D. CHENU, *Vérité et liberté dans la foi du croyant*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu, t. 1* (n. 36), 337-359, pp. 356ss.

103. M.-D. CHENU, *Contribution à l’histoire du traité de la foi: Commentaire historique de II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 1, a. 2*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu, t. 1* (n. 36), 31-50, p. 49. See also other developments following this sentence, e.g. in ID., *Position de la théologie*, in *ibid.*, 115-138, p. 119.

104. CHENU, *Vérité et liberté dans la foi du croyant* (n. 102), p. 357.

105. CHENU, *Position de la théologie* (n. 104), pp. 116ss.

106. CHENU, *Vérité et liberté dans la foi du croyant* (n. 102), p. 358.

107. M.-D. CHENU, *La théologie est-elle une science?* (Je sais, je crois, 2), Paris, Fayard, 1957, p. 15.

108. The whole paragraph is very instructive. As examples, Chenu mentions: the participation at a holy mass celebrated versus populum (in 1957!), the lecture of the Song of Songs, the lecture of St Therese of Lisieux, before he develops: “Vous vous êtes engagé dans un groupe d’Action catholique, et votre comportement a été pénétré d’une certaine vision chrétienne du salut du monde, là encore non seulement par ferveur apostolique, mais par une perception caractéristique des conditions de la grâce dans le Christ: vous avez redécouvert le mystère de l’Incarnation, vous êtes tout sensible dans votre méditation à l’humanité du Christ dans l’unité de son être divin [...] Vous voilà aux prises avec le problème du chrétien dans le monde; soucieux de porter témoignage pour la justice et l’amour fraternel, vous rencontrez le phénomène social de l’appropriation des biens matériels par les individus, phénomène fondé sans doute en nature, mais promptement menacé d’odieuse excès [...] Engagé dans les problèmes de l’organisation du travail, soucieux de l’émancipation économique et politique des peuples sous-développés, déchiré par l’ambiguïté des nationalismes, solidaire, que vous le

théologie, comme Monsieur Jourdain faisait de la prose, sans le savoir. Il serait mieux de le savoir”<sup>109</sup>. Thus, on the one hand, every aspect of human life is in touch with God and can widen our understanding of God. On the other hand, theologians can no longer neglect this practical dimension of theology, which they can surely stimulate, but which becomes even more a school of life for their scientific expression of faith.

b) At the Heart of “Nouvelle théologie”: The Incarnation of God’s Presence in the World

What I exposed in the last paragraph might sound rather classic. In fact, Chenu and Congar re-actualise doctrinal terminology in their historical studies, mainly about Thomas Aquinas and the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, as Chenu and his *équipe* were introducing new historical methods in theological understanding of the *Doctor Angelicus*, at the same time they applied this very renewed theological framework in order to allow an “intelligence” of contemporary faith<sup>110</sup>. As Thomas Aquinas did, they accepted new scientific approaches and methods in theological work. By this procedure, theological epistemology widens far beyond classical frontiers without stopping to be theology. On the contrary, in the incarnation-structured framework of theology as *fides in statu scientiae*, everything that is human has a theological value. This is true both for practical experience and intellectual explorations. Although for Chenu and Congar the historical methods of the *Annales*<sup>111</sup> and the sociological methods of Gabriel Le Bras and Fernand Braudel<sup>112</sup> had to be integrated in theological epistemology, their

voulez ou non, des non-chrétiens dans les besoins et les espérances du monde, reconnaissant chez des athées la présence de justes découvertes de nouvelles valeurs terrestres, vous êtes hésitant sur les rencontres à consentir et sur les institutions où collaborer, conscient de l’irréductible séparation du chrétien dans le monde, et, en même temps, convaincu dans votre foi d’être le ferment évangélique jeté dans la pâte [...] Et ainsi de suite. Les cas sont innombrables” (*ibid.*, pp. 15-18). On concrete procedures of group meetings with Chenu see also *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* (n. 31), pp. 101s: “Ces hommes ne demandent pas une solution venant d’en haut, ils veulent que je les aide à trouver eux-mêmes, à partir de leur expérience, les solutions chrétiennes [...] Dans certaines de ces réunions, je ne me présentais pas du tout comme théologien, parce que la théologie a une réputation de science ésotérique, abstraite, irréelle, éterniste, mais, après plusieurs débats, je leur disais: ‘Ce que nous venons de faire là, c’est de la théologie’”.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

110. Joseph Doré calls this structure: “La théologie est de la foi et pour la foi” (DORÉ, *Un itinéraire-témoin* [n. 21], p. 320), incidentally defending Chenu’s theology of experience based on Thomas Aquinas against the accusation of subjectivism.

