FROM SACRAMENT OF SALVATION TO SIGN THAT INTERRUPTS:
THE EVOLUTION IN EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX’S THEOLOGY OF
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

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by

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Abstract

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What is the role of the church in a radically secular and pluralistic world in which science and technology set its course, while the prevalence of suffering constantly undermines its progress? This dissertation addresses the issue of the church and world relationship by an analysis of the development of Edward Schillebeeckx’s thought on the issue. It makes two points: firstly, that the shifts in his theology express his consistent effort to see the church as sacrament always in relation to what it symbolizes, that is, God’s salvation for humanity revealed in Jesus Christ; secondly, that Schillebeeckx found the church’s unique role precisely in the relevance, communicability and credibility of its constructive and critical praxis in the world. To highlight continuity, this dissertation examines his multiple shifts, roughly divided into three periods: the period of his first major work, that of Vatican II, and that of his engagement with hermeneutics and critical theory. The linchpin of his continuity in discontinuity is sacramentality. From his early existential-
phenomenological retrieval of Thomas Aquinas’ theology of the sacraments to his unfinished work on the sacraments as “metaphorical celebrations,” he pursued a dialectical synthesis of the church and the world. As his theology matured, it became less church-centered, more oriented toward the world, and critical of both the church and the world. The critical impulse came both from the “foreign prophecy” of the world and from the Gospel on which he based the church’s praxis of remembrance, actualization and eschatological hope. His developed view on the church and the world found expression in the dialectic of mysticism and politics. In the final chapter, this dissertation offers a case study of an ecclesial response to a controversial environmental project of the Korean government, to examine the implications of Schillebeeckx’s theology for the church’s role in the contemporary world. In conclusion, the value of the evolution of Schillebeeckx’s view is assessed, and the strength of his developed thought reaffirmed, while some ambiguity and the need for further development are exposed in terms of the precise shape of the church’s indirect but concrete involvement in the world of politics.
To my mother and father
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The question concerning the significance of the Second Vatican Council has never waned in ecclesial and academic discussions since the promulgations of its various documents. Reevaluation of their impact, reception, and meaning for today continues even forty-four years after the closing of the Council. One of the most significant issues at Vatican II was that of the relationship between the church and the world, addressed primarily in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes). The issue of the church-world relationship since the Council has also been one of the most debated. Much of the debate has been about the autonomy of the world, salvation beyond the boundaries of the church, the distinctive role of the church in the world, particularly in the political realm, and whether the church can learn from the world. Particularly notable in this debate at the time of the Council, but especially at the time following, is the voice of growing concern in the hierarchy and in some theological circles about the message of optimism and openness of Vatican II. That message has often been interpreted to imply the world’s being on an equal footing with the church, and has raised the concern that the church is in danger of capitulating to worldly values, such as pluralistic relativism and secularism. A question arises: does an open and
dialogical attitude of the church toward its worldly context necessarily lead to the loss or compromise of the church’s unique evangelical voice and tradition as suggested by some?

One of the distinguished theologians of Vatican II who championed its breakthrough concerning the church-world question was Edward Schillebeeckx, a Belgian Dominican who was born on Nov. 12, 1914 and passed away during the writing of this dissertation, on Dec. 23, 2009. The issue of the church-world relationship engaged him throughout much of his own theological career. One of his interpreters characterizes his multifaceted theology to be precisely about this issue: “What does it mean to be a Christian, a Christian community, in the contemporary world?”¹ This was a constantly recurring question in Schillebeeckx’s work, yet his many answers come in ways that make it difficult to systematize his thought due to its changing content, framework, and perspective. For instance, two of his works, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, published in 1959, and *Church: The Human Story of God* published in 1989 exhibit vastly contrasting views on the church-world relationship. In the former, the church is the sacrament and extension on earth of the risen Christ who himself is the sacrament of God; in the latter, he discusses the church in “a minor key,” shifting his focal point to the concrete lives of the people rather than the institutional church. In *Church*, the final volume of his Christological trilogy, living human beings in the world take on the primary role of mediating God’s salvation, particularly in and through their

¹ Robert J. Schreiter, “Edward Schillebeeckx: an Orientation to His Thought,” *The Schillebeeckx Reader*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1987), 10. Schreiter is characterizing Schillebeeckx’s main concern here in terms of ecclesiology. The same concern can be expressed in various ways. Philip Kennedy puts it: “it is the quandary of explaining how that which is absolute…can be recognized and contacted in that which is limited, localized, historical, and particular. For Schillebeeckx, theology is a matter of describing how the absolute is unveiled, so to speak, in the relative; the ultimate in the limited. Philosophically expressed, his works seek to unravel the interplay between universality and particularity. Theologically worded, his publications are impelled from beginning to end by the task of explaining the mediation of divine transcendence in human, historical immanence.” See Philip Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx* (Collegeville: the Liturgical Press, 1993), 4.
experiences of suffering, and thus they are the story and symbol of God. While in *Christ the Sacrament*, the church exists to draw the world into itself for salvation, in *Church* book the church goes out to serve the world by enabling the people to recognize, celebrate and anticipate the salvific presence of God in their concrete lives.

Critics and commentators of Schillebeeckx offer differing assessments of the changes in his theology. There are those who see in the changes clear discontinuity from his earlier writings and an almost heterodox discontinuity from the tradition of the church. Of particular note in this regard are the investigations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Congregation’s concern does not directly involve the issue of the church-world relationship, to be sure. However, their objections are notable, since Schillebeeckx’s historical methodology, experiential starting point and dialectical pattern of thought – all of which the Congregation takes issue with – have direct bearing on his view on the church-world relationship. Another critic, Leo Scheffczyk, who limits his comments to Schillebeeckx’s christology, approves Schillebeeckx’s “pre-critical” positions, while objecting to his effort at updating the tradition through the frameworks of hermeneutics and critical theory. According to Scheffczyk, Schillebeeckx subordinates biblical and dogmatic faith to the subjective modern self-understanding, and thus distorts the former. William L. Portier’s assessment is more ambivalent. He thinks that later Schillebeeckx still shows elements of a “minimal, negative realistic metaphysics” in

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continuity with his Thomistic past, but this metaphysics is at odds with his fundamental theological position, i.e. one based on critical theory, operating in his later thought.⁴

There are, however, other interpreters of Schillebeeckx who see continuity despite the shifts. Mary Catherine Hilkert sees a fundamental continuity in Schillebeeckx’s insight that revelation occurs in history.⁵ Even in his “pre-critical” and dogmatic period, he was already theologizing within that historical framework. Once this fundamental framework is acknowledged, one can interpret his shifts to hermeneutical and critical methods and corresponding theologies basically as adaptations to new world-contexts of the experience of God. In other words, Schillebeeckx’s shifts are indications of his constant effort at contextualization and inculturation of the experience of God’s absolute saving grace. Another voice that echoes this “continuity” thesis is that of Philip Kennedy who focuses on Schillebeeckx’s philosophical foundations. He claims that, although Schillebeeckx’s pursuit of criteria for judging contemporary experiences of God led him to hermeneutics and eventually to praxis, his epistemological premise remains Thomistic, in that there is no source of knowledge of God other than through creation. Kennedy goes so far as saying that Schillebeeckx’s early Thomistic-De Petterian notion of “implicit intuition” and later neo-Marxist notion of negative contrast experiences are actually the same thing “in the sense that they both refer to a salvific reality independent of human beings.”⁶

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On the question of the church-world relationship, Susan A. Ross, while discussing the sacramentality of the church, distinguishes his changing content and style from his constant concern for the concrete and historical life of the church in the world. She summarizes the elements of contrast that exist between Schillebeeckx’s early and later thought on the church’s sacramentality as intensification, growing specificity, and awareness of suffering.7 Another interpreter, Daniel Thompson believes that the model of the church as sacrament remains central in Schillebeeckx’s later thought, while its content shifts in such a way that Schillebeeckx’s ecclesiology can face the problems of today, such as “pluralism and communion, authority and dissent, change and tradition.”8

This present dissertation follows the observations of the latter set of authors cited above with the view that a careful reading of Schillebeeckx’s work can reveal an evolution in which certain “breaks” keep his ideas continuous with his own earlier thought that is expressed in the language of the tradition, while they enable his conceptions of the church to be relevant and effective in the changing world. None of the works cited above, however, deals comprehensively or systematically with Schillebeeckx’s theological and methodological development on the issue of the church and world relationship. Nor has any of them placed the church-world relationship at the center of their discussions of the dialectical relationship between continuity and discontinuity. They also do not make an explicit correlation between Schillebeeckx’s evolution of thought on the topic and his effort at safeguarding the unique role of the


church that transcends the world even in its dialectical, mutually-informing and non-dualistic relationship to the world. It is the following two tasks that this dissertation will undertake: 1) to investigate whether or not Schillebeeckx’s changes on the church-world question essentially express his consistent effort to see the church as sacrament always in relation to what it serves, namely, God, Jesus Christ and humanity; 2) to assess whether or not in this process Schillebeeckx has undermined the church’s identity in pursuit of the “relevance, communicability, and credibility” of the church in the world. This dissertation will argue that although Schillebeeckx undergoes hermeneutical and critical shifts in his discussion on the church-world relationship, he nevertheless maintains a more fundamental continuity in his view of the church as sacrament. The shifts constitute a consistent development of thought, in which one finds Schillebeeckx’s dialectic of continuity and discontinuity. As he discusses the church’s relevance in the contemporary world in his later ecclesiology, he continues to affirm the church’s unique role of service to the world. In his later theology, he highlights the church’s critical and prophetic role in the political realm, in light of the new shape of sacramentality that consists in being an anticipatory sign, interrupting the history of suffering and actualizing the kingdom of God.

1.2 Structure

1.2.1 Chapter 2: Historical Background: Schillebeeckx’s Formation Leading up to his
Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God

This introductory chapter maps how various philosophical, theological and historical elements led Schillebeeckx to the notion of the church as sacrament understood in relation to God and to the world, the notion that Vatican II later fully embraces. It will
explore the theology of Thomas Aquinas whose sacramental insight Schillebeeckx developed into his view of the church. For contrast, the juridical and static approach of the neo-scholastics toward sacraments, which was prevalent at the time of Schillebeeckx’s early intellectual formation, will be presented as well. Accompanying this study of neo-scholastic theology is a look at the historical context of how the magisterium of the Catholic Church until the early twentieth century viewed the world and considered the place of the church in relation to it.

In contrast to the rigid atmosphere in which Schillebeeckx found himself during his early formation, fellow Dominican mentors such as Dominic De Petter and Marie-Dominique Chenu led him to a phenomenological and historical rereading of Thomas Aquinas. They, as well as Yves Congar, were instrumental in his reappropriation of the biblical, patristic and medieval tradition, in his historical mode of doing theology, and in his focus on human experience as the medium of revelation, as well as concealment, of God. The chapter will conclude with a brief treatment of key themes found in his doctoral dissertation on sacraments, which grounded the sacramental ecclesiology found in *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*.9

1.2.2 Chapter 3: Schillebeeckx’s Early Theology of the Church as “Sacrament of the Risen Christ”

For Schillebeeckx the *locus theologicus* of the theology of the relationship between church and world is the historical event of salvation in Jesus Christ.10 In *Christ...
the Sacrament of the Encounter with God, through which Schillebeeckx became known to the English-speaking world, he called Jesus Christ the primordial sacrament of God, in the sense that he is the “divine bestowal of salvation in an outwardly perceptible form which makes the bestowal manifest.”

Schillebeeckx’s claim is firmly grounded in metaphysical and dogmatic frameworks and terms of Chalcedon and Trinitarian theology, while employing at the same time the phenomenological notion of bodily “encounter.” Jesus Christ is both the manifestation of God’s salvation and the most perfect human response. On this christological basis, Schillebeeckx establishes the church to be the continuation of what God initiated in the Incarnation. It is the earthly extension of the glorified body of the Lord, hence Christ’s salvation itself as visibly realized in this world.

What is already central at this early stage is Schillebeeckx’s understanding of the mediated nature of human experience: salvation is an encounter with God in and through human bodiliness. The world therefore already manifests an “implicit,” “anonymous,” and “secular” Christianity. The church and the world are the “two complementary forms of experience of the one Christianity,” but at the same time, the world, in which salvation is already present, is understood in terms of its culmination, i.e. the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and by extension, the church. In the context of his sacramental ecclesiology, the world is on the way to explicit manifestation of God in Jesus. In other words, it is in the process of being drawn into the church.

The church’s role in the world is exercised through charisms of both the hierarchy with its distinct role of leadership and the faithful, who are to turn their everyday worldly


12 Ibid., 102.
life into the arena of grace, that is, the sacrament of the encounter with God. The fact that sacraments conceal as well as reveal is acknowledged, but not developed at this stage of his work. Because of the unbroken continuity between the church and Jesus Christ, the church is not merely a means of salvation, but Christ’s salvation itself as visibly realized in this world.

1.2.3 Chapter 4: Schillebeeckx and the Second Vatican Council: the Church as Sacrament of Christ and of the World

In the 1960s, Schillebeeckx’s understanding of the world became much more nuanced than it was in his early writing, allowing more room for the world’s autonomy and for its dialectical tension with the church. The church and the world must not be identified with each other, nor can they be entirely separated as two independent groups: the world is the universal People of God, whereas the church is the People of God who have become the Body of the Lord. To put it conversely: the church is both sacrament of Christ and sacrament of the world, sacramentum mundi.

Dramatic shifts also came through the experience of Vatican II within the church, and through the sweeping movements of secularization and secular humanism in the West. The event of Vatican II is inseparable from Schillebeeckx’s theological development in terms of his influence on the Council and also of the Council’s subsequent impact on his theology of the church in the world. This chapter will include an exploration of the extent of his involvement in the formation of some of the documents of Vatican II, and an analysis of his critical assessment and application of the conciliar insights in his theology. Vatican II affirmed optimistically that the church and the world were in a relationship of dialogue. Schillebeeckx went further and declared
that the church is the sacrament of dialogue for the purpose of serving the world, since it is the sign and instrument of “the unity of all mankind,” as well as of “the intimate union with God.”\textsuperscript{13}

Instead of adopting a “ghetto mentality,”\textsuperscript{14} he accepted the challenge of secularization as the point of departure for a new concept of God: the “‘One who is to come,’ the God who is our future.”\textsuperscript{15} During this time, Schillebeeckx turned to historical experience rather than to dogmas as the primary form of mediating the Christian tradition. The hermeneutics of history soon became more specific as he focused on praxis as a medium of appropriating the Christian faith in the God of the future. The immediate subject matter of the dialogue is the secular humanity in the world. The church’s contribution in its dialogue with the secular and humanistic world, however, is to be the living sign of the depth dimension and the transcendence of human existence that secular humanism can only express partially. But the world also has something to teach to the church, elements of its own message that has not been recognized. In order for the church to be truly prophetic, the church has to tend to the “foreign prophecy,”\textsuperscript{16} in light of the light of revelation.

In spite of the spirit of optimism of the 1960s, Schillebeeckx identified a special kind of this foreign prophecy which would later become one of his key notions that describe a mediating experience of God: “negative contrast experience,” a pre-reflective experience.


\textsuperscript{14} Schillebeeckx, \textit{World and Church}, 97.

\textsuperscript{15} Schillebeeckx, \textit{God the Future of Man}, 180.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 136.
response of protest (“this cannot go on”) prompted by negative experiences. This notion is a linchpin for his later critical-practical theology, because it expresses the fundamentally Christian hope that “things can be done differently, must improve and will get better through our commitment.” Concomitant to highlighting the negative contrast experience, Schillebeeckx also affirmed the role of the church, particularly the magisterium, in continued discernment of the foreign prophecy in the light of the Gospel.

1.2.4 Chapter 5: Schillebeeckx’s View since the Early 1970s: Ecclesiology in a Minor Key

Schillebeeckx’s shifts began in the early 1970s after his negative assessment of modern secularization and his appropriation of the critical framework from the Frankfurt School. His earnest shift to critical and practical theology was prompted by a challenge from the “theologians of contestation” who were critical of the way he had been influenced by the theology of secularization and the death of God movement. His trilogy that began to appear in 1974 made it clear that God, Jesus Christ and humankind were at the heart of his theological endeavor; namely, that the church existed for the sake of the salvation that God sought to bring about in Jesus for human beings in history: “The church is there for men and women and not vice versa” and “the human’ is the medium

17 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 158 (“Church, Magisterium and Politics”).

18 William Portier lists Frans van den Oudenrijn, Ben van Onna, Marcel Xhaufflaire and Karl Derksen as some members of this group. They themselves were influenced by critical theory, and were associated with “critical communities” or the “base movement” within Dutch Catholicism. Schillebeeckx saw a promise for the church’s future in this movement. See William Portier, “Edward Schillebeeckx as Critical Theorist: the Impact of Neo-Marxist Social Thought on His Recent Theology,” The Thomist 48 (1984): 351-52.

of the possible revelation of God.” Schillebeeckx put less emphasis on sacramental mediation, such as religion and churches, in favor of the broader, worldly and human mediation, since the sacraments were the second order of interpretation about the first realization of salvation, namely, the world and human history. This is the context where Schillebeeckx boldly declares, “there is no salvation, not even any religious salvation, outside the human world.” The prioritization is grounded in his distinction between the history of salvation and the history of revelation, and between revelation in reality and revelation in word. Without undermining the significance of the explicit Judeo-Christian awareness of God, he recalls that, before the cognitive awareness of it, salvation already has taken place and still is going forward in the world independently whenever “good is furthered and evil is challenged in the human interest.” The world no longer needs to be considered the realm of an anonymous Christianity.

However, the primary medium of God’s salvation was not just the world in general, but more specifically the human experience of negative contrast. As a result, ecclesiology became “negative,” “in a minor key,” and “critical.” What Schillebeeckx encountered in his later thought was the world that was at “a dead end,” a pluralistic and uncertain world where God had become a problem. In his direct and indirect involvement with the movements of the Dutch Catholic Church in the 1970s and 1980s,

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22 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 12.
he also experienced that the church “sorely tested”\textsuperscript{24} the delight in belonging to the church that produced Vatican II. In addition, his world expanded to include the “two-thirds of humankind…unfree, enslaved, and starving to death.”\textsuperscript{25} Schillebeeckx saw the Western world and even the church becoming stumbling blocks to the experience of God’s salvation, and called for critical perspective whenever this was the case. He critiqued them using the form of ideology-critique of the critical theory as a hermeneutical tool. This new shifted perspective put increasing emphasis on the fact that the God-experience in history was primarily mediated through the daily life of both the church and the world, which concealed as well as revealed the presence of grace.

Schillebeeckx continued to recognize the mediating roles of the church and the world, but his new perspective emphasized that both the church and the world could conceal God’s revelation.

However, in this period of Schillebeeckx’s writing, the idea of the church as sacrament remained operative, taking on a character of anticipatory, critical and eschatological sign. Schillebeeckx now began to describe Jesus as “concentrated creation” and “eschatological prophet.” He likewise spoke of the church as “a sign both of God’s creative and salvific intent for the human race and the eschatological culmination of human history.”\textsuperscript{26} This meant that the church, when it is faithful to its mission, actualized the message and praxis of Jesus through the remembrance and the eschatological hope for the fulfillment of God’s kingdom. As an anticipatory sign, the church prolongs Jesus

\textsuperscript{24} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Church}, xiii.

\textsuperscript{25} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Church}, 54.

\textsuperscript{26} Daniel Speed Thompson, \textit{The Language of Dissent: Edward Schillebeeckx on the Crisis of Authority in the Catholic Church} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 86.
Christ, by interrupting the human profane story with the equally human yet also eschatological drama of Jesus; thus the church’s sacramentality functions as a narrative, rather than a “quasi-ontological”\(^{27}\) continuity with Jesus Christ. There is a particular interdependence between the church’s remembrance and the experience of God in the world: without the proclamation of the church, the experience of salvation remains veiled, yet that proclamation is incredible without the concrete human experience to which it points.

Schillebeeckx’s abiding interest in sacramentality can be seen finally in the fact that it was the central theme of his final and unfinished project. His last published article concerns Christian liturgy as human ritual and sacramentality of life.\(^{28}\) It departs from a dogmatic and ecclesiological approach to sacramental theology. The culmination of his view on the relationship between liturgy and anthropology and on the role of liturgy in the daily life of the faithful reveal, by implication, uniquely sacramental ways in which the church functions as a sign in the world. He acknowledges in the act of worship aspects of both contextualization and interruption, and thus sees liturgy as “a distilled vision” of God’s presence,\(^ {29}\) through which the church remains alert to problems in the world and respond to them.

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\(^{27}\) Daniel Speed Thompson, “The Church as Sacrament,” 40.


\(^{29}\) Ibid., 13.
1.2.5 Chapter 6: A Critical Assessment

The final chapter will offer a critical assessment of Schillebeeckx’s evolving position on the church-world question, and argue that Schillebeeckx’s view of the church-world relationship indeed shows consistently his commitment to the belief that the church is a visible manifestation and bestowal of grace in history. This final chapter will also explore ecclesial and pastoral significance of Schillebeeckx’s developed views for the life of the church and the world, by a case study of the Korean Catholic Church’s engagement with its government’s environmental policy.

While examining more closely the internal significance of the shifts that Schillebeeckx made, this chapter will pursue directly the question of the identity and relevance of the church, which remains disputed in the continuing discussions on the ecclesiology of Vatican II. In light of Schillebeeckx’s theological development, one can ask: does the dialectical tension between the church and the world leave room for an ‘ecclesial’ proviso, an element of transcendence parallels the claim he makes elsewhere about the eschatological proviso of the Christian faith? When one finds an antithetical conflict in the place of the dialectical tension between the church and the world, what are Schillebeeckx’s criteria for discernment of where the Spirit of God is at work?

In addressing the issue above, this last chapter will focus on evaluating the nature of the dialectical, non-dualistic relationship that was the fundamental pattern of Schillebeeckx’s view of reality throughout his writings. Everything, including ideas, events, subjects, objects, and even God in relation to creation, is in a non-antithetical

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and dialectical relationship that is “irreducible, continually dynamic, and mutually informing.”31 One can view the dynamic of continuity and discontinuity in Schillebeeckx precisely according to this thought pattern. They inform each other in such a way that each cannot be properly sustained without the existence of the others. Interruptions and breaks, i.e. discontinuity, even seem necessary in a concrete worldly context – and later the contemporary church context – that increasingly is becoming a stumbling block to believing and experiencing God’s salvation.

However, does this dialectic involve relationships of equal partners? Put in the context of the dialogue between the church and the world, is the nature of the contribution of each, be it affirmation or protest, the same? Although both the church and the world are revelatory of salvation, only the church remains distinctively sacramental. It is “the mystery of the manifestation”32 of God’s liberating presence in the world. It is the sign of this presence. A close examination of the dialectical relationship between mysticism and politics, which is integral to the issue of the church-world, reveals that couched in his paradoxical language is a reservation, or proviso, through which he gives the ultimate priority to the action of God transcending creation. The church’s sacramental role in discerning God’s salvific presence in the world seems to point to this transcendence that the church expresses through its faith. This transcendence does not imply a God-experience above and beyond the concrete reality, which would amount to a dualistic view. Rather, it highlights the church’s role as an anticipatory and critical sign. The church, despite its own failures, anticipates the

31 Thompson, *The Language of Dissent*, 12-3.

kingdom of God by embracing hope in God’s nearness, as it also preserves the “critical impulse of the Gospel” amid false prophecies of the world.

Schillebeeckx always insisted that experience is concrete, and historically and critically conditioned. In a way of concretizing Schillebeeckx’s insight in contemporary context, the final chapter will conclude with a case study. In the case study, the chapter will first analyze the Korean Catholic Church’s response to the “Four Major Rivers Restoration Project,” the governmental engineering project that many claim threatens the natural environment, in light of Schillebeeckx’s theology of the church and the world. The analysis will show that Schillebeeckx’s insights, for instance, on a theology of creation, metaphysics of non-duality, and the church’s dialectical role of mysticism and politics, are both viable and valuable in discerning the church’s proper role in the world today. In critiquing the Korean case, particularly in regards to the relevance and uniqueness of the Church’s voice, it will be shown that Schillebeeckx’s notion of negative contrast experience points the way toward a difficult balance between indirectness and particularity of the church’s “political” involvement.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: SCHILLEBEECKX’S FORMATION LEADING UP TO HIS CHRIST THE SACRAMENT OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

2.1 Introduction

This chapter maps how various historical, ecclesial and theological elements led Schillebeeckx to the notion of the church as sacrament, understood first in relation to God and then to the world – the notion that would prevail later at the Second Vatican Council. To establish the context of Schillebeeckx’s theological development, it will first present the understanding of sacramentality according to neoscholasticism. It is against the backdrop of this prevailing interpretation of Thomas Aquinas of his time that Schillebeeckx reread Thomas Aquinas and retrieved the notion of sacramentality grounded in Jesus Christ. Instead of a comprehensive study of neoscholasticism, a limited snapshot will be given in the form of a text book presentation, representing the neo-scholastic approach at the time of Schillebeeckx’s formative years. Accompanying this study of neo-scholastic theology is an overview of how the magisterium of the Catholic Church from the 19th till the mid-20th century viewed the world in relation to the church, and vice versa.

Within this historical, ecclesial and theological context, Schillebeeckx was first introduced to religious epistemology by his fellow Dominican and mentor Dominic De Petter at Louvain. This thinking later received a theological direction under another
Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu at Le Saulchoir. Though less direct, influence on his intellectual formation also came from Yves Congar. Under their combined influence which left a permanent mark on Schillebeeckx, he reinterpreted the Thomistic theology of sacrament from the perspective of phenomenology and of personalism (via De Petter) on the one hand, and with the consciousness of and appreciation for history and secular experience (via Chenu), on the other. Congar’s influence was evident in his concern for bridging the gap between faith and life as well as in his “trawling through patristic and medieval scholastic literature,” as shown in what became to be his doctoral dissertation, De Sacramentele Heilseconomie. It is the uniquely human experience of "encounter" that he highlights as the medium of revelation, as well as concealment, of God, thus making the living encounter with Jesus Christ the locus of sacramental experience.

2.2 Situating Schillebeeckx’s Early Studies

2.2.1 The Church and the Modernist Controversy

One of the darkest clouds under which all Roman Catholic theologians operated during the period from the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth was the controversy concerning modernism. While the peak of the Crisis was in 1907 when Pope

33 In his words of remembrance, Schillebeeckx quotes Jacques LeGoff’s homage delivered at Chenu’s funeral: “You taught me that one can illuminate the development and activity of theologizing and religious thought in history by situating them in the entirety of history, by locating them in economic and social history, in a history of ideas, in a church history in all its material and spiritual dimensions without reducing them to those realities.” Schillebeeckx also adds, “What I learned above all from Chenu was that thinking is a lieu de sainteté – a locus of holiness. Even with that, the warmth that Pere Chenu communicated is what remains most clearly with me. Chenu was a man of hope, an optimist of grace. And in that he was through and through a ‘Thomist.’” See Schillebeeckx, “In Memoriam Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990),” New Theology Review 3 (1990): 90-91.


Pius X issued the Decree *Lamentabili Sane Exitu* and the Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, it would not be until the Second Vatican Council that Catholic thinkers became free from the restrictive atmosphere that resulted from the Crisis. From 1910 until 1967, even long after modernism ceased to be regarded as a threat, every future priest, bishop and teachers of theology had to take an anti-modernist oath.

Contrary to the assumptions made by the anti-modernists who called modernism the “synthesis of all heresies,” modernism was not an internally coherent system nor a carefully concerted movement with a common programme. Later interpreters of history of this period see the term modernism as a symbol of certain attitudes, ideas and tendencies, represented by a diverse group of personalities. The difficulty with precise definition, however, did not prevent the Roman authorities and the modernists themselves from synthesizing on their own, and from distilling modernism to its basic issues.

Among many issues, the Encyclical *Pascendi* identified agnosticism and immanentism as the most egregious errors of modernism. George Tyrrell, who was the most outspoken theologians accused of modernism, defined a modernist as “a churchman, of any sort,

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36 It was issued by the Holy Office on July 3, 1907. Latin text is in *Acta Sanctorae Sedis* 40 (1907), 470-8; For its English translation, see B.M.G. Reardon, *Roman Catholic Modernism*, 242-8.


39 See *Pascendi*, n. 39.

40 The persons associated with modernism include Alfred Loisy (1857-1940), Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), Lucien Laberthonnière (1860-1932), Édouard Le Roy (1870-1954), Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925) and George Tyrrell (1861-1909).
who believes in the possibility of a synthesis between the essential truth of his religion and the essential truth of modernity.”

Finally from a critical distance of history, Daly offers a working definition of a modernist: “any Roman Catholic writer whose thinking and methodology led him to challenge the over-all philosophic-theological schema, or any significant element therein, of the then prevailing neo-scholastic conception and method of doing philosophy and theology.”

Gabriel Daly considers the issue of the relationship between transcendence and immanence to be central to the controversy. What the modernists challenged was the extrinsicist account of revelation, dualistic understanding of the operation of grace, the certainty of faith expressed in dogmatic statements, and the church’s inimical perception of the modern world, particularly the world of modern philosophy and science, and the advances of critical historical scholarship. After the condemnation of modernism, all of those elements remain dominant in Roman Catholic theology in the form of neoscholasticism until the 1950’s. It is these same issues that Schillebeeckx took up in his early studies, and continued to engage in various forms throughout his entire career.

While the controversy ended with the defeat of modernism and the victory of neoscholasticism, however, it had some constructive influence on the future of theology, the impact of which would extend to the early theological formation of Schillebeeckx. Schoof identifies two creative sources that arose as a result of critical reflection on the scholastic heritage that took place during this period. The first source involves the Dominican Antoine Gardeil (1859-1931) who constructed his neo-scholastic theology

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with a cautious openness to some modernist ideas of Blondel, in which the roles of
history and contemporary Christian experience were recognized. He was also the
impulse behind the center of studies which would later produce Chenu and Congar. The
second source involved the Jesuit Pierre Rousselot (1878-1915) who took the challenges
of modernism seriously and found his answer in medieval theology and in an entirely
new interpretation of Thomas Aquinas in the light of modern thought.\textsuperscript{43} Through his
reading of Thomas Aquinas in which nature is viewed sacramentally, and the continuity
between the natural and the supernatural is emphasized, he provides a model for the later
development of \textit{nouvelle théologie}.

2.2.2 Neo-Scholastic Sacramental Theology

Schillebeeckx’s approach marks a significant departure from the ways in which
the sacrament has been studied in the church up until the 1950’s. Relying heavily on the
neo-scholastic subdivisions of causality, seminary manuals of the day built sacramental
theology on the question of how symbols function as efficient causes of grace. The bond
that the sacraments have with Jesus Christ and the church is mainly in terms of
causality.\textsuperscript{44} Even when a more fundamental approach to sacramentality was attempted,
the main focus was still on the question of causality. A good example among them was
Bernard Leeming’s \textit{Principles of Sacramental Theology}, written around the time of
Schillebeeckx’s own work, \textit{Christ the Sacrament}. Leeming’s volume considered the
whole economy of salvation as the context of the sacrament: “for sacramental doctrine
presupposes the whole Christian teaching about the Fall of man, about the incarnation

\textsuperscript{43} T.M. Schoof, \textit{A Survey of Catholic Theology}, 68-9.

\textsuperscript{44} One example is P. Pourrat, \textit{Theology of the Sacraments: a Study in Positive Theology}, trans.
Joseph Gummersbach (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1914), 28.
and Atonement, about the grace of Christ, and, above all, about the abiding presence of
the Holy Ghost in the Church.”  However, the economy was mainly in the backdrop,
while the sacramental effect received the spotlight. The effect, namely the conferred
grace, is described as the help to the faith of the recipient and remedy for the sickness of
sin, the ultimate goal of which was the ontological union with God.  This union takes
the form of the union with Christ, or more concretely, a union with his Mystical Body,
the church. It is indeed noteworthy that, although done merely in a cursory form, the
author traces the sacramentality to the church and ultimately to Christ himself. Christ is a
sacrament in the sense that he is “a sign, a promise, a guarantee, and a cause of human
salvation…expressing what he causes and causing what he expresses, that is, the new
birth and life of mankind in a supernatural union with God.”  He continues, “If that is
true of Christ, it is true, keeping due proportion, of the Church which is his Body…Since
Christ is an expression of God, so the Church is an expression of Christ…” Thus
Leeming could say that the sacraments are “an extension of the Incarnation.”

Although the language of this author is remarkably similar to that of
Schillebeeckx, it should be noted that this element of fundamental sacramental theology
comes in the middle of the work, and even then takes merely two short paragraphs. This

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46 Leeming, *Principles*, 103-114; 346.

47 Ibid., 350-1.

48 Ibid., 351. The theologian who first saw in a substantial way this continuity between Christ, the
church and the sacraments is Otto Semmelroth in his 1953 work *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* (Frankfurt am
Main: Josef Knecht, 1953).

49 Ibid., 351.
location indicates a deeper gap: fundamental sacramental theology that prior to the writing of Schillebeeckx gave a primary role to the individual sacraments in such a way that it is they that makes the church sacramental. According to this view, the church is the extension of Jesus Christ through the sacraments.\textsuperscript{50} This view limits the sacramentality of the church to those instances when the church celebrates the sacraments as pointers to Christ’s salvific grace, and does not leave room for the function of the church in the world outside of its seven sacraments. In addition, the earlier treatment of sacramentality lacks the correlation between the sacrament and the human condition.

2.2.3 The Influence of the Nouvelle Théologie

Schillebeeckx’s early theology was formed in the waning milieu of neoscholasticism, under the direct influence of the central figures of the ‘new theology,’ an early twentieth-century Thomistic counterproposal to neoscholasticism. In the background was the ongoing conflict between what is suspected of ‘Modernism,’ allegedly giving too much ground to the believer’s internal experience, and the campaign of the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church against it. Neoscholasticism was a way of doing theology that prevailed throughout the Roman Catholic Church from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. At the heart of the debate between the old

\textsuperscript{50} The present author disagrees to Erik Borgman’s claim that Schillebeeckx also followed this view in a way that Karl Rahner did not. He thinks that whereas in Rahner “sacramental action is above all action of the church, for Schillebeeckx it is action which makes visible God’s involvement in the world and thus as it were time and again give rise to the church. This is reflected in the fact that according to Schillebeeckx, unlike Rahner, the incarnation alone is not sufficient basis for the redemptive significance of Jesus Christ. This significance must emerge in its [Jesus Christ’s own] history, but ultimately also time and again in the history of those who believe in him.” See Erik Borgman, \textit{Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in His History}, vol. 1, \textit{A Catholic Theology of Culture} (1914-1965), trans. John Bowden (N.Y.: Continuum, 2003), 423, n. 80. Jean-Pierre Torrell comments that this view, in which the church is the extension of Jesus Christ through the sacraments, is what Thomas Aquinas had: “A number of texts [in the \textit{Summa}] repeat that the Church is ‘founded,’ ‘built,’ ‘constituted,’ ‘made’ by faith and the sacraments of the faith.” See Jean-Pierre Torrell, \textit{Aquinas’s Summa: Background, Structure, & Reception}, trans. Benedict M. Guevin (Washington, D.C.: The CUA Press, 2005), 60.
and the new were the role of reason and the conception of theology itself (fundamental theology), the understanding of the church (ecclesiology), and the role of history in theology (methodology). Schillebeeckx’s formative years coincided with various attempts to interpret Thomas Aquinas “in a way which left room for a real conversation and real confrontation between church faith on the one hand and the modern world, human nature and contemporary philosophy based on human reason on the other.”

Schillebeeckx had direct contact with some of these attempts, particularly through Dominicus De Petter, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Yves Congar.

Dominicus De Petter taught philosophy to young Schillebeeckx in Ghent during his three-year program of studies in philosophy, and continued his influence on his pupil during his theological studies in Louvain. His philosophy became the starting point for Schillebeeckx’s own theological direction. De Petter was at the time developing a synthesis of Thomas Aquinas and contemporary phenomenology, maintaining that the knower has an immediate metaphysical intuition of being, an implicit grasp of the whole of the reality, in the experiential knowledge of object and subject. This retrieval of Thomas Aquinas through contemporary philosophy could hardly be considered Thomistic in the eyes of the Aristotelian Thomist or the neo-scholastic; rather it was a form of modernism they considered pernicious, turning “Thomist realism into some form of subjectivist idealism.”

