

- Topic: The Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx:
Implications for Understanding the Development of Doctrine
- Convener: Daniel P. Thompson, Fordham University
- Moderator: Mary T. Stimming, Dominican University
- Presenter: Daniel P. Thompson, Fordham University
- Respondent: Elena G. Procario-Foley, Iona College

Daniel P. Thompson's paper, entitled "Schillebeeckx and the Development of Doctrine: Historical Periods, Postmodernity, and the Translation of Experience," explored the topic of the session by way of a three-part argument.

First, Thompson outlined briefly the epistemological and theological presuppositions which serve as frameworks for Schillebeeckx's thought in general and for his discussion of doctrine in particular. Noting the irreducibly dialectical, but nonantithetical style of Schillebeeckx's thinking, Thompson described the three general "epistemological circles" of Schillebeeckx's thought, his understanding of salvation and revelation and finally the christological and ecclesiological contexts in which any doctrinal development takes place. He then focused at more length on the three criteria that Schillebeeckx develops to explain the proper transmission of orthodoxy, which is the "hermeneutical, critical, and practical translation of Christian experience across historical eras," according to Thompson's reading. Thompson argued that these three criteria: the criterion of the proportional norm, of orthopraxis and of acceptance by the People of God, form an interrelated set in Schillebeeckx's work, although the first criterion in a sense encompasses the other two.

Second, Thompson then discussed Schillebeeckx's particular understanding of doctrines, which he summarized as "linguistic expressions of the experience of faith which fall within the hermeneutical, critical and practical limits of all human language." Thompson used Schillebeeckx's recent (1994) article entitled "Breaks in Christian Dogmas," to explicate further the various cultural, linguistic and epistemological conditions which call for "breaks" in doctrinal expression in order to preserve the proper translation of Christian experience across historical eras. Thompson then took up the question of whether Schillebeeckx's understanding of the status of doctrinal language implied that doctrinal affirmations themselves could become irrelevant and therefore expendable by the church.

Third and finally, Thompson set this discussion of doctrinal breaks and continuities within the wider question of Schillebeeckx's understanding of historical change and continuity. Thompson explicated the threefold division of history into "ephemeral," "conjunctural" and "structural" phases, which Schillebeeckx derived from the French Annales school and used in his *Jesus* book specifically. Arguing that this understanding of history informs directly Schillebeeckx's understanding of doctrinal development, Thompson then briefly developed a question which Schillebeeckx only suggestively hints at in his later work: the question of the move into a new phase of structural history occasioned by the advent of postmodernity. Using David Tracy's understanding of the

challenges which postmodern thought addresses to the modern, Thompson suggested that postmodern claims about subjectivity and history pose serious problems for Schillebeeckx's understanding of the possibility of doctrinal translation across historical eras. Thompson concluded the paper with the suggestion that Schillebeeckx's appeal to the negative contrast experiences of humanity, particularly as embedded in the narratives of human suffering, could still serve as an "anthropological constant" for the development of doctrine, even in a "poly-centered" or "de-centered" world.

In her response, Elena G. Procaro-Foley expressed a large degree of agreement with Thompson's paper and raised several questions for further exploration. First, Procaro-Foley noted that the abundance and complexity of Schillebeeckx's writings militates against constructing a purely systematic structure for his thought. Instead, Procaro-Foley argues that Schillebeeckx possesses a "coherent vision," if not a system in his work, and that this vision is adequate for theology in the postmodern context and for contemporary pastoral concerns. Arguing that this coherent vision is grounded in both his epistemology and his pastoral concerns, Procaro-Foley agreed with Thompson's description of Schillebeeckx's epistemological circles, but suggested that the dialectic of "experience" and "thought" underlies even the basic structures that Thompson attempted to describe. Understanding this basic dialectic, Procaro-Foley suggested, could help elucidate Thompson's description of the epistemological framework for Schillebeeckx's understanding of doctrinal development. Turning to more pastoral concerns, Procaro-Foley used the examples of the recent controversy at Corpus Christi Church in Rochester, New York, and the NCCB's most recent draft of the implementation guidelines for *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, to test Thompson's reading of Schillebeeckx. She suggests that according to Schillebeeckx's criteria, the former might be a case of authentic doctrinal development, while the latter would not. Finally, Procaro-Foley concluded her response with some epigrammatic thoughts on the question of postmodernity in relationship to Schillebeeckx's work.

During a brief question and answer period, several questions about postmodernity were raised and pursued by several members of the audience. Of particular interest was the question of Schillebeeckx's immediate context in the European situation during the 1980s and 1990s and the possibility that Schillebeeckx's nod to postmodernity was less a well-thought-out conclusion about a real break in the structural level of history than an attempt to be inclusive to currents of thought popular at the time.

The presenters concluded the session with an invitation to a further discussion about the possibility of developing a continuing Schillebeeckx group.

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