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Ross Joseph Jesmont

With Sighs Too Deep for Words:  
Edward Schillebeeckx and the Holy Spirit

August 2021

### **Abstract**

The Holy Spirit is notably absent in the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx. This absence has led some to question whether the Spirit even has a place in Schillebeeckx's theology. Through a close reading of Schillebeeckx's published works, this thesis explores the place of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology. It argues that while the Spirit is not a focus for Schillebeeckx, there is a distinctive but underdeveloped account of the Spirit in his work. The reasons for this lack of development are multifaceted but can ultimately be traced back to the dominant model of the Trinity in Western Christianity. In addition to identifying the place of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology, this thesis also responds to the ongoing recovery of the Spirit in Western theology by identifying places of constructive pneumatological potential in Schillebeeckx's work. By thinking through these areas of constructive interest, this thesis concludes by suggesting an image of the Spirit as the movement of God in creation of whom Christ is the concentrated or definitive form.

**With Sighs Too Deep for Words:  
Edward Schillebeeckx and the Holy Spirit**

Ross Joseph Jesmont

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of Theology and Religion,  
Durham University, UK.

August 2021

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## List of Abbreviations

<i>Christ</i>	<i>Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord</i>
<i>Christ the Sacrament</i>	<i>Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God</i>
<i>Church</i>	<i>Church: The Human Story of God</i>
<i>CFM</i>	<i>The Church With a Human Face</i>
<i>Essays</i>	<i>Essays: Ongoing Theological Quests</i>
<i>FSG</i>	<i>For the Sake of the Gospel</i>
<i>GAU</i>	<i>God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed</i>
<i>GM</i>	<i>God and Man</i>
<i>GFM</i>	<i>God the Future of Man</i>
<i>GNM</i>	<i>God is New Each Moment</i>
<i>HT</i>	<i>I am a Happy Theologian</i>
<i>IR</i>	<i>Interim Report on the books Jesus and Christ</i>
<i>Jesus</i>	<i>Jesus: An Experiment in Christology</i>
<i>TMC</i>	<i>The Mission of the Church</i>
<i>RT</i>	<i>Revelation and Theology (Volumes I and II)</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism</i>
<i>WC</i>	<i>World and Church</i>

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While completing this thesis I began training for ordination in the Scottish Episcopal Church. The attempt to complete a PhD while training for the priesthood has been a complicated and not an entirely successful balancing act. Therefore, I want to express my gratitude to Anne Tomlinson, Mike Hull, Richard Tiplady, and Linda Harrison of the Scottish Episcopal Institute for their patience and support.

I also wish to express my thanks to the members of the Schillebeeckx reading group at Union Theological Seminary, where this thesis has its origins. The guiding presence of Roger Haight instilled in us a lasting appreciation for Schillebeeckx's work. A thanks I extend to my fellow graduate students in Dun Cow Cottage, whose presence made this process a far more social affair. I want to express a particular thanks to my parents, Alice and John, for their constant support; Markus Dünzkofer for sharing his manse; Gaël Pardoën and Thomas Sharp for their stimulating conversation; and Kelsie and Erin for their life giving friendship.

Finally, I want to express my deep gratitude to my wife, Hayley. Your patience and support have been unfaltering. You have tolerated the presence of a Dominican friar for long enough. I, quite literally, could not have done this without you: 'And the world spins madly on.'



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## Chapter One: Schillebeeckx and the Spirit

*'I believe in the Holy Spirit, who is the greatest problem for me.'*<sup>1</sup>



In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul encounters a group of disciples in Ephesus who have not heard about the Holy Spirit. After learning that they had also only received John's baptism of repentance, Paul baptises them in the name of Jesus: 'When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied' (Acts 19:6).<sup>2</sup> As the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England observes: 'Since then all instructed Christian believers and certainly all theological thinkers have heard that there is a Holy Spirit, but many Christian people have not paid much attention to the Spirit in their thinking and praying.'<sup>3</sup> The Dominican theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx might be counted among them. Despite his considerable literary output, Schillebeeckx touches on the theology of the Holy Spirit only tangentially in his writings.<sup>4</sup> Rowan Williams suggests that one reason for this pneumatological scarcity is because Schillebeeckx focused his attention on Christology in response to a theological climate that emphasised the concrete and worldly:

For those like Moltmann and Schillebeeckx, who are profoundly engaged in dialogue with the Frankfurt School, Christology becomes, above all, the vehicle for coping with the most torturous questions of our age about the *humanum*—what is it to be a human after the Holocaust (or after Vietnam or Rwanda)? The rejection and death of Jesus is in a sense the

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1 Edward Schillebeeckx, *I am a Happy Theologian: Conversations with Francesco Strazzari*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1994), 52.

2 The scripture quotations contained in this thesis are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

3 *We Believe in the Holy Spirit: A Report by The Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England* (London: Church House Publications, 1991), 2.

4 For a bibliography of Schillebeeckx's published work see, Ted Schoof and Jan van Westelaken, *Bibliography 1936-1996 of Edward Schillebeeckx O.P.* (Baarn: Nelissen, 1996).

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only possible datum now: to avoid Christology is to avoid the human question of how to talk of God in the shadow of hell. From this perspective (though Moltmann himself does not draw any such simple conclusion), pneumatology can very easily look both evasive and triumphalist.<sup>5</sup>

However, at a deeper level, Williams traces the lack of substantive engagement with the Spirit in both Catholic and Protestant theology more broadly to the prevalence of a particular trinitarian model: 'The model of which I am speaking is this: God communicates or "interprets" himself to the world by the mediation of Word and Spirit. The problem to which trinitarian theology is the answer is the problem of revelation: how is God heard or seen to be present to the human world?'<sup>6</sup> Williams suggests that because this model appears to require only one mediator, the Spirit has routinely been introduced as an awkward afterthought in much of Western theology. It is this inherited oversight of the Spirit that an increasing number of contemporary theologians are seeking to address. In this thesis I contend that by bringing Schillebeeckx into dialogue with this ongoing recovery of the Spirit it is possible to draw out the pneumatological implications of his theology.

### *Chapter Outline*

In this opening chapter I present the rationale for this study into Schillebeeckx's pneumatology. I begin by discussing the two developments in theological research that inform the immediate background to this study: the renewal of interest in the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx and the recovery of the Holy Spirit in Western Christianity. Having identified how these two developments have created the conditions for thinking about the Spirit in conversation with Schillebeeckx, I then present the first question to which this thesis responds: what is the place of the Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology? In considering

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5 Rowan Williams, "Word and Spirit" in *On Christian Theology* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 108.

6 *Ibid.*, 110.

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this question, I explore the limited secondary material that has already been written on the topic of Schillebeeckx's pneumatology before concluding that a more comprehensive investigation is required. In addition to identifying what Schillebeeckx thought about the Spirit, in this thesis I also seek to draw out resources from his writings that might resource a more robust account of the Spirit. This is the second question that guides this study: what resources does Schillebeeckx's theology offer the ongoing recovery of the Spirit in Western theological discourse? Here I suggest that the potential of Schillebeeckx's theology is like a house that has been wired but awaits electrical sockets. Having identified the scope and aims of this study, I conclude this introduction with an overview of the chapters of this thesis.

## **1.1 Theological Background**

This study into Schillebeeckx's pneumatology has its origins in a reading group on Schillebeeckx's theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York. While reading through Schillebeeckx's major works we noticed the apparent absence of the Holy Spirit in his writings. However, it seemed disingenuous to simply conclude that Schillebeeckx had no interest in the Spirit. After all, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, the second volume of his *Jesus* trilogy, ends on a pneumatological note:

My original intention was to end this book by discussing pneumatology and ecclesiology, i.e. the view of the Spirit of God as it is at work in the church and the world, a view which is implicit both in *Jesus: an Experiment in Christology*, and this book, the original title of which was *Righteousness and Love*. However, the book has grown too long for this to be possible.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 840.

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Unfortunately, as will be discussed in more detail later in this introduction, Schillebeeckx did not complete his *Jesus* trilogy as he intended and as a result his treatment of the Spirit remained an undeveloped aspect of his theology

My intention in this thesis is to explore the undeveloped place of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology. A proposal that during the writing of this thesis has generally been received with one of two reactions: confusion or bemusement. On the one hand, those unfamiliar with Schillebeeckx as a theologian are confused as to why I have chosen to focus my attention on his work. I think this response reflects the fact that while Schillebeeckx was prominent in his time, the reception of twentieth century theology led to him being overshadowed by a number of his contemporaries.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the reaction of those who are familiar with Schillebeeckx is one of bemusement. As I was once told, 'There is no pneumatology in Schillebeeckx.'

I recognise that from both these perspectives, why Schillebeeckx and why the Holy Spirit, this study may appear to be another example of the levels of obscurity to which graduate students feel compelled to go in order to stake out some territory in the crowded field of theological research. Nevertheless, it is my contention that rather than forcing a conversation where none is required, this study is responding to two areas of energy in current theological discourse: the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx and the theology of the Holy Spirit.

### The Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx

In recent years there has been a gradual shift in theological research away from modern Protestant figures like Karl Barth and Paul Tillich towards Catholic

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<sup>8</sup> Karen Kilby observes the reversal of fortunes for Hans Urs von Balthasar, who went from being overlooked to lionised in theological circles. The result is that those looking to engage with Catholic theology are now more likely to engage a Balthasar than a Schillebeeckx. See *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 1-2.

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theologians such as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Henri de Lubac. This shift has resulted in an increased level of interest in the insights offered by certain prominent figures in twentieth century Catholicism. Even though Schillebeeckx has received less attention than some of his contemporaries, interest in his work has undergone something of a quiet revival due to the work of the Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation.<sup>9</sup>

In the *T&T Clark Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, published in 2020, Stephan van Erp and Daniel Minch survey the present state of Schillebeeckx research.<sup>10</sup> In particular they note a number of recent attempts to explicate or recontextualise Schillebeeckx's theology. These include: Edmund Kee-Fook Chia's application of Schillebeeckx's work to interreligious dialogue, Steven M. Rodenborn's comparison of Johann Baptist Metz and Schillebeeckx's treatment of secularisation and eschatology, Martin Poulsom's detailed study into Schillebeeckx's theology of creation, Jennifer Cooper's examination of Schillebeeckx's early anthropology, Christiane Alpers' exploration of public theology in a post-liberal context, and Daniel Minch's analysis of the hermeneutical-eschatological structure of human anthropology. These

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9 The Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation was founded in 1989 and has in recent years published the collected works of Edward Schillebeeckx in eleven volumes. The Foundation has also hosted a number of international conferences, contributions to which can be found in Lieven Boeve, Frederiek Depoortere, and Stephen van Erp, eds. *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), Stephan van Erp, Martin G. Poulsom and Lieven Boeve, eds. *Grace, Governance and Globalization* (London: T&T Clark, 2017) and Stephan van Erp, Christopher Cimorelli and Christiane Alpers, *Salvation in the World* (London: T&T Clark, 2017).

10 Stephan van Erp and Daniel Minch, 'Introducing Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian for Our Time' in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Stephan van Erp and Daniel Minch (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 10-12. See also, Christiane Alpers, Stephan van Erp and Daniel Minch, "The Turn to God as a Sign of the Times: New Directions in Research on Edward Schillebeeckx" in *ET-Studies* 5/2 (2014), 377-388. This essay is notable because it identifies the need for more doctrinal reception of Schillebeeckx's work, which is the aim of this thesis.

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monographs and the steady flow of journal articles engaging with Schillebeeckx's theology testify to the fact that a new group of theologians are finding stimulus for their work in Schillebeeckx's writings.

### The Theology of the Holy Spirit

In contemporary theological research, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has moved from being the overlooked 'Cinderella' of Western theology to a theological locus of considerable attention.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Ephraim Radner has even questioned whether the amount of attention being paid to the Spirit has tipped over into an unhealthy fixation.<sup>12</sup> The reasons for the renewal of interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit are multifaceted, but there are five significant contributing factors: I) people's experiences of the Spirit, II) the retrieval of trinitarian theology, III) the insights offered by biblical research, IV) improved ecumenical relationships, and V) the global expansion of the charismatic and Pentecostal movements.<sup>13</sup>

#### I) Experiencing the Spirit

One of the primary reasons why theologians are thinking more about the Spirit today is because people are experiencing the Spirit of God as present and active in the world. As Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen notes, these experiences have encouraged theologians to bring people's lived experiences of the Spirit into constructive dialogue with the resources of the Christian tradition.<sup>14</sup>

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11 See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (SCM Press: London, 1992), 1-14.

12 See Ephraim Radner, "The Holy Spirit and Unity: Getting out of the Way of Christ", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16, no.2 (2014): 207-220.

13 See Cornelis van der Kooi, *This Benevolent Force: The Holy Spirit in Reformed Theology and Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 1-21.

14 See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 4-6.

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This renewed focus on people's experiences of the Spirit has pushed theologians to look beyond the established theological definitions and generalisations about the Spirit to rediscover the dynamism at the heart of the doctrine. Nevertheless, any attempt to speak about the Spirit of God as active in the world today must contend with the fact that modern people no longer see themselves as inhabitants of a multi-tiered universe populated by cosmic forces. Instead, we identify ourselves as the dominant species on a planet that exists in the vast expanse of the cosmos. Furthermore, the world in which we live is blighted by structural injustices, environmental degradation, and innocent suffering. As a result, any talk about God as active in the world cannot remain in the sphere of private or positive experiences. As Jane Williams writes:

[I]s the Holy Spirit to be found in the world? The answer must be yes, otherwise we are saying that most of the life of the world is empty of God. That can be the perceived message of the church and of theology, but it cannot be the perceived message of Jesus. But the world is not just the beloved creation of God, it is also damaged and damaging; any discussion of the Holy Spirit in the world today needs not just to affirm but also to speak of challenge, of grief and of salvation.<sup>15</sup>

## II) Recovering Trinitarian Theology

It was on account of the influence of neo-orthodox theologies, that theology in the twentieth century witnessed a concerted move away from the creation-based theologies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries towards a focus on Christology because this was seen as a firmer place from which to speak about God. The problem with this approach is that it resulted in the near total eclipse of the Holy Spirit. As Eugene Rogers observes: 'The upshot of two

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<sup>15</sup> Jane Williams, "Introduction" to *The Holy Spirit in the World Today*, ed. Jane Williams (London: Alpha International, 2011), 12.

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centuries of trinitarian revivals seems to be this: Anything the Spirit can do, the Son can do better.<sup>16</sup>

In response to this relegation of the Spirit, an increasing number of contemporary theologians have sought to develop more explicitly trinitarian accounts of God's nature and agency. The problem now is that trinitarian theology is at risk of overstating what can be reasonably known about God.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the push to recover a more explicitly trinitarian framework has resulted in the recognition that pneumatology and Christology cannot be treated in abstraction from one another. As Yves Congar remarks: 'If I were to draw but one conclusion from the whole of my work on the Holy Spirit, I would express it in these words: no Christology without pneumatology and no pneumatology without Christology.'<sup>18</sup>

### III) The Eastern Alternative

While theology in the Latin West has historically emphasised Christology to the detriment of pneumatology, Eastern theology has tended to remain more sensitive to the Spirit. This greater level of attention to the Spirit is reflected in the way in which the Son and the Spirit are viewed as mutually correlated, with primacy assigned to the Father. This difference of emphasis has resulted in a different theological and liturgical orientation. For instance, in Eastern Orthodox theology, the goal of the Christian life is union with God. From this perspective, salvation is understood in terms of deification (*theosis*). In this soteriological schema the Holy Spirit is identified as the one who communicates divinity to

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16 Eugene F. Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 33.

17 See Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Karen Kilby, *God, Evil, and the Limits of Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2020).

18 Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, trans. David Smith (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 1.



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humans within the church and who draws them up into the life of God. So, according to Eastern theologians, the Spirit re-creates human nature by purifying us and uniting us with the body of Christ. In other words, the same Spirit who rests on Christ is the one who anoints each member of the church. Liturgically this translates into the fact that Eastern churches have always referred to the Spirit in their liturgies and understood the Spirit as a principal actor in the sacraments.<sup>19</sup> Another difference that is worth noting is that the primary pneumatological metaphor of the East is life rather than love, a difference that has arguably prevented the Spirit from being reduced to a nexus within the Trinity as has historically been the case in the West.

#### IV) The Spirit of God in Scripture

The move to recover the Spirit in contemporary theology has been accompanied by a re-examination of the ways in which the Spirit is presented in the First and Second Testaments.<sup>20</sup> As with many topics in scripture, the biblical material about the Spirit reflects a diverse range of voices and images. Nevertheless, there is enough overlap and continuity for the church to speak about the Spirit as the one who gives life, anoints, empowers, renews, and sanctifies. In fact, as Fred Sanders notes: 'At a systematic level, often the real constructive challenge for pneumatology is not so much filling out the list of

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19 This is most evident in the celebration of the Eucharist, where the East has always maintained the prayer of epiclesis. See John F. Baldovin, SJ, "The Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite", in *The Holy Spirit: Setting the World on Fire*, ed. Richard Lennan and Nancy Pineda-Madrid (New York: Paulist Press, 2017), 33-43.

20 See James Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), G. W. H. Lampe, *God as Spirit*, 1976 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), Anthony C. Thiselton *The Holy Spirit: In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (London: SPCK, 2013), Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

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the many works of the Spirit but finding a way to comprehend them all under one organizing and summarizing category or notion.<sup>21</sup>

On the basis of scripture, but also tradition and experience, Christians have learnt to identify the Spirit as God. The received creedal language of the church being that the Spirit is 'the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.' What those who have sought to recover the Spirit in contemporary theology have stressed is that the biblical symbol of Spirit refers to God but principally God as God interacts and relates with the world, an aspect of divine activity that has historically been subsumed into the language of grace.<sup>22</sup> As Kirsteen Kim writes: 'Biblically, the terms "Holy Spirit" and "Spirit of God" are ways of talking about God's presence and activity in the world.'<sup>23</sup> The language of Spirit then denotes God acting, as it were, 'outside' of God's self, an action which always affects something in the world. In fact, the connection between the Spirit and the presence of God in the world is so close that Elizabeth Johnson suggests that 'whenever people speak in a generic way about God, of their experience of God or of God's doing something in the world, more often than not they are referring to the Spirit, if a triune prism be introduced.'<sup>24</sup>

## V) The Pentecostal and Charismatic Revival

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21 Fred Sanders, "The Spirit Who Is From God: The Pneumatology of Procession and Mission" in *The Third Person of the Trinity: explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 11.

22 By identifying grace as God's presence to us, Karl Rahner has enabled us to identify the language of grace as a way in which the West has spoken about Spirit. See Karl Rahner, *Nature and Grace*, trans. Dinah Wharton (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 3-44.

23 Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (London: SPCK, 2008), 2.

24 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 127.

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Despite the historic neglect of the Spirit in Western theology, Roger Haight observes that the traditional meaning of the Spirit as the active presence of God in the world has been preserved in a number of significant reflections on the Christian life:

Augustine presented and highlighted the dynamic of grace, the gift of God's interior helper, which is needed for all true self-transcendence because of the curvature of the free human spirit back into itself in the internal bondage of sin. That *auxilium Dei*, that grace, is the Holy Spirit of God at work within a person. Luther too preserved the dynamic power of the Spirit of God that alone can explain a person's turning to accept by faith God's justification. Calvin had a lively doctrine of the Spirit of God as the illuminator of the mind that allows spiritual understanding and an internal agent that gradually sanctified people through their steadfast lives of faith. No one can live an authentic Christian life leading towards sanctification without the inner support of God as Spirit. Karl Rahner offered an inestimable gift to the Catholic Church when he relocated the emphasis of the term 'grace' from its created effect in the human person to the active presence of God who causes that effect. Grace is not primarily a created habit in the spiritual core of a person; grace is primarily God's immediate presence to a person, that is, the Spirit of God. Finally, in Pentecostal Christianity the doctrine of the Spirit retains its fully dynamic role in persons and communities.<sup>25</sup>

The rapid global expansion of the Pentecostal movement has been a significant event in the life of the contemporary church. While this broad movement is culturally and theologically diverse, it shares a common theological emphasis on being empowered by the Spirit for the work of mission and ministry. Pentecostals then represent a restorationist instinct in the church, with 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' being understood as the mark of true faith.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Roger Haight, *Spirituality Seeking Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 159.

<sup>26</sup> See Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

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While Pentecostalism has largely been a movement outside mainline denominations, the distinct but related charismatic movement has been a pneumatologically inflected revival movement within existing denominations. What both the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have succeeded in doing is pushing mainline churches to reconsider the place of the Spirit in their theology, spirituality, and worship.

### Towards a Third Article Theology

The increased levels of attention being given to the Holy Spirit in contemporary theology has led to the emergence of what some have described as 'third article theology' — the third article of the Nicene Creed being that which relates to the Spirit.<sup>27</sup> The broad aim of this theology is to identify and articulate the third person of the Trinity.<sup>28</sup> In pursuit of this task there are two prevailing instincts: historical recovery and cultural discovery.<sup>29</sup> In this section I illustrate both of these instincts with reference to recent works on pneumatology.

### Historical Recovery

The renewal of interest in the Spirit has led an increasing number of theologians and biblical scholars to reexamine church tradition to identify the constructive

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<sup>27</sup> Third Article Theology is identified by some as specifically a new movement in constructive theology that is Trinitarian in its foundation, pneumatological in its impetus, and comprehensive in its scope. For example, see Myk Habets, ed. *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016)

<sup>28</sup> As outlined by Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders in the Introduction to their edited volume *The Third Person of the Trinity: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), xvi.

<sup>29</sup> This is not to suggest that these two approaches are antithetical but rather that they carry different emphasise akin to the language of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*. Telford Work, in his survey of recent pneumatology, speaks of this dynamic in terms of capital cities and border towns, see: 'Pneumatology' in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, edited by Kelly M. Kopic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 227-257.

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material within it. This act of recovery is evident in the historical surveys of Yves Congar, Alasdair Heron, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Anthony Thiselton, where the aim is to identify patterns and norms in the church's treatment of the Spirit.<sup>30</sup> In the case of Congar, and more recently Walter Kasper, this work has implications for divisions that exists between the Eastern and Western church.<sup>31</sup> The hope is that by returning to a common past, both parties might discover a shared future.

While some have looked to the past to repair historical divisions, others have discovered fresh way of speaking about the Spirit in the present. One notable example is Eugene Roger's engagement with Greek and Syriac liturgical texts as a way of thinking beyond a modern Western paradigm.<sup>32</sup> Through his engagement with these texts, Rogers identifies the distinctive work of the Spirit in the Godhead and the economy of salvation as one of resting on the Son. On the basis of this insight, Rogers develops the claim that that Spirit has an affinity for the body, which cuts against the loss of the material in Western theology. As a result, Rogers concludes that if we want to know the Spirit then we should look to the material that communicates the narrative of the Spirit: the historical and ecclesiological body of Christ. What Roger's offers, then, is an embodied way of talking about the Spirit that takes the material seriously.

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<sup>30</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Crossroad, 2015); Alasdair Heron, *The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Bible, the History of Christian Thought, and recent Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology, and The Holy Spirit: A Guide to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012); Anthony Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit: in biblical teaching, through the centuries and today*.

<sup>31</sup> See the final volume of Congar's *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*; Walter Kasper, "The Renewal of Pneumatology in Contemporary Catholic Life and Theology: Towards a Rapprochement between East and West" in *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* (London: Burns & Oates, 2004), 96-121.

<sup>32</sup> Eugene Rogers, *After the Spirit*.

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Another example of constructive recovery is Sarah Coakley's attempt to develop a Spirit-led approach to the Trinity through prayer.<sup>33</sup> Coakley does this by identifying what she perceives to be underdeveloped resources in scriptural and patristic texts. The motivation for Coakley's project is a desire to speak about the three persons of the Trinity in a way that does not relegate the Spirit to a subordinate position. Through a dynamic reading of Romans 8, Coakley develops an 'incorporative' model of the Trinity, in which the Spirit is the primary mode of access into the divine life. This alternative model is predicated on the understanding of prayer as a movement of divine reflexivity into which the one praying is drawn. In other words, it is through the Spirit's incorporative act that we become participants in the life of the Trinity.

Through their creative engagements with church tradition, Rogers and Coakley illustrate how historical recovery can be used to develop new ways of speaking about the Spirit. However, these approaches have also been criticized for moving beyond the received language of the Western tradition. So, while some have looked to the past to rethink the present, others have sought to recover the Spirit by reaffirming the received traditions of the church.

In *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Matthew Levering argues that despite their critics the received names of 'Love' and 'Gift', used by Augustine, remain helpful because they instruct us about the distinct divine personality of the Spirit by shedding light on the biblical, liturgical, and experiential testimonies to the Spirit's missions.<sup>34</sup> Still, Levering concedes that Augustine's arguments are only persuasive if one shares his assumption that scripture is the means by which we come to know and love God. So, while from

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<sup>33</sup> See Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); and *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Mathew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: Love and Gift in the Trinity and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

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the perspective of modern exegesis Augustine's approach goes beyond what is explicitly stated in the biblical texts, his approach continues to offer us a viable way of speaking about the Spirit as the inexpressible communion or fellowship between the Father and Son.

According to Augustine, it is because the Spirit is both the Spirit of the Father (Mt 10:20 and Rom 8:11) and the Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6 and Rom 8:9) that the Spirit can be understood as that which is common to both (Jn. 4:24). Notably, for Augustine, the Spirit is neither the Spirit of the Father nor the Son alone. Instead, the Spirit is the one who proceeds from both the Father and the Son (Jn. 15:26, 16:13; Mt 10:20; Rom. 8:9, 11: Gal. 4:6). This claim forms the basis for what later becomes the division between East and West over the question of the filioque and the nature of the Spirit's procession. In considering the act of the Spirit's procession, Augustine identifies the language of 'love' (Rom. 5:5) and 'gift' (Acts 8:20; Jn. 4:10) as ways of speaking about the Spirit's movement in both the divine life and the world. It is on this basis, that Augustine concludes that the Spirit is the love by which the Father and Son are united. This approach was later developed by Thomas Aquinas into a metaphysical account of the Spirit's personhood. However, crucially the fact that the Spirit is love means that the Spirit is the love by which we, in turn, love God. Both Augustine and Aquinas, then, present a way of understanding how the Spirit manifests the fecundity of God's love in a way that offers us an insight into the inner life of God.

Christopher Holmes is another contemporary defender of the received pattern of speaking about the Spirit as 'gift' and 'love'. In his book *The Holy Spirit* he engages in a close reading of the Fourth Gospel, in conversation with Augustine, Aquinas, and Barth, as a way of moving beyond what he perceives as the fixation on the economy of the Trinity in contemporary theology to the detriment of speaking about the immanent relations within the Godhead.<sup>35</sup> By

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher R. J. Holmes, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

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focusing his attention on the divine origins of the Spirit, Holmes seeks to answer the question of what qualifies the Spirit to act in the way that the Spirit does. In concluding that the motor of pneumatology is located at the immanent level, Holmes asserts that one's pneumatology is only as good as one's doctrine of the Trinity.

In seeking to rethink the Trinity in light of the Spirit, Thomas Weinandy, in *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*, argues that the Father can be said to beget the Son in or by the Spirit.<sup>36</sup> In developing this alternative trinitarian taxis, Weinandy argues that it is possible to give a more prominent role to the Spirit in the life of Christ and the Godhead while remaining faithful to scripture and church tradition. Furthermore, Weinandy asserts that by drawing out the person of the Spirit in this way begins to overcome the pneumatological deficiencies in both the Eastern and Western traditions.

While Holmes looks to the Fourth Gospel to recover a way of speaking about the immanent Trinity, in recent decades there has been a move to replace or supplement the Christological language of Logos with Spirit as a way of accounting for the Holy Spirit in the mission and identity of Christ.<sup>37</sup> Drawing on the insights on the biblical symbol of Spirit, offered by James D. G. Dunn and Gerald F. Hawthorne, theologians such as Roger Haight, Cornelis van der Kooi, and David Coffey a means of reconceptualizing Jesus' humanity and divinity in a way that address some of the historic oversights of Logos Christology.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> For an overview of Spirit Christology, see: Leopoldo Sanchez, *T&T Clark Introduction to Spirit Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> Roger Haight, "The case for Spirit Christology" in *Theological Studies* 53 (1992), 257-287, and *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 445-456. Cornelius van der Kooi seeks to develop a sustainable Spirit Christology in *This Incredibly Benevolent Force*, 46-70. David Coffey, "Spirit Christology and the Trinity" in *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current*



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## Cultural Discovery

By identifying the Spirit as the agent by whom God is active within creation, contemporary theologians have also drawn on the insights offered by modern philosophy, cultural theory, and non-Western perspectives. This, in turn, has facilitated a greater plurality of approaches to the questions of pneumatology. For example, during the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches, which focused on the subject of the Spirit, Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung drew on shamanic symbolism to speak of how the Holy Spirit exorcises evil and injustice from the world. While this approach drew criticism from some, it raised legitimate questions about the nature and limits of encultured theology.

The explosion of theology written in the majority world has opened fresh perspectives onto the Spirit and pushed Western theology to reconsider its misplaced claim to universality. As Gene Green writes: 'While we may read the ABC's of theology—Augustine, Barth, and Calvin—we always need to recognize that the theological alphabet ends with WYZ—Wei, Yong, and Zakali.'<sup>39</sup> In other words, theologians must be open to insights from outside the received Western canon. Such new approaches have been developed in Latin America—José Comblin, C René Padilla—Africa—Caleb Oluremi Oladipo, M. L. Daneel, David Tonghou Ngong—and Asia—Yeow Choo Lak, Suh Nam-dong, Stanley J. Samaartha—as majority world theologians have sought to discern the movement of the Spirit in their own contexts.<sup>40</sup> By thinking about the Spirit of

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*Study of Pneumatology*, ed. Bradford Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee: Marquette Press, 2001), 315-338.

<sup>39</sup> Gene L. Green, "Introduction" to *The Spirit over the Earth: Pneumatology in the Majority World*, edited by Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and K. K. Yeo (Grand Rapids: Langham, 2016), 6.

<sup>40</sup> José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, translated by Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Burns & Oates, 1989); C René Padilla, "The Holy Spirit: Power for Life and Hope" in *The Spirit*

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God in contexts in which Christianity is not the normative or dominant religion, majority world theologians have also pushed the church to consider how the Spirit might be present in other religious tradition.<sup>41</sup>

One of the key insights of contemporary pneumatology, then, is that while the Spirit moves throughout the whole of creation, our expressions of this movement are always contextual and particular. While this lesson is still being learnt in some quarters of Western theology, it has been welcomed by feminist theologians who have questioned the received gendered language and practices of the church by drawing attention to the feminine characteristics of God in scripture and tradition. This has resulted in feminist theologians such as Sallie McFague and Elizabeth Johnson arguing for a complete re-evaluation of all God-language. In *She Who Is*, Johnson takes her starting point from the Spirit to reinterpret the language of Trinity to speak of God as Spirit-Sophia, Jesus-Sophia, and Mother-Sophia.<sup>42</sup> By identifying the Spirit as the active presence of God who can be discerned in creation, Johnson emphasizes the place of interpreted experience. In other words, talk about the Spirit begins with an experience of being moved by God to seek justice and a closer connection with the earth. In fact, by drawing a correlation between the exploitation of women and creation, Johnson identifies our experiences of the

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*over the Earth*, 165-183; Caleb Oluremi Oladipo, *The Development of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Yoruba (African) Indigenous Christian Movement* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996); M. L. Daneel, "African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation" in *International Mission Review*, 82, no. 326 (1993), 96-126; David Tonghou Ngong, "Who is the Holy Spirit in Contemporary African Christianity?" in *The Spirit over the Earth*, 122-141; Yeow Choo Lak, preface to *Doing Theology with the Spirit's Movement in Asia*, edited by John C. England and Alan J. Torrance (Singapore: ATESA, 1991); see also Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (London: SPCK, 2008) for a discussion of Korean and Indian pneumatology.

<sup>41</sup> See chapter 7 of Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology*, 157-182; and Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Towards a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*; Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

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Spirit as a means to develop renewed spiritual practices. Similarly, in *Models of God*, McFague treats the language of Spirit as a metaphor for speaking about the presence of God who animates the world. In developing this more relational account of God, McFague proposes the metaphorical language of Mother, Lover, and Friend, as ways to speak about God.

The way in which the language of Spirit appears to enable us to speak of God as immanent to creation has also been picked up by ecological theologians who want to emphasize the Spirit as the giver of life. Mark Wallace, for instance, asserts in his book *Finding God in the Singing River* that the language of Spirit is the lynchpin for creating theologians that are spiritually responsible in a time of ecological crisis.<sup>43</sup> This same sensibility is evident in Moltmann's *The Spirit of Life*, where the Spirit is identified with the passion for life that pervades the whole of creation. At the heart of Moltmann's project is a desire to connect the work of the Spirit in creation with the work of the Spirit in redemption. The result is a more holistic approach that treats the Spirit as the immanent presence of God's transcendence, who gives life to all and moves the whole of creation to its completion. As John Polkinghorne observes, this movement of the Spirit, in turn, has significant implications for thinking about God in light of the structural openness of the universe that has been identified by contemporary physics.<sup>44</sup>

### The Found and the Given

In considering a number of recent works in the field of pneumatology I have shown that two broad instincts are at work: historical recovery and cultural discovery. By both looking to tradition and engaging with culture, contemporary

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<sup>43</sup> Mark I. Wallace, *Finding God in the Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, Nature* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> John Polkinghorne, 'The Hidden Spirit and the Cosmos', in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, edited by Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 169-182.

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theologians have developed a variety of ways in which to speak about the Spirit that consider how our speech about God is always conditioned by our historical situation. The challenge is to hold the work of recovery and discovery in tension so that tradition remains a dynamic point of reference as the church discerns the promptings of the Spirit in the present. In his book *Found Theology*, Ben Quash criticises approaches to doctrine that assumes an ahistorical completeness.<sup>45</sup> This is because such approaches risk isolating us from new experiences by over emphasising what he calls the 'givens' of the Christian tradition. In contrast to this approach, Quash maintains that we should treat the ongoing history of doctrine as a gift of the Holy Spirit for the Spirit is the one who places things to be found. That is, the Spirit is the source of novelty in the Christian tradition. A robust account of any doctrine, then, requires the church to hold onto that which God has revealed to us while remaining open to the generative work of the Spirit.

## **1.2 Identifying the Problem**

In his essay 'Schillebeeckx on God', Philip Kennedy compares Schillebeeckx's theology to a large bridge that rests on two foundational pillars: 'The pillar's undergirding the entire edifice of Schillebeeckx's theology are [1] belief in God the Creator and [2] belief in Jesus Christ as the condensation of all that is good in creation.'<sup>46</sup> The bridge structure of Schillebeeckx's theology is reflected in the title of two successive chapters in *God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed: 'I Believe in God, Creator of Heaven and Earth' and 'I Believe in the Man Jesus:*

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<sup>45</sup> Ben Quash, *Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> Philip Kennedy, "Schillebeeckx on God" in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 223-236. See also Philip Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993).

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The Christ, the Only Beloved Son, Our Lord.<sup>47</sup> What Kennedy does not mention is the absence of a third chapter, 'I Believe in the Holy Spirit'.<sup>48</sup>

Daniel Speed Thompson, by contrast, does note the absence of the Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology.<sup>49</sup> Having identified the 'limit concepts' that give Schillebeeckx's theology its distinctive shape and style — the pure positivity of God, the manifestation of God's cause in the life of Jesus, and human flourishing as God's ultimate aim — Thompson concludes that while it would be anachronistic to accuse Schillebeeckx of a certain form of 'binitarianism' the question of what place the Spirit has in his theology does remain open.

The question about the place of the Spirit in his theology was put directly to Schillebeeckx by John Nijenhuis following the publication of *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*.<sup>50</sup> On account of Schillebeeckx's lack of engagement with the Spirit, Nijenhuis inquired whether a 'binity' of Father and Son would be more 'acceptable' and not all that untraditional given the Augustinian explanation of the Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son. In his response, Schillebeeckx acknowledged that while a 'binity' certainly had its advantages he wanted to remain faithful to the 'great Christian tradition' by speaking of God as Trinity. Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx cautioned that the

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47 See Edward Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1983)

48 Edmund Kee-Fook Chia uses the creed at the end of Christ to frame his discussion of Schillebeeckx's Jesus trilogy. However, despite the subtitle 'I Believe in the Holy Spirit' there is little discussion of the Holy Spirit. Instead, Chia focuses on how Schillebeeckx identifies the church and other religions as the sacrament of salvation in the world. See Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, *Edward Schillebeeckx & Interreligious Dialogue: Perspectives from Asian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishing, 2012), 103-108.

49 See Daniel Speed Thompson, *The Language of Dissent: Edward Schillebeeckx on the Crisis of Authority in the Catholic Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 92-94.

50 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (London: Collins, 1979), 56.

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doctrine of the Trinity must be approached with care: 'I do not speak of an essence-trinity of persons BEFORE the Incarnation! But [I do maintain] that this name (Trinity), which can be used exclusively from the time of the Incarnation, has something corresponding to it IN God, which we cannot name as such!'<sup>51</sup>

Schillebeeckx expands on his enigmatic response to Nijenhuis in *I Am a Happy Theologian*, his published conversation with Francesco Strazzari. Schillebeeckx maintains that it is impossible to think about Jesus of Nazareth without reference to God:

That is the explanation of the three persons of the Trinity [...] First of all, it relates to God who manifests himself in creation and, in a unique way, in the Jewish people as the people of God. Secondly, God manifests himself in Jesus, and then we talk of the Son of God. And thirdly, there is the manifestation of God in the life of the church and in all creation: this is the Holy Spirit.<sup>52</sup>

While Schillebeeckx affirms his belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, as 'God's mode of being personal', he questions the merits of trinitarian speculation. In particular, the dangers of talking about three *persons*: 'I have never written on [the Trinity] because I'm afraid of it. I don't want to speculate, but I feel that there is something great here, something fascinating. There is a Trinity in the personal nature of God.'<sup>53</sup> Schillebeeckx states that it is the Holy Spirit who is the greatest problem for him: 'In the Bible the Spirit is a gift, not the third person; it is the very mode of being God, who gives himself to human beings. It is always the personality of God, but the personality of God in the history of

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51 John Nijenhuis, "Christology without Jesus of Nazareth is Ideology: A Monumental Work by Schillebeeckx on Jesus" in *Consensus in Theology? A Dialogue with Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Leonard Swidler (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 134-135.

52 Schillebeeckx, *HT*, 50.

53 *Ibid.*, 52.

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the church, in the history of salvation.<sup>54</sup> In regard to speaking about the Spirit, Schillebeeckx maintains that the Spirit is anonymous and for this reason very difficult to personalise: 'It is only true that he is like the wind, which blows where it wills and we don't know where it comes from.'<sup>55</sup> It was for this reason, that Schillebeeckx remained unconvinced by much of what was being written about the Spirit:

As for the Holy Spirit, I continue to be struck by the fact that when modern theologians tackle the question they say that theology has forgotten the person of the Holy Spirit. But at the end of their books I'm not much wiser about the Spirit. I know almost nothing ... Some of the great names of theology have also tackled the subject of the Holy Spirit, for example the great Fr. Congar. Their treatises are certainly very interesting, and tell me a lot about God, but always about God. For me, when they talk about the Spirit, it is always the same God presented from different aspects and angles. The Holy Spirit is the bond between the Father and the Son: what does that mean? There is an interpersonal relationship between God and Jesus of Nazareth. But is this relationship between God and Jesus a third person? I ask myself. I am not against these speculations, but I do not find that they add anything to my spiritual life. I would say that they add nothing.<sup>56</sup>

Despite his apparent unease about the Spirit, I have already noted that Schillebeeckx intended to discuss the relationship between pneumatology and ecclesiology in the final volume of his *Jesus* trilogy. However, *Church: The Human Story of God* is not the book that Schillebeeckx planned to write.<sup>57</sup> Owing to the increased polarisation in the post-conciliar church, Schillebeeckx ultimately concluded that it was better to recover the heart of the gospel than to investigate what might be perceived as secondary issues.<sup>58</sup> Erik Borgman

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54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 53.

56 Ibid.

57 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: the Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1990), xii.

58 Ibid.

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speculates that had Schillebeeckx written *Church* as he intended then he would have described the Spirit as concretely as he had the biblical narratives about Jesus of Nazareth and people's responses to him.<sup>59</sup>

While Schillebeeckx's planned volume remained unwritten, he does give some indication of what it might have contained in *God is New Each Moment*, his published conversation with Huub Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogveen:

I haven't decided on the title yet. But I am quite sure what the contents will be. Putting it in rather theological, technical language, it will deal with a theory of God's Spirit in terms of an ecclesiology and I shall try in it to provide an insight into the blowing of God's Spirit in what messianic communities are and in what they are saying and doing. Faith in creation plays a very important part in this. If you believe in God, creator of heaven and earth, then that creation is itself the beginning of the whole process of liberation. Wherever people are trying to bring about a way of life that is more worthy of man in history, there is salvation, grace [...] the Spirit active in history.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the fact that *Church* is not the book that Schillebeeckx planned to write, in its forward he notes that the book was written in support of the grassroots churches and critical communities among whom he saw an authentic flourishing of the gospel. For Schillebeeckx, these marginal communities were an authentic expression of the spirit of Vatican II, which he understood as a movement of the Holy Spirit within the Catholic Church. So, we might say that even though Schillebeeckx does not reflect at length on the Spirit in his writings, his theology was written in response to the saving movement of God's Spirit in the world and the church.

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<sup>59</sup> See Dennis Rochford, "Theology and Culture: Schillebeeckx's Journey" in *From North to South: Southern Scholars Engage with Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Helen F. Bergin (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2013), 135.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *God Is New Each Moment*, trans. David Smith (London: Continuum, 1983), 104-105.



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### 1.3 Literature Review

Having identified the lack of substantive engagement with the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's work, it is unsurprising that little has been written about his pneumatology. The only sustained study on the question of Schillebeeckx's pneumatology is Helen Bergin's 'Pneumatology: Edward Schillebeeckx's Recent Theology'.

#### Schillebeeckx's Pneumatology

Bergin contends that, despite the distinctive lack of overt references to the Holy Spirit in his writings, Schillebeeckx does develop a theology of the Spirit that has much to offer future discussions about the Spirit. Bergin begins her essay by outlining Schillebeeckx's pneumatology, as present in his writings between 1974 and 1994. Bergin notes that in Schillebeeckx's theology there is a close connection between Jesus' exaltation and the gift of the Spirit: 'It is when the risen Jesus gives the Spirit that the pledge of "eschatological" liberation offered by the earthly Jesus begins to be effected.'<sup>61</sup> The gift of the Spirit transforms the Christian community and enables them to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. Bergin observes that the primary task of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology is recalling Jesus: 'Just as Jesus points away from himself in the direction of God, so too the Spirit points to the person of Jesus...The Spirit teaches people about Jesus of Nazareth, completing and confirming the revelation offered humanity in the person of Jesus.'<sup>62</sup> In this way, it is the Spirit who keeps the church faithful to Jesus and who sustains the Christian witness throughout the centuries. 'It is the Spirit who constantly enables the church to exist and who does this in fidelity to the one by whom he was sent ... The Spirit inspires Christians to make liberation a reality at secular and ecclesial levels.'<sup>63</sup>

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61 Helen Bergin, "Pneumatology: Edward Schillebeeckx's Recent Theology", *New Blackfriars* 80, no.943 (1999): 410.

62 *Ibid.*, 413.

63 *Ibid.*, 416.

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Having outlined Schillebeeckx's treatment of the Spirit, Bergin criticises him for identifying the Spirit too closely with the risen Jesus, for his functional treatment of the Spirit, and for the absence of the Spirit in his treatment of prayer. Bergin concedes that while there is a fine distinction between the exalted Jesus and the Spirit, Schillebeeckx does not sufficiently account for the distinctiveness of the Spirit. Furthermore, by stressing the connection between the Spirit and recollection (*pneuma* and *anamnesis*), Bergin questions whether Schillebeeckx focuses on the function of the Spirit to the detriment of the Spirit's identity. In support of this observation, Bergin cites Kilian McDonnell's assertion that theologians need to move beyond a functional pneumatology, preoccupied with what the Spirit does, to speak about the personal identity of the Spirit. To this end, Bergin suggests that Schillebeeckx's account of liberation might be one area in which the personal aspect of the Spirit might be connected with the functional. Bergin's final critique is that Schillebeeckx overlooks the Spirit in his treatment of prayer and mysticism: 'In the reflection on the God who "plays hide and seek" with the creature—or who is present to us in extreme moments of darkness, nothing is said of the Holy Spirit as the one enabling this relationship to occur.'<sup>64</sup> Bergin questions whether Schillebeeckx's account of prayer might be developed through conversation with theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann, Catherine LaCugna, and Raimon Panikkar.

Bergin concludes her essay by making some suggestions about the areas in which Schillebeeckx's theology might make some contributions to pneumatology: the connection between the Spirit and creation, the Spirit and ecclesiology, the links between Christology and pneumatology, and the Spirit in the public domain. In considering the language that Schillebeeckx uses to describe God Bergin draws attention to the fact that many of the qualities used by Schillebeeckx to describe God generally—transcendent, elusive, making-new, surprising, eternally youthful, future-orientated—are applicable to the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 418.

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Spirit. Schillebeeckx also acknowledges that creation is continually dependent on the Creator who ceaselessly enables it to exist and flourish. Bergin questions whether it is not the Spirit who is leading creation to its fulfilment? Bergin also notes that a similar dynamic is present in ecclesiology, where the Spirit operates at every level of the church. 'His vision of the church as "the eschatological liberation movement" can be integrally connected with the Spirit empowering the church to be "living Christology" in fidelity to Jesus.' Bergin states that Schillebeeckx's interpretation of the resurrection as the event in which the Spirit forms the disciples into the church indicates an important pneumatological dynamic in the formation of the church. While there is an unbreakable link between the Christ-event and the church, Bergin concludes that it is the presence of the Spirit that keeps the church in existence. Another area of possible pneumatological development comes in making the 'pneumatology implicitly present' in the first two books of the Jesus trilogy—*Jesus* and *Christ*—more explicit. In his treatment of the New Testament, Schillebeeckx draws attention to the numerous scriptural links between Jesus and the Spirit but he does not expand on these and concludes that the functions of the Spirit and Christ are the same. Bergin contends that 'it is a question of moving from a highlighting in Scripture of the Spirit's relation to Jesus Christ, to the stage where pneumatology in Schillebeeckx's theology is recognised as central to understanding and undertaking Christology.' Bergin suggests that an alternative method might be to follow theologians like Elizabeth Johnson and begin with pneumatology and move via Christology to the doctrine of God. In this way Christology would benefit from the impact of pneumatology upon it, and ecclesiology would benefit from the combined influence of Christology and pneumatology. Fourth, Bergin highlights that 'the ingredients for recognising the Spirit's role in the public areas of cultural, social, economic and political life are already present in Schillebeeckx's theology.' This is because Schillebeeckx claims that wherever people work to bring about a new world, signs of the eschaton exist. Wherever people act in favour of the humanum, the power of the Spirit is at work in creation. The recognition of the Spirit in this role is another area of possible development and fruitful study. Bergin notes that one

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recurring mark of Schillebeeckx's theology is his concern with major human questions such as meaning and meaninglessness. However, there is little reference made to the Spirit in his treatment of humanness, historicity, suffering and the phenomenon of religion. Bergin questions whether these challenges might be promptings of the Spirit which enable the church to reform its praxis.

### Hermeneutics of History

In tracing the development in Schillebeeckx's theological method, Mary Catherine Hilker identifies the role that the Holy Spirit plays in constituting the living Christian tradition: 'The conviction that that same Spirit is operative in Christian communities today undergirds Schillebeeckx's claim that new experiences in the tradition carry a claim to authority since they emerge from contemporary communities' experience of what it means to follow Jesus today.'<sup>65</sup> Hilker notes that for Schillebeeckx continuing the Christian tradition involves more than repeating established formulations of the Christian faith. This is because contemporary Christian communities 'create a fifth gospel' with their lives which are either orthodox or distorted interpretations of the tradition. Hence, 'The theologian attempts to locate the presence of the Holy Spirit living and active throughout the history of the tradition in spite of distortions and forgotten moments in its expression.'<sup>66</sup> In light of this observation, Hilker notes that Schillebeeckx's understanding of the Christian tradition as the presence of the Holy Spirit active in and through the Christian community is key to understanding his critical hermeneutical method. 'The theologian's historical investigation seeks to identify what can never be separated from history, and yet transcends it: "manifestations of grace," the presence of the Holy Spirit active in and through the concrete history of the church.'<sup>67</sup>

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65 Mary Catherine Hilker, "Hermeneutics of History in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx", *The Thomist* 51 (1987), 120.

66 *Ibid.*, 124.

67 *Ibid.*, 127.

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### Schillebeeckx and the *Sensus Fidelium*

In his essay on Schillebeeckx and the *Sensus Fidelium* Martin Poulson draws upon Schillebeeckx's treatment of the *sensus fidelium* as a resource for connecting the distinctive contributions to the development of doctrine made by the magisterium and theologians.<sup>68</sup> In doing this he seeks to develop an inclusive account of 'the faithful' that can overcome the separation that exists between the teaching Church and learning Church. By turning to the ecclesiological image of the people of God he explores the idea of 'integral ecclesiology'. Poulson concludes his essay by discussing Pope Francis' metaphor of the Holy Spirit as the source of harmony in the symphony of the church. In his essay, Poulson identifies how Schillebeeckx treats the Spirit as the source of infallibility and indefectibility in the church and he suggests how this insight might contribute to ongoing ecclesiological debates within the Catholic Church.

### Pneumatological Observations in *The Praxis of the Reign of God*

In addition to the articles discussed above, there are a few passing references to the Spirit in *The Praxis of the Reign of God*.<sup>69</sup> Mary Catherine Hilker notes that Schillebeeckx attributes the constructive-liberating character of his theology and its critical edge to the work of the Holy Spirit (xxiv). Janet M. O'Meara notes that it is the Spirit of the risen Jesus who puts the disciples into contact with Jesus' praxis of the kingdom: '*Pneuma* and *anamnesis*: the living recollection of Jesus' career, handed on in the living tradition of the church, and the abiding presence of the Spirit in the church community.' (114). Donald

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68 See Martin G. Poulson, "Schillebeeckx and the *Sensus Fidelium*", *New Blackfriars* 9 (2017): 203-217.

69 Mary Catherine Hilker and Robert J. Schreier, ed, *The Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

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J. Goergen notes the connection between the Spirit, the church and the world in his treatment of Schillebeeckx's spirituality: 'The risen Jesus bestows God's own Spirit, through which the believer enters into a relationship with God, and following after Jesus, into radical service of the world.' (128). Susan A. Ross discusses how Schillebeeckx was critical of the fact that infallibility has come to represent not so much the church's confidence in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit but a 'mysticism of infallibility' that centres upon the person of the Pope. (141). Mary E. Hinze briefly touches on how Schillebeeckx views the church as the place where the Spirit of the risen Christ continues to dwell. On account of his belief in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Schillebeeckx stresses that what comes from below is at the same time what comes from above (151). Furthermore, he argues that ministry is carried on in a community in which all are empowered with the authority of the Spirit. 'Ministry goes wrong when the liberating message of the gospel is obscured by stratified ministerial structures that make particular legitimate choices divinely normative for all time, and when the fundamental fact of the Spirit-filled nature of the whole community is forgotten.' (154). In his assessment of the continuing implications of Schillebeeckx's theology, Robert J. Schreiter highlights the primacy of the soteriological in his work, with the prophetic and the pneumatic traditions being brought to the fore before the ontological and dogmatic. (192). What these references help to highlight is the fact there is a pneumatological dynamic in Schillebeeckx's theology that might be brought into greater focus and developed in a more constructive direction.