De Petter’s pursuit was intentionally un-neoscholastic. Stating the direction of the journal *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie* which he founded in 1939, he mentioned that it was not by “imposing a narrow and closed standpoint, but by

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assimilating in a broad constructive spirit all valuable elements both of tradition and of modern philosophical life, and in this way helping to build up an enriched philosophical synthesis.”53 Through this synthesis, he tried to connect the Catholic, or more specifically, Thomistic ideas directly with human experience, rather than reducing them to a collection of doctrinal statements that purported to unify human experience. In his own philosophical papers, Schillebeeckx specifically identifies De Petter’s idea of the intuition of the totality of being with knowledge of God, implied in and found at the basis of the knowledge of concretely experienced reality. Although he later dissociates himself from De Petter’s framework,54 this intimate connection between concrete experiences of the world and the experience of God, and between contemporary existence and the awareness of God present in it becomes foundational in his sacramental theology on the one hand, and his theological view of the relationship between church and world, on the other. Put in broad strokes, this theme addresses the issue of nature and grace – how faith in God, while it is given as free gift, has to make sense to human beings in concrete lives; how the human reality is already characterized by God’s saving presence; how the divine-human order of salvation is not two separate realities but one, notwithstanding the distinction.55

Schillebeeckx’s theological training in Louvain was not in keeping with the philosophical innovation in which he was immersed under De Petter. While his

53 De Petter, “Verantwoording,” Tijdschrift voor Philosophie 1, 1939, 3-4; the quote is from Borgman, Edward Schillebeeckx, 41.


55 This view is already present in his early article “Persoon en genade” [“Person and Grace”], Biekorf, 1939-40, no. 2. See Borgman, Schillebeeckx, 48-51.
philosophical training opened his eyes to Catholic thoughts that were concerned with humanity and openly confronted with the spirit of the time, the theology at Louvain still followed conceptualistic approach to Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa*. A rediscovery of Thomas Aquinas and thus his study of “theology in a really personal way” came through the study by the French Jesuit Pierre Rousselot who showed Schillebeeckx that the abstract arguments of Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa* did not exist for a fixed system of dogmatic concepts, but were “ultimately attempts to express the divine presence in reality as this becomes visible in the light of faith.” Instead of simply “playing with concepts,” Schillebeeckx saw in Thomas Aquinas a model for the modern-day theologians in the ways he had dealt with the medieval problems of faith within his historical milieu. Schillebeeckx’s view that theology is necessarily conditioned by its intellectual and historical contexts betrays the key influence of the French Dominicans, Marie-Dominic Chenu and Yves Congar who became confreres and teachers when Schillebeeckx went to Paris to continue his studies in 1945.59

59 While the theme of spirituality is not within the scope of this chapter, it needs to be pointed out that Schillebeeckx’s theology in general and his understanding of the relationship between the church and the world in particular were also his way of living out the Dominican spirituality, or at least what Schillebeeckx considered to be a distinctive Dominican spirituality. It was Chenu who pointed out that theology was “a spirituality which had found the right rational instruments for expressing and illuminating its religious experience” (M.-D. Chenu, *Une École de Théologie: Le Saulchoir* (Paris, 1985), 148-9). Schillebeeckx’s theology embodied this view, particularly in relation to the Dominican spirituality, which is usually summed up in the sentence of Thomas Aquinas, *contemplari et contemptata aliis tradere*, contemplation and handing on to others the fruit of contemplation. There appears to be a tension in this motto “between the essentially contemplative orientation of the religious life and the essentially apostolic attitude of the Dominican order,” but Schillebeeckx resolves this tension in part by saying that “the being-in-and-with-the-world, the ‘présence au monde’, [is] a co-essential complement of the *contemplata aliis tradere.*” The world is not just a place to practice one’s private insight gained in contemplation, but it is where contemplation itself takes place, with the view to the salvation of all. He saw the dialogical presence in the contemporary world as an essential part of the Dominican spirituality. This dialogical presence in
It was first Chenu who affirmed and further inspired Schillebeeckx’s own historical and contextual reading of Thomas Aquinas, and more broadly, his understanding of the role of faith and theology in the context of the life in the world. Schillebeeckx had developed this approach earlier in 1943 lecture, entitled “Towards a Theology of Life?” In it he interpreted Thomas Aquinas in confrontation with two opposing views, one the so-called “theology of proclamation” or “kerygmatic theology” which attempted at bringing theology to a more direct connection with the life of the faithful, and the other that defended “a radical break between everyday, natural existence characterized by modern objectivity and eloquence [on the one hand], and faith and thus also theology [on the other],” and opposed “the harmony of God and world, nature and grace.” What Schillebeeckx sought in his lecture was the middle ground: theology has to be attached to the living faith as its starting point, but faith for him was a form of real knowledge of God, not just an existential experience, which needs to be spelled out and deepened by disciplined reflection and speculation. His view of the necessary distance between theology as science and life notwithstanding, Schillebeeckx’s understanding of Thomas Aquinas was far removed from the ahistorical conceptualism of neoscholasticism.

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60 Referring to Chenu, Schillebeeckx said, “this ‘(sometimes rather sloppy but) great visionary’ had a major influence on him, not only in his reading of Thomas’ work but also in his involvement in the present situation.” See Borgman, *Schillebeeckx*, 67; Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch testament: Notarieel nog niet verleden* (Baarn, 1994), 27.

61 Given on September 26, 1943, it was an inaugural lecture on the occasion of receiving the office of lector in the Dominican house of studies in Louvain. See Borgman, *Schillebeeckx*, 61ff.

He saw in Thomas Aquinas a theology that is always connected with the “historical milieu of the spirit in which the theologian lives.” This fresh interpretation of Thomas Aquinas with the attention to history is affirmed and deepened during his further studies with Chenu; it also gives a glimpse of his later focus on the sacramental role of the church in its social and political contexts.

If Chenu influenced Schillebeeckx with his historical reading of Thomas Aquinas and ability to engage theologically with contemporary social and ecclesial situation, it was Congar who helped him to focus on the ecclesiological aspect of the new theology concerning the relationship between the church and the world. In his ecclesiological vision (his “broad, organic view of faith and church”), Congar developed further Chenu’s insight that faith and church deal with all aspects of human existence, history and world. Faith is an all-embracing and living reality that has to do with a comprehensive ordering of life; it is not restricted to the reality that constitutes the institutional church, whether considered separate from or in opposition to the secular world. The church according to this view is first and foremost the “mystical body of Christ,” a dynamic and organic entity, rather than a static structure which establishes unity by an “external” organizational structure or by the people’s obedience to the

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63 Borgman, Schillebeeckx, 66.

64 Chenu saw theology as expression of a living faith, rational illumination of religious experience, rather than mere explication of church doctrine; it is a reflection on a concrete reality in human history, not just reflection on abstract concepts – a history that is taken up by God into a salvation history. The most significant influence of Chenu on Schillebeeckx lies in the concern for history. His involvement with Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique (JOC) in the 1930s, with the worker-priest movement after the war, and with Christian-Marxist dialogue throughout his career were some concrete examples of his concern for history.

65 Borgman, Schillebeeckx, 139.
In this framework, the church as a whole is a living body, forming a living unity and animated by the spirit of Christ; the hierarchy is one of the external means by which Christ guides and holds together his church. In comparison to other writers of the day, Congar relativized the importance of the hierarchy. In fact he reversed the emphasis as to who indicates the divine origin of the church. For him, it was the body of the faithful, not the hierarchical leadership, that indicated the divine origin of the church. This emphasis drew sharp contrast to the theology that was prevalent before him and the Roman reaction that would come subsequently. The mystical body is constituted and its unity realized in a sacramental action, particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist. Sacraments are “living signs of the bond between believers and…with God.” This sacramental view is contrasted with the position presented in Mystici Corporis which saw sacraments primarily in an instrumental way: “the Savior of mankind out of His infinite goodness has provided in a wonderful way for His Mystical Body, endowing it with the Sacraments, so that, as though by an uninterrupted series of graces, its members should be sustained from birth to death, and that generous provision might be made for the social needs of the Church” (no. 18).

2.3 Schillebeeckx’s Sacramental Theology

Since his days of philosophical studies under De Petter, Schillebeeckx was intent on connecting Christian faith directly with human experience. In contrast to


67 Both the dogmatic constitution Pater Aeternus of Vatican I and the encyclical Mystici Corporis of Pius XII constructs ecclesiology primarily in terms of the hierarchy. See for instance, Pater Aeternus, 1; Mystici Corporis, 55 and 82.

68 Borgman, Schillebeeckx, 136; See Congar, The Mystery, 73-6.
neoscholasticism prevalent in his day, his studies were focused on real and existentially-oriented questions that dealt with human beings and society. In one of his earliest articles published under the title “Consciousness of Being and Rationality,” he critiqued conceptualism and rationalism of the neoscholastics and embraced the contemporary existentialism in an attempt to connect thoughts to the concrete living reality. He helped his mentor, De Petter, develop the notion that was to be termed later “implicit intuition,” according to which all knowledge presupposed a living, albeit implicit, intuition of being, a totality of reality. Being is intuited (i.e. experienced) concretely in and through all experience and knowledge of things, and thus this intuition is not an abstraction from concrete reality as concepts are. This intuition of being in and through concrete reality is ultimately what leads the knower to be in contact with God. This is to say that the experience and knowledge of God is implied and is located at the foundation of all experience and knowledge of reality. While it is eventually abandoned, De Petter’s notion of the “implicit intuition” thus becomes a philosophical grounding for Schillebeeckx’s later synthesis.

In another more theological article, he continues to focus on human experience as the primary way to the experience and knowledge of God. In it he deals with the issue of the relationship between nature and grace through the discussion of the “natural” human desire for God and the divine offer of grace. While this desire or tendency did not

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69 “Theology was at that time mainly playing with concepts. In philosophy, on the other hand, we were concerned with humanity. De Petter, who taught me philosophy, emphasized that very strongly.” See Schillebeeckx, God is New Each Moment, 13.

70 “Zijnsbewustsein en rationaliteit,” Biekorf, 1938-39, 109-71 (Arch. 3208); discussed in Borgman, Schillebeeckx, 43.

71 “Person and Grace” (“Persoon en genade”) Biekorf, 1939/40, no. 2 (Arch. 3209); Borgman discusses this article in his Schillebeeckx, 48ff.
presuppose a supernatural knowledge of God, it implied, without proper content, some awareness of transcendence, and Schillebeeckx located it “in the experience, implicit and confused but no less real, of a lived desire for the true, the good and the divine.” This location of the desiderium naturale departs from the neoscholastic finding which was “in the quite abstract intellectual insight that natural, created reality is finite and thus not self-sufficient.” The point he is making here is the need for a correspondence between the human question and the divine answer, between the human desire and the divine fulfillment. The divine offer of grace, while it is free and beyond the conscious need of human beings, has to make sense for the human beings in concrete and living reality, in order for it to be meaningful to them. In other words, while there is a clear distinction between the natural and the supernatural, there is a sense that human reality is already permeated with the divine saving presence. The two orders of reality then form one order of salvation, and this salvation is to take place in concrete human existence. The work of theology is not “playing with concepts” or simply expounding the church dogmas, but finding and making explicit the divine presence in all that is natural and human.

Borgman points out that, while Schillebeeckx did not fulfill his plan to provide a sequel to this article, Schillebeeckx’s all subsequent works are in a wider sense a sequel in terms of his vision of “theandric” synthesis. 73

Borgman sees that the church's insistence to make a distinction in principle between church and world had an influence on the direction of Schillebeeckx's studies. Such insistence was clearly expressed in official Vatican documents such as Humani

72 Borgman, Schillebeeckx, 49.
73 Ibid., 50.
Generis and Menti Nostrae. Since his early days of studying philosophy under De Petter, Schillebeeckx’s focus has remained a synthesis between the divine and the human. This focus was in direct contrast to the neo-scholastic tendency to separate them. It continued to be his main interest in the early 50s, which was shown in his original plan to write his dissertation on the Catholic view of life as "the embodiment of the culture that was necessary for human salvation," in other words, "on the relationship between 'nature and supernature', viz. 'religion and the world'" through theological study of culture.74 However, he was confronted with the negative judgment of the magisterium concerning the synthetic view he embraced. Both Humani Generis and Menti Nostrae clearly indicated the view that what Schillebeeckx and his mentors had thought to be a new way of being Christian, be it through dialogue with science and contemporary philosophy or through solidarity with the working class, was in fact a veiled invasion of the church by the world. To the magisterium, this 'new Christianity' promoted a "false unity" and an "imprudent 'eirenism'" which only resulted in disunity, error, loss of Christian identity and destruction of institutions founded by Christ himself.75

Schillebeeckx responded to the shift in ecclesial atmosphere, which was not only manifested in official documents, but also in actions taken against his mentors and confreres, by writing a dissertation not originally intended. He did not abandon its primary orientation, but he changed the topic: from an ad extra theological exploration on culture, thus a study of the relationship between religion and the world, to a

74 Ibid., 125.
75 Humani Generis, 11, 12.
ressourcement in regards to the understanding of the sacraments.\textsuperscript{76} Schillebeeckx attempted to show that the Catholic tradition, particularly the sacraments, already embodied the synthesis between world and church, nature and grace, the human and the divine. The thesis of his dissertation thus became that the sacraments themselves were the \textit{locus} of the encounter between the world and God. He presents this thesis by way of retrieving St. Thomas’ understanding of sacraments within his “synthesis of faith.”

In the introduction to his dissertation, subtitled “Situating the Treatise on the Sacraments in the Thomistic Synthesis of Faith,” Schillebeeckx emphasizes that the \textit{locus} of sacramental theology in Thomas is his christology, and that this christology in turn is the key in the grand Thomistic \textit{schema} of \textit{exitus} and \textit{reditus}, which forms the structure of the \textit{Summa Theologiae}. Even though Thomas places christology and sacramental theology in the \textit{Tertia Pars} after treating the topics of grace and of virtues, they are not afterthoughts or appendices, being treated as contingent events in the necessary neoplatonic cycle, but rather are central to Thomas’ view of how the union between God and human beings takes place historically. They play a vital role in the creaturely \textit{reditus} to God in the one history of salvation. This purpose for which all are created, characterized ultimately as the beatific vision of God, is for Thomas Aquinas theocentric and metaphysical by design. At the same time, however, this salvation found in God comes through the mediation of Christ and his economy of salvation. Thus Thomas Aquinas establishes an “existential unity of the order of creation and the order of grace in

the one order of Christian life.” In this unity, Thomas makes a “bold and yet legitimate recognition of the relative autonomy of the natural order, which nevertheless takes its full meaning in the Christian supernatural grace.” In his study of Thomas Aquinas, Schillebeeckx is thus correcting the dualistic misunderstanding of neoscholasticism, in which nature is conceived of as self-closed and self-sufficient, while grace is considered as a superstructure externally imposed over nature. The return is not pure nature, but “is itself grace and is produced by the power of Christ.” His examinations of the patristic and medieval sources lead him to conclude that the Christian traditions conceive of nature essentially as having been created for a purpose beyond the active powers proper to that nature. He continues:

Grace is seen here as a metaphysically necessary element in the exitus-reditus cycle, not as if its gratuity was denied, but rather as if the vital order of fact – where the creation finds its reason to be in the supernatural destination in grace – was not seen in philosophically abstract, but existentially theological fashion: one nature which, by the free initiative of God, is created in view of a supernatural destiny, requires grace in a metaphysically necessitated manner, in order to reach such a destination that it does not deserve.

Such is the role of sanctifying grace in Thomas Aquinas. The sacramental grace coincides with this sanctifying grace, but is distinguished from the latter in that it is considered “according to its christological aspect”: it is “a modality of this [sanctifying] grace as emanating from Christ the redeemer.” While sanctifying grace is necessary secundum ordinem naturae, sacramental grace is only necessary heilsgeschichtlich or, in

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77 Schillebeeckx, L’économie sacramentelle du salut, 13.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 14.
80 Ibid., 16.
81 Ibid.
relation to salvation history; namely, they are one redemptive grace in two aspects within a single salvation history.\textsuperscript{82} From the Christ-centered point of view, the world of creation is the supernatural economy of salvation, which is at the same time the \textit{sacramental} economy of salvation. This is so, because sacraments are “the ultimate salvific organs by which the human being can reach the destination of his or her life, by which the \textit{reditus} is formally completed.”\textsuperscript{83} To put this more properly in Christological terms: “the sacramental liturgy of salvation is the meeting place of the ‘descent’ of the Son and the ‘return’ of God’s favorite creature, human beings.”\textsuperscript{84}

Structurally and thematically, Thomas Aquinas’ treatise on the sacraments is the extension and prolongation of the Incarnation, “the grand sacrament” and “original, primordial sacrament” (\textit{Oersacrament}) of the redemptive love of God.\textsuperscript{85} Christ’s Incarnation is “the visible manifestation of God’s saving love….the sign, the human version and the effective redemption-in-action, of the grace of God.”\textsuperscript{86} Schillebeeckx describes the fundamental relationship between the sacraments and Jesus Christ in the following way:

[Christ is the one from whom] the seven sacraments derive all their meaning, in such a way that they bring, through and across the centuries, the grace of redemption as extensions and relics of the Incarnation: they are actually the seven ‘\textit{sacramenta humanitatis (Christi)},’ which put us in ‘physical’ – ontologically \textit{sui generis} – contact and spiritual contact with Christ’s

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
humanity, and make us participate in the fullness of the sacred humanity of Christ, which makes the redivus possible.\textsuperscript{87}

His dissertation thus shows that the sacraments are the locus of the synthesis between the human and the divine, because they are extensions of the Incarnation of Christ who brought about the creaturely redivus in history, i.e. the return to and union with God.

2.4 Schillebeeckx’s Contributions

Schillebeeckx’s intellectual framework developed within the historical, theological and ecclesial contexts of the early- to mid-twentieth century, particularly in France. A brief consideration of the milieu reveals a central concern for the church’s relationship to the world, which he would later develop more fully and explicitly. This theme was one of his main theological interests from the very beginning of his career, also in line with the “new theology” breaking out of the rigid and narrow approach of neoscholasticism. This theme is seen from the beginning of his published thoughts and continues throughout his theological corpus. The culminating project of his early thought, his dissertation, is a highly technical and detailed examination of Thomas Aquinas’ understanding of the sacraments against the background of various sacramental theologies throughout the church history. Significantly it is also Schillebeeckx’s way of addressing his abiding question of how Christian faith and the historical human life in the world can be united – the issue that he takes up once again, at first indirectly, in his seminal book, \textit{Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God}.

Sacraments became for him the point of synthesis and unity between faith and life, between the church and world, between grace and nature, and ultimately between God (in virtue of Jesus Christ who comes toward us) and the Christians. They unified the

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
Mystical Body of Christ; they unified it with the visible church. The eucharist was special among the sacraments in that the human longing for God is united with God’s love for human beings in the eucharist. Ultimately the synthesis of divine and human reality is realized in Jesus Christ. For Schillebeeckx, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ this synthesis takes place in a personal way, making Jesus Christ the primordial sacrament of the encounter with God.

Following the Patristic tradition and the sacramental theology of Thomas Aquinas, Schillebeeckx builds his sacramental theology on a renewed emphasis of the non-dualistic relationship between infinite and finite realities, and between invisible and visible human realities. At the same time Schillebeeckx makes a significant reinterpretation of the Patristic tradition and of Thomas Aquinas in the way he gives priority to the sacramentality of the church over that of the sacraments. While his dissertation anticipates this new take on sacramentality, it is most clearly displayed in his work *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. This latter work is thus both a popular summary and significant development of his dissertation. It is a summary in the sense that he revisits in a much less technical fashion many of the same themes he dealt with in the dissertation. It is a significant move forward in that it displays Schillebeeckx’s developed sacramental theology and ecclesiology that are not fully apparent in his dissertation. He highlights the sacramentality of the church as an important link that Thomas Aquinas did not have in the Third Part of the *Summa*. It is to the development in this next phase of his thought that this dissertation now turns in Chapter two.
CHAPTER 3

EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX’S EARLY THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH AS
“SACRAMENT OF THE RISEN CHRIST”

3.1 Introduction

For Schillebeeckx, the *locus theologicus* of issue of the church and the world is the historical event of salvation in Jesus Christ. Various stages of Schillebeeckx’s theological thinking, particularly on the issue of the church and the world, result from the changes in the way of interpreting the historical event of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Around the time of Schillebeeckx’s major work *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, through which he became known to the English-speaking world, his christology was firmly grounded in metaphysical and dogmatic frameworks of traditional Incarnational and Trinitarian theology. The notion of sacramentality, reinterpreted in

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89 Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, trans. Paul Barrett (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1963). Originally published in Dutch in 1959, it is a revised, expanded version of *De Christusontmoeting als sacrament van de Godsontmoeting* (The Encounter with Christ as the Sacrament of the Encounter with God) which was the result of Schillebeeckx’s lectures at the Higher Institute of Religious Sciences of the Catholic University of Louvain; in content the latter was a “concentrated summary” of and a “more systematic sequel” to *De sacramentele heilseconomie* (The Sacramental Economy of Salvation) which is itself a revision of the first part of Schillebeeckx’s doctoral dissertation submitted at Le Saulchoir in 1951. The originally intended sequel to or the second volume of *De sacramentele heilseconomie* never appeared. In it Schillebeeckx was to present a positive theological analysis, as opposed to the historical theological analysis contained in *De sacramentele heilseconomie*, and beyond the assertions given in the two shorter works “by way of synthesis.” See Borgman, *Schillebeeckx*, 408, n. 100; 215-6. *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* was meant to be the shorter version of the second part of his dissertation, which deals with more contemporary concerns.
terms of contemporary anthropology (more specifically, the phenomenological notion of bodily “encounter”), was at the heart of his theology. A theology of creation also provided a ground for his sacramental christology and ecclesiology, not to mention his theology of the world.

Schillebeeckx’s *Christ the Sacrament* is primarily a work on fundamental theology of sacrament, the first and foremost focus of which is on the notion of sacramentality itself. Individual sacraments are examined, but only after the study of their source, Jesus Christ and, by extension, the church. The foundation of the church’s sacramentality is traced back to Jesus Christ himself, “the sacrament, the primordial sacrament” of the encounter with God. At the heart of the book then are Jesus Christ viewed in terms of his sacramental role, and the church in relation to his identity as both God and human being. The sacramentality of Jesus Christ is placed in the context of the work of the economic Trinity; it is a function of his trinitarian relationship, manifest in creation. Considered thus, Jesus Christ is the culmination of God’s self-revelation that began at the moment of the creation of the world. Extending the sacramentality of Jesus Christ, who is the origin, foundation and content of all sacraments, the church then becomes in its own right “the primordial sacrament” not only for its sacraments, but also in relation to the whole creation. For this reason, Schillebeeckx remains engaged throughout *Christ the Sacrament* with the topic of the church’s sacramentality *ad extra*, namely, the role of the church in relation to the world, even though his primary attention is on the sacramental life within the church. Salvation is already present in the world, but at this stage, Schillebeeckx understands the world in terms of its culmination, i.e., the

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90 Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 15; emphasis his.

91 Ibid., 49.
revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and by extension, the church. According to this view, the world is on the way to explicit manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, and thus is in the process of being drawn into the church.

The primary goal of this chapter is to examine his view on the relationship between the church and the world during his early dogmatic period prior to the Vatican II. Essential elements in achieving this goal are: 1) his theology of creation, which becomes the basis for his view of the world; 2) the role of Jesus Christ in creation, as the sacrament of the encounter with God; 3) the role of the church, extending that of Jesus Christ in the world; and 4) implications of his theology of sacramentality for his theology of the relationship between the church and the world.

3.2 Theology of Creation: a Non-dualistic Relationship between the Creator and Creation

The Christian understanding of creation offers a unique view of the created world in relationship to the Creator, and it becomes the first basis on which Schillebeeckx establishes what it means for the church to relate to the world. The world and its Creator are in a non-dualistic relationship: creation is distinct but not separate from the Creator. The creator God implies that “[the human being] is constantly receiving himself from God; that he is real in himself, firmly fixed in his own inviolable independence, and nevertheless wholly from, in and of God both in his thought and his will and his essential existence in this world.” He puts more succinctly: “Our whole life is lived within the vast sphere of the personal God who embraces us.” Thus it is possible to say that “the

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world is in him.” This implies that, on a purely natural level, human history does not show God. The transcendent manner of God’s presence and activity makes God seem absent in the world and hidden from human history. Not recognizing the special relationship between the creator and creation and the unique presence of God leads one to seek God “here or there” in the world, and not finding God, to mistaken views of God’s involvement with the world, including atheism. In order to find God, Schillebeeckx suggests a more basic and fundamental level: the human interiority that transcends the world, where one is open to the mystery of God. Even in this human interiority, a direct relationship with God, in which “the presence of God develops into mutuality and encounter,” is possible only when God moves beyond the indirect manifestation in creation. Once this happens, the world and the human existence therein are given a “divine significance”; the profane history is taken up and becomes the salvation history. This of course does not mean that there is a historical gap or ontological separation between the profane and salvation history. The saving history is a secular history “interpreted in the light of the divine dialogue”; the profane history becomes signs of the salvation history, the intimate divine presence in the world. In other words, the personal manifestation of God is still mediated, because God chose to reveal God’s self in and through the media that belong to the world but are taken up by grace and transformed to manifest the divine.

93 Ibid., 9.
94 Ibid., 25.
95 Ibid., 24.
96 Ibid., 28.
3.3 Sacramentality

A theology of creation for Schillebeeckx is inextricably tied to his new take on the traditional notion of sacramentality. In *Christ the Sacrament*, Schillebeeckx retrieves from tradition the notion of sacramentality, interpreting it through the lens of existential phenomenology, particularly through the notion of bodily “encounter.” The human need for sacraments sheds light on the mediated nature of the relationship between the human being and God, without neglecting the transcendent presence of God in creation.97 Schillebeeckx’s understanding of sacramentality is corollary to the view of the created world, or more specifically, to the human interiority as already “attracted to grace” from the first moment of existence. God’s self-revelation to the human beings began at the origin of the world. God first made the self-revelation to be concretely experienced by the people, through such media as desires, yearnings, images, signs, actions, words and concepts which are rooted in our natural, secular and concrete existential experience incorporated in a supernatural orientation toward God.98 Jesus Christ, as “the sacrament, the primordial sacrament” of the encounter with God,99 is the culmination of this divine self-revelation. Extending the sacramentality of Jesus Christ, who is the origin, foundation and content of all sacraments, the church then becomes “the primordial sacrament”100 not only for its sacraments, but also in relation to the whole creation. The

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97 Expressed in various ways, this synthesis is also between the natural and the supernatural, between the worldly and the godly, between the church and the world, and between “the human longing for salvation and the divine will for salvation.” This synthesis is embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and thus it refers primarily to the mystery of Christ, i.e., the incarnation. See Borgman, *Schillebeeckx*, 135.


99 Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 15; emphasis his.

100 Ibid., 49; 52; 197.
fact that God’s invisible and impenetrable reality is manifested and known in and through the material world points to the sacramentality on another level – the sacramentality of creation as a whole. A dialogue with God is always through Jesus Christ, even prior to Jesus; and the human beings participate in the dialogue always as a community. This means that the world before his Incarnation was in a sense already under his influence, and was already the church. To put it otherwise, salvation is already present in the world. The self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and in the church manifests this redeemed reality fully, although its completion still awaits the final fulfillment. According to this view, history of the world is a gradual process of opening up to the explicit manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, and thus the world is increasingly becoming a community in dialogue with God. Although the historical church is itself on the way, there is a sense that Schillebeeckx views the world being drawn into the church.

The assertion that the sacramentality of the church is grounded in Jesus Christ himself, says, on the one hand, that the significance of the church and of its sacraments is derived from the event of the Incarnation. A true ecclesial life and a proper celebration of the sacraments cannot be separated from the person, life and ministry of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, however, this assertion also indicates that the Incarnation is viewed from the anthropological and sacramental perspectives. It is through the universal human longing for God and the concrete life of the Church that Schillebeeckx understands the significance of the Incarnation. Thus a correlation is made between the mystery of the Incarnation and the human condition. Jesus Christ remains central throughout his book, while he seeks a deeper appreciation for the church’s life as the most complete way of realizing the human yearning for God. This pursuit leads Schillebeeckx to reappropriate
dogmatic contents of the Incarnation and to interpret the data of the economy of salvation through the phenomenological and existential notion of personal encounter. In doing so, he turns the sacramental theology, which has often been reduced to a mechanical explanation of the seven sacraments, into a discourse on the economy of salvation, i.e., on the unfolding manifestations of God’s saving activity in human history.

As noted at the end of last chapter, what distinguishes Schillebeeckx’s sacramental theology from those who came before him lies in the way in which he takes seriously the human factor in the working of grace. As discussed in that chapter, Schillebeeckx builds his sacramental theology on a renewed emphasis of the non-dualistic relationship between infinite and finite realities (theology of creation), and between invisible and visible human realities (theological anthropology). This approach sheds light on how human beings experience the divine reality through the sacraments – more specifically how God always reveals God’s self in creation –, and on how human beings are always in search of encounter with God. Schillebeeckx deals with this experiential aspect of the sacrament through the notion of encounter.

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101 Some interpreters of Schillebeeckx call his theology “a theology of experience,” and associate it mainly with his theology after his hermeneutical turn of the early 1970’s. The work of Schillebeeckx that deals directly with the content and methodology of this theology is The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism (N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1974). As one will see in this chapter, his theology of experience appears already in Christ the Sacrament. The difference lies in the theoretical perspective: the early work emphasizes the experiential factor in dogmatic faith understanding through existential phenomenology, while later works stress the importance of concrete experience for the concepts of faith for hermeneutical reasons. For a study that concentrates on the later works, see Lieven Boeve, “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.

102 Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament, 7-10.
3.4 Existential Phenomenology

His use of the notion of personal encounter, as a way of expounding the meaning and significance of the sacrament, is grounded in the existential insight concerning human person as the embodied spirit. This notion helps him to emphasize the non-dualistic relationship between the body and the soul, or to be more precise, the non-dualistic existence of the human person and his or her non-dualistic experience of the world. What he gains from the existential insight is the sacramentality of the body, which explains not only the manifestation of the human spirit, but also that of God’s spirit, culminating in Jesus Christ in the most literal fashion. These two aspects of the sacramentality of the body, i.e., human and divine, converge in the church that is a body manifesting both the human desire for God and the divine initiative for human beings.

In an essay titled “The New Trends in Present-Day Dogmatic Theology,” Schillebeeckx discusses four characteristics of existential phenomenology that he adopts in his new approach to sacramental theology: 1) the appeal to human existential experience for the data of revelation; 2) bodiliness or incarnation as the anthropological structure of human condition; 3) historicity of human consciousness and life; 4) the emphasis on secular activities in relation to the life of faith.103 The central point in his list, on which others are based, concerns the bodiliness of human existence. The viewpoint of existential phenomenology avoids the two extremes in human self-understanding: materialism that sees human beings as things in the midst of other inanimate objects of the world, and exaggerated spiritualism that ignores the material element in which

103 Schillebeeckx, Revelation and Theology, vol. II, 113-150. The existential influence on Schillebeeckx come from Merleau-Ponty (whom he later criticizes for denying the value of human being as a person), F.J.J. Buytendijk, and, above all, D. de Petter.
subjectivity or the conscious self is embodied. For Schillebeeckx, human life consists of dialectical interplay between the material and the spiritual dimensions.

The positive recognition of the bodily existence of the human person is not entirely new. Schillebeeckx’s use of the existential phenomenology recalls the Hebrew tradition according to which “the whole man was body and the whole man was spirit.” Dualism crept into this holistic view through Platonism and Cartesianism, resulting in the misconception that the soul is a pure spirit, and is attached to the body that is like other matters in the world. Existentialism enabled Schillebeeckx to retrieve the Hebrew instinct about the human person, and to build a Christian anthropology of personhood, taking into consideration the Western view that the human being is “primarily spiritual and only secondarily, although equally essentially, bodily.”

One of the major insights of existential phenomenology is to distinguish the being of human person from that of other beings that exist. To use Schillebeeckx’s words, the distinctive human character is found in “an essential correlation between the spirit which communicates itself to the body and the physical nature which participates in this spirit.” The human being can never be defined biologically. Far from being just another object in the world, the human body is “interpenetrated by subjectivity,” which makes the human being “embodied subjectivity-in-the-world.” Thus understood, “my body is the transition from me to my world,” and it is “the place where I appropriate my

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106 Ibid., 233.


world”; it mediates between the self and the world, lying on the side of the former, while
being involved in the latter.\textsuperscript{109} The body itself can even be considered a mysterious
reality, since “I neither ‘am’ my body nor ‘have’ it.” The non-dualistic unity in the
human person between the bodily form and the spiritual is thus not without inner
distinction. In Schillebeeckx’s words, there exists a “quasi-identity” or a “complex
unity.”\textsuperscript{110} The body is integral to the person; the person transcends the body inclusively.
The human transcendence incorporates the bodily aspect.

Using these insights, Schillebeeckx probes the sacramentality of the body that will
become one of the basic elements in his sacramental christology and ecclesiology.
According to this sacramental understanding of the body, the human body is a symbol
and manifestation of the human spirit. In fact, insofar as the spirit is embodied, this body
is the spirit in this world. This sacramentality of the body implies sacramentalization and
glorification of matter, as a “foreshadowing of the possibility of the eschatological
glorification of the body.”\textsuperscript{111} Schillebeeckx sums it up as following: “[T]he whole of
Christian sacramentality is based on this anthropological datum of the expressiveness of
the body. In the sacramental sphere, the body is not only the active presence of a human
spirit – it is also the active presence of a supernatural religious reality. The consequence
of God’s incarnation in Christ is that a body becomes the visible appearance among us of
the living reality of God.”\textsuperscript{112} He is presenting here two pillars of his sacramental
theology: one anthropological, the other theological; one comes from existential insights,

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{110} Schillebeeckx, World and Church, 238-9.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 252.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 252-3.
the other from christological datum of faith; one concerning who we are, the other concerning who God is for us. Sacrament for Schillebeeckx unites or synthesizes the two elements in ways that do not overlook the fundamental distinction between the human and the divine.

The sacramentality of the body also implies that human personal relations are always mediated through bodies. Schillebeeckx further calls attention to the fact that the relationship between God and the human being is also personal. God is bodiless, therefore the human relationship with God is fundamentally different from those between human beings. However, the relationship with God still needs to be embodied for the sake of the human participant in it. The personal nature of divine revelation thus implies that it is always mediated for the appropriate personal response on the part of the human recipient. Thus the self-revelation of God to the human being is always made in history, as personal encounters, through incarnation or embodiment.

3.5 The World as an Outward Grace of Jesus Christ

In the 1950’s the sacramental world view – that God is manifest and known in and through the material world – was a defense against one of the most serious issues of the day, namely atheism. It worked as a corrective to some abuses of existential phenomenology, in which “the ontological implications of the communion of grace with God have been completely neglected.”\textsuperscript{113} The fact that some of those whose insights Schillebeeckx borrowed, namely the “humanists” of his day, turned atheistic did not escape his attention. One of the major sources of the problem in his view was on the side of the Christians. It was the common misunderstanding to take God’s transcendence to

\textsuperscript{113} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Revelation and Theology}, vol. II, 139.
mean his separation from the world. This had a distorted effect on the Christian interpretation of the secular and on their work of improving the lives of others in the world on the one hand, and on the secular interpretation of the sacred and on their view of faith, on the other. The perceived chasm between God and the world of creation on the one hand falsely justified the lack of actions to humanize the world, and on the other hand, led to the emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the world, at the cost of the sense of dependence on the divine. Schillebeeckx dealt with this misunderstanding by reaffirming a theology of creation, discussed above, according to which the autonomous world still exists in God, and God reveals Godself to human beings in and through creation. It points to the mystery of the relationship between God and God’s creation, and of God’s sacramental presence. It becomes the basis for the discussion on the proper relationship between the church and the world.114

Schillebeeckx approaches the history of creation and revelation in two ways that seem to complement each other, albeit not without tension: one with the focus on the continuity of God’s presence in history; the other emphasizing the discontinuity in people’s responses to the perceived divine presence. This is similar to Thomas Aquinas’ approach which is found in his discussion on whether sacraments existed before Christ. The two aspects under which Thomas examines the question were: firstly “from the point of view of the essential meaning of faith [secundum fidei rationem]”, and secondly according to “the greater or lesser intensity of sinfulness, and also of explicit knowledge of Christ prevailing within it.”115 In neither ways, does Schillebeeckx consider the world

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114 In a slightly different but related context, i.e., in the discussion on the humility of Christian humanism, the same point is reaffirmed. See his “Humble Humanism,” in World and Church, 23-4.