111. QUINSKY, *Geschichtlicher Glaube* (n. 9), pp. 218s.

112. A. DUVAL, *Présentation biographique de M.-D. Chenu par ses œuvres essentielles*, in *Marie-Dominique Chenu: Moyen Âge et modernité* (n. 5), 11-23, p. 18 notes that it was thanks to Le Bras that Chenu taught at the École pratique des hautes études between 1944 and 1951, where he incidentally prepared his groundbreaking studies about the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. As to Congar, he followed lessons of Le Bras in the early 1930s (CONGAR, *Appels et cheminements* [n. 9], p. 269).

theology owed at least as much to the people of God in whose service they placed this theological framework<sup>113</sup>. This can be considered as a rather kenotic aspect of the incarnational structure of theology, in the sense that God comes to World and reveals himself in Jesus Christ. God's ongoing presence in history also transcends History. Catholic practice in Church and society is thus not only a way to discover God or to be introduced in the *scientia Dei*. At the same time, as the theology as *fides in statu scientiae*, there is an eschatological dynamics at work, which can be considered as a merely assuming aspect of the incarnational structure, aiming at a "recapitulation" of all things by Christ<sup>114</sup>. One could resume it stating that there is no way to speak about God without being aware that it is as humans that we speak of God, every aspect of individual and social human life introducing humans more deeply in the mystery of God of whom they are a part. Every aspect of human life and thought is thus taken seriously, but every aspect of human life and thought is also relativized and put in the perspective of God whose fullness transcends history.

The double-sided structure of both theology as *fides in statu scientiae* and practice of faith is the background for Chenu, who was all but a bibliocist, to operate a far-reaching use of the expression "Parole de Dieu": it describes the "lumière intérieure" (meaning knowledge of Christ gracefully present in humans<sup>115</sup>) it designates the Gospel which makes all people "contemporaries" of Christ<sup>116</sup>, it is revealed in a human-divine way<sup>117</sup>, it does not exist outside of human expressions and historic cohesions<sup>118</sup>, it is transcendent<sup>119</sup>, it is revealed at its most in the revelation of the Word became flesh<sup>120</sup>, it is incarnated in dogmatic formulations<sup>121</sup>, it speaks in the souls of humans<sup>122</sup>, to quote a few examples. Yet it is just these examples which are both the background for Chenu's intuition of the *loci theologici in actu* and the aim of their inherent dynamic. In fact, the "lieux théologiques en acte" discern the "Parole de Dieu en acte". Considering the "pastoral" character of Vatican II, Chenu summarises in a certain form his intuitions explaining in which way "la Parole de Dieu" is "en acte"<sup>123</sup>. Emanating from Jesus Christ, "la Parole de Dieu" signifies both Scripture

113. Obviously, allusion is made to the title of Jean-Pierre Jossua's introduction the life and work of Congar: JOSSUA, *Le Père Congar* (n. 17).

114. QUINSKY, *Geschichtlicher Glaube* (n. 6), pp. 204-210.

115. CHENU, *Une école de théologie* (n. 15), p. 135.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

123. M.-D. CHENU, *Un concile "pastoral"*, in ID., *La Parole de Dieu*, t. 2 (n. 12), 655-672, p. 661.

and Tradition<sup>124</sup>, it lives in the Church which is Tradition, it is transmitted in an organic way by all the expressions of the Church's being<sup>125</sup>, communicated as dialogue by an "Église en état de mission"<sup>126</sup>, "la Parole de Dieu" designates in the final analysis the very presence of God in History. Catholic practice in Church and society as they were inspired by the "nouvelle théologie" shed light on this presence of God in History far beyond the barriers of Congar analysis in what he called a desincarnated faith. In a preface to Louis Augros' *De l'Église d'hier à l'Église de demain*, an autobiographical history of the *Mission de France*, Chenu resumes one of the outstanding insights of this half-century-long development: "Pour être dans le monde comme en son lieu, constitutionnellement, et non par seul prosélytisme, l'Église doit sortir d'elle-même, de ses appareils: elle est missionnaire. Rarement l'expérience concrète a alimenté et rénové à ce point la théologie de la Parole de Dieu"<sup>127</sup>. Insofar as "la Parole de Dieu" means in a certain way God himself, Chenu's theo-logy, which aims at introducing human spirit in this mysterious presence, is intrinsically "incarnated".