Given the scattered and generally brief engagement with the place of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's writings, I see the need for a more sustained engagement with the topic of Schillebeeckx's pneumatology. This will consist of a detailed reading of Schillebeeckx's work to identify the places where the Spirit is explicitly and implicitly present.

#### **1.4 Thesis Aims**

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The aim of this thesis is to identify the place of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology, while also seeking to identify what resources Schillebeeckx's theology might offer to the ongoing recovery of the Spirit in Western theology. In order to address these two aims, I will engage in a close reading of Schillebeeckx's work primarily through an engagement with the English translations. My rationale for this focus is a desire to engage those who are unfamiliar with Schillebeeckx's work in my own English-speaking context. Through this close reading I will highlight the pneumatological material that is already explicitly present in his work, identify sites of implicit pneumology, and developing Schillebeeckx's thoughts on the Spirit by bringing him into dialogue with contemporary discussions about the Spirit.

Based on my reading of Schillebeeckx, it is my contention that even though the Spirit does not feature prominently in his work he stills offers a distinctive account of the Spirit that has constructive potential. In fact, to draw on an image used by Cornelis van der Kooi to describe the pneumatological potential of John Calvin's metaphor of anointing, Schillebeeckx's pneumatology is like unused wiring in a house.<sup>70</sup> The electrical wiring is installed throughout the house, but it has been capped with a plate instead of a usable socket. So, through this study I seek to begin installing sockets where there are currently only plates. In particular, I identify his treatment of the relationship between creation and salvation, revelation and experience, Christology, and ecclesiology as having particular relevance to ongoing discussions about the Spirit.

## **1.5 Thesis Outline**

Having established the aims of this thesis, I conclude this introduction by outlining the chapters in this thesis. In Chapter Two I provide an overview of Schillebeeckx's theological development and identify the abiding shape of his theology as essentially a soteriology framed within a theology of creation. In

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<sup>70</sup> Van der Kooi, *Benevolent Force*, 99.

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Chapter Three I explore the place of the Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's early writings. I analyse how Schillebeeckx's sacramental understanding of revelation informs how he thinks about the Spirit as the mutual love of the Father and the Son. I then consider how Schillebeeckx connects the Spirit to the subjective side of the event of revelation as the one who incorporates us into a saving communion with God. In Chapter Four I analyse how Schillebeeckx rethought his approach to the Spirit in light of his philosophical turnabout. I then explore the place of the Spirit in the confessions and experiences of the earliest Christian communities. In considering Schillebeeckx's analysis of the emergence of the Christian confession, I suggest how Schillebeeckx's lends himself to a more constructive account of the Spirit in the life of Christ. However, he ultimately limits the work of the Spirit to the act of communication. In Chapter Five, I contend that Schillebeeckx's vocal support for a more democratic rule in the Catholic Church was rooted in his understanding of the Spirit. For this reason, I explore the place of the Spirit in the formation and ongoing witness of the Christian community. In Chapter Six I return to the two questions which I asked in this introduction before presenting an account of the Spirit as the renewing movement of God in creation which finds its definitive expression in Christ. From this perspective, I conclude that the Christian life is about being caught up in the movement of the Spirit in the struggle for liberation in a world that has gone awry. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I briefly consider the contribution that this thesis has made and suggest some areas for future research.



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## Chapter Two: An Orientation to Schillebeeckx's Life and Work

*'My theological thinking clearly displays not just smooth continuity but also fluctuating ups and downs, as well as forms of continuity that could only be achieved by way of discontinuities.'*<sup>1</sup>



### *Chapter Outline*

As a theologian Edward Schillebeeckx was something of an intellectual David Bowie.<sup>2</sup> By this I mean that the style of his theology underwent a series of distinct changes during his career. This was because he understood the practice of engaging with different philosophical schools as what enabled his thinking to develop. The difficulty with this approach is that it can make his work tricky to navigate. For this reason, I begin this study into Schillebeeckx's pneumatology with an orientation to the main contours of his life and work. In this chapter I first offer a brief biography of Schillebeeckx before outlining the main stages of his intellectual development. Having presented the trajectory of Schillebeeckx's life and work, I conclude by suggesting that his theological project can be understood as essentially a soteriology framed within the doctrine of creation. However, within this picture I note that the place of the Spirit is unclear.

### **2.1. The Life and Work of Edward Schillebeeckx**

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests" in *Essays: Ongoing Theological Quests*, CW vol. 11. (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 120.

<sup>2</sup> This is not the first comparison that has been drawn between Schillebeeckx and a musical icon. Schillebeeckx himself recalls that in 1968 his nephew persuaded him to speak at his Catholic school in the United States by informing him that 'the sisters think of you as we think of the Beatles'. See Schillebeeckx, *GNM*, 128. See also, Edward Schillebeeckx, "Catholic Life in the United States", *Worship*, 42, no. 3 (March 1968), 134-149.

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Edward Cornelius Florent Alfons Schillebeeckx was born in Antwerp, Belgium, on 12th November 1914.<sup>3</sup> The sixth of fourteen children, he grew up in a middle-class Flemish family in Kortenberg. Aged eleven he joined his older brother at the Jesuit boarding school in Turnhout. Sensing a vocation to the priesthood, but dissuaded by the austere lifestyle of the Jesuits, Schillebeeckx applied to the Dominicans. During his seven years of formative study, he took the religious name Henricus and studied under the direction of Novice Master Dominic De Petter (1905-1971).

After his ordination to the priesthood, in 1941, Schillebeeckx left Belgium to begin postgraduate studies at Le Saulchoir: the Dominican house of studies near Paris. During this time, he was a student of two prominent figures in the *Nouvelle Théologie*: Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990) and Yves Congar (1904-1995). He also came into contact with prominent philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Albert Camus (1913-1960). Despite the fact that Schillebeeckx intended to remain in France to complete his doctoral studies, he was recalled to Louvain to teach theology. It was the task of preparing seminarians for ordination that ultimately led him to write his doctoral thesis on the sacraments, a study that was later revised and published in 1952 as his first monograph, *De Sacramentele Heilseconomie*.<sup>4</sup>

In 1957 Schillebeeckx was offered a teaching position at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. His superiors in Belgium opposed the move but their

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3 For a detailed biography of Schillebeeckx life prior to his philosophical turnabout, see Erik Borgman, *Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in His History*, trans. John Bowden (London: Continuum, 2003). For a short but comprehensive account of Schillebeeckx's life see Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx*, 13-30 and John Bowden, *Edward Schillebeeckx: Portrait of a Theologian* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 20-38.

4 Edward Schillebeeckx, *De sacramentele heilseconomie. Theologische bezinning op S. Thomas' sacramentenleer in het licht van de traditie en van de hedendaagse sacramentsproblematiek* (Antwerpen: Nelissen, 1952).

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objections were overruled by the Master General of the Dominican Order. Schillebeeckx describes his move to Nijmegen as an experience of stepping back in time. This was because of the austerity and conservatism of Dutch Catholicism. In response to his new 'medieval' context he began to increasingly emphasise the place of history and experience in his lectures.<sup>5</sup>

The Second Vatican Council initiated the most significant series of reforms in the Catholic Church since the thirteenth century. In calling the council, Pope John XXIII sought to throw open the windows of the Catholic Church to let the fresh air of the Holy Spirit blow through. However, his decision to call an ecumenical council less than three months after his election to the papacy took many by surprise. This is because they presumed that the days of ecumenical councils were over, given the 1870 definition on papal infallibility. Furthermore, in contrast to earlier ecumenical councils, Vatican II was not called in response to a crisis within the church but for the enlightenment, edification, and joy of the entire Christian people.

At the beginning of the council, it was unclear what direction Vatican II would take. However, an early vote led to the council departing from its preparatory documents in favour of more substantive reforms. A moment that Schillebeeckx describes as being like a flash of Pentecost into the aula. Reflecting on this moment, Schillebeeckx writes: 'We are all convinced that the "open wing" carried the day (and how mundane we are when we represent

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<sup>5</sup> Schillebeeckx describes his experience of moving to Nijmegen as one of stepping back in time because of the 'Calvinistic' outlook of Dutch Catholics. This austere disposition was the result of the minority status of Catholics in the Netherlands and the cultural practice of pillarisation (*verzuiling*): the denominational segregation of society. The way in which Schillebeeckx taught theology raised suspicion because of his departure from scholastic approach of his predecessor, G. P. Kreling (1888-1973).

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events in such terms, when in reality the whole of the world episcopacy is aware of the impulse of the Holy Spirit in God's Church).<sup>6</sup>

Even though Schillebeeckx was blocked from becoming a formal advisor (*peritus*) at the Council, on account of the progressive stance of the pastoral letter for the Dutch Episcopacy that he authored, he still had an influence on the council's proceedings through his commentaries, lectures, and involvement in the establishment of the theological journal *Concilium*.<sup>7</sup>

In a reflection written after his second trip to the United States, Schillebeeckx identifies 1967 as the most significant year in his theological career. This is because two experiences caused him to rethink his entire theological project: the 'secularised world' of the United States and an afternoon spent with a group of French university chaplains.<sup>8</sup> Schillebeeckx recalls that these two experiences put him into contact with the seemingly distinct worlds of pragmatic 'efficiency' and *spiritualité*. It was his attempt to reconcile these worlds that led him to shift the emphasis of his work away from orthodoxy to orthopraxis. Through his engagement with the insights of post-Heideggerian hermeneutics and the Western Marxism of the Frankfurt School, Schillebeeckx began to construct a theology that was philosophically robust but

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, "Vatican II: Misunderstandings at the Council" in *Life of the Spirit* 18, no. 203 (July 1963): 2. See also Edward Schillebeeckx, "Een pinksterflits in de aula" in *de Bazuin* (April 1988), 3-5. For more on Schillebeeckx's experience of the Council, see: *The Council Notes of Edward Schillebeeckx, 1962-1963*, edited by Karim Schelkens (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2011); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Vatican II: A Struggle of Minds and Other Essays* (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1963); and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Vatican II: the Real Achievement*, translated by H. J. J. Vaughan (London: Sheed and Ward, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Schillebeeckx was an informal advisor to Cardinal Bernard Jan Alfrink about whom he wrote the booklet, *Bernard Jan Cardinal Alfrink*, trans. C. A. L. Jarrott (Norte Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1965). See also, "Where are the Eleven?" in *FSG*, 145-147.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, "The New Image of God, Secularisation and Man's Future on Earth" in *God the Future of Man*, trans. N. D. Smith (London: Sheed & Ward, 1969), 169.

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pastorally sensitive. This period of transition culminated in two detailed studies on the historical Jesus and the origin of the Christian community: *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (1974) and *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (1977).

On account of his growing status as a public theologian, Schillebeeckx found himself being placed under closer scrutiny by ecclesial authorities. This resulted in him being investigated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on three separate occasions: for his work on revelation (1966), Christology (1976), and ministry (1981).<sup>9</sup> However, he was never formally censured and towards the end of his career he was even identified as an exemplary theologian by the General Chapter of the Dominican Order.

Following his retirement in 1982, Schillebeeckx continued to teach postgraduate courses and sit on the editorial board of *Concilium*. His intellectual contributions to European and Dutch culture were recognised with him becoming the first theologian to win the Erasmus Prize, his initiation into *De Orde van Oranje Nassau* and reception of the *Gouden Ganzenveer*. Schillebeeckx published his final monograph *Church: The Human Story of God* in 1989 and died two days before Christmas in 2009. Schillebeeckx is buried in the Dominican cemetery in Nijmegen.

## **2.2. Schillebeeckx's Theological Development**

In surveying Schillebeeckx's theological career, it is possible to identify three distinct stages: I) an early period characterised by a sacramental synthesis, II)

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<sup>9</sup> The records of the second investigation are published as *The Schillebeeckx Case*, ed. Ted Schoof, O.P., trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011). Leo Kenis and Lieven Boeve offer an overview of the three investigations in their co-authored essay, "The Schillebeeckx Case: Three Acts and an Open Ending" in *The T&T Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 208-222.

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a period of transition that began following the Second Vatican Council and lasted until the mid-1970s, and III) a later period during which he developed a narrative soteriology orientated towards orthopraxis.<sup>10</sup> In this section I chart the main intellectual influences on Schillebeeckx's theology at each of these three stages.

### I. Early Schillebeeckx

Schillebeeckx recalls that it was the balance of intellectualism and humanism that initially drew him to the Dominican Order.<sup>11</sup> However, the theology that was being taught in Catholic seminaries during the years of his formation was that of neo-scholasticism. This was because the Catholic Church had responded to the upheavals of the long nineteenth century by asserting that all lectures in Catholic seminaries were to be delivered in Latin and taught according to the method, doctrine, and principles of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>12</sup> Fortunately, Schillebeeckx's studies with De Petter and Chenu provided him with the resources with which to think beyond neo-scholasticism's narrow conceptualism.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Neo-Scholasticism*

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<sup>10</sup> Given that Schillebeeckx wrote on everything that he read, it is also possible to read his theological development as a biographical account of the developments that Catholic theology underwent during the twentieth century. In fact, Schillebeeckx was among the pioneers in a number of these developments.

<sup>11</sup> Schillebeeckx, *GNM*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> For more on Neo-Scholasticism, see Ralph Del Colle's chapter on the subject in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 375-394.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the influence of Thomism on Schillebeeckx's theology, see Pim Valkenberg, "The Thomistic Roots of Schillebeeckx's Theology" in *The T&T Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 19-28.

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The aim of the neo-scholastic method was to provide an account of the Catholic faith using an ahistorical form of reasoning that was predicated upon dogma and established philosophical principles. Its theological syllabus was framed around twenty-four theses that were divided into questions of ontology, cosmology, psychology and theodicy. In this approach, God was identified as the 'pure act of being' (*ipsum esse subsistens*) who was completely distinct from the created order. This facilitated the understanding that the created order had a certain autonomy, and that the existence of God could be demonstrated through the use of reason.<sup>14</sup>

Owing to the abstract nature of his theological education, Schillebeeckx expressed little interest in becoming a theologian. As he recalls: 'Theology—and theology at Louvain in those days was Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*—meant nothing to me.'<sup>15</sup> Yet, in an attempt to counteract Schillebeeckx's growing disdain towards theology, De Petter suggested that he read the work of the German theologian Karl Adam. What struck Schillebeeckx about Adam was his ability to discuss the dogmas of the Catholic Church without using scholastic terminology. It was by reading Adam that Schillebeeckx began to recognise that theology could connect with lived experience. This realisation was further cemented through the work of Pierre Rousselot, whose recovery of the *lumen fidei* helped facilitate the reintroduction of experience into Catholic theology.

### *Modern Philosophy*

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14 Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 3. Robert Schreiter observes that Schillebeeckx's Thomistic education shaped his relative optimism about the knowability of God: 'That relative optimism means that, sinful and broken though the world may be, it remains a medium for this divine-human communication.' Schreiter, 'Orientation', 20.

15 Schillebeeckx, *GNM*, 12.

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Through his studies with De Petter, Schillebeeckx was introduced to a way of reading Thomas in conversation with modern philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Whereas neo-scholastic theology had rejected the subjective turn of modern philosophy, De Petter worked with it to develop a philosophical anthropology: a theory of 'implicit intuition' in which human knowledge contains a non-conceptual element. As Philip Kennedy explains:

He explained a non-conceptual element in human knowledge by claiming that intuition forms an intrinsic part of the human intellect. Intuition is here conceived as a contemplative or spiritual link between an individual subject and the reality which is external to the subject. Intuition is thought to be a direct experience of objective reality as well as a participation in the absolute meaning of reality.<sup>17</sup>

According to De Petter, the implicit intuition is a factor in all human knowledge but the direct link it establishes with the totality of reality can only be expressed using mediatory concepts. In theological terms, De Petter's theory proposes that we can know God directly through our intuition but asserts that all our attempts to speak about God are ultimately inadequate. Thus, De Petter's theory of implicit intuition is essentially a post-Kantian theory of knowledge that

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16 As a philosophical movement, phenomenology developed out of the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). In contrast to the abstract rationalism of much philosophy in the late-nineteenth century, phenomenology was concerned with the study of essences and sought to recover a living contact with reality. In other words, to put essences back into existence. To this end phenomenologists worked to provide a direct description of human existence as it was actually experienced under the guiding maxim 'back to the things themselves'. During the 1940s and 50s this philosophical approach was used by Martin Heidegger to address the question of being, Maurice Merleau-Ponty to analyse human perception and embodiment, and Jean Paul Sartre to study the nature of human freedom. It was against the backdrop of this philosophical tradition that Schillebeeckx would develop his distinctive account of the sacraments of sites of interpersonal encounter with God.

17 Philip Kennedy, "Continuity underlying Discontinuity: Schillebeeckx's Philosophical Background", *New Blackfriars*, 70, no. 828 (1989), 267.



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seeks to develop a synthesis between knowing subject and known object.<sup>18</sup> Through his philosophical synthesis De Petter attempted to establish a mediatory position between realist epistemologies, which treated the mind as a passive recipient of knowledge, and certain forms of idealism, which treat the mind as the creator of all knowledge. Influenced by his studies under De Petter, Schillebeeckx broadly ascribed to this theory of knowledge until his philosophical turnabout in the mid-1960s.

### *Theological Ressourcement*

While De Petter encouraged Schillebeeckx to explore the essence of human experience, Chenu invited him to read Thomas and the Church Fathers with an eye to their historical context.<sup>19</sup> According to Chenu, all theology is coloured by the circumstances and regionalised history in which it is written. For this reason, theology should never be read *in vacuo* but always *in situ*. In other words, theology should always be done with particular attention to the context in which it is written.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to training Schillebeeckx in the method of theological *ressourcement*, Chenu instilled in him the understanding that there is no

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<sup>18</sup> See Dries Bosschaert and Stephan van Erp, "Schillebeeckx's Metaphysics and Epistemology: The Influence of Dominicus De Petter" in *The T&T Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 29-44.

<sup>19</sup> For a more detail of the Ressourcement movement in Catholic theology see Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, ed. *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2012); Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie: New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: OUP, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx*, 40

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opposition between God and the world.<sup>21</sup> Instead, Chenu stressed the need for Christians to be present to the world in order to interpret the signs of the times in light of the Gospel. As Schillebeeckx recalls: 'The strategy of being present in the world was to awaken in others the religious question and to do that by way of your life.'<sup>22</sup> According to Schillebeeckx, Chenu did more than anyone else to inspire his theological thinking: 'I learnt from Chenu that "to think" is sacred: "it is the intellectual which contains the spiritual."' Indeed, most of all, I am still surrounded by the great communicative warmth of Fr. Chenu. He was a man of hope, an optimist of grace. So he was a Thomist through and through.<sup>23</sup>

### *Schillebeeckx's Early Sacramental Synthesis*

The combined influence of De Petter and Chenu enabled Schillebeeckx to appreciate the place of history and experience in his theology. As Kennedy writes: 'From De Petter, above all, he learned that every concept of God is in fact godless, that is every concept falls short of adequately explaining who or what God is. From Chenu he learned that doctrines are the fruits of *human* creativity and reflection.'<sup>24</sup>

In considering the nature of Schillebeeckx early theology, as exemplified in *Christ the Sacrament* and *Revelation and Theology*, Erik Borgman concludes that while it would be an exaggeration to describe it as a system it was certainly a synthesis: 'a coherent vision worked out down to the different partial aspects.'<sup>25</sup> The fact that Schillebeeckx's early theology does offer a coherent

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21 See Karim Schelkens and Jürgen Mettepenningen, "Schillebeeckx and Theological Ressourcement: Historical Notes on Schillebeeckx's Reception of *Nouvelle Théologie*" in *The T&T Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 45-62.

22 Schillebeeckx, *GNM*, 17.

23 *Ibid.*, 16-17; Schillebeeckx, *HT*, 91.

24 Schillebeeckx, *GNM*, 16-19.

25 Borgman, *Schillebeeckx*, 191.

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synthesis makes it all the more striking that he was willing to revise his approach to theology in responses to the challenges of his changing cultural context.

## II. Schillebeeckx in Transition

Vatican II marked a significant turning point in how the Catholic Church understood itself and its relationship to the world. Where the church had formerly positioned itself in opposition to the world, in light of the conciliar reforms it sought to dialogue with the world under the watchword '*aggiornamentd*'.<sup>26</sup> As Schillebeeckx notes in a reflection on the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*: 'The watchword is no longer flight from the world, but flight with the world towards the future, a taking of the world itself with us in our Christian expectation of the future, which is already transforming the earth here and now.'<sup>27</sup> In its analysis of the processes of secularisation and humanisation, the council promoted the idea that Christian hope can act as a stimulus for building up a better world on earth.<sup>28</sup> As a result, the council documents encouraged Catholics to overcome their historic animosity towards the world and to recognise that the Spirit of God is actively present in its processes.<sup>29</sup>

### *Modern Hermeneutics*

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<sup>26</sup> Bernard Lonergan argues that a theology of renewal requires a renewal of theology. Schillebeeckx is a prominent example of such renewal. See Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context", in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 55-67.

<sup>27</sup> Schillebeeckx 'Christian Faith and Man's Expectation for the Future on Earth' in *GFM*, 71.

<sup>28</sup> For more on Schillebeeckx's reception of *Gaudium et Spes*, see: Daniel Minch, "Eschatology and Theology of Hope: The Impact of *Gaudium Et Spes* on the Thought of Edward Schillebeeckx" in *The Heythrop Journal* vol. 59, no. 2 (2018), 273-285.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the Pneumatology of Vatican II see Mary Cecily Boulding, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Documents of Vatican II", *The Irish Theological Quarterly* Vol. 51, Issue 4, (1985): 253-267

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Around the time in which Schillebeeckx began to grapple with what the changes in the church's outlook on the world might mean for theology he also began to engage the field of modern hermeneutics.<sup>30</sup> Whereas older forms of hermeneutics had stressed the historical character of texts, the philosophy of Martin Heidegger facilitated a growing awareness of the historicity of being itself. This led philosophers and theologians associated with the new hermeneutics to argue that we cannot dissociate ourselves from the historical context in which we live and the questions that arise from it. In fact, Schillebeeckx noted that what was thematically new about the 'new hermeneutics' was the realisation that we engage with the past not by adopting a neutral attitude but by consciously admitting our contemporary presuppositions: 'The process of understanding is accomplished precisely in the possible *correction* of our preunderstanding.'<sup>31</sup> In regards to Schillebeeckx's theological development, Robert Schreiter writes: 'The hermeneutics worked out by Heidegger's followers (notably Rudolf Bultmann, Gerhard Ebeling, Ernst Fuchs, and Hans Georg Gadamer), gave Schillebeeckx his first major interpretive alternative to Thomism in terms of a formal interpretation theory.'<sup>32</sup>

### *Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics*

Schillebeeckx understood the need for hermeneutics as a direct consequence of the nature of divine revelation and the historical contingency of language: 'God's word is given to us within the already interpretative response to it of the

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30 For a more extensive treatment of Schillebeeckx's engagement with hermeneutics, see Daniel Minch, *Eschatological Hermeneutics: The Theological Core of Experience and Our Hope for Salvation* (London: T&T Clark, 2018). See also, 'In Search of a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics: Schillebeeckx's Turn to Experience' and 'Interpretation and Interrelation of Tradition and Situation: Schillebeeckx's Later Theological Hermeneutics' both in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 135-154 and 155-177.

31 Edward Schillebeeckx, "Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics" in *GFM*, 26.

32 Schreiter, 'An Orientation' in *The Schillebeeckx Reader*, 22.

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Old and New Testaments—believers who had found the ground of their being in God’s faithfulness bore witness interpretatively to God’s saving actions in Israel and in the man Jesus, the Christ, the foundation of their hope for a renewed world, and their witness was interpreted in turn.<sup>33</sup> In other words, God’s revelation to humankind is the subject of a historical conversation between people that is always informed by its context. As a result, God’s revelation requires interpretation in each new situation. The hermeneutical problem then is essentially the question of how the message of God to humankind can be understood and experienced in each new historical situation.

In his seminal essay ‘Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics’, Schillebeeckx observes that while Protestant theologians and philosophers tended to speak about the hermeneutical problem in terms of the ‘hermeneutical circle’, Catholics used the language of ‘development’.<sup>34</sup> In this understanding, the historical process of mediation and interpretation that shapes the theological tradition of the church is said to enrich the content of God’s original word. Yet, despite the prevalence of implicit hermeneutical material in Catholic theology, Schillebeeckx observed that this material had not been formally thematised. Schillebeeckx suggests that a particular Tridentine understanding of the church’s apostolic office as the judge of any valid interpretation may account for this fact: ‘It is the Church’s prerogative to judge the true sense and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures.’ In response, Schillebeeckx asserts that the church’s process of discernment is one that is predicated on the faith of the whole Christian community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, he argues that even infallible statements require interpretation: ‘Anyone who maintains—as some do—that Trent, because it is formulating a dogma, is, in what it explicitly says (das Gesagte), a priori an answer to my present-day questions is radically misconceiving the historicity of man’s existence, of human questioning and all human

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33 Schillebeeckx, “Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics” in *GFM*, 5.

34 *Ibid.*, 3-49.

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understanding.’ For this reason, Schillebeeckx concludes that authentic orthodoxy is seldom found by simply repeating historical formulae and that dogmatic certainty may actually mask a hesitant faith. In order to aid the hermeneutical process of interpretation Schillebeeckx identified three broad hermeneutical principles: (I) the past in the light of the present, (II) both the present and past within the sphere of the promise, and (III) permanence in the present, past, future.

### I) The Past in the Light of the Present

In contrast to those who viewed the distance between past and present as an obstacle to objective interpretation that needed to be overcome, modern hermeneutics identified this distance in time as what makes hermeneutics possible. For this reason, the distance in time is not to be treated as a void but an ‘interim’ filled by the continuity of tradition that shapes the hermeneutical situation of the present. So, while the authority of the text is presumed within the interpretive process, it must be understood in light of the present rather than in a return to the original period. The hermeneutical task then calls for what Gadamer called a ‘fusion of horizons’. As Schillebeeckx writes: ‘Hermeneutics requires us to design a historical frame of reference which is distinct from our present frame of reference and thus to become conscious of the other as different within the fusion of the two spheres (since historicity is one great evolving process)—that is understanding the past.’<sup>35</sup>

### II) The Past and the Present within the Sphere of the Promise

Though influenced by the new hermeneutics’ stress on the historicity of being, Schillebeeckx was critical of the fact that its proponents only focused on the existential possibilities that had already been brought into existence: ‘They do not question what is, from the biblical point of view, of primary importance—

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 29.

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the future possibilities, what is new and completely unprecedented.<sup>36</sup> So, where the past needs interpreted, the future has to be realized. This act of realization, in turn, brings something new into being, which Schillebeeckx notes has implications for how we think about dogma and the nature of truth: 'What is ultimately and primarily in question here is conceiving both the past and present as open-ended, oriented towards a new reality—what is still to come.' For this reason, Schillebeeckx concludes that it is only in the sphere of action (orthopraxis) that an interpretation is fully actualized. The profession of faith then cannot remain at the level of contemplation, it is rather a historical task to be accomplished.

### III) The Permanence in the Present, Past, and Future

According to Schillebeeckx there is a third aspect of the hermeneutics of history which has generally been overlooked by all proponents of the new hermeneutics: 'consciousness of time'. For Schillebeeckx, our historicity implies a real openness to something which might be called a 'trans-historical' element which cannot be positively defined. This self-identity beyond conceptualization is the 'objective perspective of faith'. Schillebeeckx identifies this inexpressible objective perspective as 'the ever present mystery of promise—the mystery which is not uttered, which is everywhere reaching towards expression but in itself is never thought.' Furthermore, he asserts that this mystery, 'which gives itself in history [is what] ensures the identity of the faith in the Church's successive interpretations of the faith.' In Schillebeeckx's account, no dogmatic formula is capable of transmitting the living faith to all people in all times because we do not possess the absolute, which is the inner norm of our faith, in an absolute way. Rather, 'as pilgrims on the way, we live historically in the absolute, oriented towards the absolute, because this absolute embraces us in grace, without our being able to embrace it.'<sup>37</sup>

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36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 27.

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### *Developing a Hermeneutics of Faith*

Through his engagement with the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, Schillebeeckx concluded that theology has no special language of its own:

There is no special ghetto language of faith. If it exists as a ghetto language, then it is in this case an anachronistic relic of what was once the everyday, universally intelligible language of human society which had become separated and ceased to develop along with the rest of human language and has thus become the ghetto language of an enclosed 'in' group, intelligible only to this group and experts.<sup>38</sup>

When speaking about the presence of God in human history then, Schillebeeckx rejected all forms of linguistic dualism. However, he maintained that owing to the nature of its object the language of faith is not identical to secular discourse: 'To express this in a different way, theology speaks a universally intelligible language—its principles are the universal hermeneutical principles of all human understanding—but theology does not deduce its intelligibility from these universal principles.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, Schillebeeckx suggested that while the language of faith is distinct from 'secular' discourse both languages interpret the same reality. What Schillebeeckx's engagement with hermeneutics brought to light was the way in which faith and intelligibility are integrally connected: 'Without faith, there is no understanding of faith, but without understanding there is also no faith.'<sup>40</sup>

### *Towards a New Image of God*

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38 Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Crisis in the Language of Faith as a Hermeneutical Problem", trans. David Smith in *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology, and the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 86.

39 Schillebeeckx, "Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics", in *GFM*, 16.

40 *Ibid.*, 16.



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Informed by his conviction that theological discourse must be reinterpreted for the context into which it speaks, Schillebeeckx began to develop a new image of God.<sup>41</sup> In short, he reinterprets the theological category of divine transcendence in terms of the future. This is because in the context of the late-modern world, societies were increasingly orientating themselves towards the future.<sup>42</sup>

Schillebeeckx observed that whereas traditionally transcendence had been understood in terms of the past, in a culture which was resolutely turned towards the future the concept of 'transcendence' needed to be modified accordingly.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the classical notion of transcendence required a new eschatological dimension. For Schillebeeckx, this fundamental shift in orientation provided the basis for a new concept of God: 'In such a cultural framework, the God of those who believe in him will obviously reveal himself as the "One who is to come", the God who is *our* future. This, of course, brings about a radical change—the God whom we formerly, in the light of an earlier view of man and the world, called "wholly Other" now manifests himself as "wholly New," the One who is *our* future, who creates the future of mankind

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<sup>41</sup> On April 8, 1966, *Time* magazine ran the cover, *Is God Dead?* The changing attitudes towards religion in the United States and the wider Transatlantic North led to an increased interest in the question of God. Schillebeeckx was among those quoted in the cover article: 'God has disappeared because of the image of him that the church used for many, many ages.' In response, he encouraged the church to develop new images, see: John Elson, 'Is God Dead, in *Time Magazine* (April 8 1966), 82-87.

<sup>42</sup> For Schillebeeckx, the social phenomenon of secularisation was essentially a complex socio-cultural event that resulted in a fundamental shift in our relationship to history and the world. As religions are a social reality they are shaped by social changes. Therefore, Schillebeeckx understood secularisation as a religious event because it was first and foremost a social and historical event.

<sup>43</sup> For more on the impact of secularisation on Schillebeeckx's theology, see: William J. Hill, "Schillebeeckx's New Look at Secularity: A Note", in *The Thomist* 33, 1 (January 1969), 162-170.

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anew.<sup>44</sup> In this way, the change in culture provides the basis for recovering the fact that the God of promises who guided Israel through the wilderness is the same God who goes before us on the path to the promised land.

In proposing his 'new' image of God, Schillebeeckx was keen to stress its biblical basis: 'The new culture is but an occasion and stimulus to rediscover the living God as our future in the Old and the New Testament. But according to the Bible the basis of the eschatological expectation of the future is certainty, in faith, of an actual relationship with God.'<sup>45</sup> In recovering the notion of God as 'our future', Schillebeeckx contended that any future expectation of God is rooted in our present relationship with him: 'The basis of our hope is therefore our faith in Yahweh who reveals himself in both past and present as the living God of the community.'<sup>46</sup> In other words, it is only in looking back and recalling God's fulfilment of his promises that we are able to look ahead sustained in the knowledge of God's faithfulness. Schillebeeckx observes that for Christians the foundation, norm and criterion of every future expectation is Jesus Christ: 'The Lord is prior to every Christian community, and for that reason the "saving past" of Jesus, as it is relived in the preaching of the Church implies a criticism of the religious interpretations of contemporary Christianity.'<sup>47</sup> From this perspective, Schillebeeckx maintains that without paying attention to both our present relationship with God and to Jesus' past, which the Spirit bring brings to mind, all our ideas about God are ultimately at risk of becoming mythology.

For Schillebeeckx, the image of God as the future of humankind invited believers to become more fully involved in the building up of the world as the place where the question of human salvation is decided. In other words, human history is not static but a task to be realised. From this perspective,

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44 Schillebeeckx, "Man's Future on Earth" in *GFM*, 181.

45 Schillebeeckx, *UF*, 5.

46 *Ibid.*

47 Schillebeeckx, "Man's Future on Earth", in *GFM*, 189.

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Schillebeeckx argued that the turn to the future and the world deepened rather than omitted the reality of God: '[I]n other words, of an attitude which recognizes the presence of God in our human history and which can help to bring about a future of salvation for all men by concern for our fellow-men [...] Our faith in God will then become "secular". In other words, it will assume the form of love of man which is opposed to history without salvation and which strives to transform the concrete reality in which we are placed into a history of salvation for all men.<sup>48</sup> In light of this observation, Schillebeeckx established the conditions for a new form of spirituality which understands God as the one who penetrates all of human history, energising it from within and calling humanity beyond the present towards the future. However, Schillebeeckx notes that from an empirical perspective this all-penetrating intimacy is experienced as a silent absence.<sup>49</sup> Informed by the belief that through his transcendence God is immanent to creation, Schillebeeckx argues that Christians are called to commit themselves to the task of transforming human history into that which God wills it to become: 'That is the paradox of Christianity—we tread in the footsteps of the God who is to come to us from the future and, in so doing, it is still we who make history.'<sup>50</sup>

### *From Hermeneutics to Critical Theory*

By proposing an image of God as the future of humankind, Schillebeeckx levelled a critique against established Christian practice: 'Anyone whose entire being is, culturally and religiously, orientated towards the past inevitably runs the risk of leaving the world as it is, of interpreting it, but not changing it—this

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48 Ibid., 190.

49 Schillebeeckx reflects further on this sense in his 1966 essay "The Sorrow of the Experience of God's Concealment," in *World and Church*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1971), 77-95.

50 Schillebeeckx, "Man's Future on Earth," in *GFM*, 190.

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was Karl Marx's legitimate criticism of the religion of his time.<sup>51</sup> It was this conviction that led Schillebeeckx to supplement his embrace of hermeneutics with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.

Founded in Frankfurt during the years of the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), the Institute for Social Research sought to develop a social theory that could account for the economic and political regimes that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. Responding to the failure of social revolutions in Germany, Hungary and Italy, the scholars of the Frankfurt School developed critical examinations of culture, ideology, and subjectivity. Later exiled to the United States on account of the rise of Nazism, the Frankfurt School's foremost thinkers Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno drew attention to the complex matrix of social oppression in order to develop a theory of liberation. Although Schillebeeckx's engagement with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School was largely selective, Adorno's idea of negative dialectics provided him with a means of critiquing established ideologies, social structures, and theologies. However, Schillebeeckx went beyond the criticism of Adorno to draw on the connection established between praxis and theory in the early writings of Jürgen Habermas. In its future orientation humanity seeks to preserve the 'threatened humanum' but in this task it is not to overly define the future or mistake any concrete stage in the development of human history as the ultimate point.

Crucially, where hermeneutics looked to history for what could be made present again, the work of the Frankfurt School sought to negate that which should not. By drawing on the work of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, critical theory provided Schillebeeckx with the resources to recognise that any theology which remains at the level of interpretation cannot adequately respond to the fact that human history is full of non-meaning and repressed truths. As a result, Schillebeeckx began to recognise that the task of theological interpretation

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51 Ibid., 183.

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should always be connected to the task of exposing and transforming dehumanising structures.<sup>52</sup>

### *Embracing Orthopraxis*

Through his engagement with Western Marxism, Schillebeeckx arrived at the conclusion that the total meaning of human history cannot be explained by theoretical reason alone. For this reason, he began to consider the place of practical reason more seriously. To this end Schillebeeckx asserts that the thematization of universal meaning can only be accomplished meaningfully from a perspective in which suffering and injustice is counteracted by human praxis: 'In other words, total meaning can only come about through historical experiences and commitment; it cannot be speculatively thought out in a theoretical anticipation, precisely because concrete history is a mixture of sense and nonsense.' Talk about the total meaning of human history then is impossible if an account is not given of the particular praxis which seeks to make all men and women free subjects of living history. As a result, Schillebeeckx began to see the experience and memory of meaninglessness in history as a cognitive stimulus for liberative praxis.

According to Schillebeeckx the eschatological promise of God is made known in the here and now through the liberative work of the church: 'Christian commitment to the world by concern for people will be the exegesis and

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52 For more on the influence of hermeneutics and critical theory on Schillebeeckx's theology see: Mary Catherine Hilkert, "Hermeneutics of History in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx", 97-145; William L. Portier, "Edward Schillebeeckx as Critical Theorist: The Impact of Neo-Marxist Social Thought on his Recent Theology", *The Thomist* 48:3 (1984), 341-367; Dennis Rochford, "The Theological Hermeneutics of Edward Schillebeeckx", *Theological Studies* 63 (2002), 251-267; Daniel Speed Thompson, "Epistemological Framework in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx", *Philosophy and Theology* 15:1 (2003), 19-56; Elizabeth K. Tillar, "The Influence of Social Critical Theory on Edward Schillebeeckx's Theology of Suffering for Others", *The Heythrop Journal* 42 (2001), 148-172.

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hermeneutics of the new concept of God, in which Christ is shown to be the "wholly New One." That is to say that it is through the concrete practices of people in the world that God manifests himself as the one who brings about our future. It is for this reason that praxis comes to assume a central place in his theology. In his embrace of orthopraxis, Schillebeeckx was not seeking to reduce the question of truth to a merely pragmatic concern but to recover the biblical idea of 'doing truth'. In this way he sought to challenge the idea that salvation falls vertically into human history. By contrast, Schillebeeckx was beginning to think about salvation as a historical process that occurs in the world. For this reason, he argued that the task of believers was not simply to interpret history but to change it. However, in contrast to political movements such as Marxism, Schillebeeckx stressed that the Christian cannot speak about the future as a fixed teleology: 'For the Christian, it is an ideological misconception to call one concrete stage in the development of human history the ultimate point.'

By connecting the biblical image of God as promise with the future orientation of culture, Schillebeeckx developed the foundations for a political theology that challenged both church and wider society: the promise of God calls us beyond our present situation to seek the kingdom of God. For Schillebeeckx, there must be a relationship between Christian hope and the terrestrial planning of society as a means of improving the quality of life for both the individual and the collective. Although he is keen to stress that religious belief should not be treated as a supplement to society, he is clear that Christianity does have its own positive vision of salvation that exerts constant pressure upon all existing social structures.

#### *Towards a New Method of Correlation*

Schillebeeckx increasingly recognised that in a culture in which belief in God could no longer be taken for granted, it was worth considering how talk about

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God could still be meaningful.<sup>53</sup> It was the attempt to respond to this challenge without appealing to a self-authenticating fideism that had led a number of his contemporaries, notably Paul Tillich, to propose a question-answer method of correlation: 'Theology establishes the binding character of its talk about God by stating explicitly that it is an answer to the question of man's existence.'<sup>54</sup> For Schillebeeckx, the underlying intention behind this move was the desire to seek an answer to the question of what difference belief in God makes. However, Schillebeeckx concluded that any attempt to answer a non-religious question with a religious answer resulted in a 'category mistake'. This is because meaning always precedes truth. For this reason, Schillebeeckx contended that a 'hermeneutics of experience' must be established before a 'hermeneutics of tradition' can be developed: 'Language, including that of faith, becomes meaningless, in the sense in which linguistic analysts use the term, if it does not contain a recognisable reference to man's experience in the world.'<sup>55</sup> In other words, only a human answer can be given to a human question.<sup>56</sup> Without this experiential connection any interpretation of faith is at risk of becoming unintelligible to those who operate outside of its 'language game'.

### *In Search for the Humanum*

Schillebeeckx observed that the question of meaning has been raised as long as people have existed: 'People seek the all-supporting and all-embracing meaning which binds together the different sectors of human, individual and social life into a meaningful whole.'<sup>57</sup> For this reason, the search for meaning has resulted in a plurality of positive views of humankind. Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx contends that it is possible to identify a common thread that runs

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<sup>53</sup> See Schillebeeckx, *UF*, ix.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>55</sup> Schillebeeckx, "The Crisis of Language", in *LF*, 86.

<sup>56</sup> Schillebeeckx, *UF*, 90.

<sup>57</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 171.

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through all these positive views: a common search to realise the constantly threatened *humanum*.<sup>58</sup>

Schillebeeckx maintained that it is impossible to formulate a positive definition of the *humanum* without lapsing back into fragmentary and contradictory worldviews. Instead, he suggests that what is meant by the *humanum* can be understood only on the basis of a critical negativity or negative dialectics: 'There is, among men, a critical solidarity over the threat to humanity [...] All resistance to inhumane situations reveals, if only indirectly, at least an obscure consciousness of what must be confessed positively by human integrity; it manifests in a negative and indirect way the call of the *humanum*.<sup>59</sup> For Schillebeeckx, this negative dialectic which cannot be conceptualised univocally forms the universal pre-understanding against which the gospel becomes intelligible: 'The *humanum* which is sought, but always threatened, is proclaimed and promised in Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is the *humanum* which is sought.<sup>60</sup> From this perspective, the Christian message is not dependent on any particular philosophy or worldview but is rather geared towards that which is common to all:

The Christian answer reminds man that such a universal subject of history, which everyone is seeking, really exists, but cannot be given from history itself [...] This resistance to what is inhumane, negative dialectics, which can be found in the Christian answer, is at the same time a resistance to any secular, theoretical or practical, system of unity and this is so on the basis of God's promise that has been revealed in the resurrection from man's ultimate impotence, death. A life without alienation, a realm of freedom without injustice, really is the prospect before us and exists already as a positive possibility (see 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:4).<sup>61</sup>

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58 The term *Humanum* is taken from the work of Ernst Bloch.

59 Ibid., 92.

60 Ibid., 65.

61 Ibid., 93.



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Schillebeeckx increasingly came to see the basic human experience of life in the modern world as one of indignation: 'Reality as we experience it every day, what we see, read and hear about (in newspapers, on television and via other media) makes us shudder: it is not what it can and should be. It is a scurrying anthill of contradictions and suffering.'<sup>62</sup> The reality of human suffering, environmental degradation, and structural injustices rouses within us a sense that there is something fundamentally wrong with the world in which we live.<sup>63</sup> It is the sense of anger that this reality raises within us that forms the basis of a 'no' that men and women say to their actual situation of being-in-the-world: 'No, it can't go on like this, we won't stand for it any longer.'<sup>64</sup> For Schillebeeckx, this experience is one that is more certain than any form of verifiable or falsifiable knowledge that philosophy or the sciences can offer us.<sup>65</sup>

### *Experiences of Negative Contrast*

Schillebeeckx maintains that spontaneous cries of protest reveal the fact that people do not regard evil as being on an equal footing with the good. This is despite the fact that our history, which is an enigmatic mixture of good and evil, of meaning and meaninglessness, offers no assurances that the good will have the final word. Schillebeeckx asserts that it is our basic trust in the instinctive goodness of the world that informs our experience of indignation. This is because we sense that another situation could exist which has the right to our affirmative 'yes'. It is the abiding sense that another world is possible that causes people to struggle to transform the world as it exists: 'Without that

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62 Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests" in *Essays*, 154.

63 For the most comprehensive discussion of suffering in Schillebeeckx's theology, see: Kathleen Anne McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

64 Schillebeeckx, 'The Church as the Sacrament of Dialogue', in *GFM*, 136.

65 For a creative dialogue between Schillebeeckx's concept of the *Humanum* and Catholic Social Thought, see: Michael Kirwan, "The Unbearable *Humanum*: Reflecting Back, Working Forwards", in *New Blackfriars* vol. 96, no.1062 (March 2015), 239-251.

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hope the very real experience of indignation is non-existent, internally untenable, pointless and without human substance. Human indignation per se, without at least a latent positive yearning for human dignity, is intrinsically absurd.’ As Schillebeeckx writes: ‘The fundamental human “no” to evil therefore discloses an unfulfilled and thus “open yes” which is as intractable as the human “no”, indeed even stronger, because the “open yes” is the basis of that opposition and makes it possible.’<sup>66</sup>

In Schillebeeckx’s understanding this two-sided ‘contrast experience’ is common to all people.<sup>67</sup> For this reason, he argues that it provides a rational basis for solidarity between people in the struggle for a more humane world: ‘The actual threat and attack on the *humanum*—that which is worthy of human beings—which is desired but can never be defined positively leads to indignation and is therefore a specifically ethical challenge and an ethical imperative, embedded in very specific negative experiences of contrast, of human misfortune and unhappiness, here and now.’

While Schillebeeckx identifies this experience of radical or negative contrast as universal, he states that those who believe in God interpret it in religious terms: ‘The “open yes” then takes on a more precise direction. Its origin is not so much, or at least not directly, the transcendence of the divine (which is inexpressible and anonymous and cannot be put into words) as (at least for Christians) the recognizable human face of this transcendence which has appeared among us in the man Jesus, confessed as Christ and Son of God.’<sup>68</sup> In other words, for Christians the experience of contrast is interpreted

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<sup>66</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 6.

<sup>67</sup> LaReine-Marie Mosely questions whether Schillebeeckx pays enough attention to unconscious bias, see: “Negative Contrast Experience: An Ignatian Appraisal” in *Horizons* 41 (2014), 74-95. John Dunn also questions whether we actually always say ‘no’ in his essay “Negative Contrast Experience and Edward Schillebeeckx: Critical Reflections” in *From North to South*, 65-84.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

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in light of the story of Jesus of Nazareth, in whom the greatest disaster was changed, through the overwhelming power of the Spirit, into the source of eternal life.<sup>69</sup> It is on account of Jesus' resurrection that Christians are able to affirm the saving presence of God within the ambiguous reality of human history. As a result, 'the fundamental muttering of humanity turns into a well-founded hope. Something of a sigh of mercy, of compassion, is hidden in the depths of reality...and in it believers hear the name of God.'<sup>70</sup>

### *From Participation to Anticipation*

Through his engagement with modern hermeneutics and critical theory, Schillebeeckx arrived at the conclusion that the total meaning of human existence cannot be grasped from a purely theoretical perspective but only anticipated in moments of redemptive praxis. The realisation of this fact was ultimately what led Schillebeeckx to make a 'clear break' with De Petter. While De Petter's account of implicit intuition emphasised the place of human experience, it rested on a single and theoretical conception of history. As Schillebeeckx himself observed: 'Now in our society where divergent ideologies and outlooks on life compete in the 'common market' of world history, that is certainly not the case! Therefore the participation idea, as it is called has to be replaced by the idea of anticipation of a total meaning amid a history still in the making.'

### III. Late Schillebeeckx

In his attempt to respond to the social and theological challenges of late-modern world, Schillebeeckx turned his attention to the story of Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup>

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69 Edward Schillebeeckx, *On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical and Political Dimensions*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 10.

70 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 6.

71 Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 698.

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This is because he observed that where theories and theodicies risked domesticating or perpetuating the mystery of suffering, stories have the capacity to preserve dangerous memories, awaken liberating hopes and provide symbolic frameworks. So, according to Schillebeeckx, the Christian tradition does not try to explain or justify suffering but rather tells the story of 'how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how we went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him' (Acts 10:38).

### *Scriptural Ressourcement*

Whereas it was customary for Catholic theologians to begin their thinking about Jesus Christ from the received doctrines of the church, Schillebeeckx stressed that in the modern world religious belief was no longer a question of 'swallow it or choke'.<sup>72</sup> As a result, he maintained that if the Christian faith was to remain comprehensible it needed to offer a liberating answer to the real questions that people were asking about the world. This conviction led Schillebeeckx to chart a new course in Catholic theology by returning to scripture in order to uncover the experience that led people to declare that salvation from God is found in Jesus of Nazareth.

In his *Jesus* trilogy Schillebeeckx cut a new path in Catholic theology by advancing the claim that soteriology—the kingdom of God as the liberation of people—precedes Christology in the genesis of Christian knowledge.<sup>73</sup> It was the experience of new life that Jesus of Nazareth evoked in people that led them to question who he was that he could induce such an experience within them. From this perspective, the soteriological question of Christology becomes

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72 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the books Jesus & Christ*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 4.

73 See Edward Schillebeeckx, "Can Christology be an Experiment?", *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 35 (1980: 1-14).

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a 'second-order' question because it presupposes an experience of salvation with Jesus. This is not to deny that the personal identity of Jesus is the foundation for his work of liberation but to recognise that in the order of human cognition soteriology precedes Christology. For this reason, Schillebeeckx concluded that if the affirmation that salvation from God is found in Jesus Christ is to remain intelligible then the transformative experience at the origin of the Christian confession needed to be made actual in people's present situations.

Through his historical investigation into the formation of the Christian community, Schillebeeckx identifies the kingdom of God as central to Jesus' ministry. He notes that through his preaching and praxis, Jesus both spoke God's 'no' to all forms of evil and embodied the presence of God's saving rule. At the heart of Jesus' public activity, Schillebeeckx identifies a close connection with God that he describes as Jesus' 'Abba experience'. It was from out of this sense of intimacy with God that Jesus proclaimed the reality of another world. This transformative message ultimately cost Jesus his life. However, despite Jesus' crucifixion, his followers came to see that he had been exalted by God and remained present to them by his Spirit.

### *Towards a Critical Ecclesiology*

Even though the church is a recurrent theme in Schillebeeckx's writings, Paul Murray rightly observes that 'one would look in vain for anything approaching a systematic ecclesiological focus and articulation.'<sup>74</sup> Instead Schillebeeckx's ecclesiological writings are episodic in nature and reflect his changing attitudes. In his early theology, Schillebeeckx speaks of the church as the earthly body of the heavenly Christ: the people of God are the sacramental medium by which Christ's grace is mediated to the world. On the basis of this conviction, he developed a cultural account of the church's transformative place in society. An

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74 Paul D. Murray "The Ups and Downs, Highs and Lows, and Practicalities of Ecclesiological Analysis with Edward Schillebeeckx", *Concilium* (2012/1), 71.

