

THE ENDURING LEGACY OF EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

Topic: Generations of Schillebeeckx Scholarship
Convener: Kathleen McManus, University of Portland
Moderator: Erin Lothes Biviano, Columbia University
Presenters: Roger Haight, Union Theological Seminary
Erik Borgman, Tilburg University

Representing the legacy of Edward Schillebeeckx in the North American and European contexts, Roger Haight and Erik Borgman each focussed in distinct ways upon Schillebeeckx's theological method.

Roger Haight's presentation, "Lessons Learned from Edward Schillebeeckx," explored the dynamics of the transitional middle period of Schillebeeckx's career in which he "reinvented himself as a theologian." Haight focussed on this period because 1) its contents essentially trace the radical transition that S. underwent between the publication of *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* in the 1950's and *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* in the 1970's, and 2) the conversion from neo-Thomism to historical consciousness charted in this transition may well be paradigmatic. Haight observed, "I know of no other Catholic theologian who has so thoroughly recorded the dynamic logic of how one moves from a relatively premodern dogmatic imagination to an appropriation of the Christian message that addresses our postmodern world."

Haight elucidated this "dynamic logic" by analyzing the three areas influencing Schillebeeckx during the 1960's: secularization (Embracing the World), hermeneutics, (Embracing History), and critical theory (Embracing Critical Consciousness). Secularization, for Schillebeeckx, imposed on theology the task of replacing its extrinsicist language with a language that would speak to secular culture. Within secular reality is an openness to transcendence which S calls "basic trust," the ground of which is latent trust in God and faith in human existence as a promise of salvation. Haight then discussed S's hermeneutical embrace of historicity, which led him to locate the permanent element in Christian faith in the existential relationship of the Christian to God as God is mediated in Jesus of Nazareth. Together with interpreting past tradition for the present, S was concerned with eschatology. The way to God's promised future passes through action, giving rise to the language of praxis and orthopraxis. Finally, Haight considered S's embrace of critical consciousness, a "wedding of hermeneutical and critical theory." Central here was S's engagement of negative contrast experience, the dialectical nature of which accounts for the role of suffering in his later theology. In conclusion, Haight emphasized that, despite the radical and decisive nature of S's methodological shift, he did not reverse or leave behind the content of his earlier theology. Instead, he drew it forward into a modern and post-modern framework.

Erik Borgman's presentation, "Why Edward Schillebeeckx is Still Relevant," focussed on Schillebeeckx's theological method as one of "relational" or "proportional continuity." What is constant in the Christian tradition is its pro-

portional relation to the ever-changing situation of human history. The theology of creation Schillebeeckx began to develop at the beginning of his career is reflected in *Gaudium et spes*, which speaks of the world of human history as the same world in which God its maker is revealed. Schillebeeckx's later project, especially his Trilogy, fleshes out what it means theologically to view the world in this way. Borgman illuminated this project against the background of Benedict XVI's preoccupation with the Hermeneutics of Vatican II. In 2005, Benedict contrasted a "hermeneutic of discontinuity" with a "hermeneutic of reform and renewal in continuity." This reflects the thesis of a 1975 article by then Professor Joseph Ratzinger critiquing the way *Gaudium et spes* was being received, especially in the Netherlands. Only by being independent of its context, Ratzinger asserted, can the Church justifiably be called the dwelling of God's truth. For Benedict, a hermeneutic of discontinuity is wrong because it endangers the credibility of the Church's witness to Truth. The Church, before and after Vatican II, remains for Benedict the same unchanging subject. Borgman declared that what he has learned from Schillebeeckx is that "we do not need to think of the Church as one subject in possession of the truth in order to hold on to the confession of her continuity in response to God's faithfulness." Continuity consists in "being open to the unexpected ways God faithfully shows (God's) liberating presence." Rather than being a characteristic belonging to the Church's identity, continuity "is given to the Church as an opportunity in history, and she should open herself up to receive it from the God who is faithfully present to the world in which she participates." In conclusion, Borgman noted that the human situation has changed dramatically since S wrote his major works. He left us with the question, "What does a Schillebeeckxian approach mean in a world that is, like ours, both secularizing and religionizing?"

Erin Lothes Biviano moderated the lively discussion that ensued between the audience of "Schillebeeckx people" and the presenters.

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