### c) Incarnation, Christian Life in History and Salvation Economy

Whereas Chenu's theology of Incarnation could lead to a renewed attention on the relationship between God and humans, Congar's exploration of the Tradition as living process also has to be understood from within a theo-logy which conceives of God revealing himself within a historical relationship with Humanity<sup>128</sup>. In fact, a renewed understanding of the Church-world-relationship as it resulted from Congar's theology of laity intimately linked the Christian understanding of Humanity and World to the Christian understanding of God. As it was in a certain way pre-established in the incarnational approach to theology, Congar shows – and every single term of his display implies consequences for the understanding of Humanity in History – how Jesus Christ in the fullness of its messianic dynamics as king, priest and prophet is at the center of a both ever

124. If Chenu does not identify "la Parole de Dieu" with the Scripture, he nevertheless indicates clearly the place of the Scripture in the perception of the presence of "la Parole de Dieu": "Dieu parle aujourd'hui. Disant cela, je ne joue pas contre la primauté de l'Écriture: c'est précisément à l'intérieur de celle-ci que se créent peu à peu des consciences claires capables de dépasser la lettre, qui est liée à des conjonctures passagères" (*Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu* [n. 31], p. 72 – see also *ibid.*, pp. 58, 67 and 141 for further aspects of this mysterious presence of God in the history of his Creation).

125. CHENU, *Un concile "pastoral"* (n. 123), p. 662.

126. *Ibid.*, p. 663.

127. M.-D. CHENU, *Préface: L'Église en état de mission*, in L. AUGROS, *De l'Église d'hier à l'Église de demain: L'aventure de la Mission de France* (L'Évangile au XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle), Paris, Cerf, 1980, 7-13, p. 11.

128. CONGAR, 1945-1965: *La recherche théologique* (n. 30), pp. 28s.



concrete and overall Christian worldview<sup>129</sup>. This worldview is, as resuming the biblical message about God and Humanity, an “economic” one, considering Creation and History as eschatologically destined to salvation. In this theo-logy, God reveals himself in Jesus Christ. In doing so, he reveals at the same time the mystery of humans, World and History. The Revelation is, nevertheless, not a kind of abstract knowledge but a graceful relationship established by God whose graceful action opens the possibility of real liberty<sup>130</sup>. Yet God’s truth wants to become true in concrete lives with all its determinations and contextual contingencies. That is why for Congar, Christian fidelity is a twofold fidelity towards God and the World<sup>131</sup>. If Congar’s arguments place Jesus Christ at the center, this corresponds to the very logic of the Incarnation motif, relying in the most intimate way on God and Humanity, divine and human, sacral and secular. The aforementioned messianic dimension of Christ’s presence links the concrete practice of Christians to the truth of Christ in an ever historically situated way, giving its theological value to every engagement, encounter, reflection and insight of Christians wherever they live. Incidentally, it is in this context that are to be found the roots of Chenu’s “theology of work”. Concretely, an elaborated theology of work results from his participation in the “Semaines sociales” in 1947<sup>132</sup>. By that, Chenu shows that it is the theology of Creation and by that the theology of Salvation which is the horizon of a theology of work.

Chenu’s theology of Incarnation and Congar’s theological conceiving of Tradition can be seen as complementary, even if both Dominicans differently accentuated several aspects of Christian thinking and living. In a certain way, the notion of Salvation economy constitutes a frame for their theology, generated by an Incarnation-theological foundation as well as by a practical “verification” of Christian truth, linking together both Tradition and present, pastoral and dogma<sup>133</sup>.

129. CONGAR, *Jalons* (n. 48), pp. 85ss.

130. About the plan of God in this perspective see *ibid.*, p. 138.

131. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

132. Following Jacques Duquesne *interroge le Père Chenu* (n. 31), pp. 59-114, Chenu’s 1947 meeting conference of the *Semaines sociales*, criticized by curial instances but protected by Cardinal Suhard, constitutes the chapter “Le devenir social” of his later publication M.-D. CHENU, *Pour une théologie du travail* (n. 42). The oldest text republished in this volume dates of 1945. Later on, Chenu published further reflections, so in 1959 the text “Théologie du travail”, republished in *La Parole de Dieu*, t. 2 (n. 12), pp. 543-570. On Chenu’s theology of work see S. SAILER-PFISTER, *Theologie der Arbeit vor neuen Herausforderungen: Sozialethische Untersuchungen im Anschluss an Marie-Dominique Chenu und Dorothee Sölle* (Ethik im Theologischen Diskurs, 12), Münster, Lit, 2006, pp. 108-224.