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understanding that gained support from the reforms of Vatican II. However, Schillebeeckx's initial optimism towards the council soured when its proposed reforms failed to reach fruition due to internal opposition and a lack of institutional support. By the mid-1980s Schillebeeckx spoke of the Catholic Church as being in a time of 'anti-council' and expressed his fear that the spirit of the council was being stifled.<sup>75</sup> Informed by what he saw as the increasing polarity over the reception of Vatican II and the slowdown in ecumenical dialogues, he jettisoned his planned project in favour of recovering the heart of the gospel: 'For is it not the heart of the gospel message that any ecclesiology, too, can and must be measured.' Through his later writings on the church Schillebeeckx seeks to reject the ecclesiocentrism of established Catholic ecclesiology in favour of 'an ecclesiology in a minor key'. In other words, the understanding that the church is the people of God, who following in the way of Jesus, keep the eschatological promise of salvation alive.

So, it was on account of his investigation into the historical life of Jesus and the formation of earliest Christian communities that Schillebeeckx reconsidered his approach to the church and its ministries. Schillebeeckx maintained that authority in the church is located in the entire community and not just a clerical hierarchy. The purpose of the church is not to draw attention to itself but to orientate people towards the kingdom of God, a witness that it should embody as a critical community engaged in redemptive praxis. Only by engaging in the struggles of the world, can Christians begin to communicate meaningfully about God's saving will for humanity. For it is only in moments of liberation that we can catch a glimpse of the world as God intended it: a world defined by laughter and joy.

Schillebeeckx's theological career spanned nearly the entire twentieth century. As a result, his intellectual development reflects many of the

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<sup>75</sup> See Edward Schillebeeckx "John is his name," in *For the Sake of the Gospel*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1989) 130-140.

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transitions that the Catholic Church underwent during this time. By engaging with current philosophical discussions, Schillebeeckx's work also reflects the way in which people in the transatlantic north were rethinking their identity in light of two world wars and the challenges levelled against old orthodoxies by new social realities is evident in his work.<sup>76</sup>

By focusing his attention on history and experience, Schillebeeckx pushed back against those who presented the Christian faith as something that can be abstracted from the struggles and injustices of the world. By contrast, Schillebeeckx understood theology as a resource with which to question and challenge the social realities that shape our individual and collective lives. The Christian faith, then, was a viable response to the existential questions and social struggles of the late-modern world. It is this emphasis on orthopraxis that has led some to identify Schillebeeckx's theology as a western form of liberation theology.

Throughout his writings, Schillebeeckx attempted to recover the essence of the Christian tradition by reconnecting to the source experience at the origin of the Christian confession: an encounter with Christ. By returning to the source of Christian faith, Schillebeeckx challenged the established norms and practices of the Catholic Church that had shut out the insights of the world and minimised the participation of the laity. For Schillebeeckx, Christianity is essentially about learning to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. A journey of discipleship that is sustained by the promise of salvation and integrally connected to the collective struggle for more humane world.

### **2.3 The Theological Foundations of Schillebeeckx's Theology**

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<sup>76</sup> Schillebeeckx's concern for history and experiences led Schreier to characterise his theology as an attempt to *understand concrete contemporary Christian experience*. See Schreier, 'Orientation', 10-14.

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In considering the trajectory of Schillebeeckx's theological development, Kennedy admits that for a time he worked under the impression that Schillebeeckx had frequently altered the form of his theology's philosophical foundations. For instance, where he once spoke of God's accessibility in terms of implicit intuition, in his later theology he explains it in terms of negative contrast experiences. What Kennedy only gradually came to realise was that these were arguably two different expressions for the same thing: 'They are the same thing in the sense that they both refer to a salvific reality independent of human beings: for the former it is God, for the latter it is the *humanum*.' Furthermore, the expressions 'implicit intuition' and 'negative contrast experiences' both involve a dialectic interrelationship between positive and negative poles: 'For the former, the positive pole holds that God can be known; the negative is that God cannot be grasped by concepts. For the latter position, the positive pole resides in hope offered by the *humanum*; the negative resides in the limiting and debilitating experience of suffering.' What both perspectives reflect is 'a beyond' that is hoped for and trusted in from the standpoint of human limitation.<sup>77</sup> So what Kennedy's observation brings into focus is a degree of continuity that underlines the evident discontinuity in Schillebeeckx's work.<sup>78</sup>

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77 Kennedy, "Continuity underlying Discontinuity", 275. For a more detailed survey of Schillebeeckx's thought see Philip Kennedy, *Deus Humanissimus: The Knowledge of God in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Fribourg: University Press Fribourg, 1993).

78 Robert Schreiter uses the image of a gramophone record on a turntable to describe the different degrees of continuity in Schillebeeckx's theology: 'The outermost band represents the topics on which he chooses to write at any given time. Like a record in movement, there is a good deal of recurrence; he has written on Christology, ministry, and church and world issues on several occasions. The middle band represents the different philosophical frameworks he has used to express his ideas: Thomism, existential phenomenology, critical theory, and so on. Again, like a record, they tend to recur. [...] And the innermost band (he calls it the "conjunctural" in Jesus) represents some deep convictions which have not really changed much over the years, and which direct the opinions chosen within the philosophical frameworks and give a distinctive stamp to the suggestions offered in his writings.' See Robert Schreiter, "Edward Schillebeeckx: An Orientation to His Thought" in *The Schillebeeckx Reader*, ed. Robert Schreiter (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 9. While Kennedy offers the image of concentric circles,



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## Towards a Soteriology of Creation

In considering lines of continuity in Schillebeeckx's theological development, it is notable that towards the end of his career he identified the importance of creation for his theological project:

I regard creation as the foundation of all theology. At present there is a kind of appeal from many sides for theology to restore the treatment of creation to its true place. There is so much talk of the history of salvation that there is need to reflect anew on the concept of creation [...] We need to find new words to say what creation is. We all know about evolution, but almost nothing about creation.<sup>79</sup>

Importantly for Schillebeeckx, creation is not a causal explanation for the world but rather a theological affirmation about the relationship that exists between God and creation: As Schillebeeckx writes: 'Creation is an act in which God on the one hand places us unconditionally in our finite, non-divine state, destined for true humanity, and on the other hand at the same time gives himself in unselfish love as our God: our salvation and our happiness, the supreme content of true and good humanity.'<sup>80</sup> In other words, creation is the means by which God both reveals Godself to us and initiates the human quest for salvation.<sup>81</sup>

From this perspective, Schillebeeckx identifies the basic mistake behind many misconceptions about creation as the understanding that finitude is a

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Steven Rodenborn presents a more nuanced reading of the degrees of change in Schillebeeckx's thought in *Hope in Action: Subversive Eschatology in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx and Johann Baptist Metz* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014).

<sup>79</sup> Schillebeeckx, *HT*, 47.

<sup>80</sup> Schillebeeckx, 'I Believe in the Man Jesus', in *God Among Us*, 104.

<sup>81</sup> Schillebeeckx offers a concise account of his creation theology in *On Christian Faith*. These ideas are explored in greater detail in *GAU*, 91-102, and *IR*, 105-124. Schillebeeckx further develops his creation theology in *Church*, 229-246.

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flaw: 'In other words, finitude is thought to be improper, an ailment, even sinfulness or apostasy, a flaw in the existence of mankind and the world.'<sup>82</sup> As is evident in both dualistic and emanationary accounts of creation, salvation is understood in terms of rising above our status as finite beings. By contrast, Schillebeeckx maintains that the Judeo-Christian tradition affirms the essential finitude of creation: 'If God is creator, then he creates that which is not-divine, that which is completely other than himself, in other words finite things.'<sup>83</sup> To understand finitude as a defining characteristic of creatureliness then is to acknowledge that we do not need to transcend our contingent or finite nature to find salvation. In fact, Schillebeeckx identifies the desire to transcend finitude as the arrogance that alienates people from themselves and the world.

In Schillebeeckx's account then salvation from God never consists of God saving us from our finitude or from all that this entails. Instead, as Schillebeeckx asserts: 'God's honour lies in the happiness and prosperity of man in the world, who seeks his honour in God.'<sup>84</sup> That is to say, creation is the means by which God sets us free for our task in the world, which is to enjoy and delight in the worldliness of the world and in our own humanity.

So, for Schillebeeckx, creation is not a single chronological event at the beginning of all things but rather the continuous and dynamic relationship between creator and creation. To affirm this relationship then is to recognise that creation is fundamentally sustained by the absolute presence of God. As Schillebeeckx writes: 'God wills to be the origin, here and now, of the worldliness of the world and the humanity of man. He wills to be with us and with our finite task in the world.'<sup>85</sup> In this way God establishes himself as the

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82 Schillebeeckx, "I Believe in God, Creator of Heaven", in *GAU*, 92.

83 *Ibid.*

84 Schillebeeckx, *IR*, 115.

85 *Ibid.*, 116.

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deepest meaning and the highest end of human life.<sup>86</sup> In considering the relationship between God and creature, Schillebeeckx is clear that the dividing line is on the side of creation and not God. He describes this mystical and sacramental dynamic with the term of 'mediated immediacy':

Basically, we have here belief in God's grace, i.e. in the saving real presence of God with us; this is not a separate sector, for example human inwardness, but embraces the whole of reality in which we live and of which we ourselves are also part. From God's side this absolute nearness is direct, but for us the immediacy is mediated, while remaining immediacy.<sup>87</sup>

So, at the heart of Schillebeeckx's theology is a sacramental dynamic in which creation is open to the presence of God that is manifest in and through finite and contingent realities.<sup>88</sup> It is this presence of God in creation that I ultimately what to argue can be identified as the Holy Spirit. However, in terms of Schillebeeckx's own thought, this sacramental dynamic has a threefold structure: I) the positivity of God, II) Christology as the supreme expression of creation, and III) human flourishing being the intention of creation.

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<sup>86</sup> Schillebeeckx, *OCF*, 18.

<sup>87</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 70.

<sup>88</sup> Stephan Van Erp observes, what distinguishes Schillebeeckx from the diverse landscape of his theological contemporaries was his understanding that a *sacramental* dynamic provides the key for understanding the relationship between God and humanity, as well as the role of the church in the world. See Stephan Van Erp, "Incessant Incarnation as the Future of Humanity: The Promise of Schillebeeckx's Sacramental Theology" in *Concilium* 2012/ 1: 92-105. As I have started to explicate in this section, for Schillebeeckx, this sacramental dynamic is framed within his understanding of the doctrine of creation. This point has been explored in more detail in Martin G. Poulson, *Dialectics of Creation: Creation and Creator in Edward Schillebeeckx and David Burrell* (London: T&T Clark, 2014); Diane Marie Steele, "Creation and Cross in the Later Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx", PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2000; Philip Kennedy, "God and Creation" in *The Praxis of the Reign of God*, 37-58. While there are others who maintain that the key to Schillebeeckx's theology is found in his Christology or Soteriology (see Donald J. Goergen, "Spirituality", *Praxis of the Reign of God*, 117-132.

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### *1) God as Pure Positivity*

Through the act of creation, God entrusts its flourishing to human freedom: 'God trusts man to recreate *shalom* and order, salvation from and for man, out of the chaos of our history. That is why the blessing of creation has been given to men by God through his royal and sovereign decree.'<sup>89</sup> Schillebeeckx describes this expression of divine trust in humanity in terms of a 'blank cheque' for which God alone stands as guarantor. The course of human history then is not predetermined, which means that the world is an ambiguous mixture of meaning and meaninglessness. However, while creation is a future orientated adventure that is shaped by free human actions, it nevertheless remains constantly dependent on the absolute presence of God who both enables and stimulates the historical quest for salvation.

As God creates the world for the purpose of human flourishing, Schillebeeckx categorically maintains that God does not want men and women to suffer. An affirmation that Schillebeeckx expresses using the language of 'pure positivity':

[God] is the promoter of all that is good and he opposes all that is evil. He is not God of life and death, as he would appear to be at certain levels in the Old Testament. If he were, he would be an ambiguous God. No, he is pure positivity. He fights against the beast Leviathan. He opposes evil.<sup>90</sup>

By describing God in terms of 'pure positivity', Schillebeeckx 'rejects all names and images of God which injure and enslave human beings instead of liberating them.'<sup>91</sup> For this reason, Schillebeeckx fervently opposes the idea that God somehow wants or wills human suffering: 'If it were true that God needed

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<sup>89</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *IR*, 109.

<sup>90</sup> Schillebeeckx, *GNM*, 113.

<sup>91</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 75.

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Auschwitz in his divine plan for man, in order to teach us a lesson or something, then I would simply no longer believe in God! It would be unthinkable.<sup>92</sup>

In identifying salvation as the purpose of creation, Schillebeeckx treats creation and salvation as one divine act: 'Creation is the point of departure for the whole of the covenant and the whole movement of liberation in which universal salvation is to be achieved for all mankind.'<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, as both creation and salvation have their origin in God, Schillebeeckx maintains that the whole of salvation history is permeated with God's gratuitous saving presence. However, Schillebeeckx is clear that because God's being is wholly gratuitous the existence of God can never be proven through rational argument. In fact, Schillebeeckx later stresses that the mystery of God is a 'superfluous luxury' which transcends the categories of necessity and utility. For this reason, belief in the existence of God is not equivalent to accepting the existence of some distant solar system. It is rather belief in God as 'pure gift': God is the one who determines in absolute freedom to be God for us:

Belief in God is a belief in God's absolute saving presence among men and women in their history. In other words, no matter what the circumstances in which we find ourselves, even through what we human beings call sheer chance, determinism or our own fault, there is no situation in which God cannot be near to us and in which we cannot find him.

As a result, Schillebeeckx asserts that where those who do not believe in God experience an empty and disenchanted world, the believer discerns the saving presence of God who wills the salvation of men and women: an absolute presence which encompasses the whole of creation, but which cannot be located within it.

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92 Ibid., 111.

93 Ibid., 107.

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In seeking to give meaningful expression to belief in God's absolute saving presence, Schillebeeckx increasingly emphasised the place of praxis in his work. This is because he identifies sacrificial praxis as the clearest way to express the belief that God is at work in human history bringing it to the fullness of salvation. For, as Schillebeeckx writes: 'The person who believes in God...sees in the fact that right must prevail an experience of what is above humanity, an experience of transcendence, in other words, he experiences the absolute and saving presence of God in that confusion of meaning and non-sense that we call 'human existence'.<sup>94</sup>

While Schillebeeckx emphasises the place of praxis in his later theology, he always maintains that religion cannot be reduced to ethics. In responding to the concrete challenges of the world, we should not overlook the place of spirituality: our relationship with God. For it is in and through the concrete realities of the world that God is revealed to us in a veiled manner. However, what Schillebeeckx seeks to stress is that our sacramental worship and praise of God are rendered meaningless if they do not summon us to practice loving justice towards other people: '*Talk about God* only becomes genuinely meaningful and 'productive' in a framework of the *praxis of his kingdom*.<sup>95</sup>

## *II) Christology as Concentrated Creation*

Schillebeeckx locates the assurance that God's trust in humanity will not be put to shame in the person of Jesus Christ: 'In Jesus, both God's purpose with man and the meaning of human life is fully portrayed: championship of the good and opposition to all evil.' In Jesus Christ, God's trust in humanity and humanity's trust in God find their definitive expression: 'This man Jesus makes it possible for us to believe that God indeed reposes his unconditional trust in man—whereas precisely what happens in our history of suffering is for many

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94 Ibid., 111.

95 Ibid., 160-161

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people the reason why they no longer believe in God.<sup>96</sup> Schillebeeckx identifies Christology as a specific way of making belief in creation more precise. In other words, Christology is 'concentrated creation': 'belief in creation as God wills it to be.'<sup>97</sup>

By interpreting Christology in the light of creation, Schillebeeckx identifies Christology as 'a specific way of making creation more precise.' In other words, in Jesus of Nazareth the creator God makes a historical appearance. God's liberating love for humanity is revealed in Jesus the Christ. Creation is an affirmation of God's perfect freedom, God is not bound or restricted. The God, who is for us, was made manifest among us in the incarnation (1 Jn 4:8). Jesus of Nazareth is incarnate love:

Only through Christ do we begin to realise clearly that there is more to God than might otherwise have been expected. God, the creator, the one in whom we can trust, *is* liberating love for humanity, in a way which fulfils and transcends all human, personal, social and political expectations.<sup>98</sup>

It is through their experience of Jesus that Christians have learned how to speak about God and his desire for our salvation. So, the person of Jesus Christ is understood as the definitive revelation of God and the paradigm of humanity.

In affirming that Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation of God, Schillebeeckx states that all Christological confessions must be held in the context of creation faith. In other words, the belief that God creates for the purpose of salvation. From this perspective, Schillebeeckx maintains that the incarnation is not a rescue plan but the supreme expression of God's will for creation. It is the story of Jesus that provides Christians with the assurance of

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96 Ibid., 111.

97 Schillebeeckx, *IR*, 128. Schillebeeckx develops his understanding of Christology as concentrated creation in *GAU*, 103-115, and *IR*, 125-139.

98 Ibid.

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salvation.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the question of what shape salvation will take surpasses rational and verifiable concepts. It is for this reason that Schillebeeckx avoids trying to give positive definitions and instead draws on the metaphors of the Jewish-Christian tradition and the secular language of the *humanum* to speak about human flourishing as God's ultimate aim for humanity. While salvation is ultimately a reality that is received as a gift of God, the work of salvation begins in the present. In other words, to struggle in defence of the *humanum* is to make something of salvation present in the world.

### *III) Human Flourishing*

While Schillebeeckx seeks to avoid positive definitions when speaking about human flourishing, he maintains that we will not be able to understand what is meant by 'salvation' if we do not understand what it is to be human. For this reason, he identifies seven anthropological constants that together form of system of coordinates for an emerging anthropology.<sup>100</sup>

#### 1) Relation to Human Corporeality

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<sup>99</sup> Roger Haight identifies four significant contributions of Schillebeeckx's Christology to the challenges of the modern world: (i) he moves Christianity out of a framework of 'double gratuity' by treating creation and salvation as integrally connected. In other words, what we say about God in light of Christ applies to God as Creator. (ii) Given that creation and salvation are integrally connected, God does not come to us from outside our experience. Any meaningful Christology then must be grounded in a saving experience. (iii) While Schillebeeckx treats Christ as the definitive expression of God, he does not see him as the exclusive revelation of God. It is possible then to embrace a certain plurality in the world. (iv) Schillebeeckx's understanding of the life, death, and resurrection provides no grounds for passive or escapist Christianity. Rather, to follow Jesus is to be involved in the concrete struggles of the world. See, Roger Haight, "Christ and Culture" in T&T Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx, 407-409.

<sup>100</sup> For a fuller discussion of Schillebeeckx's anthropological constraints, *Christ*, 731-743, and 'Questions on Christian Salvation of and for Man' in *LF*, 109-126. This essay was originally published in David Tracy, Hans Küng, Johann B. Metz, eds., *Towards Vatican III: The Work that Needs to be Done* (New York: Seabury, 1978).



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To be human is to have a body. It is by means of our corporeality that we relate to others and the wider world. As our relationship with ourselves, others, and nature is corporeal we come up against boundaries which we have to respect if we are to live a truly human life. At a fundamental level these boundaries are our most elementary needs. To ignore the body then is to risk constructing a narrow understanding of human identity and our relationship to the world. Therefore, a Christian account of salvation must take stock of the conditions and burdens which corporeality places on humanity.

## 2) Human Existence is Human Co-existence

To be human is to live in relationship to other people. For this reason, our personal identity is shaped and informed by our individual and collective relationships with others. To live a fully human life then means enabling all people to flourish and not simply a privileged few.

## 3) Relation to Social and Institutional Structures

Through our relationships with others, we bring social and institutional structures into being that influence how we live in the world. These structures take on an objective form which shape our personal identity. However, these structures are not immutable and can be changed through collective action. This gives rise to a specific ethical demand to transform those structures which deprive people of the fullness of life.

## 4) The Space-Time Structure of Person and Culture

We live in the inescapable dimensions of space and time. As a result, we are confronted by a dialectical tension between nature and history which reveals that while we may strive to alleviate human suffering, we cannot overcome our finitude. It is at this intersection then that the question of human meaning

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arises: how do we live in the present in a way that facilitates an appreciation of our human condition?

#### 5) The Relation between Theory and Praxis

As we have the ability to shape our history, how we understand and act in the world has real consequences. This in turn means that we are faced by the challenge of how we develop a permanent culture that is worthy of humanity.

#### 6) The Religious and 'Para-Religious' Consciousness of Humanity

At the heart of our human consciousness is a 'utopian' element. It is this concern for the future that informs both progressive and conservative conceptions of a more humane society. This 'utopian' element is conceptualised in both secular and religious narratives of human history. However, at their heart they reveal a shared faith and hope that is common to all people: the desire for the total liberation of humanity.

#### 7) The Irreducible Synthesis of these Six Dimensions

Taken together the previous six anthropological constraints form a synthesis that delineate our basic form and hold one another in equipoise. Importantly these coordinates do not provide a concrete path of action but rather inform how we understand what is specifically 'worthy of humanity'. Yet, the evident disconnect between this ideal and our lived reality accounts for the ambiguities and tensions in our world. It is to the fundamental struggle for a more humane world that the Christian message of salvation must be addressed.

By affirming the graciousness of God and the importance of concrete human experience, Schillebeeckx developed a theology that was fundamentally orientated towards human flourishing or salvation. Furthermore, by maintaining that all knowledge of God is mediated in and through human history and

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experience, Schillebeeckx framed his theology within an account of creation. Schillebeeckx's theological project then might be described as essentially a soteriology framed within a theology of creation.<sup>101</sup> However, as I noted in the previous chapter, a problem with this picture is that it does not appear to have a place for the Spirit.

## **2.4 Do not Quench the Spirit**

Despite his apparent oversight of the Spirit, Schillebeeckx cites two biblical texts that sustained him throughout his ministry: 'The saying of St. Peter, "Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15b), and the saying of St. Paul, "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesies, but test everything; hold fast what is good" (I Thess 5:19-21).' Commenting on these two passages, Schillebeeckx speaks of how it was the act of discerning the promptings of the Holy Spirit that shaped his theology:

On the one hand, in my continual attempt to reorientate myself in the unexpected directions in which the Spirit breathes, this same Spirit has given my theological work a character of hope which is liberating and constructive, which, from what my readers have told me, verbally and in writing, to my great joy, opens up people's lives.

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101 I take this phrase from Kennedy. See 'Continuity underlying Discontinuity', 275. The soteriological implications of Schillebeeckx's creation theology have been picked up by a number of commentators. See: Erica Olson-Bang, 'Edward Schillebeeckx's Creation Theology As a Resource for Ecological Ethics' in *Horizons* 38/2 (2011), 253-273; George Vandervelde, "Creation and Cross in the Christology of Edward Schillebeeckx: A Protestant Appraisal", in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20/2 (1983), 257-271; Diane Marie Steele, 'Creation and Cross in the Later Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx.' PHD thesis, The University of Norte Dame, 2000; Martin G. Poulson, "Schillebeeckx's Praxis of Creation", in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 237-251; Elizabeth M. Payne, 'Creation Faith and the Politics of Nature: Reading Schillebeeckx in an Ecological Age', in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 436-456.

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On the other hand the Spirit has been a pure source of the inexhaustible critical character of my writings, of the critical attitude which in the course of these thirty years down to the present day has led me to receive a certain number of letters in which Christian brothers have termed me a 'devil in flesh and blood' and 'a wolf in sheep's clothing', 'a heretic of the worst kind' and an immigrant to the Netherlands who for the good of the church and society would do better to go back to his own country.<sup>102</sup>

Schillebeeckx concludes that it was in responding to the promptings of the Spirit that he developed a liberating theology that sought to defend people against both the dehumanising forces of the modern world and the effects of toxic religion. It is this movement of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology that I want to draw out through this study.

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<sup>102</sup> Schillebeeckx, *HT*, 81.

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## Chapter Three: The Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's Early Theology

*'In its essence Pentecost is an Easter event.'*<sup>1</sup>



### *Chapter Overview*

In this chapter I focus on the place of the Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's early theology, that is prior to his 'philosophical turnabout' in the late 1960s. I begin by outlining the sacramental framework that underlines his early theology, before focusing on how he identifies the Spirit as the mutual love of the Father and the Son. Having identified how Schillebeeckx understands the person of the Spirit, I turn my attention to the work of the Spirit in drawing people into communion with Christ through the sacraments of the Church. I conclude this chapter by bringing Schillebeeckx's early sacramental theology into conversation with the work of Herbert McCabe and Sarah Coakley.

### **3.1 The Trinitarian Initiative of Salvation History**

In this opening section I present the way in which Schillebeeckx's sacramental understanding of salvation history shapes and informs his theological method. I note that because Schillebeeckx identifies Christ as the primordial sacrament of God he sees the incarnation as the means by which we can speak of the triune God.

In Search of the Living God

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, trans. Paul Barrett (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 34.

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In his inaugural lecture at the University of Nijmegen, delivered in 1958, Schillebeeckx encouraged his audience to circumscribe more exactly the area in which theology, understood 'as faith which has become science', establishes contact with the reality of God.<sup>2</sup> This is because the popular use of God as a stopgap for that which was unknown meant that as the gaps in human knowledge decreased so did the apparent need for God. Similarly, where God had been reduced to a guarantor of material comforts, these needs were being replaced by advances in science and technology. Schillebeeckx saw it as little surprise then that an increasing number of people felt that they had no real need for God in their lives. Yet, in contrast to some of his contemporaries, Schillebeeckx welcomed the phenomenon of secularization as a positive thing because it enabled the Church to address some of the distortions in Christian belief. For instance, the realization that the core of religiousness must lie outside the sphere of human need.<sup>3</sup>

Given that humanity does not seemingly need God in order to live in the modern world, Schillebeeckx maintains that God must necessarily exceed the totality of the created order. For this reason, Schillebeeckx asserts that there must be a form of personal presence that cannot be situated amongst created

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<sup>2</sup> For the full text of the inaugural address see, Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Search for the Living God" in *God and Man*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald and Peter Tomlinson (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969), 18-40. The lecture is also found in *Essays*, 35-50, where it is followed by Schillebeeckx's retirement lecture. The comparison of these two texts shows many of the aspects of continuity and development in Schillebeeckx's theology that I discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Questions of culture and the place of God within it remain central to Schillebeeckx's thinking throughout his career. However, at this stage in his development, Schillebeeckx is explicitly seeking to develop a Catholic Theology of Culture. A number of articles published between 1950 and 1952 in *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven* are noteworthy for understanding this development: 'Ik geloof in de levende God' 454-467; 'Het hoopvolle Christusmysterie', 3-23; 'De heiligmakende genade als heiliging van ons bestann', 7-27; a detailed survey of these essay is available in Borgman, *Edward Schillebeeckx*, 165-179. The essays in *GM* are also worthy of consideration.

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things which draws our attention as the result of a certain orientation. As Schillebeeckx writes:

Only when man shows sufficient courage to see himself and the world truthfully, as a fact, as a reality thrown at his feet, as a presence in itself unexplainable, can he begin to regard this tangible presence as the evidence of a very different Presence manifesting itself in an indirect fashion therein.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, it is only when we willingly surrender to the mystery which lies at the origin of our finite existence that we can begin to speak meaningfully about God. However, Schillebeeckx asserts that meaningful talk about God is only possible when God completes that which he began in his creative act by addressing us as one person speaks to another.

### *Religion is a Saving Dialogue*

Informed by his studies in modern philosophy, Schillebeeckx defines religion as essentially a 'saving dialogue' between God and humanity: a dialogue that consists of God's self-revelation and our human response.<sup>5</sup> While we may have an innate desire for communion with God, we lack the ability to establish a personal relationship with God through the power of our own initiative. So, it is only on account of God's saving initiative that an encounter between God and humanity becomes possible. An encounter which Schillebeeckx understands as salvation.

On account of our temporal existence, Schillebeeckx is clear that an encounter with God can only take place in space and time. As a result, this saving encounter 'makes history' and for this reason it is sacramental: 'For

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4 Schillebeeckx, "The Search for the Living God", 23.

5 Schillebeeckx's definition of religion as an interpersonal dialogue was influenced by the work of philosophers like Martin Buber, as exemplified in his 1923 book *Ich und Du*. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

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every supernatural reality which is realized historically in our lives is sacramental.<sup>6</sup> This sacramental encounter, then, reveals the fundamental fact that God does not simply guide history in creative transcendence but personally intervenes in history on our behalf. In other words, God's saving actions make history by becoming history. This history of salvation is also informed by our response to God's act of revelation:

That is why it is possible to say that wherever men make history, a history of salvation or of perdition is brought about, because the significance they give their life is always, in acceptance or refusal, a response to the anonymous grace of God, his call to salvation.<sup>7</sup>

While the whole of salvation history can ultimately be understood as a revelation of God's saving love for humanity, we only come to know this truth when God enables us to acknowledge it:

Precisely because the supernatural saving reality, veiled in historical events, and surrounded by the darkness of mystery, is present to us only in earthly form (*sacramentum*), it demands the revealing word (*verbum*) as the interior aspect of its earthly appearance.<sup>8</sup>

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6 Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 5. The notion of sacramentality underlines much of Schillebeeckx's early theology. His thinking on the sacraments has its foundations in his doctoral thesis, published as *De Sacramentele Heilseconomie* (1952), which was later refined into *Christus Sacrament Van De Godsontmoeting* (1959). The insights contained in these books was also disseminated in articles such as 'De Sacramenten Van De Kerk' in *Theologisch Perspectief*, (Hasselt, Uitgeverij Heideveld, 1959), 165-192; 'Godsdienst en Sacrament' in *Studia Catholica* (1959), 267-283; 'The Sacraments: an encounter with God' in *Theology Digest* 8, no. 2 (1960), 117-121; Edward Schillebeeckx, 'The Sacraments: An Encounter with God', trans. John L. Boyle, in *Christianity Divided: Protestant and Roman Catholic Theological Issues*, ed. Daniel J. Callahan et al (New York: Seed & Ward, 1961), 241-275.

7 Edward Schillebeeckx, "Revelation, Scripture, Tradition, and Teaching Authority" in *Revelation and Theology*, vol. 1 trans. N. D. Smith (London: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 4.

8 Schillebeeckx, "The Sacraments: An Encounter with God", 246.



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As a result, Schillebeeckx concludes that both the 'sacrament' of the historical event (revelation-in-reality) and the interpretive 'word' (revelation-in-word) are necessary constituents of divine revelation.<sup>9</sup>

### *Salvation History as a Sacramental Dialogue*

In considering the historical trajectory of the saving dialogue between God and humanity, Schillebeeckx observes that the sacramental nature of human history first became explicit in God's covenant with Israel. By choosing a people to be his own, God made himself known through an act of special revelation: 'And you shall be my people, and I will be your God' (Jer 30:22). This relationship was characterised by God's constant fidelity and Israel's repeated infidelity.<sup>10</sup>

The two sides of the saving dialogue between God and humanity were only fully realised in the Incarnation. This is because as 'one person in two natures', Christ embodies both God's word to humanity and our response to God the Father. As the one sent by the Father to be the representative for all humanity, Christ is in a very real sense the whole of humankind assembled in communion with God. For this reason, Schillebeeckx identifies Christ as the Church: the invisible communion in grace with the living God in visible human form. Furthermore, Schillebeeckx maintains that any personal communion with

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<sup>9</sup> Responding to debates about whether Christianity is first and foremost about revelation by the word of God or the deification of the human person through sacramental communion with God, Schillebeeckx comments that scripture does not make such a clear distinction. The Hebrew word *dābhār* meant both a spoken or written word and an event in history. For this reason, any 'word of God' was God himself inviting humanity into a living communion. In the incarnation Jesus' word was God's word in the form of a historically conditioned word. See Edward Schillebeeckx "Revelation-in-Reality and Revelation-in-Word" in *RT I*, 36-62.

<sup>10</sup> In other words, God called a people to be his own, but the divine invitation lacked a perfect human respondent. Nevertheless, as the first fruit of God's saving initiative, Schillebeeckx identifies Israel as the first phase of the Church: the worship of Israel foreshadows the worship of the Christian Church.

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God the Father takes place through an interpersonal relationship with the incarnate Son.

As the second person of the incarnate, Schillebeeckx asserts that Christ is both God in a human way and human in a divine way. Therefore, his words and deeds are both the visible embodiment of God's love for us and our love for God. Hence, Schillebeeckx identifies Christ's actions as sacramental: 'for a sacrament is a divine bestowal of salvation in an outwardly perceivable form which makes the bestowal manifest; a bestowal of salvation in historical visibility.'<sup>11</sup> As the sacramental realisation of divine grace, Christ then is the 'primordial sacrament' (*Ursakrament*) through whom a personal encounter with the living God becomes possible.<sup>12</sup>

The difficulty is that if an encounter with God occurs through a historical person, then, we must account for how such an encounter is possible today. For by ascending to the Father, the risen Christ removes the possibility of a historical encounter with him. Schillebeeckx responds to this challenge by stating that the Church and its sacraments are the earthly extension of the 'body of the Lord' in the world.<sup>13</sup> To receive the sacraments of the Church, then, is to encounter Christ who is the sacrament of God.

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11 Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 15.

12 'Christ, therefore, is the real definition of man, and we can realize the fullness of our humanity only through the bond of grace with Christ, the Son of Man. The essence of man is not a datum, not something already given, but something to be achieved in grace.' Edward Schillebeeckx, 'Dialogue with God and Christian Secularity' in *GM*, 233. Jennifer Cooper provides the most detailed account of Schillebeeckx's early anthropology in *Humanity in the Mystery of God: The Theological Anthropology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

13 Schillebeeckx illustrates the unity of the sacramental actions of the heavenly Christ and the Church with the image of a jazz drummer: 'Just as when a drummer is playing he is extending himself through all his bodiliness into the instruments grouped around about him, so that these instruments dynamically participate in the expressiveness of his rhythmic movement, making but one total movement which, arising from within the drummer, flows through the rhythm of his body, of his beating hands and stamping feet, and produces a varied harmony of percussion—

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*Theology as Revelation Made Intelligible*

Given the sacramental nature of our encounter with God, any response to God's act of revelation is conditioned by the very nature of God's revelation. In other words, God's revelation grounds and informs our response in faith. For this reason, Schillebeeckx notes that our response to God is incipient theology.<sup>14</sup> For if faith is what determines God's revelation as credible, theology is the attempt to make God's revelation intelligible. In considering the theological task, Schillebeeckx identifies the need for both positive and speculative theology. Positive theology being the study of the content of divine revelation through the examination of scripture and the doctrines of the Church with the intention of establishing a comprehensive account of the faith. Speculative theology continues in this trajectory but seeks to establish the meaning of revelation. So, while conceding that God is ultimately beyond the grasp of human reason, speculative theology seeks to rationalise the mystery of God while avoiding the ever-present temptation to static rationalisations.<sup>15</sup>

Given the sacramental nature of divine revelation and the shape of the theological task, Schillebeeckx concludes that while Christian theology is theocentric in its focus it must be Christocentric in its method.<sup>16</sup> The reason being that it is only in light of the incarnation that we have come to know the face of the living God: 'It is only in the light of the historical mystery of Christ

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so too the heavenly saving will of Christ, through his glorified body, makes one dynamic unity with the ritual gesture and the sacramental words of the minister who intends to do what the Church does.' Ibid., 77.

14 Edward Schillebeeckx, "What is Theology?", in RT 1, 110.

15 Even during the 'dogmatic' phase of his earlier writings, Schillebeeckx never identifies revelation directly with dogma. This is because he maintains that no conceptual expression could ever exhaust the mystery of God's self-communicating love. See Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Concept of Truth" in RT II 23-29.

16 Edward Schillebeeckx, "What is Theology?" in RT I, 138.

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that we know explicitly that, even in the pre-Christian period, grace could only be trinitarian.<sup>17</sup> In practical terms this means that the study of theology is concerned with salvation history (*oikonomia*) as the means by which we come to know God (*theologia*).<sup>18</sup> Hence, while the essential datum of divine revelation (the triune God) ultimately remains a mystery (*mystērion*), salvation history is the 'nursery bed' of Christian theology.

In treating salvation history, in general, and the incarnation, in particular, as our entry points into the mystery of God, Schillebeeckx concludes that theology simply cannot be disconnected from human history nor identified directly with it. In fact, to confine the study of theology to mere definitions and creedal statements is to lose sight of the very fact that the mystery of God is dynamically revealed in human history. On this basis, Schillebeeckx concludes that an account of the Trinity is required if we are to guard against both the dangers of 'supernaturalism' and 'historical immanentism'. As Schillebeeckx writes:

If we accept, correctly, with Aquinas that the true subject of theology is the living God, the *Deus salutaris* or the *Deus sub ratione Deitatis*—that is, the saving God, God as seen under the aspect of his godhead—(for it is precisely as such that he is our salvation), then it is clear that we shall only be able to reach this living God where he revealed himself as such—in Christ Jesus, who is the public manifestation of God.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, while Schillebeeckx does not deny the possible merits of a theology that is orientated towards the *ratio Deitatis*, he maintains that our only assured means of obtaining knowledge of God is by way of the incarnation.<sup>20</sup>

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17 Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Church and Mankind" in *The language of Faith*, 130.

18 See Edward Schillebeeckx, "Salvation History as the Basis of Theology: Theologia or Oikonomia?" in *RT II*, 79-105.

19 Schillebeeckx, "What is Theology?" in *RT I* 138-139.

20 *Ibid.*, 139. In his Christocentric approach to the Trinity, Schillebeeckx is undoubtedly concerned with the intelligibility of the living God and from his perspective the history of

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This is important because it is Schillebeeckx's Christocentric method that informs how he understands the person of the Holy Spirit.

### *Summary*

By drawing on the insights of modern philosophy, Schillebeeckx was able to move Catholic theology in a more personalist direction.<sup>21</sup> At the heart of Schillebeeckx's account is the understanding that God desires a saving relationship with humanity that is only possible because Jesus Christ, who as the Son incarnate, is the primordial sacrament by which we can know and speak of God.

## **3.2 Identifying the Holy Spirit**

Having established that the incarnation is the means by which we both encounter and know God, I now turn to consider the person of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's sacramental synthesis.

### **Christ the Sacrament of God**

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salvation is the only way towards this understanding. It is on this basis that he rejects Yves Congar's distinction between theology and the Christian life. 'According to Congar, theology as a science should consider everything in relation to God and should therefore be theocentric, whereas the Christian life should consider everything in relation to Christ and thus be christocentric.' In opposition to this division, Schillebeeckx stresses that the structure of divine revelation should determine the structure of Christian theology and discipleship. In this regard, the *manifestatio Dei in Christo* (the revelation of God in Christ) is the proper theological index by which Christian theology and discipleship is to be understood. Consequently, if we wish to gain a deeper insight into God then we must begin not with philosophical speculation but rather study the history of salvation.

21 The distinctive nature of Schillebeeckx's sacramental theology arises from his use of the philosophical concept of 'encounter'—a concept that he takes from the life philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology. See Cornelius Ernst's Foreword to the Sheed & Ward publication of *Christ the Sacrament* (1963) for more on the philosophical background to Schillebeeckx's sacramental theology.

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Even though Schillebeeckx largely focuses his attention on Christ, he affirms that it is the triune God who is our redeemer. Yet, from our temporal perspective, the saving initiative of the Trinity remains veiled from us and can only be known through the incarnate Son.

In reflecting on the life of Christ, Schillebeeckx identifies four interconnected but distinct phases of the redemptive mystery: the saving initiative of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, the human response of Christ to the Father's initiative in sending him, the divine response to the Son's obedience in the humiliation of his life, and the sending of the Holy Spirit upon humankind by the glorified Christ. Schillebeeckx, in turn, maps these movements onto the biblical motifs of (I) Passover, (II) Ascension and (III) Pentecost. Where the incarnate life of Christ is understood in terms of the Passover sacrifice, the response of the Father is seen in the raising of Christ in the resurrection and ascension, before the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost.

#### I) Passover: The Son's Sacrifice

In the human actions of Christ, the love of God for humanity (the bestowal of grace) and our love for God (religious worship) become visible. From this perspective, Christ is both the supreme revelation of God and the supreme worshipper.<sup>22</sup> Hence, the incarnation was not a static event but rather a dynamic process in which Christ lived a life in obedience to the Father. For what is important is not just the fact that the Son became fully human but that the Son lived a human life in complete obedience to the Father.

This interpersonal dynamic reached its culmination on the cross. For during the crucifixion, Christ gave himself in complete obedience to the Father as the supreme act of worship. The cross being the definitive expression of the Son's obedience to the Father. As the representative of all humanity Christ's act

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<sup>22</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 18.

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of obedience became the cause of our eternal salvation. As Schillebeeckx writes:

In this the most profound significance of the incarnation is revealed; in Jesus' earthly humanity there is made known to us, in the first instance, that Christ is the Son of God through and through, even in his humanity, filial and obedient in all things to the Father. This is the interpretation in human reality of what is in the heart of the Trinity: 'from the Father'. And only when he has lived his sonship through to the very end of his human life, and lived his life in utter obedience to the Father even to death itself, is his divine sonship fully realized and fully revealed on the level of the incarnation.<sup>23</sup>

For it was on the cross that Jesus identified himself as a sacrifice to redeem fallen humanity. In Augustine's words, 'Christ dies that the Church might be born.'<sup>24</sup>

## II) Ascension: The Father's Response

In response to the Son's act of obedient sacrifice, the Father raises him from the dead. In Schillebeeckx's words: 'The resurrection is the sacrifice of the Cross heard and answered by the Father.'<sup>25</sup> Hence, in the resurrection that the Son's sacrificial death becomes an eschatological reality. The resurrection then is not simply the restoration of Christ to life but his exaltation by the Father into glory as the representative of redeemed humanity. It is this act that marks the end of Christ's earthly life.

## III) Pentecost: The Gift of the Spirit

In the Father's acceptance of the Son, Schillebeeckx asserts that that the love shared between them found its perfect expression. As a result, those who are in communion with Christ are, in principle, already 'with the Father'. The events of the cross and resurrection then account for why the Son is only able to send

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Ibid., 48.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 32.

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the Spirit once he has returned to the Father (Jn 16:7). This is because during his earthly life the Son assumed our condition of alienation and as a result was not fully with the Father. It is this experience of alienation that we glimpse in the crucified Christ's cries of dereliction. So, because the Son left the glory of the Father to live a fully human life, he was unable to give the Spirit until he had returned to the Father.

The arrival of the Spirit at Pentecost then marks the actuation of the redemptive mystery of salvation because the Spirit is sent by the Son to perfect in us that which Christ made possible: a saving communion with the Father. As Schillebeeckx writes: 'The Spirit makes actual in us that which Christ achieved for us once and for all. Thus the action of the Spirit, after the earthly activity of Jesus, is truly proper to him as the third person of the Trinity.'<sup>26</sup> As a result, Schillebeeckx asserts that we only come to appreciate the trinitarian nature of our redemption when we acknowledge that the Son was only able to send the Spirit once he had returned to the Father. In other words, 'As God, the second person of the Trinity is not only the Son of the Father, but as Son in union with the Father he is at the same time the principle of the Holy Spirit: "...*qui procedit a Patre per Filium.*"'<sup>27</sup>

### *The Spirit as Mutual Love*

In Schillebeeckx's early theology then the reciprocal relationship between the Father and the Son, made known in the incarnation, forms the basis for his understanding of the Spirit:

Within the triune God, the Father and the Son are pure giving and re-giving, and the life of these two persons in their giving and returning is so intense that, within the one divinity, it goes forth from their own persons and in a receptive returning is the fount of life of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 33.



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The third divine person is thus conceivable only in terms of the reciprocal love of Father and Son.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, the Spirit is the gift of God's love to us. Pentecost then marks the overflowing of the divine love that is shared between the Son and the Father. For this reason, Pentecost can be understood as the 'climax' of the saving work of God in Christ. This is because through his passage from death to life, Christ opens the way for us to share in the triune life of God:

The result of the redeeming incarnation, as an enduring heavenly reality, is that we are children of the Father in Christ. By the incarnation of his divine life of love, Christ earned for us that his Father should also be our Father; and by the same incarnation, but now through its fulfillment in glory, Christ in actual fact bestows upon us the Spirit which makes us children of the Father. Thus we become by grace what Christ is by nature: Son of God. As *fili in Filio* we are thus caught up into the special providential relationships which hold between the Father and the incarnate Son, and the Father proves himself, in his Son's continual sending of the Holy Spirit, truly our Father all our life long.<sup>29</sup>

### *Making Pentecost Personal*

As the 'climax' of God's saving work in Christ, the sending of the Holy Spirit marks the fulfilment of Christ's earthly ministry and the start of a new period in salvation history.<sup>30</sup> This is the time of the Church that is characterised by its

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28 Ibid., 39.

29 Ibid., 39.

30 Although it appears that Pentecost was initially celebrated over a period of fifty days in the earliest Church, during which there was no fasting and prayers were said standing, by the fourth century Schillebeeckx notes that the distinction between Pentecost and Easter became more pronounced. Although he argues the Johannine Pentecost is closer to the actual events of salvation history, he recognises that the predominance of the Lucan Pentecost came about with the formation of the liturgical calendar. As the bestowal of the Spirit inaugurated the Church period of salvation history, it made liturgical sense to celebrate the events of Pentecost separate from Easter. However, Schillebeeckx stresses that the original connection between Easter and Pentecost should not be overlooked; particularly when talking about the connection between baptism and confirmation.

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economy of separated sacraments and eschatological longing for Christ's return: the *paraousia*. In this new era the gift of the Spirit is the agent of a new creation. For the Spirit seeks to renew and restore fallen humanity.

Crucially, for Schillebeeckx, the gift of the Spirit shows that Christ was not exalted to a static position but rather to a place of prayer and intercession:

The feast of Pentecost is therefore no mere anniversary on which we celebrate the memory of an historical past event: namely, the pouring forth of the Spirit upon the Church of Jerusalem. It is really a celebration in mystery of an eternally enduring, saving reality, of the fact that now, today, all our personal Christian life and that of the whole Church, is under the continual urge of the Spirit of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

The celebration of Pentecost then bears a sacramental fruitfulness by which the Spirit takes a deeper hold of us. In other words, the Spirit, who is the gift of God, is the one by whom we are drawn deeper into communion with the Father through Christ. For it is the Spirit who bears witness to Christ's heavenly triumph and who lives and works within us despite our weakness. In Schillebeeckx's understanding then the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost is the start of a renewal that begins with the Spirit taking hold of us in our weakness and renewing us from within.

Despite the fact that there may initially seem a clear difference between the suddenness by which the Spirit acted upon the disciples when compared with our own experiences of the Spirit, Schillebeeckx maintains that it is the same Spirit who is at work in our lives. The difference is that the disciples waited upon and expected everything from the Spirit. In the same way, Schillebeeckx encourages us to wait on the Spirit because it is by the power of the Spirit alone that we are renewed and through us the rest of creation. In Schillebeeckx's words: 'Pentecost is the feast of the supernaturalness of Christianity; that is to say, of the fact that Christian life is no achievement of

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31 Edward Schillebeeckx, "Ascension and Pentecost", *Worship* 35:6 (1960), 356. This essay was first published in Dutch as, "Hemelvaart en Pinksteren", *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 43 (1959), 161-180.

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man, but a pure gift of the redeeming God.<sup>32</sup> The arrival of the Spirit, then, marks the realisation that we cannot act in new and bold way except by the Spirit who comes from beyond ourselves:

We experience that Someone Else is at work in us, that our feebleness and weakness are truly repaired by Someone who blows as a storm wind where he will, without our knowing where He comes from or whither He is going.<sup>33</sup>

For Schillebeeckx then the Holy Spirit is the one who moves all things. The Spirit is the comforter, the helper, the consoler, the Paraclete who cares for us. In seeking to express the supportive nature of the Spirit, Schillebeeckx points to Isaiah's comparison of the Spirit's activity to motherhood (Isa 66:13). This maternal aspect is also evident in that fact that the Spirit nurtures us and 'brings us up as children of God.'<sup>34</sup>

In considering our reception of the Spirit, Schillebeeckx identifies two aspects: an awareness of the Spirit at work within us as the gracious gift of God and an openness to the work of the Spirit that is informed by faith. That is to say that we do not control the Spirit and any attempt to try will result us inhibiting the work of the Spirit within us. On the other hand, if we remain open to the Spirit then our faltering belief can be transformed as the grace of God becomes a living reality in us:

It is only through faith, hope and love that the Spirit renews all in us and around about us, wherever we are, because it is only in this God-centered way of life that man comes into living contact with the eternally youthful God in his heart.<sup>35</sup>

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32 Ibid., 357.

33 Ibid., 358.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 359-60.

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So, just as the disciples were only able to leave the upper room because of the Spirit, it is through the reception and celebration of the Spirit that we are able to engage in the saving work of the Church.

### *Summary*

When taken as a whole, the events of Easter and Pentecost are the means by which we come to know the nature of God. For the processions of the Son and the Spirit reveal to us the relationship between the Son and the Father and the Son in unity with the Father to the Spirit. In terms of Schillebeeckx's pneumatology, his sacramental account of these events points to an understanding of the Spirit as the 'love' and 'gift' of God by whom we are drawn into communion with the Father by being conformed to the Son.

### **3.3 The Visible Church and the Invisible Spirit**

Having started to consider the nature and work of the Spirit, in this section I focus on how the visible witness of the Church is mirrored by the invisible movement of the Spirit. I do this to show that for Schillebeeckx it is the convergence of these two movements that draws people into communion with God.

#### The Church and Humankind

For Schillebeeckx, the fundamental purpose of the sacraments is to facilitate an encounter with Christ who is himself the 'primordial sacrament' of God.<sup>36</sup> Given his emphasis on the sacraments as sites of interpersonal encounter, the notion of 'intension' has an important place in his theology. For if a person is to encounter Christ in the sacraments, then they must willingly receive the sacrament.<sup>37</sup> The lack of intention will simply mean that a person undergoes

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<sup>36</sup> See Cornelius Ernst's Foreword to the Sheed & Ward publication of *Christ the Sacrament* (1963) for more on the philosophical background to Schillebeeckx's sacramental theology.

<sup>37</sup> See Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 108-109.

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an empty ecclesial rite.<sup>38</sup> In this way the sacraments not only make Christ's work visible to us but also express our desire for God.<sup>39</sup> The sacramental worship of the Church then both embodies God's love for us and our love for God.<sup>40</sup> From this perspective, the sacraments are not merely the inanimate means of distributing grace but dynamic sites of encounter with God.<sup>41</sup>

### *The Holy Spirit as the Light of Faith*

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38 See Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 109-112.

39 As Schillebeeckx notes: 'Redemption never attacks us by surprise, but is always actively received by us. In this sense the state of "being redeemed" always contains an element of human co-operation – [we] freely [consent] to receive the redemption which only the God-man Christ can bring. Thus each individual [person] is, with regard to [their] own redemption, already [their] own "co-redeemer".' Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, 52-53.

40 this stress on the active participation of the recipient should not be misconstrued to suggest that the interior religious intent of the recipient is a constituting factor in the validity of the sacrament. 'For the glance of Christ's love, directed through the Church to the recipient, is prior to any human response. The sacrament remains a pledge of love even when [humankind] does not respond to it. See, Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 131.