115 Summa Theologiae, Part III, q.61, art.3, rep.3.
of creation purely physically, cosmologically or metaphysically; rather, following the 
biblical tradition, he views it historically, as the world experienced in accordance with the 
history of salvation. The created world for him is not a neutral or merely external reality, 
but rather an element of the interior life of human beings. It constitutes a “world” for and 
of a human person. This is why, at this stage of his thoughts, his theology of creation 
considers primarily moral inclinations and religious practices, and their relative successes 
and failures.\textsuperscript{116}

According to the first way, which focuses on the continuity, the history of the 
created world is the history of the unfolding sacramentality. He is able to discover traces 
of sacramentality in creation before the Incarnation and outside the Christian church, 
because he explains sacramentality fundamentally in terms of the graced existence of 
human beings. They exist in an I-Thou relationship with God, and the world of creation 
has been engaged in an “inner yet still anonymous dialogue with God” from the very 
beginning.\textsuperscript{117} Although the world of creation can lead human inhabitants to the idea of its 
principle, however, creation alone cannot reveal anything about God in God’s personal 
being, nor can the human being on his or her own can reach out to God for a bond of 
personal relationship. The existence of the dialogue with God throughout history, 
incomplete though it may, attests that the world enjoys a certain presence of the 
supernatural grace. In other words, “[l]ife itself in the world…belongs to the very 
content of God’s inner word to us…in which creation becomes a sign of higher

\textsuperscript{116} Again he is following the approach of Thomas Aquinas in the latter’s treatment of sacraments, 
in which the “sacraments of nature” refers to sacraments of the natural law. For the people of “natural 
religion,” the natural law is an exterior sign through which they would “make [their] faith public to others 
for the honor of God.” On account of them, “the disposition of charity was inclining to exterior acts.” See 
\textit{Scriptum in IV Libros Sententiarum}, d.1, q.2, a.6, qc.3.

\textsuperscript{117} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Christ the Sacrament}, 8.
At the center of this sign is the hidden but authentic religious desire that has existed from the earliest times of human life. Such desire exists in the world of creation, but not entirely of creation; it is the openness to God, made possible by God’s initiative: God’s self-revelation.

3.5.1 From Anonymous to Explicit Revelation: Israel as “church,”

According to this view concerning the sacramentality of creation, both Jesus Christ and the church play key roles from the first moment of creation. The grace that calls and gathers the created world to itself, and thus enables the church to be coextensive with creation, has its source in the one mediator, Jesus Christ. The reference to Christ, as the Word of God active from the beginning of creation, is not surprising, but the reference to the church as present from the beginning of creation may be confusing. It is understandable, however, since Schillebeeckx defines “the sacramental Church” in the broadest sense as “the visible presence of grace.” In other words, the “church” connotes for Schillebeeckx God’s initiative of self-revelation, i.e., grace, which is a prerequisite for the human communal response that is often more associated with the word. Seen this way the church is as old as the world, and is a worldwide reality.

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118 Ibid.

119 Ibid., 10.

120 This is in fact the first point Schillebeeckx makes in Christ the Sacrament, which comes from Augustine. Schillebeeckx cites On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and On the Baptism of Infants, II, chaps. 15-17 (PL, 44, col. 161); On Man’s Perfection in Righteousness, chaps. 42-3 (PL, 44, col. 315); On the Predestination of the Saints, chaps. 17-9 (PL, 44, col. 974); On the One Baptism against Penilian, chaps. 15-6 (PL, 43, cols. 609-10). See his Christ the Sacrament, 7. Particularly noteworthy is the following words from On the Predestination of the Saints: “And yet from the beginning of the human race, sometimes more hiddenly, sometimes more evidently, even as to Divine Providence the times seemed to be fitting, there has neither been a failure of prophecy, nor were there wanting those who believed on Him; as well from Adam to Moses, as in the people of Israel itself, which by a certain special mystery was a prophetic people; and in other nations before He had come in the flesh. For as some are mentioned in the sacred Hebrew books, as early as the time of Abraham, - neither of his fleshly race nor of the people of
Christian religions testify to this existence of the “sacramental church” even though they are only partial realizations of the Christ event. In Schillebeeckx’s terminology, religion, Christian or not, and church, in its broadest sense, point to the same reality. The reality is the communion with the living God, to which they point with different emphases.

Church, as said above, is God’s initiative and call to the communion with God; religion is the communion with God as devotion to God’s service. God’s call never fails to generate some response in the recipient in the form of an assembly, no matter how faint and anonymous it may be. That is why Schillebeeckx is able to say that the church means God’s initiative, in apparent contrast to the common understanding of the word.

Schillebeeckx summarizes this viewpoint through his typically pithy statement: “there is no religion if there is no Church.”\(^\text{121}\) Accordingly the Christian church is “the mature Church, the ‘Church of the first born’ (Heb. 12:23),” but the “church” is not limited to the followers of Jesus Christ, since there was “the ‘Church’ of the devout heathen” and “the pre-Christian phase of the Christian Church in the form of the chosen race of Israel.”\(^\text{122}\)

What distinguishes the mature church from these anonymous forms of “churches” is the unfolding degree of visible manifestation and embodiment that God’s grace takes.

Schillebeeckx’s view on the sacramentality of creation provides broadest basis for his theology of the church in relationship to the world. What should be noted here is that

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\(^{121}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{122}\) Schillebeeckx is here following the view of Augustine who he said divided human history into three phases: “the ‘Church’ of the devout heathen; the pre-Christian phase of the Christian Church in the form of the chosen race of Israel; and finally the emergence of the mature Church, the ‘Church of the first-born’ (Heb. 12:23).” See *Christ the Sacrament*, 7.
Schillebeeckx does not see the church in the context of the world, nor see the church merely coextensive with the world, but rather inserts the world into the church, finding the world within the church in the broad meaning of the word. The church encompasses the world, in the sense that the world has always been “graced” since its very beginning.

3.5.2 Reality of Sin and a Negative View of “the World”

In addition to this positive view of the history of the world expressed in Christ the Sacrament, Schillebeeckx, in other essays in the early 1950s, discusses another perspective on the world, according to which the world’s “anti-grace” is a foil to Jesus Christ’s salvation. This latter view, which Schillebeeckx finds primarily in Pauline and Johanine works in the Scriptures, puts the world in a diametrically opposite place from everything that results from Jesus Christ’s salvation. It takes seriously the existence of sin, suffering and death in the world, and recognizes the ultimate possibility of “relative failure” of all human attempts at humanizing the world. According to this view, the universe (kosmos in Greek; “heaven and earth” in the original Hebrew) means “fallen mankind,” “the world of men under God’s ‘anger’,” or the existence diametrically opposed to salvation. The focus is on the sinfulness of human beings and evil in the world. The world of creation is good, as the Old Testament attests, but it has been “misused,” “infected, distorted, affected at its root and confused”; its goodness is shown only in the way “this misuse goes against the inner promptings of things themselves (see

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124 Schillebeeckx, World and Church, 5-6.
Rom 8:22; Phil 3:21).” What changed this world’s situation “without salvation” is Christ’s entrance into the world. This latter event also shows the hidden but positive value of the world, since “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3: 17). Christ’s Incarnation transformed the created world in such a way that it “admits the world into a personal relationship between God and man and man and God…the whole created world becomes…an outward grace, an offer of grace in sacramental form.”

What unites the two views of the world then is proper christology as is seen in Col. 1:16. In view of God’s presence in the world, the Christ event is the culmination of the unfolding sacramentality; in view of the world’s sinfulness and God’s power over it, the same event is the breaking-in of the new creation, i.e., the end of the universe in the Greek sense of the term, and the beginning of the kingdom of God. It is noteworthy that Schillebeeckx bases his “Christian humanism” (i.e. right relationship with the world) on our “‘being in Christ’, our sacramental entry into Christ’s saving history.”

Fundamentally the mystery of Christ for Schillebeeckx refers to both views combined. As a consequence, Christian humanism is “the theological consequence of the dogma of the creation in connection with the dogma of the redemption…” The transcendent God became immanent in history, and in so doing God consecrated the world. This is significant for Christian humanism, because, thanks to the Incarnation, being in the world is part of the kingdom of God, and humanizing it is an essential part of making that kingdom manifest.

125 Ibid., 6, n.15.
126 Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament, 216.
128 Ibid., 10-1.
What emerges from these two views of the world, or to be more precise, from a unified view with two aspects, is the mystery of God’s self-revelation in human history, which concerns “a twofold perspective in the one evolving historical human event,” namely, the kingdom of God and the temporal world. Creation already expresses God’s love for the world; but in Jesus Christ a new creation takes place, because in his resurrected body the created world is taken up into the kingdom of God. He is that by which “the optimistic faith in creation is once again situated in its original sphere of life in which it can freely breathe. The world of creation is…withdrawn from the yoke of evil.” In Schillebeeckx’s view, it is this mystery that is at the heart of a proper relationship between the church and the world.

3.6 Jesus Christ as the Sacrament of the Encounter with God

The mystery of God’s self-revelation in human history comes into full view in the person and life of Jesus Christ. Schillebeeckx’s sacramental christology interprets dogmatically and liturgically the significance of Jesus Christ for the church and the world. As the head of all creation and, at the same time, one who bestows God’s grace, he epitomizes the principle of sacramentality operating in the relationship between the church and the world. The unity-in-duality between the divine reality and its sacramental expression reached its unprecedented depth in the incarnate Son of God. Schillebeeckx gives the terms “translation,” “interpretation,” and “transposition” to what takes place in the embodiment of invisible divine reality.

In the context of this narrative of the history of revelation, Schillebeeckx portrays Jesus Christ as one in whose life is achieved the perfection of the divine manifestation.

129 Ibid., 10.
But as he did in his analysis of the sacramentality of creation, Schillebeeckx does not make this perfect manifestation one-sided, making human beings to be passive recipients of something external. Grace is an encounter, dialogue, and personal communion. Unlike the incomplete and imperfect responses of the pagan religions and the Israelites to God’s invitation to this communion, Jesus Christ became the culmination of human faithfulness that corresponds to God’s. For this reason, the culmination of the embodiment of grace is “the perfection both of the divine invitation and of the human response in faith.” It is the perfection of the encounter and communion. In other words, Jesus Christ is “the Church, and invisible communion in grace with the living God […] manifested in visible human form.” Jesus Christ is both the concentration of the entirety of mankind’s vocation to faithfulness and the “embodiment of the grace of final victory.” While he is the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ is also the first-born and head of all creation in the sense that the whole humanity is assembled in him into communion with God. As such, he is “the supreme realization” of the human response to God’s self-offer. Based on this sacramental view, Schillebeeckx interprets and reformulates the definition of Chalcedon, essentially reaffirming the way in which Thomas Aquinas viewed the relation of unity between Jesus’ two natures. “Christ is

130 Ibid., 12-3.
131 Ibid., 13.
132 Ibid., 12-3.
133 Schillebeeckx laments the unjustifiable correction of Thomas’ text found in the Leonine edition, because it “weakens the text.” According to Schillebeeckx, the text should say “In quo humana natura suumpta est ad hoc quod sit persona [not personae, as the Leonine edition would have it] filii Dei” (ST, III, q. 2, a. 10). In Schillebeeckx’s view, Thomas is essentially saying that “the humanity of Jesus is in reality a manner of being of God the Son himself.” See his Christ the Sacrament, 14, n. 10.
God in a human way, and man in a divine way.” Simply put, the christology contained in his work, *Christ the Sacrament*, is a trinitarian narrative, on the level of history, of the mystery of the Incarnation, retold in terms of sacramentality. What emerges then as central to the Incarnation for Schillebeeckx is the mystery of Jesus Christ’s saving worship.

Schillebeeckx’s theology of Incarnation presented in *Christ the Sacrament* is faithful to the tradition of Chalcedon, in the sense that it is firmly founded upon the mystery of the hypostatic union. However, instead of using the abstract metaphysical notions, such as ‘nature’ and ‘person’ to explain the mystery, Schillebeeckx relies on what the concrete life of Jesus Christ reveals. The unity of the divinity and the humanity in his person, from which his identity comes, is a reality lived out concretely in Jesus’ life. On the one hand, he is God in the sense that his life is the “movement down from above”; on the other hand, he is a human being in the sense that his life is the “movement up from below.” Here Schillebeeckx again follows Thomas Aquinas, as discussed in Chap. 1 above. In this way Jesus Christ is both the Son of God in the divine love of his people, and the Servant of God in his obedient love of God the Father. As the Second Person of the Trinity he manifests the divine will to save all people; as the head and member of the redeemed people, he worships and leads their worship. These two identities are not simply juxtaposed, but rather related in a sacramentally unifying way. He is not God on the one hand, and human being on the other, but is the union between God and the human being. What he manifests, then, is not the reality of God itself (*res*), but that same reality *realized* in human forms (*res* and *sacramentum*). What makes Jesus Christ the primordial sacrament of the encounter with God is this unprecedented unity between the sacrament

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134 Ibid., 14.
and what is sacramentalized. It points to the meeting of God’s self-offer and human acceptance of it, realized in the way only the incarnate Son of God can. This unity is uniquely Christ’s, but nevertheless it becomes the foundation of the unity between God and the rest of humanity. As Schillebeeckx puts it, “The man Jesus is personally a dialogue with God the Father; the supreme realization and therefore the norm and the source of every encounter with God.”\(^{135}\) The sacramentality of Jesus Christ reveals the inner dynamic of sacramentality: the movement up is the way in which the movement down is revealed; in the case of Jesus Christ, his worship of the Father is the way in which the bestowal of grace is manifested. His life is the mystery of saving worship. Borrowing the words of Thomas Aquinas, the human love and worship of Jesus Christ is the “manner of being” of the redeeming God. In other words, he is not just an ‘outward’ expression of what is already, or what can be otherwise experienced ‘inwardly’, but rather the realization of the inward communion in grace with God.

Schillebeeckx’s christology in *Christ the Sacrament* is a narrative trinitarian analysis, in the sense that he relies on the narrative of the economic Trinity to explain the events in Jesus Christ’s life, and on the relation between the immanent and the economic Trinity, to explain the unity and distinction between the ‘inward’ reality and ‘outward’ expression in Jesus Christ.\(^{136}\) The relation between the immanent and the economic Trinity explains how the Incarnation takes place in history and undergoes a temporal process of “growth” and “development.” Jesus Christ’s actions and words manifest his relationship with the Father, and they reveal his role as the redeemer only as a

\(^{135}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{136}\) It is notable to point out here that Schillebeeckx in the 1970s and 80s sees no place for the classical distinction between “God-in-Godself” and “God-for-human beings.” See his *On Christian Faith*, 25.
consequence of this relationship. Schillebeeckx’s understanding of the Father/Son relationship can be summed up as following: the divine persons are equal in all things, but the Son is who he is through the Father, though this does not mean that the Son is dependent on the Father (since dependence undermines equality). Receiving all from the Father, he is in accord with the Father in all, because “within the equality of the persons and the divine unity the Father is the origin of this life [the life of intimacy between the Father and the Son], in such a way that the Son, although equal to the Father, is beholden to him in all things by a perfect active receptivity.”

The historical events in Jesus Christ’s life and the trinitarian narrative come together in events that the church remembers through the liturgical celebrations. Schillebeeckx thus divides Jesus Christ’s life, which is the mystery of the Incarnation and of redemption, into four phases: 1) the initiative of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit; 2) the human response of Jesus Christ to the Father’s initiative, namely, the Passover; 3) the Father’s response to Jesus Christ’s obedience, namely, the resurrection in which the Father nullifies the power of sin and death, and the ascension in which the Father exalted the Son and made him Kyrios; 4) the initiative of the Son as the glorified Kyrios in sending the Holy Spirit upon the world, namely, the Pentecost as the event that unfolds his redemption for human beings. Throughout the whole events of the redemptive mystery, the Trinity is in action: the Father initiates through the Son in the Holy Spirit; through the cross the Son actively responds to the Father; Jesus Christ sends the Holy Spirit to the world out of his love for the Father and for humanity, and the

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137 Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 29.
Father remains the ultimate source of redemption by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{138} God the Father establishes Jesus Christ absolutely as the Christ upon his resurrection, the event that consummates Jesus Christ’s love of and obedience to the Father, even though in a sense the Son of God is already the Christ when he became human.

As a human being Jesus is the Son of God in history; the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity manifest in history. This historicity has consequences: a temporal procession and sacramental “translation.” In this history, Jesus Christ as the sacrament shows a “growth” process\textsuperscript{139} in which one sees the fullness of redemption unfolding. Schillebeeckx even adds that the Incarnation is not complete until the Father’s exaltation of Jesus Christ. This view of Jesus Christ’s being already-and-not-yet the Redeemer is the result of taking seriously the human aspect of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is the Trinity in slow motion, so to speak, visibly and historically undergoing essentially what is at the heart of the Trinity: “from the Father, to the Father.”\textsuperscript{140} In Jesus Christ, the perpetual cycle of mutual love within the Trinity takes the form of the encounter and dialogue with God, manifesting the eternal procession in human forms. Because it is the embodied life of the Son of God that reveals the inner mystery of the Trinity, there is a non-dualistic distinction between the reality of God and its revelation.

Schillebeeckx explains this distinction as results of sacramental “translation” or “interpretation into human forms.”\textsuperscript{141} Although the Son of God remains the same, something real happens to him in the process of the Incarnation. Through the earthly

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 20-25.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{141} Schillebeeckx uses various expressions: “translation,” “interpretation and transposition,” “representation,” “realization in human forms.”
humanity that he took upon himself, the inner-trinitarian life of the redeeming Godhead is translated into reality on the human plane. Thus the trinitarian equality is translated in the human Jesus as dependence; the intimacy between the Father and the Son, as loving obedience; self-giving, as giving-up of self or self-sacrifice; the adoration of the Father as his worship on the cross.\textsuperscript{142} The bestowal of grace by the Son of God is realized in the form of earning it for the human being by the Servant of God through his life of obedience and love on earth even unto death. Thus is the life of Jesus Christ the mystery of saving worship. After the Ascension, “the cycle of mutual love of Father and Son, as the origin of the Holy Spirit, is translated in the man Jesus by his outward sending the Spirit upon us.”\textsuperscript{143}

The relationship between the reality before this sacramental translation and its manifestation after the translation is a key to sacramentality. It concerns a structure that is peculiar to sacrament. Through a sacramental sign (Y), a reality (X itself) is translated into its visible manifestation (X in Y). This structure implies that the reality is distinct from its manifestation (X and Y), but at the same time, they form inseparable unity with one another (X is Y) in the sense that X is only available in and through Y. One is dealing with the same reality of God’s self-offer in grace, Schillebeeckx insists, before and after the sacramental manifestation, but there is also a real distinction found in the way in which the reality is presented. What contributes to the distinction is the human form in which the divine mystery is revealed, such as temporality, self-possession, alienation from God, sin, suffering, and death. Neo-scholastic theology of the past tended to view the non-dualistic distinction and unity-in-duality of the sacrament through

\textsuperscript{142} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Christ the Sacrament}, 29.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 34.
Aristotelian metaphysical categories. By choosing the narrative trinitarian approach to the sacrament instead, Schillebeeckx highlights the human qualities of the incarnation of God and the historical process through which God makes God’s self available for the encounter which is salvation. Behind this emphasis is his ongoing focus on the experiential aspect of the encounter with God in and through Jesus Christ, and of salvation in and through created world, particularly the church. For human beings, Jesus Christ is personally, sacramentally, hence, experientially the encounter with God; and the church is the prolongation of this encounter. In later works these identifications are probed further in a much more critical and dialectical fashion.\footnote{144}{See for example his article “Epilogue: In your view, Is Jesus still God? Yes and No?” in Schillebeeckx, *The Interim Report* (N.Y.: The Crossroad, 1981), 140-43.}

3.7 The Church as the Sacrament of the Glorified Body of Jesus Christ

The above christological analysis has a direct bearing on Schillebeeckx’s sacramental theology of the church, because the historical church is the extension of Jesus Christ, the Church. The church, as ongoing Incarnation, realizes Jesus Christ’s mystery of saving worship in history and in creation. Just as he did with Jesus Christ, Schillebeeckx places the significance of the church in the context of the sacramental reading of the economy of salvation, utilizing the insight of existential phenomenology.

Prior to Schillebeeckx, the topic of the sacramentality of the church came only as a subset of the sacramentality of the individual sacraments. Its treatment tended to focus on the juridical aspect of the church, and to explain various functions within the church mechanically. Pius XII’s encyclical letter, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, with which Schillebeeckx engages in critical dialogue in *Christ the Sacrament*, provides a glimpse of this approach. When the visible element of the church is discussed, the attention is often
on the “government,” namely, the visible head on the universal and local levels. The letter does extend the visibility to all aspects of the church life, but the juridical offices of the faithful are its main concern. The image of the body is the main metaphor for the church’s sacramentality, but it is to highlight the way in which the church operates for itself and its members. The church makes available “for its members a progressive series of graces to sustain them from the cradle to their last breath” as well as providing for “the social needs of the whole Body.”

The significance of the church’s visible presence itself, i.e., its sacramentality, is not fully explored. Christ the Head needs the church, not because he lacks something, but because “[h]e has so ordained it for the greater honour of His immaculate Bride…[The fact that Jesus Christ requires cooperation of his church] is truly a tremendous mystery, upon which we can never meditate enough…”

In contrast to this approach to the sacramentality of the church, Schillebeeckx carries over from his earlier discussion on Jesus Christ the central theme of the relationality of grace. Again, the trinitarian mystery as revealed in and through Jesus Christ is the source of the meaning and the life of the church. Just as Jesus did, the church receives the grace of salvation through its life of worship and love, which it can, as the Body of Christ, bestow upon its members. The church’s ongoing redemption involves a trinitarian structure that is parallel to the one that Christ’s redemptive act implied.

As Jesus Christ’s redemption showed, God’s revelation is not a monologue of

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146 Ibid., 60-61 (nn. 18-9).

147 Ibid., 72-3 (n. 42).

148 The four phases of the incarnation is mentioned above, p. 61.
God in which people are passive participants, but a dialogue. Through creation, God the Father makes the Self-revelation, thus initiating the life of the “church” and God’s relationship with it; in response to the Father’s calling, first the “pagans” and then the Jewish people worshipped God with varying degree of clarity and faithfulness; after Jesus Christ perfected the dialogue between God and the human being, the church worships the Father with Jesus Christ as filii in Filio in liturgical celebrations and in their concrete lives. In response to the church’s obedience, God makes possible a transformation: from the weak and sin-ridden community to the glorified body of Jesus Christ. At Pentecost, the church receives the Spirit from the Father and the Son, and in turn becomes the sacrament that bestows grace to its members. The redeemed church becomes the redeeming church, because the Holy Spirit “now realizes and perfects in us that which was completed in Christ.” The church now manifests the mystery of Jesus Christ’s saving worship, in which his life of love and service is the way of bestowing the grace of salvation. Through the charismatic activity, which is the visible manifestation of an interiorly possessed holiness, the Church makes holy the world.

At this stage in his writing, Schillebeeckx emphasizes the divine dimension of the church by showing how the church sacramentalizes the glorified Jesus Christ and his Spirit. As the Son of God incarnate, he is the representative of all creation; through his

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149 Parallel to the first phase of the Incarnation: the initiative of the Father through to Son in the Holy Spirit.

150 Parallel to the second phase: the human response of Jesus Christ to the Father’s initiative.

151 Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament, 47. Parallel to the third phase: the Father’s response to Jesus Christ’s obedience, namely the resurrection in which the Father nullifies the power of sin and death, and the ascension in which the Father exalted the Son and made him Kyrios.

152 Ibid., 24. Parallel to the fourth phase of the Incarnation: the initiative of the Son as the glorified Kyrios in sending the Holy Spirit upon the world.
passion, he is the head of all created worshipping community; in God the Father’s acceptance of his worship, he becomes the bestower of the Holy Spirit to the world. As the exemplar of sacrifice to and love of God, he is himself the Church in his glorified body, the redemptive community. Through the church’s intimate relation with Jesus Christ, it too represents the creation, heads its worship and bestows grace as the sacrament of the communion with God in grace as Jesus Christ primordially is.

This divine dimension is highlighted by the unity that the church’s sacramentality entails. There is unity between the inward communion in grace and the outward social sign, namely, between the mystical body of Jesus Christ and the visible church. In continuity with the way he treated the hypostatic union, Schillebeeckx expresses his position against dualism in the strongest terms: “the visible Church itself is the Lord’s mystical body…Any attempt to introduce a dualism here is the work of evil.”¹⁵³ Such an attempt is evil for Schillebeeckx, primarily because it undermines the sacramentality of the church, and reduces the church to be merely a means of salvation, not Christ’s salvation itself as visibly realized in this world. Church becomes just a sign, not the reality within the sign that it is. By undermining the church as it is, one ends up undermining the presence of grace itself. For Schillebeeckx, however, the church at issue is not an abstract ideal, but rather the living historical church, and its historical reality points to its human dimension.

In addition to the unity that sacrament attains, sacramentality at the same time implies a distinction, since the church is the Lord’s mystical body realized in the form of a visible sign. In the context of the discussion on the valid administration of the sacraments, Schillebeeckx notes that a minister must act not only as a minister of the

¹⁵³ Ibid., 48.
visible church, but also of “the Church which is mystery,” in order to make the sacrament realized in fullness, rather than merely valid. ¹⁵⁴ The former is the church visible in sacramental act; the latter is the church that is “essentially grace,” the reality that is symbolized by the visible community on earth in its sacramental act. The distinction leads one to avoid the mistaken view that the church is the final Kingdom of God – the position that ignores the church’s sacramentality. Thus there are two ways in which the sacramentality can be misunderstood: firstly by denying the graced reality of the church, and instead treating it as merely human reality; and secondly, by identifying the church with the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, thus denying its historicity and creaturely status.

Focusing on the historical and human dimension of the church leads Schillebeeckx to highlight the reality of sin and weakness within the church. His views, however, are not without ambiguities. At this point of his writing, Schillebeeckx insists that, although there are those in the visible church who are sinful, they are in fact outside the church when they sin, because “the Church as such is holy.” ¹⁵⁵ Schillebeeckx qualifies this explanation by asserting further that sinfulness in the church is an indication of “a rupture between the sign and the reality it signifies” in the sinner. ¹⁵⁶ This rupture takes place because the church is not yet what it will be in its fulfillment. As long as the church has not reached its full maturity, it is open to contradictory, or at least imperfect sacramental manifestation of Jesus Christ. In other words, the rupture is not confined to sinful actions of certain members of the church, who becomes ‘outsiders’ due to their

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 103.
¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 204.
¹⁵⁶ Ibid.
actions. It reflects a deeper condition of the visible church itself that is still situated in creation awaiting the fulfillment promised by Jesus’ redemption. In Schillebeeckx’s words: “the glory of the Church on earth is a veiled glory.” Unlike the humanity of Jesus Christ, the church’s not-yet-complete sacramentality can obscure as well as manifest God’s grace, and in fact it often does. While at this stage he already calls attention to the fact that the church is not only an object of our faith, but also a test of the faith, he asserts that the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ manifests itself “in spite of” human weakness and sinfulness. Schillebeeckx even goes so far as saying that the power of God is fulfilled, not only *despite* the weakness and poverty of the church, but also *in and through* them. In his judgment, the church’s failure does not undermine the sacramental principle that the church and the life of its members are the embodiment of God’s inner call to grace. While Schillebeeckx certainly does not divinize the church despite his dogmatic assertion of its primordial sacramentality, he also does not allow the historical reality of the church to mean the possibility that the church as a whole be a source of scandal, as he does later. The church remains the sacrament of the encounter with the risen Lord, even at moments of its failures. What Schillebeeckx is pointing to is the transcending power of the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ, that is revealed when the church, or rather some of its members and ministers, become obstacles to the experience

157 Ibid., 205.

158 In this early period of his writing, Schillebeeckx excludes the possibility of veiling from Jesus Christ’s sacramentality. Schillebeeckx explains the gap between the sacramentality of Jesus Christ and that of the church in terms of causality. See *Christ the Sacrament*, 75-6.

159 Ibid., 205.

160 See his *Christ the Sacrament*, 207. Contrast this view with that in his *Church*, 13, where Schillebeeckx states (in the context of his discussion on the sacramentality of religions and churches) that “[a]ny one who looks only at unveiling can in fact forget God, silence and even kill God.”
of grace. The visible embodiment may obscure the invisible reality, but it cannot obliterate it. In fact, embodied experiences, with all their creaturely implications, are the only way in which the invisible grace of Jesus Christ remains real in the lives of the redeemed; they are also the only way in which the eschatological hope becomes reality in the present. Thus the church works as an ambiguous sign: it is the earthly manifestation of the risen Lord, but a sign in creation. It shows the triumphant Jesus Christ, but through itself as a "lowly and submissive"\textsuperscript{161} sign. In this phenomenon lies the sacramental mystery, namely, the mystery of saving worship. As Jesus Christ was established as the encounter with God by virtue of his obedience even on the cross, so the church becomes the sacrament of Jesus Christ by virtue of its submission to Jesus Christ’s mission. When this mystery is not lost, the church, even in its rupture, can manifest that it essentially is not a human product, but the work of the triumphant Christ. Schillebeeckx discusses more concretely how the church reveals this mystery to the world in the discussions on Christian humanism.

3.8 The Church as the Sacrament of the World

Schillebeeckx’s study on sacramentality concerns not only the church \textit{ad intra}, but also the role of the church in the world. This broad view comes from the recognition of the inseparable, organic and reciprocal relationship between them\textsuperscript{162} and of the presence of grace outside the church. Through the Incarnation, the whole creation

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 210.

\textsuperscript{162} Schillebeeckx once commented that this emphasis on secular activities in relation to the life of faith is an element of new theology aided by existential phenomenology. See his \textit{Revelation and Theology}, vol. II, 145-150.
became “an outward grace, an offer of grace in sacramental form”\textsuperscript{163}; through Jesus Christ, encounters with fellow human beings became the sacrament of encounter with God. Schillebeeckx’s outward look of the church also is a critique of his milieu in which the church’s perspective is accused of being too narrow, overly focused on the internal administration of sacraments, while identifying the church with the hierarchy and its work. In fact, this critical point of view leads him at times to de-emphasize deliberately the sacramental practice, such as liturgies, for the sake of the practice of faith in the wider sense. His intention, however, is to find a proper balance, even if such a balance makes necessary the oscillation between the two points. In the context of his sacramental theology, Schillebeeckx puts at the core the everyday actions of Christians that are non-sacramental, i.e., charismatic actions as opposed to hierarchical, official and sacramental in a narrow sense, which are outward manifestations of inward communion in grace with God.\textsuperscript{164} Comparing them to the human soul that grows to personhood in the human body and in its contacts with the world around, he asserts that a religious act that is not sacramental grows to its full maturity in sacramental acts.\textsuperscript{165} The essence of the church as the visible presence of grace in the world is found in loving acts that point to the love beyond this world. The church as the sacrament of encountering God in Jesus Christ then

\textsuperscript{163} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Christ the Sacrament}, 216.

\textsuperscript{164} William Hill offers a succinct analysis of this distinction to which he refers as “two-directedness” of sacramentality and various aspects of the church. It corresponds to the distinction of the church as a redeeming institution and the community of the redeemed. He says: “Under the first aspect [redeeming institution], the dichotomy between hierarchy and laity is involved; the church here symbolizing both Christ’s will to save (hierarchical acts) and Christ’s will to offer perfect worship to the father (acts of the layman as such, \textit{in} the Church). Considered in her second modality as community of the redeemed, this dichotomy is non-existent and the sacramentality here resides in what Schillebeeckx calls the ‘charismatic’ activity of Christians, the visible manifestation of an interiorly possessed holiness; the redeemed here sacramentalize Christ as the one in whom dwells the fullness of grace.” See Hill, “Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God,” in \textit{The Thomist} 33 (1969), 176-7.

\textsuperscript{165} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Christ the Sacrament}, 198.
is only so when the church is fully engaged with the world. Such worldly engagement is how the church begins to sacramentalize in the world Jesus Christ’s mystery of saving worship.

The narrowly sacramental life of the church is still central in the life of the church, but as culmination of Christian life and apex of their encounter with God. Neither the sacramental nor the charismatic in fact can form the whole of the church’s life on its own. There is a reciprocal or circular relationship between the charismatic life of the church in the world and the sacramental life within the church. The former leads to the latter, and the latter loses meaning without the former, as a body without a soul; the latter decisively completes the former and in turn gives it direction by providing it with objectivity, ecclesiality and eschatological orientation. As directed by their sacramental life, the Christians show in their secular works “the fact that we are redeemed,” which for Schillebeeckx is “the best sign of the church’s presence in the world.” 166 This is to show what it means to be redeemed, thus, fully human through the love of God.

For Schillebeeckx in the 1950s, the church concretely becomes the sacrament of the world, namely, the outward embodiment of God’s interior call to grace in the hearts of all human beings, in the form of Christian humanism. In the same context, a theology of Christian secularism becomes the vehicle for his theology of creation. Christian humanism follows the sacramental and eschatological worldview inherent in Christian secularism. 167 In the background is the desire to move away from the defensive attitude of the church toward the world on the one hand, and the tendency in neo-scholastic

166 Ibid., 214-5.

167 In the same vein, Schillebeeckx remarks that Christians, particularly the laity “carry the dogma of creation into practice.” See his God and Man, 15.
theology to separate the church and the world, on the other. Thus his theology of the church in the world is in continuity with his attempts, by way of the notion of sacramentality, at a synthesis between the “the human longing for salvation and the divine will for salvation,” which is embodied most perfectly in Jesus Christ as “the synthesis of human life in all its fullness and mutuality with the divine sublimity and holiness.”

Sacrament bridges the gap between the world and the transcendent God, and thus the Church, as the sacrament of the glorified Jesus Christ, is at the same time, “the sign raised among the nations.” Until the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, the church continues to be engaged with the world through humanistic efforts. Like other kinds of humanism, Christian humanism aims at attaining life worthy of human beings in a humanized world. Christian mysteries, however, inspire the contents of what human life in all its fullness can mean, when all is seen in the light of the creature and Creator relationship. According to Schillebeeckx, it is Christ who showed such a fully realized humanity in himself and his actions. In one place he even considers Jesus Christ primarily to be the sacrament of the human being who is fully committed to God, and only secondarily (“in a roundabout way”) the sacrament of God. The dialogical relationship between God and the world, that began with creation but lost through sin, is restored ultimately in and through Jesus Christ. In his mystery of saving worship, he showed how a dialogue relationship is possible between God and the human being. He is the culmination of God’s revelation and all religiousness; he himself experienced his relationship to the Father in and through the world, namely, through his surrender and

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168 Borgman, Schillebeeckx, 135;141.

169 Schillebeeckx, God and Man, 12.
dedication of his human life to God. He showed ultimately that the human relationship with the living God comes in one’s experience of being *in* but not *of* the world.

Prolonging the same mystery, the church has to consider the dialogue with the world itself to be a dialogue with the living God. Through “dialogue with the world,” the church contributes meaning to the world, by creating culture, ordering temporal society, humanizing the world and the human being. His creation theology dictates that the dialogue with the world can attain its full significance only in the dialogue with God. This is so, “because the *Creator* of the universe and of man in the world is God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”170 The secular world for Christians is always “a mode of incarnation, of personal communion with God,”171 and as a result the secular tasks of Christians is “the embodiment of authentic love of God and authentic love of mankind.”172

As Jesus Christ showed in his saving worship, however, the church’s engagement with the world necessarily involves a tension. Its sacramentality implies “the tension between the aspect of mystery and the historical aspect of human history.”173 In other words, the church in itself and in its acts points to the negative aspect of the non-dualistic distinction between the divine and the human: “We cannot oppose God to this terrestrial growth, but on the other hand we cannot *identify* this terrestrial mystery with the supernatural mystery. God, despite his deep intimacy with us in history, is completely different, and this imposes on us, in the coming about of the kingdom of God, the

170 Ibid., 13.
171 Ibid., 226.
172 Ibid., 228.
fundamental duty of self-dispossession, which is merely the other side of the coin of our loving dedication to God’s greater value.” The completion of the humanizing task of the church lies not in human hands, but in God’s plan of salvation. However, the church experiences with tension this duty of self-dispossession, which is an essential part of the created world, because of the reality of sin within the church and anti-human factors in the world. The human rebellion against and unfaithfulness toward God make it necessary for the church to experience self-dispossession “translated” as self-sacrifice, and the efforts of putting history within the Kingdom of God accompanied by “constant relative failures.” Ultimately failure is inevitable for the church in its humanizing works in the world, because the church is in history and not yet fully what it is called to be. Jesus Christ’s self-sacrifice on the cross exemplified the Son’s self-dispossession, translated and interpreted into human forms in history. The same is required of the church to be his sacrament in the world. The paradox of the cross is central in the work of Christian humanism. The ultimate human failure in humanizing the world simply indicates that the completion of the humanizing task of the church lies not in human hands, but in God’s plan of salvation. The church continues to make visible the exemplar on the cross, who showed that the spirit of surrender in view of God’s kingdom always accompanies the pursuit of making the world more human. The whole community of the faithful is the “sign raised up among the nations,” in its unity with the world, as well as in its transcendence beyond it.