133. On the salvation economy in Chenu see M. QUINSKY, “Heilsökonomie” bei Marie-Dominique Chenu OP: *Kreative Rezeption ostkirchlicher Theologie im Vorfeld und Verlauf des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, in *Catholica* 59 (2005) 128-153; in Congar see among others C. MACDONALD, *Church and World in the Plan of God: Aspects of History and Eschatology in the Thought of Père Yves Congar op* (Regensburger Studien zur Theologie, 27), Frankfurt, Lang, 1982.

IV. CONCLUSION: "NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE" AS A RENEWED WAY  
OF SPEAKING OF GOD AND MANKIND – SOME THEOLOGICAL  
CHANCES AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AS AN HERITAGE  
OF THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1950 TO 1970

We can assume that after Vatican II, preconconciliar publications such as Chenu's *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* or Congar's *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* can be read as documents of transition, witnessing from within far-reaching theoretical and practical shifts – and an overall tension between theology and hierarchy, as it is shown by the condemnations of 1942 and 1954<sup>134</sup>. By this we mean that they are at the same time documents testifying an enormous learning process of the Church as a whole, culminating in Vatican II conceived of both an end and a beginning. One can illustrate this learning process with reference to the debate on theological anthropology. In fact, Catholic practice in Church and society before Vatican II shifted more and more from the ideal of "reconquest" to an engagement in what was called a "humanisation" of society and by that of every human being. This meant a breakdown of longtime one-sidedness neglecting several aspects of the human dimension of faith and life, but could also implicate the danger of a new one-sidedness neglecting the transcendental dimension of life and faith. In each case, one can measure the epochal reach of the challenge described by Congar during and after Vatican II, claiming a renewed Christian anthropology and a renewed understanding of salvation, letting behind separations such as between doctrine and pastoral, theory and praxis, theology and human sciences.

It is noteworthy that both Chenu and Congar continued their thinking after Vatican II both in line with the theological framework established since the 1930s and integrating new questions of living and thinking. Without being directly in touch with upraising tendencies in philosophy or social sciences, their very theological framework resulting from the "nouvelle théologie", and confirmed and enlarged by Vatican II, allowed them to accept new challenges of Catholic practice in Church and society in a positive way. As to Chenu, one should in no case reduce his theological thinking to a 1977 publication entitled *La "doctrine sociale" de l'Église comme idéologie*. But with respect to our thesis that the Dominican is an outstanding example of the interference between "nouvelle théologie" and Catholic practice in Church and society, it is interesting that his last monograph can just be read as the most explicit example of this interference which is characteristic of his entire intellectual and spiritual biography<sup>135</sup>. In the situation around Vatican II, when Congar wrote

134. CONGAR, *Appels et cheminements* (n. 9), 300 states nevertheless, that his manuscript of *Jalons* passed Roman censorship.

135. First, the Italian edition was published: M.-D. CHENU, *La dottrina sociale della Chiesa: Origine e sviluppo (1891-1971)*, Brescia, Queriniana, 1977. It followed the French

the above mentioned analysis, his theological presuppositions surely meant that theology had furthermore to become a new reflection about the “whole of Revelation as fact as well as content”<sup>136</sup>. Such a general review of Christian faith, exposed to the concrete lives and at the same time nourished by their experiences, must look for adequate ways to be credible – practically and theoretically – in a world which does conceive itself not only outside of Christian epistemology, but presumes even a “death of God”<sup>137</sup>. Yet, for having developed a theo-logy of God’s presence in History, and that means above all in the life of Christians, Congar did not become excessively pessimistic after Vatican II<sup>138</sup> and 1968<sup>139</sup>, but tried to discern new forms of God’s presence in the Catholic practice in Church and society<sup>140</sup>. Insofar as it’s due to Vatican II that this discernment is possible, Chenu calls it a “prophetic Council”<sup>141</sup>.