41 In contrast to the causal treatment of the sacraments in the theology of the manuals, Schillebeeckx sought to recover the personal dynamic of the sacramental economy by emphasising the place of human experience. Schillebeeckx's primary objection to the theology of the manuals was that they failed to make a necessary distinction between mere physical presence (*Vorhandensein*) of the things of nature and the unique character of conscious human reality (*Dasein*) and human existence (*Existenz*). The oversight of this ontological distinction meant that the reception of the sacraments was too often treated in terms of a cause-effect relationship. In other words, if the sacrament was correctly administered (*ex opere operato*) then grace was automatically conferred. As a result, the personal approach of God in the sacraments was obscured and the reception of grace in the sacrament was treated as a mainly passive affair. The influence of Martin Heidegger is apparent from how Schillebeeckx speaks about human nature. See *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 1962). Karl Rahner raised a similar concern about the sacramentology of the manuals, this led to the Church being treated as a dispenser of the sacraments rather than as a sacramental reality. See *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963).

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Given Schillebeeckx's emphasis on intention, the question is what makes us desire communion with God through the sacraments. To this question I want to argue that it is combination of the internal stirrings of the Spirit and the proclamation of the Church. In order to begin to understand this dynamic, I turn to Schillebeeckx's early understanding of grace.

Following the publication of Pierre Rousselot's *L'intellectualisme de saint Thomas*, in 1908, a steady flow of books and articles were published on the 'light of faith' and the '*instinctus fidei*' or 'the divine impulse which prompts and invites us to believe.' This was a consequence of Catholic theologians seeking to recover the experiential aspect of the act of faith that had disappeared in post-Tridentine speculation about the act of faith. In Schillebeeckx's opinion, Max Seckler's *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* (1962), which offers a close reading of the non-conceptual aspect of the act of faith in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, deserved pride of place.<sup>42</sup>

Through his detailed study Seckler seeks to situate the instinct of faith in the life of humankind in such a way that the 'natural' and 'supernatural' elements are not divided into two levels so that grace becomes a 'superstructure'. Instead, he maintains that human nature is such that the beatific vision of God is 'natural' to us, despite the fact that it transcends our natural human capabilities and is therefore 'supernatural'. The question that motivates Seckler's study is whether the instinct of faith is 'nature', 'grace', or a 'medium' between them.<sup>43</sup> Schillebeeckx briefly outlines Seckler's reading of Aquinas in the following way:

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<sup>42</sup> See Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Non-Conceptual Intellectual Element in the Act of Faith: A Reaction," in RT II, 30-75.

<sup>43</sup> The immediate background for this question was the debates that followed the publication of Henri de Lubac's *Surnaturel* and the difficulties that were addressed by Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar's notion of the 'supernatural existential'.

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God's *universal* activity—as continued creation—is 'converted' into a special creative activity, which is then identical with the instinct of faith, whenever it comes into contact with man (*sic*), who as a spiritual being, is by his very nature 'receptive to grace'.

In this account, the divine activity that moves the human person to natural and supernatural values is itself neither 'natural' nor 'supernatural', because in itself it cannot be qualitatively defined. It is defined by that upon which it has an effect, which in this instance is human nature. According to Seckler, humanity's constitutive orientation towards grace is therefore the explanation for the fact that God's creative activity in the human person becomes an instinct moving us to believe. Accordingly, concrete human nature is itself a 'call to grace', an instinct that impels us towards faith. Therefore, the instinct of faith is not 'actual grace' but rather the movement of God that sets up in us the inner dimension of return. Given that humanity is by its very nature orientated towards the supernatural there is no need for a new divine impulse. Rather our essential being is a divine invitation to believe that upon hearing the Gospel is either freely accepted or refused. For Seckler, it is at the level of concrete human experience simply impossible to determine what is natural and what is supernatural in this *instinctus interior* because from the very first moment of our existence, our existence is one that has been called to grace. In conclusion, Seckler argues that God did not create the will to believe and be saved *in* us but rather he created us so that the disposition towards the path of salvation is situated in the cradle of our nature. Consequently, faith is the bringing to fulfilment of a tendency that is prior to hearing the God's word but which only comes to itself in listening to this gospel. In this way, the instinct of faith is not a privilege of some people but the vehicle by which God's mercy is directed to all people.

Although Schillebeeckx welcomed Seckler's attempt to think about contemporary theological questions in conversation with Aquinas, he ultimately felt that in attempting to hit upon Aquinas's implicit thinking Seckler had failed to appreciate Aquinas as a *doctor gratiae*. Schillebeeckx sees the source of

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Seckler's misstep as an 'illusion of perspective', which is the belief that the sinner continues to be really called and to live in a supernatural order. While Secker and the proponents of the 'supernatural existential' saw humanity as essentially open to grace, Schillebeeckx contends that this does not constitute a real offer of grace. From his reading of Aquinas, he argues that human nature is neither an offer nor a promise of grace but rather the possibility of being graced. The mistake that Seckler made was to treat our openness to God as itself a concrete offer of grace. In other words, to affirm the concrete identity of the *instinctus naturae* and the *instinctus fidei*. Schillebeeckx argues that Seckler could have avoided this misidentification had he accompanied his study of the word *instinctus* with further research into the term *lumen*. What Seckler failed to grasp is that it is precisely this 'light' which points to the transcendent character of grace and that in the process of development towards the act of faith (*conversio*), the *instinctus fidei* is an inward instinct offering us in grace a new light that enables us to freely accept God's offer of redemption. Ultimately, for Schillebeeckx, humanity itself can never be the *initium fidei* nor of its own accord be a *de facto* offer of grace. 'It is only in the warmth of God's saving love, to which (perhaps only implicit) consent has been given, that our humanity becomes a grace.'

Schillebeeckx reflects further on the light of faith (*lumen fidei*) in his essay on 'The Development of the Apostolic Faith into the Dogma of the Church'.<sup>44</sup> Working on the assumption that because of the transcendence of grace, there is a real discontinuity between the natural and the supernatural, Schillebeeckx affirms that the supernatural is of significance for the natural: it is in the supernatural that the natural gains its ultimate significance. However, the reality and the doctrine of God's revelation cannot be recognised or assimilated unless God inwardly prompts us to accept them in faith. Schillebeeckx notes that Aquinas called this impulse towards faith the *lumen*

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44 Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Development of the Apostolic Faith into the Dogma of the Church" in RT I, 63-92.



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*fidei*, which is an inner *instinctus* implanted by God which prompts us to believe.<sup>45</sup> 'It is through this inward attraction proceeding from God that the subject who encounters the Church in the course of [their] life is inwardly adapted to the supernatural dimension of the mystery of revelation.' In other words, the light of faith enables us to grasp more than is said in conceptual terms or historical events. While the material objects of faith enter into our conscious minds through the Church's proclamation of the word (*fides ex auditu*), we only come into contact with the formal object of faith by the light of faith. It is only by the light of faith that we recognise God's objective revelation. Schillebeeckx asserts that this inner illumination is not a new revelation but rather an inward impulse by which we are able, in a supernatural way, to judge whether we are confronted with a datum of faith (*credibile et credendum*). The explication of all that the grace of faith prompts us to believe is made by God himself through the constitutive phase of revelation. Therefore, the act and content of faith correspond to each other. Given that Aquinas also understands the light of faith as an 'inner instinct of the Holy Spirit,' Schillebeeckx asserts that we are bound to conclude that it is the Holy Spirit who guides us into the truth of faith (Jn. 16:13) and who is the principle of continuity in the development of dogma. So, the light of faith is also the supernatural principle which guarantees that truth has been revealed by God.

### *Coming to Faith through the Spirit*

By following Aquinas' lead, Schillebeeckx maintains that the act of faith requires both an objective dimension (the revelation of God in history) and a subjective dimension (the inward movement of grace).<sup>46</sup> Since the act of faith raises us above our nature, it results from a supernatural principle moving us inwardly. Without this inward movement we are entirely dependent on our own will that is marred by sin. In this understanding, the inner vocation of the *instinctus fidei*

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45 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.2, ad.3.

46 ST II-II, q.6, a.1.

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is a drawing by the Father, which through the man Jesus in the power of the Spirit, invites those who hear the Gospel to surrender to its message and the objective reality of salvation. This *tractio Patris* comes to us via Christ who does this by virtue of the Holy Spirit. 'Unless the Holy Spirit is in the hearer's heart, the teacher's word is fruitless...to the point that even the Son of God speaking with human mouth is unavailing unless he himself is worked upon inwardly by the Holy Spirit.' It is for this reason that for Aquinas what is called the instinct of faith is an *instinctus Spiritus Sancti*. The act of faith, then, is brought about entirely by our consent to this inner vocation, supernaturally, but in and through the inclination of our own heart to the testimony on which we rely exclusively in order to accept the message that we have heard. On account of this, Schillebeeckx asserts that we attain the truth of salvation held out to us only in and through this divine instinct, in the sense of 'truth revealed by God'. In the light of faith, we come to the 'formal motive' of faith and therefore perceive the Gospel to be a personal message from God.

This dynamic shapes Schillebeeckx's treatment of the connection between the saving work of the earthly Church and the Holy Spirit. In Schillebeeckx's sacramental vision all people receive an anonymous, inward word of God calling them into communion with himself. This obscure call causes those who listen to it to suspect that there is a redeeming God who is personally concerned with their salvation. However, without the support of special revelation this innate human desire for communion with God becomes a mixture of dogmatic distortion and moral confusion from which a spark of real holiness occasionally shines forth. It was only with the appearance of Christ that the anonymity of this call was removed so that the living God could be known. In light of this assertion, Schillebeeckx describes the incarnation as the concretisation of God's inner invitation to personal communion, which is 'the impulse of the Holy Spirit drawing us to belief.'<sup>47</sup> As a result, he develops an

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47 Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Sacraments" in *Christianity Divided*, 249.

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account of how the proclamation of the Church and the inward movement of the Spirit work together in order to bring us to faith.

### *The Proclamation of the Church*

In considering the response of the Church to the phenomenon of secularisation, Schillebeeckx observed a growing unease towards the idea that Christian faith can be practised in abstraction from the world. This objection to treating faith as a superstructure erected on top of people's normal lives was reflected in the emerging tendency in parts of the Church to the secular. In other words, the desire to live in service to a world which is growing into closer unity, a movement from the Church to the world that Schillebeeckx suggested was mirrored in the movement of the world towards the Church. This two-fold movement suggests that the boundary between the Church and the world was not as hard as previously thought.

### *The Church and the Unity of Humankind*

For Schillebeeckx, the unity of humankind is by its very nature a community of persons. In other words, it is a *communio* that has its origin in a shared vocation and destiny. This unity then is not a datum to be received but a task to be realised, a task which we come to know through divine revelation is a response to the free and gracious act of God. This is because God has revealed himself to us as the highest value of human life. Consequently, communion with others is a reflection in history of our transcendent desire for communion with God.

From this perspective, Schillebeeckx asserts that the unity of humankind is not only a gift of God, but the very manner of its creation has its origin in God's sovereign act. For God gathers people into community through the values that are expressed in living persons. The supreme expression of this drawing people into communion with each other is found in the person of Jesus Christ. This is because in Christ, humanity has received salvation through the witness

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of one whose life of obedience to God secured in history our 'objective redemption'. Through the mediation of Christ then all of humanity can now be gathered up into communion with each other and God in the Church. For Christ is the one in whom the great gathering of humanity into a *communio Sanctorum* takes place.

### *The Dialectic between Humankind and the Church*

Despite the fact that Christ has redeemed all of humanity, Schillebeeckx notes that there remains a distinction between humanity gathered together in principle and the actual manifestation of this gathering in the Church: 'For it is in the Church, by free assent to the grace of justification, by acceptance of God's Word in faith, and by admission to baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, that man's new religious meaning takes on the form that establishes an historical, visible, concrete community.'<sup>48</sup> This means that it is only when a person is incorporated into the body of the Church through the sacraments of the Church that Christ's triumphant grace becomes a plain, historical, recognisable fact. For this reason, Schillebeeckx identifies the Church as, 'the People of God who through Jesus' death and resurrection become by the Spirit the Body of Christ—*soma Christoū*—the Body of the Lord.'<sup>49</sup> In other words, as the community born out of Christ's death and through his gift of the Spirit, the Church is the visible realisation of saving grace in history and the manifestation of his mystical body in the world. The Church then is both the visible realisation of salvation in the world and the sacramental means of that salvation.

Schillebeeckx maintains that in its ecclesial activity the Church is the living link with the risen Christ both horizontally through its apostolic witness and ministry and vertically because Christ remains as a personal and present reality in the Church through his Spirit. The ministry of the Church, then, is a

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48 Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Church and Mankind" in LF, 5.

49 Ibid., 7.

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human activity in which Christ remains sacramentally present to the world.<sup>50</sup> In light of this observation, Schillebeeckx notes that the norm of the Church's ministry is both the *ephapax* of the historical Jesus and the earthly form of the saving action of the glorified Christ through his Spirit. So, the whole Church is ruled by the glorified Christ who through the witness of the Church and the prompting of the Holy Spirit seeks to bring all people into communion with God and each other.

Given that Christ sends both the Spirit (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26) and his followers (Jn 13:16; 17:18) into the world, these two missions are integrally connected. For the Church can be said to make visible what Christ is doing invisibly by his Spirit. As Schillebeeckx writes:

What the hierarchy does in virtue of its apostolic office, and the faithful do in virtue of their baptismal and confirmational mission, each in the objective visible life of the Church, the Spirit of Christ does inwardly in this visible activity and in the hearts of men.<sup>51</sup>

It is the affirmation of this double movement that enables Schillebeeckx to state that the visible witness of the Church is accompanied by the invisible 'co-testimony' of the Spirit. In other words, the sacramental activity of the Church is mirrored by the inward movement of the Spirit which stirs people to belief.

In connecting the work of the Church and the Spirit, Schillebeeckx states that the glorified body of Christ is the Church of heaven, which come on earth through the Spirit and becomes the earthly Church. In Schillebeeckx's account, the earthly Church is the visible sign of the heavenly Christ and prolongation on earth of his saving work. The Church being both the supreme worshipper of the Father and the one who bestows the same Spirit that it received from Christ.

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50 See Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Lord and the Preaching of the Apostles," in RT I, 33.

51 Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 50.

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In considering the temporal nature of the Church, Schillebeeckx observes that the mystery of God can become an explicit epiphany that is historically and humanly observable. Furthermore, the ecclesial manifestation of God's grace brings into focus the mystery which is active and present at every level of human existence: 'From this viewpoint, the incarnation teaches us that the entire human reality may ferry divine grace and can be assumed into a God-centered life.'<sup>52</sup> To acknowledge this is to recognise that Christianity is sustained by faith in the absolute presence of God in Christ as well as the fact that the entire of human history is swaddled in God's love. This means that in seeking to improve the world, humanity always remains in the presence of the one who gives himself freely. For this reason, in the plan of salvation the events and affairs of concrete world can be said to reflect an implicit Christianity. In other words, all human actions occur in response to God's grace. The construction of the world and the promotion of humanity are activities that are intrinsically related to God's desire for humanity. So, by humanising the world humanity humanises itself.

While Christ is made visible in the ecclesial activity of the Church, his self-giving reaches out beyond the Church to all who are not yet members of the visible Church. This means that by virtue of his Spirit, Christ is active even among people who have not encountered the Church. Given that every association with Christ is *ipso facto* an association with the Church, Schillebeeckx maintains that the Church is the source of redemption even for those who have not yet experienced the Church in its historical form. This in turn leads to the observation that the distinction between the Church and the world is less pronounced than previously believed. For this reason, Schillebeeckx speaks of the distinction in terms of an 'implicit' or 'anonymous' Christianity.

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<sup>52</sup> Schillebeeckx, "The Church and Mankind", 10.

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Although Schillebeeckx struggles to find the best language to describe this 'implicit' or 'anonymous' Christianity, he argues that by virtue of God's grace there is a tendency to become the Church in humanity which seeks its proper sacramental form: 'It is precisely because the worldwide activity of Christ's grace is an operation in and through the Church, on account of the bond between the Christ who has gone away and the post-pascal reality of the Church as the body of the Lord by virtue of the Spirit of God, that this grace is in itself church-founding.'<sup>53</sup> Hence, wherever grace is active it seeks to become the Church. However, outside the boundaries of the 'actual' Church, this anonymous grace expresses itself in a rich variety of human forms which remain fragile and are unable to reflect what is really intended. Consequently, without the form and expression of the actual Church, anonymous grace is unable to reach its fulfilment. For the movement of humanity towards the Church must be met by a missionary activity that goes forward to meet humanity. Through this double movement, Christ is seeking his messianic community in order to prepare it for its eschatological end: 'The anonymous Church that is the work of God's Spirit and of his Body, the explicit Church vitally joined to him, will become manifest through the Spirit, as his Body, incorporated through baptism into his death and resurrection, as a visible sign both of the eschatological Man, Jesus Christ, and of what human life is concretely—namely, a deep and painful suffering, an existence ending in death, coupled with the unquenchable hope that this is not the last word about mankind.'<sup>54</sup> Schillebeeckx observes that the boundaries between the Church and humankind are not only fluid in the direction of the Church but also in the direction of the world. This is reflected in the process of desacralisation and secularisation that was brought about by

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<sup>53</sup> Schillebeeckx, "The Church and Mankind", 12. Stephen Bullivant makes the case in his essay "The Myth of Rahnerian Exceptionalism: Edward Schillebeeckx's "Anonymous Christians", *Philosophy & Theology* 22 (2010), 339-351, that the concept of "Anonymous Christians" actually has its origins in the work of Schillebeeckx. Though Bullivant does not discuss the pneumatological implications of the concept, it is apparent that it has its basis in Schillebeeckx's understanding that the Spirit of Christ is present beyond the visible Church.

<sup>54</sup> Schillebeeckx, 'The Church and Mankind', in *WC*, 135.

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the advent of modernity by which many of the distinctive activities of the Church have becoming common to humanity in general. From this perspective, Schillebeeckx asserts that the process of secularisation is ultimately sanctifying because it stems from the transcendent community with God in Christ.

Nevertheless, the divine aspect of this process is only brought to light by the faith of the Church. 'The universal sacramentality of human solidarity is only made concrete in the community which we call the Church.'<sup>55</sup> As a result, Schillebeeckx stresses that the Church's personal association with God must be made known through its genuine love for humanity:

We must be with God, not only in the Church, in prayer, in the sacraments or in reading the Bible, in other words, in the sacral forms of religion, but also, and just as much, in our human relationships with our fellow [humans] in the world and in our daily tasks.<sup>56</sup>

For this reason, Schillebeeckx began to advocate for the role of lay sanctity in which the responsibility of laypeople for the world becomes the source of a new kind of holiness. Instead of leaving the ordering of secular affairs to those outside the Church, this lay ministry would seek to make salvation visible as a sacrament of the world. This 'charism of the future' is orientated towards the building up of a society worthy of humanity. However, solutions to the world's questions and challenges will not simply fall from heaven. Instead, the Church must work for the good and seek solutions amid the ambiguous and constantly changing situations of the historicity of human existence. Yet, Schillebeeckx asserts, these efforts are not made in isolation. For while study and real dialogue with the world can provide practical solutions, the Spirit of Christ suggests to the Church which amongst the various practical possibilities can be adopted in the here and now.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 139.



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## Summary

In *The Graced Horizons*, Stephen Duffy states that Schillebeeckx situates the gratuity of grace in the fact that it is God's *divinizing offer of himself to us through Jesus Christ*, an offer that demands willing acceptance, an acceptance that in and of ourselves we cannot elicit unless inclined and moved by the saving God from within.<sup>57</sup> The offer of grace then cannot be made a constitutive element of nature, which at most is a possibility of being graced. Consequently, the ongoing creative divine activity may be indivisible but its effects in time are multiple and qualitatively different from one another. In reaching this conclusion, Schillebeeckx maintains the need for a distinct movement of the Spirit. It is this movement that I argue draws us into communion with God through the sacraments of the Church which embody the work of the Son.

### 3.4 Sacramental Participation in the Trinity

For Schillebeeckx, the sacraments are ultimately not important in and of themselves. What is significant about the sacraments is the encounter with Christ that they facilitate. Subsequently, Schillebeeckx is not overly concerned with the outward characteristics of the Church's sacramental rituals.<sup>58</sup> Although

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<sup>57</sup> Stephen J. Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 135-168.

<sup>58</sup> In performing the sacraments, Schillebeeckx argues that the early Church followed the example of Christ by accompanying all liturgical actions – the laying on of hands, breaking bread – with a prayer or a “word”. This led the Church Fathers to think of the sacraments as the bringing together of an earthly and heavenly element which are manifest in the action and word of the presiding minister. As Schillebeeckx writes, ‘the sacraments (they thought above all of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist) were considered to consist of “matter and spirit”; of an element or a thing (water, oil, bread, the laying on of hands) and the *pneuma* of the *Logos* which, in the power of the *epiclesis*, came down upon the material element.’ Later Scholastic theologians developed this Patristic position into a distinction of matter and form. While this development reflects a shift in theological orientation, brought on by the influence of the Aristotelian hylemorphism, the sacramental pattern of a sacramental action being coupled by a

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he concedes that Christ instituted the seven sacraments by founding the Church, he maintains that Christ allowed the Church to determine the external symbolic form of the sacramental rites. What was determined by Christ is the fact that the sacraments are sites of encounter with him and for this reason means of grace. In other words, the sacraments are the specifically visible form on earth of the activity of the heavenly Christ. In light of this fact, Schillebeeckx's sacramental theology is predicated on the understanding that the sacraments are the ecclesial manifestation of Christ's heavenly intercessions: through the sacraments of the Church, Christ makes himself present so that we might be transformed by God's living-giving grace. So, having been brought to conscious faith by the proclamation of the Church and the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3), we are incorporated into the visible Church through baptism and in the Eucharist enter into the eternal reality of Christ's saving worship.

According to Schillebeeckx, the infallible working of grace in the sacrament—denoted by the phrase *ex opere operato*—can only be properly understood when the sacraments are understood as Christ's prayer and worship in visible sacramental form. Underlying this assertion is Schillebeeckx's engagement with the problem of 'presence in mystery' (*Mysteriengegenwart*) as introduced by the work of Odo Casel. When God became man in Jesus Christ, the eternal redeemer entered into time. Given that time is irreversible, what has happened historically cannot be made actual again. Since Christ was truly human, all his historical actions—including his sacrificial death on the cross—are irrevocably in the past and cannot be made present again even 'in mystery'.

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sacramental prayer remained. Through this prayer, the *epiclesis*, it was understood that God's Spirit was "called down" so that Christ's act of redemption enters the Church's symbolic act. While the two-fold nature of the sacraments has remained consistent, Schillebeeckx asserts that the manner in which the sacramental rites are performed has changed throughout the history of the Church. In line with Trent, Schillebeeckx affirms that while the outward appearances of the rites have changed in their expression, the essence of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ remains unchanged.

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To deny this claim is to fall into a kind of Docetism. Yet, as the personal entry of the second divine person into the boundaries of time, Schillebeeckx contends that the divine-human reality of the incarnate Christ covers two dimensions: the historical and the perennial. Whereas the historical events of the life of the man Jesus are irrevocably historical, there is also a trans-historical element that is sacramentalised in the Church. This is Christ's exalted humanity, which is the enduring reality by which we know the love within God and in who we see one of the two divine persons from whom the Spirit proceeds. As a personal act of God, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, is an eternally present actuality. Therefore, redemption as an action of God achieved in Christ's humanity is an eternally present divine act. 'In the mode of glory, the sacrifice of the Cross, the relationship of loving obedience between the Son incarnate and the Father is an enduring reality.'<sup>59</sup> That is to say that the worship of Christ (Passover) and the infallible response to this prayer, the effect bestowal of grace (Pentecost), are really present in the sacramental actions of the Church. As the mystery of worship that *ex opera operato* pleads for and brings the grace of redemption to the recipient, a sacrament stands in relationship to Christ as the Son of the Father and as the mystery of grace that *ex opera operato* bestows grace upon the recipient, the sacrament stands in relationship to Christ as the co-principle of the Holy Spirit.<sup>60</sup> On this basis, Schillebeeckx is able to assert that in virtue of the mystery of Christ, 'both the Son and the Holy Spirit, in their distinctness and within the unity of the Trinity, have their own proper active share in the sacraments, and that this whole is dominated by the all-embracing initiative of the Father.'<sup>61</sup> In union with Christ the Church addresses its sacramental prayer to the Father, from whom, in and through the Son, the Holy Spirit proceeds. Therefore, Schillebeeckx argues that the sacraments cannot be treated as the work of the Son or the Spirit alone but only as the one and diverse work of the Trinity.

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<sup>59</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 58.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

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An encounter with Christ through the sacraments then is the marker of the Christian life because it is through our participation in the sacramental grace of Christ that we are brought into personal communion with the living God: 'For in the sacraments we are taken up into the eternal Easter and Pentecost mystery of the *Kyrios*, in which the three persons in their unity and distinctness play an active part.'<sup>62</sup> The effect of the Son's saving worship and the sanctifying power of the Spirit is that God the Father becomes our Father. Therefore, through the sacraments of the Church we enter into personal communion with God. As there can be no participation in the divine nature that is not also a communion with all three persons of the one divinity of God, Schillebeeckx concludes that our sacramental encounter with Christ is essentially an encounter with the Trinity: 'Therefore sanctifying grace, as immediate relationship with God, is essentially a divine relationship with the three persons in their distinctness and their unity, for this is what God is.'<sup>63</sup> In these terms, sacramental grace is understood as our incorporation into the mystical body of Christ and the identification of our life in the power of the Holy Spirit with his death and resurrection which brings about our saving communion with the Trinity. 'The indwelling of God, of the redeeming Trinity, which inwardly re-creates us in Christ and makes us *fili in Filio*, children of the same Father, is the overwhelming effect of a fruitful sacrament, and it is faith that gives us a conscious and living awareness of this.'<sup>64</sup>

For Schillebeeckx then the Christian life centres on a transformative encounter with Christ in the sacraments, from which 'anonymous' and sacramental grace ripples out into the world. The sacraments are the culmination or apex of the Christian life. They bring a person's desire for communion with God to an ecclesial manifestation. So, through the sacraments

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<sup>62</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 180.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*,

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the individual's desire for grace is linked with the redemptive power of the mystical body which is one with Christ. Reflecting on this further, Schillebeeckx asserts that the sacraments bring about an encounter with Christ in the seven instances in our lives where we most have need of God's grace. For the grace that comes from God in and through the sacraments transforms our moral and spiritual attitude. In effect, we come to see more clearly that by his grace God is at work in and through us. In this way the sacraments are markers on our way to becoming more like Christ. As a result, the regular reception of the sacraments is a requirement for our earthly communion with God.

### **3.5 Constructive Assessment**

Schillebeeckx established his reputation as a theologian on the basis of his sacramental theology.<sup>65</sup> This is because his interpretation of the sacraments as sites of interpersonal encounter with God provided a way to reinvigorate Catholic sacramentology by drawing on the constructive insights of modern philosophy. Yet, though creative in certain aspects, Schillebeeckx's theology during the early period of his career generally operates within the received parameters of church doctrine. This is evident in his treatment of the Spirit, which reflects the scholastic paradigm into which he was educated: the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, the bond of love between the Father and the Son, who proceeds from both the Father and the Son so that we might be drawn into the divine life of the Trinity.

As I have shown, Schillebeeckx arrives at his understanding of the Spirit by way of the incarnation. That is because he treats the incarnation as the means by which we come to know God. So, because the Son took on flesh, we have a point of access into the mystery of God. From this perspective, the

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<sup>65</sup> For a survey of the renewal of Catholic liturgy, see: Keith F. Pecklers, "Ressourcement and the Renewal of Catholic Liturgy: On Celebrating the New Rite" in *Ressourcement* ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, 318-332

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events of the incarnation are the outworking in history of the relations of the immanent Trinity: the Father gives himself to the Son, the Son gives himself to the Father, and the Spirit is their mutual love who in turn is given to the church.

In modern theology, one of the principal objections to the language of mutual love as a description for the Spirit is that the Spirit's personhood is identified as that which the other two persons share. The problem here is not simply how the Spirit is identified but the fact that the personhood of the Spirit is treated differently to the Father and the Son. The picture given suggests that while the Father and the Son are persons defined in relation to each other, the Spirit is the relationship that they share. As a result, the Spirit cannot be said to give or receive, love, or reveal in the same way as the Father and Son. For the Spirit is identified as the gift or love of the others. This in turn raises questions about the Spirit's identity as a distinct person. For whereas the Father and the Son are united but distinct persons, the Spirit is the 'bond' between them who remains distinctly impersonal.<sup>66</sup>

The lack of clarity about the nature of the Spirit's personhood is further compounded by the fact that the Son is treated as a more 'objective' or 'concrete' point of access into the divine life. This is reflected in the way in which Schillebeeckx speaks about the Son as the sacrament of God, while the Spirit is identified as the 'subjective' and 'invisible' side of revelation. From this point of view, the need for the Son is apparent: he is the visible form of the invisible God. By contrast, the role of the Spirit is more elusive: a point reflected in the fact that less attention is paid to the Spirit by both Schillebeeckx and the wider Western tradition. In turn the distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective', 'visible' and 'invisible', suggests a dualistic account of revelation that is also reflected in Schillebeeckx's two-tier cosmology, in which the Son and the Spirit seemingly act as intermediary figures between God and creation

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<sup>66</sup> If we only described a person in terms of their relations to others is something of their identity lost?

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in both visible and invisible ways. The problem with this picture is that it is not clear what two mediators are required if Christ is fully the sacrament of God.

Despite the fact that both the nature and purpose of the Spirit are left somewhat in question, a sense of the Spirit's movement still pervades Schillebeeckx's early theology: the Spirit, who is the love of God and the gift of the risen Christ, is the one who stirs people to belief, illuminates the truth of God within us, and draws us into a saving communion with the Father through the Son. In this picture the Christian life is about allowing ourselves to be caught up in the movement of the Spirit, empowered, and transformed by our sacramental encounters. In order to further draw out this pneumatological dynamic in Schillebeeckx's early theology, I turn to a similar but more explicit treatment of our participation in the divine life through the Eucharist as presented by fellow Dominican Herbert McCabe.<sup>67</sup>

In contrast to certain popular perceptions of prayer as an attempt to communicate human desires to God, McCabe seeks to recover the scriptural claim that no one comes to the Father except through the Son (Jn 14:6). In order to develop this assertion, McCabe, like Schillebeeckx, takes the incarnational dialogue between the Father and the Son as his point of reference—a dialogue which finds its clearest expression in the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>68</sup> For on the cross, the Son gives himself to the will of the Father. In this act the Son revealed that he is completely orientated towards the Father, and the resurrection of Christ reveals the fulness of the Father's love for the Son. Building on this affirmation, McCabe states that the sacramental prayers of the church should take their lead from the Son.<sup>69</sup> For in such prayer, we are not simply creatures before God but the Son before the

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<sup>67</sup> Herbert McCabe, 'Prayer,' in *God Matters* (London: Continuum, 1987), 215-22. Two similar essays can be found in *God Still Matters* (London: Continuum, 2002), 64-78 and *God, Christ and Us* (London: Continuum, 2003), 103-108.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

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Father. In other words, during the celebration of the Eucharist we become the locus of the divine dialogue between Father and Son. Prayer, then, is not something that we do ourselves but rather something we do because God prays in us. So, to pray is share in the loving relationship between the Father and the Son who is the Spirit.<sup>70</sup> For this reason, prayer should not be treated as an attempt to communicate with a distant God but the act of being drawn up by the Spirit into the mystery of God. It is this sense of being moved and drawn by the Spirit into communion with God that I have sought to draw out in Schillebeeckx's early theology. While McCabe helps to make what is implicit in Schillebeeckx more explicit, the question about the Spirit's equality with the Father and Son remains. It is for this reason that I expand McCabe's treatment of prayer by returning to Sarah Coakley's Spirit-led approach to the Trinity through prayer.<sup>71</sup>

Even though the trinitarian orthodox theology of the fourth century used the rhetoric of full equality when establishing the normative description of God as three 'persons' in one 'substance', Coakley argues that this description came with the temptation to relegate the Spirit to an effective subordination. On the one hand, Coakley traces this temptation to the ambiguity in the biblical resources: 'For the 'ordering' of the language of Father, Son, and Spirit is varied in the biblical witness; and when the picture evoked by John's gospel, especially, comes to dominate, the Spirit almost inevitably becomes — in effect — the secondary communicator of an already privileged dyad of Father and Son.'<sup>72</sup> The fact that the Council of Nicea (325 CE) focused on the 'substantial' (*homoousian*) equality of the Son with the Father only intensified the privileged status that Johannine Logos Christology had already acquired. On the other hand, Coakley contends that an 'alternative' version of a Spirit-leading approach

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 221-222.

<sup>71</sup> See Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 86.

<sup>72</sup> Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, 101.



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to the triune life of God faced centralised ecclesial opposition on account of its 'sectarian' and 'sexual' potential. So, what initially might seem an arbitrary choice between alternative biblical patterns for thinking about the Trinity turns out to carry weighty political and gendered implications for Church life. Ultimately the development of the doctrine of God is a complicated story that cannot be reduced to any single issue or dimension but, by focusing on the alternative trajectories that are already present in the Christian tradition, Coakley presents a Spirit-leading approach to the Trinity which she maintains is able to answer the 'why three?' question more effectively than other approaches.

Whereas in the dominant 'linear' revelatory model of the Trinity, in which priority is given to the Father-Son relationship at the expense of the Spirit, Coakley draws on Paul's discussion of prayer in Romans 8 (14-27) to suggest an 'incorporative' model where the Spirit is perceived as the primary means of incorporation into the trinitarian life of God. In this account, prayer is understood as *one* experience that is nonetheless ineluctably triadic: 'It is *one* experience of God, but God as simultaneously (i) doing the praying in me, (ii) receiving that prayer, and (iii) in that exchange, consented to in me, inviting me into the Christic life of redeemed son-ship.' In this view, the 'Father' is both the source and ultimate object of divine desire, the 'Spirit' is the enabler and incorporator of that divine desire in creation, and the 'Son' is that divine and perfected creation. 'Into that ceaseless divine dialogue between Spirit and 'Father' the Christian pray-er is thus caught up, and so transformed, becoming a co-heir with Christ and being fashioned into an extension of redeemed, incarnate life.'<sup>73</sup>

In this model, then, the role of the Spirit is not simply extending the revelation of Christ or enabling people to recognise Christ but catching up the created realm into the life of God. 'On this view, what the 'Trinity' *is* is the

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<sup>73</sup> Coakley, *New Asceticism*, 88-89.

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graced ways of God with creation, alluring and conforming that creation into the life of the 'Son'. This 'incorporative' model rests on an understanding of prayer as a movement of divine reflexivity into which the pray-er is drawn and incorporated. So, it is not that the pray-er is having a conversation with some distant and undifferentiated deity, and then is being asked (rather arbitrarily) to 'hypostatise' that conversation (or 'relationship') into a 'person' (the Spirit); but rather that there is something, admittedly obscure, about the sustained activity of prayer that makes one want to claim that it is personally and divinely activated from within, and yet that the activation (the 'Spirit') is not quite *reducible* to that from which it flows (the 'Father').<sup>74</sup>

According to Coakley there are three significant advantages to this alternative approach. First, the life of 'Sonship' is not restricted to Jesus' earthly life nor the mystical 'body of Christ' which is the church. It is rather expanded to include the full cosmological implications of the incarnation: the whole of creation groans with expectation for its final Christological telos in God (Rom 8: 18-21). So, prayer in the Spirit is not simply a private or sacral affair with no social or political import. Second, Paul's use of the 'birth-pangs' metaphor for the unfolding event of cosmic gestation genders his picture of prayer in such a way that it has societal implications for how we think about gender. Third, Paul is clear that 'we do not know how to pray' (Rom 8:26). This is because at its deepest the act of prayer is God's and not our own. So, in learning how to pray, we must yield to the Spirit and allow ourselves to be taken beyond normal human language and the rationality of control.

By drawing on the work of McCabe I suggested how Schillebeeckx's implicit account of the Spirit might be made more explicit. In turn, by drawing on Coakley I have identified a way in which the Spirit can be recovered from a position of subordination to the Son. In the next chapter I explore how

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<sup>74</sup> Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, 112.

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Schillebeeckx rethinks his earlier position on the Spirit in light of his philosophical turnabout.

## **Chapter Four: The Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's Late Theology**

'Perhaps we have to look for another way  
of catching the Holy Spirit in the act.'<sup>75</sup>



### *Chapter Outline*

In this chapter I focus on the place of the Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's later theology. I do this by following the general trajectory of Schillebeeckx's *Jesus* trilogy and drawing out the implicit and explicit pneumatological material that it contains. For this reason, I begin by analysing how Schillebeeckx's treatment of the relationship between revelation and experience informs his understanding of the Spirit. Having noted Schillebeeckx's unease about attempts to speak directly about the Spirit, I move to consider the place of the Spirit in the life of Jesus and the experiences of the earliest Christian

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75 Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Johannine Easter: The feast of the giving of the Spirit" in *FSG*, 70.

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communities. Here I note the constructive paths that Schillebeeckx identifies but does not himself take. Finally, I identify the place of the Spirit in the move to ethical action that Schillebeeckx identifies as the means by which the Christian message of salvation relates to contemporary culture. In light of this critical survey, I identify three particular areas of constructive pneumatological potential in Schillebeeckx's thought: his concept of mediated immediacy, treatment of Jesus as an eschatological prophet, and undeveloped trinitarianism.

#### **4.1 Experiencing the Spirit of God**

In this section I analyse how Schillebeeckx's treatment of the relationship between revelation and experience informs his understanding of the Spirit's activity. Crucially, I note that Schillebeeckx does not locate the Spirit in the depths of human experience or treat the Spirit as an external force but rather presents a way of understanding the Spirit as mediated dialectically in human experience.

##### Experience and Faith

While Vatican II was preceded by a general renewal of Catholic theology through the recovery of its sources, the post-conciliar church acknowledged the need to bring the Christian tradition into conversation with lived experience.<sup>76</sup> In other words, the church needed to provide answers to the real questions people were asking. This required a more explicit connection to be established between faith and experience. The difficulty was that in an increasingly secular

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<sup>76</sup> Donald L. Gelpi discusses the turn to experience in modern theology (New York: Paulist Press, 1994). Interestingly Gelpi begins his account of this turn with a chapter on Schillebeeckx's turn to experience. While Gelpi acknowledges the importance of Schillebeeckx's work, especially his Christological studies, for contemporary theology he concludes that Schillebeeckx's 'fallacious, inadequate, nominalistic construct of experience' undermines his argument. See *The Turn to Experience* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 9-23.

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context, there appeared little space for God-talk. This is because the cultural developments of late modernity had resulted in a flattening or narrowing of human experience.<sup>77</sup> The result was a sense of alienation, characterized by the sense that an immeasurable part of reality had been lost. In considering the theological implications of what he describes as the loss of our 'first originality', Schillebeeckx writes:

Earlier it was possible for man to *experience* God. Faith was a special form of perception: man took his experience of God for granted and accepted evidence for it. He also lived consciously among angels and saints, in a different, but just as real a way, as a farmer lived among his cows and pigs, the farmyard and the field. If religious faith is in fact a particular form of *perception* (because I cannot imagine any form of real knowledge which has no basis in perception), then the world of a man who really believes is quite essentially another world — even psychologically — from that of a purely scientific and technological experience of the world. And this latter world has been culturally popularized among us modern men in a one-sided way; i.e., that is in fact our acculturation when we grow up into this Western world. This means that life in our one-sided Western society has in fact made faith more difficult than it used to be.<sup>78</sup>

On the basis of his sustained investigation into the phenomenon of secularization, Schillebeeckx concluded that what distinguished people of faith

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77 Charles Taylor contends that one of the biggest differences between modern Western people and our pre-modern ancestors is that we live with a firmer sense of the boundary between self and other. We are what Taylor describes as 'buffered' selves. Where our ancestors lived in an 'enchanted' world in which spirits, demons and other cosmic forces could cross a porous boundary and shape people's lives, we do not. Thus, in contrast to the porous selves of our ancestors, we can form the ambition of disengaging from whatever is beyond our boundary. Nevertheless, Taylor argues that it is not the case that modern people have simply shucked off false beliefs or fears of imagined forces. Instead, the process of disenchantment which Western society has undergone has fundamentally changed how we experience the world. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

78 Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 805.

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from those with no faith was not any particular experience but rather the way in which experiences are understood and interpreted.<sup>79</sup> In other words, explicitly 'religious' experiences occur when human experience is interpreted within the 'searchlight' of a particular tradition.<sup>80</sup> I now turn to consider the two hinges upon which this account of religious experience rests: i) the understanding that all experience is interpreted experience and ii) the understanding that God's revelation always follows the course of human experience.

### *All Experience is Interpreted*

Schillebeeckx asserts that human experience is the ability to assimilate perceptions. For it is through our experiences that we interact with the world, an interaction that always involves the act of interpretation.<sup>81</sup> We understand what we experience on the basis of the knowledge that we have already acquired from past experiences. That is to say that the totality of our individual and collective experiences forms the interpretive framework or 'horizon of experience' through which we experience the world and imbue it with meaning. The cognitive structure of human experience then is shaped by the relationship

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<sup>79</sup> As I noted in chapter two, Schillebeeckx increasingly speaks of one reality being interpreted in different languages and traditions. He states that this accounts for why a believer and non-believer can share the same reality but experience something different. This approach is akin to Antony Flew's 'Parable of the Gardener.'

<sup>80</sup> Schillebeeckx returns to the relationship between revelation and experience throughout his later period. His most extensive treatment of the relationship is found in *Christ*, 29-79; however, later discussions are found in the first four chapters of *IR*, 10-63, and the first chapter of *Church*, 1-45. For the purpose of investigating the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology, the essay "Experience and Faith", a composite text published in German, is the only text to explicitly address the place of the Spirit. See 'Experience and Faith' in *Essays*, 1-34.

<sup>81</sup> By treating experience and interpretation as integrally connected Schillebeeckx sought to move away from the separation of subject and object that had shaped much of Western thought. In contrast to this persistent dualism, he maintained that we always interpret reality from within a tradition of experience.

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between three dimensions: the *experiential* dimension of the lived encounter with reality, the *interpretive* dimension that expresses experience through images, concepts and narratives, and the *theoretical* dimension that is the framework in which these experiences and interpretations occur.<sup>82</sup>

In considering the dialectical interplay between experience and interpretation, Schillebeeckx observes that certain experiences have the capacity to challenge our interpretive framework: 'Things happen and new experiences arise for which it is difficult to find an appropriate place within the totality of our growing tradition of experience: they seem to be alien elements in a familiar horizon of experience.'<sup>83</sup> For this reason, Schillebeeckx suggests that human experience has an inherent revelatory dynamic. This is because those experiences which do not conform to our established interpretive framework remind us that reality is independent from us. For instance, Schillebeeckx notes the way in which experiences of folly, injustice, and suffering force us to reconsider our identity through moments of alienation and disintegration.<sup>84</sup> In such experiences of negativity we are forced to acknowledge that reality consists of more than our expectations and projections. As Schillebeeckx writes: 'When reality resists human designs and thereby implicitly reorients them, we are in living contact with an *independent*

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82 The three dimensions of Schillebeeckx's account of experience are helpfully explicated by Lieven Boeve in his essay, "Experience According to Edward Schillebeeckx: The Driving Force of Faith and Theology" in *Divinising Experience: Essays in the History of Religious Experience from Origen to Ricoeur*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Laurence P. Hemming (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 199-225. Two other informative essays are Marcus Lefébure, "Schillebeeckx's Anatomy of Experience" in *New Blackfriars*, vol. 64, no. 756 (June 1983), 270-286, and Louis Dupré, "Experience and Interpretation: A Philosophical Reflection on Schillebeeckx's Jesus and Christ" in *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection: Excursions in the Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 107-117. What Dupré particularly shows is the difficulty that Schillebeeckx had in finding adequate wording to express his new insights.

83 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 16.

84 I discuss Schillebeeckx's concept of negative experiences in Chapter Two.

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reality that we have not conceived of or created.<sup>85</sup> In other words, these moments of resistance act as a stark reminder of our finite and contingent nature: 'Truth comes near to us by the alienation and disorientation of what we have already achieved and planned.'<sup>86</sup>

Given the fact that reality can resist our expectations, Schillebeeckx suggests that human experience contains a dimension of 'givenness'. That is to say that in certain 'disclosure experiences', when reality resists our expectations, we encounter the 'limit' or 'boundary' of human life. This, in turn, moves us to consider the presence of 'something extra' mediated through our experiences:

At this point we have a revelation of that which cannot be manipulated, a 'transcendent' power, something that comes 'from elsewhere', and which asserts its validity in the face of our projects and nevertheless makes all human plans, projects and considerations possible, by virtue of its critical and negative orientation.<sup>87</sup>

It is this 'transcendent' or 'extra' presence in human experience that believers identify as God.

### *Revelation in Experience*

Through his phenomenological analysis of the revelatory nature of human experience, Schillebeeckx identifies 'revelation' as 'the non-reflective, pre-theoretical givenness—more correctly, the self-giving—of that which is always already the basis of the process of faith, that which constitutes faith and makes it possible.'<sup>88</sup> It is this sense of givenness that we seek to identify and name through our reflections on human experience.

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85 *Christ*, 36.

86 *Ibid.*, 35.

87 *Ibid.*, 34.

88 *Ibid.*, 27.



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For Schillebeeckx, explicitly 'religious' experiences have the same dialectical structure as all other human experiences.<sup>89</sup> As a result, they do not form a separate sphere of reality but rather give expression to the deeper dimension that is present already in all human experiences. As Schillebeeckx writes: 'One has religious experiences in and with particular human experiences, though with the illumination and help of a particular religious tradition in which people stand and which is thus influential as an interpretive framework which provides meaning.'<sup>90</sup> In other words, religious experiences have the same dialectical structure as all other human experiences, but where they differ is in terms of how they are experienced and interpreted:

On the one hand the content of faith—itsself already a reflective expression of a collective experience of a group of religious people—determines the religious, Christian content of particular human experiences; on the other hand, it is not the content of faith itself (for example as proclaimed by the churches) which directly brings anyone to a Christian experience of faith. By the guidance and illumination of the content of faith presented to us by Christian churches, which comes from the great Christian tradition of faith, people here and now, in and with present-day authentically human experiences, have a personal *Christian* experience, an experience in which salvation from God in Jesus is perceived here and now.<sup>91</sup>

According to Schillebeeckx then '*Christian*' experiences occur within human experiences that are *illuminated* by the searchlight of the Christian tradition.

### *The Holy Spirit and Human Experience*<sup>92</sup>

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89 For Schillebeeckx, the fact that 'revelation is the foundation of experiences of faith means that faith owes neither itself not its distinctive content to itself. It is a gift and at the same time a human choice, both in one.' Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 27.

90 Ibid., 24.

91 Ibid., 24-25.

92 'Experience and Faith' in *Essays* is a composite text based on a Dutch original in Schillebeeckx's personal archive: 'Ervaring en Geloof'. The text was partially published in

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In considering the relationship between divine revelation and human experience, Schillebeeckx was aware that his approach might give the impression that our experiences of revelation are purely human, 'in the sense that they are fully understandable without any initiative from God and his salvific will, that is without grace and the work of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>93</sup> In response, Schillebeeckx argued that nothing was further from the truth:

The preceding analysis 'from below' is meant to make it quite clear that, considering present-day people's individual and collective experience of faith, we can never 'get away' with a supernaturalist or fideistic interpretation of such experiences, as if the Holy Spirit were but one of any number of factors that could be added to the list of human factors. Instead our analysis shows that the Holy Spirit is active throughout as a mysterious, ineffable depth dimension.<sup>94</sup>

This means that what has been described in terms of human experience also needs to be put into religious language but in such a way that does not lose its connection to everyday lived experience.

In the previous chapter I showed how in his early work, Schillebeeckx worked within the scholastic tradition of describing the grace and the work of the Spirit in terms of the *lumen fidei* (light of faith).<sup>95</sup> The understanding being that it is the grace of God that 'attracts' us to faith.' In this account, a person is rendered receptive to the proclamation of the church by virtue of the illuminating power of the Spirit that induces a longing for God within them. This

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German, as 'Erfahrung und Glaube' in F. Böckle et al. *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*, 25, but this published text does not include the final section on the Spirit and human experience. Explicit discussion of the relation of the Spirit to experience also does not feature prominently in any of Schillebeeckx's discussions of faith and experience in his *Jesus* trilogy.

<sup>93</sup> Schillebeeckx, "Experience and Faith" in *Essays*, 30.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> See Chapter Three, 3.3.

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tradition sees the act of believing, inasmuch as it is not mere acceptance of religious propositions but a personal experience of or trust in the invisible reality of a self-revealing God, as grace freely affirmed by human beings.<sup>96</sup> According to Schillebeeckx, such speech in religious language is by no means redundant nor can it be replaced with a purely profane discourse. After all, human experience would be impossible without a sympathetic openness on the part of the subject. In fact, Schillebeeckx maintains that to those familiar with the sinful and egotistical propensities of human beings, such disinterested openness spells redemptive grace that puts the human heart on the same wavelength as that which is concretely manifested in the historical Jesus and the church's account of him. Faith then is a conversion experience.

Nevertheless, while Schillebeeckx continued to affirm that faith comes through conversion, his studies in modern philosophy enabled him to recognise that the established dualism of outwardness and inwardness upon which his former position rested was no longer viable in the modern world. For this reason, we cannot locate the light of faith in the split reality of God's inward speech (the Spirit) and the outward proclamation of the church. As Schillebeeckx's engagement with critical theory helped him to recognise:

Inner freedom, we have learnt from bitter experience, must include encounters of free people in social structures that permit and safeguard freedom. The social dimension is an essential component of inwardly free acts. As a result, the freedom granted to us by grace transcends the dualistic distinction between inward and outward and its theological counterpart: the dualistically conceived distinction between 'inner' and 'outward' grace.<sup>97</sup>

So, just as historical personal identity crumbles if it receives no social recognition, the proclamation of the church also requires plausible structures.

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<sup>96</sup> Schillebeeckx notes the influence of Thomas Aquinas here: II-II, q. 2, a. 9 ad 3; Commentary on John, VI, lecture 5; *Quodlib.* II, 6, 1; III *Sent.* D. 23, q. 2, a. 1 ad 4.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

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In other words, religious discourse must be rooted in lived experience and given expression by living communities of faith. It is for this reason that Schillebeeckx argues the church ought to be the free and liberating environment in which Christian personal identity can flourish.<sup>98</sup> To acknowledge this fact is to recognise that by faithfully following in the footsteps of Jesus, the church manifests the grace of God which individuals internalise, socialise and appropriate in their religious experience.

In seeking to avoid the historic distinction between inwardness and outwardness, Schillebeeckx arrived at a more holistic understanding of God's presence in the world:

God's grace in the sense of his saving presence among people is not a separate sector of inwardness but encompasses — in different gradations of revelational density — the entire reality in which we live and which we are, and in which Christ's churches have to be the 'sacrament of the world'.<sup>99</sup>

Therefore, Schillebeeckx maintains that it is only in this concrete environment that the human experience of salvation given in Jesus can be experienced as divine salvation: 'the manifestation and realisation in human history of the universal salvific will of God as the God of human beings.'<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, Schillebeeckx asserts that only a perception that sees creation (salvation) and covenant (revelation) as distinct can explain revelational or religious experiences in a way that avoids fideism and supernaturalism and in which liberating faith is experienced as a sheer gift of God. From this perspective, the ultimate revelation of meaning which is offered in the story and praxis of Christianity can be received as a gift of God which has the structure of a historical experience.

