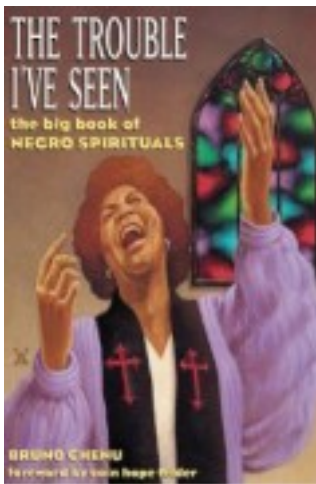




PROMINENT ASSUMPTIONIST Fr. Bruno Chenu, who died suddenly in 2002, was considered to be one of the most respected theologians in France at the time of his death. Theologian, professor, and journalist, he had a special impact in the area of ecumenical dialogue.

Born in Beaurepaire, France, on June 18, 1942, he was one of four children. He completed his secondary education in Assumptionist minor seminaries: a career so brilliant that one of his literature professors wrote at the end of a paper he submitted only one phrase, "destined for the Bonne Presse" (the world renowned publishing house of the Assumptionists). He would eventually get there, but in the meantime it would have been re-baptized Bayard Press.



Fr. Chenu was a man who approached things deliberately and profoundly. His long theological preparation began with his novitiate in 1960 at Pont-l'Abbé-d'Arnoult; then it was off to philosophy in Layrac (near Paris) from 1961 to 1963, and from there to theological studies at the Catholic Institute in Lyon, where he obtained a licentiate degree in 1968. It was in that same year that he was ordained a priest.

That was just the beginning of his training! After writing a licentiate dissertation on Byzantine theology, he began to focus on ecumenical relations and became active in the Council of Churches in France (Conseil œcuménique des Églises). The pursuit of Christian unity would

mark his life, his intellectual interests, and his own spiritual quest. In order to prepare his doctoral dissertation in this area, he took courses at the l'Institut supérieur d'études œcuméniques of Paris and then spent a year at a Protestant seminary in the United States (Hartford Seminary in Connecticut).

He became particularly passionate about blacks, now and in the past, both in Africa and in the United States. This interest led to the publication of one of the most definitive works on Negro Spirituals, later translated into English because of its range and depth.



After completing his studies he was naturally assigned to teaching. Quickly his abilities were recognized. He formed generations of students in ecclesiology, missiology and the theologies of the Third World. He held to the principle of never trying to shock anyone but felt compelled to introduce all to the truth of the Gospel, wherever it may be found, with all its challenges and ramifications, and always in order to build up the Church. The Church, it can be said, was his constant preoccupation --- its unity, its life, its future, its integrity. He was courageous in pointing out the pettiness and shortsightedness of individual Christians and their call to full "manhood" in Christ.

His authority went beyond the classroom. In 1975 he became involved with the Dombes Group and was eventually elected its co-president in 1998. The Dombes Group is an unofficial gathering of 20 Roman-Catholic and 20 Protestant theologians that has met regularly since 1937 in a small monastery near Lyon, France. It was found by Paul Couturier (1881-1953), a French priest who worked in ecumenical circles. It is not just a mere theological gathering but a "spiritual" approach to ecumenism. Aside from the discussion of doctrinal matters, it also includes common prayer and the "call to conversion" addressed to the churches.