174 Ibid.; Emphasis added.
CHAPTER 4


4.1 Ecclesial and Pastoral Development Leading to Vatican II

4.1.1 Schillebeeckx’s Role In The Development Leading To Vatican II, More Specifically, His Contribution To The Church And World Relations

Chapter one, in which Schillebeeckx’s philosophical and theological formation in the 1940s was explored, demonstrated that the period preceding Vatican II was “a time of fertility and flowering.”¹⁷⁵ A certain clash of currents, between the old and the new, cannot be ignored,¹⁷⁶ but this period was characterized by the attempt to move beyond neo-scholasticism, a non-historical and strictly logical interpretation of the writings of Thomas Aquinas, especially the *Summa Theologiae*. The movement preceding Vatican II was also characterized by a two-fold movement later described as *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*. Roger Aubert describes this dual movement as typified by “concern for the reinvigoration of theology by still more direct application to Christian sources and awareness of the continual need for reappraisal of the Christian message in its


confrontation with the preoccupations of the modern world.” Vatican II was a watershed event, in which the official church affirmed this new direction and further accelerated the church’s openness to the modern world. Schillebeeckx took on a key role in assisting the formation of the themes for the Council, in the discussions during the Council, and in developing further the main issues after the Council.

The fact that he was not an official peritus of the Council makes it difficult, if not impossible, to establish the material evidence for his contribution to the actual texts of the Council, other than the chapter on marriage in *Gaudium et Spes*, on which he, as a member of an official commission, had a direct influence. As an emerging theologian at the University of Nijmegen, and later advisor and theologian for the Dutch bishops, however, he almost singlehandedly prepared the hierarchy and the Dutch Church for the changes which Vatican II would formally usher in. Written prior to and during the Council, three of Schillebeeckx’s works are notable in that regard. The first work was a joint letter of the Dutch Episcopacy to the Church in the Netherlands, dated November 24, 1960. Schillebeeckx was a main contributor to this letter which dealt with some key

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178 Schillebeeckx was one of the theologians in the mixed commission for the revision of the schema XIII, more specifically in the subcommission on marriage.

179 Edward Schillebeeckx, probably the most important theologian from the Netherlands, was never an official peritus but he exerted a decisive influence, especially on the Dutch Fathers of the Council.” See Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *Vatican II*, 462.

180 Schillebeeckx himself mentions his ‘unofficial’ influence, citing the wide circulation and good reception of his commentaries. Schillebeeckx also recalls: “Another way I could influence the bishops was by giving conferences, about weekly for the Dutch speaking Bishops of the Netherlands and Belgium, bishops in the missions of Congo and Indonesia, and for many other Episcopal Conferences: of Asia, Africa, Canada and USA, and last not least of South-America (the CELAM).” See Schillebeeckx, “Voices from the Council: Interview with Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P.,,” interview by Carl Sterkens, transcript, private copy, 1-2.
themes that the bishops wanted the Council to take up, such as, "the distinction between
the kingdom of God and the Church; the communion that precedes the differentiation
between clergy and laity; the relationship of the sensus fidei to the magisterium…the
distinction between the internal problems and the external problems of the Church; the
importance and urgency of Christian unity."181 This letter not only prepared the Dutch
faithful for the upcoming Council, but also helped their bishops to form a united and
decisive voice on the council floor.

The second work was an anonymous commentary on the first seven schemata,
written with a non-official approval of the Dutch bishops, and subsequently made
available for all participating bishops from other parts of the world. It was titled
“Animadversiones in primam seriem schematum constitutionum et decretorum de quibus
disc pertinentur in Concilii sessionibus” (45 pages, 1962). This was the most widely
distributed, thus especially influential text at the beginning of the Council. In this
critique of the preparatory schemata, Schillebeeckx already makes a distinction between
“revelation-in-word” and “revelation-in-reality,” and expands the notion of tradition to
include "the tradition of the living realities of salvation."182 Schillebeeckx rejects "the
exclusively conceptual problematic, which arbitrarily equated 'objectivity' with
'abstraction and universality,'” and makes a case that the New Testament is an
interpretation of the original community's experience of Jesus Christ, without severing
the connection with the historical Jesus. There were many other commentaries on the
official schemata at the time, but this work of Schillebeeckx, together with Rahner's


182 Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, Vatican II. vol. II: First Period and Intersession
Disquisitio brevis de Schemate "De fontibus revelationis" was the most instrumental in forming the public opinion at the beginning of the Council.\textsuperscript{183}

The third influential work of Schillebeeckx was his critique on the schema on the Church, Animadversiones in "secundam seriem" schematum Constitutionum et Decretorum de quibus discpectabitur in Concilii sessionibus De Ecclesia et De Beata Maria Virgine (10 pages, 1962). In it, Schillebeeckx criticizes the essentialist view of the schema, according to which the Church is regarded as an abstract essence rather than a concretely existing reality. As a result of this essentialist position, he points out, the Church as the 'body of Christ' is not understood biblically, that is, in relation to the glorious body of Christ with which it is sacramentally identified, but rather in the derivative sense of a living organism comprising many members. Consistent with this deficiency of the schema was the lack of a sacramental view of the Church, connecting the visible bonds of the Church to the bonds of grace and truth.\textsuperscript{184} On the role of the laity in the church’s mission, he prefers "collaboration" rather than "participation."\textsuperscript{185} In terms of the Church’s relationship to the world, he criticizes that the schema "was not concerned to deepen the understanding of the Church's mission but solely to defend the freedom to evangelize." In his proposed new structure of the schema, Schillebeeckx suggests a final section on the eschatological dimension of the Church. Many of his critical analyses and suggestions listed above were eventually made into the final texts of the Council. It is particularly evident that Schillebeeckx’s pre-Council retrieval of the

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 84.  
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 305.  
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 309.
notion of “sacramentality,” as discussed in the previous chapter, also provided a theological ground for the sacramental approach of the Council to its ecclesiology.

His theological contribution to Vatican II continued in the period after the council, as he expounded its major themes, particularly the issue of the church and the world. He felt that the Council broke new ground for the new relationship between church and world. More specifically, he saw that the council, through pronouncements such as Gaudium et Spes, opened the door to the needed interactions between the church and its contemporary secular culture. However, he also deemed the council results ambiguous, since the texts were necessarily the result of a “compromise” between conflicting theologies. In his works immediately following the council, one finds a systematic expansion of the conciliar pronouncements interwoven with the development of his own theology of the church and world. His own development follows his constructive and critical reading of the “sign of the time,” that is, the phenomenon of secularization.

4.2 The Sign of the Times: Secularization and Schillebeeckx’s Theological Response

One of the most prominent “signs of the times” that came to the attention of the church in the 1960s was secularization. Schillebeeckx distinguished secularization as a sociological phenomenon from its ideological interpretation that made it synonymous with atheism. As a sociological phenomenon, it was a “natural consequence of the discovery and the gradual widening of man’s rational sphere of understanding.” Schillebeeckx saw that secularization was implied in the creation faith that affirmed God’s abiding presence in creation, while acknowledging the distinction and autonomy of the world from God. One could thus see it as an unfolding of authentic Christianity in the

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186 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 56.
world, as the participants in Vatican II did. Commenting on the first part of the *Gaudium et Spes*, Schillebeeckx points out two guiding ideas behind the Constitution: that there is God’s salvific intention in the new human experiences of scientific and technological developments; and that the religious concerns for the world includes all that is good in the secular world.\(^{187}\) The growing self-confidence and optimism on the part of the human being, resulting from the growth in science and technology, were in themselves not antithetical to the faith and hope in the God of salvation. However, secularization did offer a sharp critique of what were now found to be unfit and misguided religious views that were no longer compatible with the new world view. The widening of the human being’s rational sphere of understanding resulted in the narrowing of and suspicion towards the traditional role of religion. This meant “desacralization” of the world, and demythologization of certain representations of the God of traditional religion, namely a *deus ex machina*, “a God who, when we are unable to provide the answers and the explanations, provides them for us, a ‘stop-gap or long-stop’.”\(^{188}\) In Schillebeeckx’s view, various Christian responses to this secular ‘crisis’ of faith did not adequately address the issue of the apparent “absence” of God, because they, in their attempt at dealing with secularization, either separated the domain of religion from that of the world, or confused them. In Schillebeeckx’s view, these mistaken views concerning God’s and the church’s relationship to the world not only did not help, but also were partially responsible for the growth of atheism in the contemporary world.

Schillebeeckx’s theological responses to secularization came in various forms: in his engagement with Vatican II, in the development of his own theology beyond Vatican


\(^{188}\) Schillebeeckx, *God and Man*, 92.
II, in his critique of John A.T. Robinson’s book *Honest to God*,¹⁸⁹ and in a lecture form delivered during the 1967 lecture tour in the U.S. His contributions can largely be divided into three themes: 1) a metaphysical foundation for the church-world relationship in the secular age; 2) a dialogical character of the relationship between the church and the world; and 3) the eschatological turn and the central role of the church’s orthopraxis in the secular world.

4.2.1 A Metaphysic Of Non-Dualism

Schillebeeckx’s metaphysic of non-dualism continues to play a pivotal role in his view of the church’s role in the secularized world. By metaphysics he meant a point of view in which one considers God as a trans-historical being who nonetheless remains dynamic, intersubjective and interpersonal in history. This point of view remains important to Schillebeeckx, because the church is reduced to a mere sociological phenomenon in a secularized society without the recognition of God as the trans-historical and interpersonal being. On his metaphysic of non-dualism, Schillebeeckx builds the nature of the church which is fundamentally both historical and trans-historical; and he establishes the proper relationship between the church and the world.

Schillebeeckx’s metaphysical insights reveal how critically he responded to the forces of secularization and modern disciplines such as hermeneutics, even as he welcomed those new developments for the renewed life of the church and understanding of faith. Although he advocated a form of “secular Christianity,” as an authentic faith life reinterpreted for and lived in the secular world, he also saw dangers in one-sided approaches in which the authentic Christian tradition was distorted and then discarded in

the name of the demythologization of faith. His metaphysical writings reveal more explicitly than in any other places the traditional themes that support his vast theological interests: the themes such as nature and grace, negative theology, God’s transcendence, and the personhood of God. What prompted significantly his focus on metaphysics in the late 1960s was the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, John A.T. Robinson’s immensely popular work, *Honest to God*. Since Schillebeeckx’s article on this work includes a discussion of how one should interpret received tradition of faith for the contemporary understanding, one may consider it as a specific illustration of the comprehensive critique he offered on a non-metaphysical hermeneutics in another article “Towards Catholic use of Hermeneutics.” In both works, Schillebeeckx presents a dynamic metaphysic of non-dualism as an indispensible grounding for authentic Christian secularity.

Robinson’s work represented, like the radical theological movement of the “Death of God,” a serious attempt on the part of Christianity to secularize religion, in order “to bring the living God to a secularized world which is threatening to slip into atheism.” Robinson believed that we could experience God only as a “transcendental Third in our interhuman relationships,” which meant that we could encounter God only in our unconditional love for other human beings. For him, God was personal, but not a person; God was “in depth,” not “up there”; and God was ultimately the ground of our being and our relationships, but not “wholly Other.” Schillebeeckx saw in this view a legitimate attempt at avoiding dualism which no longer was credible to the secularized understanding. Robinson was correct that the worldly things, particularly human relationships, were the only way to experience God. However, in Schillebeeckx’s critical

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view, he ended up undermining God who is not just a personal being but the absolute and transcendent person, and does not need human beings to be God. To Robinson, like the proponents of the “Death of God” movement, there was a radical identity between the love of God and the love of other human beings, between being Christian and being human. Schillebeeckx points out that Robinson did not maintain the fundamental distinction between God and creation, in trying to unite the life of faith and the life in the world. He was one-sided in that his radical secularization of religion followed the lead of scientific secularization; that the brand of Christianity he tried to demythologize did not reflect the authentic tradition; and that he advocated horizontalism at the cost of the vertical dimension of human transcendence of oneself and the world. In other words, in his rejection of essentialistic or conceptualistic metaphysics, he did not leave any room for the divine transcendence. What he was left with was not theology, but “purely an anthropology: a ‘theism’ of human self-transcendence, i.e., of the giving of oneself to others.”

While agreeing with Robinson on the danger of dualistic metaphysics, Schillebeeckx leaves room for a form of realism that is dynamic, intersubjective, and interpersonal, in the sense that God is conceived of as the objective trans-historical element in our temporality. In it God is the mystery which can never be expressed in history, but nonetheless which self-reveals in history as dynamic, permanent and inexhaustible presence. Authentic theism, like authentic negative theology, is based on this realism, and “sees our existence as a basic reference to the self-sustaining personal existence of an absolute Subject that is independent of our existence (independent, also,

192 Ibid., 167.
of our knowledge of God….”

Schillebeeckx uses a longstanding Thomistic tradition concerning nature and grace to critique Robinson’s wholesale rejection of realism. Schillebeeckx made a distinction between the natural and the theologal as two moments or aspects in one’s religious orientation toward God. The natural moment refers to human acts, such as trust in and desire for God, based on “a rationally justified certainty of his existence,” which God affirms in and through God’s creative activity. The theologal is Schillebeeckx’s term for ‘supernatural,” highlighting “the reciprocity in the intersubjectivity with God.” Nothing, however, is purely ‘natural’ since the human acts referred to are initiated and sustained by the grace of God. The theologal is distinguished from the natural, in that it involves a conscious response to God’s act of grace. As part of the constitutive essential features of this approach to nature and grace, human beings have a capacity for grace, which is expressed in one’s natural desire for God. Religion is the product of this natural need for God. Instead of relegating religion as myth as secularism does, however, one needs to distinguish various sense of that need. The “religion” that Robinson demythologized comes out of a need based on a mistaken, stop-gap image of God and on undeveloped self-awareness of human beings. What he did not recognize was the “metaphysical need for God” which essentially belongs to

193 Ibid., 167.
194 Ibid., 176, n. 15.
195 Ibid., 161, n. 4. In contrast to the term ‘supernatural’ which simply refers to that which is beyond nature, the word ‘theological’ designates, in Schillebeeckx’s theology, a reciprocity or a dynamic interrelationship between God and people. See Kennedy, Schillebeeckx, 76. The term is "the adjective for the 'intersubjectivity with God.'" He defines intersubjectivity as "the interpersonal relationship of two subjects who are attracted towards each other as subjects" (See his “Life in God and Life in the World,” in God and Man, 185); it is a notion based on the phenomenology of encounter.
human beings as creatures, and leads to an authentic religion.\textsuperscript{196} It grounds an authentic religion, by enabling the believers to experience both the autonomy of creation and its dependence on the creator. It also frees them from projection and mythological ideas of God.

There is a tension between the theologal and the natural, and this also points to a tension between what is authentically Christian and human, between sanctification and humanization. Certainly they are intimately related: the former is the fulfillment of the latter, while the latter is the embodiment of the former. However, one cannot demand the former for the ultimate meaning of human existence, because it surpasses the latter, given as a pure gift. The human being is constituted in such a way that one cannot find in oneself one’s definite goal and meaning, but rather a fundamental openness to it at the core. Thus to say that an authentic human existence is Christian existence, as Robinson did, does not fully reflect this dynamic tension. What Christianity points to transcends human nature; the ultimate meaning of human existence is not found within, but given. The natural, inherent in human nature, functions as a foundation, “precognition,”\textsuperscript{197} and “anticipatory preparation.”\textsuperscript{198} Schillebeeckx states paradoxically: Christian existence as an authentic human existence is “an inward fulfillment of our human life in a transcendent – that is, a divine – manner.”\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 178; emphasis his.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 183; emphasis added.
Schillebeeckx finds this contact between the human and the divine disclosed subjectively in the fundamental “existential trust” in life, and objectively in the “givenness” in reality. In his judgment, the existential trust – that the future has meaning, that human life is ultimately meaningful, and ultimately “that the fact of human existence is a promise of salvation” – is already a decision in favor of God, preceding and justifying any explicit acceptance of God in Jesus Christ. That conviction rests on a realistic judgment about the givenness of the world. The givenness of the world means that the reality can never be made totally transparent by human understanding nor can it be totally subject to human manipulation, because it points beyond itself toward non-empirical reality. This subjective trust, Schillebeeckx explains, is a moment of authentic human self-transcendence, which is inner reference to and openness toward the objectively given, i.e. the absolute mystery. Only in this authentic self-transcendence, one attains full humanity. Further, Schillebeeckx remarks that this implicit acceptance of God grounds Christian secularity, and makes secularization meaningful, while preventing “the secularized world from imposing a modern form of ‘slavery’ on man, a system in which the human person is sacrificed to an ideology or to the bringing about of a better world.” Between faith in God and work for the better world, there is a relationship that is deeper, intimate and inseparable: on the one hand, “acceptance of God is the ultimate, precise name which must be given to the deepest meaning of commitment to this

200 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 74.


202 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 76.
world”\(^{203}\); on the other hand, “commitment to this world, experienced as \textit{faith}, thus forms an essential part of the Christian faith in God. But – and this is the vitally important complement according to Schillebeeckx – it is in and through our \textit{active} trust in faith [i.e., commitment to this world] that \textit{God’s gift} [of the kingdom of justice, love and peace] is realized in history.\(^{204}\)

Schillebeeckx’s metaphysical view, which recognizes divine transcendence as independent of creation, is translated into a response of self-surrender when it comes to the believer’s concrete involvement with the world. If the human fulfillment is found in \textit{ekstasis}, i.e., in “a sacrificial, radical going out from oneself,” and in “an essential shifting of our centre of life,” then, in the context of concrete history, the ultimate goal of human existence “transcends the aims projected by human culture and the process of humanization.” Attaining this goal in the world thus is not a self-achievement, but rather “the surrender in faith to the act of God.” Surrender in faith is not to negate or undermine humanity or the world. By transcending one’s humanity, Schillebeeckx explains, one inwardly fulfills it. This self-transcendence is a positive act of finding certainty in the God of promise, rather than in oneself. Concretely it means faithful commitment to the world through the love of others, not because one knows he or she can achieve a more human world, but because one believes \textit{God} will. Surrender transforms the contingent and non-transparent world into the dynamic sphere of divine action manifest in and through the human. It makes \textit{relative} the believer’s commitment to a more human world, because the ultimate world is \textit{God’s salvation}, given as pure gift. At the same time, the engagement with the world as a form of self-surrender makes the work \textit{radical}, rather

\(^{203}\) Ibid., 76.

\(^{204}\) Ibid., 78.
than undermining it, because the kingdom hoped for lies in the human being’s complete possession of oneself and the world “in a radical giving of himself.”\(^{205}\)

The metaphysics of transcendence, which Schillebeeckx embraced in this period, demands that the personal God be not reduced to a function of creation. One experiences God’s presence only in and through creation, but the latter does not exhaust the former. Schillebeeckx uses the notion of sacramentality, precisely in order to preserve this dynamic tension. In other words, the church symbolizes the God beyond the world, as well as the world within which one finds God. In his interaction with Vatican II, Schillebeeckx examines this dynamic more fully than before, by focusing on the integral role of the world for the church.

4.2.2 The Church as The *Sacramentum Mundi* and Sacrament of Dialogue: A Dynamic of Grace at Work in a Mutual Direction

4.2.2.1 The Church as *Sacramentum Mundi*

For Schillebeeckx, the central concept which the Council used to define the church was that of the sacrament of the world, *sacramentum mundi*. Schillebeeckx thought that this concept was even more important than the church as the People of God, because the latter still showed “the old dualism,” such as between the hierarchy and the laity, with a shift of emphasis.\(^ {206}\) Although this phrase was not explicitly used in the conciliar documents, he finds it implied in a number of scattered texts that define the church in terms of sacramentality. Two among them directly point to the church as the *sacramentum mundi*. The first is the notion of the church as “the universal sacrament of salvation” (*Lumen Gentium* no. 48, repeated in *Ad Gentes* no. 1 and *Gaudium et Spes* no.

\(^{205}\) Schillebeeckx, *God and Man*, 85.

45), and the second, the statement that the church “is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men” (Lumen Gentium no. 1, repeated in Gaudium et Spes no. 42). At Vatican II, the world entered into the definition of the church. The world by no means replaced Jesus Christ who had been the source of the church’s sacramentality in Schillebeeckx’s earlier works, nor had the view of the world as the sphere where sacramentality unfolded been lacking. However, this shift of focus during Vatican II was significant for the church and world relationship in the modern era.

Schillebeeckx saw the notion of the universal sacrament of salvation as a key statement of Vatican II because it captures the mystery of the church, the life of which always unfolds in relationship to the world. On the one hand, the church reveals and continues the salvation of Jesus Christ; on the other hand, it does so in the world and on behalf of the world where God’s salvation is already actively present. The first aspect, that is, the church’s relationship to Jesus Christ, has been a constant theme in the church, and Schillebeeckx himself recapitulated it in his earlier studies, as Chapter Two has shown. One of the contributions of Vatican II is a shift in focus here: it reaffirms the christological foundation, in order to develop further an additional urgent theme: the church’s relationship to the world. Schillebeeckx capitalizes on this shift, when he adds that the church is “the universal sacrament of divine salvation with regard to the whole world.”

In Schillebeeckx’s writings, one finds this emphasis in what appears to be a slight but significant reordering of the definition of Vatican II – the church is the sacrament of God’s universal salvation – by which he meant to emphasize that salvation “has already been offered to the whole world on the basis of God’s universal will to save

207 Ibid., 44; emphasis added.
all creation, and is already active in the world.” In other words, there is already an active presence of God’s salvation in the world, albeit that presence is neither visible nor complete. The church reveals that active presence of God’s salvation in a veiled but perceptible form. There is, however, a tension. The view presented so far emphasizes continuity or fluidity between the church and the world. In the documents of Vatican II Schillebeeckx finds that the above view is joined with statements that point to a break or gap, such as “the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation” (*Lumen Gentium* 14), because, as the holder of “completing grace,” the church is a “very distinct and separate gift of grace and opportunity for grace.”208 Schillebeeckx, however, does not see that this tension should amount to a contradiction. The notion of the church as the *sacramentum mundi* on the one hand, and the church, the sacrament of Jesus Christ, on the other, should be properly distinguished and harmonized, in order to avoid the breach between faith and daily lives, or between the kingdom of God and the world. It was this breach that Vatican II considered to be one of the most serious errors of the time. Without undermining the tension between the two themes, Schillebeeckx aims at a synthetic theology of the church and the world, by highlighting the sacred nature of the world and the church’s fundamental orientation to this world. He does not take the necessity of the church for salvation to mean “that God’s salvation cannot in any sense reach the world except in and through this world’s gradual and historical confrontation with the church.”209 This is so, because the world has an active central role to play in relation to the church in salvation history. The world is not just a preparation for the church. The church also exists for the whole world. The church is not just a sign for

208 Ibid., 48.

209 Ibid., 47.
itself, or for what it already possesses. The church is a sign that foreshadows the kingdom that is present in Christ, and as such, bears witness to what the world is already and what it is able to become. The church serves the world by revealing the world to itself. It is precisely in being the sacrament of Jesus Christ that the church is the sacrament of the world. Schillebeeckx’s synthetic theology of the church and the world is founded upon his radical understanding of the church’s sacramentality, which now is recast in terms of its implications for the world.

Returning to an ancient Augustinian understanding, Vatican II equated sacrament with *mysterion* or *mysterium*, meaning “the divine decree, or God’s plan of salvation, insofar as this is and has been manifested in a veiled manner in time and is accessible only to faith.” This meant that sacrament was “the history of salvation itself as the active manifestation of God’s plan of salvation.”

Defined by its radical sacramentality, the church’s role takes on a global meaning. The church is “nothing other and nothing less than the revelation or epiphany of and the completion of God’s plan of salvation in the world and in the history of the world in which God, through the church, visibly completes the history of salvation.”

While this fundamental understanding of sacrament reiterates that the history of the world shows gradual unfolding of sacramentality, in which the church occupies a privileged position, it also shifts the emphasis. It throws light not on the church as the culmination of the sacramentality as was done before, but on God’s salvation itself which is not yet complete and is still unfolding in the world and in the church. The church is not for its own sake, but for this salvation taking place in the world.

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210 Ibid., 44.

211 Ibid., 45. Schillebeeckx here is quoting a line from *Ad Gentes* 9, where the subject of the line is missionary activity.
In other words, Schillebeeckx presents during and after Vatican II a sacramental theology of the church and the world, in contrast to the more church-centered sacramental theology in the *Christ the Sacrament*. Schillebeeckx’s analysis of what sacrament is, that is “sign that effects,” shows this new direction.

Instead of relying on Aristotelian and Thomistic categories, he explains the meaning of an “effective sign” existentially and historically. It implies that “it is not the church herself that is in question, but unity among men; the church is only an ‘instrument’ of God’s redemptive actions in this world and therefore bound to serve.” The effectiveness of the church is measured by its service to the world. In addition, its sign value suggests that the effect, that is, the unity of human beings, is achieved through the church as “the pregnant visibility or meaningful presence of an already accomplished (still accomplishing) community of men in and through their express communion with God in Christ.”

The church is the sign that effects, by experiencing and helping others experience what will be given concrete and full shape in the whole human fellowship when the salvation is fully realized. This means that manifesting the presence of God in the world is essentially related to, even equivalent to, manifesting the presence of God in the church’s own life. In other words, the sacrament of Jesus Christ and the sacrament of the world refer to one reality, one mission. This shows that manifesting God within is not a triumphant act, even though the church is showing that salvation is present in itself and it is or has the completed form of what is present in the world. On the contrary, the church as the *sacramentum mundi* emphasizes the fact that the church is also on the way

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213 Ibid.
to the eschatological completion. The church still stands in the center of this world, because it provides the deepest meaning of the world and its development. The church at the same time needs to be in the middle of the world, by sharing in the world’s deeply human experiences, and by serving the world to experience unity in God’s presence. In so doing, the world could see in the church the deepest meaning of human life.

4.2.2.2 Sanctification and Sacralization

In the above analysis of the sacramentality of the church in relation to the world, there were three elements held together in tension: the church, the world, and the reality that the church signifies – the same reality that is already found in the world, albeit in fragmentary forms. The non-dual tension within the church, which leads to its being “already and not yet” the community of salvation, has been explored in the previous chapter. The world experiences the same tension within itself, as the awareness of its autonomy grows. Schillebeeckx defines the world theologically as “the reality which, while remaining a profane reality with its own laws and structures and a secular aim of its own, was nonetheless included by God in Christ in the absolute and gratuitous nearness of God.”214 This definition reflects the view of creation as “a divine placing of realities in their profane, non-divine distinctiveness.”215 Just as there is in the church a union analogous to the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ, there is also ‘containment’ or ‘inclusion’ of the non-divine reality in the divine, without separation or confusion. The church is set aside as a divine institution, and as such it is holy and “sacral.” However, the secular world can also be made holy or “sanctified,” by being “borne into the

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214 Schillebeeckx, *World and Church*, 100.

215 Ibid., 101.
theological sphere of the life of grace by man,” without losing its non-divine distinctiveness, that is, without being set aside like the church. In fact, the world was already made holy by creation and redemption in Jesus Christ. Secularization, if understood properly, replaces the distinction of the sacred and the profane with that between the sacral and the sanctified. Sacralization refers to the sacramental life of the church, while sanctification, which Schillebeeckx calls “secular worship” in contrast to sacramental worship, includes secular activities making the world more livable. Thanks to the inclusion in the absolute and gratuitous nearness of God, the world has implicitly, but nonetheless in a real sense already begun the salvation history. This view enables Schillebeeckx to call the world the “universal People of God,” and to assert that the dialogue between the church and the world is thus “between the two complementary forms of experience of the one Christianity.” The reality that both the church and the world already live and strive to live more fully is the same: the life of communion with the living God.

The distinction between the holiness of a sacral reality, and the holiness of a sanctified reality offers a window to the relationship between the church and the world for Schillebeeckx at this stage. The sanctified reality refers to the secular world itself, seen in its relation to the Being who gives it existence and meaning. The sacral reality is part of creation, but is set aside and taken up, and transformed in such a way that they take on a new identity in relation to the divine and a new purpose in relation to creation.

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216 Ibid.

217 This view of the world sets the stage for Schillebeeckx’s later claim that the human family is the chosen people of God.

218 Schillebeeckx, *World and Church*, 102; emphasis his; *God the Future of man*, 108.
They are two forms of living in communion with God, and authentic Christianity has both milieu. The church’s sacral activities, such as prayer, sacraments, the Word of God, etc., are the source of strength and of the deepest meaning for the secular activity of humanizing the world. Through this distinction, Schillebeeckx shows that the church and the world are related fundamentally, and that they and their activities are to be integrated and united. To put it simply, the church is a qualified world. It is not the world, but not ‘non-world’ either. Thus sacramentum mundi means that “[t]he church is the world where the world comes to itself in complete consciousness, recognizing and proclaiming the most profound mystery of its life, the mystery of salvation brought about by Christ Jesus.”

4.2.2.3 The Church as the Sacrament of Dialogue

Schillebeeckx’s explanation of the church as sacramentum mundi takes on a more specific meaning when he relates it to the theme of unity. The church now means for him the sacrament of “brotherhood” or “fraternity,” since the “world” (mundus) in the conciliar and post-conciliar context means “the confraternity, or other-oriented existence, of men in the world – man’s mode of existence in dialogue with his fellow-men.” The sacramentum mundi thus has the same meaning as the sacrament of dialogue, the equation of which, as he admits, is not found in any of the documents of the council. Previously the idea of the sacramentum mundi was to express that the church is the completed form of grace that is already present in the world implicitly. It recalls the view

219 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 76.

220 As mentioned above, the central statement of Vatican II on this point is: “…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 men…” Lumen Gentium, 1.

221 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 123.
that the world was an implicit or anonymous Christianity. Now such a view of the world retreats to the background. It is not entirely denied, but deemed inadequate, since dialogue partners need to allow each other to be other in order for the dialogue to be possible, and not simply recognize oneself in others. The church as the explicit and completed form of grace that is implicitly present in the world points out that the church has a claim to exclusiveness which in principle makes dialogue impossible. When the church is seen as a sacrament of dialogue, such exclusiveness becomes relative, because, firstly, the church has a mission to serve the world through its humanizing task which requires more than just the light of revelation; and, secondly, the church is not yet identical with the kingdom of God.

In this “other-centered” definition of the church, Schillebeeckx turns the spotlight on the world. He recognizes it not just as what is on the way to the full realization of grace, but what stands autonomously in its own right, so much so that the church looks to it for its own self-understanding. The result is more balanced mutuality in the church and world relationship. The view that “dialogue is the proper and distinctive mode of existence for the unique witness of the pilgrim church,”

222 is not only based upon the “principle of incarnation” applied to the divine revelation, but also upon the new secularized world view which includes coexistence with others as one of the world’s essential characteristics. The sacramentality here indicates that the church exists to serve this world by the way in which it engages in dialogue with the world. It is by listening to the world first that the church gives witness to its unique message of the Good News, and presents itself as the sign of its embodiment. In the church’s ultimate concern for “the well-being of all,” there is mutual enrichment: the church grows to fulfill its calling, i.e.

222 Ibid., 126.
the sacrament; the world becomes more humanly livable. In this mutual enrichment lies the realization, albeit partially, of the promised kingdom.\footnote{Schillebeeckx still has a reservation about a certain kind of dialogue, and warns against “the spirit of energetic demolition, the new triumphalism of destructive ‘dialogue’ which soon develops into a monologue ‘from below’ replacing the earlier monologue ‘from above.’” See his “The Church as the Sacrament of Dialogue,” in \textit{God the Future of Man}, 129.}

In the dialogue between the church and the world, the most prominent voice according to Schillebeeckx is the prophetic one that is both critical and constructive. It belongs primarily to the church, but the world also has a share in it. The need for it is permanent as long as both the church and the world are on their way to the promised Kingdom of God. In exercising its prophetic role in the world, the church has to be guided by the autonomous laws of the world in its commitment to the concerns of the world, because the Scriptures themselves do not directly give answers to the world’s problems. Its prophetic role cannot be fulfilled purely in the light of revelation. It rather has to depend on the analysis of secular situations, which consists of non-theological information. The world’s contribution to the dialogue, however, is not limited to analytical information, nor should it be considered simply as a raw material for the application of the church’s general norms. The world also speaks in its own prophetic voice, which Schillebeeckx calls “foreign prophecy,” which at its initial stage usually contains moral imperatives “in its immediate, concrete, \textit{inner} meaning.”\footnote{Ibid., 155.} Taking place prior to the process of reflection and analysis, the most basic element in the dialogue concerns one’s existence itself, or the pre-reflexive experience of the human reality, that is, “the historical reality of the value of the inviolable human person with all its bodily
and social implications." This experience comes initially for Schillebeeckx as a contrast-experience, inherent in the negativity toward evil and unjust elements of the world. In the world dominated by the history of suffering, this “negative contrast experience” is for Schillebeeckx the primary medium of revelation. The first prophecy based on such revelation is then in the form of critique – ‘what should not be.’ The experiences which make people say, “This should not and must not go on,” implies the perception of “what ought to be,” and even the vague awareness of “what should be done here and now.” What makes the dialogue possible is the fact that the world and the church share this experience: it constitutes the voice of prophecy both for the church and the world. The world utters its own prophetic voice, to which the church must listen, because the contrast experience in negative situations of the world is not exclusive to Christians, but shared by all human beings.

The specific Christian factor in the dialogue is the hope based on the Gospel message of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Rooted in this hope, the negative or contrast experience is intrinsically Christian experience. It is this hope that fuels the church’s prophetic role, that is, a permanent protest aimed at constant improvement of the world, and gives direction and meaning to what otherwise would remain “foreign” and implicit. The world’s foreign prophecy is not entirely foreign after all, when the church recognizes the invitation to God’s salvation in it.

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225 Ibid., 151.

226 Ibid., 136. Mary Catherine Hilkert puts it: “It is precisely the lament and protest over loss and violence – the claim that ‘this should not be’ and the ethical action which it motivates – that signal awareness that something of value is being sacrificed.” See Mary Catherine Hilkert, “Imago Dei: Does the Symbol have a Future?” Santa Clara Lectures, vol. 7:3, 11.
The notion of foreign prophecy from the world reflects Schillebeeckx’s view of the world in relation to the church at this stage. The world’s autonomy makes its contribution to the dialogue “foreign” from the church’s point of view, but its “prophetic” voice still points to Schillebeeckx’s fundamental conviction that the world is ultimately within God’s abiding love, and that God does not function as a stopgap, but rather works in and through human beings. In other words, the notion of foreign prophecy replaces a more general and one-directional notion of the implicit Christianity. The grace present in the world is not just what is to be made explicit by the church, but also to be acknowledged distinctively inherent to the world, and even to be deemed essential for the church’s self-understanding and life in the world. The church carries out the dialogue with the world primarily by its présence au monde, the existential, pre-reflexive involvement of Christians in the world. This is so, because the world is a contemporary “hermeneutical situation,” that is, the contemporary setting for the understanding of faith with its distinctive understanding of human existence. It is the negative or contrast experience that raises on the most basic level the question of one’s existence as a whole. It is only within this and from this hermeneutical situation that the church can experience and understand in faith the revelation of God. For the church to experience and exercise its prophetic call in and for the world, the world’s contribution becomes crucial. The world is the expression of God’s call, the medium in and through which the church becomes explicitly aware of that call, and the sphere of the church’s embodiment of its response to that call.228

227 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 43.
228 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 160-1.
4.2.2.4 A Double Movement between the Church and the World

Schillebeeckx’s extensive analyses of the dialogue between the church and the world illustrate a relationship of mutuality in a much more balanced and nuanced way than his earlier writings have done before. The history of salvation is a history of secularization, namely a history of sanctification of the world as world, as well as a history of sacramentalization. Schillebeeckx describes the double movement between the church and the world as “the tendency in the world to become church, the tendency which strives to make the salvation of the church visible in the world and in mankind” on the one hand, and on the other, “the tendency in the church of Christ towards sanctifying secularisation, that is, the tendency which aims to make the salvation of the church incarnate in the secular reality of the world itself.”  