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<sup>98</sup> I will discuss this point further in Chapter Five.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 32.

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## *Summary*

In this section I have identified how Schillebeeckx's account of the relationship between revelation and experience informs his understanding of the Spirit's work. For Schillebeeckx offers a way of understanding the Spirit as the presence of God that is mediated in our historical experiences of the world.

### **4.2 Tracing the Spirit in the Christian Confession**

In a sermon that he delivered on the Feast of Pentecost in 1988, Schillebeeckx notes the repeated complaints in theological literature about the neglect of the Holy Spirit in the Western church: 'People have said and still say that the Spirit remains the great unknown, indeed the forgotten one.'<sup>101</sup> Yet, despite the increased number of books on the Spirit, Schillebeeckx notes the apparent inability of theologians to conceptually grasp the Spirit. For this reason, he suggests that the Spirit might be the great unknown who wills to remain anonymous. In response, Schillebeeckx suggests that we might want to look for another way of understanding the Spirit. Instead of asking directly after the Spirit, Schillebeeckx proposes that we follow the advice of Peter's Pentecost address by learning to see and hear the effects of the Spirit. From this perspective, Schillebeeckx concludes that we cannot avoid beginning with the story of Jesus who lived in the power of the Spirit. So, having identified the place of the Spirit in human experience, I now follow Schillebeeckx's suggestion by turning to consider the Spirit in the life of Jesus and the confessions of the earliest Christian communities.

#### **An Experiment in Christology**

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<sup>101</sup> Schillebeeckx's published sermon "The Johannine Easter: The feast of the giving of the Spirit", in *FSG* 70-75, offers one of Schillebeeckx's most extensive discussions of the Spirit in his later writings. Crucially Schillebeeckx concludes that we come to know the Spirit through the impact that the Spirit has on the person of Jesus and the Christian community in history.

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In seeking to understand the 'source experience' at the origin of the Christian tradition, Schillebeeckx focused his attention on the Christian community that came into being because of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>102</sup> This is because we only come to know about Jesus through the community that came into being because of him: 'To put it another way: the constant unitive factor is the is the changing life of the "assembly of God" or "assembly (congregation) of Christ," the community-fashioning experience evoked by the impression Jesus makes and, in the Spirit, goes on making upon his followers, people who have experienced final salvation in Jesus of Nazareth.'<sup>103</sup> For Schillebeeckx then the writings of the Second Testament provide an account of how the earliest Christian communities came to experience salvation from God in their encounter with Jesus of Nazareth.

In developing this claim, Schillebeeckx identifies a particular historical experience that stands at the origin of the Christian tradition:

Some people, Jews, came into contact with Jesus of Nazareth. They were fascinated by him and stayed with him. This encounter and what took place in Jesus' life and in connection with his death gave their own lives meaning and significance [...] Their new identity was expressed in a new enthusiasm for the kingdom of God and therefore in a special compassion for others, for their fellow men, in a way that Jesus had already showed them.<sup>104</sup>

Schillebeeckx classifies this historical encounter as the 'source experience' from which the whole Christian tradition of faith originates. It was the sense of new life that Jesus evoked in people that initiated a process of reflection that developed into the earliest Christological confession: 'There is salvation in no

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<sup>102</sup> Schillebeeckx outlines his method and criteria for exploring the impact of Jesus on the Christian community in Part One of *Jesus*, 41-104.

<sup>103</sup> *Jesus*, 56.

<sup>104</sup> Schillebeeckx, *IR*, 10.

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one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).

Through a historical-critical reading of the texts of the Newer Testament Schillebeeckx identified two further experiences that are foundational for understanding the identity of Jesus and the formation of the Christian community: the Abba and the Easter experiences.<sup>105</sup>

### *The Abba Experience*

Schillebeeckx identifies Jesus as an eschatological prophet whose ministry was orientated towards proclaiming the kingdom of God.<sup>106</sup> Still, what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God only becomes apparent when his words and deeds are taken as a whole. As Schillebeeckx summarises:

The kingdom of God is the saving presence of God, active and encouraging, as it is affirmed or welcomed among men and women. It is a saving presence offered by God and freely accepted by men and women which takes concrete form above all in justice and peaceful relationships among individuals and peoples, in the disappearance of sickness, injustice and oppression, in the restoration of life to all that was dead and dying. The kingdom of God is a changed new relationship (*metanoia*) of men and women to God, the tangible and visible side of

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<sup>105</sup> Schillebeeckx presents his reconstruction of Jesus' life and message in Part Two of *Jesus*, 105-398. See also *Church with a Human Face* 15-34 and *Church*, 102-186. Three essays in *God Among Us* are also worth consideration: "Jesus the Prophet", "I Believe in the Man Jesus: The Christ, the Only Beloved Son, Our Lord", and "How Shall We Sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?"

<sup>106</sup> Benedict Viviano, Ormond Rush, and Roger Haight are three authors who credit the influence of Schillebeeckx's Christology. See: Benedict T. Viviano, 'Schillebeeckx's Jesus and Christ – Contributions to Christian Life' in *Spirituality Today* 34, no. 2 (1982), 129-143; Ormond Rush 'Schillebeeckx's piercing inquiry brought Jesus alive', *National Catholic Reporter*, December 19, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/schillebeeckxs-piercing-inquiry-brought-jesus-alive>; and Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*.

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which is a new type of liberating relationship among men and women within a reconciled society in a peaceful natural environment.<sup>107</sup>

The kingdom of God then is God present to the world in a way that transforms and transcends human life. For this reason, we can only speak about the kingdom by drawing on the parables, message, and praxis of Jesus.

In considering the source of Jesus' ministry, Schillebeeckx identifies an experience of deep intimacy with God as Father. Schillebeeckx calls this experience the 'Abba Experience'. As Schillebeeckx explains: 'Jesus never spoke of himself as "the Son" or "Son of God"; there is no passage in the synoptics pointing in that direction; what is certain is that he referred in a special way to God as *Abba*.<sup>108</sup> Jesus then experienced God as a loving Father who cares for humanity and it was on the basis of his experience of communion with God that he was able to speak a word of hope to those who encountered him.

Through his life and ministry Jesus revealed a vision of life under the rule of God. He taught those who listened to him that God is a *Deus humanissimus*— a God who is for humankind: 'Jesus presents God as salvation for [humanity]. His God is a God who looks after people. Thus, God's lordship, by which Jesus lives and which he proclaims, tells us something about God in his relation to [humanity] and likewise about [humanity] in [our] relationship to God. It is a theological and yet also anthropological reality grounded in experience.'<sup>109</sup> Schillebeeckx concludes then that for Jesus, the kingdom of God was not an abstract ideal but, first and foremost, the reality of creation restored. The kingdom is the inbreaking of a new creation into the present — a world in which those who are outcast and marginalised are welcomed into

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107 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 111-112.

108 See Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 256-271. John P Galvin explored "The Uniqueness of Jesus and His "Abba Experience" in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx' in a seminar paper at the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1976.

109 *Ibid.*, 142.



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communion with God and each other. On the basis of this promise, Jesus challenged the values and structures that brought shame on the poor, sick, and oppressed. An action which ultimately led to his crucifixion at the hands of the ruling authorities.<sup>110</sup>

Schillebeeckx maintains that Jesus was executed on account of living a life that was completely orientated towards the kingdom of God. Even though Jesus knew that his death was imminent he continued to proclaim the coming kingdom of God because he put his assurance in the knowledge that God would not let the crucifying powers of this world have the final word. As Schillebeeckx writes: 'In the resurrection God authenticates the person, message and whole career of Jesus. He puts his seal on it and speaks out against what men and women did to Jesus.'<sup>111</sup>

### *The Easter Experience*

In his treatment of the resurrection, Schillebeeckx makes the contentious claim that the belief of the earliest Christian communities was not specifically in Jesus' bodily resurrection but rather his exaltation by God.<sup>112</sup> This is because he

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<sup>110</sup> For Schillebeeckx, Jesus' death was the result of Jesus' life. As a result, he rejects the idea that Jesus' death was sacrificial. In considering this claim, Peter Phillips thinks that while Schillebeeckx is correct to challenge certain received ideas in Christian soteriology he feels that there is still a place for the language of sacrifice, see: "Schillebeeckx's Soteriological Agnosticism" in *New Blackfriars* vol. 78 no. 912 (February 1997), 76-84.

<sup>111</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 129.

<sup>112</sup> Schillebeeckx's account of the resurrection has perhaps unsurprisingly attracted a large amount of comment. For instance, Paul Crittenden questions the exegetical basis of Schillebeeckx's argument, see: "Arguments from Straw Street: Questions about Schillebeeckx's Account of the Resurrection" in *Colloquium* vol. 14, no. 2 (1982), 25-35. This is also the case with N. T. Wright, who concludes that Schillebeeckx simply fails to account for what happens: *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 701-706. John Macquarrie argues that Schillebeeckx effectively treats the resurrection as a subjective experience, see: *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 308-313. While

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argues that Jesus' resurrection is a meta-historical and meta-empirical event that cannot be experienced independently from the events surrounding Jesus' life and death. In other words, the discovery of an empty tomb or the absence of a body do not by themselves explain the belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead. It was rather the realization that the crucified Jesus had been exalted by God that brought the Christian community to their belief in the resurrection. That is to say that the resurrection of Jesus Christ only becomes apparent to those who have undergone the experience of Easter.

In Schillebeeckx's account, the fundamental question that needs to be addressed is not how the disciples came to believe in the resurrection but what caused them to regroup after they had scattered following the death of Jesus. On the basis of his exegetical analysis of the resurrection accounts, Schillebeeckx proposes that the scattered disciples underwent a conversion experience which he calls the 'Easter experience'. Scattered and dejected the disciples started to reflect on their experiences of Jesus and his message of God's love for humanity. It was only in recalling Jesus' life that his disciples remembered his message of God's unconditional mercy and Jesus' own assurance that God would exalt him to life. The disciples underwent an experience that brought them to the dawning realisation that Jesus was alive and present to them by his Spirit. On the basis of this interpretation, Schillebeeckx makes the striking claim that 'there is not such a big difference between the way we are able, after Jesus' death, to come to faith in the crucified-and-risen One and the way in which the disciples of Jesus arrived at the same faith.'<sup>113</sup> In other words, faith in the resurrection does not come through an experience of the empty tomb but by recalling the story of Jesus from within a community of faith.

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Peter Philips finds Schillebeeckx's arguments compelling but inconclusive: 'Seeing with the Eyes of Faith: Schillebeeckx and the Resurrection of Jesus' in *New Blackfriars* 79 (1998), 241-250.

<sup>113</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 90.

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### *Jesus of Nazareth*

For Schillebeeckx, the First Testament provide an account of how the earliest Christian communities experienced definitive salvation from God in their encounter with Jesus of Nazareth and how, on account of their Easter experience, they came to confess the crucified-and-risen Jesus as the Christ.<sup>114</sup> However, Schillebeeckx maintains that without reference to his *pneumatic* presence in the Christian community, all talk about Jesus remains an abstraction. This is because for the earliest Christian communities, their experience of the resurrection was integrally connected to their experience of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the sign of the expected eschatological period in which all sins are forgiven, and a new law is written on the hearts of God's people. The gift of the Spirit then was understood to grant people the same freedom which people had experienced in their historical encounter with Jesus: 'a human freedom, rooted in a dedicated commitment to God's absolute freedom.'<sup>115</sup> Schillebeeckx contends that it was this experience that informed the basic creed of the earliest Christians: 'Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, that is, the one totally filled with God's eschatological Spirit.'<sup>116</sup>

### *Identifying Jesus*

While it is apparent why an encounter with Jesus might initiate a process of reflection in people, Schillebeeckx argues that 'there was nothing necessary about the conceptual terms or limits within which an answer was looked for.'<sup>117</sup> This is because each interpretation of Jesus is set within a 'horizon of experience' and as such all Christological interpretations are 'historically

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<sup>114</sup> For more on Schillebeeckx's treatment of the ways in which Jesus was interpreted, see Part Three of *Jesus*, 399-515, and *IR*, 20-49.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 543-544.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 550.

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contingent and not in themselves the necessary context in which Christological belief in Jesus must be thought through.<sup>118</sup>

It was because of their experience of salvation through Jesus that the earliest Christian communities reached for the loftiest titles in their Jewish tradition. Each of these titles brought into focus a different aspect of Jesus' identity that had been brought into sharper relief by the arrival of the Spirit. The experience of recalling Jesus' life and teaching from the perspective of continuing fellowship with him in the Spirit then informed the way in which the earliest Christian communities came to understand Jesus:

Jesus' living and dying on earth suggested to Christians, in virtue of their experiences after Jesus' death, the idea of the resurrection or of the coming Parousia of Jesus, while on the basis of their faith in the risen or coming crucified One they relate the story of Jesus in the gospels; in other words, these gospel stories of Jesus are themselves a hermeneusis of Jesus' Parousia and resurrection, while belief in the Parousia or in the resurrection was engendered by things remembered of the historical Jesus.<sup>119</sup>

For this reason, Schillebeeckx concludes that the gospel narratives about Jesus were fundamentally shaped by the soteriological experience of the earliest Christian communities.

Influenced by the work of Helmut Koester, Schillebeeckx identifies what he sees as the four earliest stands of Christological confession: a 'Parousia Christology,' which focused on Jesus' imminent return and role as future judge; a 'divine man Christology' that presented Jesus as a miracle worker; a 'wisdom Christology,' that collected the teachings of Jesus; and an 'Easter Christology' that reflected on the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is beneath these four Christological motifs that Schillebeeckx identifies the earliest interpretation:

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118 Ibid., 570.

119 Ibid., 401.

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Jesus as the eschatological prophet. On the basis of this confession we can see that the earliest Christian communities initially identified Jesus as the latter-day prophet anointed by the Spirit in order to bring the good news of God's redemption.

### *Interpreting Jesus as the Christ*

Schillebeeckx traces the interpretation of Jesus as an eschatological prophet to the First Testament tradition of anointing. This is because the titles 'Christ' and 'Son of God' were initially given to the kings of Israel.<sup>120</sup> As the representative of God among the people, the role of king was understood to have priestly and prophetic characteristics. Following the fall of the kingdom and the beginning of the exilic period, the image of God's anointing was first extended to the high priest and later to prophets. The high priest was anointed to guard the laws of Yahweh and the anointed prophet was 'the man of the Spirit'. The development of the concept of anointing meant that what were initially three distinct roles, king, priest, prophet, became merged under the title of 'Christ'. The term meaning someone who was near to God or imbued with God's Spirit. As a result, the language of Christ and Spirit were closely interwoven.

In time the Christ title came to have an eschatological significance. Through their experience of exile, the Israelites centered their hope on a saviour-figure. Within this eschatological tradition emerged the belief that the Christ was the one anointed by God's Spirit to bring the good news of God's rule and of human salvation. This shift occurred around the time in which the Israelites become a religion of the book. In other words, God's will and message were no longer discovered through the prophets but by reading sacred texts. From the perspective of this more textual approach, the Spirit of God was understood as a gift of the last days (Joel 3: 1-5). Therefore, in circles in which

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<sup>120</sup> The following discussion is drawn from Schillebeeckx's own examination in *Jesus*, 441-449.

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the conviction that the end of the world was at hand, possession of the *pneuma* was understood to indicate the start of the end. Schillebeeckx suggests that it was within this theological milieu that the Christian confession of Jesus as the 'anointed one' came into being.

### Confessing Jesus as the Christ

In charting the development of the interpretation of Jesus as the Christ, Schillebeeckx is not suggesting that the earliest Christians simply saw Jesus as conforming to a pre-existing idea. Instead, he argues that certain established images within the culture helped followers of Jesus to express who it was they had encountered.<sup>121</sup> While the image of a Spirit-filled eschatological prophet was certainly not new, Schillebeeckx goes as far to say that 'if the model had not already existed, the impression that Jesus had made on them in his ministry would have obliged them to invent it.'<sup>122</sup> So, the impression of Jesus as someone anointed by God's Spirit was something which was given by Jesus himself. Nevertheless, as the Christian tradition developed, the image of Jesus as someone anointed by the Spirit was gradually superseded by the emergence of other frameworks. As a result, the historical life of Jesus and the role of the Spirit within it has generally been overlooked.

### The Experience of Jesus as Lord

Having considered the interpretation of Jesus as an eschatological prophet, anointed by God's Spirit, I now turn to consider the experience of the Spirit in the earliest Christian communities.<sup>123</sup> In his analysis of the earliest theologies of grace, Schillebeeckx identifies the Spirit as the greatest gift of salvation: 'As the basis of all other gifts, the gift of the Holy Spirit given with the status of

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<sup>121</sup> See *Jesus*, 533-544.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 473.

<sup>123</sup> The following discussion on the experience of the Spirit draws on Schillebeeckx's synthesis of the experience of grace in the New Testament. See, *Christ*, 463-476.

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being a child of God is God's greatest gift of salvation in and through the risen Jesus.<sup>124</sup> It is the Spirit who enables us to know Jesus as the Christ and who grants each member of the Christian community charismatic gifts for the service of all. The Spirit instils in believers a vision of restored humanity and enables them to live into this reality. The Spirit is the pledge of the eschatological liberation that is coming to pass, which was offered in Jesus and continued in his church. The Spirit is the one who connects the Christian community to Jesus and who grants deeper knowledge about his identity. The Spirit is the one who draws us into communion with God. In a word, the gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift of grace: an invitation to a new way of life prepared for us by God in Jesus Christ and offered to us on the level of our earthly history.

Schillebeeckx identifies grace as a new human possibility for life, 'a particular mode of existence through which and in which man really experiences salvation and redemption, liberation and renewal of life, happiness and fulfilment.'<sup>125</sup> In other words, the gift of the Spirit is experienced as something perceptibly different from that which was experienced during Jesus' earthly life. In their attempt to put their experience of being filled by the Spirit and becoming a child of God into language, Schillebeeckx notes that the Pauline and Johannine texts offer two different models: the juridical model of adoption (Paul) and the ontological model of being born from God (John). Given that becoming a child of God is a grace, it something that can only be accomplished by the Spirit. Thus, in both interpretations divine sonship is affirmed as the work of the Spirit of God and implies possession of the Spirit. Throughout the New Testament this adoption or birth from God, which is described in terms of redemption and liberation, is depicted first and foremost as a new way of life.<sup>126</sup>

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124 Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 471. An outline of this material in Schillebeeckx's lectures can be found in Schillebeeckx's personal archive, "Theologie van de genade en "Pneumatologie" which was taught between 1975-1976. Here Schillebeeckx traces the relationship between grace and the Spirit in the development of the Christian tradition.

125 *Ibid.*, 464.

126 *Ibid.*, 468-471.

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Schillebeeckx observes that for the authors of the New Testament communion with God the Father through the Son and in the Spirit is a living communion that is experienced. This is because the gift of the Spirit is understood to grant the recipient religious and ethical insight. Through the indwelling of the Spirit a person can address God as 'Abba', the Spirit enables a person to recognise Jesus as the Christ, the Spirit is the source of the extraordinary charismatic experiences that shaped the worship and ministry of the earliest Christian communities. By living in communion with God through the Spirit the believer is granted a special knowledge of 'what is of God.' Schillebeeckx identifies this spiritual insight as both 'theological', that which pertains to God, and ethical. It is God's Spirit that enables the recipient to embrace the works of the Spirit, 'discern the spirits,' distinguish what is ethically good and ethically bad, grants the *sensus fidei*:

In other words, by virtue of [their] spiritual way of living, the Christian has a certain capacity for distinguishing on the basis of an experiential knowledge (in the Middle Ages this was called a judgement on the basis of experienced co-naturality) in respect of the divine and the demands of a consistent Christian mode of life.<sup>127</sup>

The person who has received the Spirit of God is able to judge what comes from God. By living in communion with God by the power of the Spirit, the believer is 'conformed to Christ.' Schillebeeckx notes that this is expressed by various images within the New Testament: putting off old garments; putting on Christ; being renewed 'after the image of the creator.' From these descriptions it is apparent that conformity to Christ is the same as conformity to God. Through the gift of the Spirit, the Christian is conformed to God. 'In a word, 'life in the Spirit', is 'life in accordance with the Spirit (Gal 5:25), and because the Spirit indicates the special nature of the divine realm, all this, in accordance

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127 Ibid., 475.



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with the world view of the time is stated in expressions like, 'Seek what is above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God...' However, conformity to Christ does not only mean communion with God but greater concern for fellow humans.<sup>128</sup>

Through the gift of the Spirit the Christian shares in Christ's inheritance because of their adoption or birth. In this sense, the Holy Spirit is a first pledge of the kingdom of God. Through the 'pledge of the Holy Spirit', the entrance of the believer into the kingdom of God is achieved both actually and eschatologically. Thus, the gift of the Spirit is characterised by a tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet.'<sup>129</sup> While the Spirit grants knowledge of God, this communion will not reach its fulfilment until the day of redemption.

### *The Spirit of Pentecost*

For the earliest Christian communities, the experience of the Spirit was one of transformation and being empowered by God. Therefore, despite the fact of Jesus' death, a community came into being through the power of the Spirit, an eschatological community that lives in the assurance of the kingdom. As I will explore further in the next chapter, it was their experience of the Spirit that led these earliest communities to be of one heart and mind, sharing all things in common so that there was no needy person among them (Acts 44:32). Thus, Schillebeeckx states that to believe in the Spirit is to be energised by a vision of creation restored and the sense of being empowered 'to bring good news to the poor, to cry liberation to the captives and to make the oppressed walk free.' It is this redemptive vision that has remained foundational for the church throughout its history.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 476.

<sup>130</sup> As the active presence of God in the world, Schillebeeckx speaks of the Spirit as the one who drives away chaos, corruption, and death by moving over creation, renewing the face of

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For Schillebeeckx, the vision that the Spirit instils must be held in community if it is not to be quenched. Paul says that the Spirit reveals himself to us through each other and our gifts which are shared in the service of all (1 Cor 12). The Spirit evokes the vision of the coming world through the members and gifts of the Christian community. It is by the power of the Spirit alone that the Christian community is able to achieve anything. Schillebeeckx summarises this vision by describing the Spirit of God as the spirit 'which makes all things new.'<sup>131</sup> The utopian human desire for the promised land, in which there will be no suffering or death, finds its foretaste in the Holy Spirit who makes us people of the future who are shot through with light. The Spirit works to cast out all the darkness that is within us so that we can overcome all our inhibitions and past mistakes.

Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx maintains that that Pentecost is not really a feast in honour of the Spirit, as 'a so-called 'third-God' in a divine three-member family, but a feast of Christ.'<sup>132</sup> The Holy Spirit is the real redemptive gift of the risen Christ. While the way in which the various authors of the New Testament present the events of Pentecost differs, they stress that redemption is something that comes from God as a gift. 'But through the gift of the Spirit the redemption and liberation becomes the work of spirit-filled people — of Jesus and all who follow him, in his spirit.'<sup>133</sup> It is for this reason that the Spirit cannot be possessed or controlled but only received as (*donum Dei*) a gift of God. Schillebeeckx reinforces the fact that the Christian life is 'pure divine gift' and never a human achievement. Paul describes this in terms of the Spirit taking control of our weakness and renewing us from within (Rom 8:26). The Spirit who makes all things new is the one who intercedes for us as our advocate,

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the earth, and bringing life where there is death. For this reason, he notes that the Christian story is a continuation of his Jewish story. See, "The Johannine Easter' in FSG, 72.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 74.

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the one who can write straight on crooked human lines. Thus, Schillebeeckx identifies Pentecost as the celebration of Jesus as the Christ who sends us his messianic gift. It is the celebration of the forgiveness of sins, a festival in which we must strive to forgive one another of our past offenses, of being concerned for our fellow human beings, of tenderness and of making tender as a corrective of the unnecessary amount of suffering that we cause each other.<sup>134</sup>

### *Summary*

Schillebeeckx identifies the gift of the Spirit as God's greatest gift. This is because the gift of the Spirit grants us the possibility of new life in communion with God. Yet, as Williams asserts, the way in which the pneumatological material contained the Second Testament has been used has generally presented the Spirit as the one who draws us to Christ beyond our world rather than conforms us to Christ in the midst of the struggles and ambiguities of our world. While Schillebeeckx tends to treat the Spirit as the one who recalls us to Christ, his theology lends itself to offering an account of the way in which the Spirit conforms us to Christ in the present.

### **4.3 The Spirit in Christian Tradition**

Given that the Christian tradition has its origins in a historical encounter, Schillebeeckx is clear that we cannot receive the message of the gospel in abstraction from our cultural context.<sup>135</sup> For this reason, he identifies the

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<sup>134</sup> In his introductory note to *For the Sake of the Gospel*, Schillebeeckx states that we can discover what a theologian really thinks from their preaching. Taking Schillebeeckx at his word, 'The Johannine Easter' offers us the clearest insight Schillebeeckx's thinking on the Spirit in his later work. As is evident from this section, the focus is not on the Spirit but on the way in which the Spirit enables the Christian community to live a Christlike life in the world. In other words, the Spirit is the one who empowers and conforms us to Christ.

<sup>135</sup> 'Only in concrete particularity can the gospel be the revelation of the universality of salvation from God, because men and women are cultural beings with their own particular cultures and can only be reached as human beings in them.' Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 37.

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transmission of the Christian tradition as essentially a hermeneutical problem because its cultural form always needs to be reinterpreted in light of each new situation. In fact, without such renewal Schillebeeckx warns that the Christian tradition will simply become incompressible. Hence, the third hinge upon which Schillebeeckx's late theology rests is the need to establish a critical correlation between the Christian tradition and our present-day situation.<sup>136</sup>

### Tradition and Situation

For Schillebeeckx, a 'situation' is the concrete context in which the tradition of faith is communicated and handed on from one generation to the next. The term 'situation' then is a way of speaking about the complex totality of lived reality that we can never be fully encapsulated in theory. In a more specific sense, Schillebeeckx uses the term situation to denote the present 'Christian situation' that forms a 'new' chapter in the experiential tradition of the Christian community. As Schillebeeckx writes:

The interpretation of faith is not concerned with the adaptation of a normative Bible and an authoritative tradition of faith to a 'theologically free' situation, but rather with the encounter of different cultural forms of the same understanding of faith and the practices that go with it: that of the Bible with all the forms of Christian understanding of the faith which came later, within diverging periods of culture within one cultural tradition and within divergent cultures.<sup>137</sup>

As a result, Schillebeeckx increasingly focused his attention on the question of how to navigate the relationship between Christian past (tradition) and Christian present (situation).

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<sup>136</sup> Schillebeeckx develops the hermeneutical relationship between context and tradition throughout *Christ* but offers a more concise expression in *IR*, 50-63, and *Church*, 33-45.

<sup>137</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 37.

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In seeking to establish the 'interrelationship' between the Christian past and the Christian present Schillebeeckx sought to avoid identifying either tradition (fundamentalism) or any situation (modernism) as normative. Instead, he maintained that we can only discover the Christian tradition in our present context through the mediation of the community that Jesus began, and the Spirit sustains. As a result, he concludes that in order to navigate this relationship, an analysis is required of (I) the constant structures of the fundamental Christian tradition, (II) the present world, (III) and then we must move to establish a critical correlation between the two.<sup>138</sup> From this perspective, Schillebeeckx observes that the Christian community is engaged in a constant two-way scrutiny that seeks to establish a mutually critical correlation through which the Christian tradition is attuned to the present. In other words, meaning is only found at 'the level of a *corresponding relation between original message* (tradition) and the constantly changing *situation*, then and now.' So, the transmission of the Christian tradition is ultimately a question of establishing a *proportional equality*.<sup>139</sup>

### I) The Structural Principles of the Christian Tradition

Schillebeeckx identifies the Christian tradition as the collective response of a community of people who have experienced salvation from God through their encounter with Jesus of Nazareth. As a tradition of meaning the Christian faith possesses transformative, innovative, liberating, and redemptive power.

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<sup>138</sup> As Schillebeeckx writes in *Church*, 34: 'In the end we have the convergence of two stories, the story of the gospel tradition of faith and the story of our personal and social life which in the best instances has itself become 'gospel': a fifth or umpteenth gospel.'

<sup>139</sup> Schillebeeckx concludes in *Church*, 44: 'Christian identity — 'what Christians hold in common' — as mediated through a variety of cultural and social worlds like those of Jesus, of Paul, Augustine and Athanasius, Pope Gregory the Great, Thomas and Bonaventure, Luther and Calvin, Teresa of Avila, Martin Luther and Bishop Oscar Romero — lies in one and the same fundamental view of God and human beings and their mutual relationship, though this same perspective of faith was and is always present in historically divergent, different and even irreconcilable anthropological and theological views.'

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However, we can only come to know the story of Jesus Christ through the testimony of those who come before us. For this reason, Schillebeeckx concludes that the Christian faith is not simply a message to be believed but an experience that became a message and which is passed on through a living community of faith. In other words, what was experience for others yesterday is tradition for us today.

Considering the various forms that Christianity has taken over the centuries, Schillebeeckx draws from his analysis of the Newer Testament four structural elements that give the Christian tradition its abiding shape and character: 1) the belief that God wills to be salvation for human beings and wills to realise our salvation through history, 2) the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the one who perfectly and definitively reveals God to humankind, 3) the belief that the story of God in Jesus is handed on by the Christian community, 4) the belief that the end of history is not found in history.<sup>140</sup>

1) On the basis of their encounter with Jesus of Nazareth his disciples came to see that God is the guarantor of the meaning and significance of human life. God's honour lies in human flourishing and through Jesus is revealed to identify with those who are poor, outcast, and captive. God is not distant from the sufferings and tribulations of human life but the one who wills human flourishing: 'As Creator, God is the author of good and the antagonist of evil, suffering and injustice which throw men up against meaninglessness.' Thus, God's providence and the experience of salvation are integrally connected: 'Salvation from God is connected with human wholeness and happiness, and this stands in an essential correlation with solidarity between men and the living God who is concerned for mankind.'<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Schillebeeckx develops these four points in Part Three of *Christ*, 629-642.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 638-639

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2) God has many names but for Christians, God shows his true face in the person, career, and concerns of Jesus: In Jesus, both God's purpose with man and the meaning of human life is fully portrayed: 'championship of the good and opposition to all evil.' For this reason, he is the ultimate symbol of human life and God's will for our salvation.<sup>142</sup>

3) In recalling the life and death of the risen Jesus, the church remembers with an eye to the present. In other words, the Christian faith is a living tradition directed towards the future. It is only through the ministry and proclamation of the church that Jesus is made known to the world. Therefore, Christian life is a living memorial of Jesus Christ, and it is in living towards the promise of salvation that people can come to see what it means to believe in the risen Jesus. By following Jesus, taking our bearings from him and allowing ourselves to be inspired by him, by sharing in his Abba experience and his selfless support for 'the least of my brethren' (Mt 25:40), and thus entrusting our own destiny to God, we allow the history of Jesus, the living one, to continue in history as a piece of living Christology, the work of the Spirit among us, the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. So, the Christian life is lived in remembrance of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, towards the completion of God's will for humanity.<sup>143</sup>

4) While the church lives towards God's will for salvation, it recognises that final salvation is beyond our present experiences. However, we can experience something of what is meant by salvation in the fragmentary moments of joy and happiness in our lives. It is these moments that move us to seek the fullness of salvation that is found in God.<sup>144</sup>

While the observant reader may notice that I have already discussed these points at the end of chapter two, I do want to note particular the place

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 639-640.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 641-642.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 642-643.

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of the Spirit in the formation of the Christian tradition to which I will return in the next chapter. In considering the development of the Christian tradition, Schillebeeckx notes the close connection in the earliest Christian communities between their communal experience of the Spirit (*pneuma*) and their recollection of Jesus (*anamnesis*). In fact, the connection between the two was initially so close that that they were even treated as a single reality: 'The Lord is the Pneuma' (2 Cor 3:17). It was on account of this close connection between the Spirit and the memory of Jesus, that it was understood that no one could say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the power of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 12.3). As Schillebeeckx writes: 'Pneuma and anamnesis, both the living recollection of the story, conduct and career of Jesus of Nazareth, handed down through the church, and the active presence of the Spirit of Christ in the church community of faith, form two sides of the same original coin.'<sup>145</sup> This connection is perhaps most evident in John where the Spirit is understood to bring all things to remembrance (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). Given that the Spirit leads the Christian community into all truth, Schillebeeckx maintains that the 'new memories' of the community are not less authentic expressions of revelation simply because they are new. Rather, it is precisely because Christian revelation occurs as interpreted experience within human history, that the contemporary realisation of the tradition in praxis and narrative participates not only in the transmission of the tradition but also in its ongoing creation. However, Schillebeeckx was aware that the Christian tradition is always at risk of distortion. For this reason, he stated that a critical attitude must always be maintained. For this reason, Schillebeeckx came to focus his attention on the place of breaks and ruptures in the transmission of tradition.<sup>146</sup> This is because

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<sup>145</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 158.

<sup>146</sup> Elizabeth Tillar explores the place of critical remembrance in Schillebeeckx's theology but makes little reference to the work of the Spirit. See, Elizabeth K. Tillar, "Critical Remembrance and Eschatological Hope in Edward Schillebeeckx's Theology of Suffering for Others" in *The Heythrop Journal* 44 (2003), 15-42. The echoes of Johann Baptist Metz are clearly evident here. See *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 87-96.



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he argued that in certain contexts, continuity could only occur through moments of apparent discontinuity. Thus, a critical attitude towards the Christian tradition is required but one which recognises that the Spirit is the ultimate subject and guarantor of the tradition. For it is the Spirit who empowers and guides the Christian community and who at times is the author of the breaks because the tradition should never be identified with a specific cultural or ideological manifestation.<sup>147</sup> As Hilkert writes: 'While the Spirit may be "doing a new thing" at a new moment in history, Schillebeeckx still cautions that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. The Christian tradition has its norm in its fidelity to Jesus.'<sup>148</sup>

## *II) The Present Situation*

In considering his particular situation, Schillebeeckx identified the fundamental question confronting humanity at the close of the twentieth century as the question of who or what brings salvation to men and women? Schillebeeckx observed that this traditionally religious question had been forced on humanity by the fact that the cultural forces which had once been hailed as the liberators of humanity, namely science and technology, were the same forces that now posed the greatest threat to our continued existence: 'At present the project of the total human liberation of human beings by human beings seems to be the greatest threat to our humanity.'<sup>149</sup> It is not that science and technology are wrong *per se* but rather the non-scientific and absolute status which they are accorded. While science and technology have evidently worked wonders for humanity, they have also been used as instruments of power to rule over

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<sup>147</sup> As Schillebeeckx exclaims in an essay in *Concilium* 170 (1983), 'You Cannot Arbitrarily Make Something of the Gospel!', 15-19.

<sup>148</sup> Hilkert, 'Experience and Faith' in *Praxis and the Reign of God*, 76. In another essay Hilkert speaks of how the Spirit holds open a vision of what is possible for humanity. See Mary Catherine Hilkert, "'Grace-Optimism": The Spirituality at the Heart of Schillebeeckx's Theology' in *Spirituality Today* vol. 44 no.3 (1991), 220-239.

<sup>149</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 2.

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nature, society, and other people. So, the existential question looming over humanity is the question of whether human creativity might ultimately facilitate our wholesale destruction.

In this context, Schillebeeckx identifies the task of theology as safeguarding belief in and hope for the saving power of God who assures our salvation. However, in order to speak a work of hope into the present, Schillebeeckx contends that the church must learn to speak a word that is comprehensible to the world. For this reason, Schillebeeckx grounds his approach in the seemingly unshakable human faith that another world is possible: a future that has the right to our affirmative 'yes'. Schillebeeckx argues that it is the sporadic and fragmentary outworking of this universal experience that forms the basis of the common human endeavour to preserve the *humanum*.<sup>150</sup>

### *III) Towards a Critical Correlation*

Schillebeeckx asserts that salvation occurs whenever men and women are freed for true humanity. Fragments of salvation, then, can be found wherever people experience joy, peace, truth, and happiness. However, such moments remain fragmentary because they are constantly threatened and undermined by the realities of suffering and injustice. Still, despite the fact that history offers no assurances that meaning will ultimately triumph over meaninglessness, Schillebeeckx notes that many people retain an abiding belief that another world is possible. It is on the basis of this observation that Schillebeeckx

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<sup>150</sup> Schillebeeckx explores the question of contemporary soteriology in part four of *Christ* and in the first three chapters of *Church*. The issue is also touched on in part Four of *Jesus* and considered in several homilies in *God Among Us*: see, "I Believe in Eternal Life", "Belief in New Heaven and a New Earth", and "Belief in Jesus as Salvation for the Outcast".

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developed his account of God as the guarantor of salvation who can be discerned in situations where good is furthered and evil resisted.<sup>151</sup>

By connecting talk about God to the fragments of salvation that are present in the world, Schillebeeckx is clear that salvation cannot simply be identified with revelation because God's saving presence is not limited to our awareness of this reality. Thus, the Christian affirmation that salvation is a gift from God is predicated on an experience of liberation in the worldly reality of human history. As Schillebeeckx writes: 'God-given redemption and salvation do not lie next to or beyond and on the other side of self-liberation, but lie inside liberation (in the same way as what is called in Christian faith the *divinity of Jesus* is located inside Jesus' humanity and not next to it or on the other side of it.'<sup>152</sup> As a result, a defining feature of Schillebeeckx's late theology is his claim that the world and not the church is the primary locus of God's saving action. The task of the church then is to explicitly connect the fragments of salvation that are experienced in the world to the saving presence of God.

### On Christian Faith

At the heart of the Christian tradition is the affirmation that salvation is possible. The basis of this affirmation is found in the person of Jesus Christ who disclosed what authentic human life can be when we truly recognise that we live in the presence of the living God. As Schillebeeckx writes:

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<sup>151</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the connection between salvation and liberation, see: Derek J Simon, 'Salvation and Liberation in the Practical-Critical Soteriology of Schillebeeckx' in *Theological Studies* 62 (2002), 494-520.

<sup>152</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, "God, the Living One" in *New Blackfriars* vol. 62 no. 735 (1981), 357-369. This essay offers one of the most focused expressions of Schillebeeckx's late soteriology; a Dutch version of the text is available *God de levende*, a collection of essays edited by Stephan Van Erp (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum Uitgevers, 2019).

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Thus when people look for the best symbols which express the deepest dimensions of their existence in words in the most adequate way – and of course this can only happen in symbols, parables and metaphors – in a story – then as Christians they find no more expressive word than the Word of God: Jesus as the representative and productive symbol of the most authentic way of being a human being in a world which is God's world.<sup>153</sup>

For this reason, Christians respond to the historical ambiguities of the world by telling the story of Jesus: the one who was exalted by God and remains present to us by his Spirit. Thus, to live the Christian life is to embody the truth that life and not death will have the final word.

It is on account of the experience of Easter that the Christian community testifies to new and unseen possibilities: the ultimate destiny of humanity. A testimony that is rooted in a life of discipleship and prayer. However, the promise of salvation from God is one that can only be expressed in poetic and metaphorical language: the kingdom of God; the resurrection of the body; the new heaven and earth; the promise of the *Parousia*. Thus, the Christian assurance of salvation is primarily communicated through transformative praxis. As Schillebeeckx states:

Soteriology, Christology and anthropology cannot be separated because each clarifies the other. The question of Christian identity is fundamentally connected to the question of human integrity in such a way that this question of identity cannot be solved in purely theoretical terms: in essentials it includes the question of a particular life-style – contemplative and political. God must continually be thought of in such a way that he is never just thought of: talk of God stands under the primacy of our way of life; it is governed by the question of our real concerns in life.<sup>154</sup>

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153 Schillebeeckx, *IR*, 60-61.

154 Schillebeeckx, *IR*, 62.

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In other words, communicating the story of Jesus requires a life lived in conformity with his partisanship for the oppressed and marginalised. Such a life risks crucifixion but is sustained by the knowledge that despite all appearances to the contrary God is working to overcome our fallen world (1 Jn 5:4).

*The Spirit in the Ethical Imperative*

According to Schillebeeckx, the Enlightenment dream of establishing a moral order on the basis of abstract universal reason had been undermined by the fact that reason itself has become entangled in the ideological pursuits of power.<sup>155</sup> As a result, moral reason itself is now in need of liberation, ethics being concerned with the question of what it means to be human, how we should live, and what kind of world we want to see. Questions that are ultimately bound up with how we understand and live in the world. So, in contrast to both the Enlightenment project and Catholic casuistry, Schillebeeckx argues that ethics should not begin with abstract principles or norms but the concrete realities of human history:

[T]he specific starting point for ethics is...our indignation at human beings in concrete history who are everywhere injured: at the disorder both in the human heart and in society in its institutions. The actual threat or attack on the *humanum*...is a specific ethical challenge and an ethical imperative, embedded in very specific negative experiences of contrast, of human misfortune and unhappiness, here and now.<sup>156</sup>

The ethical imperative then is concrete history itself and what is ethically good only emerges from out of a praxis of liberation and reconciliation. From this perspective, the question of how to achieve a liveable humanity is the question that shapes and informs human history.

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<sup>155</sup> Schillebeeckx presents one of his clearest accounts of the connection between the Spirit and ethical action in "Church, Magisterium and Politics", which was first published in *Concilium* 36, 19-39, and later in *GFM*, 143-166.

<sup>156</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 29.

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Given that the church cannot respond to the challenges of the modern world on the basis of revelation alone, it must learn to enter into dialogue with the world and draw upon its insights. The theological question then is what is the nature of church pronouncements that are not based directly on the data of revelation but also an analysis of the actual situation of human society: 'How can the church justify an authoritative demand for specific options in political matters in such a way that, given the necessary conditions, it is no longer an open question for the Christian but requires them to act?'

In responding to this question, Schillebeeckx cautions against moving too quickly to invoke the charismatic assistance of the Spirit as an immediate explanation for any concrete decisions: 'For this might create the impression that we invoke the Spirit on those difficult points which we cannot explain and that we try to bridge the unbridgeable distance between general Christian principles and the many-faced concrete situations by appealing to an intervening impulse from on high which would decide the definite choice from among the many possible ones.'<sup>157</sup> For Schillebeeckx, the Spirit does not work as a stopgap but rather in and through the human history and experience: 'In this sense we may say that an appeal to the Spirit cannot *explain* anything, while on the other hand, we emphatically maintain as believers that we see the charismatic assistance of the Spirit become historically manifest precisely when we have analysed the inner structure of such a concrete decision by the magisterium and have made it intelligible (*insofar* as free human decisions can be presented intelligibly). Thus, the factual analysis of the inner structure of our ethical decisions is a homage to the Holy Spirit.'<sup>158</sup>

In making this claim Schillebeeckx opposes a certain 'duality' that he saw in certain forms of Christian ethics that sought to bridge the gap between

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157 Schillebeeckx, "Church, Magisterium and Politics", in *GFM*, 149.

158 *Ibid.*

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ethical norms and particular moments of action by appealing to an unknown third factor as a catalyst: 'This catalyst would then *either* be a "supernatural" one, the guiding power of the Spirit, which breaks through the ambivalence of the problem, *or* some human, irrational factor such as intuition, or an unrationalized sympathetic hunch, an imaginative sense of history, ect.'<sup>159</sup> While Schillebeeckx does not deny the significance of ethical norms in the total context of human life, he argues that abstract principles cannot grasp reality by themselves. Instead, he maintains that 'there is only one source of ethical norms, namely, the historical reality of the value of the inviolable human person with all its bodily and social implications.'<sup>160</sup>

Having identified that the task of ethics is oriented towards the promotion of the concrete human person in their concrete society, Schillebeeckx observes that the challenge is how to determine the right course of action: 'How do we know, or how does the magisterium know, what should be done in practice within the present society in order to contribute as a Christian to an existence that is more in line with [human] dignity for this particular part of mankind in this particular society?'<sup>161</sup> In line with the directive of the *Pastoral Constitution*, Schillebeeckx asserts that the church must learn to see the concrete realities of the world as the expression of the moral demands placed upon the Christian conscience. It is only through our confrontation with lived reality and by learning to listen to its 'foreign prophecy' that the church can begin to recognise the familiar voice of God.

In learning to discern the voice of God in the concrete realities of the world, the church arrives at the moral imperatives to which it must respond. In the protests evoked by experiences of suffering and injustice, we see that humanity is living at a level below its potential and that people are kept low by

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 152.

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systemic injustices. As such moral imperatives are discovered through a direct engagement with the world, Schillebeeckx concludes that there is no need to appeal to a 'third' factor because there is no gap between the norm and the situation. Furthermore, Schillebeeckx argues that for the believer, 'the initial creative decision which discovered the historical imperative directly in its *inner* meaning in the very contrast-experience *is...*at the same time the charismatic element of this whole process.'<sup>162</sup> Thus, the church speaks into the challenges of the modern world by speaking of God's promise of salvation as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ: 'For this reason we can attribute to the church an institutionalized "critical function" with regard to the temporal order, a function based on divine charisma.'<sup>163</sup> The church's critical function is not that of an outsider but rather that of one who is fully involved in building up of the world under the guidance of the Spirit: 'We believe nevertheless that, functioning in and borne by the whole community of the Church, [the magisterium] stands under the charismatic guidance of the Spirit.'<sup>164</sup> So, a key insight of Schillebeeckx's later pneumatology is his understanding that the Spirit of God is discovered in and through our engagement with the concrete realities of the world.

#### **4.4 Constructive Assessment**

For Schillebeeckx, the assurance of salvation is ultimately found in an encounter with Jesus Christ who is the parable of God. To encounter Jesus, then, in the living tradition of the church is experience the grace of God that gives life new meaning and significance. It is through their Easter experience, that comes through hearing the story of Jesus, that Christians are able to proclaim that Jesus has been exalted by the Father and remains present to them by the Spirit, who is the power of God and pledge of the kingdom in the present. It is the

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 159-160.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 163.



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experience of the Spirit that enables the church to proclaim that another world is not only possible but already breaking into the present in fragmentary moments of salvation.

Even though the Spirit is not an area of focus for Schillebeeckx in his later theology, his writings still contain material with which to think more about the Spirit. For instance, his discussions of grace and the earliest titles given to Jesus point to how the earliest Christian communities saw a close connection between Jesus and the Spirit. I will return to this connection and the experiences of the early church in the next chapter. However, for the purposes of moving Schillebeeckx into a constructive key I want to focus on three particular aspects of his later thought: his treatment of revelation, understanding of Jesus as Spirit anointed prophet, and hesitancy about speculative theology. In thinking through these three areas, I begin to suggest that Schillebeeckx provides a way of thinking about the Spirit as the movement of God in creation of whom Jesus is the embodied form.

Among the debates of modern theology, the relationship between revelation and experience has been one of the most contentious. This is because how we understand the relationship between divine revelation and human experience informs how we think about the movement of God in creation. For this reason, the Protestant theologian Alasdair Heron goes as far as to suggest that this debate is one of the defining problems in modern pneumatology.<sup>165</sup> To illustrate this point, I briefly consider the paradigmatic positions of Karl Rahner and Karl Barth.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Heron, *The Holy Spirit*, 137-156.

<sup>166</sup> In writing this section I draw on Heron, *The Holy Spirit*, 140-144; Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 5-8; and Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World*, 32-40. As well as Eugene F. Rogers, 'The Eclipse of the Spirit in Karl Barth' in *Conversing with Barth*, edited by John C. McDowell and Mike Higton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 173-190, and John R. Sachs "'Do Not Stifle the Spirit": Karl Rahner, the Legacy of Vatican II, and its Urgency Today', *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 51 (1996), 15-38.

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According to Rahner, God reveals Godself to every person by the fact of our transcendental experience. That is to say, we are finite but open beings who are naturally orientated to divine revelation because God has already communicated Godself to us by his Spirit. This claim has led some to accuse Rahner of unhelpfully blurring the boundaries between the church and the world. Nevertheless, what is important is that Rahner locates divine revelation in the depths of human experience. It is through the hearing of the gospel that this implicit sense of God can become an explicit affirmation of Christian faith. By contrast, Barth categorically rejects any direct association between God and creation. This is because he wants to affirm the absolute distinction between God's Spirit and the human spirit. For Barth, divine revelation is located exclusively in the person of Christ who stands over and against sinful humanity. In this picture, the Spirit is arguably subordinate to Christ as the one who leads us to Christ. Crucially, in Barth's account, there is no scope for speaking about the Spirit of God in creation or human history that is independent from Christ. Yet, as Moltmann observes: 'By setting up this antithesis between revelation and experience, Barth merely replaced the theological immanentism which he complained about by a theological transcendentalism.' In other words, God is lost to human experience rather than lost in human experience. In considering the difference between these two approaches, Heron writes:

Rahner works, as it were, 'up' and 'in' from 'spirit in the world' to God's concrete revelation in Jesus Christ. Barth travels 'out' in the light of that revelation and traces a movement 'down' in the Spirit by which man is constituted as 'body and soul'. So Rahner focuses on a movement of man towards God, Barth focuses on a movement of God towards man; Rahner speaks of man as being spirit, Barth of him receiving it; Rahner presents man as the seeker after God; Barth as the one whom God has already found.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Heron, *The Holy Spirit*, 143-144.

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In contrast to both these positions that Schillebeeckx suggests an alternative. As Mary Catherine Hilbert explains:

Modern theologians from Frederick Schleiermacher, the 'father of liberal Protestantism,' to the transcendental Thomist Karl Rahner have argued that God is to be found in the depths of human experience. On the contrary, dialectical theologians who have followed the lead of Karl Barth in facing squarely the realities of evil, suffering, and sin have insisted that the transcendent and hidden God is revealed only in the word of God—in Jesus the Christ, in the scriptures that give witness to him, and in the church's proclamation of the gospel. In his recent writings, Schillebeeckx proposes a third possibility: God is revealed in human experience, but in a dialectical, rather than a direct fashion. The ultimate mystery of compassion at the heart of reality surprises us as reality resists our human plans and expectations, and as efforts on behalf of those who suffer disclose 'something extra' in human experience the absolute presence of the creator God.<sup>168</sup>

So, where Rahner identifies God in the depths of human experience and Barth stresses the absolute transcendence of the divine, Schillebeeckx maintains that God is revealed dialectically in human experience. In considering this dialectical dynamic, Robert Schreier writes: 'Few theologians have insisted as seriously as has Schillebeeckx upon how concretely God acts in history. At points he seems to take the human and human history so seriously that the divine seems to disappear.'<sup>169</sup> This is evident in Schillebeeckx's late theology, where he rejects any notion that divine revelation might drop vertically into human history. Instead, the presence of God is understood to be made known through the whole of creation but in different revelational densities.

In seeking to describe the presence of God in the world, I noted in chapter two that Schillebeeckx adopts the language of 'mediated immediacy' —

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168 Mary Catherine Hilbert, 'Experience and Revelation' in *The Praxis of the Reign of God*, 60.

