

definitions of love. She suggested further that sexual liberation, which involves both personal and social power, is required for the creation of community, and raised the question of the role of Christianity in "de-tabooing" as well as in conserving sexual and social norms.

In the ensuing discussion, which involved some twenty participants in addition to the panel, a number of substantive and methodological concerns were mentioned, including: the importance of incorporating data from psychology, anthropology, and history into work in sexual and social ethics; the importance of distinguishing sexual liberation from promiscuity; the need, in affirming the feminist critique of gender-based divisions between the private and public spheres, not to lose sight of all differences between the personal and the social; and, the desirability of inquiring further into the ways experience (including biological and social experience) affects the doing of theology.

During its second meeting the group focused on these questions: (1) Should moral theologians be trained in feminist thought? and, (2) Why has the church's social teaching been taken less seriously than its sexual teaching? To the first question one participant responded that since the women's movement will affect the church profoundly for the foreseeable future, and since the daily life of the church is the concern of moral theology, there is an urgent need for moral theologians to be competent in this area. Most of the discussion centered on the second question. It was suggested that sexual teachings may have had more impact because the agent is more aware of this profoundly personal area, and also that social teachings since the nineteenth century may have been too disruptive, whereas sexual teachings tended to preserve a conservative social order. There was interest voiced in the question of whether the distinction between principles and application of principles noted in the recent pastoral letter of the U.S. bishops on nuclear arms will carry over into sexual questions as well as military ones. And, most importantly, it was pointed out that, considered historically, social and sexual teachings are quite intertwined in the tradition and the relationship between them needs systematic analysis and critique.

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### C. THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SCHILLEBEECKX'S CHRISTOLOGY

In the presentation which introduced the two sessions of this seminar, the ethical dimensions of *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* and *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* were addressed under five headings: Schillebeeckx's basic question; his method; the relation of ethics and religion; some specific contributions these books make to ethics; and, finally, some unresolved questions. After discussing each of these in turn, I shall recapitulate the ensuing discussion.

Schillebeeckx's basic question in his Christological volumes may be summarized as the actualization of Jesus' own question in the synoptic gospels: "Who do you say that I am?" But his basic question may also be transposed into an ethical form: Can we live humanly before God? He frequently notes that the search for a way of life with meaning is central to the modern predicament. It is thus inevitable that his Christological project has from the start and throughout its course an inalienably ethical character.

Schillebeeckx's method may generally be described as critically historical. Structural and material analysis complement his fundamental approach of historical criticism. But several other significant aspects of his method bear on ethics and deserve mention. He repeatedly emphasizes, for example, that the narration of God's history with us precedes our arguments about God's purposes and ways. Narrative and analysis must thus be combined, in every dimension of theology. Further, Schillebeeckx recommends a method of correlation according to which theology seeks to discern the correlation between the gospel as it is addressed and received in the social and historical circumstances of Jesus' life and then in each succeeding period of history. The gospel is not correlative, as answer, to history in general, as question. Rather, there is an analogy of correspondence between its liberating power in one period of human culture and its power in every other. Finally, Schillebeeckx's method significantly recommends an epistemology of compassion: between the controlling rationality of technological life and the contemplative reason of mystical experience stands compassion, opening us to the new and genuine future that comes from God's creative power. (One of my students rightly calls such an ethics "martyrological.")

Beyond his basic question and method, Schillebeeckx has also explicitly addressed the relation of ethics and religion. Of central importance here is his conception of Jesus as eschatological prophet. Calling his hearers to trust in the approach of God's reign, Jesus himself bears salvation for them, offering all men and women a wholeness of life which is at once an experience of mercy and forgiveness, a discovery of meaning and finality, and a liberation for ethical commitment. In this new situation, religion and ethics are related dialectically: religion as the response to God's saving initiative calls for a transformation of ethics according to the standard of God's own justice. Again, one may note certain correspondences here: analogous relations obtain between creation and covenant, between nature and grace, between the natural and the historical orders, and, finally, between ethics and religion. In each case there is an initial, imperfect unity given from God but called to fuller realization in the process of the world's history.