From the church’s point of view, this double movement refers to its election and universal mission, both present in the church in dynamic tension. On the one hand, the church is a visible community of the elect, or to use the term Schillebeeckx used before, the primordial sacrament. On the other hand, the church is the eschatological community, or the People of God intended at the creation of the world, which is “coextensive” with the whole humanity whose eschatological destiny is not yet realized. In Schillebeeckx’s words, the tension is between “mankind gathered together in principle and the factual, public manifestation of this mankind that has been renewed in Christ.”

In his earlier writing, represented by Christ the Sacrament, Schillebeeckx focused on the former movement, i.e., the inward movement of the world toward the church. It was explained in terms of the world-wide grace that always strives to become historically

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229 Schillebeeckx, World and Church, 115.
230 Ibid., 119.
visible in the form of a community, i.e., “church” in various shapes and in varying
degrees of clarity. The world under the world-wide grace has in itself a “church-
founding” tendency and the need for sacramentality, because it comes to realize itself
fully in its deeper meaning only when it can authentically express itself as church.
According to this understanding then, the world is “the church incognito,” and the visible
church is a sign “of what human life is in the concrete – a sign, that is, that profound and
painful suffering and existence ending in death is not the final word to be spoken about
mankind.”

His main interest now lies in highlighting the latter, i.e. the tendency in the church
toward the world. Schillebeeckx offers a christology and a sacramental ecclesiology that
correspond to this shift. Christ was the primordial sacrament of the encounter with God
and the head of his body, the church, in Christ the Sacrament; here he is the
recapitulation of all creation, the prototype and new meaning of human history - the
prototype of new human being. Consequently, while in the former the church was “the
final phase of the inner development of the people of God appearing in an increasingly
more clearly visible”; in the latter, it is a recapitulation of “the reality of the people of
God created long ago in orientation towards Christ.” By recapitulating what the world
was created to be, the visible church already embodies, albeit in imperfect way due to its
sinfulness, what the world will be in its fulfillment. This orientation of the church toward
the world occasions a blurring of boundaries, or fluidity, between the church and the
world. God is in the world, and God is in the church in a special way, namely in a
symbolic form. God reveals and gives Godself to all people in history, especially in and

\[231\] Ibid., 126.
\[232\] Ibid.
through the church; God’s activity in the world is at the same time an activity of God’s body, the church. This blurring of boundaries is an indication of the fundamental truth that, eschatologically speaking, the church and mankind are not two separate realities. Schillebeeckx affirms this truth in his retrieval of the formulation, extra Ecclesiam nulla salus. 233 Retaining a pregnant tension between the historical church and its eschatological fulfillment, he goes beyond in this restatement the church-centered view which was originally intended by this saying, and prefigures an idea which he will develop later in the Church book, namely, extra mundum nulla salus – there is no salvation outside the world. 234 Because the focus here is the issue of the world, Jesus Christ’s humanity and his representative role for the rest of the humanity are emphasized even further than they were in Christ the Sacrament. In the history of Israel, repeated instances of founding a community, beginning with creation, shows that it is in the manner of “representative mediation” in which salvation was brought to many for the sake of one elected person or a group of them. The implication is that election, i.e., sacramentalization, on the one hand, and universal mission, i.e., sanctification, on the other “grew towards each other.” 235 The election of a person or of a whole nation (e.g. Abraham or Israel) was in the service of the whole human being (i.e. universal salvation). God brings salvation to all human being (sanctification) through its elected (sacralized) element. On the one hand, the elected is a symbolic representation of all human beings. It represents what is available to all, and manifests what is already in all. Herein lies the

233 Ibid., 132.

234 Schillebeeckx, Church, 12; Even today, this expression continues to be central to Schillebeeckx’s theology. See below chapter four, pp. 8-9, for a reference to his unpublished welcome letter to Leuven Conference, Dec. 1, 2008, private copy.

235 Schillebeeckx, World and Church, 116.
aspect of continuity of the church with the world as the redeemed community. On the other hand the elected has its own specific purpose, that is, the service to the rest, i.e., the universal salvation or sanctification. Herein lies the aspect of discontinuity of the church from the world as the saving institution.

Thus sanctification (the world) is oriented toward sacralization (the church) in the sense that the world considers the church as its fulfillment in representation; sacralization (the church) is oriented toward sanctification (the world) in the sense that its reason for being is for the sake of sanctification of all. The two movements are not on an equal path. They describe two differing, albeit inseparable, aspects of the church. One concerns the question of identity (what is the church?); the other the question of purpose (what is it for?). They are inseparable in that the identity is always with a purpose, and the purpose always assumes the identity. The church then is both the kingdom of God (in a sacramental, thus, symbolic form), and for the sake of the kingdom of God (serving the world to be the world as intended by God). Both sanctification and sacralization describe salvation from God. The difference arises, because while this salvation is always mediated in ways human beings can experience it, it is not always known as salvation from God. The sacral reality, be it human person or institution, makes that manifestation. Schillebeeckx's phrase for this role is "representative mediation." It recalls the sacramentality of Jesus Christ and the church. The church is then both sacrament of the glorified body of Jesus Christ and the sacrament of the world. As the sacrament, the church is the elected with the universal mission. In other words, it is the sacrament of Jesus Christ for the purpose of being the sacrament of the world. The fact that salvation is always mediated also meant that "salvation is given by reciprocal service between man
and man living in brotherhood in the light of God’s election.\textsuperscript{236} This dynamic between election and service to all reached its climax in Jesus Christ; the one elected as the Son of God is at the same time a man of service to all, the Son of Man. Thus in Christ the people assembled around God became "a community around Christ, that serves one another.

Schillebeeckx at this stage already presents an “ecclesiology in the minor key”\textsuperscript{237} by contending that Jesus Christ set aside the visible church only in the light of people’s rejection and his impending death, and that the church is set aside not for its own sake, but for the sake of the universal people of God. Jesus’ original intension was the sanctification or salvation of the whole world, and in his preaching the obedient acceptance of his saving message, not the membership to the church, was the condition for this salvation. Jesus’ death and resurrection made the church become reality, and his followers subsequently made its membership the condition of entry into the kingdom, but even then the ultimate orientation of the church remains unchanged: the election of the church is so that it represents and serves the whole humanity. The purpose of its existence is the salvation of all. The church is still the saved community and saving institution, but with a radical inclusivity. Thanks to Jesus Christ’s salvific will to save all, the church is “the condition or, more precisely, the incarnate form of our restored association with Christ and our entry into the kingdom of God.”\textsuperscript{238}

\textsuperscript{236} Schillebeeckx, \textit{World and Church}, 117.

\textsuperscript{237} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Church}, xix.

\textsuperscript{238} Schillebeeckx, \textit{World and Church}, 123-4.
4.2.3 The Eschatological Turn and the Hermeneutics of Orthopraxis

Earlier in this chapter, the church’s role in the world was characterized as “prophetic.” The church in its prophetic role makes its critical and constructive contribution to the world in dialogue with the latter. In this dialogue, the world speaks its own “foreign prophecy,” which from the church’s point of view is non-theological information gained from analyzing secular situations.239 Though non-theological, Schillebeeckx notes that it nonetheless mediates a divine voice in the world. In an article written after his U.S. lecture tour, during which he discussed the issue of the church in dialogue with the world, Schillebeeckx offers an instance of this prophetic exchange, in this case, between his own theology and a secular consciousness. This exchange produces a new foundation for the church’s engagement with the world: the image of God as the “wholly New One.”

What occasioned this image of God was his close encounter with the secular society in the U.S. and its pragmatism during the lecture tour, on the one hand, and on the other hand, his discussion with French pastors who had “anti-pragmatic spiritualité,” which challenged him to seek a new foundation for the church’s dialogue with the secular world. This image of God is Schillebeeckx’s answer to the critical “prophecies,” both external and internal, and it offers a new ground for the engagement with the secular society that claims primacy for the future.240 The God of the future now comes to the

239 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 136.

240 From another perspective, this theological turn shows Schillebeeckx’s best effort of theologizing, based on a correlation between one’s conception of God and that of human beings. See his “Correlation between Human Question and Christian Answer,” in The Understanding of Faith, 78-101. Secularization refers in the first place to the radical changes that took place in the way in which human beings relate to the world and their social environment. It then impacts religious views, as far as one’s image of God is implicated in one’s conception of self and of the world. The shift in secular world view is from viewing the world primarily as past-oriented, to considering it as an open-ended, future-oriented
foreground, and he contends that the church’s critical dialogue with the secular world has to be based on the eschatological hope.\textsuperscript{241}

At the core of Schillebeeckx’s view of God as the “wholly New One” is the notion of God as the future of human beings: God is the one “who is to come, the God who makes all things new and the God of man’s future.”\textsuperscript{242} This new image of God is not entirely new; it is a rediscovery and recapitulation of the biblical God of promise for the secularized and thus future-oriented world view.\textsuperscript{243} Throughout his extensive confrontation and dialogue with secularization, the view toward the eschaton was never missing. Even as he develops the new image of God, one can argue that he never denies the old image of the “wholly Other.” A “renewal” is how Schillebeeckx modestly characterizes his eschatological turn, but nevertheless Schillebeeckx is undeniably proposing here a new understanding of faith that can face the challenges of the new world view, particularly the challenges that the contemporary Christians have in terms of the building up of the world. As one saw in the radical “Death of God” movement in which a “stop-gap” god is repudiated, purely metaphysically oriented theology and religious views would be easily misunderstood in the secularized world. Such views also seem to have failed to ground people’s optimism for what scientific and technological advancement would bring to human lives. In contrast, the eschatological turn of faith can

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\textsuperscript{242} Schillebeeckx, \textit{God the Future of Man}, 203.

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., 188.
support secularization in a *theological* sense, and the latter makes the former actualized in history. When secularization means “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,” it is an expression of the faith in God of human beings.\(^{244}\) Such faith in God is actualized in history, when it assumes the form of a 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.”\(^{245}\) In this view, secularization is the further unfolding of the biblical view of the God of history, the God of the future. By not separating purely secular activities from religious ones, one may experience God to be apparently absent or hidden in those activities, but God is, “because of his all-penetrating immediacy,…more intimately close to us.”\(^{246}\)

Schillebeeckx points out, however, that, while the religious and the secular are not to be separated, they are distinct. The Christian faith has a unique role to play and message to offer in the world concerning what is “humanly desirable.” Specifically, the eschatological faith has in the secular sphere a prophetic function in the form of “critical negativity.” It is for Schillebeeckx “a positive power which continues to exert constant pressure in order to bring about a better world, without humanity itself being sacrificed in the process.”\(^{247}\) The positivity here points to the implicit knowledge of what is “humanly

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\(^{244}\) Ibid., 189-90. To put it more succinctly, theological secularization is “the attitude which strives to permit the fullest accomplishment of God’s design within our human history” (See *God the Future of Man*, 195-6). It is making the eschaton the human future in history; making tangible the human maximum; incarnating salvation; embodying resurrection.

\(^{245}\) Ibid., 190.

\(^{246}\) Ibid., 189-90.

\(^{247}\) Ibid., 191. Schillebeeckx acknowledges the source of this notion of “critical negativity” to be T.W. Adorno’s *Negative Dialektik*, and Paul Ricoeur’s article “Tâches de l’éducateur politique” in which
desirable.” Unlike those in the secular sphere, “[t]he Christian is not simply seeking what is ‘humanly desirable,’ something unknown; he knows, in his eschatological faith, that the God of the promise has bound himself to be realization of this in Christ…”

Christians still cannot formulate positively the content of the humanly desirable, but, by seeing it as God’s promise, they acquire an understanding that guides their activities in the world. For Christians it is essentially the eschatological fulfillment of humanity, i.e., salvation or redemption from God. Thus it is neither humanly conceivable nor humanly attainable; it is gratuitous grace and gift. Implicit in this view is the critique of the mistaken views into which secularized world can fall without religious understanding: that one can formulate a positive and total definition of what humanity is, and that one can solve the ultimate problems of human existence through science and technology.

In all its negative function, however, eschatological faith is essentially positive, because the source of its negativity is the positive hope that God makes possible what is humanly impossible. It is positive, also because this hope inspires and challenges the provisional efforts to make the human history a history of salvation. Salvation is a gratuitous grace and gift, but human beings are not just passive recipients, but active mediators of the gift. The eschatological hope for Schillebeeckx is “not a passive state of waiting for the future…neither is it self-redemption.”

Schillebeeckx’s one summary of the eschatological faith points to its constructive function: “the humanization of the world,

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249 Schillebeeckx, “God the Future of Man, 192.
but directed towards the eschaton.” God makes the eschatological promise come true now through the believers’ total commitment to improve the course of history. Leaving the world status quo is not an option, since the new image of God, if it is to be true, has to show its effectiveness through the practice of the believers. Although Schillebeeckx does not use the term, orthopraxis, here, that is what he means by “practice.” For him such Christian practice involves more than just actions that are implied by faith. It is rather “a special kind of understanding which is appropriate to statements about faith.” He calls it “verification principle” and “exegesis or hermeneutics” of the new concept of God. This use of the term expresses the idea of doing the truth. The task of faith in the God of the future is not only to interpret history, but above all to change it. He is, however, quick to recall that it is ultimately grace itself that changes history in and through human freedom, and that this freedom is marked by sins, thus in need of reconciliation in grace. Without the saving grace, the history that sinful human beings make would be fraught with “the sin of the world” and its limitations. Secular attempts at achieving the humanly desirable can become ideologies without the guidance of the eschatological hope, and end up treating human beings as objects.

Transforming the human history without salvation into a history of salvation is the goal of Christianity in secular society. The functions of critical negativity and of the praxis aimed at the humanly desirable belong to the whole church. It is “theologically more desirable,” says Schillebeeckx, that the “Christian churches themselves” carry out

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250 Ibid., 199. Schillebeeckx refers to GS no. 39 where “a mysterious, inward bond” is acknowledged between the worldly commitment and the kingdom of God.

251 Ibid., 182;183.

252 Ibid., 185-6.

253 Ibid., 192.
the criticism of society, acting in ecumenical unity. However, he seems to have laity in mind specifically, when he says, “[a]t the technological and political level, Christians themselves ought, in the future rather to join the ranks of all men of good will who are seeking what is worthy of man. There they can make their voices heard in criticism expressed in the light of faith.”

From another perspective, he specifies the role of the church to be twofold, internal and external. Internally the church is necessary for the “nourishment,” “the strengthening and celebration” of the eschatological hope in and through the sacraments. Externally its prophetic stance leads firstly to the proclamation about the presence of God in the world as the future of humanity, and secondly to participation in the temporal mission, which is no less demanded by the nature of Christianity than the call to evangelize.

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254 Ibid., 196.
255 Ibid.
CHAPTER 5

SCHILLEBEECKX’S VIEW SINCE THE EARLY 1970S: ECCLESIOLOGY IN A MINOR KEY

5.1 Introduction

In one of his most recent writings, Schillebeeckx makes a strikingly direct statement: “The reality of suffering and threatened humanity is, in my view, the central problem for us as we enter the third millennium.” Equally direct is his prognosis: a solution to the problem depends on the nature of the relationship between the church and the suffering world. He is here referring specifically to the issue of the church’s credibility in its rendering of the evangelical message to people living in this world. How does the church, as special mediation of God’s self-revelation, relate to, and deal with the historical reality of suffering humanity? Schillebeeckx’s answer lies in the way in which this ethical and socio-political dimension of faith and the “mystical” dimension mutually inform in the concrete Christian life. A “political” relevance of Christianity is located in its specific religious character, or “the critical and prophetic impulse of the Gospel.”

In this period which covers Schillebeeckx’s most mature and most critical thoughts, he continues to view the relationship between the church and the world in terms of the church’s sacramentality. He interprets it, however, within new frameworks of hermeneutics and critical theory, and gives it contents that show deeper appreciation for

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the ambiguous and fragmentary nature of history. Although Schillebeeckx does not construct a systematic ecclesiology nor does he specifically focus on the sacramentality of the church in his writings during this period (from early 1970s to today), one can make "an analogous translation" of ecclesiology in the minor key and of sacramental theology into categories of sacramental ecclesiology in the world context.257 Two shifts in emphasis during this period should be noted from the outset: first, Schillebeeckx stresses that the world itself, now defined in more specific and concrete ways, mediates the presence of God. He pays particular attention to the reality of suffering in his discussions of the church’s relation to the world. This new accent leads to a corresponding new understanding of “politics” as a way of dealing with suffering humanity.

The second shift concerns his view of the church. He eschews any semblance to an ecclesio-centric ecclesiology which narrates salvation history mainly from the church’s (often institutional church’s) point of view.258 Schillebeeckx conducts his discussions of religions in general or sacraments in particular, in such a way that the ecclesial issues are often embedded or simply implied. Notable is that the project that

257 Thompson, The Language of Dissent, 89.

258 Schillebeeckx’s characterization of ecclesiology done in a major key: “Here in the New Testament are impulses which have yet to be allowed full play, above all in view of the long time over which the church has concentrated more on itself than on the prophet Jesus, and has almost automatically identified itself, as ‘the body of Christ Jesus’, with Christ, a conception which fails to do justice to the real concerns of Ephesians and Colossians [i.e. critical solidarity with their fellow human beings who were believers].” See Schillebeeckx, Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord (N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1980), 651; 654. His non-ecclesiocentric ecclesiology also involves an understanding of the church that is not institutional, more closely related to the world – thus rendering the boundary more fluid between the church and the world. In the context of his discussion of the church’s mediation in contemporizing the story of Jesus, Schillebeeckx explains the central subject of this mediation to be “[t]he whole of the living church community in its confession, prayer and praxis,” not the institution, nor its teaching office. He puts rather simply: “I prefer an ecclesiology in a minor key, not a grand ecclesiology. Many Christians do not agree with the vision of a grand and powerful church. They are for a modest ecclesiology. What is the centre of Vatican II? The church. That is neither God nor the message of God for all men and women. Perhaps we need a council which speaks of God in our own time. The Council meticulously considered the church, but left God in the background. The church should be more of an appendix, a corollary to what is said of God. When this happens, the church will have more of a voice in the world. See Schillebeeckx, I am a Happy Theologian: Conversations with Francesco Strazzari (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1994), 74.
occupied him at the time of his death was on the sacraments, the topic that had launched his academic career. However, unlike in his *Christ the Sacrament*, the topic of the church is in the background as the subject and source of the sacraments.

Schillebeeckx also saw that the church can be a stumbling block to the experience of God’s nearness to the people in the world, when it is not anchored to what it serves. He finds that “[w]here it is not God himself, but religion, science or some worldly power that is made absolute, not only human beings but also the ‘image of God’ are sullied.” He thus presents a “modest” ecclesiology that is always relative and secondary to the more fundamental (“first-order”) reality – God’s salvific presence in the world for humanity, culminating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Schillebeeckx seeks the church that is “relative” to God appearing in Jesus Christ (who is in turn relative to his Father), and “related” to the world in a more radical way than the way in which it has been understood. In his earlier works, Schillebeeckx fought against a dualistic view of the church in which the world remains in the background of the salvation history, working as an extra behind the main character, the church. Dualistic views still distort the proper view of the church, whether they are grounded in the “stop-gap” God, and or in the world view whose scientific and technological advancements made the transcendent superfluous. What Schillebeeckx attempts in the last phase is to return the church to its proper place, *theo*-logical in its foundation, and eschatological in relation to the human history.

In terms of the church-world relationship, his concern now is “to put the church in its place” and to “give it the place it is due.” His argument goes as following: God appears in the world process; the world is the material for salvation. Religions and

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259 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 4.
churches are the sacraments or signs of that salvation. In their actions, such as
“confession and word, sacrament and praxis of faith, action which heals and opens up
communication, following Jesus…,” salvation is remembered, made known, confessed
explicitly, proclaimed prophetically and celebrated liturgically. Religions and
churches are “answers” to what takes place first in the world: God’s address to creation,
that is, God’s saving will and action. Although Schillebeeckx refers back to his studies
done in the 50s, there is a significant shift in his current focus. The purpose of religions
and churches is to make reference to the first-order reality, that is, the worldly event of
salvation. They play necessary and indispensible roles, but as a second-order reality.
This shift in focus results in the reversal of the image of ripples he used for the
sacramental process in Christ the Sacrament, in which he located the church in the center
and the work in the world in the outer circles.

This new priority is what Schillebeeckx wants to express in his statement extra
mundum nulla salus. The history of religions is only one segment of the broader history
of the world. In religions and churches people "become explicitly aware" of God's saving
action in the worldwide history. In one of his earlier writings, he once accepted a more
traditional version, extra ecclesiam nulla salus, on the basis that the visible church
recapitulates what the world was created to be, and embodies what the world will be in its
fulfillment. His retrieval of the this formula altered its rigid application that had

260 Schillebeeckx, Church, 13.
261 Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament, 215.
263 Schillebeeckx, World and Church, 132.
originally been intended, for he wanted to indicate in it that the church and the world are not, eschatologically speaking, two separate realities. While the new formula, *extra mundum nulla salus*, was anticipated by his earlier restatement of the church-centered view, it also shows a shift in emphasis. In addition to the fact that the church is a second-order reality, this new emphasis points out that the Church can be sinful, and often disfigures what it is called to embody,264 and that the Church’s tasks are in the service of the realization of salvation in the world, rather than in perpetuating itself. After this shift, Schillebeeckx is no longer able to maintain the old formula, no matter how he reappropriates it.

Schillebeeckx reiterates his conviction over the formula, *extra mundum nulla salus*, in a letter of welcome he wrote to the participants of the Leuven Conference held in his honor. He clarifies its meaning and points out the mistake of some who misinterpreted this expression, by putting the emphasis on *salus*, instead of *mundum*. His concern is not humanism itself, but God’s salvation: “The expression…has to do with the reality that the creative, saving presence of God is mediated in and through human beings.”265 The word *mundum* replaced *ecclesiam* in Schillebeeckx’s thoughts, because “[t]he question of salvation has to do with people’s ordinary lives – work, family, politics – this is where they meet the Living God who is always near to each person.”266

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264 In his *Church* book, Schillebeeckx addresses the issue of religious absolutism by which violence is perpetuated in the name of religion. The church conceals as well as reveals, just the way the historical figure of Jesus did with the mystery of God. See Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 159-78; Hilkert, "Schillebeeckx," 384.


266 Ibid.
His fundamental concern about the challenges of the secularized and suffering world led Schillebeeckx to shape his Christological trilogy, beginning in 1974, as a response to them. In it he sought to retell the story of Jesus as “parable of God” and “paradigm of humanity” for the contemporary readers. In the first two volumes, *Jesus* and *Christ*, he constructs his “narrative-practical” christology, by going back to what was at the heart of the disciples’ experience of Jesus: the encounter with his God whose cause was the human cause. He does so, in order that the disciples’ experience of salvation can be handed on to those living in “a radically secularized western culture and a world of global suffering, violence perpetuated in the name of religion, and ecological devastation.” In other words, the concern about salvation is not primarily or only an ecclesiological concern. Rather the true meaning of salvation for Schillebeeckx is the well-being of all humanity and the cosmos. His studies lead to new expressions of Christian faith in which the mystical and political dimensions of christian life are dialectically united. This dialectical character of Christian life is grounded in Schillebeeckx’s theology of creation, the mystery of which is elucidated on the one hand by the notion of God as mediated immediacy – an absolute saving presence available to all –, and on the other hand by his view on the sacramental structure of revelation.

Amidst these significant shifts, Schillebeeckx continues to employ the notion of sacramentality for the church in the last phase of his thought. As in his early works, it

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267 His trilogy consists of (1) *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (1979), the original Dutch title of which is *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende* (*Jesus: the Story of a Living One*), published in 1974; (2) *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (1980), the original title of which is *Gerechtigheid en liefde: Genade en bevrijding* (*Righteousness and Love: Grace and Liberation*), published in 1977; and (3) *Church: The Human Story of God* (1990), the original title of which is *Mensen als verhaal van God* (*Human Beings as the Story of God*), published in 1989.

refers to “encounters in the world with God’s presence through the mediation of the worldly.”269 In and for the world, the church mediates Jesus Christ and bears witness to his living presence through the gift of the Spirit. In this sacramental role, the church is essential and indispensable. However, having recast his early thoughts in the frameworks of hermeneutics and critical theory, Schillebeeckx pays closer attention to dialectical relationship between the church as the sacrament of Christ and the church as the sacrament of the world. He analyzes this dialectical relationship by way of examining the relationship between mysticism and politics, and between liturgy and service to the world. Praxis, both liturgical and political, is at the center of his attention, as the sacramental medium in and through which the humanum is advanced and Jesus Christ is “actualized.”270 Nonetheless, the sign of Jesus Christ is found in the community of the followers of Jesus Christ, as they seek “to be a visible and tangible, socio-historical sign of liberation.”271 Thus there is a sense in which the issue of the church remains prominent, particularly in terms of its relation to the world. The one who puts the faith in the God of Jesus Christ into action is the community of faith, the church. The church as the community of Christians who in their faith in God of Jesus Christ are prophetically and critically engaged in the worldly process is still his major issue; what recedes to the background is only the church as an institution.

269 Thompson, The Language of Dissent, 90.

270 Schillebeeckx, Church, 109-110. D. Thompson puts it: “In his later theology this activity of God [God’s action on human beings for their salvation] in the church is less easily discernible because Schillebeeckx places greater emphasis on the autonomy and concrete historicity of human beings.” See Thompson, The Language of Dissent, 92.

271 Schillebeeckx, Church, 110.
5.2 Mediated Immediacy And The Sacramental Structure Of Revelation

The fundamental ground on which Schillebeeckx’s dialectical view of the church and the world stands is his understanding of God as mediated immediacy, on the one hand, and his view of the sacramental structure of revelation, on the other. They are two sides of the same reality, which is the experience of creation, “the foundation which supports everything.”\(^\text{272}\) The former concerns who God is as creator; the latter, how human beings experience this God. To believe that God is immediate is to accept “God’s absolute saving presence,” which means that “there is no situation in which God cannot come near to us and in which we would not be able to find him.” It is to believe that God is directly and creatively present in the creature.

“Mediated immediacy,” despite its apparent contradiction, is for Schillebeeckx “the most appropriate way of expressing the mystery of God as the salvation of man”.\(^\text{273}\)

For the human person, there is no unmediated relationship with God.\(^\text{274}\) However, from God’s side, there is an unmediated relationship between God and humanity. It would be a contradiction, if the term is for an inter-subjective relationship between two human persons; but it expresses a mystery when it is reserved specially for a mutual relationship between a finite person and his or her absolute origin and creator, the infinite God. In this unique instance, “the immediacy does not do away with the mediation but in fact constitutes it,” because of the absolute and divine manner of the real presence of God. God is “directly and creatively present in the medium, that is, in ourselves, our neighbors,

\(^{272}\) Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 811.

\(^{273}\) Ibid., 809.

\(^{274}\) The “death of the ‘immediacy’ of God” is Dorothee Sölle’s corrective to the ‘death of God’ theology, which opened the doors to political theology, critical communities, and more proper view on the role of religion in the world. See Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 808-9.
the world and history.” Schillebeeckx defines God accordingly: “an active reality which embraces both person and society, i.e. the whole of reality, without doing violence to it”.  

This relationship of mediated immediacy (grace) is made known to human persons through the sacramental structure of revelation. Revelation has a sacramental structure, in that it is given in and through the human experiences of the world and the historical reality of religions and churches. Thus revelation is always in history, and takes place “on the level of human intercommunication.” He contrasts this view of revelation with revelation dealing with “certain truths that are beyond our natural understanding only as a kind of addition to an already acquired natural knowledge of God.” The “sacramental structure” refers to the economy of salvation in which we find a gradual process of revelation – from the pre-Judeo-Christian tradition, through the two Testaments and eventually to the church – inseparably built on the framework of human (that is, historically situated) intercommunication. In short, the structure expresses the belief that the mystery of Christ is the revelation of God; and that it is in the historical plan of salvation, that the Trinitarian mystery of salvation which transcends

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275 Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 809.

276 Ibid., 815.

277 See Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 22-8; 38-9, for Schillebeeckx’s non-dualism in this context.

278 Creation marks the beginning of the history of salvation which is the history of God’s intervention through Grace in human history. The intervention results in an existential dialogue between God and human beings on a personal level, which reached its culmination in Jesus Christ. “God entered into personal relationships with us in and through his humanity, of which the Logos is the person…Christ is the historically visible form of God’s desire to confer grace and to do this in such a way that the gift of grace is essentially linked with something which is visible, a fundamental historical fact – the man Jesus…The gift and reception of grace, revelation, thus takes place within the framework of human intercommunication.” See Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, vol. II, 90.

history is realized for and in us.\textsuperscript{280} The object of revelation is God’s interior life itself, as manifested in and through worldly processes which as a result take on a religious significance. In this structure, human history is “the material in and through which God makes saving history and through which he accomplishes his revelation.”

Analysis of this sacramental structure involves a retrieval of one of the fundamental themes of Schillebeeckx from his early works: the relationship between revelation-in-reality (salvation) and revelation-in-word (revelation). In his early works, Schillebeeckx often used those two terms interchangeably, as in the statement, “Salvation is the very act of the encounter between God and man…This divine revelation makes history.” He went on to say, “God’s saving activity is revealed by becoming history, and it becomes history by being revealed.”\textsuperscript{281} According to this perspective, the unnamed, misnamed or implicit encounters with God before the explicit revelation of Judeo-Christian religion are “anonymous” revelations.\textsuperscript{282} In his later writings, however, he makes a clear distinction between the two.

Although salvation takes place in history, and revelation is made through history, there is a distinction. The distinction is between God’s saving activity itself in creation and its revelation whose official recipients are the world’s religions and, in a privileged and definitive way, the church. Both are on the level of history, but one concerns experiences of salvation; the other concerns consciousness or knowledge that it is the experience of God’s saving activity. In other words, revelation throws new light on the

\textsuperscript{280} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Revelation and Theology}, vol. I, 95.


\textsuperscript{282} Schillebeeckx speaks of “the inner yet still anonymous dialogue with God” to refer to an inward, albeit obscure and invisible, encounter with God through creation. He also treats pre-Judeo-Christian religious practices as fragments of “unconscious Christianity.” See \textit{Christ the Sacrament}, 7-8;10.
human experience of liberation and of wholeness, the origin of which might otherwise be perceived to be human, and presents it as God’s act. In his new distinction of salvation from revelation, Schillebeeckx is further clarifying something that he identified earlier as the distinction between revelation-in-reality and revelation-in-word. If the history of salvation is none other than “the sacramental appearance in time of the eternal Trinitarian life of God,” then revelation-in-reality is God’s saving activity itself “in which a divine reality in earthly, visible form touches the human reality.” The revelation-in-word transforms the human meaning inherent in the reality into religious meaning. Without the human meaning, religious meaning becomes “incredible,” while without the religious meaning, the human meaning forgets, is silent about and ignores God and God’s universal presence of salvation.

While Schillebeeckx maintains in his last phase the dialectic between the revelation-in-reality (now, salvation) and the revelation-in-word (now, revelation) as he did in his early period, he gives priority to revelation-in-reality over revelation-in-word, especially the revelation-in-word-of-the-church, and sees the reality in revelation-in-reality with critical consciousness. In one sense, the Church book continues to employ the insights from his early period concerning sacramentality. What distinguishes the later


284 Schillebeeckx, Revelation and Theology, vol. II, 92.

285 “In classical theology it is the content of awareness rather than the reality of salvation which predominates. There salvation is seen directly as being realized through God’s word, received in faith, bound to the church’s proclamation, confessed in a sacramental praxis. Faith, sacrament and church are indeed the three essential ingredients of all religions. But here salvation becomes synonymous with religion, and that is a misapprehension of the experienced reality of salvation in the world. Talk about religions and churches involves second-order statements; it is not about the direct, not yet ‘heard’, first realization of well-being and salvation, redemption and liberation.” Schillebeeckx then goes on to talk about extra mundum nulla salus. The world is where “salvation is achieved in the first instance.” See his Church, 12; emphasis added.
Schillebeeckx from the early one is where he finds the center of the sacramental and historically situated encounter with Jesus Christ after “the closing of revelation.” In the 1950s and the 1960s, Schillebeeckx’s focus was on the sacramental representation of salvation, that is, the church as “the encounter with the God of our salvation.” By the 1990s that focus shifted to the reality itself of salvation taking place in the world, particularly in the contrast experiences of the negative. He notes a danger of the overemphasis on the church, resulting in a sacramentalistic and hierarchical view of the system of salvation. The church has often failed to be an effective body in and through which revelation-in-word is realized. Ecclesiology in a major key forgot to see itself as only a medium for God’s self-revelation. An essential dimension of the church-world relationship is that the church is always located in concrete cultural and socio-political contexts. A shift in such contexts requires a parallel shift in church’s standing in the world. The scope of the church’s view has shifted to put in the center the Christian ecumene and ultimately the ecumene of all humankind. In step with the emphasis of history as the arena of God’s salvation, and the growing awareness of the existence of

286 Revelation is closed, but there is a sense that a gospel is rewritten whenever a dialectic of a tradition and a situation leads to a new actualization. He says, “In the end we have here [concrete Christian life] 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 as it were become ‘gospel’: a fifth or umpteenth gospel” (Church, 34). The first story is “tradition”; the second “situation.” The situation is “itself already a bit of ‘new’ Christian tradition, a new chapter in the story of the Christian experiential tradition, though this may be (as always) in an orthodox or a somewhat divergent direction” (Church, 35; See also Church, 109).

287 Schillebeeckx, “Salvation History as the Basis of Theology: Theologia or Oikonomia?” 91.

288 Schillebeeckx refers to his attempt as “the deconcentration of the church in favour of the salvation that God seeks to bring about for human beings in our history: salvation from God in and through the action of human liberation, in many spheres.” Thus for him a theological talk is also anthropological. Since the oppressive poverty “is in fact the social condition of by far the majority of the world’s population,” and since God’s will for salvation is universal, “the present-day context in which we speak meaningfully and productively, in a liberating way, about God, is the existential context of oppression and liberation” (Church, 53-55).

289 Schillebeeckx describes this view as “the exclusivist coupling of salvation with religion and church.” See his Church, 12.
suffering in the world, the church’s raison d’être becomes the service to the Christian ecumene and the ecumene of all humankind, especially the “ecumene of suffering humanity.”

The liberation from suffering becomes the urgent task for all believers and non-believers; the pervasiveness of suffering demands solutions that are universal. Thus Schillebeeckx concludes now that “the human is the medium of the possible revelation of God”, and “Belief in God is impossible without belief in human beings.”

Schillebeeckx continues to emphasize that God’s salvation is always mediated, but now broadens his own awareness of where that mediation occurs, not only in explicit ecclesial events, but “wherever a glass of water is given to one of these little ones” (Mt. 10:42).

There is an inseparable link between the belief in God’s salvation and the human experience of liberation from suffering. Schillebeeckx thus gives epistemological priority to revelation-in-reality, particularly in-negative-reality.

Schillebeeckx’s analysis of the sacramental structure of revelation in the world in general, and his emphasis on the revelatory significance of the everyday experience in particular, lead to the vision of the church firmly situated in the suffering world. A proper perspective on human suffering leads to a clearer role of the church therein. On an epistemological level, Schillebeeckx thus builds a critical and productive role of the church’s prayer (liturgy) and politics (praxis), on the basis of his analysis of the critical and productive epistemological force of human suffering. The experience of suffering...

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290 “…suffering is the alpha and omega of the whole history of mankind; it is the scarlet thread by which this historical fragment is recognizable as human history: history is ‘an ecumene of suffering.’” See Schillebeeckx, Christ, 725. Here Schillebeeckx attribute this expression to J.B. Metz: J.B. Metz and J. Moltmann, Leidensgeschichte. Zwei Meditationen zu Markus 8, 31-38, Freiburg 1975, 57. (See Christ, 891, n.65.

291 Schillebeeckx, Church, 10. The English title of this third work (Church: the Human Story of God) in the trilogy thus misses Schillebeeckx’s point. The original Dutch title is: Human Beings as the Story of God (Mensen als verhaal van God). As indispensible and essential as the church is, it has only a secondary role in this story of God.
leads to a contrastive experience, involving both the negative and the positive. The experience which is negative in itself can be a contrast experience, when it reveals an implicit longing for happiness and a vague awareness of “the positive call of the humanum and to the humanum.”