169 Schreier, 'Orientation' in *The Schillebeeckx Reader* 17.

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where *immediacy* refers to the manner in which God is present to us and *mediated* describes the mode by which we experience God's presence. In other words, while God is directly and creatively present to every aspect of creation, we can only experience God through the mediation of creation. To acknowledge this reality is to recognise that God is constantly present to us in the structures of our historical human experiences. For Schillebeeckx the language of mediated immediacy provides a way of speaking about the relationship between God and creation that acknowledges the immanent but transcendent nature of God. However, if we take the Spirit of God to denote the presence of God that we experience in the world then the language of 'mediated immediacy' might also provide a way to speak about the movement of the Spirit in creation.<sup>170</sup> To illustrate this claim I turn to Moltmann who uses the similar term 'immanent transcendence' to speak of how the Spirit is a constitutive element in our experience of God. For Moltmann, the possibility of perceiving God in all things is grounded in the theological understanding that the Spirit is the presence of God in creation and the wellspring of all life. 'To experience God in all things', then 'presupposes that there is a transcendence which is immanent in things and which can be inductively discovered. It is the infinite in the finite, the eternal in the temporal, and the enduring in the transitory.'<sup>171</sup> This immanent transcendence is the Holy Spirit, who is experienced in mediated immediacy. To speak of the presence of God that we can experience dialectically as moving in creation is to speak of the Spirit if a trinitarian framework is applied.

Having suggested that Schillebeeckx's account of divine revelation offers a way for thinking about the Spirit in history and experience, I now return to Schillebeeckx's suggestion that if we want to speak about the Spirit we should look to Jesus Christ. For he is the one who ministered in the power of the Spirit. In the Synoptic Gospels it is evident that Jesus' ministry begins with an

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<sup>170</sup> See 1.1.3.4

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

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experience of God during his baptism by John. This experience is described in the gospels as one in which the Father speaks over Jesus and the Spirit rests on him. During his baptismal experience, then, Jesus becomes explicitly conscious of his divine sonship and the anointing of God's Spirit upon him. It is from out of this experience of the Father and the Spirit that Jesus begins to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom. So, to quote James Dunn, we might say that 'Jesus thought of himself as God's son and as anointed by the eschatological Spirit, because in prayer he experienced God as Father and in ministry he experienced a power to heal which he could only understand as the power of the end-time and an inspiration to proclaim a message which he could only understand as the gospel of the end-time.'<sup>172</sup>

Dunn maintains that the biblical language of 'Spirit' should be understood as denoting the power of God that can take hold of a person and inspire them to prophetic acts. For instance, by asserting that he was casting out demons by the Spirit of God, Jesus was giving expression to the power of God working through him. From this perspective, we can affirm that God was at work in Jesus when he spoke healing over someone or stretched out hand to free people from the power of evil. In considering this dynamic, Dunn notes the particular relationship between the language of Spirit and kingdom in the Newer Testament.<sup>173</sup> For example, Paul states that if a person is to inherit the kingdom of God, they must experience the work of the Spirit within them. The Spirit then is the one who enables people to experience the eschatological reality of the kingdom. While there are fewer references to the Spirit in the gospels, a similar pneumatological dynamic is present. For as Dunn notes where the Spirit is the kingdom is present. The power of the Spirit then can be understood as the 'already' of the kingdom which is 'not yet'. From this perspective, we might say that the kingdom becomes present through Jesus

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172 Ibid.

173 See James Dunn, "Spirit and Kingdom," in *The Expository Times* Vol 82, No. 2 (1970): 36-40.

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because the Spirit of God was upon him. So, as Dunn concludes, 'It is not so much a case of Where Jesus is there is the kingdom, as Where the Spirit is there is the kingdom.'<sup>174</sup>

What Dunn offers then is way of interpreting Jesus' Abba experience, that is central to Schillebeeckx's Christology, with an eye to pneumatology. Jesus experienced God as Father and from this experience of intimacy with God arose his sense of being anointed by God's Spirit to exorcize, heal, and speak with authority. Hence, it is not simply the case that Jesus' followers interpreted him as a Spirit-anointed prophet, but that Jesus understood himself as the one anointed by God's Spirit to bring about salvation for all people.<sup>175</sup>

Schillebeeckx's historical-critical interrogation of the Newer Testament brings such pneumatological interpretations of Jesus into focus. For the image of Jesus as Spirit anointed has largely been overlooked in the Christian tradition. In considering the reasons for this Yves Congar observes that the Johannine image of the Logos led the Church Fathers and later medieval theologians to understand Christ as having the fullness of grace, the use of his free will, infused knowledge, a vision of God and his glory from the moment of his conception. In other words, there was little place for the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ. For if Christ, on account of the hypostatic union, already possessed the fullness of grace, then his earthly life added nothing to him. In fact, the

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174 Ibid., 138.

175 Ibid., 61 While Dunn and Schillebeeckx agree that Jesus' openly messianic claim in the synagogue in Nazareth are not the authentic words of Jesus (Lk 4:18-21), Dunn draws out the passage's allusion to Isaiah 61 with its list of those who are 'blessed' in the eschatological age. Dunn identifies a further allusion to Isaiah 61 in Luke 7:18-23 and Matthew 11: 2-6, where Jesus tells the disciples of John to go and tell what they have seen and heard. From these allusions Dunn concludes that Jesus not only considered the eschatological kingdom of God to be present in his exorcisms and healings but also his preaching. 'The power which he experienced in himself, the power which became evident in his healings (in his exorcisms in particular) and especially in his proclamation of the good news to the poor, was in Jesus' view the eschatological Spirit operating in and through him — the power which brought God's forgiveness and acceptance effectively to his hearers.'

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incarnation was largely seen as a manifestation for others. Congar argues that by focusing exclusively on the incarnation of the Word, the Western theological tradition has not paid adequate attention to the successive comings of the Holy Spirit on Jesus in his quality as Messiah. As a result, the historical character of Jesus in the economy of salvation remains underdeveloped. For this reason, Congar concludes that it is not sufficient to only approach Christ from the perspective of the incarnation of the Word. We must also follow the narratives of the New Testament as they reveal him as the Spirit anointed Messiah. It is here that Schillebeeckx's account of Jesus as an eschatological prophet opens itself to a constructive pneumatological reading. In particular, his notion of Jesus' Abba experience which I have reinterpreted in conversation with Dunn. The image of Jesus that begins to emerge is of someone who was marked as the Messiah by the working of the Spirit through them. Having argued that the Spirit is the presence of God in creation, who was experienced the person of Jesus, I now move to consider how these two claims might be held together within a more explicitly trinitarian framework.

In their co-authored essay 'Ignoring God Triune?', Gijsbert van den Brink and Stephan van Erp discuss the general neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity in Dutch theology.<sup>176</sup> They note that among both Catholic and Protestant theologians working in the Dutch context, the dominant attitude towards the doctrine of the Trinity is either critical or ambivalent. In their survey of a number of prominent Dutch-speaking theologians, they identify Schillebeeckx as being among those whose attitude is ambivalent. That is to say that while Schillebeeckx acknowledges a necessary place for the doctrine of the Trinity his treatment of the doctrine ultimately leaves much to be desired. A conclusion that is echoed by Kennedy:

In his many and multifaceted publications, [Schillebeeckx] makes reference to the Trinity and he takes belief in the Trinity for granted, but

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<sup>176</sup> Gijsbert van den Brink and Stephan van Erp, "Ignoring God Triune? The Doctrine of the Trinity in Dutch Theology" in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009), 72-90.

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he rarely expounds on the topic at any length. He inclined to the view that treatises devoted to the Trinity were somewhat pretentious in their aspirations conceptually to elaborate who God might be.<sup>177</sup>

Schillebeeckx maintains that it is only on account of Jesus' life, his cross and resurrection in the power of the Spirit that we can begin to consider the triune nature of God.<sup>178</sup> As Schillebeeckx writes:

[W]e should not interpret Jesus with the Trinity as our starting-point, but vice versa: only if we start with Jesus is God's unity in its fullness (not so much a *unitas trinitatis* but a *trinitatis unitatis*) to some extent accessible to us. Only in the light of Jesus' life, death and resurrection can we know the Trinity is the divine mode of God's perfect being. Only on the basis of Jesus of Nazareth, his *Abba* experience — source and soul of his message, ministry and death — and his resurrection, is it possible to say anything meaningful about Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>179</sup>

However, van den Brink and van Erp note that for Schillebeeckx this christological starting point is more historical than theological because in early Christianity the 'post-biblical' doctrine of the Trinity served to explicate the mystery of the Christ: the fact that Jesus' turning to God was preceded by God turning to him.

Schillebeeckx states that it is through Jesus' humanity that divine revelation can be understood as triune: 'It is Jesus' own being-as-man (and nothing else) that reveals God to us as a Trinity.'<sup>180</sup> So, instead of thinking about the Trinity as three persons, Schillebeeckx concludes that it is because of Jesus' personhood that we can analogously begin to speak about the Father and the Holy Spirit as persons. Thus, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, Schillebeeckx confesses his hesitancy about defining the nature of the Trinity

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177 Philip Kennedy, "Schillebeeckx on God", in *T&T Handbook*, 236.

178 Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 641.

179 *Ibid.*, 658.

180 *Ibid.*, 661.



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too precisely and his reticence towards the inherited language of three persons. For Schillebeeckx, the Trinity is 'the distinctive mode of God's personalistic nature.' However, he asserts that we have only known the trinitarian structure of God's being since the coming of Jesus. This is not to deny that the nature of God's being has been 'ternary' through the ages but to recognise that we cannot speculate about the trinitarian structure of the divine unitary separately from Jesus Christ. From this christocentric perspective, Schillebeeckx questions the limits of trinitarian speculation. 'Without Christ we cannot speculate on what the ternary structure of God's being entails independently of and apart from Jesus Christ, even though that structure is the ground and source of all Christology.'<sup>181</sup> Ultimately, Schillebeeckx confesses his belief in the Christian creed of the Trinity, but his cautious and diffident formulations have left some questioning whether he retained any substantial notion of the Trinity.

Schillebeeckx's principal objection to speaking about the doctrine of the Trinity in general and the Spirit in particular is the language of person.<sup>182</sup> The impression given that such language suggests tritheism rather than the Trinity as God's mode of being. In *Believing Three Ways in One God*, Nicholas Lash observes that '[t]he distinctions between Father, Son and Spirit are distinctions truly drawn of God, and not merely of the way that God appears to us to be, or of the way that — for some brief span of time — he was.'<sup>183</sup> So, 'there are three ways in God, three ways God is, for each of which the term we use, conventionally, is 'person'.<sup>184</sup> However, Lash argues that the received language of 'persons' is no longer viable because this language is generally taken to mean that God is three people: 'For us, a person is an individual agent, a conscious centre of memory and choice, of action, reflection and decision. But when we say there are, in God, 'three persons', we do not mean that God has, as it were,

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<sup>181</sup> Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests" in *Essays*, 132.

<sup>182</sup> See Christ!

<sup>183</sup> Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

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three minds, three memories, three wills.’ Given the individualistic assumptions that surround the language of person in Western culture, Lash instead opts to speak about God as the relations that he has. Thus, he argues that ‘[w]e learn to use this word [God] well, not by attempting to gain some purchase on God’s ‘nature’, but by learning to live, and think, and work, and suffer, within the pattern of trinitarian relations which the creed supplies.’<sup>185</sup> From this perspective, God is not an agent acting in three episodes or three people but a single mystery who is revealed to us in three ways or ‘modes of being’. Nevertheless, Lash cautions that to consider any one of these ways in isolation or abstraction from the other two would compromise the singleness of God: ‘It follows, therefore, that nothing that is said of any one of them will be appropriately said expect in relation to the other two. At every turn, our understanding of one ‘person’ will be modified, adjusted, and corrected from the standpoint of our understanding of the others.’<sup>186</sup>

In line with Lash’s treatment of the Trinity, Paul Murray adopts a similar approach to speaking about God in three ways. For Murray, we can understand ‘God’s being in-in-act as inexhaustible source (Father), expressed Form/ Logos (Son), and in-spiriting Energy (Spirit).’<sup>187</sup> In this understanding the Spirit is the energy, power, acting of God relative to God as infinite, inexhaustible source of such energy, power, acting. This is a claim that chimes with the insight of those who have sought to recover the Spirit in modern theology by arguing that the symbol of Spirit principally refers to God as God is active and present in the world, an aspect of God’s activity that has historically been subsumed into the language of grace. However, what theologians such as Karl Rahner have helped clarify is that grace is really a way of talking about God’s active presence among us. So, the symbol of Spirit which has become entwined with the language of

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>187</sup> Paul D. Murray, “Forward: Receptive Ecumenism as a Leaning-in to the Spirit of Loving Transformation” in *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning and Loving in the Way of Christ*, ed. Vicky Balabanski and Geraldine Hawkes (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2018), xviii.

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grace denotes the movement of the living God that can be traced in and through our experiences of the world. So, reinterpreting the basic structure of Schillebeeckx's theology, I also want to suggest that God is the origin and terminus (Father) of the movement (Spirit) of which Jesus Christ is the form (Son). In other words, the active presence and power of God in creation, which is the Spirit, finds its definitive expression in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. For at the heart of the Christian confession, Schillebeeckx maintains, is the affirmation that God's purpose for creation is definitely revealed in Jesus Christ. Schillebeeckx expresses this dynamic in terms of Christology being concentrated creation: the belief in creation as God wills it. From this perspective, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus gives the definitive expression to God's 'no' to a world marred by sickness, suffering, and injustice by incarnating God's love for humanity. To understand Christology as concentrated creation then is to affirm that the redemption offered by God is manifested in the man Jesus. Thus, in pneumatological terms, we might say that Christ is the concentrated form of the Spirit by which God vivifies and renews creation.

If the Spirit is the movement of God who brings wholeness and healing, then we can speak of Jesus Christ as the supreme expression of that movement. As Schillebeeckx observes, in creation God seeks human flourishing. It is in the person of Jesus that we find God's desire for creation in its clearest form: Christology is concentrated creation. In Jesus we find the embodiment of the kingdom of God. Through his life and ministry Jesus brings healing and reconciliation, acts that I have suggested he performed in the power of the Spirit. So, if the Spirit is the presence of God in creation and the kingdom is the symbol for God's presence to creation then we can understand Jesus as the definitive expression of the Spirit. This in turn suggests a way in which we might more closely connect the ministry of Christ to the eschatological witness of the church which ministers in the power of the same Spirit.

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## Chapter Five: The Holy Spirit and Schillebeeckx's Ecclesiology

'I thought that we had been given this inalienable name [Catholic] on the basis of our baptism in the Spirit.'<sup>1</sup>



### *Chapter Outline*

In this chapter I explore the relationship between the Spirit and the church in Schillebeeckx's theology. In particular, I focus on Schillebeeckx's pneumatological rationale for encouraging a more democratic rule within the church. For this reason, I begin by analysing what Schillebeeckx calls the 'classical' face of the church: the image of the Catholic Church as a pyramidal hierarchy. According to Schillebeeckx this normative image of the church rests on two flawed foundations: an overemphasis on Christology to the detriment of pneumatology and a hyperfocus on the authority of the papal office. In his attempt to overcome the abiding hierarchal instinct in the Catholic Church, Schillebeeckx sought to promote the understanding that the church initially had a pneuma-christological rather than exclusively christological foundation. In this account, the official offices of the church are a concentration of the authority that is shared by all because of their baptism. Having outlined Schillebeeckx's historical recovery I move to consider how his argument informs his understanding of papal infallibility in relation to the *sensus fidelium* of the entire people of God. By presenting the discernment of the Spirit to be a ministry for the whole church, Schillebeeckx develops his argument for a democratic account of authority within the Catholic Church. I conclude this chapter by observing that while Schillebeeckx was a voice of dissent in his own time, the papacy of Pope Francis opens the possibility for the recovery of his arguments from theological exile.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Other Face of the Church", in *FSG*, 160.

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## 5.1 Schillebeeckx's Ecclesiology

In this section I present Schillebeeckx's objections to what he refers to as the 'classical' face of the Catholic Church. For Schillebeeckx, this 'normative' model of the church rests on two flawed foundations: an emphasis on Christology to the detriment of pneumatology and an over-emphasis on papal sovereignty. Despite the ecclesiological reforms of Vatican II, Schillebeeckx argued that a hierarchical instinct had continued to shape the Catholic ecclesiological imaginary. As a result, many of the promised conciliar reforms did not fully materialize.

### The Shape of the Church

Prior to the publication of Alfred Loisy's *The Gospel and the Church* it was generally assumed in Catholic theology that Jesus had directly founded the institution of the church with its hierarchy, dogmas and sacraments.<sup>2</sup> However, in his attempt to counter Adolf von Harnack's dismissal of the institutional church, Loisy suggested that the connection between the historical Jesus and the church might be weaker than previously thought.<sup>3</sup> Even though Loisy did not formally deny the connection between Jesus and the church, his exegetical and historical arguments brought the received nature of the Catholic Church into question.<sup>4</sup> As a result his book was condemned by the Catholic hierarchy

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2 See Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, trans. Christopher Home (London: Isbister & Co, 1903).

3 See Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986).

4 Loisy's sentence 'Jesus foretold the Kingdom and it was the church that came,' became a slogan for expressing the apparent disconnect between Jesus' preaching and the existing church. See Chapter 3 of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 60-90.

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but the question of whether Jesus had intended the institutions of the church has continued to haunt the Catholic imaginary.<sup>5</sup>

In its 'classical' form, Schillebeeckx notes that the Catholic Church is presented as a pyramidal structure that consists of multiple levels and in which all powers and functions are concentrated at the top.<sup>6</sup> In this hierarchical structure the clerical world of the pope, bishops, priests, and deacons stands over and above the secular world of the faithful.<sup>7</sup> As a group's agency is determined by their place within this structure, the laity and in particular women and children were treated as the passive objects of a priestly and male pastorate. A defining characteristic of this institutional image of the church was its hierarchical conception of authority. In *Vehementer Nos* (1906), an encyclical on the French law on separation of the churches and state, Pius X speaks of the church as 'essentially an *unequal* society' comprising of two distinct categories of persons: the pastors and the flock. For Pius X, the duty of the 'multitude' was to allow themselves to be led, 'like a docile flock', by the pastors.<sup>8</sup>

Schillebeeckx asserts that this hierarchical face of the church developed in the second half of the first Christian millennium and mirrored the feudal structure of European society. Furthermore, from the eleventh century onwards, this hierarchical development was also accompanied by a centralization of ecclesiastical power in Rome. Nevertheless, it was the 'democratic turn' of the Protestant Reformation and French Revolution that

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5 *Lamentabili Sane* (1907) condemned the errors of the Modernists, including a number of presuppositions that echo the writings of Loisy: see proposition 52-56.

6 Yves Congar describes this hierarchical conception of the church with the word 'hierarchology'. See *Laypeople in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Chapman, 1965), 35.

7 For a fuller treatment of the Church as institution see Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 2002), 26-38.

8 Pius X, *Vehementer Nos*, (1906).

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caused Catholic theologians to really stress the hierarchical, visible, and juridical nature of the Catholic Church. This process reached its apex during the late nineteenth century with the idea of ultramontanism or absolute pontifical monarchy. As Congar writes: 'According to all the Popes who were against the Enlightenment, the rule of Christ over all the world is put in the hands of the church hierarchy to the exclusion of anyone else, even the people of God.'<sup>9</sup> In this triumphalist conception of the Catholic Church all bourgeois values were dismissed, the form of the church was treated as immutable, having emerged directly from the will of Christ, and the role of the Holy Spirit restricted to authenticating, confirming and sanctifying the decisions of the hierarchy. As José Comblin observes:

Having decided on and carried out a course of action, [the hierarchy] then attributed what they have decided and done to the Holy Spirit, thereby conferring an authorization that sanctifies and sacrileges their basically human actions. In this way, the Holy Spirit is not really in the church; it is above it as a sort of seal of approval, not the author from whom the church and its entire works proceed.<sup>10</sup>

What is notable absent from this picture is any consideration of the Spirit in the genesis, development, and praxis of the church.<sup>11</sup>

In considering this 'classical' face of the church, Schillebeeckx argued that it rested on two flawed foundations: the focus on Christology as the sole paradigm for ministry and the emerging cult of the papacy. Schillebeeckx maintained that together these foundations supported an image of the Catholic

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9 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 200.

10 Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, 78.

11 The encyclical *Divinum illud munus* is arguably emblematic of this paradigm with its emphasis on the hierarchical nature of the church and dualistic conception of the Spirit as the soul of the church. See Bradford E. Hinze, "Releasing the Power of the Spirit in a Trinitarian Ecclesiology" in *Advents of the Spirit*, ed. Bradford E. Hinze & D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 347-381.

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Church that was oppositional in its stance, hierarchical in nature, and which recued the work of the laity to the act of obedience.<sup>12</sup>

### *Schillebeeckx's Early Ecclesiology*

While Schillebeeckx became one of the leading vocal critics of a hierarchical church after Vatican II, his critical stance is already present in his earlier theology.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Schillebeeckx identifies the ecclesial activity of the Church as the living link with the risen Christ both horizontally through its apostolic ministry, based on the eyewitness testimony of the earliest churches, and vertically because Christ remains a personal and present reality in the Church by his Spirit. Hence, the ministry of the Church is a fully human activity in which Christ is sacramentally present.<sup>14</sup> In light of this observation, the norm of the Church's ministry is both the *ephapax* of the historical Christ and the earthly form of the saving action of the glorified Christ through his Spirit. This means that the whole Church is ruled by the glorified Christ who through the witness of the Church and by the prompting of the Holy Spirit brings the gathering of the People of God to completion.

Schillebeeckx notes that the heavenly Christ sends both the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26) and his apostles (Jn 13:16; 17:18) into the world. As a

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12 See Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 198-199 and 'You and I have the right to be there' in *FSG* 154-155.

13 The most comprehensive survey of Schillebeeckx's ecclesiology and his developing understanding of apostolicity is Daniel Speed Thompson's *The Language of Dissent*. Through his survey of Schillebeeckx's writings on the church, Thomson draws out ways in which he develops a theology of dissent to support critical communities within the Catholic Church. While Thompson touches on the place of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's ecclesiology, he does not discuss the relation between the Spirit and the church in detail. A discussion about the emerging shape of Schillebeeckx's ecclesiology can also be found in Susan A. Ross, 'Church and Sacraments' in *The Praxis of the Reign of God*, 133-148; and Neil Darragh, 'The Church and its Ministries' in *From North to South*, 33-48.

14 Schillebeeckx, "The Lord and the Preaching of the Apostles," in *RT I*, 33..



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result, these two missions are organically connected with each other. For this reason, Schillebeeckx says that through its ecclesial activity the Church makes known what Christ is also doing through his Spirit:<sup>15</sup>

What the hierarchy does in virtue of its apostolic office, and the faithful do in virtue of their baptismal and conformational mission, each in the objective visible life of the Church, the Spirit of Christ does inwardly in this visible activity and in the hearts of men.<sup>16</sup>

The recognition of this double movement allows Schillebeeckx to state that the witness of the Church is accompanied by the 'co-testimony' of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the visible and sacramental activity of the Church is mirrored in the invisible and inward movement of the Holy Spirit that stirs us to belief.<sup>18</sup>

In Schillebeeckx's view the visible Church is the external sign and prolongation on earth of the body of Christ in heaven and his work of messianic redemption. As the earthly representative of Christ, the Church is being both the supreme worshipper of the Father and, having been established in power at Pentecost, the one who bestows the same Spirit whom it has received. For this reason, the Church in its proper ecclesial activity is the historical manifestation of God's love for humanity in Christ and humanity's love for God through Christ.

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15 'Pentecost, the day on which the Church with her sacramental and kerygmatic activity stepped forth into the full light of day, is the mystery event of all the manifestation of both these missions precisely in their conjointly acting unity, a unity which is vitalized from a single life source, the Kyrios himself.' Schillebeeckx, "The Sacraments" in *Christianity Divided*, 256.

16 Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 50.

17 Schillebeeckx, 'The Lord and the Preaching of the Apostles' in *RTI*, 33.

18 By connecting the work of the Church and the Spirit, Schillebeeckx says that he has reached a similar conclusion to that of Heinrich Schlier: the glorified body of Christ is the Church of heaven, which comes on earth through the Spirit and becomes the earthly Church.

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So, in contrast to the juridical ecclesiology that was common before Vatican II, Schillebeeckx maintained that saving grace defines the entire Church: both its Head (clerical hierarchy) and members (religious and laity). On this basis, he maintained that both the ministry of the faithful and the hierarchy is truly ecclesial. As a result, the risen Christ is made known in and through the Church in a twofold manner: in the apostolic office by virtue of the character of the priesthood, and the faithful by virtue of the character of baptism and confirmation. In line with this observation, Schillebeeckx stresses that the Spirit of Christ is the active principle in the entire Church. That is to say that the Spirit not only guides the hierarchy but the whole Church:

The Spirit of Christ breathes where he will, not only on the Pope and among the rank of the bishops, but also among the people and their priests. The assistance of the Spirit which Christ has granted to his Church is not only for the exercise of the hierarchical office in the Church, but for the life of the Church in every other aspect too. It is granted to the whole community of believers.<sup>19</sup>

It is evident then that Schillebeeckx distanced himself from exclusively hierarchical conceptions of the institutional Church. Instead, he maintained that as the visible presence of Christ's body in the world, the Church can never be an abstract ideal but only the living and concrete community of believers.<sup>20</sup>

### *Schillebeeckx's post-Conciliar Ecclesiology*

By placing its treatment of the people of God before its discussion of the hierarchy, *Lumen Gentium* (1964) broke with the earlier division between the hierarchy and the laity. Instead of treating the church as synonymous with the

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<sup>19</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 203.

<sup>20</sup> 'Our stand as Christians in the world, our encounter with living Christianity through our contact with our fellow men, in other words our way of life as practicing Catholics in the wider (but no less essential) sense of the word—all this has the effect of increasing our desire for the fullness and perfection of sacramental contact with the Church.' *Ibid.*, 212.

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hierarchy, the Council defined the whole church as the people called by God and orientated towards the kingdom. From out of this conviction arose the understanding that in contrast to its former position, the Catholic Church formally acknowledged that salvation was not its exclusive preserve by recognizing the ecclesial character of other Christian communities and the authentic religiosity of non-Christian religions. In turn the Council affirmed the saving presence of God in the political, social, and economic struggles of humankind.<sup>21</sup> For Schillebeeckx, the Council's affirmation that the church is a sacrament of salvation was to have a lasting impact on his thinking.<sup>22</sup>

Schillebeeckx outlines what he sees as the pastoral consequences of the Council's affirmation that the church is the universal sacrament of salvation in a *communicatio* given at the International Congress of Theologians in Rome (1966).<sup>23</sup> In terms of the sacramental nature of the church, he read the Council's documents as affirming the view that the church is the revelation and historical completion of God's plan of salvation. The empirical Church is the historically visible form of salvation in human history and, as such, the way of salvation for all people. In this capacity the Catholic Church is the sacrament of salvation for the whole world. Although he concedes that the Council did not state explicitly that the church is the visible sacrament of the salvation that is already active wherever people are to be found, he argues that the documents of the Council gestured in that direction. Through this interpretive lens,

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<sup>21</sup> If the Catholic Church was to be faithful to its vocation Schillebeeckx argued that it had to break out of its former 'ghetto' mindset. 'Since the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all [people] – she here purposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the whole world, to set forth, as clearly as possible, and in the tradition laid down by earlier Councils, her own nature and universal mission.'

<sup>22</sup> For more on the impact of Vatican II on Schillebeeckx's ecclesiology, see: Stephan van Erp, "'signs and Precursor of God's Grace for all": Schillebeeckx's Ecclesiology During the Second Vatican Council', in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 122-134.

<sup>23</sup> See Schillebeeckx, "The Church, the 'Sacrament of the World,'" in *The Mission of the Church*, trans. N. D. Smith (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973), pp.43-50.

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Schillebeeckx was able to make sense of the Council's seemingly contradictory statements: on the one hand, that the church is necessary for salvation and, on the other hand, that those who are 'outside the Church' are still able to achieve salvation. Drawing these statements together, Schillebeeckx advanced his definition of the church as the 'primordial sacrament' of the salvation that is prepared by God for all people. In light of this claim, Schillebeeckx concludes that salvation is not the monopoly of the Church but rather the church reveals that which is already present outside the church, whenever people of good will give their consent to God's offer of grace. The church is the 'sacrament of the world'—the *sacramentum mundi*—precisely as the sacrament of salvation that is offered to all people.<sup>24</sup> In other words, in its role as the sacrament of the world the church shows the world what it is and is able to become by virtue of God's grace. For Schillebeeckx, this claim laid the foundations for a new practical synthesis between the church and the world in which the world discovers its meaning through the church. Yet, Schillebeeckx cautioned, the success or failure of this vocation was dependent on the renewal and purification of the church. As Schillebeeckx notes, the majority of people are not brought into contact with God through the church but the grace of God that is concealed but active in the whole of human life. In Schillebeeckx's words: 'The mystery of salvation is concretely and actively present wherever man experiences his own existence, even before there is any question of his coming into contact with or becoming a member of the church.'<sup>25</sup> On the basis of the

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24 Henri de Lubac criticized Schillebeeckx for promoting the theory that he hoped the Council would canonize, when in actuality the term 'sacrament of the world' does not feature in any of the Council's documents. While de Lubac was willing to concede that his disagreement with Schillebeeckx was possibly a question of semantics, he cautioned against what he saw as Schillebeeckx's reductionist concern for temporal reality. 'In short, if tomorrow as today "the glory of God" must be "man who lives", must this life be envisaged first of all after the fashion of some ideal terrestrial city, or should we not rather say, with St. Irenaeus, that "man's life is the vision of God?"' See "The 'Sacrament of the World'" in *A Brief Catechesis of Nature & Grace*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 191-234.

25 Schillebeeckx, "Man's Expectation for the Future on Earth" in *TMC*, 75.

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gift of grace that is available to each person, Schillebeeckx rejects the idea of there being a sharp distinction between the church and the world: 'There are true Christians who do not belong to the Christian churches and there are purely nominal Christians who do not belong to Christ.' From this perspective, Schillebeeckx concludes that what the mystery of salvation which the church makes explicit is already implicitly present in human life as a whole. That is to say that the church is a sign in which the mystery of salvation is made visible: 'She is a visible sign to the whole world, the sign in which the mystery of life in this world visible.'

In an essay written in 1969, Schillebeeckx frames the relationship between the church and the world in terms of the church being 'a sacrament of dialogue.'<sup>26</sup> Whereas the pre-conciliar church had maintained the basic attitude of monologue, on account of seeing itself as the sole custodian of truth, Vatican II promoted a dialogic church.<sup>27</sup> This shift in attitudes became evident through encyclicals like *Pacem in terris* (1963), *Ecclesiam suam* (1964) and *Populorum progressio* (1967).<sup>28</sup> For Schillebeeckx, the Council's renewed understanding of the church and the world facilitated the inner demand for a dialogic church. Worked out in practice this understanding led to the claim that the church must be a model of open dialogue and in this 'ministry of communication' work to overcome all impediments between people. In other words, the religious mission of the church in the world is also a humanizing task. This means that the church is unable to fulfill its role and present its message to the world except in dialogue with the world and human society:

Real dialogue—sincere and unfeigned—is necessary for the church's unique witness, and this is not only because the Spirit is active outside the frontiers of the empirical church and not only because the whole

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26 Edward Schillebeeckx, 'The Church as the Sacrament of Dialogue' in *GFM*, 119-140.

27 Schillebeeckx acknowledges that the Church's attitude of monologue was repeatedly disrupted by evangelical movements who listen to the voice of the Spirit.

28 A more recent example are the encyclicals *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti*.

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history of the world must be seen in the light of the ubiquitous, active presence of the living God, but in addition because it belongs to the inner essence of revelation to be the word of God *in* the word of [humanity].<sup>29</sup>

As a result, the relationship between the church and the world can no longer be one of 'teaching church' and 'listening world' but of a relational dialogue in which both are able to contribute. In making this claim, Schillebeeckx repeats his assertion that the church and the world cannot be treated as two separate realities but as aspects of the one human history in which the saving presence of God is at work. It was on the basis of this conviction that Schillebeeckx sought to engage more directly with the main intellectual currents of his time, which in turn led to his break with transcendental Thomism in favour of hermeneutics, linguistic analysis and critical theory.

With its affirmation of dialogue and emphasis on the 'people of God', Vatican II saw the recovery of collegiality in the Catholic Church. *Lumen Gentium* (3.23) describes each bishop embodying the mutual relationships between their individual dioceses and the universal church:

The individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal church; it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists.

As a result, the post-conciliar church saw the rapid development of local church structures and the introduction of Synod of Bishops. Few countries experienced the effects of this transition more fully than the Netherlands, who held the first National Pastoral Council in 1968. However, by the mid-1970s the Catholic Church became increasingly polarized over the issue of the correct relationship between the particular and universal church. While some feared the over democratization of the church's structures under the rubric of the People of God, others resisted what they saw as an overreaching papacy.

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<sup>29</sup> Schillebeeckx, "The Church as the Sacrament of Dialogue" in GFM, 126.

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*From the Margins*

Schillebeeckx voiced his concerns about what he saw as the reactionary turn in the Catholic Church in a reflection written before the arrival of John Paul II in the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> He identified the assumption that unity means uniformity as the root of his concerns. This misidentification, he argued, had led to an undervaluation of local bishops and the loss of collegiality. Schillebeeckx accused the Pope of failing to recognise the specific pastoral challenges faced by local churches, in his apparent attempt to restore a monolithic church. Instead newly elected bishops were encouraged to adopt the voice of the Pope, without taking into account the situation of their diocese. Although this process of re-centralization was presented as coming from a desire to restore unity to the church, Schillebeeckx saw it as a return to a top-heavy church:

The Pope is *pope*, exercising the function of Peter, also for and in the Catholic Netherlands, but he is not a local bishop here. He is the last resort, the arbiter standing above the parties, in communion 'with the eleven.'<sup>31</sup>

In opposition to this trajectory, Schillebeeckx argued that just as a province must listen to the Pope—especially when he addresses that province directly qua Pope—the Pope must also listen to each church province: 'to the Spirit which also blows there, in accordance with its own spiritual condition and not with authoritarian hierarchical approval.'<sup>32</sup> Only by maintaining the balance between the universal and particular church would the faithful be able to have confidence in their voice and able to respond to the specific challenges of their province.

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<sup>30</sup> Schillebeeckx, "Not That We Lord it Over Your Faith," in *FSG*, 141-144.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

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The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops was a significant moment in the reception of Vatican II. John Paul II convoked the Synod with the stated aim of celebrating, verifying and promoting the Council. However, Joseph Komonchak expressed the popular opinion that 'the Synod's primary interest was not in a summary of Vatican II's ecclesiology, but in an interpretation of and a response to the developments in both ecclesiology and in church life which have taken place since the Council.'<sup>33</sup> To those who welcomed the ecclesial reforms of Vatican II the Synod's Final Report signaled the walk-back of certain defining features of the Council, with its lack of reference to the 'people of God', appeal to the 'church as mystery' and claim that '[t]he ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents.' From Schillebeeckx's perspective the 1985 Synod was part of a concerted effort to stem the tide of the breakthrough of Vatican II by an ideological appeal to the 'church as mystery'.<sup>34</sup> The purpose of which was to identify the church with its hierarchical authorities and elevate the nature church above scientific analysis and criticisms of its present structures.

Reacting against this ecclesiological instinct, Schillebeeckx contended that this appeal to the 'church as mystery' rested on a tenacious dualism that had previously only been the erroneous characteristic of certain fundamentalist stands of Protestantism: the ability to talk about the church in abstract from its concrete forms.<sup>35</sup> In response to what he saw as a creeping 'supernaturalism', Schillebeeckx asserted that the 'mystery of the church' can only be found in the reality that can be demonstrated in the here and now: 'The church community as mystery cannot be found behind or above concrete, visible reality.'<sup>36</sup> The mystery of the church then is not found in some idealized form but to greater and lesser degrees in the experiments, explorations, mistakes and follies of the

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33 Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Synod of 1985 and the Notion of the Church" in *Chicago Studies* (1987), 333.

34 See Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 210-213.

35 *Ibid.*, 213.

36 *Ibid.*



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Christian communities of faith. To acknowledge this is to accept that the church, as the people of God in its various empirical manifestations is an ambiguous historical phenomenon. As a result of his emphasis on the historical and empirical nature of the church, Schillebeeckx rejected the notion of a 'normative' church form and instead stresses that the Christian community is in constant need of reform. 'Without this renewal of life which has constantly to be embarked on anew, the church, instead of being the liberation movement that it was in its origin, becomes a power structure that oppresses men and women, diminishes them and makes them suffer.'<sup>37</sup>

In Schillebeeckx's understanding the church has never existed in a socio-historical or political-cultural vacuum. Consequently, the church has taken on many faces throughout its history, with varying degrees of fidelity to the message and praxis of Jesus. Precisely because the church exists as a historical reality it can be discussed and described from multiple and sometimes competing perspectives. Although the appeal to the 'church as mystery' rightly sought to preserve the church from forms of sociological or ideological reductionism, some of its proponents were under the illusion that what can be clarified through historical and sociological analysis can be put into a 'theological storm-free zone'. The fault of this approach was that it mirrored that which it criticized: abstracting the church 'from above' from treatments of the church 'from below'. For Schillebeeckx, what this approach failed to recognise is that the grace of God is always mediated in and through historical realities.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, just as the church cannot be reduced to a sociological reality neither can it be treated in abstraction from its various historical forms.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>38</sup> See Paul D. Murray "The Ups and Downs, Highs and Lows, and Practicalities of Ecclesiological Analysis with Edward Schillebeeckx" in *Concillium*, 78-85.

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Although sociological and theological analyses of the church focus on different dimensions of the church's identity, Schillebeeckx contends that they are ultimately concerned with one and the same reality:

We are always concerned with one and the same reality: the form which has grown up through history and which can be explained sociologically (...) is precisely what the believer experiences and expresses in the language of faith as a specific manifestation of grace: a successful, less successful or improper response of the believing community to God's grace.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, although the church is not reducible to its socio-historical forms, there is no 'surplus of revelation' behind or above its socio-historical forms. Rather the saving revelation of God is a grace that is mediated in and through the structures of historical experiences. To lose sight of this insight risks having grace working only where men and women cease to have responsibility, an area called 'mystery', or ignoring the fact that one can receive God's grace in many different ways.<sup>40</sup> 'Instead of grace in the structure of historically mediating human experience and praxis, we then get a stereophony of laborious human activity on the one hand and blessings direct from heaven on the other.'<sup>41</sup> In Schillebeeckx's reading the mystery of the church is located in human reality itself, in the responses to the saving grace that is offered by God. As a result, the church is neither a purely 'sociological' reality nor a 'supernatural' entity but the concrete communities of men and women who seek to follow Jesus in the here and now. The primary question then is what

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39 Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face* trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1985), 5.

40 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 212. This was not to suggest that the language of faith, as a 'secondary discourse', was merely ideological or superficial but rather to acknowledge that the saving revelation of God is mediated in and through the historical structures of the church. To fail to make reference to the church of real human experience was to render the language of faith meaningless

41 *Ibid.*, 212.

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forms the structures of the church might take in order to be faithful to the gospel but attentive to its historical context.

### *Summary*

In this section I have shown that while Vatican II opened up new directions in Catholic ecclesiology, Schillebeeckx felt that their full implications were not being realized because of Rome's hierarchical instinct. It was in opposition to subsequent attempts to refocus authority on Rome that Schillebeeckx championed the local church. For this reason, Schillebeeckx provides the foundations for thinking about the Spirit in the concrete actions of the historical church. In the following section, I move to consider Schillebeeckx's historical analysis of the formation of church structures and ministries.

## **5.2 The Spirit and the Ministry of the Church**

Addressing the first gathering of the Eighth of May movement, Schillebeeckx assured the ten thousand Catholics who had gathered in The Hague that they had the right to be there.<sup>42</sup> Speaking in opposition to the conservative instinct within the Catholic hierarchy, which sought to suppress the critical communities that had emerged following Vatican II, Schillebeeckx asserted that the gathering not only showed the other face of the church but celebrated it. The gathering was a visible rejection of the presumption that the church must be defined in reference to its central authorities: 'Do more than 100 Catholic

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42 The Eighth of May movement (*Acht Mei Beweging*) was an umbrella organization that formed in 1985 on the occasion of the papal visit to the Netherlands. The organization emerged out of the critical communities in the Dutch church who emphasized the place of the laity and the primacy of local churches. The movement met annually until 2003 when it disbanded due to an ageing membership. John A. Coleman provides an account of the rapid changes that occurred in the Dutch Catholic Church following Vatican II in his book, *The Evolution of Dutch Catholicism, 1958-1974* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978); see also Walter Goddijn, *The Deferred Revolution: A Social Experiment in Church Innovation in Holland, 1960-1970* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1975).

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organizations and many committed believers stand outside the breathing and sighing of the Spirit?<sup>43</sup> In contrast to the hierarchical church, the Eighth of May movement embodied what Schillebeeckx saw as the necessary shift towards a more democratic rule: the recovery of the church as the people of God following in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth. Taking his direction from the practices of the early church and the constitutions of Vatican II, Schillebeeckx challenged the legitimacy of attempts to centralise authority in Rome at the expense of local autonomy: 'The co-responsibility of all believers for the church on the basis of our baptism in the Spirit essentially includes the participation of all believers in decisions relating to church government.'<sup>44</sup> Schillebeeckx argued that the Catholic Church could not speak honestly about the equality of all its members if it did not specify or support the institutional forms that enabled this equality. By expressing the complaints of the laity, Schillebeeckx understood himself as giving voice to the promptings of the Holy Spirit moving the institutional church to adopt a more 'human face'.<sup>45</sup>

### *Ministry Reconsidered*

In contrast to certain ahistorical and excessively juridical readings of the church, Schillebeeckx controversially maintained that the present structures of the Catholic Church have no 'direct link' with Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, he maintains that they emerged from within the Christian community according to sociological laws and under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> For this reason, he

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43 Edward Schillebeeckx, "You and I have the right to be there," in *FSG*, 151.

44 *Ibid.*, 157.

45 The term "human face" is taken from the title of Schillebeeckx's second book on ministry: *The Church with a Human Face*. In the book's final chapter Schillebeeckx expresses his desire that church's hierarchy would allow greater flexibility in the forms of ministry in the church and have greater confidence in the Spirit of God who is at work in the whole Christian community. *CHF*, 259-267.

46 See Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Catholic Understanding of Office," in *Theological Studies* (30/4), 567-587.

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cautions against appealing too readily to particular ordinances or historical forms as if they were instituted by Christ himself. In a series of books and articles written during the 1980s, Schillebeeckx advanced the thesis that the way in which offices and structures of the church have developed is the result of various cultural and historical pressures. On the basis of his historical survey of ministry in the church, Schillebeeckx asserts that there was a shift between the first and second millennia in how ministry was understood: from a pneuma-christological basis to a direct christological basis. Notably, he concludes that some of the present pastoral crises in the Catholic Church—the shortage of priests, disenfranchisement of the laity, and emergence of irregular practices—have their basis in this transition. So, by drawing attention to this historical shift, Schillebeeckx sought to recover alternative expressions of ministry that are apostolically faithful but attentive to the present needs of the Christian community.<sup>47</sup> Through this recovery, Schillebeeckx promotes an understanding of the Spirit as moving within the whole people of God. It is this movement that I draw out in this section.

### *The Historical Jesus and the Church*

Whereas in his earlier theology, Schillebeeckx stressed the sacramental continuity between Christ and the visible structures of the church, by the late 1960s he began to concede that the three-tiered structure of the church had not been directly instituted by Jesus himself. On account of his studies into the historical Jesus and the origins of the Christian community, he ultimately concluded that Jesus of Nazareth had no intention of founding a new religious community or sect. Instead, the Christian community that became the church emerged out of the Easter experience with its desire to follow in the way of

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<sup>47</sup> For further discussion on Schillebeeckx's understanding of ministry within the church see, Mary E. Hines, "Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ", in *The Praxis of the Reign of God*, 149-166; Marc Dumas, 'The Church with a Human Face', in *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, 194-206.

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Jesus. For this reason, Schillebeeckx notes the importance of discipleship in the formation of the church. This is following in the footsteps of Jesus and sharing the promise of the kingdom. Given that Jesus himself saw an essential link between the kingdom of God and his praxis, the disciple's decision to continue his ministry should be understood as being under the impulse of his authority. So, when interpreted theologically, the sociological and historical process by which the church came into being is rightly seen as being the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the exalted Christ:

Thus the historical Jesus stands at the origin of the historical church – that does not mean to say that the forms of the church, as they have become structured and have developed historically, go back to Jesus, nor that in its actual historical and contingent growth the church underwent a necessary development willed by God, nor that as church it must inevitably come to stand alongside Israel or the synagogue.<sup>48</sup>

If Jesus' liberating praxis and his message were to continue—the nucleus of this whole ministry being God's concern for humanity—then, Schillebeeckx contends, the Christian community needed to adopt institutional forms in order to preserve its apostolic identity.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Schillebeeckx asserts that the question of whether Jesus intended to found a church is less important than the fact that on the basis of whom Jesus of Nazareth was the historical phenomenon of the church came into being.

### *The Community of the Spirit*

On account of their experience of the Risen Christ the earliest Christian communities saw themselves as the eschatological people of God, who having been brought together by Jesus they were now transformed by his Spirit. The knowledge of God's concern for humanity that was revealed through Jesus' preaching and praxis informed the Christian community's experience of the

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<sup>48</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 156.

<sup>49</sup> Schillebeeckx, *CHF*, 24.

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resurrection. 'The God of these Christians was and is above all the God who did not leave Jesus in the lurch at his death, but made him 'life-giving Spirit' (1 Cor 15.45).<sup>50</sup> According to Schillebeeckx it was not an experience of the historical Jesus that was the foundation of faith for the second and third generations of Christians but their baptism in the Spirit: 'their baptism in the name of Jesus, after hearing and accepting the message of Jesus proclaimed to them by the church.' So, to be baptized into the Spirit of Jesus was to become a *pneumatikos*.<sup>51</sup> To have faith in the risen Jesus was synonymous with receiving his Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).<sup>52</sup> The baptism in the Spirit gave Jesus' followers the sense that they were already living in the new creation and in the fullness of time.

Schillebeeckx describes the earliest Christian communities as pneumatic in nature and egalitarian in structure. Every member of the community was seen to have authority on account of having received the Spirit. From this came the sense that all historical and social distinctions had been removed (Gal 3: 26-28). To follow Jesus and be 'in the power of the Spirit' was to be a partaker in the 'new creation'. Schillebeeckx makes the case that there was a clear sense of the liberating power of the Spirit in the earliest Christian communities (2 Cor 3:17; Gal. 5:13) because former divisions and subjugation were seen to have no place in the community. Although Schillebeeckx concedes that these passages may have been more performative than descriptive, the challenge that their vision of equality levels against the church remains pertinent today.

Through the power of the Spirit the Christian community saw themselves as living in communion with the life and death of Jesus. Therefore, *pneuma* and *anamnesis*, the living recollection of Jesus' ministry and the active presence of his Spirit, were experienced as a single reality. The concrete experience of

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50 Ibid., 34.

51 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 158.

52 Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 46.

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new life present in the first local communities of Christians was regarded as a gift of the Spirit sent by Jesus. For this reason, the pneumatic experiences of the community of faith were intrinsically bound up with their memories of Jesus. What Jesus left then was not simply a message about God's approaching dominion but a movement of people who were conscious of being the first fruits of the eschatological 'gathering' of God: an eschatological liberation movement for bringing together all people, bringing them together in unity.<sup>53</sup>

### The Emergence of Church Structures

Apart from the 'apostolate', which Schillebeeckx argues that Jesus instituted as a symbol of the eschatological community, the earliest Christian communities had no formal order.<sup>54</sup> Instead existing models of leadership in the Jewish world and the concrete demands made upon the Christian community by its historical situation in the Roman Empire informed the earliest forms of leadership in the church. However, since the Christian community saw themselves as a 'community of God', a 'community of Christ', and a 'temple of the Holy Spirit', what developed spontaneously within this community was received as a 'gift of the Lord' (Eph 4:8-11; 1 Tim 4:24; 2 Tim 1:6). From this observation, Schillebeeckx contends that the New Testament shows no knowledge of the later division between what comes 'from below' and what comes 'from above'. That which came into being was simply experienced as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

While the egalitarianism of the earliest pneumatic Christian communities prohibited any hierarchy, this was not to the exclusion of leadership and authority.<sup>55</sup> Forms of leadership gradually emerged in the community as a result of what Schillebeeckx describes as a 'pastoral strategy' to ensure institutional stability. Paul chose to exercise authority over the communities that he helped

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>54</sup> See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: A Case for Change*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1981), 5-11; *CHF*, 74-80; *Church*, 154-159.

<sup>55</sup> Schillebeeckx, *CHF*, 39.



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found and was supported in this ministry by a network of local leaders. So, what was initially a pragmatic decision, which was intended to preserve the integrity of local Christian communities, in turn resulted in the gradual development of more uniform ministries within the church. However, Schillebeeckx notes that these 'offices' did not denote a person's status within the community or have any substantive connection with presiding at the Eucharist.<sup>56</sup> In Schillebeeckx's interpretation authority structures developed in the church for the purpose of building up the community and maintaining its apostolic identity.

Although the need for a regulating authority was generally accepted in its various forms, some communities saw the emergence of 'leaders' as standing in tension with the earlier sense of pneumatic equality. Schillebeeckx cites Paul's difficulties with Apollos as an example, with both men claiming authority on account of the Spirit. As a result, Paul chose to stress the need for discipline and rational comprehension of the gospel (1 Cor 14:40). The Johannine community was also hesitant about formal structures of authority on account of its distinctive view of the Paraclete as the only authoritative teacher.<sup>57</sup> Despite these reservations, the idea of 'presbyters' as found in the Pastoral Epistles was generally accepted. However, Schillebeeckx asserts that it was not the form of ministry that was important but the apostolic tradition which it sought to preserve. Uniform ministries developed in the Christian community as a means of ensuring its continuity with the story and praxis of Jesus. This sense of the passing on of tradition was denoted by the laying of hands from one generation of leaders to the next. In this way the formal foundation of both the authoritative life of the community of faith and the specific ministerial authority within the community remained the Lordship of Christ through his Spirit. This means that all 'authority' in the church went back

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 97. 'As canonical writing, the Johannine corpus (even before the Gospel of Mark) is a biblical admonition against any legalistic grab for church authority.'