The pastoral activities as well as the theological production of Chenu and Congar can be considered as an outstanding example of the proliferation of the interference between “Nouvelle théologie” and the Catholic practice in Church and society. This interference is an ongoing stimulus of theology and history insofar as in a certain way, after Vatican II, the

edition: *La “doctrine sociale” de l’Église comme idéologie*, Paris, Cerf, 1979. Only in 1991, a German edition was published: *Kirchliche Soziallehre im Wandel: Das Ringen der Kirche um das Verständnis der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit. Mit einem Vorwort von Kuno Füssel und einem Hintergrundbeitrag von Ludwig Kaufmann*, Fribourg, Exodus, 1991. While the French title best reflects the heavy discussion in the 1970s, it is the German title (including the subtitle) which corresponds almost exactly to my thesis of an “interference”. One reason of this could be that the German title was chosen in a perspective marked by a growing consciousness for the “longue durée” of theological-historical evolutions because of and after Vatican II. As to my thesis that this book can be read as a result of the life-time interference of “Nouvelle théologie” and Catholic practice in Church and society in the thinking of Chenu, even if one cannot limit this result at this publication, it is interesting that Chenu only appears with a prominent place in this book in the third volume of J.-Y. CALVEZ, *Chrétiens penseurs du social, 3 vol.* (Histoire de la morale), Paris, Cerf, 2002-2008, pp. 127-132. See also *ibid.*, p. 139 the judgement that the position of the international review of “Communio” is a nearby-opposition to Chenu’s standpoint and the analysis made by L. KAUFMANN, *Gott im Herzen der Geschichte*, in CHENU, *Kirchliche Soziallehre im Wandel*, 101-121, pp. 119s., of Chenu’s comment on the differences of approach between John Paul II and Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider in Puebla 1979.

136. CONGAR, *La théologie depuis 1939* (n. 93), p. 19.

137. *Ibid.*

138. It is instructive to compare Congar with Henri de Lubac. See QUINSKY, *Aggiornamento – aber wie?* (n. 27).

139. G.-R. HORN, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America (1956-1976)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

140. Y. CONGAR, *Regard sur le Concile Vatican II*, in ID., *Le concile Vatican II: Son Église peuple de Dieu et corps du Christ. Préface de René Rémond* (Théologie historique, 71), Paris, Beauchesne, 1984, 49-72, p. 70, speaks of one of the most evangelical eras in history, notably because of the multifold engagement for Mankind encouraged by Vatican II.

141. M.-D. CHENU, *Ein prophetisches Konzil*, in E. KLINGER – K. WITTSTADT (eds.), *Glaube im Prozess: Christsein nach dem II. Vatikanum (FS Karl Rahner)*, Freiburg, Herder, 1984, 16-21.

main intuition of theologians such as Chenu and Congar can generally be taken for granted: theology always has to consider both God and humans. Yet, as the very history of their living and thinking as well as the history of Vatican II and as its reception shows, this interference brings with itself numerous theological and epistemological questions. As a conclusion of my paper, I want to present one of them.

If we claim an interference of theology and Christian practice, it has to be considered that we are in touch with faith in its multi-formed expressions. Especially, there is a very complex relationship between “inside” and “outside” aspects of human life, between the profoundness of the conscience and explicitly or implicitly faith-inspired engagements, acts and practices. If the “soul” of every human is historically situated, it is rather difficult to write a history of “souls”. Nevertheless, one can claim a theological urgency to write this history, or better: these histories, for epistemological researches, constitute like this an important contribution to a contemporary understanding of spirituality which is both Christian living and thinking<sup>142</sup>. According to Chenu, this would be a “histoire des âmes et non plus seulement évolutions linéaires; foi personnelle, et non plus seulement mémoire sociale. Telle est l’histoire des dogmes, mieux: l’histoire des doctrines chrétiennes, qui sera pour le théologien la matière de la Tradition”<sup>143</sup>.

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**ABSTRACT.** — In his *Conclusion théologique à l’Enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l’incroyance* of 1935, French Dominican Yves Congar argued that the Christian faith is not being successfully “incarnated” in the modern world. With his Dominican brother Marie-Dominique Chenu, Congar developed a renewed theological approach in order to fill this deficit. Their approach was distinguished by interaction between theological reflection and Catholic practice in Church and society, especially within the JOC and among the priest-workers. More exactly, this interaction implied a mutual dynamic: Catholic practice influencing theological reflection and vice versa. Doing so, the “incarnation” appeared to be the center of both Christian practice and theological reflection, opening the view for God’s salvific presence in the world within an “economy of salvation”. Thus, a renewal of the theological speaking of both God and mankind took place. This renewal continues to challenge Church and theology.

142. M. QUINSINSKY, “*Gelebtes Konzil*”: *Zur historischen, systematischen und konzils-hermeneutischen Bedeutung von Zeitzeugenberichten zum Zweiten Vatikanum*, in GALLEGOS SÁNCHEZ – HENZE – HERKERT – QUINSINSKY (eds.), *Aggiornamento im Erzbistum Freiburg* (n. 52), 31-46.

143. CHENU, *Une école de théologie* (n. 15), p. 141.