Schillebeeckx distinguishes what one gains in negative contrast experience from two other types of knowledge: “the purposive, emancipatory type of ‘controlling [or manipulative] knowledge’” peculiar to science and technology, on the one hand, and “various forms of contemplative, aesthetic and playful, so-called ‘purpose-free’ knowledge,” on the other. The knowledge which derives from experiences of suffering is neither, but also has aspects of both. Albeit its critical negativity, it is, on the one hand, contemplative (“knowledge which ‘dwells’ on its own object”) like the second type of knowledge; like the first type, on the other hand, the experience of suffering is oriented toward action which attempts to remove suffering and its causes. Emerging from the boundary between the purposefulness and purposelessness, the knowledge gained from suffering is concerned with the future of humanity liberated from injustice and from the causes of injustice. It involves aspects of both critical resistance to the present and practical openness to the future. Essentially it links them to each other; Schillebeeckx even suggests that it is the source of both.

For Schillebeeckx the church is essential, because it is by the church that the epistemological force of the experience of suffering is communicated to the contemporary world. For him, the negative contrast experience *par excellence* was given to Jesus Christ in his experience of the contrast between the living God and the history of

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293 Ibid., 817.
294 Ibid., 821.
human suffering: “On the one hand was his meaningful converse with the living God who was so close to him and who set him free…and on the other hand the servitude in our human history which sickens and maims, brings unnecessary suffering and cramps freedom.” The church remembers this experience of Jesus; and following Jesus Christ, the church continues to be alert to the contrast experience of suffering in its vague awareness (and hope for) the humanum, which is grounded in a mystical experience of the nearness and absolute positivity of God. The church sharpens the contrast between the absence of God in the contemporary experience of alienation and oppression in the world, on the one hand, and the presence of the liberating God of Jesus in resistance against injustice, on the other. In so doing, the church manifests more clearly the face of God as God for humanity. This is how the church exists in the world with a particular critical epistemological force. For a more detailed analysis of the sacramental content of this critical force of the church, this chapter now turns to Schillebeeckx’s Christology as the source of the church’s sacramental existence in the world. Simply put, the central question to be answered is “what is the role of the church in the contemporary world?”

5.3 Jesus Christ, The Source Of The Church’s Living Memory

The content of the church’s sacramentality in Schillebeeckx’s ecclesiology underwent significant development since the 70s. His increasing emphasis on the historicity of revelation led him to recognize the ambiguous and fragmentary nature of sacramental media. God’s revelation in history is at the same time concealment, which explains why Jesus of Nazareth cannot be the only living way to God, and the church is not the kingdom of God, but exists for the salvation God brings about in the world. Its

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295 Ibid., 821.
concealment often entails that it can become “incredible and a stumbling block to belief in God.” Schillebeeckx’s increasing attention to the ambiguity and tension that exist in the sacramental nature of the church is partly fueled by his vision and actual experience of the church’s role vis-à-vis human suffering in the world. He thus concludes that “the church’s sacramentality lies not so much in its visible structures [...] but rather in its way of living out the message of the gospel.”

These critical insights concerning the historicity of sacrament, however, imply a positive force: while Jesus’ humanity was contingent, the uniqueness of his way of life and message points to the mystery of God in history in such a way that it inspires people to follow him in the work for the kingdom of God. In other words, a historical approach makes the gospel message more credible in the contemporary society. The same is true on the level of the church. Its ambiguous and fragmentary existence is also a source of its uniquely critical and productive existence in history, particularly in and through its liturgies. The critical impulse of the sacramental existence of the church begins with the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

Christology came to be without a doubt at the center of Schillebeeckx’s multifaceted works in his last and most developed phase. In his first two volumes of his trilogy, Schillebeeckx focuses on retrieving the experience of Jesus Christ as the experience of salvation for the original biblical witnesses and for the early church. He is much more interested in handing on this experience to the people in new contexts, rather than in theoretical interpretations of it, as he would have been more inclined to in his

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296 Schillebeeckx, Church, 60.

much earlier work, the *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. While his personalistic and phenomenological approach in this earlier work enabled him to go beyond the confines of neo-scholasticism, the outcome was still highly abstract and dogmatic. In contrast, he declares in his later works, “Christianity is not a message to be believed, but an experience of faith which becomes a message, and as an explicit message seeks to offer a new possibility of life experience to others who hear it from within their own experience of life.”

Reflecting this shift, his christology is a “narrative-practical” christology, “retelling the story of Jesus in a way that would move others to ‘go and do likewise’.”

This new approach to christology has multiple implications for his understanding of the church in the world. Based on his historical-critical study of Scripture, Schillebeeckx acknowledges that the church’s connection to Jesus Christ is neither direct nor indirect, but organic. Jesus did not intend to found a new religious community, but the church was nonetheless the authentic result of Jesus’ message and way of life: “on the basis of what Jesus was, said and did, we can, may and must say without further ado that the historical phenomenon which calls itself the church of Christ is a divine foundation by Jesus for humankind.” The story of Jesus became the foundation of the church, and as a result, the church’s sacramental content also became “narrative-practical.” Although Schillebeeckx now emphasizes the church as the *sacramentum mundi*, rather than the *sacramentum Christi*, the source of the church’s life and message remains those of Jesus Christ. What changed is his approach to sacramentality: the church’s sacramental

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300 Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 156.
connection to Jesus Christ is no longer “quasi-ontological” but historical. The church carries out his mission and extends his resurrected presence in the world by putting into action the story of Jesus Christ. Schillebeeckx puts it: “When it follows the path of Jesus Christ, the church, by the force of its own nature, is oriented, as ‘sacrament of the world,’ toward the problems of our world.”

The story of Jesus Christ that grounds the story of the church and constitutes its sacramentality has several key themes. Schillebeeckx highlights particularly (1) Jesus’ unique relationship with God; (2) his message about the kingdom of God; (3) his death and (4) resurrection; and (5) the eschatological future embodied in Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ unique relationship with God defined who and what he was: “the deepest being of Jesus lies in his unique personal bond to God,” so much so that “God’s cause – the kingdom of God as salvation of and for human beings – was of greater importance than his own life.” Schillebeeckx calls this special bond the “Abba experience,” which was a sharp contrast to Jesus’ experience of suffering and absurdity in the world.

The Abba experience consisted of, on the one hand, God’s unconditional and absolute presence despite the appearance of the absence, and on the other hand, “the conviction of being endorsed and recognized by God.” Jesus’ special relationship to God forms the basis of his vision for the relationship between human beings and God.

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301 Schillebeeckx, “Foreword,” x.

302 Schillebeeckx, On Christian Faith, 16;17.

303 Schillebeeckx, Jesus, 261; 267. The contrast in Schillebeeckx’s words: “on the one hand the incorrigible, irremediable history of man’s suffering, a history of calamity, violence and injustice, of grinding, excruciating and oppressive enslavement; on the other hand Jesus’ particular religious awareness of God, his Abba experience, his intercourse with God as the benevolent, solicitous ‘one who is against evil’, who will not admit the supremacy of evil and refuses to allow it the last word.”

304 Schillebeeckx, On Christian Faith, 22.
The kingdom of God, contained in the message of Jesus, meant “a new relationship of human beings to God” shown in “a new type of liberating relationship between men and women, within a peaceful, reconciled society.” While one only gets vague ideas of the kingdom in fragmentary experience of goodness and in indignation against threats to this goodness, Jesus gave people a compelling vision of what it can be. For Jesus, it meant salvation from God: “the kingdom is to be found where human life becomes ‘whole,’ where ‘salvation’ is realized for men and women, where righteousness and love begin to prevail, and enslaving conditions come to an end.”

Jesus’ death on the cross was a direct result of Jesus’ central message about God’s kingdom where the outcast and rejected would become whole. When Jesus’ death is considered in relation to his life and message, Schillebeeckx argues, it becomes “suffering through and for others as the unconditional validity of a praxis of doing good and opposing evil and suffering.” Throughout his life, Jesus showed and taught that God is where the good triumphs, and suffering and injustice give way. In his death, he went further: God can also be with human beings in suffering and absurdity, revealing the “humanity of God.” The cross reveals that “God determines in absolute freedom, down the ages, who and how he wills to be in his deepest being, namely a God of men and women, an ally in our suffering and our absurdity, and also an ally in the good that we do.” The cross was a tool of extreme negativity and symbol of utter failure, but Jesus

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305 Ibid., 19.
306 Schillebeeckx, The Church, 20.
308 Schillebeeckx, Church, 126.
hung upon it in unbroken communion with God and solidarity with the people. God in turn transformed the cross into a medium of God’s supreme self-revelation.

Indicating God’s authentication and acceptance of Jesus’ life and message, Jesus’ resurrection signifies God overcoming of the extreme negativity. In the resurrection, the cross of Jesus acquires fully the productive and critical force that has already been operative in his life itself, message and praxis. The living and unbroken communion with God is shown climactically in the resurrection. In other words, “[i]n the resurrection, Jesus becomes the enduring presence of God to human beings.” This reality is central to the critical force of the Gospel, which draws a sharp contrast to the negativity and meaninglessness of death.

The resurrection of Jesus is an eschatological event, in the sense that Christians see in it the promise of the human history becoming a history of salvation. In fact, the eschatological future has already been anticipated in the life, message and praxis of Jesus. What Jesus started and left his disciples was an “eschatological freedom movement”: “a living community of believers which became aware of being the new people of God: the eschatological ‘assembly’ of God.”

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311 Schillebeeckx, Church, 157.
5.4 The Church As Living Memory Of Jesus Christ: The Content Of The Church’s Sacramentality

5.4.1 The Church As Anticipatory Sign

From Schillebeeckx’s study of who and what Jesus was, a picture of the church’s sacramentality emerges. This sacramentality reveals the church’s role in the changing world. The church lives and proclaims the possibility of liberating relationship of men and women, manifest in the willingness to suffer and die for the least among them. In this life for the wider world, the church reveals the unconditional and absolute presence of God in the world, who promises victory over suffering and death, and the fulfillment of the new people of God. The church as the sacrament of Christ in the world means then “the eschatological ‘gathering’ of God – not a ‘sacred remnant’ but the firstborn of the gathering together of all Israel, and eventually of all human kind: an eschatological liberation movement for bringing together all people, bringing them together in unity.”

The eschatological orientation of Jesus’ message and way of life takes the center stage of the church: “[t]he church is not the kingdom of God, but it bears symbolic witness to that kingdom through its words and sacrament, and in its praxis effectively anticipates that kingdom.” Schillebeeckx captures most succinctly this sacramentality of the church in the image of “the anticipatory sign.”

The description of the church as sacrament brings related but distinct elements together. It means that the church brings to full expression “both the active presence of

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312 Schillebeeckx, Jesus, 47-8.
313 Schillebeeckx, Church, 157.
314 “[T]he sacraments are anticipatory, mediating signs of salvation, that is, healed and reconciled life.” See Schillebeeckx, Christ, 836. The context of Schillebeeckx’s discussion here is liturgy, but as elsewhere, his arguments on liturgy and sacraments are at the same time ecclesiological. D. Thompson builds his discussion of the church around this image. See Thompson, The Language of Dissent, 84-94.
God in the world and the latent potential for the unity of the human race.” The image of the anticipatory sign, employed to show what the church as sacrament means, thus incorporates aspects that are essentially interrelated and interpenetrating: remembrance, actualization, and eschatological hope. In other words, the church can be an anticipatory sign of the kingdom of God, only when it is also remembrance and actualization of the message and praxis of Jesus Christ who is the concentrated creation and complete embodiment of the eschatological hope. Interrelated and interpenetrated as they are, each dimension includes the aspects of the other two.

Firstly, the church is a community that remembers and keeps alive in the world’s memory the name of God in Jesus Christ. Its main function is “the recollection, critical appropriation, and practical living” of the memoria passionis et resurrectionis Christi, not "a slavish traditionalism that preserves the memory of Jesus in the ossified form of one particular moment of history." Remembrance in the biblical sense implies renewal: God “remembers his earlier saving acts by now bringing new saving acts to pass in the present. Reference to what is actually done here and now is an essential part of the biblical view of memory.” This kind of ‘remembering’ also reflects Schillebeeckx’s hermeneutics of orthopraxis. Faithfulness to a tradition does not lie in mere repetition nor imitation, but in actualization adapted to one’s own historical situations. Traditions remain Christian only through the creation of new ones, because the gospel is confronted with ever new circumstances, and “any theology is conditioned by its time and

315 Thompson, The Language of Dissent, 85.
316 Ibid., 87.
317 Schillebeeckx, Christ, 820.
situation.” The church’s memory of Jesus Christ is a living memory, a “memory-in-praxis” through worship and prayer and through concrete liberating way of life in the world.

Secondly, the church is a community that celebrates and practices the memory of Jesus Christ in the present situation. This aspect is prominently displayed in the church’s dialectic of mysticism and politics. Christians live out this dialectic in the liturgical worship of the church community and its service to the human community. Liturgy and worship "are the most concentrated forms of the church's life as anticipatory sign," since all three aspects, remembrance, celebration and eschatological hope, are at work in liturgy and worship, particularly the sacraments. The church’s service to the world and its liturgy, both of which will be discussed more in detail below, are dialectically related in the sense that they not only complement each other, but also provide each other "the occasion for the enriched experience of both." Schillebeeckx asserts:

As long as there is still a real history of suffering among us, we cannot do without the sacramental liturgy: to abolish it or neglect it would be to stifle the firm hope in universal peace and general reconciliation. For as long as salvation and peace are still not actual realities, hope for them must be attested and above all nourished and kept alive, and this is only possible in anticipatory symbols.

For Schillebeeckx, church's celebration and praxis in the present situation involves actions of criticism both of the church itself and of the world. The basis of this

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318 Ibid., 650. For orthopraxis as a hermeneutical principle, see Christ, 659 (“orthopraxis is...a preunderstanding in which the interpretation of the Christian message in a particular age first becomes possible and meaningful.”). For examples of tradition interpreted through hermeneutics of orthopraxis, see Christ, 647-54 (e.g. the evolving biblical impulse – from 'solidarity with innocent sufferer,' to 'solidarity with their fellow human beings who were believers,' to 'solidarity with suffering humanity.').

319 Thompson, The Language of Dissent, 89.

320 Ibid., 88.

321 Schillebeeckx, Christ, 836.
criticism is the memory of Jesus Christ which leads to the church's experience of negative contrast, that is, the positive experience of the anticipated fullness of human life and the negative concerning human life in the present. Taking on this role of criticism, the church's activities are "metaphorical celebrations which interrupt the human profane story with the equally human story" of Jesus of Nazareth. The church's living remembrance of Jesus who overcame suffering becomes a dangerous living memory that, when critically and prophetically realized, overcomes suffering in the present.

Thirdly, the church is a community of hope for the final fulfillment of the world in the *eschaton*. This aspect of the church is operative in its aforementioned criticism of the world – for instance, when criticism is directed at an identification of a certain political system with the fulfilled world that Jesus promised. The church is concerned with political process, because it can be a medium of salvation. However, the church also reminds that no fruit of political actions in the world is salvation itself, since no political action leads to the ultimate human liberation which transcends history. Thus the church always works under the eschatological proviso in all its actions for the world, which means that it is God who brings the ultimate human fulfillment in and through the worldly medium.

In the 70s and 80s, Schillebeeckx expressed his view on the content of the church’s sacramentality primarily in terms of the church’s service to humanity in the wider world. He did so on two levels, firstly in general discussions on the dialectic of mysticism and politics, and secondly, in more detailed attempts at spelling out the church’s specific role in political affairs. His objective lied in defining the church’s unique contributions to the world, which stem from the critical and practical impulse of

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322 Thompson, *The Language of Dissent*, 89-90.
the Gospel. Eventually he returned to the theme that had been central to his early career, i.e. the sacraments, reappropriating them on the basis of his studies and frameworks accumulated and rehearsed throughout his career. The last, unfinished project of Schillebeeckx indicated that it was through this new analysis of the sacraments that one gained access to his sacramental ecclesiology in the world context.

5.4.2 The Dialectic Of Mysticism And Politics

The political engagement of the church in the world is in dialectical tension with its life of mysticism. Schillebeeckx defines mysticism to be “an intensive form of the experience of God in faith.” It designates the life of faith itself, and the way of salvation; and neither an extraordinary experience available only to a few, nor a purely a cognitive process. Its essence lies in “an intensive form of the theologal life of faith, hope and love.” Correlative to mysticism, “politics” for Schillebeeckx is “an intense form of social engagement (thus not restricted to the political doings of professional politicians), engagement accessible to anyone.” Mysticism deals with the life of faith that transcends Christian political engagements, but they are related in such a way that “political love” can be seen as a contemporary form of Christian love of neighbor and holiness, given the situation of pervasive suffering in the world. A disinterested political involvement for the sake of the poor “knows the same conversion and metanoia, the same ascesis and detachment from self, the same suffering and dark nights, the same losing of oneself in the other as was the case in contemplative mysticism in times

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324 Schillebeeckx calls this relationship “a transcendence by implication and not by exclusion.” See Church, 69. On the “political love” as the love of neighbor for today, see his “Jeruzalem of Benares?” 272ff; also Christ, 812.
In other words, mysticism and politics meet in a dialectical fashion, given the suffering humanity and the resulting contrast experience particularly for Christians. This is what Schillebeeckx means when he says that the experience of suffering links mysticism and politics.

The dialectical link between mysticism and politics can also be viewed in terms of the relationship between mystical and ethical formation of the source of revelation. Religion and ethics are intrinsically related in such a way that ethical thematization gives “density of reality” to ‘mystical’ thematization. Verbal and symbolic expressions of the inexpressible God of salvation require human experiences of liberation that interpret and point to that mystery. The latter becomes the experiential content of the former, although it does not exhaust the meaning of the former. He expands his thoughts in another place:

We may ask which element has the greatest density of reality: the indirect and ‘orthopractical’ expression of God in ethical action or the indirect symbolic expression of the source of this practice in explicit nomenclature: ‘my God’, ‘our God’. Both seems to me to be indispensable, but in view of the experiential structure of revelation, the symbolic-religious talk of God owes its density of reality to the mediation of ethical existence... We do not find salvation primarily by means of a correct interpretation of reality, but by acting in accordance with the demands of reality. We can act ‘rightly’ without having a correct theoretical model of reality, even if we are not professing Christians. But being a Christian essentially implies liturgical praise and thanksgiving; however, these are robbed of their real basis and their density of reality if they lack the ethos of human, helping, healing and liberating love and righteousness...  

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326 Interchangeable with “religious,” “liturgical,” “confessional,” and even “symbolic.”

327 In other words: practical and political.

328 Schillebeeckx, Christ, 59.

329 Ibid., 61.
The primacy in terms of the density of reality goes to the right practice in the world. Without the constitutive real experiences from one’s ethical life, the language of faith and of the church, like liturgy, becomes empty and meaningless. However, the converse also has a serious consequence. Ethical and political work without its religious base is possible – thus an atheist can work alongside the Christian – but it is questionable whether it “can in the last resort have any meaningful effect.” Firstly, The church, in its language, activities and gestures, can make explicit the ground and source of ethical and political work for the world, and thus intensifies the experience, by illuminating them in the light of revelation. Further, the church can become a source of strength and vision that the world on its own does not possess. Without faith, the purely ethical and political work is ultimately impotent, because of the fundamental finitude of creation. No ethical and political planning can fully master the human fate nor control the future. Schillebeeckx points out that the success of even the most responsible ethical and political work is limited: it “demands too much” of a person. He is referring to the experienced phenomena of failure in recent history, and calls this experience of failure “one of the most pathistic and creaturely depths of our human existence.” In the face of this inevitable reality of failure, the church, with its memory of Jesus’ overcoming of

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330 He asserts again: “I do not see how anyone can recognize an experience of religious reality in the liturgy, which is a special field of experience of the real presence of God, unless the real presence of God is also experienced with others in the world outside the liturgy, by virtue of our historical status as creatures. For all this [“the insuperable barrier of the historical, human and natural world of creation” outside the liturgy] is an experienceable [and “constitutive”] symbol of the real presence of God. That is the primary and fundamental experiential content of any form of the real presence of God.” See his *Christ*, 810; emphasis added.

331 Ibid., 815; this is M. Horkheimer’s doubt which Schillebeeckx shares.

332 Ibid., 60.

333 Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 822; his examples of the human failure in recent experience include “the impotence of a continuing nineteenth-century belief in progress, and the brutal repression or frustration and decay of many revolutionary resistance movements.”
his fiasco on the cross, and in its hope for the promised future, can direct the political work and help to transcend it. The church can be a source of “strength constantly to begin again” in the worldly struggle, reminding people that “no single historical event is the eschatological final event, and by the same token a fiasco is not ultimate failure.”\textsuperscript{334}

The life of union with God, i.e., Christian redemption, transcends human liberation. While the latter is “an interior ingredient” of the former, the former is “the animating aspect of guidance of a concrete praxis of liberation in which this praxis is transcended at the same time”.\textsuperscript{335} He sums up the dialectic of mysticism and politics by saying that “[p]olitics without prayer or mysticism quickly becomes grim and barbaric; prayer or mysticism without political love quickly becomes sentimental and irrelevant interiority.”\textsuperscript{336}

5.4.3 Church In Politics

What are the implications of this dialectic of mysticism and politics for the church’s engagement in the political realm? According to Schillebeeckx, Christian faith is politically relevant, but it does not have a "distinct view of society" all its own, "at which unaided human reason could not arrive."\textsuperscript{337} Its function in society is essentially ambivalent, due to the dialectical relationship of faith to social and political options. Faith has an effect in politics, but politics also influences the way faith relates to politics. As Schillebeeckx puts it: "For a specific indication of the direction in which a social and human politics has to go in order to meet Christian requirements of the action asked of

\textsuperscript{334} Ibid., 815.

\textsuperscript{335} Schillebeeckx, “Jeruzalem of Benares?” 274.

\textsuperscript{336} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{337} Schillebeeckx, Christ, 771.
believers to achieve human salvation here and now is *communicated* through the non-
theo
tical analysis and interpretation of the very specific conditions in which we
live.

Concrete ethical and political analysis is needed to inform faith-based decisions
and actions. The church is faced with a limit of competence and a difficult balance to
maintain in the political arena: its role cannot be too large or too little, and the faith-based
critical statements can only be in general terms.

Attaining the proper role of faith in the political arena thus requires careful
attention both to its own tradition and to new stimuli from outside the boundaries of faith.
The dialectical interplay of the two elements can lead to a new *religious* voice in politics,
without repeating what non-religious elements, such as critical sociologists, have already
said. A proper tone and content of such religiously critical force of faith is thus difficult
to achieve, and it has often been misunderstood. For instance, Schillebeeckx argues
against using faith as stop-gaps, as he has done so on numerous other occasions, such as
while commenting on atheistic humanism, or on the loss of faith in scientifically and
technologically advanced society. In a *political* stop-gap role, the church fills in where
the secular socio-political actions fail or where secular ideologies fail to provide rational
argument, thus making the Christian work "a new sacralization." He is also against
using religion merely as a means for non-religious ends. The service of religion to the
world has to be *as* religion, that is, as medium of salvation; only in this way can the
religion be “specifically religious” and “practically effective” in advancing the cause of
humanity in the world. Schillebeeckx is seeking a specifically religious form of the
criticism of humanity and society, which is gained in the light of its "experience of the

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338 Ibid., 772.
339 Ibid., 774.
holy.” In other words, religion has to be committed to witnessing God first and foremost. In doing so, religion becomes at the same time a service to human beings. Conversely, when a believer addresses issues concerning human beings and the society, he or she treats them as a veiled manifestation of God who is "the champion of all good and the opponent of all evil.”

Precisely in dealing with the world through the hermeneutic of mediated immediacy, religion can uniquely criticize and contribute to the historical reality. This religious point of view thus "opposes a complete identification of human salvation or well-being with politics." There is neither overestimation nor underestimation of any historical reality, because it is only a manifestation of God, that is, it is not God; and yet it is at the same time the only way to the experience of God. Religious view of the church relativizes and radicalizes the historical process; the critical consciousness peculiar to religion knows that everything in the world is valid, and at the same time the world faces a "radical crisis.” Thus the church’s political participation is always with the eschatological proviso: “while we work toward bringing about the reign of God, it is ultimately God who will work the final transformation.”

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340 Ibid., 775.
341 Ibid., 776.
342 Ibid.
343 In other words: absolutizing, sacralizing, divinizing or idealizing any particular form of the world.
344 In other words: escapism from, indifference to history, leaving it status quo.
345 Ibid., 777.
346 Schreiter, “Commentary,” in The Reader, 245.
The content of the specific Christian impulse was concretized in life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that is, from a particular belief in God oriented on Jesus Christ. It is this content that inspires and gives the church specific direction in social and political decisions. This content has to reflect the Christian God as the God of absolute positivity: God "is not God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:32). This God is also the God of the future. The eschatological theme is central in the content of the impulse of the Gospel in relation to worldly affairs: "believers must make prophecy arising from the gospel [concerning 'a new earth and a new heaven'] into a prophetic-critical and ideological-critical force" against the polis and its politics." Belief in the God of a radically different future (what is considered humanly impossible) radicalizes Christian involvement in improving the world. This involvement in action has to be particular, but not direct: "being a Christian cannot in itself be a criterion for political decision." The Gospel inspiration of love and of the kingdom of God "runs dialectically, and indirectly [i.e. through the mediation of the following]: on the one hand, by means of experiences of contrast, and on the other, by the communication of a (scientific) analysis of social structures and their (hermeneutical) interpretation."

One finds the most complex aspect of Schillebeeckx’s theology of the church and the world in his discussions on the political implications of the church’s sacramentality. In a sense, the church’s participation in political matters is the most controversial form of the church’s engagement with the world. By focusing on this topic in the final chapter, this dissertation will culminate the exploration of Schillebeeckx’s trajectory of

347 Schillebeeckx, Christ, 781.
348 Ibid., 783.
349 Ibid., 782.
development. First through a recapitulation, and then through a case study, the following chapter will assess his shifts and evaluate his thought in its most mature form.
A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

6.1 Introduction

During his long life of ninety-five years and prodigious theological career that spanned over sixty years, Schillebeeckx lived through some dramatic shifts of the 20th century secular world, and witnessed epochal changes in the Catholic Church itself. He was not a passive observer of the shifts that were taking place around him. Through his talks, homilies, and most significantly through his writings, he actively and critically engaged with them. In some cases he not only interacted with the changes, but also influenced them. He was arguably one of the handful of theologians who were most influential on the church’s renewal during the late 50s and early 60s. Overall, Schillebeeckx’s massive and unsystematic oeuvre betrays his openness to innovation, and willingness to let his theology be influenced by “non-theological” developments of his contemporary world.

While such openness is remarkable, however, it is not surprising to find that a theologian who was in constant dialogue with the shifting world for over sixty years would undergo significant changes himself within his own theology. What is surprising is how, despite such constant responsiveness to the dynamism characterizing the world,

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350 He was inaugurated as an independent theologian on September 26, 1943 at the Dominican house of studies in Louvain. He was born on Nov. 12, 1914 and passed away during the writing of this dissertation, on Dec. 23, 2009. It was widely known that he was working on his last book, on the sacraments, at the time of his death.
he remained rooted in the tradition of the Church, and in fact maintained an overarching continuity within his own theology, despite the increasingly non-traditional language of his later theology and some clear elements of discontinuity apparent throughout his shifts.

In tracing the contours of development of Schillebeeckx’s theology, this dissertation identifies that rootedness in Catholic tradition and that particular overarching continuity as key elements in understanding both the development of the theology as well as a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the culmination of his thought.

The goal of this final chapter is twofold: (1) to return to the questions raised in the introduction, and provide comprehensive answers based on the close analyses of the previous chapters;351 (2) to point out ecclesial and pastoral significance of this project for the life of the church and the world, by a case study that explores some implications of the Church’s political involvement. In the service of highlighting the elements of rootedness and continuity, the chapter will begin with a recapitulation of chapters two, three and four, paying closer attention to the flow of his organic development, particularly with respect to three central themes: christology, definition of the church, the relationship between the church and the world. The chapter will then turn to the two questions raised earlier in this dissertation regarding (1) Schillebeeckx’s dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, and will identify a particular pattern of exitus and reditus within his development and culminating work; and (2) the content of sacramentality, or specifically how Schillebeeckx’s portrayal of the church as sacrament in relation to the

351 See above Introduction, 6. The questions or tasks raised were: 1. on the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity (“whether or not Schillebeeckx’s changes on the church-world question essentially express his consistent effort to see the church as sacrament always in relation to what it serves, namely, God, Jesus Christ and humanity”); and 2. on the content of sacramentality (“whether or not in this process Schillebeeckx has undermined the church’s identity in pursuit of the ‘relevance, communicability, and credibility’ of the church in the world”).
world germinated, grew and flowered in his final thought. Finally, the chapter will turn to the practical implications and significance of this work, by taking up a concrete case study involving the recent voice of, and actions taken by, the Catholic Church in South Korea with respect to a pending ecological crisis known as the Four Rivers Restoration Project.

6.2 A Recapitulation Of Themes

Though Schillebeeckx’s multifaceted theology can hardly be divided neatly into phases, this present work nevertheless examined his thought, tracing the three distinctive periods in his theological career: his dogmatic period that was represented by his seminal work *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*; the period around Vatican II, in which a theology of the church and the world took the center stage; and the last period in which his focus on the world itself eventually became predominant, while his attention to the church in its institutional form receded to the background, as far as its role on the world stage was concerned. There are other ways of organizing the shifts of Schillebeeckx’s thought, but these three stages are presented here, because they highlight the development of his view, particularly concerning the church in relation to the world and vice versa. Presented in those stages, Schillebeeckx’s thought was analyzed in this present work according to some recurring topics. This meant that readers could detect a certain trajectory or trajectories in which ideas consistently shifted, changed, developed or even remained constant. In the paragraphs below, this flow of his thought will be recapitulated briefly in the following key topics: (1) christology; (2) definition of the church; (3) orientation of the church and the world in relation to each other, and the church’s particular form of engagement with the world.
6.2.1 Christology

One of Schillebeeckx’s major contributions in his early studies was to provide the seven sacraments with the ecclesiological foundation which in turn was grounded in an even more fundamental, or primordial sacrament, Jesus Christ. Because of this christological foundation, Schillebeeckx’s view of the church became an extension of christology, and thus shared sacramentally the same synthetic structure of being, as well as the same function in the world. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ was the culmination of the gradually unfolding salvation already present in the world. By locating christology within the sacramentality of creation, Schillebeeckx was able to claim that the church was as old as the world, and has been a worldwide reality. This is to say that christology was for him a historical narrative of the Trinitarian mystery of the Incarnation, with the focus on the sacramental nature of God’s self revelation. It is “historical” in the sense that the Chalcedonian notion of the hypostatic union is explicated, not in the abstract metaphysical notions of nature and person, but in terms of the way Jesus lived his concrete life in relation to his Father and the Spirit. Jesus is the “movement down from above,” or God’s self-offer, perfectly unified with and realized by the “movement up from below,” or the human response. The unity that Jesus realized in himself is the foundation for the unity between God and humanity, thus by extension, between Church and the world.

In the second phase, the christological foundation is recast in order to highlight the sacred nature of the world and the church’s basic orientation to the world. Jesus Christ is the Son of God to be a human being of service to all, that is, the Son of Man. By extension, the church is the sacrament of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of being the
sacrament of the world. In this second stage which precedes Schillebeeckx’s historical approach to Jesus of Nazareth in the 70s and 80s, he does not produce much in terms of christology proper; his emphasis is in ecclesiology in the modern world, in step with the movement of Vatican II. However, christology remains the foundation, with an increased emphasis on Jesus Christ’s humanity and his representative role for humanity. Schillebeeckx’s main point concerns the centrality of the universal salvation in the service of which a “representative mediation” of Jesus Christ and, by extension, of the church, is understood. Jesus Christ is the one elected to be the Son of God who is at the same time a man of service to all, the Son of Man. In this heightened awareness of the mission of the salvation of all humanity, the church then is the sacrament of Jesus Christ for the purpose of being the sacrament of the world, the community that serves one another and the world.

Schillebeeckx in his third phase brought christology to the center of his theology. In his christological trilogy he constructed a “narrative-practical” christology that was oriented to move others to the praxis of Jesus rather than to abstract theories about who Jesus was. In other words, christology at this stage begins with a problem that pervades all human life: the problem of human suffering and of evil, and it attempts to find proper response to the problem in view of the universal experience of resistance to evil.

353 In this second phase, Schillebeeckx also reemphasizes a metaphysical foundation for Christian theology in the secularizing world. He reaffirms a theistic metaphysics found in the theology of creation, in reaction to certain inadequate forms of Christian secularity. In order to view the world both in its relative autonomy and in its absolute dependence on God, Schillebeeckx claimed, one needed the metaphysical point of view in which God was seen as the Creator who transcended history and was independent of creation, and yet remained dynamically involved in history as the absolute Subject and Person. This metaphysics implied that, on the one hand, the authentic fulfillment of humanity required what was beyond humanity, since the ultimate goal of human existence was beyond the aims projected by human knowledge and culture. One the other hand, the church could not be completely absorbed into the historical reality and secularized world, even though it was essentially an historical reality that lives in the world.
Christology provides the story of Jesus as a story of God, which highlights the contrast experience of Jesus in the face of evil and suffering, and God’s overcoming of the negativity of Jesus’ death. In retelling Jesus’ story, christology then enables the faithful to relive the dangerous memories that awaken hope in the midst of negativity, and give glimpses of the specific future promised by Jesus, symbolized by the parables of the kingdom of God. At the core of the story of Jesus is God’s fundamental “no” to all forms of evil and suffering, and “yes” to God’s creation, particularly those who are marginalized and burdened by excessive suffering and poverty. Jesus’ story grounds and is extended by the story of the church, enabling the church to become a critical and prophetic presence in the world of negativity, as the sign that interrupts the dehumanizing and destructive elements of the world through the memory of Jesus, political and ethical praxis, and the celebration of the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated.

6.2.2 Definition Of The Church

One of the foundational christological notions that became a key to the church’s self-understanding in the world was the Chalcedonian formula of Christ’s identity as the hypostatic union. Schillebeeckx used the ontological notion of “synthesis,” and the phenomenological notion of “encounter” to show that in Jesus Christ, the meeting of God’s Self-offer and human response of obedient acceptance took place in the way only the truly divine and truly human being could manifest. In this synthesis, the humanity of Jesus Christ was the unique historical and human realization of the divinity of the Son of God. Jesus Christ perfected the dialogue between God and the human being. In the church, as the earthly manifestation of the risen Lord, the dialogue between the risen Christ (and by extension, his glorified mystical body) and the world is perfected. The
church, as the primordial sacrament of Jesus Christ, is a visible realization, albeit still on the way, of Christ's salvation present in the world.

The Second Vatican Council was the watershed event during the second phase of Schillebeeckx’s theology. For him the Council’s central understanding of the church was that of the *sacramentum mundi*, which he thought was implied in the conciliar notion of the church as “the universal sacrament of salvation.” This was significant, because the world entered into the definition of the church. This new definition pointed out that the church and the world are fundamentally related as two forms of living in communion with God. They are not two separate realities. As the “two complementary forms of experience of the one Christianity,” they are to be integrated and united. Highlighting this reality and task of the fundamental unity, the church then is called the sacrament of dialogue.

An ecclesiology “in the minor key” that was conceived in the second stage is fully developed in the third phase. It is an ecclesiology in which the church recedes to the background while God revealed in Jesus Christ for the sake of humanity is the central concern. This ecclesiology narrates the history of salvation not from the institutional church’s point of view, but from a theo-logical and eschatological points of view. While the institutional church is treated in the minor key, however, the role of the church as the community of Christians in the suffering world is in a sense heightened. It remains in the major key in a more fundamental way, in the sense that the liturgical and political role of the Christian community is properly highlighted in manifesting God’s salvation present in the world. In this vein Schillebeeckx continues to discuss the church in terms of its sacramentality. While the community of believers is still a socio-historical sign of

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liberation, the church’s *praxis*, both liturgical and political, is now the sacramental medium in and through which Jesus Christ is actualized and the *humanum* is advanced. The church is still firmly grounded in Jesus Christ, but its sacramental connection is not ontological but historical: the church becomes the sacrament of Jesus Christ by putting into action the story of Jesus Christ. This reflects Schillebeeckx’s central conviction that “the human,” manifested particularly in transforming the suffering humanity to a more fully living one, is the medium of the possible revelation of God. A narrative-practical christology of this phase led to a narrative-practical ecclesiology. The sacramentality of the church that extends the story of Jesus Christ in today’s world is best captured by the image of “the anticipatory sign.”

6.2.3 The Relationship Between The Church And The World

6.2.3.1 Orientation Between The Church And The World

In his early phase, Schillebeeckx saw that world was being drawn into the church, in the sense that, while the world is coextensive with the church (defined broadly as the presence of grace visible in people’s communal religiosity), it is increasingly and more explicitly becoming such a community in dialogue with God. One can then say, based on the broad notion of the church and on the graced creation, that the world is found in the church, and understood in terms of it.