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to the effectiveness of the Spirit of Jesus. Consequently all authority had to be exercised in such a way that the liberating authority of Jesus, that is abidingly present in the community of faith, could come into effect time and time again.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Schillebeeckx notes that in the Pastoral Epistles it is not the ministry that is the norm but the *paratheke*, the pledge entrusted to the community (1 Tim 6:20). This deposit of faith was interpreted by the apostles as that which was entrusted to the community and passed on by its members: 'Essentially it is a matter of the unbroken succession of the apostolic tradition of the gospel content of faith.'<sup>59</sup>

In Schillebeeckx's interpretation, the structure and ministries of the early church developed as the specialization of what belonged communally to everyone in the community. Non-hierarchical structures of authority developed as a means of preserving that which was important to everyone within the community and without which the community risked ceasing to exist. However, the danger of this development, as testified to in the later development of the church, is that the charisma of the Spirit that belongs to the entire community of faith is swallowed up and ultimately quenched (1 Thess 5:19). For Schillebeeckx, the earliest forms of ministry in the Christian community developed out of a common experience of baptism in the Spirit. This shift from the charisma of the many to the specialized charisma of a few did not signal the end of the Spirit's gifts but their crystallization into particular forms:

What is also involved here is the expansion of the church and therefore also some fading of the first enthusiastic pneuma christology and of the general experience in the church of the power of baptism in the Spirit, the foundation of prophetic, pneumatic and even ecstatic phenomena. However, it emerges from the whole of this development that what is later rightly called the *sacramentum ordinis* is a specific, viz. diaconal or

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58 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 216.

59 Ibid.

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ministerial heightening or crystallization of the baptismal gift of the Spirit.<sup>60</sup>

To overlook this process is to detach the 'presbyteral' ministry of the early church from its pneuma-christological foundation.<sup>61</sup>

### *The Development of Ministry in the History of the Church*

In Schillebeeckx's account the emergence of ministry in the first three centuries of the church was a process of narrowing, in which the pneumatological authority that was shared by all was gradually focused through the presbyterate onto the figure of the bishops and ultimately, in the Catholic Church, the Roman pontiff. For the duration of the first Christian millennium ministry was understood within a pneumatological ecclesial matrix in which the emphasis remained on local communities in communion with each other and Rome. Even after the emergence of a formal priesthood, with its more formal ties to the Eucharist, it was the normative practice that a community partook in the process of choosing its leader. The prohibition of absolute ordinations meant that priests could not simply be moved without the consent of the faithful. However, following the 'Constantinian shift' the church began to adopt the status and forms of state power: 'Christianity became one with the interests of the empire, and as ministers of the Christian cult, the clergy then became of central importance for the empire.'<sup>62</sup> As a result of this shift the church and its understanding of ministry became increasingly hierarchical in nature and sacerdotal in character.

As the leaders of the Christian communities began to take on the insignia of political status, the majority of believers were designated as the laity and increasingly viewed as the objects of priestly care. In turn, as a result of a

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<sup>60</sup> Schillebeeckx, *CHF*, 122.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

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complex network of sociological and theological factors, the pneuma-christological basis of ministry was replaced with the understanding that the priest was ontologically set apart from other Christians. In this light, priests were no longer first and foremost leaders of communities but sacred performers of the Eucharist. This process reached its tipping point with the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils, during which the celebration of private mass was permitted and the ban on absolute ordination was overturned. Therefore, the earlier notions of *ecclesia* and *ministerium* were replaced with the relationship between *potestas* and *eucharista*, the power of consecration and the Eucharist.<sup>63</sup> Whereas ministry in the early church was viewed as a work of love and service it was now expressed in terms of juridical power. In Schillebeeckx's reading the mystification of the priesthood was accompanied from the sixth century onwards by a neoplatonic interpretation of the church and the world. 'This pseudo-Dionysian principle of substitution devalued the pluriform specialized ministries in the church which came into being historically as a result of church needs, being thought pastorally necessary.'<sup>64</sup>

In the seventeenth century, following the Council of Trent, Schillebeeckx observes that theologians moved from identifying the priesthood with Jesus' humanity in favour of connecting the priestly office with his divinity. As a result the priesthood of the church was seen as participating in a sacral mystery that was above the new creation that is shared by all by virtue of their baptism. This development in particular obscured the fact that baptism in the Spirit lies at root of the sacrament of ordination and is what gives this ministry its substance. In light of this developed the tendency to understand everything in the church in relation to the hierarchy, who were understood to have been instituted directly by Christ. 'The conceptions which developed in this way express a view of the church which looks at everything in the church in terms of 'from above

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63 Ibid., 193.

64 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 217.

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to below', and in practice identifies the church with the church's hierarchy.<sup>65</sup> The ultramontane image of the church developed out of this exclusively christological foundation.

Although Vatican II saw an attempt to address this clericalism by dropping the term *potestas* and speaking of *ministeria* in the church the council still located the 'representation of Christ' by the priest in the minister as a person and not formally in the act of exercising their office. This reveals a confusion between the ontological level of baptism in the Spirit and the functional level that presupposes the former. 'At all events, the representation of Christ comes about not purely on the basis of ministry, which is simply a typological ministerial focusing of the universal charisma of the Spirit at the level of ministerial service as mandated by the church.'<sup>66</sup> The diaconal service is coupled with Christian ethic and spirituality, this is all that can be really taken from the New Testament. This spirituality must be sought in the mystical depths of the baptismal anointing and therefore in consequence of belief in the gospel and the *sequela Jesu*:

The continuity between Jesus Christ and the church is fundamentally based on the Spirit. The ministry is a specific sign of this, and not the substance itself. Whereas in the early church ministry was seen rather in the sign of the Spirit which fills the church, later, people began to see the ministry in terms of the ecclesiology which regards the church as the extension of the incarnation. People moved from a pneuma-christological view of ministry to a theology of ministry based directly on Christology. In fact the two need not to be in contradiction and can be supplementary. However, the danger of taking the Spirit into one's own hands becomes great in a direct christological view.<sup>67</sup>

Both views share the realisation that no Christian community can say that it is autonomously the ultimate source of its ministers. However, the view of a direct

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65 Schillebeeckx, *CFM*, 205.

66 *Ibid.*, 206.

67 *Ibid.*

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christological foundation of ministry is a theology of ministry with a suppressed and even concealed ecclesiology, with no foundation in the living reality of the community of believers who live by the Spirit.

*From Pneuma-Christological to Christological Foundations*

Schillebeeckx wrote *Ministry and The Church with a Human Face* with the intention of showing that changes in the practice of ministry could be legitimate and pastorally necessary for the vitality of the gospel in Christian communities. In this way he challenged the assumption that the process of trial and error in the development of offices in the church had come to an end with the modern image of the priest. Although Schillebeeckx conceded that he had initially drawn too sharp a distinction between the conceptions of ministry in the first and second century, he maintained that there had been a fundamental shift in the way in which ministry was understood. Whereas ministry in the early years of the church was treated as the crystallization of the pneumatic authority that was common to all, the church came to treat itself as the extension of the incarnation. 'People moved from a pneuma-christological view of ministry to a theology of ministry based directly on Christology.'<sup>68</sup> While both understandings retained the understanding that no Christian community could be the source of its own ministers, Schillebeeckx noted that a direct christological foundation of ministry risked overlooking the pneumatological ecclesial matrix, the community of believers who live by the Spirit, from out of which the practice of ministry developed. Despite this reservation, Schillebeeckx rejects the idea that the two models are in opposition to each other:

A contrast between a pneuma-christological and a direct-christological basis of both community and ministry comes from the devil. These are complementary aspects of one and the same reality, as is already shown by the Johannine pneuma doctrine; the actual presence of the pneuma throughout the community of believers *recalls* (the anamnetic or

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68 Ibid.

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horizontal bond) Jesus of Nazareth, the Risen One, and thus points to the original apostolic church.<sup>69</sup>

Through his writings Schillebeeckx sought to recover the idea that the church itself is the 'womb of ministry'.<sup>70</sup> That is to say that ministry arises from within the community and as a result a 'shortage' of priests is an ecclesiological impossibility. For Schillebeeckx, it is the Spirit who is the source of all authority in the church and it is the Spirit who, by recalling the Christian community to Christ, assures its apostolicity. The church, then, is not defined by a normative form but by its ministry of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world.

### *Summary*

In this section I have shown how Schillebeeckx understands the development of ministerial structures in the history of the church. Crucially Schillebeeckx identifies the sense of new life in the Spirit as being the source of the Christian community's ability to continue the ministry of Jesus in the world. However, Schillebeeckx argues that the power and authority that once belonged to the whole Christian community was gradually overlaid by an increased emphasis on authority being connected to the celebration of the Eucharist.

### **5.3 The Teaching Authority of All**

According to Schillebeeckx the 'ecclesial impasse' in the Roman Catholic Church around questions of authority, collegiality and subsidiarity is symptomatic of the fact that the Catholic Church is caught between two ecclesiological paradigms: the triumphant clericalism of Vatican I and Vatican II's vision of the people of God journeying towards their final consummation.<sup>71</sup> In seeking to hold these two paradigms together the church had slipped into an

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69 Ibid., 264.

70 Ibid., 207.

71 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 207.

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ecclesiological malaise, being unable to recover its former identity but lacking the conviction to let it go.<sup>72</sup> In turn this has shaped the reception of Vatican II and the competing senses of which direction the Catholic Church must go.

### Infallibility and the *Sensus Fidelium*

John Henry Newman may have been clear that he could toast conscience before the Pope but for many Catholics *Pastor aeternus* (1870) was received as a directive to absolute obedience.<sup>73</sup> As the successor of Peter, with the pastoral duty of preserving the unity of the church, the 'First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ' decreed that the Pope has the ability to speak infallibly on matters of faith and morals. Despite the clarification that the Pope is only infallible when speaking *ex cathedra*, the popular perception developed that the Pope is personally infallible. As a result, the social significance of papal infallibility has extended beyond its formal doctrinal definition. This disconnect between perception and the actual dogmatic definition encouraged Catholics to adopt a passive disposition towards a supreme authority within the church. In turn this sense of absolute papal power, supported by a hierarchical understanding of authority in the church, has muted the voices of others by overlooking the fact that the Petrine office is one ministry among many within the church.

For Schillebeeckx, the ambiguity surrounding papal infallibility was the result of a last-minute decision to augment the approved definition with an

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<sup>72</sup> For more on the place of authority within the church, see: Thompson, *The Language of Dissent*, 111-146; and Thompson, "Magisterium and Authority" in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 354-374.

<sup>73</sup> See John Henry Newman, 'Letter to the Duke of Norfolk' (1900). Christopher Cimorelli brings Schillebeeckx into conversation with Newman in his essay, 'Development Amid Sin: Schillebeeckx and Newman for Today', in *Salvation and the World*, 180-196.



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additional clause: *'non autum ex consensus Ecclesiae'*.<sup>74</sup> This addition created the false impression that the pope could proclaim infallible dogma on his own without consulting the wider church.<sup>75</sup> This impression was supported by the counter-reformational idea that the lines of authority in the church run from the top to the bottom. A fact that led reception to be understood in terms of obedience: a subordinate submits themselves to the legitimate precepts of their superior out of respect for their authority.<sup>76</sup> However, with its emphasis on the church as the people of God, Vatican II enabled a recovery of what Yves Congar saw as the 'dangerous' practice of the early church: the reception and evaluation of church teachings by the local churches.<sup>77</sup> In this light, the exercising of ecclesial authority required space for consent and evaluation by local churches. In Schillebeeckx's reading, this enabled the church to move away from an exclusively christological foundation, which treated papal authority as a monarchical power, in favour of treating the infallible voice of the Pope as the articulation of the sense of the faithful.

The definition of papal infallibility in *Pastor aeternus* is repeated almost verbatim in *Lumen Gentium* (1964) but crucially, Schillebeeckx notes, it is placed within a broader context. First, the definition appears in chapter three, after reflections on the 'mystery of the church' and 'the people of God'. From the context of *Lumen Gentium* it is clearer that papal infallibility arises from out of the 'infallible faith' and vocation of the whole church. Second, a greater emphasis is placed on the place of episcopal collegiality. 'According to Vatican II the subject of infallibility is not the pope, but the college of bishops headed

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74 Edward Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests" in *Essays*, 116. See also Edward Schillebeeckx, 'The Problem of the Infallibility of the Church's Office' in LF, 55-69 and 'Discontinuities in Christian Dogmas,' in *Essays*, 85-109.

75 A conclusion that cut against the intended assertion of the constitution that there can be no papal infallibilitas separata.

76 Hermann Pottmeyer, 'Reception and Submission', *Jurist*, 51 (1991), pp.269-292.

77 Yves Congar, 'Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality,' in *Election and Consensus in the Church*, eds. G. Alberigo and A. Weiler, Concilium, 77 (1972), 45.

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by the pope.<sup>78</sup> This in turn makes it more apparent that an infallible papal statement is the expression of the 'universal consensus' of the entire people of God and a statement that requires the pope to listen and receive from the church that is dispersed around the world. For this reason, Schillebeeckx argues, 'it would be better not to speak of papal infallibility (the expression is elliptic and misleading) but rather of the infallibility of the world episcopate together with the pope as head of that college, and then only in regard to certain exceptional acts.'<sup>79</sup> Schillebeeckx supports his assertion by appealing to Ratzinger's claim that the pope and the world episcopate have a moral commitment to be the voice of God's people. To which Schillebeeckx adds that this commitment must be embodied concretely in special representative organs, in order that the Holy Spirit can be discerned by the whole church (Acts 15: 22-28).

Despite the attempt to clarify the nature and scope of papal infallibility, the final document of *Lumen Gentium* was muddled by the addition of an explanatory note that reemphasized the primacy of the pope. So, the official document reflects two competing sensibilities within the Catholic Church: the fear of undermining papal primacy and the suspicion of papal absolutism. In response to this division, Schillebeeckx stresses that papal infallibility can only be sensibly understood if read through the hermeneutic of the people of God.<sup>80</sup> In other words, papal infallibility must be understood as arising out of the *sensus fidelium* of the whole church which is under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

For Schillebeeckx, the infallibility of the church does not derive from the papal office but the promise of the risen Christ to his entire church that until

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78 Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quest" in *Essays*, 118.

79 *Ibid.*, 119.

80 See Thompson, *The Language of Dissent*, 111-145 and Martin G. Poulosom, 'Schillebeeckx and the Sensus Fidelium'.

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the end of time it will dwell in the truth and the truth will dwell in it. This is not to claim that all members of the church possess the 'charism of truth' in equal measure or that the church cannot err but that the charism of truth will always remain in the church. It is from out of this charism that certain papal acts in unity with the world episcopate are concretized. Consequently, mirroring God's covenant with Israel, the promise of Christ is not an automatic or juridical guarantee of success but the assurance that the faith and proclamation of the church will not cease until the end of time. Therefore, far from enabling the church to adopt a triumphant disposition the doctrine of infallibility is a reminder that the church is entirely dependent on the grace of God.

As the people of God in the world the church is comprised of fallible institutions and sinful people. Therefore, the indefectibility of the church cannot be treated as a static or an 'essential' characteristic but rather a dynamic and existential reality that is made interior in the church by the constant urge to *metanoia* and renewal. The church is '*sancta simul et purificanda*' – holy but always in need of purification. Schillebeeckx notes that in *Lumen Gentium* this dynamic indefectibility is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit:

Moving forward through trial and tribulation, the Church is strengthened by the power of God's grace, which was promised to her by the Lord, so that in the weakness of the flesh she may not waver from perfect fidelity, but remain a bride worthy of her Lord, *and moved by the Holy Spirit may never cease to renew herself*, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows no setting.<sup>81</sup>

Schillebeeckx describes this in terms of the Spirit being the *telos* or end of the Trinity, who, as the eschatological gift to the church, brings the church to its end. This is something that is true of the whole church before any distinction is made between the community and its office-bearers. The promise of Christ then applies to the whole people of God. The indefectibility of the church is

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81 *Lumen Gentium* 2:9. The italics are mine.

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faithfulness expressed in a history in which the church in its concrete historical forms is always limping behind the grace of God. 'The real history of the church, then, is a history of constant decline and renewal.'<sup>82</sup>

In 'Is the Church Adrift?', an essay published in 1966, Schillebeeckx illustrates this dynamic indefectibility by contrasting the image of the church as an island with that of a boat. Prior to Vatican II it was common to treat the church like a static island in the flow of history, unaffected by the changes around it. In actuality, Schillebeeckx argues, the church was affected by the changes of the world far more than it often cared to admit. In recognition of this fact and in light of the conciliar reforms, Schillebeeckx promoted an alternative image of the church taken from the writings of the Church Fathers: 'they saw the church herself as a boat at sea, tossed by the waves and often creaking in all its joints, but always with its helm pointing towards the one goal—the safe port.'<sup>83</sup> In this second image the security of the church is not found in its immutable nature but in the promise of Christ that despite the many storms it would face the church will not be overcome: the gospel will not cease to be heard because the Holy Spirit will guide it on its course.

Schillebeeckx saw a tension existing around the question of infallibility because of the competing sensibilities within the church. At the First Vatican Council infallibility was presented as a privilege of the papal office, which the community of faith possessed insofar as it remains obedient to the Pope: 'Faith therefore means the obedient acceptance of truths which are put before us as revealed by the church's teaching authority for us to believe.' However, in *Dei verbum* and *Lumen Gentium* infallibility is located within the collective faith of the whole people of God who have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit: 'The people of God receive these gifts of the Spirit so that they may also listen faithfully to the word of God.' In this understanding it is the faith of the church

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82 Schillebeeckx, "Infallibility of the Church's Office" in LF, 57.

83 Edward Schillebeeckx, "Is the Church Adrift?" in TMC, 20.

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which is infallible but this requires the guidance of the Magisterium: 'The teaching office of the church can only, critically, authoritatively and selectively, bring forward what is already present and living in the tradition of faith of the whole church.'<sup>84</sup> For this reason, the doctrine of papal infallibility must be understood within a wider understanding of the church and not as the sole power of an individual.

This broader understanding of infallibility allows for a richer theology than the idea of an individual with a direct line to God, supplying cut-and-dried answers to doctrinal questions. The infallibility of the church is the preserve of the whole people of God who enact the promise of Christ that the church will never cease to be heard. However, Schillebeeckx notes, there have been periods when certain aspects of the faith have been overemphasized or overlooked. This recognition of the fact that the faithfulness of the church has not always been consistent in every age puts a positive light on the Reformation's critique. In fact, Schillebeeckx argues, centuries can pass before the church is brought back to its authentic vocation. 'This being made right again is, however, not something automatic. It requires faithfulness to the Holy Spirit which is always renewing itself.' The promise of Christ, then, which grounds the church's indefectible nature requires a fidelity to the Spirit who guides the church and triumphs over human impotence. The recognition of this pneumatic guidance reminds the church that it is insufficient by its own strength. Acknowledging the guidance of the Spirit also casts suspicion over any highhandedness about our expression of faith. In this respect Schillebeeckx comments that Vatican II promoted a greater sense of humility in the Spirit:

We do not have any mythical faith that the church only needs to open her mouth in order to proclaim heavenly and infallible truths to us, but we do have an unshakable trust, in grace, that, despite these ups and downs, the Holy Spirit will set the church's compass on the right course and that the definition of dogma will be like beacons placed at intervals

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 34.

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to mark the long voyage to the safe port—though of course the voyage is not yet over.

Surveying the history of the church it is evident that the church has taken a zigzag route on account of the fact that there have been times when the church should have acted differently. Yet, despite these shortcomings, the church has never completely fallen away because it is the Holy Spirit who guides her and the promise of Christ that sustains her: 'the Holy Spirit has piloted the church safely. Despite her weakness, the promise that the Lord made to the church continues to be with her.'

For Schillebeeckx the tension created by the belief in the indefectibility of the church but the need for constant ecclesial renewal was not only exacerbated by theological misconceptions about papal infallibility but also misplaced ideas of representative realism:

The mistake that many Catholics, both leaders of the church and faithful, have made is that they have tended to believe, on the basis of the rightful conviction that we are really in touch with the absolute, we already possess this absolute truth in an absolute manner.<sup>85</sup>

This idea failed to grasp the inexhaustible nature of revelation. Hence, the belief in an infallible church must not be mistaken for the rejection of historical contingency. By recognising that the ways in which we speak about faith are influenced by our historical-cultural location enables us to account for the plurality that already exists within the church. In the council's move to permit greater inculturation, was a *de facto* recognition of the fact that the mystery of faith ultimately escapes any singular or precise definition.

In Schillebeeckx's reading it is the task of the whole people of God to be alert to the promptings of the Spirit and to raise the alarm should the church

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 32.

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begin to steer off course. In this understanding there is a need for the constant reinterpretation of the life of faith in light of the gospel and the signs of the times. This means that the fidelity of the church is not determined by its immutable character but the promise of its dynamic indefectibility. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the church must recognise that its apostolic vocation has taken on different faces throughout its history. By listening to the complaints of the people and challenging the foundations upon which the image of the church as a pyramidal hierarchy rests, Schillebeeckx sought to encourage the church to adopt a face that would more faithfully present the message and praxis of Jesus in the modern world.

### *Summary*

In this section I have shown how Schillebeeckx locates papal infallibility in the promise of Christ to the whole Christian community that his message will not cease to be heard. This promise is rooted in the gift of the Holy Spirit who guides the church in its witness and proclamation of the Gospel. However, this assurance is not a justification for a triumphalist understanding of the church but rather an invitation for the church as the pilgrim people of God to be always open to the promptings and leadings of the Spirit.

## **5.4 Towards a Democratic Rule of the Church**

This chapter began with Schillebeeckx's assertion that the current impasse in the Catholic ecclesiology is a result of the decision to affirm the bourgeois values of dialogue and tolerance while retaining a feudal image of its structure. This led the Catholic Church to speak the language of reform while continuing to think of itself as an inherently hierarchical institution. In the previous sections I have shown that Schillebeeckx challenged the image of the church as a 'pyramidal hierarchy' by questioning the foundations upon which it rests. In the first instance, he disrupted the christological justification for the church's structure by showing how ministry in the church originated from a pneuma-

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christological basis. In his distinctive interpretation of the development of offices in the church, Schillebeeckx contends that it is not the form of ministry that is normative but its function of preserving the apostolicity of the church's praxis and proclamation. Therefore, if a particular form of ministry begins to obstruct rather than support the witness of the church—as Schillebeeckx claims the modern image of the priesthood has—then it should be reformed. On the basis of his critical historical survey, Schillebeeckx asserts that ministry should be seen as the crystallization of a common charisma rather than a specialized charism granted only to a few. Having established a pneuma-ecclesiological basis for the church and its ministry, I then focused on how Schillebeeckx addressed misplaced assumptions about papal infallibility. In Schillebeeckx's reading papal infallibility, like all ministries in the church, is predicated on the whole community of faith. Consequently, papal infallibility is not a personal charism but a function of office. Having framed papal infallibility within the context of the people of God, Schillebeeckx contends that the church needs to facilitate meaningful dialogue in order to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Christ's promise of indefectibility should not be taken to mean that the church cannot stray into error but that the gospel will not cease. Parsing out this claim Schillebeeckx disrupts the false dichotomy between an active hierarchy and a passive laity but showing that it is the task of the entire community of faith to listen for the Spirit and keep the church in the truth of Christ. In this section I foreground Schillebeeckx's constructive proposal that the church should adopt a democratic rule. The idea of introducing democratic values into the church has generally been opposed on two counts: first, because it would undermine the hierarchical nature of the church and second, for reducing the mystery of the church to a social reality. In Schillebeeckx's account, the idea of democratic rule in the church is not reductionist but established on theological grounds: if Christians are the instruments of the Holy Spirit then ecclesial structures must not stifle the Spirit.

While the Catholic Church came to see democracy as the ideal form for 'civil society', it maintained that it was a non-democratic community because



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its structural form was founded by God. Schillebeeckx asserts that this claim rests on a category mistake. The church remains closed to democratic forms of authority because it has experienced the authoritarian exercise of authority for most of its history. This argument rests on an ideological view of the church that fears relinquishing power: 'positivism of tradition'. Schillebeeckx rejects the argument that the church is not democratic because it is hierarchical. There are integral theological reasons for wanting a more democratic rule in the church. In the concluding pages of his chapter on the church in *Church*, Schillebeeckx identifies three intrinsic ecclesiological reasons for preferring a democratic exercising of ministerial authority to hierarchical forms of government: 1) church structures as the instruments of the Holy Spirit, 2) the vulnerable rule of God, and 3) the tension between official teaching authority and the teaching authority of believers.

1) Christians affirm the support and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who keeps the church on course despite its ups and downs. As noted earlier this guidance comes in and through the life of the church: generally, and specifically in the people of God and the official activity of church leaders. This means that the Spirit is at work in a number of different historical mediations, through which the faithful and the hierarchy give access to the gifts of the Spirit or shut themselves off. The Spirit is received differently within the church and so it cannot be claimed that the promptings of the Spirit are received equally across the church. As a result, God's grace cannot be treated as automatic nor can anyone disregard the multiple ecclesial mediations by which the Spirit speaks to the church. Crucially this means that church leaders cannot ignore the voices of the laity or appeal to past decisions without being at risk of shutting themselves off to the Spirit:

A reference to the support of the Holy Spirit is therefore only meaningful in ecclesiological terms if the ministerial authority has taken serious

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account of all these ecclesial mediations and has become informed about them in order to take its own ministerial responsibility seriously.<sup>86</sup>

For this reason, while the Spirit is heard in prayer it is discerned by the whole community of faith in dialogue. On this basis it is clear that the democratic participation of everyone is required, in a theologically responsible way, if the Spirit is to be received in and through differing ecclesial mediations and not falsely identified with the hierarchy. Equally church authorities cannot make an appeal to the Spirit as a means of ignoring the mediating organs of the Spirit without undermining its own effective power and ultimately stifling the Spirit (1 Thess 5.19). In brief, if every person in the church can receive the Spirit then they should be given space to communicate what they hear the Spirit saying.

2) According to Schillebeeckx the non-authoritarian rule of God provides a model for the exercising of authority in the church. Drawing on his discussions of the mediation of God's grace in and through human history, Schillebeeckx contends that God is at work in the world in a modest and hidden way. From this historical mediation we learn how God rules, out of respect for human freedom and not in the way of earthly emperors, potentates and prelates. In the crucified Christ the rule of God is revealed as only being possible in the spirit of fearfulness and compassion. God's rule is one of love with a preferential option for the poor. Therefore, the 'holy rule' of the church should mirror the life of Christ and not transcend his authority. Quoting from Thomas Aquinas, Schillebeeckx argues that the power and rule of Christ over human beings is exercised by truth, justice and above all love. Therefore, where the church lays claim to any other form of rule is departs from the Spirit of Jesus Christ and fails to uphold his liberating witness in the world. Schillebeeckx expands this point by asserting that the 'holy rule' of the church should be seen as a service: an eschatological token of the kingdom or rule of God in our history. Thus, in

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<sup>86</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 221.

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its exercising of authority, the church should not seek to impose its will on others but rather seek to defend the rights and freedoms of others.

3) As a theologian it is perhaps unsurprising that Schillebeeckx identifies theology as a 'channel of the Holy Spirit'. Yet he comments that like other channels theology is also open to self-assurance, neglect, and a tacit passiveness. Although the teaching authority of the ministry is able to speak infallibly, its witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ must always remain relative to multiple factors: the coming rule of God, the authority of scripture and tradition, and the present situation of the church.<sup>87</sup> This means that the witness of the church cannot be treated as an immovable rock but as something that has undergone a changing history and which therefore must be understood in the totality of human history:

From all these mediations it emerges on the one hand that even the magisterial language of dogma must always be related back to the original Christian 'interpretandum', that which is to be interpreted: the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth in our history, interpreted in canonical scripture as the Christ, the anointed Son of God who wishes salvation from God and in face also offers it to all men and women. On the other hand what the ministry says, even in dogmatic statements, about this offer of salvation in Jesus can only be understood in the totality of the whole of human history.<sup>88</sup>

Consequently, the teaching authority of the church must be held within its historical context and not treated as a timeless absolute. Given that this teaching authority is pastoral and not scientific in nature, it must remain open to the world and the voices of the faithful. Therefore, Schillebeeckx argues that the task of the theologian is to express the views that are alive in the communion of faith and compare them critically with the great traditions of

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87 See Edward Schillebeeckx "The Magisterium and Ideology," trans. Lance Nadeau, in *Authority in the Church*, ed. P. F. Fransen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1983), 5-17.

88 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 224.

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Christian experience. In conversation with Huub Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogeveen, Schillebeeckx compares this task to the prophets of Israel who criticized the leaders and the people while remaining a member of the community.<sup>89</sup> The task of the theologian is to hold the church to the critical light of the gospel:

Precisely in listening to and standing critically by the specific faith which is alive at the grass roots — the people of God — the theologian is at the same time servant of the authority of the ministry in the church, but not its cringing slave.

Yet it is also the task of anyone who has been seized by that gospel, to 'criticize', 'accuse' and 'attack' whatever strips the gospel of its liberating power. The hierarchy may exercise authority in the church but it does not have control over the Holy Spirit. Therefore, while church authority is granted the special charisma to speak into disputes in order to prevent polarization in the church this gift is framed within the wider context of the community of faith. The teaching authority of ministry, church theology and the believing community all remain dependent on one another and together these three are fundamentally dependent upon and relativised by the living God, who brings creation through history, in Christ and his Spirit, to its final consummation.

### *Summary*

If ministry is the crystallisation of that which is common to the whole Christian community on account of the Spirit, then Schillebeeckx argues that the church should seek to create institutional structures that do not stifle the Spirit. In order to direct the church in this venture, Schillebeeckx maintained that the church must remain open to the Spirit and the possibility of renewal. He also identifies the way in which God operates in the world as a model for how the church must exercise its ministry. Ultimately, Schillebeeckx identifies the task

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<sup>89</sup> Schillebeeckx, *GNM*, 83-84.

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of theology as holding ecclesial power to account and attending to places of ambiguity and tension within the Christian community. For, as I have shown, Schillebeeckx views such places as indicators of the Spirit of God moving in the church and the world.

## **5.5 Constructive Assessment**

Schillebeeckx's involvement with critical communities within the Catholic Church arose out of his conviction that in many respects a great many people found their experience of the church to be negative.<sup>90</sup> The dominant conception of the Catholic Church as a pyramidal hierarchy and its institutional theology of ministry seemed to strip the gospel of its liberating force.<sup>91</sup> For Schillebeeckx, this was evident from the apparent shortage of priests, the exclusion of women from positions of authority, the lack of meaningful lay participation and the loss of autonomy for local churches. In response, he argued that the theologians and especially the clerical hierarchy must learn to listen to 'the complaints of the people' through whom the Spirit of God also speaks.<sup>92</sup> By learning to hear the Spirit in sites of tensions, Schillebeeckx maintained that the church could discover the impetus needed to question its assumed practices and suggest alternative forms.

In his own attempt to respond to the tensions within the church, Schillebeeckx engaged in the hermeneutical and critical task of putting the existing practices of the church into conversation with the broader history of Christian experience. Notably, he argued that the church and its ministries do not have a fixed institutional form. Instead, they are shaped by the interaction between tradition and situation in which the Spirit operates. The challenge, then, is to remain faithful to the heart of the apostolic tradition while being open to the promptings of the Spirit. Hence, it has been my contention in this

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<sup>90</sup> See Schillebeeckx, *CHF*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

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chapter that a pneumatological instinct undergirds Schillebeeckx's mature ecclesiology. The Christian community arises out of a life-giving experience of the Holy Spirit, who is the eschatological gift of the risen Christ. It is this experience of the Spirit that is the source of the Christian life and the basis of all forms of ministry within the church. For in the Spirit all members of the Christian community *de facto* have authority and as a result Schillebeeckx asserts that those in positions of leadership cannot see themselves as being over and above the rest of the community.

In his consideration of the Spirit in modern Roman Catholic ecclesiology, Bradford Hinze identifies two dominant ecclesiological instincts: a revived pneumatology and a reassertion of the Christological norm. The former is exemplified in the work of Yves Congar, Heribert Mühlen, and Karl Rahner who sought to set Roman Catholic ecclesiology on a path away from a rigid and juridical vision of the church by drawing attention to the mission of the Spirit in the life of Jesus and the wider world. This, in turn, facilitated the work of liberation and inculturation theologians who because of a more robust pneumatology were able to challenge established norms and values. In response, theologians such as Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Joseph Ratzinger sought to counteract what they saw as an excessive pneumatism that threatens the loss of ecclesial unity and apostolic authority. Hinze ultimately concludes that setting up an opposition between a Spirit-centered and an Incarnational ecclesiology is unhelpful and fruitless.<sup>93</sup> Instead, we need to develop a trinitarian ecclesiology that recognises the power of the Spirit. In Schillebeeckx's concept of a pneuma-Christological basis for ministry we see something of an attempt to reach this balance. Here the emphasis is moved away from an exclusively Christological focus, towards an account that sees the Spirit as the source of continuity between Christ and the church. In

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<sup>93</sup> See Bradford E. Hinze, 'Releasing the Power of the Spirit in a Trinitarian Ecclesiology' in *Advents of the Spirit*, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 353-361.

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other words, it is the same Spirit who empowers the church that anointed Jesus for his prophetic ministry. Thus, returning to a constructive point at the end of the previous chapter, we might say that the Spirit is the movement of God of which Christ is the form. So, by being attentive to the Spirit, the church is able to execute its task as the community that embodies the witness of Jesus in the world.

From his pneuma-christological perspective Schillebeeckx also advanced the idea of 'authority without hierarchy', in which those in positions of authority do not seek to 'rule' but 'guide' the Christian community in the way of Jesus. So, whereas a sharp distinction was historically drawn between the pastor and the flock, Schillebeeckx identifies a minister as a person who leads from within their community and who seeks to build up and release the gifts of others. In this way leadership is understood in terms of service rather than power, a dynamic that Schillebeeckx sees reflected in God's own agency in the world.<sup>94</sup>

While Schillebeeckx's theology of the ministry sought to challenge forms of 'neo-clericalism', his emphasis on the functional nature of church leadership leaves him open to the charge of reductionism. Although he rejected the opposition between a solely christological and a pneuma-christological basis for ministry, in his attempts to move the church away from prioritizing the Eucharist over baptism Schillebeeckx arguably downplayed the sacramental nature of the priesthood: the priest is not ontologically distinct rather their ministry should be treated as a crystallization of that which is common to the whole community. This apparent 'loss of the sacramental' is also evident in Schillebeeckx's claim that the church is a sacrament of salvation. While this claim broadly reflects the change in the self-understanding of the Catholic Church, the way in which Schillebeeckx relates the sacramental nature of the church (*signum*) to the

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<sup>94</sup> Schillebeeckx is critical of established ideas of omnipotence, instead he prefers to speak of God's 'defenselessness' in the sense that God renounces power by creating human beings with their own will. See, Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 85-91.

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promise of salvation (*res et sacramentum*) significantly weakens the connection between Jesus and the church. In Schillebeeckx's theology the church is a place where salvation from God is confessed and proclaimed in word and sacrament. So, the Christian community exists as a living recollection—the *anamnesis*—of the absolute saving presence of God in the history. The condition of this talk about God is the veiled appearance of God in Jesus of Nazareth, whose presence remains active in the church by the power of his Spirit. In its vocation as a sacrament of salvation, the church is shaped by the memory of Jesus and the experience of his Spirit within the context of the world. In Schillebeeckx's understanding the church exists only in its concrete forms as the people of God who make known the love of God. Therefore, the vocation of the church is dependent on its fidelity to God's Spirit. By taking on a more democratic form the church embodies that which is to come: the reality of a new creation. In this way its confessional talk is never autonomous but always an answer to God's creative action in history. However, while Schillebeeckx repeatedly speaks of the church as 'people of God' other ecclesial images, notably the church as the body of Christ, are all but absent in his later writings. To limit the definition of the church to the people of God, Ratzinger argued, fails to give expression to the New Testament understanding of the church in its fullness. 'Here 'People of God' actually refers always to the Old Testament element of the Church, to her continuity with Israel. But the Church receives her New Testament character more distinctly in the concept of the 'Body of Christ'.<sup>95</sup> The impression given by Schillebeeckx is that the church is the community *sequela Jesu* but not the sacramental body of Christ in the world.

Despite downplaying the sacramental nature of the church, Schillebeeckx makes a sophisticated contribution to overcoming certain persistent forms of ecclesiological abstraction: the mystery of the church is found only in its historical and visible forms. In this claim Schillebeeckx

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95 Joseph Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985). 47.



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precedes the arguments of Nicholas Healy and Stanley Hauerwas that the people of God are no less a historical reality than the crucifixion of Christ:

There is no 'ideal church,' no 'invisible church,' no 'mystically existing universal church,' more real than the concrete church with parking lots and potluck dinners. It is the church of parking lots and potluck dinners that comprises the sanctified ones formed and forming the continuing story of Jesus Christ in the world.<sup>96</sup>

In Schillebeeckx's interpretation, the concrete church is a 'critical community' which seeks to continue the emancipatory praxis of Jesus in the world. In this eschatological task the church exists as an 'anticipatory sign' of the kingdom, embodying a new way of living that responds to the need for salvation in its historical context.<sup>97</sup> For this reason the church must remain open to the concerns of the world and the promptings of the Holy Spirit who guides the community in the way of truth. In his interview with Antonio Spadaro in 2013, published under the title 'A Big Heart Open to God', Pope Francis reflects on the importance of discernment in his style of leadership. As a provincial he had learned that people tire of authoritarianism and as a result he came to favour consultation. In practical terms, he asserts that this means that the church must learn to be a 'listening church' which is open to the insights of others. By seeking to 'think with the church', in genuine consultation with the whole church, Francis accepts that things will be messy. However, he stresses that the whole church must be consulted because all the faithful, when considered as a whole, are infallible in matters of belief: 'When the dialogue among the people and the bishops and the pope goes down this road and is genuine then it is assisted by the Holy Spirit.'<sup>98</sup> In the same trajectory as Schillebeeckx,

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96 Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,' in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 382-383..

97 A term I take from Daniel Speed Thompson, *The Language of Dissent*, 84.

98 Pope Francis, 'A Big Heart Open to God', *America* (2013), 13

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Francis maintains that the infallibility of the church must be understood within the context of the *sensus fidelium* of the whole people of God. A claim that Gaillardetz notes stands in stark contrast to earlier mechanistic notions of the assistance of the Spirit.

For Schillebeeckx, it is not a problem that there are differences between churches but that these differences have become an obstacle to communion. To this end he argues that there can be no authentic communion without an acceptance of plurality: 'There is no eternally valid model of unity to which all churches must convert themselves.'<sup>99</sup> Given his rejection of an 'ideal' ecclesial form, Schillebeeckx's writings offer a means of uncovering and embracing alternative ways in which the church can remain apostolically faithful while remaining attentive to its situation and the movement of the Spirit. For church communities that are struggling with a shortage of priests and resources, the claim that the church is not bound to any particular cultural, historical or social form creates space for alternatives. Where the form of the church fails or hinders the communication of the gospel it is in need of reform. In order to know the status of the local church, the hierarchy must be open to the complaints of the people and acknowledge that what may work in one context may not necessarily work in others.

The image that emerges from Schillebeeckx's ecclesiology, then, is one in which nothing is determined in advance and in which there are no fixed institutional forms that must exist for all eternity. Instead, what Schillebeeckx's writings offer is a vision of the church as alive and attentive to its situation in the world and the movement of the Spirit. In this vision, the Spirit is not treated as a guarantor of the hierarchy's authority but rather the one who works in and through the ambiguities of the world and the messy realities of the historical church.

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<sup>99</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 198.

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## Chapter Six: The Spirit and Schillebeeckx

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
who is the Lord and gives life.  
And for the prophets among us,  
he is language, power and fire.  
I believe that together we are all on a journey,  
pilgrims, called and gathered together,  
to be God's holy people,  
for I confess freedom from evil,  
the task of bringing justice  
and the courage to love.<sup>1</sup>



### *Chapter Outline*

In this chapter I return to the questions with which I began this thesis: what is the place of the Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology and what resources does Schillebeeckx's theology offer constructive pneumatology? I answer the first question with a critical summary of my investigation into Schillebeeckx's pneumatology. I observe that for Schillebeeckx the Spirit is the eschatological gift of the risen Christ whose principal task is to renew and sustain the witness of the Christian community. I then move to consider the constructive potential of Schillebeeckx's theology. Here I identify his treatment of the relationship between creation and salvation, revelation and experience, approach to Christology and ecclesiology as sites of interest. I conclude this chapter with a constructive sketch of the Spirit that draws on the insights gathered through this study.

### **6.1 The Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's Theology**

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<sup>1</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 847.

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I begin this thesis by asking what the place of the Holy Spirit was in Schillebeeckx's theology. In this section I answer that for Schillebeeckx's the Spirit is primarily the eschatological gift of the risen Christ. For the sending of the Spirit marks the culmination or climax of God's redemptive work and the beginning of a new age in which the church is the sacrament of salvation.

### *The Spirit in Schillebeeckx's Early Theology*

In chapter three I observed that Schillebeeckx explicitly identifies the Holy Spirit as the mutual love of the Father and the Son (3.2). On the basis of his sacramental understanding of revelation, he arrives at this understanding by interpreting the historical events of Easter and Pentecost as revealing something of the inner life of God. In other words, the actions of God in history are what reveal the triune nature of God (3.1.3). From this perspective, the ascension of Christ is understood to signal the fulfilment of the saving dialogue between the Father and the Son, and the sending of the Spirit marks the outpouring of God's love which makes actual in us the salvation that has been objectively secured in Christ (3.3.3). As the gift of the risen Christ the Spirit is the one who enables people to respond to the Father's saving invitation in Christ (3.4) and live the Christian life (3.2.4). In this way Schillebeeckx follows the scholastic tradition of thinking about the Spirit in terms of the Light of Faith (3.3.2). The Spirit, then, is the one who renders people receptive to God's offer of salvation, which is made known in Christ and through the ministry of the church (3.3.4.2).

While Schillebeeckx's early account of the Spirit enabled him to speak of the Spirit as operating beyond the boundaries of the visible church (3.3.4), he generally identifies the work of the Spirit as being the subjective side of revelation. For the Spirit is the invisible movement of grace in the world that is mirrored by the visible actions of the church (5.1.1). In this picture a person comes to faith when they are moved by the Spirit to receive the sacraments of the church, which are sites of encounter with Christ who is the sacrament of

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God the Father. So, by receiving the sacraments of the church a person claims for themselves the salvation that was secured for them in Christ. Furthermore, by partaking in the sacramental life of the Church they are drawn deeper into communion with God (3.4.2). Crucially, this means that the sacraments are not an end in themselves but rather the means by which we can encounter the living God. To trace the role of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's early theology then is to find a dynamic account of the saving work of God, which centers on a sacramental encounter with Christ. It is also striking that by understanding the Spirit as operating beyond the visible boundaries of the church Schillebeeckx lays the foundation for his theology of culture in which the grace of redemption shapes the nature of society (2.1.1).

While the pneumatology in Schillebeeckx's early theology is dynamic, it does not engage with the ambiguities and tensions of the modern world. As a result, his early work is somewhat devotional in tone. In other words, the treatment of the Spirit is broadly what we would expect from Catholic theologian of this period: the Spirit is identified as the third person of the Trinity, who is the mutual love of the Godhead, whose task is to draw people into the saving communion of the church. I noted that one significant shortcoming with this picture is that it leaves the nature of the Spirit's 'personhood' in question (3.2.3). Furthermore, it is unclear why the Spirit is required if the Son is able to fully reveal the Father to us. This may account for why the work of the Spirit is largely limited to the subjective and invisible side of revelation. The result is an understanding of the Spirit that carries little weight and is easily overlooked.

### *The Spirit in Schillebeeckx's Late Theology*

Following his philosophical turnabout, in the late 1960s, Schillebeeckx breaks away from his earlier, more speculative, approach to theology. Instead, he seeks to develop a way of speaking meaningfully about God in the concrete struggles of the modern world. It was this concern that led him to stress the

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importance of praxis over thought. In other words, the meaning of Christian faith is communicated by participating in the struggles for a more humane world.

As a result of his developing thought, I note that Schillebeeckx's way of understanding the relationship between revelation and experience matures. Notably, Schillebeeckx affirms that we should see God's presence as mediated to us through creation in different revelational depths (4.1.5). In other words, he moves beyond his earlier distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' revelation. In this picture, Schillebeeckx identifies experiences of suffering and injustice as having a particular revelatory significance. This is because in these situations we are forced to acknowledge that reality is independent from us. In considering Schillebeeckx's account of 'contrast experiences', I suggested that we might understand these experiences as the Spirit moving us to seek the fullness of salvation. This alternative account of the Spirit's agency means that Schillebeeckx increasingly focuses less on the nature of the Spirit and more on the Spirit's effects. The principal effect being the formation of the Christian community (4.2). The result is that Schillebeeckx moved away from speaking about the Spirit in terms of divine 'personhood' and instead identifies the Spirit as the mode by which God gives Godself to us. For this reason, Schillebeeckx concludes that we should not seek to find language with which to grasp the Spirit but rather learn to follow where the Spirit is leading (4.2.6).

In his later theology, Schillebeeckx maintains that if we want to speak of the Spirit then we should focus our attention on Jesus of Nazareth who lived his life in the power of the Spirit. Even though Schillebeeckx does not explicate the role of the Spirit in Jesus's life in detail, I suggest that his account of the 'Abba experience' and emphasis on the kingdom of God sets him up for a more constructive pneumatological reading. This is supported by the fact that Schillebeeckx asserts that all talk about Christ remains an abstraction without an experience of the Holy Spirit.

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As the gift of the risen Christ, Schillebeeckx identifies the Spirit as the basis of all other spiritual gifts. This is because the Spirit is the agent of the new creation, who instills the status of being a child of God. It is by the gift of the Spirit then that people are able to confess Jesus as the Christ and share his vision of creation restored. Through his study of the New Testament accounts of grace, Schillebeeckx identifies the connection between salvation, the status of being a child of God, and the gift of the Spirit. According to Schillebeeckx, reception of the Spirit is characterized by an experience of forgiveness, renewal, and liberation. For it is by the Spirit that God's grace and redemption becomes actually in us. The Christian life, then, is only possible because of the Spirit. This is why Schillebeeckx maintains that people can only confess Jesus as Lord and continue his ministry in the power of the Spirit (4.2.6).

### *The Spirit in Schillebeeckx's Ecclesiology*

On account of their reception of the Spirit, Schillebeeckx observes that the earliest Christian communities were able to see themselves as living in the final days. It was this experience that led these communities to form egalitarian in structures (5.2.1). However, in time, the present structures and ministries of the church began to emerge as the pneuma-christological experience of the early church was replaced by exclusively christological foundations (5.2.3). The result was that authority was increasingly understood to reside in the hierarchy of the church rather than in the entire Christian community.

In response to the culture wars within the post-conciliar church, Schillebeeckx sought to recover the place of the Spirit in order to promote the idea of a more democratic rule within the church (5.4). Crucially, for Schillebeeckx, the living memory of Jesus is communicated through the entire Christian community. As a result, the voice of the entire church must be heard. Schillebeeckx identifies the margins of the church as a privileged place in which the voice of the Spirit can be heard most clearly (5.1.4). In identifying the role of the Spirit in the historical struggles and debates of the church, Schillebeeckx

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is clear that the Spirit can correct the witness of the church through apparent breaks in tradition. However, the Spirit is always the Spirit of Jesus. Consequently, the Spirit does act independently of Jesus but rather recalls the church to his witness.

In considering the witness of the church, Schillebeeckx maintains that there can be no abstract Christian faith because the Gospel can only be communicated through concrete actions. This means that the Christian message is always shaped and influenced by social and political realities. This in turn creates the real possibility that human structures and language might corrupt the church. While the Spirit operates beyond the church, Schillebeeckx is clear that the Christian community is fundamentally the place where the Spirit dwells. So, while the church may falter, the Spirit assures that the Gospel will never cease to be heard (5.3).

### *Summary*

In surveying Schillebeeckx's theology I have shown that, despite the general lack of attention that he gives to the Spirit, there is a subtle pneumatology in his work. The Spirit is principally the gift of the risen Christ who empowers the church for its witness in the world.

## **6.2 Identifying Constructive Pneumatological Resources**

Having identified the place of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology, I now turn to consider the constructive potential of Schillebeeckx's theology. In chapter one I noted the way in which contemporary theology has paid attention to the Spirit by both recovering aspects of the Christian tradition and by locating the movement of Spirit in the world. Together this interchange of found and given pneumatology has enabled the emergence of what some have described as a third article theology. In Schillebeeckx we find a similar desire to interrogate both tradition and culture to reinterpret the Christian faith for a new context.



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In considering the constructive potential of Schillebeeckx's work, I return to the aspects of his thought that I have identified in the final sections of the preceding chapters. Here I have started to develop an understanding of the Spirit as the movement of God in creation of which Christ is the concrete form.

### *The Spirit of Salvation in Creation*

Historically in both Catholic and Protestant theology it has been customary to treat the Spirit almost exclusively as the Spirit of redemption. From this perspective, the Spirit is understood as the gift of the risen Christ who resides in the church and assures people of their salvation.<sup>2</sup> A notable shortcoming of this approach is the impression that the Spirit of redemption is distinct from the Spirit of God in creation. One of the more significant contributions of recent pneumatology has been the move to connect the Spirit of creation more intentionally with the Spirit of redemption. In other words, to see the Spirit who gives life as the same Spirit who draws creation into the fullness of salvation. As Jürgen Moltmann writes:

[I]f redemption is the resurrection of the body and the new creation of all things, then the redeeming Spirit of Christ cannot be any Spirit other than Yahweh's creative *ruach*. If Christ is confessed as the reconciler and head of the whole cosmos, as he is in the Epistle to the Colossians, then the Spirit is present wherever Christ is present, and has to be understood as the divine energy of life animating the new creation of all things.

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2 Jürgen Moltmann suggests two reasons for why the Spirit has been generally limited to the work of redemption: the influence of Platonism on Christian theology and the affirmation of the filioque in the Western church. First, the influence of Platonism has cultivated a hostility towards the body, an abstraction from the world, and a privileging of the inner life over sensory experience. Second, the affirmation of the filioque has meant that the Spirit has generally been understood as the Spirit of Christ to the oversight of the Father. Thus, the emphasis has been placed on redemption over creation. *The Spirit of Life*, 9.

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Salvation and creation, then, are integrally connected. This means that the Spirit should be treated as the dynamic presence of God, who gives life to all creation and leads all things into the fullness of redemption.

By identifying creation as the foundation of his theology, Schillebeeckx provides a framework with which to think more intentionally about the nature of salvation. Given that, according to Schillebeeckx, creation is an ongoing process that is shaped by humanity's response to God, we might understand the Spirit as the enlivening presence of God who seeks to draw us into the fullness of life that God intends. The Spirit, then, is the presence or movement of God in creation who is always new, who orientates us towards the future, and drives us towards salvation. In this picture, the Spirit moves us towards the fullness of life that God intends for all creation. As a result, it is by learning to become more attentive to the dynamic movement of the Spirit in creation that we begin to partner with God in the work of redemption.

Nevertheless, one of the dangers of connecting the movement of the Spirit to human actions is that we unintentionally treat our desires as God's desires. In response to this dilemma, Simeon Zahl observes that 'One of the most reliable ways in which the Spirit acts in our lives is through "negative", cruciform experiences: through suffering, the thwarting of our egos, and the uncomfortable disruption of usual patterns of relating to the world, to each other, and to God.'<sup>3</sup> This picture of the Spirit is evident in John's description of the Spirit as the one who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement (Jn 16:8). For this reason, we should understand the Spirit as the one who conforms us to God's will. The Spirit, then, is not simply a source of comfort but challenge. As David Beck writes: 'We may think of the Holy Spirit as our loving, divine Nurturer, as long as we remember that the Spirit's relentless pursuit of our well-being poses an imminent threat to every earthly

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<sup>3</sup> Simeon Zahl, "The Spirit and the Cross: Engaging a Key Critique of Charismatic Pneumatology" in *The Holy Spirit in the World Today*, 119.