Several specific contributions to ethics should also be noted in Schillebeeckx's two volumes. First, he has sought to ground ethics ultimately not in any human principle but in the justice of God's own life. This justice must be understood Christologically and eschatologically; it is a promise of justice made available through Jesus and awaiting full realization with

the completion of time. Second, Schillebeeckx speaks of human solidarity in a way that echoes documents of Vatican II and also many of his contemporaries. But he also raises solidarity to the status of a principle, solidarity, namely, as the relationship between God and humanity which God has established and which God calls us to let reign among ourselves. Third, while acknowledging a permanent anthropological tension between the person and society, Schillebeeckx maintains that the distinction, while remaining real, is nevertheless transcended and brought to a further unity by the event of salvation. Fourth, and connected with the basic question at once of Christology and of ethics, we find in *Jesus and Christ* a fundamental conception of good and evil; it indicates a slight but significant historical variation on the issue as it was posed by someone like Thomas Aquinas. The question of the good now becomes: Empowered by God's life and mercy, what may we in our turn do for life? Put in the imperative, the fundamental conception is that following the divine example, we may commit ourselves on behalf of a humanity which always exists in an endangered, suffering situation. It is not simply that good is to be done and evil to be avoided. In a more thoroughly historical vision, we are called to take the part of the endangered good and to stand against the evil which is always already a part of human history.

A fifth ethical specific in Schillebeeckx's thought derives from his conception of time. While acknowledging the excesses of some recent futurology, he nevertheless continues to insist on the importance of the future and here develops at even greater length how the future which comes to us when we side with human suffering belongs primordially to God. Sixth, Schillebeeckx recognizes the dangers of relativism for both doctrinal and ethical thought. He is clearly concerned to promote an ethics for a pluralistic world and maintains, accordingly, that there is always a tension between ethical reflection's relation to specific circumstances, on the one hand, and, on the other, its drive for universal validity. This finally brings us full circle to the first of his specifically ethical contributions, concerning the justice of God. With the specifications noted, Schillebeeckx's ethical thought appears distinctly sacramental: the immediacy of God's presence is always mediated; it is also a constant call for our repentance and conversion.

But some unresolved questions or needed clarifications should also be noted. Let me mention a few that Volume Three in Schillebeeckx's trilogy may well address. Most urgent of all, perhaps: How do we avoid an ethical relativism, if the discontinuity between historical periods is as great as Schillebeeckx sometimes suggests (at other times he speaks more conservatively of the continuity in history)? Further, how is salvation, and ethical invitation, available apart from the actual experience of Jesus and the historically preached word of witness to him? Do the gifts of the Spirit attested by Paul deserve fuller treatment, and integration into a Christian ethical perspective? At the same time, what structures of the church deserve to be accorded normative character and how do they relate to the ethical life of Christians? And given the "different experiences" of believers

and unbelievers, how is the church in the world to promote dialogue that serves the public order? Finally, if salvation indeed means perfect and universal wholeness, how more precisely should we conceive the parousia and the end of time? What are its implications for ethical thought which does indeed relativize all human action (none of it fully divine) but also decisively radicalizes it (in all of it divine life is at stake)?

The discussion which followed this presentation centered on clarifying some of Schillebeeckx's basic notions, testing their practicality, and relating his thought as a dogmatic theologian to Christian ethicists' recent questions about a specifically Christian ethics. On the first point, it was noted that ethics can signify a reflective discipline, a set of principles applicable to moral conduct, or actual practice, the *ethos* of a people. Schillebeeckx seems to use the term in each of these senses. His understanding of "historical reason," furthermore, was contrasted with more classical notions of human reason. Without being relativistic, his approach commended itself as appropriate to a pluralistic, non-synchronistic world culture.

Questions about the practical relevance of Schillebeeckx's insights started generally with his conviction that practice precedes theory. In recent years his own pastoral concerns have become increasingly social, addressing issues of social justice such as nuclear disarmament. His own practice seems to answer well the charge that faith in God's triumph over evil inevitably undermines human responsibility. With regard to the question of specifically Christian ethics, the seminar saw Schillebeeckx, in a typology like James Gustafson's, neither as a purely rational ethicist nor as proposing an ethic merely for Christians but rather as the advocate of an ethics rooted in (a particular) tradition while appealing to universality.

One final note: it was unanimously agreed in the seminar that efforts to promote dialogue between systematic and moral theologians should by all means be encouraged in the CTSA and at its convention.

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