In the second phase, Schillebeeckx pursued more thoroughly a dialogical character of the relationship between the church and the world. One can argue that, in order to attain a more balanced mutuality, his theology became much less church-centered; his focus rested rather on the world and the church’s role in it. What Schillebeeckx develops during and after Vatican II was a sacramental theology of the
church *and* the world, shifting his focus from the church, as the culmination of God’s salvific plan in history, to God’s salvation itself, still unfolding in the world. The church is fundamentally oriented to the world that is already sacred, and the church serves this world by revealing the true calling of the world to itself, and by completing that calling, i.e. God’s plan of salvation. The fundamental mutuality replaces a rather one-directional view of the world’s implicit Christianity becoming more explicit in the church. There is a sense that the church *needs* the world for its own fuller understanding of God’s self-revelation, and for the exercise of its prophetic call in and for the world.

What came to typify his view of the church and the world in the third phase was his statement *extra mundum mulla salus*, a reformulation of the traditional formula he once accepted in his earlier writings, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. In this new statement, he made clear that the church was a second-order reality, the tasks of which are in the service of the realization of salvation in the world, rather than in perpetuating itself. In that service, the church has a crucial role of providing the world with an eschatological orientation, thereby it can be shown that no historical liberation is the final salvation, and no fiasco is an ultimate failure.

6.2.3.2 Forms Of Engagement Of The Church In The World

In his early phase, Christian humanism, as distinguished from Marxist and existentialist humanism of his day, was the church’s way of being in right relationship with the world. The church is called to participate in the humanizing process in history, with the humility of creatures and the hope of the redeemed. Christian humanism thus is

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355 Schillebeeckx also called Christian humanism “a humanism of the redemption” and “humble humanism.” See *World and Church*, 17; 23ff.
built on a theology of creation and Christology, since it is the grace of the resurrection operating in human persons in the world, conditioned by the grace of the cross.

In the second phase, Schillebeeckx deepened the church’s commitment of service to the world as the *sacramentum mundi* in and through its distinct and separate gift of grace as the *sacramentum Christi*. Building on the belief in the relative autonomy of the world, and its absolute dependence on God (i.e. metaphysics of non-dualism mentioned above), Schillebeeckx viewed the church’s humanizing work in and for the world in terms of an act of self-surrender in faith. The church works for a more human world, trusting that God will ultimately build it. The metaphysical grounding makes the church’s engagement both *relative* (since the human fulfillment is ultimately God’s salvation, a pure gift), and *radical* (since the fulfillment lies in a radical self-giving). The church stands *in the center* of the world (providing the deepest meaning for the world) as the sacrament of Christ; the church at the same time needs to be *in the middle* of the world (by participating in the world and serving it) as the sacrament of the world.

The church’s service to the world involves an authentic dialogue with the latter, in which the most prominent voice to heed to is the prophetic one, spoken not only by the Church but also by the world. The church is called to listen to what Schillebeeckx called the “foreign prophecy” that comes in the form of a contrast experience. He considers this voice from the world to be a medium of God’s Self-revelation found in the world.

Faced with a worsening reality of threatened humanity, Schillebeeckx in the third phase highlighted the church’s unique “political” relevance that is grounded in “the critical and prophetic impulse of the Gospel.” His renewed exploration of the theology of creation and extended christological studies led him to an appreciation of the Christian
involvement in the world, in which the mystical and political dimensions are dialectically united. Because of Jesus Christ, the church has a special role in dealing with the suffering in the world: it communicates with the world the critical and prophetic force of the contrast experience, and in so doing manifests the absolute presence of God for humanity.

6.3 A Dialectical Relationship And The Church’s Identity And Relevance

In the introduction, two questions were raised for the subsequent chapters to explore. They were:

1. whether Schillebeeckx’s changes on the church-world question essentially express his consistent effort to see the church as sacrament always in relation to what it serves, namely, God, Jesus Christ and humanity;
2. whether in this process Schillebeeckx has undermined the church’s identity in pursuit of the ‘relevance, communicability, and credibility’ of the church in the world.

These two questions deal with the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity on the one hand, and the particularity of the church’s role in the world, on the other. The previous chapters dealt with these questions analytically through a close reading of Schillebeeckx’s works. This final chapter will do so by having a close look at the flow of development that was identified in the first section above under three themes.

6.3.1 A Dialectic of Continuity and Discontinuity

As stated in the introduction, this present dissertation analyzed Schillebeeckx’s work with a view that there was an evolution throughout his career, in which one finds a fundamental continuity in various breaks. The key to his continuity was his dialectical thought. It was noted earlier that, for Schillebeeckx, dialectic interplay was a major principle for the interpretation of reality, and dialectical relationship was a succinct way
of structuring the reality of creation. While he himself did not define it anywhere, he employed various terms in his reference to dialectic interplay, such as non-dualistic metaphysics, and dialectic of mysticism and politics. One of the most helpful descriptions by one of his commentators was mentioned earlier: dialectical relationship is a non-dualistic, non-antithetical relationship that is “irreducible, continually dynamic, and mutually informing.”

It takes place between existents that are distinct, but in essence do not exist in separation from each other, drawing one another, or oriented to one another in order to form a synthesis or unity. Thus it is distinguished from Hegelian dialectic or Barthian dialectical theology. It indicates a relationship of non-dualism the unity of which is achieved not “by the overcoming of some fundamental opposition but by the reestablishment of the irreducible and cooperative relationships which make up all of reality, including the very nature of God.” For Schillebeeckx dialectic interplay is found in everything, including ideas, events, subjects, and objects, and even God in relation to creation.

Generally speaking, for Schillebeeckx dialectic is part of what it means to live as human beings in the world. Human existence is for him a dialectical “interplay,” “interweaving,” or “unity” of encounter with the world in experience, thought (or interpretation) and language. It expresses a fundamental “relational ontology.” “Experience” for Schillebeeckx is thus a loaded word, for it is a term for a dialectical encounter with a reality which is independent of the human subject:

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358 Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 31; 49.

359 Philip Kennedy, *Deus Humanissimus*, 23.
People “have experiences” above all when their plans and reflections, their anticipations of knowledge, come up against the refractory nature of reality, which thus reveals itself indirectly. This resistance directs all our reflections. It reveals a reality which is independent of all human plans, which does not come from men, but “from elsewhere.”

The resistance of reality points to ontological distinction to be mediated, as one finds, for instance, between knowing subjects and known objects, or between subjects that experience and realities to be interpreted and experienced.

This experience of a dialectical encounter is at its most fundamental level when it describes a relationship between creation and Creator. On this level, the ultimate dialectical synthesis of ‘distinct but not separate” is experienced, since it describes the relationship between an existent and the ground of its existence, most uniquely as in between the Creator and creation: God “is not undialectically the ground of everything that is.”

For Schillebeeckx in his early phase, this dialectical relationship or process was what he perceived in the Neoplatonic and Thomistic circle of exitus and reeditus, which he considered to be the fundamental worldview and structure undergirding the Summa. Schillebeeckx used the expression “mediated immediacy” for this unique relationship in his later phase. Both ways of describing the dialectic between God and creation capture the relationship between them; both imbue the creaturely existence with relative independence from, and absolute dependence on God. They describe a relationship based on transcendence, understood together, yet in tension, with immanence. It is a relationship with a transcendent being that nevertheless reveals itself in and through creation, and relates to creation only in and through creation. On the creation-Creator level, dialectic refers to a relationship devoid of resistance and rivalry that one

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360 Schillebeeckx, Christ, 46-7.

361 Schillebeeckx, Christ, 808.
experiences in creation. 362 When understood correctly, God “embraces both person and society, i.e., the whole of reality, without doing violence to it.” 363 This dialectic relationship is the fundamental focus of Schillebeeckx’s theology, because the unity between God and creation, that is, salvation, is his most abiding theological concern. God’s being the mediated immediacy also means that the dialectical process of unity between God and creation necessarily involves mediation on the side of creation. Schillebeeckx identifies various forms of such mediation, Jesus Christ, the church, the world, and negative contrast experiences. In his mature thought, what mediates God to human beings comes to lie in the way they respond to negative contrast experiences. 364

From the point of view of dialectic, Schillebeeckx’s lifelong project has been a progressive exploration of these various realities that mediate God to humanity, in order to attain a deeper awareness of the absolute closeness of God to humanity that leads ultimately to an authentic experience of life of unity with God.

A dialectical process can also be described as an ongoing circle or ascending spiral in which entities at one point begin a process of interplay, and undergo a transformation, in order to return synthesized and to be ready to begin another circular process on a higher level. Thompson identifies three epistemological circles to describe

362 In principle, there is no rivalry between God and God’s creation, between what God does and what human beings do, and between “Christian faith” and “our experience of reality,” “on the foundation provided by him.” See Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 810 (emphasis his). However, since God is always experienced as mediated, the mediating element can hide or distort God. In later Schillebeeckx, this reality came to be emphasized more and more.

363 Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 815.

364 Philip Kennedy explains Schillebeeckx’s dialectic in terms of “relational ontology.” He observes: "In his later work…Schillebeeckx came to define the relational ontology: (a) through praxical forms of justice; (b) through the mystical dimension of politics; and (c) through the perception of the (suffering, poor) other as the image of God. Therefore, for the later Schillebeeckx, 'One knows God if one is engaged with the poor who, in crying out for justice, are God's image'." See Kenndy, *Deus Humanissimus*, 23.
the dialectical thought pattern that permeates Schillebeeckx’s work: The ontological circle of subject and object, the hermeneutical circle of context, new experiences, and reformed context, and the critical circle of theory and praxis. Thompson sees in these circles a progression: later circles represent more developed epistemology than one that came before, while the later ones are built on what came before. Grounding these epistemological circles was a theological circle that this dissertation perceived to be the ground of all dialectic: the Neoplatonic and Thomistic circle of exitus and reditus. It was this circle that Schillebeeckx highlighted in his dissertation as the trajectory that the history of salvation makes, and it was in view of this circle that he asserted that Jesus Christ and, by extension, the sacraments are “the ultimate salvific organs by which man can reach the destination of his life, thus by which the reditus is formally completed.”

Even with the increasing critical consciousness at his later phase, he continued to hold the view of the sacramental structure of revelation in which he found a gradual process of revelation in and through worldly processes. In his later phase, the Thomistic teleology is replaced by the eschatological hope that directs and sustains Christians in the world.

Based on the understanding of dialectic discussed here, including the circle of exitus-reditus, one is able to identify a similar dialectical process or circle within the development of Schillebeeckx’s theology of the church and the world. There is a dialectical process, because, within the salvation history in which God’s self-revelation gradually unfolds, the church and the world have distinct roles in their interplay with one

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365 Thompson, The Language of Dissent, 13-46. Thompson also explains how knowledge is mediated in these epistemological circles: knowledge is mediated by concepts (in a limited fashion) in the circle of subject and object; by historical tradition, present encounter, and future anticipation in the hermeneutical circle; by negative contrast experiences, ideology critique, and action on behalf of suffering humanity in the critical circle. See p. 13.

366 Schillebeeckx, L’économie sacramentelle, 11.

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another. They are not two separate realities, but rather two manifestations of one reality, that is, God’s absolute salvific presence in the world through Jesus Christ. As distinct manifestations, they are called to engage in an “irreducible, continually dynamic, and mutually informing” interaction with one another. In this dialectical circle, the views about the church and the world undergo shifts in relation to one another. In other words, their relationships evolve in continuous dialectic.

The dialectical process between the church and the world can be seen in the definition of the church, which Schillebeeckx always makes in relation to the world. This dissertation made a claim that the development of Schillebeeckx’s theology of the church and the world followed the progression of, firstly, the church as the sacrament of Jesus Christ for the world, secondly, the church as the sacrament of the world, and finally the church as the sign that interrupts secular narrative – as well as sinful praxis – of the world, providing an alternative vision, i.e., its anticipatory hope. His ecclesiological progression parallels the shifts in his worldview. To be more precise, the identity of the church in the world is mediated by an increasingly sacramental view of the world, first as graced creation coextensive with the church, then as the locus of God’s self-revelation which the church interprets in order to serve the world. In his most developed phase, Schillebeeckx increasingly highlights the negativity that veils God’s presence in the world, but, despite the prevalent suffering and the threatened humanum, he considers the world as the stage in which God’s salvation itself takes place through the church’s mystical and political response to the negative contrast experience.

Despite the shifting definition of the church in relation to the world, however, there is a more profound continuity in his understanding of the church as sacrament,
particularly in regard to the fundamental source of sacramentality, even as he shifts his focus from one aspect to another. From the beginning of his theological career, his overriding concern was the sacramentality that grounds all individual sacraments, which he found in Jesus Christ primarily, and then in the church by extension. What Schillebeeckx showed in this groundbreaking approach was the primacy and the comprehensive scope of the sacramental reality (res tantum), that is, God’s absolute creative saving presence. In light of this insight, one can see an encompassing vision in Schillebeeckx, which places the sacramental reality at the center of what the church is, even as he teases out the elements and implications with respect to the identity of the church in relation to the world. In other words, he consistently employs the notion of sacramentality in understanding the church, while he highlights various aspects of what the church sacramentalizes, and proclaims to the world: i.e. the coming of the kingdom of God as salvation from God manifested in and through Jesus Christ.

The church’s mystical and political role in the world points to the fact that the dialectical relationship evident in the nature of the church and the world is at play in their engagement with one another. The form of engagement is particularly illuminating, because it directly concerns the dialectical interplay itself. In his dogmatic phase, the church’s engagement with the world was in the form of Christian humanism which Schillebeeckx called “humble humanism.” In his middle period during the 60s and the early 70s, he summed up the church’s action as service to and critique of the secularizing world through the church’s faith-based vision of creation and its fulfillment. In the last stage of his career, he highlighted the church’s political and liturgical interruption based on the critical and prophetic impulse of the Gospel, as the church’s dialectical interplay
with the world that mediates salvation from God despite sin and suffering. The form of
the church’s engagement with the world shifted because the world in this interplay
shifted. Schillebeeckx developed a notion of a particularly Christian form of humanism,
because of the threat of atheism on the one hand, and the limitation of the atheistic or
non-theistic humanism, on the other. Schillebeeckx shifted the church’s role to the
service to the world so that the world become what it is called to be at creation, because
of his positive view of secularization, as well as its limitations. Schillebeeckx’s later
emphasis on the church’s presence in the world “in the minor key,” particularly in and
through the church’s dialectic of mysticism and politics, came with his growing
awareness of the suffering and evil in the world that led to the threatened humanity and
creation.

6.3.2 The Identity and Relevance of the Church

In his theology that concerned the relationship between the church and the world,
Schillebeeckx has always been interested in the communicability, relevance and
credibility of the church in the world. The shifts in his thought show this clearly. His
focus has shifted from the church itself to what the church serves as sacrament. If there
ever was a time when his ecclesiology was done in the major key, he intentionally
pursued an ecclesiology in the minor key in his mature theology. The orientation has
reversed too: in his early years, the world was oriented to the church; in his later theology,
the church is oriented to the world. The modus operandi of the church became mutual
dialogue with the world. His favored definition, the sacramentum mundi, is also an
indication of his main interest in the church’s relevance. The world enters into the
definition of the church, rendering the boundary between the church and the world fluid.
One can argue that in this process Schillebeeckx lost a proper view of the church, the view that he held in his early career when he seemed to have shown greater interest in the unique identity of the church, the voice of which was what truly mattered in the church’s relationship with the world.

A close study of his work, however, reveals that his dialectical thought is also at play here: that identity and relevance are dialectically related, and thus cannot be separated. The church finds its unique voice in its dialogue with the world; it becomes truly relevant in being faithful to its identity and mission. One recalls that the definition *sacramentum mundi* was his reformulation of a definition given by Vatican II, that is, “the universal sacrament of salvation” (*Lumen Gentium* n. 48; *Gaudium et Spes* n. 45). In other words, that of which the church is a symbol is not the world itself, but the salvation that is unfolding in the world. One can thus say that all the shifts that are observed are a return to what the church truly is, that is, a sacrament in service of realities of higher “density,” that is, God, Jesus Christ who is God in human person, and humanity, “the story of God,” whom God saves. In this vein, Schillebeeckx says: “The church should be more of an appendix, a corollary to what is said of God. When this happens, the church will have more of a voice in the world.”

In a world where that experience of salvation is conspicuously obscured due to the prevalence of suffering, this proper view of the church’s sacramentality is a central element in the faith life of Christians. Schillebeeckx observes in commenting on the meaning of the *sacramentum mundi*, that the church is “a religious community oriented toward a finite and autonomous world [more specifically, toward the problems of this world] which serves this threatened world by being a

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369 Schillebeeckx, *I am a Happy Theologian*, 74.
His leading question is how the church can be credible in its rendering of the evangelical message to people living in such a world. The answer for him in his later theology was the dialectic of politics and mysticism. Commenting on this dialectic, he said:

Ethical coherence and credibility are, therefore, the most important presuppositions of the church’s service to the world and at the same time are the consequences of its message that God’s kingdom is among human beings. In addition to the ethical and sociopolitical dimensions, the Christian life of faith also has a ‘mystical’ dimension, that is, the constitutive, emotional, and at the same time cognitive aspect of personal union with God within God’s ecclesia.  

At the core of this mystical aspect of faith in God lies “the nonconceptual dimension of what is, nevertheless, our ‘cognitive’ faith-filled contact with the invisible God.” The mystery of God, experienced in this mystical aspect of faith has a content that believers can recognize. Because the God of Judeo-Christian tradition is a God of human beings, the invisible God has a human and worldly face.

This human and worldly face of God, or the God of human beings, appears first in the content of faith itself. For Schillebeeckx’s ecclesiology, of particular importance are the themes of creation, Jesus Christ and the eschaton, all of which are intimately and inseparably intertwined. Theology of creation for Schillebeeckx is “a statement of God’s creative and preserving relationship to humankind, which ultimately signifies that God wishes to be a God of human salvation”; eschatology is “a statement of the utter historicity of human nature and both God’s immanence within and ultimate transcendence of history”; as for christology: “In the person and work of Jesus,

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371 Ibid., x.

372 Ibid.
Schillebeeckx sees the concentration of these ideas of creation and eschatology: Jesus is the fullest expression of Israel’s trust in God’s creative presence as well as God’s promise for the future.\(^{373}\) The church as sacrament brings all these themes together and thus gives them to full expression in the world, through its remembrance, actualization and eschatological hope. In other words, the church becomes true sacrament and speaks in its unique religious voice, when it is remembrance and actualization of the message and praxis of Jesus Christ who is the concentrated creation and the complete embodiment of the eschatological hope. Such is the way for the church to be a religious signpost for the threatened world: it is to be an anticipatory sign of the kingdom of God.

In order for this religious voice of the church to be meaningful, however, the church has to be engaged with the world and to participate in its process, precisely in and through this voice. In a world where humanity is constantly threatened by violence and suffering, the church’s religious participation is often expressed in its critical role. The church offers a “critical religious consciousness” to the world.\(^{374}\) The church, according to this “critical ecclesiology,” (1) recognizes God’s saving act “where human good is furthered and evil is challenged in the human interest.”\(^{375}\); (2) itself opposes anti-\textit{humanum}, pseudo-\textit{humanum}, that is, identification of salvation with a particular socio-political system, and status quo, that is, separation of church and world. The recognition is on the conscious level; the opposition gets expressed in praxis.

Central to Schillebeeckx’s view of the church thus is its critical consciousness and role, particularly in terms of the negative experience. The church in such a role is

\(^{373}\) Thompson, \textit{The Language of Dissent}, 85.

\(^{374}\) Janet M. O’Meara, “Salvation,” 110.

\(^{375}\) Schillebeeckx, \textit{Church}, 12.
relevant to the world, because "[h]uman beings have created and perpetuated a history that is dark with suffering and oppression," and the history of suffering "continues in spite of the progress of emancipation and in spite of God's redemptive action in Jesus." 376

The church's critical force comes on the one hand from the critical and productive force of human suffering itself, and on the other hand, from the particular story of Jesus of Nazareth who, though part of the history of accumulated suffering, fought against it in his message and praxis and overcame it through death and resurrection. In bringing together the critical force of human suffering and the critical impulse of the gospel, the church becomes relevant in the world through its unique religious voice.

6.4 Church in Politics: The Ecological Debate

In service of the final assessment of the value of the shifts in Schillebeeckx, and of the strengths and weaknesses of his developed thought on the church and the world, it may be helpful to look at a concrete case study in which one can examine how his theology plays out in historical and cultural context. As it was shown, his project has always been dialectical in the sense that he theologized in critical dialogue with his constantly shifting contemporary world. His theology has also highlighted the practical aspect of faith, that is, how it impacts the concrete lives of Christians. It is therefore fitting to ask at this final stage of the dissertation how his theology of the church and the world is applicable to the church and the world of today. Some other related questions can be raised: Does the sacramental church have a role to play in today’s world? Is it a viable paradigm for the church today to be the sign that interrupts? If so, how would it be played out, so that the church remains relevant and effective? How “political” can the

376 Janet M. O’Meara, “Salvation,” 111.
church be? These questions are valid, because the present social and political circumstances, with which the church is called to be in a critical dialogue, may have evolved from Schillebeeckx’s own, if not shifted quite differently from his. In this section then, the question of applicability will be raised in terms of Schillebeeckx’s mature thought. Such examination also involves a critical analysis on the level of effectiveness of a dialectical thought process. Among the myriad worldly issues with which the church actively engages on various levels, this section selects the issue of ecological crisis, in order to examine the church’s sacramental role and its political effectiveness in the way it deals with the issue. It is to be noted that Schillebeeckx discusses the issue of ecological crisis as early as in 1989. Christian theology of creation revisited from the point of view of environmental concern leads him to a cosmic aspect of the kingdom of God and ecological negative contrast experience. In order to both limit the scope of this examination and provide a contemporary concrete example, a specific case study has been chosen: the South Korean church’s involvement in the protest against its government’s massive engineering project to dam and dredge four major rivers, which is officially called “Four Major Rivers Restoration Project” (hereafter “Four Rivers Project”).

The Four Rivers Project refers to a $19.2 billion public works project that broke ground in South Korea in November of 2009, with a proposal for a profound transformation of the four longest rivers of the country. It would involve building 16 dams, dredging 130 billion gallons of sand and gravel to deepen nearly 435 miles of riverbed, renovating two estuarine barrages, and constructing other facilities. It was a brainchild of President Lee Myung-bak who claimed that the project would prevent

377 Schillebeeckx, Church, 234-46.
flooding, secure water supplies and improve its quality, generate thousands of jobs, and create lakes for water sports, bike trails and other recreational facilities. It was touted as a model for environmentally sound development while at the same time seen as boosting the sagging economy.

Critics of the project have been calling it “river killing” rather than river restoring, and claimed that it was a political boondoggle which would only create an unprecedented environmental disaster for the country. From the beginning, the project has attracted fiery opposition from politicians (mainly from the main opposition Democratic Party), environmental groups and academics, the list of which has grown since then. Most notable of them is the unusually collective voice of experts in the area, the Professors’ Organization for Movement Against Grand Korean Canal. This group of 2800 academics contends that the government and supporters are twisting data and ignoring expert panel recommendations on key scientific and environmental issues.\(^\text{378}\)

The reaction of the Korean Catholic Church has been one of the most visible among all oppositions of various religious groups. Though small in terms of its members in Korean society, the Catholic Church traditionally has had strong voices representing the minority, the marginalized, the oppressed and the voiceless. From the very inception of the Four River project, the church has expressed its opposition from the pulpit, organized prayer services, and offered its space (most significantly its cathedral ground in Seoul, which has become a national symbol of opposition to unjust governments) for various demonstrations. On the institutional level, the Church reacted both directly and indirectly to the controversy. Firstly, the Bishops’ Conference made a brief statement in March of 2010 at their first biannual meeting convened after the Four River project broke

ground. In the statement, the bishops framed the project of “saving the four rivers” within the pro-life issue. Comparing the society under the dark curtain of the anti-life culture to the whole creation “groaning in travail” (Rom 8:22), the Korean bishops stated that the same anti-life culture revealed itself against the environment: “All life on earth is connected as in a chain. When nature is destroyed, human life that breaths it and is nourished by it, gets to share the same fate.”

Specifically on the issue of the Four Rivers Projects, they expressed their disbelief in the explanations of the government officials, and presented two sources to support their opposition: the Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium. The statement concluded with a call for reflection and conversion of the entire society including bishops themselves, and with a prayer for the administration and the people.

In their Fall meeting of the same year, the Korean bishops presented a more fully developed theological and pastoral response, entitled “Our Responsibility and Action for the Recovery of the Order of Creation: Korean Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Environment.” This Letter stayed above the fray concerning the Four Rivers Project, and focused rather on the relevant theological principles and their pastoral applications in the lives of the faithful. The bishops set out to provide a foundation for the Church’s responsibility regarding the environmental issue in general, and in so doing, to respond

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379 “Korean Catholic Bishops’ Statement concerning the Issue of Life and of the Four Rivers Project,” March 12, 2010; translation is mine. It is found in various Internet sites, for instance, see http://blog.daum.net/_blog/BlogTypeView.do?blogid=0Lr7a&articleno=6965346&categoryId=0&regdt=20100312151743#ajax_history_home.

380 “Choose life, that you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:19).

“The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole...the natural environment is more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a 'grammar' which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation” (Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, Encyclical Letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, n. 48).
theologically to the criticism of “why religion participates in politics” and more to the point, to explain to the faithful “why the environmental issue is a faith issue,” and why their interest and action in this issue is “God’s call from which no Christian is exempted.”381 In addition to these collective responses, individual bishops also made statements through their diocesan pastoral letters on the issue of the ecological crisis.

Perhaps the most unusual response of the Church to the Four Rivers Project came in the form of an instructional comic book. It also happened to be the first collective response of the Korean Catholic Church, published on November 6, 2009. Prepared by the Committee for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, it was entitled “Stop the ‘Four Major Rivers Restoration Project’ that Disrupts the Divine Order of Creation! – The Christian Response.”382 Addressed to Catholic Christians, it is narrated by a priestly figure who seems to be representing the official Church. While reflecting the spirit of the bishops’ first statement, and theologically grounded in their pastoral letter, it went well beyond both in its assertiveness and directness. The comic makes a visually effective point that the church has an important voice with respect to this project, a voice which scripture calls forth in response to the situation at hand. This detailed yet highly engaging comic reveals a church speaking in its own voice, a voice which perhaps culminates in a particular comic frame, the one in which the priestly figure intervenes in the Four Rivers Project by shouting, “Stop!” Surely this is a vibrant


382 See the appendix. Originally published in Korean, the comic was translated into English by the Committee for Environment of the Archdiocese of Seoul. The English version is provided in the appendix of this dissertation. The English translation quoted in the dissertation, however, is mine. For an eBook version of the English translation, see http://www.albummania.co.kr/gallery/view.asp?seq=119348&path=100415104903.
A contemporary example of the Catholic Church literally and visually becoming the sign that interrupts.

A close look at the Korean Catholic Church’s involvement in the controversies over the “Four Rivers Project” reveals a number of key elements that Schillebeeckx highlighted in his theology of the church and the world. It also provides an opportunity to raise questions about the political role of the church, and more specifically, to examine the viability of his theology in relation to today’s issues of the world.

One of the constant elements in Schillebeeckx’s shifting theology throughout his career was his firm grounding in a theology of creation. His theology of creation was the basis for his unity-in-distinction between the profane and salvation history. It was the basis for the Church’s humanism, as opposed to non-theistic humanism. It was what enabled him to embrace secularism, while critiquing extreme Christian reactions toward it. It was also the basis for the Church’s dialectic between mysticism and politics in the world. The bishops’ pastoral letter, “Our Responsibility and Action for the Recovery of the Order of Creation,” took this Christian view of creation as its foundation. After describing the ecological crisis in the Korean peninsula and its various causes, the pastoral letter reasserted the meaning of the *imago Dei* in human beings, and what it implied in the human relationship with the rest of creation: i.e., the human being is *cooperator Dei*, serving God’s intention for all creation. It then presented a theology of creation that grounded Christian humanism, the anthropocentric world view made relative to the theocentric faith. The intention of the creation accounts of Genesis, the pastoral letter said, was to indicate that there should be proper harmony between human beings, between God and human beings, and between human beings and the rest of
creation. Sin disrupted this harmony on all levels, even causing suffering on the land (Gen. 3:17; 4:12). Highlighting the fundamental relatedness, the creation story implied that caring for creation is to care for humanity, and that one needed to restore the natural order if one wished to be happy. In the pastoral letter, one finds a notable echo of Schillebeeckx’s early view of “humble” humanism, which is distinguished from an humanism or anthropocentricism “in an absolute sense.” For Schillebeeckx, humble humanism was the Christian church’s way of engaging in the worldly progress. In the pastoral letter, it is how human beings are called to steward creation in light of their faith in the Source of all.

Built on Schillebeeckx’s appropriation of theology of creation, both metaphysics of non-dualism and the sacramentality of creation are also found in the pastoral letter. The term “creation” expresses the faith that the universe is in God, while God is also truly present in the universe. Far from identifying nature with God, such faith calls for an attitude of reverence toward nature, so that one can discover the meaning and beauty, and ultimately God, in all things that exist. The pastoral letter affirmed that faith in creation is a faith in the absolute presence of the transcendent God in creation and in the continued process of creation, to which God invites humanity as helpers. The sacramental view of creation thus leads to a certain view of human work vis-à-vis nature:

The help of the Christians in restoring the order of creation and their secular effort to make the world more livable are never inconsistent with the Christian faith in the Kingdom of God. On the contrary, such help and such effort are active and sacred participation in the establishment of the Kingdom...The love for the invisible God is made real and concrete in the love for God’s creation, that is, humanity’s co-creatures.383

Schillebeeckx’s view of the sacramentality of the world is reframed here as the sacramentality of the universe, through which all creation enables the believers to see God and experience God’s love by reflecting God’s infinite perfection and beauty.

The negative contrast experience, the concept that Schillebeeckx borrowed from Theodor Adorno and developed in his view on the revelatory character of human suffering, was for Schillebeeckx at the center of Jesus Christ’s experience, and by extension, was also central in the church’s role in the world. By framing the issue of the ecological suffering within the implicit vision of life and justice, the Korean church echoed the same notion. Faced with the ecological devastation being committed by the Four Rivers Project, the Korean Catholic Church saw its major role in mediating to the faithful and to the rest of the nation the experience of negative contrast between the destruction caused by human beings and God’s creative presence, and in communicating to them of the call to resist, protest and interrupt the Project. For Schillebeeckx, negative contrast experience primarily concerned human suffering. As the original Dutch title of his *Church* book indicates, human beings are the story of God, the words with which God tells God’s story. This meant that the “world” for him was the world of human activities, accomplishments, sufferings and failures. With the formula *extra mundum nulla salus*, the *locus* of salvation, at least its main focus, expanded from the church to the world of humanity.

The extension of Schillebeeckx’s negative contrast experience to the world of creation beyond humanity, however, is a continuous development of his thought. With the issue of ecological contrast experience, the scope of the church’s relationship to the world is decidedly widened to include the whole creation. The continuity in this
expansion can be seen on multiple levels: his creation theology, dialectical theology, and christology. First, his robust creation theology always located God’s revelation to human beings within the larger context of creation. They cannot be separated. Mary Catherine Hilkert thus notes that for Schillebeeckx “the mystery of God’s creative and sustaining presence in human life is hidden in the creation which remains vulnerable to the finitude and mortality of nature as well as to the possibility of the abuse of human freedom.”

Secondly, Schillebeeckx’s dialectical theology showed that the church and the world are always mutually informing, that the church remains continuous in discontinuity, due to the shifting world, and that the church reveals the presence of God, thus remain effective, in the world through dialogue with the world, particularly concerning the contrast experiences of negativity. In parallel to this dialectical theology, or more accurately, as a foundation of this dialectical theology, Schillebeeckx’s narrative-practical christology focused on handing on the experience of salvation in the world where salvation needed to be uncovered, rather than simply reformulating the christological doctrines of the early church. In this christology, Schillebeeckx highlighted the experience of suffering and evil, which obscured and yet revealed the presence of the saving God. This basic thrust of his dialectical thought and narrative-practical christology enables his readers today to rethink his theology in new contexts, or as Hilkert puts it, “in a radically secularized western culture and a world of global suffering, violence perpetrated in the name of religion, and ecological devastation,”

One of today’s numerous new loci of negative contrast experiences is the ecological

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crisis in which the image of God in nature is disfigured and the future of humanity is threatened. This new locus becomes a privileged place where the experience of salvation becomes possible in and through human action on behalf of the suffering “other,” in this case, the violated Earth. The church then serves not only the Christian ecumene and the ecumene of all humankind, but also the ecumene of all creation, especially the ecumene of suffering creation. It is here that the protest is extended to “ecological experience of contrast” beyond, and yet in intimate connection with, human experience of contrast.  

Schillebeeckx notes:

> On the basis of the catastrophe to the environment we have become aware that our relationship to nature is subject to ethical values and norms. The modern ecological experiences of contrast have led us to the insight that here too, and not just at a personal and social level, ethical dimensions are present.  

The Korean Church directed the attention of the faithful to this contrast experience, by relating the environmental issue with both the issue of life and the issue of justice and peace. It was already mentioned above that the first statement by the Korean bishops saw the Four Rivers Project as an instance of the prevalent anti-life culture. The instructional comic book also made the issue of life as its central lens to criticize the Project. Its first Scripture quote was “Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live...so everything will live where the river goes” (Ezek 47:9). The comic book then stated simply: “the river is the source of life.”  

Utilizing the graphic medium effectively, the comic book portrayed the land and the river as living beings now

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387 Schillebeeckx, Church, 239.

suffering and dying by the human greed and abuse. Construction equipments were drawn as lethal weapons of choice.

The framework of justice was another way in which the Korean Church drew contrast between the ecological devastation and the well-being of nature. The issue at hand could then be considered a “realization of the ecological justice.” In the pastoral letter, for instance, the bishops reminded the faithful of the history of the Catholic Church’s involvement in various social and political problems, such as democratization of the nation, the economic poverty, rights of farmers and workers, and unification of the two Koreas. The Church’s participation in these matters was grounded in the memory of Jesus Christ who had sided with the marginalized, and stood in solidarity with them. The pastoral letter then called for the expansion of the horizon: “It is now time to love and care for the marginalized ‘nature,’ in addition to the marginalized ‘people,’ since the Creator God also loves nature, and dwells in it.” As in the case of social justice issues, environmental justice concerns reestablishment of broken relationships, starting with the relationship with God through the recognition and praise of the Creator God. One also establishes the just relationship between human beings, through the recognition that the gift of nature is for the common good of all human beings including the future generations; and finally one establishes the just relationship with nature, through the respect for the rights of other creatures and through the pursuit of the common good of all creation. The pastoral letter then went a step further and called for a unified approach to ecology, since the two issues, social and environmental, are intimately and inseparably related on a global level as cause and effect for one another. The economic inequality between nations leads to a further ecological destruction, especially in the poorer nations; 

the ecological crisis also deepens the economic inequality. The pastoral letter concluded the theological section by stating that ultimately the social justice and the ecological justice had to be pursued together, since without one, the other cannot be possible.

For Schillebeeckx, one of the major roles of the church that emerged from the narrative-practical christology was as an anticipatory sign, living and proclaiming the possibility of liberating relationship among human beings. The Korean Church extended its message of hope to include a vision of the liberating relationship with nature. In that eschatological vision, the church is not just a sign of the fulfillment of the new people of God, but also the fulfillment of the “new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1).

According to Schillebeeckx, the church becomes an anticipatory sign in its contemporary setting through its dialectic of mysticism and politics. On the one hand, mysticism, expressed in liturgy and worship, is one of the most “concentrated” forms of the church’s action as an anticipatory sign. It is what gives the church’s “political” participation its drive and direction. It is what sets it apart from political activities of other organizations. Political praxis, on the other hand, gives the church’s celebration “a density of reality,”\(^{390}\) that is, content, relevance and effectiveness as a sign that serves the world. Such praxis shows that the anticipated new heaven and new earth is in a real sense a continuation of the current heaven and earth, and that the welfare of the latter not only affects the future generation of humanity, but also the new kingdom of God. To put it otherwise, the church is interested and engaged in the political process, because it is an integral medium of the experience of salvation, while no fruit of such process should be identified with salvation itself.