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attachment, we hold dear.<sup>4</sup> So, the Spirit conforms us to God by disrupting our misplaced norms so that we might have life to its full. Here we begin to see the place of what Schillebeeckx identifies as contrast experiences in thinking about the Spirit.

### *The Nature of Revelation*

In considering the relationship between divine revelation and human experience in modern theology, Kathryn Tanner observes a bifurcation between those who understand the Spirit of God as working immediately without any obvious mediating forms and those who understand the Spirit as working gradually in and through the fallible processes of ordinary life. In reflecting on these two instincts, Tanner writes:

The one side stresses, then, immediacy, interiority, privacy, singularity, and the bypassing of the fallibility and sinful corruption of the human in both the Spirit's operations and effects; the other side, historical process, mediation, publicity, surprise within the course of the commonplace, and the ability of the Spirit to make do with the fallibility, corruption, and confusion of human life for its own purposes.<sup>5</sup>

To locate the Spirit in the complexities and ambiguities of the world is, ultimately, to place the Spirit in the midst of poverty, sexism, racism, and war which have destroyed the lives of millions throughout history. However, in the midst of systemic violence and injustice, the Spirit can be identified as the one who empowers people to strive towards the promise of salvation. For without

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<sup>4</sup> T. David Beck, "The Divine Dis-Comforter: The Holy Spirit's Role in Transformative Suffering", *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, vol. 2. Issue. 2 (2009), 216.

<sup>5</sup> Taking Christ as the key, Tanner concludes that 'God works in Christ as the Spirit works in us: in and through the human.' Thus, we should not expect the Spirit to bypass the problematic features of our lives, anymore than Christ does in working to save us. As Tanner concludes: 'In the same way that the Spirit does not come on the scene when human processes vacate it but appears in and through them, the divinity of Christ does not start where humanity ends, but shines through its entirety.' Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 274.

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the Spirit the disciples would have remained locked in the upper room mourning the loss of Jesus. The Spirit, then, is the source of an alternative vision of reality which proclaims victory over death and destruction. We might speak of the Spirit as the one who moves downtrodden communities and people to engage in acts of creative resistance against the crucifying powers of the world and enables them to maintain a hope for a different future.

In Schillebeeckx's account of revelation we find such a way of thinking about the presence of God within the realities of the world. For Schillebeeckx seeks to move beyond the binary of revelation and experience by suggesting that God is mediated to us, dialectically, through our lived experiences. In particular, negative experiences of suffering and injustice. This understanding of revelation, in turn, suggests a way to think about the Spirit that echoes Paul's treatment of the Spirit in Romans. For Paul creation waits with eager longing to be set free from its bondage to decay. In our waiting he writes that our sighs of longing are accompanied by the intercessions of the Spirit, who intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. In this Pauline imagery I find scriptural parlance for what Schillebeeckx describes in his writings on contrast experiences. It is through our 'no' to the world as it is that the Spirit helps us to express our hope for the world as God wills it to be. In Schillebeeckx's terms, then, we might think of the Spirit as a divine dis-comforter who through our experiences of radical contrast prevents us from prematurely identifying the *humanum* and thus lapsing into a form of socio-political idolatry. Having considered the movement of the Spirit, I now turn to consider the form that this movement takes.

### *The Ministry of Christ*

I began this thesis by suggesting that a significant reason why the Spirit is often absent from much of Western theology is because of the dominant model of the Trinity: the understanding that God communicates himself to the world through the mediation of Word and Spirit. In this regard, Schillebeeckx's

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emphasis on the place of God the Creator and Jesus as the condensation of creation highlights its pneumatological shortcoming. As Williams argues this approach has led to a situation in which the Word routinely supersedes the Spirit. The result being that the Spirit is overlooked or reduced to little more than the subjective side of the event of revelation. As Williams writes: 'Pneumatology looks uncomfortably like an exercise designed simply to explain how we know what Christ does (granted that we do not know it simply by historical inspection or by subjective intuition): the seal is the seal of epistemological security.'<sup>6</sup> As a result, it has been difficult to give an account of the Spirit in the constitutive reality of human experience.

Williams notes that this is because much pneumatology in the Western church has been cast in a loosely Lukan mould: 'the Spirit as continuator of Christ's work, filling a space left by Christ's exaltation, manifest in the conviction of extraordinary experiences.'<sup>7</sup> By contrast, he notes that in both the Pauline and Johannine traditions, the Spirit does not point to the Son outside the human world but rather conforms people to 'Son-like' life in the human world. For instance, in the Pauline tradition: 'The central eschatological reality is the identification by grace with the obedience of God's Son, through which human beings are set "on the far side" of judgement and condemnation; so that the Spirit's eschatological character is inseparable from the condition of life lived "in Christ"'. Meanwhile in the Johannine tradition, the Paraclete is presented as 'active in and with the disciples, moving them towards Father and Son, as well as acting simply *upon* them.' These two alternative accounts present a picture of the Spirit as the one who enables 'Son-like' life in the world by drawing people into Christ's relationship with the Father. For this reason, Williams suggests that one way of bringing the Spirit into focus is to draw on these more elusive accounts of the Spirit.

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6 Williams, "Word and Spirit" in *On Christian Theology*, 118.

7 *Ibid.*, 118.

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In Schillebeeckx we see the beginnings of a more Spirit conscious understanding of Jesus' identity and mission. As Dunn argues, echoing Schillebeeckx's own treatment of the Abba experience, the interplay between Christ and the Spirit in the Second Testament suggests that Jesus' experience of God—Abba experience—was one of being inspired and moved by the Spirit of God. From this perspective then Jesus can be understood as the one who embodies the kingdom because the Spirit is working through him. To take this insight back into Schillebeeckx's treatment of God and Christ, we can say that the Spirit is the movement of the God in creation who finds their definitive or most concrete expression in Christ. So, instead of simply continuing the work of Christ, the Spirit is the one who anoints and empowers Christ to proclaim the message of God's kingdom to the world.

*The Church as the Sacrament of the Spirit*

In considering the recovery of the Spirit in twentieth-century Catholic theology, Bradford Hinze notes how the increased emphasis on the mission of the Spirit enabled the Catholic Church to move beyond a rigidly institutional and juridical vision of the church. The ecclesial repercussions of this move are evident in the shift away from treating the church as a self-sufficient monolith to the pilgrim people of God who must remain open to the Spirit and in constant dialogue with the world. This trajectory is evident in Schillebeeckx's writings where he invokes the importance of the Spirit in the renewal of the people of God, reform of ecclesial institutions, and openness to the alternative expressions of ministry. While Schillebeeckx has been accused of promoting a minimalist ecclesiology, what he offers is a way of understanding the church as the embodied response to the leading of the Spirit. This is evident in his particular emphasis on the place of praxis in the handing on of the Christian tradition. The picture of the church that emerges is of an eschatological liberation movement that seeks to make known the movement of God's Spirit in history through concrete acts of redemption. In other words, the church seeks to embody and draw attention to the movement of God's Spirit in the world.

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### *Summary*

Despite the creative pneumatological potential contained within Schillebeeckx's theology, he largely limits the work of the Spirit to the act of recalling us to Christ. In seeking to move beyond this communicative approach to the Spirit I noted how the Western tradition offers other ways of thinking about the Spirit that give the Spirit a more prominent place in the economy of salvation. Principally I suggested that we might treat the Spirit as the saving movement of God in creation of which Christ is the concentrated form. In this account, the Spirit not only leads us to Christ but orientates us towards the promise of salvation.

### **6.3 With Sighs Too Deep**

Having identified the role of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology and suggested how his work might resource ongoing pneumatological discussions, I conclude this thesis by suggesting how Schillebeeckx's theology might be enriched by a more robust understanding of the Spirit. I do this by treating Schillebeeckx's concept of 'negative contrast experiences' as a unifying metaphor for the movement of the Spirit, which has its origins in the Father and who finds their definitive form in the Son.

### *We Hope because the Spirit Prays*

Even before the impact of COVID-19, we were already in a situation of crisis. This can be traced to the fact that we live within a capitalist economy that's relentless drive for profit has led to an impending environmental disaster that threatens the future of the world as we know it. Furthermore, our collective response to this harmful reality has been hampered by the rise of aggressive forms of nationalism that have placed self-preservation above meaningful action. The sense that dark clouds are gathering over the world has led some to adopt a position of cynicism, resignation, or despair. As Pope Francis writes:

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In today's world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalised indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realise that we are all in the same boat.<sup>8</sup>

Our present situation then might be described as a pandemic wrapped within a financial crisis, encased within an impending ecological catastrophe. Still, despite the real challenges that we face, there remains an abiding hope for a different future. It is this sense of hope that informs our abiding belief that another world is still possible.

At the heart of our present situation, then, is an experience of restlessness. A longing for a world that is not marred by meaningless suffering and systemic injustice. It is this sense of longing that has shaped and informed the human quest for meaning. For Christians, the longing for an alternative future is interpreted in light of their Easter Experience. In other words, the affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth was exalted by God as the Christ and remains present to us by his Spirit. As a result, the longing that is felt in the world 'is not just a cry of hope in the face of despair, but also a hope that even prior to its eschatological fulfilment can already be celebrated and *even now* — in a time of the earthly "not yet" — calls for celebration.'<sup>9</sup>

So, the Christian sense of hope is characterized by an eschatological tension: the recognition that while our salvation has been secured in Christ, we still wait for the fullness of our redemption. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of how the whole of creation groans in expectation of redemption. A groaning that is shared by those who have received the gift of the Spirit. As we

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8 *Fratelli Tutti*, 30.

9 Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests" in *Essays*, 156-157.



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wait in expectation, Paul states that the Spirit comes to help us, weak as we are: 'For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express' (Rom 8: 26). To speak of the hope that is present in both the church and the world then is to speak of the Spirit who instills within us a longing that we can never adequately express, but which finds its origin and meaning in God whose Spirit prays within us.

### *The Openness of History*

By connecting the sense of longing that is present in the church and the world to the intercessions of the Spirit, we can begin to understand the work of redemption as the working out of the salvation that was secured in Christ through the ongoing struggles of history. For we are moved by the Spirit to partake in the ongoing work of redemption of the world by attending to those situations and places where good is furthered and evil resisted. This is a saving work that is entirely dependent on the grace of God and given shape through human actions.

To recognise that we have the ability to shape the direction of history is to acknowledge that creation is not static but rather an ongoing event. For this reason, we can speak of humanity as co-creators with God. To accept this account is to concede that our actions have real consequences, especially when we find ourselves in moments of crisis. As Pope Francis writes:

Some respond to the suffering of a crisis with a shrug. They say, 'God made the world that way, that's just how it is.' But such a response misinterprets God's creation as static, when it's a dynamic process. The world is always *being made*. Paul in his Letter to the Romans 8:22 says creation is groaning from birth pangs. God wants to bring forth the world with us, as partners, continually. He has invited us to join Him from the very beginning, in peaceful times and in times of crisis—at all times. It's

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not like we've been handed this thing all wrapped up and sealed: 'Here, have the world.'<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, we must learn to discern and respond to the promptings of God whose Spirit presses us towards that for which we were made.

### *The Spirit in Creation*

Given that the purpose of creation is its flourishing and the historical task of bringing creation to fruition has been given to humanity, the quest for salvation cannot be limited to a 'religious' or 'internal' sphere of human experience. Rather, it encompasses the entire scope of human history and experience. The whole of creation then is a sacrament of God. That is the means by which God's presence is mediated to us. our experience of God always occurs within the complex and ambiguous realities of our everyday experiences. It is the presence of living God who is present in our experiences of the world that the Christian tradition identifies using the symbol of Spirit. To speak of the Spirit then is to speak of the movement of God that can be traced in and through our history and experience.

While Christian talk about the Spirit has tended to begin with Pentecost, it is worth remembering that the opening lines of the First Testament are an account of the Spirit (*ruach*) of God hovering over the deep, giving life and form to creation (Gen 1:1-2). From this perspective we see that the Spirit is present from the beginning blows through creation as a life-giving force. As Schillebeeckx notes, in creation God creates that which is finite and contingent. In other words, that which is not-God. To acknowledge the essential finitude of creation then is to recognize that creation is both distinct from God but also entirely dependent upon God for its continued existence. In scripture the means by which God vivifies and sustains creation is closely connected to the language

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10 Pope Francis, *Let us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 4.

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of Spirit. As the author of Job writes: 'The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life' (Job 33:4). To be deprived of the Spirit, then, is to be deprived of life: 'When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.' (Ps 104:29 To acknowledge this creative dynamic is to recognize that God is constantly present to every aspect of creation:

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
(Ps 139: 7-10)

### The Spirit Speaks through the Prophets

While the earliest depictions of the Spirit in scripture might suggest an impersonal cosmic force, the language of Spirit gradually came to denote a personal agent who informs human behavior and attitudes. For instance, the Spirit is presented as a charismatic power who comes upon people, enabling them to perform supernatural deeds (Judg 3:10) and have supernatural visions (Ezek 3:12; 8:13). Through the power of God's Spirit, Joseph is able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams (Gen 41: 38-39); Daniel can speak to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:8); Samson is given incredible strength (Judg 14:6; 15:14;15.15). In less dramatic ways the Spirit also comes upon Othniel (3:10), Gideon (6.34), Jephthah (11.29), and Saul (1 Sam 11:6).

One of the most distinctive gifts of the Spirit in the First Testament is prophecy (Zech 7:12). A connection that is particularly evident in Ezekiel, where the Spirit of God is identified as the source of prophetic inspiration: 'And when

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he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me' (Ezk 2:2); 'The spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the Lord, which faces east... Then the spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and he said to me, Say, Thus says the Lord: This is what you think, O house of Israel; I know the things that come into your mind' (Ezk 11:1a;5).

In considering the role of the Spirit in the actions of the prophets it is notable that the anointing of the Spirit is repeatedly connected to God's promise of justice and peace for the nations. For instance, in Isaiah the Messiah is identified as the one anointed by the Spirit to execute God's judgment:

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.  
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.  
(Isa 11:1-5)

The book of Isaiah also presents the Messiah as the Servant of the Lord who by the power of the Spirit will bring forth justice among the nations and restore Israel from exile:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,

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to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn.  
(Isa 61:6)

The connection of the Spirit to restoration is also present in Ezekiel, where of God promises to restore Israel by putting a new heart and spirit within them (Ezk 36:26-28):

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

This work of restoration is vividly depicted in the image of the Spirit of God breathing life back into a valley of dry bones (Ezk 37: 1-6):

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.

The image of the Spirit as the renewing presence of God reaches its culmination in Joel (2:28-29), where the Spirit who anointed the prophets is depicted as anointing all people so that they can inaugurate God's rule. The gift of the Spirit then is the sign of the eschatological age of the new creation:

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Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

It is apparent then that there is a close connection in the First Testament between creation, prophecy, restoration, and the Spirit. The image of the Spirit that emerges from the First Testament is of the power of God who gives life to creation, endows people with supernatural abilities, and enables Israel to embody of new way of living in the world. It is this understanding of the Spirit that shaped and informed how the earliest Christian communities came to understand their encounter with Jesus of Nazareth.

### *The Spirit of Jesus*

In the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus' mission and identity are explicitly described with reference to the Holy Spirit: 'That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how we went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (Acts 10: 37-38)' An image of Jesus as anointed by the Spirit that is present in the wider synoptic tradition.

For Mark, it is during Jesus' baptism that an explicit connection is made between his status of divine sonship and the anointing of the Spirit: 'And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased"' (Mk 1:10-11). It is implied, then, that during his baptism, Jesus underwent an experience that marked the beginning of his experience, an experience of intimacy with God that Schillebeeckx identifies as the Abba Experience. It was on account of his experience of close communion with God that Jesus understood himself as the

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one anointed by the Spirit to inaugurate God's rule in the world. In other words, Jesus identified himself as God's son because in prayer he experienced God as Father and he experienced the power of God's Spirit working through him in his eschatological ministry.

As the one anointed by the Spirit to manifest the salvation promised by God, Jesus' mission and identity are integrally connected to the Spirit. This is evident from the fact that Jesus was not only moved by the Spirit during his baptism but at various points throughout his life. For instance, following his baptism Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit where his sense of vocation is tested: 'And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him' (Mk 1:12-13). Jesus then emerges from the wilderness, to announce the year of the Lord's favour (Lk 4:18). It is by the power of the Spirit that Jesus is able to cast out demons (Lk 11:20). In fact, when Jesus is questioned about the source of his power, he draws a direct connection between the Spirit and the kingdom which he proclaimed: 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you' (Mt 12:28).

Even though Jesus does not speak at length about the Spirit, a picture emerges of Jesus as the Messiah who is led and empowered by the Spirit. Furthermore, in considering the relationship between the Spirit and the kingdom of God in the Second Testament, it is apparent that the two are closely related. For this reason, we can say that where the Spirit is present the kingdom of God is found. From this perspective, we might conclude that Jesus was able to manifest the kingdom through his ministry because the Spirit of God was working through him.

So, it was on account of his close communion with God the Father and his anointing by God's Spirit that Jesus was able to inaugurate the kingdom of God. However, while Schillebeeckx identifies Jesus' experience of God as the

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Abba experience it is notable that Jesus only calls God Abba on the eve of his crucifixion: "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mk 14:36). In other words, it was in his moment of dereliction that Jesus cries out to God as Abba before submitting to the Father's will. So, we can infer that it was Jesus' sense of close communion with God, which he experienced as the Spirit working through him, that enabled him to go to his death in the knowledge that the Father would not abandon him.

### *The Spirit of the Risen Christ*

It is only on account of their Easter experience that Christians are able to proclaim Jesus as the Christ: the one exalted by God who bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the Christian faith rests on an experience of the Holy Spirit, an experience that has tangible effects in the world and not just within the interior lives of believers.

It was because of their experience of the Spirit at Pentecost that the disciples were able to leave the upper room in which they were hiding. For the earliest Christian communities then the Spirit was experienced as faith, love, forgiveness, redemption, justification, sanctification, adoption, reconciliation, freedom, illumination, and spiritual gifts. In a word, the Spirit was experienced as grace. So, the experience of being 'in the Spirit' and 'living through the Spirit' instilled within the earliest Christian communities the sense that they were living in the fullness of time. As people empowered by the Spirit, it was understood that each person within the community shared the insight and authority that the Spirit granted. As a result, a new sense of solidarity and equality shaped the praxis of these communities (Acts 2:44). Furthermore, it was understood that the fixed identities of the old world were superseded by the identity of being in Christ and the Spirit (Gal 3:28).



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Paul, in particular, identifies the gifts of the Spirit as being given for the purpose of building up a community that is 'in Christ'. In other words, the Christian community can only exist because of the Spirit. For it is the Spirit of adoption who transforms believers into the image of Christ and enables them to enter into the relationship between the Son and the Father. In a word, the Spirit enables the Christian community to continue Jesus' eschatological witness in the world.

The new creation that is manifest in and through the praxis of the Christian community is one in which God's rule is brought into being. For the Spirit who anointed Jesus and raised him from the dead is the same Spirit who delivers believers from their bondage to the law. At its heart, the eschatological gift of the Spirit enables the Christian community to experience the redemption that men and women have longed for throughout history.

It is on account of their experiences of the Spirit that the Christian community is able to confess Jesus as Lord and identify him as the definitive revelation of God. In seeking to express this reality, the earliest Christian communities drew on the theological categories of their Jewish tradition to identify Jesus as an eschatological prophet anointed by the Spirit of God. This in turn led to Jesus' conception being linked to the Spirit: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God' (Lk 1:35); and the Spirit being identified as a distinct person (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:16; 16:7). The Spirit then is another *paraclete* who leads believers into all truth and enables us to understand Jesus and continue his witness in the world.

### *The Spirit of Contrast*

The combined witness of the First and Second Testaments, points to the fact that when the Spirit of God rests on a person they are moved to action. A person anointed by the Spirit is empowered by God to challenge the realities of

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sin and death in the world. In other words, it is the Spirit who compels people to the work for which Christ died. As James Cone writes:

The man possessed by God's Spirit has no time to ask abstract questions about how the poor got to be poor or why blacks are hated by whites. All he knows is that 'the Gestapos are busy again, the prisons are filling up, the torturers are once more inventing, perfecting, consulting over their work benches,' and he cannot close his eyes to it. [...] There is no time for talk when men are suffering. For the man of the Spirit, racism is 'not a word; it is a fact,' a ghetto, poverty, 'an event.' He, therefore, must join and take sides with the sufferer. To be possessed by God's Spirit means that the believer is willing to be obedient unto death, becoming the means through whom God makes his will known and the vehicle of the activity of God himself.<sup>11</sup>

The Spirit then is the saving presence of God in the church and the world who brings about salvation by moving people to disrupt and transform the crucifying realities in our world. This is a saving work that is not limited to the church or the consciousness of those through whom the Spirit of God is acting.<sup>12</sup>

One of the ways in which we might understand the sense of being moved by the Spirit of God is experienced in our present context is the sense of indignation that we feel towards the actual state of the world. An experience which has the ability to impel us to action. As Schillebeeckx notes, the world in which we live is full of contradictions that undermine and hamper human flourishing. Yet, despite the fact that history offers no assurances, we retain an abiding sense that good and not evil will have the final word. It is this conviction that another world is possible that informs our desire to work towards a different future. As we have seen, Schillebeeckx expresses this dynamic in terms of contrast experiences: the recognition that our fundamental human 'no' to the world as we experience it is informed by the 'open yes' to the world as it could be. This desire to construct a different reality is sustained by our

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<sup>11</sup> James Cone, *Black theology & Black Power*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013), 58-59.

<sup>12</sup> see Isaiah 45

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fragmentary but real experiences of meaning in the midst of history. It is these fleeting moments of joy that nurture and sustain our hope for redemption.

From the perspective of the Christian tradition, the sense of being moved by something that comes from outside our own initiative is understood with reference to the Spirit. Furthermore, our fragmentary experiences of meaning are also interpreted in light of the Spirit. For the Spirit is the pledge of our redemption. The human experience of restlessness then can be seen as a sign of the Spirit moving through creation. So, in a context in which the future of the world is uncertain, the Spirit is named as the source of the self-transcending protest through which people feel impelled to resist the destruction of creation and challenge those realities which deprive people of the fullness of life. As Michael Welker writes: 'The messianic promises assign the name "Spirit of God" to the power that both promises and realizes new community for poor and rich, strong and weak, people separated and alienated by economics, politics, racism, and sexism.'<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, as the fullness of our redemption remains a future reality, the flourishing that God wills for creation can only be experienced in fragmentary moments of meaning. It is in these moments in which another world not only seems possible but already present that we can discern the Spirit at work in the world. As Johnson writes:

While history goes on the suffering continues, the red thread of suffering that unites all life. Yet, incorrigibly, hope keeps rising that, in the words of the mystics, all will be well. The direction of hope, this hope against hope, points to [the Spirit] shaping the world towards an ultimate end: the liberation of the world in God.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Spirit and Redemptive Praxis*

To interpret our present situation in terms of a contrast experiences is to recognize that it is not sufficient to simply oppose that which we disapprove.

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 138.

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We must also seek to embody the reality which the Spirit of God seeks to bring into being. As Schillebeeckx observes, we do not overcome the ambiguity and absurdities of the world in which we live through argument or reason alone. Therefore, we must learn to respond to the Spirit's promptings that move us to challenge the realities of injustice and seek an alternative way of living in the world. In other words, the movement of the Spirit is integrally connected to the work of redemptive praxis.

As the one who moves creation towards its fulfilment, the Spirit produces freedom, speech, action, community, and life. However, while these realities are fruits of the Spirit, they only become historical realities when embodied by men and women. As Comblin notes: 'The works of the Spirit have no material grandeur: it does not produce the pyramids of Egypt or the towers of Babylon, but human realities, free people and free communities living in free association. The Spirit produces complete human beings.'<sup>15</sup> If freedom is the heart of the gospel, the Spirit is the constant divine pressure towards the possibility of greater freedom.

It is the Spirit then who enables people to engage in the work of liberating praxis because the Spirit enables us to move beyond ourselves to embody a new way of being in the world. For we do not find the Spirit by abstracting ourselves from the world but by recognising that the Spirit is present and active in history. For this movement of God is one that always exceeds our awareness, but which is present wherever good is furthered and evil resisted. Thus, we can discern the saving movement of the Spirit in the world in those experiences and situations where a new reality is emerging from within the old. In short, the Spirit is present wherever healing and wholeness become realities in a world of suffering and sorrow. For this reason, we do not come to know the Spirit in abstraction but by paying attention to those places where a new creation is coming into being.

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<sup>15</sup> Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, 70.

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From this perspective, the work of the Spirit is not confined to the depths of human experience or to an intervening force that breaks into our world. Instead, the Spirit is understood as working in and through our concrete experiences of the world. To be attentive to the Spirit, the Christian must be attentive to the world.<sup>16</sup> As Schillebeeckx writes: ‘This does not imply complicity with the world, but a saving Christian presence, the forerunner of that hope in a “new heaven and a new earth,” a hope which *revolutionises* our efforts for a better future on earth and one in which, at the same time, every socio-political order that already exists becomes of *relative* value inasmuch as it is not yet the new world of God’s promise.’<sup>17</sup> In other words, is through our encounter with the crucifying realities of the world that we discover the imperative of the Spirit that moves us to strive for a more humane world.

### *The Prayer of the Spirit*

While the hope for redemption is present in the whole of creation, it finds its clearest expression in the praxis and prayers of the church. As Rowan Williams writes:

At the heart of the church, there is a yearning to be what God designs us to be, a yearning to receive the full gifts that God wants us to receive — and that carries with it the implication that there is indeed something that we are for. Human beings are not just random, they’re for something, there is a kind of magnetic needle quivering in there somewhere, pointing to the north, and when our hearts are engaged in and through Jesus Christ, what happens is that that magnetic drive comes to life, that yearning is kindled. The Spirit in us is God pressing us towards what we are made for.<sup>18</sup>

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16 What Marie-Dominique Chenu called ‘*présence au monde*’.

17 Schillebeeckx, “The Church as Dialogue” in *GFM*, 138.

18 Rowan Williams, “The Holy Spirit in the Bible” in *The Holy Spirit in the World Today*, 65.

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So, the Christian life is shaped and informed by the sense of longing that is instilled by the Spirit. In Schillebeeckx's terminology this longing is expressed in the language of the *humanum* but for Paul it is conveyed in the prayer of Jesus, *Abba, Father!* In these two words, the longing that the Spirit places within us can be understood as the desire to share in the fullness of Jesus' humanity and his relationship with the Father. For as Williams observes, 'when we are where he is, praying his prayer, then we're at home, then we're human.'<sup>19</sup>

The experience of longing that is present in the church then can be understood as an expression of the Spirit praying within us. As Sarah Coakley suggests, to think about the Spirit in this way is to see ourselves as being caught up in the saving movement of God. An understanding of prayer as a divine call and response into which we are drawn by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who prays within us who instills the desire to be where Jesus is, as the Son in communion with the Father. For it is the Spirit who bears witness to our identity as children of God and who sets us free for a fuller humanity which finds its definitive expression in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the definitive or concentrated expression of creation as God intends it.

### *The Christian Life is Cruciform*

By praying within us, the Spirit instills in us the desire to be where Christ is and to share in his relationship with the Father. However, to be where Christ is, praying his prayer, is not to find ourselves in a place of peace and serenity but drawn into the concrete struggles of the world. For, as we have already noted, the place where Jesus prays his Spirit-filled prayer is in the garden of Gethsemane. As Williams writes: 'Jesus prays his Spirit filled prayer in a place where all his powers of will and resolve and courage and fidelity are summoned

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 66.

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up in order to accept God's will for the salvation of the world.<sup>20</sup> To join Jesus in praying his Abba prayer in a world of violence is to surrender the desire for self-preservation and risk becoming the crucified victim. As Schillebeeckx writes:

Jesus' death on the cross is the consequence of a life lived in radical service of justice and love, a consequence of his option for the poor and outcast, of a choice for his people suffering under exploitation and oppression. Within an evil world any commitment to justice and love is deadly dangerous.<sup>21</sup>

The desire for God's rule which the Spirit instills within us then runs counter to the instincts and powers of this world. For, in contrast to worldly power, the kingdom of God does not come through force but weakness. As Schillebeeckx writes: 'The basic choice of Jesus was to refuse power, and so his words and actions take on an unparalleled authority.'<sup>22</sup>

On the cross Jesus shared in the brokenness of the world. Yet, Jesus went to the cross in the knowledge that his death shared in the same power of God that was at work in his life, a power that can be identified as the Spirit. Jesus' concern for self-preservation faded because he placed his complete trust in God. For this reason, we can speak of Jesus' death as a defenseless act that disarmed evil through its anticipation of the resurrection. In considering the place of God the Father during Jesus' crucifixion, Schillebeeckx argues that God was not powerless but rather defenseless. By this he means that God was absolutely present to Jesus on the cross but in such a way that was without power or compulsion. In other words, God the Father did not rescue the Son as an external force. Instead, the Father raised the Son through the power of the Spirit. As a result, Jesus' death can be seen as an attempt by those in power

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20 Ibid., 66-67.

21 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 125

22 Ibid.

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to remove the threat posed by Jesus' promise of the kingdom. Yet, where human power is exercised through force, God's power is expressed in a choice for defenselessness. As Schillebeeckx writes: 'The strength of God's love for mankind and of human love for God can clearly shown in earthly powerlessness, which perhaps as a result is still the most disarming and reconciling.'<sup>23</sup> For God's power does not override human finitude and freedom but rather works in and through it to bring about the fullness of salvation.

This then is the message of Jesus' resurrection: humanity did its worst and yet the kingdom still comes. In raising Jesus to life by the Spirit, the Father affirms the victory of life over death and hope over despair. On the cross Jesus was present to the darkest corners of human experience and by the power of the Spirit he draws them into life. To speak of the Spirit then is to speak of the indelible movement of God towards the fullness of redemption, a future in which life and not death will have the final word. For the Christian community, the assurance of salvation rests on an experience of the Spirit, an experience that enables Christians to trust God despite the evident absurdities of the world.

### *The Sacrament of Salvation*

As the saving movement of God in the world, the Spirit always exceeds our expectations. As a result, the range of the Spirit's activity cannot be limited to any place or people. Instead, the Spirit is present wherever people are trying to bring about a way of life that is more worthy of people in history. To acknowledge this reality is to recognize that the Spirit is at work before the Spirit is even named and identified. While the Spirit is present to every aspect of creation, the church is the place where the Spirit is explicitly named and identified. This is because the church is the place where salvation from God is confessed, thematized, and celebrated liturgically.

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<sup>23</sup> Schillebeeckx, *IR*, 134.



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The church then is not the exclusive domicile of the Spirit but rather the sacrament or sign of salvation from God. The task of the church is to be the community of faith that proclaims the coming reign of God through prayer and praxis. It is for this reason that Schillebeeckx describes the church in terms of living Christology. The church is the eschatological liberation movement inaugurated by Christ, that is empowered by the Spirit to continue his ministry in the world. As a result, the church does not exist to draw people to itself but to direct them towards communion with God. In more explicitly Christian terms, to enter more fully into Christ's relation with the Father. Given that the Spirit is the one who moves us to seek creation as God wills it, a key sign of the Spirit is the existence of Christlikeness in the world. It is such a Christlike life that the church seeks to embody through its praxis and praise. As Schillebeeckx stresses, authentic faith in the modern world must be expressed in praxis.

The Christian life then means learning to live in response to God's Spirit but in such a way that is always orientated towards the task of freeing creation from the forces which restrict and bind it. The witness of the church then is integrally connected to the question of meaning and human flourishing. To understand the Christian life as participation in the saving movement of is to recognize that our faith should not cause us to flee from the world but move with the world towards fullness of redemption. As Schillebeeckx writes: 'Love of humankind and love of God are one and the same theological virtue in the Christian tradition; it is the love which comes from God and through the assent of our heart is taken further towards our fellow men and women.'<sup>24</sup> So, love of humanity and creation are a hallmark of our love for God, a love that Schillebeeckx maintains can be expressed in political mysticism where the term mysticism denotes an intensive experience of God and the term political denotes an intensive form of social commitment. So, in a context in which the future of the world is uncertain, the Christian life is integrally connected to both prayer and political praxis.

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<sup>24</sup> Schillebeeckx, *TCF*, 70.

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To acknowledge the political import of the gospel is not to suggest that politics is the solution to our problems. It is rather to recognize that we are called to struggle amid the ambiguities and tensions of the world in the assurance that the Spirit of God is at work in and through us. Thus, a praxis of liberation, that is rooted in political love and orientated towards the kingdom of God, is the means by which the reality of divine redemption is brought into being. This is not to suggest that salvation is achievable through political action but to recognize that such experiences of liberation enable us to make sense of what is meant by salvation: 'Here experience of God is the ensouling element which goes along with the specific action of liberation in which at the same time this praxis is transcended: it is active witness to the God of righteousness and love.' An experience of salvation that exceeds our awareness and as a result is received as a gift from God. On this basis, Schillebeeckx concludes that whenever good is done and injustice is challenged salvation is made present in the world. However, he maintains that such praxis must always be rooted in prayer: 'Without prayer or mysticism politics soon becomes cruel and barbaric; without political love, prayer or mysticism soon becomes sentimental or uncommitted interiority.' In other words, the connection between the mystical and political dimensions of faith are inseparable and find expression in the ethical dimension of the Christian faith.

So, where there is a struggle for new life in the midst of the old, where community is formed between strangers, where hope arises in the world, it is there that we discover the Spirit at work. For the Spirit of God is the one who instills creation with life and who seeks to draw all people into the fullness of salvation.

#### **6.4 The Saving Movement of God's Spirit**

To speak of the Spirit of God in our present situation then is to begin with the hope and longing that people feel for a future in which all might experience the

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fullness of life. In a Christian understanding this sense of restlessness has its origin in God whose Spirit prays within us. It is the Spirit then who orientates us towards the future by enabling us to cry "Abba, Father." It is in this prayer then that our deep desire for communion with God finds its fullest expression.

Our desire for God stems from the fact that God creates for the purpose of salvation. It is through the gift of the Spirit that God gives life to creation and empowers people to challenge and transform situations which deprive people of the fullness of life. This saving movement of God's Spirit finds its definitive form in the person of Jesus Christ, through whom people experience salvation from God. It is in the power of the Spirit that the church continues the witness of Christ in the world. So, to be in the Spirit is to be orientated towards the kingdom of God.

While the movement of God's Spirit can be described in many ways, I identified Schillebeeckx's concept of contrast experiences as an organizing metaphor. In this understanding we experience the movement of God in those places and situations in which we feel compelled to act to transform the realities which deprive creation of life. While the fullness of salvation ultimately evades adequate expression, I identify Christ as the form to which the Spirit is moving us. At the heart of the church, then, is a desire to be where Christ is. However, by standing where Christ is we find ourselves drawn deeper into the struggles and ambiguities of the world. Yet, in our confrontation with crucifying powers we find assurance in the fact that the Spirit who empowered Christ is the same Spirit who lives in us. For this reason, the church does not shy away from the possibility of death.

The Christian life then is about being orientated by the Spirit towards the kingdom of God. It is about learning to live in relation to the Spirit who prompts and moves us to seek a future in which joy and not sorrow have the final word. It is to recognize that while history is shaped by human actions, salvation is ultimately a gift of God which is brought alive in us by the Spirit. To

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live in the power of the Spirit then is to be caught up in the movement of God that seeks to bring creation into the fullness for which we were created. From this perspective, the Spirit does not draw us out of the world but more deeply into it. For the Spirit is the one who works through us to bring new realities into being and who by praying within us gives expression to our deep desire for salvation in sighs too deep for words.

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## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

'Regardless of what God is asked,  
he will give His Spirit and thus will hear every prayer.'<sup>1</sup>



### 7.1 Schillebeeckx and the Spirit

I begin this thesis by noting the apparent absence of the Holy Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology. I observed that this had led some to suggest that Schillebeeckx might be accused of binitarianism, an accusation that he denied but did little to abate. This is because, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, Schillebeeckx questioned the merits of trinitarian speculation. Nevertheless, through a close reading of Schillebeeckx's work I have shown that there is a subtle and, in certain instances, distinctive account of the Spirit. This is a pneumatology that has largely been overshadowed by his focus on the relationship between God as Creator (Father) and Christ as the condensation of creation (Son). Nevertheless, it should be remembered that this approach is not distinct to Schillebeeckx but has characterized the shape of Western pneumatology more broadly.

In response to the question then of what place the Holy Spirit occupies in Schillebeeckx's theology, I answer that in part this depends on the period of Schillebeeckx's career to which you are referring. However, generally Schillebeeckx identifies the Spirit as the gift of the risen Christ who empowers and sustains the witness of the church in the world. For the Spirit is the one who enables us to live the Christian life.

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<sup>1</sup> Schillebeeckx, *HT*, 105.

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By focusing on the place of the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's work, I have drawn particular attention to the dynamism or sense of movement that pervades his work. In his early theology Schillebeeckx identifies the Spirit as the one who draws people into communion with Christ and in whose power the church goes out into the world. It is through the meeting of these two movements that we are able to enter into a saving communion with God through the sacraments of the church. By contrast, in his later theology Schillebeeckx shifts from speaking about God in terms of participation to anticipation. In other words, God is understood as the future of humanity who invites us to move history forward into the fullness of creation. In this account, the church finds its assurance in the story of Jesus of Nazareth which the Spirit brings to mind. Thus, the principal task of the Spirit is recalling the Christian community to Jesus, an act of recollection that enables the Christian tradition to adapt to new situations while remaining faithful to the experience of salvation at the heart of the Christian faith.

The Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology then is essentially the mode by which God gives himself to humanity, a reality which Schillebeeckx largely expresses using the language of gift and love. However, an examination of Schillebeeckx's pneumatology shows that how we locate the Spirit in the economy of salvation has significant implications for how we understand the Spirit. For instance, by working within a loosely 'Augustinian' or 'Western' mold, it is evident that Schillebeeckx struggles to account for the role of the Spirit beyond the work of communication. However, by bringing Schillebeeckx into conversation with some of the insights of pneumatological research, I have shown that his theology might resource a more explicitly pneumatological reading. It is for this reason that I compare the pneumatological potential of Schillebeeckx's theology to a house that has been wired but not equipped with plates. Notably, Schillebeeckx's concept of contrast experiences provides a conceptual framework for thinking about the way in which the Spirit moves us to seek the fullness of life that God wills for us. In this account, the task of the

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church is not to call attention to itself but to testify to the movement of God's Spirit in creation and to allow this movement to shape how we live in the world.

To understand the Spirit as the movement or presence of the living God in creation then is to see the Spirit at the one who energizes and draws creation to its ultimate end: the fullness of life in communion with God. The image that emerges then is of the Spirit moving us through our concrete experiences of the world to seek a more humane world that finds its definitive expression in the person of Christ. Thus, it is the same Spirit that anointed Christ who rests on his followers and enables us to also cry 'Abba, Father', words which give expression to our deep desire for salvation and communion with God. In this account we are caught up in the movement of the Spirit who enables us to stand where Christ stands in his relationship to the Father. To approach the Spirit in this way then shows how Schillebeeckx's theology might be read in a more explicitly trinitarian manner.

### **7.3 Possible Areas of Continued Research**

On the basis of my investigation into Schillebeeckx's pneumatology, I have identified three specific areas for continued research.

#### *Towards a Spirit Christology*

By suggesting that Schillebeeckx's theology might be read from a more pneumatological perspective, I have flirted on the edges of Spirit Christology: the understanding that the divinity of Jesus Christ can be accounted for using the foundational metaphor of Spirit. The aim of Spirit Christology is not to negate Logos Christology but to compliment it by expanding how we think about the person of Christ in conversation with the biblical witness.

In understanding the symbol of Spirit as a way of accounting for Jesus' distinct identity, a number of theologians have either substituted or

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complimented Logos Christology with Spirit Christology. The advantages of this move include a closer fidelity to the synoptic tradition, an emphasis on historical experience, and appeal to a less obtuse foundational metaphor to explain Jesus' divinity. Such an approach also helps to explain the connection between the life of Jesus and the ministry of the church. As Roger Haight writes: 'In a Spirit Christology it becomes plain that the salvation mediated by Jesus is closely bound up with the way one lives in the Spirit; this salvation thus has a bearing on our lives in history.'<sup>2</sup>

As I have noted throughout this thesis, the biblical symbol of Spirit denotes God as God is present and active in the world. In other words, the action of God outside of God's self in the world of God's creation. In the synoptic gospels the language of Spirit is used to account for the divine presence in Jesus' life. For instance, Jesus is able to cast out demons and heal the sick because of the power of God's Spirit within him, a divine power that is closely related to the arrival of God's kingdom. The synoptic tradition gives the impression then that it is because of the Spirit of God that Jesus experienced working through him that he was able to inaugurate God's rule. What is notable about this approach is that it focuses on the human, historical, and relational dynamic of Jesus' identity in a way that has not always been true of Logos Christology. This is because Logos Christology has tended to take its starting point from the Chalcedonian definition in a way that has made it difficult to account for the notion of growth and development in Jesus' historical life. This in turn has fuelled accusations of Docetism. To approach Schillebeeckx's Christology then from the perspective of the Spirit seems to open up the possibility of speaking about Christ in a way that is more sympathetic to the trajectory of his thought.

### *The Spirit and Religious Pluralism*

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 466.



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For most of its history the Catholic Church has held the view that it is the vehicle of absolute truth. This exclusivist position is perhaps best encapsulated by the axiom outside the church there is no salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). However, in an increasingly pluralistic society, the church has been pushed to reconsider its absolute claims.

For Schillebeeckx, religions are worldviews that share a 'family likeness' as schools of wisdom. While Schillebeeckx sought to move away from any claim to absolutism, he also wanted to avoid sliding into a reductionistic relativism. For this reason, he proposed that no single religion can exhaust the question of truth. Schillebeeckx grounds this claim in the fact that our relationship to God is always in and mediated through the particularities of place and time. So, the way in which we relate to reality is filtered through experiences and language that conditions our perception. How we understand reality then informs how we think about God.

Schillebeeckx maintains that the distinctive nature of Christianity is essentially bound up with the unsurpassable and limited 'historical peculiarity' of Jesus of Nazareth. In other words, Christians find God above all in Jesus, whose 'unique' but nevertheless 'contingent' human life makes manifest the gift of salvation from God for all people.<sup>3</sup> To overlook the specific concreteness of Jesus' humanity then is to cut against the Christological confessions of the church and risk reducing Jesus' humanity to a docetic pseudo-humanity. If we take the finite condition of Jesus' humanity seriously, Schillebeeckx argues that we cannot claim that the revelation of God in Jesus is absolute. This is not to deny that the fullness of God dwells in Jesus but to assert that his corporeal nature is contingent and limited. On this basis, Schillebeeckx concludes that while Jesus can be understood as the definitive revelation of God, his earthly life was not an exhaustive revelation. This is evident from the fact that Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to continue to lead his disciples into all truth. Ultimately

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<sup>3</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*,

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for Schillebeeckx, God exceeds the limits of language and as a result cannot be exhausted by any religious tradition. It is this conviction that leads Schillebeeckx to conclude that there is more truth in all the religions together than in any particular religion.

So, in contrast to those who have dismissed the implications of Jesus' historical and limited human nature, Schillebeeckx identifies Jesus as a symbol of openness: Jesus through his preaching and praxis reveals that God is relational. To treat Jesus as a symbol of openness is to concede that there is good, truth, and beauty in other traditions that should not be ignored. However, Schillebeeckx maintains that we only truly enrich each other when we speak with our own authentic voice. While Schillebeeckx locates the transcendent unity that is present in human history in God the creator, we could also connect it to the creedal affirmation that the Holy Spirit is the Lord who gives life.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the understanding that the Spirit is the source of life, who calls all people and enables them to bring justice and to love one another. From the perspective of the Christian tradition, the shape of life lived in the Spirit is revealed in Jesus Christ. To dismiss the contributions of other traditions is to ultimately reject the idea that Spirit is at work in all of creation.

Schillebeeckx contends that 'the actual historical violence of Christianity and its Christology has its deepest roots in our continual forgetfulness of pneumatology.' This is because the Spirit is not 'incarnate' in our contingent history but transcends it. Therefore, the Spirit of God is not limited but able to blow in a life-giving way wherever human beings are to be found. In the Spirit the redemption of Jesus becomes a historical and universal offer without any discrimination or virtual violence. The Spirit reminds Christians of the historical person of Jesus, about his prophetic message, his life and death as a protest against all violence. Thus 'only in the Christian confession of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>4</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 847. Credit to this thought to Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, Edward Schillebeeckx & Interreligious Dialogue, 105.

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(pneumatology) does Christology come into its universal openness for all human beings without any discriminating undervaluing of all other religions.’ In the power of the gift of the Spirit, which is not bound to the church of Christ, people are able to forgive others and encounter ‘the other’ in their otherness and to affirm the other. In fact, Schillebeeckx concludes:

Only pneumatology can prevent Christology, too, from being violent. Without pneumatology any Christology is false in a way that threatens human beings and its unorthodox. The actual historical violence of Christianity and its Christology is most deeply rooted in our constant forgetfulness of pneumatology: the Logos of the pneuma blows where it will.<sup>5</sup>

To focus on the Spirit then is to speak of the presence of God that pervades the whole of creation. A presence which Christians affirm has a distinctive form, but which is not limited to the church or any aspect of creation. This in turn has implications for how we might think about the relationship of theology to science and culture.

### *The Spirit and Mary*

In reflecting on the shape of Catholic theology, Elsie Gibson noted: ‘When I began the study of Catholic theology, every place I expected to find an exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, I found Mary. What Protestants universally attribute to the action of the Holy Spirit was attributed to Mary.’<sup>6</sup> It is striking then that in his search for a responsible and authentic Christology, Schillebeeckx identifies his desire to establish a pneuma-christological Mariology. In other words, an approach that seeks to take both the Spirit and Jesus Christ as normative. It was of particular note to Schillebeeckx that while the First Testament speaks about the Spirit being the gift of Pentecost, Mary is

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx “Religion as a Source of Violence” in *Concillium* (1997) 142.

<sup>6</sup> Elsie Gibson, quoted in Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 163.

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presented as receiving the Spirit before Pentecost: 'In the Gospel, in the New Testament, Mary is the first to share in the history of the Holy Spirit which takes place in our secular history, a real history which is set in motion by Jesus Christ, and her name is associated with his work of salvation.'<sup>7</sup> Schillebeeckx identifies the act of overshadowing Mary as marking the transition from the holy spirit as the name for God's creative power to the Holy Spirit as the very presence of God. Thus, the overshadowing by the holy spirit and being called son of God are integrally connected to one another: 'In this context of Jesus' conception in Mary's womb this certainly does not mean that the Spirit takes over the role of the man in producing a child; what we have here is God's unique presence in the origin of new life, the life of this human child Jesus.'<sup>8</sup> It is on account of the Spirit then that Jesus is from his conception the Son of God.

In contrast to his earlier view on Mary, Schillebeeckx wants to stress that it is the Spirit and not Mary that is the source of all life. As a result, it is the Spirit and not Mary who is 'the mother of all believers', the 'true mother of the church'. The Mariological titles of honour then have been transferred from the Spirit to the church and to Mary. For this reason, Schillebeeckx concludes:

The whole of the church's Mariology must therefore be reactualised on the basis of the fundamental idea that the Holy Spirit is 'mother of the church. All further transference of pneumatological titles of honour both to the church and to Mary must be reviewed again very critically: pneumatologically and christologically, then ecclesiologicaly, and finally mariologically.'<sup>9</sup>

To think more intentionally about the relationship between the Spirit and Mary opens space to reconsider how we understand the nature of the church and the Christian life.

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halkes, *Mary, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1993), 26.

<sup>8</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Mary*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Mary*, 29.

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## 7.2 The Scope of this Research

Admittedly, by focusing on the Spirit in Schillebeeckx's theology, I have gone somewhat against the grain of his work. This is because by the end of his career Schillebeeckx really emphasised the oneness of God and was overtly reticent about speaking of God in terms of 'three persons'. Fundamentally, Schillebeeckx stresses the importance of 'letting God be God', an argument that is apparent from his emphasis on the mysterious nature of the Spirit. However, my investigation into Schillebeeckx's treatment of the Spirit ultimately flows from his own concession that there is a latent pneumatology present in his work.

Through this study then I have sought to bring into focus that which Schillebeeckx himself identified as present. In this task, my investigation might be compared to the work of a horologist who traces the maker's marks in a watch in order to fix its mechanism. To this end, one significant way in which this study might be enhanced is through an exploration of archival material. It may be that more material is contained in Schillebeeckx's notes and lectures which would help us establish an even clearer picture of how he understood the Spirit. It would also be beneficial to bring Schillebeeckx into a more intentional dialogue with a number of his contemporaries on the subject of the Spirit. For instance, by comparing and contrasting the approach taken by Schillebeeckx to that of say Rahner, Moltmann, or Tillich. However, it is also important to note that Schillebeeckx was not writing for posterity. It is for this reason that I sought to think with Schillebeeckx beyond Schillebeeckx by identifying material that might be pertinent to the current recovery of the Spirit in Western theology more broadly. Thus, this study would also be expanded if the constructive proposals contained within it were to be fleshed out more fully. In particular the understanding that the Spirit should not be thought about in abstraction but in relation to the Spirit's effects, which are arguably most evident in those situations where people are able to manifest a new reality in the midst of the old.

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## **7.5 The Contribution of this Thesis**

This thesis was written in response to a persistent question in Schillebeeckx studies: where is the Holy Spirit? While a number of authors have briefly touched on the Spirit in Schillebeeckx, there has been no concerted effort to read the entire of Schillebeeckx's theological corpus with an eye to his pneumatology. In fact, on the basis of the T&T Handbook and other recently published monographs in the Studies in Schillebeeckx series one would struggle to know that there even is a Holy Spirit. The most comprehensive engagement with the question of Schillebeeckx's pneumatology prior to this thesis was Helen Bergin's essay on the subject published in 1999. The time had come then for a more detailed investigation into the question of Schillebeeckx's pneumatology.

Through this modest but necessary contribution to the ongoing reception of Schillebeeckx's work by a new generation of theologians, I have started to show how Schillebeeckx's theology might be read in a more pneumatological manner. In part this has been possible because I followed the latent pneumatological trajectory that was already present in Schillebeeckx's work. However, by drawing on the insights of some of those who have contributed to the recovery of the Spirit in Western theology, I have also been able to show how Schillebeeckx's work can be enhanced through alternative approaches to the Spirit in the economy of salvation.

In conclusion, there is a pneumatology in Schillebeeckx's theology, but the strength of Schillebeeckx's approach is less in what he explicitly says and more in the way in which his theology acts as a toolbox for enabling us to speak meaningfully about God in a world that is marred by suffering and injustice. For in Schillebeeckx we find someone who takes the challenges of the world seriously and who locates the active presence of God's Spirit within them.



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