\(^{390}\) Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 61.
The Korean Catholic Church has definitely striven to be an effective sign in terms of the ecological issue. Earlier it was mentioned that the Korean Catholic Church expressed its opposition through organized gatherings often centered around the celebration of the Eucharist or prayer services. The liturgy and worship of the church are central to the church’s life as an anticipatory sign. One recalls that Schillebeeckx’s sacramental ecclesiology eventually led him to view that the church and its sacraments, as the retelling of the story of Jesus, are essentially interruptions in history, taking place in the form of resistance, engagement and eschatological expectation. The Korean Church was attentive to the element of mysticism also through the theological and spiritual focus in the pastoral letter. The bishops’ call for actions was firmly grounded in the recognition of the God of transcendence and immanence. In their pastoral suggestions, they specifically asked that the faithful pray for peace in the universe, and for the healing of the sick natural world. Since prayer and action are inseparably connected, such simple actions as not being wasteful can become a genuine “offering” to the Creator God. In terms of ritual practices, the bishops suggested that the faithful expand the understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation to include forgiveness of the

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391 Schillebeeckx planned this theme to be the subject of his book at one time. He said, “And so I am working on this book with the preliminary title: ‘The Interrupted Story: Resistance, Engagement, Celebration – Sacraments as metaphorical celebrations.’ The ‘interruption’ of the historical narrative of engagement and resistance, of consolation and mourning… is the interruption of this profane, historical narrative by another ‘eschatological dromenon or drama’ that is just as human and just as much being realized in our profane history (and not in some mythical dimension of it) – in the event of the life of Jesus of Nazareth which occurred in our profane history, ending in the historically shameful fiasco of an execution.” See Edward Schillebeeckx, “Resistance, Engagement and Celebration,” in Nieuwsbrief 5 (oktober 1992), published by Stichting Edward Schillebeeckx (Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation); unpublished translation by Robert J. Schreiter.
individual and social sin of ecological destruction as another way of turning away from God, and called for a practice an “ecological confession.”

In terms of political actions, the Korean bishops eschewed direct involvement. In the last section of the pastoral letter, the bishops made “suggestions for responsible actions.” In it they showed some concrete practices that Christians could do in an effort to live their creation faith at homes, in parishes, on the diocesan level, in their secular professions, on the interdenominational and interreligious level, through civic organizations, and finally through international bodies. In this last section, the pastoral letter stayed mainly pastoral, remaining true to its character as a pastoral letter given to the Catholic faithful. However, it did touch on some possible political actions that the faithful could take: for instance, it suggested that Christian politicians be responsible in their decisions not only to the nation and their constituents, but ultimately to God, since God is the source of all rights from the point of view of faith. Another possible channel of political participation would be civic organizations through which Christians could exercise their collective power in spreading the ecological values.

The instructional comic book has been the most “political” of all ecclesial responses. Compared to the “Korean Catholic Bishops’ Statement concerning the Issue of Life and of the Four Rivers Project,” in which the main point was a call for reflection and conversion of the entire society including bishops themselves, the comic book demanded that the Four Rivers Project be stopped. Compared to the pastoral letter, the comic book made detailed scientific, legal and factually based arguments for its opposition to the project, and appealed to Christians to join the Church in the actions, including political ones, of preserving the created order. The visibly indignant priest-

hero in the comics made use of biblical passages and magisterial statements to lay the ground, and, citing policy facts and scientific studies, scolded the government, particularly the president, for the distortion of facts, deceit, greed and neglect of the responsibility. In one of the most effective scenes, the priest is in the air over the president who is dredging the river with a shovel; he says to the president simply, “Stop!” Perhaps this directness of the message explains why the comic book has appealed most to the general public, and was singled out by secular media as an effective instance of the church’s activism. A secular journal Science mentioned this comic book, next to the Professors’ Organization for Movement against Grand Korea Canal, as notable instances of activism. Its effectiveness was shown by the fact that parts of the comic book were also used to illustrate a more scholarly publication, “Let Us Save Our Rivers of Life: the Truth of the Four Rivers Project,” by the Korean Academy of River Science.

What is the unique voice of the church in such issues as the environmental controversy under consideration? The pastoral letter reaffirmed the foundation for the Church’s unique role in the world. Regarding the ecological crisis undeniably as one of the clear signs of the time, it quoted Vatican II: “At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel…” Schillebeeckx, however, pointed out that there is ambivalence due to dialectical nature of the church’s participation in the world. A proper balance is difficult

391 Dennis Normile, “Restoration of Devastation?” 1570.

394 For an eBook version of the latter publication, see http://www.albummania.co.kr/gallery/view.asp?seq=120655&rpage=.

395 Gaudium et Spes (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”), n. 4. The Pastoral letter also relies on other ecclesial documents: most notably, John Paul II’s message for the World Day of Peace, “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation” (1990), and Benedict XVI’s message for the World Day of Peace, “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation” (2010).
to attain, while there is definite limit in the church’s competence. In its prophetic role, the Church has to rely on the “foreign prophecy” gained from the reactions of the secular sectors of the country. It has to rely also on the non-theological analysis and interpretation of the situation, while the voice of the church has to be religious, that is, it aims to communicate the content of salvation in the world. Its service to the world is to advance the world’s experience of salvation, by manifesting God’s presence in the natural environment that suffers as well as flourishes. The church interprets the world’s problems and responds to them in the light of its faith in God’s absolute presence. This means, in Christian terms, that the content of the church’s prophetic voice is the critical and constructive impulse of the Gospel, that is, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the basis of the belief in Jesus’ God of a radically new future, the church becomes a critical force against the institutional and ideological bias, distortion and lies.

The critical praxis of the church is not limited to public and political actions. The personal life of the faithful in their concrete practice of the faith can also reflect the critical and constructive impulse of the Gospel. One of the most insightful sections in the pastoral letter contains some practical suggestions on how one can live ecologically the evangelical counsel and the four cardinal virtues. Through poverty, the faithful realize that the material resources are limited, and that they are not only for human beings but for all God’s creatures; through obedience, the faithful learn to listen to the Word of God, the call of neighbors, and the demands of other creatures; and through chastity, the faithful are enabled to serve “the other” more freely, and gain strength to dedicate themselves to pro-environment practices, such as “joyful inconvenience movement.”

396 “Responsibility and Action,” 19.
So far the Korean Catholic Church’s response to the perceived threat to the natural environment has been examined in light of Schillebeeckx’s theology of the church and the world. His key insights illuminate some of the ecclesial actions of the Korean Church in a context beyond his own. The contemporary example showed that his theology is very much viable and valuable in discerning the church’s role in the world today. The Korean experience, however, also leaves some room for critique in terms of its effectiveness. Assessing the effectiveness of the Korean Catholic Church’s action in and for the world is in this dissertation a way of assessing the effectiveness of Schillebeeckx’s theology of the church and the world.

In one sense, the Korean Church has not been entirely successful in interrupting the process of ecological destruction. Widening and deepening of rivers by dredging, and constructing dams and weirs in all four major rivers are currently well underway despite strong oppositions from the Church and from other sectors of Korean society. President Lee Myung-bak is intent on completing the project by early 2012 as he promised. The Church’s effectiveness, however, is measured by criteria distinct from those used for other secular organizations. One of the central questions is whether the Church mediated the experience of the Kingdom of God in its message of hope based on the critical and constructive impulse of the Gospel.

Quite understandably the bishops’ statement, pastoral letter, and the comic book all had their core message grounded in the Judeo-Christian theology of creation. Christological aspects are also present, but in less degrees of emphasis and of integration within the texts, at least in the way Christian Scriptures are used. The pastoral letter took great care in expounding a theology of creation, while devoting only a few lines to the
message of Jesus Christ. It is notable that the Christian Scripture was used only twice in
the entire document, to describe the effect of human sin on creation (Rom 8:21;
“[creation’s] bondage to decay”), and to urge the faithful to live their creation faith (Luke
6:46; “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”). The comic book
had one and only appearance of Jesus in the last frame, and quoted the Christian Scripture
twice, both of which were used to urge Christians to action: Rom 12:2 (Christians must
“discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect”) and Mt 7:21
(“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only
the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”). This simple observation suggests
that the Korean bishops’ message about the environment utilizes a christology that is not
fully developed nor well integrated enough to manifest its critical and constructive
impulse. An exception is the shortest document of all (only two pages), a regional
bishop’s diocesan pastoral letter. It showed a firmer christological grounding through its
attention to soteriological and eschatological elements: it framed the environmental issue
within the salvation of all creation, and the church’s work within the hope-filled journey
to eternal life. In it, the church’s environmental movement was related to the
evangelization of all creation (Mk 16: 15; “preach the gospel to the whole creation”).
The apparent disconnect between a theology of creation and christology in the other
documents seems to lessen the Church’s uniquely Christian contributions to the debate.

Related to the lack of integrated christology, a perspective on Christian hope is
even less developed and integrated. The mostly indignant priest-hero in the comic book

397: “The goal of pro-environment movement is always the eternal life. In other words, it is for the
salvation of all creation… We should walk the journey of eternal life with hope, so that all creation, not just
human beings, be saved.” See Bishop John Chrysostom Kwon, “Proclaim the Gospel of Life: an Advent
Pastoral Letter,” (Nov. 28, 2010), n. 13.
has no mention of it. The lengthy pastoral letter devoted the short last paragraph to saying that “in conclusion, we believe that our effort to restore the order of creation should be grounded in hope which is the deep spiritual wellspring of Christianity.”

Lacking in both documents is a clear vision of the faith content of Christian hope, and of how the effort to restore the created order today is related to the eschatological faith. Without that vision, the message misses an integral element of Christian faith, and in fact, loses its specific Christian character. Earlier it was noted that, thanks to its argument largely based on non-theological analysis, the comic book was singled out by a secular scientific journal, along with a more professional publication, for its effective activism, and that parts of it were also used (or quoted) to illustrate another publication by river science academics. A question, however, needs to be raised: was it effective as a Christian message? The answer is ambivalent: its popularity and transferability seem to indicate, on the one hand, its ability to deliver a relevant message of the church to the general public; however, the same popularity and transferability, on the other hand, appears to hint at its weakness – that it lacked a specific, unique and irreducible Christian character, particularly concerning the story of Jesus Christ and the eschatological hope.

It is true that the degree of prominence, be it that of christology or Christian hope, cannot be measured simply by the number of Scriptural quotes. The Christian retelling of the creation accounts is always through the lens of the experience of Jesus Christ and his good news, whether there is explicit mention of them or not. The pastoral letter in particular gives some glimpses of implicit christology and eschatological hope in its theology of creation. It views the issue of ecological crisis within the larger framework of human sin that disrupted the harmony of creation, thus proposes that the solution lies

398 “Responsibility and Act,” n. 61.
in the recovery of the broken relationship within creation through repentance and conversion. When the pastoral letter asserts the expansion of the church’s role from caring for the marginalized people to caring for the marginalized creation, it recalls the words and deeds of Jesus Christ who showed the love of God for humanity in and through his solidarity with the poor. A sacramental view leads the letter to make the connection between restoring the order of creation and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The pastoral letter points to eschatological hope in its assertion that creation is still on its way of completion: “God continues to sustain creation and to guide it to its ultimate fulfillment, having created all in the state of progression toward the end.”

However, these references display a still underdeveloped integration of a theology of creation, christology and a vision of hope that inspires and guides the church’s involvement in worldly affairs. As a consequence, the Korean Church underutilized the unique role of the church in its opposition to the ecological policy of the government. As Schillebeeckx pointed out, the church has to speak from the critical and prophetic impulse of the Gospel, and this impulse is ultimately connected with and grounded in “the critical and productive force” of authentic belief in creation. Schillebeeckx’s robust theology of creation can offer here some valuable insights upon which the Korean Church can draw.

Schillebeeckx developed his theology of creation as the most comprehensive framework of his theology in general and his view of the church’s relationship with the world in particular. Its full expression comes in his mature phase of thought, but it is in

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399 “Responsibility and Action,” n. 29.

400 Schillebeeckx, Interim Report, 119; 122.
fact a constant theme that undergirds his entire career. Creation for him is “an act of God’s unconditional trust in human being,” which will not be put to shame, because of God’s absolute presence in creation and loving perseverance with the finite. The God revealed in creation is God “with and in us, even in our failure, even in our suffering, even in our death…” – *Deus Humanissimus.* God’s absolute presence in the finite world also points to the “proviso of the creator God,” which guarantees that the inevitable failure and the possible despair that the finitude of creation produces will be taken up and be overcome by God. Here lies the source of constantly renewed hope that Stimulates all Christian actions in the world. Schillebeeckx sums up the meaning of creation in the words of Irenaeus: “God’s honour lies in the happiness and the prosperity of man in the world, who seeks his honour in God.”

Based on this view of creation, christology for Schillebeeckx is “a specific way of making belief in creation more precise,” giving it specific content in and through Jesus of Nazareth. The Christ event is “concentrated creation,” the supreme expression of all that God revealed God’s self to be in and through creation. Jesus expressed this God-for-human-beings through the symbol of the kingdom of God, and filled that symbol with the concrete message and praxis for the poor, the sorrowful and the oppressed. Jesus Christ, in his message and life, then became the foundation and fundamental rule for the

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401 Ibid., 109.

402 Ibid., 115.


406 Ibid., 127.
church’s actions in the world. In an extended sense, the church itself becomes
*concentrated* message and praxis of Jesus Christ. For Schillebeeckx, the concentration is
most intense in the church’s liturgy and worship, particularly through sacraments, since
in them the three aspects of the church’s identity as a sign come together: remembrance,
actualization and eschatological hope. When the church remembers, actualizes and hopes
for what Jesus Christ stood for, the church sharpens the contrast between the
contemporary experience of suffering and alienation in the world on the one hand, and
the presence of the liberating God of Jesus. In so doing, the church brings to a clearer
focus the face of God as God for humanity.

Seen in light of this interrelated view of creation, Jesus Christ and the promised
kingdom of God, Schillebeeckx’s insights on the central role of the church in the world –
speaking, celebrating and living out the critical and prophetic impulse of the Gospel – are
as profound as they are far-reaching. The question, however, remains as to exactly *how*
this role is to be fulfilled, particularly in the political realm. To put otherwise, what are
the implications of the dialectic of mysticism and politics for the church’s engagement in
the political realm? In Schillebeeckx one finds both ambivalence and some directions for
possible answers. For Schillebeeckx, the church’s faith-based critical and constructive
statements can only be in general terms. However, can there be anything more, other
than inspiration and orientation? The church should be only *indirectly* involved in
politics, but its contributions still need to be *concrete.* The fact that Jesus Christ’s critical
impulse of the Gospel is the source of the church’s contribution to the world’s issues does
not necessarily mean that his sayings have to be quoted or his stories retold as from a
pulpit in the church’s public statement or actions. Revelation does not speak directly to
political issues in concrete history. Nor does the church have the competence to speak on
them without relying on non-theological information. Echoing Gaudium et Spes,
Schillebeeckx recognized that “between the message of the Gospel and the concrete
historical political decisions, some decisive element must intervene.”

What is needed is a concrete paradigm that can be distilled from the Gospel, in
terms of what the church’s praxis means, or an “explicitly Christian foundation for the
Church’s public activity.” In other words, a mediating step of guiding principles is
needed between the story of Jesus and specific solutions and policies, in the way in which
natural law has functioned in the past. Unlike natural law, however, the guiding
principle, foundation or paradigm for today cannot be removed from history or static
toward action in history; at the opposite end, it cannot be considered as a principle from
which a concrete and specific conclusion about social policy, or a decision for a specific
action can be deduced.

Schillebeeckx’s notion of negative contrast experiences offers a direction to
possible answers, if not answers themselves, to the questions raised above. The notion
functions as a linchpin in his mature theology of the church and the world. It enables the
church to be anchored in christological foundation and to be oriented to eschatological
hope, while remaining in dialogue with the world and heeding to the voice of the Spirit in

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407 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 146. The conciliar statement he echoes is “To carry out
this task the Church must continually examine the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the
Gospel” (n. 4).

408 David Hollenbach, “A Prophetic Church and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination,” in The

409 Schillebeeckx interprets Thomas Aquinas’ notion of “sacraments of nature” in terms of natural
law in his Christ the Sacrament, 8-10.

410 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 153ff.
“foreign prophecy.” Schillebeeckx incorporated the notion of negative contrast experience into his christology, the main thrust of which was to enable the faithful to experience the salvation that Jesus brought from within their own experience of life.

According to this narrative-practical christology, to hear the story of Jesus was then to be moved to “go and do likewise.” Jesus’ life, his message, his death and resurrection can be characterized as a narrative of contrast experience, between suffering and Jesus’ Abba experience, between the kingdom of the earth and that of God, between the negativity of the cross and its overcoming by God in resurrection, between the human history and the eschatological future. It is in fact the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection that gives foreign prophecy (or universal negative contrast experience) a specific Christian aspect.

What the message of the Gospel shows is the hope for the establishment of God’s kingdom despite all human despair and failures. Without such hope, negative contrast experiences cannot lead one to actions of permanent protest and criticism aimed at constant improvement of human condition.

Negative contrast experience is concrete, thus not abstract nor general, but it is open to formulations of some concrete paradigms or foundations of Christian actions, such as Schillebeeckx’s set of “anthropological constants” which “point to permanent human impulses and orientations, values and spheres of value, but at the same time do not provide us with directly specific norms or ethical imperatives…”411 This set of anthropological constants, and negative contrast experience as a way to the awareness of it, were in Schillebeeckx’s mind when he said:

Abstract pronouncements cannot seize hold of the reality simply by themselves; if they nevertheless possess a realistic value, this can only be derived from our total

411 Schillebeeckx, Christ, 733.
experience of reality...Only and exclusively as intrinsically individualized is ‘being human’ a reality and can it be the source of moral norms...Therefore, 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. 412

Schillebeeckx’s notion of negative contrast experience, as a convergence of “creative imagination, charismatic insight and the lived experience of social struggle,” shows a way “toward a more positive and concrete approach to the Church’s prophetic role in society.” 413 A charismatic element (action of the Holy Spirit) in the impulse of Christian hope and the creativity of Christian imagination (personal and affective synthesis), emerging from the heart of human experience shared by all and from the message of the Gospel – this is where Schillebeeckx locates the link between Christians’ shared identity and shared prophetic action, or positive and specific proposals for social policy. Schillebeeckx states this link in two steps:

First, that of the negative experience itself, where the “utopian” urge of the Gospel provokes the prophetic protest against man’s curtailment of the possibilities of his own existence, and where the moral demand for changes and improvements develops, with the result that in a vague way some concrete moral pointers begin to stand out; secondly, the phase where the message of the Gospel matures through a combination of theology and the scientific analysis of a particular situation into a responsible and more concrete plan of social and political action. In this way the Gospel message becomes indirectly relevant in social and political matters. 414

Based on this analysis, Schillebeeckx sees two functions of the church in and for the world: critical and utopian. The church is called to protest and criticize society constantly, based on its view of the future experienced and promised by its Lord. In other

412 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 151.


414 Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, 159.
words, the church is called to be the prophetic sign of the eschatological hope that
interrupts the negative experiences in and of the world through its protest.

6.5 Conclusion

The main goal of this concluding chapter was twofold: to return to the questions
raised in the introduction, and address them based on the analysis of the previous
chapters, and to explore the significance of this project for the life of the church by way
of a case study. In the first part, a focus was placed on the flow of his shifts or
development, in terms of his dialectical thought and of his notion of sacramentality. In
the second part, the case of Korean Catholic Church’s engagement with the
environmental project of its government was analyzed in light of Schillebeeckx’s
theology traced in previous chapters, while at the same time, his theology of the church
and the world was evaluated based on its applicability to the contemporary social and
political situation represented by the Korean case.

While the political participation of the church represents his most mature thought
on the relationship between the church and the world, it is not his last word. In the last
decade of his life, he returned to where he had started: the theme of the sacraments,
particularly the sacramental celebration. However, his interest in the issue of the church
and the world never waned. It is more accurate to say that the issue became clearer. In
his focus on God, Jesus Christ and the world, his ultimate intent was a renewed
understanding of the significance of the Christian belief today. At the core of this
understanding that he sought was the role of the adherents of such belief in a secular and
suffering world. Given his pioneering work on the sacramentality of the church and his
subsequent theological shifts on the topic of the church and the world, one cannot read
about his unfinished project on the sacraments without detecting the implicit reference to
the sacramentality of the church, which is the source and subject of rituals and other
sacramental actions.

As discussed above, one observes continuity in Schillebeeckx’s theological shifts:
his abiding concern over what it means to be a Christian, a Christian community, in the
contemporary world.\textsuperscript{415} Continuity is also found in the framework in which he sought to
pursue this concern: the sacramentality. The evolving contents of the notion of
sacramentality, however, indicate developments. Schillebeeckx moved away from a
“quasi-ontological”\textsuperscript{416} approach in ecclesiology to the historical, and in the last phase,
embraced a “performative” one which included the aspects of both praxis and rituals. In
other words, sacramentality gradually came to refer to the \textit{doing} of the church, rather than
to its \textit{being}, although the latter remains in the foundation of its actions. This is because
the Christian belief, which sacraments embody, ultimately concerns God’s activity in
history.\textsuperscript{417}

Since sacraments are the primary actions of the Christian community, all his
statements about the sacraments in general can be construed to be extensions of his
understanding of the church. The ecclesiology in the minor key, which he began
explicitly in the \textit{Church} book, continued to be his \textit{modus operandi}. There is a new
context in which the church must operate, that is, various worldly and ‘profane’ social
and historical factors outside the church that still mediates salvation from God. The


\textsuperscript{416} Thompson, “The Church as Sacrament: Schillebeeckx’s Contributions to the Construction of a

\textsuperscript{417} Hilkert, “Schillebeeckx,” 380.
wider context is a world of history, in which “the church is not the only historical fulfillment of the universal salvation for all people that it preaches.” If the world mediates salvation from God outside the sacramental mediation, he asks, what is the role of a “metaphorical celebration” which is what the church and sacraments are? They are related in such a way that

- on the one hand, the metaphorical ‘eucharistic breaking of the bread’ becomes a hollow and empty shell without the human base of our actual ‘sharing with others in brotherly and sisterly fashion’ in the forum of the earthly reality of everyday life, while on the other hand the simple optimism of a worldly-political solidarity without liturgical celebration and hope becomes a deceitful ideology because of repeated historical failures.

As was the case in the political context above, the key to the uniqueness of the church’s sacramental mediation of salvation lies in the eschatological salvific meaning of Jesus’ life and death, his ministry and his humanity. What is different in the metaphorical celebration is that the meaning of the sacraments, thus of the church became more concrete and specific within the everyday experience of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The church engages in the work for salvation and for the genuine happiness of human beings “in resistance against all forms of evil and the violation of the inviolate value of being Human by the grace of God’s creation.” The church and its sacraments are essentially interruptions of history. They are interruptions of the daily human drama of “engagement and resistance, of consolation and mourning” by another drama that is eschatological but “just as human and just as much being realized in our profane history,” that is, the life,

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419 Ibid., 2.

420 Ibid., 1.
death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.\footnote{Ibid.} The realization of the Jesus event takes place in the church’s resistance, engagement and eschatological expectation.

In an article where he anticipated his work on the sacraments,\footnote{Schillebeeckx, “Toward a Rediscovery of the Christian Sacraments: Ritualizing religious elements in daily life,” in \textit{Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table: A Liturgical Primer in Honor of Gordon W. Lathrop}, eds. Dirk G. Lange and Dwight W. Vogel (Akron, Ohio: OSL Publications, 2005), 6-34; references below are to a private copy of a photocopied manuscript, 1-16.} Schillebeeckx suggested a title for his work on the way: \textit{Sacramental Liturgy – Jesus’ vision and his way of God’s kingdom: Experiences of meaning and contrast distilled to ritual}. Through this title, he wanted to highlight the experience of God and the inevitable distance between such experience and the reality of the world. Jesus revealed that contrast in a primordially concentrated form. The church in its sacramental celebrations continues to “distill” the contrast for the world to see. By being alert to the worldly problems and responding to them in light of the faith in God’s active presence, one discerns “sparks of the grace of God’s kingdom which continually ‘irrupts’ into human history.”\footnote{Schillebeeckx, “Toward a Rediscovery of the Christian Sacraments,” 13.} In order not to miss or be forgetful of this presence of God, “[o]rdinary actions are ‘interrupted’, in the sense that, at given times, such everyday behavioural [sic] complexes are stylized and, up to a point, fixed in symbolic movements.”\footnote{Ibid., 14.}

His words on the relationship between sacramental liturgy and the engagement in the worldly affairs is again applicable to the relationship between church and world:

In sacramental liturgy we celebrate the Christian dream of God’s kingdom proleptically, in anticipation. That kingdom, the basis of the celebrations in the Christian community, is also actualized fragmentarily in an openness to eschatological liberation and salvation, which entails more than individual or
socio-political liberation. In fact, ritual celebrations show how God’s footmarks in Christians’ profane engagement are the presupposition of their sacramental celebrations, and how these celebrations – the occasions when Christians are nourished by God in and via Jesus in the power of Christ’s Spirit – in their turn give courage, orientation and inspiration for their earthly endeavors, to which the liturgy returns them.  

425

Ibid., 15.
APPENDIX

Stop the 'Four Major Rivers Restoration Project' Challenging the Divine Order of Creation!

The Committee for Environment
Archdiocese of Seoul, Korea
The ‘Four Major Rivers Restoration Project’ Challenges the Divine Order of Creation

Nowadays the government is pushing on with the ‘Four Major Rivers Restoration Project’ (hereafter the FMRRP) in a hasty manner and causes serious troubles.

Polls show that 73.5% of the Korean people opposed the FMRRP (Kyunghyang Daily, October 7, 2009).

Why does the majority of the Korean people oppose the FMRRP in the face of the governmental argument?

As the Bible tells us,

“Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live” (Ezek 47,9).

the river is the source of life.

And the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (hereafter the Compendium) teaches us:

The attitude that must characterize the way man acts in relation to creation is essentially one of gratitude and appreciation … … Nature’s realm of mystery opens the path of man to God, Creator of heaven and earth. The world presents itself before man’s eyes as evidence of God, the place where his creative, providential and redemptive power unfolds.” [Compendium, n. 487].

Furthermore, “we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem”
“without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations” (Compendium, n. 459).

Nevertheless, now the FMRRP is being pushed forward by force, directly contradicting the teaching of Christ and the Church.

When we witnessed the Yongsan fire tragedy, which claimed the lives of 5 slum residents on the pretext of the redevelopment project,

we cannot but feel sorry for the unsatiable greed of human beings.

and the FMRRP

as well as the misbehavior of the newly-appointed high-ranking officers of the government,

false resident registration, plagiarism, illegal real-estate speculation, tax evasion, evasion of national duality, evasion of military service, perjury, etc.

also seems to be a monster bred by the human greediness.

Such a greediness is contrary to the order of creation (Cf. Compendium, n. 481).

Therefore, Christians must “discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rm 12.2).
The 'FMRRP' is a False Policy

The President announced the cancellation of the so-called 'Korean Peninsula Grand Canal Project' in June, 2008, yielding to the heavy protest of the nation.

"If the nation does not want, I will not carry out the Grand Canal Project." (June 29, 2008)

Notwithstanding such a public announcement,

January, 2009

It is my unyielding will to build the canal......

April, 2009

The cancellation of the Grand Canal Project does not mean a complete abandonment, but a postponement......

[I will carry out] not the Korean Peninsula Grand Canal Project, but the FMRRP.

The President officially announced the FMRRP in June, 2009.

The FMRRP will be started in September, 2009.

The Goals of the FMRRP
1. Make preparation for water shortage and big flood.
2. Improve the water quality of the four major rivers (up to the Class 2)
3. Vitalize local economy.

Duration: September 2009 - 2012
Cost: ₩22.2 trillion ($1.9 billion)

However, the parliamentary inspection of the governmental officers by the 18th National Assembly of the Republic of Korea in 2009 revealed that

The FMRRP is in the midst of pandemonium.

The FMRRP has many problems:
Burdening the Korean Water Resources Corporation with the cost of the project to deceive the nation about the misappropriation of the money of taxpayers.

Exorbitant compensation cost for the possession of private lands near the four rivers;

Arbitrary increase in budget by some trillion Korean Won within a few months;

Lack of Preliminary Environmental Assessment, as well as violation of the State Budget Act and Rivers Act.

While there are many problems that are already revealed, no one can be sure what will happen when they put the project in practice.

A wise leader listens to the voice of the nation, withholding his idea,

The FMRRP stems from the greed of a leader who does not care much about morality, ethics and precious values to be protected.

but a foolish leader mistakes his idea for the opinion of the nation.

My word is law.
Korea Does Not Belong to the Water-Scarce Countries

As Korea belongs to the water-scarce countries according to the UN, we must carry out the FMRRP quickly to secure enough water.

Liar! The UN has never officially released such data.

On the contrary, Population Action International (PAI) issued a report saying:

South Korea was classified as a water-stressed nation according to a simple data summation, but it cannot be classified as a water-scarce nation thanks to the presence of stable water supply system such as dams and widely established waterworks.

Even the government itself admitted that Korea does not belong to the water-scarce countries.

Water Resource
Long-Term
Comprehensive Plan
2006
Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs; Korea Water Resources Corporation

Except the extreme drought season, there is almost no water scarce in Korea ...... we can solve the local water scarcity with the inter-regional water supply.

However, the government is trying to seek the grounds of its argument in the cases of the highest water demand.

as well as of the worst drought, exaggerating the presumed water scarcity to push on with the FMRRP.
The FMRRP Has Almost Nothing to Do with Flood Prevention

With the FMRRP we can save 8 trillion Korean Won of the average annual damage cost of flood inclusive of restoration expenditure.

Are you going to keep on distorting the fact?

The 8 trillion Korean Won include the total damage cost of natural disaster and restoration expenditure throughout South Korea, not just that of the four major rivers.

South Korea’s Natural Disaster Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cost (trillion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typhoon, Floods, and Other Natural Damage</td>
<td>2.7 trillion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flood Prevention Investment</td>
<td>1.1 trillion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration Costs</td>
<td>4.2 trillion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.0 trillion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, the flood damages mostly mountain valleys, small and medium size streams and urban regions with poor sewerage.

The critical areas of flood damage in South Korea are: southeastern coastal area; lower Nakdong River area; mountain area of Gangwon Province. They have nothing to do with the mainstream of the four major rivers.

As mentioned above, the fact of flood damage has nothing to do with the FMRRP which will cost more than 22 trillion Korean Won.

At present, the greater part of mainstream of the four major rivers are well maintained (about 97%).  
(Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs, 2006)

In this regard, it is a distortion of the reality to dredge the bottom of the four major rivers on the pretext of the flood prevention.
The FMRRP Does Not Improve, but Deteriorate the Water Quality

The government depicted the four major rivers as if they are dead when it announced the FMRRP.

The water quality of the areas of Lower Nakdong River and Yeongnam River (Class F)

Rivers with no fish

no wetland in the areas of the four major rivers

Rivers with no migratory bird

However, the water quality of the mainstreams of the four major rivers are quite good.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Major Rivers</th>
<th>BOD Class 1</th>
<th>65%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Class 4</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stream Environment</td>
<td>55%, stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakdong River Water Quality</td>
<td>Daegu outskirts: Class 2 to 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other areas</td>
<td>Class 1 to 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides, the promotional video clip, asserting that the migratory birds did not come again, was also a fraud.

So much that the 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) was held in Changwon of Gyeongsangnam Province in 2018.

Ramsar Convention: intergovernmental treaty for the conservation of wetlands important for waterfowl with 155 contracting parties as of January, 2010.

there are many wetlands in South Korea.
Besides, the FMRP will deteriorate the water quality, dredging the river bottom and building more than 20 submerged weirs which will eventually disturb the stream of water.

In fact, the cases of the worst water quality are indicated in the areas where the water is contained with estuary dykes and submerged weirs.

According to current plans,

Isn't it a common sense that the water contained with submerged weirs and dams would be eventually polluted?

New lakes and marshes will come into being in every 30km along the Nakdong River.

Here the lakes and marshes mean the reservoirs which are deeper than 50cm, containing water more than 5 days.
The Submerged Weirs and Dredging Mean the Severance of the Lifeline of the Rivers

Essentially, the main parts of the FMRRP are to dredge the river bottom and to build submerged weirs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Han River, Nakdong River, Geum River</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submerged weirs</td>
<td>more than 20 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of water</td>
<td>4.6m in Nakdong River; 2.5-3m in other rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of dredged sands and gravels</td>
<td>570 million cubic meter, including those of Nakdong River (440 cubic meter)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To maintain the average depth of 6 meter, 440 cubic meter of sands and gravels of the Nakdong River will be dredged, with which we may build 15-storied apartments in a row on the entire lanes of the Seoul-Busan Expressway.

The intention of the government is to flatten the river bottom, dredging tremendous amount of sands and gravels.

and to control the stream of water with more than 20 units of submerged weirs.

It must be an act of stabbing the heart of the river with a dagger.

Sometimes, we need the dredging, when the water is contaminated,

but the indiscriminated dredging according to the FMRRP will stir up the sediments of the river bottom.
and cause the extinction of the organism of the water.

It damages the self-cleansing power and the natural water purification system of the river.

It stinks……

We cannot live here anymore.

Let's move away!

Stagnant water must be inevitably polluted.

The submerged weirs stop the stream and pollute the water.

It's not fair

From the Taehwa River, once presented as a model of river restoration by the President, the submerged weir was removed and thus the water quality has improved.

It's refreshing!

The water quality of the mouth of Han River also improved after the removal of the second Gokreung submerged weir.

(Korea Institute of Construction Technology 2003)

the site of old submerged weir

In the same manner, 467 units of submerged weirs and dams in the USA have been removed since 1912.

We have to remove the submerged weirs to save the rivers.

Constructing submerged weirs means forcing the four rivers to be the river of death.
The FMRRP Destroys the Historic and Cultural Remains

The government will make the rivers of history and culture with the FMRRP.

From ancient times, cities have been built around rivers,

and thus there are many cultural remains to be excavated,

or to be preserved near the rivers.

However, with the construction of submerged weirs, bikeway and water recreation facilities,

the cultural remains will be submerged or disappear.

The area is more than 200 times as wide as that of the Cheonggyecheon.

Cheonggyecheon: a small stream in the center of Seoul, which was artificially restored in 2005 under the direction of the then mayor of Seoul and current President.

Besides, it is quite outrageous that the government let an unqualified company conduct a survey on the cultural remains near the four major rivers within just a couple of months.

We will not be sorry only if a new survey is conducted in a proper manner.
The FMRRP is Violating Law and Order to be Observed

According to the State Budget Act, a large-scaled national project was to be executed as follows:

A national project going over the budget of 50 billion Korean Won and a project demanding more than 30 billion Korean Won must undergo the Preliminary Feasibility Study, except the case of special national project.

This is tantamount to a disposition of abusing the money of taxpayers like a thief.

Furthermore, finishing Environmental Impact Assessment within a couple of months, which in fact must be conducted in four full seasons.

If you've seen the cover you've seen everything...

the illegal ground-breaking ceremony was held without the Preliminary Environmental Assessment.

paying no attention to Rivers Law and Long-term Comprehensive Plan for Water Resources.

On top of that, the government tries to burden the Water Resource Corporation with the construction cost of 8 trillion Korean Won which goes way beyond its financial capacity.

I am sure that the Water Resource Corporation can make it.

The government is carrying out such an outrageous policy.
We Have to Protect the Four Major Rivers, the Repository of the Culture of Life

The FMRRP leads to procrastination of projects of SOC (Social Overhead, Capital) like railways, roads, and harbours.

Never mind what others say.

Budgets for education and social welfare are curtailed.

The FMRRP

Educationsocial Welfare

and subsidies for local governments are also reduced.

Tie up your belt tightly for the FMRRP!

The Provinces

Notwithstanding the argument of the government that the FMRRP will procure new jobs for 350,000 people, it is said that the project will come out with less than 10,000 jobs, because the project is a large-scaled engineering work.

With shoveling you can make money and keep fit! What else can be better?

We do not have an exclusive right for the four major rivers.

as H.H. Pope Benedict XVI and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I said:

"in the face of the great threats to the natural environment, .... we consider it one of our duties to encourage and to support all efforts made to protect God's creation, and to bequeath to future generations a world in which they will be able to live."

[Common Declaration of Pope Benedict XVI of Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, November 30, 2006, n. 6].

They are the fountain of life which should be bequeathed to future generations,

as we have inherited them from our ancestors,
If you want to be a true Christian, you must not turn your face away from the crisis of the rivers.

We have to rebuke the greediness of those who are engaged in the FMRRP, and participate in the initiatives for the preservation of the divine order of creation.

Stop!

Right now, the four rivers are asking our help.

Now is the time when we have to take the words of Jesus to our heart.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7,21).
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